

Estonia's Security

A Case Study of Internal and External Perceptions

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Abstract

Estonia is facing a challenging security situation, given the broad spectrum of threats and its historical and geopolitical ties to Russia. With that in mind, this qualitative case study aims at providing an overview of Estonia's security by establishing the similarities and differences between internal and external perceptions and applying role theory to the findings. The empirical data, gathered through elite interviews with Estonia's prime minister and defence minister, as well as officials and experts from the Baltic Sea region, mainly indicate that threats to Estonia's security come from Russia and are played out on various arenas, all combined in the concept of hybrid threats. Furthermore, the Russian-speaking minorities and the aging population are additional threats, perceived externally. Moreover, Estonia's own defence forces are perceived as very professional, but small in size, as is the country's economic and diplomatic capacity. Consequently, Estonia's security derives directly from NATO and the EU, which can also compensate for capacity shortcomings. Accordingly, Estonia is perceived as a very committed ally to its partners, embodying multiple roles in the region, among others, the leadership role in the cyber domain.

Key words: small states, security, perceptions, role theory, Estonia

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List of Abbreviations

CCDCOE	Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
EU	European Union
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Hybrid CoE	The European Centre of Excellence Countering Hybrid Threats
ICDS	International Centre for Defence and Security
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
UN	United Nations

List of Country Codes

DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
FI	Finland
LT	Lithuania
LV	Latvia
PL	Poland
SE	Sweden

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Aim and Question

For small states, security is always high on the agenda. Paired with historical ties and geographical proximity to great powers, small states find themselves in power disparity, where they do not hold the upper hand (Knudsen 1996). That is also the case for Estonia. Ever since the restoration of the nation's independence in 1991, Estonia has been on the path to finding its security and distancing itself from the neighbouring great power, Russia (Tromer 2006; Jurkynas 2014). This path led Estonia to seek numerous institutional ties, among which perhaps the most important ones were established in 2004 with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU) memberships. Institutional structures have given Estonia a boost in confidence when it comes to security but concerns have never truly faded.

The broader conceptualisation of security has added new dimensions to the term, expanding the spectrum from hard military threats to soft issues related to economy, cyberspace, society, energy, and other fields (Mabee 2009). Furthermore, if at one point it was believed that military aggression was a thing of the past, the events that took place in Georgia, followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the on-going crisis in Ukraine, have brought geopolitics back to the table (Korolev 2015). The new 'old' world order, where military threats are combined with soft security issues, is the reality of today, affecting primarily states that lack capacities to provide security on multiple fronts. Although institutional structures compensate for some of the shortcomings, the situation is still challenging. An interesting example is Estonia's security, faced with that exact situation, where on the one hand, the geopolitical ties to the current aggressor make the country's security vulnerable; but on the other hand, the institutional guarantees provide security to some extent.

The current state of the political circumstances poses many interesting questions. Firstly, what is there actually to be afraid of? Are institutional guarantees sufficient to provide security? What is the role of Estonia in the security domain? Finally, how secure is Estonia today? With these inquiries in mind, this research aims at providing an overview of Estonia's security by gathering perceptions from inside and outside the country. I believe that the most accurate overview of the situation lies somewhere in-between how Estonia's elites perceive the security and how it is perceived externally by close allies and partners. Hence the research question of this study is:

What are the similarities and differences between the internal and external perceptions of Estonia's security?

By analysing internal and external perceptions of the security situation and Estonia's role, as well as its capacities in the security field, it will be possible to identify threats, roles, and capacities that together offer a valuable insight into Estonia's current security situation. Given that perceptions are important for policy-makers' choices and thereby the policy outcomes,

due to the influence of others' views on self-image (Jervis 1976), pairing internal and external perceptions has the potential to form Estonia's self-image (Lucarelli 2014) and contribute to understanding Estonia's overall role and identity in foreign affairs, including security questions.

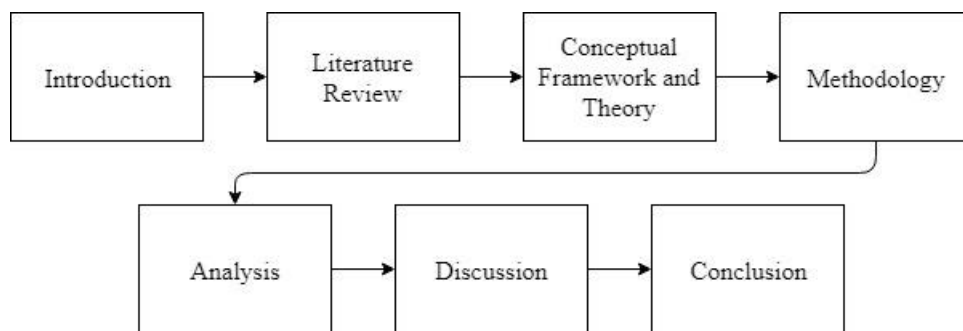
1.2 Theoretical and Methodological Approach

On that note, the theoretical structure used in the thesis is derived from the role theory, more specifically Holsti's (1970) national role conceptions framework. This is due to the centrality of perceptions, as they provide a solid ground for identifying roles played by actors (Elgström and Smith 2006), making the role theory the best option for identifying Estonia's role in the security domain. Consequently, the methodological approach of the study is a qualitative single case study, as the focus is fixed on one case, Estonia's security perceptions, and the data are gathered through qualitative means, specifically elite interviews. As elites (in this thesis defined as decision-makers and experts) directly influence states' policy outcomes (Jervis 1976), their perceptions provide great insights into Estonia's current security situation. The unique data collection, with internal insights from Estonia's prime minister, its defence minister, and an established expert in the security domain, combined with contributions from experts and officials of the Baltic Sea region states, contributes to the existing security and perceptions literature as well as to the role theory scholarship.

1.3 Delimitations

Nevertheless, there are many limitations to this study that should be taken into consideration. First and foremost is the length of the thesis that limits the inclusion of external views and the depth of the analysis. It surely would be interesting to gather the external perceptions from a larger context such as the EU or NATO, or even more global perspectives from other continents. That would, perhaps, give a more accurate overview. However, a manageable context had to be chosen, resulting in the focus on the Baltic Sea region to represent the external environment. Due to the close cooperation between the states in the region and a shared common history and security sphere (Neretnieks 2006), this choice makes the most sense. Secondly, the limits in time and resources represent a challenge to obtain all the necessary information to conduct the study. Therefore, written interviews provide an alternative to compensate for not being able to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, when possible, the latter option is preferred. Finally, the broad theoretical conceptualisation of security and subjectivity of perceptions have challenged the analytical conclusions, in a sense that there is no single point of departure defined for the participants. However, in order to avoid steering the outcomes in a certain direction, an open conceptual approach was chosen.

1.4 Thesis Outline



2 Literature Review

This is a discussion on the state of the art in the fields of perception literature and small states' security studies, to which my thesis belongs. Starting with the perceptions scholarship, the external dimensions take precedence over the internal ones. Therefore, more attention is given to the external aspects of perceptions. Furthermore, it is not possible to discuss small states' security without providing definitions to the concept of small states, which is why a considerable part of the literature review is dedicated to this notion, providing a link to discussions on security challenges.

2.1 (External) Perceptions

Perceptions have been used in academia and in every day politics to pursue governance and election campaigns. Already in 1976, Robert Jervis concluded that decision-makers' perceptions matter for policy-making and that they are influenced by internal as well as external factors, such as how others view them. Today, it is common practise to look at public opinion on issues relevant to election platforms or policy outcomes. Surveys among electorates often indicate which issues to prioritise and give an overview of people's attitudes towards leaders or a government (see Lebanidze and Kakachia 2017 on Georgia; election; public opinion surveys¹). Furthermore, media perceptions hold an influential position as they can shape public opinions and embody a platform for information flow between the public and the elites (Elgström and Chaban 2015). Thus, it is fair to conclude that knowledge of perceptions provides a powerful tool for politicians and decision-makers in conducting their daily work, since perceptions can influence policy outcomes and form priorities. Therefore, given that perceptions are used for nation states' governance, one would assume that the question of how states are perceived externally also matters in their foreign policy, which is an assumption that inspired this thesis.

¹ E.g. "Public Opining and National Defence" report ordered by Estonian Ministry of Defence.

The contemporary scholarship on external perceptions in political science is dominated by a rather EU-centric approach, meaning that most of the research in this field focuses on the external views on the EU. This is mainly due to the tendencies in literature to characterize the EU as a ‘special’ global actor (Bretherton and Vogler 2006, 2013) and the curiosity to find out if it is a shared or perhaps only a unilateral understanding (Lucarelli 2014; Elgström and Chaban 2015). In addition to establishing the realities of EU’s global dominance, supplementary arguments for external perceptions’ usefulness can be found. Lucarelli (2014) provides five reasons to explain the usefulness of external perceptions (in the EU context but also applicable to a single actor), which 1) challenge the EU’s self-representation and the academic literature on the global position occupied by the union; 2) have possible impact on identity formation processes; 3) are relevant for gaining the broader understanding of the EU’s role in the world; 4) help to identify the conditions under which the EU policies are effective; and finally, 5) help to overcome the dominative Eurocentrism in EU literature by providing insights of non-Europeans’ views on the world, their interests, and perceptions (Lucarelli 2014:1-2; also Lucarelli 2012; Elgström and Chaban 2015; Chaban et al. 2006).

Perceptions and Roles

Some of the external perception scholars have taken a step further towards a more specific focus relating to external perceptions, by looking into explicit policy areas and precise roles played by the actors. Holsti (1970) created a framework for national roles in the Cold War era in order to explain nations’ foreign policy behaviour, shaping a role theory useful for foreign affairs. However, his approach included decision-makers’ perceptions about their own states, and not the external perceptions of others. Nonetheless, knowing that decision-makers’ perceptions are also influenced by others’ views on them (Jervis 1976), external perceptions still have a significant relevance to actors’ roles. Additionally, through his research, Elgström found that perceptions are important for roles because “there is a close relationship between external images, legitimacy, effectiveness and distinctiveness” (Elgström cited in Lucarelli 2014:2; Elgström and Chaban 2015; Elgström and Smith 2006). This provides a good reason to why external perceptions are valuable to actors, as they have a direct impact on negotiations and hence the policies, which therefrom develop legitimacy and effectiveness that spill over to media and public debate (Lucarelli 2014).

On that note, perceptions also influence the overall actorness of an actor, provided that actorness refers to the “ability to function actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system”, (Sjöstedt cited in Niemann and Bretherton 2013:265) putting actors’ capabilities and delimitation under the spotlight. Furthermore, Bretherton and Vogler (2013) define actorness through three main concepts: presence, opportunity, and capability, whereas the first concept is directly linked to outsiders’ views on the actor and whether it has presence or not. This makes external images essential to establishing whether a player in the international system is seen as an actor or not.

In international affairs literature, the roles and external perceptions of the EU have been extensively researched. Many authors have studied which roles the EU possesses in negotiations: whether the EU is a leader in certain fields; what type of power the EU represents; what influence it actually has; and so forth (see Kilian and Elgström 2010; Elgström 2006, 2008; Chaban et al. 2013; Elgström and Smith 2006; Chaban et al. 2006). Nevertheless, there is little research on nation states (except on the US in Brooks 2006) and how they are perceived by other states or institutions; what roles they have in negotiations or overall global politics; or whether or not they have any influence whatsoever. Moreover, the individual perceptions of small states in general, and small European states in particular, are not subject to much research (with the exception of Croci and Lucarelli's 2010 study on Italy; or the Transatlantic Trends Survey²). This research offers a modest contribution to fill this void.

2.2 Small States (and) Security

Definition of Small States

Security is a broad concept, incorporating many factors into its definition (Baldwin 1997). The size of a state is believed to be one essential factor when it comes to security, and hence there is an ongoing debate in literature on the definition of small states, where realists' definitions are contested by more extensive explanations, even including perceptions to the definition. Paving the way for small states studies, Robert Rothstein (1968) acknowledged that there is a difference in behaviour between small states and great powers in the international system; however, in order to study the behaviour, concrete definitions needed to be provided. So, for the purpose of categorizing states, he defined small powers as follows:

A Small Power is a state which recognizes that it can not obtain security primarily by use of its own capacities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, and developments to do so. (Rothstein 1968:29)

Traditionally, the definition of small states starts by referring to measurable factors relative to power, such as the size of territory, population, gross domestic product (GDP), and military capacity (Thorhallsson 2006; Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006). As these quantitative measurements reflect on states' ability to stay secure, deficiencies in these areas indicate that a state is incapable of providing its own security and thus have little influence on the international arena as 'small' equals 'weak', portraying small states as "fragile creatures in the rough sea of international relations" (Goetschel 1998:13).

Nevertheless, criticism towards the traditional definition exists in literature, as scholars acknowledge that without specific context, power is difficult to measure and thereby

² "The aim of the Transatlantic Trends Survey (TTS), 2014, is to identify the attitudes of the general public towards foreign policy and transatlantic issues in ten European Union member states: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, as well as in the United States, Russia and Turkey" (ICPSR 2015).

tells us little about small states' behaviour (Wivel et al. 2014; Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006) and henceforth alternative definitions surface. Early on, Robert Keohane (1969) added an additional variable to the traditional measurements: the perceptions of domestic governments' view on their own size, claiming that a state is as big or small as its elite believes it to be. Further relevant size indicators were contributed by Thorhallsson (2006) in the form of the political elite's ambitions and ideas but also states' administrative and diplomatic capacities and the external perceptions of other states.

Security Challenges

Nevertheless, when talking of small states' security and challenges they face, literature seems to fall back on the underlining idea of power and small states' incapability to provide own protection. Wivel et al. (2014:9) claim that small states are "the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship, which is unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on its own" and thus, they express their security through institutions, falling in line with Rothstein's (1968) original definition. Knudsen (1996), however, distances himself from the assumption that small states act so differently from large ones and Lamoreaux (2014) believes all states to act similarly, regardless of their size. Knudsen (1996) dismisses the traditional definitions, and claims that small states' security is all about "power disparity – a significant power differential between great powers and small states as seen from the perspective of the weaker side" (5) relying on factors such as: geographical proximity, degree of tension, power cycle, historical relations, policies towards rivalling power, and existence of multilateral frameworks. Similarly, Jurkynas (2014) claims that the historical and geographical context is important to small states' hard security concerns, as states with peaceful neighbours have less worries about hard security, such as for example Luxembourg.

