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Where do we belong?
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Baltic and Nordic regional identities
in speeches by the presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

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Abstract

This thesis aims to discover how Baltic and Nordic regional identities are discussed in 448 speeches by the presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania during 1991 – 2021, and how regional identities in these countries may have changed over time. The research is conducted as a critical discourse analysis, with an addition of elements of comparative analysis. The theoretical framework consists of Anssi Paasi's theory about regional identity.

The conclusion of this thesis is that the Baltic regional identity has remained important in all three countries throughout the examined period. This regional identity is considered a result of the resistance and solidarity of the Baltic peoples during the Soviet Occupation.

The Nordic regional identity on the other hand, is only discussed consistently in Estonia, where it is considered a natural cultural unity. In the Latvian speeches, the Nordics appear in the early and very late years of the material, but instead of establishing Latvia as a part of the Nordics, the wish is to “become Nordic” in the sense of developing traits that are perceived as positive and typically Nordic. This discussion is not found in the Lithuanian speeches. However, that the Nordics should be considered as an inspiration in terms of society and economy, is agreed by presidents in all three countries.

The two societal events that have shaped the discourses the most is the Baltic Way, that is seen as the starting point of the Baltic regional identity, and the EU and NATO accession. In the latter case, political hopes of the Baltic states, as well as expectations from Western European countries, led to the highlighting of unity within the Baltics and Central and Eastern Europe. After Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had joined both the EU and NATO, the need to promote a Central and Eastern European identity and cooperation is superseded by the wish to be associated with other regional identities, such as Baltic, Nordic or Western European.

Keywords: Baltics, Nordics, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Regional identity

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1. Introduction

In 1999, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who at the time was Minister of Foreign Affairs in Estonia, argued in a speech that Estonia belongs to “Yule-land”.¹ The name “Yule-land” is based on the similarities between the words used for Christmas, *yule*, in the Nordic countries, Estonia and the United Kingdom. According to Ilves, these countries share a common history and culture, as opposed to “the Baltics”, which merely is an “externally imposed category” that lumps together three countries that have nothing in common except for “shared unhappy experiences imposed upon us from outside”. Thus, the internationally recognised term “Baltics” seems to be less self-evident than what is commonly assumed.

Today, The Nordic Council of Ministers has offices in all Baltic countries, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are all part of the educational cooperation “Nordplus”. At the same time, *The Baltic Times* and other pan-Baltic newspapers exist, and companies such as Air Baltic hint at a common Baltic cooperation. In addition to commercial collaborations, one can also find various types of governmental or organisational cooperation, such as The Baltic Assembly and The Baltic Culture Fund.²

This seems to indicate that despite the apparent distaste for the notion of a Baltic unity, some kinds of cooperation do exist, in addition to the identification with the Nordics mentioned above. Thereby, the question is raised if the attitude towards “the Baltics” as an actual cultural identity has changed. The thesis thus aims to examine how Baltic and Nordic regional identities are discussed in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and if the regional identities of the three countries have changed throughout the period after regaining independence in 1991. The study will be conducted as a critical discourse analysis with an added comparative element. Anssi Paasi’s theories about regional identities will help exploring how the identities found in the material are constructed.

¹ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, “Estonia as a Nordic Country” (speech, Stockholm, December 14, 1999), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-nordic-country> (Accessed 2021-04-14).

² “How do we work?,” The Baltic Assembly, accessed May 18, 2022, <https://www.baltasam.org/about-us/how-do-we-work>; “About us”, Baltic Culture Fund, accessed May 18, 2022, <https://www.kulka.ee/about-us>.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse changes regarding regional identity in speeches and statements from presidents in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania throughout the time period 1991 – 2021, and to compare the findings in all three countries. The research questions are as follows:

- *How are Baltic and Nordic regional identities discussed in the speeches of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian presidents 1991-2021?*
- *How has the official discussion about regional identity changed in the three countries during the time period?*

1.2 Disposition

The introduction is followed by the theoretical framework. Even though this thesis addresses the question of regional identity, it is also important to clarify how identities manifest themselves on a national level. Therefore, both the concepts of national and regional identity are presented. This chapter also includes the definition of the terms “Baltics” and “Nordics”, that will be used throughout the thesis.

Chapter three presents the background. A brief historical background containing important events in the region, as well as an overview of Baltic, Nordic, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian identity in academic discourse will be given. This is to familiarise the reader with circumstances and debates which might be referred to in the material.

The fourth chapter introduces the methodology. This includes a presentation of Norman Fairclough’s method for critical discourse analysis, which is divided into three parts: *text*, *discursive practice* and *social practice*. Since the aim is to compare regional identity in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, comparative analysis is presented as well. This chapter also contains a description of the material and of the Baltic presidents during the examined time period. In addition, an overview over previous research within the topic is given.

Hereafter, the findings from the speeches are presented. This chapter is divided geographically in order to demonstrate any differences between the three Baltic countries. The

findings are followed by the discussion, wherein the findings in the three countries are compared thematically, and in accordance with critical discourse analysis and Anssi Paasi's theory about regional identity. Finally, the conclusion is presented in the seventh chapter.

2. Theoretical framework

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework of this thesis will be presented. The concept of regional identity will be discussed, and a brief introduction to Benedict Anderson's theory of national identity will be given. Additionally, the terms "Baltics" and "Nordics" will be defined.

2.1 Regional identity

According to Iver B. Neumann, Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities" is applicable on regions, in addition to nations.³ Political actors justify the territory of a region by using cultural traits, history and similarities among the population living in the area. Neumann also highlights the importance of regions being recognised parts of a discourse. If the existence of a region is no longer questioned, it has become "natural" and acknowledged. Regions are thus "written and spoken into existence".⁴

Anssi Paasi also discusses a constructivist approach to the development of regions in his article "The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and empirical Observations on Regional Dimensions in Europe". Regions have material components such as economy and political relations, but the main producing actors are media, culture and administration. Through these platforms, narratives of collective memories and identities are spread.⁵

Paasi distinguishes between two types of region-building: "old regions" and "new regions." "Old regions" are based on cooperation and cultural and emotional ties that precede modern

³ Iver B. Neumann, "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe," *Review of International Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): 58-59.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Anssi Paasi, "The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and empirical Observations on Regional Dimensions in Europe," *Review of International Studies* 35 (2009): 133-134.

administration and institutions, and that, over time, have developed into established parts of contemporary governance. “New regions” are modern projects that are instead based on a political wish to raise the level of competitiveness by for instance facilitating cooperation across national borders. Political, and sometimes cultural, discussions about whether the existence of the region is justified or not “creates” the region. Gradually this results in the region being included in institutions and maps. Actors in such region-building processes sometimes use historical events or parts of infrastructure established in ‘old regions’, but these kinds of regions are in many cases not very present in the everyday lives of the inhabitants.⁶

Paasi further argues that the building of a region can be divided into four steps. The region needs a *territorial shape*, an area separated by surrounding lands either by hard borders or soft, sometimes vague, boundaries.⁷ The territory is either historically motivated or simply decided for a modern purpose.

Equally important are *symbolic shapes*, which can take various forms such as coat of arms, regional foods or place names. The choosing process have stakeholders from cultural as well as political and economic organisations, since the intention of the symbols could be to unify regional inhabitants and become part of a collective identity, but also to promote the region for investments and tourism.

The *institutional shaping* of a region entails both formal institutions such as political organisations, but also informal habits and dialects that showcase typical traits of the regional inhabitant. These institutions produce and reproduce both the territorial shape and the symbolic shapes.

Finally, the region needs to become *established*, by being an acknowledged part of a bigger context. Depending on the case this can mean gaining sovereignty, administrative status or other kinds of legitimacy.

⁶ Paasi, “The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’,” 133-134

⁷ Ibid., 134-136.

According to Paasi, the topic of regional identity has not been widely researched.⁸ Previous research has mainly focused on what Paasi refers to as “identity of a region”, i.e., a collection of features that are generally associated with the spatial territory of a region.⁹ This could for example be cultural traditions or nature. The identity of a region distinguishes the region from its surroundings but is not the same as the regional identity. The latter relates to the regional consciousness of the people, and how they identify with the region. The reality of a regional identity is created discursively top-down through media and politics, or bottom-up as an act of resistance. Regional identities are therefore for the most part ideological and are often based on an ideal type of identity, where actors involved in the discursive construction choose to only focus on myths and cultural elements that they find beneficial.¹⁰

2.1.1 National Identity

In order to contextualise regional identities, national identities must briefly be explained. According to Benedict Anderson’s theory about national identity, presented in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983), nations are communities that are imagined in the sense that their inhabitants feel attachment and solidarity with each other, despite the fact that a majority of them will never meet.¹¹ This imagined attachment explains why inhabitants are willing to sacrifice themselves for their homeland. The envisaged bond between every citizen supersedes any thoughts of injustice or inequality that in other contexts could lead to internal animosity.

Furthermore, is the nation imagined as limited, since however large it is, there will always be some kind of border separating the nation from other nations. No nation claims to encompass every single human on earth, thus certain limitations are needed to define the nation. Nations are also imagined as sovereign, since it realises the freedom of the state.

2.2 Definition of “Baltics”

Before giving an overview of Baltic history, the term “Baltic” must be defined. Even though the name “Balticum” can be traced back to the eleventh century, its etymological roots remain

⁸ Paasi, ”The Resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’,” 138.

⁹ Ibid., 141–142, 144.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 3rd ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6-7.

unknown.¹² The categorisation of the Lithuanian and Latvian languages as “Baltic languages” only dates back to 1845, when the German linguist Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann suggested the term as fitting. At the time, in both German and Russian, “Baltic” could refer to all countries surrounding the Baltic Sea.¹³

In German, “Baltic” eventually became a term used to describe the German speaking elites in the Russian provinces of modern-day Estonia and Latvia, transforming it into a name of a cultural group instead of a geographical area. However, nineteenth century Latvian nationalists considered Baltic to be synonymous with Latvian, and thus had a remotely different understanding of the word than the Germans. The Estonians, who already had a strong attachment to the territorial label “Estland” did not claim the term.¹⁴

“The Baltics” finally developed into a description of the now independent states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1918. The addition of Lithuania was mostly based on the close nationalistic cooperation between the three countries during the early twentieth century. Finland was also involved in this cooperation, and discussions whether they should be included in the Baltic community, or if they should seek closer cooperation with the Scandinavian countries, occurred throughout the interwar period.¹⁵ Among other things, Finland’s more amicable relationship with Germany clashed with the stances of the other Baltic countries. The understanding of “Baltic” as meaning Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was cemented in 1940, when the three countries were occupied by the Soviet Union.¹⁶

In the USSR, the term *Pribaltika* meant a unified Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, that was often considered a natural part of the Soviet, or Russian, empire.¹⁷ The view that these areas were an entity that, historically and geographically, should be Russian already appeared in the late nineteenth century when it was discussed among the bureaucracy. During the Soviet era, the Baltic unity was demonstrated administratively by establishing *Pribaltika* as an indivisible

¹² Jörg Hackmann, “Was ist und wo liegt das Baltikum? Ein Blick auf die politische Geografie der Ostseeregion,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 67, no. 8 (2017): 4-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Edgar Anderson, “Finnish-Baltic Relations, 1918-1940: An Appraisal,” *Scandinavian Studies* 54, no. 1 (1982): 52, 55.

¹⁶ Hackmann, “Was ist und wo liegt das Baltikum?” 4-8.

¹⁷ Karsten Brüggemann, “An Enemy’s ‘Outpost’ or ‘Our West’? Some Remarks about the Discourse of Russian *Pribaltika* in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union,” in *Ethnic Images and Stereotypes – Where is the Border Line? Russian-Baltic Cross-Cultural Relations* ed. Elena Nomm (Narva: Tartu Ülikooli Narva Kolledž, 2007), 81–82, 85, 92.

economic and defence unit.¹⁸ The Baltics became perceived as a region that stood out from the rest of the USSR, a group that was united by their distinction and in the Russian view, their foreignness.¹⁹

The definition of the “Baltics” as being comprised of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will hereafter be used in the thesis.

2.3 Definition of “Nordics”

The current way of using the term “Nordics” stems from the romanticism of the early nineteenth century.²⁰ The thought that Swedes, Norwegians, Danes and Swedish speaking Finns belonged to a shared ancient culture became common. However, up until World War II, this definition was not strict, and some parts of the population in the Baltic countries, especially in Estonia, referred to themselves as Nordic, and sought to establish closer ties with the Scandinavian states. The identification with being Nordic was also relatively common in St. Petersburg and Northern Germany. In independent Finland on the other hand, the ethnic and linguistic situation resulted in an ambivalence towards the Nordic identity that emphasised the Swedish-Scandinavian heritage over the Finno-Ugric. At the time, some Finns considered belonging to a Baltic unity to be just as relevant as a Nordic.²¹

The Soviet occupation of the Baltics put an end to the regional confusion of Finland.²² Finland joined the Nordic Council in 1955, three years after its foundation, and has since been considered a self-evident part of the Nordics together with Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and the autonomous regions of Åland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. The foundation of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971 further established the region as a politically and economically unified group.²³

¹⁸ Gerhard Simon, “Regionalismus in der Sowjetunion,” *Osteuropa* 37, no. 10 (1987):761.

¹⁹ Malte Rolf, “Kanon und Gegenkanon: Offizielle Kultur und ihre Inversion in der UdSSR,” *Osteuropa* 60, no. 11 (2010): 185–186.

²⁰ Mikko Lagerspetz, “How Many Nordic Countries? Possibilities and Limits of Geopolitical Identity Construction,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 38, no. 1 (2003): 50-51.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 51.

²³ *Ibid.*

3 Background

3.1 Historical overview

From the thirteenth century onwards, Lithuania developed as a powerful grand duchy.²⁴ The country was significantly enlarged through a personal union with Poland, creating the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which remained intact until the late eighteenth century. Estonia and Latvia were not autonomous countries during the era. Instead, the area was an amalgamation of smaller provinces belonging to Germany, Sweden and Denmark.²⁵ During the seventeenth century, the provinces were under Swedish rule. However, the German speaking nobility that at the time had become very influential, still exerted power over the local population.²⁶

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were first united under the same rule when they became part of the Russian empire in the late eighteenth century.²⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century, nationalistic feelings were prevalent among Estonians and Latvians, but they were too scattered to form any united nationalistic movements.²⁸ Initially, these tendencies expressed themselves through folklore and literature, rather than politics. Between 1863-1904 in Lithuania, conflicts between the Russian authorities and local ethnic groups led to social unrest and stricter control, which prevented the development of a Lithuanian nationalism. Laws prohibiting the use of the Latin alphabet in the conflict-ridden areas further complicated the Lithuanian sense of nationhood.²⁹

In 1918, all three countries eventually succeeded in declaring themselves as independent republics.³⁰ For Lithuania, this led to a long conflict with Poland regarding which nation Vilnius should belong to. At the time, the Lithuanian population in the city were a minority. After Polish troops invaded Vilnius in 1920, Lithuania lost control of its historical capital. Between 1918 and 1920, Estonia and Latvia also experienced wars related to their declarations of independence, when they were invaded by the Red Army. The cultural life in

²⁴ Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 65-67.

