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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
DA	Discourse Analysis
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
DNP	Discursive Nodal Points approach
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	European Commission
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EE	Estonia
EEA	European Economic Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EMU	European Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
EUMS	European Union Member State
FI	Finland
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
IBO	Identities-Borders-Orders triad
IBSO	Identities-Borderscapes-Orders triad
IR	International Relations
JHA	EU Justice and Home Affairs
Kesk	Center Party (Finland)
LT	Lithuania
LT-MFA	Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ND	Northern Dimension
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PFP	Partnership for Peace
REF	Reform Party (Estonia)
S	Social Democratic Party (Sweden)
SBC	Schengen Borders Code
SDD	Lithuanian State Security Department
SDP	Social Democratic Party (Finland)
SE	Sweden
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
T-LKD	Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats

1 BORDERS IN GOVERNMENTAL COMMUNICATION: A PUZZLING MATTER

The images of Europe do not exist as a natural phenomenon but are discursively shaped. Central to our identifications are images of others. The idea of, for instance, a European identity necessarily contains a demarcation from the non-European. This is inherent to all distinctions, they are both inclusive and exclusive. Europe can only be realized in the mirror of Others. These projections probably say more about their producers than about the targets they construct.

Bo Stråth 2002, 397

There are so many paths through a landscape.
Ant wanted to draw a map of them all on one piece of paper, but it was impossible. It came out as an indecipherable mess. Instead, he drew a map for each road network on the thinnest paper he could find and layered them on top of each other. Then he could see them all at once. Individually, none of them felt real. Separately, each road was isolated, lonely, nothing. The landscape was made up by all of them combined.

Tangled Roots, Maria Turtschaninoff 2025, 187

Borders, just like roads through a landscape, are numerous, traversing physical and mental maps, as well as each other; creating a complex network and the occasional indecipherable mess. They encompass not only the borders of today but also the remnants of past borders, and quite possibly, some morsels of potential borders that are only just beginning to be imagined. I dare say this is true in all places of the world, and the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is no exception.

This border complexity becomes particularly visible in governmental communication, where different border types frequently appear together without any clarification to their distinctions. Consider, for instance, the Estonian statement:

> The Government aims to build out a more modern *state border of Europe* that would be worthy of the *European and NATO external border*. (EE 02.06.2016(2), author's emphasis)

Here, the state border, the European Union's (EU) external border, and the NATO border are invoked simultaneously, producing a discursive jumble of border regimes. This results in ambiguity, making it difficult to discern which type of border is being referenced and what function or meaning it serves. Moreover, the quote suggests that various types of borders are invoked simultaneously to emphasize the significance of one or more of these borders, or stretches of

borderlines. Such conflation raises questions about how states conceptualize and differentiate between various borders. And ultimately how governments communicate and justify decisions regarding borders.

Institutionally and legally, national borders, and EU internal and external borders constitute different border regimes, governed by distinct functions. Against this backdrop, the observed pattern of governmental communication conflating or collapsing distinct border types is surprising. Why is it so that governments describe and communicate borders in ways that blur distinctions between clearly differentiated border regimes? Existing scholarship recognizes the lack of precise communication in governmental communication regarding the conceptualization and functions of borders. Governmental communication often lacks clear differentiation on bordering across internal EU borders (debordering) and external EU borders (rebordering) (Schimmelfennig 2021), particularly in terms of functions related to the openness and closedness of these borders (Brändle and Eisele 2023). Yet, while this scholarship notes vagueness in EU border communication, questions remain regarding how different border regimes appear together in governmental discourse. Thus, mirroring these findings, this dissertation emerged out of questions about how governments, specifically in the EU, communicate about various types of borders whose regimes interact in practice, including discursively. This dissertation builds on this speculation by approaching border communication with a clear distinction between different border types.

The analytical challenge then, is to uncover why national governments often conflate various border types in their public discourse, and what purposes this conflation serves. This issue is significant because such conflation can obscure the underlying logic of border politics, challenge assumptions in existing research that treat border regimes separately, and reveal strategic discursive practices that have not yet been conceptualized or systematically analyzed. To this end, the dissertation seeks to address the discursive phenomenon of border interaction by introducing the concept of "entangled borders," (Green 2019) which facilitates an analytical separation of overlapping and layered borders in discourse. By analytically separating national borders from the EU's external border, the study aims to clarify how each border type is invoked and constructed in governmental discourse. This helps to untangle layered and often overlapping border narratives (Green 2019; 2015; 2013; Leutloff-Grandits 2023), thereby rendering visible how conceptualizations of different types of borders contribute to understandings of borders in general. Furthermore, the separation of border types in the analysis makes it possible to reveal the complexity and strategic use of borders in governmental communication.

Hence, the focus here is on how governments are *speaking* about borders and the EU. In other words, it examines how borders and the EU are represented in public discourse. The way borders are articulated reveals insights into how they are imagined, legitimized, and enacted. Conceptually, the practice of speaking is referred to as governmental communication, which Brändle and Eisele (2023, 598) define as: "an instrument for governments to strategically give meaning to borders

that serves their specific agendas across different policy issues, and so, to legitimize their border politics in the broader public arena." (see also Canel and Sanders 2012) This resonates with interpretations of the border as a political device, functioning as "a mutable, adaptable and malleable technology that is used to pursue specific goals." (Casaglia 2020, 27) At its core the focus of this dissertation centers on the narrated border (Eder 2006; Ono 2012). This research is thus structured around the notion of borders as discourse. It understands discourse as an articulation of (border) imaginaries and realities, and as the act of endowing these with meaning in order to make sense of the world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). As such, discourse serves as the framework that structures what can be conceived and expressed (Hajer 1993), thereby providing the context for both social reality and policy actions. This understanding of meaning as constructed is closely linked to the concept of discursive struggles, which refers to competition over different discursive positions (Diez 2014a; Carta and Morin 2014).

The example quote of governmental communication included above also reflects the enduring role of the state in shaping border discourses (Demata 2024; Opiłowska 2025), as states remain central actors in determining bordering practices, particularly in the governance of human mobility. Yet, while states have long been a primary agent in research on bordering processes and practices, how national governments justify and legitimize changes in border politics remains understudied (Brändle and Eisele 2023). Addressing this gap allows for a better understanding of how states discursively justify border practices, and how those discourses are crafted (Simmons and Shaffer 2024). It also enables this work to comment on how the entanglement of different border types serves both symbolic and strategic purposes for the state.

At the core of the dissertation lies the question of what form borders take conceptually, what they signify and how they function in the political imagination. More specifically, the aim is to uncover how states participate in mapping the EUropean entity (Scott 2005, 434), or in other words, to examine "how Europe borders itself" (Andersen and Aubry 2022, 2). In doing so, the dissertation contributes to a broader scholarly effort to trace the discursive construction of borders across the EU. As such, this study offers a focused analysis of governmental communication. It, thereby, highlights the role of the state in shaping the symbolic and practical meaning of borders in contemporary EUrope; and by extension the symbolic and practical meaning of Europe (Moisio et al. 2013, 744). Note, I make a distinction between 'EUropean' and 'European' to highlight that 'EUrope' is indeed different from 'Europe.' From a border perspective this distinction is of importance as EUropean border-making is not necessarily synonymous with EU borders (Bialasiewicz 2012; Foster and Grzymski 2019). This distinction is applied throughout the dissertation to render visible, and problematize, how language denotes spatiality and boundary-making.

A central premise underpinning this dissertation is that the concept of border does not carry an inherent or fixed meaning within political discourse. If borders were understood as static constructs with a stable set of meanings, one would expect little variation in how border management policies evolve. Instead, the

meaning of borders is continuously shaped and reshaped by the discourses surrounding them, leading to shifts in their management and significance. This approach underscores the fluidity of borders as politically contingent constructs, influenced by contextual factors and shifting (geopolitical) power dynamics. Calling for closer attention to how the meaning of borders is fixed during times of 'crisis.'[1] While crisis narratives are commonly applied to border events involving human movement (e.g., Cantat et al. 2025; Lindley 2014; Collyer and King 2016), it is important to emphasize that 'crisis' also functions as a discursive tool that mobilizes political support and legitimizes the expansion of power under exceptional circumstances (Gordon 2020; Perkowski et al. 2023). Accordingly, by focusing on discourse during times of perceived crisis, this dissertation highlights the performative nature of constructing certain events as crises.

To respond to the research questions set forth in this study, the dissertation applies the Identities-Borders-Orders (IBO) triad to examine governmental border communication across Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden over the course of three distinct border-related crises. These include the so-called migration crisis in 2015–2016, the instrumentalized migration crisis along the Belarusian border in 2021, and the retraction of visas among Russian Schengen visa holders in 2022. The IBO triad is a set of loosely defined dimensions that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the triad's three dimensions. It is applied here as a heuristic framework that enables the analysis to capture nuances of bordering discourses from the perspective of identity, border, and order. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the IBO triad can assist when deconstructing border discourse to isolate communication on different types of borders and the distinct features and functions attached to each border type. This is operationalized by analyzing metanarratives of border discourse, following the logic of the Discourse Nodal Points (DNP) approach. By structuring the analysis in this way, it maps how governments invoke different border types, but also uncovers the symbolic and strategic purposes of discursive entanglements.

Lastly, as this dissertation aims to engage with discourses about borders one must bear in mind that these are, at the very least, dichotomous. That means that what is here presented as 'the other side of the border' produces their own interpretations and imaginaries about said borders. These are not considered in this dissertation as it is beyond the scope of this work, but they are nonetheless equally valid in and of themselves – at least as far as discourses go. The contents of the discourses, however, might be less valid from a perspective of accuracy.

[1] The notion of denoting events, in this instance the movement of people, as a crisis is a deeply problematic practice, for this reason I have added emphasis the first time the term appears. For reasons of style and clarity, I will not add quotation marks when discussing crisis and crisis discourses throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

1.1 What are visions of EUrope?

In the field of Europeanization, visions of EUrope can largely be understood as ideas and normative imaginaries that shape how the EU is perceived, justified, and contested. As such, visions of EUrope help explain the direction, legitimacy, and purpose of the EUropean project across time and space. On closer inspection, these visions might engage with ideological or national interpretations and conceptualizations of the direction of the EU as a polity (Ferrera 2024). Thus, visions of EUrope reflect that Europeanization is a process of competing integration narratives, in turn reflecting that the EU is the result of different models of integration realized through the politicization of the desired integration process and outcome (e.g., Börzel and Risse 2018; van Kessel and Fagan 2022). For the sake of this work, it suffices to think of vision as a future-oriented trajectory which is underpinned by ideas about what the EU ought to be, such as the scope of its capabilities and the nature of its policy focus areas. In other words, visions of EUrope are thus structured around the notion of European integration – be it a growing or diminishing integration trajectory (Radaelli and Salter 2020).

Visions of EUrope are embedded into the political debate across EUrope; emerging from institutional arrangements, political practices, and legal frameworks. Accordingly, these visions are enacted through governance structures and materialized in policies, allowing them to shape, and be shaped by, everyday political life. Because of this embeddedness, visions of EUrope can also be deciphered through governmental discourse, such as in the context of border politics, where the meaning of EUrope is negotiated. In moments of crisis, these visions are particularly visible. Crises act as catalysts for discursive shifts, contributing to the rearticulation of dominant imaginaries and justifications underpinning the EUropean project (Börzel and Risse 2018; Schmidt 2020). As such, analyzing border discourse during times of disruption provides an entry point into further understanding visions of EUrope. It reveals how the ideas of EUrope and Europe are mobilized in response to perceived threats and uncertainties in relation to borders, and how institutional practices attempt to stabilize or transform the European order through bordering processes.

Thus, this dissertation views visions of EUrope as being produced in the imaginations of the EU's limits, specifically in relation to questions of who is European, and by extension, who is *not* European (Stråth 2010a). These geopolitical and civilizational imaginaries are intrinsically interwoven with the discourse on borders. Accordingly, this dissertation argues that EUropean visions can be identified in the ways borders are communicated, as border discourse is about articulating belonging and exclusion, as well as political identity. Examining visions of EUrope from the perspective of its borders draws attention to the role of shifting border regimes and changing conceptualizations of bordering in "reclassifying the spaces they demarcate." (Green 2013, 349) Borders, in this sense, are productive: they respond to political developments but also participate in shaping how EUrope is imagined and legitimated. As such, analyzing how borders are framed by means of discourse offers a lens for understanding the

broader visions of EUrope that underpin them. Shifting conceptualizations of Europe's borders thus provide a window into the evolving imaginaries of what EUrope is, where it begins and ends, and which challenges are seen to lie within or beyond it.

Many of the assumptions embedded in the research that studies EUrope and Europe through their borders departs from the premise that the EU is approached as a discursive construction or a discursive project (Wodak 2007), producing imaginaries about what Europe and the EU are and what it entails to be European. In essence, what do we signify when we talk about EUrope? In this way, "the concept of 'Europe' becomes a cognitive frame that mediates in the perception and in the feelings that individuals have of social reality, including in their interaction with others." (Moreno Barreneche 2023, 685) Importantly, Europe and the EU are not fixed entities but rather products of overlapping discourses and hegemonic narratives that contribute to the formation of national and European identities (Stråth and Wodak 2009). As noted by Fornäs (2012, 44),

> Europe as meaningful implies that it is constructed and understood as a cultural entity: a text composed of signs, in the wide sense of both words, denoting any conglomerate of material marks used for carrying meaning. Europe is not (only) a text, but when people give it meaning, they approach it as if it was and thus construct Europe as a cultural category.

Discursive constructions of EUrope and its borders have focused on the delimiting aspect of discourse, especially the process of how the interaction of language articulates, or limits, the availability of possible visions and policies of EUrope and EUropean governance. According to this logic, the EU is the result of discursive struggles in the meaning production of competing visions of Europe and the functioning of the EU (Diez 2001; Neyer 2003). This, in turn, contributes to the formalization of more coherent identity boundaries while also constructing the conception of the EU as a polity. In Moreno Barreneche's (2023) view, the idea of a set of shared values constitutes a central component in the discursive construction of the EU. Andersen and Aubry (2022, 11) instead identify the discursive construction of Europe as ontological politics, symbolizing the "ongoing negotiations of what Europe is and who belongs," specifically examining how the EU's boundaries are shaped through the bordering that emerges in the early integration efforts of welcome cultures.

These notions themselves hinge upon constructivist perceptions, which challenge traditional approaches in international relations theory by emphasizing the social construction of reality as well as the meanings and knowledge that underpin it (Guzzini 2000). It views the international system as a social construct, focusing on how states' perceptions of themselves and others in the political arena shape their interactions (Wendt 1999), including those of non-state actors (Weber 2007). The approach combines a social theory of knowledge with an intersubjective theory of action, highlighting the importance of power analysis in understanding the link between observation and action (Guzzini 2000). However, not all research on EUrope departs from the constructive nature of the EU and its

process, nor the discursive process through which these assumptions and imaginaries are collectively arrived at. Barbehön (2016) illustrates, for example, that research on Europeanization as the impact of European integration (especially at local levels) has been less prone to dwell on how Europe is discursively constructed, tending to accept the EU as an objective reality.

1.2 Studying borders

This dissertation engages with borders from the growing understanding of borders as constructed and ever-changing, embedded in political and social processes. Rather than viewing borders simply as fixed lines on a map, border studies today emphasizes the practices, discourses, and power relations that continuously shape and reshape them. The notion of borders as social constructs, rather than neutral, static territorial dividers, has become central to the field, reflecting a broader shift in understanding how space and identity are ordered and contested. At the same time, it deserves to be emphasized that the border has not ceased to function as a geographical divider, rather, the border has conceptually expanded beyond its physical characteristics. As noted by Eder (2006, 260): "Territorial borders matter. What is to be explained is how borders make sense, how they succeed in providing narrative resonance and narrative fidelity to the people."

While there remains some conceptual uncertainty of what a border is and where it is located (Vaughan-Williams 2015; Paasi 2013) as a result of the interdisciplinary and empirical width and depth of the field (Newman 2006, 144), critical approaches within the field of border studies are increasingly perceiving borders as social constructs, disseminated through a geopolitical imagery of spaces; borders are thus seen as "institutions and ideological symbols" that help reproduce territorial power (Paasi 2009b). This depicts borders as sites of governance, control, and identity production, shaped by both top-down state practices and bottom-up social interactions. This understanding has opened up space for analyzing borders as relational and performative, tied to narratives of national identity, and belonging and exclusion. Moreover, in relation to this, there has been increasing critical scrutiny specifically on how 'crisis' (that is, perceived crisis) narratives, imaginaries, and anxieties are contributing to border governance, which in turn also contributes to shifting border conceptualizations (Perkowski et al. 2023; Cantat et al. 2025; Paul 2024; Simmons and Shaffer 2024).

A key development underpinning such conceptual shifts is the idea of bordering, the processes through which borders are made meaningful. Concepts such as b/ordering space (van Houtum et al. 2005) and borderscapes (Brambilla 2014) have emerged to capture the processual and multi-scalar nature of borders. These frameworks focus on how borders are shaped through social interaction, policy, and discourse. These concepts in particular highlight the everyday experiences and practices that constitute borders, offering a lens to examine how borders operate as mobile and relational zones (Krichker 2021, 1225). The analytical shift towards bordering directs attention to the actions and activities of

the border rather than the border as a line (van Houtum et al. 2005). This furthermore reveals how bordering practices intersect with struggles over rights, recognition, and justice (Brambilla and Jones 2020).

Rather than focusing on static border lines, increasing attention has been paid to the historical processes of borders, along with the denoted temporal dimensions (O'Dowd 2010). Borders are not static; they carry historical legacies that shape their current meaning and function. Thus, past borders persist to varying degrees in conceptualizations about space, spatial orderings, and perceived hierarchies (Leutloff-Grandits 2023; Jansen 2009; Zhurzhenko 2011). Border temporalities have become a more central approach in the study of borders to grasp how borders change over time, which can be conceptualized as the chronological development of a change of borders (Megoran 2012; Baud and Van Schendel 1997) or as a plural and contradictory process to capture the overlap and continuity of borders from one border regime to another (Brambilla 2014; O'Dowd 2010). Green (2018) conceptualizes borders as traces and tidemarks, understanding the border as marks that shift and accumulate over time, thus revealing the layered nature of bordering processes. A similar understanding is found in the concept of phantom borders (Hirschhausen et al. 2019), which reflects how former border lines continue to influence contemporary spatial imaginaries and socio-political relations, especially in post-socialist spaces, reminiscent of the phantom pains experienced at the loss of a limb.

Discourses about borders are deemed considerably apt at tracing the nuances that indicate border change. In line with the above argumentation, this dissertation adopts the reasoning that there is a continuity of overlapping temporal borders rather than a chronological life cycle of borders. Such a conceptualization of border temporalities opens up the possibility for border change that goes beyond changes in territorial demarcations. Even in instances where the territorial border does not change considerably over time, discourses about the border may still change. The BSR is an excellent case to study how narratives concerning borders in the region have shifted also in recent times: from promoting pragmatic cooperation with post-Soviet Russia as a means to secure regional stability to increasingly hardened border policies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and later its full-scale invasion in 2022. While territorial borders have largely remained intact what the border symbolizes has changed all the more so. Other aspects, such as changes in border regulations, the level of guarding, or movements across are equally important aspects that indicate border change. As processes of change are intrinsic to borders, it is useful to study periods where changes occur. In other words, it is useful to study critical junctures in the lifecycle of borders.

Before moving forward, it is essential to highlight the violence inherent in states' border management, given the focus of this work on state borders and bordering practices. Within the field of border studies, the complex intersections of bordering and violence have emerged as key dimensions to examine. Borders are reconceptualized as sites of struggle where alternative subjectivities can emerge, challenging sovereign power (Brambilla and Jones 2020) and the

hardening of militarized borders (Slack et al. 2016). Violent bordering practices, such as expulsions, pushbacks (Ilcan 2021), and family separation (Hernández 2019) expose the injustices inherent in state-preserving violence and blur the line between lawful and unlawful actions. These practices disproportionately affect racialized Others, leading to cascading dehumanizations and sustained inequality. As such, it challenges the nation-statist system's right to deploy violence against selective 'Others' and calls for a multidimensional approach to examining bordered knowledges and practices (Kaul 2023). Yet, at the same time, critiques have emerged over how the documentation of border violence, while necessary, may risk reproducing dehumanizing representations of migrants (Lindberg 2024). Such critiques stress the need to reflect on how knowledge about border violence is produced and the potential implications of representing suffering within unequal global orders. Hence, while this dissertation focuses on governmental discourses and border constructions within a state-security-mobility nexus, it remains attentive to the broader discursive terrain in which borders are embedded. Borders are not only expressions of sovereignty; they also profoundly shape the lives of those who move, or are prevented from moving, across them. The border*ed* migrant body is often subjected to exclusion, surveillance, and violence, reflecting deep asymmetries in who is permitted to belong.

Hence, by engaging with borders as discursive, temporal, and contested spaces, this study contributes to a critical understanding of how borders function in contemporary discursive EUrope. It highlights how bordering practices are both material and symbolic, shaped by historical trajectories and ongoing struggles over space, identity, and power.

1.2.1 Studying border entanglements?

The foundational notion of this dissertation concerns the entanglement of borders. The process of entanglement, be it with either material or immaterial subjects, entails the intertwined nature of that which is entangled. Specifically considering the entanglement of borders, a key question concerns examining how borders interact with, and entangle one another. One of the ways to do this is through the examination of how different border regimes are overlapping and layering (Green 2019, 2018; Leutloff-Grandits 2023; Hagelin 2024; Koch 2015). Entangled borders are not unique to the BSR, nor the EU for that matter. One may find similar patterns in all places where different border regimes layer or overlap one another.

Nonetheless, the EU is frequently cited as a prime example of entangled borders due to its structure as a political and economic union of sovereign states with diverse agreements (Green 2019; Rumford 2002). This produces multiple border regimes in EUrope. Green (2015) argues that multiple border regimes contribute to 'grey zones' at the European borderlands, representing the ambiguity and obscurity that is created when different border regimes exist "in layers that sometimes overlap, sometimes interact and sometimes slide past each other."

(2015, 173)[2] Notably, collective agreements that incorporate a form of spatial agreement rarely challenge sovereign territorial borders. Rather, these collective agreements add dimensions to the organization of the space as regulations or laws crosscut state borders (Green 2019, 3). Green thus conceptualizes entangled borders as "coexisting border regimes that run in parallel rather than clashing with one another, but whose coexistence nevertheless makes the world a more contingent place than it would otherwise be." (Green 2015, 183)

Previous examinations of the entanglements of borders highlight the prevalence of the phenomenon along the EU's southern[3] external border (Green 2019; 2015; Leutloff-Grandits 2023). This research directs this analytical lens to the EU's eastern external border, where various types of borders are similarly entangling and overlapping. However, a point of difference needs to be highlighted, as while the just mentioned examples of research examining the entanglements of borders do so from the perspective of human movement, this research instead approaches border entanglements from the perspective of discourse, specifically originating from governments.

Research on entangled borders posits that borders affect one another when they overlap or layer, whether physically or discursively (Green 2019). In the EU context, such overlaps are particularly visible in the coexistence of multiple border regimes, for instance, the EU's external border, the Schengen external border, and other functional or security-related borders. I distinguish between the EU's external border and the Schengen border, as they are not always the same. Throughout this dissertation, I will primarily refer to the EU's external border. This choice may create the mistaken impression that the two concepts are blended, but there are two main reasons for my approach. While the external Schengen border and the EU's external border do not always coincide, they do overlap along the eastern section. In close relation to this, the empirical material I am analyzing predominantly refers to this section as the EU's external border, and adopting this terminology is done to enhance stylistic coherence.

Moreover, the overlap between the EU's external border and the external border of Schengen suggests a dense configuration of discursive conceptualizations of the EU's borders and its governance, which differs from other stretches of the EU's external border where such layering may be less pronounced. The entanglement of these different border regimes matters because, as Green (2019, 10) argues, "the co-existence of different power-geometries (in this case, different and overlapping border regimes) results in conditions in which none of them is likely to ever create exactly the effects that were intended." Overlapping regimes introduce complexities that can redirect, dilute, or even contradict intended policy outcomes. In the EU's external borderlands, these entanglements also have a

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[2] Green (2013, 347) includes a helpful visual representation of the overlapping border regimes of EUrope.

[3] In this dissertation, I make a distinction between lowercase cardinal directions (e.g., east or west) and the capitalized concepts of 'East' and 'West.' The latter referring to the conceptualization of regional unification (and dichotomy) based on cultural and religious ground.

symbolic dimension: they contribute to an ongoing relocation of EUrope itself (Green 2013), redefining where and how the EU is imagined to begin and end. Understanding these layered regimes is therefore essential for unpacking the discursive work that borders perform in shaping the EU's territorial and conceptual landscape.

The borders which this dissertation refers to are borders of a "literal spatial significance," to borrow the wording of Green (2019, 3). This should be understood as borders whose meanings and functions are affected or generated by a geographical location, with the border marking a sort of separation. This specific research concerns geo-political borders, as it examines discourse on national borders and the EU's external border, both of which are institutionalized geo-political borders. This will be further unpacked in the following chapters, especially chapter 3 and chapter 6. These are, however, not the only types of borders available, as borders are also produced by other forces or entities, including financial, religious, and infrastructural institutions, as well as supranational organizations. Connecting the various types of borders is the fact that entanglements of borders are underpinned by understandings of borders as more than fixed lines, tying into the above discussion on the study of borders. More specifically, when borders are viewed as processes, acts of imagination, and dynamic configurations of social relations and networks, their entanglements increase (van Houtum 2012; Green 2018, 67–68). This bridges the material and the non-material (or symbolic) nature of borders; in effect connecting the discursive production of borders with their material forms. In addition, the entanglement of borders further draws on the assumption that the meaning and nature of borders are historically contingent, as detailed above, through which borders entangle by means of the residual traces of borders.

1.3 Research questions and contribution

I have argued above that various types of borders tend to be bundled together in the border discourse emerging from governments. This makes it precarious to examine the communication of borders as this communication needs to be carefully untangled to provide meaningful insights into state constructions of different types of borders. Responding to this, this research explores and examines how Baltic and Nordic governments communicate about borders in the region, with a particular focus on the discursive construction of EUrope through such communication. In addition to this, I further argue that border discourses provide articulations of competing visions of the future trajectory of EUrope, by shaping and promoting particular interpretations of borders and bordering processes. As the empirical analysis will show, governmental communication often reflects entanglements between national borders and the EU's external border, thereby privileging some understandings of EUropean over others.

Overall, this dissertation aims to further the conceptual and empirical understanding of how borders are communicated and constructed through governmental border discourse. More specifically, the dissertation aims to render visible how governments conceptually construct and imagine their national border and the EU's external border, to demonstrate the entangled nature of governmental border communication and to provide an entry point for further probing regarding the nuances of border discourse. As such, this work is primarily situated within the interdisciplinary research of border studies, but its findings are of relevance within the scope of political science and in particular in the domain of political communication. Moreover, as the work engages with visions of EUrope, the findings might also be of relevance for topics within European studies that are concerned with narrative constructions of the EU.

The dissertation also aims to examine how border representations invoke visions of EUrope. Ultimately, this rests on argumentation that the existence of the EU hinges on the notion of borders in a combined process of rebordering and debordering along both internal (here approached as national) and external borders (Schimmelfennig 2021). Despite this, scholarship on European borders has, overall, focused relatively little on the conceptual understandings of the external borders, and even less so on the interaction between conceptualizations of national borders and the EU's external border. Within this context, the objective of this dissertation is to examine the connection between the discursive re/framing of different types of borders and border-making processes during times of crisis and the trajectory of the EUropean integration process from a perspective of visions of EUrope. The decision to limit the empirical examination to border-related crises is underpinned by the assumption that the reconfiguration of border discourses is brought to the forefront during times of crisis, hence, the time of exceptionality functions as a conditional factor. Specifically, the study poses the following research questions:

(1) *How are different types of borders and bordering processes discursively re/represented in governmental border communication during border-related crises in the EU?*

(2) *How do discursive representations of various types of borders portray broader visions of EUrope?*

The first research question aims to untangle entangled borders in governmental border discourse by structuring the empirical examination around the various types of borders entangling into one another. This study assumes that border measures constitute a prominent instrument in the re/presentation of the world by means of geopolitical imaginaries (among others Agnew 2008; 2016; Moisio 2015; Moisio et al. 2013; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012). This has bearing on the second research question, as this then assumes that border framings contribute to European integration trajectories, where trajectories may be interpreted along the lines of a process of integration (and Europeanization) in forward or reverse gear (Gravey and Jordan 2016; Radaelli and Salter 2020). Hence, the

second research question shifts attention to how these border representations envision EUrope, thereby contributing to the understanding of how (discursive) borders relate to visions of EUrope.

This thesis makes four main contributions to current scholarship:

Conceptually, the dissertation advances the concept of entangled borders by proposing entanglement as an analytical tool to uncover how various border regimes interact discursively and how such interactions shape political meaning. By shifting the analytical focus from material practices and human mobility to the domain of discursive articulations of border, the dissertation emphasizes how borders are symbolically and imaginatively produced through state communication, challenging approaches that treat various types of borders as conceptually distinct. The notion of entanglement thus captures the coexistence of border regimes, but also their mutual invocation and reinforcement within border articulations. The dissertation further extends entangled border scholarship to the EU's eastern external border, where overlapping border regimes generate dense discursive configurations. Nevertheless, while empirically grounded in the context of northern Europe, the conceptual contribution speaks to broader debates on borders and governance in regions characterized by overlapping border regimes.

Methodologically, this dissertation suggests a pathway for comparing border discourse across countries. It does so by bringing attention to the utility of qualitatively studying governmental border communication. A qualitative study of border communication offers the possibility to closely examine the nuances in border discourse, which by extension opens up comparisons between countries, even in instances where border discourses largely converge. In this instance, these nuances are captured through the DNP approach, which facilitates the comparison of shifting combinations of metanarratives between countries. This is of course not the only methodological approach which would facilitate a fruitful comparison of border discourses between countries. However, the DNP approach facilitates a systematic cross-country comparison of border discourse through its emphasis on the scope of metanarratives upon which a nodal point draws meaning. This is important because border discourse remains largely understudied from the perspective of cross-country comparisons. Adding to this, the dissertation offers a methodological contribution to discursive analysis, by carefully justifying the methodological choices and demonstrating the operationalization of the method.

Theoretically, this dissertation demonstrates the applicability of the IBO triad for systematically studying various aspects of borders. It argues that the IBO triad is particularly effective for examining border discourse, precisely because it provides a structured approach for analyzing key dimensions of borders in isolation from one another. The IBO dimensions facilitate comparative research of brodersby providing a structured logic of analysis. As the empirical analysis presented in this dissertation will show, these dimensions serve as valuable tools for deconstructing border discourse, enabling a more structured comparative examination of how borders are represented and justified.

Finally, this study makes an empirical contribution to the broader field of border discourse, and to the research on shifting borders and spatial reconfigurations across northern Europe in particular. The BSR has historically served, and continues to do so, as a backdrop for significant reconfigurations of geopolitical belonging and division. These reconfigurations reverberate beyond the region, not the least within the EU. As a result, this research offers valuable insights into some of these ongoing discussions and their implications for EUropean perspectives on borders.

Additionally, a contribution beyond investigating the role of discourse in border-making is the possibility to critically engage with the notion of integration, asking what sort of integration trajectory is on display in EUrope by and through its border-making. This is underpinned by a query that permeates the study: *what sort of 'EUrope'*? As the remainder of this dissertation will show, and as hinted at in the introduction above, borders are everchanging in nature. It is this volatile context of border imaginations within EUrope and Europe that the study sets out to confer with.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, the dissertation proceeds with chapter 2, detailing the contextual determinants of the region and the crises under study here. The research covers Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden, four countries located in the BSR, representing distinct historical contexts that shape their perceptions regarding bordering imaginations and practices. These contextual differences are introduced, serving as the backdrop to the analytical examination that follows.

Chapter 3 reviews existing research on the topic, spanning two primary fields of study. First, it addresses previous studies on borders in the BSR, with particular attention paid to Baltic and Nordic characteristics. Second, it examines the literature on EUrope from a border perspective, focusing on the intersection of Europeanization and borders. This chapter also serve to later position the findings of this dissertation within the context of earlier literature.

Chapter 4 introduces the IBO triad, which serves as the theoretical basis for this dissertation. The chapter discusses previous applications of the framework and illustrates how it is employed within this study to facilitate a close examination of the entangled discourses surrounding various types of borders.

Chapter 5 outlines the research design and methodological considerations that guide this research. It explains the logic behind data selection and collection, as well as the DA methodology, specifically the DNP approach, that structures the analytical examination of the data. Additionally, this chapter details how the IBO triad is operationalized within the research conducted for this dissertation.

The next three chapters present the empirical examination in this study, where each chapter corresponds to one of the three lenses of the IBO triad. Chapter 6 discusses how governmental border communication shapes the nature of national

and external EU borders, outlining the main themes through which these two types of borders are described. Chapter 7 shifts the focus to the prevalence of EUropean orders, specifically analyzing how various orders are constructed and emphasized through border communication. Chapter 8, the final empirical chapter, examines how identity is constructed in border communication, exploring displays of both national and supranational identity, along with the use of history and territory to envision identity.

The dissertation concludes with a chapter that synthesizes the empirical findings and offers reflections on how to interpret visions of Europe. This final chapter also addresses the challenges of comparing governmental border communication across different countries, highlighting the difficulties that arise from varying practices in border communication. It concludes with considerations for future research aimed at enhancing our understanding of the role of discourse in the study of borders, and more specifically how states communicate and justify borders.

2 CASE PRESENTATION: SITUATING THE BALTIC AND NORDIC SPACES WITHIN ITS BORDERING CONTEXTS

This chapter introduces the particularities of the four case studies, placing shifting borders and spatial reconfigurations in the context of both the EU's complex border dynamics and the three crises which delineate the analysis of this study. The chapter begins with a general introduction of the BSR before proceeding in more detail with the specificities of the Baltics and the Nordics respectively. The intention is to situate the region and its borders within its own spatial configurations, and its geographical and geopolitical contexts. The chapter subsequently details the impact and lingering effects of the three crises periods in the region at large.

Below, I will first discuss the broader spatial configurations and reconfigurations that apply to the region, including attempts of re/mappings that have been explored in the BSR, and in the Baltic and Nordic spaces more specifically. Following this introduction to the spatial conceptualizations of the region, I will present each country case individually, starting with the Baltics and then moving on to the Nordics. I provide a *long durée* perspective that seeks to situate each region within its own set of spatial discourses and attempts at reconfiguration. Border discourses are often embedded within a complex web of historical consciousness, which encompasses a society's current interpretations and perspectives on past events (Gerner 2002, 399). Thus, recognizing the significance of the *long durée* perspective is imperative for understanding nuances about these discourses. Finally, I provide an overview of the border dynamics within the EU, highlighting the complex interdependence of various overlapping border regimes. The chapter concludes with a review of how the three crises have impacted the four country cases discussed.

2.1 Conceptual re-mappings of the Baltic Sea Region

The territorial and spatial characteristics of the BSR vary depending on the conceptualization of borders and their location. The regions encompass different types of borders, including physiographic borders, functional borders, and operational borders (Moraczewska 2023, 21–30). The physiographic borders are based on geographical criteria and defines the region based on shorelines or possibly river connections to the Baltic Sea basin. Functional borders, as applied in this study, are determined by the institutional and legal regulations that create regional cohesion. Relying on this type of border grants significance to the various institutional initiatives that exist in the region and mostly covers territories along the shoreline, but occasionally also neighboring countries as they partake in regional institutions. Operational borders, instead, define belonging based on the interregional cooperation taking place through various programs.

Despite different inclusion criteria, the countries usually considered to belong to the BSR are those along the shoreline of the Baltic Sea basin: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Sweden. Out of these, the ensuing discussion will predominantly center on Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden. Note, however, that the above elaboration of different conceptualizations of borders remain in the sphere of physical borders. Cultural affinities, such as religion or language, may likewise play a central role in the conceptualizations of borders, and particularly in the envisioning of the location of said borders.

The history of the BSR is largely characterized by rivalry and confrontation among local hegemonic powers struggling for control over the region and its trade routes, albeit with periods of cooperation interspersed throughout (Szacawa 2023). During the 9th and 10th centuries, Viking conquerors, known as Varangians, travelled from present-day Sweden toward the area of today's Baltic states and further into Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. The introduction of Christianity introduced new patterns of power struggles across the BSR. The areas of the northern Baltic shore were especially affected by attempts to reconfigure the space through religious crusades predominantly starting in the beginning of the 13th century. These crusades came to introduce several competing ecclesiastic orders, which contributed to new dividing lines in the region based on religious denominations. The crusades also contributed to land settlements, mostly by German and Polish-speaking nobility, which established elites that ruled over local populations (North 2015). Additionally, between the 13th and the 15th centuries, the Hanseatic League, founded largely by German merchants, dominated extensive trade networks across the Baltic Sea and beyond. This league, too, contributed to the establishment of a German elite in what is today Estonia and Latvia, known as the Baltic Germans. In today's Lithuania, a Polish-speaking elite dominated instead, as the region belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In Finland, conversely, the elite spoke Swedish as the area was under Swedish rule.

In the 16th century, in the context of the Livonian wars (1558–1538), the Tsardom of Russia faced a coalition of Denmark, Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, resulting in territorial gains for the latter. In the first half of the 17th century, following the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), Sweden emerged as a dominant power of the Baltic Sea and the present-day Baltic states. A power struggle ensued between Denmark and Sweden, which also involved the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, with the end of the Great Northern War in the beginning of the 18th century, the Romanov Empire, under Peter the Great, had risen to become a major power in the region, having gained control of the Baltic states in the early 18th century and Finland in the early 19th century from Sweden. By the end of the 18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned between the Romanov Empire, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire; what is today Lithuania (and Poland) was not re-established until 1918. In the late 19th century, a unified German Empire began to exert increasing influence over the Baltic Sea through its expanding naval power and

stronger economic ties with the Baltic territories. Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, Finland gained independence and a wave of political unification and national self-determination movements across the Baltic region laid the foundation for the creation of independent nation-states in 1918 when Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania declared independence (Piirimäe 2017). After the WWII, the Soviet Union occupied large territories including their control over the entire eastern coastline of the Baltic Sea, marking a new shift in the balance of power in the region. While this brief rendering of the history of the BSR is by no means exhaustive, it serves as a reminder that the region has a long history of fluctuating unity and separation (Åselius 2018). And thereby a long history of fluctuating borders and a shifting significance of these borders.

The borders separating Sweden and Finland (as well as Norway) have remained relatively constant since the mid-eighteenth century, despite shifting political unions (Lundén 2015). In contrast, the borders in the Baltic area have remained significantly less stable over time, including in more recent years. Viewing the BSR as a whole, the space and its borders have continued to experience reconfigurations as a result of shifting conflict patterns, but likewise by shifting cooperation patterns and identity formations. The BSR, and more specifically the Baltic and Nordic spaces are hosts of coexisting and, at times, overlapping regional identity formations (Lehti 2003), such as *Scandinavia* (traditionally Denmark, Norway, and Sweden), *Norden* (the Scandinavian countries, Finland, and Iceland), and *the Baltics* (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). Less successful attempts at regional formation include *Fennoscandia* (Scandinavia and Finland) from the time of Finnish independence from Russia in the early 1900s and *Baltoscandia* (Scandinavia, Finland, and the Baltics) from the inter-war period (Moisio 2003). Additionally, in the 1990's the term *Baltic World* emerged.[4] Toward the end of the 20th century, the notions of Norden began to change fundamentally. While Norden previously embodied a semantic, cultural, political, and geographic entity, the geo-political space has over time been reinscribed as the BSR (Andersson and Hilson 2009, 222; Musiał 2009). As Lehti (2003, 11) notes, the denotation appears, however, more as a spatial image than a serious attempt at identity formation.

Notably, sub-regional cooperation has emerged as a key determinant in the reconfiguration of the space. During the Cold War period, structures of sub-regional cooperation were limited in the BSR. This changed with the transition into the post-Cold War period, when, as Grezechnik (2012, 330) notes, the BSR emerged as "a whole for which a common history can be written." Steadily, the BSR emerged as a poster child for the so-called 'new regionalism,' which aimed to increasingly engage state and non-state actors to contribute to the development of the region (Branka 2023). This is largely a result of the EU's presence in the

[4] The term *Baltic World* was introduced by David Kirkby and Matti Klinge independently from one another in the 1990s in the following texts: D. Kirby (1990), *Northern Europe in the Early Modern Period. The Baltic World 1492–1772*; D. Kirby (1995), *The Baltic World 1772–1993. Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change*; M. Klinge (1994), *The Baltic World*.

BSR, which consolidated following the two enlargements, first in Sweden and Finland (1995) and later in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (2004). These enlargements had extensive implications for border discourses concerning the EU's eastern border, particularly the EU-Russia border. When joining the EU, Finland, and to a lesser degree Sweden, promoted increased cross-border cooperation along the EU-Russia border (Kononenko 2005) through platforms such as the Northern Dimension (ND),[5] alongside a plethora of other multilateral initiatives. Among its key objectives was the aim to sustain and/or improve border stability with Russia. In contrast, the Baltic states have tended to negotiate for a hardened border towards Russia and Belarus (Lamoreaux and Galbreath 2008). It is, however, not only the EU's presence (i.e., EU, EFTA, Council of Europe) that has shaped the region; security structures such as NATO (both through membership and loser partnership-based cooperation) and the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) have likewise contributed to a complex security structure (Szacawa 2023).

As a result of increasing efforts to establish closer sub-regional cooperation an increasing number of networks emerged, containing varied cooperation partners and thematic focus areas. As a general rule, however, post-Cold War sub-regional cooperation structures emerged in the region with two broad aims: to integrate the Baltic states into Europe and prepare them for EU membership, and to engage with Russia through cross-border cooperation (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2023). Still, this type of cooperation has tended to revolve around matters of environmental protection, infrastructural development, and cultural exchange. Traditionally, matters of security are less prominent themes of regionalism, as "[r]egional fora are not effective antidotes to security problems, especially when they aim to connect spaces (i.e., European and Eurasian ones) characterized by different value systems and regimes" (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2023, 70). Instead, security matters have remained in the sphere of inter-state cooperation (Szacawa 2023).

Despite extensive cooperation within the context of the Baltic and Nordic regions – as well as the geographically more extensive BSR – some distinctions have traditionally existed between these two regions related to discursive imaginaries about borders and how these are nested within geopolitical identity formations. The historical contingency of discourses on borders, orders, and identities is readily identifiable. This is particularly noticeable in how the Baltic and Nordic states have traditionally approached interaction with Russia. Such differences were more pronounced prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Overall, a greater focus on military capabilities in the region followed in

[5] The ND, an initiative put forth in 1997 by the then Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen, may serve as an example of the discursive construction of space in the north, encompassing contested identities which contribute to both challenging and emphasizing perceived geopolitical and security boundaries (Aalto et al. 2003). As such, the ND may also serve as an early example of how geopolitical imaginations contribute to the making of EUrope by (re)negotiating how regional borders, real and imagined, define spatial constructions.

2014 and solidified in 2022 (Wither 2020; Ekengren 2018). February 2022 has likewise emerged as another critical juncture in the (re)conceptualization of imagined space within northern and eastern Europe. In response to Russia's actions, a considerable shift in regional geopolitical imaginaries regarding divisional lines and moral belongings has emerged (Hagelin and Gibson 2024). Perhaps even more so in Finland and Sweden than in the Baltic States, given the pair's historical shift away from previous stances of military non-alignment (Arter 2023; Forsberg and Vaahtoranta 2001; Ydén et al. 2019).

Indeed, February 2022, has significantly contributed to the consolidation of regionalism in the BSR (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2023). This event has helped to close the foreign policy divide that previously lingered between the Baltics and the Nordics, which had hindered the development of a common security culture (Wrange et al. 2024). The effects of February 24 are, consequently, most evident in the region's security and geostrategic architecture, largely due to the just mentioned NATO membership of Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) (Szacawa 2023). As a result, sub-regional cooperation structures are shifting, as Russia has been increasingly excluded from such structures.

In summary, the territory of the Baltic and Nordic spaces and the BSR at large has, throughout history, been subject to diverse attempts at reconfiguration. Nonetheless, simplified, one could argue that a key distinction between the Baltic and Nordic spaces of the BSR concern the stability of their respective spatial imaginations. Below, I further highlight some of the particularities of the Baltic and Nordic spaces separately, focusing predominantly on more recent spatial reconfigurations.

2.1.1 Baltic

Over the years, the territory of the present-day Baltic states has been subject to multiple attempts to geopolitically re/configure its physical and narrated spaces (Piirimäe 2017). Up until the wave of national self-determination in 1917–18, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia were widely regarded as having similar historical trajectories and therefore seen to compose the three Baltic states. Lithuania, in contrast, was perceived to have a closer relationship with Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine. The Soviet occupation and annexation of the Baltic states in 1940, the ensuing Nazi occupation in 1941, and the reoccupation by the Soviets in 1944 has had a long-lasting impact on border imaginaries within the region. After WWII, the borders of all three Baltic states were redrawn, altering the borders established by the peace treaties of 1920 that had followed Baltic national independence. Due to the illegality of the Soviet occupation, the Baltic states asserted continuity of their interwar borders, a claim strongly contested by Russia (Mälksoo 2005). In addition to these territorial changes, the transformation of the Königsberg to Kaliningrad in 1945–46, created a Soviet, and later Russian, exclave that redrew territorial borderlines and introduced new dimensions of BSR geopolitics on the Baltic shore.

The shifting reconfigurations of the spatial belonging of the Baltic states in particular has been underpinned by shifting narrative formulations. Following re-independence (1991), the nation-building and identity formation of the Baltic states were nested within a Europeanization agenda. It equally, however, pertained to narratives of Russia as the alien 'Other' (Jurkynas 2021b; Rutland 2021). While the Baltics' relations with Russia improved in the early 2000s, security threats were inscribed through a cultural language. Thus, although there was a form of softening of security discourses, geopolitical discourses, in some sense, became more fundamental as they took on a civilizational character. Civilizational geopolitics in the Baltics took inspiration from Samuel Huntington's thesis of civilizational clash, although Kuus (2007, 44; 55–60) shows that civilizational geopolitical discourses existed before then; notably, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has traditionally been conceptualized as possessing dual cultural characteristics belonging to the 'West' and the 'East.'

Despite significant efforts by Baltic leaders to reposition the three Baltic states as integral members of the West, these efforts were only partially successful during the 1990s and early 2000s. As Mälksoo (2006, 280) argues, the Baltic states' aspirations to be seen as part of "core Europe" were tempered by their persistent 'Othering' within EU enlargement discourse, which framed them as "Europe but not Europe." This hierarchical structure was perpetuated by the core EU Member States (henceforth EUMS), particularly in the pre- and post-accession periods, where distinctions were drawn between the older EU-15 and the newer EU-8 MS (Habermas and Derrida 2003). Pravatorau (2023) observes that similar narratives towards the Baltics also exist in contemporary Russia, where portrayals of the Baltics as the Western East or a 'non-genuine' West prevail.

Geopolitical identity formation in the Baltic states may be approached as being nested between the west (EUrope) and east (Russia as the ontological 'Other'), north (Scandinavia) and south (eastern Europe).[6] The Baltic states have moved in and out of these different geopolitical and spatial imaginations – although not always by choice. Following re-independence and into the 2000s, Baltic narratives of aspired Nordicness emerged (Jurkynas 2021a; 2021b), more tangible in Estonia than in Latvia and Lithuania (Lagerspetz 2003). Estonia's Nordic aspiration, an aspiration to escape the Baltic label, can partly be explained by a close relationship with Finland based on linguistic similarities and shared

[6] Larry Wolff demonstrates in his book *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (1994) that the idea of Europe divided between a West and an East emerged during the Enlightenment period. Prior to that, mental maps of Europe were divided along North and South. This emphasizes that geographical divisions taken to represent this or that territorial 'truth' are rather the result of mental inscriptions and imaginaries of space. With that being said, my proposition of the Baltic states being nested between the four geographical constructions should not be taken to draw upon such old mental inscriptions as a divisional line between a European North and South. Despite that, only relating Baltic identity formation to an East-West divide risks neglecting the prominence of the Nordic narrative within Baltic discourses.

historical experiences (Tammpuu et al. 2019), which also sets them apart from their Baltic neighbors. Furthermore, the aspirations to become Nordic is underpinned by Finland managing to rebrand itself from Baltic to Nordic, thus demonstrating the possibility (Kasekamp 2018).

Nested identity formation is hinged on a perceived hierarchical ordering of spaces where Europe is signified not by Estonia's immediate neighbors but by the more distant Britain, France, or Germany, denoted as the "peripherality syndrome." (Made 2003, 187) As exemplified by Pfoser (2017), Estonia's re-independence and accession to the EU brought about a narrative of "becoming peripheral," as the borderland "shift[ed] from being the 'West in the East' to becoming eastern and backwards." (2017, 28) In Estonian (public) narratives Europe has been presented as a place further away, "shaped by a hierarchical ordering of spaces in which an imagined 'West' served as a model and in which Tallinn ranked higher than Narva, and Germany higher than Estonia," (2017, 35) and where Norden ranked higher than the Baltic. As Made (2003, 190) remarks, such narratives are in some ways founded on the fact that the Baltic states are indeed small states, and geographically located far away from western Europe.

While narratives often appear to originate from centers, Estonia, for example, exemplifies how a marginal actor can articulate its own understanding of the opportunities and challenges tied to its peripheral position (Panke and Gurol 2018; Wivel and Crandall 2019). Following (re)independence, leaders and intellectuals in CEE embraced their position as part of the 'emerging Europe,' translating the unique characteristics of the peripheries for Western audiences and shaping which interpretations were deemed "plausible" or "implausible." (Kuus 2008, 190) Alongside this, after joining the EU, the Baltic states – alongside Poland – sought to expand the "mnemonic map" of Europe by incorporating the historical experiences of eastern European countries into the broader "core European" narrative (Mälksoo 2009). The Baltic states have thus established themselves in foreign policy as a "cultural meeting point, economic gateway and political mediator between East and the West" (Berg 2007, 62). However, while Finland traditionally has been a strong advocate for increased regional cooperation to de-politicize topics on security, geopolitics, and identity, the Baltic states have promoted a starker divide towards the East (Mölder 2011; Sulg and Crandall 2020).

Spatial practices and geopolitical narratives emerging in the Baltics have been strongly intertwined with politics of identity, concerning notions of belonging and notions of not belonging (Aalto and Berg 2002; Lehti and Smith 2003). This is unsurprising as "the essential moment of geopolitical discourse is the division of space into 'our' place and 'their' place; its political function being to incorporate and regulate 'us' or 'the same' by distinguishing 'us' from 'them', the same from 'the other'." (Dalby 1991, 274) This mirrors the functions of the border pertaining to exclusion and inclusion, that are integral to the relational and symbolic relational characteristics of borders, introduced in the next chapter. A tendency is emerging, to view especially the eastern stretch of the border as a demarcation between inherently different cultural and political practices.

With regard to borders, notably, Estonia still has an unratified border treaty with Russia, the two parties signed a border agreement in May 2004 after prolonged negotiations, but Russia revoked its signature in June the same year. Latvia and Russia completed negotiations on the state border in 1997, but the ratification of the border treaty took place only in December 2007. A similar storyline occurred in the case of Lithuania, which signed a bilateral border treaty with Russia in 1997, Russia, however, only ratified it in 2003. For Estonia as well as Latvia, the ratification of border agreements was complicated due to border claims resting on the historical legitimacy of the 1920 Peace Treaties of Tartu and Riga respectively. A notion that Russia refuted. Eventually, Estonia and Latvia had to cease their interwar border claims. Nevertheless, despite having unratified border agreements, the Baltic states finished their EU accession processes in 2004, as Russia was generally considered the main reason for the failed ratification processes (Levinsson 2006).

2.1.2 Nordic

Although this section will touch upon the shared particularities of the Nordic countries, the main focus rests on Finland and Sweden. The Nordic space has also been subject to reconfigurations (e.g., Jukarainen 1999; Haapala et al. 2017; Jalava and Stråth 2017), notably in the Finnish case. The Swedish space has conversely remained relatively stable for a significant period. Thus, we find fewer attempts to inscribe and reinscribe the space of Sweden in the sense of shifting geographical boundaries, as opposed to the other countries cases in this study (Lundén 2015). And while Sweden has been geopolitically reinscribed within its regional and global contexts (Barton 2005; Marklund 2009; Andersson and Hilson 2009),the country has been able to play a more active role in shaping the reconfiguration of its space, as it has enjoyed sovereignty for a significantly longer period than any of the other cases included in this study.

In the case of Finland, the country emerged as an independent state following the Russian Revolution (1917), after having existed as an autonomous Russian Grand Duchy since 1809, and a Swedish territory for centuries prior (Barton 2005, 318). During the period of Russian rule, the formalization of a Finnish territory and its borders laid the groundwork for statehood and sovereignty in the early twentieth century (Paasi 1997; 2002). During the WWII, Finland successfully fought off an invasion by the Soviet Union known as the Winter War (1939–40) and again in 1941 when Finland, aligned with Nazi Germany, declared war on the Soviet Union during the Continuation War (1941–44) to regain lost lands. Due to its Axis-alignment, Finland was forced during the Treaty of Paris (1947) to cede territory such as Eastern Karelia and Vyborg to the Soviet Union, including claims to territory lost during the Winter War. The redrawing of borders amounted to a loss of about a tenth of Finland's territory at the time (Finnish Ministry of Defence 2009). Despite this, the country retained its independence from the Soviet Union but remained under heavy influence until the Union's demise. As a result, in Finland, a narrative akin to the Baltic states,' 'return to

Europe' emerged, ascribing western Europe as 'home' and the Finnish identity as first Nordic (Wæver 1992) and later Western (Browning 2002). Nevertheless, following the WWII, Finland pursued a policy of neutrality to navigate its geo-political context. As Forsberg and Pesu (2016) explain, this neutrality was difficult to sustain in practice due to remaining under the Soviet Union's sphere of influence throughout the Cold War. Thus, while never formally occupied by the Soviet Union, Finland was compelled to develop a security policy that sought to appease the Soviet Union, known as *finlandization*. As a result, while Sweden actively pursued its neutrality, with deep historic roots to their non-alignment (Brodin et al. 1968), Finnish neutrality was in many ways imposed out of necessity. Although, it should be emphasized that as the neutrality stance remained in place post-Cold War such realpolitik considerations do not paint the full picture (Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016).

Following the end of the WWII the notions of Norden changed. Norden as a construction was particularly prominent during the Cold War, reflecting regional attempts to achieve a stable security balance in the region despite an otherwise bipolar world (Götz 2003). Over time, however, Norden became increasingly reinscribed as the BSR (Andersson and Hilson 2009, 222; Musiał 2009). Yet, despite the relative decline of a separate Nordic identity, a certain Nordic distinctiveness has remained, notably in how Norden has negotiated its marginality in comparison to other contemporary liminal regions (Parker 2002). At the core of this Nordic distinctiveness is the Nordic model of economic policies that underpin the Nordic welfare systems (Hilson 2008). This also acquired a spatial characteristic, as noted by Marklund (2009, 274):

> Nordic authors generally tended to continue and even extend the notion of the general middle way by giving it a particular sense of geographical orientation. Scandinavia was to be found in between the West and the East, between the USA and the Soviet Union.

As Lagerspetz (2003) points out, it was largely economic policies that set the Baltic and Nordic regions apart. These continue to be a point of distinction also today.

Finland's and Sweden's accession to the EU in 1995 brought attention to the European elements of national and regional identifications previously down-played (Götz 2003, 324). The accession of the two countries added a stronger Nordic dimension to the EU, while also facilitating closer functional cooperation across wider northern Europe,[7] particularly in the field of environmental protection (Heininen 2017). This notwithstanding, spatial reconfigurations of the Nordic space are less cohesive than that of the Baltic. Norway and Iceland, while part of the Nordic spatial construction, remain outside of the EU but within the European

[7] Wider northern Europe is coined to capture the inter-linkages between the Baltic Sea, the Arctic regions, and the North-Atlantic. In other words, regions in or at the vicinity of Arctic Europe.

Economic Area (EEA). Similarly, although Denmark, Sweden, and Finland are all EUMS, the former two, in particular, have historically exhibited skepticism toward deeper integration, adopting a pragmatic approach to their EU strategies (Einhorn 2002). This is particularly prominent with regard to formal integration in areas of security and defense: up until 2022 that is. Prior to 2022, Denmark held an opt-out from the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), while Sweden and Finland retained a pragmatic neutrality/non-alignment stance vis-à-vis NATO as well as the framework of the CSDP (Migliorati 2024). Finland, conversely, as Jungar (2002) notes, opted for deeper integration and compromise-seeking with the aspiration of greater influence.

Thus, largely due to the earlier military non-alignment of Finland and Sweden, the Nordics have previously lacked official conformity in matters of security policies (Forsberg and Vaahtoranta 2001; Ydén et al. 2019). All the while, the two countries' security neutrality stabilized the region during the Cold War by counterbalancing the NATO memberships of Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, which opted to join the alliance in 1949. This Nordic balance contributed to a detente between East and West in northern Europe (Elgström and Jerneck 2000, 189). Following the Cold War, and as a result of Finland's and Sweden's EU memberships, neutrality was abandoned in favor of military non-alignment (Devine 2011). For many years, military non-alignment remained a powerful self-narration (Agius 2006). Nonetheless, the fact that Finland and Sweden joined the EU but not NATO remains somewhat of a paradox, as the two countries largely supported deepening security cooperation within the EU while retaining non-alignment vis-à-vis NATO (Forsberg and Vaahtoranta 2001). All the while, Finland and Sweden both pursued practical cooperation with NATO, joining the Partnership for Peace (PFP) in 1994 (Migliorati 2024; Ydén et al. 2019). Yet, as Wood (2024) shows from interviews with state representatives in the region, Finnish non-alignment entailed a strong military, and should thus not necessarily be perceived as neutrality in the true sense of the word.

Due to the geographical location of the Nordic countries, Arctic dimensions have overlapped with northern dimensions. The former has increasingly obtained a central role in Nordic policies and geospatial imaginaries (Andersson 2018). At the EU level, the Arctic region has gained increasing importance across a variety of policy areas, although the primary actors remain the Arctic countries themselves (Conde Pérez and Yaneva 2016). Especially in Finland, the Arctic dimension has come to play an increasing role in the country's foreign and domestic policies as the country strives to become a key player in the region. Since 2021, security concerns have become increasingly pronounced in Finland's Arctic policies, alongside the ongoing priorities of climate change and local development. This shift in focus to security aspects can be traced back to the rising tensions in the region that emerged after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Middleton 2023). Security is, however, not only tied to traditional or hard security concerns, but instead other security understandings have also emerged in Nordic policies for the Arctic region, including internal and human security,

reflecting the environmental, depopulation, and economic challenges facing this region (Baumann and Tucker 2023).

As already highlighted, most recently, the spatial reconfigurations of the Nordics changed when Finland and Sweden abandoned their non-alignment policy and applied for NATO membership following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Finland's and Sweden's membership, albeit a drastic change from previous policies, is best understood in the light of a changing security reality in the BSR following Russian aggression (Arter 2023), which began after Russia's unlawful annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Ekengren 2018; Wither 2020). Likewise, it should be understood against the backdrop of increasingly expanding practical cooperation with NATO dating back to the 1960's (Christiansson 2023; Pesu and Iso-Markku 2024). Moreover, this shift needs to be considered against drastically re-shaped internal perceptions within the two countries (Migliorati 2024, 3258–59; Forsberg 2023). Notably in terms of spatial reconfigurations. Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership consolidated the notion of a northern flank of NATO, as was previously prevalent during the Cold War (Christiansson 2023). As a result the prospects for a shared security culture across the Baltics and Nordics have thus materialized, albeit with slow progress (Wrange et al. 2024).

2.2 The EU's Complex Border Dynamics

The EU border regime with its distinct mode of border management took form with the Schengen Agreement in 1985. The continuous enlargement of the Schengen Borders Code (SBC) is a good example of how processes of bordering shape the location and overlap of different borders and border regimes in Europe. At the time of writing, the SBC encompasses all of the EUMS aside from Ireland and Cyprus, the latter of which is in the process of adopting the necessary legislation. The SBC also includes non-EU member states Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. In 1999, the Schengen Agreement was made into EU regulation, providing an opt-out for the UK and Ireland. Hence, the removal of internal border controls and the inclusion of the agreement into EU regulation points towards a process of de-differentiation within the EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA), under which the area of asylum, border controls, and police cooperation falls (Comte and Lavenex 2022, 131). This third pillar of the EU arguably demonstrates a progressive supra-nationalization following the Lisbon Treaty (Maricut 2016).

The EU's border regime is characterized by a combination of internal openness and external control, balancing humanitarian concerns with securitization, creating a control versus care dilemma (Confalonieri 2021). Common policies for the management of the movement of people and goods at the external Schengen border allows for the removal of control at the internal borders. Key traits include the harmonization of categories among member states, use of networked databases, and the security-based sorting of individuals (Takle 2012). Yet, the

Schengen borders function as a composite policy, shaped by diverse areas such as Regional Policy and Justice and Home Affairs, resulting in a differentiated strategy with varying patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Berg and Ehin 2006). Within the Schengen framework, the EU establishes admission criteria, such as family reunification for non-EU nationals while the EUMS determine admission quotas. In matters of asylum and illegal migration, the European Council sets strategic priorities, including those defined by the Dublin Regulation, formulates action plans, and negotiates agreements with non-EU countries. These frameworks are subject to legislative approval by the European Parliament (EP), typically through the ordinary legislative procedure.

However, while there is a supranationalization of border regulations at the decision-level, MSs continue to hold primary responsibility at the operational level of border management. This includes making most decisions on the admission of migrants and asylum seekers, as well as overseeing the control and surveillance of the external border (Confalonieri 2021).Although progress has been made under the Pact on Migration and Asylum to address national imbalances, EUMS continue to manage migration flows, asylum claims, and irregular migration independently, with the EU providing support. This support, often facilitated through the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), includes assistance with border checks and identity verification, but only upon an EUMS's request.

The same division of responsibility applies to the Schengen system and EU visa policies, with the Commission initiating policies, the EUropean Council coordinating them, the EP providing democratic oversight, and the EUMS implementing. However, as demonstrated for example, by the Covid-19 disruptions and temporary border controls, the Commission has adopted a more flexible approach which accepts national measures as *fait accompli*. Despite efforts to strengthen the EU's role in external border management, the Covid-19 response consisted primarily of non-binding guidelines by the Commission aimed at coordinating actions already undertaken by individual EUMS (Montaldo 2020). A pattern that is repeated also during the 2021 instrumentalized migration 'crisis' and the 2022 visa restrictions (Braghiroli and Hagelin 2024). Noteworthy, it has been demonstrated that the Schengen visa policy is implemented more restrictively towards visitors from poor, Muslim-majority, and refugee-producing countries (Hobolth 2012).

One reason for these inconsistencies could be that the management of the EU's external borders emerged from several policy paradigms, all grown out of the Single Market, which contributed to a differentiated border regime (Berg and Ehin 2006). It should also be noted that these different policy paradigms correlate to different discursive interpretations about the nature of the border: Regional Policy focuses on cross-border cooperation and relates to a discourse of (regional) cohesion; Schengen, which falls under the JHA, highlights a discourse on security in relation to the external border; finally, the policy paradigm including enlargement and the ENP relates to a discursive notion of enlargement (2006, 57). Brunazzo (2022) further highlights that, political discussions surrounding border

related integration such as the SBC and the European Monetary Union (EMU) agreements clearly indicate that the EUMSs have been far from in agreement on the depth and reach of both of these instruments.

2.3 Contextualizing the three crises and their regional impacts

Aside from the reconfigurations of the spatial and regional dimensions, it is equally imperative to contextually situate the three events which delimit the time frame of the study. The events share a common feature in that they constitute human movement across borders. Interpretations of human movement studied here are hinged on two key threat assessments: one relates to the threat of migrants,[8] the other relates to the threat from other states. In addition, a further distinction can be made: human movement prompting the visa restrictions in 2022 entailed individuals attempting to cross the border as tourists, whereas those crossing borders during events of 2015–2016 and 2021, can largely be designated as migrants.

It is not only the type of human movement that sets these events apart, but also the number of border crossings. In 2015 alone, the arrival of first-time asylum seekers to the EU was more than 1.2 million; in 2016, the number amounted to 1.1 million.[9] Comparably, in 2021, with regards to the so-called instrumentalized migration crisis along the Belarusian border, the number along the border with Belarus amounted to 43,115 (Lithuania: 4,115; Poland: 39,000). Note that it represents border crossings and not first-time asylum seekers; one individual may cross the border multiple times, each recorded. These numbers are specifically labeled 'irregular migrants' according to statistics in the two countries. This can help to explain disparities with numbers in the table below (Table 2.1). What is not included in these numbers are the 'prevented' border crossings, otherwise known as pushbacks. This will be further discussed below. The observant reader will notice that the numbers for 2015–2016 and 2021 respectively represent quite different things. The former displays the number for the whole of the EU, while the latter displays numbers relating to human movement specifically in the Baltic

[8] I use the term 'migrant(s)' in broad reference to 'people on the move' crossing international borders, alongside 'human movement.' It needs to be pointed out, however, that the term migrant is not unproblematic, due to the lack of consensus on a definition, while also often conflating issues on migration status with gender, class, and race (Anderson and Blinder 2024). Although beyond the scope of this work, it is worth noting that legally 'migrant,' 'refugee,' and 'asylum seeker' refer to different legal statuses (Craig and Zwaan 2019, 30), such legal differentiations will not be considered here.

