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Narrating Independence

A Narrative Analysis of Contemporary Estonian and Latvian
Narratives about Independence

Per Brishammar

Supervisor: Tomas Sniegon

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Per Brishammar, Lund, 26 May 2020

Abstract

In 2018, several European nations celebrated their centennial anniversaries of independence. Two of them, Estonia and Latvia, had never been independent before 1918, and for these nations, the events surrounding independence therefore have a special meaning. This is not least made evident by the historical development that they have gone through over the course of the past century, having been incorporated in the Soviet Union for fifty years before regaining independence in 1991.

This study sets out to explore how historical narratives about independence told in predominately commemorative speeches, given by political leaders in Estonia and Latvia in the period 2017-2020, are constructed in relation to historical consciousness. Other points of interest are the stories' abilities to justify Estonian and Latvian relations to external actors such as Russia, EU and NATO as well as their abilities to construct national identity. The project was done by applying a narrative analysis based on William Labov's elements of a narrative, focusing on three elements where expressions of historical consciousness were most likely to be manifested. As a theoretical framework, theories about historical consciousness and historical narration have been used to explain the sense-making functions of the studied narratives.

The results show that the identified narratives show proof of historical consciousness, with extensive connections to metanarratives dominating in Estonia and Latvia, drawing on references about the live-through period of suffering during the Soviet era and a period of thriving in the post-Soviet era, using historical narration to justify relations to Russia, EU, and NATO, with varying degrees of optimism. The dominant view is that the respective nation has and must pursue the ability to act independently, regardless of external actors. The Estonian and Latvian narratives are to a large extent similar in terms of historical consciousness but differ most of all in the way the issue of how unity between ethnic groups is treated.

Keywords: Estonia, Latvia, Historical Consciousness, Historical Narratives, Independence

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1 Introduction

The year 2018 marked a special happening in the Baltic nations of Estonia and Latvia; the centennial anniversary of their respective independence, declared in 1918. Throughout history, the Estonian and Latvian lands have been subjects of numerous rulers, including German knights, Swedes, Poles, and Russians. Thus, reaching independence was a major achievement. The road to freedom in Estonia and Latvia was far from simple; upon declaring independence in 1918, both countries were thrown into upstirring independence wars.

After World War II, Estonia and Latvia lost their hard-fought independence to the Soviet Union. They would remain parts of the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991. However, the narratives surrounding the struggle for independence were never forgotten, eventually filling a vital role in the process of the singing revolution that led to the restoration of independence of Estonia and Latvia in the early 1990s.

Despite the new geo-political reality of Estonia and Latvia, now members of the European Union (hereafter: EU) and NATO, the narratives of independence still serve an important role in both countries. This is visible in the scale of commemorations of it in political speeches, statements, and celebrations organised to pay respect to the events and people that contributed to independence. In Estonia, the centenary celebrations stretch over three years, while the Latvian centenary stretches over five years.

The celebration of the first century of independence in Estonia and Latvia presents an occasion for storytelling about the course that history has had since 1918. It is also an occasion for presenting outlooks and anticipations for the future. Therefore, it is a time for making sense of the past, present, and future: a display of historical consciousness, a mental process that serves as an orientation in time. By looking at narratives presented in the years surrounding the centenary celebrations, the display of historical consciousness can be made apparent, giving us clues about how it shapes the relationship to the past, present, and future, to external actors, and national identity, departing from narratives about independence told in speeches from commemorative events.

In the light of further European integration and the emergence of new superpowers and security threats, national independence is becoming an increasingly debated issue in Europe. Estonia and Latvia, due to their past as occupied territory and their present as firmly European, can provide a litmus test for how identity in time can play a role in perceptions of independence and dependence and their role in defining a national identity in a changing world.

1.1 Purpose

The aim of this study is to analyse narratives connected to Estonian and Latvian independence and their construction in relation to historical consciousness. This is interesting given that independence and sovereignty are discussed all over Europe, as the influence of international organisations and foreign powers in a globalised world grow. Yet, the will to display independence can take many expressions, not least based on historical experience, and recent examples of this can be seen in Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which have celebrated their centenaries of independence in the latest years. The celebrations provide occasions for historical narration linked to independence. Out of these countries, Estonia and Latvia stand out as similar considering their historical experience, but also very different considering factors such as language and culture, thus making them interesting for comparing.

The study will be carried out by analysing narratives found in speeches by political leaders in Estonia and Latvia, given between the years 2017 and 2020. The study attempts to highlight different aspects of historical consciousness expressed in these narratives, mainly the construction of a national identity and justification of the countries' relationship to Russia, NATO, and the EU. The results from the Estonian and the Latvian material will be compared throughout to make apparent similarities and differences between the studied cases.

Before beginning the research, a hypothesis was formulated based on previous knowledge about the subject at hand. Since historical developments in Estonia and Latvia since 1918 are very similar, it is probable that the independence narratives from a perspective of historical consciousness will turn out to be similar as well. Nevertheless, Estonian and Latvian culture are distinctively different, which suggests that there should also be important and interesting differences in the narratives, that may become visible when comparing the narratives.

1.2 Research Questions

The study will be based on the following research questions:

- How are the Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence constructed in relation to historical consciousness in the respective countries?
- Based on the idea of historical consciousness, how is independence/dependence vis-à-vis Russia, NATO and the European Union described in the narratives?
- In what way do the Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence communicate national identity?
- In what way are the Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence similar? In what way are they different from one another?

1.3 Disposition

First, the background will be presented, including the historical context of the Estonian and Latvian struggle for independence. Significant events from the countries first century will be described in broad strokes to set the scene.

Secondly, the theoretical framework will be constructed. It will consist of theories about the sense-making functions of historical narratives, their function in the construction of national identity, and, most of all, historical consciousness. In connection to this, a brief review of previous research examples on the subject will be presented.

Thirdly, the research material and chosen methodology for the study will be presented. This includes the motivation of the chosen material and a description of a narrative analysis based on William Labov's elements of a narrative that will be used as main research method.

The results of the analysis will then be presented thematically, departing from the research questions. This will be followed by a discussion of the findings which will be followed by a conclusion.

2 Background

To fully understand the Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence, the historical context of the nations must be presented. This chapter will briefly describe some of the most important events from the past 150 years that have had influence on Estonian and Latvian independence.

2.1 The Roots of the Estonian and Latvian Independence Movements

The roots of Estonian and Latvian independence can be found in the nineteenth century. As in many other parts of Europe, national identity was taking shape, mainly through publications in Estonian and Latvian language. However, for the time being, the nationalist movement remained cultural, focusing on language and folklore rather than achieving independence.¹ Accumulating cultural consciousness eventually lead to the political opposition against the ruling Russians and the economically dominating Baltic Germans gained momentum.²

Several factors contributed to the politization of the initially cultural nationalist movements. In Estonia, growing rifts between the Russian administration and the Baltic German elite offered an opportunity for improved rights for the marginalised ethnic Estonians. The Estonians also took inspiration from Finland, who successfully had achieved autonomy

¹ Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, Cambridge Concise Histories (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 224–26.

² Plakans, 267.

within the Russian empire and to whom Estonia had linguistic and cultural ties. They were also inspired by Latvia, where similar developments were beginning to take place.³

2.2 The First Era of Independence

In the political chaos that followed the abdication of Czar Nicholas II in 1917, Estonian political activists demanded and were granted extended autonomy by the provisional government in Petrograd. Simultaneously, the provinces of Northern Livonia and Narva, where Estonian was the most widely spoken language, were incorporated in the Estonian province and a national council was established.⁴

Ethnic unification was an important goal for the Latvian independence movement too. The debate in Latvia concerned the incorporation of the eastern region Latgale, at the time a part of the Vitebsk province, where a high number of ethnic Latvians lived. In contrast to the unification of the two Estonian-speaking governates, the incorporation of Latgale into the Latvian province was not self-evident. Moreover, control over Latvian territory was fragmented and divided between Russians, Latvians, and Germans, further complicating the issue of unity. This called for intense negotiations, involving a series of political congresses held to reach a common ground for the future of Latvia.⁵

In 1918, both states declared themselves independent for the first time in history. In Estonia, this was done on the 24 February 1918, when a manifesto of independence was presented in Tallinn.⁶ Latvian independence would have to wait for another six months due to problems with inner divisions. Still in the spring of 1918, many political activists were hesitant regarding whether Latvia should be a fully independent state or remain a part of Russia. As negotiations between political parties continued, support for Latvian independence gathered support and in November 1918, the formation of a Latvian democratic republic was proclaimed in Riga.⁷

Both independence declarations were followed by wars of independence. In February 1920, Estonian and Russian officials met in Tartu to discuss a peace treaty, a result of intense diplomatic work, which eventually was signed on the 2 February 1920. Consequently, it meant that Soviet Russia recognized the independence of Estonia, and Estonia became a *de jure*

³ Ea Jansen, 'Cultural or Political Nationalism? (On the Development of Estonian Nationalism in the 19th Century)', in *Time of Change in the Baltic Countries: Essays in Honour of Aleksander Loit*, ed. Anu Mai Kõll (Stockholm: Institutionen för baltiska studier, Univ, 2000), 68–69.

⁴ Neil Taylor, *Estonia: A Modern History* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018), 28.

⁵ Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 297–99.

⁶ Taylor, *Estonia*, 31–33.

⁷ Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 298–99.

independent nation. Today, the treaty of Tartu is perceived as the starting point of Estonian statehood.⁸ In Latvia, a peace treaty between the newly founded Latvian government and Soviet Russian officials was signed in August 1920, recognizing Latvia as a fully independent country.⁹

2.3 Loss of Independence and Soviet Experience

Estonia and Latvia would remain independent until the beginning of World War II. As a part of the German-Soviet pact of non-aggression, they were initially occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940.¹⁰ Having been torn between Germany and the USSR during the war years, Estonia and Latvia would ultimately become Soviet Socialist republics ruled from Moscow from 1944 up until 1991.¹¹ Independence was lost, but never forgotten. By the end of the 1980s, the stories about the years of independence served a vital function in the growing independence movements in Estonia and Latvia.¹²

The Soviet experience left deep marks on Estonian and Latvian society. Having been deprived of their independence and sovereignty, many ethnic Estonians and Latvians were deported to Siberia during the Stalin era.¹³ A particularly significant change in both societies was the result of Soviet policies of repopulation, which meant that many ethnic Russians moved to Estonia and Latvia. This in combination with the deportations and the fact that many ethnic Estonians and Latvians fled their countries after the Soviet annexation led to major demographic changes. Today, it is estimated that almost a third of Latvia's population speak Russian as their first language. In the large cities and eastern parts of the country, the ethnic Latvians are in minority.¹⁴ In Estonia, the situation is similar, with approximately 25 per cent of the population having Russian as their first language, mainly concentrated to the eastern parts of the country.¹⁵

⁸ 'Estonica.Org - Tartu Peace Treaty', accessed 29 April 2020, http://www.estonica.org/en/Tartu_Peace_Treaty/.

⁹ Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, 1. publ, Postcommunist States and Nations 10 (London: Routledge, 2001), 15.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Estonia*, 64.

¹¹ Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 359.

¹² Thomas D. Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 127.

¹³ Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 368.

¹⁴ 'Lettland - Uppslagsverk - NE.Se', accessed 18 February 2020, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/1%C3%A5ng/lettland#befolkning>.

¹⁵ 'Estland - Uppslagsverk - NE.Se', accessed 18 February 2020, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/1%C3%A5ng/estland#befolkning>.

2.4 Regaining Independence and Returning to Europe

After regaining independence in 1991, Estonia and Latvia have gone through rapid democratic and economic transitions, leaving the years of Soviet oppression and plan economy behind. Since 2004, both nations are a part of the European and Transatlantic community through their memberships in the EU and NATO. This has fundamentally changed the conditions for Estonia and Latvia.¹⁶

This second era of independence has been, in many ways, a success story, but it has not been free from conflicts. Often, conflicts in Latvia and Estonia are caused by nationalist tendencies and policies discriminating the Russian-speaking minority. In Latvia in the 1990s, only those who could prove that they had ancestors who lived in the first Latvian republic of the interwar period were granted citizenship. Others, mainly Soviet immigrants of the first or second generation, were not. This meant that approximately 20 per cent of Latvia's population were not Latvian citizens.¹⁷ Similar measures were made in Estonia during the same period, causing widespread discontent among the country's Russian-speaking minority.¹⁸ Since 1991, the Latvian language has been perceived as a prerequisite for achieving Latvian citizenship.¹⁹ Similar demands, making knowledge of the Estonian language a condition for citizenship, were issued in Estonia.²⁰ This highlights the prevalence of ethnic nationalism in Estonia and Latvia, displaying a crucial connection between language and community in the nations.

3 Previous research

Use of history, historical culture, and historical consciousness are growing research fields, where the theories connected to these concepts are applied in many different contexts. One example is linked to a European historical culture of the Holocaust, where a concrete example is Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander's volume *Echoes of the Holocaust*. The book consists of studies exploring the role of the Holocaust in European history, describing its place in memory, historical cultures, and historical consciousness in several European countries.²¹

¹⁶ Mikhail Bushuev, 'The Baltic States: From Soviet to European | DW | 23.08.2014', DW.COM, accessed 10 May 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-baltic-states-from-soviet-to-european/a-17872310>.

¹⁷ Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia*, 72–73.

¹⁸ David J. Smith, *Estonia: Independence and European Integration*, Postcommunist States and Nations 11 (London: Routledge, 2001), 78.

¹⁹ Fredrika Björklund, 'Lettland: Demos, etos och den politiska makten i en ung demokrati', in *Det Nya Östeuropa stat och nation i förändring*, ed. Fredrika Björklund and Johnny Rodin (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009), 91.

²⁰ Taylor, *Estonia*, 180.

²¹ Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture: Theoretical and Analytical Challenges', in *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2003), 13.

In the Baltic context, similar research has been conducted mostly under the topic of historical memory and historical cultures. One event that has achieved media and academic scrutiny is the “war of monuments” in Estonia. The event setting of the discussion was the debated decision to remove a Soviet monument from central Tallinn, which provoked outrage among the Russian-speaking population. The discussion can be connected to conflicting memories, where the monument for the Russian-speaking population symbolised victory in the Second World War, while it brought back memories of oppression among the ethnic Estonian population.²²

In an article by Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp, the matter of different historical memories along the lines of ethnic groups is presented, suggesting that the different attitudes towards the Soviet era would also imply diametrically different attitudes towards Estonian independence. The authors express a need for a democratisation of history in Estonia, where all ethnic groups are included in the writing of Estonian history.²³

In a Latvian context, Ammon Cheskin has written several articles about conflicting memories, mainly from the perspective of the Russian-speaking population. His research shows that attitudes towards the past is not as simple as just two conflicting narratives: one Latvian focusing on victimhood and Soviet oppression, one Russian focusing on victory and the liberation of Eastern Europe in the wake of the Second World War. With time, an ever-increasingly part of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia have a dual understanding of the past. Especially among the younger generations, this shift is visible, suggesting the effects of top-down pressure through, among others, the educational system.²⁴

The role of narratives, especially narratives of independence in the Baltic states, is discussed by Thomas Sherlock in his book *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*, focusing on the role these narratives played during the age of the *perestroika*. Like the other studies about memory in the Baltic states mentioned in this section, the issue of ethnic groups is given attention.²⁵

Attitudes towards NATO and EU membership is also a point of interest in this thesis and is an issue that has been given attention because of the generally high approval that these

²² Kenneth Nordgren, ‘How to Do Things With History: Use of History as a Link Between Historical Consciousness and Historical Culture’, *Theory & Research in Social Education* 44, no. 4 (October 2016): 486, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1211046>.

²³ Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp, ‘The Politics of History and the “War of Monuments” in Estonia’, *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 3 (July 2008): 427, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990802080646>.

²⁴ Ammon Cheskin, ‘History, Conflicting Collective Memories, and National Identities: How Latvia’s Russian-Speakers Are Learning to Remember’, *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 04 (July 2012): 578, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.685062>.