With the broadening of the security concept, security threats to small states expanded from a military aspect to threats to economy, energy, cyber-space, and national identity (Jurkynas 2014; Crandall 2014; also Wivel et al. 2014). In line with this, Crandall (2014) has studied the case of Estonia as an example of soft security threats to a small state. Furthermore, Bailes et al. (2014) identify possible security agendas for small states starting from state attacks and ending with environmental disasters that can lead to resource exhaustion, putting all kinds of dimensions of non-state violence and economic security in between (see table 1 in chapter 3 Conceptual Framework and Theory). For the Baltic States, however, non-state security issues such as terrorism or organized crime are not on top of the list, as opposed to those directly affecting their territorial sovereignty (Tromer 2006). With that said, this research adds to small states' security literature, providing empirical contributions to perceptions of threats to small states.

3 Conceptual Framework and Theory

The literature review has, possibly, given a glimpse of what perceptions are and how to define security. However, in order to understand these concepts in the context of perceptions of Estonia's security, a more detailed discussion on the definitions of these notions is in order. Furthermore, although security and perceptions are both central concepts for the analysis, the theoretical framework used for the study is derived from role theory, which itself represents a combination of concepts wherein national role conceptions provide the context for analysis.

3.1 Definition of Perceptions

The study of perceptions derives from the field of physiology and the intent to explain human neurological behaviour: mainly how people observe their surroundings and receive information. In this context, perceptions are understood as “the end result, the output, of physiological system adopted to handle information originating from the environment” (Gregory 1974:3). The main value of studying perceptions has been connected to explaining the human behaviour, and although ‘perception’ as a concept has been widely used in daily vocabulary, the debates on the specific definition have been topical for many decades (Bartley 1958). One of many definitions provided over time explains perceptions as follows: “Perceiving is a process comparable with discriminating, differentiating, and observing. The term is customarily used to complex receptor and neural processes which underline our awareness of ourselves and our world. The awareness is referred to as perceptions” (Bartley 1958:10). Understanding the human behaviour does not only provide physiological enlightenment but can also be used in other fields, such as international relations.

When Jervis (1976) wrote about perceptions and misperceptions, he found a connection between the decision-makers' perceptions of the world and the policies they carry out, thus giving one possible explanation to states' behaviour in international affairs (Jervis 1976). Taking a step further from the physiological focus of perceptions, Jervis (1976) claims that perceptions, or the awareness of the world and other actors, “diverge from reality in patterns that we can detect and for reasons we can understand” (3), hence providing explanations to policy behaviour. Elgström and Chaban, however, are even more specific, claiming that perceptions are

Mental pictures composed of our cumulated experience-based knowledge about the surrounding world and beliefs about desirable behaviour. Policy-, decision- and opinion makers have identifiable political world views, with images of self and relevant others as key ingredients and use these as basis of making judgements and for selecting strategies. (2015:18-19)

This latter definition, in which the human physiology and the field of political science meet in order to explain the role of states in international affairs, is relevant to this thesis and to understanding the role theory, especially role conceptions. Therefore, Elgström and Chaban's

definition is used in the study and analysis of the data in this thesis. However, it is also important to keep in mind that “a common misperceptions is to see the behaviour of others as more centralised, planned, and coordinated than it is” (Jervis 1976:319), given that perceptions are strongly individual, emerge from personal beliefs, and are not always rational. This is significant to remember when reading the data of this study as perceptions on Estonia’s security were acquired from many different individual from various countries and backgrounds. Their definitions of perceptions do not necessarily align with the theoretical definition used in this thesis and should therefore be attained with an open mind.

3.2 Definition of Security

“Security is an important concept, which has been used to justify suspending civil liberties, making war, and massively reallocating resources during the last fifty years” (Baldwin 1997:9). Furthermore, according to Baldwin (1997), “writers often fail to offer any definitions of security, and if one is offered, it is rarely accompanied by a discussion of reasons for preferring one definition to the others” (11). Considering the events that took place on 9/11, 2001, and the continuing power game in Europe, security has been put under the spotlight again, producing a diversity of literature on the matter. Nonetheless, clear definitions to the concept have not yet been provided as the school grows. Perhaps it is because the concept of security is complex to say the least, and difficult to define; or because it overlaps with other concepts such as power; or even because the vagueness of the concept is suitable for policy-makers (Baldwin 1997; Baylis 2011). Whatever the reasons, due to the concept’s relevance to this thesis, possible definitions need to be discussed.

Scholars seem to have come to an agreement on a common general definition of the term, suggesting that security simply implies a freedom from threats to someone’s values, may it be an individual or a group. However, that is where their consensus ends and disagreements arise on who a) (*Security to whom?*) or what b) (*Security for which values?*) to focus on (Baylis 2011:233). The two questions remain essential to the concept and should be considered when defining security. However, if one would conceptualize security even further, answering additional questions such as c) *How much security?*, d) *From what threats?*, e) *By what means?*, f) *At what cost?*, and g) *In what time period?* would provide a profound understanding of the concept (Baldwin 1997:12-18). With that said, the contemporary literature on security has widened the spectrum of what security is. Concepts such as cyber-security, energy security, economic security, hybrid warfare, and so on, have become the contesting focus of the scholarship, in contrast to the previous military emphasis, especially when it comes to small member states (Crandall 2014; Baylis 2011; Jurkynas 2014; Bailes et al. 2014). To summarise, table 1 below provides an overview of small states’ security threats presented in literature that later are used with the intent to contextualise the findings of this thesis.

Table 1 A Possible ‘Comprehensive’ Security Agenda for Small States (Bailes et al. 2014:31)

A. Military, hard security	B. Non-state violence (conflict actors apart)	C. Economic security	D. Accidents and natural hazards
State attack Caught in crossfire Subversion, sabotage Political or economic blackmail, forced clientage Coup from outside Internal (armed) conflict, including top-down violence Severe civil disorder	Terrorism Violent/organized crime Smuggling of strategic goods Other ‘asymmetric’ attack, e.g. cyber-attack Illegal migration, trafficking	General economic and financial viability, including problems of underdevelopment Security of supply (food, energy, other essentials) Severe social weaknesses/divisions (including issues of demography)	Major deadly accident, including nuclear, biological or chemical release Infrastructure breakdown Pandemics Natural disasters Environmental degradation, resource exhaustion Climate change

On that note, when compiling the data, the most common and broadest possible definition of security is used: freedom from threats. The reason is the complexity of the concept and the many possible angles to look at it from. The research question is intentionally without specification of the definition of security, in order to let the interviewees make the distinction and provide yet another definition of the concept that can be later paralleled to the existing ones. Besides, this would enable the thesis to simultaneously contribute to the ongoing debate in academia by identifying diverse views on the concept and providing an overview of how security is seen in the Baltic Sea region and from a small state perspective.

3.3 Role Theory

The goal of the role theory in behavioural science is to explain the behaviour of individuals in social life. *Role* is seen as a behaviour that is expected and appropriate (Holsti 1970; also Bengtsson and Elgström 2012) and it is a notion that historically was developed via theatrical performance, where actors were expected to act according to the script (that is ‘the role’) (Thomas and Biddle 1966, also Aggestam 2006). When thinking in terms of the same theatrical metaphor, the stage actor’s performance is influenced by many factors, such as the script, instructions from the director, how the other actors perform, as well as the character’s own individual capacities to act (Thomas and Biddle 1966, also Aggestam 2006). According to this logic, roles or *role performances* are determined by internal as well as external influences. In line with this, Elgström and Smith’s (2006) explain that roles are social positions or categories of actors which are determined both by an actor’s own conceptions about appropriate behaviour and by the exceptions or role prescriptions of other actors in an organized group (see also Harnisch et al. 2011). Hence, *role prescriptions* are “norms and expectations cultures, societies, institutions, or institutions attached to particular positions” (Holsti 1970:239), whereas *role conceptions*, “encompass both actors’ self-images and the effects of others’ role expectations, and the prompt investigation of the interplay between these two elements” (Elgström and Smith 2006:6).

In the study of international affairs, combining all these concepts into a role theory provides a framework to analyse states' foreign policy. However, the purpose of this thesis does not lie in analysing (Estonia's security) policy in particular, but rather in analysing the images of Estonia's security domain. Therefore, only the concept of role conception is in focus, as the aim of the paper is to compare Estonia's self-image (internal perception) and others' views on Estonia (external perception), which, when combined, result in Estonia's role conception in the field of security.

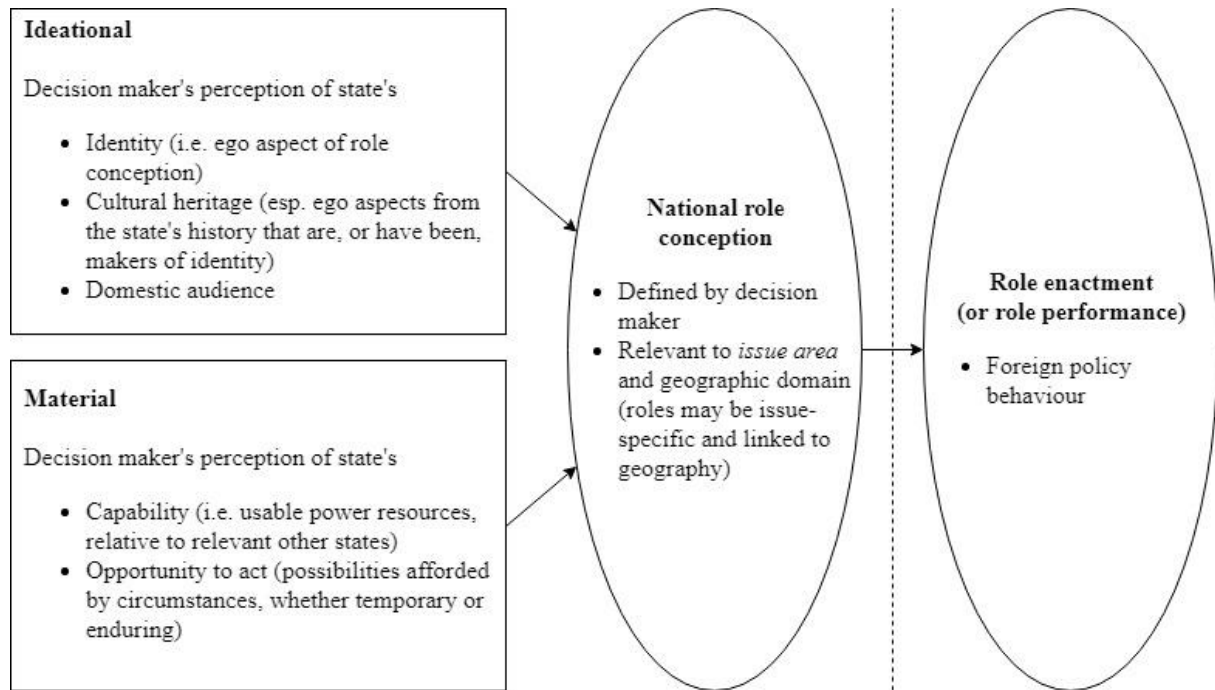
National Role Conception

To clarify, if one can explain an individual's behaviour in a group using the role theory, one should also be able to apply the same theory on states in order to explain their actions in international affairs. Provided that states' general foreign policy actions, such as decisions, responses, and commitments etc. towards other states are seen as their role performances (Bengtsson and Elgström 2012:94; also Holsti 1970:245), and that these performances are directly influenced by states' role conceptions (Holsti 1970:239), it is fair to assume that identifying the national role conception would enable to predict states' behaviour in global politics to a certain extent.

During the Cold War era, the political atmosphere inspired scholars to classify states by the roles they were taking in international affairs characterized by bipolarity, using structures such as 'allies', 'non-aligned', and 'satellites' (Holsti 1970; Harnisch 2011; Aggestam 2006), which helped to explain and predict their choices of foreign policy. As the international system evolved, so did the school of role theorists and the number of suggested social roles expanded, creating a viable framework for foreign policy analysis. "National role concepts are, in short, an important aspect of the total intellectual setting in which day-to-day decisions on foreign policy are made" (Holsti 1970:426). It is important to keep in mind that states normally play many different roles depending on the policy field and the arena they are played upon (Aggestam 2006; also Holsti 1970). Nevertheless, having too many roles is seen as a sign of weakness as "multiple constantly evolving roles are hallmarks of maturity and development" (Flockhart 2011:211).

The national role conceptions consist of two factors, both domestic and international, since "decision makers form their conceptions of their state's role on the basis of both their understanding of the state's identity and cultural heritage, and their perception of their state's place and possibilities within the international system" (Breuning 2011:26). The latter also indicates the importance of external perceptions, as they have an impact on states' place in the international system, and as previously established, an individual's perceptions of its surroundings are influenced by many factors, such as historical background, beliefs, and personal understandings, but also others' views (Jervis 1976). Figure 1 illustrates decision makers' perceptions in the framework of contracting national role conceptions, which then lead to role performance. The vertical dotted line illustrates the limit of this thesis, as role performance is not included in the analysis.

Figure 1 *Role Theory as a Cognitive Model of the Agent-Structure Relationship* (Breuning 2011:26)



In order to explain or create national role conceptions, one should take into consideration the various sources of role prescriptions, established by internal as well as external surroundings. According to Holsti (1970:246), the internal sources would be the state's location, available capacities, various resources, socio-economic demands, mass movements, public 'mood', values and ideologies, a personality of policymakers. The external sources include: a) structure of the international system; b) system-wide values general legal principles; c) rules, traditions and expectations of partner states; d) less formal commitments and understanding. Due to the limitations of this thesis, not all of these sources can be considered separately, but are rather incorporated into two main standing points. The internal sources are thought of in regard to Estonia's overall state characteristics, which fall in line with the literature on small states; whereas the external sources rely on the structure of today's international system which is highly institutional. This is relevant when discussing Estonia's security which greatly relies on institutional cooperation, given that 'institutional' can, in a broader sense, mean "a general pattern or categorization of activity... [where] rules must be durable, and must prescribe behavioral roles for actors" (Keohane quoted in Aggestam 2006:15) or more specifically an institution such as the EU or NATO.