²⁵ Karsten Brüggemann, "Kleine Geschichte der Baltischen Staaten," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 67, no. 8 (2017): 10.

²⁶ Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 98.

²⁷ Brüggemann, "Kleine Geschichte der Baltischen Staaten," 11.

²⁸ Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, 225-227, 232.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 234-237.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 299-302, 305-306.

the Baltic states blossomed during the interwar period, and Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian finally became the official languages used in state administration.³¹

However, the state-building processes were seen as too slow by many, and a wide-spread wish for a single strong, leader instead of fragmented parliamentarism, emerged.³² This, in addition to perceived threats of political coups from extremists, led to the instalment of authoritarian regimes in all three countries. In Lithuania, the Christian Democrats and the Nationalist Party gained power through a coup d'état in 1926. The leader Antanas Smetona can be described as rather moderately authoritarian however, which can be illustrated by the fact that the Communist Party was the only opposing party to be explicitly forbidden.³³

This cannot be said of the Latvian authoritarian regime. In 1934, both the Latvian parliament and all political parties were abolished by the Agrarian Union leader Kārlis Ulmanis and other representatives from the same party.³⁴ Until 1940, Ulmanis continued to lead the nation without reviving the parliament.³⁵

The Estonian coup was preceded by an important change in the constitution, allowing the prime minister to exert more power, while simultaneously decreasing the role of the parliament.³⁶ Prime minister Konstantin Päts took advantage of this opportunity in 1934, in order to stop the extreme right-wing party, The League of Veterans, from winning the election. After declaring a state of emergency, Päts dissolved the political opposition and put all parliamentary meetings on hold. Elections resumed in 1938, but Päts continued his authoritarian rule until the Soviet occupation.³⁷

By 1940, the Baltics lost their independence again through the Soviet annexation of the three countries.³⁸ This, and the Nazi German rule 1941-1944, resulted in vast demographic changes. The Polish, Jewish and Roma populations had been deported to German concentration camps, Baltic Germans had been repatriated and mass deportations of Estonians, Latvians and

³¹ Brüggemann, "Kleine Geschichte der Baltischen Staaten," 13.

³² Plakans, *A Concise history of the Baltics*, 320, 326-327.

³³ *Ibid.*, 323.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 325-326.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 327-328.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Brüggemann, "Kleine Geschichte der Baltischen Staaten," 14.

Lithuanians to Gulag had been frequent. During the Stalinist era, a great number of Baltic intellectuals also fled to the West.³⁹

After the Baltics had returned to Soviet occupation in 1944, resistance movements were established in the entire region.⁴⁰ In all three countries, partisans fought the occupational powers. In Lithuania, the resistance had a catholic character, and had a more advanced organisation than their Estonian and Latvian counterparts. The partisan wars continued until 1954, but a few members of the resistance remained active until the 1960s.⁴¹

After the partisan wars, discontent was shown through several public protests.⁴² The protests were often held against negative economic and ecologic development, but the fear of total russification was the greatest source of anger. Demonstrations increased drastically after the Prague Spring 1968.⁴³

The ever-growing series of mass protests in the Baltics in the 1980s culminated in the so-called “Singing Revolution” in 1988, where large groups of people gathered at song festivals to protest through singing.⁴⁴ In 1989, around two million Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians united in a human chain connecting the Baltic capitals Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius in a very symbolic peaceful protest that later has been referred to as the “Baltic Way”.⁴⁵

The three states finally regained independence in 1991, and have since joined both the EU and NATO in 2004.⁴⁶ Since the early 1990s, the Baltic countries have cooperated closely, on both parliamentary and governmental level, through the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers.⁴⁷

³⁹ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 87-90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 103-105.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Mara Lazda, “Reconsidering Nationalism: The Baltic Case of Latvia in 1989,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 22, no. 4 (2009): 517-518.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Brüggemann, “Kleine Geschichte der Baltischen Staaten,” 15.

⁴⁷ Mindaugas Jurkynas, “Brotherhood Reconsidered: Region-Building in the Baltics,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 35, no. 1 (2004): 10.

3.2 Baltic identity in academic discourse

Several sources clearly state that there is no “Baltic identity”. In fact, a few articles even refer to the idea of such a regional identity as a “myth”. Most importantly, the relative lack of shared culture and experiences is highlighted. Before the Soviet occupation, cooperation had not been substantial between the Baltic countries. The local populations were historically not involved in the construction of a Baltic unity. Hain Rebas explains the relationship between Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians before the late twentieth century as “[living] more next to each other than with each other”.⁴⁸ Baltic unity was thus initially imposed on Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians from foreign powers. The Baltics were treated as an economic and administrative unit during the Soviet period, which further reproduced the image of a real functioning region.⁴⁹ Ordinary Soviet citizens also thought of the Baltics as a unity with region-specific traits. The area was often referred to as the “Soviet West” or “our foreign country”. During the independent interwar period, cooperation between the three countries was scarce and mostly symbolic.⁵⁰

Because of their history, Balts associate the term “Baltic” with loss of independence. It carries a Baltic German, as well as a Soviet, legacy and binds the three countries to negative past experiences. Thus, the word has historically been associated with foreign influence.⁵¹

When Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regained independence in 1991, western European countries perceived the fact that they belonged to the regional category “Baltics” as self-evident. Yet again, an imagined Baltic unity was imposed upon the Balts from outside.

During the 1990s, the Baltic countries felt the need for close cooperation in order to be accepted into the democratic European context.⁵² The common goal of EU and NATO memberships required temporary collaboration that showed the will to integrate. On the other hand, Baltic leaders were worried that being treated as a unit would result in slower

⁴⁸ Hain Rebas, “Baltic Cooperation – Problem or Opportunity,” *Perspectives*, no. 9 (1997): 72.

⁴⁹ Dietrich André Loeber, “Towards Baltic Regional Identity,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 18, no. 2 (1987): 116, 120.

⁵⁰ Kęstutis Paulauskas, “The Baltic States: Picking Regions, Shedding Myths, Decoding Acronyms,” *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 15-16, (2005): 52-53.

⁵¹ Hain Rebas, “Baltic Regionalism?,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 19, no. 2 (1988): 102–103.

⁵² Paulauskas, “The Baltic States: Picking Regions, Shedding Myths, Decoding Acronyms,” 53-55.

negotiations since they were not equally advanced in all areas.⁵³ Kęstutis Paulauskas writes in his article “The Baltic States: Picking Regions, Shedding Myths, Decoding Acronyms” that even though this cooperation turned out to be mostly beneficial for the Baltic countries, it has also been a hindrance.⁵⁴ Baltic politicians seem to avoid expressing views that oppose the foreign policies of the other Baltic countries, since they wish to maintain the image of political unity in front of Western powers.

According to the historian Jörg Hackmann, the Baltic unity shown during the Singing Revolution 1986-1991 and the Baltic Way in 1989 was an exception fuelled by shared anti-Soviet feelings.⁵⁵ After the fall of the Soviet Union, the popularity of claiming “Balticness” declined among the Baltic populations.

Despite the above-mentioned arguments for the non-existence of a Baltic identity, some aspects that speak in favour of such an identity have also been discussed in academic debates. Indeed, even if older history differs in the Baltic states, they share common experiences for most of the twentieth century, and modern-day relations with the EU and Russia are in many ways similar.⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, Russia has been highlighted as the most important “Other” in the construction of a Baltic identity.⁵⁷

Furthermore, have all the Baltic states expressed a wish to “return to Europe”.⁵⁸ Europe in this context symbolises security, prosperity and democracy, that guarantees protection from the political and economic insecurity of the past. “Returning to Europe” is associated with distancing from “the East”, meaning Russia and former communist states. It might thus be argued that a common trait for the Baltics is the wish to shift the regional identity to Western Europe instead of being associated with the former communist East. Paradoxically, this can in some cases mean distancing from the negatively laden term “Baltic”.

In the early 1990s the Baltics considered themselves a “bridge between East and West”, because of their geopolitical location. In their opinion, they had the unique role of being a

⁵³ Grazina Miniotaite, “Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities: A Decade of Transformations in the Baltic States,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2003): 212.

⁵⁴ Paulauskas, “The Baltic States: Picking Regions, Shedding Myths, Decoding Acronyms,” 55.

⁵⁵ Hackmann, “Was ist und wo liegt das Baltikum? Ein Blick auf die politische Geografie der Ostseeregion,” 8.

⁵⁶ Miniotaite, “Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities,” 211.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 211-212, 214-215.

mediator between two very different parts of Europe. Eventually, this developed into a “bridgehead” situation instead. The Baltics have succeeded in shifting more towards the West, and have turned into a barrier against Russia, and what is perceived as non-Western values.

Additionally, a Baltic identity seems to have existed since the Soviet era among exile Balts.⁵⁹ A need to unite and collaborate both politically and culturally emerges in a foreign context, and several Baltic institutes, research centres and academic journals exist outside the Baltic area. Legal historian Dietrich André Loeber even stated in 1987 that “Estonians, Latvians or Lithuanians travelling to a Baltic sister republic will make an effort to be identified as fellow-Balts”, hinting that Balts become aware of their Balticness when leaving their home country.⁶⁰ However, Loeber does not further explain how this attempt at presenting oneself as Baltic manifests itself.

3.3 Nordic identity in academic discourse

In several academic texts, deviance from the Western European norm is considered the core essence of Nordic identity. This was most evident during the Cold War, when the Nordic states were seen as being more peaceful and less tense than the rest of the continent.⁶¹ Because of their peripheral geographic location, neutrality, or at least moderate participation in the conflicts dividing Europe, became relatively easy.⁶² The region branded itself as an alternative to the east-west division, within both security issues and economy.⁶³ In addition to advocating disarmament instead of increased military tension, the Nordic countries have been devoted to mediating and peace research, which has further developed the image of peacefulness as a Nordic trait. An economic “Third Way”, that successfully combined elements of capitalism and socialism, also became part of what was considered typically Nordic. Thirdly, solidarity and environmentalism are mentioned as traits related to Nordic identity.⁶⁴ Therefore, international justice and stopping climate change have been important topics within Nordic international politics.

⁵⁹ Rebas, “Baltic Cooperation – Problem or Opportunity?”, 73.

⁶⁰ Loeber, “Towards Baltic Regional Identity,” 120.

⁶¹ Christopher S. Browning, “Branding Nordicity: Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 42, no.1 (2007): 27.

⁶² Kazimierz Musiał, “Reconstructing Nordic Significance in Europe on the Threshold of the 21st Century,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34, no.3 (2009): 287.

⁶³ Browning, 32-35.

⁶⁴ Hans Mouritzen, “The Nordic Model as a Foreign Policy Instrument: Its Rise and Fall,” *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no.1 (1995): 11.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, a discussion about the future of the Nordic identity started. Ole Wæver, a Danish professor of political science, claims that the Nordics lost parts of their identity when their peaceful mediator role in Europe was no longer needed.⁶⁵ Thus, the Cold War itself was a precondition for the Nordic identity and self-image. The exceptionalism and obvious contrast to the rest of the continent were suddenly not as evident. In addition, the location in the outskirts of the continent was no longer convenient. Instead, identifying with the periphery posed the threat of exclusion from an increasingly more united Europe.⁶⁶

Thus, Wæver argued in 1992, the Nordics should pursue close connections with the regions surrounding the Baltic Sea, in order to establish a new identity, that is more oriented towards Europeanness.⁶⁷ The Nordic identity prior to the fall of the Soviet Union had to reinvent itself, so that it became part of the modern European development, and thereby closing the gap between the peripheral Nordics and the rest of the continent.

The Polish professor in Scandinavian and Finnish studies, Kazimierz Musiał, concluded in 2009 that even though the Nordics do cooperate more with the Baltics, Wæver's suggestion of a modified Nordic-Baltic identity has not been fulfilled.⁶⁸ Whenever the Baltics are included in cooperation, it is done on the Nordics' terms. A shift towards including German, Polish and Russian regions in the Nordic identity cannot be found. Instead, it is often stated that the Nordic identity has survived the new political environment in Europe.

Others have pointed out that regardless of outer geopolitical development, there are common cultural ties that bind the Nordic countries together. Linguistic ties and common history unite the Nordics.⁶⁹ A common Lutheran faith is also mentioned, even though religion does not play a big part in the Nordic societies. In addition, Nordic literature and music prizes are awarded by the Nordic Council as a way of promoting and further unifying Nordic cultural expressions. Overall, the Nordic Council is presented as a driving actor for the strengthening

⁶⁵ Ole Wæver, "Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 68, no.1 (1992): 78-79.

⁶⁶ Musiał, 291.

⁶⁷ Wæver, 96-99.

⁶⁸ Musiał, 299-300.

⁶⁹ Alastair H. Thomas, "The Concept of the Nordic Region and the Parameters of Nordic Cooperation." In *The European Union and the Nordic Countries*, ed. Lee Miles (London: Routledge, 1996), 15, 25-26.

of the Nordic identity, via facilitation of inter-Nordic movement, migration, and cooperation, as well as harmonisation of domestic legislations.⁷⁰

3.4 Estonian identity in academic discourse

Throughout history, Germans and Russians have been the two ethnic groups that most commonly have been an alien “them” that differs from the Estonian “us”.⁷¹ The Baltic German minority remained for many centuries a highly unpopular group among Estonians. Since they were a ruling elite with a foreign culture and language, the general view of the Estonians was that the Germans were an invasive people that benefited from the hard labour of Estonians.⁷²

However, after the Soviet occupation in 1940, the role of Germans in the Estonian identity narrative changed. Mass migration to Nazi Germany led to a considerable demographic shift, and the fact that the ruling elite now consisted of Russians decreased the fears of German culture overruling the native Estonian. The Estonian identity discourse gradually shifted focus to a more positive view of the Baltic German influence on Estonian history.

