Identity on the Latvian Border: The politics of migration and national security

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts, Honours
Political Science

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the impact that domestic conceptions of Latvian national security have on informing the acceptance of refugees and migrants in Latvia. As illustrated by the high-profile media coverage of key events, Latvian border policies have dramatically pivoted in their responses to the 2021-2022 Belarus border crisis with the European Union and the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022. The research question guiding this thesis is as follows: to what extent did the political expressions of national security differ in the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, and were the responses of Latvia to each situation different? To explore this question, this research involves a comparative analysis of these two case studies, as informed by government documents, news stories, and other publicly available resources. Furthermore, the findings of this analysis have been contextualized through semi-structured interviews with Latvian university students on the underlying tenets of national identity within Latvia's immigration policies. The main argument of the thesis is that there exists a significant difference between how Latvian approached these crises as the Belarus border crisis was framed as a threat to the prosperity and continuity of Latvia, whereas Ukrainian refugees were accepted as a moral obligation to ensure the future security of Latvia. Thus, this thesis highlights the differences between the approach of the Latvian state to the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Yasmeen Abu-Laban, for her guidance and mentorship over the course of this research project. Her expertise and thoughtfulness were integral to the completion of this thesis, such that I was able to explore issues of national security and migration in a foreign country. Additionally, I would like to thank Pēteris for his thoughtful insight into the cultural, political, and social context of Latvia. I am beholden to his efforts to contextualize the ongoing and rapidly developing situations surrounding both migration events by providing a local perspective. His wisdom and support were extremely appreciated in shaping a final product that holds relevance to the current and historical understandings of Latvia. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow peers in the political science honours seminar (2023) for their support on the continual review and development of my thesis. This thesis would not have been possible without all your encouragement and support.

Table of Contents

Chapter One "Introduction"

In February of 2022, the Eastern frontier of the European Union (EU) was the construction site of barbed wire fences along its borders while governments were simultaneously preparing their populations to welcome large numbers of refugees. More specifically, the former Soviet-controlled states have gone to great lengths to accept and provide for the waves of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war with Russia. However, these same states have been constructing barriers and enhancing border security to prevent other migrants and asylum seekers from crossing the Belarusian border (Joly 2021).

Notably, what came to be called the Belarus border crisis by the Latvian government and the broader EU political institutions was inspired by the lack of legitimacy and recognition of its undemocratically elected leader, President Lukashenko (Joly 2021). Following these internationally condemned elections, the EU imposed sanctions on Lukashenko who retaliated by transporting asylum seekers and migrants seeking EU visas from the Middle East directly to the borders of the EU (Neuman 2021). At the same time, the war in Ukraine had driven Ukrainian refugees to neighbouring states or farther into the EU following Russia's invasion in February of 2022 (Karasapan 2022).

Latvia has experienced both events simultaneously throughout 2022, however, despite both migratory events being framed as crises by the Latvian government and state media, the state response to each of these crises has been decidedly different. When the first migrants from Belarus arrived on the Latvian border in the summer of 2021, the Latvian government declared a state of emergency and enabled their border security to employ force against migrants (RFE/RL 2021). Latvian border guards saw over 1000 migrants attempt to cross the border in the first two months of the crisis, most of whom were from countries in the Middle East (RFE/RL 2021). The

countries implicated in this border crisis, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania, accused Belarus and its President Lukashenko of "weaponizing" the migrants to destabilize the EU, which was used as justification to forcibly pushback the attempted crossings of the migrants (Baczynska 2021). Conversely, most former Soviet republics, including Latvia, have been greatly receptive toward Ukrainian refugees. As of October 2022, more than 41 000 Ukrainian refugees have claimed asylum in Latvia, whose government has sponsored various policies and grassroots organizations to support the arrival and stay of these refugees (UNHCR 2022; We Stand With Ukraine 2022). Indeed, the Latvian border guard has even been authorized by the government to allow Ukrainian refugees without official documentation to enter the country (We Stand With Ukraine 2022).

These migration crises have elicited very different responses from the Latvian state and its population despite their overlapping timeframes, which raise the question of why these differences arose and to what extent do they differ.

Research Question

The research question guiding this thesis is as follows: to what extent did the political expressions of national security differ in the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, and were the responses of Latvia to each situation different?