[9] The number is obtained from Eurostat showing the total number of first-time asylum applicants entering the EU. In 2015: 1,216,860; 2016: 1,166,815; in 2021: 535 985; in 2022: 873,680. Accessed 29.08.2024.

region. The reason can be found in the spatial structure of the two crises respectively; while the former is EU-wide, the latter is not.

While the numbers of migrants are awkward to compare between countries without taking into consideration the proportional share of the population in each country, the number of asylum seekers registered per country and year are helpful in the sense that it allows us to identify trends over time (Table 2.1). This alone provides a backdrop for contextualizing rhetoric on both migration as well as the border. The numbers in the table are obtained from Eurostat; hence, they allow for comparison as the numbers themselves are calculated on a uniform logic. However, it deserves to be pointed out that I have noted slight discrepancies as to the exact number of applications across different sources. Below, I provide further context for each of the three 'crises' delimiting this study. Each crisis is briefly introduced, offering an overview of the key events while situating the roles and experiences of the countries examined in this research.

Table 2.1. Number of first-time asylum applications per country and year

Year	Sweden	Finland	Estonia	Lithuania
2014	74,980	3,490	145	385
2015	156,115	32,150	225	275
2016	22,335	5,275	150	415
2017	22,190	4,330	180	520
2018	18,075	2,950	90	385
2019	23,125	2,445	100	625
2020	13,595	1,445	45	260
2021	9,015	1,355	75	3,905
2022 (From Ukraine[10])*	13,180 (24,720)	4,815 (51,030)	2,940 (37,020)	905 (67,775)
2023	8,945	4,450	3,980	510

*Data from end of March 2023

A contextualization of the three crises will not be complete without a consideration of the performative practices of labelling, or categorizing, humans on the move, a practice that has had bearing both on research and policy. As debates on human movement heightened in political and public discourses during 2015–2016 the question of language and labels became a prominent theme, specifically so in public debates. The categorization of human movement is a political and

[10] In response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU Commission proposed to activate the Temporary Protection Directive which was unanimously adopted on March 4, 2022. The decision granted Ukrainians fleeing the war a right to temporary protection in the EU. The directive was initially adopted in 2001 following the conflicts that erupted with the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. However, the directive had not been put to use before 2022.

rhetorical strategy which allows those taking part in the asylum debate to impose classifications and political imaginations about people on the move (Goodman and Speer 2007), thereby constructing reality (Yanow 2015). In general, labels and narratives of human movement tend to represent the migrant as a problem (Anderson 2025; Dennison 2021). Ultimately, this debate revolves around the implication of representing asylum seekers as illegal, implying criminality. To illustrate, in August of 2015, an article on the BBC (2015) highlights how different groups of people on the move are interpreted and represented as 'good' (desirable) or 'bad' (undesirable) migration.[11] By shifting between labelling the people on the move as "refugees," "migrants," "irregular," or "illegal," those active in the asylum debate engage in questioning who is a *real* or *genuine* refugee and who is not, as exemplified by a news article in the Daily Mail in May 2016 (Reid 2016). Such debates can be further ensnared by categorizations of voluntary or forced migration (Erdal and Oeppen 2018), which is yet another layer to the often dichotomic labelling of migrants, i.e., skilled/unskilled, temporary/permanent.

By sorting people on the move into pre-existing categories the aim is to differentiate between their status as people on the move and the legitimacy of their claims for international protection. For instance, labeling individuals as economic migrants is often employed to delegitimize their asylum claims by framing them as motivated by economic aspirations rather than a need for protection (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). This differentiation and categorization not only influence perceptions of legitimacy but also impacts immigration trajectories and integration policies. By categorizing migrants into distinct groups, policymakers and political commentators identify those who are perceived to require specialized integration measures to better adapt to their new socio-political environments (Mügge and van der Haar 2016). These categorizations often involve explicit identification of target groups, such as third-country refugee of different religion, while simultaneously creating implicit hierarchies among them. Consequently, such distinctions play a role in shaping migration governance and integration frameworks, reinforcing societal perceptions and policy outcomes tied to the perceived legitimacy of different migrant categories. Finally, as Donato and Massey (2016) emphasize, one should not forget that the notion of 'illegal migration' is a recent construction used to control the movement of people; this should be placed in the context of practices of migration that humans have historically relied on to adapt to changing conditions.

[11] The shifting language of migration is not limited to crafting distinctions among those seeking asylum (e.g., migrant, refugee, economic migrant, irregular migrant) as it is equally applicable when we speak of other forms of human movement. One such example is the tendency to describe Western migrants as expats rather than immigrants, whereas non-Western migrants remain immigrants (at best). For a more exhaustive discussion see the books *Bad News for the Refugees* by Greg Philo, Emma Briant, and Pauline Donald (2013) and *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* by Ruben Andersson (2014).

2.3.1 The 2015–2016 migration crisis

The so-called migration crisis of 2015–2016, that reached its apex in the summer of 2015, is characterized by the increase in human movement to the EU along the eastern Mediterranean external Schengen border and the western Balkan routes. This influx was largely driven by conflict, instability, and poverty in countries such as Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq, but also Eritrea and Somalia. The crisis exposed gaps in the EU's asylum and migration policies, particularly in the implementation of the Dublin Regulation, which assigns responsibility for processing asylum applications to the first EU country of entry. The failure of the distributive regulation led to border fencing and closing across the EU (Armstrong 2019). Migratory pressures, however, had increased already in 2014, when the number of asylum applications reached the highest number since the Yugoslav wars. Sweden was among the top four EU countries for asylum application recipients per capita.

The Arab Uprisings (Arab Spring) in 2011, with the ensuing destabilization in the region and increasing displacement of people, foreshadowed increasing migratory pressures at the EUropean borders. Prior to 2011, the EUropean border regime in the Mediterranean relied extensively on externalization through cooperation between the southern EUMS and north and west African countries. However, following the uprisings in 2011, the majority of these cooperation agreements ended which weakened the externalized border regime (Bialasiewicz 2012) along the Mediterranean transit routes, meaning that a rising number of migrants could – and did – reach the borders of the EU (Hess and Kasparek 2017). Largely in reaction to the large numbers of migrants reaching the EU, a number of Schengen member states reintroduced temporary border control along internal Schengen borders, including Sweden. In 2016, Sweden, among other EUMS, appealed to the European Commission for the possibility to extended temporary border controls for an additional two years. The temporary border controls reflect inconsistencies between the EU as a peace project and the inability of EUMS to collectively address the "consequences of conflict and economic underdevelopment elsewhere." (Crawley 2016, 13)

The four country cases of this study had quite diverging experiences of the migration crisis. While all four experienced increased numbers of asylum seekers and asylum applications, Sweden and Finland received proportionally much larger numbers in terms of population sizes compared to Estonia and Lithuania. Initially, Sweden and Finland maintained an open policy towards asylum seekers, but this changed during the fall of 2015 when narratives and border policies shifted dramatically toward heavy border controls, partly due to pressure from far-right parties in the two countries (Sakki and Pettersson 2018). As Bucken-Knapp (2017) shows for the case of Sweden, this was partly facilitated by shifting party rhetoric and a reframing of the crisis by the Swedish Social Democratic Party (S), which returned to power in 2014 (Appendix III). Sweden imposed temporary border controls, in part as a response to the large numbers. These temporary controls have proved anything but temporary, as evidened by a long

string of extended controls. Thus, among the four cases under study here, Sweden arguably underwent the most substantive change in their border policies, transitioning from open to closed borders (Bucken-Knapp 2017; Skaarup 2021; Naper 2022).

As a matter of fact, Sweden emerged as a destination country long before 2015 due to its generous asylum policies. Of relevance for this case is, for example, a decision in 2013 to grant all asylum seekers from Syria residency with the right to relocate their families (Bucken-Knapp 2017). In 2015, Sweden, alongside Germany, accepted the largest number of asylum seekers and applicants (156,000) in relation to its population size at the time (c. 9.8 million) among the EUMS (Table 2.1). Finland came close behind, receiving 32,150 asylum applications in 2015, and 5,275 in 2016, to compare with its population size in 2015 (c. 5.48 million). These numbers are about 10 times greater than the year before. The majority of the asylum applicants entered Finland across the land border with Sweden, which previously had little systematic border-control enforced. Following the migration crisis, this stretch of border experienced re-bordering (Prokkola 2021). A big part of Finnish migration, thus, represents movement across an internal Schengen border. In the beginning of 2016, Finland began to experience some migration flows across its border with Russia, in the far north on the so-called Arctic route. Similar patterns occurred across the Norway-Russia border (Paulgaard and Soleim 2023). In the Norwegian case, it was found that some of the border-crossers were already living in Russia, thus the border-crossings along the Arctic route were only partly connected to the migration crisis in a very strict sense (Hohmann and Laurelle 2016). However, given the timing, such human movement was nonetheless read through the lens of the migration crisis. It is likely that similar patterns hold true for the human movement in Finland too.

Although the number of border crossings along the Arctic route was considerably lower than other pathways of entry to Finland, at just over 1700 asylum seekers (4.6% of the total share), the significance of the migratory movement was nonetheless high. It also resulted in Finnish hesitance toward the relocation of asylum seekers among EUMS (Wahlbeck 2019). The border has traditionally been closely monitored and managed through several bilateral agreements with Russia (Laine 2015). In that regard, human movement along the Arctic route was both surprising and concerning as it indicated that Russian border authorities suddenly underperformed on previously successfully performed duties (Skön 2017, in Piipponen et al. 2017). Adding to that, there are indicators that suggest that the Russian state, through informal practices, facilitated some of the border crossings (Virkkunen and Piipponen 2021b).

Moving on to the Baltic country cases, starting with Estonia. Prior to the migration movements of 2015, Estonia had very limited experience dealing with asylum seekers. An administrative system that officially recognized asylum seekers was first adopted in 1997, providing Estonian officials with the tools to process asylum applications (Potisepp 2002). Between 1997 and 2014 it is estimated the country only received 618 asylums (Trei and Sarapuu 2021, 244), which should help to place the 225 administered during 2015, and the additional

150 in 2016 (Table 2.1) in a comparable light (population size c. 1.3 million). The low number of asylum applications prior to 2015 meant that asylum was not on the political agenda, and that asylum reception systems and other services were of low standard (Trei and Sarapuu 2021, 249). Furthermore, as Trei and Sarapuu (2021, 250) note, "Estonia's formal position on asylum matters has remained conservative and has reflected the country's generally precautious attitude towards immigration, shaped by historical experience and geographical position." This should predominantly be understood in light of the large numbers of forced labor immigration during the Soviet occupation, which significantly changed the ethnic composition in the country. This has made the question of immigration sensitive in the country.

As the events unfolded in 2015, along with the failures of the Dublin Regulation, Estonia remained opposed to the redistribution system proposed on the EU level, through which Estonia eventually agreed to receive up to 550 asylum applicants. Despite the comparably low numbers, the topic of immigration increased in salience in the public debate, with anti-immigration notions gaining traction among citizens (Ojala et al. 2019, 174). Notably, despite a stark contrast in the number of asylum applications between Estonia and Finland, immigration remained a debated topic, as displayed through a comparison of the narratives of refugee debates in the two countries (Ojala et al. 2019). As will become evident from the data sample of this study, Estonia emphasized proportional asylum redistribution. According to the argumentation, Estonia should not need to accept more asylum applicants than the size of the Estonian population and economy proportionate to the EU.[12]

Similar to Estonia, Lithuania, as part of the EU, was indirectly impacted by the 2015–2016 migration crisis, though it did not experience the same scale of irregular migration as Sweden and Finland, and certainly not as frontline countries like Greece or Hungary did. Despite initial hesitancy, Lithuania participated in the EU's relocation and resettlement program, committing to take in 1,100 asylum seekers in 2015 (LRT 2021). The actual numbers were lower than the target numbers, largely due to an extensive and time-consuming screening system. According to data from Eurostat, the country received 275 first-time asylum applicants in 2015, and 415 in 2016 (Table 2.1), to be considered against the population size (c. 2.9 million in 2015 and 2016).

Lithuania strengthened their commitment to the asylum process through the ratification of the Convention on the Status of Refugees of 1951 and its Protocol of 1967 in 1997. During the 2000s and early 2010s, migration politics in Lithuania was predominantly focused on emigration as it remained high for a number of years following re-independence (Streimikiene et al. 2016). Migration, despite

[12] In this study, the Baltic states emerge as conservative regarding migration policies, especially in comparison to Sweden and Finland. When looking at the broader context of the EU, the Baltic states take a more moderate position, while the Visegrad Group (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia) constitute the conservative block with regard to views on immigration.

international obligations regarding asylum structures, tended to be treated as a security problem "viewed through the prism of law enforcement, and the procedures for managing the asylum procedure and the institutions involved are all linked to the policing structures of the state." (Maskaliūnaitė 2015, 108) Furthermore, the asylum legislation stipulates that granting asylum is dependent on a threat analysis by the State Security Department (SDD) (Maskaliūnaitė 2015, 109).[13]

Following the agreement of resettlement among the EUMS, Lithuania developed extensive assessment criteria for individuals to be admitted, ranging from education level, language skills in at least one EU language, religion, and expressed wish to resettle in Lithuania. This slowed down the process of resettlement, but also diverted focus and resources from the integration process, which remained largely neglected, causing tension. Discursively, immigration had remained infrequent in the public debate up until 2015–2016 when immigration became more salient, often portrayed in negative tones. But it tended to be economic and cultural arguments rather than security, which were invoked when arguing against accepting migrants. As a matter of fact, proponents of immigration also relied on economic arguments but from the perspective of compensating for the large share of emigration. Historic dimensions were another frequent argument for why Lithuania should accept migrants (Maskaliūnaitė 2015).

The human movement of 2015–2016 brought attention to the weaknesses in EU regulations regarding human movement (Guild et al. 2015). A brief introduction to the main regulations governing asylum in the EU can help to contextualize the discursive representation of borders that emerges in reaction to human movement of different kinds. Thereby situating the border representations found within this study in a larger framework of EU responses in questions on asylum and migration.

The EU's approach to migration and asylum is shaped by Articles 79 and 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which emphasize shared responsibilities between the EU and its MSs under the principle of subsidiarity. While EUMS retain control over specific actions, the EU supports coordination in areas such as immigration management, integration, and return agreements. Additionally, Article 6 of the TFEU assigns the EU a supplementary role in public health, relevant to asylum contexts. The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was established to ensure fair and efficient asylum procedures in alignment with the 1951 Refugee Convention. Central to CEAS is the Dublin Regulation, which determines which EUMS is responsible for processing an asylum application, typically the country of first entry, supported by the Eurodac fingerprint database. However, the 2015–2016 migration crisis

[13] The threat analysis by SSD includes information concerning the potential threat posed by a migrant. This information is classified, and the asylum seeker's lawyer may refuse its disclosure. However, in cases where an asylum seeker is assessed as posing a threat, the relevant information is presented to the presiding judge, even if the asylum seeker's lawyer objects to its disclosure (Maskaliūnaitė 2015, 109).

revealed deep imbalances, as frontline states at the external Schengen border disproportionately bore the burden of processing claims, leading to systemic inefficiencies, rights violations, and the rise of border barriers.

In response to the failures exposed during this crisis, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum was proposed in 2020 and adopted in 2024. The Pact aimed to reform external border governance and EU solidarity mechanisms. Yet, it has drawn criticism for reiterating key elements of the flawed Dublin system without offering substantive reform (Smeets and Beach 2023; Maiani 2022). Scholars have argued that the Pact reflects broader trends toward illiberalism and securitization in EU migration governance (Wolff 2024), while also embodying a strategic effort to depoliticize contentious debates to enable reform of the CEAS (Smeets and Beach 2023). Despite these efforts, the fundamental challenge of achieving equitable responsibility-sharing among EUMS remains unresolved, continuing to strain the EU's asylum framework and border politics.

2.3.2 The 2021 instrumentalized migration crisis

The instrumentalized migration crisis at the EU's external border with Belarus intensified in the summer of 2021, after Belarusian President Lukashenko threatened to enable migrants to transit freely through Belarus to reach the EU. It soon became evident that the Belarusian government intentionally directed migrants to the eastern borders of the EU by organizing 'tourist trips' and relaxing its visa requirements for people from the Middle East. Consequently, migrant arrivals in Poland, Lithuania, and to a lesser degree Latvia started to rise in late spring 2021 and escalated significantly during the summer. The Baltic states, and Poland, largely remained transit countries, as migrants sought to reach EUMS further west. To situate the borders, Belarus shares a 678 km border with Lithuania, a 418 km border with Poland, and a 172 km border with Latvia. Estonia does not border Belarus.

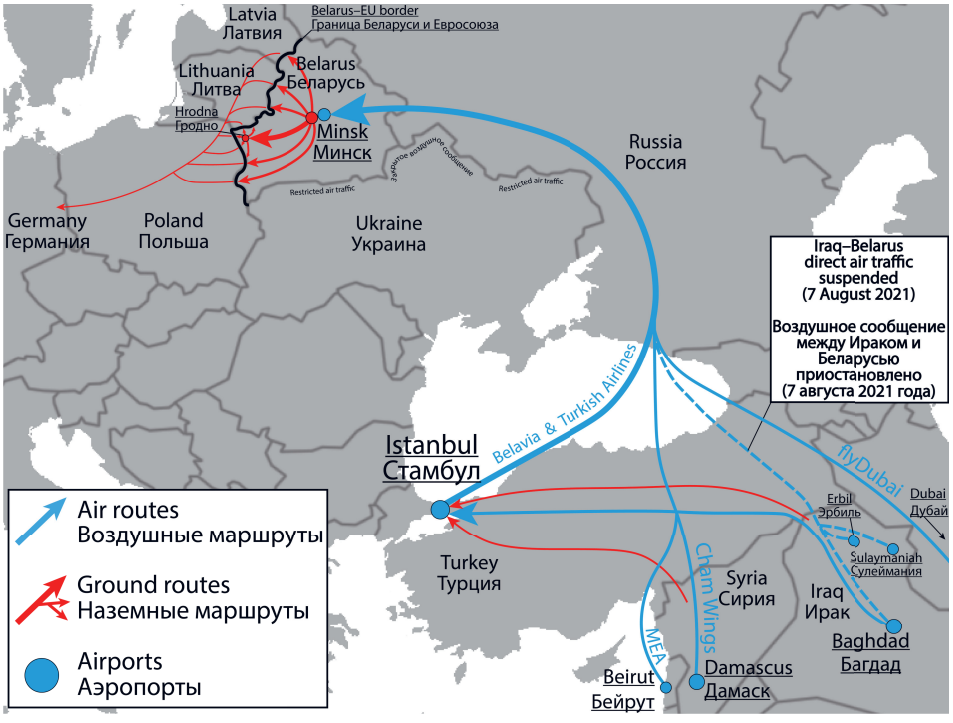

Figure 2.1. A map of the instrumentalized migration from Belarus

The map depicts the borders between Belarus and Lithuania (and Latvia and Poland) in the top left corner. It also demonstrates the paths of the human movement reaching the Lithuanian, Polish, and Latvian borders in 2021. Note well, however, that the depiction of human movement through arrows on a map is highly problematic, as this form of cartography is easily used for propaganda purposes (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2020). Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2021_Belarus-EU_border_crisis_-_general_map.png

The unfolding of the instrumentalization of migratory pressure should be understood against the backdrop of the sanctions the EU imposed on Belarus following the contested election campaign and fraudulent Belarusian presidential election on August 9, 2020, when Lukashenko won yet another fabricated victory against the opposition candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. The Belarusian authorities unleased a brutal crackdown on the hundreds of thousands who took to the streets to peacefully protest the results, jailing more than 7,000 protesters in the first five days. In response, the EU implemented sanctions in October 2020, after some internal difficulties to agree upon the scope and scale. Following the forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk on May 23, 2021, to detain the Belarusian journalist Raman Pratasevich, the EU further intensified sanctions, albeit with mixed effects (Bosse 2021).

Indeed, instrumentalization of migrants was not a new phenomenon for the EU when it erupted along the Belarusian border in 2021. Similar instances had previously occurred along the Greek-Turkish border in February 2020, after

Turkey proclaimed they would no longer prevent refugees and migrants from trying to cross the border. The Greek police answered forcefully with tear gas and rubber bullets and kept the border closed, without any reprimand from the EU. Yet another instance of the instrumentalization of migratory pressure unfolded along the border between Spain and Morocco in May 2021, where migrants attempted to cross the border into Spain following a dispute between the two countries over Spain's medical treatment of the leader of the Polisario Front in Western Sahara (Lang 2024).

With regard to the country cases of this study, the country most affected was Lithuania. Previous annual instances of unlawful border crossings typically numbered around 70, these increased to approximately 470 in June 2021 and over 2,600 in July (Ledur 2023). According to numbers presented by Lithuanian authorities, the reported number of apprehended border crossers in 2021 was 4,339 individuals. Comparing with the number of first-time asylum seekers (Table 2.1), we can observe that the number reported by Lithuanian authorities is slightly higher than first-time asylum seekers (3,905) reported by Eurostat. This could, however, also be a result of inconsistencies in reporting or categorization of people on the move. Adding to that, reported numbers of prevented attempts to illegally cross the border was 8,106 (European Committee on Crime Problems 2023), otherwise known as pushbacks.

In response to these numbers, on July 2, 2021, Lithuania declared an "extra-ordinary situation," and also introduced changes to asylum laws, effectively permitting practices such as pushbacks and the automatic de facto detention of migrants. Additionally, in August 2021, Lithuania approved amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens, with the successive introduction of pushback practices (ECRE 2021a).[14] Pushbacks were legally implemented through amendments to the Law on the State Border and Protection Thereof in April 2023, although practiced before that.[15] On November 10, 2021, Lithuania implemented a state of emergency, further raising significant concerns about the treatment of

[14] At the time of writing, there are over 30 cases pending before the ECHR against Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland concerning the situation along the Belarusian border between spring 2021 and summer 2023. Lithuania has been found to have breached their human rights obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights in their border management during the instrumentalized migration crisis. See *C.O.C.G. and Others v. Lithuania* (App. no. 17764/22), 8 April 2022, and the interim measures in *A.S. and Others v. Lithuania* (App. no. 44205/21), 8 September 2021.

[15] The amended Law on the State Border and Its Protection Thereof adds a paragraph to its Article 4, which effectively legalizes pushbacks. 4(13) stipulates that in instances of declared state-level emergency due to a mass influx of foreigners the Government, upon a proposal from the National Security Commission, may adopt a decision that declares that foreigners who intend to cross or have crossed the state border in places not designated for crossing, or have otherwise violated the procedure for crossing the state border, shall not be admitted. Amendments to Article 2(20) stipulate that coercion might be applied when the requirements or instructions of an official are not complied with. The amendments, furthermore, limit access to the border area in instances of a declared state-level emergency by stipulating in Article 11(10) that access in such cases is only permissible with a valid permit.

migrants (Amnesty International 2022b; ECRE 2021b).[16] This legal status limited the access of all but the military and specifically approved state bodies to enter the area, barring media, health personnel, and organizations, including NGOs from providing services to people in need.

According to national statistics Estonia did not experience any attempts at border crossings with regard to the human movement emerging from Belarus, but deployed police and military units to Lithuania and Poland to support border operations (European Migration Network 2022, 36). At the EU level, Estonia actively engaged in the debate concerning the events along the Belarusian border, promoting a political interpretation that recognized the events as an instrumentalization and a hybrid attack (Hagelin 2024). Moreover, Estonia, similar to Lithuania, introduced more permanent amendments to its State Border Act in August 2022, allowing pushback practices and refusals to accept asylum applications in the event of mass immigration or threats to public order and national security.[17] The justification of the amendments highlights that "[t]he artificial migratory pressure in the region showed that the Estonian legal system must also be prepared to manage such a hybrid attack and ensure security in the event of mass immigration," (Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus 2022) demonstrating the link to the events of 2021 along the border with Belarus.

Media interpretations across the three Baltic states emphasized heightened levels of threat, pointing to the unfamiliar security challenge which the instrumentalization of migrants posed toward the region. Framing the events as a 'hybrid attack' strategically shifted focus away from humanitarian perspectives of migrants seeking asylum to a collectivization and criminalization of the migrants. This was further emphasized by a persistent focus on reporting the precise numbers of migrants entering the respective countries. Such narratives dehumanized migrants by portraying them as tools of warfare by an opposing state regime, and thereby as threats to national security rather than as individuals with valid claims to asylum under international law. More importantly, Belarus was seen to act as a proxy for Russian aggression (Hagelin 2024). Of course, such reactions did not evolve in a vacuum; EU narratives on migrants as potential dangers permeated regional discourses (Fassin 2011). Additionally, geopolitical discourses in relation have to the eastern EU border steadily increased since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Cadier 2019). Furthermore, as Halemba (2022) notes in her early ethnographic documentation of migrants' experiences in the woods between Belarus

[16] Latvia implemented a similar state of emergency on August 10, 2021 (Amnesty International 2022a).

[17] The amended Estonian State Border Act § 9^{10}(1) stipulates that in the event of mass immigration and a threat to public order, or national security, the Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB) may return an alien who crossed the border irregularly to the foreign state from where they arrived, if the alien could have crossed through an open crossing point but despite that opted to cross irregularly. § 9^{10}(6) similarly stipulates that the PBGB may refuse the asylum application from an alien if the alien was able to submit the application at a PBGB designated location but chose to cross the border irregularly.

and Poland, the events that played out along the Belarusian border reflected global political realities of conflict.

In contrast to their Baltic neighbors, Finland and Sweden were not as immediately affected by the events along the Belarusian border as Lithuania, or even Estonia, given their geographical proximity to the events. Nonetheless, despite not experiencing any border crossers connected to the instrumentalized migration crisis, Finland implemented legal amendments similar to that of the Baltic countries to pre-empt hybrid threats (Scheinin 2022). In May 2022, Finland amended its Border Guard Act and the Emergency Powers Act in order to "help prepare for hybrid influence activities that exploit migration." (Sisäministeriö 2022) Further amendments in matters of migration occurred in 2023 and 2024, which mirror the bordering policies implemented by the Baltics during the 2021 instrumentalized migration crisis.[18] With regard to the initial amendments in 2022, it is somewhat difficult to specify with certainty whether these are a result of the instrumentalized migration crisis organized by Belarus in 2021, or if they occurred largely in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, amidst fear of Russian attempts to instrumentalize migrants along the Russia-Finland border. The amendments do not specify situations of instrumentalized migration, but instead rely on the unspecified terminology of 'hybrid attack.' The broad definition of the term garnered criticism, as did the decision to enact an emergency law rather than working on a definition of hybrid threats that could be included under the clause for emergency situations in the Constitution (Scheinin 2022).[19] However, although the legal amendments themselves do not specify instrumentalized migration, migration is mentioned in the press release of the amendments, highlighting the connection to the experiences along the Belarusian border short of a year prior. It is thus, most likely, a combination of the instrumentalized migration crisis in 2021 and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 that initiated Finnish amendments.

Sweden was considerably less affected by the events of the instrumentalized migration crisis. As the country is not located along the external Schengen border, the threats posed by instrumentalized migration are less immediate than for the other country's cases in this study. There have thus far not been any legal

[18] For example, throughout November and December of 2023 Finland closed all border crossing points along the eastern border with Russia following a surge of asylum applicants who admitted they received assistance to reach the border. Finland accused Russia of orchestrating instrumentalized migration pressures. In July 2024 Finland introduced a temporary emergency law on migration, remaining in force for a year. The law permits the removal of aliens crossing the border who are being exploited by a foreign state to exert influence, see *Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalised Migration (482/2024)*. While this is partly explained by the geopolitical context, the governmental composition (Appendix III) might also offer some explanations to the shrinking rights for asylum seekers.

[19] Some of Scheinin's (2022) criticism concerns the fact that the 2011 Emergency Powers Act, which was amended to include the notion of hybrid threats, replaced an earlier law with the same name that failed to meet the requirements of the Constitution.

amendments similar to those observed in the other country cases. And, as we shall see, communication on the matter remained considerably infrequent.

The occurrences of the instrumentalized migration crisis had quite an impact on EU asylum regulations which ought to be emphasized here. Besides a number of relatively recent proposals central to the development of the EU's asylum regulations,[20,21,22,23] the EUMS lacked measure to address the increasing instrumentalization of migrants along the external borders of the EU (Turkey in 2020, Morocco in 2021, Belarus in 2021). Hence, in December 2021, the Commission proposed regulations to address this phenomenon in the field of migration and asylum, building upon an earlier proposal by the Commission concerning a six-month provisional emergency measure for the benefit of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.[24] The 2021 instrumentalized crisis proposal also introduced an amendment to the SBC, including a definition of instrumentalization. The proposal would allow states to perform the processing of an asylum application in locations close to the border, allow the possibility to extend the processing time by up to four weeks, and to apply an emergency asylum management procedure which allows the possibility to determine admissibility of an asylum application directly at the border, except in of medical cases.[25] Overall, these propositions are underpinned by the recognition that:

> Where the EU is under attack, it is important that the EU, at the level of the European Council acknowledges that the actions by a third country can be considered as instrumentalisation of migrants. Those actions are not necessarily targeting one or more Member States but the EU as a whole and therefore require collective EU support (European Commission 2021, 3).

Despite credible evidence of Poland and Lithuania breaching the regulations of the CEAS, including violations of *refoulement*, the Commission largely adopted the narratives of Poland and Lithuania (Grześkowiak 2023). At the same time, it

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[20] Amended proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common procedure for international protection in the Union and repealing Directive 2013/32/EU, COM/2020/611 final.

[21] Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast), COM/2016/0465 final – 2016/0222 (COD).

[22] Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (recast), COM/2018/634 final.

[23] Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum, COM/2020/613.

[24] Proposal for a Council Decision on provisional emergency measures for the benefit of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, COM(2021) 752 final.

[25] Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council addressing situations of instrumentalisation in the field of migration and asylum, COM(2021) 890 final, 2021/0427.

should be emphasized that the affected EUMS were bound by more demanding legal obligations than Belarus, demonstrating that legal obligations can create an asymmetry that favors a hostile state (Sari 2023).

2.3.3 The 2022 travel restrictions for Russian citizens

As for the travel restrictions and visa ban towards Russian Schengen visa holders, the Baltic states and Poland have been the main proponents for stricter measures toward Russian citizens travelling to the EU. The proposal consisted of two main objectives: ending the EU regime of visa facilitation toward Russian citizens and banning short term tourist visas. One of the challenges of EU-wide travel restrictions concerned coherence among the EUMS (Kozioł 2022); while short-term visas are regulated by common EU regulations, long-term visas and humanitarian visas are determined by national regulations.

In March 2022, Estonia stopped issuing visas to Russians (Embassy Estonia Moscow 2023), and in September that same year the country announced plans to restrict entry to Russian citizens holding valid Schengen visas, with the exceptions of humanitarian reasons, family, and diplomatic travel. In September 2022, the EU decided to suspend the Visa Facilitation Agreement with Russia, making the process for obtaining Schengen visas more complicated for Russian citizens (Council of the European Union 2022). The EU remained, however, divided regarding the extent of travel restrictions. While the suspension of the Visa Facilitation Agreement was approved, a more extensive ban was not unilaterally supported among the EUMS (Ganty et al. 2022). In September, the Baltic states and Poland announced and implemented a joint decision to impose a regional policy of nonrecognition for previously issued visas, which aimed to reduce Russian tourism, although some earlier exemptions remained in place. Finland adopted a partial ban on September 30, restricting non-essential travel, applicable for travel to Finland, as well as transit-travels. Although Finland initially was more skeptical of the legal conformity of travel restrictions based on ethnicity, stricter entry restrictions were eventually adopted.

In this scenario, as with COVID-19, the Commission's priority appeared to be minimizing the resulting Schengen inconsistencies among the EUMS rather than penalizing the unilateral action. Visa bans based on nationality have been criticized for the lack of legal conformity with the EU *acquis* (Ganty et al. 2022). The argumentation supporting this claim is, however, divided, as opposing views persist in the EUMS bordering Russia. There, sentiments on the matter suggest that if the visa bans are seen as conflicting with the current Schengen *acquis*, and by extension, the broader EU *acquis*, the EU should consider amendments to grant external border EUMS with greater flexibility in securing their borders.[26]

[26] The author took specific notes of this perspective while attending the public panel "Arts of survival in the Baltic: Russia's futures and their implications" in Tartu in September of 2024. However, such sentiments are part of a broader public debate and should not be viewed as a one-time occurrence.

Visa regulations toward Russian citizens on the one hand and migration policy toward Ukrainians on the other (the Temporary Protection Directive) more broadly became a soft power tool for the EU to emphasize the distinction between the democratic Europe and the isolated authoritarian Russia (Rosina 2023).

The seemingly ad hoc visa suspensions indicate a rebordering process that is of interest in the context of bordering discourses and European integration, as it displays an incoherence in the function of the Schengen border. Border events constitute an outside challenge to the coherence of the Schengen border system. As pressure mounts on the external border, effects are noticed along internal borders as well, as is evident in the case of Sweden and Denmark as the so-called migration crisis of 2015 proceeded. The counteraction to border instability, or incoherence, is to adapt the many border management tools which a state is equipped with as part of their border toolkits. Hence, we can see how EU borders tend to become coherent as the Union adapts to various outside challenges.

A final note on the introduction of travel restrictions toward Russian citizens. Presumably, the uncovering of the atrocities committed by the Russian army, especially those of Bucha and Irpin in late March–early April, functioned as catalysts for imposing stricter sanctions on Russian citizens. Adding to that, by autumn of 2022 forced conscriptions in Russia increased, prompting increasing attempts to leave the country.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to shed light on the complex dynamics of the Baltic and Nordic regions, emphasizing the historical and geopolitical factors that have shaped identity re-configurations and cooperation patterns across the region. Thereby shaping the re/making of national and regional border discourses. In this chapter I have presented a long durée overview of how the separate countries have been discursively inscribed and reinscribed in overlapping fashion. The various attempts to spatially reconfigure both the Baltic and the Nordic spaces indicate how deeply intertwined these spaces tend to be in the constructions of narratives.

The chapter has also aimed to situate the three crisis events that constitute the timeline of this study within the regional context of the Baltic and Nordic spaces. As such, it has presented the general patterns of crisis, highlighting similarities and differences. Notably, concerning legal amendments, although some had a set duration, they nonetheless contributed to a re-articulation of narratives pertaining to border security by challenging what measures are considered acceptable in the context of human movement (Braghiroli and Hagelin 2024).

There are a few key takeaways worth emphasizing before moving forward. The modern geopolitical identities of the Baltic states have, broadly speaking, been shaped by various external influences and internal aspirations, transitioning from a peripheral region to a contested borderland. Post-1991, Estonia and Lithuania both focused on distancing themselves from Russia and integrating with Western Europe, culminating with EU and NATO memberships, thereby

stabilizing their borders and solidifying their Western orientation. Regarding human movement, the Baltic states have maintained relatively skeptical narratives. This skepticism is influenced by their population and economic size, as well as the perceived societal threats posed by human migration. As we shall see even more clearly in the empirical analysis, the perception about the origin of threats shifts between 2015–2016 and 2021, fully consolidating in 2022, as the instrumentalization of human movement shifts attention away from individuals' need for protection.

The Nordics have in modern times experienced stability with regard to territory and border (re)inscriptions, especially in comparison to their Baltic neighbors, with Finland being a slight exception. While the Baltic states opted for military alliance to counterbalance their geographical location, Finland and Sweden instead committed to non-alignment in the twentieth century, specifically in an attempt to balance the geopolitical challenges of their geographical location. In this light, the pair's recent shift towards NATO membership is a stark contrast, reflecting the severity of perceived contemporary security threats at the time of writing. With regard to human movement, the Nordics, and Finland and Sweden in particular, initially emerged as promoters of humanitarianism, advocating for relatively open borders. Such notions, however, began to shift already in 2016 as pressure remained high on the countries' respective social structures. From a border perspective, Sweden displayed the least engagement with the events of 2021 and 2022, this will be further discussed in the section on data collection in chapter 5. For now, it suffices to point to the lack of a shared border with Russia as the distance has diminished the immediate threat faced by the other countries in this study.

What becomes evident from this contextual overview, is that the region serves as a rich example of the entanglements of different types of borders both in the sense of spatial dimensions, but also in the sense of ontological imaginaries. All in all, this chapter serves as the backdrop for the empirical research conducted in this dissertation, enhancing the analysis of contemporary discursive patterns in the region being studied.

3 EUROPE AND THE BSR: TRACING BORDER CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE LITERATURE

This chapter aims to examine previous research on borders within EUrope and more specifically the BSR, particularly how these borders are discursively constructed and what these constructions reveal about competing visions of EUrope. By examining the intersection of border studies and EUropean Studies, this review highlights the ways in which border discourses and imaginaries shape understandings of the EU as a political and cultural project. The objective is to engage with the breadth of the literature on borders and discourses to uncover the implications for the broader vision of a political space, particularly in times of crisis, when the boundaries are most visibly negotiated and contested. Thereby, the chapter engages with broader considerations of what and where borders are. Borders, or perhaps more accurately our perceptions of borders, are ever-changing, meaning that the conceptualization of borders remains fluid and evolving. One should also bear in mind that with regard to the EU, locating the Union's borders is different from locating its bordering, as the Union's border management stretches beyond the territory of the Union itself (Bialasiewicz 2012).

Borders have for a long time been linked to the state as a means to claim and enforce sovereignty, i.e., state borders. This understanding of borders is, as illustrated in the previous chapter, deeply rooted in historical readings of the link between state and territory, founded largely on the Westphalian system. Despite a diffusion of power away from the nation state as a result of globalization, the role of state borders prevails. Therefore, as O'Dowd (2010) argues, historical reflexivity is integral for understanding the boundedness and globality of state borders, along with their distinctiveness. Hence, we should understand state borders to be grounded in the aspirations and practices of their creation and continuation as part of the nation, but also with roots in the somewhat more unbounded, imperial state that existed before. A historical perspective is especially salient in areas marked by extensive border changes over time, especially in instances of changing inter-state systems and imperialistic borders; of which the BSR is a good example.

However, the departing point for this dissertation is that borders are not merely physical demarcations of territory; they are deeply embedded in social, cultural, and political discourse. The field of border studies has increasingly moved beyond understanding borders solely as static, territorial lines, emphasizing instead their dynamic and socially constructed nature (Moisio 2015; Paasi 2009b; 2013; van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002; Parker, Vaughan-Williams et al. 2009; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012; Brambilla 2014; Brambilla and Jones 2020). Furthermore, the chapter will focus on how borders are shaped and reshaped through discourse, serving as markers in both a cultural (symbolic) and political sense. Within this evolving field, this chapter pays particular attention to the BSR and EUropean borders, which exemplify the entanglement of national and supranational border dynamics.

Likewise, in European Studies, discourse has become a critical lens through which the EU can be studied. These studies depart from the premise that the EU is a discursive project – a space where narratives about identity, values, and belonging are negotiated. As this chapter and dissertation demonstrate, border discourses play a central role in this negotiation process, as they communicate and construct ideas of EUrope. While the chapter outlines key developments, it does not attempt to provide an exhaustive review of the extensive literature on this interdisciplinary area of study. Albeit a relatively young field, border studies is empirically rich and covers a wide range of regional knowledge, much of which falls beyond the scope of this chapter. Similar richness is found also in European studies. Instead, the aim is to identify foundational ideas and key shifts that underpin the discussion of borders as dynamic and discursive constructs related to northern Europe and the BSR.

The chapter proceeds as follows, the next section begins by exploring how borders in the BSR have been conceptualized over time. Building on this, there is discussion on the features and functions of borders as understood here and on how borders are studied through discourse. The subsequent section shifts the focus to the EU, and examines how the EU, as an entity, has been studied through its borders. This part will establish a connection between the study of European integration and the concepts of orders and identities, before reflecting on the construction of the EU's borders in response to crisis. The chapter then proceeds to identify gaps within the nexus of border studies and EUropean studies, briefly explaining how this dissertation aims to address these gaps. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief summary and concluding remarks.

3.1 Evolving conceptualizations of borders in the BSR

Border narratives in northern Europe reflect complex dynamics of identity, security, and ordering. This section introduces the evolving conceptualizations of space and borders, with particular attention paid to the reconfiguration of space and borders in literature looking specifically at the northern European context. As introduced in the previous chapter, the BSR has been marked by significant geopolitical changes and the emergence of new forms of cooperation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of research on borders, border constructions within northern Europe and the BSR permeate overlapping fields of research that in different ways approach the topic of spatial representations or imaginaries within the BSR. As a result, while this section concerns research on borders in the region it will not strictly engage only with scholarship of border studies.

Border studies emerged in the 1970s in reaction to the largely state-centric approaches to borders found within social and political research. Recent decades have seen a significant increase in border studies, with a European-based tradition emerging from the traditional American borderlands studies (Liikanen 2010). The European approach has been influenced by globalization and EU integration,

leading to three main research focuses: flow, cross-border cooperation, and people (van Houtum 2000). As globalization expanded, border studies revolved around debates over a 'borderless world,' and transboundary cooperation in the case of the EU. However, despite previous assumptions about the decreasing significance of borders due to globalization, state borders have actually proliferated and become more complex, particularly within the EU (O'Dowd 2002).

Albeit the emphasis here is on top-down bordering practices, border studies have increasingly highlighted how bordering practices are not only enacted by states, but also by a range of other actors, diffusing border powers (Szczepanik 2018). Examples of this include when traditional border powers are transferred to non-traditional actors such as transport companies, or health and education institutions (e.g., Jones and Johnson 2014; Szczepanik 2018; Amoore 2006). Through this, the power to define and fix borders is diffused as well. Thus, although the nation-state seeks to govern its border, the reality is that in many instances part of the governance resides elsewhere, particularly on an international level (Macdonald 2015). This is especially true within the EU, as internal borders have largely have been de-bordered (although a reversal of this process is observable in reaction to migration pressures as well as during the Covid-19 pandemic) while the outer-edge border, and particularly the eastern border, has continually been re-bordered (Mkrtchyan 2012). The enlargement processes have geographically shifted the eastern border multiple times, while bodies of cooperation such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern partnership (EaP) have re-constructed the conceptualization of borders and altered the boundaries between the EU and the so-called 'Neighborhood.' Hence, citizens are involved in legitimizing and interpreting border changes too. Everyday narratives and local engagements contribute to the meaning and function of borders, as individuals seek to position themselves within changing geopolitical landscapes (Pfoser 2017; Perkins and Rumford 2013). This reflects the multiplicity of border narratives that operate across various levels, from the institutional and geopolitical to the everyday and affective. Local and bottom-up interpretations of borders are, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation.

As we examine the BSR, perhaps the most significant shift in how borders are understood in the region concerns the permeability of existing borders and boundaries. Following the Cold War, borders in the region transformed from impenetrable dividing lines to more permeable boundaries (Berg and Filtenborg 2002). As a result, the concept of bordering expanded to encompass not only physical boundaries but also ethnic, cultural, and political demarcations (Hurd 2010), reflecting broader developments in the study of borders (among others van Houtum 2000; Balibar 2009; Brambilla 2014; Brambilla and Jones 2020; van Houtum et al. 2005). The EU's enlargement further contributed to the transformation by multiplying border types and functions within the BSR, influencing regionalization processes and cooperation patterns (Koch 2015). At the same time, European integration reshaped the region's geo-conceptual landscape by integrating the Baltic states while excluding Russia (Moisio 2003). However, geospatial and geopolitical approaches in northern Europe simultaneously

emphasized cross-border cooperation, seeking to blur dividing lines that had emerged in the region (Archer and Etzold 2008). Following EU enlargement, border constructions in northern Europe have increasingly been approached from the perspective of a EUropean borderland; a region located at the edge (Jones 2008) or margin (Parker 2002; 2006; Browning 2005a) of Europe. Thereby drawing attention to border constructions and spatial imaginations of the region in relation not only to the EU's center, but perhaps more so in relation to what lies beyond its edges. Along a similar line of reasoning, some literature has likewise focused on the role of the Baltic and Nordic states as small nations steering the regionalization of the BSR (Hackmann 2002).

As this work pertains to discourses in relation to the construction of borders in the BSR it is essential to engage with existing literature that examines how BSR borders are socially and discursively constructed, and how they serve as identity markers. As Paasi (1999, 670) notes, borders are practices that "produce, express, and reproduce territoriality." Hence, shifting border discourses have an impact on imaginaries about spatiality and borders within both elite narratives (Braghiroli and Hagelin 2024) and the public debate (Hagelin 2024).This body of literature allows us to trace the emergence of regional geopolitical orders that reflect shifting perceptions of security challenges and practices of cross-border cooperation (Kononenko 2005; Koch 2015; 2018; Koch and Vainikka 2019; Makarychev 2020), leading to a more formalized regionalization of the BSR (Metzger and Schmitt 2012).

History is a common discourse that features repeatedly in the interpretation and representation of BSR border constructions. Previous literature has investigated the ways in which history has been approached as a lens and a tool to conceptualize space and borders, and to reinterpret regions (Grzechnik 2012; Scott 2013; Gibson 2017). The east-west European border especially has been approached from the perspective of history, with the aim to trace the emergence of a clear concept of an east-west boundary (Korpela 2002; Eskelinen et al. 1999). Moreover, Kähönen (2021, 100) demonstrates how contemporary border conceptualizations as well as border policy and management are indeed "a reflection of historical patterns of the conceptualization and representation of space and territory."

With that said, not all border constructions are studied through the language of discourse. Paasi's (1996) conceptual triad of bordering, ordering, and othering offers a regionally rooted framework for understanding how spatial hierarchies and identities are constructed through borders. His work, grounded in the Nordic context, particularly Finland, has been pivotal in shaping critical border studies in the BSR. For Paasi, bordering is not only about delineating space but about embedding those delineations in historical narratives, institutional practices, and identity discourses. In the BSR, this process has unfolded through shifting geopolitical alignments and the remaking of the post-Cold War regional order.

The process of ordering, meaning the construction of territorial hierarchies and the definition of spatial belonging, has been particularly evident in the Baltic states' reintegration into European and Nordic regional frameworks after regaining

independence. Regionalization and cross-border cooperation have become defining features of the BSR, marked by the emergence of cross-border networks and the development of new governance mechanisms, not least through the EU's macroregional strategy (Metzger and Schmitt 2012). At the turn of the century, constructions of the BSR and northern Europe emphasized cross-border cooperation as a means of overcoming former geopolitical divides (Joenniemi 2000; Scott 2013; Koch 2015; Żęgota 2021), forming symbolic geographies of transnational cooperation (Scott 2002), and fostering a regional consciousness (Taranenko 2023). As the region became increasingly integrated into the EU, both cross-border cooperation and regionalization (Nilsson et al. 2010; Koch 2015) were progressively envisioned through a EUropean framework. This shift mirrored broader EU developments, where regional strategies emerged as tools to promote cooperation and cohesion in the Union (Gänzle 2018; Paasi 2009b). Together, these processes illustrate how the BSR was reimagined as a space of connection rather than division, with EU integration providing a key vehicle for advancing cross-border and regional collaboration.

The construction of the BSR as a space of shared governance and "soft security" (Archer and Etzold 2008) can thus be seen as an ordering project, one that reconfigures the territorial structure around EU integration and cooperation. From this perspective, regionalization and cross-border cooperation emerged as tools to manage security challenges by balancing competing systems and preferences present in the region (Laine 2011; Makarychev and Sergunin 2017). Environmental and energy governance as distinct areas of regional cooperation in the BSR have also shaped the spatialities of the BSR, especially regional security imaginaries (e.g., Kern and Söderström 2018; Lang 2016). As the empirical analysis will show, this sort of infrastructural geopolitics is recognized in governmental discourse as being closely connected to overall security interpretations. Nevertheless, issues of infrastructural security largely remain beyond the scope of this literature review, as the focus remains on state-level bordering narratives in crisis contexts concerning human movement.

At the same time, othering has remained a persistent dimension of bordering in the BSR, particularly in the way Russia has been cast as a geopolitical and civilizational 'other.' Thus, while the cross-border emphasis has attempted a sort of cognitive remapping of the BSR, in parallel, angles of security and geopolitics have persisted in research on the BSR and the construction of borders in the region (Makarychev 2020). Scholars such as Moisio (2003) and Browning (2003; 2005b) have demonstrated how bordering practices in Finland and the Baltics have been integral to establishing a normative distance from Russia, and reorienting toward a European (and occasionally Nordic) order. According to Browning (2003), the east-west binary becomes a foundational frame for political spatialization. Thus, adding to Paasi's (1996) argument that borders are sustained through the repetition of difference. Recent scholarship underscores how such distinctions have sharpened following Russia's actions in Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014), and Ukraine (2022) (Makarychev 2020; Christiansson 2023; Banka and Bussmann 2023).

As such, the BSR area has increasingly been identified as a space of hardened borders (Metzger and Schmitt 2012; Wood 2024; Andžāns et al. 2021; Banka and Bussmann 2023; Christiansson 2023) reflecting shifting patterns of cooperation, while also pointing to a return to geopolitics (Ekengren 2018) and a growing defense cooperation (Forsberg 2013). Especially so following the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, which grew more acute with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Bengtsson 2020; Wrange et al. 2024). Hence, Makarychev (2020, 244) argues that the region is the backdrop to a return of old geopolitical raptures, resulting in the development of "a multi-order and multi-layer spatial entity encompassing different policy areas." One should note well, however, a distinction between border constructions that emerge in research on the BSR from the perspective of the EU versus NATO, as these two actors have previously imagined quite distinct security designs for the region (Makarychev 2020). Regional cooperation, besides promoting new avenues for cooperation has also been perceived to have addressed issues of security challenges. This is because security understandings in the BSR have been marked by both realist and liberalist (regional cooperation) perspectives simultaneously (Browning and Joenniemi 2004; Koch 2018). While the latter has been more prominent during periods of regionalization and cross-border cooperation, the former has been more closely aligned with harder security narratives during instances of increased geopolitical tension.

In addition, space and borders have increasingly been studied from the perspective of mobility, especially in the wake of the 2015–2016 migration crisis (Bucken-Knapp 2017; Hagelund 2020; Krzyżanowski 2018; Prokkola 2021; Naper 2022; Peterson 2020; Sakki and Pettersson 2018; Virkkunen and Piipponen 2021a). This too should be placed within the larger context of a re-bordering of EUropean borders in response to the increasing pressures of migratory movements (Hess and Kasparek 2017; Crawley 2016; Ryan 2019; Campesi 2018). That notwithstanding, the migration crisis also features in border constructions beyond the notion of mobility (e.g., Makarychev 2018).

What emerges from the literature, is the notion of borders as markers of identity. Such notions are on the one hand inward looking, in the sense that border imaginaries help to contribute toward a regional identity (Paasi 2009b; Joenniemi 2008). Which, to reiterate, reflects a broader attention to regional identities within the EU. On the other hand, identity markers underpin discourses of othering within the region (Browning 2003), which contribute to regional orders (Makarychev 2020). In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Baltics in particular became strong proponents of a reconceptualization of the mental maps of eastern Europe more broadly, guided by the perceptions of moral or value-based boundary demarcations between Europe and Russia (Hagelin and Gibson 2024). Note, the emphasis is on Europe rather than EUrope; this distinction lies at the heart of this attempt at spatial reconfiguration. This furthermore highlights a postcolonial reclaiming of historic bordering in the east European region at large (Budrytė 2023; Mälksoo 2022; Kuus 2004).

Taken together, these developments illustrate the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of bordering in the BSR, where integration and exclusion coexist alongside efforts to foster cross-border cooperation. Borders, but more so imaginaries about borders, co-exist in a complex array as attempts of mapping the BSR are performed.

3.1.1 Features and functions of borders

Drawing upon the distinction of borders in the BSR, as well as broader border studies literature, this section distinguishes the key features and functions of borders as they pertain to this study (Table 3.1). First, borders have *spatial* characteristics. This does not mean that borders are bound to a geographical borderland, on the contrary, the many various types of borders and boundaries indicate the opposite. However, borders evoke a spatial understanding in that they operate as a form of jurisdictional marker, indicating a particular set of rights and duties within a designated space (Paasi et al. 2022, 6) – haphazardly denoted as territoriality. Traditionally this has been perceived in the sense of a container signifying what belongs inside versus outside of the border. The spatial characteristics are evident in the common border-making of the EU where different border regimes signify different juridical belongings (Green 2013) that co-exist in a complex overlapping of one another (Green 2015).

Second, borders are *relational*, meaning that borders are inherently a "politics of difference." (Amilhat Szary et al. 2012, 5) In other words, borders give rise to classifications that contribute to distinctions that separate or enable relationships between people and places (Green 2010). Thus, denoting the inside from the outside is done through the practice of defining the inside in relation to the outside. It is the relational characteristics that contribute to the familiar dichotomy of Self/Other. This is what creates a sense of belonging to a spatialized inside such as the nation, the Nordic, the Baltic, the EU. The relational role of borders is also what constitutes the sense of power struggle between what is perceived to fall inside versus outside of the border. The border is also a place that separates the border*er* and the border*ed*, making the border a point where power originates, is practiced, and lived. Here I want to make a further distinction between the material and the immaterial of the relational border. On the one hand the material relational role of the border is based on current political relations, on the other hand, relations are based on the perceived and the imagined, leading me to identify another feature of the border as *symbolic relational*.

Fourth, borders are *multi-scalar*, meaning that the border is socially constructed across a number of scales, including political and social practices and discourses (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012; Laine 2016). It is possible to distinguish between scales operating on an everyday level in the lives of individuals, and the scales influencing cross-border relations among institutional actors. With that said, the latter remains of primary interest in this dissertation, as it directs attention to interactions on political, socio-cultural, economic, and administrative levels across the national, (macro-) regional, and supranational (Häkli and Kaplan 2002).

Fifth, and finally, borders are *temporal*, a notion that relates to the continuity and change of borders, both in terms of the border's spatial and temporal longevity; as noted by Parker and Vaughan-Williams (2012, 728), borders are in a "constant state of becoming." This is exemplified in European borders as they are grounded in narrative plausibility, reflecting historical trajectories and interactions between inner and outer boundaries (Eder 2006; Scott 2013). In this sense, the temporal feature of borders could also be approached as mobile borders, especially so in the case of EUropean border making which takes place at a number of ever-changing locations more or less simultaneously (as enlargement progresses), including beyond the external border of the Union (Bialasiewicz 2012; Green 2010; 2015). With regard to this, Green (2018) demonstrates the link between the immaterial activities of the border and the material forms it takes on. Rather than seeing the border as a fixed line, she suggests borders are traces and tidemarks, reflecting the multiple lines a border exhibits over time. The temporal nature of borders also highlights how historical borders influence and intertwine with contemporary border discourses, as they continue to shape understandings of space and spatial arrangements (Jansen 2009; Pfoser 2014; Palang et al. 2009), especially evident in eastern Europe (Hirschhausen et al. 2019).

Table 3.1. The main features of borders

Border Characteristic	**Spatial**	**Relational**	**Symbolic Relational**	**Multi-scalar**	**Temporal**
Border Manifestation	Borders denote space by functioning as jurisdictional markers, denoting particular duties and rights.	Borders operate as a politics of difference, identifying physical difference between the inside and the outside.	Borders produce an immaterial politics of difference based on the perceived and the imagined.	Borders are socially constructed along a number of scales or inter-pretations.	Borders change over time, both in a physical and discursive sense.

The features of the border underpin its functions. The functions reflect the institutional interpretation of the role of borders. Pettersson (2018), identifies in her work on sovereignty through bordering, three primary functions of the border: exclusion, filtering, and inclusion. These functions clearly detail the border as an institution determining belonging to the inside or the outside of what the border denotes, as well as determining who/what can move across. Although this is true for most types of borders, what Pettersson is primarily concerned with is the movement of people across a state border.

Similarly, Schimmelfennig (2021, 315) identifies the primary function of the border as regulating movement, from which he interprets the institutional practice as closure and control of the border. Regulation of movement concerns the entry and exit of people or goods, and thus corresponds to Pettersson's filtering function.

This is realized institutionally through the practice of closure, which determines the scope of movement across the border. A closed border permits no movement, whereas an open border permits movement with very limited control, of which most borders within the EU can stand as an example. For example, anyone who has travelled across the Valga-Valka border crossing between Estonia and Latvia is well familiar with the concept of open borders, while Narva-Ivangorod on the other side of Estonia demonstrates a relatively closed border. Closure typically exists at one of these two opposites. Hence, bordering practices require the researcher to identify where border control is located, both in terms of legal competencies and resource capacities necessary to enforce these competencies. In the case of the EU, for example, the Schengen Agreement is a good example of the transfer of bordering competencies away from the nation-state. Hence, *de jure* some of the control of the EUMS's nation state-borders has shifted to the supranational level, as the closure of the EU-borders has shifted to primarily reside along the external border of the EU. *De facto* this is not always realized, as exemplified in the case of denied entry targeting Russian holders of a Schengen visa by the Baltic States, Poland, and eventually Finland in late 2022.

3.1.2 Borders through discourse

While the broader field of border studies has increasingly approached borders as social and political constructions, a subset of this research focuses more explicitly on the role of discourse in shaping and producing borders. Space, in this reading, is constructed and imagined through narratives and discourses in various ways. This section reviews key literature that examines how borders are constructed through discursive practices and representations. In the words of Kuus (2007, x), geopolitical language in the political sphere serves to "cast security as a matter of identity, culture, and values." In other words, political actors and society at large resort to geographical and geopolitical language to make sense of the world and their place in it. Although narratives and discourses may be applied as different methods, for the purpose of this review they are seen as interchangeable in that they both represent the articulation and re/representations of border experiences and interpretations. Therefore, narrative and discourse approaches reveal the multidimensionality and fluidity of borderland identities, challenging fixed categorizations (Prokkola 2009). Border articulations and representations are not bound by the border but may be performed away from the borderland as well. Materialized narratives, such as everyday objects and artworks, can articulate unspeakable aspects of borders and border crossings (Kurki 2020; Schimanski and Nyman 2021). In similar ways, cultural performances may serve as powerful mediators of collective memory, contesting official border narratives and highlighting the ongoing significance of borders in people's lives (Prokkola 2008). Furthermore, border narratives play a significant part in the legal assessment during (political) asylum processes, as applicants narrate their experiences to convey credibility (Shuman and Bohmer 2020), highlighting that narratives, or discourse, are embedded in both the politics and policies of bordering.

A central tenet for this work is that borders are constructed and legitimized through rhetorical enactment (DeChaine 2012), as they come into meaning and are justified through the discursive representation that imbues them with material and symbolic meaning. As Scott (2020, 19) notes, borders are "both markers and carriers of meaning," as such, the border is brought to life at the level of narrative, anecdote, and communication (Newman 2006, 152). Therefore, examining borders and boundaries through the lens of discourse offers a nuanced understanding of their implications and significance. Previous studies have explored borders as discursive constructs or through changing discourse on the meaning of borders. For instance, within northern Europe, Swedish refugee reception and a hardening of national borders has been examined from the perspective of discourse (Bucken-Knapp 2017). In Finland, discourse has been applied to trace how national contexts reshape border imaginations over time (Häkli 1998). Similarly, Koch and Vainikka (2019) explore the role of discourse for fostering or undermining trust in cross-border cooperation along the Finnish-Russian border. Along the EU-Russian border discourse serves as an analytical frame to highlight how geo-political narratives frame the border's significance (Kononenko 2005). These examples demonstrate the centrality of discourse in shaping both the meaning and function of borders, but also how discourse is a useful tool to examine shifting border practices.

Related to the focus of this work, some recent analyses on borders as discursive constructs have specifically been looking at how governments, or central figures in the government, represent borders (Demata 2024; Opiłowska 2025; Brändle and Eisele 2023). These three works overlap in their view of borders as actively constructed through social, political, and discursive practices, subject to negotiation and redefinition. Brändle and Eisele (2023) contribute to the literature by illuminating the role of governmental border communication in grasping a more nuanced understanding of how border policies are articulated and justified. The authors demonstrate an innovative approach to the study of border discourse, raising important questions about how governments negotiate and redefine border openness and closedness. Demata (2024) and Opiłowska (2025) both lay bare the performative nature of borders, and bordering as a discursive practice; the former through the emphasis on bordered aesthetics of exclusion, the latter through emphasis on the often-racialized practices embedded in bordering that interpret different groups of migrants differently based on perceived proximity. All in all, the emphasis on discourse demonstrates how the meanings and functions of borders, function as mechanisms of power (Demata 2024).

More specifically, Demata (2024), examines border rhetoric in the US by studying the articulations of borders and identity formation from two recent US Presidental administrations (Trump, 2016, and Biden, 2020) to reveal how politicians recontextualize historical narratives of national identity and deploy strategies of inclusion and exclusion to promote their vision of the nation. He demonstrates through this examination that borders (symbolic and material) are an essential component in political discourse for establishing and renewing a

nation's sovereignty and legitimizing its existence, this often involves the 'othering' of foreign subjects.

Brändle and Eisele (2023) investigate governmental communication in Germany and Austria from 2009 to 2020, focusing on communication about borders and justification of bordering measures, particularly during crises. They argue that borders are instrumentalized for various purposes, from violence to enabling freedom of movement, and are never entirely closed or open, but exist on a scale of permeability (2023, 598). Furthermore, they demonstrate that governments do not necessarily adhere to a specific ideological position with regards to open or closed borders, and matters of EUropean dis-/integration, border communication, and by extension border policies, appear to be governed by more short-term political goals, arguably reflecting the duration of electoral mandates.

Opiłowska (2025) examines (de)bordering through discursive practices in Poland between 2021 and 2023, with a particular focus on discourses related to EU external border crises. Her study approaches the theme of bordering during a crisis through the lens of discursive practices, which the author interprets as policy narratives within a broader discourse-historical approach. The author illustrates how governmental border discourses influence de/re/bordering processes, using the example of Poland and the contrasting framing of middle eastern migrants during the instrumentalized migration crisis and Ukrainian refugees resulting from the Russian full-scale invasion. As noted by Opiłowska (2025, 8), this approach emphasizes the historical situatedness of the border and policy narratives, allowing for an analysis that can "focus on and compare frames, positionalities and strategies applied by Polish political actors to justify their stances and actions." Notably, Opiłowska's work on discourses suggests a practice of narrating the border through references to the national or the EU border depending on the context, although this is not elaborated on explicitly in her work.

Finally, a few remarks on how this dissertation compares to the three works: Demata and Opiłowska both employ Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), while Brändle and Eisele rely on a mixed-methods design consisting of an initial quantitative automated text-analysis followed by a qualitative text analysis, to capture nuances and patterns emerging from governmental border communication. Moreover, while Demata and Opiłowska embark on a single-country analysis (US and Poland respectively) Brändle and Eisele analyze German and Austrian border discourse. These works confirm that the meaning of borders is not inherent but is continually negotiated, conceptualized, and understood through discourse within society. What is largely missing from these works, however, are further reflections on the prevalence of various types of borders in the border discourse they examine. Thus, my research thus builds upon the findings emerging from these three works, by more specifically investigating the differences in how border discourses rely on and make use of border representations that emphasize the national border versus EU's external border. This also determined the methodological choices, further detailed in chapter 5, made to help facilitate a multi-country comparison of border discourse.

3.2 Studying EUrope through its borders

This section examines research specifically dealing with the borders of the EU, focusing on how the borders contribute to shaping understandings about the EU as a spatial, political, and cultural entity. The key argument advanced in this section is that EUrope and the construction of its borders should be understood as a discursive project. Border communication plays a pivotal role in this process, reflecting and negotiating competing visions of EUrope. Hence, this section sheds light on how borders not only define the EU's territorial limits but also contribute to broader debates about identity and purpose through their construction (Bialasiewicz et al. 2005).

Within the context of the EU, the role and impact of borders and the politics of space have received considerable attention. This growing body of research reflects the complex and dynamic nature of borders in contemporary Europe. More recent trends in literature on EUropean borders have increasingly opted for multi-scale analyses of bordering processes, with increasing focus on the relocation of Europe as a concept (Green 2013; Liikanen 2010). Reflecting the structure of the EU, the region's spatial structure has been studied from the perspective of transboundary cooperation and regionalization (Sohn 2014; Durand et al. 2020; Johnson 2009; van der Velde and van Naerssen 2011); examined from the angle of the Union's external relations and foreign policy, particularly in relation to eastern Europe and the EaP (e.g., Cadier 2019; Duna 2017; Orenstein 2015; Bialasiewicz 2011; Scott 2011); and through geopolitical interpretations, especially prominent in studies of regional character, such as in the case of investigations of northern and Baltic dimensions of EU border policies (Laitinen 2003; Moisio 2003; Laine et al. 2021; Raik 2016). As a result, spatial perspectives introduce conceptualizations about the imagined role of EUrope and the logic of its borders, thus offering interpretations of ways to organize the EUropean polity.