²⁵ Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*, 126.

organisations have in Estonia and Latvia, which has been proved by research. Only 5 per cent of the Estonian population disapproves of the country's EU membership.²⁶ In Latvia too, the number is about 5 per cent.²⁷ These numbers suggest an overall positive view on European cooperation, which might be reflected in the studied narratives.

These research examples, displaying aspects of the countries' past and present, will be of importance when discussing the results of this study. As most of the reviewed research treats earlier periods, focusing on the years after the *perestroika* up until the late 2000s, it will bring perspectives on the relatively recent research material that this study is founded on.

4 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the study will be presented. The focus will be on the concept of historical consciousness, its functions, and its connection to historical culture and use of history. Thereafter, the basics of narrative theory will be presented, highlighting the structural definitions of a narrative and its sense-making functions before moving on to the features of a historical narrative.

4.1 Historical Consciousness

At the centre of the study's theoretical framework is the concept of historical consciousness. Swedish historian Klas-Göran Karlsson describes historical consciousness as a mental process through which we orient ourselves in the present given our perceptions of past experiences and future outlooks. The three levels, present, past, and future, are strongly connected to one another, changing over time because of new experiences.²⁸ Historical consciousness has several functions. It contributes to the construction of identity, it justifies or legitimises actions and values, it provides answers to existential questions about life practices and it makes distinctions between different ethnic or social groups.²⁹

To explain the identity building qualities of historical consciousness, we talk about "borderline events", a term coined by German historian Jörn Rüsen. They include events of

²⁶ Christoph Sebald et al., 'EU Country Briefing: Estonia', *Www.Euractiv.Com* (blog), 14 May 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/eu-country-briefing-estonia/>.

²⁷ Daniel Matthews-Ferrero, Ilvija Bruge, and Robert Steenland, 'EU Country Briefing: Latvia', *Www.Euractiv.Com* (blog), 9 May 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/eu-country-briefing-latvia/>.

²⁸ Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'Historiedidaktik: begrepp, teori och analys', in *Historien är nu: en introduktion till historiedidaktiken*, ed. Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander, 2., [uppdaterade och bearbetade] uppl (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009), 49–50.

²⁹ Karlsson, 52.

major change, often with negative impact.³⁰ Rüsen meant that crises are vital components for historical consciousness, as it creates a rupture in temporal continuity. To make sense of these events, our historical consciousness is activated, explaining what can be referred to as contingency, caused by events that challenges the known and familiar course of history. The mode of sense-making of a borderline event is the historical narrative.³¹ In the cases of Estonia and Latvia, the declarations of independence in 1918 and 1991, and more importantly the loss of independence in 1940, are good examples of borderline events.

From the processes of historical consciousness activated by borderline events, identity is constructed. The construction of collective identity, illustrated by an Estonian and a Latvian identity in our study, typically creates a continuity that surpasses the life span of every member of the group. This collective sense of continuity comes from the meeting between historical memory and future anticipations. Because of the processes of historical consciousness, the past experiences are kept alive, bringing members of a collective unit, for example a nation, the feeling of having lived through events that may have occurred in a distant history. The continuity this portrays contributes to a sense of togetherness, differing one collective from other groups, thus constructing an identity.³²

Historical events and the commemorations of them are vital for the construction of a collective identity, displaying their constitutive influence on the group. More importantly, broader chains of such events leave a mark on collective identity, connecting the past with the present and the future.³³ The events, or chain of events, can have different functions in the construction of identity. They can have a positive function, normally describing a founding event for a group, such as a declaration of independence. They can have a negative function, which often occurs when identity is constructed in relation or opposition to rival groups, or they can represent a change in the concept of a collective identity.³⁴ An example of the last function relevant for this study is the “Return to Europe”, as Estonian and Latvian went through a process of leaving an eastern identity to a western identity after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

As, previously mentioned, crises are important borderline events, activating historical consciousness. Rüsen makes a distinction between normal crises and catastrophic crises, depending on the graveness of the event. So called normal crises are portrayed as easier to get

³⁰ Karlsson, 51.

³¹ Jörn Rüsen, ‘Holocaust Memory and Identity Building: Metahistorical Considerations in the Case of (West) Germany’, in *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Michael S. Roth and Charles G. Salas, Issues & Debates (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), 253.

³² Rüsen, 254–55.

³³ Rüsen, 256.

³⁴ Rüsen, 256–57.

to terms with, while catastrophic crises need considerable time to heal and to find ways to make sense of. In identity making, a catastrophic crisis cannot contribute to any positive features, but rather it acts as a disturbance to the self-image of the group.³⁵ In the context of this study, a catastrophic crisis is the crimes committed by the Soviet regime, particularly during the reign of Stalin, when many ethnic Estonians and Latvians were deported to Siberia. In both Estonia, these events are often made equal to the crimes committed by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust, further nurturing a metanarrative of victimhood.³⁶ Similar patterns are visible in Latvia.³⁷

4.2 Narratives

Narratives are fundamental tools of human interaction and communication. They construct meaning as the narrator gives structure to his or her inner thoughts and feelings, through the study of which a narrator's identity can be explained.³⁸

There are many definitions of the word "narrative", but the main characteristics of a narrative consist of "an account of a non-random sequence of events that conveys some kind of action and movement through time".³⁹ The events are held together by a plot, which gives the narrative a logical progression, where one action eventually leads to another. The plot departs from a message that the narrator wants to communicate.⁴⁰ The message thus influences the rest of the story: what events are chosen to depict it, the order in which they take place.⁴¹ In the narratives that constitute our research material, the goal is to reproduce narratives of independence that legitimise Estonian and Latvian positions in relation to external actors and defines national identity.

An important part of understanding a narrative is to understand its context: who is the narrator, who is the recipient and what is the setting in which the story is told? In that sense, a narrative is co-constructed in dialogue between the narrator and the audience.⁴²

³⁵ Rüsen, 254, 258.

³⁶ Paul Oliver Stocker, 'Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Estonia « balticworlds.Com', *Balticworlds.Com* (blog), accessed 10 May 2020, <http://balticworlds.com/holocaust-memory-in-contemporary-estonia/>.

³⁷ 'Latvia', Holocaustremembrance, accessed 11 May 2020, <https://www.holocaustremembranceproject.com/Countries/Latvia>.

³⁸ Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, and Tamar Zilber, *Narrative Research* (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States of America: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1998), 7, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412985253>.

³⁹ Ann Griffin and Vanessa May, 'Narrative Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis', in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seale, 4th edition (Los Angeles ; London: Sage, 2018), 513.

⁴⁰ Griffin and May, 513.

⁴¹ Kenneth J. Gergen, 'Narrative, Moral Identity, and Historical Consciousness: A Social Constructionist Account', in *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*, ed. Jürgen Straub (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 100–101.

⁴² Griffin and May, 'Narrative Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis', 513–14.

A structuralist definition of a narrative was presented by American sociolinguist William Labov, focusing on the organising of events in a narrative. Labov's method, formulated as six structural elements of a narrative, helps to explain the functions and features of a narrative and his typology has been used in many research projects. It was originally used in Labov's research on Afro-American speech communities in New York City, but has since been adopted by narrative researchers in various scientific disciplines.⁴³ This can be explained by the spread of interest in narrative research, that originally derives from literary studies but today has a solid place in many disciplines across social sciences and humanities. Examples of such disciplines are history and sociology.⁴⁴

The elements are as follows:

1. An abstract: an introductory summary of the narrative.
2. An orientation: what is the time, place and situation of the narrative? Who are the characters?
3. A complicating action: a turning point that changes a set balance.
4. An evaluation: the narrator's attitude towards the event, what is his/her message?
5. A conclusion: how the story finally ended.
6. A coda: a return to the present.⁴⁵

Swedish narrative researcher Alexa Robertson makes a distinction between the fourth element, the evaluation and Labov's other structural elements, where the abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, and coda is part of a narrative's *histoire*, signifying the content of a narrative. The evaluation meanwhile is part of a narrative's *discours*, signifying how the story is presented.⁴⁶

4.3 Historical narratives

As previously stated, historical narration is a sense-making expression of historical consciousness, meaning that historical consciousness and narrative competence are intertwined.⁴⁷ According to Rösen, a historical narrative should rest on three principles:

⁴³ Wendy Patterson, 'Narratives of Events: Labovian Narrative Analysis and Its Limitations', in *Doing Narrative Research*, by Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2008), 22, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024992.d3>.

⁴⁴ Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges, *Narratives in Social Science Research*, 2004, 14, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=254588>.

⁴⁵ Alexa Robertson, 'Narrativanalys', in *Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, ed. Kristina Boréus and Göran Bergström (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2008), 229.

⁴⁶ Robertson, 230.

⁴⁷ Jörn Rösen, 'Historisches Erzählen', in *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik*, ed. Klaus Bergmann et al., 5., überarbeitete Auflage (Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1997), 57.

- The story should rest on historical memory. The audience should be able to feel a connection to the event, avoiding that it becomes merely fictional, but something concrete.
- The levels of historical consciousness, past, present and future should be connected in the frame of the story. This contributes to the continuity of the story.
- The narrative should be connected to a larger framework of temporal change. This helps the audience to orientate themselves in time.⁴⁸ This type of narrative framework is described further down.

Rüsen's thoughts about the connection between narrative competence and historical consciousness are supported by Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller. According to her, the main interest in a historical narrative comes from its transmitted meaning in the way the story of the past is told to an audience. The audience then reflects upon the narrative's message, which gives the past a certain meaning.⁴⁹

Furthermore, the sense-making functions of a historical narrative can be described in four interacting levels, contributing to the building of identity in time:

- Creation of a perception of contingency in time.
- Interpretation of this perception through narrative framing.
- Orientation of present conditions based on changes over time and past experiences.
- Justification of actions departing from this temporal orientation.⁵⁰

The sense-making features of a historical narrative is constructed by a narrative structure, giving it its form, by historical experience, giving it its content, and by orientation in time, giving it its function.⁵¹

4.4 Historical Culture and Use of History

Connected to the concept of historical consciousness are the concepts of historical culture and use of history. These are not going to be discussed in depth in this thesis, but should be mentioned, as they are all interconnected and will increase our understanding of the theories about historical consciousness.

Historical culture is a chain of stories, rituals, literature, and other types of communication referring to a certain historical context. It influences our relationship to the past, thus

⁴⁸ Rüsen, 58–59.

⁴⁹ Karlsson, 'Historiedidaktik: begrepp, teori och analys', 54.

⁵⁰ Jörn Rüsen, *Berättande och förnuft: historieteoretiska texter*, ed. Martin Wiklund, trans. Joachim Retzlaff (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2004), 98.

⁵¹ Rüsen, 103.

influencing our historical consciousness.⁵² Therefore, the study of historical cultures, in whole or in part, is a necessary mode of research for operationalising historical consciousness.⁵³ The telling of historical narratives can be a part of a historical culture⁵⁴, and is, as previously mentioned, an important way of making sense of historical events.

Some historical cultures are more stable and dominant than others, forming metanarratives. Metanarratives can be described as “structured patterns of context and meaning that shape human understanding of the world, society, and states, often within a dominant or hegemonic framework”⁵⁵. For a historical narrative to produce a meaningful identity construction, its individual reproductions must be grounded in such a collective, grand narrative framework.⁵⁶ These dominating frameworks are therefore to have in mind throughout the analysis, particularly considering the investigated narratives’ connection to metanarratives in an Estonian or a Latvian context respectively.

Dominating metanarratives in contemporary Estonia and Latvia are often connected to victimhood, deriving from the experiences of the Second World War and the Cold War, as explained in section 4.1.⁵⁷ Recently, a narrative of transition from east to west has been added, creating a new image of success for the Baltic nations as well as the emergence of a new Baltic identity oriented towards the west.⁵⁸ In Estonia, this is mirrored in the political project that took shape in the 1990s under the banner “Return to Europe”.⁵⁹ This term is also used in Latvia, designating the same process of reorientation on the global arena.⁶⁰ The “Return to Europe” signifies the intention to become members of the European and Transatlantic community, and was primarily visible all over Eastern and Central Europe in the decade following the fall of the Iron Curtain.⁶¹ It can be perceived as an ideological move, where the old divisions of the Cold War disappeared, calling for a need for reorientation of identity in Eastern and Central Europe,

⁵² Nordgren, ‘How to Do Things with History’, 481.

⁵³ Karlsson, ‘The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture: Theoretical and Analytical Challenges’, 45.

⁵⁴ Jörn Rüsen, ‘Geschichtskultur’, in *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik*, ed. Klaus Bergmann et al., 5., überarbeitete Auflage (Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1997), 39.

⁵⁵ R James Ferguson, ‘Great Traditions and Grand Narratives’, *Culture Mandala: Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 31.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Straub, ‘Telling Stories, Making History: Toward a Narrative Psychology of the Historical Construction of Meaning’, in *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*, ed. Jürgen Straub (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 64.

⁵⁷ Cheskin, ‘History, Conflicting Collective Memories, and National Identities’, 561.

⁵⁸ Bushuev, ‘The Baltic States’.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Estonia*, 65.

⁶⁰ Solvita Martinsons, ‘A Book on Latvia’s “Return to Europe” to Be Launched on Europe Day’, accessed 11 May 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/50641-a-book-on-latvia-s-return-to-europe-to-be-launched-on-europe-day>.

⁶¹ Elsa Tulmets, *East Central European Foreign Policy Identity in Perspective Back to Europe and the EU’s Neighbourhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

affecting policy making and identity construction. The reorientation is mainly based on the distancing from the communist past of the region.⁶²

By presenting parts of a historical culture in a given context, be it scholarly, existential, moral, or else, to communicate a message, we can talk about a specific use of history.⁶³ Klas-Göran Karlsson has presented a typology for different uses, and valuable for this study is the so-called ideological use of history, which describes how history is used by leading groups to form and disseminate ideas such as national identity.⁶⁴

This thesis focuses on only a part of a historical culture in Estonia and Latvia, namely political speeches and more exactly historical narration used in speeches. There will be no room for an evaluation of the larger historical culture of independence. However, the study allows us to understand a significant part of it, as political leaders have a major influence over the creation of a historical culture.

5 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology of the study will be presented. First, the chosen method of narrative analysis will be gone through. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to explaining possible issues and how the result of a narrative analysis can be made valid and reliable by paying attention to certain criteria. After the presentation of methodology, a selection of primary and secondary sources will be presented.

5.1 Narrative Analysis

There are several ways to approach a written or oral narrative depending on what the researcher wishes to find out. Two general approaches can be described as two axes: one holistic-categorical and one content-form, that can be combined depending on what the researcher wants to study. The approaches are often mixed to achieve a whole-covering picture of the material at hand.⁶⁵

The chosen approach for this study is mainly thematic, focusing on narratives of independence. They will be analysed using William Labov's structural elements presented in section 4.2. In that way, the analysis can be defined as categorical-form, exploring the sense-making functions of narration by examining structural components of narratives treating different themes.

⁶² Tulmets, 25, 27.

⁶³ Nordgren, 'How to Do Things With History', 481.

⁶⁴ Karlsson, 'Historiedidaktik: begrepp, teori och analys', 63.

⁶⁵ Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, *Narrative Research*, 12–14.

As with any method, there are advantages and disadvantages. The structural approach is useful when studying historical narration as it explains its function as a communicative action and similar approaches have been suggested by Jörn Rüsen.⁶⁶ The Labovian approach in particular appear as appropriate for this research project as it is useful for making comparisons, of which this study aims to do.⁶⁷ Moreover, the structure itself of a historical narrative is, as previously presented, connected to the sense-making function of a narrative, which we want to explore in the study.

Labov's method of narrative analysis has received criticism, mostly related to its strict definitional attributes that disqualify many narratives. Such narratives can be found in transcripts from interviews where, for example, traumatic experiences are discussed, where a structure from Labov's perspective is sometimes incomplete or lacking.⁶⁸ This is however not primarily an issue for our research material, since official speeches by nature are well-structured monologues, which are suitable for this type of analysis.

To repeat, the six elements that will serve as a template for the analysis are:

- 1 An abstract
- 2 An orientation
- 3 A complicating action
- 4 An evaluation
- 5 A resolution
- 6 A coda

Before proceeding, some notes must be made about the elements. An important note concerns the first element, the abstract. The abstract is optional and is sometimes left out, depending on the context of the investigated narrative.⁶⁹ If or when an abstract is not applicable in our material, it will be left out of the structural analysis.