Hypothesis

My thesis hypothesizes that the key difference between how Latvia approached these crises is in how the Belarus border crisis has been framed as a threat to the prosperity and continuity of the Latvian nation, whereas accepting refugees from Ukraine is seen as morally right to ensure the future security of Latvia. Specifically, the migrants coming from Belarus are deemed as a security threat to the stability of Latvia and the EU as part of Lukashenko's hybrid

warfare. Conversely, I hypothesize that this difference emerges from the Ukrainian refugees having the sympathy of most Latvians, who have historically also been subjected to Russian aggression. The expressed concerns about the future security of Latvia and the moral necessity to assist Ukraine are viewed as apprehension and suspicion by the Latvian population towards Russia expanding its influence in Eastern Europe.

As partially informed by its national history of occupation under the Russians, Latvian identity incorporates a degree of skepticism about unfamiliar cultural influences and social pressures within its borders. In this thesis, such skepticism primarily refers to the Latvian attitudes towards migrants from the Middle East caught amid the Belarus Border Crisis, who frequently reported being treated with contempt regarding their motivations to enter Latvia (Amnesty International 2022, 4). In contrast, I suggest that the Latvian border policies towards Ukrainian refugees tend to be more lenient and accepting in large part due to their shared history of being subjected to the political will of the Soviet Union. Thus, the national history that Latvians share with Ukrainians informs their border policies in solidarity with resisting the modern Russian imperialism as expressed in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Research Objectives

The primary research objective of this thesis is to identify the differences between the approaches of Latvian state to the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis by analyzing the political expressions of national security. This research also has a few secondary research objectives, including:

01. To identify and compare key thematic differences across primary sources on the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis; and

02. To understand how border policies in Latvia are connected to broader civil conceptions of national security.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The key terms that will be used extensively throughout this thesis are 'migrant', 'asylum seeker', and 'refugee'. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between these terms and define them in order to operationalize each concept in the context of the Belarus migrant crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. European member states have made extensive use of this differentiation, with geographical blocs within the union securitizing the issue of migration to different extents (Dempsy 2022). Asylum seekers are those who are in the process of putting forth a claim for asylum and to be recognized as a refugee in a country outside of their place of origin (UNHCR n.d.). A refugee is protected under international law by the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees in 1951 due to reasonable fear of prosecution related to nationality, race, religion, or political views (Burnell 2009). However, in operationalizing this term it is important to recognize its limitations, including that this definition was shaped by predominantly Western nations during the Cold War (Burnell 2009). As a result, the accepted definition of a refugee is largely seen as inaccurate in the modern context of human rights abuses and the lack of a functioning economy in some countries (Burnell 2009). On the other hand, the term 'migrant' has a broader definition compared to refugees, which neglects to consider whether the movement of migrants across borders is voluntary or not and does not address the reasons for this movement (UN n.d.). Thus, the term migrant can be used to refer to any person who has moved either internally within a country or between countries from their long-standing place of residence for any reason (UN n.d.). In the current discussion on migration in Europe, European countries have continuously reinforced hegemonic conceptions of refugees as fleeing a

conventional war, especially when referring to Ukrainian refugees in 2022, whereas the term migrant is frequently used to refer to racialized individuals seeking entry into Europe for a variety of reasons (Dempsy 2022).

Another term that is important to define when considering the research question of this thesis is securitization. This concept of framing migrants or refugees as security threats emerged after the end of the Cold War, and therefore came to the forefront of scholarly discussions on security with the rise of the Copenhagen School on security studies in the 1990s (Hammerstad 2014, 266). Perhaps most consequentially, this idea of portraying certain groups or identities as a threat to security has contributed to the differential treatment of migrants and refugees. Those who are seen to have a less legitimate asylum claim, predominantly referred to as migrants, are constructed in both language and security practices as potential risks that could threaten the social cohesion or group identity of a nation (Hammerstad 2014, 268). Securitization will be operationalized throughout this research to refer to how some migrants and refugees have come to be conceived as a national security threat to Latvia.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

The significance of this work can be seen in three core areas as it relates to Latvian identity and the impact of its political expression on border policies. Firstly, this research can be used to inform the greater academic and policy debate on migration to the EU, as evidenced by both the case studies in this research. Over the last decade, much of the academic focus in Europe has been devoted to finding solutions to cope with rising numbers of migrants to the EU and the challenges to considering the interests of each member state. This research puts forth the case of Latvian as a path towards understanding migration politics in the EU at the nation-state

level through an informed understanding of how Latvia has approached these two migration crises.