The Russian Other can be divided into two groups. One consists of Russians arriving in Estonia after 1940. Because of the large number of immigrating Russians, a wide-spread fear of Estonians becoming a minority within The Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic developed. This group was not considered to be as well integrated as the “old Russian minority”, that has existed in the country since the 1600s, and thus, linguistic, cultural and religious differences were thought of as a threat. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian speaking part of the population has started gaining more acceptance.

Ties with the Finns, who also belong to the Finno-Ugric language family, have been important.⁷³ The term *Soome sild*, “The Finnish Bridge”, refers to the cultural and linguistic kinship between the two groups, and Finland has historically been seen as an “alter ego” for Estonia, a visualisation of what Estonia could have been in other circumstances. Serious talks

⁷⁰ Thomas, 17.

⁷¹ Pille Petersoo, “Reconsidering Otherness: Reconstructing Estonian Identity,” *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 1 (2007): 124.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 122–123.

⁷³ Mart Kuldkepp, “The Scandinavian Connection in Early Estonian Nationalism,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 44, no. 3 (September 2013): 320.

about Finnish-Estonian cooperation were common in the interwar period, but the discussions existed as early as the 1800s.⁷⁴ Due to the access to Finnish TV in the Northern parts of Estonia, the population continued to receive cultural influences also in the later years of the Soviet occupation.⁷⁵

In addition to Finland as a nation, the Nordics as a region, is often described as a positive influence in literature about Estonian identity. The term “good old Swedish time”, referring to when Estonia was under Swedish rule, is widespread.⁷⁶ The era is presented in Estonian historiography as being particularly prosperous with the establishing of the University of Tartu and the introduction of a fairer treatment of Estonian peasants, and prophecies about the Swedish king as a saviour that in the future would return to Estonia to protect its people has appeared throughout Estonian history.⁷⁷ Denmark is also included in the legends about the history of Estonia through the old myth saying that the Danish flag arrived on earth by falling from the sky near Tallinn.⁷⁸ The idea that Estonia would have been a more advanced country, and a self-evident member of the Nordics, if they had remained under Swedish rule instead of Russian, was expressed among the cultural elite during the early twentieth century.⁷⁹ These statements can be seen as attempts at establishing a clear Nordic past in the Estonian historical narrative. In modern times, the relationship between the Nordics and Estonia has consisted both of investments and business, and of the Nordic countries’ wish to help Estonia join the EU.⁸⁰

3.5 Latvian Identity in academic discourse

As opposed to Estonian and Lithuanian identity, Latvian identity has not been extensively researched and defined. Andrej Plakans states in his text “Regional Identity in Latvia: The Case of Latgale”, that Latvians struggled to find their identity after the abolishment of serfdom in the early 1800s.⁸¹ When they could no longer define themselves in terms of which

⁷⁴ Rein Ruutsoo, “The Estonians: Identity of Small Nation in Past and Present,” *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures* 6 no. 1 (1997): 80–81.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁶ Petersoo, “Reconsidering Otherness”, 126–127.

⁷⁷ Kuldkepp, “The Scandinavian Connection in Early Estonian Nationalism,” 322–323.

⁷⁸ Ruutsoo, “The Estonians”, 80–81.

⁷⁹ Kuldkepp, “The Scandinavian Connection in Early Estonian Nationalism,” 321, 326, 328.

⁸⁰ Gregory Feldman, “Shifting the Perspective on Identity Discourse in Estonia,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 31, no. 4 (2000): 417, 420.

⁸¹ Andrejs Plakans, “Regional Identity in Latvia: The Case of Latgale” in *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History: Diversity and Inclusion* ed. Martyn Housden and David J. Smith (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 49.

estate owner they served, identity became related to religion, social status and regions. Latvians therefore had differing views regarding identity, and opinions varied greatly between generations.

That foreign powers continuously have influenced Latvia throughout history is noticeable in Latvian culture. Because of this, Latvian folklorist Aldis Pūtelis argues, Latvian folklore is regarded as the only source of true, original expression of Latvian culture.⁸²

Despite the many sources denying any kind of Baltic unity or identity, modern-day Latvia seems to consider “Baltic” as an important part of their identity.⁸³ Located in the centre of the Baltics, Latvians are said to generally feel more attached to the region than their neighbours, and continue to work for future cooperation and the remembrance of the common past.

Katrīna Pētersone indicates in her article “Baltic Unity within European Unity – why Myth, not reality?”, that being European is increasingly becoming more important than being Baltic.⁸⁴ The younger generation, that grew up within the EU, feel more attachment to the European unity than to historical Baltic cooperation. Europe and the West are among Latvian politicians seen as protection against Russian aggressions.⁸⁵ Especially before joining the EU and NATO, Russia was the main negative outer “them” that the Latvian identity is constructed against. The desire to distance themselves from the powerful neighbouring country in the east, resulted in a strong wish to be incorporated into the Western world, that they considered to be more stable and modern.

3.6 Lithuanian identity in academic discourse

Poland has been an important part in the construction of a Lithuanian identity. Through the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Polish culture has influenced Lithuanian culture

⁸² Aldis Pūtelis, “Folklore and Identity: The Situation of Latvia”, *Folklore. Electronic Journal of Folklore* 4, (1997): 61.

⁸³ Jurkynas, “Brotherhood Reconsidered”, 21.

⁸⁴ Katrīna Pētersone, “Baltic Unity within European Unity – why Myth, not Reality?” Latvian Institute of International Affairs, accessed May 16, 2021, https://liia.lv/site/docs/Katrina_Petersone_Baltic_Unity_EU.pdf.

⁸⁵ Katerina Kesa, “Latvian and Lithuanian Policy in the Eastern Neighbourhood: Between Solidarity and Self Promotion,” *Perspectives* 19, no. 2 (2011): 84

and identity.⁸⁶ The catholic faith is another aspect unifying the two countries, that simultaneously separates Lithuania from the Protestant Estonia and Latvia.

However, Poland has also been depicted as a threat to Lithuania.⁸⁷ During the interwar period, a fear of expansionist tendencies spread among politicians and intellectuals. They felt the need for a strong Lithuanian culture and identity as a protection against political and cultural expansion. Others disagreed with an isolationist approach to the Lithuanian identity building, and instead suggested mixing the best components of Russian, Polish and German culture. A shift towards the view of Lithuania as an active participant in European politics and culture, rather than a mere victim of foreign aggression grew more popular after World War II.⁸⁸

After the “Singing Revolution”, the narrative that Lithuanian culture and values had been violated reappeared. In this case, Soviet communism was contrasted against the view of the Lithuanian tradition of democracy and tolerance. The liberal Western Europe seemed tempting to many, whereas others asked for more cautiousness in fear of dissolve into a bigger European culture.⁸⁹

Following the re-independence in 1990, the cold Polish-Lithuanian relations continued as before World War II.⁹⁰ After a few years however, the two countries managed to repair the bond. In many articles, Lithuania is therefore connected with Poland and part of a regional identity described as “Central European”.⁹¹

4 Methodology

This chapter will give an overview of critical discourse analysis and comparative analysis, and explain how these methodologies are relevant for the research question. It also entails a presentation of the primary sources, as well as a short review of previous research within the topic.

⁸⁶ Evaldas Nekrašas, “Lithuania’s Identity and Place in Europe,” *Dialogue and Universalism*, no. 1 (2003): 15–16, 18.

⁸⁷ Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, “‘Nation’ and ‘Europe’: Re-approaching the Debates about Lithuanian National Identity,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003): 77–80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 81–86.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Nekrašas, “Lithuania’s Identity and Place in Europe,” 15–16, 18.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

4.1 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method that focuses on the role of language in society. We make sense of reality through language, which means that language is not only used to describe the physical reality, but to give meaning to it.⁹² When events are spoken and written about, their relationships to other phenomena in society are determined through the word choices and associations of the speaker or writer. What in CDA is referred to as “discourse” is therefore the use of language as a social practice, that maintains or remodels the society, while society simultaneously shapes the discourse.⁹³ The British linguist Norman Fairclough describes the relationship between discourse and society as dialectic.⁹⁴ Discourse is constituted by existing norms, and is at the same time capable of changing or reproducing relationships, identities and other social structures.

Through language, power can be discursively legitimised. Therefore, CDA aims to analyse power structures within discourses. By examining which actors are allowed to express themselves within the discourse, one also uncovers who has the power to discursively produce changes in society.⁹⁵ Power is also exerted in the discourse by defining what should be seen as tradition and by establishing what is right or wrong.⁹⁶ In the case of this thesis, the speakers are in an obvious position of power. Presidents have a unifying role and the authority to discursively produce or reproduce narratives within the national mindset via platforms that reach large amounts of the population.

This thesis will use Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of CDA, that divides the analysis into sections. The first part is the *text*, wherein the analysis focuses on word choice, metaphors and other elements that can show the attitude of the text producer towards the subject.⁹⁷

⁹² Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: SAGE publications, 2002): 8-9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹⁴ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Harlow: Longman, 2001): 37.

⁹⁵ Göran Bergström and Kristina Boréus, ”Diskursanalys” in *Textens mening och makt: Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, ed. Göran Bergström and Kristina Boréus (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2005): 328.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁹⁷ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Harlow: Longman, 2001): 94-95.

Secondly, the *discursive practice* should be analysed. This part is related to the production and consumption of the text. One useful tool for the study of discursive practices is intertextuality. Producers of texts often draw on other texts by referring to them or including parts of them.

The last dimension of the model is the *social practice*. This stage is the analysis of how the discourse changes or reproduces the wider context, i.e., the standards and structures of the society or organisation where the discourse takes place.⁹⁸

The aim of this thesis is to trace changes in how regional identities are constructed in presidential speeches over time, thus, how the discourses of regional identity in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have changed. By using Fairclough's model, the idea is to explore how the speeches (*text*) are related to surrounding societal events, and how they, in turn, shape the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian understanding of their regional identities.

4.2 Comparative analysis

The main principle of the comparative analysis method is that the study must contain data from two or more cases that are commensurable, meaning that they, if not identical, at least can be measured within the same category.⁹⁹ Furthermore, there are two kinds of comparative analysis. In *descriptive comparative research*, the idea is to thoroughly describe differences and similarities found within the material.¹⁰⁰ In addition to a description, an *explanatory comparative research* entails an analysis of *why* there are differences and similarities, and *how* they have developed. The latter is the version that will be used for this thesis.

Furthermore, this thesis will be conducted as a *focused comparison*. In this kind of comparative analysis, a smaller number of cases is studied, which allows for a deeper and more explanatory analysis compared to larger case studies.¹⁰¹ The findings from the three countries will be contrasted and compared, in order to locate similarities and differences

⁹⁸Ibid., 94-95.

⁹⁹ Chris Pickvance, "Four Varieties of Comparative Analysis," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 16, no. 1 (2001): 11, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Denk, *Komparativ metod – förståelse genom jämförelse* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2002), 7-12.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 42.

regarding how the presidents in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania discuss regional identity in their speeches.

4.3 Material

The primary source material consists of speeches from the presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania throughout the time period 1991-2021. The speeches have all been accessed on the official websites of the three governments and foreign ministries, or on official websites of international organisations such as NATO (<https://www.nato.int>). Many of the speeches were originally held in English, while others were held in the native languages of the presidents. In the latter case, English translations of the speeches have been used for this thesis. This poses the risk of missing some linguistic nuances, such as metaphors and word choices, that can be found in the original texts. However, because of the quantity of the material, trends and changes should still be detectable. Additionally, the translations are published on the official websites, indicating that they are approved and of good quality.

The choice of focusing on speeches held by presidents instead of foreign ministers or prime ministers is motivated by the representative power of the presidents. In Estonia and Latvia, the presidents are elected by the parliament, whereas in Lithuania, the president is chosen in direct elections.¹⁰² Thus, the Estonian and Latvian presidents should somewhat reflect the opinions of the elected parliaments. The Latvian president generally has a representative role.¹⁰³ In Estonia on the other hand, the president is also in charge of nominating a prime minister, which further ties the president to the parliamentary institutions.¹⁰⁴ The Lithuanian president has a somewhat bigger political role, since they are not dependent on the parliament to be elected, and also have the right to veto the parliament's legislations.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the political systems of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania differ, but in all three countries, the presidents are the highest level of political authority, which means that they have a representative responsibility for their respective nations. It is interesting to examine how they

¹⁰² "Estland", *Nationalencyklopedin*, <http://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/estland> (Accessed 2022-06-09); "Lettland", *Nationalencyklopedin*, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/lettland> (Accessed 2022-06-09); "Litauen", *Nationalencyklopedin* <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/litauen> (Accessed 2022-06-09).

¹⁰³ "Lettland", *Nationalencyklopedin*.

¹⁰⁴ "Estland", *Nationalencyklopedin*.

¹⁰⁵ "Lithuania", *Nationalencyklopedin*.

discuss regional identity since it is presented as a unified Estonian, Latvian or Lithuanian view. Furthermore, the wide accessibility to English translations of presidential speeches has proven useful for this thesis. This, however, means that statements from other political institutions and settings are missing from the analysis.

Since regional identity is not the only topic touched upon in the majority of the speeches, the texts will not be analysed in their entirety. Instead, the speeches have all been gone through thematically, and the analysis will only focus on the parts that are relevant for this study. In order to categorise the themes, the material has been manually coded. When reading the speeches, passages that in any way address regional identity have been highlighted in different colours indicating that *Nordic*, *Baltic* or *Other* regional identities are discussed. Even though the focus of this thesis is to examine how Baltic and Nordic identities are discussed, other regional identities were also taken note of, so that a complete picture of the discourse could be obtained. However, the limitations of this thesis do not allow a thorough analysis of all regional identities present in the material.

The speeches are relatively evenly distributed over the time period, but the access to speeches from different parts of the chosen time period varies from country to country. This is especially noticeable in the analysis of the Lithuanian speeches, since very little material can be found from the 1990s. The complete list of speeches held during the decade can neither be found through online searches, nor through communication with the Lithuanian presidency. As a result, the Lithuanian material lacks complete data from the earliest years of the examined time period. In total, 448 speeches have been selected. 160 Estonian speeches, 140 Latvian speeches and 148 speeches from Lithuania. The material is relatively evenly divided between speeches held in domestic and international settings. Thus, it reflects both what is said about regional identity when the intended audience is the own population, and when foreign representatives are present. However, it is worth noting that the intended audience has an impact on the content of the speeches. For example, speeches held in the Nordic countries would presumably be more likely to heavily highlight Baltic-Nordic relations than those held elsewhere.