Adding to that, it is quite the challenge to pinpoint the exact location of Europe's borders, and by extension the EU's borders, as the former have never been definitively fixed (Ferrer-Gallardo and van Houtum 2013; Boedeltje and van Houtum 2008), emphasized by the lack of any geographical distinction between Europe and Asia (Davies 1996). Historically, Europe has experienced frequent and often violent border changes (O'Dowd 2002). These continue to be embedded in the logic of the EU's integration and enlargement processes, which rest on the removal of some borders and the introduction of new ones (Diez 2006; Green 2013). The legal construction of common borders within the EU has contributed to shifting perceptions of the EU as an entity, underpinned by its continually changing outer edge. Consequently, the nature of EUrope remains closely tied to its margins, as demonstrated in both its northern and eastern regions (e.g., Browning 2005a; Mälksoo 2020). This ambiguity of borders is furthered by the EU, exemplified through the geographies of the ENP which reconfigures traditional notions of clearly delineated EU borders (Casas-Cortes et al. 2013). Adding to that, the externalization of borders, also known as the "off-shoring and out-sourcing" of EU borders (Bialasiewicz 2012), further complicates the

location of EUrope's borders. Hence, the border regions of the EU (i.e., along the external Schengen border) bring into question whether the EU is distinct from the broader concept of Europe (Armbruster et al. 2003) – hence the distinction between EUrope and Europe applied here.

In the theoretical chapter that follows this one, I make a distinction between EUrope as a political order and as a geographical space. The two are, however, in practice hard to separate as space and order are closely interrelated and inter-dependent. As a matter of fact, space has been imperative as a referential system of ordering for the establishment of the nation-state of the Westphalian system (Albert and Brock 2001); otherwise known as the politics of territoriality. The heritage of this spatial ordering is noticeable in that we today primarily perceive territory as enclosed within state borders: the legal construct which bestows states with administrative sovereignty over a region (Sassen 2013). A similar construction of territoriality remains a central component in the structure of the EU as well. According to Wæver (1995) and his work on societal security, the process of European integration in many ways is constructed to fit into the narratives of the states which make up the Union. This in turn, makes it difficult to envision other formats or understandings of space within the context of the EU.

The colonial past on the European continent is yet another interconnection between order and space which has bearing on the current political order in the EU. The present-day EU has been interpreted as an imperial power due to its export of norms and values as well as its political and economic leverage (Zielonka 2008). The neighborhood policies of the EU (ENP and EaP) have especially been criticized for their imperial underpinnings (Dimitrovova 2010; Dimitrovova and Kramsch 2017). But internal divisions within the EU have displayed similar underpinnings, as distinctions between 'old' and 'new' members have perpetuated over time. Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine has not only revealed the West's ignorance of CEE more generally, but has also brought attention to the lack of recognition for the agency of CEE states (Mälksoo 2022; Budrytė 2023). Thereby, the war has led to a "decolonizing moment." (Mälksoo 2022, 2) However, it is important to stress that Russia is more commonly identified as a colonial power in the European context (Annus 2019), given its long history as an imperial power over the centuries.

It is not only the heritage of territoriality that affects how we perceive the interlink between space and order within the EU. The ever-evolving geography of the EU also shapes perceptions of order(s), quite literally as new peripheries are added. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, state borders have greatly increased in Europe as new states have formed, and in the EU more specifically as these new states have joined the Union. The 'new' EUMS have contributed with new perspectives and aspirations, naturally shaping the Union. A process that more commonly is recognized in its reverse process, as states themselves are shaped by the integration processes. From a border perspective this is observable, for example, in the changing significance of the EU's borders over time (O'Dowd 2002). Yet, it is important to remember that "the institutionalisation of the concept of Europe through the European Union is complemented by a further

dimension which partly overlaps and partly dissects other transnational structures through organisations such as NATO." (Armbruster et al. 2003, 887)

Also, in other fields of study, including European studies, there is increasing attention on the construction of European spaces, driven by EU enlargement, globalization, and geopolitical shifts (Rumford 2006; Meinhof 2011; Green 2013). This is exemplified by Eder (2006, 256) with regard to the construction of a EUropean space through the lens of historic imagination:

> Europe has accumulated an immense history of images of its boundaries that are used selectively to define its borders. This history is more than a box that is used to reconstruct the unity of a society. The history of such images has an internal logic, a temporal structure that is characterized by diverse attempts to construct a unity in the course of the time.

As part of this development, it is useful to recognize the various attempts at rethinking European spaces by critically examining how space and border are constructed within and beyond the EU (Rumford 2006; Biebuyck and Rumford 2012). Likewise, the processes of critically examining European spaces include recognizing the paradoxical nature of the EU's borders (Diez 2006) and the contradictions revealed in the EU's bordering (Grzymski 2019).

3.2.1 Europeanization and questions of orders and identities

Studying the European space through representations and imaginations about its borders, orders and identities is underpinned by studies on European integration. Especially if we understand European integration as a societal process that aims to overcome previous tensions at and across borders (Diez et al. 2006). Europeanization has emerged as a conceptual approach to study European integration. As is common regarding terminology in research, and social science in particular, Europeanization has multiple conceptualizations (Olsen 2002; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). Overarchingly, the term can be interpreted as the impact of the EU on the EUMS. Breaking that down, Europeanization thus encompasses the development of institutions at the EUropean level, and a political unification project (Olsen 2002, 923–24). The former includes the strengthening of institutional and organizational capacity at the supranational level, as well as an enhanced consensus of common ideas (Olsen 2002, 929). The latter concerns how EUrope displays, or will develop into, a more coherent political entity (Olsen 2002, 940), hence a more visionary approach than the former. Thus, it encapsulates EUrope as a set of ideas.

A central question of Europeanization centres on whether or not the EU shares a public culture or a sense of a 'we' feeling, and the extent that such a collective community of thought is necessary for the continuous development of the EU. Attempts to convey and invent Europe – and eventually EUrope – as a particular idea or civilization have a long history (Evink 2020; Andrén 2023; Weller 2021). The terminology is obscure, in that there is more than one concept attempting to

convey the essence of the EU, with considerable overlap in conceptualizations. Two of the concepts most applicable for this work are: *images* of EUrope (Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2015; Fuchs et al. 2009), and *ideas* of EUrope (Lee and Bideleux 2009; Kumar 2003; Turunen 2023). In both cases the research revolves around how to approach questions of EUrope as a shared public culture – or lack thereof.[27] How images and ideas conceptualize EU/Europe as a collective community are in practice hard to differentiate. With that said, images tend to be used when considering the visual representation of the EU (e.g., Wintle 2009). As such, it arguably alludes to capturing a shared set of ideas.

Identity formation is conceptualized both as individual and collective (albeit individually experienced and expressed). EUropean identity, which belongs to the latter, draws on conceptualizations of identity within political science. These are primarily rooted in national identity formation, which has a strong territorial component (Kohli 2000). Our understanding of how societies are held together steers our perception of the centrality of identity formation; a society perceived to be integrated by culture has identity at its very centre, whereas a society perceived to be integrated by strategic exchange does not require identity as an integrative attachment mechanism (Kohli 2000, 118). Within the EU, debates about national versus EUropean identity emerged in the 1950's when the integration process was set in motion. In terms of attitudes toward the emergence and coexistence of a national and a EUropean identity, there are three general camps: The first perceives national identities as the core of a collective EU identity, hence the latter will remain weak in and of itself. The second argues that the European identity is becoming stronger due to the deepening integration process. The third views national and European identities as separate and argues that a zero-sum perspective does not represent how people operate within multiple identities simultaneously (Mansfeldová and Špicarová Stašková 2009).

Collective identity formation occurs at multiple levels ranging from the local to the global. The *Eurobarometer*, a polling instrument within the EU monitoring public opinion, has regularly asked about identity attachment at various levels: local, regional, national, European, and global. The formulation in the survey has shifted over time and thus functions as an excellent mirror for different conceptualizations of identity formation emerging from within the EU. Notably, identity formation was initially perceived as mutually exclusive but has evolved to be conceptualized as a "multi-level set of attachments." (Kohli 2000, 125; Risse 2005) Thus, it need not be so that a EUropean identity is competing with national identities as individuals hold multiple identities. As a matter of fact, previous

[27] The concept *Identities* of EUrope can be added to this group as well, as *identities* appears to be used almost interchangeably with both *ideas* and *images*. To avoid confusion between the 'Orders' concept and the 'Identities' concept within the IBO triad, *identities* of EUrope has been excluded from this discussion. Although there are variations in how different conceptualizations are presented, they generally address similar themes. To my knowledge, there is currently no systematic overview of the various conceptual attempts to understand Europe and EUrope as a collective community.

research suggest that European identities are replacing local identities rather than national, and that national identities, in fact, foster collective identity formation based on an abstract solidarity of a similar character as that needed for the formation of a EUropean identity (Duchesne and Frognier 1995; Inglehart 1977 in Kohli 2000, 123). Such a compatibility between national and EUropean identity formation is further suggested as EUMS have used the area of European integration to strengthen their own existing state identities, or to promote and project said state identity (Laffan 1996).

Notably, however, displays of EU identity may also serve as a means to designate belonging, as aptly argued by Diez (2006, 242; see also Neumann 1999):

> When the Cold War had ended, and the former Warsaw Pact states in Central and Eastern Europe were pushing for EU (and NATO) membership, it was common for them to represent themselves as being 'more European' than their immediate neighbours to the East. Indeed, they constructed their 'true' European identity by comparing themselves to the other states next door, which were 'not there' or 'not there yet.'

3.2.2 EU borders and crisis narratives

This sub-section introduces the role of crisis narratives in the EU, and how invoking the notion of crisis shapes public and political debates. Please note that there are many more instances of crises affecting the EU, as well as examples of crisis response and crisis labeling that could be brought forward here than the length of this sub-section allows me to delve into. This section aims to introduce how the development of EU borders is strongly linked to crisis narratives. It, however, remains worthwhile to note that crisis labeling with regard to (irregular) migration is not unique to the EU (Cantat et al. 2023).

Crisis narratives have become a regular practice (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2014) underpinning EUropean border governance through acute and protracted narrations of crisis (Perkowski et al. 2023). This is seen in particular through the securitization of human movement in the EU, which has intensified over time (Léonard and Kaunert 2022). According to this type of securitization, the EUropean space is threatened by human movement from 'problem-spaces' outside of the EU (Chamlian 2016; Sachseder et al. 2022). Notably, the security architecture of the EU is shaped by the interplay between acute and protracted crisis narratives; Perkowski, Stierl, and Burridge (2023, 123) demonstrate that "as practices and imaginaries invoked in times of acute crisis have come to shape periods of protracted crisis and narrowed space for alternative understandings of migrant arrivals and their periodic increases." While an active crisis demands urgency and sacrifice (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2014) the protracted crisis demands "vigilance, surveillance, and preparedness" (Perkowski et al. 2023, 114). Yet, while the distinction between "crisis and normality has eroded" (Perkowski et al. 2023, 113), it is important to recognize that what constitutes a

crisis in political perspectives may not be perceived as such by bureaucratic and security professionals (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2014). For example, although crisis labeling is a recurrent practice in the EU's political sphere, aspects of EU migration and border control policies remain in part conceptualized by administrative practices such as "population profiling, risk assessment, statistical calculation, proactive preparation, and what may be termed a specific *habitus* of the security professional." (Bigo 2002, 65–66)

The 2015–2016 human movement and instability at the eastern and southern external EU border significantly impacted EU border policies (Loschi and Russo 2021), leading to a mix of temporary disintegration and incremental reforms rather than supranationalization (Boşilcă 2021). Particularly, the 2015–2016 crisis exposed intrinsic weaknesses in the EU's border control regime, prompting efforts to restore and consolidate it (Campesi 2018). In response, the EU expanded FRONTEX's role (Perkowski et al. 2023), granted Schengen states new powers for internal border controls, and intensified cooperation with third countries like Libya and Turkey. This reflects a shift toward stabilization efforts for the EU border regions and beyond, as opposed to previous efforts of transformation (Loschi and Russo 2021). In addition, the pattern of incremental internal changes and external reach by the EU border control regime reflects intergovernmental constraints on EU policy in areas of EUMS sovereignty (Ryan 2019). Furthermore, as is evident from the varied responses during the events of 2015–2016, Bachleitner and Betts (2025) demonstrate how national identity shapes interpretations of what adequate approaches to migration movements entails, instructing different responses to perceived crisis.[28]

Notably, however, not all migratory movement is connected to a crisis lens. For example, skilled migration and student migration are generally perceived as unproblematic. A more compelling example is the migration of Ukrainian refugees following February 2022, in which the temporary protection activated by the EU contributed to deflating the crisis of migratory pressures. Furthermore, the temporary protection offered a regular legal migration framework and granted those arriving a right to move within the EU. Contrastingly, the human movement of 2015–2016 was strongly interpreted through a crisis lens (Cantat et al. 2023), drawing on conflicting framings of migrants as a security threat and a life in need of saving (Vaughan-Williams 2015). As a result, the humanitarian practices meant to protect and aid migrants often ended up subjecting the very same individuals to extensive border security mechanisms, while also risking perpetuating crisis interpretations (Vaughan-Williams 2015).

On a more general level, crises have been decisive for the progress of integration within the EU, as crisis leads to uncertainty that often requires change (Ross 2011; Brunazzo 2022; Wolff and Ladi 2020). In terms of borders, Green (2013) demonstrates how crises have transformed the nature and significance of European borders. The author argues that the 2008 Eurozone financial crisis,

[28] The centrality of the state in matters of migration has likewise been affirmed on a global level (Micinski and Lefebvre 2024).

along with previous developments such as EU border experiments, the Cold War's end, and conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, have collectively reshaped the concept of Europe both geographically and ideologically. This process has led to the 'relocation' of Europe as a place and an idea. Notably, this emphasizes the importance of understanding the ways in which political reorganization impacts every day experiences and belonging of ordinary people as borders can shift beneath their feet.

The EU border regime itself is the result of never-ending compromises. Hess and Kasparek (2017, 59) argue that, "the European border regime, is structurally ridden by moments of crisis as its order is constantly contested by the movements of migration." Yet, as noted in the previous chapter, crisis labeling makes it possible to re/interpret different types of movement as well as different types of crisis. Tazziolo and Stierl (2021) demonstrate this, showing that Covid-19 emergency measures shifted the argumentation concerning border-control in the EU; from that of a hostile EUrope that emerged following the migration crisis in 2015, to an unsafe EUrope constituting the narrative of closed borders for the migrants' own protection, as the EU is presented as a place that cannot provide adequate health protection to people, other than the citizens of each EUMS. As such, the notion of EUrope is redefined, as the re/shaping of the spatial imaginaries of borders underpins the current and future shape of the EU (Bürkner 2021), thus, indicating a linkage between border-making processes and European integration trajectories. Indeed, this speaks to the potentially long-lasting effects of emergency border measures, while also highlighting the ingrained link between a (border) crisis and the movement of people (Lindley 2014). Lindley (2014, 17), directs attention to the fact that the conceptualization of a migration crisis is twofold in that it simultaneously may denote both the migration that occurs in response to a crisis in the country of origin, and the sense of crisis in the destination country as generated by migration (see also Cantat et al. 2023). The notion of a migration crisis is thus highly spatialized.

Nonetheless, the spatiality of crises is accentuated at the border, especially evident at the 'emergency' border and border-regime; a number of recent crises in the EU have demonstrated this notion, among the most notable with a distinct border characteristic: the 'ring of fire' in the 'Neighborhood'; the Arab Uprisings in 2011; the migration crisis in 2015; Brexit; the Covid-19 pandemic; the migration and security crisis along the border with Belarus; and most recently, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The notion of an emergency border may be understood through the conceptualization of 'emergency politics,' defined as actions out of the norm justified by the presence of perceived exceptional and urgent threats (Kreuder-Sonnen and White 2021; Schmidt 2022). Although the 'emergency' border is reconstructed through emergency measures, and thus not necessarily intended to remain in place, it nonetheless contributes to a redefinition of the border itself, as crisis response mechanisms extend to the physical *and* imaginary role of borders. As Atentas (2020, 432) notes:

> Borders are spaces of exclusion, a limit space that marks a constituent outside, often a terra incognita. But they are also territories of hybridization and political–cultural crossbreeding. This double character of the spatiality of the border can be related to the temporal characteristics of every situation of crisis.

Moreover, this process of redefinition extends beyond the border itself through the emergency border, by redefining who can move or not move across said border, thus redefining the migrant by renegotiating who is legal/not-legal (Nail 2015).

Finally, there are different approaches through which to mitigate the practice of crisis labeling, for example, Cantat, Pécoud and Thiollet (2023) suggest a lens of *migration as crisis*, as opposed to *migration crisis*, as they argue the former denaturalizes and historicizes the link between migration and crisis. Although this dissertation does not incorporate this lens in the analytical framework, the shift in perspectives of what constitutes a crisis adds value to the analysis of discourses in times of crisis, as it helps to shift attention from the notion of crisis to the content of the perceived crisis.

3.3 Gaps and how they instruct this study

Overall, there is a lack of research on borders that recognizes various types of borders as independent sources of narrative production in instances when these borders entangle, layer or overlap. There is however some limited recognition that different types of borders across the BSR region have emerged as a result of EU enlargement and increasing regional cooperation (Koch 2015; 2018). Adding to that, there are implicit suggestions of multiple borders traversing physical and mental maps of the BSR, albeit they are never articulated, such as in the conceptualization of a multi-ordered regionalism to order the political space (Makarychev 2020). In the literature on borders more broadly there is insufficient engagement with the distinct discursive nature of these various borders. As a result, there are relatively few accounts that more closely contrast border discourse and imaginaries of various types of borders; despite the appearance of these phenomena within communication on borders, especially in places of overlapping border regimes. By engaging more intentionally with these matters this study contributes to addressing border entanglements.

A key question when studying EUropean borders, is how the external and internal borders of the EU are interpreted and represented differently (Schimmelfennig 2021). Yet, the interplay between imaginaries of the national and EU external borders remains largely underexplored, alongside a deeper engagement with how states communicate about borders (Brändle and Eisele 2023). Previous research on governmental border communication has predominantly focused on communication related to the internal borders (Brändle and Eisele 2023; Jungblut 2017; Bishop 2020). However, as argued by Schimmelfennig (2021) and Leutloff-Grandits (2023), the external border of the EU often carries distinct symbolic and functional significance, reflecting the interplay between being inside or remaining

outside of the EU within the EU border regions. This interplay between internal and external border communication underscores the importance of narratives in constructing the EU as a cohesive, yet contested, entity. Discourses about borders within the context of the EU can be expected to take on a different symbolic meaning depending on where they are located. It is likely that while national borders that are also internal borders of the EU are (generally) marked by openness and continued debordering, national borders that are also external borders of the EU take on a different symbolic representation. In this sense, we can expect the process of attaching symbolic meaning to the external border of the EU to be concerned, in a relative sense, with the more traditional demarcation designations between the inside and the outside.

On a more regional note, there is limited comparative analysis of border perspectives across Baltic and Nordic states. While there is a rich scholarship on Baltic and Nordic countries separately, comprehensive studies comparing the discursive construction of borders across these two regions are less prevalent. Existing literature tends to examine EU border policies broadly or focus on specific countries, especially cases situated along the EU's external border such as Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, or Poland. Along a similar line, the role of regional identity narratives and how these intersect with border discourses has largely remained understudied. Adding to that, Russia's war in Ukraine has had profound implications for border discourses in EUrope and Europe, especially in the BSR which has become the backdrop for extensive shifts in security politics and military alliances. As a result, research should pay more attention to how Baltic and Nordic states frame their borders in these changing geopolitical contexts, especially in relation to Russian aggression and the redefinition of EU/European security architecture.

Additionally, while the conceptual shifts of borders have allowed research on borders to capture more nuanced border perspectives, the literature has in some sense lost sight of the state border, and more specifically border imaginaries produced by the state. This is not to say that the approach to borders should return to predominantly state perspectives. Rather, the argument put forward here is that the conceptual expansion of the notion of borders has overlooked border inscriptions by the state. The state remains a central actor in the articulation and production of bordering; as such it continues to set the parameters for the bordering activities that those crossing the borders are subjected to. As Parker and Adler-Nissen (2012, 787) contend:

> While the various planes on which state sovereignty is inscribed do not fit neatly on top of each other, states have not surrendered their will or all of their capacity to act on, or manipulate their border inscriptions. Thus we arrive at an account of the arena where states will 'pick and choose' the border: not the presuppositions, but the expressions of their borders. Given the wider environment, their best option is often to amend the way that their border is articulated, that is to make a choice of how to inscribe which versions of their borders.

The experiences and perspectives of those crossing the border are paramount to understanding the effects and reach of bordering practices. But if we also do not critically examine the border articulations and justifications by the state that imposes them, we risk overlooking perspectives of bordering; thereby limiting our understandings of bordering practices.

The current study contributes to filling some of these gaps by offering a comparative discursive analysis of governmental border communication in Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden. More specifically the study sets out to complement existing literature by comparing how Baltic and Nordic countries construct both national and EU borders during crises, emphasizing regional similarities and differences. This highlights how countries with differing historical and geopolitical contexts contribute to broader EUropean and European border narratives.

3.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to review how previous research has approached border discourses in northern Europe and how these have shaped imaginaries about EUrope. Hence, the chapter has reviewed the scholarly literature on borders in EUrope and, more specifically, in the BSR, with the aim to present the literature underpinning further studies on how borders are discursively constructed and how these constructions reveal competing visions of EUrope. Drawing on an interdisciplinary lens engaging with literature at the nexus of border studies and European studies, and more specifically the role of discourse in these fields, the chapter has emphasized the cultural (symbolic), spatial, and political roles of borders as sites of meaning-making and identity negotiation. The scope of the chapter has deliberately focused on governmental and regional (BSR) articulations of borders as discourse, rather than offering an exhaustive survey of the field. Importantly, the chapter has provided an overview of the development of border constructions in northern Europe, demonstrating how previous research has engaged with and examined spatial reconfigurations and the meaning of borders in the region.

The review highlighted key themes and conceptual developments. First, it has shown how discourses of identity, belonging, and othering shape both national and EUropean borders, particularly in moments of perceived geopolitical or migratory crisis. Second, the literature has emphasized that regional bordering practices are shaped not only by spatial logics, but symbolic and historical narratives that reconfigure notions of EUropean belonging. Recurring themes have been the tension between openness and exclusion, between cross-border cooperation and hardening, and between the EU's normative ideals and its security-driven border practices.

Despite this rich and evolving field, several important gaps persist. The chapter identified that there is limited engagement with the comparative discursive construction of different types of borders, including the national borders versus the EU's external border; especially in regions where these intersect, such as the

Nordic and Baltic spaces. As different types of borders represent distinct spatial configurations, and embody different border regimes, it is highly likely that they are imbued with distinct discursive representations and imaginations. This leads to the question of discursive entanglements in instances of different borders overlapping geographically. While the scholarship on EU bordering has expanded significantly, it often blurs the distinction between internal and external borders or fails to examine how this distinction is communicated by states. Moreover, a comparative perspective seeking to uncover differences and similarities in border imaginations across different countries remains underexplored, despite the diversity of geopolitical experiences and regional identity narratives within the BSR. Additionally, while discourse-oriented studies are expanding, there is a tendency to overlook the role of governmental actors as producers of border imaginaries.

This dissertation addresses these gaps by offering a comparative discursive analysis of governmental border communication in Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden, focusing on how states narrate national borders and the EU's external border in times of crisis. It examines how borders are discursively constructed as both national and EUropean, and how these constructions reflect broader visions of EUrope. In doing so, it contributes to scholarship on border entanglement by distinguishing between different types of borders as sites of discursive production and exploring how crisis narratives shape their symbolic and political functions. As such, the chapter contributes to rendering visible the discursive representations of different types of border and how these interact with each other. The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework through which governmental border discourses will be examined, outlining more specifically what border entanglements entail before engaging the IBO triad, demonstrating how this framework can be applied as a prism to critically examine border discourses across different types of borders.

4 THE IBO TRIAD AND ENTANGLED EUROPEAN BORDERS

This chapter engages with the discursive processes of defining and consolidating various types of borders and border processes in the BSR, and how such practices infer different visions of EUrope. The chapter will initially outline the research agenda of the IBO (identities-borders-orders) triad, before demonstrating how the theoretical framework is applied as a prism to examine the subtle distinctions of border discourses and entanglements within the Baltic and Nordic spaces.

The conceptual framework proposed here contributes to the body of literature on how discourse on borders relates to imaginations of the EU and Europe. Border crises are far from a new phenomenon, yet a long history is not in and of itself a cause for salience. Its salience, however, emerges from the particular patterns of politicization of contemporary border crises. As is made evident in the previous chapters, discursive representation of borders aims to shape the world, including through reinventing historical discourses by pointing to bordering as a historical process and thereby strengthening border discourses, constituting them as matters with a long past. This, in combination with the strong spatial connotation of processes of European (dis)integration, reveals a necessity to further engage with how the re/making of the nature and scope of the EUropean borders relates to shaping the idea of the EU and Europe, through inferring certain trajectories over others. There are different ways to approach this relationship, I have chosen to approach it through discursive representations. As the notion of remaking suggests, border discourses are continuously negotiated and renegotiated. By focusing on the discursive process of border-making, it is possible to capture the many nuances that are so deeply intertwined with the notion of border(s).

The chapter will introduce the theoretical framework that situates this research within the nexus of border studies and the study of EUrope as an idea. As such, it will provide the analytical framework that is used to answer the research questions: 1) How are different types of borders and bordering processes discursively re/represented in governmental border communication during border-related crises in the EU? 2) How do discursive representations of various types of borders portray broader visions of EUrope? I apply the IBO triad, a loosely defined framework, to approach this topic, as its dimensions allow me to capture the nuances of bordering processes. Due to the undefined nature of the IBO triad, the dimensions are initially defined, conceptualized, and later operationalized to add substance to the analytical framework. The dimensions, as defined and unpacked here, function as the building blocks for tailoring the IBO triad to the contextual specificities of this dissertation.

The chapter proceeds as follows: the next section briefly introduces the IBO triad as a research agenda, along with definitions of the IBO dimensions as they apply here. The ensuing sections introduce the three dimensions of the triad in more detail in the following order: borders, orders, identities. The third section

introduces the logic of various types of borders, making a special distinction between national and supranational borders, as found along the Schengen border. The fourth section engages with the notion of orders, looking specifically at how the EU may be perceived as an order, it also unveils the connection between order and geopolitics, in particular identity geopolitics, to situate the border-making process in the region within its spatial and temporal context. The fifth section introduces how identities are approached in this study, making a distinction between displays of national versus supranational identities. Finally, I introduce the theoretical framework as it is operationalized in this dissertation, followed by a conclusion to the chapter.

4.1 Reviewing and defining the IBO triad

This section introduces the IBO triad, a loosely defined theoretical framework to approach matters of bordering, ordering, and identity formation. The IBO triad brought about a new focus on the constitutive role of identities, borders, and orders when thinking about space and state territoriality in International Relations (IR). Missing, however, from the IBO research agenda, if it may be called as such, is how to develop and apply the triadic analytical frame. In this chapter I add to the structure of the analytical framework, demonstrating how the triadic intersection may serve as a fruitful approach to critically examine constructions of borders and space. Before moving forward with the conceptualization of the IBO dimensions, followed by a presentation of the analytical framework emerging from these conceptualizations, I introduce a brief review of previous applications of the IBO triad.

The IBO triad was introduced by an interdisciplinary group of scholars in the mid-to-late 1990s. The work emerged out of aspirations to bridge, what was in their eyes, a static IR theorization with an "increasingly mobile global reality." (Albert and Lapid 2017, 69) Their work challenged the traditional ontology of IR theory focused on stability and continuity and instead introduced an approach that focused on the processes of identities, borders, and orders, in what is described as a *processual/relational/verbing* approach. This approach is meant to shift the way of thinking about identities, borders, and orders as processes in relationality with each other, which largely occur on a discursive or rhetorical level. Another way to denote this shift is to approach the IBO dimensions as being "in-formation" and "in-relation" (Lapid 2001, 3–5), meaning they are neither constant nor do they evolve in isolation. The IBO dimensions should, according to the originators, be thought of as mutually self-constituting due to their close relation with one another (Figure 1). It is worth noting that at the time when the IBO triad was introduced the world was indeed on the move. The recent unravelling of the Soviet Union, the (re)independence of CEE states, and the decline of the divisions of the Cold War world order highlighted that our political world is far from fixed.

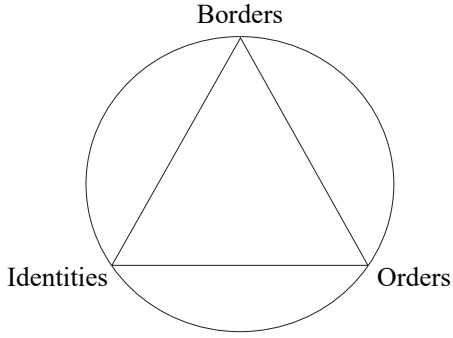

Figure 4.1. The interdependence of the IBO triad dimensions, as introduced by Lapid (2001, 10).

While the triad emerged out of IR studies, it developed within a cross-disciplinary context. The initial design draws on sociological inquiries about how the international system develops and operates. As such, it shares many qualities with the International Political Sociology (IPS) research agenda (Albert and Lapid 2017). As a matter of fact, there was a considerable overlap of researchers working on the IBO triad who then continued to develop the IPS agenda. In the field of border studies, the IBO triad has been less utilized, although similar approaches exist, such as the b/ordering perspective (van Houtum et al. 2005).

Previous examples of the IBO triad demonstrate the triad's versatility in matters of (trans)border constructions, such as work applying the triadic lens to transnational migration (Vertovec 2004) and to diaspora studies (Balalovska 2013). Another example is the work by Tallis (2023), who in his book on identities, borders, and orders in CEE claims to develop the IBO triad, specifically by replacing the border perspective with that of *borderscapes* (hence identities, borderscapes, orders (IBSO). The work, however, fails to properly describe how the three dimensions come together as a theoretical framework and as a result does not contribute significantly to the question of how to use the IBO triad as a framework for analysis. Nevertheless, these examples demonstrate that the IBO triad may serve as a useful analytical lens to approach questions of borders and bordering.

Overall, there are few examples of works that have incorporated the full triad in their analysis (Albert and Lapid 2017), and few provide any detailed interpretations on how the concepts in its triadic intersection are interpreted and applied. Although the triad can provide fruitful results of a dyadic analysis along the three intersections: I-B; B-O; O-I as "the same phenomenon can be productively situated at different intersections," (Lapid 2001, 9) the lack of well justified triadic analytical lenses points toward an underutilization of the triad's full potential. This is likely due to the skeleton-like feature of the triad, meaning the structure is only minimally outlined. While that offers flexibility when applying the framework, it simultaneously poses a limitation due to the unclarity it produces. In an attempt to tackle this deficiency, this work rests its analytical frame

on all three dimensions of the IBO triad. In the words of Lapid (2001, 4), the triadic relationship can be envisioned as the following:

> Processes of collective identity formation invariably involve complex bordering issues. Likewise, acts of bordering (i.e. the inscription, crossing, removal, transformation, multiplication, and/or diversification of borders) invariably carry momentous ramifications for political ordering at all levels of political analysis. Processes of identity, border and order construction are therefore mutually self-constituting. Borders, for instance, are in many ways inseparable from the identities they help demarcate or individuate [and] from orders constituted to a large extent via such acts of individuation and segmentation.

The modern understanding of the IBO dimensions hinges on the notion of territoriality that developed alongside the formation of the Westphalian system. In this dissertation, I define territoriality as intents to structure geographical space as a fixed set of boundaries (Agnew 1994, 55). The notion of territory and territoriality are foundational for the nation-state system (Peña 2021, 7). This notion of territoriality "depicts political space in terms of distinct, disjoint, and mutually exclusive formations." (Lapid 2001, 8) Traditionally, territoriality has been perceived as the foundational force to modern political, social, economic, and cultural processes, thus, perceived as holding the world together (Brenner 1999; Agnew 1994; Elden 2010; Brenner and Elden 2009). And while the rise of globalization has, on the whole, demonstrated increasingly novel patterns for the movement of capital, information, and people, conceptualizations of identities, borders, and orders have largely remained perceived through a lens of territoriality. This has limited imaginations of how identities, borders, and orders may take shape along new spatializations. Against this backdrop, the territorial underpinnings of the IBO triad have been criticized (Rea 2017; Shani 2004). Rea (2017, 142) argues that the state-centeredness of the theory creates difficulties to move beyond more traditional understandings of the concept of state-sovereignty, leading to perceptions of political orders from a state-centered perspective.

While it is imperative to acknowledge the state's coercive conception of security and legitimation of violence, the state remains one of the central actors in the discursive representation of borders and bordering processes. Scrutiny of the legitimization process, here in the form of discursive representations, from the state is therefore an important contribution toward understanding how states themselves perceive territoriality and envision new forms of spatializations. As such, examining governmental border communication can therefore form a complement to non-state experiences and imaginaries to the scales, sites, and methods of bordering.

Although the IBO triad as an approach may be under-defined this offers flexibility in combining the focus of different intersections between identity, bordering, and ordering. Ultimately, this ensures a malleable approach that can be shaped to a number of contexts, thereby allowing a stronger analytical conformity across a range of regional contexts and particularities. This in itself could be a tool to bridge fairly restricted regional attention within border studies. As

there are no determined definitions of the triad's three dimensions, defining these and detailing their operationalization is, as in most cases when working in the social sciences, a crucial step indeed. In this case, the conceptualizations are produced to reflect the regional particularities of the Baltic and Nordic spaces, as well as discursive representations of border crises that concern the movement of people. Below follows a brief definition of the three dimensions as applied here – note that each will be further unpacked throughout the remainder of the chapter.

First, the 'identity' dimension of the triad is understood in this work as collective identity formation as opposed to individual identity formation (Kohli 2000). While there are a number of collective identities ranging from the local to the global, the focus here is on references to national and EUropean identities. Governments contribute to determining the parameters of a 'we' feeling in their communication on borders and demarcations. Note that this is in a broad sense, the aim is not to determine the process(es) of collective identity formation but to include the analytical lens of collective identity displays as a means to capture the nuances of border discourses.

Second, the 'border' dimension of the triad rests on the assumption that borders are constructed, and thereby, open for contestation (Eder 2006). Furthermore, despite global flows of information, capital, and goods, borders continue to be a site where nation-states retain strict control over the movement of certain groups of people, thereby controlling membership (Vertovec 2004, 29). That is not to say that discourses about information, capital, and goods moving across borders do not contain images of particular ideas of EUrope. Nonetheless, for the sake of this work, it is deemed that such images are especially salient in communication concerning the movement of people.

Third, the 'order' dimension of the triad departs from the premise that communication on borders includes representations and imaginations that inform the social and political order which is designated by borders. This resembles Vertovec's (2004, 29) interpretation that orders are the result of policies "concerned with reproducing certain legal, social, and political systems." As the focus in this work concerns visions of EUrope, the central concern revolves around how and when the EU is imagined as a political entity, which is in part represented in relation to order(s) outside (Stråth 2002).

Through a careful conceptualization below, the chapter underscores the importance of considering identities, borders, and orders as mutually reinforcing processes that shape political and social landscapes. Note well, the dimensions will not be introduced in order of the triad (I-B-O), instead they will be introduced according to the following sequence: borders, orders, identities. This is because this best introduces the logic of the analytical framework as applied here in relation to the empirical material.

4.2 Borders

Theorizing borders brings into question what and where borders are. The following section introduces the 'border' dimension of the IBO triad. The aim here is to locate and conceptualize borders departing from the premise that different types of borders can, and often do, co-exist in the same space as has been argued in the preceding chapters. More specifically, this section focuses on identifying similarities and differences between the national and the supranational border.[29] Note, these are not the only borders that co-exist in the BSR space, but for the sake of limiting the scope of the dissertation they are the ones that will be considered for the analysis of border discourse.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the conceptualization of borders in the BSR is rooted in ideas about identity construction and the reconfiguration of space. However, existing work on borders in the BSR often overlooks the coexistence of various types of borders that entangle, layer, and overlap. Missing, is an acknowledgment of how these borders serve as distinct sources of discourse and how their entanglement offers a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of borders. Therefore, the objective of this section is to differentiate between state borders and supranational borders, highlighting their features and functions.

The underpinning logic of both national borders and the EU's external border, is the assumption that borders are discursive productions. This in turn presupposes borders as social constructs; disseminated through the geopolitical imagery of spaces (Paasi 2009b, 226). At the same time, borders are a good place to unpack the conceptual understanding of the spatial manifestation of borders. Traditionally the border has been perceived as a line, which, as Green (2018) rightly points out, requires both the technical understandings and skills developed through cartography,[30] along with ontological understandings linking power with territory rather than people. Yet, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, borders have increasingly been perceived as unbounded spatial spaces rather than static lines, as is noticeable in the analytical shift in border studies towards conceptualization of the processes of borders. A question, therefore, arises with regard to this, to what extent governmental communication on borders expands beyond traditional understandings of borders as static lines.

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[29] This work concerns EUropean state borders, while all state borders resemble each other in their core function, relating to the construction of sovereignty and territorial demarcation, geographical contextualities set borders apart. Hence, the claims here first and foremost pertain to EUropean borders at various levels.

[30] Cartography is the art of making maps to depict the world. Yet, maps are inherently selective, relying on an act of translation as they omit information to make sense of the world, making them inevitably unreliable, but also potent as political tools. Essentially, cartography has not just recorded borders but actively created and reinforced them as powerful, often politicized, lines that enforce control by delineating perceived identities and belonging, even when such clear-cut divisions do not exist on the ground (e.g., Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2015; Gibson 2022).

Drawing on the notion of entangled borders introduced in the introductory chapter, it is assumed that both the national and the external supranational contribute to the re/making of EUrope's symbolic boundaries – that is, where EUrope is perceived to be located and what it is perceived to signify. As this dissertation examines the Baltic and Nordic spaces, it is especially attuned to the language of symbolic geographies that have developed in relation to imaginations of an East-West divide, manifested in and through different discourses on Europeanness, Self and Other, and security. Such discourses are present at the levels of both the nation-state and the EU (Della Sala 2018). Yet, there is a need to examine if, and then how, distinctions in discourse appear in communication vis-à-vis national borders and the EU's external border. While the features of these types of borders, I argue, largely remain the same, the empirical examination will demonstrate that the imagination of these border types displays variation.

4.2.1 The state border

Although the literature of borders has moved away from its earlier state-centrism, state borders remain a highly salient type of border, especially in governmental discourse as the state border persists as a prominent lens through which to designate national sovereignty and uniqueness (Rudolph 2005), but also functions as a site of power from which border violence erupts (Ilcan 2021; Hernández 2019). Crucially, the state border is not limited to the geographical border line but may conceptually be enforced across a number of scales and locations, reflecting the range of border features identified in chapter 3. This means that national border discourse may be interpreted from narrations that imply features or functions of the national border without directly talking about the border line. Unlike other forms of boundaries (e.g., regional cooperation), state borders are legally codified (Paasi et al. 2022), internationally recognized, and politically enforced; characteristics they also share with the Schengen border regime.

For the purposes of this research, the state border is not assumed to possess uniquely distinct features compared to the supranational EU border. Both display variations of the border features identified in the previous chapter: spatial, relational, multi-scalar, and temporal, none of which are exclusive to the national level, as other types of borders may exhibit similar characteristics. Likewise, given the physical and functional overlap between national borders and the EU's external border, their functions are often difficult to disentangle. What remains distinct, however, are the nuances of representation and the imaginaries that underpin such representations. Each feature of the national border is shaped by the state as a vessel from which it derives its specific character. Consequently, interpretations, representations, and imaginaries of the national border are anchored in, and should therefore reflect, particular imaginations of the state as a political and territorial entity.

The national and supranational borders are likely to display more distinctness between their functions than their features. The EU is unique in its division of competencies following the introduction of the Schengen border regime (Confalonieri

2021). While some national borders within the EU have diminished in their traditional roles, particularly their filtering function, national borders along the external Schengen border have taken on intensified roles. These external borders now encompass the functions associated with the external Schengen border itself.

4.2.2 The supranational border

Representations of supranational borders specifically focus on the external Schengen border. The Schengen border regime is set apart from other supranational borders being institutionalized beyond general globalization patterns. Attached to the Schengen border, if one accepts its overlap with the EU's external border, are narratives of EUropean border-making that include both normative (Manners 2002; Dimitrovova 2012; Piskorska 2018) and security objectives (Börzel and van Hüllen 2014; Christou 2010; Petrova and Delcour 2020). However, these two narratives are in practice hard to separate (Leonard 2009).

While I argue that the features of borders are shared across both national and supranational borders, nuances emerge in how these are communicated and which functions are emphasized. Importantly, features of the supranational border are grounded in the EU as a political and territorial entity, meaning that interpretations shift from state-centered understandings to being shaped by supranational logics. For instance, whereas the spatial feature of the national border refers to the location and territory of the state, in the context of the supranational border the spatial feature instead renders visible the forms of space and territory of the EU (Walters 2006, 142). This shift reconfigures the referent object from the bounded state to the broader European project, thereby altering the nuances attached to border features as well. The same principle applies across all identified features: their conceptual core remains, but their expression adapts to the level, national or supranational, at which the border is framed.

While distinctions in border functions are more difficult to distinguish, given the overlap of the majority of the national borders studied here with that of the EU's external border, a few remarks are worth making. The functions of the EU's border-making occur at many institutional levels, making border policies and processes diverse and, at times, also fragmented. This multilateral border regime hinges on a division of competencies across the national and supranational. Crucially, while the functions of the Schengen border are determined on a supranational level, implementation remains a responsibility of the EUMS (Campesi 2018).

4.3 Orders

Below, the dimension of 'orders' from the IBO triad is introduced. The section demonstrates how EUropean political orders may be conceptualized as images and ideas of EUrope, which feeds into the notion of a vision of EUrope. This draws on literature on Europeanization as introduced in the previous chapter, and especially on how Europeanization functions as a display of a collective European

project. Note well, while Europe and EUrope contain notions of spatial designation(s), the conceptualization of orders as it is applied here concerns EUrope as a political order. Hence, this dimension makes a distinction between Europe as a geographical place and EUrope as a political order. That is not to say that visions of EUrope do not contain allusions to the spatial location. The location is, however, in a continuous state of becoming as a result of changing EU borders due to enlargement. Furthermore, spatial denotations are instead captured within the scope of the border dimension presented just above.

The political order of the EU is often studied from the angle of institutionalism, which focuses on the functional and instrumental aspects of integration (Olsen 2007). Missing from this perspective is the role ideas and a shared sense of meaning-making can have on integration trajectories. To understand political order, I borrow from the concept of a normative political order, defined as the normative ideas determining ties and relationships which make up a political entity (Olsen 2007, 22; Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998, 411). The normative angle directs attention to the role of ideas, or "structures of meaning" underpinning institutions (Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998, 411). These may include references to a market economy, collective security, moral values, or history, to name a few. Following this reasoning, normative ideas about EUrope may be approached through discourse, such as the ones available in border communication. By shifting the conceptual understanding of EUrope towards a set of ideas, as introduced in the previous chapter, the EU is presented as a collective political polity, underpinning the notion of a shared order. This implicitly frames the EU as more than a governance arrangement, instead it is a collective political entity that exists through shared visions and values.

Political orders, and the normative orders they are embedded in, tend to be stable over time (Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998). As a result, the relatively short timeframe applied in this study (2015–2023) might not display the full shifts between different political order(s). Rather, the objective is to examine the nuances, as opposed to the shifts, of political order(s) of the EU, as envisioned among the northern EUMS through the means of border communication.

The question of EUropean orders relates to the query of 'EUrope of *what*.' In this sense, EUropean orders may be perceived as images or ideas of ways to imagine, perform, and organize the EUropean polity. In other words, it is looking at the composition and trajectories of the imagined shape of the EU. More concretely, in this case, the display of (a) EUropean order(s) will be approached through meta-narratives, which are taken to lend their meaning to the EU-polity (Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998; Diez and Lucke 2024; Diez 2001), further explained in the chapter to follow. Here it might be worth putting forward a small disclaimer, the dissertation does not directly deal with empirical claims of a changing world order, given that the main attention remains on the EU as an order. At the same time, the process of distinguishing what is EUropean inevitably engages with orders outside of the EU to facilitate such distinctions (Eder 2006). The work thereby implicitly engages with notions of change outside of the EU. Therefore, while the primary concern in terms of the concept of 'orders' is the internal order

of the EU, the process of ordering inevitably includes a discursive differentiation between the inside and the outside, thereby linking it to the act of bordering. This is because the political order is manifested at the border through the display of normative values that different bordering policies represent; thereby functioning as an exchange between territoriality and morality (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002). It is, thus, implicitly argued in this chapter that borders infer some images (hence orders) of EUrope above others.

Spatialization on the grounds of moral claims connects back to the notion of an entity of shared ideas. In Europe, previous literature has indeed identified ordering on the basis of moral claims of shared community (Mansbach and Wilmer 2001), or responsibility (Ó Tuathail 1996). Moral spatializations are based on a sense of moral obligations towards regions other than one's own, often regions riddled with unrest or conflict. Moral geography is particularly apparent in the West's ordering of the world. The argumentation appeared, for example, in the drafting of policies towards Kosovo in the 1990's (Lipschutz 2001), as well as in the US's shift in foreign policy following 9/11, and not least in the structuring of political alliances during the Cold War. As a matter of fact, moral values can function as claims for geographical belonging in the sense that shared values postulate belonging to the same entity, which is a pattern of reasoning that has become prevalent in CEE's narration of Ukraine (Hagelin and Gibson 2024). Thus, ordering and space are joined together through moral geography. As such, it has bearing on both the order and identity formation within and among countries declared to belong to the same moral geographical community.

Nevertheless, it is somewhat difficult to distinguish a EUropean 'order' from a EUropean 'identity,' especially when defining the former as a shared set of ideas. In this case, I draw a distinction between order as a shared set of ideas and identity as the displays of a 'we' that extends beyond the nation, further introduced in the following section. In this sense, we can think of the distinction between order and identity being that orders are the mechanisms of the EU as an entity, and identity as the essence of the entity. Using a metaphoric image, the order may be envisioned is the shape outlining what the EU is, while identity fills this shape. Ultimately, however, they both contribute, together with borders, to capture nuances that display visions, or trajectories, of EUrope, which also happen to be distinct from 'outside' order(s).

4.4 Identities

This section introduces the 'identities' dimension of the IBO triad. Constructions that denote space and politics function as powerful tools in the state's attempts to construct matters of identity (Demata 2024). Similarly to how borders are constantly changing, dominant constructions about identity are far from stable and often subject to change. This work explores identities from a discursive perspective, taking on the three factors introduced by Diez (2010, 321): 1) identities are discursively constructed, implying that identity formation is always political;

2) identities may change over time as alternative narratives challenge dominant ones; 3) identities are constructed in relation the 'other,' hence to say what 'we' are is always to say what 'we' are *not*.

Constructing the identity of the nation-state is to claim a legitimate link between the nation and a particular territory. Among other things, this interconnection between a nation and its territory contends – in its ideal-type – a distinct difference between the inside and the outside. Yet, with EUrope, the link between territory and identity is not as evident and, thereby, not as forceful in crafting a EUropean identity. Rather, a EUropean identity is predominantly to be understood as a shared idea (Stråth 2010b). While some argue this is based on cultural, intellectual, and emotional dimensions (Passerini 2010), the EU is commonly taken to represent a political polity based on functional and rational interests (Della Salla 2010, 2). Most importantly, there is no EUropean identity to be discovered, it needs to be constructed (White 2010; Wæver 1996, 127).

Constructions of an EU identity have predominantly remained different from the nation-state's emphasis on a territorial dimension of identity making, centered on the notion of the inside versus the outside. This is because the identity of the EU remains "as something impossible to fill, always incomplete due to the presence of the outside in the inside," (Wæver 1996, 127) but also because of the lack of a shared historical myth, not to be mistaken with a foundational or functional myth (Della Salla 2010). Due to the lack of a shared historical myth, the EU's 'other' has traditionally been the pre-EU past, symbolizing an undesirable political order – the EU's *temporal other*. However, the enlargements following the end of the Cold War challenged the notion of where Europe and EUrope is located, and introduced a geopolitical notion, as enlargement was narrated as a necessity to maintain the peace of EUrope. But also because enlargements, or potential enlargements (such as Turkey), raised the question of what it means to be European. Such a shift introduced the *geopolitical other* of the EU, externalizing perceived threats (Diez 2010). Meaning that, even if the EU's identity is less tied to a territory in comparison to the national entity, the distinction between the inside and the outside is becoming increasingly important.

Nevertheless, while collective EUropean identity formation is indeed an actuality, it is worth noting that research shows a strong divide between elites and ordinary citizens. The former group is primarily made up of the economic and political elite. Elites tends to showcase a stronger identification and support for the EU and its integration efforts when compared to citizens. This is not a surprising pattern, given that the elite tend to have a more regular engagement with the EU community itself and therefore have a more consistent and close-up familiarity with what the EU is, how it operates, and the opportunities it creates (Risse 2005; Mansfeldová and Špicarová Stašková 2009). This has implications for this work, to the extent that the discourses considered here are produced within the government. Hence, first and foremost these discourses represent EUropean identity constructions and the creation of Europeanness from the perspectives of elites. That means that in more general terms, we should expect that attitudes

toward the EU (and likely also EUropean borders) would not be articulated in the same manner in discourses emerging from a wider representation of the population.

Drawing on Paasi (2001), who argues that a collective identity requires shared territorial and temporal (shared narratives of past, present, and future) understandings, the dimension of identity is taken to capture displays designating both space and history. Thus, by embedding the EU in a shared historical understanding it constructs EUrope within a continuum of becoming. This temporal-spatial framing reinforces the idea of the EU as an ongoing collective endeavor rather than a static institution, which contributes to envisioning EUrope.

Be that as it may, a European or EUropean identity is difficult to define based on features such as geography; neither do cultural designations such as religion, language, a distinct culture – economic or intellectual – or history constitute a solid foundation for collective identity formation, as none are shared uniformly across EUrope. Nor are they distinct to the region in question (Fernández-Armesto 2002). Identity formation is instead embedded in a strategic or normative setting, defined and shaped by a "structured time sequence" (Eder 2006, 256). In other words, identity formations are historically and contextually contingent (Biebuyck and Rumford 2012; 2016). Although there are overlaps in the articulation of national identities across the EU, leaving space for a sense of a shared EUrope to emerge, differences remain. This is especially true if viewed from the perspective of continuous enlargement. As more countries join the Union the spectrum of objective features, and cultural and historic designations, among its members increases. This pattern is evident in that different regions of the EU display somewhat diverging understandings of the essence of 'Europe.' (Kushnir 2022)

Thereby, we ought to more accurately approach an EU identity as a collection of identities. This would prove more inclusive for the contextual variation that exists across the geographical and cultural realities of the states and regions making up the EU, as well as those aspiring to join. If that is the case, displays of a EUropean order emerging from the Baltic and Nordic spaces are but one contribution toward the construction of a EUropean collective vision. Granted, such a collection of identities is difficult to study, and not the least to operationalize. As this work indeed remains regional, it means that for the continuation of this work I can set aside the challenging task of theorizing an EU-wide European identity as a collection of identities, and instead focus on the north European vision of EUrope.

Furthermore, it is beyond the scope of this work to explain the processes of identity formation in greater detail.[31] Neither can it attempt to answer whether or not a widespread sense of a collective EUropean identity is necessary for the development of the EU. For the sake of this research, it suffices to investigate the display of national and supranational identities across three questions: 1) Does border discourse emphasize a 'we,' and what is this 'we' referring to? 2) Are displays of a European identity tied to a specific history? 3) Are displays of a EUropean identity tied to a specific territory? Practically, this will also include

[31] For an overview and further introduction to European identity formation see Risse (2005).

taking heed of any distinctions made between a national versus European identity in governmental communication on borders, as a means of identifying the 'we.' As such, I argue that the three questions detailed above underpin inferred trajectories of the EU; in other terms, what sort of EUropean vision is strived for within the polity. Table 4.1 summarizes the conceptualizations of the IBO dimensions introduced in this chapter. The next section introduces the theoretical framework of this dissertation, building on the elaboration of the IBO components.

Table 4.1. Overview of the IBO dimensions when considering border discourse

	Borders	**Orders**	**Identities**
Border discourses	How national and supranational borders are interpreted and communicated, paying particular attention to the location, features, and functions of borders.	How the EU as a social and political order is presented, paying particular attention to different imaginations of EUropean order(s) and to any representations of comparisons with other orders.	How the EU is presented as having a collective identity, paying particular attention to whether the border discourse displays a 'we-feeling,' territorial, and historic components.

4.5 Theoretical framework

The following section details the theoretical framework of this dissertation, synthesizing the IBO dimensions into an analytical lens. First, it outlines how the IBO dimensions presented above are understood to be interrelated. Second, it demonstrates how the IBO triad is applied as a prism through which to deconstruct and analyze entangled border imaginations of governmental border discourses. Finally, it details how the deconstruction of border discourses makes it possible to examine visions of EUrope produced through border discourse. As such, the framework discusses how the three conceptualizations of the IBO dimensions come together in relation to this work. Thus, the framework exemplifies one approach to the operationalization of the IBO triad in questions of border discourse and European borders.

As was made evident in the previous chapters, tracing constructions of EUropean borders as discourse, the connection between borders and notions of Europeanness has mostly been studied from the perspective of internal Schengen borders. The process of debordering that is the norm along the internal borders, sets the stage for the co-creation of a shared sense of EUrope. However, discourses emerging from and about the external Schengen border arguably also contribute to visions of EUrope, particularly as they more distinctly highlight what the EU is, as opposed to what it is not (Stråth 2002). Yet, studying discourses emerging across the entirety of the external Schengen border would be a project far beyond the scope of a doctoral dissertation. It also risks producing a macro-level analysis that overlooks the nuances and contradictions of border

policies everywhere. Hence, the regional focus suggested here allows the analysis to adequately display the nuances and variations in border discourses on the regional level, all the while capturing the macro-level by categorizing visions of EUrope.

For the purpose of this dissertation, to understand how governments construct visions of EUrope through border discourses, the theoretical framework captures a direction of influence from border discourses to the construction of a EUrope of *what* (Figure 4.3). This direction of influence departs from the premise that discourses on borders first and foremost contribute to attaching symbolic meaning to a border. The articulation of a border is, hence, taken to contain logics about said border, and descriptive evaluations of how the inside departs from the outside. Note well, it is not an aim of the dissertation to provide a quantifiable measurement of these relationships, rather, the work suggests that this direction is one among other observable linkages that influence the effects of bordering more generally, and border discourses in particular.

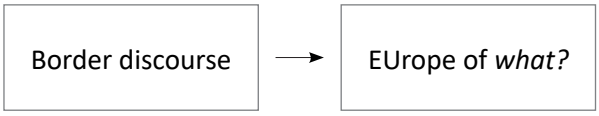

Figure 4.2. The direction of influence of the theoretical framework, demonstrating how border discourses influence the making of EUrope.

The foundation of the theoretical framework centers on borders, orders, and identities as interdependent and co-constitutive. This was first suggested by the contributors who introduced the IBO triad (Albert et al. 2001), but has remained poorly articulated. I, nevertheless, make the argument that the triad's three dimensions can be described as feeding into one another, in the sense that they produce meaning and context that underpin each other. Of course, we need to recognize this as a never-ending loop of the co-constitutive process, making it difficult to pinpoint the exact causal mechanism between them. For the purpose of their inclusion in the prism, however, I maintain it is enough to determine more general patterns of influence connecting the three concepts. Such general patterns of influence offer an outline of how the IBO triad hangs together, while still allowing interpretive fluidity in the analysis to capture the nuances that appear in the grey zones in-between the IBO dimensions. I want to emphasize that the interrelatedness of the dimensions is based on the conceptualizations introduced here; they will thus have to be conceptualized anew for other studies and other contexts. This is a strength of the theoretical framework, as it demonstrates flexibility with regard to contextual particularities while still allowing analytical conformity to facilitate comparisons also between different studies. The rest of this chapter will proceed with the description of the interrelatedness of the IBO dimensions, and the details of the theoretical framework.

A key principle of this work is held the presence of different types of borders that entangle as they overlap and become layered. Yet, governmental border discourse, as highlighted in the previous chapters, is not particularly good at

distinguishing between all of the different types of borders intersecting a country. To counteract this, the border concept as utilized here emphasizes the prevalence of multiple borders, and their potential entanglements, which may produce reinforcing border imaginations when occurring in overlapping or layered contexts. The process of disentanglement is valuable not only to isolate discourse on different borders, but also to isolate distinct imaginations about order and identity attached to individual border types. Specifically, interpretations of the filtering process of a border play a significant role in defining who 'we are' and who 'we are not,' thereby contributing to the constructions of identities, but also in consolidating orders.

The concept of orders, as understood here, constructs images and ideas of what constitutes EUrope, thereby shaping the norms and ideals of the EU. The interrelation between political order and geographical space, influenced by historical territoriality and contemporary moral geography, reveals the complexities of identity formation and regional variations within the EU. This approach offers insights into the evolving nature of EUrope as a political and normative entity, shaped by both internal dynamics and external influences. This notion of orders contributes to identity formation by supplying the norms and ideals that underpin the creation of a collective identity. Furthermore, the orders dimension influences the delineation of borders by determining their scope while also emphasizing the necessity for 'more' or 'less' border(ing), depending on the perceived disparity between the order inside and the order outside.

Lastly, identities highlight how political elites construct notions of an EU identity, thereby constructing who 'we' are. This construction of identity reinforces ordering processes by consolidating the foundation of a collective entity on which orders may stand. It is also assumed to function as a conditional component, where displays of national or supranational identity formation limit what EUropean orders are possible and desirable. In relation to borders, identities play a crucial role in conceptualizing traditional borders, including imagining the outline of borders, but also by envisioning bordering processes that take place at non-traditional border sites.

Empirically, this is analyzed through the identification of metanarratives across to the three theoretical dimensions: borders, orders, and identities. Metanarratives are defined as discourses that are referenced to stabilize the particular meaning of a concept/idea/nodal point during a point in time. As such, metanarratives are taken to provide meaning to the interpretations of events, places, and things in border communication. This dissertation argues that the theoretical approach found in the IBO triad is an applicable tool to render visible the nuances found in discourses on borders, and which may tell us something about visions of EUrope. The triadic composition offers a prism through which governmental border communication may be broken down into smaller components, which, when considered together, facilitates a closer examination of how a EUropean polity is envisioned in more detail.

Table 4.2. Analytical framework for deconstructing border discourse applying the IBO triad

Analytical Focus	**Borders**	**Orders**	**Identities**
Representation and imagination	How are different types of borders imagined and represented? Where are they imagined to be located?	How is the EU framed as a normative and spatial order? Is the representation hinged on comparison between a EUropean order and 'outside' orders?	How is the EU imagined as a collective 'we'?
Feature and/or function	What features and functions are attributed to different types of borders?	What are the main features of the imagined EU order?	In what capacity do notions of group formation draw upon territorial or historic components?
Entanglements and layering	How are borders and border imaginaries overlapping or layered, establishing entanglements? How does this reinforce or challenge established border discourse?	How do orders contribute to or problematize layered borders? Are EUropean orders made possible or impossible based on identity and territorial imaginaries?	Are identities represented as split, nested, or something in-between?

The second research question posed at the beginning of this dissertation concerns what visions of EUrope are produced and inferred through border discourses. At this point in the dissertation, the question becomes how these visions of EUrope may be identified. Drawing on the argumentation in the introductory chapter, visions of EUrope are understood as future-oriented trajectories of the EU as an entity, underpinned by ideas about what the EU ought to be in terms of scope, capabilities, policy focus, and political identity. Such visions are in this work taken to be expressed through discourse, spanning both institutional practices and policies, becoming particularly visible in moments of crisis when meanings are renegotiated. For the prupose of this work, the shape and essence of the EU are therefore approached through the ways in which its borders are represented and justified.

Theoretically, this link rests on the assumption that border discourse provides an entry point into the normative and geopolitical imaginaries that underpin different trajectories for the EU. To capture this, visions of EUrope are approached through a synthesized reading of the three interrelated discursive dimensions, demonstrating how their rationales interweave into a coherent trajectory. The logic for making inferences about EUropean visions from border discourses is based on a two-step analysis of the overall findings regarding governmental

border discourse across the four country cases. Hence, after having initially critically examined border discourse, isolating the IBO dimensions of borders, orders, and identities, the insights from the three dimensions are then synthesized to comment on the trajectories of EUropean visions produced through a combined reading of the findings. These dimensions are analytically distinct, but in practice they are mutually constitutive: spatial boundaries derive meaning from the orders and identities that sustain them, just as orders and identities are stabilized through bordering practices. Empirically, it will be demonstrated in the following chapter that a synthesis of the three IBO dimensions across cases and crises makes it possible to identify the underlying metanarratives that project specific visions of EUrope.

The operationalization of the analytical framework is presented in chapter 5, which introduces the research design and methodological considerations. The framework is designed to be applicable to other contexts of entangling border regimes with objectives to identify the shaping of EUrope and Europe. Although this work focuses on the BSR broadly speaking, it does not mean that the framework in itself cannot be applied to other regions along the external border of the EU. While the structure of the framework can certainly be applied to cases of one border regime, I want to stress that the strength of the framework lies in its ability to render visible the nuances between different types of borders, particularly in cases involving overlapping border regimes and entangled border discourses.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the construction of visions of the EU can be examined from the perspective of border discourses, more specifically in this instance, border discourses from the EU's edge. Discourses from, and on, both national borders and the EU's external border respectively provide new, and possibly distinct insights into how the EU as a common entity is perceived and communicated by EU governments. These borders are instrumental in highlighting what the EU is, often in contrast to what it is not. Expanding our understanding of how borders contribute to constructions of the EU is important not only for the sake of better understanding how borders are understood and justified, but also for demonstrating the complexity of the role of borders in building EUrope. The theoretical framework proposed here offers a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted and dynamic nature of borders in the EU and the discourses through which they are communicated.

The analytical framework presented above has been developed to respond to the two research questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation. The first research question asks how borders and border processes are represented in governmental border communication. The analytical approach suggested here deconstructs the border discourses into their smaller components. Here the central components are translated into the three IBO dimensions, resulting in an analytical framework that considers the borders, orders, and identities dimensions separately.

The distinction between different types of borders is based on the argument put forth at the opening of this dissertation, that various types of borders appear to be overwhelmingly entangled in governmental border communication, with the potential of creating complex interactions between how different borders are conceptualized, which ultimately might contribute to a renegotiation of spatial understandings.

The second research question concerns the vision(s) of EUrope inferred in border discourses. To this end, the analytical framework is constructed to offer the building blocks of an imagined vision of EUrope by synthesizing the findings from the three individual IBO dimensions. Theoretically, this is argued to emerge from a close analysis of the synthesized findings of the three IBO dimensions, as the logics of the dimensions are taken to interweave to envision EUropean trajectories.

Hence, the chapter has established the theoretical framework of the dissertation by detailing how the IBO triad, identities, borders, and orders, interrelates, as well as how the triad can be used to analyze and deconstruct border discourses in the context of the EU. This makes it possible to more accurately identify and examine the conceptualization of different types of borders entangled in governmental border discourse, as well as how these border discourses envision EUrope. Despite its potential, the IBO triad's application has been limited, which I have argued is to some extent a result of the absence of detailed operational frameworks. This chapter addressed this gap by proposing a more comprehensive analytical framework, highlighting the triad's relevance in understanding the fluid interplay between bordering processes, political ordering, and identity formation. The framework presented here reveals that by including all three dimensions of the IBO triad into the same analytical frame, the analysis better captures the nuances and variations in border discourses and their role in shaping visions of EUrope. Thus, by deconstructing governmental border communication into its constituent components, including the entangled border types often referenced in border discourse, this framework offers a comprehensive understanding of how border discourses entangle border types and border imaginations, but also how border discourse shapes the European polity.

5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This chapter introduces the methodological reasonings of the dissertation, detailing the research design as well as the method used to investigate the research questions of this study, which reads, 1) How are different types of borders and bordering processes discursively re/represented in governmental border communication during border-related crises in the EU? 2) How do discursive representations of various types of borders portray broader visions of EUrope? The underpinnings of the study presume that the framing of the spatial and imaginary characteristics of different types of borders occur simultaneously and interchangeably in governmental border communication, making it difficult for those on the receiving end of this communication to distinguish between border imaginations. In order to account for these discursive entanglements, I have adopted an analytical framework that allows me to disentangle border discourse, to capture nuances pertaining to the national and external EU borders, demonstrating how border discourse may be deconstructed. This analytical framework will be further operationalized in this chapter, building upon the rationale introduced in the previous chapter.

The research design of this dissertation rests on the reasoning of interpretative research, where meaning-making research is the key scientific endeavor, with the aim to uncover how "specific human beings in particular times and locales make sense of their worlds." (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 10) As such, there are some distinctions from positivist research that are worth mentioning. First, the aim is not to test the accuracy of pre-defined concepts, rather the aim is to explore and examine how such concepts are understood and applied in the field (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 18). There is also the possibility to add concepts through inductive analysis that have not previously been acknowledged in the literature. In the specific case of this dissertation, this translates into how the national border and the external EU border respectively are understood, applied, and conveyed in the political communication on borders. So, although border as a concept is pre-identified through literature, its definition is not fully determined following the literature review or theoretical framework. Second, contextuality is a key underpinning in the production of meaning-making and knowledge (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 42). This connotes the context of the data, but also the context of the researcher. Third, a notion which has been raised above, but deserves to be reiterated; to research borders is inherently to research power relations (cf. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 43). The data generation applied in this dissertation allows for certain conceptual understandings and dimensions of power to emerge while others remain in the background, or even silenced. Since the focus is on how discourses on different types of borders overlap and entangle, the focus here remains state-centric. While this allows me to answer the particular research question of this dissertation, it is necessary to recall that this is by far not the only legitimate representation of border discourses or narratives of power dimensions.

