

NATO or Not

Understanding Sweden's NATO membership application using a synthesis of the
Multiple Streams Framework and Securitization theory

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1.1 Abstract.....	3
1.2 Introduction.....	3
1.3 Background.....	4
1.4 Research Question.....	7
2.1 Past studies.....	8
2.2 Theory.....	9
2.3 Material & Method.....	13
3.1 Analysis.....	15
3.1.1 PROBLEM STREAM.....	15
3.1.2 POLICY STREAM.....	18
3.1.3 POLITICS STREAM.....	21
3.2 Conclusions.....	27
3.2.1 PROBLEMS.....	28
3.2.2 POLICIES.....	31
3.2.3 POLITICS.....	32
3.2.4 FINAL THOUGHTS.....	33
3.3.1 FURTHER RESEARCH.....	35
4.1 References.....	36

1.1 Abstract

Using a framework for analyzing security policy consisting of a synthesis of the Multiple Streams Framework by Kingdon (2014) and Securitization theory as described by Balzacq (2010), this study aims to explain the process of Sweden's national security policy between 2014 and 2022. Such an investigation has relevance particularly for studies of peace, security and policy processes, since it relates to the broader question of what conditions make military alignment possible or impossible. Drawing on Securitization theory, the study concludes, among other things, that there are a number of tools within the speech-repertoire of decision-makers that contribute disproportionately much to the likelihood of successful securitization, including what this study calls *ideological dichotomization*, *problem evolution* and *scope expansion*. Further, the role of the policy-community within the security-policy process was shown to be less impactful than predicted by the Multiple Streams Framework.

1.2 Introduction

International relations has always been a highly complex field of study. With innumerable moving parts, discerning something as fundamental as the actors, motivations and processes involved in macro-scale politics remains challenging. To a justifiably significant degree, peace and warfare have long been central topics in the field. As a subset of these topics, military cooperation has played an important role as a possible enabler of a sense of security in an otherwise anarchic world stage.

Understanding when and how cooperation between states is possible within the international system is a high stakes question with relevance to both decision makers as well as the average person, in that it often concerns our most basic instincts of survival. It is said that in the absence of a world police, states seek to secure their safety and sovereignty, and the solution of allying themselves with other states is, at least on its face, one way of achieving such security. For this reason, it is perhaps no surprise that organizations that facilitate security through cooperation, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) have grown in membership over time.

Yet, this begs the question of what states seek security *from*. It stands to reason that states are concerned with other states, but it is also clear that not all states pose the same level of threat. Not only are the intentions of other states often obscured, ambiguous and contradictory, but expressions of intent then have to be interpreted by others. What constitutes a threat to a given state, then, is to a non-trivial degree the consequence of a certain perception, not of material reality.

While perceptions generally follow some analysis and thus may well be in line with material reality, there is always the possibility that it may not be. Certainly, we would expect there to be a gap between the two regardless, that can be wider or narrower depending on the accuracy of the analysis. Decision makers on the international stage and their advisors are frequently concerned with these types of judgments, and make decisions, presumably, in concordance with them. In allying themselves in the form of an organization like NATO, it follows that member states have perceived an external threat, and that they have perceived it to be of such nature that it requires military cooperation. In light of this, it's important to understand how some object comes to be understood as a threat, and how the solution of cooperating militarily is produced in response.

1.3 Background

The scope of this project is to examine the context around Sweden's application to NATO in May of 2022. At first glance, the decision to apply for membership may come as a surprise. Historically Sweden has, at least nominally, been opposed to military alliances across the board. The arms length between Sweden and various military alliances is not only rare in the Westphalian international system, but has often been framed as a point of strength rather than weakness – conjuring the image of Sweden as one of the world's so called *normative superpowers*.

It is, of course, a narrative worth taking a critical stance towards. While Sweden has had a long policy of non-alignment, it has several times been *de facto* aligned with one side of a conflict or another, whether by choice or by force. Famously, Sweden let the Wehrmacht transport an infantry division via Swedish railway during the second World War. Further, it has continuously

deepened its relationship with the colloquial ‘West’, and has participated in a number of NATO-led missions over the years.

But while this non-alignment stance has gradually shifted over the post-cold war period to a more militarily involved stance, the country’s rising involvement has continuously been framed as a vehicle to exercise normative, rather than hard power. Following the pledge to spend at least 2 percent of their GDP on defense as part of NATO, where the guarantor of safety ultimately lies in an umbrella of American nuclear warheads (Bringéus & Eriksson 2016, p. 135), that narrative requires revisiting. The expectations that come with NATO membership require a level of international engagement beyond diplomacy that Sweden has hitherto elected to distance itself from.

As late as March of 2022 the Social Democratic leadership were arguing that joining NATO would lead to destabilization, but it wouldn’t take long for that stance to reverse entirely. Undeniably, this reversal has to do with factors such as the outlook of the war in Ukraine at the time; the move by Finland to apply for membership as well; and the shift in public opinion in favor of NATO. While such factors do provide a political rationale for applying for membership, they cannot on their own explain why this moment, of all moments, leads to a response of such proportion. The myriad of feasible solutions to a given problem implies that the final proposal is the result not of necessity, but of picking and choosing based on limited salient information.

It is easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to argue that Sweden’s solution is the only logical one. We can, however, imagine several alternative paths. For one, Sweden could have continued to deepen the already existing relationship between it and NATO short of applying for membership. Second, Sweden could have carved out its own path by deepening cooperation with other states on its own terms – that is, outside the institution of NATO. Third, it could have done nothing, in service of minimizing the risk of destabilization, as was more or less the stance taken by leaders in March. Lastly, we could just as easily imagine Sweden distancing itself from NATO, again with the rationale of wanting to minimize destabilization. Clearly, the path chosen was not an inevitability, but rather the product of a congruence of several factors. That a decision was made

at all is in itself not necessarily puzzling, but the nature, or proportion, of the decision is not easily explained by present narratives.

Similarly, if we understand national security and its threats through a strictly materialist ontology, we can imagine a multitude of moments prior to this one that may just as well have resulted in the same (or a historically comparable) outcome. If we grant that the decision is the only rational response to a vast external threat, how then, for instance, could we explain Sweden's non-alignment during the World Wars, or in the face of Russian expansionism during the Cold War? Were they not periods in history where Sweden had equal reason to now, in view of supposed 'objective threats', to ally itself militarily? Even granting, with regards to the former case, that there was no NATO to ally oneself with, there was still (famously) a slew of military alliances encompassing much of Europe at the time, to the point where Sweden's non-alignment becomes a noteworthy exception to the rule.

To, alternatively, credit the decision of applying to NATO to the change in public opinion only begs the question of why that public opinion has changed. This too, cannot be handwaved away by referring to the war in Ukraine, as we would then need to explain why previous conflicts must have had negligible effect on public opinion. Such a position would suggest, counter-intuitively, that Swedes were not fearful of an invasion during the World Wars; or of nuclear warheads during the Cold War.

Indeed, it seems that most commonly cited positivist explanations seem ill-equipped to alone explain the decision. For this reason, this paper will adopt a more post-positivist lens. The argument is not that these factors aren't driving forces when it comes to the decision to apply per se, but rather that they are in turn socially constructed and are thus contingent on social and discursive developments over time. An event alone is not enough to guarantee a specific outcome, but rather the meaning of an event must be interpreted by actors who then set out to accomplish outcomes in line with their interpretations.

1.4 Research Question

Clearly, that which makes Russia a threat to Sweden is at least in part socially conditioned, that is to say it requires that certain social conditions be present in order for it to be perceived as a threat, independent of material reality. There is also no doubt that public perception has shifted, which in turn has given decision-makers political justification for their solutions. Yet, we must acknowledge that public perceptions are themselves a product of social processes and that the degree, as well as the likelihood, of capitalisation of them on the part of decision-makers varies across different contexts whereby positive public perception of a given proposal does not alone guarantee the success of that proposal.