4.3.1 The presidents

4.3.1.1 Estonia

Lennart Meri was the first president of re-independent Estonia.¹⁰⁶ He belonged to the nationalist party *Isamaa* (Fatherland), and served two terms 1992-2001. Before becoming president, he briefly had the positions of foreign minister (1990) and ambassador to Finland (1992). During the Soviet period he took an interest in documenting Finno-Ugric history.

Arnold Rüütel was president 2001-2006 and has a background within the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Estonian SSR.¹⁰⁷ He represented the agrarian party People's Union of Estonia.

Toomas Hendrik Ilves was president 2006-2016.¹⁰⁸ His parents left Estonia because of the Soviet occupation. Therefore, he was born in Stockholm and spent his childhood and youth in the US. He served as ambassador to the US, Canada and Mexico 1993-1996, and as minister of foreign affairs 1996-1998 and 1999-2002.

Kersti Kaljulaid was president 2016-2021. She was independent, but considered herself to be conservative in economic issues, and liberal in social issues.¹⁰⁹

4.3.1.2 Latvia

Guntis Ulmanis, a former member of the Latvian Communist Party, was involved in the establishment of the Latvian Farmers' Union when the multi-party system was reintroduced in 1990.¹¹⁰ He served as president 1993-1999.

Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga escaped Latvia with her family in 1944, and spent her childhood in Germany and Morocco before eventually moving to Canada in 1954.¹¹¹ Her interest in

¹⁰⁶ "Lennart Meri", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lennart-Meri> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹⁰⁷ Jan Richard Bærug, "Arnold Rüütel", *Store Norske Leksikon*, https://snl.no/Arnold_Rüütel (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹⁰⁸ Toomas Hendrik Ilves", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Toomas-Hendrik-Ilves> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹⁰⁹ Jan Richard Bærug, "Kersti Kaljulaid", *Store Norske Leksikon*, https://snl.no/Kersti_Kaljulaid (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹⁰ "Guntis Ulmanis", *Nationalencyclopedia*, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/guntis-ulmanis> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹¹ "Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vaira-Vike-Freiberga> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

Latvian folklore was awakened during her time as an active member of the Latvian émigré community. She returned to Latvia in 1998. A year later she became a politically unaffiliated president, a title she would hold until 2007.

Valdis Zatlers was president 2007-2011.¹¹² He participated in the fight for independence 1988-1989, but has later kept a low profile politically. Despite this, he was elected as an independent president for the term 2007-2011.

Andris Bērziņš represented the agrarian-conservative Union of Greens and Farmers and was president 2011-2015.¹¹³ During the first years of independence he was active in the Popular Front movement that had worked for self-government.

Raimonds Vējonis was Minister of Environmental Protection 2002-2011 and Minister of Defence 2014-2015, before he was elected as president in 2015.¹¹⁴ Vējonis represented the Union of Greens and Farmers and remained president until 2019.

Egils Levits represents the conservative National Alliance, and has been president since 2019.¹¹⁵ When he was a teenager, his family moved to West Germany after being deported from the Soviet Union. During the early 1990s, he was ambassador to Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Hungary, and he has been Latvia's representative in both the European Court of Justice and European Court of Human Rights.

4.3.1.3 Lithuania

Algirdas Brazauskas was leader for the Lithuanian Communist Party 1988-1989, and played an important role in the separation from the Soviet Communist Party.¹¹⁶ The party was later renamed Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania and had a more social-democratic ideology.

¹¹² "Valdis Zatlers", *Nationalencyclopedia*, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/valdis-zatlers> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹³ "Andris Bērziņš", *Nationalencyclopedia*, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/andris-berzins> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹⁴ "Raimonds Vējonis", *Nationalencyclopedia*, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/raimonds-vejonis> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹⁵ "Egils Levits", *Nationalencyclopedia*, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/egils-levits> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹⁶ "Algirdas Brazauskas", *Nationalencyclopedia*, <https://www-ne-se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/algirdas-brazauskas> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

Brazauskas continued as head of the party until 1993, when he was elected president. He had this position until 1998, and later returned to politics as Prime Minister 2001-2006.

During the 1940s, Valdas Adamkus was active in resistance movements against both the Nazi German and Soviet occupations.¹¹⁷ He immigrated to the US in 1949 and founded a community for Lithuanian Americans in Chicago. In the upcoming decades he was politically active in émigré circles. He returned to Lithuania in the 1990s and had two presidential terms, 1998-2003 and 2004-2009. He was politically unaffiliated.

In 1999, Rolandas Paksas became Prime Minister for the conservative party Homeland Union, but soon left the position because of disagreements within the party.¹¹⁸ 2000-2001 he became Prime Minister for the Liberal Union of Lithuania instead. A year later, Paksas founded the Liberal Democratic Party, which he represented when he won the presidential election 2003. In 2004, however, Paksas was accused of having ties to criminals. The Constitutional Court of Lithuania ruled that he had violated the constitution and he was later impeached.

Dalia Grybauskaitė served as Minister of Finance 2001-2004 and as an EU commissioner 2004-2005 before being elected as president in 2009.¹¹⁹ She continued as president until 2019, and was not affiliated with any political party.

Gitanas Nausėda won the presidential election 2019 as an independent candidate.¹²⁰ He was political advisor for former president Valdas Adamkus 2004-2009, and has earlier worked within the banking sector.

4.4 Previous research

¹¹⁷ "Valdas Adamkus", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Valdas-Adamkus> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹⁸ Darius Furmonavičius, "Rolandas Paksas", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rolandas-Paksas> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹¹⁹ Sherman Hollar, "Dalia Grybauskaite", *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dalia-Grybauskaite> (Accessed 2021-07-22).

¹²⁰ Jørn Holm-Hansen, "Gitanas Nausėda", *Store Norske Leksikon*, https://snl.no/Gitanas_Nausėda (Accessed 2021-07-22).

As presented above, the research on identity in the Baltic countries, and in the Baltics as a region, is rather extensive. However, this research has mainly focused on historical accounts and the opinions of the population instead of official governmental statements.

One researcher, that has interested himself in official statements of the Baltic countries regarding this matter, is the Lithuanian political scientist Mindaugas Jurkynas. In his article “Regional identities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: Being Baltic, looking North”, he has analysed how regionality is expressed in speeches by Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian presidents during the time period 2014 - 2018.¹²¹ In the material, Jurkynas has located four regional identities that are present in all three countries.

The most important is the Baltic region.¹²² Russia as both a past and present aggressor is the main reason for discussing Baltic unity. The second category is identification with the Nordic countries.¹²³ None of the countries see themselves as Nordic, according to Jurkynas, but the Nordics are seen as a positive example that can serve as inspiration.

Thirdly, Central and Eastern Europe is discussed. In all three countries, these regions are associated with the communist past. Therefore, when the presidents mention Central or Eastern Europe, they actively try to distance themselves from these communities.

The last group in Jurkynas’ article is the Baltic Sea region. This regional identity is not expressed as often as the others, and it has mainly been relevant during times of regional insecurity brought on by Russia.¹²⁴

In conclusion, Jurkynas suggests that the threat from Russia is the incentive for regional identities among the Baltic countries. Concerns over geopolitical instability in the region lead to a wish for closer cooperation with Western countries that can secure their safety, and the communist past urges the Baltic countries to distance themselves from other former Soviet or satellite states.

¹²¹ Mindaugas Jurkynas, “Regional identities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania: Being Baltic, looking North,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 3 (2020).

¹²² *Ibid.*, 5-6, 8.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Jurkynas' article and this thesis explore a similar topic, but the longer time span of the analysed speeches in the thesis can hopefully give a broader picture than the findings of the article. The aim is not to disprove Jurkynas' conclusion, but to extend the research and analyse changes within a longer period.

5 Findings

In this chapter, the findings in the source material will be presented. First, regional identity in the Estonian speeches will be outlined, then the Latvian speeches and finally the Lithuanian speeches. Themes and aspects that are frequently mentioned will be presented. Quotations from the speeches will be included for exemplification.

5.1 Regional identity in the Estonian speeches

Throughout the examined time period, the Estonian presidents frequently refer to a unified Baltic region. Firstly, the extensive use of expressions such as “Estonia and the other two Baltic states”, “the three Baltic countries” and other variants connecting Estonia to Latvia and Lithuania give the impression that these three countries self-evidently should be seen as a unified group. In the 1990s, a few instances of Latvia and Lithuania being described as belonging to the same family as Estonia, e.g., by the use of phrases like “sister states” and “sister countries” also occurred, which further strengthens image of a natural and deep connection between the nations.

This unity is almost exclusively described as a product of the shared twentieth century history. “Who was it, but the small Baltic nations whom the world had already forgotten, that caused the big and mighty Soviet state to collapse – and peacefully, mind you, without a single shot fired or a single drop of blood shed”, President Lennart Meri says in a speech from 1994.¹²⁵ Thereby, the Baltics are depicted as a cooperative group of nations, that skilfully managed to escape the mistreatment of foreign powers. In addition to the Soviet occupation, the Baltic Way and the regained independence in 1991 are the two most commonly mentioned historical

¹²⁵ Lennart Meri, “Address by H.E. Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia, at a Matthiae-Supper in Hamburg” (speech, Hamburg, February 25, 1994), Office of President Lennart Meri, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=9401> (Accessed 2021-02-22).

events that bind the fates of the Baltic states. In 1999, while discussing how increased cooperation will lead to secured sovereignty in the Baltics, Meri says “I do not mean to say that the Baltic solidarity is based on fear. I mean that the Baltic solidarity is based on our common historical experience”.¹²⁶ Past negative events have thus been the driving force of the unification of the Baltic states.

With reference to history and geography, Rütel calls Baltic cooperation within energy and economy “the most natural thing in the world” in a speech in 2004.¹²⁷ That the cooperation established during the occupation naturally must lead to post-independence collaboration within other areas occur in many speeches, especially in the context of military cooperation. Both Rütel and Meri, in 2002 and 1999 respectively, point out that unity and helpfulness in the accession processes of NATO and EU would be beneficial for all Baltic countries.¹²⁸ It would appeal to the Western image of the Baltic states as one undividable entity.

There are, however, also tendencies of more cautious approaches to Baltic cooperation regarding the applications for membership in NATO and the EU. Meri states in a speech from 1997, that even though he wishes for all three countries to join the EU at the same time, he wants to make clear that “under no circumstances should any country be held back because of considerations concerning its neighbour”.¹²⁹ He also assures that this would not damage Baltic cooperation within any other areas, and points to the Nordics as an example of a successful region wherein only some of the states are members of the EU and NATO. By referring to Latvia and Lithuania as Estonia’s “neighbours”, Meri creates a greater distance between the countries compared to the more kindred “sisters” mentioned above. However, four years prior, Meri expressed concern over the fact that Baltic cooperation so far only had been

¹²⁶ Lennart Meri, “President of the Republic on the State visit of the Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus And Mrs. Alma Adamkiene at the Dinner in the House of Blackheads” (speech, Tallinn, October 14, 1999), Office of President Lennart Meri, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=4263> (Accessed 2021-02-22).

¹²⁷ Arnold Rütel, “Address by the President of the Republic at the Lithuanian-Estonian Business Seminar” (speech, Vilnius, October 5, 2004), Office of President Arnold Rütel, <https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=54265> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

¹²⁸ Arnold Rütel, “A nation state and its defence capability in the 21st century” (speech, Tartu, May 10, 2002), Office of President Arnold Rütel, <https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=16819> (Accessed 2021-06-13).; Meri, “President of the Republic on the State visit of the Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus”.

¹²⁹ Lennart Meri, “President of the Republic at the dinner on the Conference ‘The Baltic States Integration into the European Union’” (speech, Tallinn, June 9, 1997), Office of President Lennart Meri, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=4377> (Accessed 2021-02-24).

rhetoric, and that this had been the case historically as well.¹³⁰ In 2019, President Kersti Kaljulaid confirms Meri's view that a sense of solidarity with the region had not been self-evident among all Balts during the 1990s.¹³¹

That the Baltics are not as alike as many believe is highlighted in a few speeches. For example, the above-mentioned sibling metaphor returns once in 2018, when Kaljulaid quotes the Latvian film director Daira Abolina's statement that Estonia and Latvia are half-brothers.¹³² The two peoples share history, values and traditions, but their languages, temperament and humour differ, making them only half-brothers. Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves distances the family bond even further by calling Estonians and Latvians "relatives" in a speech in 2012.¹³³ He also says that it is "too categorical" to say that Estonians and Latvians are the same people. According to Ilves, the Estonian-Latvian relatives are similar, but they have differences, nevertheless.¹³⁴

Language, religion and cultural expressions such as art and music are mentioned as different in the Baltic states, and the Estonian character is described as more "phlegmatic" than their neighbouring counterparts.¹³⁵ Because the twentieth century history is more commonly known to outsiders than inter-Baltic cultural differences, the Baltics blend into one single entity, similarly to the Balkans, Rüütel argues in a speech in 2000.¹³⁶ In Rüütel's opinion, it is still important to note the cultural differences between the three countries.

¹³⁰ Lennart Meri, "Address by Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia at the opening of the Pro Baltica Forum Conference" (speech, Helsinki, September 11, 1993), Office of President Lennart Meri, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=9469> (Accessed 2021-02-22).

¹³¹ Kersti Kaljulaid, "President of the Republic at the 20th anniversary and graduation ceremony of the Baltic Defence College" (speech, Tartu, June 20, 2019), Office of the Estonian President, <https://president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/15309-president-of-the-republic-at-the-20th-anniversary-and-graduation-ceremony-of-the-baltic-defence-college-in-tartu/index.html> (Accessed 2021-03-16).

¹³² Kersti Kaljulaid, "Opening Speech in the Honour of the 100th Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia at the Latvian National Opera House" (speech, Riga, February 26, 2018), Office of the Estonian President, <https://president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/14162-opening-speech-in-the-honour-of-the-100th-anniversary-of-the-republic-of-estonia-at-the-latvian-national-opera-house/layout-visit.html> (Accessed 2021-03-16).

¹³³ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, "The President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the state dinner of the President of Latvia Andris" (speech, Riga, June 5, 2012), Office of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, <https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/7567-the-president-of-estonia-toomas-hendrik-ilves-at-the-state-dinner-of-the-president-of-latvia-andris-brzi-riga-5-june-2012/index.html> (Accessed 2021-03-25).

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Meri, "President of the Republic on the State visit of the Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus And Mrs. Alma Adamkiene at the Dinner in the House of Blackheads".