The study assumes that the construction and representation of borders are closely intertwined with linguistic practices (Müller 2008). Thus, the role of language is central in the construction and representation of discourses that relate to the making of the border. This study applies the DNP approach (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Diez 2001) to study the discursive representation of borders in times of crisis. The approach allows me to identify metanarratives that are drawn upon to assign meaning to the two types of borders under scrutiny here. While this offers the possibility to identify nuances in how borders are imagined by reviewing the metanarratives drawn upon, it also presents the possibility to compare the varying prevalence of metanarratives across the different country cases.

A brief note on the timeline of when this dissertation was undertaken. Research on European borders and bordering has increasingly been impacted by the events unfolding in Ukraine since early 2022. The first stages of this dissertation began before the invasion and the original design included a focused on the unfolding effects of Covid-19 on border imaginations. However, as time went by and the magnitude in terms of border change became evident – imaginary and, to-be-expected, physically – it became imperative to address it in the analysis. Hence, the aim and research design were re-formulated to account for the processes of re-bordering that have taken place along the eastern EU external border as an immediate effect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This will be studied through the event of the visa retraction to Russian citizens that was largely initiated by the three Baltic States and Poland, and later introduced in Finland as well.

Before introducing the selection and particularities of each of the cases, I will briefly introduce the reasoning underpinning the unit of analysis in the case selection. The unit of analysis in this study is countries, and more specifically countries in their capacity as providers of a state-perspective on borders and border policies, thus, locating border discourses within governmental communication. To make the scope of the data more manageable, I select time periods which are generally described as a border crisis across the four country cases. As such, moments of border crisis function as a delimitation in time rather than a unit of analysis.

The selection of cases is centered on the discursive representation of borders within the Baltic and Nordic spaces, specifically looking at Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden as the country cases. As such the study is case-oriented, constituted by a small-*n* comparison (Landman 2008). Although the Baltic and Nordic spaces on many accounts are their own separate entities, they naturally share many overlapping components by being located within the BSR. Particularly in terms of different types of borders. As introduced in chapter 2 of this dissertation, the spatial imagination of the BSR has transformed considerably over the years, and regional cooperation has re/positioned the space and its borders, as cooperation patterns have emerged and receded. As abovementioned, the EU's presence in the region consolidated following first the 1995 and later the 2004 EU enlargements. Among other ramifications, these enlargements have had extensive implications for border discourses concerning the EU's eastern border, in particular the EU-Russia border.

To ensure methodological manageability, a selection was required from among the eight countries commonly included in the Baltic and Nordic spaces, which, aside from the selected countries, also includes Norway, Denmark, and Latvia; and, if one considers the overlap with the NB8, also includes Iceland. Iceland and Norway were excluded on the basis of not being EUMS, despite their participation in the Schengen Area. Among the remaining countries, Denmark was excluded partly due to its longstanding opt-out from the CSDP, albeit this opt-out was terminated after a referendum in 2022.[32] Adding to that, Denmark has, at the time of writing, an active opt-out from EU laws concerning JHA which includes asylum standards. This means that Denmark is not bound by EU legislation relating to JHA matters, including border control and immigration policy (Folketinget 2022). Denmark has, thereby, remained outside of relevant frameworks relating to human movement during all three of the crisis events studied here. It is assumed that these two opt-outs not only affect policy but also shape the way borders are discursively constructed in governmental communication, as such, including Denmark would therefore risk skewing the comparative basis of the study.

Among the Baltic states, although Latvia has the second longest EU external border among the three Baltic states, Lithuania displays unique border features through its border with Belarus to the east and its border the Russian exclave Kaliningrad to the west. Lithuania was also among the primary targets for the Belarusian instrumentalization of migrants in 2021, further enforcing the selection of Lithuania as a case of study. Estonia provides similar minority patterns as Latvia with a relatively large Russian minority (20.9% compared to Latvia's 23.4%).[33] Estonia also constitutes an interesting example from the Baltics in that the country has a comparably closer relationship with Finland, and has indeed previously aspired to a Nordic identity rather than a Baltic (Lagerspetz 2003). Hence, to manage the number of cases among the Baltic states, Latvia is excluded from the selection. All in all, Finland, Sweden, Estonia, and Lithuania are considered to constitute a good aggregator of Baltic discourses framing different types of borders in the Baltic and Nordic contexts.

The chapter proceeds with a discussion about data selection and collection. Next, the chapter provides a brief introduction to discourse analysis (DA) from a methodological viewpoint, before situating the analytical technique of DNP against these broader considerations of DA. Finally, the chapter presents the operationalization of the study, with a particular attention to the procedure and logic of the coding process and analysis.

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[32] Denmark had four opt-outs from EU cooperation agreed upon among the EUMS in 1993, after the Maastricht Treaty originally was rejected in a Danish referendum in 1992. However, following a referendum on June 1, 2022, the opt-out concerning the EU CSDP was terminated and Denmark joined the CSDP in July the same year (Folketinget 2022).

[33] Statistics refer to 2025 published data from Estonian (*Eesti Statistika*, stat.ee) and Latvian (*Latvijas oficiālā statistika*, stat.gov.lv) national statistics portals respectively.

5.1 Data selection and collection

Within interpretive data, it is assumed that data is generated rather than simply existing out there. The process of generating data is conducted in conjunction with the researcher and the settings from which the data is gathered (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 78–81; Tallis 2023). Hence, the data generated here evokes findings that would most likely be different if other settings were approached. This is crucial to keep in mind as discourses on borders differ between the borderer or the bordered, reiterating from the introductory chapter.

While the unit of analysis instructs the selection of cases, the level of analysis determines what type of data is generated for each of the country cases. The level of analysis pertains to the perspective from which border discourse is studied, specifically at the national level as this work focuses on governmental border communication. Thereby, different types of borders, invoked orders, and identities are explored and assessed from the national perspective. Consequently, the analysis is based on the national interpretation and re/presentation of different types of borders, orders, and identities invoked in border discourse, while the supra-national interpretation and re/presentation is excluded from this study. The unique aspects of governmental communication from a discursive perspective will be discussed in the following section introducing discourse analysis as a methodology. This section proceeds with introducing the selection of data in more detail.

The research focuses on crises as critical conjunctures signaling change (Table 5.1). The context-dependent nature of discourses is a fundamental starting point for examining how border discourses evolve in relation to perceived social realities. This suggests that the contextual setting determines what can be understood as metanarratives. Consequently, the study highlights discursive nuances through a contextual lens, aligning with the temporal dimension inherent in bordering processes and border changes. This approach allows for mapping and exploring the entangled border discourse, which I have previously explored in news media (Hagelin 2024). The interplay of these multiple entangled borders demonstrates how the practices of spatial and power ordering contribute to the ongoing re/presentation and re/construction of social realities. This is because space and power are semantically constitutive (Sharp 1993) and contribute to the ordering of borders, orders, and identities (Self and Other). This emphasizes the inherently constructive nature of border discourses and, by extension, the borders themselves.

The research looks at three separate crisis periods within the EU, occurring between 2015 and 2022: the migration crisis in 2015–2016, the instrumentalized migration crisis of 2021, and the retraction of Schengen visas belonging to Russian citizens in 2022. The time frames of data collection are presented in Table 5.1. A brief justification for these choices, which draws upon the contextual overview of each time period in chapter two, will now be made. The first crisis event comprises the migration crisis of 2015 and 2016. While human movement increased considerably in April of 2015, this study includes data from the start of the year to grasp some of the discourse prevalent as tension was increasing within the EU. The end point of data collection is set to December of 2016.

The second crisis event comprises the instrumentalized migration crisis of 2021, generally perceived to have erupted in the summer of 2021. While the human movement increases around August of 2021, the collection of data begins already in June to capture early framings of the matter. The end point of the period is set to February 2022, largely because the human movement slows down towards the end of 2021, but also because come end of February 2022, the attention shifts towards Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine meaning that there is little attention given to the instrumentalized migration from Belarus. I have, nonetheless, collected some supporting data, in instances where there is governmental communication that emerges on the topic but at a much later time than the time period determined here. This includes legal amendments that have a clear connection to the instrumentalization of migration, which occur in both Estonia and Finland for example. It is clearly specified when such supplementary data is drawn upon for analysis and discussion.

Finally, the third crisis event comprises the retraction of visas among Russian Schengen visa holders in 2022. The discussion of this emerges in governmental communication towards the early fall of 2022. This is the event with the least delineated time period where communication is consistent. The time period for this event encompasses August through March 2023. While most of the decisions on visa retraction were made and communicated in 2022, the occasional press release appeared in the beginning of 2023. Nevertheless, it remains the event with the most infrequent communication, resulting in a considerably lower number of collected documents compared to the two other events.

Table 5.1. Overview of the crisis events

Event	**TIME PERIOD**
Migration crisis 2015–2016	January 2015 – December 2016
Border-crisis Belarus 2021	June 2021 – February 2022
Visa-retraction Russia 2022	August 2022 – March 2023

The data consists of text material, reflecting the format of governmental communication. It is also assumed that there is a time sensitivity inherent to interview data, relating to crisis discourse by which interviewees inevitably will interpret (consciously and subconsciously) older crises through the lens of more recent crises and discourses. Hence, engaging with text material from the time is perceived to be more reliable in representing discourses of the time. The relatively short timeframe posits that if discourses are found to be in flux for this period, we can confidently assume change is even more evident throughout a longer time span. Due to the public nature of the material, no special ethical approval was needed as per Tartu University guidelines.

The data is so-called found data, in line with the logic of interpretive research, meaning it consists of material already publicly available at the time of writing, manually collected from the respective government's websites. Manual data collection provided flexibility in navigating the structures and layouts of websites across the four countries, in part because some of the data had to be requested via

email. The data was collected over a period from 2021–2024 and for the most part includes two forms of governmental communication: press releases and speeches, with the former forming the majority of the dataset. Articles published on governmental sites are also included into the text corpus when these have matched the collection requirements. Each event was searched for separately, applying predetermined keywords (Table 5.2) and filtering by years and/or months whenever possible. The data was stored, organized and analyzed using the MAXQDA software. The text corpus was duplicated into two separate folders in MAXQDA, which allowed the coding to distinguish between national border discourses and external EU border discourses separately. Both folders contain the same text corpus, and was processed using the same code book for the sake of coherence. The coding process was recorded in a log-book, to ensure consistency in coding practices and interpretations over time. The log-book made it possible to highlight noteworthy text excerpts, record initial reflections and early impressions of shared patterns across the country cases. These interpretations were drafted and shared with supervisors and at a few presentations to receive peer reflections on the scope and depth of the interpretations.

As for the availability of the data, for Estonia, all relevant material was accessible through the government website, which allowed filtering by dates. The English version of the website was used, which limited the availability to only translated communication. For Lithuania, materials for 2021 and 2022 were found online, but there were no available press releases from the Lithuanian government's website for the period 2015–2016. Following prolonged email correspondence, I was informed that older press releases are not saved long-term, meaning that no files that could be sent to me. As a substitute, press releases were collected from the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (LT-MFA), which had press releases available from their website. The data from the LT-MFA posed some challenges in coding, as the tone and content differed slightly from governmental border communication. For example, the data from the LT-MFA contains a considerably more frequent mention of bilateral cooperation between EUMS as well as non-EUMS. At the same time, the data remains valid in the sense that the data reflects the government's stance on foreign affairs, which contains imaginations about various types of borders. For Finland, materials for 2021 and 2022 were available online, but the absence of a date-filtering function made the search process less structured. Older materials were available on request. Most press releases were translated into English alongside Finnish and Swedish, which made it straightforward to verify coherence between translations. Where no English translation was available, the Swedish version was used. In the case of Sweden, press releases from previous governments are removed from the website but press releases can be accessed through downloadable files containing a minister's full list of press-releases and news articles. As no English versions of these materials were available, the analysis relied on communication published in Swedish.

The entries of data for each of the cases is presented below (Table 5.3). The full text corpus amounts to 525 individual entries. As this is a qualitative study, the allocation of entries between different crises within the data set is not a primary basis for the analysis. The scope, however, tells us something about the

prominence of each event within each country case, hence, these numbers may support the analysis by indicating whether an event featured prominently in governmental border communication or not.

Table 5.2. List of search words for collection of data

Border crisis	**SEARCH WORDS**
Migration crisis*	'Border'; 'Borders'; 'Refugee'; 'Migrant'; 'Migration'
Border-crisis with Belarus*	'Border'; 'Migrant'; 'Belarus'; 'Lithuania';
Visa retraction Russia*	'Visa'; 'Russia'; 'Russians'; 'Border'; 'Tourism'

* For Finland and Sweden, the Swedish equivalents were also used to search for the material (border – *gräns*; refugee – *flykting*; migrant – *migrant*; migration – *migration*; Lithuania – *Litauen*; visa – *visum*; Russia – *Ryssland*; Tourism – *Turism).*

Table 5.3. List of the number of separate border communications for each border crisis by country

Event	**FINLAND**	**SWEDEN**	**ESTONIA**	**LITHUANIA**
Migration crisis	96	92	95	102
Border-crisis with Belarus	23	5	24	61
Visa retraction Russia	11	1	11	4
Total	130	98	130	167

The number of press releases in 2021 regarding the instrumentalized migration crisis in Belarus is comparably lower for Sweden. A plausible explanation to the low numbers is that Sweden experienced a governmental crisis around the same time as the migration crisis erupted along the Belarusian border. A vote of no confidence was initiated against the then-Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (S) by the Left Party (V) on June 17, 2021, following a dispute over the possible introduction of market rents for new rental productions.[34] Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic was still ongoing, which may also explain the lack of governmental communication on the events along the Belarusian border. Needless to say, the period was one of political instability in Sweden.

[34] To understand the magnitude of the dispute, this is the first time in Swedish history that a Prime Minster was ousted by a vote of no confidence, although a snap election was avoided as Löfven was re-elected by the Parliament on July 7 with a slim margin. However, already on August 22, 2021, Löfven announced his intended resignation as Prime Minister and party leader at the Social Democrats' party congress in November. Thus, on November 4, 2021, Magdalena Andersson (S) was elected as new party leader. Following this, Andersson was approved as the new Prime Minister on November 24 after prolonged government formation negotiations, however, she was forced to resign only 7 hours later as the Green Party (MP) left the government coalition due to the government's budget proposal failing in the Parliament. Despite this, Andersson was once again re-elected as Prime Minister on November 29, 2021, with a single party minority government (Appendix III).

The number of press releases is even lower for visa retractions in 2022, as there is only one document that corresponds to the key words used in the search. The discussion on visa restrictions takes off in the fall of 2022, coinciding with the Swedish parliamentary election (September 9, 2022). This alone could explain the relative absence of communication regarding visa restrictions for Russian tourists. Adding to that, Sweden does not share a border with Russia, transit movement of Russian Schengen visa-holders is less of a concern following EU-wide sanctions on air travel to and from Russia. Furthermore, Sweden experienced growing challenges with gang criminality, including severe gun violence, which presumably took precedence in the government's communication. As a result, the communication included here is limited to a joint statement by Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and Ukraine and does not display any representation of the national border for any country, other than Ukraine. This could explain the limited communication on the national border emerging from Sweden with regard to the visa restrictions of Russian Schengen visa holders. However, taking a wider glance at Swedish debate on the matter, the question of visa restriction was present, albeit to a more limited extent, as demonstrated by a question for written answer by Björn Söder (SD) to Ann Linde (S) on July 28, 2022. Additionally, the question was also raised in news media (Dagens Industri 2022; Auvinen et al. 2022).

Nevertheless, despite the low availability of data for Sweden in 2021 and 2022, the country remains an interesting case due to its relatively unique role in welcoming a large number of asylum seekers in 2015–2016. It also remains interesting to examine how bordered imaginations envision the entanglements of various types of borders in a country that is not located along the EU's external border. Hence, the country was retained as a case in this study.

5.2 Discourse analysis as methodology to study borders and visions of EU

Discourse is a finicky term, as emphasized already in the introductory chapter. In the literature it has been used and applied in multiple ways and across multiple fields, contributing to a broad and sometimes contradictory terminology. This section does not set out to give an exhaustive overview of the diversity of discourse studies, as the interdisciplinary nature of discourse analysis has allowed it to be applied in research fields beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, this section aims to situate the methodological considerations of discourse analysis as a tool to approach borders and visions of the EU. In so doing, it will also provide a backdrop for the DNP approach which is the analytical method applied in this dissertation.

To reiterate from the introduction, discourse is understood here as an articulation of (border) imaginaries and interpretations of realities, alongside the action of endowing these with meaning to make sense of the world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). The aim is to "map out the processes in which we struggle about

the way in which the meaning of signs is to be fixed, and the processes by which some fixations of meaning become so conventionalised that we think of them as natural." (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 25–26) It is, however, crucial to make a distinction between discourse articulation and policy articulation. The former, as it is perceived here, acts to delimit the latter in the sense that the boundaries of discourses provide the limits for what can be legitimately perceived or articulated (Diez 2014b). More specifically, the process of identifying discourse can more accurately be labeled the analysis of discourse (Bacchi 2005), which signifies the focus on how issues are given meaning within a particular social context.

The underlying function of discursive articulation concerns the struggle over meaning, in the sense that meaning cannot be entirely fixed but rather is constantly negotiated (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). This is denoted as discursive struggle (Diez 2001). In this process of discursive struggle, the meaning which is attached to a discourse at any one-point constructs and delineates possible articulations, thereby, "discursive contexts work through the setting of limits to what is considered legitimate and practicable," (Diez 2014b, 29) creating "boundaries of what can be articulated." (Diez 2014b, 34) This line of reasoning can be traced to Laclau's (2007 [1993]) conditions of possibility. As such, discourses are delimiting in their function, making one of the tasks of DA to examine the discursive battleground (Larsen 1997; Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

This leads to another important point of interest, namely discursive change. Diez (2001, 31) uses the metaphor of a glacier to conceptualize discursive change, emphasizing its gradual, almost imperceptible nature. Nonetheless, while the pace of change may seem imperceptible to the eye, it is undeniably ongoing. Following Diez's glacier metaphor, this means observing how discourses evolve over time through the slow accumulation of shifts in framing, language, and meaning. It is crucial, however, to acknowledge that my approach does not aim to explain the origins of these changes, but rather to analyze their observable expressions within specific contexts. This distinction allows for more focused understandings to be gained on how discourses are articulated and rearticulated in response to evolving sociopolitical conditions.

One can broadly divide DA into three analytical dimensions: language use, which aims to capture how language is used and by whom; cognition, which aims to uncover how language communicates ideas and beliefs; and interaction, which looks at the communicative interaction between different groups in a society (van Dijk 1997, 2; Taylor 2013, 10). For this dissertation it is the second dimension which is central, namely how discourse is a means to communicate ideas and beliefs about social constructions. The underpinning assumption is that "language both *shapes* and is *shaped by* society." (Machin and Mayr 2012) Thereby, discourse can be understood as a means of producing knowledge through language, where knowledge entails knowledge or awareness of discursive structures, the rules that govern these structures, as well as the broader societal and sociocultural beliefs shaping them (van Dijk 1997, 17). In this sense, discourses shape beliefs about the world and the structures that govern it. However, this influence is not solely attributable to specific word choices or grammatical forms, although these

can play a significant role. Rather, discourse should be understood to "capture what happens when these language forms are played out in different social, political and cultural arenas." (Simpson and Mayr 2010, 5) Thus, although the role of language is central in the construction and representation of discourses that relate to the making of the border, it is not primarily the words themselves that are of interest, but rather the interpretations and imaginations they communicate, which re/construct perceptions and understandings of borders and border processes.

The assessment of discourse hinges on knowing the intended audience. In the case of governmental border discourses there are diverse target audiences (Brändle and Eisele 2023, 612). Borders are an integral part of foreign policy, in so much as border discourses and policies often overlap with immigration management strategies aimed at regulating who is permitted to enter and who is not. I would, however, argue that foreign policy should not be understood as exclusively confined to the influence of another state (Duncan 2020). Immigration policy can also have the intent of influencing the behavior of prospective migrants and still qualify as foreign policy. This is evident when policy makers in the EU resort to information dissemination about closed borders to deter asylum seekers (Oeppen 2016; Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020). The construction of border fences and walls enforce similar messages as they herd individuals to designated crossing points, or attempt to keep people out. With that said, borders are also an integral part of domestic politics in that border communication and border policies are a means for politicians and political parties to legitimize themselves to their constituencies, especially prevalent in populist discourse (Osuna 2024; Beurskens 2023). Following these broader methodological considerations of DA, the next section limits the scope of analysis by presenting the interpretive analytical method the dissertation adheres to, namely the DNP approach.

5.3 Discursive nodal points as interpretive method

The DNP approach draws on considerations found within DA, specifically in Laclau and Mouffe's (2001[1985]) work on discourse nodal points as empty signifiers, which are assigned meaning by drawing on already established discourses, here denoted as metanarratives. The DNP provides a framework for comparing discourses between countries by illustrating the respective reliance on metanarratives to anchor meaning to different types of borders.

Two concepts central to the DNP approach deserve some attention. Nodal points and metanarratives. Both of these reference words, or possibly concepts, found within written and spoken language; these are otherwise known as *signs*, a linguistic term signifying words, used both in structuralism and poststructuralism. A nodal point acts as an anchor in discursive struggles; it acquires its meaning when situated in the context of a discourse and placed in relation to other signs (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 10–12; Diez and Lucke 2024). Meaning that nodal points are interpreted as contested conceptualizations. Thus,

> [t]o conceptualize DNPs as the instrument for the limited fixation of meaning helps us understand the nature of policies not as outcomes of politics, but as an integral part of politics in constituting powerful discursive practices that are not only shaped by, but also reproducing and reasserting their discursive contexts. (Diez 2001, 17)

In this process, metanarratives play a crucial role in anchoring the meaning of the nodal point through their relationship with it. Thus, it is a set of metanarratives that, when taken together, produce an articulation of a discourse (Diez 2001). As such, the differences in these compositions of metanarratives allow for a comparison of discourse articulations across countries and contexts (Figure 5.1).

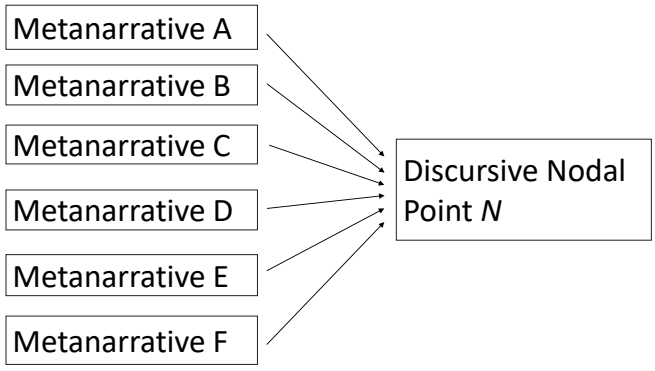

Figure 5.1. A display of the network of a discursive nodal point and the metanarratives through which it acquires meaning. Inspired by the work of Diez (1998, 46).

The DNP approach proposed here draws heavily on work by Diez (e.g., 2001; 2014b; 2010), in which he applies a discursive framework to study European integration. As is argued by Diez (2001, 18), DNP directs attention to how certain central political concepts allow metanarratives to be "re-inscribed into the political debate." Following this, the DNP approach is a fruitful discursive framework to critically assess how changing conceptualizations of borders in governmental border communication emphasize certain metanarratives over others at different times. Diez' conceptualization of the DNP approach builds on two separate strands of political theory: on the one hand Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) nodal points introduced above, and on the other hand, work by Peter Hejl (1987) who developed a theory of identity production by conceptualizing individuals as nodes in a network of social systems. The latter is not of central importance here, predominantly because it reiterates structuralist patterns as Hejl sees identity and the individual as a product of the system. This work is instead primarily situated within poststructuralism, in which the instability of meaning is emphasized, creating a network of discursive structures centred around the nodal point that is incomplete and uneven (Jacobs 2018, 303). The emphasis is thus on the principle of articulation, through which the world, and distinct nodal points, are given meaning by

"combining and connecting certain words, objects, ideas, and concepts in specific ways." (Jacobs 2018, 298)

There have been some attempts to transcribe the DNP approach into a more formalized method (Tereszkiewicz 2017; 2018), with limited success, through the detailing of method and accompanying operationalization. I do not set out to present a method, in a very strict sense, as the existing formalization of the DNP suffices for the task at hand. I will, however, aspire to pay attention to the transparency of my operationalization, as that is oftentimes a criticism directed at interpretive research. In doing so, I will demonstrate the applicability of the method.

When applied to the concept of borders, approaching the border as a discursive nodal point calls for treating it as an empty signifier. As an empty signifier, the meaning of the border is never fully stabilized but remains subject to discursive fluctuations with an only temporary fixation of meaning. The temporary fixation of meaning allows for different ascriptions of meaning, which in turn enable different forms of action, as exemplified in the case of EU border management as a crisis response (Loschi and Russo 2021), or the discursive use of the state border to politically justify border closing (or opening) (Lamour and Varga 2020). This highlights the centrality of examining the temporary fixations of meaning, which, as already argued here, can be identified by the unique set of meta-narratives attached to the empty signifier during a moment in time.

5.3.1 Researcher reflexivity

This work is grounded in interpretive research, informing the research methodology. Rather than seeing empirical data as 'given,' interpretivist research approaches data as generated in a conjunctive process between the researcher and the researched (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 80–82; Tallis 2023, 62–63). As such, the scientist is not a passive observer but is performing the action of identifying and naming the empirical data. The goal is to produce rich, descriptive accounts that convey the complexity and depth of the phenomena under study. This often involves detailed narratives and thick descriptions. Because of the co-generative nature of interpretive research, the role of the researcher, and methodological decisions are assumed to have implications on the project and the analysis as a whole. Therefore, in this section I will reflect on what I bring into this project as a researcher, and the implications these might have on the final analysis. This is accomplished by reflexively examining the circumstances under which I attempted to produce knowledge about borders and border discourses in the Baltics and the Nordics, and by reflecting on that knowledge itself.

Researcher reflexivity is a process of learning and unlearning by scrutinizing the practices of data production, one's own personal and theoretical commitments as data is produced, and the ethics and epistemology of these decisions (Kleinsasser 2000). It involves critical self-reflection on the researcher's role and influence throughout the research process, ensuring awareness of how one's positionality, biases, and assumptions shape the data and its interpretation (Lazard and McAvoy 2020, 177). Reflexivity, therefore, encourages researchers to remain conscious of

the power dynamics inherent in their interactions with their data, as well as the methodological choices made during the study. By continually reflecting on these factors, researchers can better understand how their own presence and decisions impact the knowledge being generated. Reflexivity is valuable in all research (see Jamieson et al. 2023), but it is especially critical in interpretive research, where data is understood to be co-constructed or generated through interaction. In this context, knowledge production is not a neutral process; rather, it is shaped by the researcher's subjectivity and engagement with the material. Hence, the reflexivity of contexts, processes and my situatedness and positionality as a researcher are important to make the generated data more trustworthy (Tallis 2023, 62–63). Without it, interpretive research risks obscuring the ways in which the researcher's positionality affects the data, ultimately compromising the validity and richness of the findings.

In my case, I am researching the Baltic and Nordic spaces as a native Swede living in Estonia. As such, my understandings of the two regions are intertwined with my close familiarity, as someone living and working in the region I study. The advantage of immersing myself into the context I am studying has increasingly become more apparent. My approach to borders in the region would have been decidedly less sensitive to the nuances that are portrayed within border discourses had I not been exposed to perceptions and ideas about borders from an Estonian perspective as during this research. Similarly, local perceptions about borders have been eye-opening, in the sense that much of the current border literature approaches border security from a critical perspective – especially when it comes to border fencing of various sorts. The Estonian context provides another interpretation of border security that has challenged my own analytical lens at times, further expanding my sensitivity to the nuances of border discourses.

Likewise, the time period in which I have undertaken my research proved increasingly significant as well. I first embarked on this project in the fall of 2021, just over half a year before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The invasion, and the ensuing war initially toppled my research design in the sense that I had to reconsider events and timelines. As I approached the second year of my doctoral studies, it became clear that my project would have to consider how the invasion led to shifts in narratives and policies alike in the region I study. Not least as the invasion invoked major shifts in perceptions on border security in the Nordics. As such, the choice of crisis events studied changed from Covid-19 to the retraction for Russian visa-holders of Schengen visas among the Baltic states and Finland, exemplifying a border policy change directly related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, while retaining focus on the eastern stretch of the EU's external border. These adaptations and new interpretive angles illustrate how interpretive research often requires researchers to be flexible and make adjustments in response to emerging insights from the data, or, as in my case, the unfolding of contextual determinants as a study progresses (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 29, 71–72).

There is yet more to the problematization and unlearning of biases that has shaped my perspective. This stems primarily from connecting personal experiences

with theoretical insights during data collection and interpretation. More specifically, some of my discomfort arises from navigating two distinct opinion environments. I am a researcher focused on border narratives in the BSR, and I am also an active member of the Swedish civil society, particularly engaged in issues of gender and peace within the BSR. As I have immersed myself in the themes of this dissertation, I have become increasingly aware of the nuances of what regional security ontology entails from different perspectives. This awareness has created some conceptual challenges for me, especially when engaging with the more militarized themes prevalent in official border narratives found in the Baltic context, and increasingly prevalent in the Nordic context as well. My interpretations of these often-conflicting narratives have oscillated between naivety and cynicism. I believe, however, that exposure to these divergent perspectives has enhanced my sensitivity to the nuances emerging from my data. Yet, many questions remain unresolved, and I anticipate they will persist for years to come as I continue to learn and unlearn in my role as a researcher.

5.3.2 Limitations

All research is shaped by the decisions that structure the research process; that also means that some design choices are made at the expense of others. This makes it worthwhile to elaborate on the choices that were not included in this particular study and why that is so. Research on (governmental) border communication and border discourse is most commonly studied from the perspective of a single country case, which would make it possible to study change over a longer period of time. Expanding from governmental perspectives, border communication can also be studied from other perspectives, including the micro level, investigating local perspectives prevalent within local state authority structures, organizations, or interest groups. It can also be studied at the macro level, such as examining discourse emerging from different EU bodies, including but not limited to the EU Commission or FRONTEX. Ultimately, the research design presented in this chapter is intended to capture and contrast the nuances of border discourse across different countries. This is, in the end, both a reflection of the relative absence of cross-country comparisons of border discourse, but also a reflection of research interest.

As with any form of inductive research, DA carries an inherent risk of research bias. This is because discursive studies largely depend on the researcher's interpretations, which are inevitably shaped by one's theoretical understandings, prior knowledge, and personal experiences. Consequently, these interpretations are filtered through the researcher's subjective lens, potentially influencing the way discourses are identified, categorized, and analyzed. Recognizing and mitigating this bias is critical, typically by employing rigorous methodological frameworks and transparent coding processes.

The limitations of language impact this study as I am researching discourses across four different country cases, requiring diverse language skills. Instead of analyzing texts in local languages, the circumstances favored looking at English

language governmental communication. English-language communications display discursive interpretations that are intended for a non-native speaking and, possibly, non-regional audience, thus highlighting discourses potentially projected to a broader audience. This also allows me to bypass the need for language skills in Estonian, Lithuanian, or Finnish at a level required to conduct the kind of in-depth research that DA demands. The original design intended to rely on English-language data for all four cases, including Sweden despite native-Swedish competencies. In the end, Swedish-language sources were used due to restrictions in availability. Analysis in the official languages of all four countries would likely have increased the number of available data entries, accompanied by the potential ensuing result that further delimitations would have been required to make the analysis more manageable. More importantly, the analysis is overwhelmingly interested in broader meanings and interpretations conveyed by the texts, rather than on word-level choices and dictionary definitions. Therefore, reliance on officially translated material is not perceived to significantly compromise the validity of the results.

By focusing on text-based data, there are other types of data that are excluded from the dataset. Discourse, although initially understood as language components, is today commonly applied to other mediums that articulate meaning. For example, the visual aspect of politics is now recognized to influence the representation of political and sociocultural phenomena (Stocchetti and Kukkonen 2011). Visual representation has many overlaps with the study of borders, especially through the display of space and orders that emerge in maps (Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2015). In the material included in this study, visual representations are sometimes available, predominantly as photos frequently accompanying press releases and other forms of communication emanating from the government. These have not been included for analysis in this work, mainly because of the inconsistency of including photos in press releases published on official websites. Relying on outlets other than governmental websites would have allowed for more substantial and consistent visual material.

Similarly, one can also study spoken productions of political and governmental discourse, for example, by relying on political speeches and parliamentary debates (Ilie 2003). Speeches mirror the logic of disseminating a political interpretation to the general public as written text-based communication. Text-copies of speeches are in fact included in the dataset of this study, but only their written form. Parliamentary debates differ from speeches in the sense that they display intra-party negotiations of discursive interpretations rather than a direct dissemination of information to the public. Notably, spoken productions of discourse open up a broader analysis by incorporating other aspects in combination with text data. These are called non-verbal practices (Müller 2008; Wodak 2018) and include body language and mimicry, pauses, and other types of spoken sounds. None of these are captured in my work as they are not present in the text-based forms of governmental communication.

5.4 Operationalization and coding process

Combining the methodological considerations of DNP with the theoretical framework, the operationalization begins with the identification of the nodal point, which in this study corresponds to *the border*, as the central theme of governmental border communication. This nodal point serves as an empty signifier; hence its meaning is not fixed but is continuously constituted through the articulation of metanarratives that provide it with meaning (recall Figure 5.1).

The theoretical framework applied in this dissertation disentangles border communication along the three dimensions of the IBO triad: borders, orders, identities. Consequently, metanarratives are identified within the scope of the three dimensions, allowing the analysis to adequately interact with the data from the perspective of the theoretical concepts. The metanarratives were determined through a semi-inductive fashion, meaning that while some metanarratives were tentatively established prior to the coding process drawing on previous literature, the final code book of metanarratives was derived through interaction with the data.

The process of finalizing the code book reflects the interpretive research logic of moving back and forth between the data and the analytical lens. Hence, I conducted an initial coding of Estonia and Finland looking at the 2015–2016 period, this included a full cycle of working with the material from coding to text to presentation. This allowed me to engage in a circular process of identification and revision of codes, while also granting me the possibility to evaluate the range of metanarratives and address any confusion arising from terminology. Starting with one Baltic and one Nordic country case increased the variance during the initial phase of the coding process. Additionally, some of the data has been incorporated in a separate, but related study (Braghiroli and Hagelin 2024). This granted me familiarity with at least parts of the material before I embarked on the coding process addressing the full corpus of this study.

Following the initial coding of Estonia and Finland for 2015–2016, a full coding of the material identified the metanarratives from which the nodal points are endowed meaning. One aspect in need of specification is the available scope of metanarratives to draw upon. In theory there is an endless number of metanarratives to draw upon for the articulation of a discourse. Yet, as discourse is a "reduction of possibilities" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 27) one needs to consider what constitutes the additional or surplus meaning signifying all the meanings a nodal point has, but which are excluded by a specific discourse or reading of the nodal point. Laclau and Mouffe define this as the *field of discursivity* (in Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 27). Yet, in Laclau and Mouffe's work it remains unclear if this field of discursivity is determined by the topic of the discourse so that only metanarratives relevant to the topic of the discourse, are available, or if the field of discursivity includes an infinite number of metanarratives. For this dissertation, the former understanding is settled on, as it also limits the process of analysis to the thematic topic of the discourses in question. In other words, the field of discursivity is determined by the topic of the discourse, thereby making only relevant metanarratives accessible to the discussion.

The coding is carried out on a country-by-country basis in the following order: Estonia, Finland, Sweden, and Lithuania. This order should be assumed to shape the scope and detail of the code book. This implies that the earlier cases have a greater influence on the range and variability of the codes compared to the later ones. Introducing new codes closer to the end of the coding process would necessitate an additional round of coding for the entire dataset to integrate those new codes into the overall analysis. Therefore, it is not unlikely that if the coding process were to be performed in a reverse order, a somewhat different codebook would have been produced than the one currently established.

One further aspect of the coding process needs to be clearly justified. While the selection of data is based on the three crisis events, the coding procedure codes each data entry in its entirety. This means that the coding procedure records representations of borders that may not necessarily relate to the crisis events. The reason for this is that governmental communication can, and often doess, cover multiple themes within a single press release or news article. It is also reasonable to expect that themes might overlap. Initially, the plan was to only code the sections of border communication that were specifically addressing one of the three identified crises. However, as I began the coding process, I quickly readjusted this approach in favor of coding the full documents for a couple of reasons. First, it allows for a broader interpretation of borders as they represented in border communication, extending beyond the specific crises that define the time period of the study. Second, it enables the inclusion of references to non-focal border events, which by their inclusion in the documents are deemed important enough to be highlighted in governmental border communications and therefore contribute towards an overarching border discourse.

The code book is presented in Table 5.4 (5.4a and 5.4b). The first table of the two (5.4a), introduces descriptive codes which makes it possible to more systematically compare contextual interpretations and representations across the different country cases. This includes capturing how each of the crisis events are described in governmental communication, and tracing the various labels attached to each crisis. Additionally, the descriptive codes include a code labeled *non-focal border events*. This captures references to border events that fall outside of the three key crisis events identified for this study (migration crisis of 2015–2016, instrumentalized migration crisis of 2021, and retraction of Schengen visas in 2022). The reason for this is that there are many more border events aside from the three events identified here, which are occurring throughout the studied periods that are mentioned, referenced, juxtaposed, or in other ways drawn upon in border communication. Some of these non-focal border events are mentioned frequently, while others are mentioned just a few times. Nevertheless, references to non-focal border events can be utilized to strengthen or challenge border imaginations and bordering practices and policies; ultimately contributing to border discourse. It is therefore imperative to capture the prevalence of these border events in the border communications on hand.

The second table (5.4b), introduces the analytical codes that guide the dissertation's empirical analysis. These codes are organized according to the IBO triad's analytical framework as developed here: borders, orders, and identities.

Each section of the code book corresponds to one of the analytical dimensions and captures their conceptualization and operationalization. This stucture enables a systematic approach to disentangling the discursive border constructions observed in governmental communication, and ensures coherence between the theoretical framework and the analytical process.

Table 5.4a. List of contextual codes and sub-codes

Main code	**Sub-codes (when applicable)**	**Coding instructions (when applicable)**
Contextual codes		
Diagnostics – issue specific	• National border • Supranational border	Descriptions of the three focal crises, showing how each event is communicated and justified by the four governments; all other events coded as 'Non-focal border events' (if coded at all)
Label of 'crisis'		Labels used to describe a crisis event, including the term 'crisis'; helps to assess event representation and labeling of individuals crossing the border (e.g., refugees, instrumentalized migrants, weaponized migrants)
Non-focal border events		References to border events outside the three focal crises; highlights presence and possible relevance of non-focal events in communication

Table 5.4b. Code book of metanarratives

Main code	**Sub-codes (when applicable)**	**Coding instructions (when applicable)**
Borders		
National border		
External EU border	• Schengen integrity	Schengen integrity: Mentions of Schengen's integrity and interconnectedness; focus on how external border threats risk disrupting internal border cohesion
Orders		
Functional	• Supranational coordination (crisis specific) • Functional cooperation across different policy domains (e.g., market, energy, climate, digital, health)	Supranational coordination: cooperation in matters of economy and sanctions; security; asylum responsibilities; and external solutions; only coded for the three focal crises. Functional cooperation: Cooperation on border-related issues outside the focal crises; includes activities like cross-border projects and routine collaboration

Main code	Sub-codes (when applicable)	Coding instructions (when applicable)
Regional	• BSR Cooperation	Increased cooperation across the BSR for societal operability and security; addressing shared regional challenges (e.g., energy security); shared infrastructure projects (e.g., Rail Baltic); collective defense
Normative	• Humanitarian and foreign aid	EUropean values: Mentions of EU values or freedoms; a EUropean way of life Humanitarian: Aid (committed or promised); concern for the lives of migrants; humanitarian obligations
Security	• Defense • Hybrid security • Technical and construction solutions • Surveillance • Threat from another state • Responsive bordering	Security: Captures military defence and cooperation; threat articulations of various nature (hybrid, state-based); technical solutions and constructions; physical border barriers (surveillance and border fence) Responsive bordering: National policy measures responding to the focal crisis; support and cooperation between EUMS; efforts to shape EU border and migration policy; legal changes/amendments
Geopolitical	• East/West divisions • Transatlantic/ NATO • Other non-state actors	Mentions of geopolitics and divides; allusions to civilizational differences; NATO presence and cooperation; security cooperation with non-state actors that emphasize geopolitical divides
Progress		Tracks integration and policy evolution; mentions of past developments to justify future steps; emphasis on a 'forward' EU trajectory; core theme: "More EU"
Identities		
National identity		Displays of national identity constructions; threats against national identity;
Supra-national identity		Displays of supranational identity constructions; shared features between EUMS identity and beliefs; threats against supranational identity
History		References to historic events, or time periods; personal or collective experiences; situating an event in a historic context as a means to comment on current contexts.

Following the coding of the data, the analysis is assisted by one of the analysis tools available in MAXQDA, namely the *code frequency* tool. This is used to plot bar-graphs displaying the frequency of the codes, at the level of segments for each country and border type. In other words, the figures display the number of segments coded with each code across the material, and the same segment can be coded for more than one metanarrative. Meaning that segments are treated as mutually inclusive. Frequencies are plotted individually for each country case. This includes plotting the frequency of each crisis separately, as well as an overall display of the frequency of metanarratives across the three time periods. The latter graph, is where the combined frequencies will be introduced in the discussion of empirical results. While the figures depicting the frequencies of the individual time periods remain important for interpreting border discourses, especially by helping to make sense of shifts over time, the figures showing frequencies on a crisis basis will not be included in the body of the text; instead, they are found in Appendix II.

The frequency of each metanarrative is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, it offers an overview of the range of metanarratives drawn upon. Second, it highlights the significance of each metanarrative in shaping the meaning of different types of borders. Additionally, comparing the frequencies of the metanarratives allows for an examination of the scope and expression of one metanarrative in relation to others. Although the frequencies are mutually inclusive, they offer a starting point for analyzing how borders are represented, particularly in terms of the preferences for certain metanarratives over others. However, it is likewise important to note that the frequencies should not be compared in absolute numbers. The distribution of data entries varies between the country cases, and there is also an imbalance in data entries for the three crisis events. As a result, a crisis event with fewer data entries will likely show a lower frequency in absolute numbers compared to one with a larger number of data entries.

The study departs from the assumption that border communication engages different types of borders which are endowed with, at times juxtaposing, nuances of meanings, and that these different borders entangle with one another in the communication. To capture the nuances of different border types, the national and the external EU border are coded and analyzed in separate folders in MAXQDA. As previously mentioned, the two folders are duplicates in terms of both material and codes, with the only difference being the analytical focus. Hence, one folder center on the national border, examining the ways it is represented, in what contexts it is invoked, and which metanarratives are invoked to give it meaning. The other folder instead shifts the focus specifically to the external EU border, applying the same coding process used for the national border.

While this approach requires the data to be processed twice, it offers several advantages. Revisiting the material twice enhances exposure to it, which may help to uncover representations and nuances that could otherwise be overlooked. More importantly, this division ensures a clear analytical distinction between the two types of borders, aiding in the separation of both coding and analysis of each of them. Given the overlaps and entanglements in how borders are discussed and represented, this separation provides a tangible way to maintain clarity and assist

with the disentangling of the two border types during the coding process and subsequent analysis.

Through a synthesis of the three IBO dimensions across cases and crises, it becomes possible to identify the underlying metanarratives that project specific visions of EUrope. By examining how different configurations of borders, orders, and identities are brought together within these metanarratives, distinct visions of EUrope can be inferred and interpreted. These visions, while anchored in concrete political contexts, speak to broader and evolving imaginaries of the EU as a political and civilizational project. Empirically, connecting with the theoretical approach detailed above, a composition of metanarratives is taken to collectively represent a particular vision of the EU. Hence, depending on what specific metanarratives are emphasized in a particular border setting and context, different visions of EUrope can be extracted from the communication. From this perspective, visions of EUrope emerge not from any single dimension in isolation (identity, *or* borders, *or* orders), but from the ways these dimensions intersect to form coherent metanarratives, these produce overarching trajectories linking spatial, institutional, and identity-based interpretations of what the EU is and should become.

As the work proceeds to the final stage of the analysis, that of the interpretation of visions of Europe, this will be guided by a few possible fields of (re)articulations, or what Demata (2024) denotes as recontextualization. These span the following areas:

- Integration direction (forward/reverse)
- Normative justification (values, principles)
- Spatial/territorial designations (belonging, who is in/out)
- Threat interpretation and solutions
- Crisis-triggered reframing

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodological considerations of this dissertation, outlining the research design and the operationalization of the IBO triad as it has been applied here. More specifically, the chapter proposed an analytical framework to disentangle entangled borders while keeping their interdependence visible. It does so by adopting the DNP approach as a line of DA, to approach the border as an empty signifier stabilized temporarily via metanarratives. The coding is structured by the three dimensions in the IBO triad (borders–orders–identities). Crucially, the analytical framework proposes to code the national and the EU border separately to ensure analytical separation. This design enables cross-country comparison of how metanarratives anchor the 'border,' thus revealing convergences/divergences within the Baltic and Nordic spaces.

This chapter marks the end of the first part of the dissertation. In the chapters that follow, the analytical framework outlined in this and the previous chapters

will be applied to an empirical analysis of border discourse in Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden to critically examine how national borders and the EU's external border are discursively understood and justified, and the visions of EUrope these discourses promote. Chapters 6–8 are structured according to the division of the IBO triad, meaning that each IBO dimension will be examined separately in the following order: borders, orders, identities. Chapter 9 will provide a summary of the empirical findings before detailing a synthesized review of the three preceding chapters, to render visible how EUrope is envisioned through border discourse.

6 DISENTANGLING BORDER TYPES

This chapter marks the first of three empirical chapters aimed at disentangling governmental border communication by examining border discourse through the three conceptual lenses of the IBO triad: borders, orders, and identities. The purpose of this chapter is to attempt to make sense of border communication by applying the concept of entangling borders, focusing on discourses on national borders and the EU's external border. Hence, the chapter is structured around the first research question: How borders and bordering processes are discursively re/framed in governmental border communication during border-related crises in the EU? By addressing this question, the chapter unpacks the ways in which Baltic and Nordic governmental actors construct, justify, and contest border policies in response to crisis-driven border challenges. As argued in previous chapters, governmental border communication tends to articulate a discourse on multiple borders without much distinction, leading to a conceptual overlapping of border regimes. Before moving forward with the disentangling of the two types of borders studied here, the chapter begins with an overview of different labels used to designate crisis across the country cases throughout the crisis periods in consecutive order. This helps to more firmly situate the conceptualization of borders in relation to the three crises.

From 2015 to 2016, migration is frequently framed through the language of crisis in border discourse across the Baltics and Nordics. Representations focus on the challenges to European security and order, rather than acknowledging the precarious experiences and humanitarian needs of those on the move. This is done by designating the crisis as the "*European* refugee crisis," (EE 09.07.2016, author's emphasis) and "the most serious threat against European security since the end of the Cold War." (FI 12.01.2016) Emphasizing the events as "dramatic," (FI 21.04.2015) and as a "long-term challenge," (LT-MFA 27.10.2015(2)) the crisis narratives necessitate urgent and large-scale responses. In contrast, Sweden initially maintained a more open and humanitarian tone in its 2015 border discourse. Unlike its neighbors, the Swedish government refers to the period as "the refugee situation," (*flyktingsituationen*) (e.g., SE 24.09.2015) a descriptive label which somewhat obscures the crisis narrative. Nevertheless, Swedish communication is concerned with the volume of arrivals, communicated through an emphasis on strained national capacities. As the crisis persisted, the humanitarian framing gave way to a discourse centered more on Sweden's internal crisis management such as availability and sustainability of asylum housing and education, somewhat obscuring the situation of migrants.

Migration is largely described as "unwanted," (EE 23.09.2015) and although some communication acknowledges the loss of life in the Mediterranean, the prevailing discourse in Estonian and Lithuanian communication stress the need to address "root causes" in countries of origin (LT-MFA 20.04.2015) as well as the criminality of traffickers. Emphasis rather quickly shifts toward combating human trafficking: "It is essential to fight the networks of human traffickers ...

who benefit from the difficult situation of the refugees." (EE 24.04.2015) This framing diverts critique from the EU's policies and border practices. Alongside emphasis on problematic structural trafficking, Lithuanian discourse also contains concerns about insincere migrants exploiting broader movements, thus justifying enhanced screening measures (LT-MFA 19.05.2015). At the same time, migration-related issues are often presented as secondary in Lithuanian communication, typically mentioned briefly among a list of other international concerns. This fragmented attention may partly reflect the eastern orientation of Lithuanian border security concerns, with the southern Mediterranean routes receiving comparatively less focus. It is also worth recalling that Lithuanian data from this period stems from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, potentially skewing the findings toward supranational themes and bilateral cooperation. It is also worth noting that Estonian governmental communication suggests that public attitudes toward migrants softened slightly over the course of 2016 (EE 06.12.2016), potentially counteracting the unwanted stances towards migration emerging earlier.

Migrants themselves are portrayed ambivalently, at times acknowledged as people in need deserving of empathy, such as when Estonian communication draws resemblance to Estonian refugees of the 1940s. At other times migrants were represented as threats requiring improved control systems (EE 16.11.2015). In Finnish communication, migrants were often presented as victims of smugglers, thus the dismantling of trafficking networks was presented as a means to protect vulnerable people (FI 19.02.2016; FI 22.09.2015). Within this framing, the EU is portrayed as a moral actor acting in solidarity, while migrants are depicted as passive subjects in need of rescue, thus legitimizing stricter border controls. Notably, language describing migration in the sense of a "flow of refugees" (EE 17.03.2016) evoked imagery of uncontrollable and depersonalized masses, a common rhetorical device in European migration discourse (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; Baker and McEnery 2005). The imagery of "migrant flows which rise every day," (LT-MFA 04.09.2015) reinforces a sense of disorder and emergency and contributes to a broader depersonalization of migration. In Swedish communication as well, metaphors of "flows" and mass movements were applied (SE 30.01.2015; SE 30.03.2016), reinforcing the language of emergency seen in other contexts, although migrants, especially those from Syria, simultaneously were depicted as "desperate people" fleeing serious conflict (SE 30.03.2016; SE 07.06.2016).

In 2021, discourses across the region converge around a security narrative in response to what is widely understood as an orchestrated event by Belarus and Russia. In Estonia, the situation is framed as a "hybrid attack carried out by Belarus against the European Union," (EE 16.11.2021) and is termed "politically motivated migration pressures." (EE 03.09.2021) Although Belarusian involvement is largely accepted, these framings redirect attention away from the underlying conditions that compel migration. Emphasis is placed on the illegality of movement: "these people are in Belarus legally and trying to enter the European Union illegally," (EE 16.11.2021.2) reinforcing a binary of legal versus illegal migration that is criticized in academic literature (Donato and Massey 2016; Baldwin-Edwards

2008; Crawley and Skleparis 2018). In Lithuania, the 2021 border events are likewise described as a "tool of hybrid aggression" and as "regime-sponsored smuggling of illegal migrants." (LT 06.08.2021; LT 06.07.2021) Migrants are referred to as "deceived people," (LT 21.11.2021) reinforcing their vulnerability while simultaneously denying them agency. As in 2015–2016, the emphasis on distinguishing between genuine and illegitimate migrants linger in the background, though less explicitly articulated. Finnish discourse during this time also consistently refer to the movement of people as "the instrumentalisation of migrants by the Belarusian regime." (FI 17.12.2021) The issue is frequently listed as one among several "topical international matters," (FI 13.09.2021) signaling a less intense prioritization than in Estonia and Lithuania. While there is some reference to basic humanitarian responsibilities, such as access to asylum (FI 17.02.2022), the broader framing marginalizes migrants by reducing them to passive tools of warfare – criminalized and stripped of voice (Halemba 2022).

In 2022, the border discourse shifts as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Across Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland, attention to human movement takes on a dual character. On the one hand, there is a deep commitment to Ukrainian refugees. On the other hand, attention to another category of border crossers emerges: Russian tourists with Schengen visas. These individuals, overwhelmingly civilians rather than asylum seekers, are framed as "citizens of the aggressor-state." (Joint Statement 07.09.2022) The moral logic underpinning entry restrictions is explicit, as communication from Finland demonstrates, "It had become morally unacceptable to allow the Russian middle and upper class to continue to enjoy their vacations while their army kills, tortures and terrorizes Ukrainians." (FI 02.12.2022) Another statement emphasizes that sanctions "must be reflected in the everyday lives of ordinary Russians," (FI 13.09.2022) framing mobility restrictions as instruments of political awareness rather than direct security measures. The Lithuanian discourse echoes this rationale, focusing on the overlap between Russian citizenship, popular support for the war, and entry restrictions into the Schengen area. Joint Baltic statements are a key source of such framings, emphasizing regional unity in constructing the Russian population as both a security concern and a moral subject.

With regard to the events of 2021 and 2022, there is limited border communication emerging from the Swedish government. This does not necessarily mean that these questions are absent from the agenda of Swedish authorities. Rather, the lack of communication should narrowly be understood to reflect the absence of press releases or other forms of official communication emerging through the channels of the government. Be that as it may, the result limited insight into how the Swedish government labels the events of 2021 and 2022, the latter only with regard to visa restriction. There is a multitude of representations of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but none that specifically describes shifting imagery of Russian tourists and their entry to the EU.

Altogether, while temporal and national differences exist, a pattern emerges: border discourse navigates between humanitarian concern and securitized crisis response. Migrants are variously depicted as victims, threats, or tools of hybrid

warfare, depending on the context and geopolitical conditions. The logic of illegality, the dehumanizing imagery of 'flows,' and an oscillation between empathy and exclusion structure much of the communication across all three crises, emphasizing the entangled and evolving nature of border construction in the region. At the same time, it is at times difficult to determine whether references to migration or human movement are intended to denote the three crisis periods, or reference migration more broadly. Migration is often listed as one of several topics discussed, without further specification of form or location, requiring a degree of interpretive inference based on context. This grey-area is especially prominent during the first crisis period. To illustrate, a Lithuania press release (LT-MFA 09.11.2015) describes a meeting with Kosovan counterparts in which migration is mentioned as a discussion topic. This could plausibly refer to migration originating in Kosovo, given the political circumstances of the country. At the same time, Kosovo's geographical location could suggest that the reference denotes the broader migration crisis of 2015–2016, as the Western Balkan route gained traction at the time. What speaks against the interpretation, however, is that the main routes of the Western Balkan corridor did not go through Kosovo (Abikova and Piotrowicz 2021).

Before proceeding with the chapter, it should be clarified that remarks directly concerning national borders are less frequent in absolute numbers than for the supranational border. The coding frequency reflects the number of segments coded for each code, and thus represents frequency relative to other codes within each folder (distinct per type of border). Nevertheless, the frequency of metanarratives is not directly compared between national and EU border discourses in absolute terms. More meaningful to compare, is the ranking or prioritization of certain metanarratives within these discourses. This comparative analysis provides insights into the discursive focus and priorities within the border communication of the four countries during each crisis. It highlights the distinct ways in which national and EU border management are framed. Relatedly, the frequency of codes for cross-crisis comparisons cannot be compared in absolute numbers as the data entries for each crisis differ.

The chapter is structured by first presenting an aggregated overview of border representations across the Baltic and Nordic regions. This section elaborates on the prevalence of the two types of borders in Baltic and Nordic governmental border communication, while also engaging with the main patterns of entanglements between the two borders. Moreover, this allows me to highlight similarities and differences between the two regions. After this overview, the chapter proceeds with two sections detailing specific border communications related to the national borders and the EU's external border separately. The chapter ends with a section that discusses border communication regarding other types of borders, as well as issues related to non-focal border events. This allows me to highlight some of the entanglements of borders that emerge from the data but are not directly within the main focus on national borders and the EU's external border.

6.1 Border entanglements across the Baltic and Nordic

This section discusses the recurrence of the two types of borders in governmental border communication across the Baltic and Nordic regions. It also explores the key entanglements between these two types of borders and highlights the primary similarities and differences in how borders are represented in each region. This will lay the foundation to subsequently disentangle national and supranational border discourses from one another.

As noted, in the introduction of this chapter, the national border is less prevalent in border communication when compared to the EU's external border. This observation rests on the difference in absolute numbers of coded segments across the two border types. The material was coded in separate folders in MAXQDA, to aid the separation of communication on national borders and the EU's external border. This facilitated the identification of interpretations of each border type, while managing some of the messiness that accompanies the process of disentangling discourse. While the EU's external border is often highlighted in government communications, this does not necessarily mean that it holds greater importance for EUMS than their national borders. This conclusion is supported by the analysis that goes beyond the mere number of coded segments. Instead, it seems that the EU's external border is commonly used for rhetorical purposes. This is particularly evident in cases where the two borders physically overlap; in these situations, there are strong indications that the external border is referenced to emphasize the significance of the national border.

Such semantic entanglements are largely visible in the two Baltic cases, where the governmental border communication relies on this kind of entanglement to convey the urgency and relevance of the physical border line: "The border that Latvia and Lithuania share with Belarus, which has come under sustained migration pressure, is the external border of the European Union." (EE 15.10.2021) Estonia and Lithuania position themselves as frontline defenders not only of their own sovereignty but also of EUrope and Europe, portraying their eastern borders as the outer limits of the EUropean project. This conflation of national and EU borders is central to their geopolitical self-understanding, especially in the context of perceived threats from Russia and regional instability. This self-positioning as guardians of the EU's eastern flank underlines their commitment to European solidarity and serves to consolidate their geopolitical relevance within the Union. In contrast Finland, although sharing similar border distinctions as Estonia and Lithuania, does not as visibly connote the national border with that of the external EU border.

From a territorial perspective, the national borders of Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland all coincide with the external EU border, so in this regard it is perhaps not surprising they rely on communication that frames the two in tandem, despite the fact that the borders remain distinct in a judicial sense. Yet, interestingly, border entanglements do not only occur in instances where borders overlap physically, they are also invoked in instances of imagined border layering: "The security of Estonia begins at the borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. We stand firm

with our neighbours and help them cope, especially through political and diplomatic support. We are also ready to offer practical support to Poland." (EE 22.11.2021) Given that Sweden is the only country case in this study not located along the EU's external border, this begs a question of how Swedish border communication is distinct. The Swedish case helps to demonstrate that the two border types are prone to entanglement in discourse, even in instances where borderlines are not overlapping physically. This is in some degree a result of, what I have labeled here, the integrity of the Schengen system, by which the external border is discussed from the perspective of internal Schengen borders. As this research demonstrates, communication that engages with the EU's external border from the perspective of the national border display patterns of border entanglements: "The management of the EU's external border, the actions of our neighboring countries and other EU countries play a major role in Sweden's overall assessment of border controls going forward." (SE 01.06.2016) This illustrates that border regimes in the EU are interconnected both structurally and, in the imagination of said borders. As a brief reminder, when discussing Sweden's situation regarding the interactions between its national border and the EU's external border in governmental communications, it is important to note that this work does not focus on the discourses surrounding internal Schengen borders. Nevertheless, it can be challenging to completely differentiate between discussions between those and national borders, as they are indeed intricately interlinked.

The discursive entanglement of different border types is further reflected in how various stretches of the EU's external border are imagined to share common characteristics, challenges, and strategic priorities. This mental conflation suggests that geographical proximity is often secondary to broader geopolitical framings in how borders are discussed. Different segments of the external border are not only seen as part of a collective defensive structure but are envisioned as interconnected sites for mutual learning and policy alignment. This is particularly evident in references to shared practices and joint approaches across national contexts, even when borderlines are not nearby. An illustration of this appears in Lithuanian discourse commenting on cooperation with Greece:

> Both countries are of geo-strategic importance, both are interested in strengthening the EU and NATO's external borders, both make efforts to build a stable neighbourhood that would have strong links with Europe and, finally, further success of the development of the two countries will be largely determined by the success of the EU. (LT-MFA 25.10.2016)

This demonstrates how border imaginaries often extend beyond their own geographical reach and reflect a vision of EUropean spatial cohesion. Such framing supports the idea of a unified external frontier, where regional challenges are embedded in broader EUropean security logics.

Security concerns dominate both national and EU border discourses across the four countries, with borders widely framed as central instruments for safeguarding both national sovereignty and the collective security of the EU. In both

the Baltic and Nordic contexts, borders are increasingly portrayed as defensive mechanisms, particularly in response to perceived external threats. The 2021 Belarusian instrumentalized migration crisis plays a pivotal role in this securitizing shift, frequently framed as an act of 'hybrid warfare' that repositions the border as a shield against hostile geopolitical strategies. The border policies of Estonia and Lithuania reflect a dual concern with both the instrumentalized use of migration and the threat posed by both Belarus and Russia. The latter believed to have been involved in the instigation of the migrant instrumentalization (Sari 2023, 15). This concern should be understood in the context of previous displays of Russian aggression, particularly in 2008 and 2014.

Initially, Estonia and Lithuania are more explicit about security concerns within their geographical proximity than Finland and Sweden. This difference becomes increasingly less pronounced over time, especially in Finnish communication. While both Estonia and Finland share a border with Russia, in 2015–2016, the former emphasized the eastern border and Russia as central security concerns, while the latter continued to advocate for diplomatic engagement with its eastern neighbor. This contrast suggests that political orientation and security strategy, rather than geography alone, shape the securitization of borders. Over time, however, Finland has moved closer to the more securitized positions of Estonia and Lithuania. Sweden initially remained the least securitized among the four, traditionally favoring a more humanitarian and flexible border policy. Nonetheless, the country has begun shifting toward stricter measures, largely in response to increasing migratory pressures. Notably, across all cases, the notion of a 'secure border' is framed as a continuous process of adaptation; a sentiment encapsulated in Estonian discourse asserting that, "Estonian security is something, which is never perfect. Our national defence will never be finished – we will continue strengthening it domestically and in cooperation with allies." (EE 16.07.2015)

The growing militarization of border management is increasingly apparent in the material across both regions, reflecting heightened attention to security and defense. This is particularly evident through enhanced cooperation within the EU in matters of defense and, more significantly, through collaboration with NATO. The EU's and NATO's presence serves to bolster capabilities, but perhaps more so as a statement of solidarity against potential aggression. In this context, geopolitical narratives have taken center stage in shaping national policies and strategies. Finland, having recently joined NATO, has adopted a stronger geopolitical stance similar to that of its southern neighbors, suggesting growing awareness of regional tensions and the need for robust defense mechanisms. This shift in Finland's position demonstrates the evolving security dynamics in the region, where historical memories and contemporary threats converge.

Across the cases examined, migration is predominantly constructed as a challenge to national and EUropean stability. Thus, while governments do acknowledge the humanitarian dimensions of migration, the prevailing narrative presents restrictive border policies as necessary measures to protect societal order and national interests. It is likely that this framing is pronounced during moments

of intensified migration flows, and it does not necessarily indicate that similar narratives persist during non-crisis periods. Yet, it has been demonstrated in the literature that crisis frames linger after an acute stage has passed (Perkowski et al. 2023). During the crisis periods examined as part of this research, migrants are depicted both as vulnerable individuals and as instruments that can be strategically used to destabilize states, as is the case in the framing of the 2021 Belarusian border crisis. Estonian discourse explicitly identified this shift in perceptions of human movement in the EU, arguing that "[t]he use of migration as a weapon, both in the south and in the east, has finally led the European Union to reassess the need for common border standards and investment into the external borders." (EE 01.12.2021) It should be emphasized that the weaponized migration in the south is taken to refer to the instrumentalization of migration along the Turkey–Greece border in 2020, and the Morocco–Spain border in 2021. Such statements illustrate how migration becomes entangled in broader geopolitical narratives, addressing human movements as matters of (in)security and defense rather than as humanitarian challenges.

Narratives surrounding emergency measures in the cases under study emphasize the immediate security challenges related to migration. Emergency measures are generally aimed at facilitating easier access to the border region for national authorities and agencies, and at limiting or preventing human movement across borders. Such measures are commonly justified by their temporary nature. Nevertheless, they tend to reinforce long-term border restrictions. This is exemplified by prolonged border controls in Sweden, or by legal amendments introduced in Lithuania, Estonia, and Finland. Previous literature demonstrates a link between crisis and policy change in the field of human movement (Perkowski et al. 2023; Hagelund 2020). To the degree that that is observable in the data of this dissertation, all three events examined here prompted shifts in border narratives and border policy. The data will not permit me to comment on whether such shifts in discourse is the cause or the result of reactive border policies. Nonetheless, they both risk eroding some of the value system at the center of the EUropean polity, as suggested also by Trei and Sarapuu (2021, 256), who argue that the 2015 migration crisis "unfolded mainly as a crisis of values and solidarity, rather than an actual crisis threatening the functioning of the Estonian asylum system."