Considering the features of historical consciousness presented in the theoretical framework, three of Labov's elements appear particularly useful: The complicating action, the evaluation, and the coda. These elements will be given attention while the remaining three elements mainly serve the purpose of setting the narrative context.

The complicating action is at the heart of the narrative. Without a complicating action, there is no narrative. As the other elements depart from it, they reinforce the sense-making effects of

⁶⁶ Rüsen, *Berättande och förnuft*, 99.

⁶⁷ Patterson, 'Narratives of Events', 28–30.

⁶⁸ Patterson, 33.

⁶⁹ William Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, Conduct and Communication 3 (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 364.

the story.⁷⁰ The study of complicating actions of the narrative assist us in identifying what Rūsen calls borderline events, allowing us to explain their influence on Estonian and Latvian historical consciousness.

The evaluation concerns how the narrative is presented and showcases aspects of why the narrative is important. In short, it can be done in four ways:

- External evaluation: a pause in the narrative, where the narrator expresses the point of the narrative.
- Embedding of evaluation: the evaluation is embedded into the story, either through a quote or a comment concerning a character's action.
- Evaluative action: proving the point through descriptions of characters' actions.
- Evaluation of suspension of the action: the prolongation of a certain event in the narrative, drawing the audience's attention to it and thus highlighting its importance.⁷¹

The study of the narratives' evaluation assists the researcher in identifying the narratives' message, which, as previously described, affects the whole structure of a narrative. By finding the events accentuated in the narratives, we will be able to find expressions of historical consciousness and possible explanations and justifications of different interpretations.

Finally, the coda could be argued as an integral function for historical consciousness, as it creates a bridge between the narrated past and the current situation. Not only does it close the narrative sequence, it presents the narrator's conclusion about the accounted events, rounding of the narrative construction.⁷² It is a suitable element for identifying the interplay between the three levels of past, present and future, thus presenting the temporal orientation that the study strives to explore.

Having applied the theoretical framework, the results will be compared. It will be useful for making visible potential similarities between the Estonian and Latvian narratives as well as between the narratives presented by different actors within the countries. The findings will then be discussed, and a conclusion will be presented thereof.

5.2 Reliability and Validity

Narrative analysis is by its nature an interpretative discipline, with many different approaches.⁷³ This raises questions about the validity of the results of a research enterprise based on a narrative analysis, as the results might change depending on who is conducting the study and

⁷⁰ Labov, 370.

⁷¹ Labov, 370–75.

⁷² Labov, 366.

⁷³ Griffin and May, 'Narrative Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis', 513.

from what perspective the material is analysed. It has also been a source of criticism against the study of narratives. The criticism has been addressed by Amia Lieblich, psychologist and famous narrative researcher. She has presented four criteria that should be kept in mind while performing a narrative analysis to make the result valid and reliable. They are as follows:

- **Comprehensiveness:** The results should be well anchored in the text, with concrete examples from it and reflections regarding different interpretations of the examples.
- **Coherence:** The results should be well anchored in theories connected to the studied themes, and the different parts of the analysis should be coherent.
- **Insightfulness:** The study should show proof of originality and creativity.
- **Simplicity:** The study should remain concrete and stick to the subject.⁷⁴

The above criteria will be useful for guaranteeing that the results of this study are made reliable and valid. They will be elaborated on in the discussion.

5.3 Material

The material that will be analysed in this thesis consists of a selection of speeches held in Estonia and Latvia between the years 2017 and 2020. They all share a common theme: independence. This specific time is chosen because it coincides with the centenaries of independence in Estonia and Latvia. Most of the speeches are given in connection to celebrations of the centenary of independence, others are dedicated to specific events highlighting unique experiences in the respective countries. These events are the congress of Latgale in 1917 and the Tartu peace treaty in 1920. Both events have a certain significance in the respective nations' independence narrative. Furthermore, the issue of independence and autonomy has appeared more important in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the Crimea crisis in 2014, not least in the Baltic Sea Region, given the Baltic nations' historical relationship to Russia, making it a relevant field of study.

In total, eighteen speeches given by representants of the Estonian and Latvian parliaments, governments, and presidential offices between 2017 and 2020 were accessed through the internet. This selection is presented in the second appendix. Due to the limited scope of a master thesis, fourteen narratives from nine different speeches have been identified and analysed using the method explained above. The material is relevant, because of the influential positions enjoyed by the narrators in their respective countries. As leaders of their institutions and countries, they can influence the perceptions and interpretations of the past, making it an official and widely approved narrative.

⁷⁴ Robertson, 'Narrativanalysis', 255–56.

The speeches are English translations of Estonian and Latvian originals. This means that there is a risk that certain linguistic nuances might be lost. However, the speeches are from the official channels of Estonian and Latvian government, parliament, and presidential office, which should guarantee that the translations are official and valid. Therefore, the fact that the study is not conducted in the material's original language should not lead to an invalid result.

For the introduction and background chapters, literature on the history of Estonia and Latvia has been consulted. This includes *A Concise History of the Baltic States* by Andrejs Plakans and *Estonia: Independence and European Integration* by David J. Smith as well as the electronic version of the Swedish encyclopaedia *Nationalencyklopedin*.

For the theoretical framework, works treating historical consciousness and narration have been consulted. Among the references, the volume *Historien är nu* edited by Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander as well as works by Jörn Rüsen stand out.

For methodological guidance, the book *Language in the Inner City* by William Labov has been used as the main reference for methodological guidance. This has been complemented by insights from works by, among others, Amia Lieblich and Alexa Robertson.

6 Results

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be presented and analysed, covering the narratives found in the research material. The narratives will be presented thematically, highlighting the aspects of narratives of independence expressed in the research questions. In total, fourteen narratives were identified, seven in the Estonian material, seven in the Latvian material. The narratives are presented in their entirety in an appendix.

The first section treats a more general approach to narratives of independence, focusing on borderline events connected to independence in Estonia and Latvia. In the second section revolves around identified narration where the nations' relationship to the Soviet era and Russia as a successor state of the Soviet Union is narrated. The third section focuses on narration about international cooperation in general and Estonian and Latvian views on EU and NATO in particular. The fourth section studies narration about national unity, an increasingly important issue in relation to ethnic divisions in Estonia and Latvia, not least considering the identity building function of historical consciousness.

6.1 Independence as Borderline Events

The first theme focuses on storytelling about the events that led to Estonian and Latvian independence in 1918. Often used to set the scene in commemorative occasions, these

narratives are presentations of people and events that have had a decisive impact on the course of Estonian and Latvian history, from the nineteenth century onwards. The chain of events leading up to the declarations of independence and the wars of independence that followed in both countries serve as borderline events, referring to Rösen's ideas about the impact of certain events on historical consciousness. Thus, the narratives studied in this section will help us understand the more specific themes that this thesis sets out to explore further on.

Storytelling of events leading up to Latvian and Estonian independence was found throughout the material, depicting different phases of the states' creation depending on the context of the speech. A long narrative, covering the history of Estonia from the nineteenth century up until today, was found in a speech given by Estonian prime minister Jüri Ratas on Estonian Independence Day, 22 February 2018.

Jüri Ratas is a politician and economist that has been Prime Minister of Estonia since 2016. He represents the centre party *Keskerakond*. Since 2019, Ratas is leading a coalition of rightist parties, including centre right party *Isamaa* (from the Estonian word for Fatherland) and right-wing populist party EKRE (*Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond*, Conservative People's Party of Estonia).⁷⁵

Ratas's centre party is known for its popularity among the Russian-speaking part of the population, and it has in previous times been regarded as an unpopular coalition partner due to its alleged ties to Vladimir Putin's party United Russia. Nevertheless, it is often described as a centre right party with a pro-EU agenda.⁷⁶

The storyline is found in the introduction of Ratas's speech. He starts by talking about Estonian poet Lydia Koidula, a prominent figure in the Estonian national awakening movement⁷⁷, acknowledging her role in founding the idea of an independent Estonian state.

*"We can therefore say that the idea of independent Estonia was born right here in Tartu, authored by Lydia Jannsen-Koidula. Surely, this dream of independence was, at the time, in the hearts of many."*⁷⁸

Ratas continues by calling for a commemoration of the individuals that throughout history has contributed to the nation's independence. He mentions the fighters of the independence

⁷⁵ 'Jüri Ratas - Uppslagsverk - NE.Se', accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/1%C3%A5ng/juri-ratas>.

⁷⁶ 'Estonia's Ratas Steps down as PM but Could Be Back Soon', France 24, 4 April 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190404-estonias-ratas-steps-down-pm-but-could-be-back-soon>.

⁷⁷ 'Estonica.Org - Baltic German Literature and Its Impact', accessed 10 May 2020, http://www.estonica.org/en/Culture/Literature/Baltic_German_literature_and_its_impact/.

⁷⁸ 'Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18', Government of the Republic of Estonia, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www.valitsus.ee/en/news/speech-prime-minister-juri-ratas-centenary-republic-estonia-220218>.

war, the exiles that fostered Estonian culture abroad during the Soviet era, and, those who struggled and succeeded in regaining Estonian independence in 1991.

Having this brief outline of the narrative, we now proceed with the analysis, starting with the *histoire* of the narrative.

Abstract	(Not applicable)
Orientation	Situation: The idea of an independent Estonia was born. Place: Estonia. Time: Nineteenth century. Who: The pioneers of Estonian independence.
Complicating action	Estonia achieved independence.
Conclusion	The creation of an Estonian state goes on, even after the nation regained its independence.
Coda	Today, the Estonian population must remember its history going forward, because if they do not, the future is unstable.

Table 1. The histoire of Ratas’s storyline about independence as borderline events.

Considering the evaluation of the story, it expresses gratefulness for the previous generations who have made it possible for the Estonians of today to live in their own, independent nation. This is visible in calls for a collective commemoration of past deeds: “Let us now bow before those generations that persevered in this corner of the Earth that we now call home; before generations whose language and survival skills we have inherited.”⁷⁹ By acknowledging the fact that an independent Estonia is a collective effort and the struggles the Estonians have gone through during the course of the nation’s first century, Ratas explicitly reminds the audience that independence cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, it can be said to be an external evaluation, as the narrator explicitly states the meaning of the narrative. An additional note can be made regarding the centrality given to the Estonian language, that has been passed on through generations. This suggests that the language brings continuity to the legal independence of the nation, which further emphasises the role of the Estonian language in the Estonian project of nation building, most of all visible in the issue of citizenship.

The coda further underlines the message of Ratas’s narrative and brings the perspective to what will be. A future as an independent country is only possible if people are aware of the experiences of past generations and continue to work every day to keep Estonia the way it is

⁷⁹ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

today: “I am recalling these historical moments because the future of Estonia stands on a stable ground only if we never forget who we are, where we come from, and how we have reached this point in our lives”.⁸⁰ This brings the past to life in the present, showing how past events contribute to the construction of Estonian identity, which is the function of historical consciousness.

A similar type of narrative can be found in a speech given by Ināra Mūrniece, speaker of the Latvian parliament, the *saeima*, at a ceremonial sitting of the parliament on 18 November 2018, the centennial anniversary of Latvian independence.

Ināra Mūrniece is the speaker of the *saeima* since 2014.⁸¹ Her party, the National Alliance, is described as a right-wing populist party.⁸² Members of the party have expressed hostile opinions against the Russian-speaking minority and admire the authoritarian regime of Karlis Ulmanis in the interwar period.⁸³

Mūrniece introduces her speech with a narrative of the founding of independence, like Ratas did. The focus is on the principles of freedom and democracy upon which the young Latvian state was founded. The political leadership of the time is described as progressive, which is illustrated by the mentioning of initiatives such as women’s suffrage.⁸⁴ The driving force of the founding fathers of Latvia is described as: “[...] the people’s will for a state of their own, their belief that their national identity, the Latvian language and liberty can only be guaranteed by the state of Latvia”.⁸⁵ Like in Ratas narrative, Mūrniece introduces a connection between language and independence, creating an image of the Latvian language as a bearer of this value, an image that is strengthened by the prominent role the language has had in the Latvian national project since the fall of the Soviet union.

The narrative continues with the loss of independence in connection to the Second World War, leading up to the miraculous restoration of independence in 1991. Mūrniece explains how these events came about by referring to “the unbreakable spirit of the Latvian people and the power of our national ideals.”⁸⁶

The structural analysis produced the following results:

⁸⁰ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

⁸¹ ‘Ināra Mūrniece’, *saeima.lv*, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/about-saeima/work-of-the-saeima/inara-murniece/>.

⁸² Andres Kasekamp and Daunis Auers, ‘Comparing Radical-Right Populism in Estonia and Latvia’, in *Right-Wing Populism in Europe*, ed. Brigitte Mral, Majid Khosravini, and Ruth Wodak (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 240.

⁸³ Kasekamp and Auers, 242–43.

⁸⁴ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’, *Latvia 100*, accessed 25 March 2020, <https://www.lv100.lv/en/news/address-by-inara-murniece-speaker-of-the-saeima-november-18-2018/>.

⁸⁵ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’.

⁸⁶ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’.

Abstract	The creation of an independent Latvia changed the course of the nation's history, and the desire to live freely has been a red thread in Latvian history ever since.
Orientation	Situation: Latvia was founded. Place: Latvia. Time: 1918 Who: The pioneers of Latvian independence.
Complicating action	Latvia lost its independence after the Second World War.
Conclusion	Latvia regained independence and restored the democratic institutions.
Coda	Today, the Latvians are grateful for those who participated in building an independent and democratic Latvia, both in 1918 and 1991.

Table 2. The histoire of Mūrniece's storyline about independence as borderline events

The evaluation of the narrative can be described as external evaluation, as it explicitly presents a tribute to the founders of the Latvian state. Mūrniece expresses her gratitude several times, most explicitly in the identified coda of the narrative: "We are grateful to both those who 100 years ago and those who again nearly 30 years ago implemented the nation's right to self-determination. Our values and ideals have not changed!".⁸⁷ The paragraph is important for understanding the historical consciousness expressed in this narrative, as it displays the continuity of Latvian values and ideals, upon which state was founded on, up to this day.

The complicating action of the narrative is the loss of independence after the Second World War. For Mūrniece, the fact that Latvia managed to regain independence after fifty years of occupation makes for a unique case for her homeland and the other Baltic countries. It creates the image of the uniqueness of the Latvian and Baltic peoples, differencing them from other peoples in Europe, which creates an appeal for Latvian identity, grounded in dominant Latvian metanarratives.

Many ceremonies celebrating foundational events in Estonian and Latvian history have been organised in the past few years, since the Estonian and Latvian official programmes for the centenaries of independence were initiated. One example is a narrative from a speech by

⁸⁷ 'Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018'.

Henn Põlluaas, president of the Estonian parliament, the *riigikogu*, at the celebration of the parliament's centennial anniversary on 26 April 2019.

Henn Põlluaas is the president of the Estonian Parliament since 2019 and belongs to the faction of the Conservative People's party of Estonia, EKRE. He describes himself as a national conservative who will give priority to national interests to bring Estonia "out of the democratic, demographic and economic crisis".⁸⁸

Põlluaas's party, EKRE, is since the general elections in 2019 the third biggest party in Estonia and a government coalition member. It is described as a national conservative party, whos "aims to ensure the independence and sovereignty of Estonia".⁸⁹ The party is perceived as an anti-establishment party and has expressed critical opinions against the EU and, not least, Russia. They have verbally attacked Estonia's Russian-speaking minority, threatening to close Russian-language schools.⁹⁰

Põlluaas highlights the importance of the first Estonian parliament, the constituent assembly, and their work to draft fundamental legislation in the new independent Estonia. Meanwhile, Estonian soldiers fought in the war of independence:

*"90 minutes and exactly one hundred years ago, the fourth meeting of the Constituent Assembly was concluded right here. The participants were committed to their work and understood its gravity. After all, the War of Independence was still raging."*⁹¹

Põlluaas makes a point about the independence of the constituent assembly, that did not take into consideration how foreign actors would perceive them. They would only think about Estonia and the Estonian people, mirroring Põlluaas's political allegiances:

*"The Constituent Assembly did not worry about how we would be seen elsewhere, nor did they wait for foreign guidelines. They were thinking about how to serve the best interests of the Estonian state and people."*⁹²

The structural analysis gave the following results:

⁸⁸ 'Member of the Riigikogu', Riigikogu, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/parliament-of-estonia/composition/members-riigikogu/saadik/65b1d8bb-7f45-48f5-b4aa-7ba4ca459824/Henn-P%C3%B5lluaas>.