Seeing as the theory of securitization is fraught with debate about conceptual underdevelopment, a relatively novel synthesis of frameworks will be used to better understand the case, while illustrating a modern methodology for researching the emergence of security threats more broadly. By understanding the case of Sweden applying for membership in NATO in great detail, we can also gain insights about the social conditions necessary for military allyship. In other words, by looking at what the process leading up to Sweden applying for membership in NATO looked like, we can better understand not just the factors driving the decision, but *how* those factors led to the decision and by extension what conditions make possible, or impossible, military cooperation. Specifically, the research question this paper answers is: *How can Sweden's NATO membership application in May 2022 be understood as a securitization process, following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014?*

Part of the underlying goal of the question above, is to conclude the study with examples of different *kinds* of security articulations that in some way or another impacted the likelihood of successful securitization. The term *securitization process* here relates to the specific synthesis of the theories used in this study. Namely, it places the theory of securitization within a larger policy process, hence the term. By consequence, this study will serve to not only examine the case in question, but also to evaluate the application of the theoretical framework and, as such, theoretical shortcomings that this synthesis may present during the study will also be highlighted in the concluding chapter.

2.1 Past studies

Certainly, the decision to apply to join a military alliance in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine speaks volumes about how Sweden sees itself in relation to the international system in the modern day, as demonstrated by Lundqvist (2023) as well as Forsberg (2023). The latter paper, for instance, argues that the decision to join NATO shows that Sweden sees the war in Ukraine “as a conflict of values between democracy and authoritarianism” (Forsberg 2023, p. 94). This ties into the notion that Sweden can be considered a ‘normative superpower’. As the argument goes, what it lacks in manpower it makes up for in disseminating democratic or otherwise progressive values. This of course is often coupled with the narrative of Sweden’s historical non-alignment policy, such as by Nilsson (2009).

Swedish membership would also, as has been shown by Chivvis (2017), unquestionably bring with it an expansion of military capabilities for the alliance. However, this is mainly rooted in the fact that it can “serve an important role in basing aircraft in the event of a military crisis”, not because it boasts a particularly strong military capability in its own right (Chivvis 2017, p. 2). Kannianen (2022) argues that the abolishment of the general draft in Sweden in 2000 is largely responsible for the relatively weak state of Sweden’s national defense in terms of capability, which leaves little option but to apply for membership in NATO in service of defense, especially in light of the Gallup polls supporting it. Together, the studies suggest that the rationale for joining NATO is based chiefly on rational military-strategic considerations.

Lastly, Alberque & Shreer (2022), when discussing what level of involvement we might expect from Sweden, highlight what they consider to be ‘other challenges’ in southern Europe, namely: terrorism and illegal immigration. This link between immigration and national security is one that will come as no surprise to anyone who has followed the discourse surrounding immigration in Sweden (and Europe writ large) over the past decades. It is certain that the member states along the mediterranean perceive these as threats to their security and that they would expect of Sweden a level of assistance in tackling them which it does not provide today. The authors conclude that Sweden is unlikely to engage with these challenges to a significant degree, which might lead to tensions between states.

In summary, the scholarship so far seems united behind the narrative of Sweden as a ‘normative superpower’ whose hand was essentially forced in the face of a worsening security situation in the region. They also generally identify the same threats, namely Russia, with Alberque & Shreer (2022) going a step further by showing that the different focal points between Sweden and other states may lead to internal tensions. These narratives provide the background on which authors base their studies. They answer questions about what kind of actors are involved, what challenges Sweden is facing, what it can provide to its allies, et cetera.

What prior scholarship has yet to do is study the role that securitizing language plays in the policy process, which may shine a critical light on the narratives that provide a political rationale for Sweden’s decision to apply for NATO membership. Instead, they tend to springboard off of already established, ‘ready made’ narratives about Swedish history and identity, like that of the ‘normative superpower’. Furthermore, they often do little to argue why these narratives hold true, resorting instead to rely on the audience recognising them as self-evident truths. It may or may not be the case that Sweden had little to no choice but to join NATO, but at this stage we have reason to remain skeptical about such conclusions, especially seeing as the decision to apply to join NATO seems to be at direct odds with remaining a purely normative superpower. By instead analyzing the event as the result of a securitization process, this project will hopefully provide future studies with the grounds to make comparisons between states, to draw conclusions about the history and future of Sweden, and to better analyze the international security-political nexus of the present.

2.2 Theory

Developed in the 90’s by Ole Waever and others, together dubbed the Copenhagen School, the field of securitisation is a framework for analyzing when and how some referent object comes to be perceived as a threat to the security of a state’s sovereignty or identity. As the argument goes, it follows that a successful securitising act leads to the proposal of a policy aimed at deterring or otherwise blocking the development of the referent object.

Securitisation is borne out of speech act philosophy, in turn inspired by the works of Austin & Searle (Balzacq 2010), wherein focus is placed on the performance of speech; speech is not

objective communication, but rather, it ‘does things’. Speech, in mobilizing metaphors, analogies, stereotypes, image repertoires et cetera inside certain contexts, works to persuade an audience to share the securitising actor’s perception of the referent object. That is to say that the ‘actual threat’ that the referent object presents is not always in unison with what the securitising actor presents, but that a successful securitising act may nonetheless persuade the audience that it is so.

Securitisation divides the speech act itself into two, arguably three distinct parts: (1) Locutionary, or, to say something; (2) illocutionary, the act of saying something; and (3) perlocutionary, to bring about something by saying something (Balzacq 2010). It has been argued that perlocution should be thought of not as part of the speech act itself since it ultimately refers to the consequences of the speech act. As such, much of the focus by the Copenhagen School has instead been placed on the illocution, that is to say, the productive power of the speech event.

Recent scholarship has brought this focus into question, since it implies that speech acts do not require that the securitisation act results in any particular effect in the audience (perlocution), thus, it can not be considered an intersubjective process as has been proclaimed by the Copenhagen School. Following this critique, scholars have devoted time towards developing the theory regarding the relationship between the securitising actor and the audience. Expressed in the above terms, this amounts to studying the relationship between the illocutionary and perlocutionary processes; how securitising language brings about (in)security, where it is understood as something co-produced between the securitising actor and the audience.

Naturally, this has led to a lot of studies investigating what the role and characteristics of the audience is. Most notably, the argument has been raised that the audience should be thought of as consisting of multiple audiences, often requiring different rhetorical approaches on part of the securitising actor in order to be swayed. An easy way to conceptualize this is to consider both the general public and the political elites, for instance, as two camps whose approval are often both required for a securitising move to be successful.

However, the nature of the relationship between the audiences and the securitising actor remains nebulous. We might ask ‘what is the makeup of the different audiences; when is their respective swaying needed for the securitisation to go through; what strategies are best employed for which recipient?’ and so on. In an effort to better understand this, Léonard & Kaunert (2010) suggest we draw on lessons from the public policy field by synthesizing securitisation with Kingdon’s (2014) seminal Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). Kingdon’s MSF is one of most prominent public policy frameworks in use today. It conceptualizes the policy process as consisting of three largely independent streams: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the politics stream.

For a policy proposal to be successful, the three streams must converge within a *window of opportunity*. This can take the form of either an event causing a new problem to appear on the agenda, or changes in the composition of the political stream, such as a change in administration. This window of opportunity is then taken advantage of by a so-called *policy entrepreneur*, which is someone for whom the policy in question is a pet project, as well as someone who is passionate and well connected enough to persuade others within the separate streams.