Scholars have established that there are profound and significant differences in the behaviour patterns of large and small states due to differences in their capacities, meaning that size determines the role a state is playing on the international arena and therefore, the "size (and power?) relative to the state's relevant neighbours cannot be ignored" (Breuning 2011:18). Hence, the size of a state could be a component of a national role conception, but not necessarily the only factor defining it. The size factor can also influence states' positions in institutional structures and one cannot ignore institutions such as NATO or even the EU when talking of Estonia's security, as institutions often have roles embedded into their

structure and continue to exist, regardless if states choose to play them or not (Aggestam 2006). Nevertheless, roles in the institutional setting can be ascribed but also achieved through engagement in regular interaction with associates (Harnisch et al. 2011), which should be kept in mind in the case of Estonia, as it is a novice state still on its path to establishing its roles. Changes in roles or role sets are important determinants for both role enactment and identity formation (Harnisch et al. 2011).

National role conceptions relevant to this thesis have been hand-picked from Holsti's (1970:260-272) framework, in which he identified more than 17 national role conceptions. However, not all of them are relevant to Estonia, as many roles were inspired by the Cold War atmosphere and are overlapping in nature. Therefore, roles that have a link to states' size or institutional/regional cooperation are prioritised. Elgström and Smith (2006:5) claim that traditional roles for great powers in literature are, for example, *balancer* or *global* or *regional leader*, whereas roles that are more associated with small states can be: *model*, *bridge-builder*, or *mediator*. Inspired by this, both sides are included in the framework. The list of national role conceptions, paired with the explanation of the functions that particular roles embody, as well as the sources for the role, is presented in table 2 below.

Table 2 *National Role Conceptions (Holsti 1970:260-272)*

Role Type (page no)	Major Functions	Primary Role Sources
1. Bloc/Regional leader (261)	Bloc cohesion; protection of bloc members; opposition to other bloc(s)	External threats; ideology; structure of system
2. Regional protector (261-262)	Leadership responsibilities; providing protection for adjacent regions	Perception of threat; geographical location; traditional policies; needs of threatened states
3. Independent (268)	Non-aligned; policy self-determination	Anti-bloc attitudes; anti-colonial sentiments; economic needs-trade expansion; threat perception
4. Balancer (271)	Balance unequal blocs; international integration	Power distribution in system; location
5. Bridge (266-267)	Communication function; 'translator'	Geographical location; multi-ethnic composition of state
6. Faithful ally (267)	Increase capabilities of bloc; support bloc leader	Threat perception; geographical location; ideological affinity; structure of system and traditional policies; insufficient capabilities
7. Example (268)	Promoting prestige and gaining influence through certain domestic policies	Domestic policies
8. Mediator-integrator (265)	Interposition into bloc conflicts; integration	Geographical location; traditional policies; cultural-ethnic composition of state; traditional non-involvement in conflicts
9. Regional-subsystem collaborator (265)	Indicate far-reaching commitments to build wider communities	Economic needs; sense of 'belonging' to region; common political-ideological tradition; geographical location
10. Protectee (270-271)	Serve economic and/or security interests of major power	Perception of threat; Insufficient capabilities

Limitations of the National Role Conceptions Framework

When it comes to applying the framework of national role conceptions, one has to be aware of possible limitations of this theory. When Holsti (1970) conducted his research, he gathered huge amounts of data through multiple sources. In this thesis, however, the data collection has certain limitations (read more in chapter 4 Methodology). Furthermore, it is a common practice in role theory to use decision-makers' role conceptions in order to explain states' foreign policy behaviour (Aggestam 2006). However, this tendency is criticised in literature by Cantir and Kaarbo (2011), who claim that scholars tend to assume that there is a consensus on a state's role among its elites, which in their opinion is a misassumption, as perceptions of the role can vary among elites as well as between the masses and elites. Besides, they add, elites do not represent the role of a whole state. In addition, leaving out the mass opinions and often keeping the elites' identities secret (they call it 'black-boxing elites'), while gathering data over a long period of time, pose a credibility problem to the theory application (Cantir and Kaarbo 2011:5-6).

All these concerns are valid and should be taken into consideration. However, in this thesis, some of these concerns are addressed, as the identities of the Estonian elite are revealed, and the interviews are conducted in a limited period of time. Moreover, the role perceptions are contested with 'the others', which in this case are not represented by the domestic public but external elites. These will, however, remain anonymous. Moreover, national role conceptions will be identified among the elites with a clear possibility to link the role back to an individual, in order to provide an overview of internal differences in role conceptions. Nevertheless, as the data for this thesis is limited, the role theory is used to provide an analytical framework to compare the internal and external perceptions, while not assuming that these roles are definite.

Summary: Conceptual and Theoretical framework

What should be assessed from this chapter is, firstly, the fact that the security concept is very broad. Secondly, perceptions are significant for states' self-image and decision-making, having a direct link to national role conceptions. Perceptions are also very subjective and individual. Thirdly, role theory provides a good framework to study states' behaviour in international affairs, however, there are still many limitations to the theory that should be kept in mind when reading the analysis. Finally, national role conceptions provide the main framework to the analysis of Estonia's security perceptions. Nevertheless, they are interpreted from this particular data and thus cannot claim to represent the whole truth.

4 Methodology

This research takes an interpretist epistemological position, due to its aim at understanding the ways in which Estonia is perceived internally and externally in the field of security as well as providing an interpretation of the findings through the role theory. At the heart of interpretist epistemology lies the notion that no one can see the world objectively, meaning that an individual's perceptions of the world are affected by his surroundings or social constructions, and include two levels: a) how the individual interprets these surroundings, and b) how this interpretation is interpreted by others (hence the interpretist approach) (Marsh and Furlong 2002). In terms applicable to this thesis, a decision-maker's (or individual's) perceptions of the world are affected by his surroundings, which are composed of how he perceives his surroundings and how others' have perceived his views. This provides a clear link to the concept of perception that represents "...experience-based knowledge about the surrounding world and beliefs about desirable behaviour" as defined in this thesis (Elgström and Chaban 2015:18-19, see the previous chapter).

In other words, the point of departure in this thesis is constructivist in nature, taking the epistemological stance of thinking that the world is socially and historically constructed and does not exist independently from our knowing about it (Marsh and Furlong 2002). The opposite would be the ontological stance that there is a 'real' world out there that exists independently, without our knowledge (March and Furlong 2002). However, I believe that social constructions – history, norms, values, and culture – have an impact on how Estonia's security is perceived internally and externally, hence my epistemological point of view. Furthermore, in order to investigate the similarities and differences between the internal and external views of Estonia's security, a qualitative approach is taken.

Qualitative Case Study

The interpretist tradition relies on qualitative methods to study the social phenomenon and establish how people view the world (Marsh and Furlong 2002) or, in the case of this thesis, how Estonia's security is perceived. More specifically, a case study is in order, as most scholars claim that a research qualifies as a case study when it uses qualitative methods to study a single case (Yin 2009; Gerring 2004; Gillham 2000), such as the single case of perceptions of Estonia's security. John Gerring (2004) explains that a "case study is an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units. A unit connotes a spatially bounded phenomenon – e.g., a nation-state, revolution, political party, election, or person – observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time" (342). In addition, the key characteristic of a case study is that it aims at answering the research question(s) through the collection of multiple sources of evidence, as only one source is seen as insufficient (Gillham 2000). Thereby, in this thesis, internal as well as external perceptions are collected, providing multiple sources of evidence when studying the perceptions of Estonia.

The central reason for using a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach is that it is descriptive in character and enables interpretations. While the latter relies on numerical measurements and statistics, the former leans towards interviews or depth analysis with focus on a particular phenomenon (Gillham 2000; King et al. 1994). As will be described in detail further on in this chapter (see 4.3 Data Collection), this thesis is no exception, in the sense that it relies on interviews as a means of data collection. The descriptive nature of qualitative methods can often be seen as a soft approach to research, as statistics and numbers provide hard evidence, whereas talking to people and interpreting their answers does not (Gillham 2000). Nevertheless, although these two approaches are divergent in nature, both quantitative and qualitative methods are valuable in political science, as when “facts do not speak for themselves – someone has to speak for them” (Gillham 2000:19; see also King et al. 1994). However, in the case of this specific research, the qualitative style serves its purpose better.

Criteria for Case Selection

Sometimes, the selection of a case for research might appear obvious due to its uniqueness or some special access to that particular entity; however, there might be other cases that qualify as candidates and in order to find the best case, a criterion should be established (Yin 2009). In this thesis, the factors for selecting a suitable case are derived from the existing literature on small states’ security and role theory, but they require an explanation nonetheless. Firstly, the focus on a) small states in the Baltic Sea region is due to their compelling and unique security situation (Jurkynas 2014) and small states characteristics that influence their national role conception (Breuning 2011). Secondly, given that Russia is viewed as the region’s main source of threats, b) states’ historical and geographical ties to this great power put security questions high on the agenda (Knudsen 1996). In turn, this situation c) can push small states towards institutional cooperation that also influences their role (Aggestam 2006). In addition, d) states with a relatively recent date of acquiring independence are still in the process of finding their security identity and role (Harnisch et al. 2011), hence the importance for them of knowing perceptions and role conceptions.

Taking all of these criteria into consideration, the three Baltic States are equally interesting cases for this research (see table 3 below). Therefore, in order to single one out, Yin’s (2009) suggestion “if doing a single-case study, choose a case that is likely, all other things being equal, to yield the best data” (91) comes to use. My knowledge of Estonian (my mother tongue) in combination with my working experience from the Estonian Government Office in the autumn of 2017, provided me with e) special access to data, with a linguistic advantage, on internal perceptions of Estonia in general and Estonian government officials’ views in particular. Given these special conditions, I would not have been able to access the corresponding level of data on Latvia or Lithuania, resulting in my choosing to study the case of perceptions of Estonia’s security.

Table 3 *Criteria for Case Selection*

Country	Denmark	Sweden	Finland	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Germany
Criterion								
a) Small state in the Baltic Sea region	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
b) Historical ties and proximity to Russia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
c) Membership in intergovernmental institutions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
d) Recent date of formation	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
e) Accessibility to data, with linguistic advantage	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

Data Collection

In order to analyse the differences between the internal and external perceptions of Estonia in the field of security, a proper methodology for data collection is needed. “Data’ are systematically collected elements of information about the world. They can be qualitative or quantitative in style” (King et al. 1994:23). In studies on perceptions, the data is most commonly collected through a) conducting discourse analysis on media; b) retrieving public opinion via surveys; or c) conducting interviews with people representing the elite population in a state (Lucarelli 2014; Chaban et al. 2013; Elgström and Chaban 2015). In addition, while role theory literature often uses the latter option, it also alternatively analyses officials’ public speeches (Holsti 1970). However, the appropriate method depends on the research focus and specific question. In this research, written as well as face-to-face interviews are used as the method to gather data, as other aforementioned methods are insufficient for fulfilling the purpose of this thesis.

Using media outlets such as newspapers and TV news, or even social media, as a source of identifying perceptions, is a valid option as media often represent the crossroads of elite and public opinions (Elgström and Chaban 2015). However, while it can be useful to monitor media to find discourse on one particular globally recognised actor, such as the EU, problems with this method appear when only one small state is in focus. In foreign media, rather than being specifically mentioned as a country, small states such as Estonia can be referred to in a regional context, such as the Baltic States. When studying Estonia, references to the Baltic region rather than Estonia poses a significant problem to the research as the states’ foreign and security policies differ from one another (Crandall 2014). Therefore, analysing media discourse does not fit the purpose of this research.

Another alternative method is to gather public opinions. Most of this research is done by analysing data from surveys that have been distributed among diverse ranges of representatives of the public sphere. Leaning towards more quantitative measures, the collected data provide valuable insights; however, for this research, the gathering of public opinion is not a suitable method. Firstly, the scope of this master’s thesis does not allow for

undertaking public opinion surveys in numerous countries, which would be required for proper analysis. Secondly, it is not provided that the public of other states have any overview, whatsoever, on Estonia's foreign policy approaches and security domain.

In literature, the most common and frequently used way to gather perceptions (and also establish actors' roles) is through elite interviews, which is also the main approach of this thesis. Elite interviewing means that the data is collected by speaking to an authority or expert who is capable of giving valuable insights to the researched topic (Gillham 2000). In other terms,

Elites are defined as individuals who have gained their knowledge by virtue of their position and experience in the community, their established networks of relationships, their ability to express themselves orally, and their broad understanding of their community...they are seen as able to provide a key input into national foreign policy as they may be motivated to influence policy change. (Chaban et al. 2013:434)

In the context of this research, the definition corresponds to individuals who have experience from working closely with foreign policy and security questions, such as ministers or high ranking officials of foreign and defence ministries or government offices, officials of institutions that represent intergovernmental cooperation, and experts from relevant think tanks with influence on policy changes.

The ambition of this thesis was ideally to gather perceptions from at least one expert and one official from each Baltic Sea region state, granting anonymity to all external participants in order to enable them to reveal subjective perceptions. 82 interview requests were therefore sent out to officials and experts in all Baltic Sea region states. In order to obtain internal perceptions, two officials were interviewed, the Estonian prime minister and the Estonian defence minister, as well as an expert from a security think tank (see overview of all interviewees in chapter 7 References), all of whom agreed to reveal their identity. These interviews were conducted in Estonian, while the interviews aimed at gathering external perceptions were held in English. When it comes to the external perceptions, the goal to interview officials from every state proved difficult to achieve, primarily due to their sensitive positions. Hence, not all Baltic Sea region states are represented by an official. On the other hand, experts from every state participated in the study (see table 4 below). In total, 14 interviewees shared their perceptions of Estonia's security, which exceeds the minimum number of sources required in Holsti's (1970) national role conception framework.

The perceptions were primarily gathered through written interviews, by letting the participants answer a common questionnaire, with the possibility to have a follow-up interview to ask complementing questions if necessary. However, because of the geographical distribution of the participants, face-to-face interviews were not possible to arrange, thus the written communication was used. An overview of the interviews is presented below, in table 4.