¹³⁶ Arnold Rüütel, "President of the Republic at the Festive Dinner in Honour of the President of the Republic and Mr. Imants Freiberg" (speech, Tallinn, May 2, 2000), Office of President Arnold Rüütel, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=3792> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

In 2009, Ilves says that “[the] classification of Baltic countries is strictly a 20th century phenomenon that did not exist prior to statehood. Indeed, culturally and historically before independence they shared little other than small size and belonging to the Russian empire”.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Ilves is dissatisfied with the fact that the Baltics are commonly seen as one single country and concludes that there is a need for a new regional identity. “This threesome, [...] need not remain final as a way of looking at this part of Europe”¹³⁸, he says and hopes for an identity “that is not mired in externally imposed geopolitical divisions of the last century, which no one liked when they existed and which indeed ceased to exist a full generation ago”.¹³⁹

In Ilves’s speech, a wish for a regional expansion to the North is expressed. Northern Europe and the Nordics is the second most noticeable regional identity found in the Estonian speeches. In Ilves’s speech from 2009, he argues that it indeed is possible to construct a Nordic identity for Estonia, and uses Finland as an example of a country that has become Nordic, and is no longer seen as Baltic.¹⁴⁰ He also questions how Estonia belonging to the tripartite definition of Baltics can be seen as a more traditional world view than belonging to “Balto-scandia”, which includes both the Baltics and the Nordics. Meri has a similar claim in a speech from 1993, when he says that the Baltics are inseparable from the Nordic region.¹⁴¹

An even larger region that Estonia belongs to according to the material, is the Baltic Sea region, encompassing all states surrounding the Baltic Sea. It is described as a community with historical roots, that is beneficial for the involved countries in terms of economy, security issues and environmental protection. These bonds are said to have been rebuilt after the interruption during the Soviet era.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, “Who are we? Where are we? National Identity and Mental Geography” (speech, Turku, April 22, 2009), Office of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, <https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/2664-address-by-president-ilves-in-turku-university-finland/index.html> (Accessed 2021-03-27).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Lennart Meri, “Address By Mr. Lennart Meri President Of The Republic Of Estonia At The 11th Plenary Meeting Of The Forty-Eighth Session Of The United Nations General Assembly” (speech, New York, September 30, 1993), Office of President Lennart Meri, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=9474> (Accessed 2021-02-23).

¹⁴² Lennart Meri, “Ten Years from the Cold War” (speech, Jyväskylä, November 8, 1999), Office of President Lennart Meri, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=4262> (Accessed 2021-02-26).

However, that Estonia is a fully Nordic country is more commonly discussed than a united Baltic-Nordic region. Ilves states in a speech in 2011 that Estonia is “quietly and truly becoming a Nordic country” after he had had this as a goal ten years prior.¹⁴³ Thus, the Nordics had been a positive “other” that Estonia should strive against. This is predominantly mentioned in speeches from the early 2000s, but a few examples can be found in later speeches as well. In these cases, the presidents distance their country from the Nordic region by depicting the Nordics as an admirable example, separated from Estonia. In the speech from 2011, Ilves continues, “[w]e are finding that we belong to that very part of Europe that we dreamed of for many years”. Estonia has thus transformed into a Nordic country in Ilves’s opinion. Three years earlier, Ilves presents Estonia as an “almost-Nordic’ country”, indicating that there still are aspects where Estonia differs from the Nordic countries.¹⁴⁴

Throughout the entire examined period, Estonian presidents have mentioned several times that Estonia belongs to the Nordics. This is illustrated by phrases such as being a “Nordic people” and by listing “Nordic characteristics” that Estonians have, such as having a specific Nordic humour, being close to nature and being introverted. On New Year’s Eve 2000, Ilves states that “Estonia has become a Nordic country, where Christmas and the threshold of New Year are the most celebrated feast of the year”.¹⁴⁵ Thus, he shows that Estonian traditions are becoming more Nordic. Kaljulaid, when speaking in Helsinki about digitalisation and remote work, says in 2018: “So, our people can basically work everywhere in the world, without ever leaving the Nordics – which truly is the best place in the world where to live, as you all very well know”.¹⁴⁶ In addition to the quotation from Kaljulaid, other statements declaring that Estonians reside in the Nordics occur. Tallinn is for example referred to as a “Nordic capital”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, “The President of the Republic of Estonia Independence Day” (speech, Tallinn, February 24, 2011), Office of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, <https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/5701-the-president-of-the-republic-of-estonia-independence-day-24-february-2011-/index.html> (Accessed 2021-03-20).

¹⁴⁴ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, “President Ilves at the Opening of the Estonian-Turkish Business Seminar” (speech, Tallinn, October 10, 2008), Office of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, <https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/2645-president-ilves-at-the-opening-of-the-estonian-turkish-business-seminar-in-tallinn-estonia/index.html> (Accessed 2021-03-25).

¹⁴⁵ Toomas Hendrik Ilves, “The President of the Republic on December 31, 2000, and on January 1, 2001” (speech, Tallinn, December 31, 2000), Office of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=3746> (Accessed 2021-03-02).

¹⁴⁶ Kersti Kaljulaid, “President Kersti Kaljulaid’s keynote speech at the Northern Light’s Summit” (speech, Helsinki, June 29, 2018), Office of the Estonian President, <https://president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/14440-president-kersti-kaljulaid-keynote-speech-at-the-northern-light-summit/index.html> (Accessed 2021-03-12).

¹⁴⁷ Arnold Rüütel, “The President of the Republic at the Festive Dinner in Honour of H.E. The President of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, and Mrs. Semra Sezer” (speech, Tallinn, April, 18, 2002), Office

In some speeches, Estonians are also described as Scandinavians. Sweden, and to a lesser extent Denmark, are discussed, but the Nordic country most predominantly mentioned in the speeches is Finland. Ties based on linguistic similarities, mythology and values are highlighted, and the metaphor of a cultural bridge between Estonia and Finland is frequently mentioned. The special relationship with Finland can be found throughout the whole time period, but is especially noticeable around the turn of the millennium. In a few speeches in 2001, the two countries are described as brothers. Estonia and Finland are depicted as belonging to a strong Finno-Ugric solidarity. Even though Hungarian is also a Finno-Ugric language, Hungarians are only mentioned once as being related to Estonians.

Geographically, Estonia is relatively often described as being situated in Northern Europe. Similarly to the Nordic characteristics, Estonia is ascribed with “Northern characteristics”, for example in sentences such as “our small country, peaceful in a Northern way”.¹⁴⁸ Although interchangeable in some speeches, the term “Northern” often encompasses a greater area and includes countries such as Latvia.

In 2001, Rützel states that “Finland still sees Estonia as the northernmost bridgehead of the Central European cultural space, whereas for Estonia, Finland has been the gate to Scandinavia”.¹⁴⁹ This does not only showcase Estonia’s wish to get closer to countries belonging to the Nordics, but also an external image of Estonia’s regional belonging. However, that Estonia is a Central European country is not solely expressed from a foreign perspective. In fact, several speeches from the 1990s and early 2000s contain unifying phrases such as “Estonia and other Central European countries”¹⁵⁰. In some cases, this is expanded to “other Central and East European countries”.¹⁵¹ When Eastern Europe is added, the topic of

of President Arnold Rützel, <https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=15945> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

¹⁴⁸ Arnold Rützel, “The President of the Republic at the Czech Institute for International Relations” (speech, Prague, May 2, 2002), Office of President Arnold Rützel, <https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=16409> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

¹⁴⁹ Arnold Rützel, “On Strategy of the Life Environment in the 21st Century Estonia” (speech, Turku, November 21, 2001), Office of President Arnold Rützel, <https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=12151> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

¹⁵⁰ Meri, “Address by H.E. Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia, at a Matthiae-Supper in Hamburg”.

¹⁵¹ Arnold Rützel, “Address by the President of the Republic at the Small Enterprise Forum ‘Entrepreneur, Local Government and state – is Cooperation possible?’” (speech, Valjala, November 11, 2003), Office of President Arnold Rützel, <https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=40928> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

the speech almost exclusively includes the whole post-communist area of Europe. Estonian presidents thus see Estonia as a Central, not Eastern, European country, for the most part, at least in modern times.

Central and Eastern Europe is mostly mentioned in a comparative context, i.e., the Estonian presidents point out how far their country has come in terms of economic and democratic development, compared to other countries with a communist past. Noteworthy is that these kinds of comparisons end in 2004, coinciding with the EU and NATO accession. It seems thus as if the Estonian presidents only have discussed this aspect of the Estonian regional identity as a way of promoting their country and to facilitate the accession process.

During roughly the same time frame, the Estonian presidents also discussed their country as either already being part of the European identity or wanting to re-join this cultural community. On the one hand, Rützel mentions in a speech from 2001 that “we want to become an inseparable part of the new, democratic, and integrated Europe”.¹⁵² On the other hand, he says in a speech four years earlier that “[d]espite Estonia’s absence from the political map of Europe for nearly fifty years, there has never once been any reason to question Estonia’s belonging to Europe”.¹⁵³ The analogy of Estonia being erased from the map of Europe due to the Soviet occupation reoccurs in a few other speeches as well. In some speeches, the metaphor of Estonia being a bridge between different parts of Europe appear. The opposing sides are mostly east and west, but also EU and Russia, or protestant and orthodox.

5.1.2 Summary

The Baltic region has been present throughout the entire examined time period, but with a slightly bigger emphasis in the 1990s and early 2000s. The most commonly used argument for this grouping is the shared history of the Soviet occupation, the Baltic Way and the regaining of independence. Despite some raised concerns about whether unity with Latvia and Lithuania

¹⁵² Arnold Rützel, “President of the Republic at the presentation of the credentials By H.E. Joseph M. De Thomas, Ambassador of the United States of America” (speech, Tallinn, December 11, 2001), Office of President Arnold Rützel, <https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=12436> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

¹⁵³ Arnold Rützel, “Estonia – a Centre of Northern Europe” (speech, Crans Montana, June 27, 1997), Office of President Arnold Rützel, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=4380> (Accessed 2021-06-13).

is good for Estonia's chances of becoming an EU and NATO member, it is argued that because of the shared history, contemporary cooperation is self-evident. The Baltic Sea region is also mentioned throughout the time period as a historically justified region.

A theme that occurred a few times during the 1990s was the notion of Baltics as inseparable "sister states". The family related metaphors did not reappear until the 2010s, but then in a more moderate way, using words like "half-brothers" and "relatives", and acknowledging cultural differences between the countries.

Another major regional belonging in the Estonian discourse is the Nordics. Especially around the turn of the millennium, Finland is highlighted as a country that has significantly close cultural ties with Estonia. The presidents speak of a Finnish bridge, emphasise linguistic similarities and refer to Finland as a "brother". The family metaphor is thus not only reserved for Latvia and Lithuania.

The other Nordic countries are also seen as important. The Nordics as a region is presented as a goal, especially during the early 2000s. Towards the end of the decennium, and during the 2010s, President Ilves refers back to this, and claims that Estonia has succeeded in obtaining this, or is at least on the way to do so. The claim that Estonia is a Nordic country becomes more common after this, and mentions of Nordic characteristics and Tallinn being a Nordic city appear more often.

The speeches from the 1990s and early 2000s also entailed the idea that Estonia is a Central European country, but almost always as a way of demonstrating Estonia's success in comparison to other post-communist states, which might explain why Central Europe is not mentioned as a possible regional identity after the EU and NATO accession in 2004.

During the same time period, the Estonian presidents stress that the country is, and has always been, European. Simultaneously, it is stated that Estonia was forcefully separated from Europe during the Soviet occupation, which means that there was a break in their Europeanness.

Thus, some transformation of the Estonian regional identities can be seen in the speeches. Despite remarks of dissimilarities between Estonia and the other Baltic countries, the strong

Baltic unity continues throughout the examined time period. It is however a little less emphasised after the EU and NATO accession in 2004. An example of this is the fact that the metaphor of the Baltics as siblings in the 1990s is toned down to metaphors of more distant familiar ties. The Nordics is also a consistent regional identity, but Estonia is more confidently described as having fully achieved “Nordicness” from the 2010s and onwards. The discussion of Central European and European identities is discontinued after the NATO and EU accession in 2004.

5.2 Regional identity in the Latvian speeches

Based on the findings in the Latvian speeches, the Baltics is the most important regional identity in Latvia. It is often repeated that Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania form “the three Baltic countries”, and that the Latvians are one of the three Baltic peoples. Unifying phrases such as “Latvia and the Baltics as a whole” and “Latvia and the other two Baltic states” reproduce the existence of, and Latvia’s partaking in, this group. Latvia is also clearly presented as a Baltic country in comparative statements such as when President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in 2006 stresses that Riga both is the biggest capital, and has the biggest airport, in the Baltic nations.¹⁵⁴ During the late 2010s, the word “sisters” was also used a few times to describe Estonia and Lithuania, indicating a close bond between the three countries.

Even though the word “Baltics” in the speeches almost exclusively refer to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, two speeches also discuss a special Baltic unity that only entails Latvia and Lithuania. In a speech from 2001, for example, Vīķe-Freiberga says that Latvia and Lithuania are the “last two surviving nations of Baltic origin”, referring to the two countries’ belonging to the ancient Baltic language group.¹⁵⁵ Estonian, which is a Finno-Ugric language is not related to this group. However, Estonia is included several times when mentioning the Baltics in the same speech. The territorial shape of the region is thus mostly defined as encompassing

¹⁵⁴ Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, “Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, at the Latvia-Israel Business Forum Dan Panorama Hotel” (speech, Tel-Aviv, February 22, 2006), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/speeches-and-interviews/6778-address-by-h-e-dr-vaira-vike-freiberga-president-of-the-republic-of-latvia-at-the-latvia-israel-business-forum-dan-panorama-hotel-tel-aviv-22nd-february-2006> (Accessed 2021-05-21).

¹⁵⁵ Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, “Address by H.E. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, to the Lithuanian Seimas” (speech, Vilnius, March 15, 2001), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/speeches-and-interviews/3979-address-by-h-e-vaira-vike-freiberga-president-of-the-republic-of-latvia-to-the-lithuanian-seimas-15-march-2001> (Accessed 2021-05-20).

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but in some speeches, a kind of cultural and linguistic sub-region within the Baltic region is constructed.