⁸⁹ 'Conservative People's Party of Estonia Faction', Riigikogu, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/parliament-of-estonia/factions/conservative-peoples-party-estonia-faction/>.

⁹⁰ Jean Mackenzie, 'How Boom-Time Estonians Embraced Far Right', *BBC News*, 15 May 2019, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48264637>.

⁹¹ 'Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas at the concert meeting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Riigikogu', Riigikogu, 26 April 2019, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/press-releases/board-of-the-riigikogu/speech-president-riigikogu-henn-polluaas-concert-meeting-celebrate-100th-anniversary-riigikogu/>.

⁹² 'Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas at the concert meeting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Riigikogu'.

Abstract	One hundred years ago, the constituent assembly came together to draft legislation for the new-born, independent Estonia. Meanwhile, the country was engaged in an independence war.
Orientation	Situation: The constituent assembly came together for the first time. Place: Tallinn, Estonia. Time: 1919 Who: The members of the constituent assembly.
Complicating action	The assembly passed the constitution, a fundament of society.
Conclusion	The constituent assembly declared that the people of Estonia wanted to act independently.
Coda	The constitution bears this legacy up to this day.

Table 3. The histoire of Põlluaas's storyline about independence as a borderline event.

The evaluation of the narrative can be described as evaluative action, focusing on the actions of the constituent assembly. The description of their work is infused by war metaphors. Just like the war of independence fought on Estonian territory at the time, the work that the constituent assembly carried out is described as a battle: “The Constituent Assembly was also like a frontline unit in 1919. [...] They knew that by laying the foundations of democracy, they themselves would be under attack.”⁹³ This conveys an image of democracy and independence as something hard-fought, and a battle that Estonia ultimately won.

By creating a link between the constitution that is still in effect and the past, Põlluaas puts the foundation of independence in a continuum through time, explaining how it has influenced Estonia and how it will continue to influence Estonia, which gives the narrative its meaning. This is visible in the short yet meaningful coda of the narrative: “Forever, as our constitution confirms to this day”.⁹⁴

The studied narratives on the theme of independence as borderline events share traits in how they are presented, what Labov calls evaluation. They are all told in a commemorative manner, praising the founding fathers and their actions in both nation's history. Independence is at the core of all three narratives, which is visible when examining their complicating actions. In each narrative, the event that shifts the balance of the situation is the gain or loss of

⁹³ ‘Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas at the concert meeting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Riigikogu’.

⁹⁴ ‘Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas at the concert meeting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Riigikogu’.

independence, which explains their centrality as borderline events in Estonian and Latvian history.

The codas of the studied narratives have one thing in common: the expression of continuity. In Ratas's speech, he pays respect to those who contributed to independence, and wants to communicate the importance of how the Estonians should carry ancestors' legacy forward. Mürniece and Põlluaas's narratives also address continuity, expressing that the values that once contributed to independence remain steady in Estonian and Latvian society. This is done by bridging the gap of time through referring to quotes, documents, and people involved in the independence process, making the past come alive in the present, which gives the narratives their meaning.

Hence, the central aspect in the narratives is continuity, which brings meaning to the events that have caused contingency in the course of Estonian and Latvian history. The events commemorated in the narratives have a positive function on Estonian and Latvian identity as they cover the foundation of independence in the respective country, and their commemorations further emphasise their place in Estonian and Latvian identity constructions, as the memories of these events are made vivid.

The narratives are all connected to the Estonian and Latvian metanarratives of victimhood and transition, which further gives meaning to their function in identity construction. This is most of all visible in the narratives of Ratas and Mürniece, where the loss of independence and challenges in connection to this and eventually the regaining of independence in 1991 are narrated. The whole chain of events, from 1918 to 1991, represents a chain of events that has impact on national identity, and by referring to it, Ratas and Mürniece reproduces the widespread image of the fate of the Estonian and Latvian nations. Meanwhile, the intense battles described by Põlluaas can be connected to a narrative of suffering and oppression, from which the early Estonian law makers broke free.

6.2 Independence and Russia/Soviet Union

The image of Estonian and Latvian independence is in many ways shaped by the rulers from whom they gained independence. In 1918, it was the Russian Empire, in 1991, the Soviet Union. This means that Estonia and Latvia have a historically close but complicated relationship to the successor state of these empires: the Russian Federation. In the material, several storylines expressing views on Russia and the Soviet Union were found, showcasing views on independence in relation to Estonia's and Latvia's past as parts of these empires. Since the

Soviet experience is more recent than the experience of the Russian empire before 1918, the identified narratives are focused on relations to Russia after 1991.

At a meeting in the UN general assembly in September 2018, Latvian minister of foreign affairs, Edgars Rinkēvičs, gave a speech where the upcoming centenary of his homeland had a central part. Edgars Rinkēvičs is Latvia's minister of foreign affairs since 2011 and is known to be a vocal critic of Russian infringements in other countries' political processes.⁹⁵ He belongs to the liberal party New Unity, which formed a government together with four other parties after the Latvian general elections in 2018.⁹⁶

The narrative starts with the foundation of Latvia in the wake of the first world war:

“A remarkable change occurred one hundred years ago. The end of World War I and collapse of empires resulted in the liberation of nations and brought about a fundamental revision of Europe’s political map.”⁹⁷

Rinkēvičs continues his presentation, highlighting the Latvian experience of Soviet occupation and the support that Latvia received from the western world during the Cold War era. In the narrative he criticizes an alleged Russian view that Latvia was not an independent country during the occupation which, according to Rinkēvičs, goes against international law:

“In accordance with international law, the state of Latvia continued existing throughout the occupation period. [...] However, the Russian Federation, the official successor of the Soviet Union still does not acknowledge well-documented facts of history.”⁹⁸

The structural analysis of the narrative produced the following results:

Abstract	The time of the speech is very special for Rinkēvičs's home country, as it draws close to the centennial anniversary of independence.
Orientation	Situation: The first world war ended, and new states emerged in Europe, Latvia was one of them. Place: Europe Time: 1918

⁹⁵ Patrick Wintour, 'Baltic States No Longer a Bridge between East and West, Says Latvia', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/18/baltic-states-no-longer-a-bridge-between-east-and-west-says-latvia>.

⁹⁶ 'Latvian Coalition Parties Sign Kariņš's Government Declaration', Baltic News Network - News from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, 23 January 2019, <https://bnn-news.com/latvian-coalition-parties-sign-karins-s-government-declaration-196377>.

⁹⁷ 'Statement by H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly New York, 29 September 2018', accessed 19 March 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/61349-statement-by-h-e-mr-edgars-rinkevics-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-latvia-at-the-73rd-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-29-september-2018>.

⁹⁸ 'Statement by H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly New York, 29 September 2018'.

	Who: The Latvian nation.
Complicating action	A weak international community lead to the loss of Latvian independence.
Conclusion	After decades of dictatorship and trauma, Latvia regained independence in 1991.
Coda	Since the restoration of independence, Latvia is a strong advocate of international law, due to past personal experiences of what happens when other countries do not comply with international law.

Table 4. The histoire of Rinkēvičs's storyline about Russia and the Soviet Union.

The evaluation of the narrative is presented through external evaluation. Rinkēvičs accentuates the grim experience of occupation, expressing his condemnation of the Soviet Union's unlawful actions after the Second World War and his gratefulness towards the countries that pursued a non-recognition policy of the Soviet occupation. The meaning of the narrative is therefore two-folded, its separate functions being in sharp contrast which is made apparent by the fact that they are presented immediately after each other:

“We are grateful to all those nations that for decades implemented policies of non-recognition of the occupation of the Republic of Latvia and stuck to their principles [...] I call on Russia to embrace the truth and to clearly condemn the actions of the Soviet Union.”⁹⁹

In the identified coda, Rinkēvičs announces the principles and values that Latvia want to convey internationally. These ideas are strongly connected to Latvia's historical experiences: the Latvian struggle for independence and the Soviet era in Latvia. It shows proof of historical consciousness in the way Rinkēvičs explains and justifies Latvia's advocacy for international law on the global arena based on past experiences. Justifying actions and attitudes in this way is one of the functions of historical consciousness presented in the theory chapter.

A similar narrative was told by Estonian minister of foreign affairs, Urmas Reinsalu, at a ceremony celebrating the centenary of the peace treaty of Tartu in February 2020. As explained in the background chapter, the treaty marked the end of the war of independence and is regarded as the *de jure* recognition of Estonian independence, and therefore, the document is integral in the Estonian independence narrative, most of all in relation to Russia.

⁹⁹ ‘Statement by H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly New York, 29 September 2018’.

Urmas Reinsalu is the Estonian minister of foreign affairs since 2019. He has previously held other ministerial offices, first as minister of defence, then as minister of justice.¹⁰⁰ Reinsalu belongs to the centre-right party *Isamaa*, which gives priority to Estonian interests and strives for a liberal market model inspired by western neo-liberal values.¹⁰¹

With the peace treaty of Tartu as a starting point, Reinsalu explains how the former rulers of the Estonian lands, the Russian empire, recognised the sovereignty of Estonia. However, Reinsalu adds that Russian authorities recently claimed that the Estonian interwar state “lost its status as a subject of international law due to its accession to the Soviet Union”.¹⁰² Reinsalu condemns this statement, claiming that it goes against international law.

The structural analysis provided the following results:

Abstract	The peace treaty of Tartu is the starting point of Estonian statehood and shows the legal continuity of the Estonian nation
Orientation	Situation: The peace treaty of Tartu stated the independence of Estonia from Russia Place: Estonia Time: 1920. Who: Estonian and Russian officials.
Complicating action	A recent claim from Russian authorities says that the peace treaty lost its effect after the occupation, meaning that the legal continuity of Estonia ceased.
Conclusion	The Russian statement is not true, and Estonian authorities continue to claim the legal continuity of the treaty of Tartu.
Coda	Estonia continues to respect that actions of international law remain legally binding.

Table 5. *The histoire of Reinsalu’s storyline about Russia and the Soviet Union*

The evaluation of this narrative is embedded, relying on quotes from the Tartu peace treaty and a statement from the Russian ministry of foreign affairs, conveying a criticism of a

¹⁰⁰ ‘The Foreign Minister | Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://vm.ee/en/ministry-contacts/foreign-minister>.

¹⁰¹ ‘Isamaa Faction’, Riigikogu, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/parliament-of-estonia/factions/isamaa-faction/>.

¹⁰² ‘The Speech of Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu at the Formal Ceremony Dedicated to the Centenary of the Tartu Peace Treaty at the Vanemuine Concert Hall on 2 February 2020 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, accessed 2 April 2020, <https://vm.ee/en/news/speech-foreign-minister-urmas-reinsalu-formal-ceremony-dedicated-centenary-tartu-peace-treaty>.

perceived Russian questioning of the legal continuity of Estonian sovereignty. It is made obvious by the order in which the quotes are presented, as Reinsalu first reads an excerpt from the treaty of Tartu, followed by quotes from the recent Russian statement. The message is that Estonia respects international law, Russia does not. This is further illustrated by experiences from the Second World War:

*“The Tartu Peace Treaty is valid, and it remains unchanged from the perspective of our statehood by the fact that it was violated by the legal predecessor of the Russian Federation, the Soviet Union with its illegal annexation of the Republic of Estonia in 1940.”*¹⁰³

Like in Rinkēvičs’s narrative, views on international law is explained in the coda of Reinsalu’s narrative. Just as in the Latvian case, Russia stands as the antithesis of what is perceived as the “right” thing to do, and Estonia’s past becomes a justifier for their own actions in world politics.

The relationship between the Baltic states and Russia is often presented in the form of contrasts. Such an account is given by Henn Põlluaas, the speaker of the Estonian *riigikogu*, who in his ceremonial speech constructs a narrative about Estonia’s Soviet experience. A red thread is the strive for democracy and freedom that has been intimately linked with the idea of the Estonian nation that did not waver during the Soviet era: “But we did not just accept that. Our yearning for freedom and democracy never went out.”¹⁰⁴

The structural analysis produced the following results:

Abstract	(Not applicable).
Orientation	Situation: Independent Estonia was a democratic and progressive country. Place: Estonia. Time: 1920s Who: The Estonian nation.
Complicating action	Estonia was occupied after World War II.
Conclusion	Estonia managed through struggle to regain independence and started to rebuild a democratic state.
Coda	Today, Estonia is a member of NATO and the EU.

Table 6. The histoire of Põlluaas’s storyline about Russia and the Soviet Union

¹⁰³ ‘The Speech of Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu at the Formal Ceremony Dedicated to the Centenary of the Tartu Peace Treaty at the Vanemuine Concert Hall on 2 February 2020 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs’.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas at the concert meeting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Riigikogu’.

The evaluation of Põlluaas's narrative revolves around the successes of the independent Estonian states, mainly focusing on the actions of the constituent assembly and the re-established parliament in the post-Soviet era. Therefore, it can be described as evaluative action, highlighting success and progressiveness in the two eras of independence, compared with the years of occupation, that led to a destruction of the country's democratic institutions. The fate of the nation is mirrored by the constituent assembly:

*“By autumn 1944, more than one half of the members of the 1919 Constituent Assembly were either dead or missing. Half of the rest had to flee Estonia. They shared the fate of their people. The occupied Estonia remained at the mercy of the communist regime and Russification policy for half a century.”*¹⁰⁵

Põlluaas makes sure to tell that the spirit of the first republic was not quenched during the Soviet era, and the legacy of the first constituent assembly was carried on by the parliament established after the restoration of independence. Bold legislation and high ideals once again made Estonia successful, awarding them membership in NATO and EU: “Just like the Constituent Assembly, the Riigikogu began to draft legislation, procedures, and provisions. Today, we are a member of the European Union and NATO.”¹⁰⁶ The very last sentence serves as a short coda, describing how far the nation has come since regaining independence, ultimately finishing a successful transition, looking forward to a new future. That way, the narrative displays a strong connection to the dominating narrative about Estonia as a victim of Soviet occupation and later on a narrative of reorientation towards the west, giving the message that Põlluaas wants to disseminate with his narrative justified.

The speaker of the Latvian parliament, Ināra Mūrniece, also uses contrasts in a narrative about Soviet Latvia. In a narrative told in her speech, Mūrniece talks about the Soviet era and, more importantly, its consequences on present day Latvia:

*“Yes, for 50 long years Latvians were forced to live in an occupied country, and that has left deep and lasting scars. The repressions enacted by the occupation regimes are the grimmest pages in the history of the Latvian nation.”*¹⁰⁷

Mūrniece continues by listing the problems left by fifty years of Soviet rule. However, she ends the narrative on a positive note by explaining a resurging interest for everything

¹⁰⁵ ‘Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas at the concert meeting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Riigikogu’.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas at the concert meeting to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Riigikogu’.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’.

Latvian today: “People’s interest in Latvian culture and identity is blossoming, patriotism and love of one’s homeland is also increasing.”¹⁰⁸

The structural analysis of the narrative produced the following results:

Abstract	Latvia was occupied lands for fifty years, resulting in much harm done on the nation.
Orientation	Situation: Latvia was occupied and oppressed. Place: Latvia. Time: The fifty years of occupation (1941-1991). Who: The Latvian people.
Complicating action	The occupational regime destroyed academic, political and economic institutions in Latvia.
Conclusion	Despite the negative effects, nationalism, patriotism and an interest in Latvian identity and culture is rising today.
Coda	The Latvian memory of the Soviet era does not vanish.

Table 7. The histoire of Mūrniece’s storyline about Russia and the Soviet Union.