The problem stream concerns how political problems come to appear on the agenda. A core assumption of the framework is that political problems are constructed, that is to say, events in the world are not problems in and of themselves but must instead be problematised (Kingdon 2014). This problematisation is the product of a decision-maker interpreting – that is to say they place values onto, or employ comparisons or categories to – prevailing conditions, be it long lines at gas stations, smoking, or climate change (Ibid). In Kingdon’s words “[f]or a condition to be a problem, people must become convinced that something should be done to change it” (Kingdon 2014, p. 114). Typically, certain events like a crisis or disaster can serve as an indicator for the decision-makers that a potential political problem is emerging (Kingdon 2014). Once a political problem is part of the agenda, decision-makers continuously monitor the feedback from their constituents, the economy, the media as well as other potential indicators in order to gauge the approval of – or attention towards – a specific problem (Léonard & Kaunert 2010). The audience in the problem stream mainly consists of other decision-makers that the securitising actor (i.e. the policy entrepreneur) are attempting to convince to see the problem their way.

The policy stream refers to the process of policy formation. It is made up of the community of specialists, academics and technocrats that largely “hums along on its own” (Kingdon 2014, p. 117). They produce policy alternatives that fight for survival in a “policy primordial soup”, in which technical feasibility, value congruence, political support and future constraints (e.g. budgetary constraints) select the alternative(s) best fit to solve the problem, much like natural selection (Kingdon 2014, p. 200). In order to fit this set of criteria, successful proposals rarely wholly invent their constitutive elements, instead relying on the recombination of elements in proposals already circulating in the policy stream (Ibid). The audience within the policy stream can be said to be made up of other technocrats and specialists who tend to be convinced by arguments based on the policy’s perceived adherence to the aforementioned criteria (Ibid).

Finally, the politics stream describes the activities and changes within the political sphere including things like changes in national mood and election results (Kingdon 2014, p. 198). Changes in the government of a country often widely influence the political agenda, leading to new problems appearing and old problems fading from view (Kingdon 2014, p. 164). More so than persuasion, the politics stream is characterized by bargaining whereby actors attempt to build coalitions through concessions as well as accepting compromises to gain wider public support (Kingdon 2014, p. 199). Because the major changes in the political stream happen as the result of changes in administration or changes in public mood, the audience can be thought of as composed of decision-makers on the one hand, and the general public on the other (Léonard & Kaunert 2010).

As highlighted by Léonard & Kaunert (2010), there are clear parallels that can be drawn between this framework and the securitisation framework. The policy entrepreneur, for instance, can be recontextualized as the securitising actor who is part of a securitisation (policy) process. In doing so, the audience is made part of a policy process composed of three independent streams characterized by different participants; the audience is effectively split into three categories. It follows by the framework that the different streams require different strategies on the part of the securitising actor in order to be successfully persuaded. As Léonard & Kaunert (2010) puts it:

This has the advantage of allowing for: (1) a more precise operationalisation of the concepts of ‘securitizing actor’ and ‘audience’ and (2) a more refined conceptualisation of ‘the audience’ as comprising different audiences, which respond to different logics of persuasion, but are all inter-linked as they are involved in a single policy-making process (Leonard & Kaunert 2010:69).

Once a particular event happens, the streams may couple within a window of opportunity wherein the perceived problem can be paired with the pet solution of the securitizing actor, leading to the securitising policy proposal coming to fruition.

2.3 Material & Method

In mapping out the three streams, data collection can come in many forms. Prior studies have utilized surveys, interviews, statistical indicators, content and discourse analysis among others as well as mixed-method approaches. To optimize the fit between MSF and securitisation, given that securitisation theory is linguistically driven, it seems most logical to use a theoretical approach rooted primarily in speech, that is to say, a discursively driven approach. At the same time, the MSF invites the usage of other types of data, so while it is hard to pinpoint an exact epistemological positioning, we are closer to a constructivist approach than to a post-structuralist one.

The timespan will begin at – or shortly before – the annexation of Crimea by Russia beginning in the spring of 2014. This was, by most accounts, a turning point in the relationship between Europe and Russia which had since the fall of the Berlin wall been characterized by rivalry more so than outright aggression. This positioning of Russia as a strategic competitor was not only present in the media, but formalized by the EU (Bringéus & Eriksson 2016, p. 137). Following this event, we would expect that securitizing speech from the part of European decision-makers would increasingly focus on Russia and that the nature of these articulations would shift to paint Russia as more and more violent or dangerous. This is not to suggest that the intentions or rhetorical goals of those decision-makers are wrong or right, but to make the point that threats are constructed and that understanding the mechanics of how threats are constructed gives us insights about (among other things) the conditions necessary – or at least sufficient – for military alignment.

Many sources are expected to be in Swedish, which may prove to challenge the validity of such a language-driven approach as this, given that I plan on writing the study in English. However, this study does not intend to map out the discursive field in any exhaustive sense, nor is it intended to mark fine details in speech such that translation errors would have noticeable impacts. Instead, the aim is to draw particular attention towards different securitizing articulations, or, what we might call the securitization repertoire and to see how this repertoire is utilized to aid or impede successful securitization. Examples, drawing on Léonard & Kaunert (2010), are things such as metaphors, anecdotes, comparisons et cetera. All this to say that the conclusions of this study are not contingent on perfect translation, but by sufficient translation, since these tools within the speech repertoire most often transcend the linguistic barrier between Swedish and English. In the rare case that this were to not be the case, it will be highlighted for the reader. To reduce friction in translation, the original Swedish word will sometimes be included in parentheses wherever a particularly difficult to translate word or phrase comes up. Translated sentences and paragraphs will also never be within double quotation marks, but instead within single quotes. In effect, Swedish statements are not directly quoted, but rather paraphrased, emphasizing the fact that meaning is somewhat altered through the translation process.

The extent of the data collection is, as is common with similar methods, flexible in that it aims not to exhaust all possible data but rather to reach sufficiency, where additional data would grant diminishing analytical value, to draw conclusions (Balzacq 2010). Seeing as the aim is to understand the Swedish policy-process, as much data as possible will be limited to Swedish texts. With that said, the Swedish policy-process is to a significant degree embedded within the larger European context and as such cannot be separated entirely from discourse circulating in Europe. Therefore, relevant texts from other sources may be used as part of that larger discourse when necessary with the understanding that they are texts that have relevance for the Swedish policy-process. Speeches made in the European Parliament may, for instance, help shape the Swedish policy-process even if the speaker is from a different member state since it provides Swedish MEPs with insights about the perspectives of other states. This is especially true seeing as the security-policy field often involves interstate cooperation, which means that aligning behind shared European understandings of problems and solutions is often required for a given

member state. By extension, future studies might benefit, particularly in terms of validity, by exploring not just the national but the larger European security debate at this time.

3.1 Analysis

3.1.1 PROBLEM STREAM

In 2014, a number of factors amounted to a new geopolitical context in the eyes of European decision-makers. Crucially, the last few decades had seen the rise of Asian economies and subsequent partial retraction of US involvement in EU-Russian relations. While few states could realistically challenge *Pax Americana*, China was, evidently, viewed by the US as a far stronger rival than the declining Russian state, seeing as American focus had gradually shifted further east year by year, at least to the eyes of European decision-makers (Transatlantiska Tvivel 2021). In April of 2014, for instance, the European perspective on this trend would be highlighted by a report from the European Parliament which describes, among other things:

[N]ew actors pursuing competitive regional and global ambitions, growing interdependency, the rise of multidimensional asymmetric threats, the refocusing of US security policy towards the Asia-Pacific, the growing struggle over energy and resource security, the increasingly serious effects of climate change and a severe and long-lasting global financial and economic crisis affecting all EU Member States (European Parliament 2014, p. 2).