The Latvian presidents make clear that a unity between the Baltic states was created through the “Baltic Way,” and that this unity has been strong ever since. This is especially noticeable during the late 2010s. “History evolves, and we create the future together. Our shared Baltic Way will never end”, President Egils Levits says in a speech in 2019.¹⁵⁶ The same year, he even suggests that he believes that the Baltics are “one of the most united regions in Europe. There are others too, but Baltics is one of the strongest regions in terms of transnational cooperation”.¹⁵⁷ Three years prior, Levits’s predecessor President Raimonds Vējonis illustrates how the long human chain of the “Baltic Way” should inspire Balts today by saying that “it is still important for each of us to feel the other’s shoulder in order to protect our freedom and independence”.¹⁵⁸ The “Baltic Way” can even be an inspiration to other countries, according to President Andris Bērziņš. “The Baltic people made their choice. The Ukrainian people have the same right to choose their own democratic path”, he says in 2014.¹⁵⁹

The Soviet occupation is also frequently mentioned as a shared historic trauma, and just like in the Estonian speeches, the metaphor of being erased from the political map of Europe during this period appear quite a few times. However, whereas the Baltic Way is seen as a foundation for regional unity, the Soviet era is rather treated as just a common experience.

¹⁵⁶ Egils Levits, “Address by H.E. President of Latvia Egils Levits at the event to Mark the 30th Anniversary of the Baltic Way at the Freedom Monument” (speech, Riga, August 23, 2019), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-he-president-latvia-egils-levits-event-mark-30th-anniversary-baltic-way-freedom-monument#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-05-21).

¹⁵⁷ Egils Levits, “Statement of the President of Latvia Egils Levits at the press conference following the meeting of the Baltic heads of state” (speech, Riga, December 17, 2019), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/statement-president-latvia-egils-levits-press-conference-following-meeting-baltic-heads-state#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-05-18).

¹⁵⁸ Raimonds Vējonis, “Speech on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of adoption of Constitutional Law ‘On Statehood of the Republic of Latvia’” (speech, Riga, August 21, 2016), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/speech-occasion-25th-anniversary-adoption-constitutional-law-statehood-republic-latvia#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-04-29).

¹⁵⁹ Andris Bērziņš, “Statement of H.E. Mr Andris Bērziņš, President of Latvia, at the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, New York, September 25, 2014), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/newyork/latvia-in-the-un/statements-at-the-general-assembly-general-debate/47727-statement-of-president-of-latvia-andris-berzins-at-the-69th-session-of-the-united-nations-general> (Accessed 2021-06-25).

Apart from shared fates throughout the twentieth century, very few examples of special characteristics or other things creating a togetherness between the Baltic states are mentioned. In a speech from 1996, President Guntis Ulmanis admits that a Baltic identity is not easily defined, but that it includes knowing the importance of working together.¹⁶⁰ At a Baltic folklore festival in 2015, Vējonis calls the festival a tradition that “enables us to have a new look at the values that make up the common cultural heritage of the Baltic nations, and the fact that we would not be the ones who we are now without each other”.¹⁶¹ Folklore can thus be seen as an example of a common cultural expression, but Vējonis does not further elaborate on the mentioned common values.

In 1997, Ulmanis mentions that “we often hear doubts about the very existence of the Baltic co-operation and whether it is welcome at all”, but later claims that Baltic cooperation will forever continue to be important in all three countries.¹⁶² In 2020, Levits argues that the Baltic unity “will never be overshadowed by minor economic disputes or healthy competition against one another. In the eyes of the world, we are a kind of a trinity, and it is good for us because our interests are very much aligned”.¹⁶³ The claim that there is a strong Baltic unity has thus remained unchallenged.

Around the turn of the millennium, but also occasionally in later years, cooperation within the Baltic Sea region, mainly regarding security, economy and trade, is frequently discussed as well. It is stressed that due to different fates in history, the states in the region have developed differently, but to some extent, the countries are described as sharing similar traits such as being hard-working. In a speech from 1997, Ulmanis states that “[t]he Baltic Sea region is marked also by general human values which are important for entire Europe – stability,

¹⁶⁰ Guntis Ulmanis, “A Time for Latvia – A Time for Europe?” (speech, London, November 12, 1996), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/speeches-and-interviews/4203-a-time-for-latvia-a-time-for-europe-address-by-h-e-guntis-ulmanis-the-president-of-latvia-at-the-royal-institute-for-international-affairs-chatham-house-12-november-1996> (Accessed 2021-06-03).

¹⁶¹ Raimonds Vējonis, “Address by the President of Latvia at the International Folklore Festival Baltica” (speech, Rēzekne, July 18, 2015), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-international-folklore-festival-baltica#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-04-29).

¹⁶² Guntis Ulmanis, “Modern Latvia in the New Europe” (speech, Stockholm, November 25, 1997), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/speeches-and-interviews/4197-modern-latvia-in-the-new-europe-address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-latvia-mr-guntis-ulmanis-to-the-swedish-foreign-policy-institute-stockholm> (Accessed 2021-06-03).

¹⁶³ Egils Levits, “Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the opening of exhibition ‘Baltic Appeal to the United Nations’” (speech, Riga, September 18, 2020), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-egils-levits-opening-exhibition-baltic-appeal-united-nations#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-05-15).

democracy, co-operation and welfare”.¹⁶⁴ In some speeches, it is also argued that the economic and political cooperation of the region will be beneficial for the entire European continent.

Just as in Estonia, the concept of Latvia being a strategic bridge in the central parts of Europe is mentioned, especially during the first three decades of the material. In addition to being a “bridge”, Latvia is referred to as a “springboard”, “crossroads” and a “link”. This is used as an argument for foreign businesses to invest in Latvia, as the country supposedly has a good understanding of, and close relations to, the markets in both Western and Eastern European countries. Therefore, the speeches containing this metaphor are held in front of international audiences. Interestingly, Levits argues against the bridge metaphor in two speeches. In 2019, he says that “[w]e are an integral part of the West and of Europe, and not some kind of bridge between the West and the East. I decline such a metaphor strictly”.¹⁶⁵ A year later, he states that a bridge is no longer necessary, and that Latvia should consider itself to be a Western country.¹⁶⁶ Thus, the perceived regional role of Latvia has changed towards the end of the 2010s.

Latvia is also described as a Northern European country, predominantly from late 1990s until mid-2000s. In 2006, Vīķe-Freiberga says “Riga is also Northern Europe’s Art Nouveau capital and one of the ‘greenest’ cities in the region”.¹⁶⁷ That Riga is the “Art Nouveau capital” of Northern Europe is mentioned multiple times as a selling point for Latvia. In the cases where Latvia is said to be Northern European, it is also seen as beneficial for trade and financial cooperation. Regarding cultural and historic ties, Finland is the Nordic country most prevalent in the speeches.

¹⁶⁴ Guntis Ulmanis, “Address by Mr Guntis Ulmanis, the President of the Republic of Latvia, at the Official dinner hosted by Mr Kocheril Narayanan, the President of the Republic of India” (speech, New Delhi, October 19, 1997), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/speeches-and-interviews/4210-address-by-mr-guntis-ulmanis-the-president-of-the-republic-of-latvia-at-the-official-dinner-hosted-by-mr-kocheril-narayanan-the-president-of-the-republic-of-india-new-delhi-19-october-1997> (Accessed 2021-06-03).

¹⁶⁵ Egils Levits, “Address by the H.E. President of Latvia Mr Egils Levits, Assuming the Office at the Saeima” (speech, Riga, July 8, 2019), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-he-president-latvia-mr-egils-levits-assuming-office-saeima#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-05-18).

¹⁶⁶ Egils Levits, “Remarks by the President of Latvia Egils Levits to the German-Baltic Chamber of Commerce in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania” (speech, Riga, February 26, 2020), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/remarks-president-latvia-egils-levits-german-baltic-chamber-commerce-estonia-latvia-lithuania#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-05-16).

¹⁶⁷ Vīķe-Freiberga, “Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, at the Latvia-Israel Business Forum Dan Panorama Hotel”.

“I believe that our generation’s mission is to keep forging our country into highly-developed, democratic, modern and sustainable North-European state governed by the rule of law”, Levits says in 2019.¹⁶⁸ The same year, the Northern dimension of the Latvian regional identity reappears many times. Levits reiterates in several speeches that the goal of Latvia should be to become Northern European, something that seems synonymous with having various positive traits. In another speech, Levits says that “[w]e all agree that Latvia should become a prosperous and safe Nordic country”.¹⁶⁹ Latvia is not only Northern European in this example, but also Nordic. Northern Europe and the Nordics has thus become a positive other and an inspiration in the Latvian regional identity.

In addition to Baltic and Nordic, Central and Eastern Europe is also mentioned as a possible regional identity. “Central and Eastern European countries are acquiring the experience that the Western countries have accumulated over the decades since Second World War. We were denied that period of time”, Ulmanis states in 1998.¹⁷⁰ It is often acknowledged that Latvia shares history with other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and that they have faced similar challenges both before and after joining the EU and NATO. Unifying expressions such as “Latvia and all the other countries in Central and Eastern Europe” can be found throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, and there are some instances of comparisons between Latvia and the other Eastern and Central European countries as well, however not to the same extent as in the Estonian speeches. The tendency is to categorise Latvia as a Central European, rather than an Eastern European country.

Regardless of if Latvia is Central, Eastern, or Northern, it is clear throughout the findings that Latvia should be seen as a European country. “Latvia and the other Baltic countries have

¹⁶⁸ Egils Levits, “Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the reception marking the 101st Anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia” (speech, Riga, November 17, 2019), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-egils-levits-reception-marking-101th-anniversary-proclamation-republic-latvia#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-05-15).

¹⁶⁹ Egils Levits, “Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at freedom monument” (speech, Riga, November 18, 2019), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-egils-levits-freedom-monument-18-november-2019#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-05-15).

¹⁷⁰ Guntis Ulmanis, “Integration of Latvia into Europe” (speech, Rome, April 29, 1998), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/speeches-and-interviews/4190-integration-of-latvia-into-europe-address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-latvia-mr-guntis-ulmanis-to-the-foreign-policy-institute-of-italy-rome> (Accessed 2021-06-02).

always been, and always will be European, despite 50 years of Soviet occupation. We want to be at the core of Europe, not in some grey zone”, Vējonis says in 2017.¹⁷¹

5.2.1 Summary

That Latvia is part of the Baltic region has remained unchallenged throughout the entire time period. The Baltic Way is considered as the starting point for this unity, and according to the speeches, the actions of the Balts could be seen as an inspiration for other countries who have had similar experiences. This theme is especially common during the late 2010s. During this decade, Estonia and Lithuania are frequently referred to as Latvia’s “sisters”.

In two speeches, Latvia and Lithuania are seen as a special Baltic unity based on language and ancient cultural ties, but for the most part, “the Baltics” consists of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Latvian discourse.

The Baltic Sea region is discussed as a beneficial cooperation unit, that has some common values, especially during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Latvia is sometimes said to belong to a Northern European regional identity. This is common during the 1990s and 2000s, as a way of promoting the country in trade contexts. In 2019, the Northern European region returns to the Latvian discourse, and is seen as a positive role-model with sound values that Latvia should strive for.

Throughout the examined period, the Latvian presidents consider their country to be European. Most of the presidents stress Latvia’s position as a bridging country between Western and Eastern Europe, which they mean gives the nation an unique advantage. A transformation towards a clearer Western identity has occurred during Levits’ presidential term.

¹⁷¹ Raimonds Vējonis, “Address by the President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis at the opening of the Riga Conference” (speech, Riga, September 29, 2017), Office of the President, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-raimonds-vejonis-opening-riga-conference#gsc.tab=0> (Accessed 2021-04-29).

Finally, during the 1990s and 2000s, Latvia is described as a “Central European”, or sometimes “Central and Eastern European”, nation. This is justified by the common history and challenges after the fall of communism.

The change in the Latvian speeches is thus noticeable in the halt of the discussion about a Central European identity and Northern European identity after the first two decades of the material. From 2019 and onwards however, Northern Europe and the Nordics reappear in the discourse, and are accompanied by a shift towards a Western European identity. The discussion of a Baltic identity remains uninterrupted throughout.

5.3 Regional identity in the Lithuanian speeches

Lithuania is consistently described as a Baltic country throughout the examined time period. Similarly to the Estonian and Latvian speeches, expressions such as “Lithuania and the other Baltic nations” are frequently found. The three countries are also referred to as “Baltic sisters” a few times. President Dalia Grybauskaitė states in a speech, held in Estonia in 2017, that “[o]ur two nations are linked by so many bonds that no wonder they are called ‘Baltic sisters’. Whatever happens, we will be together as always”.¹⁷² Grybauskaitė thus means that there is a strong bond between the Baltic states, and that this bond comes with the promise to forever stay united.

“Today, it is not difficult to respond to the skeptics of Baltic unity: Yes, it is true our countries do not share centuries-long history, but they have been brought together by the common trials and challenges of the 20th century”, President Valdas Adamkus says in a speech from 2008.¹⁷³ Furthermore, he claims that the Baltic states have ended the internal competition of the early days of independence, and now stand together. A year later, he claims that “[t]he very idea of the Baltic region has always been, and still is, multifaceted and contradictory. Various political and cultural visions and perceptions of the region have emerged and existed

¹⁷² Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Toast remarks by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at state dinner hosted by President Kersti Kaljulaid of Estonia” (speech, Tallinn, June 6, 2017), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/toast-remarks-by-president-dalia-grybauskaite-at-state-dinner-hosted-by-president-kersti-kaljulaid-of-estonia/27720> (Accessed 2021-05-11).

¹⁷³ Valdas Adamkus, “The Baltic States in a Changing Europe: Our New Roles and Responsibilities” (speech, Tallinn, April 29, 2008), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/9006> (Accessed 2021-05-17).

throughout history. Different viewpoints and perspectives create different mental images”.¹⁷⁴ The current President Gitanas Nausėda, says in a speech from 2020, that it is time to test the closeness of the Baltic nations. “Is it limited to festive declarations only? Can it withstand the challenges of economic and financial solidarity?”, he asks.¹⁷⁵ Apart from these instances, the strong bond between the Baltic nations remain unquestioned. The Lithuanian presidents occasionally bring up scepticism, but usually downplay any animosities between the countries and choose to focus on cooperation.

As their Estonian and Latvian counterparts, the Lithuanian presidents point to history when explaining how this close cooperation came about. The dominant events in the material are the Soviet occupation and the Baltic Way. The European map that both Estonia and Latvia allegedly have been deleted from occur in Lithuanian speeches as well.