The evaluation of this narrative is to communicate a dark chapter in Latvia’s history, highlighting parts of Latvian society that was destroyed by the Soviet regime. Not only physically, but also mentally. By drawing the attention to the complicating action, an evaluation of suspension of the action can be considered. This further displays the centrality of the event in the context of Latvian independence, not least including it in the metanarrative of Latvian victimhood during the Soviet era.

This narrative stands out from the other identified narrative about Russia and the Soviet Union in how it explicitly blames a wide number of contemporary societal problems on the Soviet leadership. In the long run, the narrative depicts the Soviets as having bad work ethic and no sense of beauty, as opposed to the Latvian population. It also describes Soviet efforts to suffocate Latvian national identity. Triumphantly, Mūrniece declares that the strategy failed. Today, Latvian patriotism is thriving and going into the future, the nation has managed to regain something that was almost lost as an effect of Soviet policies. This is underlined by the coda of the narrative, where Mūrniece states that “The historical memory of the people cannot be erased!”¹⁰⁹ This contributes to the concretion of a historical narrative, as presented by Rūsen,

¹⁰⁸ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’.

since Mūrniece refers to a memory shared by the majority of Latvians that still have vivid memories of the Soviet era.

The evaluations of the narratives, despite being different in how they are presented, follow two patterns: contrasting the Soviet past with a western present and future and portraying the Soviet era as a sombre chapter of history. The narratives thus become presentations of how Estonia and Latvia have broken free from the Russian/Soviet sphere of influence. The narratives are strictly related to the dominating metanarratives of victimhood during the Soviet era, while at the same time also subscribing to the image of post-Soviet success in both countries. This proves that the crisis that the Soviet occupation meant is an important borderline event in both Estonian and Latvian identity building. The connections to the dominating narratives provide grounding for the legitimisation of the presented attitudes towards Russia and the Soviet past.

The complicating actions of the narratives vary, but they all have in common that they present events that have had a negative impact on the respective nation's independence. It ranges from destruction of institutions during the Soviet era, loss of independence after the Second World War and more recent conflicts over interpretations of history. In all cases, independence is once again at the core of the narratives.

The codas of the narratives present the same conclusion about independence and Russia: Estonia and Latvia are firmly independent from Russia and the time of Soviet influence belongs to the past. However, it is expressed that the Soviet experience has left a mark on present-day Estonia and Latvia. A recurring theme, not least in the speeches of the ministers of foreign affairs, is the justification of actions based on historical experience. The Baltic nations pursue international diplomacy to strengthen international law due to their past, personal experiences of breaches against it. In the two other narratives, the attitudes towards the Soviet experience is described as a sign of persistence, aiming to legitimise the character of Estonia and Latvia.

All investigated narratives express strong opinions about the nations being independent from Russia. Historical consciousness is a key aspect in the presentations, with the past being a solid ground and motivator for their attitudes towards Russia. But even though there is a strong will to leave the Soviet past behind, the present conflicts mentioned by Reinsalu and Rinkēvičs suggest that Russia remains present in the Estonian and Latvian historical consciousness, representing a dark and troubled past.

6.3 Independence and EU/NATO

The second era of Estonian and Latvian independence has been characterised by the forging of new alliances within Europe and the Western world. Today, being members of EU and NATO

affects their independence, not least in security issues. The organisations are present in several identified narratives, often in connection to narratives about transition.

Storytelling connected to NATO and EU membership is often linked to security issues. One example is found in Jüri Ratas’s speech on Estonian Independence Day in 2018. Ratas begins the by talking about defence and security, referring to a meeting with Emmanuel Macron and Theresa May one year earlier.

“Members of the Estonian Defence Forces next to British and French soldiers clearly helped convey that us belonging to NATO does not simply mean that someone is holding an umbrella over us – we are part of the unified security network of the Western world.”¹¹⁰

This narrative is an example of a narrative where the orientation is placed further on, which is not uncommon.¹¹¹ This is visible as the situation of the story, explaining a state of unsafeness that led to an Estonian loss of independence, is placed after that Ratas has stated that Estonia today, because of European and Transatlantic cooperation, is a safer place:

“The Republic of Estonia was born in the turbulence left behind by the First World War only to be lost in the next one. It is our shared duty to do everything we can to keep history from repeating.”¹¹²

This last example illustrates a connection between security and independence. It also gives meaning to past experiences when discussing a contemporary issue.

The structural analysis produced the following results:

Abstract	The narrative is introduced by a quote of a Finnish general, describing the importance of defending one’s country.
Orientation	Situation: Turbulent times made Estonia an unsafe country. Place: Estonia. Time: The interwar period. Who: The Estonian nation.
Complicating action	Estonia joined NATO and EU.
Conclusion	Closer international cooperation has made Estonia safer.
Coda	Because of Estonia’s participation in international cooperation, the country is safer and better off than any time before.

Table 8. The histoire of Ratas’s storyline about EU and NATO.

¹¹⁰ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

¹¹¹ Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 364–65.

¹¹² ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

The evaluation of Ratas’s narrative is a positive account for Estonia’s NATO and EU membership, from a security perspective. This message is explicitly communicated; thus, the evaluation is a case of external evaluation. Estonia’s engagements in the organisations are described as key factors for the nation’s stable position, which is contrasted by a troubled past: “Thanks to cooperation and consistent effort, the Baltic countries have achieved more in their national existence than before.”¹¹³ However, as seen in the quote about the meeting with Macron and May, it is also evident that Ratas wants to present an image of Estonia as not simply a protégé of larger NATO allies such as France and the UK, but an equal to them, meaning that the membership does not infringe on Estonian independence. Rather, it enhances the country’s ability to act independently.

In the narrative’s coda, Ratas concludes by praising Estonia’s allies and friends. Moving into the next century, the partnerships must remain strong, to avoid the repeating of history, from which Estonia has suffered: “It is our shared duty to do everything we can to keep history from repeating [...] The best security for the future is taking care of each other as well as our friends close and far away. We are stronger together.”¹¹⁴

This way of perceiving European and Transatlantic cooperation is also present in the Latvian material, as a similar note is made by Ināra Mūrniece. Departing from the general elections that were held a couple of weeks before the centenary celebrations, she notes that the results imply that there is a support for Latvia’s membership in international organisations. She is positive about it and explains that it is important that Latvia continues its cooperation with NATO and EU, given the increasing visibility of “Kremlin’s military activities and displays of power within our region”.¹¹⁵ Mūrniece expresses that the situation is similar to that of one hundred years ago:

“[...] we must keep in mind that alone we are not strong enough. Just as a century ago, today security is also best ensured when working together with allies – our NATO partners in Europe, the USA and Canada.”¹¹⁶

The structural analysis produced the following results:

Abstract	(Not applicable)
Orientation	Situation: Results of the general elections showed that support for EU and NATO is strong. Place: Latvia.

¹¹³ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

¹¹⁴ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

¹¹⁵ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’.

¹¹⁶ ‘Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018’.

	Time: 2018. Who: The Latvian electorate.
Complicating action	A more aggressive Russia makes security an issue.
Conclusion	Latvia has in a short time been able to strengthen its defence and NATO has been a great help
Coda	Just as in the past, Latvia's allies are important for the nation's safety and, in the long run, its independence

Table 9. The histoire of Mūrniece's storyline about EU and NATO.

The evaluation of this narrative is highlighting the important connection between security and Latvia's engagements in international cooperation, which is underlined when Mūrniece states that "Security is and will remain our priority number one!".¹¹⁷ This explicit underlining of the narrative's message suggests an external evaluation.

In the narrative, Mūrniece expresses support for the Latvian security policy while showing gratitude to their allies. However, Mūrniece also makes a point by saying that "[w]e know what it means to defend our own state!".¹¹⁸ By stating this, she shows that Latvia is an independent and strong actor. NATO is a good help for improving security, but Latvia is not necessarily dependent of them.

Not all narratives about EU and NATO membership address the issue of security. Some highlight aspects such as success and development as a part of post-Soviet transition. One such narrative was identified in Latvian prime minister Krišjānis Kariņš's New Year's speech, given on New Year's Eve 2019. Kariņš is Latvia's prime minister since January 2019 after a lengthy government formation following the 2018 general elections, that had led to a fragmentation of the parliament.¹¹⁹ He belongs to the liberal party New Unity and has earlier been a member of the European parliament. 2004-2006, he was the minister of economics in Latvia.¹²⁰

The narrative mainly concerns Latvia's transition since the restoration of independence. Departing from the past year, he praises Latvia's allies and the way they help the country reach its internal goals:

"We are a reliable partner to our NATO allies. We are a member state of the largest and wealthiest democracy and economy in the world, the

¹¹⁷ 'Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018'.

¹¹⁸ 'Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima / November 18, 2018'.

¹¹⁹ 'Latvian Coalition Parties Sign Kariņš's Government Declaration'.

¹²⁰ 'Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš', 12 March 2020, <https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/amatpersonas/krisjanis-karins-0>.

*European Union. Our international ties help us achieve our national development goals.*¹²¹

Latvia's favourable situation today is given attention which displays progress made since regaining independence. The success is explained by the determination of the Latvian people.

The structural analysis gave the following results:

Abstract	Despite uncertainties of 2019, Latvia keeps progressing.
Orientation	Situation: Latvia used to be ruled in a totalitarian manner Place: Latvia Time: 1991 Who: The Latvian people.
Complicating action	Latvia regained independence, which started the transition and made it possible for the country to "Return to Europe".
Conclusion	Latvia continues to develop into a "Nordic welfare state".
Coda	The developments in Latvia since the restoration of independence is a proof of the Latvian population's strong determination to achieve their goals.

Table 10. The histoire of Kariņš's storyline about EU and NATO.

The successes of the past year are a part of the transition narrative, the "Return to Europe", that is characteristic for both Estonia and Latvia since the restoration of independence, that works as the complicating action in this narrative: "We have put the era when our country was ruled in narrow interests behind us."¹²² Kariņš furthermore expresses that Latvia is again, a part of Europe, in contrast to its situation during the Soviet occupation: "After many years of separation, we have fully reintegrated into Europe".¹²³ This is described as a success, but he makes sure to tell that the work continues. The suspension of the complicating action suggests an evaluation by the suspension of action, drawing attention to the transition narrative and the message of success.

As presented in the narrative's coda, Kariņš is confident that the country can reach any goal envisaged, due to the strong determination of the Latvian people: "Together we are Latvia. As our past shows, if Latvians decide something, nothing can stop us. Our strength comes from

¹²¹ 'Prime Minister's New Year's Speech', 30 December 2019, <https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/aktualitates/prime-ministers-new-years-speech>.

¹²² 'Prime Minister's New Year's Speech'.

¹²³ 'Prime Minister's New Year's Speech'.

our unshakable determination to get things done.”¹²⁴ Drawing on references to important events, mainly the restoration of independence, the narrative receives meaning as it is linked to the metanarrative of a successful Latvian transition from a Soviet republic to a thriving EU member state.

Another narrative that pays attention to the post-Soviet era and transition is found in a speech by Estonian president Kersti Kaljulaid held on Estonian Independence Day 2018, where she addresses Estonia’s geographical context. Kersti Kaljulaid is the first female president and was launched as an independent candidate for the presidency as the parliament was unable to reach an agreement about a new president in 2016. Kaljulaid, officially an unattached politician, describes her political values as liberal conservative.¹²⁵

Kaljulaid starts by stating that other countries have always had, and will continue to have, a certain influence on the fate of the Estonian nation. Most of all, Kaljulaid recognises the importance of Estonia’s western allies in their struggle for regaining independence during the Soviet era: “What would have become of Estonia, had Western states attempted to relieve tensions during the Cold War by surrendering our rights?”¹²⁶

The structural analysis gave the following results:

Abstract	Estonia is, has been, and will be, influenced by other countries.
Orientation	Situation: Estonia was occupied by a neighbour state (Russia/Soviet Union) for many years. Place: Estonia Time: The Cold War era Who: The Estonian nation.
Complicating action	Through patience, persistence and assistance from Western allies, Estonia became a free country again.
Conclusion	Since regaining independence, Estonia has flourished.
Coda	Estonia will continue to fight for the values of freedom and are fit for huge tasks. But it must always act independently.

Table 11. The histoire of Kaljulaid’s storyline EU and NATO.

¹²⁴ ‘Prime Minister’s New Year’s Speech’.

¹²⁵ ‘Kersti Kaljulaid - Uppslagsverk - NE.Se’, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/kersti-kaljulaid>.

¹²⁶ ‘On Estonian Independence Day in Tartu | President’, accessed 17 March 2020, <https://president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/14154-the-president-of-the-republic-at-the-estonian-national-museum/index.html>.

The narrative displays a contrast between the painful experiences of the Soviet era and the success of the post-Soviet era, making it a reproduction of the dominating metanarratives of Estonia as a victim of Soviet occupation and a successful transition state. These images are legitimised based on narration about the past:

“Now, it is our duty to remind Western allies of the magnificent role they played in our darkest years of history [...] The magnificent end to our first century of independence obligates us to do so”¹²⁷

The gratitude for Estonia’s Western allies is contrasted by the way Kaljulaid depicts one of Estonia’s neighbours, most probably Russia; “We also have one especially difficult neighbour. However, a neighbour is a neighbour. They are not to be ignored even if they disappoint us over the period of a few decades.”¹²⁸ This last sentence is interesting in the way it opens up for reconciliation with Russia in the future. Nevertheless, the Soviet era is, as shown in the quote above, described in literally dark terms while Kaljulaid explicitly expresses thankfulness towards the West for having contributed to a successful post-Soviet era, which suggests an external evaluation.

The coda expresses the need for Estonia to remain independent, not giving away its values to larger allies. This is a link to what was previously told in the complicating action about the Estonian persistence during the Soviet era that, in combination with support from the Western world, eventually brought them freedom. It is hence a link from the past to the present, explaining why Estonians must continue to act independently, based on the event marked by the restoration of independence in 1991.

The common denominator in all presented narratives is the positive view on NATO and EU membership, which is clearly based on past experiences of insecurity and turbulence compared with the present that is more stable. Just as in the case with the narratives of independence and Russia, the presentations of narratives about independence and EU/NATO is often built by contrasting the present and the past. However, all the narrators make sure to point out that their respective nations are not dependent of EU or NATO, but the membership is a nevertheless a catalyst for success and security. The roots of this stance can also be traced to the historical consciousness in both Estonia and Latvia. Independence, throughout the examined narratives presented as something hard-fought and yearned for, cannot be taken for granted in Estonia and Latvia. Looking into the next century, it is therefore of importance for both countries not to give it away, but to retain integrity.

¹²⁷ ‘On Estonian Independence Day in Tartu | President’.

¹²⁸ ‘On Estonian Independence Day in Tartu | President’.

The complicating actions of the narratives follow the pattern seen in the already studied narratives. They are related to loss and gain of independence as well as recent security threats, as seen in Mūrniece's talk about increased Russian military activity in eastern Europe. Given the metanarratives of Baltic victimhood and the narrative of transition, this way of structuring a narrative about independence in relation to EU and NATO makes sense, addressing the issue of contingency that the loss and gain of independence mean in Estonian and Latvian history.

The codas of the narratives underline the positive attitudes towards EU and NATO that previous research has proved. In the narratives of Ratas and Mūrniece, the codas aim to show the importance of allies with the past as a point of departure, confirming that the countries have acquired a good security position today through international cooperation. Only in Kariņš's narrative, the coda is not related to the theme of EU/NATO, but rather the strong determination of the Latvian people that has made the nation so successful. This can be considered a way for Kariņš to acknowledge Latvian independence while still giving praise to the European and Transatlantic community in other parts of the narrative, a trait shared with the coda of Kaljulaid's narrative.

The studied narratives on independence in relation to EU and NATO most of all show positive accounts of international cooperation, grounded in the metanarrative of successful transition. It underlines the attitudes that have dominated in Estonia and Latvia since the regaining of independence.

6.4 Independence and National Unity

Contemporary Estonia and Latvia are ethnically divided nations. This raises questions about conflicting views on history, as previous research on memory and historical cultures show. Being a product of a troubled past, the issue of Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia is unavoidably connected to history and is therefore something that historical consciousness can tell us more about.