Following this introduction of entanglements of the two types of borders, the remainder of this chapter will more closely examine distinct representations of national borders and the EU's external border in governmental border communication.

6.2 National borders

Across all three periods, the national border is generally referenced less frequently than the EU border in the governmental communication of Estonia, Finland, and Lithuania, though the reasons for this vary across countries and time. Sweden stands out in comparison, showcasing a comparably larger attention to its national

border than the EU's external border, although this is only the case for 2015 and 2016, as the material after that is quite minimal.

In the Estonian and Lithuanian cases, national borders receive comparatively lower attention throughout all three crisis periods than the EU's external border. For the first period, this pattern can largely be explained by the absence of direct migratory pressure. During the 2015 migration crisis, migrant entries into both countries occurs in a controlled manner, allowing sufficient time and capacity for screening and processing. For Estonia, a similar justification can be drafted for discursive patterns in 2021. Although Estonia actively communicates about the instrumentalization of migration at the EU's eastern border, border crossings Estonia's national borders remained limited; most 'irregular' entries occured in Poland and Lithuania. This logic would suggest that Lithuania, in particular, would place greater emphasis on its national border in response to heightened migratory pressures during 2021. However, the Lithuanain border communication largely frames the national border from the perspective of the EU's external border: "The Lithuanian Prime Minister thanked Estonia and Latvia for their strong support and comprehensive assistance to the country in fighting the Belarusian regime-sponsored smuggling of illegal migrants to the EU via the border with Lithuania." (LT 06.08.2021) This framing appears to function as a strategy to mobilize EU-level. One possible explanation for this might lie in the absolute numbers of the migratory pressures across the three periods. As outlined in chapter 2, the total number of attempted border crossings was considerably lower in 2021 and 2022 than in 2015 and 2016. Framing the situation primiarly in terms of the EU's external border may therefore serve to draw attention from other EUMS and to garner support from those not directly affected by the human movement. Such a strategy may, in turn, reduce the salience of the national border in public discourse. Similar discursive patterns emerge in reponse to developments in 2022, when references to the national border remains limited despite tangible increases in border crossings by Russian Schengen visa holders along the eastern borders with Russia.

In Finland, similar patterns emerge. The national border appears infrequently in governmental communication across all three time periods, with the external EU border instead taking center stage. This tendency is especially notable during the 2021 instrumentalized migration crisis, where Finnish communication strongly emphasizes EU-level coordination and solidarity rather than national border management. Importantly, this cannot be attributed to a lack of data: the volume of Finnish material from 2021 is comparable to that of Estonia. Rather, the low salience of the Finnish national border appears linked to the geographical distance from the primary sites of irregular migration. A similar pattern is observed during the 2015–2016 period: the EU border dominates the discourse until the point when Finland begins to experience a more substantial number of crossings across its own border, after which national concerns become more pronounced. These shifts in emphasis suggest that the visibility of the national border in governmental discourse is highly contingent on the actual presence, or absence, of movement across it. The situation reflects a broader trend also visible in media

coverage of the 2021 events, where Estonian reporting was less frequent than that of Latvia and especially Lithuania (Hagelin 2024), indicating that physical proximity to border events remains an influential factor for discursive constructions of national borders.

In the Swedish case, the national border is also relatively underemphasized in official discourse, though for somewhat different reasons. Swedish communication tends to focus less on the border itself and more on societal effects of cross-border movement, especially in the context of migration. This approach reflects a broader tendency in Sweden to highlight the internal implications of border permeability, such as pressures on welfare systems or social cohesion and the legitimacy of state provisions (Collyer and King 2016). This is noteworthy because it demonstrates that different countries rely on different approaches to convey borders and their functions to the public. Ultimately, this impacts what essence of borders are 'spoken into existence' through border communication. When the national border is mentioned explicitly in Swedish communication, it is often in reference to the events of 2015 and 2016, when Sweden faced a substantial increase of human movement. In contrast, by 2021, although there is some communication about the instrumentalized migration crisis, the focus shifts predominantly to the EU's external border. The relative absence of the national border during 2021 and 2022 should also be interpreted in light of the smaller dataset available from Sweden for that year. Border references do appear somewhat more frequently in discussions of market regulation or trade, what is here interpreted to reflect a functional EUropean order, although such mentions remain limited due to the thematic structuring of Swedish governmental communication.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that the visibility of the national border in governmental discourse across Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden is highly dependent on contextual situatedness. Its salience appears to fluctuate with the national border's perceived proximity to a crisis, the intensity of cross-border movement, and whether an event is nested within questions of EU integration, or national sovereignty. More specifically, national borders are imagined through three central metanarratives: security, regional cooperation, and national responses.

6.2.1 Security

Security is a dominant metanarrative in the framing of national borders, especially so in Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland, while less prominent in Sweden. In Estonia and Lithuania, it appears as the most frequent metanarrative across all three time periods, in Estonian communication it is even double the frequency of the next most prominent metanarrative. In Finland, it remains the most frequently referenced in 2015–2016 and 2022, and the second most frequent in 2021. Despite differences in the scale and duration of the crises under study, the persistence of security as a central metanarrative across the different national contexts underlines the entrenchment of security logics in Baltic and Nordic border communication (Metzger and Schmitt 2012; Wood 2024; Andžāns et al. 2021; Banka and Bussmann 2023; Christiansson 2023). At the same time, the

prominence of security also highlights a differentiation between perceived threats. During the 2015–2016 migration crisis, security discourse related to human movement focuses on the pressures of migration, and in particular facilitators (smugglers etc.) of human movement, as a key threat. While communication on security also identifies the threat posed by antagonistic states during this time, the prevalence of the security metanarrative increases from 2021 and onwards, including emphasis on hybrid attacks and geopolitical instability.

Across all four countries, national borders are imagined through its filtering mechanism to control movement, especially of migrants. Internal border controls are framed as compensating for a perceived lack of control along the external EU border:

> Europe has failed to maintain its external borders. Until we can see a common European solution, Sweden is forced to work with short-term national measures. Internal border controls continue to give us better control over who enters the country and the opportunity to maintain public order and internal security (SE 03.03.2016).

The notion of failing external EU borders necessitating internal border controls, reflects believes that migrants seeking to cross the border pose a danger. Granted, Swedish communication around borders is not explicitly portraying migrants themselves as a threat; rather it emphasizes the challenges to societal structures posed by the large number of individuals arriving in Sweden. As such, Sweden may be interpreted as exhibiting more nuance than the counterparts included in this study. Notwithstanding, the prolonged border closure that has followed in Sweden has indeed given rise to more traditional migration-related threat interpretations. As a result, border crossers seeking refuge are interpreted as a threat in and of themselves, as demonstrated by the prejudices and stereotyped assumptions that tend to underpin border assessments (Skaarup 2021).

Security, thus, remains imagined as intrinsically tied to the workings of the physical borderline framing the border as a protective barrier against various threats. For example, one Lithuanian statement from the then-Minister of the Interior Agnė Bilotaitė (TS–LKD) highlights,

> Building the fence as soon as possible is our top priority now. This is not a simple fence, but a defensive wall protecting the entire European Union and us. The first steps have been taken, and we will continue the work: the law has been passed, the project manager has been appointed, and we will allocate as much money as needed. We will build the fence together with the Armed Forces, Riflemen's Union, businesses, and if necessary, the Lithuanian people will help. We will all defend ourselves together. (LT 23.08.2021(2))

Lithuanian communication on border infrastructure is technical and informative, especially in 2021, when it is recurrently updating on procurement progress and border barrier length along the Lithuania-Belarus border. Yet, communication on border infrastructure development and border management reflect security concerns and imagine the border as a defensive structure.

Ultimately, the security metanarrative emphasizes the interconnectedness of the national border and the external EU border, as events occurring at EU borders in different regions influence communication on national borders and border preparedness. For example, Estonia's discursive framing connects contemporary border challenges with its historical experiences of vulnerability. This illustrates the entanglement of different types of borders, and their distinct temporal understandings. Furthermore, by invoking security as a dominant metanarrative, Estonia addresses immediate threats while also strengthening its strategic narrative within the EU, emphasizing the need for collective defense and solidarity along the eastern borders. The focus on security reflects efforts to align national and EU priorities in protecting (or securitizing) the region.

Consequently, national borders are imagined as interlinked with the international security architecture, making national border protection part of collective defense, specifically that of the EU and NATO. In Estonian discourse both the EU and NATO borders are invoked to justify increased national expenditures on border management and various technologies. Visible in Estonian efforts to build "the most modern Eastern border of the EU." (EE 22.12.2016) In 2022, the intensity of shifting security challenges is strongly emphasized, as exemplified in Finnish border communication: "We are living in the middle of a major transition. The change requires perseverance and will continue for a long time. It is better to be able to affect the change as a member of both the European Union and NATO." (FI 23.08.2022) Security in this sense is very clearly linked with the perceptions of threats emerging from beyond the EU (Chamlian 2016). As apparent in the quote above, security narratives during 2022 in Finland are closely intertwined with the NATO-membership application the country embarked on in tandem with Sweden. The justification for the shift from previous non-alignment policies is explicitly tied to the increasing security threats that Russia poses in the region:

> We can assume that Russia turning into a more agreeable neighbour for us – or for anyone else for that matter – is nowhere in sight. Had we waited for better times to come, it would have left us in a vulnerable position with Russia having become increasingly vigorous in its demands to have a say in other states' freedom of choice. (FI 23.08.2022)

This is underpinned by the imagination of national borders – and all types of borders – as being in a constant state of becoming (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012). A notion that is reflected in Estonian approaches to national security, quoted in the section above (EE 16.07.2015), hinting at a perpetual reinforcement of national borders.

6.2.2 Regional cooperation

Across the border discourses of Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and, to a lesser extent, Sweden, national borders are recurrently framed through regional cooperation, second only to security in frequency. While the intensity and framing of this cooperation fluctuates over time and varies among the countries, its presence

points to a deep regional consciousness. BSR cooperation encompasses a broad societal security logic, extending to areas such as energy independence and infrastructure development.

While Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania recurrently articulate regional ties as vital to both strategic deterrence and social resilience, the relational dynamics within the region evolve throughout the time periods studied. Finnish border articulations are a good example of this, as they initially emphasize cross-border cooperation as a means to overcome security concerns:

> Our long, common borders have worked well and have therefore enabled lively and active contacts between both our citizens and our companies. In Finland, we ensure that the borders are strong and secure. At the same time, we also bear our responsibility for the EU's external border. (FI 29.01.2016, author's translation)

This frames the border as both a site of active bilateral cooperation and a line of European defense, reflecting the dual imperatives of openness and control. The same border is thus represented as both functional and fortified; a space of economic and interpersonal exchange, yet simultaneously a site requiring vigilance and securitization. Over time, however, security risks take precedence in communication on their national borders, exemplified by Finnish leaders acknowledging that Finland should "have listened to our friends in the Baltics more closely." (FI 23.08.2022) Finland's NATO accession further strengthens this alignment, prompting calls for "even more common objectives" (FI 23.08.2022) with Estonia and symbolizing a broader shift toward deeper strategic cohesion in the region. At the same time, the familial language that is used in Baltic and Nordic border communication, such as the Finnish example "[t]he Nordic countries are a family and we work well together," (FI 04.02.2016) contributes to embedding the imaginary of stretches of their national borders within the context of cultural and political kinship.

Regional cooperation in Sweden's border discourse, while present, is less prominently featured and often more diffuse. When alluded to, it usually relates bilateral discussions with neighboring countries. Yet, at the same time, Sweden's comparison of its border control practices with those of Denmark during the migration crisis reflects a practical approach to regional border policy learning. In this case, regional neighbors act as models rather than collaborators in a coordinated response. However, in 2021, regional cooperation was given symbolic weight through high-level meetings between Swedish and Baltic leaders, held to commemorate diplomatic milestones since the re-independence of the Baltic states. Although these events do not elaborate on concrete policy measures, their timing, coinciding with heightened tensions on the EU's eastern frontier, implied that security cooperation within the BSR framework is of growing importance in Sweden's discourse on national borders as well.

Communication on regional cooperation produces an image of national borders as being part of a shared regional security space (Koch 2015). Lithuania emphasizes regional security cooperation, which reinforces national borders as

part of a resilient regional framework: "As close neighbours, the Baltic and Nordic countries face the same challenges and threats, so they must act together in a coordinated manner." (LT-MFA 17.06.2016) During the 2021 instrumentalized migration crisis, Estonia supported Lithuania and Poland with military personnel and building material for the construction of border infrastructure, framed as regional solidarity in border defense (EE 15.11.2021). Such practical cooperation was shown to also enhance national security for the sending country: "[The Estonian police officers and border guards] have been helping Lithuania since the start of the crisis and this is a value in itself, allowing us to acquire experience in different stages of the crisis." (EE 08.12.2021) The statement illustrates how collective management strategies of national borders are envisioned to enhance the shared security space. Resembling Sweden gaining insights about border control from Denmark. Similar sentiments of a shared regional security space were also evident in Estonia's advocacy on behalf of Lithuania and Poland in 2021: "Estonia has helped to build broad support for our closest allies, whose borders were hit by the hybrid attack organised by Belarus." (EE 23.12.2021) Furthermore, imagery about national borders embedded in a shared regional security space is further advanced through the use of regional advocacy for specific crisis interpretations and responses, which I have previously demonstrated in the context of the instrumentalized migration crisis from Belarus (Hagelin 2024). To exemplify this, Estonian border communication yet again demonstrates this pattern: "Estonia would help its neighbour in coping with the situation by providing both diplomatic and practical support." (EE 21.11.2021)

Adding to that, exceptional national border practices are justified by depicting them as regionally normalized or necessary. For example, Estonia presents its visa restrictions on Russian nationals as regionally aligned, positioning the national policy as a regional norm rather than unilateral action:

> Until we have come to an agreement on EU level on restricting entry for Russian nationals into the European Union, we are imposing these restrictions regionally. This is our legitimate response to the mass movement of Russian tourists through our countries to the rest of Europe. (EE 08.09.2022)

This illustrates how national border control becomes framed as a collective decision or bordering practice, with the aim of reinforcing legitimacy through regional occurrence.

Emphasis on regional cooperation in areas of cross-border cooperation beyond militarized security produces imaginations about national borders as embedded in regional interdependence and infrastructure, including shared non-military regional projects (energy, transportation, economy, climate etc.). This demonstrates that regional cooperation is often justified in the sense of a broad societal security, highlighting its strategic role in addressing shared regional challenges such as energy security (e.g., detachment from Russian energy dependency and green energy initiatives), infrastructure projects like Rail Baltic, as well as collective defense. This broadens the imagination of national borders to include cross-sectoral infrastructure as part of regional border features.

Crucially, the BSR is constructed through shared histories, spatial proximities, and strategic narratives that deliberately exclude some actors. This contributes to symbolic bordering practices (Scott 2002) that imagine national borders as anchored in a longstanding regional community (Taranenoko 2023). The removal of Russia from the sphere of cooperation post-2022 is a key moment in this re-bordering process. As Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland stress the need to detach from Russian energy systems and implement coordinated restrictions on Russian citizens, the BSR becomes reimagined as a more bounded, exclusive, and ultimately safer space. While its prominence varies by crisis and country, the broader trend suggests an increasing regionalization of border politics in northern Europe, one that is shaped by both pragmatic necessity and a shared commitment to preserving stability in an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment. Eventually, what becomes evident across the discourses is that regional cooperation blurs the lines between national and EU borders. In both Estonian and Finnish communication, bilateral and regional actions, such as cross-border assistance, coordinated restrictions, and energy infrastructure projects, are simultaneously framed as acts of national defense and contributions to European stability. This unruly overlap between border types reveals the entanglement of spatial imaginaries: regional cooperation contributes to resilient national borders while projecting security outward, positioning the BSR as both a buffer zone and a cohesive actor within a broader European order.

Finally, it might be useful to clarify that while the current analysis centers on regional cooperation within the BSR, this is not the only configuration of regional cooperation present in north European governmental communication. Regional cooperation may also be interpreted through, for example, a CEE lens, expanding the imagined network of partners beyond the BSR. This includes countries such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and/or EaP third countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Such references suggest that while BSR cooperation is a prominent and recurrent narrative, there is discursive space for alternative or complementary regional alignments that could be a useful analytical substitute or expansion when examining the spectrum of regional cooperation in governmental communication. This reflection on the various levels of interpretation of regionalism serves to highlight the never-ending analytical choices that underpin interpretive research.

6.2.3 Responsive bordering

Responsive bordering is another frequent theme in the communication on national borders. The reason for this is partly a result of the coding logic. Responsive bordering was initially introduced as a sub-code while coding the 2015–2016 data sample to capture national border governance, including policy implementations with relation to each of the three crises. The code also captures instances of support in-between EUMS, such as symbolic and material support to Greece and Italy in 2015 and 2016 to manage refugee reception. Furthermore, the code captures attempts to influence EU practice and legislation with regard to borders

and migration, as this is considered here to reflect national border governance strategies as well. Following the instrumentalized migration crisis in 2021, responsive bordering also captured legal changes which became more frequent in the regional context. These include legal amendments, as well as proposals and investigations of potential legal amendments that aim to govern migratory movements across the national border. Such as for example attempts by Finland, the Baltic states, and Poland to influence expanding EU-wide sanctions on Russian Schengen visa-holders in 2022: "Finland calls for a recommendation that allow Schengen countries, when they refuse entry of Russian nationals at their border, to either annul or revoke a person's visa or impose an entry ban on them in accordance with ordinary Schengen practices." (FI 20.09.2022)

While the coding is, regrettably, somewhat blunt, the aim was to introduce a sub-code that could capture the range of strategies to govern migratory movements employed at the national level. An alternative possibility would have been to introduce an additional code specifically isolating legal changes, but this too would have been an imperfect solution, due to the order of coding which meant that the data samples with the most frequent use of legal amendments (Lithuania and Finland from 2021 and onwards) were coded towards the end of the coding process. Framing the analysis around how each country responds to various border challenges enables the identification of both similarities and differences in respective policy tools and strategies. By examining responses to specific challenges, it becomes possible to assess the extent to which national preferences align with or diverge from broader EU frameworks. This, in turn, sheds light on how border policies are shaped by domestic priorities, perceived threats, and geopolitical positioning. As such, this analytical lens offers insight into the preferred models of border governance among the studied countries, particularly in moments when border stability is tested. It is important to note that while many utterances categorized under the responsive bordering code do not explicitly mention a border, national or otherwise, the statements are interpreted to do so implicitly. For example, in Swedish communication these utterances tend to address the challenges emerging from the (comparatively) porousness of Sweden's national borders. Additionally, references to the 'refugee situation' further highlight the intrinsic connection to border discourse.

Through the metanarrative responsive bordering, national borders are framed as a symbol of sovereignty and state capacity, with governments emphasizing autonomy and responsibility in managing their own borders. In 2015 and 2016, Estonia and Lithuania repeatedly stress the importance of voluntary burden-sharing in asylum relocation, anchored in capacity-based reasoning: "Estonia is not planning to do anything that exceeds our capabilities. However, within the limits of what we can do, we will of course lend a hand to people who are fleeing war." (EE 24.02.2016) Similarly, Swedish border communication stresses the strain on national, regional, and local actors: "We are preparing for a crisis situation. We have a very difficult situation in several [ministries and agencies] and in many municipalities. Now we need to come together and take joint responsibility." (SE 09.10.2015) The organization of a national conference, *Sweden*

together, emphasized deepening coordination (SE 01.10.2015(2)), justified by the argument that "[t]he refugee situation requires a concerted effort to create the jobs, housing, educational opportunities and community that are needed, so that we all, no matter where we come from, can continue to build a Sweden that is strong together." (SE 24.09.2015) The finite nature of institutional capacity ultimately warranted "tough decisions [needed] to create a breathing space for the reception," (SE 12.01.2016) including repeatedly extended internal border controls (e.g., SE 03.03.2016; SE 07.04.2016) first introduced on November 12, 2015 (Jacobsen 2015).

In connection, communication on national borders imagines the border as a zone of institutional learning and progress. Border-related challenges are framed as opportunities to draw lessons and reform institutional arrangements, such as in the Swedish example: "The ability to handle difficult challenges that society may face needs to be constantly developed. It is therefore important that a major event that significantly affects several of society's functions is followed up and evaluated so that lessons can be learned for the future." (SE 07.06.2016) At the same time, the code responsive bordering also exposes perceived gaps or inefficiencies in EU frameworks which are seen to inhibit effective national border management, justifying unilateral or temporary national measures. This depicts national borders as spaces for EU critique:

> Lithuania has come up against an extraordinary challenge as a result of Lukashenka's arranged hybrid attack on the EU border. This has brought to light gaps and loopholes in the existing EU legal framework regarding the protection of the EU external border and the potential for abuse of the Community asylum system. It is obvious that the measures applied at the national level are insufficient in situation at hand. (LT 29.09.2021(2))

The responsive bordering sub-code frames national borders as spaces vulnerable to hybrid threats. This is because borders are imagined as potential targets for a range of hybrid threats, largely as a tool of geopolitical pressure. While present before 2021, the awareness of hybrid threats increases in salience in response to the instrumentalization of human movement along Lithuania's border. The term 'hybrid' became increasingly utilized to describe the event, and to communicate the severity of the situation. This is often communicated in a fashion that aims to disseminate a certain crisis interpretation, thereby translating the crisis to western counterparts (Kuus 2008; Mälksoo 2022). This furthermore relies on the entanglement of national borders and the EU's external border to emphasize the significance of the events: "Lithuania is facing a hybrid war, which is directed against the entire EU and democratic values." (LT 18.08.2021) The awareness of hybrid threats is present across the region. For example, in November 2021, the Finnish Ministry of Interior launches a project aimed at assessing legislation to address instances of hybrid influencing: "The project assesses the means of the current legislation that can be used to prepare for and respond to such hybrid influencing." (FI 16.12.2021) In communication on the project, a distinction is made between

the mass influx of migrants and hybrid influencing that exploits migration. One can assume this distinction is largely influenced by the events along the Belarusian border earlier the same year.

Furthermore, and in relation to the aspect of institutional learning introduced above, the national border is seen as a site and tool for crisis preparedness. Borders are constructed as proactive measures for managing potential future crises, rather than merely responding to existing threats. This approach involves two key elements: first, it arises from recounting negative trends in the regional security landscape. Statements from Finnish leaders explicitly tie this shift to the perceived permanence of the Russian threat:

> We can assume that Russia turning into a more agreeable neighbour for us – or for anyone else for that matter – is nowhere in sight. Had we waited for better times to come, it would have left us in a vulnerable position with Russia having become increasingly vigorous in its demands to have a say in other states' freedom of choice. (FI 23.08.2022)

Second, national borders are specifically addressed from the perspective of preparedness in light of shifting security challenges. In Swedish border discourse, notions of comprehensive security and defense intertwine the roles of individuals and state authorities: "In light of today's vulnerability, security becomes more important than ever. Safety becomes central. /…/ if Swedish crisis preparedness is to work, individuals, the voluntary [defense] movement and politics must be involved." (SE 20.10.2015)[35] While interpretations of borders are somewhat muddled in this representation of security and broad societal crisis preparedness, the themes of migration movements as well as terrorist threats do play on the imaginaries of a border as a barrier protecting those within from external threats. In this sense, it reiterates the notion that threats emerges from outside of the nation, and outside of EUrope (Chamlian 2016; Sachseder et al. 2022). Estonia and Finland are also referencing preparedness as part of border management:

> There is currently no migratory pressure on Estonia, but over the years, the necessary preparations have been considered and made in case the number of illegal border crossings increases. Estonia is prepared to avert a threat to its security, should this need arise. (EE 09.11.2021)

> The amendment will improve preparedness for large numbers of migrants and clarify the division of duties between the authorities. (FI 16.12.2021)

[35] While voluntary movements can broadly designate a plethora of civil society organizations in Sweden, it is more likely that the term in this context refers to volunteer-based defense, which plays a central role in Swedish crisis preparedness (Krisinformation 2025).

6.3 The supranational border

The EU's external border is frequently mentioned in border communication across all four country cases, though the emphasis and framing vary with (geo)-political positionings and historical experiences. Overall, the EU border is framed as a site of collective responsibility and cooperation. The metanarrative EU-level cooperation, highlights the role of shared responsibility in managing external threats and migratory pressures. This framing is particularly pronounced in the Baltic states, where national security is closely linked to the integrity of the EU's external borders. This interpretation views border filtering and control, as well as the effects of these filtering functions as a matter of EUropean solidarity and strategic coherence. For example, between 2015 and 2016, Sweden and Finland emphasize the importance of collective solutions and burden-sharing in asylum reception, advocating for a more equitable distribution of responsibility among EUMS. While there are some echoes of this approach in the discourse of Estonia and Lithuania, the primary focus in these two countries is on voluntary burden-sharing. This suggests a tension among countries in the BSR, regarding what constitutes fair cooperation across the EU. In 2021, such division diminishes, as Estonia and Lithuania vehemently enforce the need for collective EU action when migratory movements are perceived as instrumentalized threats. The invocation of EU solidarity tends to intensify when perceived threats appear closer to national borders, as captured in the Estonian statement: "We must never forget that when European countries turn their back to each other's problems, turn against each other, then the independence of Estonia – here at the edge of the Western world – will be among the first victims." (EE 16.07.2015) Such rhetoric underlines how national and EU borders are discursively entangled, with security concerns catalyzing calls for deeper integration and mutual support.

In Estonia, the external border features as a prominent reference point throughout all three crisis periods, reflecting both Estonia's location on the EU's eastern border and its broader understanding of border security as a shared EUropean responsibility. Notably, in 2015–2016, the migration crisis is discursively located at a distance, yet still invoked as a matter demanding Estonian solidarity and engagement: "Estonia is not an isolated island which would be left untouched by what is happening elsewhere." (EE 29.09.2015) In contrast, during the 2021 and 2022 crises, as the sense of urgency is experienced with greater national proximity, Estonia highlighted its role in supporting neighboring member states: "The government does not want to turn its back on friends and allies." (EE 01.12.2021) Notably, this solidarity with neighboring EUMS is framed as enhancing Estonian security. Yet, overall the external EU border is framed less in terms of national interests and more as an EU-wide concern, integral to maintaining the integrity of the Schengen system and the openness of internal Schengen borders.

This logic of shared responsibility and regional embeddedness is echoed in Lithuania's discourse. The country is actively seeking to EUropeanize its border challenges, encouraging western member states to recognize the eastern external border stretch as integral to the EU's collective security and migration governance.

Similarly to Estonian discourse, Lithuanian communication on the EU's external border in 2015–2016 period maintained attention on the eastern segment of the external EU border. Lithuania emphasizes the strategic importance of the, in their words, often-overlooked stretch of the border, warning against neglecting the threats posed by Russia and advocating for greater EU awareness and investment in the region. Particularly in 2021 and 2022, Lithuania's discourse stressed that migration at the eastern border represents not a national crisis, but a European, and above all a EUropean one. A similar pattern of foregrounding the EU's external border is found in Polish border narratives throughout the events of 2021 (Opiłowska 2025, 10). Notably, the framing of the eastern threat incorporates a civilizational dimension, presenting it as a challenge with far-reaching consequences: "Although equally relevant, threats from the South and the East are different. Unlike terrorism and migration, Russia poses a challenge to the entire international system. This should be taken into consideration when making decisions on relations with Russia." (LT 22.06.2016) This discursive strategy positions Lithuania as a key advocate for sustained EU attention on eastern challenges.

Finland also integrates the external EU border into its governmental communication, although with a somewhat different emphasis. While the Finnish stretch of the Schengen border is less central in the 2015–2016 and 2021 crisis narratives, likely due to the spatial distribution of events, Finnish discourse still reflects a strong commitment to EU-wide collaboration on border issues. The external border is discussed primarily in relation to the securitization of the Schengen area, and Finnish communication often emphasized the interdependence of external and internal borders. Even when Finland's own border is not immediately under pressure, the country frames external border management as vital to preserving the integrity and functionality of the EU's internal mobility regime.

In Sweden, the external EU border features more selectively, although it appears most prominently in the discourse surrounding the 2015–2016 migration crisis. Comparable to the other country cases, Sweden's governmental communication connects the issue of asylum to the broader challenge of managing mobility within the EU, particularly regarding border control at the EU's external borders. However, Sweden's approach is somewhat unique as it emphasizes the introduction and extension of control mechanisms at its national border primarily in the context of a lack of solidarity among EU member states. This perspective can be interpreted as criticism aimed at other EU member states for not doing enough. Hence, Swedish discourse on the external border focuses largely on the need to strengthen EU-level control mechanisms, particularly in light of the perceived failure to achieve equitable burden-sharing in asylum reception: "It is difficult to see a better distribution of reception responsibilities between member states in the short term. Therefore, the efforts of the EU institutions are focused on limiting the number of refugees arriving in the EU." (SE 16.02.2016) While Sweden initially is less vocal in securitizing migration, its engagement with the external EU border reveals concerns about systemic strain and institutional imbalance, framing strengthened external control as a pragmatic response to internal EU tensions.

In comparison to representations of national borders, the EU's external border is represented through the key metanarratives of supranational coordination and security. Despite the thematic similarity with national border representations, the metanarratives for the EU's external border are invoked with some variance, mainly because representations of national borders versus the EU's external border are referring to different political entities: the state or the supranational entity. This constructs the nature of the different borders with some nuance.

6.3.1 Supranational coordination

Supranational coordination is among the most dominant metanarratives in discourse on the EU's external border in Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden across the crises of 2015–2016, 2021, and 2022. The sub-code captures coordination among the EUMS on questions related to the three focal crises of this study. Because it is crisis-specific, meaning it is not coded for cooperation on matters not related to the three focal crises, it makes it possible to capture crisis-specific coordination, encompassing both implemented and suggested supranational coordination. Though the articulation of supranational coordination is country-specific, it collectively points to a broader pattern: the EU's external border is imagined as a shared space of political and operational responsibility that necessitates coordinated supranational responses.

Responsibility for the EU's external borders is imagined to be divided evenly between individual EUMS and the EU, as evident from Finnish communication:

> It is very important that the EU countries ensure effective control of the external borders in the Schengen area. The responsibility needs to be borne by the Member States themselves, but if a Schengen country neglected its border control, the other countries should have an opportunity to oblige the country to request assistance. (FI 18.12.2015)

There are, however, strong sentiments in Estonian and Lithuanian border communication arguing that shared border management solutions are only viable when the EUMS "on the front line" (EE 27.05.2015) perceive it as such: "[T]he situation is still serious as the decisions that have been made so far in order to solve the migration crisis do not satisfy the countries who are under the greatest pressure." (EE 12.11.2015) This front-line awareness is likewise noticeable in advocacy for retained focus on regional security in 2015–2016, specifically Crimea. In 2021 and 2022, as the pressures on the external Schengen border shifted closer to Estonian borders, emphasis on the uneven burden on front-line EUMS intensified: "We firmly believe that the protection of European external border is not just the duty of individual Member States but also the common responsibility of the EU." (EE 23.08.2021)

As a result, the external border is imagined as a place where EUropean solidarity is put to the test. This solidarity largely reflects burden-sharing within the EU for the sake of assisting other EUMS:

> The EU member states must act in solidarity and contribute to the joint EU operations, provide development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Burden-sharing of refugees is one form of solidarity and it must be based on the principle of voluntarism as we agreed during the meeting of the European Council in April. (LT-MFA 20.05.2015)

> Although Estonia, situated in the north, is not on the migration routes of the refugees from south and it is unlikely that a large number of refugees will want to traverse the whole continent to reach Estonia, we as a part of Europe still have the responsibility to help. (EE 24.02.2016)

At the same time, solidarity might also be interpreted as solidarity with individuals on the move. References to responsibility to assist could very well be read as expressions of an obligation to support people on the move. Similarly, Swedish criticism of uneven burden-sharing among the EUMS may reflect humanitarian commitments, as illustrated in the following statement:

> The EU has a common asylum policy. This means that all member states must provide asylum seekers with a legally secure and equal examination and a humane reception. If you have grounds for asylum, you should be given protection. The system is based on all member states following the rules and taking their responsibility. Yet today, responsibility is very unevenly distributed, with Germany and Sweden together accounting for almost half of the refugees who come to the EU. (SE 12.03.2015(2))

At the same time, this statement should be understood against the backdrop that Sweden, alongside a few other EUMS, received the highest number of migrants per capita. As such, appeals directed at other EUMS does not necessarily stem from humanitarian considerations alone.

This discussion notwithstanding, the concept of solidarity presented some challenges during the coding phase due to its elusive nature. Its various interpretations may fall under a range of the metanarratives making up the code book, especially when considering different orders. For example, when discussing solidarity among the EUMS, the term reflects supranational coordination, or is desired to be such, which feeds into a metanarrative of a functional EU order. At the same time, it can also be interpreted to display solidarity as a shared EU value, which instead falls under the metanarrative of a value-based EU order. When solidarity is addressed in relation to third countries or people on the move, it reflects supranationally coordinated humanitarian assistance, particularly when references to developmental efforts are included. This, too, aligns more with notions of EUropean values according to this study's coding scheme. Yet, for the sake of the EU's external border, the term can be taken to reflect shared attention to the EU's external border and the shared management of said border. With that said, one might question whether solidarity should be treated as a distinct sub-code, as this could reveal additional overlaps with other codes. This remains a consideration for any future research that employs a similar analytical approach as presented here.

Regardless of the nuances of solidarity, EU cohesion in the face of shifting threats and foreign aggression is emphasized. This is especially apparent in relation to crisis interpretations during the two later crisis periods. Cohesive crisis interpretation entails that EUMS largely share similar interpretations of a crisis; in other words, ensuring the border challenges are generally perceived and addressed uniformly across the Union. Estonian and Lithuanian discourse especially displays efforts to transmit crisis interpretations to their western counterparts, in an attempt to assure cohesion on sanctions among the EUMS, and to enable more effective responses to perceived aggressions. The then-Prime Minister Kaja Kallas (REF), emphasized the importance of a unified interpretive framework across EU states, noting that, "it is very important that the European Union and its partners have unambiguously grasped the nature and intent of the hybrid attack. It is crucial that the messages we send out are the same and that we all follow one plan of action." (EE 21.11.2021). Lithuania voiced similar sentiments, stating that "the EU shall stand united, without compromising to the regime that stranded thousands of deceived people at the EU eastern border with Belarus." (LV 21.11.2021) This resembles how Kallas emerged as a prominent expert of European policies vis-à-vis Russia and their war in Ukraine, expanding the political agency of the CEE (Hagelin and Gibson 2024; Mälksoo 2022). Although, it deserves to be pointed out that translating the particularities of the eastern peripheries is not a new phenomenon (Kuus 2008, 190).

The externalization (coded as external solutions) of EU border control reflects an imagination of the EU border as stretching beyond the EU's geographical territory. Border management is somewhat dependent on third-country cooperation and includes strategies aimed at preventing people on the move from reaching the EU's border, or facilitating returns to countries of origin or transit: "We should strengthen our cooperation and work together with third countries to resolve the migration crisis and to effectively implement readmission agreement." (LT-MFA 14.10.2015) One form of externalization is the EU-Turkey deal from March 2016, imagined to increase the protection of the EU's external border: "The border is guarded from both sides of the boundary line and its effectiveness depends on the level of security and will to cooperate on both sides." (EE 24.10.2016) Effectively the deal shifted responsibility for border management from within the Schengen area, to external management by Turkey, on behalf of the EU. Aside from that, the EU-Turkey deal has been criticized for circumventing the EU's legal system (Carrera et al. 2019), so while it certainly displays cooperation both among EUMS, and between EUMS and a third partner, it is in legal terms not to be considered as a form of EU integration (Reslow 2019). Externalization, as it is coded here, also captures cooperation with, and support to third countries who are hosting a majority share of refugees, such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria in 2015 and 2016. A notion that is repeated during the 2021 instrumentalized migration crisis, through arguments that "equitable and sustainable partnerships with countries of origin and transit are crucial." (FI 09.12.2021)

Noteworthy, a growing emphasis on supranational coordination is not limited to traditional border policies. In Estonia, the discourse on EU borders extends

into the digital realm, with calls for building a shared digital market and establishing digital competencies as a fifth freedom of the EU (EE 24.10.2016; EE 09.09.2016). As such, Estonian border communication underlines the necessity of interoperable and secure information systems for managing both physical and digital border threats. This illustrates a broader understanding of border resilience that extends beyond borderline infrastructure and border guards, to include cybersecurity and digital infrastructure as vital components of the EU community, reaching into the domain of security. Digital components of border making are present in Swedish communication as well: "Sweden continues to push for better controls at the external border and mandatory use of biometric data in passports." (SE 24.02.2016) The mention of biometric data highlights the concept of a digital border, thereby emphasizing the multi-scalar features of borders in this context (Jeandesboz 2021; Jones and Johnson 2014).

Taken together, the discourses of Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden, reveal a converging understanding of the EU's external border as a collective responsibility that must be managed through multilevel, supranational coordination. Thus, while local conditions and crisis proximities shaped how each country approach supranational coordination, a common thread runs through their communications: in a shifting geopolitical environment, effective border governance of the EU's external border cannot be achieved in isolation. Whether through external partnerships, sanctions regimes, policy harmonization, or solidarity mechanisms, supranational coordination emerges as a key metanarrative through which the country cases articulate their border imaginaries and project their visions of EUropean unity.

6.3.2 Security

Aside from supranational coordination, security emerges as another key metanarrative in border discourse, with parallels to the supranational coordination metanarrative above in how threats are constructed and how responsibilities for managing those threats are frame. Security is often addressed in the sense that a secure external Schengen border is the premise for open internal Schengen borders, captured here as Schengen integrity, which is further detailed below. Thus, while security is drawn upon to describe the national border, as detailed in the preceding section, security narratives are also contributing to interpretations of the EU's external border. A common theme across all four country cases is the emphasis on the EU's external border as a site of supranational responsibility for managing security challenges, mirroring the previous metanarrative on supranational coordination. Meaning that sentiments of border management and filtering functions, specifically the establishment of functional controls at the external border are rooted in security narratives: "Responsibility for *the protection* of the EU's external borders cannot fall only on the Member States – it is a common responsibility of the entire EU." (LT 06.08.2021, author's emphasis) Similar emphasis on supranational responsibility is present in communication on FRONTEX's expanding role, as exemplified by Finnish emphasis on a "stronger

role for FRONTEX at the European Union's external borders." (FI 14.10.2015) Overall, this envisions the EU border as a shared (geo)political project, requiring material cooperation as well as political solidarity.

Similarly to how security frames the national border as a barrier, security frames the external EU border as a defensive barrier against threats from individuals and states. Notably, the perception of threats evolves across the three examined periods from human movement to geopolitical threats. To illustrate, during the 2015–2016 migration crisis the primary threat is framed as unprecedented migratory pressures, partly the result of "organised crime's involvement in human trafficking and illegal transportation of persons." (LT-MFA 14.09.2015) Such representations of human movement reframe migration as a criminal or illicit threat. At the same time, it is acknowledged that human movement is the result of persistent instability in the regions from which the majority of migratory movement arise. The emphasis on human trafficking, nevertheless, directs attention to the direct challenge to the EU's external border, justifying border management strategies that seek to impede such 'criminal' activities. By 2021 and 2022, the security narrative more strongly highlights the actions of adversary states, particularly focusing on hostility from Belarus and Russia at the state level. Although the movement of people remains a factor in the latter crises, migratory pressure in 2021 is identified as "being used as a political tool of influence." (EE 01.07.2021) In this context, migration is framed as a weapon: "If Belarus regime uses illegal migrants as a weapon and a means of pressure against the EU, it is a violation not only of international norms, but also of basic humanity." (LT 18.06.2021) This in itself depicts people on the move as tools or weapons rather than individuals with rights, further limiting interpretations regarding the legitimacy of asylum seekers. As for imagery on the nature of the EU's external border, it reinforces the need for effective border filtering systems capable of guarding against the threats posed by so-called hybrid migration.

In relation to that, the security metanarrative envisions the EU's external border as a filtering mechanism for ensuring internal EU security. This links external border control directly to the viability of internal free movement, reinforcing the notion of Schengen integrity. Schengen integrity, understood here as references the interaction between the external border and national borders (in other words the internal Schengen borders) to describe the external border. Discursive representations of the symbiosis between the external and the internal Schengen borders, though not surprising given the structure of the Schengen system, illustrate how policies for the external EU border are justified to the public. Migratory pressures are represented not only as a challenge for the external border management, but as a direct threat to the Schengen system as a whole: "The European Council stated that so far the measures to manage the migratory flows have been insufficient. It is indispensable to regain control over the external borders for the integrity of Schengen to be safeguarded." (FI 18.12.2015) The argument rests on the assumption that the open border characteristics of internal Schengen borders will not function as intended, without a secure external border. Thus, while the border representation remains on the securitization of the external border, the discourse

does not necessarily imply favoring increased border security for the sake of defense of said border, but may also be interpreted from the perspective that it allows the EU to preserve its *raison d'être*, namely the removal of internal barriers between EUMS for people and goods alike. With that said, one cannot disregard that the effects of discourses of a secure external border result in a hardened external border, akin to previous criticisms of a "fortress Europe EU." (Miller and Mills 2020, 167)

Importantly, the preservation of the Schengen system is not portrayed as being threatened by the border closures themselves, but by the pressures from human movement across the external EU border. In Swedish governmental border communication, recurrent national border controls at Swedish are justified by pointing to perceived deficiencies in border controls at the external EU border. The statement, "Europe has failed to maintain its external borders. Until we can see a common European solution, Sweden is forced to work with short-term national measures" (SE 03.03.2016) exemplifies this perspective. The renewal of said border controls is justified by referencing changes in EU directives in 2016 that permitted prolonged border controls: "The EU has confirmed both Sweden's image and need for border controls, which means we can make a longer-term decision to have border controls." (SE 01.06.2016) In this regard, Schengen integrity bridges narratives of security and supranational coordination by emphasizing burden-sharing among the EUMS: "'Return to Schengen' is a goal for everyone, but it in turn requires that we can ensure that work on a new asylum system is moving forward." (SE 27.10.2016)

Ultimately, the security metanarrative legitimizes the physical fortification of the EU's external border, including the construction of fences, barriers, and surveillance systems. The narrative recognizes that different stretches of the EU's external border face different security challenges, and thereby require unique border infrastructure solutions. The eastern stretch is largely concerned with raising awareness to threats emanating from Russia. This signifies that border infrastructure intersects with multifaceted perceptions of threats, specifically pertaining to regional vulnerabilities. In Lithuania, border fences were rapidly erected in reaction to the events of 2021: "the Government does not see any alternative to creating a physical barrier. Lithuania is going to build it to properly protect the external border between Lithuania and the EU." (LT 02.08.2021) These measures depict the external EU border as technologically equipped and surveilled, promoting a vision of EUrope as a physically protected zone. Nonetheless, local border securitization should be understood against a backdrop of broader securitization patterns of the Schengen border space (Ceccorulli 2019). The EU's external border, which in 2015 and 2016 became a space defined largely by immigration control, is thus later on discursively constituted as a front line of geopolitical defense, both against adversarial state actors and in defense of European norms and values.

6.4 Other types of borders and non-focal border concerns

Although I essentially focus on the national borders and the EU's external border, a few reflections on other types of borders emerging in governmental border communication are worth highlighting. Adding to that, I will also briefly reflect on communication about non-focal border concerns, as these too have an impact on broader border conceptualizations, albeit they largely fall beyond the scope of this work.

There are of course many more border types than national borders and the EU's external borders, and the complexity of border entanglement increases with every additional border type considered. The identification of these borders partly depends on how one distinguishes between borders and boundaries, the former often linked to some kind of institutionalized authority and the latter to softer, functional, or cultural divisions. For the sake of this discussion, I will engage with these interchangeably. On the local level, various forms of borders emerge, including municipal and other forms of administrative boundaries. Furthermore, cross-national regional divides reflect shifting patterns of cooperation within the BSR. For example, recall how cooperation patterns have shifted within the region over time, as introduced in chapter 2. Adding to that, geopolitical reconfigurations, such as NATO enlargements, introduce layers of military-strategic borders.

With regards to the Baltic and Nordic regions, there is a pattern of bridging borders and boundaries. Regional cooperation patterns (including but not limited to institutionalized cross-border cooperation) are particularly strong, demonstrating close cooperation and trust between BSR countries and non-state BSR partners. Cross-border cooperation in areas of, for example, energy, digital, and transportation networks (e.g., Rail Baltic) are presented as means through which to strengthen regional security and resilience. Specifically, deepening regional cooperation is perceived to strengthen regional security in response to Russia's aggression against its neighbors: "We can only react to this by tightening our bilateral, regional, EU- and NATO-level cooperations." (EE 10.05.2016) This discourse emerges already in 2015–2016, in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, but likely also Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008. As such, similar reactions emerging in 2022 should be interpreted as renewed efforts underpinned by a long aspiration to strengthen capabilities, which can address and counteract antagonistic state behavior in and around the BSR region.

Not surprisingly, entanglements with the border of NATO are most commonly articulated in relation to security concerns, particularly when discussing the EU's security capacities and its cooperation with NATO. This is especially evident by references to the institutional overlap between EUMS and NATO member states:

> At the joint session of the Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministers, Lithuania's Foreign Minister drew attention to the fact that 22 EU member states were members of NATO, thus it was particularly important for the EU to identify common threats together with NATO, while ensuring their security and avoiding duplication of effort and cost. (LT-MFA 19.05.2015)

Such framings are particularly prominent in the Baltic states but have become increasingly present in the Nordic region as well. Preparedness for potential aggression, largely from the east, is underlined: "being unprepared is more provocative." (LT 18.11.2015) The overlapping and entanglement of types of borders in the region is demonstrated in statements that identify the interaction and interlinkage between different border regimes. Recall again, for example, the Estonian statement which opened this dissertation: "The Government aims to build out a more modern state border of Europe that would be worthy of the European and NATO external border." (EE 02.06.2016(2)) This statement appears underpinned by a conviction that EUrope is secured by securing the north-eastern region and its borders. Indeed, NATO's presence is recognized as "very important in strengthening the security of our region and of the entire Europe." (LT 01.12.2021)

NATO membership is presented both as a strategic necessity and a reaffirmation of identity, more specifically as a means of safeguarding national autonomy in the face of an increasingly assertive Russia. Emphasis on NATO membership thus highlights the significance of the NATO border. One example of this is from Finnish border communication:

> The membership in NATO gives Finland freedom to manoeuvre which we otherwise might have lost. We can assume that Russia turning into a more agreeable neighbour for us – or for anyone else for that matter – is nowhere in sight. Had we waited for better times to come, it would have left us in a vulnerable position with Russia having become increasingly vigorous in its demands to have a say in other states' freedom of choice. (FI 23.08.2022)

In a similar sense, the alliance is also imagined as a community of belonging, notably to the Western world. A notion which also alludes to the perceived significance of the NATO border, "[t]he presence of our partners has been visible in our ports, over the cities and on training grounds around the country. We are grateful for this, and things are better this way. The Finnish people have also welcomed our future allies. This is the family we belong to." (FI 23.08.2022) Military exercises among NATO partners further reinforce this alignment and signal the increasing securitization of the region, where the NATO border now plays a prominent role in the symbolic and material display of defense capabilities (Banka and Bussmann 2023). Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership, moreover, sparked discussion on NATO's eastern flank. The conceptualization of a northern flank alludes to a EUropean past marked by the divisions of the Cold War (Christiansson 2023). The term displays perceptions of vulnerabilities that need to be secured through strategic planning and strengthened cooperation, especially through NATO (Makarychev 2024).

Notably, Finland and Sweden's NATO memberships are fostering closer cooperation between the two, and within the region at large, as alluded to in the section above on regional cooperation. This is especially evident in the communication regarding the pair's process towards the NATO application: "The deep trust between Finland and Sweden made it possible that we eventually made our

choice – when the time was right – independently, but together." (FI 23.08.2022) It is likewise evident in Finnish communication regarding cooperation with its Baltic neighbors, specifically detailing how Finland is learning from its neighbors: "[O]ver the past decades, we could have listened to our friends in the Baltics more closely along the way in questions related to our common security and Russia." (FI 23.08.2022) In contrast to Finland, the Swedish communication studied here does not include many references to NATO. This makes it difficult to closely examine Swedish interpretations of the NATO membership and to interpret the entanglements occurring between the NATO border and other types of borders in and around Sweden. This restriction reflects the availability of the data rather than the actual state of the debate (political and public) in 2022 concerning a Swedish NATO membership.

In addition, governmental border communication often addresses border concerns beyond the three crises examined here. For sake of clarity I refer to these as non-focal border concerns. Overall, similar framings of such concerns emerge across the two regions, especially regarding Russian aggression. Additionally, there are structural security concerns such as energy security, and transportation connectivity across the region and with western Europe. These concerns are portrayed as long-term, structural threats to European stability in their own right, but they are often interlinked with one another. Nevertheless, some particularities from the four country cases as to what non-focal border concerns take precedence over others.

Estonia's border discourse prominently stresses the need for the EU to maintain focus on Russia's aggression in Ukraine, especially during 2015–2016. Although acknowledging the significance of the migration crisis, Estonia repeatedly emphasizes the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine as existential challenges to European security and the EUropean order. This is framed in terms of moral obligation and shared EUropean values: "it is Estonia's moral duty to stand for Europe continuing sanctions for as long as Russia has complied with all international agreements." (EE 16.07.2015) Estonia argued that sanctions must continue until Russia complies with international law. The Estonian discourse also makes distinctions between migration and European security, the latter being more closely associated with threats from the east: "For the European Union it is essential to address current issues, such as migration, unemployment and Europe's security." (EE 13.10.2016) This suggests that while migration is a significant concern, it remains differentiated from broader European security issues. The narrative thus implies a layered understanding of security, where migration is one factor among many that requires comprehensive EU-level solutions. European security, based on a comprehensive review of the narration of security, tends to signify challenges arising along the eastern border much more frequently than challenges at the southern external Schengen border. For instance, comparisons to Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008 underpin warnings against EU complacency (albeit using the terminology of 'Europe' rather than the EU). This, according to Estonian representation, foreshadowed Russian actions: "It took less than a year for Europe to forgive Russia for attacking and occupying

Georgia. We cannot close our eyes a second time, we cannot pretend that we do not see and we do not want to see." (EE 24.02.2016) In addition to Ukraine, energy security and Brexit also feature as border-related concerns, particularly where energy dependency on Russia is seen as a form of geopolitical vulnerability.

Lithuania advances similar arguments, advocating for sustained EU attention to threats from the east. As a result, non-focal border concerns are largely framed through a south versus east perspective, in which Lithuania criticizes the EU's shifting focus toward the southern border, cautioning that the EU lacks a clear understanding of the regional security challenges along the eastern border. Most dominant is that Russia is framed as a systemic threat to the international order. This is particularly prominent in 2015 and 2016, when the EU on the whole turned its attention to the southern border. As one statement illustrates: "Psychologically, after the other crises we have seen, such as in Syria and the migration crisis, attention is being [taken] away from Ukraine and it will be more difficult to stay focused." (LT 18.11.2015)[36] Lithuania also stressed the European nature and thereby belonging of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, advocating for their right to independently choose their respective futures. Through this framing, Lithuanian border discourse simultaneously contributes to shaping the imagined borders of Europe. In doing so, it emphasizes that the characteristics of EUrope extend beyond the EU's external border, advocating for a broader and more inclusive vision of EUropean belonging.

Energy and geopolitics are strongly linked in Lithuanian communication, especially in criticism of Nord Stream 2 and concerns about the Astravets nuclear plant under construction in Belarus in 2015. The nuclear plant is interpreted as entailing both traditional security frames, energy security risks, and health risks: "[the] Belarussian regime's unpredictability has further highlighted the problem of the unsafe Astravets NPP. 'The unsafe Astravets NPP is a threat to the whole of the EU and a reminder that Russia will always tend to use energy projects for geopolitical purposes'." (LV 08.07.2021) Hence, issues of energy and geopolitics overlaps with security concerns, as energy dependency on antagonistic states is framed as a strategic vulnerability that threatens not only Lithuania but also the broader stability of the EU.

Finnish communication, though less explicitly persuasive toward other EU member states, similarly references Russian aggression in Ukraine, while maintaining pragmatic cooperation with Russia up until 2021: "the European Union must also be able to take initiatives for selective cooperation with Russia. /…/ Pragmatic cooperation is a prerequisite for a successful Russia policy. In this way, we maintain functioning relations. It is also a matter of security policy." (FI 24.08.2021, author's translation) In 2022, a rhetorical shift occurs, detailed above in relation to visa restrictions. Finnish statements evolve from emphasizing bilateral cooperation and shared border responsibilities to acknowledging

[36] There appears to be a word missing from the original text, as the quote reads "… attention is being away from Ukraine …."

strategic misjudgments about Russia. Other border-related concerns include Brexit, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the latter discussed both from the perspective of human rights, and in terms of how the takeover might affect the EU by way of creating migration pressures. In 2021, the effects of Covid-19 is a relatively frequent topic, although this primarily revolved around the integrity of internal Schengen borders it also concerned cross-border vaccine policies and vaccine access. The Arctic, while less prominent after 2016 in this text corpus, is framed as a site of economic and geopolitical importance. Finland's strategic self-positioning as an Arctic state underpins the country's advocacy for more comprehensive Arctic policies in the EU, integrated in the Union's sector-specific policies (FI 09.12.2021). Although not explicitly mentioned for much the later time periods, the Arctic region can very well be assumed to be included in communication focusing on regional challenges and policies.

Swedish border discourse touches more sporadically on non-focal border concerns. Mentions of Ukraine and Russia remain limited and largely descriptive until 2021. Adding to that, regional security is not a term that appears regularly in Sweden's border communication, setting the country apart from the other country cases of this study. In fact, it appears only once in this study's text corpus.[37] The specific press release describes a meeting between the then-Prime Miniter Stefan Löfven (S) and the EU's High Representative at the time Federica Mogherini, discussing regional security as well as the 'refugee situation.' While these topics are listed as discussion topics there is noting that suggests a correlation between the two topics, nor is there any evidence to suggest the opposite either. The most consistent non-focal border concern in Swedish border communication is that of the threat of terrorism, particularly in the context of the 2015–2016 migration crisis. In this regard, border security narratives overlaps with national security and anti-terrorism efforts. Yet, while terrorism is framed as a threat that legitimizes stronger border controls, Swedish communication also acknowledges the societal risks of linking migration too closely with security.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how national borders and the EU's external border are discursively imagined in governmental communication from Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden. The chapter has more specifically demonstrated how national borders and the EU's external border are imbued with imaginations and visions about their respective nature, by elaborating on the most prominent metanarratives in the respective border types.

[37] For illustrative purposes, to convey the format of Swedish border communication, the specific communication entry reads as follows: "On Monday, October 10, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven will receive the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, for discussions. Time: October 10, 2016 at 1:30 p.m. Location: Rosenbad. Issues on the agenda include the war in Syria, the refugee crisis and security in the immediate area." (SE 07.10.2016(2))

Overall, national borders were referenced less frequently than the EU's external border, with variations shaped by proximity to crisis and migration volume. Visibility of the national border correlates with the proximity and intensity of perceived threats, actual cross-border movement, and the institutional or geopolitical context. Security emerged as the dominant frame, particularly in Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland, where national borders were portrayed as defensive infrastructures tied to both national sovereignty and broader EU and/or NATO security architectures. The second metanarrative, regional cooperation, embedded national borders within shared frameworks of resilience and strategic alignment. Finally, responsive bordering, highlighted national-level adaptations to shifting security challenges, including legal reforms, policy initiatives, and critiques of EU frameworks. The comparative imaginations presented above have shown that national borders are imagined as multifunctional spaces, where the border is negotiated at the intersection of the symbolic and the material. National borders were thus perceived and constructed across a range of spheres, including the infrastructural, legal, ethical, security, and geopolitical, particularly in the context of migration-related crises. As such, crises act as discursive windows through which national borders are reimagined, enabling shifts in institutional practice and public narrative. Furthermore, national border imaginaries were deeply entangled with EU and regional narratives, revealing overlapping spatialities and multi-scalar interpretations of security, cooperation, and governance.

Reflecting tendencies to represent challenges as shared, the EU's external border was framed as a site of supranational responsibility, requiring collective EU coordination and cooperation. Estonia and Lithuania foregrounded this framing most strongly, often invoking security threats from Russia and Belarus to justify deeper EU integration and solidarity. Two dominant metanarratives, supranational coordination and security, structure discourse on the EU's external border. Supranational coordination was emphasized both in terms of operational burden-sharing and solidarity, initially with individuals on the move but also with other EUMS. A security discourse increasingly emphasized geopolitical threats and hybrid warfare, although threat perspectives concerning antagonistic state behavior existed in Estonian and Lithuanian border communication prior to 2021 and 2022. These narratives legitimized practices like externalization, and overall contributed to hardening borders. Finally, Schengen integrity emerged as a key concern, linking external border control to the preservation of EU internal mobility. Altogether, the external border was portrayed as an institutional and geopolitical frontier, crucial to both national and EUropean security and identity.

The chapter also detailed the prevalence of other types of borders and non-focal border crises in the border communication from the four country cases. Their prevalence illustrates the impact of geographical proximity in retaining attention on border issues and challenges. It also suggested that border discourse is composed of a multitude of border types, beyond the two examined in this study. The next two chapters will focus on how border communication shapes the concepts of European orders and identities, rather than exploring how the nature of borders is framed in governmental communications. This shift in emphasis addresses the second research question of this dissertation.

7 EUROPEAN ORDERS

In this second of three empirical chapters, national borders and the EU's external border will be examined from the perspective of orders, the second of the three IBO dimensions. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how border communication frames political ideas or images of EUrope that shape integration trajectories. It does so by looking more closely at how border communication envisions various EUropean orders through their depiction of borders. This chapter is guided by the second research question: How do discursive representations of various types of borders portray broader visions of EUrope? By addressing this question, the chapter unpacks the ways in which governmental actors construct, justify, and contest imaginations of different EUropean borders in response to crisis-driven border challenges. Thus, instead of categorizing themes per border type, this chapter traces how different EU orders are discursively constructed through border communication, cutting across border types. The chapter pays particular attention to different imaginations of distinct EUropean orders, with the awareness that these in practice co-exist. While the chapter to some degree is engaging with demarcations between EUropean and non-EUropean orders, the work is not able to provide any detailed insights into how non-EUropean orders are imagined. Any distinctions to Others are here assumed to re-inscribe the Self rather than the Other(s), reiterating the argument put forth by Stråth (2002) at the opening of this dissertation.

As argued in earlier chapters, border communication intertwines various types of borders, which in turn affects the representations of political entities and policy strategies. The previous chapter demonstrated how border communication shapes our understanding of borders by highlighting prevalent themes. Building on this, the current chapter shifts the analytical focus from the different types of borders and their associated themes, to examining how borders serve as vehicles for projecting various EU orders. The orders are analyzed through the prevalence of metanarratives, which are taken to structure visions of EUrope. The coding of the data identifies six distinct EUropean orders: functional; geopolitical; normative; progress; regional cooperation; and security. Each represent a distinct feature of an imagined EU integration trajectory, or a vision of EUrope. However, these identified European orders should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Rather, this dissertation posits that the trajectory of EUropean integration results from the interplay of various orders and their relative prominence in relation to one another.

To analyze the different orders, the findings are visualized to show the relative frequency of the various EUropean orders (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). This visualization is carried out separately for communication on national borders and the EU's external border, to visually highlight the differences in how communication on each type of border produces imaginations about the EU as an order. There are noticeable distinctions in how communication on the two border types portrays visions of EUrope, as the prevalence of the different EUropean orders varies across them. As the two figures illustrate, two metanarratives emerge as the most prominent across both border types, though they appear in reverse order. Communication on national borders places stronger emphasizes on a EUropean security

order, while communication on the EU's external border instead highlights a functional EUropean order. The prominence of the functional and security metanarrative is, in part, a result of the coding logic, and more specifically the division of sub-codes, as these two metanarratives ended up with a larger number of sub-codes compared to the other metanarratives (see Table 5.4b). For comparative transparency, the progress metanarrative, for example, has no sub-codes.

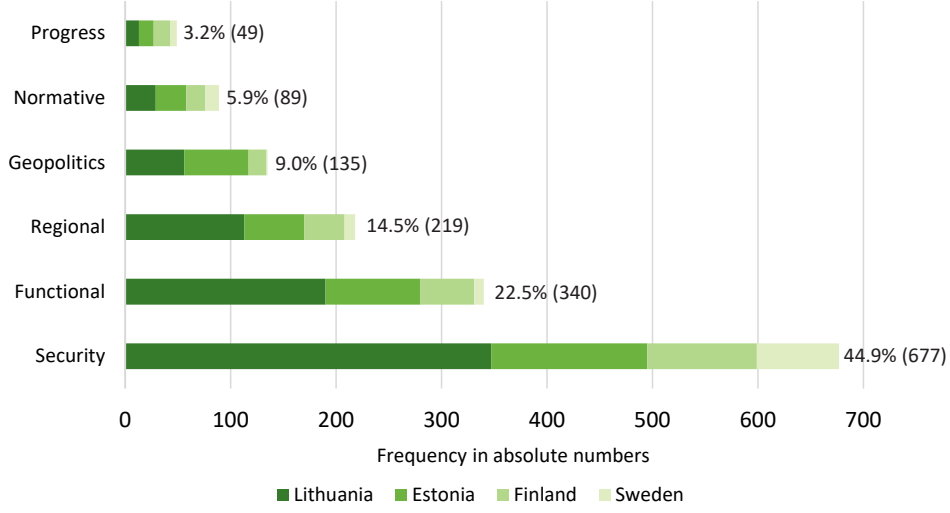

Figure 7.1. Frequency of 'orders' metanarratives in national border discourse.

The graph depicts the frequency in absolute numbers, in governmental border communication in Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden in 2015–2016, 2021, and 2022.

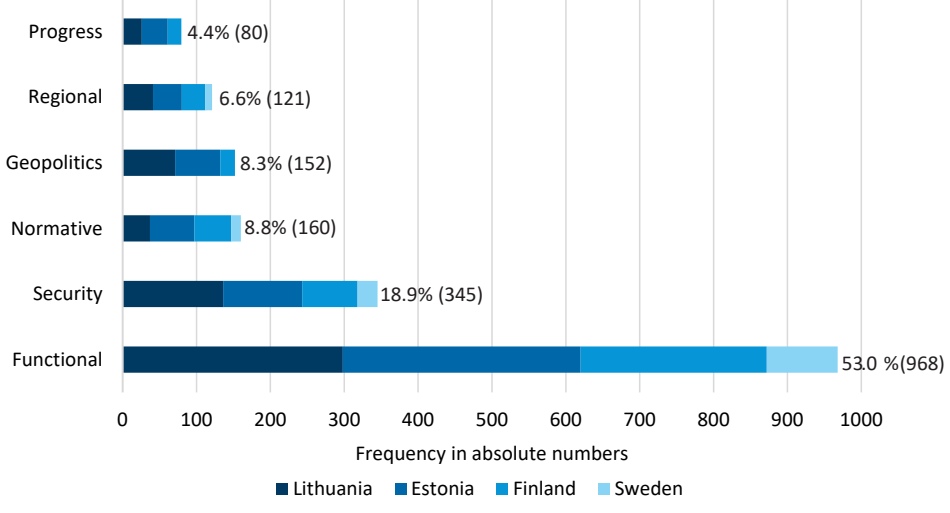

Figure 7.2. Frequency of 'orders' metanarratives in EU external border discourse.

The graph depicts the frequency in absolute numbers, in governmental border communication in Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden in 2015–2016, 2021, and 2022.

In the discussion that follows, I will engage more closely with three of the metanarratives: functional, security, and normative. The first two as they occur most frequently. The functional metanarrative, encompasses representations of supranational cooperation and common solutions to facilitate the efficient functioning of the EU. It most closely reflects the notion of an 'ever-closer' Union, in the sense that it reflects the aspiration to improve and/or expand operative cross-border cooperation across the EU. Worthy of mentioning is that the metanarrative includes references to both existing coordination and to aspirations for future cooperation. This metanarrative, therefore, captures a more comprehensive expression of implemented and desired EU-level coordination in response to crisis events along the external Schengen border. The security metanarrative, in turn, captures explicit references to security in relation to the two borders types, encompassing security challenges and defense capabilities. It also captures more implicit representations of the EU's capacity and adaptability to meet evolving security challenges, including enhanced or fortified border infrastructures and practices.

The third metanarrative, the normative one, includes articulations of values that are deemed to be foundational, if not distinct for the EU, and that enable a distinctly EUropean way of life; notably, these are often invoked to justify protective border measures. The metanarrative also includes humanitarian perspectives, such as providing aid and support to those in need, captured through the sub-code 'humanitarian perspectives and aid.' While the normative metanarrative does not stand out in terms of frequency, nor does it hold the position of the third most frequent metanarrative across the two border types, it is nevertheless valuable to examine more closely. This is because it introduces a more nuanced perspective on EUropean border discourse, relevant for understanding the future direction of EUropean integration trajectory. Hence, while the geopolitical metanarrative appears more frequently in communication on national borders than the normative metanarrative, its themes and imaginations largely complement those emerging in the security metanarrative.