It is against this backdrop that, on the 27th of February 2014 Russia annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea – a move that would send shockwaves through Europe. This is precisely the type of external event that Kingdon (2014) argues often signals decision-makers of the emergence of a new political problem. Indeed, as early as the 3rd of March 2014 a special Foreign Council (“Utrikesrådet”) meeting was held, wherein the Swedish government made clear that ‘the military intervention that has already begun on the Ukrainian peninsula is unacceptable’ (Regeringen 2014:1). Furthermore, ‘the EU should show solidarity towards Ukraine and quickly take action through financial and political support to the government in Kiev and thereby coordinate itself with partners across the global community [“världssamfundet”].’ From the

statement we can gather that, while Russian aggression is considered a problem, it is not at this moment a threat to Sweden but to Ukraine.

On the 17th of March, the Foreign Council in Sweden would add that ‘the [Swedish] government considers Russia to be responsible for answering the openings for dialogue sent by the Ukrainian government’ (Regeringen 2014:2). Along with comments about economic sanctions and ‘far-reaching consequences for the cooperation between the EU and Russia,’ this statement indicates that solutions to the problem of Russian aggression are still seen as diplomatic in nature. Because the scope of the problem is at this point limited geographically to Ukraine, the Swedish security regime is not perceived as vulnerable.

To a non-trivial degree, part of the problem for decision-makers was the difficulty inherent to discerning motivations. Because Russia stood to suffer needless losses both on the battlefield and in the internal economy following widespread sanctions aimed against the Putin regime, prevailing scholars and decision-makers alike concluded that Putin’s actions must be grounded mainly in ideological differences. In the eyes of European decision-makers as well as their allies, the war follows not from a material calculation on the part of Putin but from an ideological chasm between the colloquial *West* and an authoritarian rogue state. Heisbourg (2015) perhaps best summarizes the view in stating that “[r]evisionist Russia emerges as a largely unpredictable player, which no longer gives prime importance to abiding (even in appearance) by international law” (Heisbourg 2015, p. 34).

Similar sentiments would be raised by the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, who stated at the Yalta European Strategy conference in 2014 that “[w]hat happens in Ukraine concerns all Europeans, because we cannot stand by and watch idly while the founding principles of the international community are being violated” (Schulz 2014, p. 1). He continues by stating that:

In fact, what we have been witnessing during the last six months is the ideological battle between two worlds: one representing the ideals we all treasure, such as democracy, rule of law, individual

rights and human dignity; the other, based on fear, intimidation and the oppression of individual freedom (Schulz 2014, p. 1).

Evidently, to many European decision-makers, the threat Russia presents is at this stage not limited to material losses, but relates to a larger perceived ideological struggle between democracy and non-democracy.

The following year, Foreign Affairs Minister Margot Wallström (2015) spoke of the Crimean annexation as ‘the greatest challenge to European peace and security since the end of the Cold War’ (p. 1) Still, the minister added that ‘we support the efforts being made at this moment to find a political road to easement [“avspänning”]’ (p. 1). This along with the statement that ‘the European way’ is where ‘blood on the battlefield is replaced by patience at the negotiating table’ (p. 1) sends a clear message that the problem is able to be solved diplomatically through European cooperation as opposed to military action. It follows directly from the logic that the European Union must act in accordance with the values it espouses, that military engagements must be the last resort, which realistically leaves only financial and diplomatic tools at the Union’s disposal.

In consecutive annual speeches by Wallström, the Swedish view of Russia is elaborated on and by 2017 the view that the war is ideologically grounded is reinforced, making it clear that Russia is, at this stage, seen as a threat not just to Ukrainian sovereignty but a threat to broader Europe, including Sweden. The disregard shown by Russia towards international law and international norm is reiterated multiple times throughout the 2017 Foreign Declaration (“Utrikesdeklaration”) speech, indicating a shift in the scope of the problem and thus a shift in appropriate responses. One particular paragraph of note, which comes to be repeated more-or-less verbatim in every subsequent speech up until June of 2022, is first stated by Wallström here: ‘Sweden's security-political course is persistent. Our military non-alignment serves us well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe. It presupposes an active, broad and responsible foreign- and security policy in combination with deepened military cooperation, especially with Finland, and a credible [“ trovärdig ”] national military capability’ (Wallström 2017, p. 2).

By connecting the crisis with the Swedish security regime, Russia is now clearly considered a security threat to Swedish sovereignty from the perspective of the Swedish Foreign Ministry. As a consequence, the range of possible solutions shifts since they now have to alleviate not just Ukrainian but Swedish insecurity perceptions. While the sanctions imposed on Russia as well as the financial and material support given to the Ukrainian government is as close to what the Swedish government can do to ‘solve’ the problem Ukraine is facing within the constraints of the European security regime, Swedish decision-makers now face the task of also solving national security concerns.

In the document Ds. 2022/7, which we will return to, the problem description is redefined further. In it, the authors write that ‘[t]he deterrent effect of Sweden's military cooperation is limited in that they do not include mutual defense obligations [...] The importance of being covered by guarantees has risen as Russia has shown itself prepared to engage in a large-scale military assault on a neighboring country’ (Utrikesdepartementet 2022, p. 32-33) Military non-alignment, in contrast to historic descriptions, is described here not as a strength, or even as a neutral condition, but precisely as the problem itself. This perceived two-pronged problem of irrational and unpredictable Russian aggression on the one hand, and a not only insufficient but almost non-existent Swedish security regime (if Sweden were to be invaded by a foreign nation) on the other, makes applying for NATO membership more or less the only feasible solution since no other institution already in place in Europe can provide similar guarantees.

3.1.2 POLICY STREAM

In January of 2014 one of few reports from the policy community in Sweden detailing Russia at the time, a chapter in the report *Europaperspektiv 2014*, highlighted the state of EU-Russian relations and its challenges. In it, the author argues that ‘data from Eurostat (the statistics bureau of the EU) regarding the developments in the volume of trade [...] very clearly shows the completely superior position [“helt överlägsna ställning”] of the EU’ (Schmidt-Felzmann 2014, p. 248) The report makes clear that, while EU-Russian relations face challenges, Russia has far more to lose if the relations were to worsen than the EU does. This description illustrates the prominent sentiment within the policy-community at the time that norm diffusion and socialization, i.e. soft power, were the means of choice for reducing insecurity. What Russia has

in military might means little to nothing if using it leads directly to internal economic and political losses – assuming that Russia behaves in accordance with their supposed best interest. Thus, the pressure once exerted on the battlefield is replaced by pressure at the negotiating table. As the author points out however, there is internal division within the EU as to what degree of pressure should be put on Russian decision-makers (Schmidt-Felzmann 2014), since there is great uncertainty as to when and why the Russian response to external pressures might turn negative, as well as what that response might be.

Losing substantial ground in Europe to Russia would suggest that the diplomatic approach employed by European democracies has at least partially failed at defending itself against ‘hard power’ threats. This has led some scholars, like Mearsheimer, to draw the conclusion that the ‘logic of realism’ has won the debate against liberal institutionalism as the most accurate interpretation of international affairs (Averre 2016). Averre (2016) on the other hand, claims that “Realism's preoccupation with geopolitics and material structures does not capture the multiple causal factors—political, ideational, identity—influencing the nature of this intra-European conflict” (Averre 2016, p. 701). Similarly, Nitoiu (2016) argues that the EU failed to notice in time that “a clash of values and worldviews between the EU and Russia makes conflict between them virtually unavoidable” (Nitoiu 2016, p. 376).