In this field, Estonia and Latvia face both similar and different challenges. Similar in the way that both countries have substantial Russian-speaking minorities, different in the way that Latvia already in the past was a more heterogenous nation than Estonia, making Latvian unity an issue with historical roots.¹²⁹ Never is it as apparent as when Latvian officials tell stories about the eastern province Latgale. An example can be found in a speech held Latvian president Egils Levits on 9 January 2020 in Viļaka, a town in eastern Latgale.

¹²⁹ Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 448.

Egils Levits is the president of Latvia since autumn 2019. He has had a long career with various missions in Latvian politics and was a driving force in the Latvian independence movement in the 1980s, authoring parts of the declaration of independence in 1990.¹³⁰

Before proceeding with the narrative, the context of Latgale must be explained, as it is distinctly different from the other Latvian regions, both historically and culturally. As presented in the background chapter, it was a major issue for the independence movement whether Latgale would be united with the other Latvian lands or not. In the region, a distinct dialect of the Latvian language, Latgalian, is widely spoken and since the Soviet era, most of the region’s inhabitants speak Russian as their first language. Furthermore, the Roman-catholic church has a strong base in Latgale, while most Latvians are Lutheran by faith, and the socio-economic status of the region is weaker than the other Latvian regions. These factors have led to political conflicts between the inhabitants of Latgale and the government in Riga, and the discrepancy is apparent in issues regarding EU-membership, among others. Support for Latvian EU-membership is much lower in Latgale than in the rest of the country.¹³¹

The identified storyline in Levits’s speech is directed towards the region of Latgale, and the vital part it plays in the narrative of Latvian independence. Examples are given, from the congress in Rēzekne in 1917 to the Latgalian Partisan Regiment that fought during the war of independence. This is introduced with the following words:

“Today, I would like to specifically highlight the historic importance of unshakeable sense of Latvian identity and belonging to united Latvia our fellow Latgalians had shown.”¹³²

Attention is afterwards given to the assistance of Latvia’s allies, mainly Poland and Estonia, that contributed to the liberation of Latgale in 1920. Moreover, when shifting the temporal perspective to present time, Levits includes all of NATO.

The structural analysis of the narrative produced the following results:

Abstract	National unity was at the core of the independence struggle. Uniting the Latvian lands is the fulfilment of the founders’ dream and the four regions of Latvia must remain united.
Orientation	Situation: Fighting in Latgale during the independence war.

¹³⁰ ‘President of Latvia Egils Levits | Website of the President of Latvia’, accessed 26 March 2020, <https://www.president.lv/en/president-of-latvia/president-of-latvia-egils-levits>.

¹³¹ Geoffrey Pridham, ‘Latvia’s Eastern Region: International Tensions and Political System Loyalty’, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 49, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 5–6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2017.1413408>.

¹³² ‘Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, during the Commemoration at the Jaškova Brethren Cemetery’, accessed 26 March 2020, <https://www.president.lv/en/news/news/address-of-the-president-of-latvia-egils-levits-during-the-commemoration-at-the-jaskova-brethren-cemetery-26091>.

	Place: Latgale. Time: The Latvian war of independence (1918-1920). Who: Latgalian partisans, allies from Estonia and Poland.
Complicating action	The assistance of Estonian and Polish allies helped Latvia in the battles in Latgale.
Conclusion	Latvia managed to win the independence war, which resulted in full-fledged independence.
Coda	The alliances with Poland and Estonia remain important, today in the context of NATO.

Table 12. The histoire of Levits's storyline about national unity.

The evaluation in this narrative is to include the region of Latgale in the Latvian independence narrative, describing events that took place in the region as paramount for the independence movement. By presenting how Latgalian partisans fought in the independence war creates a picture of a strong will to fight for a united Latvia. This is a point that Levits mentions explicitly, therefore, the evaluation can be considered as an external evaluation.

The anecdotes about Estonian and Polish support in the battles, seen in the complicating action and the coda of the narrative, creates a link between Latgale, Latvia, Europe and NATO. This poses questions, given the demographic composition of present Latgale that might not share these views. Nevertheless, considering the widely approved Latvian metanarrative of transition since 1991, Levits's statement makes sense considering the dominating historical consciousness among the ethnic Latvians, though it appears incompatible with the common attitudes towards Europe that seem to dominate in Latgale.

The theme of national unity is visible in a narrative found in former president Raimonds Vējonis's speech at a ceremony celebrating the centenary of the congress of Latgale in Rēzekne on 5 May 2017. The organisation of such an event, just like the Estonian ceremony for the treaty of Tartu, underlines its historical significance for independence and serves as a way to keep the memory of it alive in the national historical consciousness.

Raimonds Vējonis was president of Latvia between 2015 and 2019 and belongs to the Latvian Union of Greens and Farmers, which is considered a centre-right green party. He has an ethnic Russian mother and an ethnic Latvian father, meaning that he belongs to both the ethnic Latvian majority and in one sense also the Russian-speaking minority.¹³³

¹³³ 'Raimonds Vējonis - Uppslagsverk - NE.Se', accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/1%C3%A5ng/raimonds-vejonis>.

Vējonis refers to the congress as vital for bringing Latvians from all regions together. An important event, without which there might never had been a Latvia:

“At the Latgale Congress, we learned to be united and to trust each other. [...] If everybody had searched for the best individual future, most likely we would not have had our own country.”¹³⁴

The structural analysis of the narrative gave the following results:

Abstract	A hundred years ago, political activists decided that the future of the Latvian regions was a united country.
Orientation	Situation: A political congress was organised to discuss Latvian unity Place: Rēzekne, Latgale. Time: 1917 Who: Pro-Latvian political activists in Latgale.
Complicating action	The proclamation of Latvian independence, changing the conditions for a Latvian state.
Conclusion	Latgale was liberated in 1920, ending the war of independence and became the start of Latvian statehood.
Coda	The spirit of the congress of Latgale shows that unity leads to greater things and therefore, Latvians need to trust each other and think about the common good.

Table 13. The histoire of Vējonis’s storyline about national unity.

The evaluation of the narrative is to convey the image of unity that started at the congress of Latgale in 1917, and is embedded through a quote from the congress: “Here we proudly said, ‘Acknowledging the Latvians living in Vitebsk province and Kurzeme and Vidzeme people as the one Latvian people, we decided to join the Latvians from Kurzeme and Vidzeme.’”¹³⁵ It is presented as a cornerstone of Latvian independence, explaining why the congress of Latgale is important. By presenting Latgale’s integral role in the history Latvian independence, Vējonis aims to include the region in the narrative, much like Levits did. It is visible in how he points out that the period that lead to Latvian independence began and ended in Latgale, making it a part of an important chain of events:

¹³⁴ ‘Speech of President of Latvia at the Latgale Centenary Congress in Rēzekne’, accessed 2 April 2020, <https://www.president.lv/en/news/news/speech-of-president-of-latvia-at-the-latgale-centenary-congress-in-rezekne-24936>.

¹³⁵ ‘Speech of President of Latvia at the Latgale Centenary Congress in Rēzekne’.

“The torch of faith lit at the Latgale Congress led us off to the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia on 18 November 1918 and the victory during the Latvian War of Independence culminating exactly after the liberation of Latgale.”¹³⁶

The will to include the sometimes-alienated eastern province is visible in the complicating action of the narrative: the declaration of independence, presented a result of the steps taken in Rēzekne. Inclusiveness is also visible in the coda, that urges the audience to preserve what the congress once taught the Latvian people. This shows that the ideas are as relevant as ever, considering the past challenges and the present challenges for national unity, looking out for a future based on trust between different groups in Latvian society.

The will to include minority audiences in the national narrative of independence is also visible in the Estonian material, in a narrative told by Jüri Ratas. In an identified plot in his speech on Estonian Independence Day 2018, the Estonian prime minister demands national unity between the Estonian majority and the Russian-speaking minority. Referring to the declaration of independence, Ratas calls on the population of Estonia to stop making divisions between the ethnic groups present in Estonian society.

“The Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Estonia begins with an address to all peoples of Estonia. The manifesto itself includes a promise to ensure opportunities to maintain the cultural identity of national minorities.”¹³⁷

Moving forward, Ratas asks the audience to rejoice over the fact that the Russian speaking minority wants to contribute to Estonian society and that among this group, there are a strong sense of patriotism: “What I mean to say by this is that our linguistic and cultural origin may set us apart, but patriotism, having Estonia as our shared home, is what unites us.”¹³⁸ The analysis of the structural elements of the narrative’s *histoire* is as follows:

Abstract	Ratas wants to address ideas from the declarations of independence from 1918 and 1991.
Orientation	Situation: Declaration of independence promised equality between ethnic groups. Place: Estonia. Time: 1918. Who: The Estonian majority and Russian-speaking minority.
Complicating action	Times of suffering and loss caused ethnic conflicts.

¹³⁶ ‘Speech of President of Latvia at the Latgale Centenary Congress in Rēzekne’.

¹³⁷ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

¹³⁸ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

Conclusion	Differences remain, but there are more that unites the groups than divides them.
Coda	Moving forward, the population of Estonia should seek unity and harmony. Together, they are stronger.

Table 14. The histoire of Ratas's storyline about national unity.

The evaluation of this narrative is perhaps the most important part of it. It is inclusive towards the Russian-speaking minority but is mainly directed towards the Estonian majority, who should be regarded as main recipients of the message. By presenting what the minority brings to Estonian society, Ratas wants the majority to accept and appreciate the Russian-speaking part of the population, despite past experiences of Soviet oppression and injustices, which are not mentioned: “Let us be happy that the non-Estonian speaking part of the population wishes to contribute actively to the society.”¹³⁹ The quote is an example of external evaluation, pointing out the message of the narrative, which becomes an imperative to the Estonian majority. Another aspect is the connection made between the declaration of independence and acceptance of national minorities, which in the long run creates a connection between independence and tolerance.

More than communicating perspectives on national identity, the Estonian and Latvian independence narratives regarding minorities present differences between the countries. In Latvia, a certain issue for the independence movement was the question about Latvian unity, and because of the demographic shifts of the Soviet era, this remains an issue. As was the case already in 1917, an important venue for the discussion of Latvian unity is Latgale, made visible by the narratives of Levits and Vējonis. In Estonia, the issue of national unity, though also present in 1918, was easier to solve. Therefore, it is not a feature in the Estonian independence narratives. As complicating actions of the stories are concerned, the loss or gain of independence again serve an important role in the narratives. In this case, it suggests their influence on national unity between ethnic groups.

In the narrative of Ratas, the loss of independence and Soviet repopulation policies, even if merely implied, act as the defining events that is the reason for ethnic conflicts in the countries. The fact that Ratas only vaguely mentions these events may be explained by the catastrophic nature of this crisis in relation to Estonian identity: the wound is still open, which does not allow for elaboration. Moreover, in this narrative, the Russian-speaking minority is

¹³⁹ ‘Speech of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas before the Centenary of the Republic of Estonia, 22.02.18’.

described as a victim rather than the Estonian majority, which goes against the dominating metanarrative of Estonian victimhood. This is discrediting the sense-making function of the narrative in relation to the national Estonian narrative and seems more like a political promise to the Russian-speaking electorate, among which Ratas party enjoys substantial support.

The codas of the narratives are forward-looking, whether it is about requesting national unity (Ratas), trust (Vējonis), or gratitude to allies (Levits). From what the narratives teach about the past, the narrators aim to convey an image of how a better future is created, and at the core of this image are considerations of what it means to be Estonian or Latvian. The link between unity and independence helps to legitimize the narratives.

By referring to historical events that has a positive function on identity building such as the Estonian and Latvian independence and the victory in the Latvian war of independence, the narrators aim to include parts of the nation that often appear unfairly treated since the fall of the Soviet Union. It becomes a way of legitimising the place of the minorities in the construction of an Estonian and Latvian identity. However, it appears as though the Latvian narratives of Levits and Vējonis fit better with their nation's dominating metanarratives, giving them a more sensemaking function, at least in a national Latvian context, while Ratas's plea for unity between ethnic groups in Estonia falls somewhat short due to its lacking of grounding in the metanarrative that dominates in the country.

7 Discussion

Historical consciousness was the main theory from which the analysis departed, with the aim to find out how Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence are constructed in relation to the concept. This was achieved by using a Labovian structuralist approach, focusing on three structural elements where historical consciousness was most likely to be manifested.

Studying the different themes, a certain degree of narrative competence as described in the theoretical framework was identified. The narrators told stories with a sense of continuity, displaying an interaction between past, present, and future: the levels of historical consciousness. The majority of the identified narratives had apparent connections to Latvian and Estonian metanarratives about suffering during the Soviet era and the successful transition characterising the post-Soviet era, enhancing their ability to make sense of the past and communicate identity.

Due to similar historical developments in the Baltic littoral, the three states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are often presented together, despite being linguistically and culturally very different. At first glance, the chains of events since 1918 in Estonia and Latvia have many

similarities: a declaration of independence is followed by a war of independence, followed by an interwar period of state building, followed by the Second World War and occupation, followed by fifty years of oppression before independence is restored and the countries joined the western community. Considering Rösen's idea of borderline events, three specific events that are common for Estonia and Latvia can be sought out in the course of Estonian and Latvian history: The declarations of independence in 1918, which is a positive founding event, the loss of independence in 1940, which serves as a crisis, and the restoration of independence in 1991, which serves as an initially positive, founding event, then taking the form of a chain of events displaying a transition of identity as Estonia and Latvia (re)orient themselves to the western world. These events were present in the complicating actions of the narratives, which highlights their role as borderline events. The other studied elements, the evaluation and the coda, provided interpretations of the past and its meaning in the present, thus making apparent expressions of historical consciousness, as this gave the narratives their orienting and justifying functions.

This completes a chain of events over the course of the last century that has had a decisive impact on Estonian and Latvian identity. The similarities between the studied narratives suggest the strong impact that historical consciousness, identity in time, have on the narrative structure. This can be proved by the apparent relative absence of expressions of Estonian and Latvian cultural identity in the narratives. Had the cultural element rather than a historical element been more present, the narratives would probably had appeared as less similar. It can also be noted that the narratives remained similar, despite the different political affiliations of the narrators, which further suggest the primary impact of historical consciousness on the narratives of independence.

However, some vital differences do appear when looking at more specific narratives related to independence in Estonia and Latvia. An example is the issue of national unity, which is given attention in both the Estonian and the Latvian material. The examined narratives show differences with national unity being a historical issue in Latvia and more of a contemporary issue in Estonia, most of all in relation to independence. This means that the narratives about national unity presented by Latvian leaders have a more solid place in Latvian historical consciousness. This was not the case with the narrative on the subject presented by Estonian prime minister Jüri Ratas. According to the applied theoretical framework, this ultimately suggests that the Latvian narratives about national unity made more sense from a perspective of historical consciousness.

When discussing similarities and differences between Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence, especially in relation to identity construction, it is important to consider the contexts of the studied narration, as it is a vital part in understanding a narrative. Even though the narratives appear as similar, the contextualisation of them, being given in their national languages on dates with particular meaning for the nations contributes to a distinct Estonian and a distinct Latvian identity. It is therefore unquestionable that the narratives contribute to two separate identities, despite sharing a partly identical structure.

Since the restoration of independence in 1991, the role of Estonian and Latvian language has been important in the building of states, visible not least in both countries' citizenship laws. This connection between state and language was present in some of the investigated narratives. An obvious example is from Ināra Mūrniece's narrative about the founding of the first Latvian state, where an independent state was perceived as a guarantee for Latvian language and culture. Estonian prime minister Ratas made similar notes, highlighting the linguistic and cultural legacy of past generations. These examples, expressing Estonian and Latvian cultural identity, pose questions about the inclusiveness of the narratives of independence, particularly in relation to the Russian-speaking minorities. Even though some narrators open up for inclusiveness and tolerance, not least Ratas in his narrative about national unity, it appears as though the narration about independence is directed mainly towards the ethnic majorities of Estonia and Latvia.

The people behind the studied narratives were exclusively from the ethnic majorities in Estonia and Latvia, which are the dominant groups in national politics since the fall of the Soviet Union. This did not give any space for views on history and independence from the minorities' point of view, which could therefore be an interesting subject for further study. As pointed out in previous research, interpretations of the past, often vary between the ethnic groups, creating major differences in attitudes independence and dependence of other actors. That these differences were non-existent in the studied material is probably a consequence of the marginalisation of the Russian-speaking minority, who remain excluded from many parts of Estonian and Latvian society, not least the political sphere.