The findings from the regional and the progress metanarratives are only briefly discussed in this chapter. The regional metanarrative is more frequently identified in communication on national borders, as opposed to the EU's external border. This is perhaps logical, as national borders are more commonly imagined within a regional context than the EU's external border. The latter tends to be imagined from the perspective of the supranational. Nonetheless, the regional metanarrative still produces imaginations about the EU, as it envisions the regional as an avenue for addressing issues in the supranational context. Progress was initially not approached as a distinct metanarrative but instead coded as a sub-code of the functional metanarrative, the code was later re-formalized into a metanarrative of its own. The reasoning behind this shift is that progress arguably displays a unique feature of how the EU is envisioned, even though progress permeates many of the other metanarratives in the sense that many of them include mentions or underlying notions of a continuous process of deepening and/or widening

cooperation within the EU. This made the coding process quite arduous as it was sometimes a fine line on whether a segment ought to be coded as progress or not.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it introduces EUrope as a functional order, examining how border communication presents the EU as a space of supranational governance from the perspective of functional cooperation. Second, the chapter explores evidence of a EUropean security order, analyzing how security is articulated in terms of emerging challenges and corresponding defense capabilities. This section also addresses the grey area that distinguishes the security metanarrative from a geopolitical one. Third, the chapter discusses how border communication invokes a vision of a EUropean normative order, centered around the concept of EUropean values. Finally, the chapter briefly outlines how regional and progressive EUropean orders are portrayed in border communication across the Baltic and the Nordic.

7.1 EUrope as a functional order

The EU as a functional order centers on how the EU is imagined as a space of supranational governance, this involves displays of technical coordination and administrative functionality. The metanarrative includes the sub-code supranational coordination, a code which is discussed at length in the previous chapter as it is one of the key themes through which the EU border is communicated. However, while the previous chapter discusses supranational coordination from the perspective of imagining the nature of various types of borders, this section instead examines how supranational coordination produces visions of a functional EUropean order. The communication that envisions a functional EU order is structured around a few key themes: operational mechanisms, rule-based polity, and crisis management.

In addition to supranational coordination, the metanarrative also includes a number of sub-codes that contribute to the interpretation of the EU as a functional order. These sub-codes, including market, digital, climate, health, and energy and infrastructure, represent central policy areas of EUropean integration that, while not always directly tied to the focal border crises (i.e., voiced in relation to migration), are nevertheless invoked within the broader context of governmental border communication concerned with cross-border cooperation. Their inclusion reflects the coding logic in which whole data entries are coded, rather than only the sections relating to the main focal border crises. The functional sub-codes contribute to the portrayal of border issues as embedded within a wider governance framework. For instance, references to the energy Union or the digital capacities of the Union often appear alongside discussions on resilience or sovereignty, suggesting that border security is understood not only in territorial terms but also through interconnected policy domains that strengthen overall capacity.

Crucially for this order, the EU is consistently portrayed by both Baltic and Nordic states as a legitimate and necessary framework for guiding national

decisions on border control. In border communication, references to EU policies, especially those related to the Schengen system, serve to legitimize domestic actions, even in cases where those actions diverge from the Schengen ideal of open internal borders. The Schengen system, while occasionally suspended, remains a foundational principle in border communication, symbolizing trust and shared responsibility among EUMS. Across the cases, the EU is thereby positioned as a broader guarantor of stability, particularly in moments of heightened external threat. For the Baltic countries, this narrative is especially pronounced; the EU is explicitly contrasted with the Soviet past and present-day Russian authoritarianism, constructing EU membership, and its borders, as a protective boundary against non-democratic influence and aggression. Within this context, the EU is viewed not just as an economic or political union, but also as a symbolic and practical foundation for a liberal democratic order. By contrast, the Nordic states, and Sweden in particular, communicate a more ambivalent perspective regarding the supranational governance of the EU, and thereby of the EU as a functional order. While affirming the importance of the EU, Swedish communication emphasizes the need for alignment between EU-level governance and national priorities, suggesting that legitimacy also depends on national context and public support.

7.1.1 *Key themes:* operational instruments, rule-based polity, and crisis management

EUrope as a functional order is imagined as a provider of tools and capacities that structure the workings of the Union and individual EUMS. Such shared instruments are seen as enabling EUMS to act flexibly and proportionately in crisis situations, and for signaling institutional adaptability through shared flexible capabilities and policies. The metanarratives that fall under functional order convene around three themes: operational instruments, rule-based polity, and crisis management.

Operational instruments relate to common tools and policies, imagined as prerequisites for national responsiveness, reinforcing the EU as a provider of functional instruments. These instruments include, but not limited to, regulations, information systems, and relocation quotas. Emphasis on these various instruments is consistent across all four country cases such as is voiced in Finnish communication related to the example of the CEAS, arguing that "[t]he System must be developed in a way that enables efficient, proportionate and more flexible ways for Member States to respond to changing situations." (FI 17.02.2022) In terms of border management, there is a recurrent call for increased capacities at the EU's external border: "[Lithuania's] principled position is that the EU must invest in strengthening the protection of its external borders. Responsibility for the protection of the EU's external borders cannot fall only on the Member States – it is a common responsibility of the entire EU." (LT 06.08.2021) Such measures are seen as essential for the continued development of the EU: "[I]t is crucial for the development of Europe that the member states find solutions to secure the common external border." (SE 24.02.2016) Within metanarratives of a EUropean

functional order, EU agencies such as FRONTEX may be interpreted as operational instruments that enhance the capabilities and capacities of EUMS. Such discussions primarily concern the scope of FRONTEX's mandate. At the same time, FRONTEX is often framed in close relation to sentiments painting EUrope as a security order, further discussed below.

Another key theme related to a functional EUropean order is that of the EU as a rule-based polity, especially prominent in the metanarrative supranational coordination. The dominance of the theme springs from emphasis on common legislation to ensure uniform border control and mobility management that members must uphold. Notably, however, supranational coordination is not presented as a substitute for national responsibility in border management across the Baltic and Nordic states, but as a vital framework within which national actions gain legitimacy and coherence. In this sense, EU-level mechanisms are envisioned as being necessary for coherent border policy implementation. This envisions the EU as a rules-based polity that holds EUMS accountable and maintains internal legitimacy through shared obligations. A rules-based EUrope is further reinforced through framings of illegal border crossings, which constructs the EU as a political space founded on law and regulation. This framing is particularly prominent in relation to the 2021 border crisis with Belarus, where rules-based EU is juxtaposed with the illegal actions attributed to the Belarusian regime:

> The [Baltic and Polish] Prime Ministers underscore that they are ready to provide all necessary protection to persons who enter their countries on conditions under the international refugee law and their obligations, but point out that they will take all necessary actions, including advancing advocating for the possible new restrictive measures by the EU, to prevent any further illegal immigration orchestrated by the Belarusian state. (LT 23.08.2021)

At the same time, border representations from Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania point to tensions between EU legal frameworks and domestic border management needs. These tensions become particularly pronounced in contexts of perceived security threats, not seldomly of a hybrid character, such as instrumentalized migration. While the EU's role in shaping national border procedures is acknowledged, especially in the form of shared regulations or guidelines, there is also an undercurrent of critique. Specifically, national actors express concern over the limitations of existing EU legislation in addressing emergent challenges. For instance, in 2021, Lithuania's response to instrumentalized migration pressures includes appeals for legal clarity and expanded authority at the national level, revealing frustrations with what was perceived as an insufficiently responsive EU legal framework. Similarly, Finland emphasizes the necessity for legislative tools that empower authorities to act decisively: "legislation must be clear and the authorities must have sufficient powers to act pre-emptively and respond effectively to [attempts of instrumentalized migration] influence activities." (FI 15.03.2022) This concern resurfaces in 2022, when Finland proposes a recommendation to adapt Schengen practices in response to Russian visa holders:

"[A] recommendation that allow Schengen countries, when they refuse entry of Russian nationals at their border, to either annul or revoke a person's visa or impose an entry ban on them in accordance with ordinary Schengen practices." (FI 20.09.2022)

The representation of the EU as a coordinated crisis manager underlines its role as a responsive and strategic supranational actor. Across the cases of Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland, border discourse positions the EU as the central node in mobilizing collective responses that go beyond the capacity of individual member states. Lithuania, in response to the instrumentalized migration crisis in 2021, calls for EU-wide action against Belarus, reinforcing the image of the EU as a diplomatic and protective force that defends both territorial borders and shared values. Similarly, Estonia emphasizes the importance of cohesion at the EU level when confronting hybrid threats and implementing sanctions, portraying the Union as a unified entity capable of confronting non-traditional threats. Together, these examples contribute to the construction of an imagined EU as a strategic and capable actor, whose coordinated actions transcend national limitations and reflect its evolving role as a crisis manager within the broader European security and governance landscape. Ultimately, border communication that imagines the EU as a functional order argues that effective coordination is what underpins the EU's legitimacy in times of crisis.

7.1.2 Non-crisis cross-border cooperation

There are many examples that illustrates the EU's supranational coordination on cross-border concerns not related to border crises involving human movement. They reference joint efforts in areas such as market integration, energy, digital, health infrastructure, and environmental sustainability. Through this the EU is imagined as a facilitator of deeper cooperation and interconnectedness where cross-border challenges are met with collective solutions. These non-crisis border articulations reinforce an image of the EU as an evolving structure, continuously working to enhance integration across a number of policy fields. Among the sub-codes of a functional EU order, other than the supranational coordination (crisis specific), market and digital are the ones that are more frequently coded. The other sub-codes are relatively scarce but together they provide insights into imaginations about the EU as a stable, functional order.

The market sub-code frames the EU as grounded in trade and growth, frequently appearing at the intersection of border discourse and regional cooperation. Economic stability and growth are seen as critical elements of national resilience, particularly in the context of regional relations. Economic references in this context typically emphasize two dimensions: first, the financial benefits of cross-border trade and infrastructure projects within the BSR; and second, national expenditures related to general border management. Importantly, this sub-code is not limited to specific migration-related crises but reflects broader concerns with strategic autonomy and continuity in times of disruption. As stated in Finnish communication:

> The EU must develop its resilience and preparedness for crises comprehensively and in a way that takes into account a wide range of different risks. It is particularly important to improve security of supply and ensure that the single market can remain functional in times of crisis. (FI 09.12.2021)

Such statements reflect a vision of the EU as a functional order resting on a cohesive economic bloc, where a functioning shared market reinforce stability.

Thus, while external borders are often framed as sites of contention or conflict, they are also interpreted as zones of economic potential and cooperation. This duality is reflected in communications that highlight the border not only as a security challenge but as a gateway to new markets and cross-border opportunities. For example, in 2015, a Lithuanian statement details a meeting between the President of Malta and the Lithuanian Ambassador to Malta, in which they discuss "the possibility to share the experience of working in the markets of neighbouring countries, e.g. Malta could share its experience of and expertise in operating in the markets of the North African countries." (LT-MFA 08.09.2015) This illustrates how external border states exchange knowledge and best practices related to their liminal geopolitical location, positioning the border as a space of functional engagement. Such interpretations align with broader market-oriented metanarratives that view economic cooperation as an integral part of EU resilience and growth. Thus, in a non-crisis context borders are represented as a means to establish closer cooperation, as further exemplified in a data entry detailing prospective cross-border cooperation between Lithuania and Algeria: "[T]he development of economic relations needs a solid legal foundation, which could be strengthened through the signing of an agreement on economic cooperation and an agreement on the promotion and protection of investments." (LT-MFA 28.09.2015) In this instance, the border is portrayed as a bridge for cooperation.

Notably, cooperative versus protectionist interpretations are often produced side by side in Lithuanian and Estonian communication, somewhat less in Finnish, and even less in Swedish communication. This expects the reader to possess the capability to distinguish between 'good' borders and 'bad' borders, between 'good' neighbors and 'bad' neighbors. This is not necessarily a concern in and of itself; humans have lived with different kinds of borders and boundaries throughout our existence and are therefore familiar with such 'bordered' thinking. What makes this somewhat more precarious to distinguish in governmental communication is the fact that 'bad' borders are much more visible and frequently discussed. In contrast, communication about 'good' borders tends to become overshadowed by the effects of the open border dynamic of the internal Schengen borders. Another dimension of non-crisis border cooperation relates to digital cross-border cooperation. The digital metanarrative constructs the EU as a shared informational and technological space, where knowledge, data, and digital infrastructure transcend national boundaries. This too relates more strongly to national borders in their role as internal Schengen borders. Yet, the external border is strongly alluded to in matters of cybersecurity. While this borderless digital EU is not yet fully realized, it is invoked as a vision of functional and integrated cooperation.

7.2 EUrope as a security order

A EUropean security order centers on how the EU is imagined as a security actor and a defensive alliance. Thus, rather than looking at security as a theme to understand how borders are constructed this section shifts attention to security as a logic of political ordering that structures visions of EUrope. This political ordering is centered around the following key themes: reconfiguring the EU space, collective defense, and hybrid security.

Border communication on security reinforces the idea that EUrope must evolve into a security community that "take[s] more responsibility for its own security and defence." (FI 17.12.2021) Alongside such representations, the EU is frequently portrayed as the institutional structure necessary for ensuring collective security and political stability. This vision emphasizes the need for the EU to be resilient across multiple domains, including energy, transport, and digital infrastructure, in addition to political or economic domains. This framing aligns with the broader strategic vision of the EU as a robust, self-reliant actor in a volatile geopolitical environment. Finnish border communication links national security developments of NATO membership to the EU's evolving role in questions of security and defense: "The NATO membership will also emphasise the importance of the European Union as a security community and our key frame of reference. It is in our best interest to continue strengthening the cooperation between the EU and NATO." (FI 23.08.2022) Such statements reflect the growing expectation that the EU, in partnership with NATO, should play a more pronounced role in safeguarding regional security, signaling a long-term trajectory toward a EUrope capable of defending itself and contributing to collective defense.

This is, furthermore, accompanied by a deepening discourse on the collective European security identity and responsibility. The three states along the EU's external border increasingly portray themselves as acting on behalf of the EU, and emphasize their role in defending Europe's borders as front-line states. Arguments that serve to elevate their geopolitical significance within the EU and to justify their calls for material and political support. Finland, likewise, frames the security of its external border as critical for EU resilience and demands better preparedness and legal frameworks to live up to these expectations, and be better able to adequately respond to various threats, especially hybrid ones.

During the 2015–2016 migration crisis, security concerns in border communication from all four countries center on the unprecedented volume of people arriving at the EU's external borders. In Finland and Sweden, the discourse focuses on controlling migratory flows and maintaining the integrity of the Schengen area, highlighting the need for better situational awareness and consistency across EUMS. Finland emphasizes improved information systems and compliance with EU-wide agreements. Sweden, meanwhile, focuses more narrowly on control standards and the filtering function of the external border, distinguishing these challenges from those associated with its own national borders.

At the same time, in Estonia and Lithuania, by 2015 there was already a discernible tendency to frame migration not solely as a humanitarian or socio-

economic issue, but also through a more articulated security lens. Both countries place strong emphasis on the criminal networks facilitating human smuggling and trafficking, positioning migration as a symptom of organized crime rather than as a standalone challenge. Additionally, alongside communication on the human movement along the EU's southern external border there is a notable emphasis on the geopolitical vulnerabilities of the EU's eastern border, portraying the border as a strategic line of defense for the EU more broadly. Lithuanian communication even warns against "gaps and loopholes" in the EU's legal framework that might be exploited by adversary actors (LT 29.09.2021(2)). During this period, all four countries pushed for a more integrated EU border regime and the expansion of supranational capacities at the border. Lithuania and Estonia strongly advocate for increased funding and an enhanced mandate for FRONTEX: "[T]here is a consensus between the member states that Europe needs border and coast guard working on a uniform basis. 'At the same time, it is very clear that this does not mean replacing national border guards, first and foremost, we are talking about joint additional forces'." (EE 18.12.2015) The eastern stretch of the border is largely discussed with aims to raise awareness of threats emanating from Russia, following the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Thus, signifying that security in Estonian and Lithuanian border communication intersects with multifaceted perceptions of threats specifically pertaining to regional vulnerabilities. Nonetheless, local border securitization should be understood in the larger perspective of securing the external Schengen border.

By 2021, security discourses evolved substantially. The emergence of instrumentalized migration along the Belarusian border marked a decisive shift in threat interpretations. In Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland, migration is perceived as a deliberate tactic of hybrid warfare conducted by authoritarian states. As a result, human movement is increasingly perceived as a 'weapon' wielded by antagonistic states to destabilize the EU. In Estonia and Lithuania particularly, this is framed as a breach of international norms and as an assault on EU values and democratic institutions. Lithuania's rhetoric is particularly sharp, framing the events as part of a 'hybrid war' against the EU and insisting that the crisis affects the entire Union, not just the front-line states. This rhetorical shift is interpreted as aiming to invoke a sense of shared responsibility and justify stronger EU engagement in managing the external border.

In 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine reinforces and intensifies existing securitization trends, pushing state-level discourses even further toward emphasizing supranational defense and border resilience. Estonia and Lithuania shift almost entirely to focusing on state-led threats from Russia, with human movement framed as one vector among many in a broader campaign of destabilization. The concept of border security is no longer about stopping individuals but about safeguarding the EU from adversarial states. For instance, visa bans on Russian citizens are justified by claiming a substantial portion of the Russian population supports the war, portraying their presence as a latent security risk for the entire Schengen area. This line of argumentation underlines how tightly linked external border control is to notions of internal security and the defense of European values.

7.2.1 Key themes: reconfiguring the EU space, collective defense, and hybrid security

The security metanarrative is centered around securing the EU space through bordering and filtering. Across all cases, security concerns are invoked to justify increasingly technical and institutionalized mechanisms of border governance portrayed as essential for maintaining European order. In Lithuania and Estonia, this includes physical infrastructure such as border walls and advanced surveillance systems, highlighting the role of information systems in ensuring security, while Sweden emphasizes administrative tools like readmission agreements and biometric registration.[38] These technologies reflect an understanding of EUrope as a technopolitical entity, which governs movement through various systems of control (Jeandesboz 2016). This framing represents the Union's borders as sites of regulated and securitized governance. Supranational agencies, such as FRONTEX, are commonly referenced as integral to this system, positioned as essential mechanisms for managing external threats, a such these framings reinforces a collective security framework (Léonard 2010; Léonard and Kaunert 2022). By emphasizing both security, operational efficiency and political solidarity, framings of FRONTEX align border control with ideas about EUropean cohesion.

The focus on the EU's eastern border, particularly its vulnerabilities and the need for strengthened defenses, shapes territorial interpretations of the EU's perimeter. In Estonian and Lithuanian border communication, there is a significant emphasis on their roles as border states of the EU, "[a]s the border states of the EU, we must keep Europe safe." (EE 08.09.2022) As such, the security metanarrative challenges configurations the EUropean space by ordering various security challenges. In 2016, Lithuanian border communication highlighted the security challenges emerging along the EU's eastern border urging the EU to retain attention on the entirety of its external border despite the pressures of human movement in the south:

> Although equally relevant, threats from the South and the East are different. Unlike terrorism and migration, Russia poses a challenge to the entire international system. This should be taken into consideration when making decisions on relations with Russia. (LT-MFA 22.06.2016)

These representations reinforce East–West asymmetries within the Union, suggesting uneven exposure to threats and therefore uneven burdens of border enforcement.

[38] In the fall of 2022, Finland also introduced border fences along its approximately 200 km of the eastern border, to be completed in 2026. This stands in stark contrast to earlier stances on border fences from 2021 when the building of a fence was deemed "unrealistic from a cost perspective." (Yle 2021) However, this border fence is not reflected in the text corpus underpinning this study due to methodological constrictions. Nevertheless, the Finnish construction of border fences is a reaction to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and concerns of hybrid threats along the Russia-Finland border.

The recurrence of crises contributes to a perception of EUrope as being in a permanent state of vulnerability and crisis (Zeitlin et al., 2019), which further legitimizes exceptional border practices (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins 2014; Léonard and Kaunert 2022). Security discourses often refer to perpetual instability, instilling a sense of an ongoing geopolitical rupture while urging for improved defense capabilities:

> Europe is at the crossroads, as it confronts extraordinary challenges today. The future of success of the project of the European Union depends on us, Europeans, as well as on our faith and determination to defend our common values. (LT-MFA 25.08.2016)

> […] in a world of growing instability, the EU will take more responsibility for its own security and defence. The EU will promote its interests and values, and reinforce its resilience and preparedness to tackle security threats and challenges effectively. (FI 17.12.2021)

The quote just above (FI 17.12.2021) also emphasizes the collective defense efforts of the EU, which is a key theme in the security metanarrative: to secure EU borders hinges on developing stronger collaboration in security domains. This is conveyed, on the one hand, by emphasizing the shared nature of challenges, as illustrated by a Lithuanian statement: "Irregular migration through Belarus shows that there are no Eastern or Southern European problems, but that there are common European problems." (LT 04.09.2021) Thereby contrasting earlier claims (LT-MFA 22.06.2016) that suggested differences in the threats facing the southern and eastern external EU borders. On the other hand, by emphasizing the importance of effective collective responsibility for security measures, which includes, but is not limited to, the management of the EU's external border:

> In the EU we need to use this momentum to rethink our approach towards the protection of our borders. We firmly believe that the protection of European external border is not just the duty of individual Member States but also the common responsibility of the EU. Hence, proper political attention should be paid to it on the EU level and sufficient funding allocated. (EE 23.08.2021)

Closely connected to the theme of collective defense is the theme of hybrid security. The challenges of hybrid security are increasingly acknowledged in border communication, partly in response the instrumentalization of migrations in 2021. Following the rise in border crossings in the summer of 2021, the Finnish Ministry of the Interior launched a project in November 2021 aimed at "assess[ing] the means of the current legislation that can be used to prepare for and respond to such hybrid influencing, as well as possible needs to amend the legislation in the administrative branch of the Ministry of the Interior." (FI 16.12.2021) At the same time, Finnish border discourse acknowledges that hybrid security encompasses a wide range of security challenges that goes beyond national competencies and capabilities: "The EU must develop its resilience and preparedness for crises

comprehensively and in a way that takes into account a wide range of different risks. It is particularly important to improve security of supply and ensure that the single market can remain functional in times of crisis." (FI 09.12.2021)

While hybrid security to a large extent is framed through legislative preparedness and flexibility in the text corpus studied here, Estonian border communication case introduces a stronger emphasis on the digital domain, reflecting national expertise in digital infrastructures and cybersecurity. [39] This is not to suggest that cybersecurity is absent from border discourse in the other case countries, but rather that Estonia engages with the topic more frequently. The digital sub-code includes mentions of digital competencies across the EU more generally, thus not only limited to security narratives. For example, Estonia is a strong proponent for introducing "a digital single market" and free movement of information as a "fifth freedom of the European Union." (EE 24.10.2016) This partly explains the relatively high frequency of the digital sub-code in Estonian border communication, across both national and EU border discourse. More specifically related to border crises, the strengthening of digital competencies is explicitly linked to the strengthening of EU borders in that "the key issue with regard to guarding the borders lies in flawlessly functioning information systems, which must be reciprocally operated by all internal security authorities across Europe." (EE 18.10.2016(2)) This is underpinned by the awareness of hybrid security challenges in the domain of the digital: "In addition to conventional methods of warfare, these days, computers and social media are also used for military purposes." (EE 07.10.2015)

7.2.2 Distinguishing a geopolitical order from a security order?

While this dissertation has opted to distinguish between a security order and a geopolitical order, these two are in practice closely intertwined. Nevertheless, some distinctions remain. Simplified, one can say that while geopolitical concerns tend to entail security dimensions, not all security concerns entail geopolitical dimensions. The main reason for the distinction employed here, however, is that these two topics, or orders, are distinguishable in communication on borders. Security concerns are much broader than questions of a geopolitical character. Thus, in order to sharpen the analysis, the two were separated during the coding process.

With that said, the security metanarrative does contribute to geopolitical imaginations about the EU as an order. Not least because the security metanarrative renders the EU as a geopolitical actor capable of defending its external borders and responding to hybrid threats, particularly after 2021. In Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland, border communication increasingly enforced the notion that the EU needs to "take more responsibility for its own security and defence,"

[39] Estonian focus on cybersecurity is also grounded in previous experiences of cyberattacks, more specifically in 2007 when the country was targeted by major cyberattacks, perpetrated by hackers sanctioned and sponsored by the Russian state (Herzog 2017).

(FI 17.12.2021), or as a key defender of the European "security order" in the face of Russian aggression (FI 13.09.2022). These framings position the EU as an entity that must act with force and conviction, reinforcing its role in preserving geopolitical order. At the same time, the instrumentalization of migration instigated by Belarus and Russia is presented as a hostile act against the EU, enabling EUMS to frame the Union as a geopolitical target. This reframing, found in statements from Latvia and Estonia (LT 18.06.2021; EE 23.08.2021), demonstrates how border-related crises are used to bolster the narrative of the EU as a geopolitical agent, actively defending itself from external coercion.

There is a particularly noticeable interconnection between geopolitics, and the sub-codes hybrid security (security metanarrative), and energy (functional metanarrative). They frequently appear together in governmental communication, especially in the border communication from Lithuania. The emphasis is related to energy supply, mirroring communication emerging from Estonia on the importance of establishing secure energy supply within the EU: "as we know the energy supply is not just a technical or economical issue, but has become a political issue, allowing Russia to have leverage over some countries. We were basically held hostage to the situation for a long time." (LT-MFA 18.11.2015) This narrative should be a familiar line of reasoning to most readers, as energy was indeed used as a tool for political pressure exerted by Russia against the EU in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with the result of surging energy prices across many EUMS. The link between energy and geopolitics is equally noticeable in Lithuanian discussions on the Nord Stream gas pipe:

> [The Nord Stream gas pipe] has no economic background. Nothing. It's just politics, to skip Ukraine, which is really not very nice, to put it mildly. And it's really very sad that this project is taking place, and that European companies are taking part in it. Europe doesn't need Nord Stream 2. (LT-MFA 17.11.2015)

Lithuanian discourse on energy and geopolitics also relates to a nuclear power plant located in Belarus close to the Lithuanian border which was under construction in 2015–2016. Communication regarding the plant is present also in 2021, pointing to the security risks of the plant, interpreted to entail both traditional security frames, energy security risks, as well as health risks: "[The] Belarussian regime's unpredictability has further highlighted the problem of the unsafe Astravets NPP. 'The unsafe Astravets NPP is a threat to the whole of the EU and a reminder that Russia will always tend to use energy projects for geopolitical purposes'." (LV 08.07.2021) These statements frame energy dependency on Russia as a strategic vulnerability that threatens Lithuania and the broader stability of the EU, demonstrating an interconnectedness of metanarratives.

7.3 EUrope as a normative order

Across Baltic and Nordic border communication, the EU is imagined as a normative order that anchors national and supranational identity and maps the moral boundaries of Europe. This is largely organized around three key themes: identity, free movement, and humanitarianism. Together they reveal representations of a shared, if shifting, moral geography.

Narratives of the EU as a normative entity are rooted in liberal democratic values such as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Borders are imagined not only as physical lines but as symbolic markers of these shared principles, positioning the EU as a "community of values." (FI 23.08.2022) Belonging to this value-based community is seen as both a marker of identity and a source of security: "The security and success of Estonia are directly related to our belonging to the European Union and NATO, as well as the European value system." (EE 24.02.2016) This is particularly evident in moments of perceived threat, where actors frame the defense of borders as synonymous with defending EUropean ideals. As one Lithuanian statement describes instrumentalized migration crisis in 2021: "The aim of the attack is to force the members of the European Union and the EU as an institution to give up their values and give in to blackmail." (LT 28.11.2021) Hence, in times of crisis, the EUropean normative order is often articulated as moral steadfastness: "Our best response is to stay true to our values, and what's most important, stay true to ourselves so that our behaviour does not come to resemble that of the attackers." (EE 19.11.2015).

Across both the Baltic and the Nordic contexts, governments emphasize their role as protectors of the liberal European order, Sweden and, to some extent, Finland do so by means of highlighting their humanitarian traditions. Estonia and Lithuania are more explicit in this regard, by emphasizing their contribution in defending the 'free world' against antagonistic states such as Russia and Belarus.

7.3.1 What are EU values?

EU values, as expressed in Baltic and Nordic border communication, operate both as formal principles and as lived norms that structure a European way of life. In Estonia, these values are often referenced as an inherent part of national identity:

> European values are a part of our identity. We follow certain principles and hold on tightly to the general principles of democracy. We have personal liberty and freedom of speech, we understand and respect each other, we discuss, argue and are responsible for our words and actions. (EE 29.09.2015(2))

Yet, despite such references, these values are seldomly defined in governmental communication explicitly, instead assuming a shared understanding of their meaning, likely aligning with Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights. In Finnish border communication, EU values are more explicitly aligned with this list of values, framed as evolving through cooperation and integration among like-minded

states. Borders are thus depicted as active sites where EU values are enacted and shaped. Alongside these normative articulations, the metanarrative also encompasses humanitarian commitments, such as providing aid and support to those in need. Such emphasis is particularly visible in Swedish border communication, but echoed across the other country cases as well.

Most commonly, EU values are articulated in connection to the fundamental freedoms, especially the freedom of movement, indicating emphasis on these aspects. As one example states:

> Estonia consistently stands for European values and works to ensure that the voice of the European Union is effective and united in the world. It is important for Estonian people and companies that Estonia stands up for the four fundamental freedoms of the European Union and the internal market, and continues to stand up for the fifth fundamental freedom, the free movement of data, because data is at the core of the twin transition. (EE 01.12.2021)

EU values are framed as abstract ideals, but they are also framed as commitments that demand concrete actions. The invocation of solidarity elaborated above, emphasizes that value-based membership in the EU comes with shared responsibility toward the Union as a whole:

> Next to NATO membership, belonging to the European Union carries as great a responsibility. Talking about European values is suddenly no longer merely for appearances. Words must be affirmed with actions. The crisis has swelled so large that the entire responsibility cannot be left on the shoulders of those countries where the wartime refugees arrive. Estonia is not an isolated island which would be left untouched by what is happening elsewhere. Estonian European and value-based obligation is to contribute responsibly and in solidarity to the solving of the crisis. Regardless of whether by tying the shoelaces of a little child or helping someone on the ground – no person is greater than when he bows to help someone in need. (EE 29.09.2015)

This statement highlights the belief that the normative EU identity manifests in practical solidarity toward other EUMS. Not least because individual EUMS, as part of a larger EUropean whole, cannot remain insulated from external upheavals. The core message of the statement, however, revolves around notions of humanitarian assistance to individuals in need. As such, the moral imperative to act positions humanitarian engagement as both a duty and a marker of EUropeanness. At the same time, EUropean values are invoked to justify protective border measures. In this light, "belonging to the European Union carries a great responsibility." (EE 29.09.2015) can be understood as upholding defensive obligations toward the Union and its EUMS, rather than humanitarian efforts. Thus, securitization of the external Schengen border may be interpreted through the lens of safeguarding the EUropean project. Yet again, the statement might also be interpreted from the perspective of upholding Union-wide interpretations of EUropean values.

References to EUropean values serve to interpret the EU in civilizational terms. EU values are occasionally conveyed as having the potential to transform the world through their dissemination, which can help mitigate threats to the EU. For instance, this involves ensuring regional stability and security through enlargement (LT-MFA 10.11.2016) and acting as a counterforce against global threats, such as terrorism (LT-MFA 16.12.2015). In 2021, values determined cohesiveness within the Union, "the worsening situation in Belarus has underlined the fact that the EU Member States have very strong common interests and shared values." (FI 23.08.2021) In 2022, values increasingly came to represent a divide of global scale, distinguishing democracies from autocracies: "Cooperation among progressive democracies is now more important than ever. We need to defend our common values, universal human rights and democracy with new force, new determination. We need to build bridges across the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific regions." (FI 02.12.2022) This suggests that narratives of EUropean values are travelling from one crisis to another. Although, such patterns are more prevalent between the two latter time periods as they represent instances of threats by neighboring states.

Building upon that, in the context of border discourse, the EU values system is frequently invoked to articulate a deeper civilizational divide, particularly in relation to authoritarian regimes such as Russia and Belarus. Europe is framed as a space of values that are positioned in direct contrast to the perceived repression and aggression of its eastern neighbors. This reinforces an East–West division, where borders are imagined not only geographically but also morally. In a speech by the Latvian then-Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė (TS–LKD), this dichotomy is starkly expressed:

> The 24th of February, the day when we woke up to a new reality, also happened to hit the calendar as the day of mourning for Russians and Belarusians around the world too, because the two dictators not only have spread terror over Ukraine but also soaked their own nations in blood that will not be easy to wash. The 24th of February is the day when the comfortable illusion of neutrality was shattered. All the nations of the world had to answer a question: what do you choose – on whose side are you? (LT 21.03.2022(s))

This rhetoric constructs a binary of moral versus immoral, civilized versus barbaric, in which the EU's normative identity is both sharpened and defended. This language of division is made more potent by recalling previous East-West divisions. However, in a *longue durée* perspective, imaginaries about a civilizational divide are not new, Russia has repeatedly been interpreted as barbaric and lesser than Europe (Paul 2001).

A prominent theme, therefore, is that of protecting EUropean values and the EUropean way of life from external threats. This concern was especially evident in communications from 2021 and 2022, which characterized the threats to the EU in terms of emanating from other states: "Lithuania is facing a hybrid war, which is directed against the entire EU and democratic values." (LT 18.08.2021). This perspective leads to interpretations that understand divisions between

different parts of the world in terms of value-based civilizational divides, separating the democratic world from the undemocratic and/or criminal world. One statement emphasizes, "It is also unacceptable that citizens of the aggressor-state are able to freely travel in the EU, whilst at the same time people in Ukraine are being tortured and murdered." (Joint Statement 07.09.2022) Similar patterns have previously been observed in Kaja Kallas' (REF) social-media communications in response to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Hagelin and Gibson 2024).

The entanglement of various types of borders further reinforces the centrality of EUropean values in contemporary border discourse. This interconnection becomes especially apparent in moments of geopolitical transition, such as Finland's and Sweden's decision to pursue NATO membership. As then-Prime Minister Sanna Marin (SDP) affirmed, the decision should "encourage us [Finland/Finland and Sweden/NATO members][40] to stand behind our shared values and to defend them." (FI 23.08.2022) Here, national security considerations are directly linked to normative commitments, with values functioning not only as guiding principles but as elements that legitimize institutional alignment and cross-border solidarity. This entanglement highlights how borders are framed in terms of defending a value-based community. Furthermore, in cases where national borders simultaneously operate as internal EU borders, this overlap is framed as a site for cultivating a common set of values that continue to deepen through cooperation and integration. Rather than presenting the national and the EU levels in opposition, the discourse suggests a mutual reinforcement in which border security, institutional belonging, and normative commitments are intertwined, thereby producing a layered understanding of borders as both protective lines and symbolic thresholds of a shared EUropean political identity.

7.3.2 Key themes: identity, free movement, and humanitarianism

The normative metanarrative draws upon European values to signify identity characteristics: "European values are a part of our identity," (EE 29.09.2015) and to articulate belonging: "It is the European nature of Estonia, supportive of European unity, that will keep us from standing alone again." (EE 24.02.2016) More specifically, values are framed as emerging across or at the border. For instance, Finland initially emphasizes the importance of open and direct discussions with Russia (Kononenko 2005), even in instances of disagreement: "We believe it is important that we can discuss openly and directly with Russia even when our views differ sharply. Finland has highlighted issues of human rights and democracy when justified." (FI 24.08.2021, author's translation) Although such sentiments have drastically shifted since 2022, their existence nevertheless illustrates that EU values guide national political behavior. In Sweden, the essence of EUropean values is boiled down to "human value," (SE 04.09.2015)

[40] The original quote uses the term 'us,' but it is somewhat unclear from the context of the text whether this self-reflexive reference pertains only to Finland, if it is directly addressing the decision made by Finland and Sweden, or if it is intended to represent NATO as a whole.

although EUropean values are not as explicitly noted in the Swedish discourse on the EU's external border when compared to that of the other countries. There are, however, manifold references to the notion of humanitarianism more broadly, as well as direct mentions of humanitarian aid which is a sub-code to European values. This is, however, primarily representative for the 2015–2016 crisis. There is not enough data to accurately discuss if this standpoint holds in 2021 and 2022; or what human value is imagined to encompass in closer detail.

The metanarrative emphasizes free movement as a core principle embodying a normative EUrope, a notion consistently identified across all three time periods. This principle is particularly salient in communication concerning national borders that also function as internal EU borders: "Free movement is an integral part of our Nordic identity and one of the strengths in the Nordic societies." (FI 27.10.2015) In Swedish communication, however, freedom of movement is more often represented through references to the structural integrity of Schengen rather than through explicit invocations of freedom of movement itself. Notably, even as external pressure increases, border discourse stresses that restrictions mut remain temporary and proportionate, in order to avoid fracture the Union from within. The rhetoric thus crafts a normative self-image in which to be European is to cross borders with ease. This understanding mirrors the emphasis on Schengen integrity, which is more frequently highlighted in external EU border discourse.

Humanitarianism emerges as a key discursive thread in governmental border communication across Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden, though its articulation and prominence vary by context and over time. In the early phase of the 2015–2016 migration crisis, humanitarianism is foregrounded as a moral and political imperative across the region. Saving lives and respecting human rights is presented as a central concern: "Our priority must be saving human lives and respecting human rights. However, we should also go beyond that and work together to address the root causes of migration." (FI 16.07.2016) Lithuania similarly emphasizes the urgency: "As we witness horrific scenes of some migrants crossing seas to get into the EU, we cannot remain indifferent to this humanitarian crisis. European values oblige us to help refugees fleeing war or persecution." (LT-MFA 08.09.2015(2)) Sweden, the most outspoken of the four country cases on matters of humanitarianism, calls for a shift in perceptions on immigration:

> Europe must shift its perspective. In many countries refugees are just seen as a burden. And I do not deny that it costs money to take care of people in need, to give them education and health care. But I am convinced that done right, a country benefits from migration. Europe must stop looking upon people as costs. Europe must look upon people as human beings, who can be a part of building our continent – if they are provided with the right tools. That should be the European approach. (SE 24.04.2015)

Taken together, the early stages of 2015 reveal a shared emphasis on compassion and responsibility, albeit articulated to varying degrees. It should however be emphasized that this outlook is short-lasting. This is exemplified in Swedish border

discourse, and not the least in its border policies, as Sweden's borders became increasingly controlled as the human movement toward the EU and Sweden remained high.

Over time, the humanitarian narrative undergoes significant transformation. In Finland, while the language of solidarity remains, humanitarianism gradually shifts toward a more controlled approach, emphasizing external solutions such as the EU–Turkey deal and burden-sharing through reforms to the Dublin Regulation. A critical examination, however, reveals an underlying protectionist motive. Improving conditions in origin countries is frequently emphasized as a means of preventing migration to Europe: "It is important to help people where they are, so that they have hope for the future and do not need to leave their homes to embark, for instance to Europe, on a journey that might prove to be very dangerous." (FI 02.02.2016) This controlled approach is further entrenched as efforts to differentiate between genuine and non-genuine migrants move to the foreground, reinforcing the filtering logic of borders:

> European values is about helping refugees fleeing war or persecution but has warned that economic migrants should not be allowed to piggy back on genuine refugees and enter Europe. /…/ Of course, there are those, who are less enthusiastic as the migration wave puts extra burden on the social system. That's why it is so important to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. People can understand and are ready to help if someone seeks to escape from war or persecution. (LT-MFA 08.09.2015(2))

Distinctions between European and non-European migrants, such as the more favorable framing of Ukrainian mobility, highlights the conditional nature of humanitarian discourse (Opiłowska 2025): "We clearly understand concerns over the new challenge of migration in Europe, so we have to remain objective. The citizens of Ukraine do not pose an essential threat to us." (LT-MFA 25.08.2016) Granted, this particular statement specifically addresses the question of visa liberalization with Ukraine and therefore does not directly comment on migratory movements. However, its timing amid the migration crisis reveals an underlying concern about distinguishing between those considered acceptable and those deemed undesirable to move across EU borders. As such, the discourse produces imaginaries about what constitutes a genuine refugee, but also what constitutes a desirable individual on the move.

In Sweden the large influx of asylum seekers triggers a substantial policy shift, resulting in more restrictive bordering practices and the normalization of previously 'temporary' measures as these take on a permanent character (Hagelund 2020). In other words, about securing the border. In the Swedish case, this also entails a discursive legitimization from within the government, in order to justify such an extensive shift away from humanitarianism (Hagelund 2020). The most significant shift occurs in the years following the migration crisis, as a policy paradigm among the political parties emerges favoring more restrictive immigration policies (Emilsson 2020), which is also demonstrated through changing political coalition patterns (Hellström and Lindahl 2021). However, that is not as well reflected in

this study due to the scope of the dataset and the format of Swedish governmental communication. Swedish governmental communication regarding borders tends to focus on a limited range of topics for each communication entry, resulting in a narrower border discourse compared to the other countries under study. Adding to that, the shift is more noticeable in discussions about the national border, which hardened over time. In contrast, discourse on the external EU border retained a humanitarian perspective for a somewhat longer period, thereby mirroring previous longstanding Swedish self-narrations of exceptionalism as a humanitarian 'super-power.' This in turn, reflects the 'activist' foreign policy that characterized the Social Democrats in Sweden in the latter half of the twentieth century, and in particular the leadership of the former Prime Minister Olof Palme (Eriksson 2020; for a critique see Dahl 2006).

In Estonia and Lithuania, border communications from 2021 and 2022 draw sharper distinctions between different categories of migrants, particularly during the 2021 Belarus border crisis. It is especially emphasized that the humanitarian responsibility lay with Belarus and international institutions such as the UN. Humanitarian concessions were increasingly framed as security risks: "Belarus is responsible for systemic human rights violations against both its own and foreign citizens. Our actions cannot create a new channel for human trafficking in the European Union." (EE 01.12.2021) Similarly, EU values were rearticulated to support exclusionary logics, such as in the 2022 visa restrictions targeting Russian tourists. As such, values help to justify selective border closure: "Travel to the European Union is a privilege, not a human right. As the people of Ukraine are being tortured, murdered and terrorised, the citizens of the aggressor state should not be able to enjoy the benefits of the free world." (EE 08.09.2022) When Helsinki and Tallinn restricted Russian tourist visas, officials argued it was "morally unacceptable to allow the Russian middle and upper class to continue to enjoy their vacations while their army kills, tortures and terrorises Ukrainians." (FI 02.12.2022) Crucially, EU values expressed in communication on national borders extend beyond identity formation; the emphasis on values and existentialism convey divisions between conflicting value systems (Mansbach and Wilmer 2001). This mirrors the discussion on civilizational divides just above.

The findings from this study suggest that rhetoric about values sharpens when the border and polity appear threatened. As one Estonian example demonstrates: "continuing with sanctions against Russia was crucial for putting relentless pressure on Russia, and from Estonia's foreign policy perspective, it is a values-based and existential issue," (EE 08.09.2022) drawing a stark line between liberal Europe and an aggressive Russia. In the spring of 2022, Finland and Sweden translated the same binary into an institutional choice as their application for NATO membership was discursively intertwined with the defense of shared values, as quoted above: "Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO will be a significant step for the whole alliance, and hopefully it for its part will encourage us to stand behind our shared values and to defend them." (FI 23.08.2022) The border here is represented as a frontier between normative orders; guarding it becomes a moral duty.

Taken together, these themes show a dynamic incorporation of EUropean values as underpinning policy decisions. The border is imagined as the laboratory where these values are refined, sometimes widened, sometimes narrowed, according to shifting threat perceptions. Moreover, it also confirms that identity constructions produce belonging. Across Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden the vocabulary differs, but the underlying story is similar, EU values are abstract in their conceptualizations, yet still functions as living practices that legitimate a wide and varying range of border policies and measures. The result is a moralized border discourse that both unites and hierarchizes, inviting insiders to act in the name of EUrope while reminding outsiders that admission depends on upholding, or at least not violating, the same values.

7.4 EUrope as a regional order

A regional EUropean order is more commonly articulated in communication concerning national borders, suggesting that the regional dimension of the EU is often imagined through a national lens. Although the conceptualization is not a novel idea, it has become somewhat discarded (e.g. Elias 2008). Nevertheless, border discourse emphasizes regionally grounded interpretations of security challenges, while framing national responses as integral to broader regional stability. At the same time, national security is envisioned within both regional and supranational frameworks of collective security, "Estonia's security is ensured, but we have to work for it every day – this applies to both our immediate neighbours, as well as partners and allies in the European Union and NATO." (EE 14.12.2015(2)) United Nordic and Baltic efforts in security dimensions have become even more pronounced following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as the region has taken a leading role in advocating for continued support for Ukraine:

> We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and Ukraine, strongly condemn the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine that has caused enormous suffering to the Ukrainian people. It has also undermined security and stability in Europe and represents a serious attack on our rules based international order. (FI 29.11.2022)

Regional security highlights the regional structuring of the EU as an entity. Already in 2015 and 2016, the Baltic states strongly emphasized regional security challenges, illustrating both awareness and efforts to communicate a regional perspective to western counterparts, largely preoccupied with the human movement along the southern stretch of the EU's external border. Finnish and Lithuanian cooperation exemplifies this: "We are facing very similar threats, so we have to strengthen cooperation to ensure the security in the region. Not less important is our cooperation to counter Russian propaganda." (LT-MFA 28.09.2015(2)) Such statements highlight joint threat perceptions as well as regional solidarity in the

face of external pressures. Regional distinctions within the EU are further illustrated through references to different challenges along different stretches of the EU's external border as "special attention [is paid] to the threats arising at southern and eastern borders of the EU." (LT-MFA 19.05.2015) However, in response to the 2021 instrumentalized migration crisis, Lithuanian communication increasingly emphasizes the need for collective EU responses across different regions: "[i]rregular migration through Belarus shows that there are no Eastern or Southern European problems, but that there are common European problems." (LT 04.09.2021) Taken together, this produces an image of a regional EU order, underpinned by regional support and burden-sharing.

In close connection to the previous point, BSR cooperation and regional solidarity is more broadly portrayed as a key factor for enhancing regional resilience and security. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

> The close cooperation between Finland and Estonia and our geographical proximity are factors that enhance security. We must strive to resolve the tension in our neighbouring regions by collaboration and measures that strengthen security. (FI 03.11.2016)

> Bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden fosters security and stability in our region. (FI 19.06.2016)

Another example of regional initiatives to strengthen resilience is the border control cooperation between Sweden and Denmark, where Sweden drew inspiration from Denmark (SE 11.04.2016), illustrating how border management strategies are shared across the region. Across the three focal crises, especially the two later ones, similar patterns of cooperation are embedded within a growing temporal and spatial interconnectedness of regional awareness, underlining how turbulent contexts necessitate deeper regional collaboration: "The turbulent times are leading us to even closer cooperation – we discussed the restrainment of the Lukashenko regime, but also our response to the growing threats and offensive messages from Russia." (EE 08.12.2021)

Through the regional metanarrative, the BSR is portrayed as a frontline region responsible for defending EU values and territorial borders, reinforcing the notions of distinct northern region in the EU (Joenniemi 2008; Gänzle 2018), and by extension a regionalized EU border regime. This is especially evident in the border management of the EU's external border in 2022, when Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland (alongside Latvia and Poland) implement region-wide national visa restrictions targeting Russian nationals. These measures were taken despite a lack of EU-wide agreement, and, in fact, ran counter to existing EU regulations at the time, although that visa facilitation agreement with Russia was suspended shortly after the invasion of Ukraine. By August 2022, the EUMS reached an agreement

to suspend the visa facilitation process for short-term travels from Russia.[41] As noted in Estonian border communication, "[u]ntil we have come to an agreement on EU level on restricting entry for Russian nationals into the European Union, we are imposing these restrictions regionally." (EE 08.09.2022) The regional response is, thus, framed as a legitimate and necessary substitute in the absence of an EU-wide agreement, suggesting a decentralized but cohesive EU order emanating from the various regions. This reflects an understanding of EUrope as composed of regional blocs that can act decisively when broader consensus is lacking. In this way, geopolitical challenges are both a regional burden and a source of regional agency.

7.5 EUrope as a progressive order

The EU is also framed as a project of continuous evolution and progress, capable of adapting its tools and strategies to respond to new and emerging challenges. The progress metanarrative emphasizes the EU's historical trajectory of integration and policy development, where the invocation of past achievements serves to legitimize present decisions and to orient future action. Hence, the articulation of progress positions the EU not as a static entity but as one that learns and reforms in response to geopolitical shifts and security threats. Lithuanian then-Prime Minister Šimonytė (TS-LDK) underlined this sentiment, stressing that,

> The EU must learn from its experiences and adjust to ever changing challenges and their contexts. Be it a blurred line between freedom of speech and disinformation, or an abuse of our migration and asylum policies by weaponizing human smuggling. We must review our policies and our acquis and find new mechanisms and solutions. To be able to preserve our fundamental values but not let adversaries turn them into our biggest vulnerabilities. (LT 09.09.2021)

Similarly, Finnish communication emphasizes the importance of EU resilience and strategic autonomy: "It is natural for us to use the European Union for addressing these vulnerabilities. The EU must become more self-sufficient and ready to act than it is today, regardless of the leverage of the kind of countries that do not share our common values." (FI 23.08.2022)

The notion of progress is succinctly articulated as the activity of continuous learning. This posits we understand progress as building upon previous structures and drawing from experiences to establish new structures and measures. In other words, it interprets articulations of past EU integration to urge for increasing integration, embodying an 'ever-closer union.'

[41] Although beyond the scope of the argument here, visa regulations are a powerful dimension of the EU's soft power and serve as a foreign policy tool to legitimatize or delegitimatize non-EUropean regimes, as argued by Rosina (2023).

> The EU has a unique opportunity to emerge from the ongoing transition more united, more capable and stronger than it used to be. (FI 23.08.2022)

> The Lithuanian and Polish Prime Ministers also urge the EU and its Member States to use this momentum to strengthen the common EU migration and asylum policy as well as to rethink the approach towards the protection of common borders. (LT 06.08.2021(2))

Thus, progress is interpreted as deepening integration that encompasses expanding capabilities to manage events of crisis.

Notably, progress permeates many of the other metanarratives, capturing forward-looking notions of development and illustrating the interconnectedness of these narratives. For instance, Estonia draws on lessons from its historical vulnerabilities to justify alignment and reform: "If we want to learn anything from the painful lessons of our history, we should understand that having allies and friends is quite literally a matter of life and death for us." (EE 24.02.2016) Progress also appears in the ethical justification of the 2022 visa restrictions, which sought to align national measures with EU sanctions:

> We have seen an enormous rise in the number of Russian citizens coming into or passing through Estonia. The possibility they have to visit Estonia, or other parts of Europe via Estonia, en masse is not in line with the principles of the sanctions we have imposed. In implementing them, Estonia sought to restrict the ability of the aggressor state to carry on with ordinary international life at the levels of both the state and its citizens. (EE 11.08.2022)

Though values dominate this justification, security concerns are also embedded, framed as "protecting the public policy and internal security." (Joint Statement 07.09.2022) The pervasive characteristic of progress suggests that governmental border communication constructs a discourse that seeks to form cohesive policy justifications, rooted in a wide combination of metanarratives, in turn reflecting wide aspirations for EUrope.

While progress at the level of the EU's external border reflects continued supranational integration, at the level of the national border, the narrative does not evoke the same sense of symbolic intensification for shared policies reflecting continued integration. Instead, the idea of progress is expressed in terms of effective and efficient functions, as displayed through the evolution of legal frameworks aimed at enhancing border capabilities, both in a national and supra-national sense, such as in Finnish examples (FI 12.04.2022; FI 21.04.2022). In Estonia, narratives of learning and reform are closely intertwined with broader geopolitical alignment: "we are part of the West which dusts off its strategy, learns to protect itself again, and stands united for its values in the world." (EE 29.09.2015)

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how governmental border communication from Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden produces imaginations about EUropean orders. The chapter has more specifically demonstrated how EUropean orders emerge in border discourse, by looking at the frequency of metanarratives in communication on national borders and the EU's external border. The orders that each metanarrative corresponds to were not exclusive nor static; instead, they appeared to be re-imagined through crisis and therefore subject to contestation.

The chapter has paid special attention to three out of the six imagined orders, namely functional, security, and normative. The functional and security orders dominated across both national and EU external borders, though in inverse proportion. The functional order was more prominent in external border discourse, while the security order was more commonly referenced in national border communication. This asymmetry illustrated how the discursive interpretation of the purpose and position of borders shapes how EUrope is imagined. The normative order, despite its lower frequency, comparable to the other remaining orders, was nonetheless elaborated on at greater length. The normative envisioning of the EU helps to display how the EU is envisioned as a union of multiple, but complementary, orders.

The functional order envisioned the EU as a space of supranational coordination, characterized by effective and up-to-date supranational governance, facilitating efficient crisis response at the national level. This order was imagined through emphasis on crisis-specific supranational coordination, meaning that the EU is reactive and responsive to crisis events. Yet, some tensions emerged with regard to the adequacy of EU legal frameworks, particularly in times of challenges interpreted as hybrid threats. At the same time, a functional order is also envisioned in governmental border communication through the emphasis on non-crisis cooperation across fields such as market, energy and infrastructure, climate, digital, and health coordination. This framed border governance within broader cross-border cooperation, portraying the EU as an order characterized by its evolving structure enabling effectiveness and resilience within the EUMS.

The security order increasingly constructed the EU as a security actor and a defensive alliance, whose institutional structure remains necessary for ensuring collective security and political stability in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment. The EU was, thereby, also presented as essential for regional resilience. Against this backdrop, border communication invoked the notion of a capable EU that is resilient in the face of evolving security challenges; these challenges were increasingly interpreted as being of a hybrid nature. Notably, security concerns evolved from migration management to framing migration as a hybrid threat deployed by authoritarian states. As a result, communications increasingly justified border technologies and legal reforms through narratives of existential threats. Lastly, while the dissertation analytically distinguished between the security and geopolitical orders, governmental border communication was

regularly found to blend the two, envisioning the EU as a geopolitical actor preserving stability within the EU.

The normative order interpreted the EU as a normative community of shared values and freedoms, which anchored both national and supranational identities. EUropean values served to signify EUropean belonging; they thereby contributed to distinguishing insiders from outsiders, often mapping a moral frontier that aligned the EU with liberal democratic ideals and cast authoritarian states like Russia and Belarus as threats. In this light, the defense of borders was framed as being synonymous with defending EUropean ideals. While humanitarianism initially dominated, particularly in Sweden, over time it was subordinated to security logics, with humanitarian aid becoming conditional and selective. EU values also legitimized restrictive practices like visa bans, framing them as moral responses to adversarial state aggression. This is linked to the interpretation of the EU in civilizational terms, which underpinned border policies aimed at protecting EUropean values and the EUropean way of life from external threats. Values were, thus, represented as adaptable principles, used to regulate movement and justify control.

The analysis demonstrated that border communication by Baltic and Nordic governments constructs diverse but overlapping visions of EUrope, shaped by shifts in crisis dynamics. While the orders have been analytically separated here for the sake of clarity, in practice, they interact and overlap extensively, reflecting the evolving nature of bordering interpretations and practices. For example, solidarity appeared both as a functional mechanism and a normative principle; security concerns overlapped with geopolitical narratives, particularly in discourses from Estonia, Lithuania, and, to a lesser extent, Finland; and the civilizational demarcations that are (re)emerging in the value-based order resemble ideas about threats from adversary states in the security order.

The findings on EUropean orders hint at the role of borders in the envisioning of national and supranational identities. The following chapter will examine questions of identity more closely, by examining how these two forms of identity are constructed in governmental border communication. This exploration will include an examination of the influence of history and territory formulations.

8 IDENTITIES IN BORDER COMMUNICATION

This chapter concludes the empirical section of the study, by focusing on the final dimension of the theoretical framework: identities. Although a broad field of inquiry, the discussion here is limited to how identities are constructed through border communication. In doing so, the chapter also lays the groundwork for reflecting on how these identity constructions contribute to broader visions of EUrope. Like the preceding chapter, this chapter is guided by the second research question, which examines how discursive representations of various types of borders reflect visions of EUrope.

As noted in the theory chapter, the objective of the identities dimension of the IBO triad is to examine how governmental border communication shapes notions of collective identity, predominantly at the EU level. More specifically, the identity dimension focuses on whether border discourse displays a sense of 'we,' and how it incorporates territorial and historical components. Note well, although the key focus for identity construction is that of a collective identity within the EU the following chapter engages with notions of national identity as well. This is because the latter is entangled with the former, making it worthwhile to consider also how national identity constructions appear in border communication and the way they interweave with notions of EUrope. Throughout the text corpus, the two forms of identities have been coded separately in an attempt to distinguish how these forms of identities potentially appear differently in communication on the national borders and the EU's external border respectively. Explicit references to identity are generally infrequent in border communication across the four country cases. Such references are more prevalent in Estonian and, to a lesser degree, Lithuanian communication than in Finnish or Swedish communication. One possible reason for this lack of emphasis on identity could be that the format of governmental communication examined here does not allow much space for identity construction. Alternatively, a different researcher might interpret the data differently and conclude that identity is more extensively elaborated.

Finnish and especially Swedish discourses on EU borders reveal a notable absence of national and supranational identity narratives in communication, regardless of the type of border. The less emotionally descriptive language is particularly the case for the 2015–2016 time period, where the one notable reference to an explicit mention of a EUropean identity appears in a joint article by then-Prime Minister Juha Sipilä (Kesk) and his Swedish counterpart, then-Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (S), where they reflect on perceived threats to the EUropean way of life: "We are living in times where our existing world order, our fundamental values and our open societies are being challenged from many directions. In times like these, it is imperative to act responsibly and from a long-term perspective." (FI 12.01.2016) While the press release touches on the migration crisis, it also addresses broader concerns such as terrorist threats post-Paris attacks in November 2015 and the rise of ISIS. The narrative could also be interpreted as extending to regional security challenges, particularly following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. In 2021 and 2022, the identity meta-

narratives were slightly more prevalent in Finnish border communication, although more so for supranational identity than national identity. As a result, Finnish and Swedish communication surrounding the three crisis periods largely lacks identity-related expressions, resulting in a more reserved or detached tone compared to, for example, Estonia's more emotive narratives. This detachment produces communication that is less emotionally descriptive, which in turn makes it more difficult to discern identity narratives.

The chapter is structured as follows, initially I discuss the prevalence of national identity constructions in border communication, demonstrating towards the end of the section how national identity constructions are entangling with constructions of an EU identity. Next, the discussion shifts to more specifically examine EU identity constructions. Finally, the chapter discusses the use of history and understandings of territory as displays of identity construction.

8.1 National identity constructions

This section examines how national identity is constructed through the imaginaries and representations of borders. While the main focus of the dissertation centers on visions of EUrope, the analysis of the text corpus revealed a prevalence of national identity constructions in communication related to various types of borders. Moreover, these national identity constructions appeared to feed into the envisioning of EUrope. Consequently, national identity constructions were included as an independent metanarrative to deconstruct border discourse. These findings will be discussed in this section. Across these cases, border communication is thus not only about delineating territory, but also about expressing the nature of the nation.

Border discourses are powerful tools for constructing national self-imaginaries, yet when compared to earlier findings on the connection between the border and national identity construction (Demata 2024), the scope of identity narratives in governmental border communication is somewhat scarce across the Baltic and Nordic country cases. When comparing the four country cases, some common patterns emerge. National identity, as it appears in governmental border communication, is constructed around a few central themes, namely: independence and sovereignty; identity projections, responsibilities; and foundational values. It should, however, be emphasized that not all themes are represented equally across the different country cases. Additionally, there are examples of the entangling of various identity constructions within the text corpus, particularly concerning regional and supranational identities, which are discussed briefly towards the end of this section. A closer look at the two regions independently, show that while Nordic governmental border communication does not engage extensively with matters of national identity construction, Baltic governmental communication engages considerably more.

In the cases of Estonia and Lithuania, borders are closely linked to the safeguarding of national identity against external threats. In both countries, national

identity is articulated through the language of the frontline of Europe. As demonstrated in the two preceding chapters, the frontline narrative frames borders as sites of defense not only for the nation but also for a broader European way of life and the integrity of the European project. This sense of geopolitical positioning is complemented by recurrent emphasis on strengthening ties with western Europe, and reinforcing belonging within EUrope. While such geopolitical narratives are prominent in discourse on the EU's external border, sentiments of strengthening ties with western Europe also appear in communication concerning internal Schengen borders. Evident in statements such as: "We need Rail Baltic to connect ourselves with Western Europe strategically, politically and economically." (EE 24.10.2016) This illustrates how both physical and symbolic connectivity with the West is central to Estonia's identity narrative, positioning the border as a key site through which this identity is articulated.

Independence is a theme that emerges predominantly in the border communication of Estonia and Lithuania. References to independence invoke the border insofar as independence carries spatial undertones tied to sovereign territory. In this sense, independence is closely linked to the defense of the borderline itself. This connection is made explicit in Estonian discourse:

> [O]n the first day of December, we celebrated a symbolic anniversary in Estonia: since that day, Estonia has been an independent country in total longer than an occupied one. We do not take this for granted. We work hard every day to secure our future. We are currently facing a number of serious crises, but our close cooperation will help us deal with them more successfully. Together, we will strengthen physical borders and expand our cooperation. (EE 08.12.2021(2))

Beyond highlighting the benefits of independence, such as sovereignty, security, prosperity, Estonian discourse also alludes independence as a moral and political obligation. Independence is thus portrayed as a burden as much as a right, underlining a strong sense of national responsibility, "independence means an opportunity, ability and above all a responsibility to do everything that needs to be done. It means an ability to decide first and foremost whether to be or not to be." (EE 16.07.2016) While this statement appears in the context of Estonian commentary on Greece's economic situation, its broader message can be taken to reflect an internalized understanding of independence as something that must be continuously defended and earned. The quotation suggests that independence is not static but instead entails an ongoing commitment to responsible statehood, a vision of the nation as capable and willing to make difficult choices in the name of self-governance and long-term survival. Similar sentiments are transferred to the nation's perceived responsibility at its borders.

In the case of Estonia, awareness of the national responsibility is particularly visible in narrations of its EU membership: "belonging to the European Union carries as great a responsibility." (EE 29.09.2015) Arguably, by emphasizing the responsibilities, Estonia simultaneously highlights its own capacity to meet these expectations: this dual function, asserting both commitment and competence,

serves to depict Estonia's image as a dependable and active EU member. A similar sentiment is reflected in Lithuanian border discourse, where national identity is partly constructed through the lens of the EU's external border. Lithuania's self-representation centers on its willingness and ability to contribute to supranational border management: "We have a commitment to protect the EU's eastern border and we will live up to that commitment." (LT 20.10.2021) The portrayal of Lithuanian capabilities is intrinsically interwoven with its abilities at the border, implying the nation as both principled and capable because of its border management efforts. A statement by the then-Minister of the Interior Agnė Bilotaitė (TS-LKD) demonstrates these connections:

> Building the fence as soon as possible is our top priority now. This is not a simple fence, but a defensive wall protecting the entire European Union and us. The first steps have been taken, and we will continue the work: the law has been passed, the project manager has been appointed, and we will allocate as much money as needed. *We will build the fence together with the Armed Forces, Riflemen's Union, businesses, and if necessary, the Lithuanian people will help. We will all defend ourselves together*. (LT 23.08.2021(2), author's emphasis)

In Swedish border discourse, national identity is also closely linked to the notion of responsibility, although from a slightly different angle. Rather than focusing on the responsibilities toward political allies and the international community, Swedish border communication engages with the notion of responsibility both in terms of solidarity with people in need and with ensuring the integrity and functionality of the state. In this reading, a responsible nation is one that maintains an effective filtering process at the border. To justify and align border controls with humanitarian responsibilities, Sweden presents itself as a solidary country, but one that must also balance its humanitarian commitments in accordance with practical limitations. As articulated in one statement: "And no matter how solidary we are and should be, we must recognize that we do not have unlimited capacity in society for reception to be dignified." (SE 12.01.2016) To this end, border control during 2015–2016 in Scandinavia has been portrayed as compassionate rather than exclusionary, the action of control and stricter filtering depicted as a means to fulfill international obligations such as providing shelter for refugees (Naper 2022). In other words, border control and closure are reinterpreted as the state being unable to provide sufficient shelter and welfare benefits. Thus, the need to close the border is partly represented from the perspective of concern for those individuals seeking to enter. This is also reflected in my data when harder borders are narrated as compassion for those attempting to cross borders in that they aim to prevent humans on the move from undertaking dangerous and life-threatening journeys.