In 2016, *Europaperspektiv* would dedicate the annual report *Europaperspektiv 2016* entirely to the topic of emerging security threats. In its introduction, the authors write that Russia’s ‘aggressive politics in Ukraine and occupation of parts of the country’s territory [has] underlined the importance of the European states’ military capabilities and of NATO’s role as a guarantor for their territorial integrity’ (p. 11). Later, they also add that ‘it is evident that the member states [of the EU] and their citizens have shifting perceptions with regards to what degree Russia constitutes a security threat’ (p. 11-12). Evidently, the soft power approach favored by EU decision-makers has at least partially failed in the eyes of the policy-community, so focus has now shifted towards bolstering the defenses of the member states to a smaller or greater degree depending on how each respective state perceives Russia’s threat level. In a chapter discussing the sanctions placed on Russia by the European Union, political scientist Mikael Eriksson states: ‘Russia comprises in 2015, according to several security-political assessors, the single greatest

conventional threat to the EU security regime. The threat image is founded in part on the gradual worsening national political situation under the Putin regime, in part on Russia's military actions towards its neighbors' (Eriksson 2016, p. 98).

This illustrates the perceived divide between the security assessment of decision-makers at the time and that of the security policy-community. Whereas the responses from decision-makers across member states had been mixed, Eriksson withholds that Russia ought to be seen as the chief threat in line with the assessments made by the policy-community, which suggests that the responses of decision-makers should reflect that situation.

Also in 2016, a 'government inquiry' ("offentlig utredning") into the feasibility of NATO membership (Bringéus & Eriksson 2016), concludes by stating that it 'leaves no comment on whether or not Sweden should apply for membership in NATO' (p. 18), arguing that 'it is fundamentally political in its nature and requires broad public support' (p. 18). This sentiment goes in line with EU norms – and NATO legislature – wherein decisions pertaining to sovereignty, certainly including military alignment, are by principle to be determined by the public. What the authors attempt to show, rather than argue for either position, is what joining NATO might mean for Swedish security, including the difference between EU security legislation and NATO legislation in case of a crisis.

The paper, being a government inquiry – which is to say it is intended primarily as a means to inform government decision-makers – means that much of the content is devoted to the calculation of risk and potential responses from Russia in the event that Sweden were to join NATO. Critically, the authors consider the threat of Russia, as far as direct aggression towards Sweden is concerned, to be low, stating that 'the red line that Russia has drawn – and violently so – is by Ukraine and Georgia' (p. 155). As such, the inquiry makes indirectly clear that there is no necessity for Sweden to join NATO in order to secure itself.

By 2021 discussions of a Swedish NATO membership had begun to circulate in increasing numbers, which according to the report *Transatlantic Trust Issues* (Gustafsson et al. 2021) from October that year, stemmed in part from the disinterest shown by the then president of the US,

Donald Trump, for European security concerns. The trust in America coming to Europe's defense in the event of a crisis seemed to be in flux now that Trump was putting "America First", which likely heightened concerns in Sweden particularly among those who had already long been proponents of the NATO project and who had already put trust in the US to come to Sweden's aid if a crisis were to arise.

As the paper would argue, 'the European countries have to take greater responsibility for their own security, which ideally happens through a strengthened European pillar in NATO' (p. 37). It also states that the growing impact on global affairs by the Chinese state has been a factor in diverting the attention of the US away from Russia, contributing to European insecurity (p. 51-52). In light of this 'the question is how countries and governments in Europe who are dependent on American support and protection should act [...]' (p. 20). The authors conclude that, while uncertainty has arisen within European governments, particularly in the eastern regions of Europe, governments have met this uncertainty with an "increased engagement and willingness to accommodate American demands and wishes" (Gustafsson et al. 2021, p. 4).

3.1.3 POLITICS STREAM

In the years 2014, 2018 and 2022 general elections were held in Sweden. Across all three elections, results would prove most successful for the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats (SD) whose platform was based largely on anti-immigration, nationalism and law-and-order. The party that suffered the greatest losses on the other hand was perhaps the Moderates (M) – a party that previously made up almost a third of the general voter base in the election of 2010, but most recently closer to a fourth of the same (Valmyndigheten 2022). Subsequently, they were increasingly forced to compromise and bargain with both the SD and the minor parties to a greater degree than before if they were ever to challenge the left-wing Red-Green coalition.

Ahead of the 2014 election cycle, leadership had changed within several parties, including all the parties on the left wing with seats in the Riksdag. Most notably, Social Democratic (S) leadership changed hands twice following poor performance in the 2010 election, but after Stefan Löfven assumed the role of party leader the Social Democrats seemed to stabilize in opinion polls, though never climbing significantly above the 2010 election results (Novus 2012). The

center-right Moderates (M) however, were steadily losing voters to the SD in the period between the 2010 and 2014 elections (cf. Novus 2011; Novus 2014).

On the 19th of February 2014, i.e. prior to the full scale annexation of Crimea, but after Russian troops had begun entering the region, foreign minister Carl Bildt would hold the annual Foreign Declaration speech. In it, Bildt states that the Swedish government wishes for the Ukrainian government and the opposition to find a diplomatic path to ending ‘the political crisis’, referring to the wave of protests in Kyiv at the time that would shortly thereafter oust the then-president Yanukovich (Bildt 2014, p. 3; Jalabi & Yuhas 2014). Bildt would then highlight the deteriorating internal politics of Russia, including their treatment of the LGBTQ community, urging the international community to encourage development of democratic values in Russia (p. 5). This of course went in line with the rationale at the time which was centered around diplomacy and democratic socialization as primary means with which to pacify Russia.

Evidently, the populist rhetoric of the SD had resonated among Swedish voters. This presented a problem for the two-bloc system in Sweden, particularly for the right-wing coalition The Alliance, who now stood little chance to secure an election win without making concessions to the SD, who themselves were part of neither The Alliance nor the Red-Greens. Due in no small part to this weakening of The Alliance on account of the SD siphoning their voters, the Red-Greens would win the 2014 election, promising – among other things – a feminist foreign policy strategy courtesy of the new (Social Democratic) foreign minister Margot Wallström.

Following the Crimean annexation, support for Ukraine would surge in Europe. Support was most notable in Northern Europe, as pointed out by Wagnsson in *Europaperspektiv* 2016, citing the 2014 Transatlantic Trends Survey (see Stelzenmueller et al. 2015; Wagnsson 2016). Among Swedish respondents, 73 percent were in support of Ukraine in 2014, compared to 44 percent in Greece or 59 percent in Great Britain (Wagnsson 2016). Wagnsson (2016) would conclude that ‘[a] large portion of respondents in many of the EUs major member states express[...] concerns for both terrorism and Russia. In some countries where the concern for terrorism is relatively low – such as in Estonia – the concern for Russia is all the more widespread’ (p. 263).

In 2015 Wallström would speak more on the subject. In the Foreign Declaration of 2015 Wallström stated that ‘Sweden will continue to work for politics that are as clear in their demands for respecting international law as in its support for every country’s sole right to determine its future’ (p. 1). Once more, the willingness to resolve tensions through diplomacy above all is reiterated. In 2016, the Foreign Declaration would see the first mention of a mantra that would recur in every successive annual Foreign Declaration up until Sweden applied for NATO membership, namely that ‘military non-alignment has served [Sweden] well’ (p. 1). The argument, as it is laid out by Wallström, is that cooperation and interdependence are the most effective mechanisms available for reducing insecurity (p. 1).

Over the same timespan, the frequency and total number of refugees to Europe, including Sweden, would increase, and in 2017 a terrorist attack killing five in Stockholm shocked the nation (Silberstein 2015; Krisinformation 2017). While not directly connected to Euro-Russian relations, these events likely bolstered the already upward-trending SD. Consequently, the 2018 election would prove as successful for the SD, as it was devastating to the Moderate party (Valmyndigheten 2018). The Sweden Democrats had now garnered votes roughly equal to the Moderates, such that both coalitions would be forced to bargain either with each other or with the SD in order to form a government. Under threat of an extraordinary election the Center and Liberal parties would break away from The Alliance, which made possible a second term for Löfven in what came to be known as the January Agreement.