The narratives of independence in relation to external actors (Russia, USSR, EU, NATO) follow the pattern set by dominating metanarratives in Estonia and Latvia ever since the fall of the Soviet Union: a will to leave the Soviet past behind and embracing a European future. In terms of the Soviet occupation as a borderline event, it acts like a crisis in Estonian and Latvian historical consciousness, which suggests its impact on the construction of identity. These narratives have an especially integral function for identity construction and are strongly connected to a Baltic metanarrative of suffering and oppression during the Cold War. Hostile

attitudes towards Russia, displayed by ongoing conflicts over interpretations of history as presented by the countries' ministers of foreign affairs, can therefore be justified as based on historical consciousness.

The Soviet era in Estonia and Latvia is often contrasted by the present, moving from the narrative of victimhood during the Soviet era to the narrative of new independence and success, and the general appraisal of EU and NATO membership is therefore legitimised and the positive effects are often mentioned by Estonian and Latvian leaders. Nevertheless, narratives from both countries communicate a need for Estonia and Latvia to always act independently, regardless of whether it is in relation to Russia, EU, or NATO. This displays the centrality of independence in the Estonian and Latvian national narratives: it is presented as hard-earned and not something they are willing to give up. This stance is justified by narration of important historical events about the loss of independence. Drawn to its extreme, this means that both Estonia and Latvia justify a sceptical view towards European integration, while still expressing mostly positive thoughts about European cooperation. Therefore, it is not as easy as to say that Estonia and Latvia unreservedly accept all aspects of international cooperation, as would be a possible interpretation of previous research and the metanarrative concerning the "Return to Europe".

In a broader, European context, the results of this study can be perceived as exemplary for explaining national attitudes towards the increasing influence of foreign nations and international organisations in a globalised world. It is especially visible in Latvia and Estonia, where the presence of two antipoles on the global arena, in this case Russia and the EU/NATO, is strong. This, in combination with historical experiences affecting the relation to each actor, makes the issue of independence and national identity particularly vivid in these countries. Meanwhile, discussions about independence and influence from external actors can be seen in other countries across the European continent, where populist leaders in, among other, Austria, France, and Italy argue for more independence vis-à-vis the EU while showing signs of approaching Russia. Whether these standpoints can be justified in terms of historical consciousness has not been elaborated on, but as the influence that major global actors have on nation states grows, it is an increasingly important topic, that can be explained in many different terms, not least through the glasses of humanities, as our study suggests.

Addressing the aspects of validity and reliability as described in the methodology chapter, four criteria must be addressed. First, it is comprehensiveness. This aspect has been addressed by giving text examples from the research material and through the anchoring of the Labovian methodological approach in the theory of historical consciousness, focusing on the three elements most closely related to the concept.

The fact that the theories presented in the theoretical framework of the study complemented and to a certain extent reinforced each other improved the coherence of the study. Presenting the results and analysis thematically also contributed to the coherence of the study, creating a red thread through the study.

The structural approach and focus on independence in relation to historical consciousness helped the analysis to remain concrete. Even though the goal was to explore several perspectives of Estonian and Latvian independence narratives, they could all be discussed simultaneously and in connection to each other.

Regarding the insightfulness of the study, the narrative approach to historical consciousness provided interesting insights about a recent theme. The combination of a structural approach, theories about the traits of historical consciousness, and knowledge about the historical background of Estonian and Latvian independence fulfilled the triangle of historical narration as presented in section 4.3. However, it must be admitted that the results to a certain degree confirmed the hypothesis formulated before starting the research. Therefore, it can be discussed what new insights was provided. Here, we would like to point out a more nuanced perception of independence and dependence of the EU and NATO, as well as Estonian and Latvian attitudes towards national unity, and how these can be explained in terms of historical consciousness, which has been presented in this study. Moreover, as the studied material is very recent, the study provides insights in perspectives on historical consciousness in Estonia and Latvia in a post-transition period, apart from previous research that mainly concerns the years leading up to the nations' accession to the EU and NATO.

8 Conclusion

As Estonia and Latvia begin their second century as independent nations, the narratives about the first century of independence remain important. They serve an orienting function, displaying features of historical consciousness that contribute to the construction of identity and making sense of the nations' past, present, and future.

The Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence show many similarities, which can be traced back to the similarities between dominating metanarratives drawn from the historical development that the countries have undergone over the course of the twentieth century. This includes mainly two narratives: one about suffering during Soviet oppression, one about post-Soviet transition and success, the "Return to Europe". These similarities are visible in the identified narratives of independence and is in line with the hypothesis formulated in the introduction. In this case, the historical experiences appear as more influential for the content

and structure of the narratives rather than the distinctly different Estonian and Latvian cultural identities.

Differences appear when looking at more specific stories found in each nation, the most notable being narratives about national unity. Discussions about national unity have a longer history in Latvia, not least in connection to the independence movement and the decisive debates about the Latgale region. In Estonia, the issue of national unity is more of a recent phenomenon, dating back to only after the fall of the Soviet Union. Thus, even though the countries have much in common regarding perspectives on independence and similar challenges connected to ethnic tensions, there is an important difference in the way they tell stories about national unity, which has been explained by this study.

Departing from Rösen's ideas about the impact of borderline events and broader chain of events on national identity, the role that Estonian and Latvian narratives of independence play in the construction of identity has been studied. The narratives, often told in connection to commemorations of decisive events for Estonian and Latvian independence, reproduce to a large extent the dominating metanarratives in the countries. The connections to these dominant narratives strengthen their ability to transmit an identity construction. Therefore, the narratives of independence have a central place in the creation of Estonian and Latvian identity.

For two countries whose history to large parts has been affected by other countries, the independence narratives provide orientation towards the actors that historically and presently have had influence on Estonia and Latvia. It can be argued that the past is represented by the Soviet Union and, in its extension, Russia, while the present and the future is represented by EU and NATO. Often portrayed through contrasts, the influence of the Soviet past is in both Estonia and Latvia described in dark terms, whereas the influence of European and Transatlantic cooperation is described as mostly positive. These results show that external actors and tensions between East and West continue to have a vital impact on Estonian and Latvian identity construction, even after almost thirty years of independence and fifteen years as members of the EU.

The Baltic states are often portrayed as EU-optimistic, an image that is, in parts, strengthened by our study. However, the studied narrators all express the need and ability for Latvia and Estonia to act independently in relation to all external actors, opinions that can be justified in terms of historical consciousness. This contributes to a more nuanced image of Estonian and Latvian attitudes towards EU and NATO. This can be perceived as a new, useful insight provided by our study.

In sum, the study shows the intimate relationship between narration and historical consciousness, explaining the functions of the latter concept in its practical expression. The results show how, through applying a Labovian, structuralist approach, narrative constructions with relation to historical consciousness can be identified and explained. In this case, it further highlights the centrality of events related to loss or gain of independence in Estonian and Latvian identity construction. Even though the results to a certain extent confirm the hypothesis presented in the introduction of the thesis, thus throwing weight behind previous research, the study was able to further explain the impact of historical events on historical consciousness and give a more nuanced account of Estonian and Latvian attitudes towards other countries and intergovernmental organisations, rooted in historical experiences. While the studied cases are overall very similar, one major difference is the narratives of independence in relation to national unity, an integral issue in contemporary Estonia and Latvia, with the difference being that unity has a more solid place in historical consciousness in Latvia than it has in Estonia. This can be explained by the greater historical heterogeneity of the Latvian lands compared to its Estonian counterpart.

In further studies, the presented methodology and theoretical framework could be applied to study historical consciousness in narratives deriving from other geographical and cultural contexts. This could provide a deeper understanding for the construction of national identity through historical narration, making sense of attitudes expressed in texts and speeches, explaining where they come from and how they can be identified in the structure of a narrative.

In an everchanging geopolitical landscape, the aspect of national independence and sovereignty is an increasingly discussed topic and a vital part of the European debate, with countries all over Europe displaying varying attitudes towards the concept in relation to not least the EU. Studying historical consciousness through historical narration in connection to independence could assist in decoding the relationship that different member states have to the EU. This is not least true for Eastern and Central European countries, where independence is an important issue, since they have a past as parts of historical empires and a more recent experience of Soviet dominance. This would help to deepen the understanding of what different expressions the widespread notion of the “Return to Europe” take in a more recent, post-transitional context.

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Appendix I: Analysed Narratives

The analysed narratives have been organised by theme as presented in the results chapter.

Independence as Borderline Events

” Exactly one year ago, I gave a speech here at Vanemuine theatre hall starting with a quote by Lydia Koidula from one of her poems dedicated to Estonia. Today, as well, there is reason to mention her. Koidula won the hearts of the people of Estonia with her poetry, as well as for editing *Eesti Postimees* with passion and for helping to organise the first Estonian Song Festival. In the spring of 1870, she wrote to her Finnish colleague Antti Almborg-Jalava: "The people of Finland are, by far, more likely to gain independence than us, and we are not giving up; we believe that one day, our nation will flourish once again and we will continue working towards that."

Today we know that those words held a prophecy, as Almborg-Jalava wrote to Koidula for them to believe in the independence and liberation of both nations. Forty-eight years later, the two nations did indeed achieve freedom and now, with only a couple of months apart, both countries are celebrating their 100th anniversary.

We can therefore say that the idea of independent Estonia was born right here in Tartu, authored by Lydia Jannsen-Koidula. Surely, this dream of independence was, at the time, in the hearts of many.

The REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA, however, was first mentioned in writing – in the poem "Sõjalaul" – by intellectual and active participant in the Estonian national movement Andres Dido thirty-six years before the birth of the Republic of Estonia. He was then forced to leave his homeland for the poem that goes as follows:

Time to free ourselves from slavery
And ride to the war together
With freedom showing the way
Guiding us and our republic

Let us now bow before those generations that persevered in this corner of the Earth that we now call home; before generations whose language and survival skills we have inherited. Let

us also be proud and thankful of nineteenth century national awakening leaders, Estonian schoolteachers, municipality mayors, society members, literary scholars, Estonian sextons and pastors, who, as pioneers, laid the foundation for future Estonia rock-by-rock. We will never forget those who created the Republic of Estonia, or the thousands who made the ultimate sacrifice and lost their lives in the Estonian War of Independence, the sacred war in the name of a free Estonia.

We are also thankful to the Estonians who conserved and developed Estonian culture even in exile, and bore the idea of legal continuity of our country. The work of Estonians who were forced to flee and live abroad built a valuable bridge uniting different generations and helped us return to the family of European countries, thereby also retaining and perpetuating the cultural continuity of Estonia.

The story of Estonia is a story of constant self-creation, which cannot end today, nearly twenty-seven years since we regained our homeland. And speaking of regaining, we must give thanks to those brave men and women, who, step-by-step, restored the independence of Estonia on 20 August 1991 as if chasing a camel through the eye of a needle.

I am recalling these historical moments because the future of Estonia stands on a stable ground only if we never forget who we are, where we come from, and how we have reached this point in our lives."

Jüri Ratas, Prime Minister of Estonia, 22 February 2018

“The founding of our state is an important turning point in the history of our nation. The will of the Latvian people to have their own state was and remains strong and unwavering. It is our choice to live in a state of our own and to be masters of our own destiny.

We are the happy chosen ones who get to celebrate Latvia’s 100 years in a free and democratic state. And we are able to gather in the very place where the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed 100 years ago.

The people's dream of an independent Latvia, the politicians' ability to work together for a higher ideal and parliamentary democracy – these were the cornerstones of the newly-founded state.

Today we can only marvel at how politically mature and modern the state of Latvia was upon its birth, how forward-looking its politicians were.

The pre-parliament of Latvia – the People's Council – had formulated a cutting-edge political platform, which was progressive even by Western European standards, stipulating a democratic system of government, voting rights for both genders, respect for the interests of national minorities, freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

It was also clearly stated that in foreign relations, Latvia belongs among the League of Nations.

The newly-appointed government led by Kārlis Ulmanis decisively acted on all of the objectives set by the People's Council.

Within five years following the War of Independence, Latvians had completed all the necessary steps for their state to begin functioning in full and to take its place on the world stage.

The Constitutional Assembly and the first President of the State, Jānis Čakste, were elected.

Latvia gained full international recognition and was admitted to the League of Nations.

In 1922, our constitution – the Satversme – was adopted.

The main driving force was the people's will for a state of their own, their belief that their national identity, the Latvian language and liberty can only be guaranteed by the state of Latvia, and that this can all be achieved only through the ability of politicians to work together for the good of the nation and the state.”

Latvia's statehood has always been intertwined with geopolitical processes in Europe and the world. In the 20th century it was affected by World War I and II and the fall of the Soviet Union. The restoration of our independence on 4 May 1990 was rightfully called a miracle, something unbelievable and incredible. There are few precedents in the world where a nation, having lost its freedom and spent half a century under a totalitarian and repressive regime, has managed to rise from the ashes, regaining its freedom and restoring its democratic state. This remains the

unique example of Latvia and the Baltic States, and it is respected and admired throughout the free world.

That is why we have so much appreciation and why we take such pride in the unbreakable spirit of the Latvian people and the power of our national ideals.

Nearly thirty years ago, similarly to the founding of the state in 1918, the will for a state of our own and the unanimity of patriotic entities helped to find the best way to restore our statehood and democracy and return to the Western civilisation.

We are grateful to everyone who joined hands back then and succeeded in restoring the Republic of Latvia statehood on 4 May 1990! They are among us today. Thank you all.

We are grateful to all members of the Popular Front, the People's Congress. Today I would also like to personally thank Egils Levits, who played a decisive role in drafting the core of the 4 May Declaration of Independence as well as the preamble of the Satversme, thus reinforcing the constitutional durability of our state.

We are grateful to both those who 100 years ago and those who again nearly 30 years ago implemented the nation's right to self-determination.

Our values and ideals have not changed!"

Ināra Mūrniece, speaker of the Latvian parliament, 18 November 2018

"I have the honour to greet you in the beautiful Estonia Theatre Hall. We are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Estonian parliament. The 100th anniversary of the Estonian democracy.

90 minutes and exactly one hundred years ago, the fourth meeting of the Constituent Assembly was concluded right here. The participants were committed to their work and understood its gravity. After all, the War of Independence was still raging.

The night before, Russian cannons had lit a massive fire in Narva. One week before, the enemy had launched an offensive on the southern front. Men were being mobilised and our forces were mounting a counter-attack. The frontline was being held by the most patriotic and brave fighters. Our heroes.

The Constituent Assembly was also like a frontline unit in 1919. The average age was 36 years. They knew that by laying the foundations of democracy, they themselves would be under attack. However, the Constituent Assembly was supported by the whole Estonian society. They did not see themselves as the elite, but as part of the people.

The Constituent Assembly was brimming with self-confidence and courage to walk their own path. They adopted a radical Land Act, although their opponents called it alien to European values. This, as well as the Constitution, were passed against the backdrop of fiery but well-argued debates. They also introduced the right to conduct referendums by public initiative. However, we no longer have the possibility of public initiative that would lead to a referendum, the adoption of an Act, or an Act not being promulgated.

The Constituent Assembly did not worry about how we would be seen elsewhere, nor did they wait for foreign guidelines. They were thinking about how to serve the best interests of the Estonian state and people. They declared that the people of Estonia wanted to live independently in a nation state. Forever, as our Constitution confirms to this day.”

Henn Põlluaas, president of the Estonian Parliament, 26 April 2019

[Independence and Russia/Soviet Union](#)

“I address this Assembly in a very special time for my country. This year, Latvia is celebrating its centennial. A remarkable change occurred one hundred years ago. The end of World War I and collapse of empires resulted in the liberation of nations and brought about a fundamental revision of Europe’s political map.

A new Europe was born which promised much more than just self-determination, freedom and democracy. The peoples of Europe expected lasting peace and prosperity. These objectives were pursued both individually and collectively. Peoples’ right to self-determination materialized in concrete forms. New nation-states were born.