Table 4 *Overview of Interviews*

Interviewee	Written	Face-to-face	Month	Interviewee	Written	Face-to-face	Month
Expert DE1	Yes	Yes	March	Expert PL	Yes	No	April
Expert DE2	Yes	No	May	Expert SE	Yes	No	March
Expert DK	Yes	Yes	April	Official DE	Yes	No	May
Expert EE	Yes	Yes	March	Official DK	Yes	Yes	March
Expert FI	Yes	No	March	Official SE	Yes	No	May
Expert LT	Yes	No	March	Prime Minister	No	Yes	April
Expert LV	Yes	No	March	Defence Minister	No	Yes	March

Interview Questions

In order to gain information valuable to the analysis and discussion, the interview questions were organised into three parts, covering 1) Estonia's security situation, which would give an overview on how (in)secure Estonia is perceived to be and what the threats and sources of its security are; 2) Estonia's security role, which is essential for establishing Estonia's role in the Baltic Sea region, and the European and global arena; and finally, 3) Estonia's capacities in the security field in the Baltic Sea region, providing the perceptions on diplomatic, economic, and military capacities. For analytical and comparative purposes, a numerical scale from 0 to 10 was developed, in order to enable the interpretation of findings, indicating in which direction the respondents leaned. I inquired the interviewees to specify their opinion on the scale and thereafter motivate their choice by providing at least three reasons to elaborate on their perception (see the interview guide in chapter 8 Appendices). The questions were distributed to the interviewees via email, and as mentioned before, the external perceptions were gathered in English, whereas an Estonian translation of the questionnaire was sent to the Estonian participants. The results are presented in the next chapter.

5 Analysis

5.1 Data Presentation

In this first part of the analysis, the data on internal and external perceptions of Estonia's security are presented. The interviewees who provided the internal perceptions were the prime minister of Estonia, Jüri Ratas (hereinafter Prime Minister); the minister of defence of Estonia, Jüri Luik (hereinafter Defence Minister); and an expert, Kalev Stoicescu (hereinafter Expert EE). The participants representing the external perceptions of Estonia's security were

all promised anonymity in order to ensure openness and are therefore referred to simply as either Official, in case the interviewee comes from a government institution; or Expert, in case the person represents a think tank, followed by the country code in order to show the country affiliation. To limit the word count, in-text references will not include the month and the year of the interview. However, the dates and institutions involved are available in chapter 7 References (see also table 4, chapter 4 Methodology).

5.1.1 Internal Perceptions of Estonia

Estonia's Security Situation

When it comes to assessing Estonia's (in)security today, the internal agreement is that Estonia is secure, or as expressed by Expert EE: "Estonia is today more secure than ever before" (my translation). However, the concept of security is complex and rather broad, consisting not only of military dimensions but also economic and political ones (Defence Minister; Expert EE). On that note, the notion of hybrid threats³ has nowadays become central in the security field as the threats are no longer only military in character but are played out on numerous arenas, for example in the form of propaganda or disinformation in media outlets or cyber-attacks (Defence Minister; Expert EE).

The main threat to Estonia's security, as expressed by the Defence Minister and Expert EE, comes from the neighbour in the east, as Russia represents a threat with many faces. According to the Defence Minister, Russia poses a threat to Estonia's security with its politics, which are "aggressive and interpret the region's history in the way that the biggest catastrophe of the 20th century, according to the neighbour's president, is the collapse of the Soviet Union"⁴ (my translation). Furthermore, Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine are also proof of the matter that it poses a threat to Estonia's security (Defence Minister). Expert EE explains that Russia is active in many ways, conducting hybrid warfare by spreading false information and propaganda through mass media and propaganda channels in order to stir the water and create alternative versions. He adds that the military drills in close proximity to the Baltic Sea region as well as the overall focus on strengthening the military capacities pointed towards the West, all show in which direction the adversary is believed to be headed, clarifying that "in peace conditions one does not talk of enemies but rather of adversaries"⁵ (my translation, Expert EE). Both Expert EE and the Defence Minister add terrorism to the list of threats as it has hit many states in Europe and the Baltic Sea region, and thus cannot be excluded; however, although terrorism can be fatal to individual lives, it does not pose a

³ One possible definition to hybrid threats, provided by the European Centre of Excellence Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), is as follows: "the range of methods and activities is wide: influencing information; logistical weaknesses like energy supply pipelines; economic and trade-related blackmail; undermining international institutions by rendering rules ineffective; terrorism or increasing insecurity" (read more on Hybrid CoE's webpage).

⁴ Cut from the original interview with the Defence Minister: "...idanaabri poliitika, mis on tihtipeale agressiivne ja tõlgendab piirkonna ajalugu selles suunas, et 20. sajandi suurimaks katastroofiks meie naaberriigi president peab Nõukogude Liidu lagunemist."

⁵ Cut from the original interview with the Expert EE: "Taolistes rahutingimustes ei räägita vaenlastest, nagu *enemy*, aga vastastest mis on *adveresery*."

drastic threat to a state's existence (Defence Minister). Environmental catastrophes should also be considered, even if they are very unlikely to happen in Estonia (Expert EE). Finally, however, the Prime Minister defers from defining any specific threats to Estonia's security claiming that if all measures to ensure Estonia's security (discussed in the next paragraph) are taken, then he does not see any threats.

When it comes to the sources that provide Estonia's security, the Defence Minister elaborated that Estonian security comes from the fact that the country belongs to a shared democratic value space, whose clearest demonstrations, in his opinion, are organisations such as the EU and NATO – both equally important, as the concept of security is not only about the military aspect (hence, NATO) but also about economic stability (hence, the EU) (Defence Minister). According to Expert EE, military security is provided by NATO and Estonia's own defence forces, but internal security credit goes to the police, defence police, and many others active in that domain. The Prime Minister listed further sources to Estonia's security by stating that “Estonia's security is ensured by a coherent society; our defence force's will is high; our patriotism is definitely rising; I think that Estonia's membership in the EU and NATO provide a really good guarantee and deterrence”⁶ (my translation). Moreover, the security of Estonia's air space has proven that Estonia can count on its allies and thus the trust in friends is high (Prime Minister).

Estonia's Security Role

Estonia's security is perceived to be very important in the Baltic Sea region, and plays a significant role as the other regional states since the Baltic Sea region security is a wholeness (Defence Minister). The Defence Minister states that although some of the region's states have chosen a different approach to their foreign and security policy, such as Sweden and Finland who are not members of NATO, or Denmark that has opted-out from the EU's common foreign and security policy, the region remains secure. In order for it to stay secure, every state needs to contribute, which means that Estonia's contribution is equally essential. He continues,

Here it is important to stress that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as NATO member states play a key role in the region even for states that do not belong to NATO, because NATO troops have been placed here, they are in the Baltic Sea region; here NATO ships navigate, again in the Baltic Sea region, so the fact that the Baltic States belong to NATO has automatically added to the security and certainty in this region as a whole.⁷ (My translation, Defence Minister)

⁶ Cut from the original interview with the Prime Minister: “Eesti julgeoleku tagab see, et meil on sidus ühiskond; meie kaitsevõime tahe on kõrge; meie patriootlikus kindlasti on tõusuteel; ma arvan, et Eesti kuulumine Euroopa Liitu ja NATOsse on väga oluline garantii ja heidutus.”

⁷ Cut from the original interview with the Defence Minister: “Siin on oluline rõhutada ka seda, et Eesti, Läti, Leedu kui NATO riigid mängivad meie piirkonnas olulist rolli ka nende riikide osas, kes NATOsse ei kuulu, sellepärast et siia on toodud NATO väed, nad on Läänemere piirkonnas, siin liiguvad NATO laevad, jällegi Läänemere piirkonnas, niiet Balti riikide NATOsse kuulumine on toonud automaatselt juurde niisugust kindlust ja julgeolekut ka kogu piirkonnale tervikuna.”

Expert EE reasons in the same way, claiming that each state is important and that the cooperation between the states is crucial. The fact that Sweden and Finland are not members of NATO does not mean that there is no cooperation; “important is that all these states have apprehended and understood the situation in the same manner”⁸, regardless of whether the political rhetoric differs (Expert EE). He explains that, for example, the differences in rhetoric can clearly be seen between Estonia and Finland’s approach to Russia. After the incidents in Georgia in 2008, there were still illusions among states, but after the events in Ukraine and up to the poisoning in the UK⁹, even Finland dared to expel a Russian diplomat (Expert EE).

Estonia’s relevance to the EU’s security and defence development is also considered high as it is one of the 28 member states and, according to the Prime Minister, an attack on one member state is an attack on all member states. He also comments on the centrality of the peace aspect in the EU, which dates back to the Union’s establishment (Prime Minister). The Defence Minister relates to the complexity of the security concept; as the EU deals with political, economic, environmental, and monetary topics, which are part of the security, each member state has to contribute and play its part. Expert EE is more analytical when it comes to the EU, explaining that there are two dimensions represented in the Union – the east and the south. The immigration issues and instabilities, paired with some member states’ self-interests in the region, such as France, have made the southern dimension important for the EU. Nonetheless, the EU has realised that both dimensions are important and hence perceive the eastern front as significant too (Expert EE).

In the context of NATO and its collective defence principal, Estonia is perceived to be really important because, as stated by the Defence Minister, “Estonia’s security comes directly from the fact that NATO has the collective defence principle”¹⁰. From his perspective, one should ask what Estonia is contributing to NATO and how important Estonia’s actions are to its collective defence principle, claiming that if everyone fulfils their responsibilities towards NATO as they are supposed to, then everyone is secured, including Estonia. However, the Prime Minister adds that the goal is to not trigger NATO’s Article 5 (Prime Minister). The fact that NATO troops are present in Estonia shows the importance of the country (Defence Minister). Expert EE illustrates that every square meter of NATO’s territory is essential, from a small island in Norway to one square meter in Estonia, and the member states defend it collectively (Expert EE). In addition, he speculates that if Estonia was not a member of NATO, it would probably not be a member of the EU and the country might have faced the same destiny as Ukraine (Expert EE).

Estonia is perceived as important for the general global security and the Estonian military participates in missions all over the world – at the moment, for example, in Lebanon (Prime Minister). The Defence Minister agrees and highlights that the United Nations (UN), which Estonia is a member of, is the main guarantor of global security and that Estonia would

⁸ Cut from the original interview with the Expert EE: “Oluline on see, et kõik need riigid on enam vähem ühte meele tajunud ja mõistnud seda olukorda.”

⁹ Formal spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter were poisoned by a nerve gas in UK on March 4, 2018. Russia is believed to be behind the attack (BBC News, March 6, 2018).

¹⁰ Cut from the original interview with the Defence Minister: “Eesti julgeolek tuleb ju otseslt sellest, et NATO-l on ühiskaitse põhimõte.”

be safe if all states would fulfil the principles posed by the UN's charter. Unfortunately, not all states do that, as shown by Russia's actions in Ukraine (Defence Minister). Expert EE, however, estimates Estonia's role in the global security to be lower as there are many other areas in the world that suffer from insecurities, such as for example the Korean peninsula or the Middle East (Expert EE).

Estonia's Capacities in the Field of Security

The Estonian diplomatic capacities are ranked highly by the interviewees. The Defence Minister explains that security is not only about solving crises, but also about crisis prevention, which is essential and the main focus of the Estonian diplomacy (Defence Minister). As stated in the national security agenda, the military defence and diplomatic actions are equal in ensuring the national security, and Estonia's role in relations with the EU, NATO, or great powers such as the US is, according to the Defence Minister, "definitely stronger and more active compared to the size Estonia has to offer. Hence, I believe that we are bigger than our measurements in many questions and we speak along on many global security topics"¹¹ (my translation). A good example thereof is Estonia's application for a temporary seat on the UN Security Council. Expert EE adds to the idea by referring to the fact that Estonia had to build up its diplomatic capacity from scratch after its re-independence and that the foreign and defence ministries are contributing to a successful cooperation with institutions as well as bilateral relations (Expert EE). The Prime Minister also characterises Estonia's diplomatic capacity as good, but acknowledges that there are still steps to be taken, by pointing to the fact that Estonia still does not have a diplomatic representation in the south, in Italy, where NATO's centre is being established (Prime Minister).

Estonia's economic capacities are ranked on the upper side of the scale and the interviewees acknowledge that Estonia's economy is gradually improving and that investments are high at the moment, although there is still room for improvement (Prime Minister; Expert EE). The Defence Minister explains that Estonia's economy is relatively small in size, with a focus on export, and is highly integrated and thus dependent on other states, as is the case of other European economies. Nevertheless, Estonia's stable living conditions, trustworthy corruption-free settlement, and attractiveness to external investors create a net of factors that support its security. The problems of countries with severe security issues are connected to a weak economy and legal system, paired with high corruption, which have made these states vulnerable. Hence, the development of Estonia's economic policy does not represent a problem to its security (Defence Minister).

Regarding Estonia's military capacity, the participants unanimously agree on a very high ranking, which is supported by several reasons. Firstly, according to the Prime Minister, Estonia's military capacity is high due to the motivated men and women in the Estonian Defence Forces, which Expert EE agrees with by pointing out that people serving in the

¹¹ Cut from the original interview with the Defence Minister: "Meie roll suhetes NATOga, Euroopa Liiduga, USAga, paljude teiste suurriikidega on kindlasit palju tugevam ja aktiivsem võrreldes selle suurusega mis Eestil on pakkuda. Niiet ma usun et meie oleme suuremad kui meie mõttmed väga paljudes küsimustes ja räägime kaasa paljudes ka globaalsetes julgeolekuteemades."

Defence Forces are highly professional and experienced given their participation in numerous foreign missions. However, the Defence Minister believes that Estonia's military capacity should not be considered separately but as a part of NATO's military capacity, although one of Estonia's primary tasks is to ensure its capacity to defend itself, in case NATO would not be able to help during the first days of an assault. Moreover, because the Estonian military is active in many of NATO's units, and participates in resolving foreign crises, such as the one in Afghanistan, it can be concluded that "in that sense, Estonia's military capacity is one piece of NATO's overall military capacity mosaic"¹² (my translation, Defence Minister).