In his Declaration of Government (“regeringsförklaring”) in 2019, Löfven would echo the words of Wallström by reiterating that Sweden would not seek membership in NATO, but instead focus efforts towards strengthening national military capabilities as well as bilateral agreements with other Baltic Sea states, especially with Finland (Löfven 2019, p. 15). Löfven would also underline that Sweden is committed to aiding allies in the event that a conflict breaks out, and crucially, that Sweden expects others to do the same (p. 15). The 2019 Foreign Declaration by Wallström followed much the same argumentation, though it describes the Swedish approach to Russia as resting on two pillars: on the one hand, the Swedish government condemns the aggressive actions and tendencies of the Russian state, and support the sanctions placed on

Russia; on the other hand, Sweden supports Russian civil society and the efforts being made to democratize the country (Wallström 2019, p. 5).

Turbulent Swedish domestic politics would continue however, and tensions would culminate in a successful vote of no confidence for prime minister Löfven, initiated by the left party retracting their support of the government following a housing policy dispute (SVT 2021). Subsequently, a transitional government was put in place, with former finance minister Magdalena Andersson taking on the role as prime minister. The perceived Russian threat was of primary concern and Andersson would point to four pillars of foreign policy that the government sought to focus on: (1) strengthened cooperation in the Nordics and in the EU; (2) non-alignment; (3) multilateralism, particularly transatlantic cooperation with the US; and (4) strengthened national military capabilities (Andersson 2021, p. 12-14).

In February of 2022, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military was initiated, triggering a sudden shift in stance among Social Democratic leadership (Ritter 2022). On the 24th of February 2022 a special European Council meeting condemned the invasion and demanded that Russia cease all military operations, underlining Ukraine's right to "choose its own destiny" (European Council 2022). Not a week later, Andersson would hold a speech echoing much the same sentiment, though the question of whether Sweden would now seek to join NATO is notably absent from the speech, presumably because the government had yet to reach consensus with regards to it (Andersson 2023:1). Instead, the immediate response is explained as consisting of sanctions against Russia, support for Ukraine, and a strengthened national military capability (Ibid).

On May 1st 2022, Andersson would revise the official party line, stating that 'all security-political assumptions made prior to the outbreak of the war must be retried', and that the question of a possible NATO membership is open to discussion within the party (Andersson 2023:2). Internally, the subgroup of the Social Democratic party representing women (S-Kvinnor; eng: "S-Women"), spearheaded by Climate and Environment Minister Annika Strandhäll, came out firmly against a possible NATO membership when Strandhäll said in an

interview that the subgroup would not change their stance in regards to the NATO-question (Strandhäll 2022).

Meanwhile in Finland, on the 12th of May 2022, Finnish president Sauli Niinistö and prime minister Sanna Marin declared in a joint statement their intent to apply for NATO membership “without delay” (Tanner 2022). With Sweden’s chief military ally already poised to join, a Swedish membership was soon to be expected according to international media (Ibid). On the 13th of May 2022 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a document called ‘A Worsened Security-Political Situation – Consequences for Sweden’ (“Ett försämrat säkerhetspolitiskt läge - konsekvenser för Sverige”), also called *Ds. 2022/7*. The new Foreign Minister Ann Linde, Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist, representatives from all political parties with seats in the Swedish Riksdag along with a group of advisors prepared the document for the purpose of informing the incumbent government about the state of the security-political situation in Europe as well as the political question of a possible NATO membership application.

In many ways, the document is one of the clearest illustrations of the turning point in the Swedish security-political course. It had taken roughly two months worth of deliberation according to Foreign Minister Linde (2022), and was likely intended mainly to convince other decision-makers such as the S-Women subgroup rather than the general public. It springboards off of the (now established) perceived battle between values and ideologies that the Russian invasion of Ukraine represents, stating that ‘[t]he Russian government presumes [“utgår från”] values, interests and a historical lens that differs from those in the west [...] It is thus a conflict between an authoritarian social order and the free, open and democratic world’ (Utrikesdepartementet 2022, p. 10). While we have heard this framing before in policy documents, it is one we would expect precisely in situations like these where the audience to be persuaded consists chiefly of decision-makers, seeing as they are more likely to be persuaded by ideological arguments than by technocratic arguments in the view of Léonard & Kaunert (2010).

The document goes on to highlight a series of political advantages stemming from NATO membership, including the ability to ‘participate fully in the security political discussion in NATO’ particularly in service of strengthening the ability of Swedish decision-makers to assert

or maintain Swedish interests at the NATO level (Utrikesdepartementet 2022, p. 39). Moreover the document's authors argue that joining NATO would complement Swedish involvement in other international institutions including the European Union, and suggest that Sweden would have better capacity to push for items like 'climate change' and 'equal rights' to appear higher on the international agenda (Ibid). In doing so, the authors attempt to connect the NATO membership application to topics that other decision-makers presumably value highly, such that a NATO membership would allow them to pursue these goals more effectively.

Continuing, the document attempts to assuage concerns that abandoning the non-alignment policy would be a step away from the Swedish international identity. While joining NATO would mean the end of the non-alignment policy, the authors argue that it would remain in line with a security-political course marked by solidarity (Utrikesdepartementet 2022, p. 39). The primary threat being Russia is reiterated on multiple occasions and the authors make clear their stance that this problem can only be solved by altering the Swedish security regime in one way or another. Finally, other possible policy alternatives, including the development of new security-political formations outside of existing structures like NATO are deemed 'unrealistic', leaving NATO membership as the sole option (Ibid, p. 8).

While the main contents of the analysis was agreed upon by all parties of the Riksdag, representatives could also comment on aspects or statements they disagreed with. For instance, the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties added that they do not consider the Swedish non-alignment policy to be a source for security, but rather the opposite (Utrikesdepartementet 2022, p. 43). The Left Party offers different comments, beginning with the argument that joining NATO would be a source for insecurity, in that it risks making Sweden part of conflicts that other NATO members are engaged in (Utrikesdepartementet 2022, p. 47). They also highlight the proximity to US foreign policy interests that a NATO membership entails (citing in part the Transatlantic Trust Issues paper), as well as the possibility of staging nuclear weapons in Sweden in the event that NATO deems this necessary (Ibid, p. 48-49). Taken together, these comments highlight how the document is the result of political bargaining rather than consensus. Some of the involved parties presumably feel compelled to distinguish their own party-line from that of

the others, such that their respective audiences, i.e. their voter-bases, are made aware of how the document is the result of political compromise.

Shortly after the release of the document, the decision was made by the government to apply for NATO membership together with Finland on the 18th of May 2022. In a special Foreign Declaration speech on the 10th of June 2022, Foreign Minister Linde would state that all parties of the Riksdag were in agreement with regards to the analysis chapter of the Ds. 2022/7, and ‘especially the section on Russia’ (p. 3).

3.2 Conclusions

As the research question states, the goal of this analysis was to understand the Swedish NATO membership application in terms of securitizing articulations. By looking at three distinctive streams where such articulations are made, as defined by their participants and by their respective audiences, the aim is to draw conclusions that grant us insight as to what role securitizing articulations serve in enabling military cooperation more broadly. In so doing, though indirectly, this paper also served to test the feasibility of the synthesis between the MSF and securitization in a larger study, given that it is a fairly novel approach.