Throughout the three crisis periods, border communication consistently engages with immigration through the lens of the values and identity of the welcoming state. This is particularly evident during the first crisis period, where Estonian national identity narratives reflect a belief that immigrants arriving as refugees

embody a culture that is different and potentially incompatible with the national culture. National survey responses shared in Estonian governmental communication indicate that a sizeable share among the citizens are skeptical about the cultural compatibility of refugees and immigrants, reflecting concerns about borders portraying cultural differences. Similar sentiments are conveyed as information shared about adaptation programs aimed at individuals granted international protection:

> Although the adaptation programme is not compulsory for persons granted international protection, the Police and Border Guard Board directs all such persons to participate in the adaptation programme, and the completion of this programme is also assisted by a support person. A support person and public services, including the services of the unemployment insurance fund, will help people to adapt; persons granted international protection are also offered language training. (EE 19.01.2016)

At the same time, the communication also emphasizes that demonstrations of intolerance are detrimental for Estonia as a society. Hence, the aim is to establish a more welcoming society:

> When self-appointed gangs randomly scare all foreigners, we must not close our eyes to this. As politicians, employers, citizens – it is our all duty to clearly state that we do not need pseudo-security from racist gangs. /…/ Once intolerance prevails in society, it at some point devours the profit of every company and the welfare of every person. (EE 02.03.2016)

It is worth noting that it is not only the national borders or the EU's external border that are drawn upon to construct notions of a national identity. During the first crisis, Finland and Sweden framed their policy of military non-alignment (declining the NATO border) from the perspective of values and identity (Agius 2006): "Both Finland and Sweden are outside military alliances. We believe military non-alignment serves us well." (FI 12.01.2016). The same statement goes on to emphasize that their non-alignment is contributing to "stability and security in Northern Europe on a whole." (FI 12.01.2016) This illustrates how rapidly political sentiments and organizational alignments can change, as Finland and Sweden upended their previous non-alignment by 2022, the rationale behind this shift mirrored the earlier justification for remaining outside alliances namely regional security: "The Russian war of aggression triggered Finland and Sweden's applications for NATO membership. Our countries' membership in NATO will strengthen the security of the whole Northern Europe and reinforce the Alliance." (FI 13.09.2022) This evolution demonstrates how national identity narratives can be rearticulated in response to changing threat perceptions, while maintaining continuity in the underlying logic of contributing to broader regional security.

Occasionally, national identity entangles with other identity constructions, such as regional and supranational identities. The findings presented here suggest that communication on these other identity constructions also contribute to

imbuing the national identity with certain understandings. For example, communication that frames regional identity is increasingly emphasizing the deepening cooperation within the Baltic and Nordic spaces during the course of the three crisis periods studied, reflecting a more strongly forged regional identity in the making. While discourse from 2015–2016 suggested a more distinct divide between the Baltic and Nordic states in border awareness, it appears to diminish following Finland and Sweden's NATO membership. Finnish communication explicitly highlights these shifts, "over the past decades, we could have listened to our friends in the Baltics more closely along the way in questions related to our common security and Russia." (FI 23.08.2022) Hence, Finnish and Swedish security and alliance reassessments suggest that there are accompanying reconfigurations of identity constructions. The statement above, furthermore, reflects larger patterns of knowledge production shifts from the EUropean west to the EUropean east (Mälksoo 2022; Hagelin and Gibson 2024), concerning matters of borders, spatial divisions, and security. The idea of shared regional belonging is, however, more commonly depicted in Nordic rather than BSR terms: "The Nordic countries are a family and we work well together." (FI 04.02.2016) alluding to close cross-border cooperation, diminishing the role of the borders.

In the Baltic context, especially in Estonia, national identity is commonly constructed through the supranational. Estonia's political discourse frequently frames the national identity as inherently European, specifically by presenting EU membership and shared values as integral components of the state's self-conception. This connection is evident in how EU values and freedoms (the removal of borders) are invoked to define Estonia's national identity: "Estonia is a part of Europe and European values are intrinsic to us." (EE 09.09.2015) The interweaving of identities thereby emerges through explicit references to shared values, which are positioned as fundamental to national self-understanding: "European values are a part of our identity." (EE 29.09.2015) These values are, however, as noted in the previous chapter, seldom explicitly defined in Estonian governmental communication, assuming an implicit knowledge instead. At the same time, EU values often appear alongside mentions of priorities such as freedom of movement across different domains, suggesting Estonian emphasis and reliance on these freedoms alongside other EU values:

> Estonia consistently stands for European values and works to ensure that the voice of the European Union is effective and united in the world. It is important for Estonian people and companies that Estonia stands up for the four fundamental freedoms of the European Union and the internal market, and continues to stand up for the fifth fundamental freedom – the free movement of data – because data is at the core of the twin transition. (EE 01.12.2021)

Crucially, EU values extend beyond identity formation. They are frequently invoked to designate divisions between conflicting value systems in the world, contributing to a reconfiguration of space based on moral grounds (Mansbach and Wilmer 2001). As one example demonstrates: "continuing with sanctions against Russia was crucial for putting relentless pressure on Russia, and from Estonia's

foreign policy perspective, it is a values-based and existential issue." (EE 08.09.2022) Hence, this demonstrates how EU values serve as a foundation for identity formation and consolidation, while also shaping Estonia's international stance.

8.2 Supranational identity constructions

Border discourse constructs imaginaries about the supranational self through articulations about what the EU is, as well as through visions about the development of the EUropean project. In this sense, border discourse becomes a window into supranational identity formation and political imagination. The portrayal of a collective identity of the EU varies among the country cases. Additionally, the extent to which this collective identity is depicted as coexisting with national identities varies even more across these cases. In this regard, it is worthwhile to distinguish between supranational identity constructions and the way states articulate their position within the EU, the latter is not necessarily an identity construction of the supranational entity, but rather a description of national characteristics clad in the language of the supranational. Supranational identity construction, as it appears in border communication, is structured around a few themes: EU values, progress, and capabilities.

Crucially, border communication frames the EU as a normative space shaped by shared principles and values: "We emphasise that a social and economic model based on democracy, human and fundamental rights and the rule of law is the foundation for European states and the European way of life." (FI 23.08.2021) Such statements project an image of the EU as a value-based community. It furthermore suggests that the EU is dependent on its foundational values for cohesion. Finland frames EU values as foundational to both national and supranational identity: "We emphasise that a social and economic model based on democracy, human and fundamental rights and the rule of law is the foundation for European states and the European way of life." (FI 23.08.2021) As these articulations appear in communication on borders and border policies, it suggests a strong interlinkage of the mental inscription of EUropean borders with inscriptions of EUropean values, contributing to a spatial containment of the 'European way of life.' Notably, there is no clear distinction between Europe and the EU in these formulations, which subtly blurs the line where the European way of life begins or ends, and by extension who is considered to belong.

The three crises examined here are portrayed not only as security threats but as challenges to the unity and ideals that underpin the EUropean project. As one Estonian statement acknowledges, "serious danger lies in damaging Europe's unity, losing European ideals." (EE 16.07.2015) In relation to borders, this threat is portrayed as particularly acute, as the erosion of EU unity is imagined to directly undermine core principles such as freedom of movement. Introducing internal border controls is seen as a sign of distrust among EUMS, and a lack of effective collective solutions in matters of borders: "Restoring internal border

controls is a result of a missing general solution or its weakness, and this is an area that would need much more Europe." (EE 19.11.2015) In this light, the border becomes a symbol of both EUropean integration and its potential unraveling. Yet, border crisis is also framed as a possibility to reinforce community and collective efforts. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is framed both as a geopolitical rupture and as a catalyst for renewed solidarity: "The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought us closer together as a community of values." (FI 23.08.2022) These articulations position crises as moments of moral realignment, where adversity exposes fragility but also holds the potential to foster a deeper, more unified attachment to the core values that define the EU. These crises thus foreground the stakes of maintaining EUropean unity, illustrating a clear link between value preservation and the sustainability of the EU.

Furthermore, EU values are depicted as a moral compass for individual EUMS and for the EU as a whole, guiding identity constructions. This imagery emphasizes the importance of EU values in ensuring the continuity of the EUropean project and space, by outlining a clear path for potential reconfigurations. This idea is effectively demonstrated in a longer excerpt from a speech delivered by the then-Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė (TS-LKD) during the Conference on the Future of Europe in 2021:

> [N]ow, as before, at the centre of the debate on the Future of Europe, is not the question of what we want to achieve but of how we get there. I am convinced that we'll get there, most importantly, by staying true to ourselves. By never compromising on the values that define and unite us. Freedom, peace, democracy, rule of law, human rights, and human dignity. Can we remain true to ourselves if we abandon the people of Belarus struggling for their basic rights and freedoms? Can we honestly say we live up to our values if one day we choose to forget Alexei Navalny in a Russian prison or the people of Ukraine losing their lives for Donbas? Can we come to the point where we trade Ukrainian Crimea for whatever bargaining chip the Kremlin might offer us?
> /…/
> But whatever price we are or might be paying in the future for choosing the right side of history, it cannot compare to the cost of losing (or worse even – trading in) our moral compass. For then we'd become 'a community of those who have nothing in common,' if I may borrow this spot-on definition from Alphonso Lingis, an American philosopher of Lithuanian descent. (LT 09.09.2021).

Thus, border communication also reflects ambitions for the EU's further development. As one Estonian communication notes: "The European Union is just as effective as we want it to be. Estonia stands for a strong, developing, and growing European Union and for Estonia to be an effective member. Europe is still a peace project, but we have to deal with a changed situation of hybrid conflicts." (EE 01.12.2021)

The EU is frequently depicted in border discourse as a project in motion; an entity that is constantly developing, much like its expanding borders, converging

with narratives about the EU as an order of progress. This framing emphasizes the EU as a dynamic and evolving supranational entity with an aspirational trajectory. As expressed by Estonia, "The European Union – like all other political projects is constantly developing, it is not perfect, but it is the best supranational form of cooperation that we have." (EE 24.10.2016) Such statements convey a supranational identity that is both malleable and purposeful, where progress is understood as building on past achievements. Hence, the EU is imagined as a space that reforms and adapts when it is called for. This emerges in Latvia's call to "review our [EU] policies and our acquis and find new mechanisms and solutions. To be able to preserve our fundamental values but not let adversaries turn them into our biggest vulnerabilities." (LT 09.09.2021)[42] The caution of adversaries and vulnerabilities specifically refers to the instrumentalization of migration, thus making a connection between a progressive EU and reactive bordering practices. In this sense, the EU is portrayed as a responsive and resilient structure, capable of self-correction and innovation. Border discourse thus contributes to narrating the EU as a political community oriented toward progress, constantly refining itself to meet emerging challenges while holding on to its foundational ideals.

Set against this light, progress is viewed as a necessary and desirable transformation. Through progress, the EU is imagined as becoming a more capable Union, which is another key theme of the supranational identity. Transformation is thought to result directly from the various crises the Union has faced.

> If anyone had ever doubted it, numerous, mounting challenges – from economic crises to the current pandemic – have given us a lesson that we need a stronger, not weaker EU. The EU that can overcome the crisis. The EU that can even beat cancer. From economic recovery plans to vaccine sharing, from green certificates to border control – it is the EU we end up leaning on. (LT 09.09.2021)

While this statement addresses a wide range of policy areas, it highlights the need for stronger border control capabilities within the EU, as well as improvements in other sectors. This is essential because it suggests that the manner in which border control is managed can either support or undermine the European way of life. Estonian communication captures this: "If the sovereign right of border control also means lack of control we are soon out of necessity without the European freedoms and borderless Europe, without which the youth of today could not even imagine life in Europe." (EE 19.11.2015)

As discussed in the previous section on national identity constructions, there are examples of how various identity constructions intertwine within the discourse.

[42] The term 'our' in this statement refers specifically to the EU. The paragraph from which this quote is taken begins with a call to build "the Future of Europe that our people deserve." It continues by stating, "[t]he EU must learn from its experiences and adjust to ever-changing challenges and their contexts." (LT 09.09.2021) This makes the identification of the segment's subject straightforward.

While the earlier sections focus on how these entanglements shape national identity, they can also contribute to the formation of a supranational identity. These entanglements are particularly evident in the Baltic countries, likely due to several key factors. One prominent explanation is the many reconfigurations of the Baltic region, including transitioning from Soviet occupation to re-independence and forming Western alliances. However, by this logic, similar narratives should also emerge in Finland. Another potential factor is the differing content and scope of border communication, which varies significantly between the Baltic and Nordic countries. This refers to *how* governments communicate about borders. To illustrate how borders entangle to convey supranational identity constructions, consider the following statement: "If Europe is strong, Estonia is strong – and vice versa. I hope that you will be as demanding on European Union matters as you are on national matters." (EE 01.12.2021) This statement links the resilience of both the national and supranational entities, interestingly placing similar expectations on both.

EU identity emerges in border communication as a hybrid construction of strategic and cultural determinants. On the one hand, functional cooperation and supranational coordination, as outlined in the two previous chapters, demonstrates the functional and strategic dimension of EU identity. This is evident through increasing emphasis on shared security capabilities and supranational crisis response among EUMS, portraying the Union as a rational and pragmatic alliance. On the other hand, the frequent references toward shared values in border discourse reveal a cultural foundation underpinning the construction of the EU identity and the imagined limits of its space. These values serve as markers of belonging and distinction, framing the EU as a community defined not only by what it does but by what it stands for. The growing invocation of a value-based civilizational divide in communication around borders further entrenches this cultural framing, positioning the EU in contrast to non-European or illiberal 'others' (Diez 2010). In this way, border discourses contribute to a supranational identity negotiated by both strategic necessity and normative aspiration.

Notably, the Swedish border communication examined in this study does not explicitly address the topic of supranational identity constructions. The structure of the Swedish border communication is believed to be the main reason for this, as it relates information regarding the overall theme of the meeting, the individuals involved, and the time and place, without expanding on the topics to be discussed, or providing additional details about the discussions that took place, recall the example in footnote 39. The lack of communication on a EUropean identity remains the same across all three crises, regardless of the number of individual data entries for each crisis. As a result, it is difficult to derive any significant interpretations from the data.

8.3 History and territory

The identity dimension of the IBO triad is also thought to be reflected in the way borders convey how these identities are nested within the (temporal) spaces they occupy. In this context, identity is communicated through borders that draw upon representations of history and territory. In this section, I will examine how these references to history and territory are used to convey deeper meanings to identity constructions.

Historical narratives generally play a more prominent role in Estonia's and Lithuania's border discourse than in Finland and Sweden, where borders are instead framed through more pragmatic narratives. Although it should be pointed out that history is not as frequently evoked as might be expected knowing the history of the Baltic countries, or compared to findings on the prevalence of historical narratives in Kallas' (REF) positioning of Estonian solidarity with Ukraine following February 2022 (Hagelin and Gibson 2024).[43] Notably, history intersects with forward-looking notions of development and illustrates the significance of cooperation and alliances. For instance, Estonia draws lessons from its historical vulnerabilities, reinforcing the necessity of allies: "If we want to learn anything from the painful lessons of our history, we should understand that having allies and friends is quite literally a matter of life and death for us." (EE 24.02.2016)

Historical narratives appear more frequently in discourses on national borders, than in framings of the EU's external border. National borders are often interwoven with broader historical metanarratives, particularly those tied to memories of sovereignty. In these contexts, the border becomes a symbolic line where national identity and (historical) independence struggles are articulated. For example, in Estonia, the national border is imagined as intimately linked to historical experiences of resistance and the defense of independence:

> The defending wall of Estonia is made up of the Estonian people and their will to defend their country and their people. In the complex situations of history, Estonians have repeatedly demonstrated their readiness to sacrifice everything they have to protect the freedom of our state and our people. Forever. (EE 24.02.2016)

This contrasts with representations of the EU's external borders, which tend to focus more on contemporary challenges, supranational coordination, and future-oriented goals. The relative absence of historical narratives in the EU border discourse may suggest that the EU's external borders are being constructed as political and symbolic spaces, whereas national borders remain more deeply embedded in national historical imaginaries. It is of course precarious to differentiate historical references in practice, especially the ones alluding to experiences

[43] Albeit, those findings are based on data gathered from Kallas' social media, more specifically her X (then Twitter) account which certainly allows for a different tone and style of presenting interpretations of events than official press releases from a Prime Minister's Office.

related to regaining independence and the consecutive 'return to EUrope,' as such references should be interpreted as speaking both of reconfigured national borders, as well as of shifting EU borders.

Among the Baltic cases, borders are deeply intertwined with post-Soviet independence narratives, nestled in considerations of sovereignty. As such, history as a metanarrative is not evoked for the sake of remembering the past, but to stake out a path forward, thereby demonstrating how Estonia's past shapes and legitimizes contemporary political decisions and (border) security measures. This is particularly evident in highly symbolic statements that tie contemporary sovereignty to the legacy of Baltic independence movements:

> In 1939 and 1940, there were those who advised that we should keep up the good relations with Russia, and that we should bend our political backbone in the interest of good economic relations. We know all too well where that ended. The people of Estonia know and remember that security comes at a price, while freedom is priceless. /…/ I don't want to leave my daughter and our coming generations an Estonia that is an isolated border state in the draughts of the world. It wasn't for the freedom of such a state that two million people stood in a 600 km unbroken chain. It was not for that state that 300,000 people sang at our Song Festival Grounds. (EE 24.02.2016)

Such rhetoric demonstrates how Estonian border communication invokes history to underpin efforts to strengthen EUropean integration and alliance-based security.

Unlike Estonia, Lithuania engages less consistently with the Soviet occupation when representing the national or the EU's external border. This relative absence is somewhat surprising, given the countries shared experiences of occupation and reorientation toward the West. When they do appear, historical narratives are drawn upon to emphasize how Lithuania's sense of sovereignty is tied to its alignment with the West. It is also often tied to issues of security:

> Our membership in the EU and NATO and the successful transformation of Lithuania make us feel the safest in the entire history of our country. On the other hand, we see the deteriorating security situation towards the east of Lithuania and the continuing Russia's aggression, which prevents any attempts of reloading the EU-Russia relations. (LT 30.06.2021)

The relative absence of historical narratives suggests that Lithuania's border discourse makes use of these less frequently to address contemporary border challenges. Be that as it may, history is invoked to address the nature and severity of security issues emerging from eastern neighbors, more specifically Russia, arguing that there is a "need to learn from history when assessing Russia's actions and the necessity for the West to begin to react accordingly." (LT-MFA 22.06.2015) Overall, this displays a deep awareness of the temporality of borders, especially the temporal traces of borders (Green 2018), wherein historical legacies remain latent, even when not overtly expressed.

By contrast, historical references are largely absent from Finnish and Swedish governmental border discourse. In Finland's case, this absence should not be

taken to reflect a lack of historical awareness, but rather a different approach to framing border politics and managing geopolitical tension (Mölder 2011). Although Finland has a well-documented history of territorial loss to Russia (e.g., parts of the Karelian region), such narratives are largely not included in contemporary official communication. Instead, Finnish border communication emphasizes cooperation, particularly with Baltic and Nordic neighbors, and future-oriented security planning. There is only one exception in the material of this dissertation, a historical reference that refers the security challenges existing during the Cold War to justify contemporary political decisions: "In the light of all these events, we are faced with the most serious threat against European security since the end of the Cold War." (FI 12.01.2016) This extract refers to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the increasing military presence in the BSR. The press release was included as a data entry because it appears in a governmental communication that discusses issues related to human movement along the southern section of the external border.

Comparable to Finland, in Swedish border communication there is really only one notable exception to the absence of historical references. For the most part, instances of such low occurrences for a metanarrative are not discussed at great length in this dissertation as the data does not provide significant insights, other than what the absence might imply. In this particular instance, however, it is worth highlighting as the particular demonstration of history reveals Sweden's self-image as a humanitarian actor, as well as the associated pride in that role. This is illustrated by comparing the reception of refugees in 2015 to earlier receptions of humans on the move, such as the arrival of refugees from the Balkans and those saved by the White Buses during the WWII:

> Sweden can also take pride in that we have welcomed people who have fled from Assad's oil barrel bombings, from DAESH terror and displacements, which have murdered a quarter of a million people. We can be as proud as when we received 25,000 refugees through the white buses, as proud as when we received 100,000 refugees during the Balkan War, take pride that in 2015 we received over 160,000 people in urgent need of our help. That we, together with Germany and Austria, are the country that has taken the greatest responsibility and has been more open and more supportive than any other country. (SE 12.01.2016)[44]

[44] The translation of this quote was more complicated than many of the others because of the different ways to express the concept of pride. Although I do not believe that the essence of the quote changes significantly with these variations, I will include the original quote for the sake of transparency: "Sverige kan också vara stolt över att vi tagit emot människor som flytt från Assads oljefatsbombningar, från DAESH terror och folkfördrivningar, som mördat en kvarts miljon människor. Vi kan vara stolta som när vi genom de vita bussarna tog emot 25 000 flyktingar, stolta som när vi under balkankriget tog emot 100 000 flyktingar, stolta över att vi 2015 tog emot över 160 000 människor i akut behov av vår hjälp. Att vi tillsammans med Tyskland och Österrike är det land som tagit det största ansvaret och varit öppnare och mer solidariskt än något annat land."

In this way, the history that is invoked supports a narrative of open borders and international solidarity, rather than sovereignty under threat. Nevertheless, the relative absence of historical references paints the picture of a virtually history-less Swedish border, in the sense that historical accounts of the border are notably lacking in Swedish governmental border communication. Of course, one should consider this absence in the light of the prolonged border stability Sweden has enjoyed, especially when compared to Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania.

History tends to intersect with ideas about continuous progress; just as progress permeates many of the other metanarratives, capturing forward-looking notions of development and illustrating the interconnectedness of these narratives. For instance, Estonia draws lessons from its historical vulnerabilities, reinforcing the necessity of allies: "If we want to learn anything from the painful lessons of our history, we should understand that having allies and friends is quite literally a matter of life and death for us." (EE 24.02.2016) Another example is the implementation of visa restrictions in 2022. This action was justified on ethical grounds, emphasizing the fairness of limiting Russian citizens' tourism opportunities while their state engages in a war against Ukraine. Thus, this framing merges the idea of progress in sanctions with adherence to European values:

> We have seen an enormous rise in the number of Russian citizens coming into or passing through Estonia. The possibility they have to visit Estonia, or other parts of Europe via Estonia, en masse is not in line with the principles of the sanctions we have imposed. In implementing them, Estonia sought to restrict the ability of the aggressor state to carry on with ordinary international life at the levels of both the state and its citizens. (EE 11.08.2022)

Although this justification foregrounds values and progress, less prevalent in this particular case are security concerns. Security concerns are, however, also enmeshed in the representation of visa restrictions, as restrictions are framed as measures for "protecting the public policy and internal security" (Joint Statement 07.09.2022) of the region. This combination of progress, values, security, and history illustrates how border discourse is constructed to anchor policy justifications in both political aspirations and historical experiences.

There are some examples of history being recalled to invoke solidarity toward people on the move, although such uses of history are less frequent in the governmental discourse than security perspectives.

> A few hundred war refugees per year is a minor share of the foreigners living among us. I understand completely that Estonians have questions about the refugees, sometimes even fears arising from not knowing enough about them. This is perfectly natural. But we know that 'different' is not necessarily a synonym for 'worse.' After all, we should remember how ungrounded and humiliating it was a decade ago to hear Western Europeans resenting free movement of people in the European Union, and how insulting it was for us, self-conscious Estonians, to be called 'Eastern Europeans.' A state border should not be a measure of human values, and whether our doors are open should mostly depend on the intentions of the one who wants to enter. A

> confident state will not close its doors to an Albanian family whose children speak fluent Estonian, a confident state will not close its doors to a person who is ready to learn our language, to respect our traditions and to contribute to Estonia. (EE 24.02.2016)

While this passage urges solidarity and compassion toward people on the move, it also explicitly illustrates the underpinnings of the filtering function of the border. It shows how the filtering function of borders is envisioned as assessing individuals based on their ability to fulfill the admission criteria established by the host country. According to the passage in question, these criteria often fail to consider the actual needs of people who are relocating, somewhat nullifying notions of solidarity.

Within the material, historical references often appear in the form of allusions to the Soviet occupation, which are relatively straightforward to identify. Alongside these, there are historical references of a much more recent character, as exemplified by an extract from Finish border communication: "Our security environment has been changing since Russia's illegal invasion of Crimea in Ukraine. We do not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea." (FI 24.08.2021, author's translation) These more contemporary historical references are overwhelmingly discussing Russian aggression, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014, or the war in Georgia in 2008. Interestingly, in my own coding I noticed during the first round of analysis, a tendency to not recognize and code references to more recent events as historical narratives. This indicates a bias in my own perception of what counts as 'history.' This also demonstrates the impact of historical awareness when studying borders (O'Dowd 2010), and pointing to the fact that researchers have varying sensitivity to historical references that may unconsciously influence the coding process.

Aside from historical accounts, questions of identity are closely linked to notions of territory, particularly regarding whether the imagined 'we' is associated with a specific space. Territory is in this instance, examined from the angle of territorial or spatial language and/or understandings appearing in notions of the two forms of identity elaborated on above, as well as in narrations of history. It has thus not appeared as a distinct metanarrative during the coding process. In the context of the Baltic and Nordic regions, discussions about borders focus on two main aspects. First, there is an effort to narrate the space of the EU by trying to overcome geopolitical variation within the Union. Second, descriptions of territory often highlight the differences between the EU and its neighbors from the point of view of cooperation or adversary threats. Typically, the latter is explicitly identified as Russia and occasionally also as Belarus.

In 2015 and 2016, territory was predominantly imagined through a conflation of different regions of the EUropean space to demonstrate unity, where the borderlines and concerns of different regions are mentally and discursively connected to each other. This shared spatial imaginary reinforces a sense of unity and mutual dependency within the EU. This is done both in communication on the national borders, and in communication on the EU's external border, although

these often entangle in one another. For instance, with regard to the former, events taking place at the EU's southern external border are portrayed as having direct implications for life in the north: "There is no doubt that what is happening behind Europe's southern border also directly affects how we live in Estonia." (EE 29.09.2015) National borders are thus framed as inseparable from the broader territorial order of EUrope. A similar sentiment is echoed in Sweden, where the preservation of internal mobility is directly tied to the integrity of external border control: "If we are to have free movement within the EU, there must be both effective border control at the external border and legal routes in." (SE 22.01.2016) These spatial imaginaries culminate in statements that shift focus away from national boundaries altogether in favor of imaginaries of the EU's external border as well as the systemic structure of the Schengen area: "The strengthening of the EU's external borders remains essential for reducing illegal immigration and preserving the Schengen area, the fundamental principle of which is free movement of persons." (LT-MFA 16.12.2015)

Another aspect of territoriality concerns the framing of the EUropean space as a cohesive entity that has developed over time, particularly in contrast to earlier divisions across the continent. These framings draw on historic narratives that invoke the legacy of the Soviet occupation and the symbolic transformation from geographical (and political) separation to integration: "we should also not ignore the fact that instead of iron curtain, there is free movement of labour in the modern world – one of the most important backbones of the European Union." (EE 02.03.2016) This transformation is not only presented in abstract terms, such as shifting border imaginaries, but is also reinforced through tangible, infra-structural developments that underpin integration. One example is the Rail Baltic project, which is framed as correcting historic dividing lines: "In ten years nobody can say that the Baltic countries constitute an anomaly in Europe, as one can only take a train towards the East from there. Rail Baltic is a strategically important corridor for Europe." (EE 18.10.2016) These examples illustrate how national and supranational borders are entangled in discourse, constructing a vision of the EU as a space that is not only politically unified but also physically connected and historically transcendent.

Across 2021 and 2022, attention to territory increasingly shifts to emphasize the distinction between the EUropean space and that of antagonistic states beyond its borders. This territorial differentiation is articulated through an intensified focus on the eastern stretch of the EU's external border, and the corresponding need to defend this borderline: "As the border states of the EU, we must keep Europe safe." (EE 08.09.2022) The role of the border is thus elevated beyond national concern and framed as integral to the collective security of the Union. This is further underlined by portrayals of external threats not as attacks on individual member states, but on the EU as a whole, thereby constructing mutual vulnerability, and a shared territorial imaginary: "Lukashenko's hybrid attack on the entire EU at the EU's border." (LT 24.09.2021) Through such framings, security at the border becomes a supranational concern, reinforcing the perception of the EU as a bounded space.

This emphasis on the eastern stretch of the EU's external border is entangled with imaginaries of the national borders that coincide with it, particularly in the case of Estonia and Lithuania. Here, the national border is presented not only as a site of domestic security, but as a point of shared responsibility for the entire Schengen area.

> In addition to its own internal security, Estonia, an external border state, is responsible for the entire Schengen area and the mass travel of Russian nationals entails an increased security threat in current circumstances. Every country has the right to close its borders for security considerations and temporarily restrict border crossings, and for ensuring security in the region and the Schengen area more broadly, together with the other Baltic States and Poland we will restrict the transit of Russian tourists. (EE 08.09.2022)

This directs attention to the broader geopolitical role attributed to border states and links national security decisions to the safeguarding of the supranational space. Notably, this can be contrasted with Finland's communication on the same issue, which tends to be more reserved and administrative in tone: "Tomorrow, on Thursday 29 September, the Government will adopt a resolution that will significantly restrict the right of Russian citizens to enter Finland as tourists and to use Finland as a transit country when travelling to other parts of the Schengen area." (FI 28.09.2022) The contrast also highlights national variation in how borders are communicated (Kushnir 2022).

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated on the identity component of the IBO triad, by analyzing the scope and nature of identity narratives in border communication. It has demonstrated that, although identity constructions are relatively scarce, borders and border discourse continue to be a site and a tool for governments in constructing identity. Specifically, the prevalence of identity narratives in border communication highlights the significance of borders concerning both perceptions about the 'Self,' and spatial imaginaries connected to the 'Self.'

National identity, more extensively used in Baltic states than in Nordic states, was narrated around a few central themes: independence and sovereignty, identity projections, responsibilities, and foundational values. Albeit not all of these themes were equally present across the four country cases. Ultimately, crisis moments appeared to function as catalysts for rearticulating national identity. At the same time, there appeared to be tension between inclusion and exclusion in national identity narratives specifically related to cultural boundaries and inclusive values. While intolerance was condemned, concerns remained about national capacity as well as cultural compatibility when welcoming humans on the move. These ambivalences reflect broader identity dynamics at play in border discourse, especially during perceived crises involving human movement.

Furthermore, the chapter illustrated how border discourse contributes to shaping imaginaries of the supranational self. Similar to national identity constructions, supranational identity was narrated around a few central themes: EU values, capabilities, and progress. Border discourse constructs a supranational EU identity grounded in shared values as border communication across Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, and, to a lesser extent, Sweden, portrays the EU as a normative community. While crises of human movements are framed as security threats, they are also framed as tests of EU unity and values. They thereby become opportunities for reasserting the EU's moral compass. Adding to that, the EU is framed as a project in motion, whose progress underpins continuous developments of capabilities. Overall, border discourse reflects a dual structure of EU identity: on one hand, a functional, strategic identity rooted in policy coordination and security cooperation; on the other, a cultural and normative identity built on shared values. This hybrid construction contributes to an imaginary of the EU as both a rational actor and a moral community, increasingly contrasted with illiberal or non-European 'Others.'

Notably, national and supranational identities become closely intertwined through the shared reference point of EU values. These values form the basis for constructing a collective EUropean identity and help to consolidate national belonging within that broader framework. By aligning with these principles, member states position themselves as legitimate participants in the EUropean project, reinforcing both internal cohesion and external credibility. In doing so, EU values function as both a moral compass and a strategic tool, shaping how nations understand themselves and how they engage with the wider international community.

In matters of history and territory, the Baltic states engaged more actively with these topics when communicating borders, especially post-Soviet independence. In essence, mentions of history or territory aimed at constructing imaginations of a unified and mutually dependent inside, while emphasizing the antagonistic state behavior of the 'Others,' which was typically identified as Russia. Notably, divergent uses of history underline the varying temporalities at play in border constructions in northern Europe, reflecting different historical experiences and different understandings of what borders are and what they do. Within this context, historical references, especially tied to sovereignty and independence struggles, were more prominent in national border discourse than in discussions of the EU's external borders. This suggests that national borders remained embedded in national historical imaginaries, while bordering practices related to the EU's external borders appeared to be interpreted less frequently through a lens of history. At the same time, the lack of historical references in Finnish and Swedish governmental border communication should not be interpreted as accidental, on the contrary, it reflects border stability and a tendency to frame identity through regional cooperation and humanitarian values.

9 VISIONS OF EUROPE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The central aim of this study has been to examine how governments communicate about borders, and how those border imaginations envision EUrope. Guided by this aim, the dissertation set out to examine border discourse across the Baltic and Nordic spaces, structuring the research around two research questions. The first empirical question asked how borders and bordering processes are discursively re/represented in governmental border communication during border-related crises in the EU. The second asked how discursive representations of various types of borders portray broader visions of EUrope. This concluding chapter brings together the insights developed across the theoretical and empirical chapters of this dissertation, concerning how border discourse in the Baltics and the Nordics produce visions of EUrope, particularly during times of crisis. It brings together the inferences of what kind of EUrope is envisioned through representations and imaginations of national borders and the EU's external border in governmental border communication across Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden during 2015–2016, 2021, and 2022.

As argued in the introduction to this dissertation, governmental communication often lacks clarity and structure when distinguishing between different types of borders in the EU (Brändle and Eisele 2023). Drawing on this, it was argued that communication on borders frequently bundles multiple border types together, be they territorial, institutional, or strategic, without adequate explanation or delineation. Throughout the analyzed cases presented in this work, border communication frequently merged territorial, institutional, and strategic border imaginaries without clear delineation, leaving it to the audience to interpret whether references pertained to the national borders, the Schengen external border, as well as NATO's border, or broader historical-cultural boundaries. Over time, such ambiguity may impact public understanding of regional composition and the institutional logics shaping EUrope's and Europe's borders. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that more effective border communication, especially in times of crisis, would benefit from moving beyond technocratic or security-dominated discourse and engaging with the broader public in a manner that acknowledges and navigates the entangled imaginaries of borders.

Drawing on the IBO triad and a discourse-analytical methodology, the preceding empirical chapters have examined, in turn, border interpretations through the dimensions of the IBO triad: borders, orders, and identities. As such, the dissertation has critically examined how national and supranational borders are entangled in governmental communication, how they are linked to shifting ideas of order, and how they inform identity constructions. Furthermore, this dissertation has argued that in light of how EUrope communicates and conceptualizes its borders, it is possible to examine how EUrope envisions its future. Recalling the introductory chapter, visions are understood here as future-oriented trajectories supported by ideas about what the EU should be in terms of its capabilities

and policy focus areas. Therefore, this final chapter offers a discussion of the findings related to border discourse, synthesizing these findings to discuss how governmental communication articulates visions of Europe, and considers the implications for future research on European border politics through discourse. Consequently, this study aims to outline potential competing visions for the future of Europe.

Entangled borders can be examined in various locations where different border regimes intersect and overlap. Northern Europe is a prime example of multiple borders coexisting. Specifically, studying entangled borders using examples from the Baltics and the Nordics allowed the analysis to engage with narrations of borders set within a shared geopolitical backdrop, yet simultaneously display variation in the distinct representation and justification of borders and border policies. Furthermore, the ongoing reconfiguration of security challenges in northern Europe has made the Baltic and Nordic countries relevant examples for discussing the evolving imagination of borders and visions of Europe.

9.1 Summary of findings

This summary reviews the key findings emerging from the three preceding empirical chapters and reflects on their broader significance. A few overarching findings emerged that are worth highlighting before proceeding with a structured review of the findings from each empirical chapter.

The findings emerging from this empirical analysis demonstrated that governments overwhelmingly frame both national borders as well as the EU's external border as demarcations between spaces, suggesting a conventional understanding of the nature and function of borders as dividing lines. Accordingly, conceptualizations of borders in governmental border communication appear to be grounded in understandings of borders as institutionalized and symbolically charged expressions of territoriality. In relation to this, while the process of bordering may be initiated within government buildings, it ultimately envisions the border at the physical edge, functioning simultaneously as a protective barrier and as a point of connection for cooperation, depending on the context of the borderland. Even in instances where borders were not explicitly mentioned, their functions were reinforced through discussions of, or references to, their effects. This highlights that borders need not be named or mentioned explicitly in order to be implicitly invoked and discursively spoken into existence.

Between 2015 and 2022, migration was increasingly framed as a weapon, and thereby interpreted from the perspective of hybrid security. Despite this evolving interpretation, security narratives in governmental border communication from the specific region under study did not exhibit major shifts during the investigated period. Rather than being restructured in response to specific crisis events, security narratives remained relatively consistent, grounded in longer-standing threat perceptions. Although the 2015–2016 crisis predominantly involved human movement from the EU's southern border, border communication, particularly in

Estonia and Lithuania, consistently focused on security threats associated with the eastern border. This orientation toward the east reinforced a geopolitical reading of border challenges and contributed to a securitized regional outlook that transcended the specifics of each individual crisis, emphasizing continuity in security logics.

The findings demonstrate how different metanarratives overlap in shifting constellations, depending on the context in which narratives are drafted. Importantly, the combined analysis of border discourse through the IBO dimensions shows how various types of borders at the EU's edge are discursively employed to emphasize the significance of borders. Hence, the findings suggest that communication about one type of border can serve to reinforce the importance of other borders. This is particularly evident in the communication emerging from Estonia and Lithuania, in which the EU's external border is discursively employed to emphasize the significance of the eastern stretch of their respective national borders. However, the case of Sweden suggests that this pattern prevails also in instances where EUMS are not located along the EU's external border. Hence, this underlines the role of the border as an empty signifier. It also highlights the complexity of border imaginaries, where each crisis context generates distinct yet interrelated combinations of metanarratives to construct border understandings. More research is, however, needed to determine whether this pattern holds in other contexts and across longer time spans.

The findings further demonstrated the value of examining entangled borders in governmental communication and of analyzing how such entanglements invoke visions of EUrope through discursive analysis. The close reading that constitutes this approach enables careful engagement with the nuances that emerge across country cases and crisis periods. In this way, the analysis shows how discursive examinations of governmental communication complement broader investigations into how governments communicate and justify borders. At the same time, while this dissertation has argued for differentiating between different types of borders in the analysis of border discourse, certain aspects may risk being overlooked when border types are treated in isolation, given that border discourse itself rarely does so in practice. Overarching imaginations of borders may therefore remain obscured when discourse is disaggregated. This underlines why research on borders should seek to complement perspectives emerging from other contexts and from different border actors.

9.1.1 Borders

The first IBO dimension structured the analysis around borders, and more specifically the characterization and imagination of different types of borders appearing in border communication. This analytical lens facilitated the distangling of entangled border types in communication, as well as that of shifting meanings related to the national borders and the EU's external border. Overall, the national borders were less prevalent in governmental border communication compared to communication on the EU's external border, although in times of intensified

security challenges and threats, communication on the national borders intensified somewhat.

The meaning of borders has been examined here through the prevalence of the dominant themes constructing the nature and characteristics of borders. These themes were operationalized through the full range of sub-codes used in the coding of border communication. While some themes overlap, the content of each thematic area pertains specifically to individual border types. For example, while security appears as a recurring theme in both national and supranational borders communication, the way security was invoked to construct the nature of the border remained analytically distinct for each border type. In the case of national borders, security was overwhelmingly connected to matters of national defense and sovereignty, portraying borders as an intrinsic component of national defensive infrastructure. That is not to say that national borders were not situated within broader security structures, including the EU, but more commonly NATO. In contrast, in communication on the EU's external border the security theme instead shifted from focusing on human mobility and criminality to focusing on geo-political threats and hybrid warfare. These narratives served to legitimize practices such as externalization and, more broadly, contributed to envisioning hardening borders.

A second theme, which also displays similarities across imaginations of both national borders and the EU's external border, concerned the question of cooperation. In the case of the former this is related to regional cooperation, in the case of the latter this instead related to supranational cooperation. Regional cooperation envisioned national borders within shared frameworks of resilience and strategic cooperation, portraying the border as embedded in a regional security space, sharing similar security challenges. Furthermore, representations of the national border that relied on, or evoked notions of regional cooperation also did so in order to justify bordering management practices by portraying them as regional phenomenon. Supranational cooperation, similarly, envisioned the EU's external border as a collective responsibility, although at the supranational level. The border, and related border management, was increasingly envisioned as demanding growing cohesion and solidarity among the EUMS.

A third theme emerged in the representation of national borders, this related to responsive bordering, a sub-code of the security metanarrative. Despite being a fairly blunt category, the delimitations of this sub-code emphasized the role of national adaptations to shifting security challenges, including legal reforms, policy initiatives, and critiques of restrictive EU frameworks. The findings from this sub-code revealed the national border to be conceived of as a space of national autonomy and sovereignty, as well as a site of institutional learning and progress.

When comparing the various imaginations of different border types, the findings demonstrated that borders are negotiated at the intersection of the symbolic and the material (Green 2018). Crises appeared to serve as discursive opportunities, through which various types of borders may be reimagined, enabling shifts in the discursive interpretation of borders as well as the institutional practices determining

the management of borders. Notably, national and supranational border imaginaries were deeply entangled with one another, revealing overlapping imagined spatialities and multi-scalar interpretations of security, cooperation, and governance.

9.1.2 Orders

The orders dimension of the IBO triad guided the analysis toward how border communication frames political ideas or images about EUropean orders, in other words, how the EU is structured as a system of governance. Governmental communication constructs multiple visions of EUrope through distinct, yet overlapping, meta-narratives. During the coding process, six distinct EUropean orders were identified, operationalized here as metanarratives: functional, geopolitical, normative, progress, regional cooperation, and security. Out of the identified metanarratives, the functional, security, and normative orders were examined more closely throughout the chapter due to their relative prominence in comparison to the other metanarratives or for their significance in promoting distinct visions of EU.

The functional order portrayed the EU as a mechanism for joint crisis management, particularly responsive during emergencies. While the need for supranational coordination was emphasized as a mechanism for addressing urgent challenges, tensions surfaced around the adequacy of existing EU legal frameworks, especially when crises were framed as hybrid threats. Beyond crises, the EU was also framed as a space of ongoing collaboration in areas like energy, infrastructure, climate, and health, which portrayed the EU as a stabilizing framework that fosters long-term resilience through integration across multiple domains.

The security order increasingly presented the EU as a collective defense actor. Communication coded as security constructed the Union as essential for regional security and resilience, particularly as threats became more hybrid in nature. Migration shifted from being a logistical issue to a strategic and hybrid threat, justifying tighter control and expanded technologies. Although this study treated security and geopolitics separately, in practice, border discourse often fuses them, presenting the EU as a geopolitical force safeguarding internal stability.

The normative order framed the EU as a community of shared values, shaping notions of both identity and belonging. These values, especially democracy and freedom, were mobilized to contrast the EU with authoritarian states. Over time, references to humanitarianism appeared in increasingly conditional language, while values were simultaneously used to legitimize restrictive measures such as visa bans. This shift was further reflected in a civilizational framing of EUrope, in which values perceived as core to the Union were invoked to justify control as much as solidarity.

Together, the findings from the orders dimension of the IBO triad demonstrated that border discourse contributes to envisioning how the EU is structured as a polity while also depicting borders as performative sites where the EU's purpose and direction are made visible and contestable. Thus, by examining border communication from the perspective of orders, the borders were constructed to

articulate EUrope as a functional and operational project, where legitimacy flows from collective action and rule-based governance. Moreover, borders served as a site where EUrope's identity is asserted and where its capacity to defend itself, materially and symbolically, is tested. At the same time, borders produce and transmit normative ideals, thus serving as a pathway to (re)affirm the EU's self-image.

9.1.3 Identities

Finally, the identity dimension of the IBO triad guided the examination of how national and supranational identity was represented and constructed through border communication. As discussed in earlier chapters, borders contribute to reshaping our understanding of identity by expressing a sense of who 'we' are. And crises appeared to serve as catalysts for rearticulating shifts in identity. The findings indicate that borders serve as both a place and a tool for EU governments to influence identity at the level of the national and the supranational.

The Baltic states, particularly Estonia, actively employed border discourse to express national identity, often positioning themselves on the frontline in the defense of Europe, and especially European values. In contrast, Sweden and Finland adopted a more restrained, administrative tone, emphasizing themes like solidarity and resilience. Common threads in national identity construction included independence, sovereignty, international image, and foundational values, though the emphasis varies by country. For instance, Sweden and Finland framed their NATO accession as a logical continuation of prior security narratives. However, tensions between inclusion and exclusion emerged, particularly around cultural compatibility, as seen in Estonia's emphasis on integration and Sweden's balancing of compassion with the society's capacity.

At the supranational level, border discourse played a role in shaping supranational identity by articulating the current meaning of the EU and its imagined future. Emphasis is placed on the EU as a value-based community and a political project in forward motion. While all countries refer to EU values, Estonia and Finland more openly link these values to inform a collective self-understanding across the EU. Within this context, crises are framed as moments that test and reaffirm the EU's unity and moral foundations. Alongside this normative dimension, the EU was constructed as a dynamic political project capable of evolving in response to emerging threats like hybrid warfare. This reveals a hybrid construction of EU identity positions. At the same time, identity representations reinforced the image of the EU as a distinct and unique entity, which was contrasted with non-European, and often uncivilized others.

In addition to representations of national and supranational identities, representations of history and territory in border communication were also considered to convey notions of identity, as per the theoretical interpretation and operationalization of the identity dimension. Here too, a disparity emerged between the Baltic and Nordic country cases, where the former's border discourse displayed a greater prevalence of historical and territorial narratives. Moreover, these frames were more prominent in communication on national borders. This related

predominantly to the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, and the ensuing re-independence. Historical and territorial frames were utilized to legitimize border management practices, embedding these practices within specific security interpretations. Furthermore, the analysis showed that territorial imaginaries in governmental border communication served to reinforce a sense of EU and European unity, by situating national borders within the EU-Atlantic spatial and mental community. In this way, borders were presented not solely as national markers, but also as part of layered, nested identities that connected national space with the European project. Notably, these historical and territorial narratives served to differentiate individual EUMS, as well as the EU as a whole, from its 'Others.'

A recurring representation of identity and territory portrays the EU as a collective 'we,' a cohesive political and value-based community. This framing is particularly pronounced in Estonian and Lithuanian border communication, where national and EU identities are more explicitly fused. In contrast, Finnish and Swedish discourse employs emotive identity narratives less frequently. However, across all four countries, national identity is regularly constructed in relation to EUrope, either affirming EU belonging, as in the Baltic states, or navigating tensions between national priorities and supranational norms, as seen in the Nordic states. In the Baltic cases especially, the EU was framed not just as a political union, but as an existential anchor, a shield against authoritarianism and a guarantor of independence. Here, the EU symbolized a civilizational alignment, often referred to through a commitment to a 'European way of life.'

An initial observation emerging from this summary of findings relates to the benefit of the multi-dimensional analytical framework. It is clear from the discussion above, that an examination of border discourse along only one of the dimensions applied in the analytical framework of this dissertation would have generated a much more limited interpretation of how various types of borders are communicated in governmental communication, and how those border representations produce visions of EUrope. With that said, one question remains, and that concerns what sort of EUrope is envisioned in governmental communication across the Baltic and the Nordic countries examined.

Another observation worth highlighting is that borders are imagined as inseparable from notions of Europeanness in the BSR, and particularly the Baltic states. The empirical findings of this dissertation emphasize that different border regimes entangling in the region not only coexist, but are actively used in border discourses to reinforce one another. This supports previous findings, in which I have demonstrated how the overlapping of national and supranational borders in Baltic news media follows a pattern of discursive entangling (Hagelin 2024). What this also points to is that the heterogeneity of the EUMS is a central aspect for how borders and border regions in the EU operate, manifest, and are thought about. To exemplify, while the entanglement of new border regimes in the Balkan context has led to an increasing peripheralization of the border region (Leutloff-Grandits 2023), entangled border regimes in the Baltic region instead suggest a renegotiation of the imagined geography of Europe, as the origin of expertise and centers of power are brought into question (Hagelin and Gibson 2024).

9.2 Visions of EUrope

Is it possible to interpret and theorize about visions of EUrope as articulated through border discourse? This dissertation set out to demonstrate that border discourse is a rich source of material for examining visions of EUrope, and ultimately for engaging with how visions of EUrope are co-constructed through the interplay of representations and imaginations about borders, orders, and identities. Specifically, this section reflects on how visions of EUrope are portrayed through border discourses, synthesizing the border representations and imaginaries presented in the three empirical chapters. This work has explored how representations and narratives surrounding borders are expressed in governmental communication. However, it is important to recognize that similar discourses are also produced by various other societal groups, not just by state actors. Thus, while this discussion is tied to governmental perspectives, research on border discourse and visions of EUrope expands beyond that. Notably, studying entangled borders in the EU contexts also serves to reveal the entanglements of visions of EUrope.

Overall, visions of EUrope emerged from the analysis as multidimensional and complex, interwoven through different metanarratives found in governmental border communication. These visions reflect not a singular image but a multilayered and occasionally conflicting portrayal of EUrope, shaped by varying border types, national contexts, and shifting crisis conditions. Nevertheless, some commonalities appear across different portrayals of EUrope. First, the justifications for the EUropean project found in border discourse are closely tied to how the EU's authority and purpose are legitimized or contested. These visions reflect different interpretations of what the EU stands for and what it should achieve. The border-related communication examined here tended to present the EU as a guarantor of peace, solidarity, order, or security, each invoking a distinct vision of EUrope; yet many convene around notions of defending the uniqueness of the EU. Second, across the different interpretations of EUrope, there is, broadly, a shared directionality of integration; the development of the Union is largely envisioned as deepening and/or expanding integration. Addressing contemporary challenges is seen to require increased cooperation within the EU, not only in terms of traditional domains of functional cooperation (market, energy, etc.), but also through more comprehensive security cooperation. Sentiments along these lines appeared frequently throughout the three IBO dimensions. For example, both national and supranational borders were portrayed through the lens of collaboration and collective action; different EUropean orders were imagined from the perspective of closer cooperation and combined efforts; and identity-related narratives highlight the uniting influence of shared values.

This dissertation has examined justifications for the EUropean project across border discourse from Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden in the context of the migration crisis of 2015–2016, the instrumentalized migration crisis in 2021, and the retraction of visas targeting Russian Schengen visa holders. These crisis moments guided the analysis to focus on how established narratives are tested and rearticulated. Crisis may serve as a discursive turning point (Tazziolo and

Stierl 2021), where EU action is either legitimized or called into question. For instance, when the EU is framed as ensuring collective security or providing a unified response to hybrid threats, it is positioned as a capable and necessary actor. Conversely, failures or delays in EU coordination were used to contest its effectiveness, pointing to structural limitations or political fragmentation, with the underlying notion being that more functional cooperation is needed. Thus, crisis moments are instrumentalized in discourse to reaffirm or reject the EU's legal framework to deal with various types of challenges. This process reflects how border communication becomes a site for negotiating broader ideas about the EUropean project and its legitimacy in an evolving geopolitical context.

Moreover, visions of EUrope are embedded in governance structures, such as legal frameworks and policy practices. Thus, an important dimension of analyzing border discourse lies in recognizing that borders are not only constructed rhetorically. In addition, the institutional (re)actions of governments (e.g., border infrastructure and asylum policy reform) play a crucial role in how borders are imagined and enacted. These, in turn, shape broader governmental envisioning of what sort of EUrope is being pursued. All of the countries examined in this study implemented various forms of both temporary and permanent border infrastructures and/or legal amendments, aimed at controlling and restricting movement across their national borders. These measures reflect converging threat perceptions, where issues related to human mobility and migratory pressures are increasingly conflated with security challenges. As a result, the scope of what constitutes legitimate grounds for reaching and crossing the EU's borders appears to be shrinking (Fassin 2011; Léonard and Kaunert). The growing emphasis on hybrid threats, and more specifically the risk of the instrumentalization of migration, further complicates the line between protective measures and the EU's and individual EUMS's commitments to international human rights conventions. In the border communication examined here, there are indications of tension with regards to the commitment towards these two imperatives. Adding to that, the communication on borders does not provide a clear answer on how these two commitments can or will be balanced in practice, only the recognition that it ought to be balanced.

Hence, the analysis reveals some discursive tensions emerging that may indicate potential future trajectories, in as much as these tensions highlight key policy domains where the EU and EUMS must find a mutually acceptable path forward. Within the context and scope of this study, one prominent tension is between normative aspirations and security concerns, as noted just above. This tension remained more prevalent during the 2015–2016 crisis period, during which the two imperatives produced an evident friction regarding what kind of EUrope was envisioned from and through border policies. During the two consecutive crisis periods, there appeared to be a more consolidated perspective on security challenges and the demands they impose on both individual EUMS and the EU as a whole, especially for the final crisis period in 2022. Another significant discursive tension appeared between national resilience and supranational integration, reflecting differing policy requirements, but also different regional

contextual challenges. While recognizing the variation in the challenges arising along different stretches of the external EU border, there was a growing recognition that the EUMS located at the external EU border face comparable challenges that other EUMSs do not. The tension between national resilience and supranational integration might reflect variations that are likely to exist between national visions of EUrope, and a shared supranational vision of EUrope. These tensions aside, the findings of this dissertation suggest a convergence of collective visions of EUrope, at least in the realm of security challenges. This convergence was especially evident in the increasing emphasis on achieving a shared understanding of the scope, type, and potential consequences of crises throughout the EU. Emphasis on consolidating crisis interpretations took an increasingly central role as the consecutive crises progressed.

As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, borders function as discursive tools that reclassify space and identity (Green 2013). Representations of geopolitical or cultural distinctions in the examined border communication, which were found to underpin utterances of a civilization divide, reveal how borders are used to articulate visions of who is considered European and who is not. This lends itself to constructions of EUrope as embodying a distinct identity and drawing symbolic boundaries between the 'Self' and perceived 'Others.' This process establishes imagined limits of inclusion and positions the EU as fundamentally different from its 'Others,' in the case of this material from its Eastern 'Others.' Such delineations are particularly evident in the articulation of the normative order, where emphasis on shared values and freedoms serves to define the EU's distinctiveness. This civilizational framing supports broader processes of differentiation, contributing to a vision of EUrope that is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, united through shared ideals, yet defined in contrast to those who fall outside their perceived scope. In doing so, border discourse contributes to constructing the spatial limitations of Europe, by designating who is understood to belong within the European community and who is excluded from it. This is notable in communication on the, so-called, EaP neighborhood. The majority of the countries belonging to this category are consistently framed as embodying EUropean values, and of belonging to the free world and the EUropean family. Noteworthy, with regard to this, Europe is normatively equated to the civilized world. As such, border communication challenges presumptions about where the EU is located while also designating characteristics of the space it demarcates.

This invites a return to the distinctions between EUrope and Europe, only addressed in passing in the introductory chapter. While this dissertation primarily examines how EUrope is envisioned, the border communication from the Baltic states, and to a lesser degree the Nordic states, recurrently conflate these two discursive categories. Beyond a general lack of differentiation between the EU and Europe in the governmental communication, references to the 'neighborhood' states further suggest such a conflation. For instance, when the EaP states are attributed values understood to signify the EU, this framing extends to conceptions of Europe more broadly. At the same time, it points to diminishing

distinctions between the EU and Europe, in contrast to the rhetoric of "neighbourhood," which implies lower degrees of Europeanness (Kølvraa 2017). While the border communication between Sweden and Finland is less explicit about the shared values that unite the EU and non-EU European states, one could argue that the commitment of both to the efforts of the EaP program indicates similar conceptual overlaps between EUrope and Europe. However, this idea is not prominent in the border communication included in this analysis.

Ultimately, this work has explored how representations and narratives surrounding borders are expressed in governmental communication. However, it is important to recognize that similar discourses are also produced by various other societal groups, not just by state actors. The EU is portrayed as both exceptional and under persistent threat, a framing that legitimizes the adoption of ever more forceful border measures to preserve its distinctiveness. In this discourse, the act of protecting the EU becomes synonymous with upholding its values and way of life, reinforcing the logic of containment and exclusion. Open internal borders and the principle of free movement are presented as contingent upon the ability to control and restrict access from the outside. Borders are specifically presented as necessary for maintaining the internal order of Europe, with disorderly migration framed as a disruptive force. This links to a broader imaginary of EUrope as a space of order and control; of an ordered interior that must be shielded from disorder beyond its external boundaries (Chamlian 2016). In particular, Baltic border communication repeatedly emphasized a sense of fragility, portraying the essence of the EU as needing constant vigilance and defense. This protective vision demands 'more EU' at the EU's external border: more security infrastructure, an increased presence, and higher spending. Thus, altogether, border discourse from the Nordic, and particularly the Baltic space, envisions a more bordered EUrope.

9.3 Reflections for future research

Due to the multi-scalar nature of borders, there is not one right way to examine the essence of borders. Border discourse, as has been the entry point here, is but one of the possible, and fruitful, ways through which to deconstruct borders and the ways they structure the world. To study borders through discourse is to engage with the imaginations of borders, and the ways in which those imaginations construct bordering practices. This proved to be worthwhile to study during times of heightened crisis, as these are moments when previously established imaginations and practices are put to the test.

Adding to that, within the scope of discourse analysis, there are, yet again, multiple methodological variations. In the end, DNP was settled on for this study as it was deemed it best facilitates a structured comparison across countries, even in elusive nuance-rich findings, such as those of discourse. The DNP approach made it possible to systematically compare the prevalence of metanarratives between countries, which made it possible to perform a close examination of the

discursive nuances within countries as well as in-between countries. While there are other, equally valid, methodological approaches to study border discourse, DNP proved to be especially valuable when it came to the comparative aspect of this study.

Furthermore, this research has demonstrated the applicability of the IBO triad when studying borders, and especially that of border discourse, as it facilitates a multifaceted analysis structured around the three IBO dimensions. As such, the IBO triad has proved a useful analytical tool to identify and examine how various types of borders are represented in governmental discussions about borders, and consider how these narratives shape the vision of EUrope. Matters of discourse in relation to borders need more attention to lay bare the workings of the imaginations, justifications, and contestations of borders and their practice.

9.3.1 Comparing governmental communication between different countries

While the synthesized discussion of the findings above addresses how borders shape visions of EUrope, the analysis also provides insights with regard to the process of comparing border discourse between countries. Just like the themes of border discourse are contextually dependent and can vary significantly from one country to another, so can the structure of border communication. This means that the way governmental communication is produced and disseminated has a significant impact on how borders are understood and interpreted. Note well that this is not the only limitation affecting the comparability of border discourse. Other challenges may arise, such as differences in the nature of various crises. In coherence with the scope of this research, I will share some reflections derived from the empirical analysis regarding the cross-country comparability of governmental communication.

Governmental communication can differ widely from country to country, meaning that researchers conducting cross-border research on border discourse are faced with contrasting conditions to examine discourse though governmental communication. Despite being relatively similar in many aspects, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, and Sweden demonstrate well that border-related communication is unique for each country. This concerns both the availability and scope of communication. For example, as noted in the chapter on research design, the availability of data was smaller for Sweden than for the other countries as there was only limited communication on border measures outside of the 2015–2016 migration crisis. In contrast, the other country cases maintained border-related communication across all three crises, meaning that there is a discrepancy already in the amount of material from which to extract and examine discursive representations. Although, it must be noted this pertains specifically to the three crisis events of this study; for instance, a broader look at Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine would likely have generated a different scope of material for Swedish discourse. Hence, this shows how different approaches to border communication

produce varying scopes of border representations. Although these variances do not necessarily reflect differences in national border imaginaries, they certainly impact the possibility of making inferences. It is inherently more challenging to interpret the absence of discourse.

In addition to variations in the availability of material, the content of border communication differs significantly between countries. Estonian governmental communication stands out as more descriptive and emotive, with narratives that regularly highlight Estonia's role as a defender of the Western world and its contributions to EU security. As a result, the entanglement of borders is more prominently articulated in Estonian discourses than in, especially, the Nordic cases. These differences can, in part, be attributed to Estonia's stronger emphasis on its 'border-identity.' In contrast, Finnish and Swedish border communication tends to be more restrained, employing less emotive language to illustrate borders and geopolitical positioning, affecting the ease with which discursive positions can be inferred. In Swedish communications, for example, it was often challenging to identify metanarratives, as press releases frequently focused on announcing meetings between state representatives (detailing when and where they took place, and listing attendants), while listing general topics without providing any further details into what would be or had been discussed. Such communications were often structured as photo opportunities and appeared to mainly address the media rather than the general public. In addition, there were notable variations in the intensity or salience of national versus EU border discourses across the four country cases. Consequently, these variations in both content and form of border communication make cross-country comparisons of border communication somewhat precarious.

Thus, a valuable point of reflection concerns how different types of media shape the discursive nuances of border communication. The findings presented in this dissertation are grounded in governmental communication. While this dataset offered direct access to how governments frame borders in moments of crisis, this focus also limits the scope of communicative dynamics by excluding more spontaneous or politically contested discourses. Different types of communication, such as social media, parliamentary debates, or journalistic coverage, may reveal additional layers of meaning, contestation, or public resonance in border discourse. Earlier work (Hagelin 2024; Hagelin & Gibson 2024) demonstrates that different media types present distinct angles on similar events, showing how border discourses may shift depending on the medium through which they are conveyed. This variation, in turn, illuminates different dimensions of border entanglements. For instance, while official communication often emphasizes institutional legitimacy and policy coherence, political speeches or media interviews may highlight ideological commitments, and offer more emotive and reactive language. As a result, different communication formats may give rise to shifting discursive narratives, which shape how borders are framed, imagined, and interpreted by the researcher. A broader dataset would likely have revealed greater variation in tone, intent, and audience engagement, all valuable when studying entangled and multi-layered border imaginaries.

These reflections are particularly important for comparative analyses of border discourse. Attentiveness to such variations is imperative when comparing across countries or political contexts. This is especially relevant in comparisons that draw on single-case studies of previously published findings, where the basis for comparison is often indirect or reliant on secondary accounts. Such approaches severely limit the ability to assess discursive nuances and may result in skewed or incomplete interpretations. These challenges highlight the need for transparency in methodological design, including clearly specifying not only what is communicated in border discourse, but also how it is communicated, and what remains unarticulated. In short, understanding the nature of the discursive material, and how it shapes the articulation of borders matters deeply for the validity and comparability of findings related to border discourse.

9.3.2 Suggestions for future research

While this work has taken stock of governmental perspectives of bordering, there remains a need to examine border discourse produced by a range of actors who affect, or are affected by, borders. In relation to this, there is a remaining need to map the various actors that contribute to bordering processes within and across different spaces, where the government is but just one actor among many (Koinova 2025). This is especially true for discourses articulated by those that cross borders in various capacities, especially those crossing borders to seek asylum. Engaging with these voices would likely lead to altogether different perspectives that are imperative for capturing a more comprehensive picture of borders. Future research would therefore benefit from a more detailed mapping of the voices, roles, and impacts of these various actors across different regions.

In addition, a closer examination of the linguistic structures used in each national context could further unveil nuances and strategies involved in border discourse. If retaining a similar comparative perspective as the one employed for this dissertation, it would require a study of broader scope and depth than this one, also considering it would need to account for sufficient language competencies across the countries examined. In addition, engaging with minority perspectives in border discourse could offer valuable insights into how border narratives resonate across linguistic and cultural divides. Minority perspectives, such as those of indigenous communities, should also not be overlooked, as these groups may contribute to alternative understandings of territoriality and belonging.

When it comes to researching governmental border discourse more specifically, several dimensions of this format of border discourse would benefit from additional studies. One such area involves examining other types of data which could further enhance our understanding of governmental border discourse. Interviews with government officials, both in written and spoken form, could reveal how official narratives are shaped behind the scenes. Parliamentary debates offer another important source, capturing how borders are discussed in more deliberative, often politicized contexts. Furthermore, exploring the discourse of border police and state agencies tasked with managing border control and migration

procedures could expose how policies are rationalized and enacted on the ground. These additional sources would enrich and deepen the analysis of how borders are communicated and constructed by state actors.

To deepen our understandings of how governments communicate about borders, there needs to be a large variation in the cases studied. So far, there have been studies on a relatively limited scope of countries, and regions. Further studies in the EU could focus on governmental border discourse in the southern region of the Union, especially along the southern external border. This also includes studies that focus on border discourse related to internal EU border reconfigurations. The reinstatement of internal Schengen border controls during crises remains an underexplored aspect of EU border discourse. Studies could investigate, for example, how EUMS discursively justify and frame these measures within the broader EU framework. To continue widening the research field, cases from beyond Western examples are especially needed, as border discourse is shaped by the style of communication. Examining regions which might have other communication traditions could be helpful to further uncover dimensions of border discourse.

There is a notable omission of a sustainability dimension among the border discourses examined here. This in turn, leads to a lack of sustainability dimensions for the EUropean visions produced through these border discourses. This is most probably a result of the type of data, as it specifically concerns human movement. It is likely that the sustainability dimension would be more prominent with a different selection of data, as natural disasters do not take heed of borders between political entities. For the advancement of the research agenda on border discourse, it is imperative to examine how borders are interpreted and justified from a range of perspectives, including those of the environment and natural disasters.

Finally, more comprehensive longitudinal studies on border discourse within the context of EUrope than the one performed here could offer valuable insights into how narratives evolve over a longer period of time, and in response to shifting political and geopolitical conditions. Future research could focus on tracing the development of border discourses across an extended timeframe, potentially anchored around a broader range of crisis events. Notwithstanding, it does not have to be bound to periods of crisis. A longer temporal lens would be particularly useful for identifying discursive patterns, ruptures, and continuities in how borders are constructed, legitimized, and contested over time. This would deepen our understanding of the temporal dynamics of bordering processes and contribute to ongoing debates around border imaginaries in EUrope and Europe.