The Paris Peace conference laid the foundation for the League of Nations. It was the first international organisation whose principal mission was to maintain universal peace through the development of binding norms and multilateralism. Latvia also joined the League of Nations firmly establishing its status as a full-fledged member of the international family. However, the weakness of the League of Nations was one of the main reasons why Latvia for a time lost its independence.

The history of both Soviet and Nazi occupations of Latvia and much of the European continent is a harsh reminder of what happens when serious violations of international law are tolerated. We know all too well the consequences of allowing countries to break these principles with impunity. In Latvia's case, it was a life under occupation by Nazi and Communist regimes of terror and gross violations of human rights.

We are grateful to all those nations that for decades implemented policies of non-recognition of the occupation of the Republic of Latvia and stuck to their principles. In accordance with international law, the state of Latvia continued existing throughout the occupation period.

However, the Russian Federation, the official successor of the Soviet Union still does not acknowledge well-documented facts of history. I call on Russia to embrace the truth and to clearly condemn the actions of the Soviet Union.

Since the restoration of independence in 1991, Latvia has been advocating compliance with international law and human rights. The protection of these principles was needed throughout the transition to a democratic society governed by the rule of law, and in building Latvia's role internationally.”

Edgars Rinkēvičs, Latvian minister of foreign affairs, 29 September 2018

“The Tartu Peace Treaty is not merely a peace treaty signed a hundred years ago; it is the starting point of our statehood. I will now read Article 2 of the Tartu Peace Treaty:

‘ARTICLE 2. On the basis of the right of all peoples freely to decide their own destinies, and even to separate themselves completely from the State of which they form part, a right proclaimed by the Federal Socialist Republic of Soviet Russia, Russia unreservedly recognises the independence and autonomy of the State of Estonia, and renounces voluntarily and for ever all rights of sovereignty formerly held by Russia over the Estonian people and territory by virtue of the former legal situation, and by virtue of international treaties, which, in respect of such rights, shall henceforth lose their force.

No obligation towards Russia devolves upon the Estonian people and territory from the fact that Estonia was formerly part of Russia.’ End of quote.

On 30 January, the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation made an official statement that claimed, ‘The state of Estonia that functioned from 1918 to 1940 lost its status as a subject of international law due to its accession to the Soviet Union, and the Treaty of Tartu lost its force, since both parties that signed it were included in one subject of international law – the Soviet Union.’

The statement continued, and I quote, ‘Unlike the Russian Federation (the continuator of the Soviet Union), today’s Estonia is a new state formed following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and one of its successors, recognised as such by the international community.’ End of quote.

Every word in this statement is untrue. The position of the Republic of Estonia has been and remains clear: the Tartu Peace Treaty is valid, and it remains unchanged from the perspective of our statehood by the fact that it was violated by the legal predecessor of the Russian Federation, the Soviet Union with its illegal annexation of the Republic of Estonia in 1940. Secondly, the Republic of Estonia that restored its independence in 1991 is legally identical to the Republic of Estonia that was founded by our people according to their right to self-determination in 1918. The occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as a consequence of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact resulted in the loss of a fifth of our population. The Republic of Estonia adheres to the principle of legal continuity in its international-legal actions and rejects any reading that contradicts it.”

Urmas Reinsalu, Estonian minister of foreign affairs, 2 February 2020

“As we approached Latvia’s centenary, some occasioned, however, to smirk in disbelief – can the state of Latvia truly celebrate 100 years of existence?

Yes, for 50 long years Latvians were forced to live in an occupied country, and that has left deep and lasting scars.

The repressions enacted by the occupation regimes are the grimmest pages in the history of the Latvian nation.

To this day we still feel the consequences of artificially induced migration, russification, militarisation, the destruction of the academic, political and economic elite which were implemented by the Soviet occupation regime.

Fifty years of occupation weakened our language, work ethic, it changed our social interaction and affected our sense of beauty.

Today we are regaining to an ever deeper and fuller extent the heritage left by our previous generations. People's interest in Latvian culture and identity is blossoming, patriotism and love of one's homeland is also increasing.

The historical memory of the people cannot be erased!"

Ināra Mūrniece, speaker of the Latvian Parliament, 18 November 2018

"In 1920s, Estonia was among the twelve most democratic states in the world, and among the top seven in Europe. Women's suffrage had already been introduced here in 1917. Nearly thirty years before France or Switzerland.

By autumn 1944, more than one half of the members of the 1919 Constituent Assembly were either dead or missing. Half of the rest had to flee Estonia. They shared the fate of their people. The occupied Estonia remained at the mercy of the communist regime and Russification policy for half a century.

But we did not just accept that. Our yearning for freedom and democracy never went out. We survived as a people and restored our country in 1991. Our nation state. We clearly remember the emotional moment when we hoisted our national flags again. We had to start everything from the beginning once more. Just like the Constituent Assembly, the Riigikogu began to draft legislation, procedures, and provisions. Today, we are a member of the European Union and NATO."

Henn Põlluaas, president of the Estonian parliament, 26 April 2019

Independence and EU/NATO

"The will to defend of Finns, our neighbours in the north, can be summarised in the words of Adolf Ehrnrooth, Finnish infantry general who lived to the age of 99 and received the Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana from the Republic of Estonia. I quote, 'Finland is a good country. It is the best one for us Finns. It is worth defending and its only defender is the people of Finland.'

We can proudly say the same for our country and our people. In a beautiful early morning last year, I had the honour to stand alongside Theresa May, prime minister of the UK, and Emmanuel Macron, prime minister of France, in front of a military contingent in Tapa. Members of the Estonian Defence Forces next to British and French soldiers clearly helped convey that us belonging to NATO does not simply mean that someone is holding an umbrella over us – we are part of the unified security network of the Western world. This comes with certain obligations and responsibilities. The annual two per cent of our gross domestic product that is allocated to national defence serves maintaining peace – the most precious value, without which everything else might become meaningless.

Today, we can say that our situation of security is stable. There will always be challenges and the world is nowhere near free of instability, threats, or terror, but there is no cause for excess concern. We have made many investments into strengthening our security and these investments are now showing results – in recent years, Estonian security is more clearly integrated with its allies. The most obvious sign of this is the very same NATO battlegroup working alongside our Defence Forces in Estonia. Developments in the European Union, specifically strengthening defence cooperation, but also the feeling of unity among the Member States help ensure our security.

The work behind ensuring security is actually much more extensive – it also involves people who protect our borders, patrol police officers on our streets, rescuers on crash sites, and diplomats away from Estonia. It also involves the much-appreciated work of volunteer firefighters, volunteer police officers, and members of the Estonian Defence League. And it is also the work of our Defence Forces, who stand for peace and security in distant areas of the world – just like British, French, or Danish forces do in Estonia.

The Republic of Estonia was born in the turbulence left behind by the First World War only to be lost in the next one. It is our shared duty to do everything we can to keep history from repeating. Thanks to cooperation and consistent effort, the Baltic countries have achieved more in their national existence than before. The best security for the future is taking care of each other as well as our friends close and far away. We are stronger together.”

Jüri Ratas, Prime Minister of Estonia, 22 February 2018

“As you know, the world has also faced a lot of uncertainty this year. But the good news is that we are not alone. We have strong allies. We are a reliable partner to our NATO allies. We

are a member state of the largest and wealthiest democracy and economy in the world, the European Union. Our international ties help us achieve our national development goals.

What will the 2020 bring? Phase of moderate growth is likely to continue in Latvia and Europe. We will complete regional reform and have clearer local government structure, as well as improved education system and better health care across Latvia. We will continue to strengthen the rule of law through our judicial system, which is essential for any democracy. We have put the era when our country was ruled in narrow interests behind us. Together we can make sure it never happens again.

Latvia has made enormous and notable progress since regaining of independence. We have transitioned from the occupation regime system to market economy, implemented reprivatisation and rebuilt democratic institutions from scratch. After many years of separation, we have fully reintegrated into Europe. We must continue on our path towards higher level of well-being across Latvia, less inequality and more trust towards each other and the government as a whole. Or, as I simply call it, ‘path towards Nordic welfare model’. Towards smart Latvia where climate policy brings numerous opportunities for economic development. Latvia whose science and business community regains its global role. It is not something we can achieve overnight. But I believe that we will achieve it, step by step. I am convinced that we can.

Fellow Latvians,

All of us are different in terms of our political beliefs, well-being, social and family status. Some of you share this moment with your friends and some are probably alone, or at least feeling alone. Let us use this moment to appreciate each other.

Together we are Latvia. As our past shows, if Latvians decide something, nothing can stop us. Our strength comes from our unshakable determination to get things done. I encourage all of you to embrace all your love for Latvia and join hands in making Latvia stronger. There is no better time than now. This is our time!”

Krišjānis Kariņš, Prime Minister of Latvia, 31 December 2019

“One hundred years from now, we will also not be alone in the world, if we stay the course of democratic European values and freedoms. We have different neighbours. There are those that are democratic, and those that are less so. There are those who shared our fate in the last

century, and those with which we are in close sync today. We also have one especially difficult neighbour. However, a neighbour is a neighbour. They are not to be ignored even if they disappoint us over the period of a few decades.

We expect our partners to not exchange a value-based world order for one that promotes short-term interests. We point out that strategic patience will ultimately lead you to your goal: even our own policy of refusing to recognize occupation had to last for fifty years before it finally succeeded.

What would have become of Estonia, had Western states attempted to relieve tensions during the Cold War by surrendering our rights? Now, it is our duty to remind Western allies of the magnificent role they played in our darkest years of history in order to guarantee secure and peaceful development for Estonia, as well as to preserve hope for others. The magnificent end to our first century of independence obligates us to do so.

On the 90th anniversary of Estonian independence, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves remarked: ‘When we were held down in the mud, we still had the knowledge that that was not our place. Our place is elsewhere. ‘Among the giants,’ as the classic Estonian poet Betti Alver wrote, ‘in a stone book upon a stone table atop a stone crag, which also contains the chapter ‘*Eesti*’.’’

Today, ten years later, our place is indeed among giants. Our responsibility and our task are fit for giants. Our common space of values, not our population or our wealth, is what will make us and our like-minded partners great in Europe.

It is our responsibility to remain true to our values, even when it might seem more beneficial to impulsively step over them while held by a large ally. As soon as we do so, the giant transforms back into a dwarf, because only raw force matters in a valueless world order. I’d like to thank all our politicians and diplomats who understand this and act accordingly!”

Kersti Kaljulaid, President of Estonia, 22 February 2018

“The recent parliamentary election demonstrated that the vast majority of the electorate has no doubts about Latvia’s geopolitical stance. Latvia’s membership in the European Union, NATO, and the western democratic world is undisputable.

It is of utmost importance for our foreign policy to maintain this course, especially in light of the Kremlin’s military activities and displays of power within our region that are not expected to abate any time soon.

Security is and will remain our priority number one!

In a short period of time, Latvia has accomplished much in strengthening its security – our defence spending complies with the NATO commitments and Latvia’s military capabilities along with practical cooperation with our allies are being continuously developed.

We know what it means to defend our own state!

However, we must keep in mind that alone we are not strong enough. Just as a century ago, today security is also best ensured when working together with allies – our NATO partners in Europe, the USA and Canada.

On behalf of the people of Latvia, let me express gratitude to our allies for the invaluable support you provide in ensuring security and for your participation with the NATO battle groups in Latvia. Together we are doing really well!”

Ināra Mūrniece, speaker of the Latvian Parliament, 18 November 2018

Independence and National Unity

“United Latvia emerged from the shared fate of all Latvian lands. The fulfilment of the dream of founding fathers to have our own state means that our Latgale, Vidzeme, Zemgale and Kurzeme must always be united.

We had to win the independence of united Latvia ourselves. 100 years ago, our ancestors had to fight the War of Independence to defend our right to our own state. They fought for it with guns in their hands.

Liberation of Latgale put an end to the War of Independence. We restored control over Latgale and reached the Eastern border of our state. We had won our state. We continued with establishment of government structures and further development of state. We had only 20 more years for that before the occupation. Then came 50 years of occupation before building of our own state resumed, and we have been building it for the past 30 years.

Today, I would like to specifically highlight the historic importance of unshakeable sense of Latvian identity and belonging to united Latvia our fellow Latgalians had shown.

“Shared fate of united lands historically inhabited by Latvians and the Latvian nation was declared in Rēzekne during the Congress of Latgale where Latgalian public and political figures demonstrated that they are the staunchest supporters and advocates of the concept of our statehood.

Latgalian Partisan Regiment is recognised for its significant role in the War of Independence. War which evolved into struggle for Latvia. War initiated by small partisan units that came together and lead the liberation of Northern Latgale. Latgalian partisans who have been immortalised in Arvīds Egle mural on one of the walls of Riga Castle Festival Hall.

Our victory would not have been possible without crucial and vital support provided by our friends and allies.

Estonian troops fought side by side with Latvian soldiers and partisans to free the Northern Latgale from enemy force. Whereas Poland played a decisive role in liberating Daugavpils. Polish force helped Latvians overcome the Soviet Russia.

I am happy that Polish and Estonian ambassadors are here today. Their presence shows that we are brothers in arms for already 100 years and will continue to be brothers in arms under the NATO. As NATO member states, we collectively defend Estonia, Poland, Latvia, the whole Europe and NATO members in the West.”

Egils Levits, President of Latvia, 9 January 2020

“Here, a hundred years ago it was decided that we all are one people and we can have only a shared future. The Latvians from Latgale joined the Latvians from Vidzeme and Kurzeme into one nation and destiny communion. Only as a united nation, we were able to claim our country. Only together, we were strong enough to succeed.

The Latgale Congress gave our people confidence in themselves and strength for the future. A hundred years ago, here the prayer of our nation sounded with unflinching confidence, “God bless Latvia”. Here we proudly said, “Acknowledging the Latvians living in Vitebsk province and Kurzeme and Vidzeme people as the one Latvian people, we decided to join the Latvians from Kurzeme and Vidzeme.”

The torch of faith lit at the Latgale Congress led us off to the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia on 18 November 1918 and the victory during the Latvian War of Independence culminating exactly after the liberation of Latgale.

At the Latgale Congress, we learned to be united and to trust each other. We learned that great deeds could be done by searching for common that united rather than divided and split. The Latgale Congress reminds us that Latvia became possible when we thought more about the future of all the people rather than the benefit of our own parish or county. If everybody had searched for the best individual future, most likely we would not have had our own country. United for Latvia is the message of the Latgale Congress, which is also carved on the Monument of Latgale's Māra.”

Raimonds Vējonis, former President of Latvia, 5 May 2017

“The Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Estonia begins with an address to all peoples of Estonia. The manifesto itself includes a promise to ensure opportunities to maintain the cultural identity of national minorities. I understand the difficulty of overcoming the mentality of differentiating between "us" and "them" in Estonian societal awareness because of the suffering and loss we have been through. However, there is no other way. As professor Marju Lauristin recently emphasised, we must stop constantly shaping barriers, alienation, and negativity.

Let us be happy that the non-Estonian speaking part of the population wishes to contribute actively to the society. We have our own Russian-speaking writer, Andrei Ivanov, the famous Juri Lotman school of semiotics, Russian Theatre of Estonia with its long-standing traditions, an increasingly efficient local Russian information space. There are dozens of athletes who have brought fame to Estonia who also speak Russian as their first language.

What I mean to say by this is that our linguistic and cultural origin may set us apart, but patriotism, having Estonia as our shared home, is what unites us. In his speech on the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which laid the foundation for the European Union, Pope Francis highlighted the value of living together in harmony and maintaining unity. He emphasised that together, we are more than any of us could be on their own.”

Jüri Ratas, Prime Minister of Estonia, 22 February 2018.

Appendix II: Selection of Speeches

- ‘The Speech of Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu at the Formal Ceremony Dedicated to the Centenary of the Tartu Peace Treaty at the Vanemuine Concert Hall on 2 February 2020 | Ministry of Foreign Affairs’. Accessed 2 April 2020.
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- ‘Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the 100th Anniversary Concert of the Latvian Academy of Music’. Accessed 18 March 2020.
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