Secondly, this research also has political and legal implications for improving Latvian border policies and legislation to reflect best practices under international law pertaining to human rights and refugees. Additionally, the ongoing discussions within EU institutions and bilateral relations among EU states questions the extent to which the EU should be involved in managing large flows of migrants. For this reason, the findings of this thesis could inform the national policies in Latvia and offer suggestions on how to ensure congruence and interoperability with EU policies. One specific concern of this research is to understand the difference in treatment towards those labelled as refugees or migrants. In particular, this thesis draws on the commonly accepted definition of a 'refugee' under international law and the right to seek asylum. This research holds great significance in providing a legal and political foundation to understand the differentiations made by the Latvian state between Ukrainian refugees and the migrants from the Belarusian border.

Finally, the findings of this research can also contribute to improved awareness of how Latvian statehood has evolved since regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Only recently over the course of the last three decades has Latvia conducted its own independent foreign policy. Given this development, it is also important to understand how Latvia's approach to managing borders and international relations has evolved throughout this period. Although Latvia has always conceived of Russia as a threat to its sovereignty since its independence, many former Eastern bloc countries have grown increasingly wary of Russia's expanding scope of influence in Europe given the use of hybrid warfare tactics in the Belarus border crisis (Łubiński 2021, 1). Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 also poses a risk to Latvia's independence,

and so this research provides insight into how the perception of this risk has manifested in Latvia's borders. Ultimately, these insights can be used as the foundation to interpret the border management and future responses of Latvia to migration.

THESIS CHAPTER PLAN

In order to address the objectives of this research, the first chapter of my thesis cover the research question, research objectives, and my hypothesis. This chapter also includes the significance of this study, and how it relates to this field of research. Additionally, this section defines important terms as they relate to the case studies and objectives of this thesis.

Secondly, the following chapter establishes the theoretical framework composed of two theories, critical border studies and critical security studies. Furthermore, this chapter conducts a literature review on academic work related to Latvian migration, the Belarus border crisis with the EU, and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Subsequently, I outline how my thesis intends to fill the gaps in existing research in my research design and methodology.

The third chapter analyzes the case study of the Belarus border crisis with the EU through the news media, government documents, and other publicly available sources. To provide context for this analysis, this chapter provides a brief overview of the events leading to the crisis, before covering how the government addressed the crisis through public statements and policies, as well as how the crisis was depicted by the media. Particular focus is devoted to understanding how the Latvian border is described in these sources and examining cultural conceptions of the Latvian border. For this purpose, excerpts from the interviews I conducted with university students are used to contextualize this analysis of the migration crisis in Latvian culture.

In the fourth chapter of my thesis, I examine the Ukrainian refugee crisis and the relevant news articles, government policies, and open-source documents describing the reception and

settlement of refugees in Latvia. Similar to the third chapter, this chapter refers to statements from the interviews that connect Latvian national identity and cultural conceptions of its border to this case study.

The fifth chapter presents a discussion which comparatively analyzes the two case studies and how they were approached by the Latvian state. This discussion covers the similarities and differences between the two case studies while also identifying potential reasons as to why the Latvian states approached these crises in the manner that it did. This comparison is further augmented by quotes from the interviews to demonstrate how national security concerns have influenced border policies, if at all.

Finally, the sixth chapter of this thesis presents a summary of the research findings, identifies the limitations of this study, and suggests further avenues for research. The implications of this comparative analysis are also discussed as they relate to the fields of international relations, migration politics, and what this means for Latvia itself. In conclusion, I answer the research question of this thesis by examining the findings of this research and how its implications determine the extent to which Latvia's political expressions of national security differed between the two cases.

Chapter Two "Theoretical Framework and Methodology"

Critical Border Studies Framework

This study makes use of a critical border studies and critical security studies framework to situate its findings. Critical border studies is an interdisciplinary school of thought that questions the rights of states to enforce their own borders and the assumptions about the