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Appendix I. Government documents

Estonia

EE 24.04.2015	Prime Minister Rõivas ahead of the extraordinary European Council: Human trafficking in the Mediterranean must stop
EE 27.05.2015	Prime Minster Rõivas in Sweden: direct economic cooperation must continue
EE 05.06.2015	Prime Minister Rõivas at the Baltic Defence College: without educated officers there is no security
EE 16.07.2015	Political statement of Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas in the Riigikogu on 16 July 2015
EE 23.09.2015	Prime Minister Rõivas: The EU must support the neighbouring countries of Syria to reduce the migration pressure on Europe
EE 29.09.2015	Prime Miniter Rõivas's speech at Riigikogu on the delivery of the draft 2016 State Budget Act
EE 29.09.2015(2)	Prime Minister Rõivas in his state budget speech: the Government will continue its responsible approach
EE 07.10.2015	Rõivas at the Bocconi University: Free movement of data could be the fifth fundamental freedom in the European Union
EE 12.11.2015	Prime Minister Rõivas in Malta: EU has to regain control over its external borders
EE 16.11.2015	Rõivas: While the terror threat level has not changed for Estonia, preventive measures will be extended
EE 19.11.2015	Speech delivered on the implementation of Estonia's European Union Policy by Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas at the Riigikogu, 17 November 2015
EE 18.12.2015	Rõivas to EU delegates: the European Union is forced to continue with sanctions on Russia
EE 14.12.2015(2)	Prime Minister Rõivas will participate in the meeting of Baltic Prime Ministers in Lithuania
EE 19.01.2016	Rõivas on the audit of the National Audit Office: My rating is even more demanding
EE 24.02.2016	Prime Minister's Speech in the Tartu Vanemuine Concert Hall on February 23
EE 02.03.2016	Rõivas: Intolerance in society at some point devours every company’s profit and every person’s well-being
EE 17.03.2016	Rõivas in Brussels: We expect quick stemming of migratory flows from Turkey

EE 10.05.2016	Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas meets Sauli Niinistö, President of Finland
EE 02.06.2016(2)	News in picture: The members of the Government visited the south-eastern border
EE 09.07.2016	Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas: Turkey is an important partner and Ally in tackling the migration crisis and in NATO
EE 16.07.2016	Political statement of Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas in the Riigikogu on 16 July 2015
EE 13.10.2016	Rõivas: An open economy and a safe world are the common interests of Denmark and Estonia
EE 18.10.2016	Prime Minister Rõivas on EU Policy: we have to explain our decisions more thoroughly to people
EE 18.10.2016(2)	Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas: The migration crisis has been brought under control, but there is still much to do
EE 24.10.2016	Speech delivered on the implementation of Estonia's European Union Policy by Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas at the Riigikogu, 18.10.2016
EE 06.12.2016	The general attitude of Estonian residents towards migration and refugees has significantly improved
EE 22.12.2016 (supporting)	The Government approved its Action Programme for 2016-2019
EE 01.07.2021	Kallas at a meeting with Šimonytė: Estonia is prepared to aid Lithuania, who is dealing with migratory pressure
EE 23.08.2021	Statement of the Prime Ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland on the hybrid attack on our borders by Belarus
EE 03.09.2021	Kallas discusses EU migration policy and Belarus hybrid attack with European Commission Vice President Schinas
EE 15.10.2021	Prime Minister Kallas: Bold ideas are needed to inject new blood into cooperation between Estonia and Latvia
EE 09.11.2021	Today, the cabinet discussed the hybrid attack by the Belarusian regime against Poland
EE 15.11.2021	The Security Committee proposed securing the eastern border of Estonia with a temporary barrier
EE 16.11.2021	Prime Minister Kallas: Estonian Defence Forces continue to be the foundation of our security, even after 103 years
EE 16.11.2021(2)	Statement of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas at the press conference held after the National Defence Council meeting on 16 November 2021

EE 21.11.2021	Prime Minister Kallas in Meeting with Mateusz Morawiecki: The Hybrid Attack on the Belarusian-EU Border Shows No Signs of Stopping
EE 22.11.2021	Press Statement by Prime Minister Kaja Kallas After the Meeting with Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki, 21 November 2021
EE 01.12.2021	PM Kallas' address to Riigikogu on the EU policy and priorities for 2022-2023
EE 08.12.2021	Kaja Kallas discussed security and functioning of electricity market in Lithuania
EE 08.12.2021(2)	Statement by Kaja Kallas at the meeting of the Baltic Prime Ministers in Vilnius on 8 December 2021
EE 23.12.2021	Government summed up this year's work
EE 11.08.2022	Government limits issuing of visas to and entry into Estonia of Russian citizens
EE 08.09.2022	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland stop entry to Russian tourists through external borders

Finland

FI 21.04.2015	Prime Minister Stubb to extraordinary European Council
FI 14.10.2015	Ministerial Committee on European Union Affairs meeting on 14 October 2015
FI 27.10.2015	Dismantling of cross-border barriers and promotion of digitalisation Finland's objectives during Presidency of Nordic Council of Ministers
FI 18.12.2015	European Council speeds up measures to manage migratory flows
FI 12.01.2016	Long-term perspective in foreign and security policy creates stability
FI 29.01.2016	Prime Ministers Sipilä and Medvedev met in St Petersburg
FI 02.02.2016	Prime Minister Sipilä in London on Finland's support to Syria and its neighbouring
FI 04.02.2016	Prime Minister Sipilä participated in the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference in London
FI 19.02.2016	European Council discussed measures to manage migratory flows
FI 19.06.2016	Prime Ministers Sipilä and Löfven discussed the economy and foreign and security policy
FI 16.07.2016	Prime Minister Sipilä at ASEM Summit: Global problem solving calls for common effort

FI 03.11.2016	Prime Ministers Sipilä and Rõivas met in Tallinn
FI 23.08.2021	Minister Tuppurainen's speech in the Annual Meeting of Heads of Mission
FI 24.08.2021	Statsministern Marins talvid ambassadörsmötet den 24 augusti 2021
FI 13.09.2021	Nordic, Baltic and Visegrád foreign ministers to meet in Finland
FI 09.12.2021	Ministerial Committee on European Union Affairs discusses upcoming summits, economic affairs and international issues
FI 16.12.2021	Amendment to the reception act clarifies responsibilities for preparing for mass influx of migrants
FI 17.12.2021	European Council calls for better vaccination coverage
FI 17.02.2022	Commission proposes common model to respond to instrumentalisation of migrants
FI 15.03.2022	Ministry of the Interior to prepare introduction of border procedure
FI 12.04.2022	Legislative amendments related to border security help prepare for hybrid influence activities that exploit migration
FI 21.04.2022	Finland could request support from the EU Agency for Asylum in the event of mass influx of migrants
FI 23.08.2022	Speech by Prime Minister Sanna Marin at the annual meeting of Heads of Mission
FI 13.09.2022	Prime Minister Sanna Marin’s speech at the European Parliament on 13 September 2022
FI 20.09.2022	Finland proposes a European Commission recommendation on visa annulment if a Schengen country refuses entry of Russian nationals
FI 28.09.2022	Government discusses foreign and security policy situation at evening session
FI 29.11.2022	Finnish Government issues a resolution to strongly restrict entry of Russian tourists into Finland
FI 02.12.2022	Speech by Prime Minister Sanna Marin at the Lowy Institute on Friday 2 December 2022

Lithuania

LT-MFA 20.04.2015	Lithuania to contribute to the international efforts in addressing the problems of illegal migration
LT-MFA 19.05.2015	Minister Linas Linkevičius attended the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting

LT-MFA 20.05.2015	Linkevičius stressed that burden-sharing of refugees among EU member states must be based on the principle of voluntarism
LT-MFA 22.06.2015	L. Linkevičius: we need to strongly support Ukraine and to take a principled stance on Russia
LT-MFA 08.09.2015	Lithuanian Ambassador presents her letters of credence to President of Malta
LT-MFA 08.09.2015(2)	Educated migrants can make Europe's job market more vibrant: Linas Linkevicius. The Times of India, September 7, 2015
LT-MFA 14.09.2015	Lithuania's Foreign Vice-Minister underlines importance of EU's comprehensive migration policy in Brussels
LT-MFA 28.09.2015(2)	Lithuania's Foreign Vice-Minister underlines importance of EU's comprehensive migration policy in Brussels
LT-MFA 04.09.2015	Strengthening of security in the region and migration challenges addressed with the Hungarian ambassador
LT-MFA 14.10.2015	'Protection of EU's external borders is not an option, but responsibility': Lithuania's Foreign Vice-Minister
LT-MFA 27.10.2015(2)	'Migrant crisis can be tackled only through joint effort': Lithuania's Foreign Vice-Minister
LT-MFA 09.11.2015	Lithuania's Foreign Minister expresses support for Kosovo's European integration
LT-MFA 17.11.2015	Lithuanian FM: EU should put more pressure on Russia. euractiv.com, November 16, 2015
LT-MFA 18.11.2015	To do Nothing is Provocative. neweasterneurope.eu, November 17, 2015
LT-MFA 16.12.2015	Protecting EU external borders is essential for reducing illegal immigration, says Linkevičius
LT-MFA 17.06.2016	Lithuania's Foreign Minister stresses that cooperation with Nordic Council of Ministers is important for Lithuania
LT-MFA 22.06.2016	In Riga, the Political Director at Lithuania's Foreign Ministry stresses the importance of support for Eastern Partnership countries
LT-MFA 25.08.2016	Why should we celebrate Ukraine's independence together? Veidas. 25 August 2016
LT-MFA 10.11.2016	EU enlargement process is a driving force for reforms in South Eastern Europe, an anchor of stability and security, says Foreign Minister
LT 18.06.2021	Prime Minister: Latvia and we see similar threats
LT 30.06.2021	Prime Minister and Lithuanian diplomats discuss Government priorities and foreign policy

LT 06.07.2021	Prime Minister: illegal migration from Belarus is a tool of hybrid aggression
LT 08.07.2021	Prime Ministers of Lithuania and Spain highlight the value of closer bilateral co-operation
LT 06.08.2021	Baltic Prime Ministers discuss response to Lukashenka's hybrid aggression against Lithuania and the EU
LT 06.08.2021(2)	Poland supports Lithuania, both countries will seek decisive response to the Belarusian regime – Joint Statement by the Lithuanian and Polish Prime Ministers
LT 18.08.2021	Prime Minister: all EU member states are responsible for the protection of external borders
LT 23.08.2021	Baltic and Polish Prime Ministers condemn hybrid attack by Belarus against state borders
LT 23.08.2021(2)	Government takes decision to install a physical barrier on the border with Belarus, to be built by EPSO-G
LT 04.09.2021	Project supervision commission approves project phases to construct a physical barrier at the border with Belarus
LT 09.09.2021	Šimonytė: we need to review policies and European Union law to preserve our core values
LT 24.09.2021	Prime Minister: Lithuania appreciates support of EU institutions and member states in combating the hybrid attack
LT 29.09.2021(2)	Prime Minister and President of European Court of Auditors talk over recommendations on EU asylum system
LT 20.10.2021	Prime Minister: we have a commitment to guard the EU's eastern border and we will live up to that commitment
LT 28.11.2021	Prime Minister: we cannot give up our values and give in to blackmail
LT 01.12.2021	Prime Minister's greetings to Romania celebrating its Unification Day
LT 21.03.2022 (supporting)	Speech by Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė at International Kalinowski Forum Iliustracija

Sweden

SE 30.01.2015	Morgan Johansson på informellt ministerrådsmöte i Riga
SE 12.03.2015(2)	Justitie- och migrationsminister Morgan Johansson på ministerråd i Bryssel
SE 24.04.2015	Tal från Morgan Johansson Tal vid lunchseminarium med UNHCR

SE 04.09.2015	Statsminister Stefan Löfven i möte med förbundskansler Angela Merkel
SE 24.09.2015	Statsministern bjuder in till Sverige tillsammans
SE 01.10.2015(2)	Regeringen presenterar åtgärder med anledning av flyktingsituationen
SE 09.10.2015	Regeringen presenterar åtgärder för asylsökandes boende och skolgång
SE 20.10.2015	Anders Ygemans anförande vid Civilförsvarsförbundets årsstämma
SE 12.01.2016	Tal Folk och försvar, Sälen 2016
SE 22.01.2016	Ygeman till RIF-råd i Amsterdam
SE 16.02.2016	Flyktingkrisen dominerar och hotar Schengen
SE 24.02.2016	Europas gränser på agendan för Ygeman i Bryssel
SE 03.03.2016	Regeringen beslutar att ytterligare förlänga gränskontroll vid inre gräns
SE 30.03.2016	Tal av Morgan Johansson vid UNHCR:s högnivåkonferens i Geneve om vidarebosättning av syriska flyktingar
SE 07.04.2016	Regeringen beslutar att ytterligare förlänga gränskontroll vid inre gräns
SE 11.04.2016	Ygeman tror på mer samarbete med Danmark
SE 01.06.2016	Gränskontroller förlängs till november
SE 07.06.2016	Utvärdering av hanteringen av flyktingsituationen 2015
SE 07.10.2016(2)	Inbjudan till fototillfälle när statsministern tar emot EU:s höga representant för utrikesfrågor och säkerhetspolitik och vice ordförande i EU-kommissionen Federica Mogherini
SE 27.10.2016	Anders Ahnlids EU-krönika: Motgångar och framgångar under året

Joint Statements

Joint Statement 07.09.2022	Joint statement of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland

Appendix II. Frequency of metanarratives by country and year

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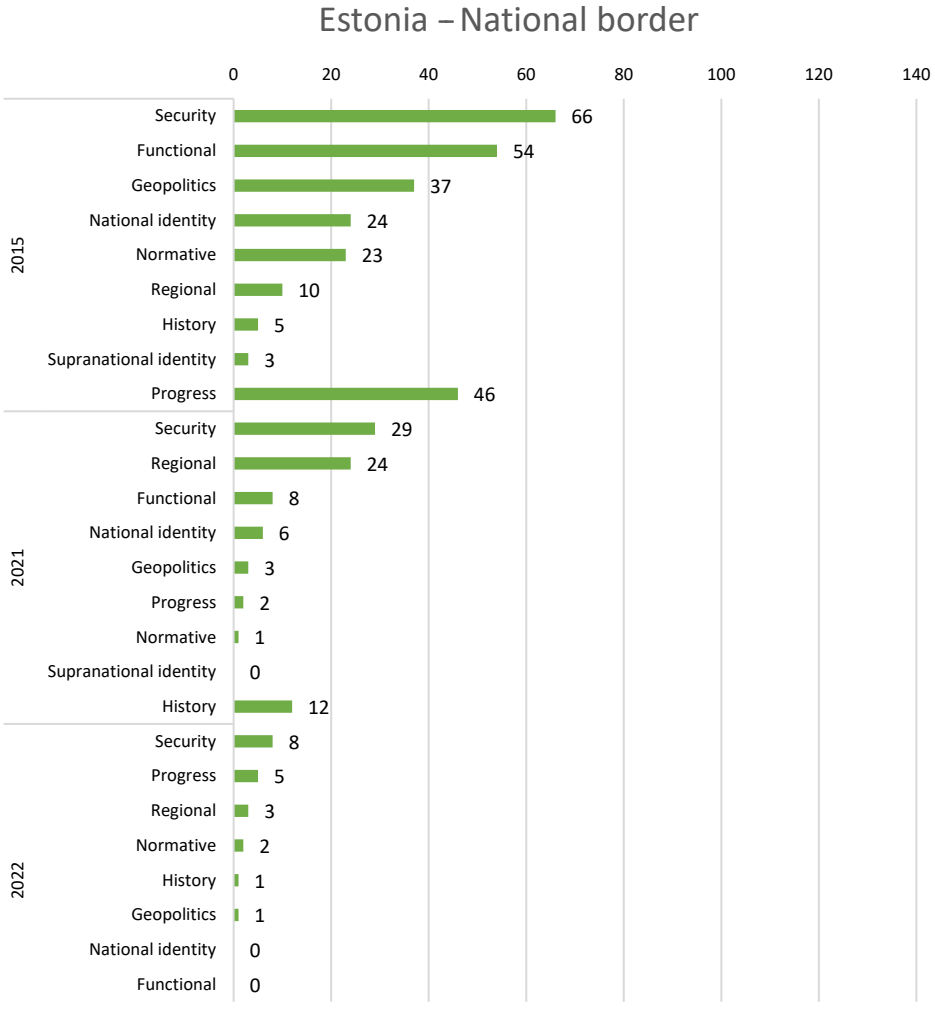

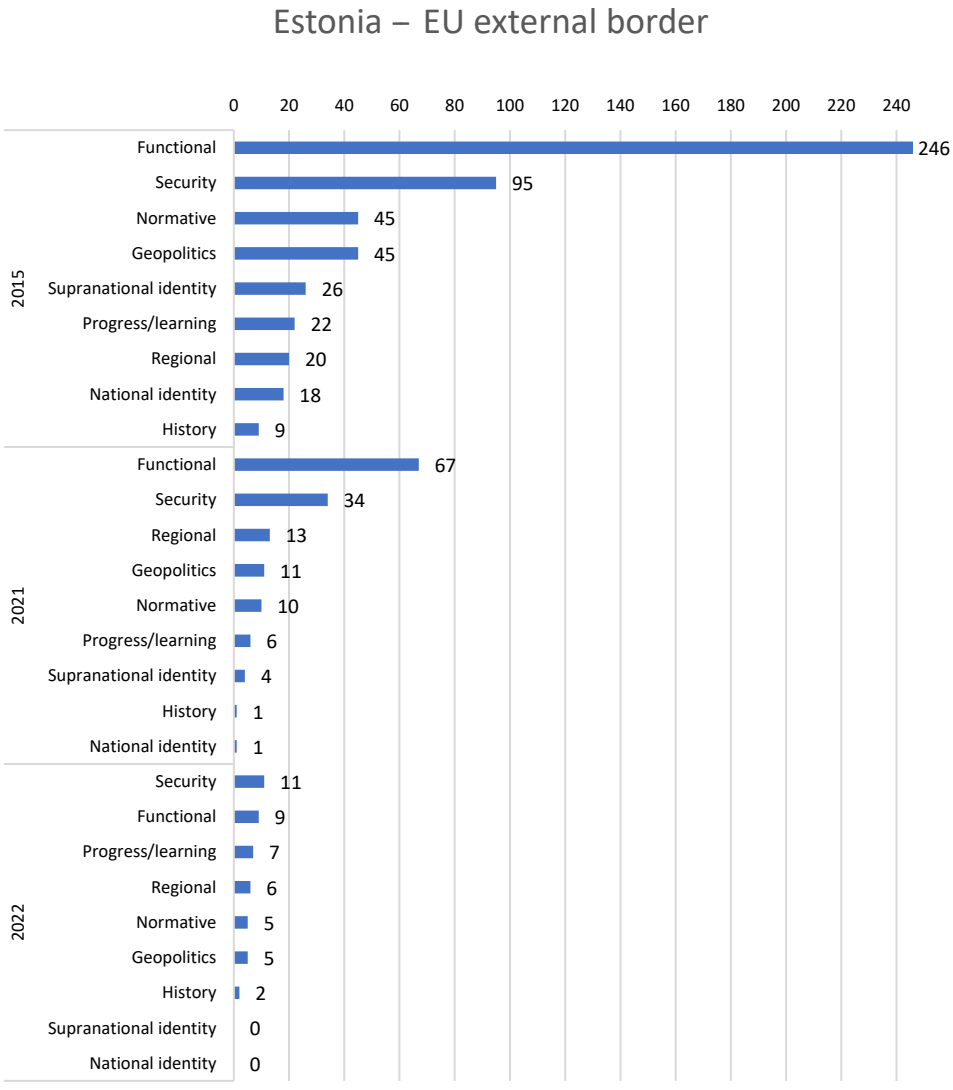
Estonia – EU external border
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60
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100
120
140
160
180
200
220
240
2015
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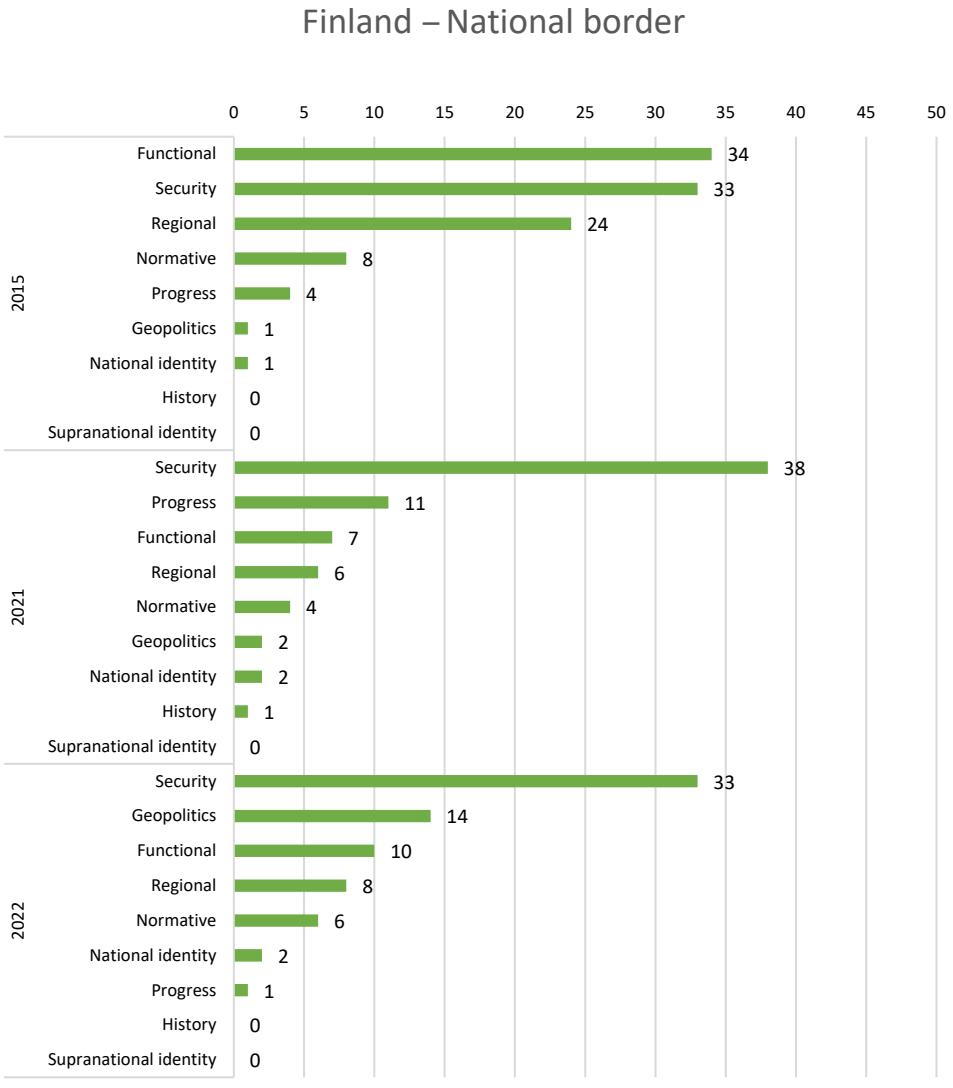
Security 95
Normative 45
Geopolitics 45
Supranational identity 26
Progress/learning 22
Regional 20
National identity 18
History 9
2021
Functional 67
Security 34
Regional 13
Geopolitics 11
Normative 10
Progress/learning 6
Supranational identity 4
History 1
National identity 1
2022
Security 11
Functional 9
Progress/learning 7
Regional 6
Normative 5
Geopolitics 5
History 2
Supranational identity 0
National identity 0

Finland:


Finland – National border
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5
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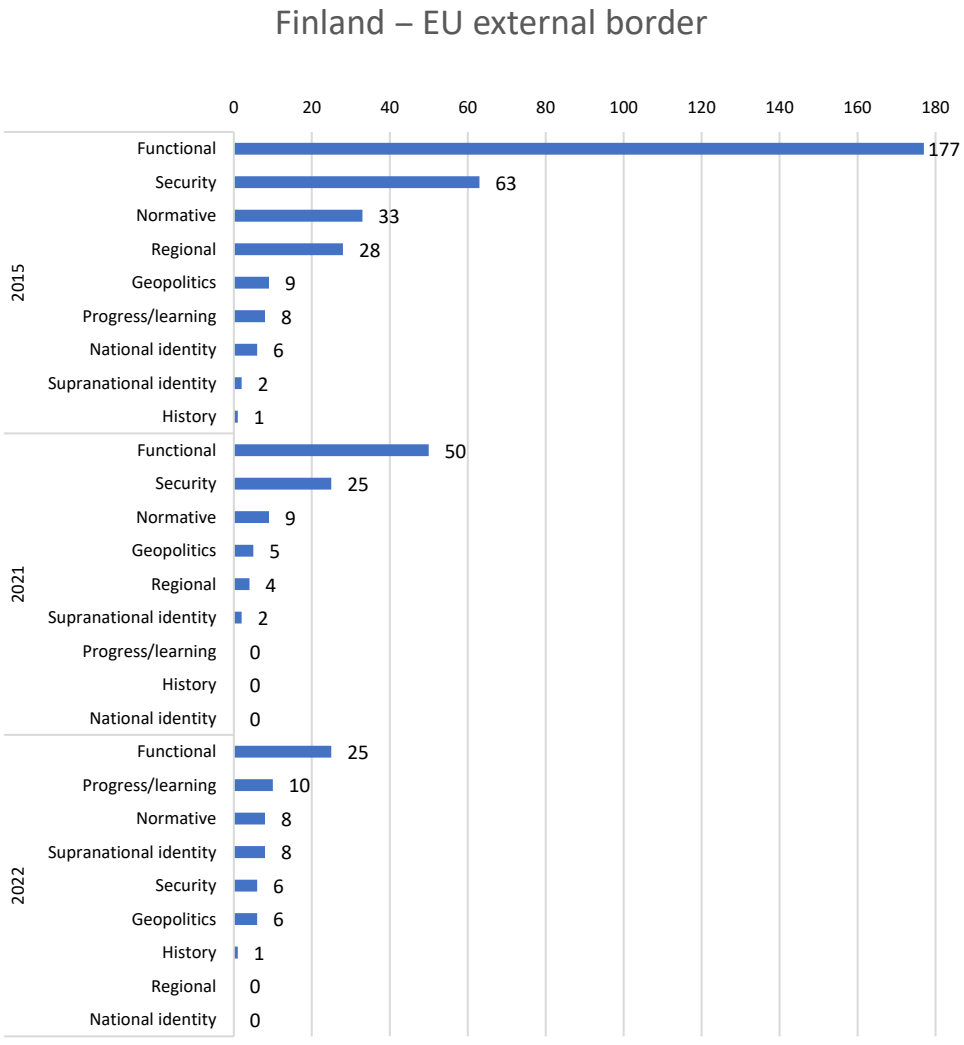
15
20
25
30
35
40
45
50
2015
Functional 34
Security 33
Regional 24
Normative 8
Progress 4
Geopolitics 1
National identity 1
History 0
Supranational identity 0
2021
Security 38
Progress 11
Functional 7
Regional 6
Normative 4
Geopolitics 2
National identity 2
History 1
Supranational identity 0
2022
Security 33
Geopolitics 14
Functional 10
Regional 8
Normative 6
National identity 2
Progress 1
History 0
Supranational identity 0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2015
Functional
177
Security
63
Normative
33
Regional
28
Geopolitics
9
Progress/learning
8
National identity
6
Supranational identity
2
History
1
2021
Functional
50
Security
25
Normative
9
Geopolitics
5
Regional
4
Supranational identity
2
Progress/learning
0
History
0
National identity
0
2022
Functional
25
Progress/learning
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Normative
8
Supranational identity
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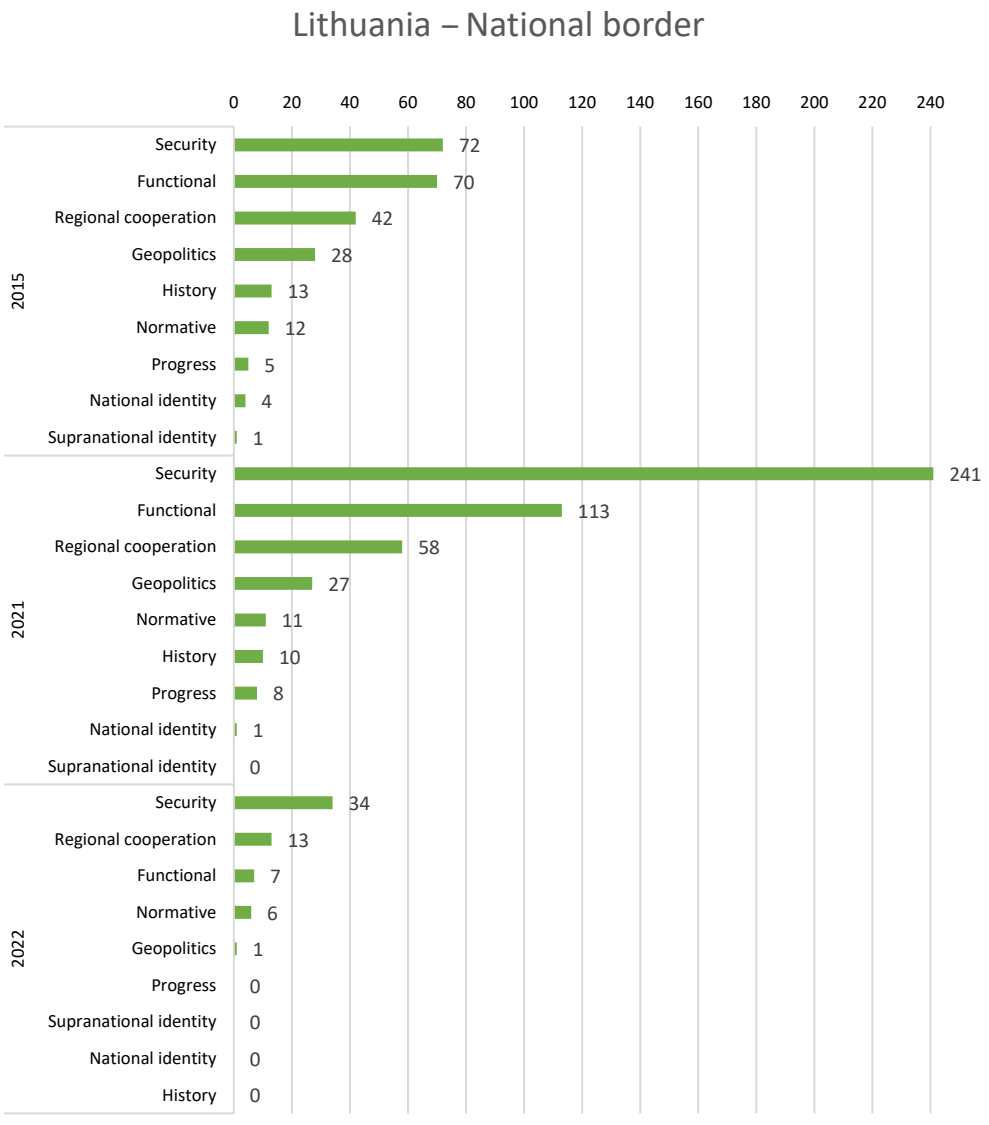
Security
6
Geopolitics
6
History
1
Regional
0
National identity
0

Lithuania:


Lithuania – National border
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180
200
220
240
2015
Security 72
Functional 70
Regional cooperation 42
Geopolitics 28
History 13
Normative 12
Progress 5
National identity 4
Supranational identity 1
2021
Security 241
Functional 113
Regional cooperation 58
Geopolitics 27
Normative 11
History 10
Progress 8
National identity 1
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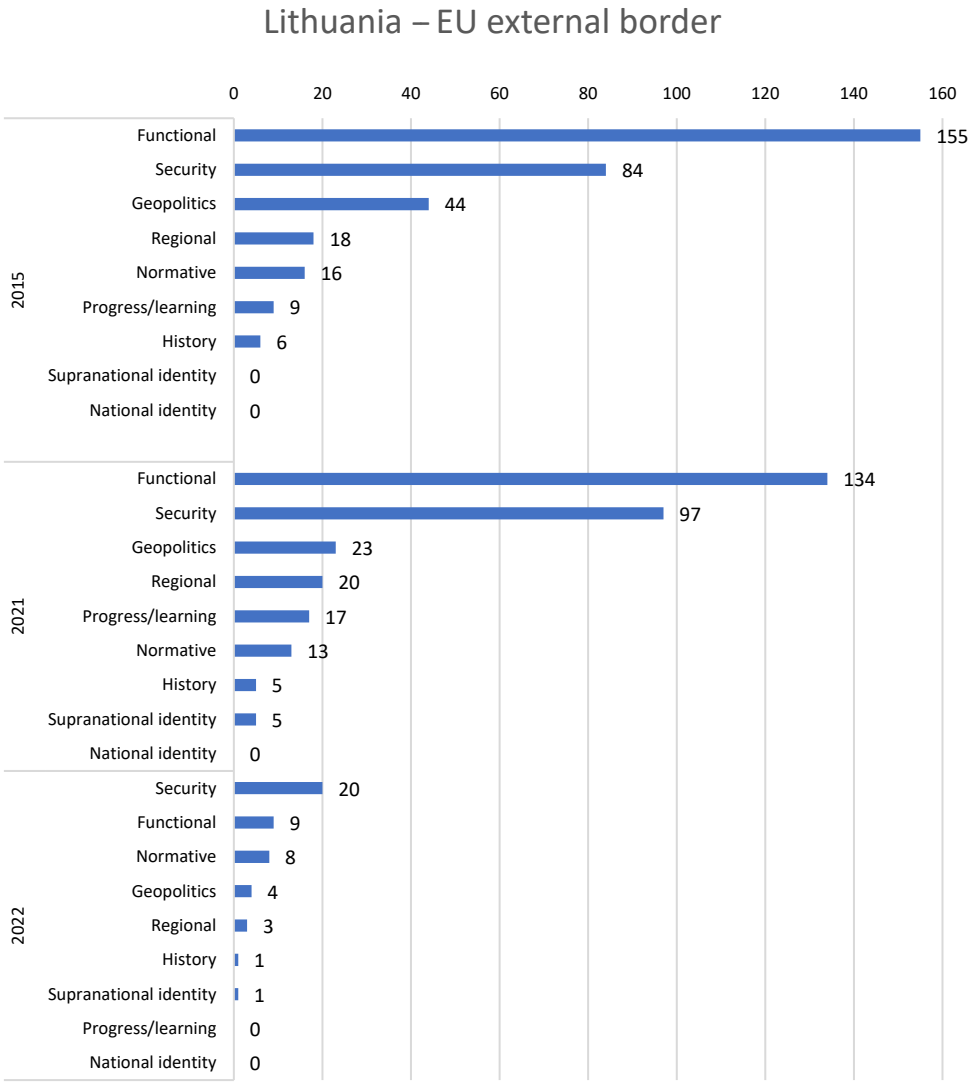
Functional 7
Normative 6
Geopolitics 1
Progress 0
Supranational identity 0
National identity 0
History 0


Lithuania – EU external border
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2015
Functional 155
Security 84
Geopolitics 44
Regional 18
Normative 16
Progress/learning 9
History 6
Supranational identity 0
National identity 0
2021
Functional 134
Security 97
Geopolitics 23
Regional 20
Progress/learning 17
Normative 13
History 5
Supranational identity 5
National identity 0
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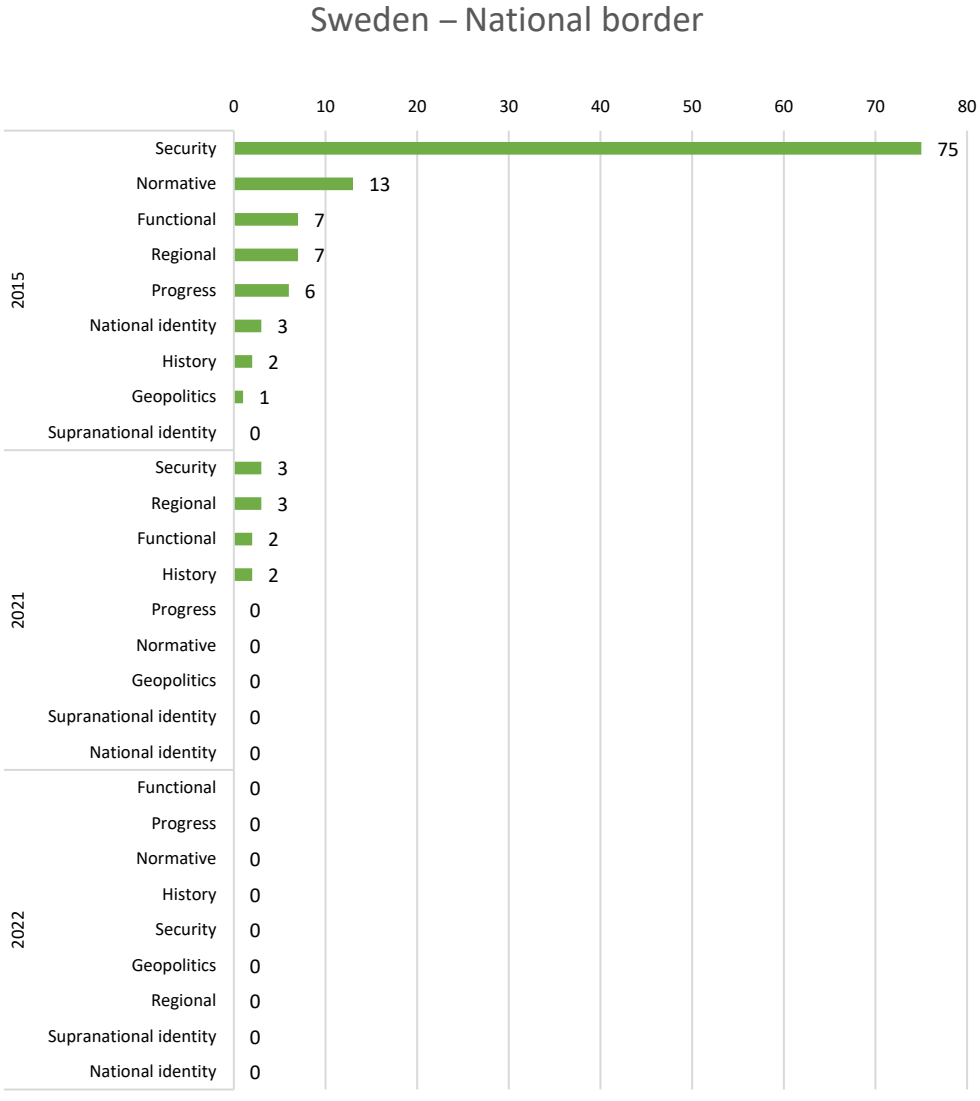
Functional 9
Normative 8
Geopolitics 4
Regional 3
History 1
Supranational identity 1
Progress/learning 0
National identity 0

Sweden:


Sweden – National border
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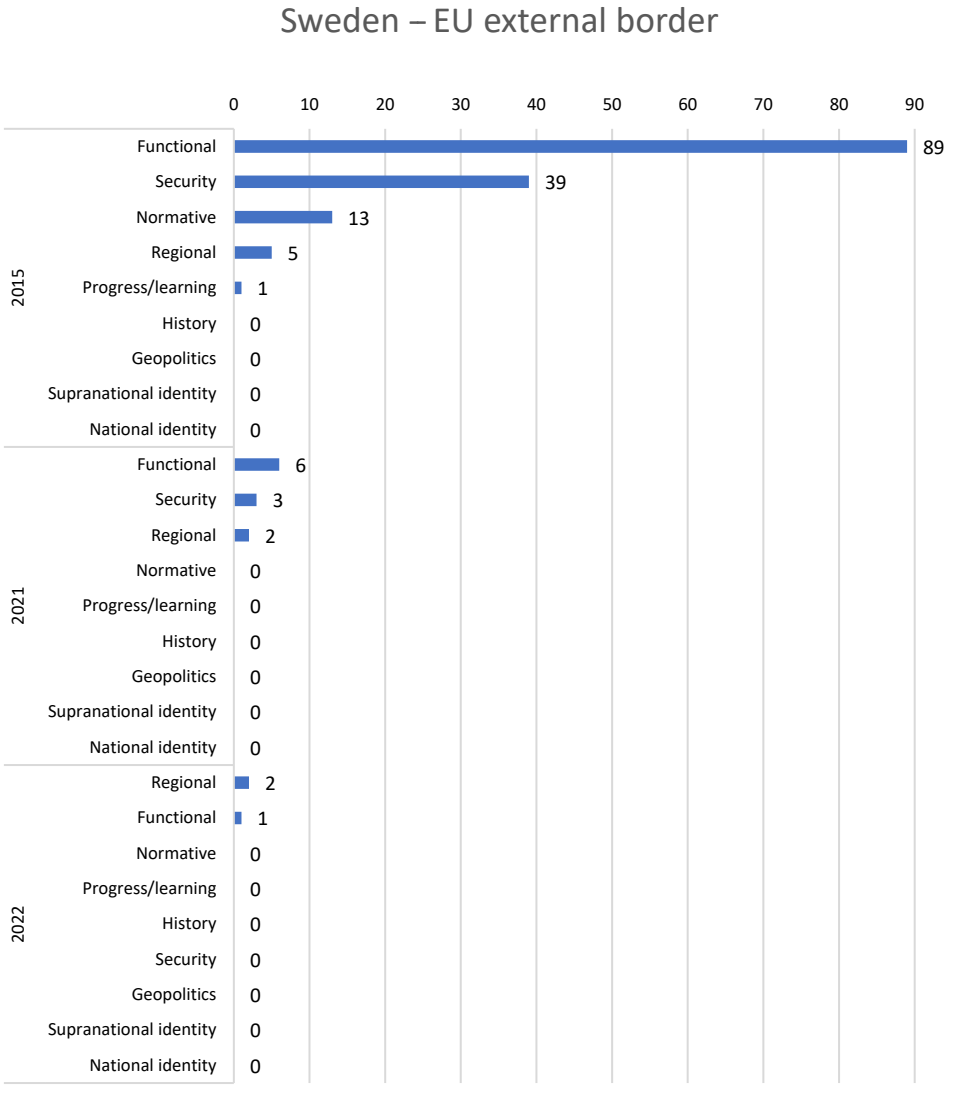
70
80
2015
Security 75
Normative 13
Functional 7
Regional 7
Progress 6
National identity 3
History 2
Geopolitics 1
Supranational identity 0
2021
Security 3
Regional 3
Functional 2
History 2
Progress 0
Normative 0
Geopolitics 0
Supranational identity 0
National identity 0
2022
Functional 0
Progress 0
Normative 0
History 0
Security 0
Geopolitics 0
Regional 0
Supranational identity 0
National identity 0


Sweden – EU external border
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90
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Security 39
Normative 13
Regional 5
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2021
Functional 6
Security 3
Regional 2
Normative 0
Progress/learning 0
History 0
Geopolitics 0
Supranational identity 0
National identity 0
2022
Regional 2
Functional 1
Normative 0
Progress/learning 0
History 0
Security 0
Geopolitics 0
Supranational identity 0
National identity 0

Appendix III. List of incumbent governments during the studied time period

Country	Year	Parties in Government	Prime Minister	In office	Type of government	Supporting Party	EU Party main party
EE	2015–2016	Reform Party (REF) Social Democratic Party (SDE)	Taavi Rõivas (REF)	26 March 2014 – 9 April 2015	Coalition government		ALDE
		Reform Party (REF) Social Democratic Party (SDE) Pro Patria and Res Publica Union	Taavi Rõivas (REF)	9 April 2015 – 23 November 2016 (Vote of no confidence)	Coalition government		ALDE
		Center Party (EK) Social Democratic Party (SDE) Pro Patria and res Publica Union	Jüri Ratas (KE)	23 November 2016 – 29 April 2019	Coalition government		ECR
	2021	Reform Party (REF) Center Party (EK)	Kaja Kallas (REF)	26 January 2021 – 14 July 2022	Grand coalition cabinet		ALDE
	2022	Reform Party (REF) Isamaa Social Democratic Party (SDE)	Kaja Kallas (REF)	18 July 2022 – 17 April 2023	Majority coalition cabinet		ALDE
FI	2015–2016	Center Party (Kesk) National Coalition Party (Kok) Finns Party (PS)	Juha Sipilä (Kesk)	2015-2017	Majority coalition government		ALDE
	2021; 2022	Social Democratic Party (SDP) Center Party (Kesk) Green league (Vihr) Left Alliance (Vas) Swedish People's Party (RKP)	Sanna Marin (SDP)	10 December 2019 – 20 June 2023	Majority coalition government		PES

LT	2015–2016	Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP) Labour Party (DP) Order and Justice (TT) Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA-KŠS)	Algirdas Butkevičius (LSDP)	13 December 2012 – 13 December 2016	Majority coalition government		PES
	2021; 2022	Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS–LKD) Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LS) Freedom Party (LP)	Ingrida Šimonytė (TS-LDK)	11 December 2020 – 12 December 2024	Majority coalition government		EPP
SE	2015–2016	Swedish Social Democratic Party (S) Green Party (MP)	Stefan Löfven (S)	2014-2018	Minority coalition government	Left Party (V)	PES
	2021	Swedish Social Democratic Party (S) Green Party (MP)	Stefan Löfven (S)	2018-2021 (Vote of no confidence 21 June 2021)	Minority coalition government	Center Party (C); Liberals (L)	PES
		Swedish Social Democratic Party (S) Green Party (MP)	Stefan Löfven (S)	9 July 2021 – 30 November 2021	Minority coalition government		PES
		Swedish Social Democratic Party (S) Green Party (MP)	Magdalena Andersson (S)	24 November 2021 – 24 November 2021	Minority coalition government		PES
		Swedish Social Democratic Party (S)	Magdalena Andersson (S)	30 November 2021 – 18 October 2022	Minority government	Center Party C); Left Party (V); Green Party (MP); independent parliament member	PES
	2022	Moderate Party (M) Christian Democrats (KD) Liberals (L)	Ulf Kristersson (M)	18 October 2022 – Current at the time of writing	Minority coalition government	Sweden Democrats (SD)	EPP

KOKKUVÕTE EESTI KEELES

Räägime piiridest, räägime Euroopast: põimunud piirid valitsuse diskursuses Põhjala-Balti ruumis

Piiridega seotud diskursuse keerukust võib täheldada valitsuste kommunikatsioonis, kus erinevad piiride tüübid esinevad sageli koos, ilma et nende erinevusi selgitataks. Käesolevas väitekirjas uuritakse, kuidas valitsused räägivad piiridest ja Euroopa Liidust (EL), analüüsides mõlema representatsioone Põhjamaade ja Balti riikide, täpsemalt Soome, Rootsi, Eesti ja Leedu avalikus diskursuses. Analüüs rajaneb eeldusel, et viis, kuidas piiridest räägitakse annab aimu sellest, kuidas neid ette kujutatakse, legitimeeritakse ja jõustatakse. Varasem teaduskirjandus rõhutab piiride temaatikaga seotud ebatäpsust valitsuskommunikatsioonis, eriti just selge eristuse puudumist ELi sisepiiride (piiride kaotamise – debordering) ja ELi välispiiride (piiride taastamise – rebordering) vahel (Schimmelfennig 2021; Brändle ja Eisele 2023). Kuigi nimetatud uuringud märgivad, et ELi piiridega seotud kommunikatsioon on ebamäärane, jääb lahtiseks, kuidas valitsuse diskursuses samaaegselt erinevatele piiri režiimidele viidatakse. Analüütiline väljakutse seisneb seega selgitamises, miks riikide valitsused sulatavad avalikus kommunikatsioonis kokku riiklikud, ELi ja muud piiride liigid, hoolimata nende institutsionaalsest ja funktsionaalsest eripärast ning milliseid poliitilisi eesmärke see sulandamine teenib. Nimetatu võib hägustada piiripoliitika loogikat, seada kahtluse alla olemasolevate uuringute eeldused, mis käsitlevad piirirežiime eraldiseisvatena, ning viitab strateegilistele diskursiivsetele tavadele, mis teoreetilistes käsitlustes vähe esinevad.

Käesolev doktoritöö käsitlebki erinevat tüüpi piiride diskursiivset interaktsiooni, tutvustades mõistet „läbipõimunud piirid" – entangled borders - (Green 2019), et analüütiliselt lahti harutada diskursuses esinevad kattuvad ja kihilised piirid. Töös vastatakse järgmistele uurimisküsimustele: (1) millised on piiride ja piiride loomise protsessi diskursiivsed representatsioonid valitsuskommunikatsioonis EL piiridega seotud kriiside ajal ja (2) milline pilt avaneb ELroopast (ingl.k. EUrope – normatiivne kujutlus Euroopa ja Euroopa Liidu olemusest) nendes representatsioonides. Töö keskmes on küsimus, millise kontseptuaalse vormi piirid omandavad, mida nad tähistavad ning kuidas nad poliitilises kujutluses toimivad. Töö selgitab ka, kuidas ELi visioone saab analüüsida läbi piiridiskursuse, seda eriti ELi äärealadel. Riiklikke ja ELi välispiiride diskursusi uurides pakub töö uusi teadmisi selle kohta, kuidas ELi kui ühist üksust tajutakse ning kuidas valitsused sellest räägivad.

2. peatükis jälgitakse geopoliitiliste ümberkujundamiste ja piiride kujutluste pikaajalist arengut Põhjamaades ja Balti riikides, rõhutades ruumiliste ja ontoloogiliste piiride segunemise traditsiooni. Peatükis selgitatakse, kuidas Balti riikide geopoliitiline identiteet arenes äärealast vaidlusaluseks piirialaks, mis viis neid riike liituma sõjalise allianssiga, samas kui Soome ja Rootsi valisid geopoliitilise positsiooni kindlustamiseks mitteliitumise. Seejärel asetatakse peatükis

kolm kriisi nimetatud piirkondlikku konteksti, rõhutades ühiseid mustreid ja riikidevahelisi erinevusi selles, kuidas inimeste liikumist tajutakse. Samal ajal kui Balti riigid on demograafilise ja majandusliku haavatavuste tõttu säilitanud suhteliselt skeptilise suhtumise, toetasid Soome ja Rootsi algselt humanitaarset ja avatud piiride lähenemist. Viimane on alates 2016. aastast, mil surve sotsiaalsüsteemidele kasvas, hakanud nõrgenema. Ohutaju muutus aja jooksul, konsolideerudes 2022. aastal, mil mure rände instrumentaliseerimise pärast ületas humanitaarsed kaalutlused.

3. peatükk käsitleb ELroopa piiride alast teaduskirjandust, pöörates erilist tähelepanu Läänemere piirkonnale (BSR), et asetada väitekiri diskursiivse piiride loomise ja ELroopa konkureerivate visioonide arutelude konteksti. Tuginedes interdistsiplinaarsetele järeldustele piiriuuringutest ja Euroopa uuringutest, rõhutatakse peatükis piiride sümboolset, ruumilist ja poliitilist rolli tähenduse loomise ja identiteedi kujundamise kohana. See näitab, kuidas identiteedi, kuuluvuse ja teisestamise diskursused kujundavad nii riiklikke kui ka Euroopa piire, eriti geopoliitiliste- ja rändekriiside ajal, ning rõhutab, kuidas piiride kujundamist mõjutavad ruumilise loogika kõrval ka sümboolsed ja ajaloolised narratiivid. Läbivaks teemaks on pinged avatuse ja väljajätmise, koostöö ja karmistamise ning ELi normatiivse ideaali ja julgeolekupõhiste piiripraktikate vahel. Peatükis tuuakse välja ka uurimislüngad varasemast teaduskirjandusest, mida käesolev väitekiri adresseerib. See puudutab eeskätt nappe võrdlevaid analüüse erinevate piiriliikide diskursiivsete konstruktsioonide kohta, iseäranis riikide ja ELi välispiiride kohta sellistes ristuvates regioonides nagu Põhjala ja Balti riigid. Lisaks rõhutatakse, et puuduvad võrdlevad perspektiivid, mis uuriksid piiride kujutluste sarnaseid ja erinevaid jooni eri riikides, hoolimata Läänemere regiooni mitmekesisest geopoliitilisest kogemusest ja piirkondlikest identiteedinarratiividest.

Doktoritöö teoreetiline raamistik, mis on esitatud 4. peatükis, kasutab uurimisküsimuste käsitlemiseks kaheastmelist analüütilist lähenemisviisi, mis põhineb identiteetide-piiride-korra (identities-borders-orders, IBO) kolmikul (Albert jt, 2001; Albert ja Lapid 2017). Selles raamistikus käsitletakse piire, korda ja identiteete vastastikku sõltuvate ja üksteist täiendavate nähtustena, mis loovad üksteist toetavaid tähendusi ja kontekste. IBO-kolmik võimaldab analüüsida erinevate piiride tüüpide vahelisi nüansse, eriti kattuvate režiimide ja põimunud diskursuste kontekstis, ning pakub prisma, mille kaudu saab valitsuse piirikommunikatsiooni lahti harutada. Neid komponente omavahelises seoses uurides hõlbustab raamistik ELroopa visioonide väljendamise detailset analüüsi.

Teoreetiline raamistik seostub kahe uurimisküsimusega. Esimene uurimisküsimus käsitleb seda, kuidas piirid ja piiride loomise protsessid on kujutatud valitsuse kommunikatsioonis. Kriitiline analüüs jagab piiridiskursused vastavalt IBO-kolmikule analüütiliselt väiksemateks piirid-korrad-identiteedid komponentideks. „Piiride" dimensioon rõhutab mitmete piiride olemasolu ja nende võimalikke seoseid, mis aitavad kaasa Euroopa Liidu piiride sümboolsele ümberkujundamisele ja peegeldavad konkreetseid ettekujutusi selle poliitilisest ja territoriaalsest tähendusest. „Korra" mõõde keskendub sellele, kuidas piiridega

seotud kommunikatsioon väljendab sotsiaalset ja poliitilist korda, mis on kooskõlas sellega, kuidas ELi kujutatakse poliitilise üksusena suhetes väliste toimijatega (Stråth 2002). „Identiteetide" mõõde analüüsib, kuidas poliitiline eliit loob ELi identiteete ja määratleb kollektiivse „meie". Selline identiteedi konstrueerimine tugevdab sotsiaale ja poliitilise korra kujunemise protsesse, kindlustades kollektiivse üksuse aluse, millele sellised korrastavad struktuurid võivad tugineda. Teine uurimisküsimus küsib, millised ELroopa visioonid tulenevad piiridiskursustest. Selleks sünteesib analüütiline raamistik järeldused kolme IBO-mõõtme lõikes, tuletamaks ELroopa üldised visioonid ja väites, et need omavahel põimunud loogikad kujundavad kollektiivselt ELroopa arengusuundi.

5. peatükis kirjeldatakse väitekirja metodoloogilisi aspekte ja analüütilist lähenemist. Teoreetiline raamistik rakendatakse metanarratiivide identifitseerimise kaudu piiride, kordade ja identiteetide lõikes. Täpsemalt rakendab väitekiri diskursiivseid sõlmpunkte (Discursive Nodal Points, DNP), eristades ja võrreldes metanarratiive Soome, Rootsi, Eesti ja Leedu valitsuste kommunikatsioonis kolme kriisi kontekstis: 2015. aasta rändekriis, 2021. aasta Valgevene piirikriis ja 2022. aasta piirangud vene Schengeni viisa omanikele. Metanarratiive defineeritakse kui diskursusi, mis stabiliseerivad sõlmpunkti tähenduse antud ajahetkel (Laclau ja Mouffe 2001; Diez 2001, 2010), võimaldades võrdlevat analüüsi selle kohta, kuidas erinevad piirid on eri riikides ja kontekstides diskursiivselt konstrueeritud. Tähenduse ajutine fikseerimine hõlbustab erinevaid poliitilisi meetmeid, nagu kriisist tingitud ELi piirihaldus (Loschi ja Russo 2021) või piiride sulgemise ja avamise õigustamine (Lamour ja Varga 2020). Metanarratiivid tuvastatakse poolinduktiivse protsessi abil, kombineerides varasema kirjanduse teadmisi iteratiivse andmeanalüüsiga. Andmed koosnevad valitsuse pressiteadetest ja uudistekstidest, mis on valitud tabamaks kaasaegset kriisidiskursust, erinevalt tagasivaatavatest tõlgendustest, mis on omased näiteks intervjuudele. Tekstikorpus koosneb 525 tekstist, mis on käsitsi kogutud valitsuse ametlikelt veebilehtedelt ja hiljem salvestatud, korrastatud ja analüüsitud MAXQDA-s. Riiklike ja ELi välispiiride diskursuste eristamiseks kopeeriti korpus kahte kausta, mis võimaldas kodeerimisel eristada riiklike piiride diskursusi ja ELi välispiiride diskursusi.

Empiirilised tulemused näitavad, et valitsused käsitlevad nii riigipiire kui ka ELi välispiire valdavalt ruumilise demarkatsioonina, mis peegeldab traditsioonilist arusaama piiridest kui eraldusjoontest ja institutsionaliseeritud, sümboolse tähendusega territoriaalsuse väljendustest. Kuigi piiride loomise protsessid algavad valitsusasutustes, kujutatakse piire lõppkokkuvõttes füüsilise eraldusjoonena, mis sõltuvalt piirialade kontekstist toimivad nii kaitsva barjäärina kui ka koostööpaigana. Isegi kui piire otsesõnu ei nimetata, tugevdatakse nende funktsioone viidates nende mõjule, mis näitab, et piiridele saab diskursiivselt tugineda ilma neid otseselt nimetamata. Analüüsis selgub, et erinevad piiriliigid on omavahel keeruliselt põimunud ja nende tähendused tekivad nende vastastikmõjust. Kuigi see on kõige nähtavam kohtades, kus piirid füüsiliselt kattuvad, kehtib see muster ka Rootsi puhul, kus riigipiirid ei lange kokku ELi välispiiriga Schengeni alal.

6. peatükis esitatakse analüüsi tulemused IBO-kolmiku „piiride“ mõõtme osas, näidates, kuidas piirid kujunevad sümboolsete ja materiaalsete aspektide interaktsioonis. Kriisid pakuvad diskursiivseid võimalusi piiride ümbermõtestamiseks, võimaldades muutusi nii tõlgenduses kui ka institutsionaalsetes tavades. Kolme kriisi jooksul on liikuvaid inimesi kujutatud erinevalt, vastavalt kas ohvritena, ohuna või hübriidsõja vahendina, samal ajal struktureerivad piiride konstrueerimist ebaseaduslikkuse loogika, „voogude” dehumaniseerivad kujundid ning heitlemine humanitaarsete kaalutluste ja julgeolekustatud kriisireageerimise vahel. Üldiselt keskendub valitsuse kommunikatsioon rohkem ELi välispiirile kui riigipiiridele, kuigi riigipiiride teemaline kommunikatsioon intensiivistus suurenenud julgeolekuohtude taustal. Rändega seotud kriiside ajal jäävad riigipiirid kujutletavateks multifunktsionaalseteks ruumideks, mida kujundatakse infrastruktuuri, õiguse, eetika, julgeoleku ja geopoliitika valdkondades. Seevastu ELi välispiir on raamistatud kui riigiülese vastutuse valdkond, mis nõuab kollektiivset koordineerimist. Seda raamistikku rõhutavad kõige tugevamalt Eesti ja Leedu, viidates Venemaalt ja Valgevenest tulenevatele julgeolekuohtudele, et õigustada ELi sügavamat integratsiooni ja solidaarsust.

7. peatükis uuritakse „korra” mõõdet, analüüsides, kuidas piirikommunikatsioon väljendab poliitilisi ideid või ettekujutusi ELroopa korrast, teisisõnu, kuidas EL on üles ehitatud valitsemissüsteemina. Tulemused näitavad, et valitsuse kommunikatsioon loob mitmekesiseid, üksteisega kattuvaid ettekujutusi ELroopast erinevate, kuid omavahel kattuvate metanarratiivide kaudu. Kuuest tuvastatud kujutletavast korrast on põhjalikumalt käsitletud kolme olulisemat – funktsionaalne, julgeoleku- ja normatiivne kord. Funktsionaalne ja julgeolekukord domineerivad piiridiskursuses nii riikide kui ka ELi välispiiridel, kuigi vastupidises proportsioonis: funktsionaalne loogika on silmapaistvam välispiiride kommunikatsioonis, samas kui julgeoleku narratiivid on tugevamalt esindatud riiklikul tasandil. Funktsionaalne kord kujutab ELi ühist kriisiohjamise mehhanismi, mis reageerib eriti kiiresti hädaolukordades. Kriiside kõrval kujutatakse ELi ka koostööruumina, stabiliseeriva raamistikuna, mis soodustab pikaajalist kerksust mitmete valdkondade integratsiooni kaudu. Julgeolekukord kujutab ELi üha enam kollektiivse kaitse subjektina. Kommunikatsioon kujutab Liitu piirkondliku julgeoleku ja kerksuse seisukohalt eluliselt olulisena, iseäranis üha hübriidsemaks muutuvate ohtude taustal. Normatiivne kord raamistab ELi ühiste väärtuste ja vabaduste kogukonnana, mis kinnistab nii riiklikku kui ka riigiülest identiteeti ja muudab piirikaitse sünonüümseks ELroopa ideaalide kaitsmisega. See normatiivne raamistik lõikub ELi tsivilisatsiooniliste tõlgendustega, toetades piiripoliitikat, mille eesmärk on kaitsta ELroopa väärtusi ja eluviisi väliste ohtude eest.

8. peatükis esitatakse „identiteedi” mõõtme analüüsi tulemused, näidates, kuidas piirid toimivad nii kohana kui ka vahendina, mille abil ELi valitsused kujundavad rahvuslikku ja riigiülest identiteeti. Balti riigid, eriti Eesti, kasutavad piiridiskursust rahvusliku identiteedi kinnistamiseks, positsioneerides end Euroopa eesliinil ELi väärtuste kaitsjatena, samas kui Rootsi ja Soome kasutavad tagasihoidlikumat, administratiivsemat tooni, rõhutades solidaarsust ja vastupidavust.

Riigiülesel tasandil väljendab piiridiskursus ELi kui väärtuspõhist ühendust ja arenevat poliitilist projekti, mis põimib ELi ühisväärtuste kaudu riiklikke ja riigiüleseid identiteete. Need väärtused toetavad kollektiivset ELroopalikku identiteeti, konsolideerides samas rahvuslikku kuuluvust selle sees. Piiridiskursus väljendab identiteeti ka viidetega ajaloole ja territooriumile. Balti riigid käsitlesid neid teemasid piiridest rääkides aktiivselt, eriti läbi viidete taasiseseisvumisele. Selles kontekstis on suveräänsuse ja iseseisvuse eest võitlemisega seotud ajaloolised viited silmapaistvamad kui ELi välispiiride kommunikatsioonis. See näitab, et riigipiirid on endiselt ajalooliste kuvanditega seotud, samas kui ELi välispiire tõlgendatakse harvem läbi ajalooprisma.

Lisaks näitab käesolev väitekiri, et piiridiskursus on produktiivne keskkond ELroopa visioonide uurimiseks ja selleks, kuidas need visioonid piiride, korra ja identiteetide kujutamise kaudu ühiselt konstrueeritakse, nagu on täpsemalt kirjeldatud töö 9. peatükis. Uurimuse tulemused näitavad mitmekihilisi ja mõnikord vastandlikke visioone ELroopast, mis on kujunenud erinevate piiritüüpide, riiklike kontekstide ja muutuvate kriisiolukordade mõjul. Piiridega seotud kommunikatsioon kujutab ELi erinevalt kui rahu, solidaarsuse, korra või julgeoleku garanti, viidates erinevatele, kuid omavahel kattuvatele visioonidele, mis kipuvad omavahel ühtima ELi ainulaadsuse kaitsel. Kommunikatsiooni ühine joon on ka edastada ELroopa jagatud trajektoori, mida kujutatakse integratsiooni süvendamise ja/või laiendamisena.

Geopoliitiliste või kultuuriliste erinevuste representatsioonid, mis leiti olevat tsivilisatsioonilise lõhe väljenduste aluseks, näitavad, kuidas piire kasutatakse, väljendamaks visioone sellest, kes on eurooplane ja kes mitte. Selline raamistus kujutab ELi kui eraldiseisvat normatiivset kogukonda, mis põhineb ühistel väärtustel ja vabadustel, tugevdades sümboolseid piire „mina" ja „teiste" vahel. Sellised representatsioonid kujutavad ELi nii ainulaadse kui ka pideva ohu all olevana, õigustades üha jõulisemaid piirimeetmeid, et kaitsta ELi väärtusi ja eluviisi. Seega järeldab väitekiri, et ELi kaitsmine muutub sünonüümiks ELi väärtuste ja eluviisi kaitsmisega, tugevdades piirangute ja välistamise loogikat. Avatud sisepiirid ja vaba liikumine on raamistatud välisest kontrollist sõltuvaks, piirid on raamistatud vajalikuna sisemise korra säilitamiseks ning korratu rände vältimiseks. See seostub laiema kujutlusega ELroopast kui korra ja kontrolli ruumist; korrastatud sisemisest ruumist, mida tuleb kaitsta väliste piiride taga valitseva korratuse eest. See kaitsev visioon nõuab ELi välispiiril „rohkem Euroopa Liitu": rohkem julgeolekutaristut, suuremat kohalolekut ja suuremaid investeeringuid. Seega kujutab Põhjamaade ja eriti Balti riikide piiridiskursus kokkuvõttes ette rohkem piiratud ELroopat.

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***

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