According to Adamkus, the shared history is a vital part of a regional Baltic identity. He argues in 2008, that the identity was “re-discovered and re-established” during the Baltic Way.¹⁷⁶ In the same speech he says that the identity was “born in a land by the Baltic Sea where our common ancestors arrived thousands of years ago and where they confronted and conquered many mutual challenges”. Here Adamkus hints at a Baltic unity that existed long before the twentieth century, which contradicts the view, earlier also expressed by Adamkus himself, that the Baltic region cannot be justified by ancient emotional ties. Older history is otherwise not extensively discussed.

“Let the courage of resistance fighters, the resolve of dissidents and the unity of the Baltic Way guide our steps forever”, Grybauskaitė says, in 2009, at the opening of an exhibition

¹⁷⁴ Valdas Adamkus, “Address by H.E. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, at the International Conference ‘The Baltics as an Intersection of Civilizational Identities’” (speech, Tallinn, April 29, 2008), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, http://www.adamkus.lt/en/activities/speeches/address_by_h.e._valdas_adamkus_president_of_the_republic_of_lithuania_at_the_international_conference_the_baltics_as_an_intersection_of_civilizational_identities.html (Accessed 2021-05-17).

¹⁷⁵ Gitanas Nausėda, “State of the Nation Address by Gitanas Nausėda, President of the Republic of Lithuania” (speech, Vilnius, June 18, 2020), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://www.lrp.lt/en/media-center/news/state-of-the-nation-address-by-gitanas-nauseda-president-of-the-republic-of-lithuania/34260> (Accessed 2021-06-01).

¹⁷⁶ Valdas Adamkus, “Toast by the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Mr. Valdas Adamkus, at the State Dinner Hosted by the President of Estonia, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, and Mrs. Evelin Ilves” (speech, Tallinn, April 29, 2008), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/9010> (Accessed 2021-05-16).

about the Prague Spring.¹⁷⁷ The same year, she also claims that “[t]he Baltic Way signifies our past, present and future. For us, it is a moral and spiritual standard of our relationship with the world and ourselves [...]”.¹⁷⁸ History is given the role of a moral guide, something that should encourage Lithuanians and other Balts and lead them in the right direction. The Baltic history, especially the road to independence and democracy, can also serve as a guide for other post-communist countries, according to Adamkus. During the mid-2000s, he mentions this opportunity several times, and argues that it is the Baltic nations’ responsibility to help countries like Ukraine and Georgia to develop as successfully as the Baltics. In 2005, Adamkus says that “our democratic know-how is required in the Black Sea region”.¹⁷⁹ The same year, he also says that “[w]e are prepared to share our experience both today, and tomorrow” to nations hoping to achieve a development similar to the ones in the Baltic countries.¹⁸⁰ In another speech Adamkus claims that the Baltic nations serve the same purpose for countries in the Black Sea region, that Western countries did for the Baltics in the 1990s.¹⁸¹ During this time, the Baltic nations are prescribed the role of a positive example for countries that have experienced similar historic difficulties.

In 2013, Grybauskaitė calls the Baltic Way a “symbol of Baltic courage, strength and unity”, and says that the same cooperativeness was shown when the three countries worked towards memberships in the EU and NATO.¹⁸² In 2005 and 2007, Adamkus says that “one for all and all for one” has been the motto for the Baltic states in international negotiations, which further

¹⁷⁷ Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Remarks by President D. Grybauskaitė at the opening of the exhibition ‘The Aftermath of Prague Spring and Charter 77 in Latvia/the Baltics’” (speech, Prague, August 21, 2009), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/remarks-by-president-d.grybauskaite-at-the-opening-of-the-exhibition-the-aftermath-of-prague-spring-and-charter-77-in-latvia-the-baltics/6731> (Accessed 2021-05-13).

¹⁷⁸ Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Address by President D. Grybauskaitė at Special Parliamentary Sitting Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Baltic Way” (speech, Vilnius, August 23, 2009), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/address-by-president-d.-grybauskaite-at-special-parliamentary-sitting-celebrating-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-baltic-way/6734> (Accessed 2021-05-13).

¹⁷⁹ Valdas Adamkus, “Discovering Terra Democratica in Eastern Europe and Beyond: Successes, Challenges and the Way Forward” (speech, Chicago, September 19, 2005), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/5982> (Accessed 2021-05-20).

¹⁸⁰ Valdas Adamkus, “Speech of President of the Republic of Lithuania at the meeting with members of French MEDEF” (speech, Paris, October 7, 2005), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/6032> (Accessed 2021-05-20).

¹⁸¹ Valdas Adamkus, “Black Sea Vision” (speech, Berlin, October 26, 2005), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/6123> (Accessed 2021-05-20).

¹⁸² Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Toast Remarks by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, at State Dinner in Honor of H.E. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia, and Mrs. Evelin Ilves” (speech, Vilnius, May 27, 2013), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/toast-remarks-by-h.e.-dalia-grybauskaite-president-of-the-republic-of-lithuania-at-state-dinner-in-honor-of-h.-e.-toomas-hendrik-ilves-president-of-the-republic-of-estonia-and-mrs.-evelin-ilves/16246> (Accessed 2021-05-15).

denies any competition in the Baltics.¹⁸³ That the countries need to unite in order to successfully achieve better societies, is heavily highlighted during the 2000s. This is especially noticeable in speeches held in front of foreign audiences, which can be seen as a strategy to reproduce the foreign narrative that the Baltics work together. In 2003, President Rolandas Paksas says that cooperation within infrastructure and economy is important since “many West European investors treat the three Baltic states, which share similar historical development, as a common economic area”.¹⁸⁴ He continues: “I believe that American business people also perceive Lithuania as part of the Baltic region”, thereby stating that Lithuanians are aware of their regional belonging in the eyes of outsiders.¹⁸⁵

Throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, a special unity between Lithuania and Latvia occurs sporadically in the speeches. “Our people are not only neighbors, we are also sister nations. We are the only two Baltic nations in the world, so we have to stand together”, Grybauskaitė says in 2010.¹⁸⁶ The notions that Latvia and Lithuania are sisters, and that they have a unique Baltic identity and culture are expressed multiple times. Both Adamkus and Grybauskaitė, in 2008 and 2012 respectively, refer to “Baltic Unity Day”, a celebration that highlights the cooperation and common heritage of the two nations.¹⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, all speeches that address this special unity are held in a Lithuanian-Latvian setting. When Estonian representatives are present, this narrow definition of Baltic countries is not used, neither in non-Baltic settings. One of the most important similarity between the two countries is

¹⁸³ Valdas Adamkus, “Address of the President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus to the Members of Georgia’s Parliament” (speech, Tbilisi, November 9, 2005), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/6167> (Accessed 2021-05-21).; Valdas Adamkus, “United States and European Union Transatlantic Partnership: Building a Secure and Stable Region in the East of Europe” (speech, August 2, 2007), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/7486> (Accessed 2021-05-23).

¹⁸⁴ Rolandas Paksas, “Presentation by H.E. Rolandas Paksas, President of the Republic of Lithuania, during the Meeting with members of the American Chamber of Commerce” (speech, Vilnius, May 29, 2003), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://paksas.president.lt/en/one.phtml?id=3949> (Accessed 2021-06-07).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Speech by Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, at the Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the Declaration of the Restoration of Latvian Independence” (speech, Riga, May 4, 2010), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/speech-by-h.e.-dalia-grybauskaite-president-of-the-republic-of-lithuania-at-the-commemoration-of-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-declaration-of-the-restoration-of-latvian-independence-riga-4-may-2010/8615> (Accessed 2021-05-15).

¹⁸⁷ Valdas Adamkus, “Joint Statement by the Presidents of the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Latvia to the Third Congress of the Lithuanian-Latvian Forum” (speech, Rēzekne, September 21, 2008), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/9619> (Accessed 2021-05-17).; Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Toast Remarks by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, at the State Dinner in Riga” (speech, Riga, June 12, 2012), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/toast-remarks-by-h.e.-dalia-grybauskaite-president-of-the-republic-of-lithuania-at-the-state-dinner-in-riga/1384> (Accessed 2021-05-14).

language. “Ours are the unique Baltic languages that have challenged the time and preserved their archaic forms and structures”, Adamkus says in 2002.¹⁸⁸ As stated in the findings of the Latvian speeches, this linguistic sub-unity appears in Latvian speeches as well, even if it is not to the same extent as in the Lithuanian speeches.

In 2007, Adamkus mentions that Lithuania and Latvia are part of the Baltic Sea Region and Europe.¹⁸⁹ The former region is often mentioned in speeches from the 2000s and early 2010s as a successful cooperation of the states surrounding the Baltic Sea, and it is emphasised that this region will not only benefit its own members, but also all of Europe. When speaking of the region, the presidents mostly bring up security and economic aspects, but some attempts to justify the region historically and culturally exist. For example, in 1999, Adamkus says that financial cooperation has existed in the area since the Middle Ages, and Grybauskaitė claims in 2010 that the Baltic Sea itself is part of a Baltic Sea Region identity.¹⁹⁰

In the speeches addressing the Baltic Sea Region, Russia is included in the territorial shape of the region. Towards the end of the 2010s, however, Nausėda firmly denies any regional cooperation between Lithuania and Russia. In 2019, when discussing a new suggested geopolitical region stretching from Vladivostok in Russia to the Atlantic Ocean, Nausėda says: “It may sound interesting, but do we have common ground for it? Do we have shared values? The answer is no!”.¹⁹¹ Later that year, he says that “[w]e should not deceive ourselves by speaking optimistically about our biggest neighbor”.¹⁹² Thus, Russia is treated with more

¹⁸⁸ Valdas Adamkus, “Lithuanian-Latvian Cooperation in a New Europe” (speech, Riga, September 3, 2002), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://adamkus.president.lt/en/one.phtml?id=3133> (Accessed 2021-05-28).

¹⁸⁹ Valdas Adamkus, “Statement to mark Baltic Unity Day by Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, and Valdis Zatlers President of the Republic of Latvia” (speech, Vilnius, September 21, 2007), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/8280> (Accessed 2021-05-16).

¹⁹⁰ Valdas Adamkus, “Keynote Address by President Valdas Adamkus of the Republic of Lithuania at the Fourth Annual Stockholm Conference on Baltic Sea Security and Co-operation” (speech, Stockholm, April 11, 1999), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://adamkus.president.lt/en/one.phtml?id=1279> (Accessed 2021-05-30).; Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Opening Address by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, at the Baltic Development Forum Summit” (speech, Vilnius, June 1, 2010), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/opening-address-by-h.e.-dalia-grybauskaite-president-of-the-republic-of-lithuania-at-the-baltic-development-forum-summit/8782> (Accessed 2021-05-13).

¹⁹¹ Gitanas Nausėda, “Speech by the President of the Republic of Lithuania, at the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, New York, September 26, 2019), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://www.lrp.lt/en/media-center/news/speech-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-lithuania-at-the-united-nations-general-assembly/33144> (Accessed 2021-06-03).

¹⁹² Gitanas Nausėda, “Speech by President Gitanas Nausėda at the Annual Lithuanian Foreign Policy Conference” (speech, Vilnius, December 12, 2019), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania,

scepticism in the later years of the material and is established as a clear “other” that is dissimilar to Lithuania.

During the first half of the 2000s, the metaphor of Lithuania as a bridge between East and West occurs multiple times. However, as in the Latvian speeches, this bridge is mainly used to promote opportunities for regional cooperation and business with Lithuania as a strategic hub. For example, Adamkus says in 2001 that “[o]ur trade has been thoroughly restructured to reflect the unique position we occupy as a bridging point between West and East”.¹⁹³

Unlike the Estonian and Latvian counterparts, the Lithuanian speeches do not entail any statements about being a Nordic country. In 2008, Adamkus calls Lithuania “a tiny country in Northern Europe”, but otherwise the nation is not really said to be located in the North.¹⁹⁴ The Nordics start appearing in the speeches during the second half of the 2000s, and are mentioned with varying intensity throughout the 2010s. The region is frequently considered a positive example that Lithuania can look to and learn from. Thus, Grybauskaitė states in 2013, that “[t]he economic standards of the Nordic countries act as a stimulus for the Baltic countries, calling on us to learn in order to achieve a similar quality of life”.¹⁹⁵

Around 2009, some ancient historic ties between the Lithuania and the Nordics, especially Finland, are discussed. This cultural exchange is illustrated through words that are similar in the Baltic and Nordic languages and through closeness to the Baltic Sea.¹⁹⁶ Adamkus also admits some kind of familiarity with the Nordic countries in 2008, when he calls them “Nordic cousins”.¹⁹⁷

<https://www.lrp.lt/en/media-center/news/speech-by-president-gitanas-nauseda-at-the-annual-lithuanian-foreign-policy-conference/33568> (Accessed 2021-06-03).

¹⁹³ Valdas Adamkus, “Address by the President to the participants of the First Roundtable of the Economist Conferences” (speech, London, November 16, 2001), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://adamkus.president.lt/en/one.phtml?id=2520> (Accessed 2021-05-29).

¹⁹⁴ Valdas Adamkus, “Lithuania – A new European Partner for Brazil” (speech, São Paulo, July 18, 2008), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/en/news.full/9401> (Accessed 2021-05-20).

¹⁹⁵ Dalia Grybauskaitė, “Welcome address by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of Lithuania, at the Swedish-Baltic Business Forum” (speech, Vilnius, December 12, 2013), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://grybauskaite.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/welcome-address-by-h.e.-dalia-grybauskaite-president-of-lithuania-at-the-swedish-baltic-business-forum/18284> (Accessed 2021-05-14).

¹⁹⁶ Valdas Adamkus, “Toast by the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Mr. Valdas Adamkus, at the State Dinner” (speech, Turku, April 23, 2009), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, http://www.adamkus.lt/en/activities/speeches/toast_by_the_president_of_the_republic_of_lithuania_mr_valdas_adamkus_at_the_state_dinner.html (Accessed 2021-05-26).

¹⁹⁷ Adamkus, “The Baltic States in a Changing Europe”.