Thirdly, Estonia's military capacity is high due to the fact that Estonia still has, and is planning to increase, a compulsory military service (Prime Minister, Expert EE), which many other states abandoned after the Cold War, as emphasized by Expert EE. Furthermore, Expert EE illustrates by saying that many politicians naively believed that after the winter, an eternal spring and summer had arrived and many states, such as Sweden, ripped their radiators off the walls in belief that it would be forever warm and that winter would never come again. Unfortunately, we now see that winter has come back and states have restored the compulsory military service; nonetheless, "these particular capabilities, that so naively were dropped and were present during the Cold War and all, these are extremely hard to restore"¹³ (Expert EE). Finally, the Prime Minister claims that the growing patriotism and the population's general tendency to be more defence-oriented are improving, which is supported by studies conducted by the Defence Ministry that show that support for NATO and the Estonian Defence Forces has increased, while the difference in support between the Russian and Estonian speaking population has decreased.

National Role Conceptions

By applying the national role conception framework to the internal perceptions data, some of the role conceptions become evident. Given the interviewees' strong emphasis on the importance of institutional memberships to Estonia's security, as well as Estonia's commitment and trust in them, the role of *independent*, with focus on non-alignment (Holsti 1970:268,270), is out of the question. However, parallels can be drawn to the national role conception of *faithful ally*. According to Holsti (1970), a state is a faithful ally if it does not only receive external guarantees, but makes specific commitments to support the guarantor's policies and actions in return, much like Estonia has done for NATO (but also the EU and in bilateral relations) by meeting the economic responsibilities, participating in foreign missions, and providing support for US's foreign policy agendas. But then again, strong commitments to alliances represent alternative motives to receive protection: military protection from NATO and economic security from the EU (Defence Minister; Expert EE; also Prime Minister). Furthermore, the tendencies to look for likeminded partners also point at the role conception of *regional sub-system collaborator*. This role represents far-reaching

¹² Cut from the original interview with the Defence Minister: "Niiet sellesmõttes on Eesti sõjaline võimekus üks tegur selles NATO üldises sõjalisevõimekuste mosaiigis."

¹³ Cut from the original interview with the Expert EE: "...see teatud võimekused ja nii, mida on küllaltki sinisilmselt lastud minna, mis olid külmasõja ajal olemas ja kõik, neid on väga väga raske taastada."

commitments to build wider communities of cooperation and promote the existing ones (Holsti 1970), which Estonia has been doing in the Baltic Sea region with the Nordic countries (Expert EE), but also through bilateral relations with other states and in the form of foreign missions (Prime Minister).

The principle of the collective defence is what Estonia depends on and embodies the source of Estonia’s security (Defence Minister). This indicates Estonia’s role as *protectee*, defined as a position where “governments allude to the responsibility of other states to defend them” (Holsti 1970:270). The fact that Estonia’s security relies on the NATO treaty’s Article 5 and the principles offered by the UN’s charter (Defence Minister) supports this national role conception. Moreover, the fact the Estonia and the Baltic States are perceived by the Defence Minister to be essential to non-NATO states in the region can be interpreted as the role conception of a *bridge*, which often appears in vague forms and refers to states’ function as mediator of messages and information between actors (Holsti 1970). The geographical and historical factors are significant in this case, and as Estonia is located at the northern border of NATO’s territory, it provides a link between non-NATO states and the organisation’s strategies. Finally, Estonia is not a *regional leader* nor a *regional protector*, as both require some degree of leadership and special responsibilities (Holsti 1970), whereas the interviewees have stressed the notion of equal importance and shared responsibilities between members of international organisations (Expert EE; Defence Minister).

Table 4 Internal Perceptions of Estonia’s Security

Security and threats		Security provider	
Military security	Hybrid threats	NATO	
Economic security	Disinformation	The EU	
Cyber-security	Propaganda	National defence forces	
Political security	Terrorism	Patriotic and defence-oriented population	
Energy security	Environmental threats	Allies	
Relevance			
<i>Baltic Sea Region</i>	<i>The EU</i>	<i>NATO</i>	<i>Global Security</i>
Very important	Very important	Very important	Important
Common security space	Attack on one member state is an attack on all 28	Estonia’s security comes directly from a collective defence	Global security shared
Member state	Economic security comes from the EU	Shared responsibilities	Missions around the world
Shared responsibilities	Share responsibilities	Committed member state	UN member state
NATO presence in the region		Fulfils responsibilities	Other regions’ insecurity
Cooperation		NATO missions/units	
Shared perceptions of threat		Presence of NATO troops in Estonia	

Capabilities			National role conception
<i>Diplomatic</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Military</i>	
High	High	Very high	Protectee
Crisis prevention	Economic growth	Motivated and professional defence forces	Faithful ally
Strong and active	Attractive economy	Patriotism	Bridge
Bigger than size	Export-oriented	Defence-orientation	Regional sub-system collaborator
Candidate for UN Security Council	Highly integrated	Part of NATO's capacities	
Short period of existence	Small in size	Compulsory military service	
Many positions unmanned	Dependent on other states		
Room for improvement	Stable living conditions		
	Corruption-free settlement		

5.1.2 External Perceptions of Estonia

Estonia's Security Situation

The external respondents evaluated Estonia's (in)security today as slightly above average on the scale and the general tendency points at Russia as the main threat to Estonia's security (Official DK, SE; Expert SE, DE1, DE2, LV, LT, PL, DK). More specifically, Russia's promotion of a multi-polar international order and military threat were mentioned (Expert DE1, PL). Furthermore, hybrid threats in all their varieties were brought up, including attempts to undermine Estonia's sovereignty through economic pressure (sanctions); political interference; cyber intrusions; and spreading disinformation (Expert FI, DE1, DE2, PL, DK; Official SE, DE). Potential espionage (Expert LT), attempts to discredit Estonia abroad, and provocations against allied troops in Estonia, were also mentioned (Expert PL, DK). For example, according to Expert DK, there is a debate in Denmark on the potential challenges for Danish troops in Estonia in relation to 'honey traps', which are situations where people try to provoke fights in order to create headlines and portray NATO's presence negatively. Another scenario would be Russia's potential intrusion into Estonia's domestic politics that could "undermine the solidarity of the Baltic states and use Estonia as 'a bridge' to extend Russia's influence to the Nordic states, the EU or/and NATO" (Expert LT). Moreover, Russia is believed to not only challenge Estonia's and NATO's physical borders but also their psychological boundaries in order to test the limits of the organisations and their reaction to different types of provocations – they use Estonian territory for doing so (Expert DE1).

Another frequently mentioned threat to Estonia's security is the socio-ethnic differentiation among the population, in particular with regards to the Russian-speaking minorities and their disloyalty to Estonia (Expert LT, LV, DE1, DE2; Official DE). Expert DE1 explains that the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia are still partially under the Russian media sphere and therefore, the question remains whether they would be loyal to the local government in a situation where Russia would attempt to activate them (also Expert DK). Expert DE1 continues by discussing that even though Estonia has been good at integration, in the worst case scenario, there is a potential threat that the Russian minorities would jump ship, as there are all types of statistics that prove the presence of people not

supporting the integration with the EU and NATO and who still believe that Estonia's security issues can best be handled through good relations with Russia (Expert DE1). Expert LV expresses the same concerns claiming that Latvia is facing a similar situation and, in case of a crisis, the Russian speaking community's resilience is very questionable.

Another threat that was mentioned, although less frequently, was Estonia's demography, more specifically the issue of an aging population, which is a threat in the long term (Expert LV, LT, PL). Furthermore, Expert PL lists the following threats: crises in the European integration (Brexit and populist movements); a potential Eurozone or global economic crisis; military crises in a "remote region which would distract NATO's attention from strengthening deterrence on eastern flank and Baltic Sea region". Finally, Official SE points out terrorism as a threat.

There are several sources that provide Estonia's security according to the interviewees. However, the most frequently mentioned source is the membership in NATO (Official DK, SE, DE; Expert SE, DE1, DE2, LV, LT, PL, DK). When it comes to military alliances, Estonia's military is participating in numerous foreign operations and missions that represent the idea of collective defence and "is all about getting some credit ...so in case of something there is hope that if we support others then the others support us" (Expert DE1, DK). Likewise, the membership in the EU is essential, as it provides economic security (through the single currency) (Expert SE, FI, LT, PL; Official DE) and represents the Western values sphere, which is important for Estonia to belong to (Official SE). Official SE illustrates this claim by stating that in the event of a modern version of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Estonia would, this time, without question be part of the West. Furthermore, NATO's current presence in Estonia is seen as a great help to increase security (Expert SE, LV, DE2, PL), but Estonia can also rely on the bilateral relations with the US or the UK, who after Brexit is very eager to be active in NATO and embodies an important strategic partner for Estonia (Expert FI, LV, PL; Official SE). The Nordic-Baltic relations and Germany's position as a security provider is noted by Expert DE2. According to Expert DK, Estonia is part of the extended Nordic family and has historically developed strong ties with the Nordics that are nurtured through close path dependency.

Regarding the EU and NATO, Expert DK expresses concerns about Estonia's security challenges, explaining that there are two challenges that need to be considered. First, there is the question of the nature of threats to Estonia's security and at what point the threat is 'serious' enough. Estonia faces many different threats coming from Russia, but is a cyber-attack on Estonia, for example, a sufficient reason to "send missile to Russia"? What is an appropriate response? NATO and the EU lack intermediate levels of responses to various threats, which is the second challenge. "What the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine have proved is that the US and the allies are reluctant to get into military conflict with Russia ... [and it] seems that Russia is able to push the West pretty far" (Expert DK). Although Estonia is in a different position, being a member of NATO, would the alliance still risk a military confrontation with Russia, who possesses nuclear weapons, over minor and indirect attacks? The unwillingness of the US and the allies to get into a conflict with Russia leads to a relationship that is pushed "further and further into a more defensive position" and that is a threat to Estonia.

In addition, the respondents give high credit to Estonia's own efforts to provide security in the form of a good territorial defence model which can be used to provide resistance, at least to some extent (Expert LV, FI, PL; Official DK, SE). Moreover, its efficient political government and open and flexible economy (Expert LT) has placed Estonia closer to the Nordics and distinguishes it from an orthodox civilisation (Expert PL, DK). Finally, several participants believe that one of the sources of security is Estonia's societal resistance (Expert LT, SE, DK), meaning that the general tendency is to defend the state and exert resistance, which historically has helped Estonians to survive both German and Russian domination (Expert PL).

Estonia's Security Role

Estonia's security relevance to the Baltic Sea region is high and evident due to the interdependence between the states and the common security sphere (Expert PL). Furthermore, due to its geographical location bordering Russia (Official DK, SE) and position on route between St Petersburg and Kaliningrad (Expert PL), Estonia is vulnerable to influence and provocations from Russia (Expert LT). From the perspectives of Officials SE and DK, it is important to have friendly states around the Baltic Sea and as Estonia is the link between Russia and the region, its security is essential. "If there is a confrontation in one of the countries in the Baltic Sea, all others will be affected negatively as well" (Expert SE; also Expert DE2) as the Baltic Sea region's states are interdependent (Expert PL). Proceeding on the same note, military provocations or political instability in Estonia may affect all three Baltic States, the Nordics and even NATO (Expert LT), which represents a credibility issue in the latter case (Expert PL; DE2). Expert FI concludes by claiming that "if Estonia is not secure, the Baltic Sea region is not secure; it's as simple as that", which Expert LV agrees with by claiming that all three Baltic States are in the same boat and "logically, if something happens to the Baltic States it directly affects the whole Baltic Sea region". Moreover, one should bear in mind that Estonia also plays an important role in trade relations in the region (Expert DE1). Official DE sees Estonia, with its stable government and modern society, as a role model in the region.

Regarding Estonia's security role in the EU, the assessments made by the respondents are mainly high but not as high as in relation to the previous context. This is because of the larger number of member states and more complex EU policy mechanisms (Expert LT). Besides, according to Expert LV,

Alone Estonia's security/defence issues are not topical to EU as a whole identity. Too small country, too less influence. The post-Ukraine crisis shows an old truth that only when speaking in one voice the Baltic States can achieve something done within NATO or EU. It gives totally different weight in decision making.

Expert PL claims that even though Estonia is a strong supporter of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), Estonia's general defence policy is focused more on NATO than on the EU, as the latter's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is more focused on the Union's southern neighbourhood. Expert DE2 claims, on the same note, that the EU's defence

cooperation is still developing and rather weak. However, due to Estonia's bordering a non-EU state, it has a responsibility to keep the border to the EU safe, and if Estonia fails to do so, the whole EU, which provides its members with a collective defence, fails as a union (Expert DE1, DK; Official SE). Nevertheless, Estonia seems to take that commitment seriously (Official DE), which is evident in Narva, where the border is visibly guarded (Official DK). Estonia is also an important partner to the EU (Official DK) and a deteriorated Estonian security situation could give a boost to the EU's security and defence policies (Expert FI). Furthermore, Estonia is perceived as a pro-EU state (80%), with active participation and security expertise, and a role model member state (Official DE). Finally, Estonia's cyber capacities play into EU's ambitions in the cyber domain, which makes Estonia relevant (Expert PL).

When it comes to NATO, Estonia is essential because if the country is not secure, the whole collective defence principle would come to be questioned (Expert FI, PL, DE2; Official SE). Moreover, it is perceived that the Eastern flank¹⁴ of NATO is the most vulnerable of all its territories. As a result of NATO forces' lack of mobility and the access problems that Russia has imposed on the region, it is a challenge for NATO to provide security in the area, hence putting the whole collective defence idea into test (Expert SE). In addition, Russia is trying to assess NATO's solidarity and Article 5 guarantee, and "espionage in Estonia could compromise the classified information of NATO structures, as the case of Hermann Simm¹⁵ shows" (Expert LT). Expert LV claims that, again, Estonia is not a separate player in NATO, except when it comes to the cyber field where Estonia has developed a good niche; however, "in any other sense, NATO has ALWAYS seen the Baltic States as one unity" and the summits after the Ukraine crisis have proved NATO's commitments to its northeast flank. Expert DE1 refers to the same argument as mentioned above, that if Estonia's security fails, NATO and its Article 5 fail as well. Lastly, Estonia is significant for NATO because the non-alliance states in the Baltic Sea region make defence planning in the region more demanding, thus highlighting Estonia's importance (Expert PL). Estonia's strong commitment to NATO is noted as well (Official DE).