In the outset, it was assumed that the solution that military cooperation presents comes as a response to some perceived problem or threat. In this case, escalating Russian aggression served as the chief catalyst for Swedish NATO ambitions. However, the direct line often drawn in hindsight between problems and solutions, that is to say the idea that Sweden applied for NATO membership *because* of Russian aggression, has been shown by this study to be overly simplistic. Speech, as we have established – ‘does things’ – which is to say that audiences’ interpretations of events are contingent on how those events are portrayed to them by securitizing actors. That means that the strategies employed, consciously or otherwise, by the securitizing actors, matters greatly in the securitizing policy outcome. By that same token, the political stream was particularly instrumental in the convergence of the three streams in this instance. The role that changes in government figures had, such as the position of Swedish Prime Minister, proved to be very important to the outcome, such that it would be equally valid to suggest that Prime Minister Andersson was the reason Sweden applied for NATO membership. In reality of

course, the outcome was conditioned not on one single factor but on the convergence of numerous factors, as illustrated by the analysis section.

3.2.1 PROBLEMS

Looking at the problem stream, we can glean some general take-aways in the case of the Swedish NATO membership application. First, problems do not have to appear from a vacuum, but instead may build on already existing, generally accepted, problems. Problems like the annexation of Crimea can be understood also as an evolution of generally accepted pre-existing problems of corruption or Russian imperialist tendencies. Further, the later outbreak of the war can be considered an escalation of the earlier problem of the annexation of Crimea. In this sense, it would be fair to say that problems – understood here as problematized conditions – are often borne out of already apparent problems; that is to say, a problem can serve as a foundation for future problems. In a manner of speaking, of course, all events are borne out of prior events, but the point is that, in our interpretation of the world, there are different ways to lump together events. Further, the question of how a securitizing actor lumps together events presumably matters for the likelihood of successful securitization, if we assume that the acceptance of the audience is required for securitization to be successful. We are, in other words, referring to one of many tools in the repertoire of securitizing actors. This problem *evolution* suggests that the likelihood of successful securitization of an event is likely increased if the problem builds on a prior problem already familiar to the audience in question. Whether we think of the events between 2014 and 2022 as a series of problems, or as one big problem, has implications for the policy process, and by proxy the likelihood of successful securitization.

As was made clear by the analysis of the development of the problem description, the scope of the threat was redefined numerous times following ongoing events. Notably though, between 2014 and 2022, that is to say between the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine at large, decision makers' perceptions of the problem remained more or less the same. As we recall, the policy-community noted the insufficiency of the passive diplomatic response from decision-makers, and letting Putin effectively 'get away' with annexing Crimea must have emboldened the Russian state moving forward. Had the annexation itself sparked a stronger

response, that is to say, if it had been seen as the type of problem that may be the catalyst for a full-scale war, European efforts to strongly counteract Russia could have begun earlier.

Instead, it was only in February of 2022 that the severity of the problem was revealed to decision-makers, but this turning-point also came with an expansion in the scope, or breadth, of the problem. In effect, Russia was now not only waging a war, but the war was on democracy itself and so any European democracy could be next. While the former statement is certainly true, the latter is less supported. Though this paper hasn't explored the territory, the conditions of Ukraine are markedly different from that of, say, Sweden, not in the least exemplified by its proximity to Russia geographically, historically and culturally. To suggest that Sweden has any of the same conditions in common with Ukraine that would make possible a Russian invasion of Sweden in the foreseeable future, seems far-fetched. This holds true for the majority of European states, especially those beyond the old borders of the Soviet Union as noted by Bringéus & Eriksson (2016). This expansion of the scope of the threat, which made possible the Swedish NATO membership application, is due in part to a second tool in the aforementioned repertoire of securitizing actors: the usage of dichotomy.

In the case studied here, what we can tentatively call the specific phenomena an *ideological dichotomization* of the war. Following the outright annexation of Crimea, decision-makers in Sweden as well as within the larger international community began utilizing increasingly ideological distinctions between Ukraine and Russia. The suggestion that the Russia-Ukraine war is one that can be understood in terms of a battle between democracy and non-democracy is evidently an effective political tool, though it carries with it some long term implications that may be less desirable. There are two ways of interpreting the dichotomy, one of which is more charitable than the other.

First and *least* charitably, we can interpret it literally to mean that Ukraine is a democratic state and Russia is non-democratic. However, while there is wide consensus around Russia's democratic shortcomings, there is not so much a consensus regarding Ukraine's democratic achievements. What I mean to say is that the dichotomy in part smoothes over the complexities of Ukrainian domestic politics, a state historically marred by corruption and grievances, by

placing it next to other states in Europe that we have come to call democracies. The political differences between EU member states and Ukraine, which had been the central discussion point inhibiting a possible Ukrainian EU membership status, were quickly glossed over the moment that Russian troops set foot in Ukraine, expediting the Ukrainian EU membership candidacy.

This is not to imply that great strides haven't been taken in regards to democratizing Ukraine, or that other states in Europe are somehow free of corruption – not to mention the difficulty inherent to determining *when* a state can be considered democratic. Instead, we are invited to question whether the political utility (i.e. the increased likelihood of successful securitization) gained by reducing the complexity of Ukrainian politics outweighs the importance of the information and moral complexity lost in the process. In part, the need to paint Ukraine in democratic colors stems from the same logic that tends to paint all victims of war as 'perfect'. In reality of course, perfection, or indeed the democratic tendencies of a state or lack thereof, shouldn't be a prerequisite for aid or sympathy. It shouldn't matter whether the conflict has a democratic or non-democratic victim since both international law and, I would argue, basic moral principles, stipulates that we should aid innocent civilians irrespective of the policies of their government.

Second and *more* charitably, we can consider the aim of the dichotomy is to suggest not that Ukraine is a democratic state, necessarily, but that it serves as a representative of the international 'democratic' order. In Russia's assault on Ukraine, it also assaults the tenets of international law and norm. Thus, it can supposedly be viewed as a battle between democracy and non-democracy.

While far greater than the former interpretation, this version is not without its own problems of course. For one, the conflation between international law or norm and democracy glosses over differences between states that may not between themselves share much in terms of democratic tendencies but all fall under the same international legal framework. Second, and while I won't belabor this point much since the question is already explored in other studies, the ways in which international law is often selectively applied presents problems especially when taken together with its aforementioned conflation with democracy. The United States for instance, is generally

accepted to be a democracy, yet there are instances where it has broken international law, even as far as through military means. What does it *actually* require, then, to be considered a non-democracy? Clearly the answer lies beyond simply breaking international law. Therefore I would argue that the utilization of the democracy versus non-democracy dichotomy only serves to set the securitizing actor up for failure, in that it exposes an apparent hypocrisy that can be used by opponents (of the securitizing actor) to embolden *their* audience.

So, while this ideological dichotomization is useful in that it is demonstrably effective in securitizing a perceived problem, it comes at the expense of reinforcing the ideological divide between the securitizing actor and the perceived threat, making future diplomatic relations, for instance, far more difficult. It seems counterintuitive in the long term then to utilize such a tool, if one of the core tenets of the international order you are seeking to construct is to rely primarily on diplomatic solutions.

3.2.2 POLICIES

By virtue of there not being a clear academic consensus preceding the decision to apply (intentionally or otherwise) as to whether Sweden ought to apply for NATO membership, this study seems to indicate that specific recommendations from the policy stream are not required in order for a policy to move forward. Subsequently, great freedom is granted to decision-makers in pushing for their proposals irrespective of the ongoings of the policy stream writ large. This, for one, begs the question of where exactly the decision-makers get their solutions from, if they are not exclusively informed of them by the relevant policy-community. One possibility of course is that many such solutions follow directly from the ideological presuppositions that decision-makers have. Decision-makers already inclined towards, say, neo-liberal institutionalism may in large part have already made up their minds about an appropriate solution when problems that can, in their eyes, be alleviated through institutionalism appear on the agenda. In many ways this echoes what Kingdon (2014) calls the *pet projects* that policy entrepreneurs have. In a very real sense, then, the solution (as it were) has already been selected for at the moment the decision-maker in this scenario adopted a neo-liberal institutionalist lens. Insofar as this observation is true, it calls into question the relative analytical importance of the policy-community within the Multiple Streams Framework since their convergence with the

other streams appears to not always be a necessity. Alternatively we can think of the decision-makers as (sometimes) a part of the policy-community and thus avoid this pitfall, which would imply that the composition of the policy-stream varies more greatly across states than anticipated by Kingdon (2014), and that the independence of the streams cannot be guaranteed to the same extent in contexts outside the US.