Instead of Nordic, Lithuania is in some cases in the early 2000s perceived as a Western country. “Free Lithuania sees itself today as a country of Western culture. This is how millions of people who visit Lithuania see it, too”, Adamkus says in 2002.¹⁹⁸ Adamkus thus means that free Lithuania, as opposed to occupied Lithuania, has joined a cultural belonging that used to be unattainable. Lithuania as a Western country returns a few times in 2020. “For three decades our ultimate goal was to return back from where we were ripped out by force: the Western world in political, cultural and economic terms”, Nausėda states, and indicates that similarly to being European, Lithuania has historically also been Western.¹⁹⁹

That Lithuania is also considered to be part of a Central and Eastern European region is made clear by the various expressions that link the country to other nations in the region, such as “Lithuania and the other Central European countries”. In fact, in the first half of the 2000s, Lithuania is more often described as Central and Eastern European than Baltic. However, in some speeches, both regional identities are mentioned. For example, in 1996, Brazauskas talks about “the new democracies of Central Europe, including the Baltic states”.²⁰⁰ In a small number of speeches, Lithuania is compared economically with the other Central and Eastern European states, but this is not done extensively. The Central and Eastern European identity is prevalent up until the end of the 2000s, thereafter, Lithuania is not discussed as part of this regional grouping. This confirms Mindaugas Jurkynas’ research, which found that Lithuania was not described as Central or Eastern European in the presidential speeches 2014-2018.

5.3.1 Summary

The Baltic unity has remained relatively unquestioned throughout the examined time period, and same the “sister theme” seen in Estonian and Latvian speeches occur. Twentieth century history, and the Baltic Way in particular, is presented as the origin of this close unity. These common historical actions are also promoted as a possible positive example for countries facing similar conflicts.

¹⁹⁸ Valdas Adamkus, “Address by H. E. Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania, during the official opening of Frankfurt Book Fair” (speech, Frankfurt, October 8, 2002), Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://adamkus.president.lt/en/one.phtml?id=3240> (Accessed 2021-05-28).

¹⁹⁹ Gitanas Nausėda, “State of the Nation Address by Gitanas Nausėda, President of the Republic of Lithuania”.

²⁰⁰ Algirdas Brazauskas, “Address by H.E. Mr. Algirdas Brazauskas” (speech, Brussels, October 16, 1996), NATO, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1996/s961016a.htm> (Accessed 2021-06-17).

This Baltic unity most commonly entails Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, but a special sub-unity between Lithuania and Latvia is expressed during the 2000s and 2010s. This identity is based on the linguistic and historical ties between the two nations.

The Baltic Sea Region also appears as a regional identity throughout the speeches. This collaboration is mostly built on economic and security collaboration though, and is seldomly claimed to have any cultural aspects in common. A change can be seen towards the end of the 2010s, when Russia is explicitly excluded from the identity.

Northern Europe and the Nordics are not very prevalent in the material, but they appear to some extent from the late 2000s to the 2010s. Cultural and historical ties are rarely mentioned, and when they are, they mostly concern Finnish-Lithuanian bonds. The Nordics are generally not seen as a regional identity that Lithuania is part of, but rather as a positive example.

During the early 2000s, Lithuania was sometimes also referred to as a Western European country, an identity label that returns occasionally in 2020. The most mentioned regional identity during the first half of the 2000s however, is Central, and to some extent, Eastern Europe. This unity is said to be built on common experiences during the communist era. As the 2010s started, the expressions of a Central and Eastern European identity came to an end. Within the Central European context, Poland is mentioned as a country that has special bonds with Lithuania, based on history and culture. During the early 2000s, the Western and Central Eastern European identities of Lithuania were combined into a bridge metaphor that indicates that the country is rooted in both cultures. This was mostly expressed in business related circumstances.

A few changes can therefore be seen. The heavy emphasis on Central European regional identity during the first half of the 2000s disappears at the end of the decade, together with the occasional references to a Western European identity. The few mentions of the Nordics also fade out within the 2000s. The only regional identity to make a comeback is the Western European, that is brought up a few times in 2020. Similarly to Estonia and Latvia, the Baltic identity remains throughout the time period.

6. Discussion

In the following chapter, the findings in the three countries will be compared in order to answer the two research questions posed in the beginning of this thesis.

How are Baltic and Nordic regional identities discussed in the speeches of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian presidents 1991-2021?

The Baltics is the most prevalent regional affiliation in all countries, and the Baltic Way seems to be generally accepted as a starting point for this unity. That the Soviet Union had already defined the region through *Pribaltika* is not mentioned, instead the construction of the regional identity is considered a bottom-up act of resistance and solidarity against a common oppressor. According to Paasi's theory, the Baltics would then be a "new region", based on the fact that it is seldomly perceived as an ancient bond, but rather a modern necessity. It is also based on a political wish to facilitate cooperation, which is in accordance with how Paasi explains the origin of new regions. The "sub-region" compiled of only Latvia and Lithuania, however, is argued for in terms of an "old region", because of its perceived ancient roots. Since this regional identity is only discussed in Latvian-Lithuanian contexts, it can be assumed that it is not meant to replace the Baltic identity that includes Estonia, it is merely a sub-unity based on older linguistic and cultural ties.

All states acknowledge the influence of the wish of Western powers, and realise that a Baltic unity is preferable in the negotiating processes for NATO and EU accession. The discourse has thus been influenced by surrounding events, and Western political actors have been given the power to establish the region as nationally and internationally recognised within the discourse. The Estonian speeches contain the most sceptical statements regarding this, and are also the only ones wherein cultural difference between the three countries are explicitly stated. The Latvian presidents are the ones most confidently denying negative effects of cooperation, which confirms the view expressed in the academic discourse, that Latvia is the country that is most comfortable with the Baltic regional identity.

In the academic discourse about Baltic identity discussed in chapter 3.2, the Baltics seem to have left their identity of bridge states in favour of a more western bridgehead identity, that distances them from Eastern Europe. In the material, this can only be found in the Latvian speeches, and only in the later years. The Estonian and Lithuanian presidents do not express the same wish to change their bridging role, instead, they gradually stop using the metaphor. The bridge metaphor is often used as a way of promoting the transregional competence of the

specific country in an international setting. When this is no longer needed, the uniqueness of the Baltic states' position is no longer emphasised.

According to Paasi's theory, the Baltic Sea region would be considered a new region. The presidents in the three countries agree that cooperation within this region is good for the development of their own states, and therefore actively speak in favour of the Baltic Sea region. Close cooperation within the region would raise the competitiveness of the involved countries. Arguments include that this unity would be beneficial for the whole continent, and in some cases, that there is evidence of historic exchange between the countries surrounding the sea, that has resulted in some shared culture and traits. This seems thus to be a case of a new region-building that makes use of already existing ties of an old region. The Latvian speeches do not discuss shared history as a justification of the region, instead, they highlight that history has taken different turns in the Baltic Sea countries, but other than that, the views of Baltic presidents seem to harmonise regarding this region.

In all Baltic countries, the Nordics are seen as a positive other. The Baltic presidents associate the region with traits such as modernity, sustainability and good economic standards, that their countries could learn from. For Estonia and Latvia, the wish to become a part of this regional unity is expressed. In the Latvian case, "becoming Nordic" seems to mean establishing a society with these positive traits, rather than becoming a part of the territorial shape of the Nordic region. The focus lies more on societal and economic benefits than cultural unity. In Estonia on the other hand, the country is often explicitly said to be Nordic both geographically and culturally, a finding that differs from Jurkynas's claim that no Baltic country considers itself to be Nordic. That the Lithuanian presidents never express any wish to "become Nordic", could be related to their lack of historic interactions with the Nordic countries. Estonia and Latvia, who have both been under Swedish and Danish rule may consider themselves more closely related to the Nordics, and may find that the gap between the Nordic region and their country is smaller. The Nordic region including the Baltic countries can be considered an old region in the Estonian speeches, and a new region in the Latvian and Lithuanian.

Finland is considered the link between the Baltic states and the Nordics, and to some extent, all three countries discuss a cultural and historic bond to the country. Unsurprisingly, this is most evident in the Estonian speeches. Sweden and Denmark, that have also had historic

contacts with the Baltics, are not extensively mentioned. Linguistic ties, but also more relatable history, might be some causes for a closer identification with Finland, compared to other Nordic countries.

Another regional identity that also appears in all countries is Central and Eastern Europe. Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians agree that their countries are Central, rather than Eastern European, but otherwise, this region is given different importance in the three states. In the Estonian speeches, Central and Eastern Europe is mostly used as an object of comparison, that shows how Estonia is excelling in integrating into Western standards. As stated in the findings, Central and Eastern Europe disappear from the regional discourse of the Estonian presidents when NATO and EU memberships are achieved. It can thus be assumed that the Estonian presidents do not identify as closely with this region, and that they prefer to highlight Estonia's belonging to other regions.

In contrast, in the earlier Lithuanian speeches, the country is clearly presented as part of Central Europe. History is said to have created a close bond that has resulted in experiences and characteristics that are considered unique for the region. Within the region, Lithuania also has a special relationship with Poland, built on even older shared history and culture. Why the Lithuanian speeches suddenly cease to discuss the Central European identity cannot be said for certain. Like other Central European countries, Lithuania had joined both EU and NATO by the time, which may have given Lithuania a sense of security that led to a shift of focus.

A Western regional identity can only be found in the Lithuanian and Latvian material. In both cases, this can be seen as a way of distancing themselves from Russia and the past. This is noticeable in the Lithuanian speeches already in the early 2000s, when Adamkus says that free Lithuania chooses to consider itself to be a Western country, but the connection to a perceived Russian threat is stronger towards the end of the 2010s. In the Latvian case, the sudden Western identity is a way of shifting focus from the bridging role, and thereby cutting the ties with Eastern Europe.

How has the official discussion about regional identity changed in the three countries during the time period?

Overall, the regional identity in the Baltic countries seems to change with the needs of foreign politics, and depending on the context wherein the speech is held. An event that has had major

impact on the discourse is the negotiation process and accession of the Baltic states into the EU and NATO. As stated in the chapter about Baltic identity in the academic discourse, outwardly visible collaboration was deemed important in order to seem ready for a membership. This is evident in the material as well. The Baltic presidents present their countries as parts of Baltic and Central European unities, possibly with the intent to seem more integrated. This can be seen as an extension of Jurkynas's conclusion that regional insecurity brought on by Russia is the main driving force in the construction of regional identities. The wish for EU and NATO memberships are also a wish for security and a greater distance from the past.

The Baltics has been one of the most influential regional identities in all three countries. Even if the relevance, and sometimes the existence, of this unity has been questioned in both Estonia and Lithuania, it continues to be a topic throughout the time period. The Central European regional identity, that similarly to the Baltic is built on shared historic experiences and political difficulties, has not remained part of the self-perceived identity of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian presidents. Instead, it has gradually been toned down or completely disappeared from the discourse. An achieved acceptance into the European political community could have brought about this change. When the Baltics, and many other post-communist countries, have joined a greater community, the need for smaller scale cooperation is not as big.

Towards the end of the 2010s, there is a shift in the Baltic countries' perceptions of their regional identity. In Latvia and Lithuania, a Western European identity is emphasised, and in Estonia, it is claimed that the nation has finally reached the goal of becoming Nordic. The current Latvian president starts focusing more on Northern Europe as well. Thus, there is a tendency in the discourses of the presidential speeches to associate the Baltic countries with European regions that have not been as affected by the Soviet Union. Instead of discussing the solidarity between Central and Eastern European nations, the Baltic presidents identify with regions that, in their opinion, have admirable traits which were allowed to develop freely in democratic countries. The Baltic regional identity, however, is still in place.

7. Conclusions

The Baltic identity appear continuously throughout the entire examined time period and in all countries. Even if some variations occur in the discourse about the Baltic unity, the Baltic presidents seem to have relatively similar views on the matter. It is agreed in the discourse that Baltic unity was created during the Baltic Way, as a result of the solidarity of the Baltic people. An event that similarly to the Baltic Way has been important in the shaping of the regional identity discourse is the years leading up to EU and NATO accession. The presidents also acknowledge outside political powers as an influential factor, the demonstrated will to cooperate and integrate into EU and NATO standards increases the chances of a preferable outcome in the negotiation processes. The benefits within economy and security that come with a united Baltic Sea region are also discussed in similar terms in all countries. Thus, the Baltic identity is discussed as a “new region”, that was created through the needs of cooperation against oppression, and cooperation to join desired alliances.

The Nordics have only been a consistent part of the regional identity discourse in one country, namely Estonia. Both in the Estonian and in the Latvian speeches, the wish to be part of a Nordic identity is mentioned, but in Latvia, this topic was only present from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s and from 2019 and onwards. The focus also differs in the two countries. In the Estonian speeches, the presidents present the Nordics as a cultural region wherein Estonia is a self-evident part, whereas the Latvian presidents rather see it as a societal model they wish to adopt. The Lithuanian presidents do not extensively talk about a Nordic, or Northern European, identity for their nation. Instead, the Nordics are considered a positive other. In all three countries, Finland is mentioned as the Nordic country that is most closely tied to the Baltics.

In addition to the Baltics and the Nordics, Central and Eastern European identity was discussed in all three countries. The political reality created the need to emphasise regional unity and cooperation in the Baltics, as well as Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. When EU and NATO memberships were achieved, the Central European regional identity changed character in the discourse. The wish to get closer to Western and Northern Europe trumped Central European solidarity based on shared history. However, the current Latvian president Egils Levits is the only speaker outrightly declaring that Latvia should not be considered a Central or Eastern European country.

A Western identity can be found both in a few Lithuanian speeches from the early 2000s, and in very recent Lithuanian speeches. In the Latvian material, it is only present in the three last years of the examined time period, coinciding with the expressed will to stop being a bridging country between the East and the West. Thus, during the later years of the examined material, Latvia and Lithuania have moved their perceived regional identities in a Western, and in Latvia's case, also a Northern direction.

Less change can be found in the Estonian speeches. When discussing a Central and Eastern European identity, the Estonian presidents were more moderate than their neighbouring counterparts, and greater importance has consistently been given to the Nordics, the Baltics and Europe.

In further research, it would be interesting to include a wider material. Speeches by other politicians, including those in opposition, could give a more nuanced picture. By examining news articles and comments from the public, the findings would probably give an even broader picture. Presidents, and other politicians, have a perception of regional identity that is mostly based on the political needs of the country, whereas the public might base their opinions on emotional and cultural ties. It would therefore be interesting to examine if the same regional identities occur on other platforms. Therefore, further research would benefit from a material that includes Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian citizens, which for example could be collected via interviews or polls. This would also allow an analysis of how the statements of the presidents interact with society, i.e., if they are discursively reproduced amongst the population, or if regional identity is discussed differently outside a political setting.

It could also be interesting to compare countries in other regions such as Benelux or the Nordics to see if their self-perceived regional identity is as multifaceted as in the Baltic countries, or if they have a unified understanding of the regional identities of their nations.

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