When it comes to the broader global security, the answers are divergent as the interviewees interpret the situation in two main ways. On the one hand, if there would be a political or military confrontation in Estonia initiated by Russia, this could lead to a bigger global escalation involving the US and NATO (Expert LT, PL, DE2; also Official DK, SE). Moreover, an escalation could be triggered in case of lack of compliance with Article 5 by the alliance (Expert SE). In terms of cyber security, Estonia is globally relevant (Expert DE1), which is also the case in the context of Europe and the US (Expert FI). Furthermore, because of its institutional commitments to NATO, the EU, and UN, Estonia is relevant (Official DE). However, on the other hand, there are more important issues in the world than Estonia's security, such as terrorism, migration, organized crime, and so on, which are not tied to a

¹⁴ Expert LV calls Estonia the Northeast flank of NATO, whereas Expert SE refers to it as the Eastern flank, and Official DK as Northern flank.

¹⁵ "For years, from his senior position in Estonia's Defence Ministry, Herman Simm leaked highly sensitive NATO intelligence and the names of Western spies to Russia's foreign intelligence service. In a classified damage analysis, NATO concludes that the former KGB colonel was one of the "most damaging" spies in the history of the alliance" (Schmid and Ulrich, May 6, 2010).

particular state, making a small Baltic State irrelevant (Expert DE1). Besides, compared to insecurities in the Middle East or East Asia, the Baltic Sea region remains very stable (Expert PL). Furthermore, in the perspective of the bigger world and other great powers such as China, India, and Brazil, Estonia matters very little (Expert FI, DK; Official SE). Therefore, as concluded by Expert LV, “such small states as Estonia has next to nothing in relevance for broader global security. In way this is a faith of small states in the international system”.

Estonia’s Capacities in the Field of Security

Estonia’s diplomatic capacities are measured to be on the positive side of the scale, diverging from 5 to 9, with one exception that positions the capacity on the lower side (Official SE). Estonia’s diplomats in the field of security are seen as trained and professional in their tasks (Expert SE, LT, DE2). Since the riots of the Bronze statue¹⁶ (also called the Bronze Night) in 2007, it was evident that Estonia took a more serious approach to its defence by increasing the spending and moving further in comparison to other Baltic States (Expert LV). Furthermore, Estonians are seen as successful in self-promotion regarding Estonia’s capacities in the cyber field (Expert LV, FI, DE1, DK; Official DK, DE) and the digitalization of public administration (Expert DK). Expert DK calls that “a textbook-smart diplomacy”, explaining that Estonia has identified own interests and then played it into the discourse of more powerful players, such as NATO and the EU, where the cyber niche and e-governance contribute to common interests but are still directly linked to Estonia’s own agenda. Besides, many European states are in the process of digitalization and face many challenges due to it, and this is where Estonia can be an example (Expert DK).

Moreover, Expert PL gives credit to Estonia’s presidents, both previous and the current one, who he sees as competent in the context of security conferences; he then refers to the International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS) as “brilliant” in the security domain. Official DE points out Estonia’s active participation in institutions and engagement with Eastern Partnership countries. Nevertheless, according to Expert DE1, Estonia’s diplomats (the Baltic States’ diplomats in general) can in times be seen, in the EU context, as more radical in their views on Russia in particular, which means that they can be perceived as a kind of “panic makers”. However, on the one hand, there is a reason coming from historical experience, but on the other hand, it can be hard to find the balance between ‘panic’ and a “clear issue to be considered” (Expert DE1).

Estonia’s economic capacities are ranked above average by the majority, because of the stable currency and attractive economy for investors with its liberal laws that are beneficial to entrepreneurs (Expert DE1). Furthermore, the country’s economy is perceived as strong and flexible, thanks to the membership in the EU and OECD and the fact that Estonia was one of the EU states less affected by the economic crisis in 2008-2009 (Expert LT). Similarly, Expert SE notes that Estonia’s economy has improved since the crisis but rates the capacity just above the average. Evidently, the small size of the state, and thus its economy, is

¹⁶ Due to the decision to relocate a Soviet WWII memorial statue, riots started in Tallinn in April 2007. One person was killed, over 300 arrested (Spiegel, April 27, 2007)

crucial as it limits the spending on security and defence as well as set barriers to sufficient defence undertakings and to fulfilling its commitments (Expert LV, LT, DE2; Official DK).

Therefore, due to Estonia's smallness, even spending 2% of the GDP still represents the lowest defence budget in the Baltic Sea region, which in turn sets limits to affording its own independent defence (Expert PL; Official SE). Moreover, Estonia's defence spending is insufficient for meeting the opponent's high-tech equipment, as modern weapons systems are very costly in terms of purchase but also management and use (Official SE). Nevertheless, Official DK is confident that Estonia is probably doing the best it can and contributes its fair share in order to be an accountable state for its allies. Expert DK elaborates that it is obvious for many small states, and Estonia too, that the defence does not come from own capacities but rather through paying NATO fees, which in itself also indicates Estonia's strong commitment. Back in the days, small states tried to hide and stay out of great power struggles; however, today, small states want to be seen and not forgotten (Expert DK).

The perceptions of Estonia's military capacity vary among the interviewees as the estimations stretch from one side of the scale to the other. Experts DK, DE1, SE, FI, PL, and LT (also Official SE) assess Estonia's military capacity to be low and give the following reasons: firstly, Estonia's independent army is modest in size in order to defend Estonia (Expert FI, LT), while lacking capacities to meet high-tech opponents (Official SE), and although Estonia contributes to international missions, it can only deploy a company-sized unit (Expert PL). Regarding foreign missions, Expert DK sees similarities between Estonia's and Denmark's strategies, claiming that it is a paradox of sorts that Estonia is so committed to contributing to external operations and sending its troops abroad, while the biggest threat is nearby; however, this has to do with showing commitment to its allies in hopes to be awarded the same courtesy in return, probably making it a rational strategy for Estonia. Secondly, Expert DE1 pulls in the same direction by adding the fact that not only the army size is small but also the economic contributions (also Expert SE, DE2; Official SE) and therefore, Estonia is not able to provide the military armament needed, seeking alliances elsewhere with focus on collective defence (NATO and the EU). Thirdly, and similarly, Estonia possesses "only light infantry as a main part of military forces, no heavy fighting vehicles, has almost no air defence capacities" (Expert LT) and regardless of the professionalism and experience of the army, it still cannot act as a deterrent factor for potential enemies without NATO support (Official SE). For example, Denmark provides air surveillance to Estonia as the latter does not have the capacity to do so (Official DK; Expert DE2).

Nevertheless, on the positive side, Expert LV claims that Estonia has a good territorial defence model and can provide independent protection to some extent, at least until help arrives (also Expert PL). Besides, the NATO presence and membership help fill the gap (Expert LV) but also illustrates that NATO's help, in case of a real threat to Estonia's national security, is crucial (Official SE). Official DE1 gives credit to Estonia's "impressive societal support [and] mobilisation potential of [the] military". Finally, Expert DE2 refers to Estonia's development plan for 2018-2021, increasing the current capacities.

National Role Conceptions

Analysed through the framework of national role conceptions, the external perceptions of Estonia's security provide references to several national roles. First, the national role conception of *protectee* is apparent given the interviewees' common understanding and their constant mentioning of the fact that the foundation of Estonia's security is directly related to NATO and the EU membership (Official DK, SE; Expert SE, DE1, LV, LT, PL, DK). This role, however, indicates that Estonia is not *independent*. Yet, many external views point out Estonia's leading role in cyber security, focusing on its high cyber capacities that are relevant to the EU as well as NATO (Expert DK, PL, LV, FI, DE1; Official DK). That could be interpreted in line with the national role conception *regional leader*, where governments have taken specific responsibilities upon themselves and perform special duties in a particular context (Holsti 1970). Since Estonia has developed a strong niche in the cyber domain and ensured a leadership position regarding cyber questions within the structures of NATO and the EU, this role conception is relevant in relation to cyber threats and security. Related to the same subject is the national role conception of *example* that "emphasises the importance of promoting prestige and gaining influence in the international system by pursuing certain domestic policies" (Holsti 1970:268). Expert DK's description of 'textbook-smart' diplomacy regarding the cyber field and digitalization of Estonia's public administration complies with the notion of an example to other states.

Many respondents acknowledge Estonia's strong economic and military commitment to NATO in particular and to its other allies in general (Expert DK, LT, LV, DE2; Official DK), which makes Estonia a *faithful ally* to its partners. Far-reaching relations, dating back to Estonia's re-independence, with the closest neighbour in the north, have included Estonia in the extended Nordic family (Expert DK) which speaks to Estonia's role as a *regional subsystem collaborator*. Ties with the Nordic states but also between the three Baltic States are strong and nurtured actively, as the Baltic States are often expected to speak in one voice (Expert LV). Moreover, Estonia strives to belong to the Western value space, thus making Western communities important to Estonia (Official SE). Whether or not Estonia could be seen as a *bridge* between NATO and non-aligned states is uncertain; however, Estonia could be used as a bridge between Russian influence and the Nordic states, through 'honey traps' or undermining of Estonia's solidarity (Expert LT, DK). None of the external interview results gave any indication to Estonia's role as *mediator-integrator*, seen as states' role to reconcile conflicts between states in a group (Holsti 1970), nor is Estonia seen as a *balancer* of the current divided world order.

Table 5 *External Perceptions of Estonia's Security*

Security and threats		Security provider	
Military security	Hybrid threats	NATO	
Economic security	Disinformation	The EU	
Instabilities in Eurozone	Provocation against allied troops	National defence forces (good territorial defence)	
Demography (aging population)	International discredit	Bilateral relations (especially with the EU and UK)	
Cyber-security	Propaganda	Allies/friends (Nordics)	
Political security	Terrorism	Societal resistance and defence-orientation	
Espionage	Socio-ethnic differentiation	Efficient political government	
European integration crisis	Reluctance of allies	Open and flexible economy	
Rising populism			
NATO's distraction			
Relevance			
<i>Baltic Sea Region</i>	<i>The EU</i>	<i>NATO</i>	<i>Global Security</i>
Very important	Important	Very important	Important/not important
Common security space	Supporter of PESCO	NATO's credibility	NATO's credibility
Geographical location	Pro-EU	Collective defence	Potential escalation
Bordering Russia	Bordering non-EU state	Very committed	Cyber capacities
Vulnerable	EU's credibility	NATO troops' presence	Other threats more relevant
Shared perception of threat	Cyber capacities	Cyber capacities	Other regions' insecurity
Cooperation	More member states	Baltic States – one voice	Small state
Regional trade relations	Complex EU mechanism	Link to non-allied	Little influence
Stable government	Baltic States – one voice CFSP focus on the South EU's general identity Little influence		
Capabilities			
<i>Diplomatic</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Military</i>	National role conception
Mainly high	Mainly high	Low – high	Faithful ally
Active	Stable currency	Modest in size	Regional sub-system collaborator
Eastern Partnership focus	Attractive economy	Modest economic contributions	Regional leader (cyber)
Trained and professional	Liberal laws	Collective defence	Example (cyber)
Self-promotion	Strong and flexible economy	Low defence capacities	Bridge
Cyber niche	EU and OECD membership	No weaponry	
'Textbook-smart diplomacy'	Small in size	International missions	
Competent presidents	Limited spending	Professional and experienced small army	
'Brilliant' security think tank	Insufficient defence undertaking	Good territorial defence model	
Well-functioning public administration	Insufficient to high-tech challenges	Committed to allies	
Irrational, at times	2% of GDP not substantial	Societal support	
'Panic makers'	NATO fee Fulfilling its responsibilities Dependent on NATO		

5.2 Similarities and Differences

In this final part of the analysis, the similarities and differences between the internal and external perceptions provided by the interviewees are disclosed. Furthermore, the national role conceptions, interpreted through the answers, are compared.

Estonia's Security Situation

When it comes to Estonia's current security situation, the internal and external perceptions agree that Estonia is a rather secure state, perhaps more secure than ever before (Expert EE), but obviously there are still several threats to its security. The main threat is unilaterally identified as coming from the eastern neighbour (Defence Minister; Expert EE, SE, DE1, LV, DE2, LT, PL, SK; Official DK, SE), which in itself is no surprise given Estonia's (and the Baltic States') historical and geopolitical ties to Russia, hence why Russia has never been excluded from Estonia's security agenda (Jurkynas 2014). However, the nature of threats, as shown by Russia's threats towards Estonia, has over time moved from military aspects to a broader variety in course with the theoretical development of the security concept (Jurkynas 2014). With that in mind, the respondents identified several threats coming from Russia, including military, economic, cyber, and political factors, all of which have been mentioned in the literature on small state security as part of the extended security conceptualisation (see table 1 in chapter 3 from Bailes et al. 2014; Jurkynas 2014)

Furthermore, the concept of hybrid threats seems to apply to this situation, containing multiple forms of threats such as spreading disinformation and propaganda (Defence Minister; Expert EE, FI, DE1, PL, DK; Official DE). However, the Estonians did not mention the threat of espionage, which was brought up by the external interviewees (Expert LT; Official SE), despite Estonia's past problems with leaking classified information to Russia, specifically in the case of Herman Simm, when an official of the Ministry of Defence leaked classified NATO-related intelligence to Moscow (Expert LT). Moreover, the external respondents are also concerned with Russia's influence on allied troops present in Estonia at the moment, as some believe that in addition to Russia's trying to discredit Estonia internationally, it might also set 'honey traps' for NATO troops in order to create mistrust, making NATO troops' presence in Estonia a risky task for the involved states (Expert DK; PL). On the other hand, the Estonians point to threats in the field of energy (Expert EE), which is not mentioned specifically by the external respondents but can be part of the hybrid threat concept nevertheless.

However, in addition to the threats originating from Russia, Estonia's security can be threatened by other factors as well. To begin with, terrorism is seen both internally and externally as a threat, given the general increase of terror attacks in Europe and the assaults that have occurred in states in close proximity to Estonia, such as Denmark and Sweden (Defence Minister; Expert EE; Official SE). This presents a more postmodern definition of threats (Tromer 2006). Additionally, external views stress the demographic threat Estonia is facing, mainly due to its aging population (Expert LV, LT, PL), which was not reflected by

the internal assessments. Furthermore, seen from the outside, the socio-ethnic differentiation poses a challenge to Estonia's security, as Russian-speaking minorities fall under the Russian influence sphere through media channels and their loyalty to Estonia cannot be guaranteed (Expert LT, LV, DE1, DE2; Official DE). Having such a large minority could enable Russia to apply a " 'compatriots abroad' policy" in order to generate tensions, possibly riots, and attract wider attention, as was the case with the Bronze Night in Tallinn in 2007 (Expert LV; Jurkynas 2014). However, the Russian-speaking minorities only become a security issue for Estonia if they were to be exploited by an external power (Tromer 2006). The perception of threat from the Russian-speaking minorities is not mentioned internally; on the contrary, the Prime Minister believes that the differentiation has decreased and even Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia are patriotic and defence-oriented.