This observation is at the very least true in the sense that it has been the explicit aim of the institutional design of NATO as well as the EU: that a decision about membership requires not technocratic (i.e. policy), but public (i.e. political) support. Expressed differently, and with regards to military cooperation specifically, the policy-community can in theory be largely sidestepped by decision-makers, so long as the potential objections of the policy-community doesn't substantially affect the general opinion. To that end, the usage of a securitization repertoire designed to convince the general public, such as (let's say) drumming up fear, simplifying the problem, or reinforcing an us-versus-them mentality, is likely to be far more impactful in the overall securitizing policy process than language aimed at convincing the policy-community.

3.2.3 POLITICS

As has been noted, the political stream seems to have played a disproportionately large impact in this case. The dissolution of the traditional two-bloc system, the popularization of right-wing populist talking points, the changes in government and the Finnish application all played major roles, and as per the design of NATO such political forces make or break the possibility of membership. Another related point to consider is the difference between the formal design of the policy process in Sweden compared to that of the US which the Multiple Streams Framework is modeled after. Recall the importance of the Ds. 2022/7 document for instance, which in some respects can be considered a policy-document, and in another sense a political agreement. It was constructed by decision-makers with the aid of the policy-community for the purpose of convincing other decision-makers. Such a document straddles the line between the supposedly independent policy and political streams within the MSF. The point being that the independence of the streams may be an observation that holds more true in the context of the American policy process than in non-American policy processes. This presents an interesting conundrum for the

NATO membership process seeing as the division between policy and politics is enshrined in its design, as we have discussed. There is an effort made by NATO and by the policy-community to let politics and policy be separate, and yet we have shown that such a separation can be hard or perhaps impossible to make. In the literal sense *all* policy documents come with some political baggage, however banal, so the insistence of keeping politics separate is a battle that in some sense cannot be won. To that end, the policy-community might serve decision-makers better by providing recommendations regarding membership based on accurate threat-assessment, while still able to withhold that the decision is left ultimately up to the general public.

Looking across the span of the timeline there is no obvious singular policy entrepreneur, i.e. securitizing actor. There is a strong case to be made however, that Magdalena Andersson played a pivotal role in the bargaining process as evidenced by Andersson effectively steam rolling Strandhäll, and by smoothing over political differences in highlighting points where all parties agreed. Both can be thought of as instances where Andersson attempts to secure support across the left-right political divide which would indicate Andersson's role as the securitizing actor within this context. This in turn also makes the Riksdag appear univocal which might convince stragglers – especially on the left wing – that there was a level of consensus present which there might not have been in actuality. I believe it to be unsupported, though, to characterize NATO membership as Andersson's pet project seeing as Andersson changed position only after February 2022. More likely is that NATO membership was the pet project of right-wing politicians who found themselves within a window of opportunity as a result of new conditions in the political stream, though the details are in this case subject to speculation.

3.2.4 FINAL THOUGHTS

It is clear that the sentiment often touted by decision-makers on the international stage, that all states have the right to determine their own destiny, is not meant to be understood literally. All states have to contend with the reality of the conditions surrounding them, many of which are outside of their own direct control. In other words, the decisions they are free to make are constrained by factors they are not free to choose. This principle of sovereignty is on the one hand sanctified by decision-makers when applied to Ukraine, and rightly so. Yet, when the Swedish government is charged with deciding its own fate, Finnish and US sentiments are of

such high import that it would be disingenuous to suggest that it was made entirely on Sweden's own terms.

Indeed, part of the reality of the ratification processes that follow membership applications involve negotiating and often caving to demands made by external actors like Turkey (in the case of Sweden). This is not to suggest that trading away some portion of a state's sovereignty in exchange for the securing of the remainder, as is the trade-off when it comes to military non-alignment, is a bad deal to take in all instances. Rather, it suggests that any such trade-off hinges on the presumption that the state in question is otherwise vulnerable – that sovereignty is under threat to begin with and therefore necessitates securing. Because if it is not, then the loss of sovereignty that comes with military alignment was effectively for naught. As we have seen, the accurate assessment of threat levels, which is a question for the policy-community, matters less in the actual securitization process than the interpretation made by decision-makers and their subsequent communication of that interpretation. We could therefore draw the fairly provocative conclusion that the actual assessment of threat levels only indirectly affects the likelihood of securitization, insofar as that assessment affects the interpretation of decision-makers.

This invites a larger discussion on the role of academia on the topic of national security, since it is partially absent as a result of the institutional design of existing military alliances on the one hand, and by virtue of the relatively ineffective speech repertoire used on the other. To tie back to the aspirations of this paper's introduction, we might say that what makes military cooperation possible is not exclusively contingent on accurate threat assessment, but rather largely the result of a securitizing repertoire utilized by decision-makers and aimed at convincing the general public specifically. In this paper, the timeline of the policy process has been laid out, and some of the many imaginable tools of the securitization repertoire have been highlighted as they appear. Though I will not go so far as to conclude so here, it is perhaps indicative of a reintroduction of ideology in a political climate long marred by complaints of technocracy, that the policy-community is cast aside in favor of fiery speeches aimed at the masses.

3.3.1 FURTHER RESEARCH

Even in cases such as this one, where the policy concerns national security, the bounds of the streams are difficult to pin down in a European state. In the case of the US, by contrast, the extent of the policy-, problem- and political streams are all mostly limited geographically to the US, which allows the MSF a high degree of research validity. The case of Sweden, by virtue of being in the EU, presents challenges for the application of the MSF seeing as a lot of politics, for instance, is decided on an EU level. The same is true of the policy and problem streams by analogy. For this study, this shortcoming was predicted and somewhat alleviated through the inclusion of some European sources, but there is no clear rule for how and when such inclusions are appropriate, such that they often appear arbitrary in service of confirming a conclusion already drawn by the researcher. Further research that attempts to model interactions between EU level and national streams is needed to ensure high scientific reliability moving forward.

Likewise, and as has been discussed, there is a degree to which the independence of the streams is jeopardized in contexts outside of the US. In this study, the politics and policy field were seen to intermingle in such a way as to call into question the separation of the streams. Moreover, this has consequences for the concept of the ‘coupling’ or ‘convergence’ of the streams since it is a concept that presumes an initial independence of the streams. In part, the conceptual issues this presented were alleviated in this study as a result of the streams being characterized not only by their participants but by their audiences. This, however, is not entirely foolproof either since we can imagine texts aimed at more than one type of audience. Future conceptual refinements are needed in order to better understand how texts that fall ‘in between’ two (or three) streams are to be categorized.

While this study has generated some insights as to the repertoire of security speech that made possible a Swedish NATO membership application, question marks still exist regarding the policy entrepreneur which can perhaps best be studied through interviews rather than through textual analysis. To complement this study, interviews with decision-makers involved in the process could be conducted where questions could be aimed at conclusively finding a policy entrepreneur and to describe their involvement and impact more closely. Another option would

be to continue exploring the subject using textual analysis, since there is a lot of existing data not included in this study due to practical limitations.

4.1 References

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