Finally, the memberships in NATO and the EU seem not to come without insecurities (Tromer 2006) and the external interviewees indicate that Estonia's security is threatened by the European integration crisis, with the best example being the Brexit, and rising populist movements (Expert PL). In case of instabilities in the Eurozone, Estonia's security (mainly the economic one) would also be endangered (Expert PL). Moreover, if there would be a situation where NATO would have to redirect its focus away from the Baltic States to some other crisis, Estonia would be left vulnerable (Expert PL). Furthermore, Estonia's allies' reluctance to actually start a conflict with Russia enables the latter to slowly push and test the boundaries of the West, as could be seen in Georgia and Ukraine, which in turn could be played out on Estonia's territory (Expert DK). The US and its allies do not seem eager to get into conflict with Russia (Expert DK; Tromer 2006). The Estonians, however, have showed no such concern and remain very confident in NATO's and its friends' devotion to Estonia's security (Defence Minister; Prime Minister; also Official DK).

On that note, regardless of the concerns about allies' reluctance to act (Expert DK), it is still commonly established that Estonia's security comes directly from NATO's collective defence principle (Defence Minister; Prime Minister; Official DK, SE, DE; Expert EE, SE, DE1, DE2, LV, LT, PL, DK). Moreover, being a member of the EU is also a source of protection for Estonia, especially when it comes to soft security issues or hybrid threats that fall under the EU's jurisdiction (Defence Minister; Expert SE, LT, FI, LT, PL; Official DE; also Jurkynas 2014). Estonia's good bilateral relations and many 'friends' contribute to its security (Prime Minister; Defence Minister; Official DK, SE; Expert DE2, PL, LV), provided that "the Baltic States' next most prominent regional alignment has become the Nordic-Baltic one" (Jurkynas 2014:119; Expert DE2). Alongside with Estonia's institutional commitments, its own Defence Forces are given credit for their professionalism and devotion to defend the country, as well as their good territorial defence plans (Prime Minister; Expert EE, LV, FI, PL; Official SE, DK, DE). Furthermore, the resistance of Estonia's society is a noteworthy source of security, as the tendencies to be more defence-oriented and patriotic has increased (Prime Minister; Expert LT, SE, DK; Official DE). In addition, Estonia's efficient political government and open and flexible economy are externally seen as factors in ensuring Estonia's security (Expert LT; Official DE). So, in total, the internal and external perceptions seem to overlap on most parts regarding the question on who provides security to Estonia.

Estonia's Security Role

Estonia's security is very important for the security of the Baltic Sea region since every single state's security is essential for the region as a whole (Defence Minister; Expert PL). Furthermore, all Baltic Sea states seem to have apprehended the security situation in the same manner, knowing from which direction the main threat is coming, regardless of their different foreign affairs approaches towards Russia or a membership in NATO (Defence Minister; Expert EE, DE2; Official DK, SE). This consensus has become apparent after the events in Georgia and Ukraine (Expert EE). In order to secure the region, the states have to cooperate closely, and Estonia, with its stable and modern society, is a role model to other states (Official DE). Together with the other Baltic States, who are also members of NATO, it provides a link between the non-aligned states and NATO in the region (Defence Minister; Official SE, DK; Expert PL). The Baltic States have been seen as the 'Atlanticists' acting as a bridge between NATO and other actors (Tromer 2006). Thus, there is no doubt about the relevance of Estonia's security for the regional security sphere, since Estonia's instability affects everyone (Expert SE, FI, LT). As indicated by the external perceptions, these instabilities come from Estonia's vulnerability to provocations and its geographical location, which encompasses not only the fact that it is bordering Russia but also lies on the route between St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad, which makes it even more relevant to Russia in terms of trade (Expert PL). Finally, on the subject of trade, Estonia plays an important role in trade between the Baltic Sea region states, thus making its well-being relevant to the others (Expert DE1).

If there was a consensus regarding Estonia's security's importance for the Baltic Sea region, its role in the EU is not as agreed upon. While the Estonians consider their security to be essential to the EU's collective defence undertaking, claiming that an attack on one member state is an attack on all of them (Prime Minister), some of the external interviewees see the EU's CFSP as more focused on the southern periphery of the Union (also acknowledged by Expert EE), thus making Estonia less relevant to the overall EU identity (Expert LV, PL, DE2). Furthermore, Estonia is seen as a small country with little influence, and according to Expert LV, its voice in the EU is only heard when speaking together with the other Baltic States. Nonetheless, the Estonians consider themselves to be devoted members, as their economic security relies on the EU, and stress the importance of every member state's responsibility to contribute (Defence Minister). Indeed, the country seems dedicated, as Estonia's support for PESCO and its cyber capacities are recognised externally (Expert PL; Official DK). Overall, Estonia is perceived as very pro-EU (Official DE). Estonia is also important to the EU's security due to its bordering a non-EU state and the EU's credibility as an intergovernmental cooperation relies on each member state's success (Official DK, SE; Expert DK, DE1). However, the realities of the EU's complex political machineries and the involvement of a larger number of states have put Estonia's security lower on the Union's agenda (Expert LV).

In the context of NATO, Estonia's security relevance is commonly acknowledged as very high, because everyone agrees that Estonia's security comes directly from its NATO membership and the collective defence principle, expressed in the treaty's Article 5 (Defence

Minister; Prime Minister; Expert FI, PL; Jurkynas 2014). Besides, NATO's credibility is on the line here, because if something were to happen to Estonia and NATO would not respond, its collective defence principle would fail and so would the whole organisation (Defence Minister; Prime Minister; Official SE; Expert FI, PL, SE, LT, DE1, DE2). The fact that NATO troops are present in Estonia shows the allies' commitment, whereas Estonia proves its devotion to NATO by contributing financially according to requirements, as well as through its participation in foreign missions (Defence Minister; Official DK, DE; Expert DE2). Furthermore, the external perceptions indicate that Estonia's cyber capacities are very relevant to NATO (Expert PL, LV, DK), as showed by the establishment of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn (see also Crandall 2014; Crandall and Allan 2015). Nonetheless, Expert LV stresses the fact that in the framework of NATO (as with the EU), Estonia is not a single player, except in the field of cyber. Things can only be established when the Baltic States speak in one voice, as noticed by Expert LV from the NATO summits that have been held after the Georgia and Ukraine crises. An opposite view can be found in literature, as Mälksoo and Šešelgytė (2013) claim that "there is no Baltic States when it comes to security" (397). Nevertheless, the Defence Minister gives credit to all Baltic States as key actors in bringing NATO to the Baltic Sea region.

For the general global security, Estonia's relevance is perceived as important internally and to some extent externally, albeit for different reasons. The common perception is that due to the fact that Estonia is a NATO member, a conflict in Estonia would possibly escalate to a greater conflict between the NATO and Russia, thus implicating global security and NATO's credibility (Expert LT, PL, SE, DE2; Official SE, DK, DE). However, the Estonians also recognise their security relevance in the global context through foreign missions and its UN membership (Prime Minister; Defence Minister; Official DE), whereas others point to Estonia's cyber capacities (Expert DE1). Nevertheless, some still recognise the fact that in the global setting, Estonia is too small a nation with too little influence (Expert LV, DE2). Furthermore, due to the existence of more insecure regions in the world, such as the Middle East or areas in Africa, with threats related to terrorism, migration, or organized crime, the Baltic Sea region remains very secure in comparison and thus has no relevance, whatsoever, to global security (Expert EE, FI, DK, DE1, PL, LV; Official SE).

Estonia's Capacities in the Field of Security

Estonia's diplomatic capacity in the field of security is ranked relatively high by both the internal and external respondents. However, the reasons are somewhat different and the external views provide a more specific reasoning that mostly addresses the positive nature of the diplomatic capacity. Firstly, both the internal and external interviewees agree that Estonia's diplomats are professional and very active in NATO and the EU (Defence Minister; Expert EE, SE, LT, DE2; Official DE). The Defence Minister believes that Estonian diplomats have a strong voice in institutional settings in relation to Estonia's size, highlighting the country's ambition for a seat on the UN Security Council. He also claims that Estonian diplomacy is focused on crisis prevention and that its diplomats excel in this area.

The external views, however, underline the diplomats' ability to promote Estonia by identifying a niche in the cyber arena and promoting it in foreign affairs. This, according to Expert DK, is 'textbook-smart diplomacy'. Furthermore, Estonia's competent presidents (current and previous ones) and security think tank are credited (Expert PL), as well as its well-functioning digital public administration (Expert DK; Official DE). Estonia's engagement in relation to the Eastern Partnership countries is also recognised (Official DE). On the other hand, however, Estonia's diplomatic capacities are perceived as low due to the fact that the Baltic States diplomats can be perceived as 'panic makers' at times, mainly when it comes to Russia, which makes it hard for other decision-makers to identify their priorities (Expert DE1; see also Jurkynas 2014). Moreover, as acknowledged by the Prime Minister, many diplomatic representations are still missing, so there is still space for improvement in diplomatic capacities. Official SE ranks Estonia's diplomatic capacities very low but does not provide any specific reasons to explain this perception.

Estonia's economic capacities in the security field are perceived above average. This is due to the stable currency, liberal laws that make the state attractive to external investors, and its membership in the EU and OECD (Defence Minister; Prime Minister; Expert EE, DE1, LT). Nevertheless, both the internal and external participants admit that Estonia's economy is relatively small in size which sets certain limitations to its capabilities (Defence Minister; Expert LV, LT; Official DK). On that note, the external participants refer to shortcomings that are mostly related to the size of the state, claiming that even if Estonia dedicated 2% of its GDP to the defence, it still represents an insufficient amount due to its small population (Official SE; Expert PL, DE2), thus limiting its defence and security budget. Additionally, small size leads to an insufficient defence undertaking incompatible with high-tech opposition and expensive weaponry (Official SE; Neretnieks 2006). Moreover, Estonia's economy is highly integrated to its neighbours' and the European market, making it dependent on others and vulnerable to crisis (Defence Minister; Expert PL; Tromer 2006). Although Estonia fulfils its financial responsibilities to NATO in order to receive protection, which is a rational strategy for a small state (Official DK; Expert DK), there is still room for improvement, as perceived both internally and externally.

Finally, Estonia's military capacities are perceived internally as very capable, as opposed to the external perceptions. However, both sides support the notion that Estonia's military is professional and experienced, mainly due to its willingness to participate in international missions (Defence Minister; Expert DK), which Expert DK means can be perceived as paradoxical, as the biggest threat to Estonia is in its close vicinity. Furthermore, the Estonian military is perceived as defence-oriented and with a good territorial defence model (Prime Minister; Expert EE, LV, PL). Likewise, the fact that Estonia still has a compulsory military service contributes to its capacity (Prime Minister; Expert EE), as does the impressive societal support of the military (Official DE). Nevertheless, the reality is that Estonia's military capacity, professional or not, is modest in size and insufficient to meet a large opponent with technologically advanced weaponry (Official SE, Expert PL, FI, LT, DE2), meaning that Estonia remains vulnerable to Russia's modern arsenal (Neretnieks 2006). Moreover, Estonia has no air defence capacities of its own and a lack of weapons in the military is common (Official DK, SE; Expert LT, DE2). The Estonians seem aware of their

inadequacy but nonetheless believe that the NATO membership fills this gap, as the Defence Minister sees Estonia's military capacity as part of NATO's overall capacity. As mentioned before, it is no secret that Estonia's security is heavily dependent on NATO.

National Role Conceptions

There are many similarities between the internal and external perceptions of Estonia's security. Everyone seems to agree that the main provider of Estonia's security is the country's membership in NATO and the EU (Defence Minister; Expert EE, SE, DE1, LV, LT, PL, SK; Official DK, SE, DE). The correspondent national role conception for Estonia would therefore be *protectee*, because NATO and the EU's credibility are on the line, making Estonia's security highly relevant to these institutions (Holsti 1970; Official DK, SE; Expert DK, DE1, PL). Furthermore, Estonia's insufficient military capacity leaves no other option than to rely on its NATO membership. Its geographic location and dependence on external cooperation excludes the national role conception of *independent*, since there is no anti-institutional attitude (Holsti 1970); on the contrary, Estonia welcomes institutional involvement with open arms, as can be seen from the presence of NATO troops in the country (Defence Minister; Expert SE, LV, PL, DE2).

Moreover, Estonia's complete devotion to NATO and the EU, as shown by its fulfilling the responsibilities (economic and military), indicates its role as a *faithful ally*, trying to increase NATO's capacities and supporting the US in its foreign policy agendas (Holsti 1970; Official DK; Defence Minister). But Estonians are not only devoted to these organisations, but also to creating strong bilateral or regional ties with neighbours and states within the general Western value space (Defence Minister; Official SE). This is not only done in relation to security but also through economic cooperation and the need to belong to the Western (and perhaps more regionally to the Nordic) sphere (Defence Minister; Expert DK, PL, DE1), showing association to the role conception of *regional-subsystem collaborator*. Provided that the sources for this conception are connected to states' economic needs, sense of 'belonging' to a region, geographical location and so on, which are pushing states to commit to creating communities, Estonia definitely qualifies for this role (see table 2; Holsti 1970).

Both internal and external views indicate quite similar perceptions of threats in general. However, external views give Estonia a flagship position when it comes to cyber security, calling it a leader and giving credit to its abilities to market cyber capacity internationally, hence pointing to the role conceptions of *regional leader* and *example* in the cyber field. The Estonians, however, do not indicate any type of leadership in the cyber field, perhaps because they are too modest to do so. Moreover, Estonia's role as a *bridge*, connecting NATO with non-NATO members in the region, is recognised by both sides. Nevertheless, external views also add a dimension of Russia's influence to the bridge role, claiming that Estonian territory could be used by Russia to extend its influence (Expert DE1).

Finally, Estonia is not seen as a *regional protector*, as all Baltic Sea region states have to contribute to the common security and NATO represents the main protector, at least to its regional members. Nor is Estonia considered to hold a *balancer's* functions to stabilise

unequal blocs. Then again, these two roles are traditionally linked to great powers anyway (Elgström and Smith 2006). On the other hand, the role of *mediator-integrator* is common to small states, which could potentially be a role for Estonia as well. However, Estonia's efforts to remain neutral in conflicts have historically been unsuccessful (Expert EE) and therefore, Estonia has clearly picked a side, thus not qualifying as an impartial mediator.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

In the following discussion, as a result of the debates in literature and the many questions that arise from the data results, I choose to elaborate further on the two topics of perceptions of threats and institutional settings. Finally, I present my conclusions and point to future research possibilities.

6.1 Shared Perceptions of Threats

Estonia seems to face threats on many levels, including military and economic pressure, but also within the cyber, energy, social, and information spheres, all of which can be combined into a concept of hybrid threats. It is also commonly agreed that all of the aforementioned threats come mainly from the neighbouring state, Russia (Crandall 2014; Knudsen 1996; Official DK, SE; Expert SE, DE1, DE2, LV, LT, PL, DK). The concerns are not irrational, as Estonia suffered a cyber-attack in 2007 (Jurkynas 2014; Crandall 2014; Mälksoo and Šešelgytė 2013) and is perceived as an 'energy island', with high dependency on fossil fuel supplies from the East (Jurkynas 2014; Tromer 2006). Furthermore, the events that took place in Georgia and the on-going situation in Ukraine have brought back the fear of military aggression, which perhaps never went away (Tromer 2006; Lamoreaux 2014; Mälksoo and Šešelgytė 2013; Korolev 2015; Expert EE). Given the geographical proximity and historical ties to Russia, a Russian-focused view on security and an anti-Russian discourse are inevitable (Wivel et al. 2014).

There is a joke in diplomatic circles that "the Baltic States are preoccupied only with three issues: Russia, Russia and ...we forgot the third one – must be Russia" (Jurkynas 2014:113). Interestingly, during Estonia's accession period to the EU, its (or Baltic States in general) national security approach was more in line with a "do not provoke the bear" attitude, as the Baltic States did not want to draw any attention to the Russia-card in order to avoid upsetting EU partners and starting a debate on the usefulness of the ESDP (Tromer 2006:373). Today, however, the 'Russia card' is openly played, to some extent in the EU but mainly in the framework of NATO, which is perhaps a way for Estonia to not be forgotten (Expert DK). But what initiated this shift in discourse? Is it perhaps a global change in politics, making it more acceptable to voice concerns over Russia's actions? If the international community stayed rather silent during the events in Georgia, then Ukraine was a step forward, whereas the recent Skripal incident in the UK resulted in actual diplomatic responses (from some states) to Russia (also Expert EE). Naumescu (2017) believes that there is a clash between different approaches taken by the EU member states towards Russia's

actions that might even threaten European unity. Previously, the Baltic States' public views on the Western approach on Russia described it as naïve and underestimating the latter's capacities (Tromer 2006). This notion has changed to some extent. Furthermore, it is probably due to its institutional shelter that Estonia has gained the confidence to 'poke the bear' and show that it is not afraid to speak up. After all, it is the institutional settings that provided small states with a platform to level the playground and seek protection from threats to their security.

6.2 The Janus Face of Institutional Membership

Estonia's security is directly provided by NATO and the EU (Keohane 1968; Bailes et al. 2014; Jurkynas 2014; Defence Minister; Official SE, DE, DK), but institutional memberships also come with insecurities, especially for small states (Expert PL, DK; Tromer 2006). As Estonia has put all its money, figuratively and literally, on its NATO membership to ensure security, I wonder how small states relying on alliances relate to the downsides of institutional dependency. Are the possible interference in national affairs (Bailes et al. 2014) and the expanded spectrum of security concerns (Tromer 2006), both effects of Estonia's NATO membership, not relevant when assessing a small state's security? For example, although terrorism is perceived by a few interviewees as a threat to Estonia (Defence Minister; Expert EE, SE), the country did not join the 'coalition of the willing' in Iraq in 2003 or continue to participate in international missions solely to fight the war on terrorism, but first and foremost to demonstrate its devotion to the US and NATO (Tromer 2006; Expert DK). Institutional belonging inevitably means giving up a slice of a state's sovereignty, and paradoxically, after having fought so long for its autonomy, Estonia is now willing to give some of it away.

Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate in literature when it comes to NATO's essence. On one side, there are those who believe that NATO is as strong as ever; and on the other side, there are those who perceive the alliance to be weakened (see Wallace 2016; Fröhlich 2016; Goldgeier 2016). Although NATO's commitment to Estonia's security (and the Baltic Sea region) is currently perceived as strong, due to the actual presence of troops in the region (Defence Minister; Expert SE, LV, PL), there are still concerns that NATO's focus may be redirected to other conflicts (Expert PL; also Bailes et al. 2014). Moreover, there are worries of a reluctance to act on the side of the US and its allies (Expert DK; Tromer 2014); or even that Estonia is used as a base to confront Russia, putting it in more danger as NATO's 'borders' are tested on Estonia's territory (Expert DE1, DE2; Bailes et al. 2014). President Trump's shifting approach to NATO is another source of concern, as he had previously called NATO "obsolete", then changed his views and ensured NATO's capacities (BBC News, April 12, 2017). The transatlantic bond has weakened in the past decade (Fröhlich 2016), raising the questions where it is headed and what this development means for small states such as Estonia, who are so highly dependent on NATO.

In the context of the EU, which provides Estonia's economic security (Jurkynas 2014; Tromer 2006; Defence Minister), the instabilities in the Eurozone and challenges in European integration can shake its foundation (Expert PL; Jurkynas 2014; Knudsen 1996). Furthermore, the high economic integration can pose a problem as shown by the economic

crisis in 2008 and EU's inability to spare small states from its effects (Bailes et al. 2014). When it comes to hard security, the EU is not perceived as an actor since perceptions indicate its strong focus on soft issues (Defence Minister). But maybe Expert FI has a good point, claiming that Estonia's security concerns might give a boost to the EU to advance its hard security capacities. Establishing PESCO is likely a step in that direction (Expert PL). Nevertheless, as mentioned before, a good start would also be to adjust the focus of the CFSP, which presently does not include the eastern dimension. Meanwhile, however, Estonia will keep its focus on NATO, not the EU, to provide it with hard security.

6.3 Concluding Reflections and Future Research Possibilities

There are many similarities between Estonia's perceptions of its security situation and how the other Baltic Sea region states assess it. Firstly, there seems to be an agreement in the perceptions of threats and Russia's role as the main source of these threats. Everyone also agrees on the fact that Estonia's security comes from its NATO and EU memberships, along with its own professional defence forces, even though they are of insufficient size. Moreover, it is apparent that Estonia is a very committed member state to its allies, which is illustrated by its fulfilment of economic responsibilities and providing of support in international missions. However, some aspects are only brought up from external perspectives, such as the threat from socio-ethnic differentiation or, more surprisingly, Estonia's strong niche in the cyber domain. Furthermore, some external statements provide more critical perspectives on institutional commitments and insecurities embodied by the EU and NATO memberships.

Moreover, this study illustrates the internal and external perceptions that even a small state can be relevant for regional and international security, as it is apparent that the global community is interconnected: if something were to happen to Estonia, other states and institutions would be affected. In the present situation, were the West and Russia are once again experiencing a strained relationship, this notion becomes very topical, especially since Estonia is on the border between these two spheres. It will indeed be interesting to follow the development of the security circumstances and roles played by the states in the Baltic Sea region. As shown by the internal and external perceptions of Estonia's security, the country clearly plays the roles of *protectee* and *faithful ally*, *bridging* NATO and non-aligned states. How these roles would be affected if either Finland or Sweden would join NATO is another interesting topic that could become central to the region's security.

Conducting a master's thesis on perceptions comes with methodological challenges, especially in terms of data collection and empirical evidence. In this study, the broad conceptualisation of security proved to be problematic when conducting interviews, with twofold effects. On the one hand, the deliberate absence of a definition of the concept of security in the interview guideline caused insecurity among the interviewees, who seemed hesitant to misunderstandings. On the other hand, though, this lack of definition left room for individual interpretations and perceptions of security, which was the aim of the interviews. Furthermore, the opportunity for personal perceptions caused another challenge, as the experts seemed comfortable with sharing their opinions, whereas the officials' positions set limitations, albeit undetermined, to personal assessments. To inquire officials to expose

subjective opinions about state affairs, whether it is their own state or not, represents a problem as they cannot express themselves as openly as one would desire, if they agree to respond at all.

The nature of the security topic is generally very sensitive. Therefore, it was a great privilege and benefit for this study that both Prime Minister Jüri Ratas and Defence Minister Jüri Luik participated in my interviews and contributed with their perceptions of Estonia's security. Unfortunately, obtaining an equivalent level of external perceptions from non-Estonian officials proved to be more challenging, irrespective of the promise of anonymity. Based on the experiences from this study, it would benefit such research to dedicate more time on the collection of data, especially by focusing on face-to-face interviews, as they represent a more in-depth method of acquiring perceptions. Finally, the national role conceptions framework provides a suitable and structured method to interpret perceptions. However, the large quantity of roles, overlapping at times, makes it difficult to categorize certain cases. Furthermore, the framework needs to be updated with new role conceptions that fit better with the present complex political structures.

The study of national roles and perceptions of individual states is a topic that should receive more attention and focus in literature, which would benefit the understanding of states' behaviour. Given that Estonia is perceived as a *protectee*, it is not surprising that it consequently is a *faithful ally*. Understanding the perceptions of other states, and the interconnected links between different types of roles, could enable a state to act in relation to these perceptions and thus guide it in its security strategy. Hence, in order to analyse different roles played by states, it would be interesting to study states that find themselves in various specific security situations. Which roles are played by independent states who border institutional alliances or act as pawns in the power game between larger states? The varying roles played by states could also be researched by choosing to study the perceptions of several players within the same institutional cooperation, such as the EU, NATO, or even the Eastern Partnership. Both these scenarios would enrich the academia of perceptions and promote the development of role theory.

7 References

7.1 Interviews

Below is a list of the institutions involved in this research. The interviews were held over a three months period, starting from March and ending in May, 2018. Firstly, the list of institutions and their respective expert in the study is presented, followed by the list of officials from the Baltic Sea region states. Finally, the list of Estonian participants is provided.

Atlantic Council - Expert SE, March 22, 2018

Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) – Expert PL, April 19, 2018

Finnish Institute of International Affairs – Expert FI, March 29, 2018

German Council on Foreign Relations – Expert DE1, March 27, 2018

German Institute for International and Security Affairs – Expert DE2, May 15, 2018

Institute of International Relations and Political Science (Vilnius University) – Expert LT,
March 19, 2018

National Defence Academy of Latvia – Expert LV, March 28, 2018

University of Copenhagen – Expert DK, April 19, 2018

Federal Foreign Office (Germany) – Official DE, May 12, 2018

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark – Official DK, March 23, 2018

Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs – Official SE, May 3, 2018

Government Office of the Republic of Estonia – Prime Minister of Estonia Jüri Ratas, April 4,
2018

International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS) – Expert EE (Kalev Stoicescu), March
27, 2018

Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia – Defence Minister of Estonia Jüri Luik,
March 23, 2018

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8 Appendices

8.1 Interview Guide in English

Date:

Your Name:

Your participation in this interview and your answers to the following questions will remain anonymous.

For each question, please mark the number that best represents your opinion by writing an 'x' in the blank box under the corresponding number. Thereafter, please motivate your choice by providing at least three brief answers to the sub-question(s).

Part I Estonia's security situation (0 –insecure; 10 –secure)

1) How (in)secure is Estonia today?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- a) What are the main threats to Estonia's security?
- b) What are the main sources that provide Estonia's security?

Part II Estonia's security role (0 – not relevant at all; 10 –extremely relevant)

2) How relevant is Estonia's security to the Baltic Sea region's security?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

a) In which ways?

3) How relevant is Estonia's security to the EU's security and defence development?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

a) In which ways?

4) How relevant is Estonia's security to NATO's collective defence undertaking?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) In which ways?

5) How relevant is Estonia's security to the broader global security?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) In which ways?

***Part III Estonia's capacities in the security field, in the context of the Baltic Sea region
(0 – lowest capacity; 10 – highest capacity)***

6) How would you assess Estonia's diplomatic capacity in the security domain?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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a) Please motivate your answer.

7) How would you assess Estonia's economic capacity to provide security?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) Please motivate your answer.

8) How would you assess Estonia's military capacity to provide security?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) Please motivate your answer.

8.2 Interview Guide in Estonian

Kuupäev:

Teie nimi:

Igale küsimusele vastates palun valige üks number, mis kõige paremini esindab teie arvamust. Seejärel palun motiveerige oma valikut andes vähemalt kolm vastust lisaküsimus(t)ele.

I osa: Eesti julgeoleku maastik (0 – madal julgeolek; 10 – kõrge julgeolek)

1) Milline on Eesti julgeolek täna?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

a) Millised on põhilised ohud Eesti julgeolekule?

b) Mis tagab Eesti julgeoleku?

II osa: Eesti julgeoleku roll (0 –; 10 –)

2) Kui oluline on Eesti julgeolek Läänemere piirkonna julgeolekule?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

a) Miks te nii arvate?

3) Kui oluline on Eesti julgeolek Euroopa Liidu ühtse julgeoleku arengule?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

a) Miks te nii arvate?

4) Kui oluline on Eesti julgeolek NATO ühiskaitse põhimõttele?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) Miks te nii arvate?

5) Kui oluline on Eesti julgeolek üldisele globaalsele julgeolekule?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) Miks te nii arvate?

III osa: Eesti võimekus julgeoleku valdkonnas (Läänemere kontekstis) (0 – ei ole üldse võimekas; 10 – väga võimekas)

6) Kuidas hindaksite Eesti diplomaatilist võimekust julgeoleku valdkonnas?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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a) Palun motiveerige oma vastust.

7) Kuidas hindaksite Eesti majanduslikku võimekust julgeoleku tagamisel?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) Palun motiveerige oma vastust.

8) Kuidas hindaksite Eesti sõjaväelist võimekust julgeoleku tagamisel?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

a) Palun motiveerige oma vastust.