sovereign ability to do so (McCorkle 2020, 57). As part of this framework, critical border studies examines the attitudes of state actors and publics towards migrants attempting to enter the country and how these attitudes in the Global North increasingly frame migration as harming the host country (McCorkle 2020, 57). To support this perspective, common rhetoric on migration by these countries includes overstated concerns about national security (McCorkle 2020, 57). To deconstruct these exaggerations, critical border studies examines how state borders are socially constructed as a performative measure to communicate signals internally and externally about that state (Salter 2012, 734). More specifically, the state relies on its social capital as the pinnacle of collective identity and in some cases, as the provider of welfare to shape the performativity of the border by emphasizing this distinction between states as 'natural' (Salter 2012, 735). A crucial part of this performative process is the assumed ability of the sovereign state to remove specific individuals from within its borders as it suits the interest of the state (Salter 2012, 735). In most cases, this forcible removal of people and restriction of their freedom of movement is justified in the name of protecting its population from security risks — without this ability, the authority of the state is undermined (Salter 2012, 735). There is, however, another concept of border studies which relates to the subversion of the political authority of the state through the process of globalization, otherwise known as 'debordering' (Kolossov and Scott 2013). For this research, the utility of critical border studies is the critical analysis of the underlying assumptions about a state's territorial integrity and national sovereignty. My thesis will employ this theoretical framework in order to problematize how in both case studies of migration to Latvia, the sovereign's ability to enforce its border according to its will remained unquestioned by the domestic population and the international community.

Critical Security Studies

Critical security studies is a theoretical framework that seeks to problematize how security has been studied and approached in international relations (Krause and Williams 1997, vii). Particularly, this framework aims to understand how certain issues have become of interest to security scholars and how these issues affect their primary concern regarding the conditions of war and peace (Krause and Williams 1997, viii). To date, critical perspectives of traditional security studies have provided great insight into how white privilege and whiteness are upheld by controlling the ways of knowing about security threats; this assists white privilege in distinguishing which objects and people should be seen as a security concern (Guerra 2021, 30). To address the racist foundation of security studies, critical security studies applies a racial lens in constructing security threats to account for the existing structures in international relations that uphold hierarchies based on white ways of knowing (Guerra 2021, 30). To implement a critical security studies framework, Guerra (2021, 31) describes how two divergent understandings have developed, the first focusing on moving beyond the traditional military scope of security, and the second emphasizing the individual's agency over the state. Taken together with critical border studies, this theory of critical security studies is important as a framework in this research because it places additional emphasis on questioning which actors and objects are seen as needing to be 'secured' (Krause and Williams 1997, x). Furthermore, this critical approach to security is essential when considering the racialized aspects of migration and how the state's conception of 'security' is viewing those within its borders in a state of belonging (Guerra 2021, 32). In European nations, this view of security privileges white bodies and can be reasonably assumed to privilege white migrants as well (Guerra 2021, 32). This theory of critical security

studies can therefore be used to question how the nation-state prioritizes the security of its own territorial borders and sovereignty before the bodily security of migrants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To address how migration to Latvia has been previously covered by scholars, this section reviews the available material pertinent to immigration to Latvia, the Belarus border crisis, and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The reasoning behind this scope for the literature review is to understand how migrants to Latvia have been studied before and which methods were used to accomplish this end. Additionally, while there has been little emphasis in the literature on challenging the sovereign's ability to enforce its borders and keep migrants out of the country, there is much in the literature which references state security as a primary concern for controlling migration to Latvia. However, given the novelty of the two migration crises selected for analysis and the limited availability of academic scholarship on these crises as they relate to Latvia, this literature review will also cover perspectives from other affected European countries such as Poland.

Immigration to Latvia

The existing literature covering topics of immigration or migration to Latvia largely focuses on the role of Latvia, in the context of the Baltic states, in combating the irregular migration the EU has faced in the last decade. This logic is followed in the literature with the widely shared knowledge that the Baltic states have been long-time net-emigrators, meaning that people often immigrate from these states to other countries (Lindberg and Borrelli 2019, 308).

As such, many of the migrants who are seeking routes into the EU take advantage of the Schengen Zone and attempt to enter the Baltic states to migrate to other countries in the EU (Lindberg and Borrelli 2019, 307). However, the literature understands this process of Latvia and the other Baltic states as pivoting from emigration countries to now having to re-border their former Soviet-era borders (Lindberg and Borrelli 2019, 308). Even so, the emphasis of the literature post-independence remains on two considerations. First, young, skilled workers are leaving the country in search of better opportunities in Western Europe (McCollum et al. 2013, 688). Another emphasis in the literature is the effects of the 2015 migration crisis on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), a region encompassing Latvia, and how the number of migrants seeking entry into Europe has increased in recent years. The literature discusses how former Soviet rule over these countries has produced civil and political systems which the population has only recently started to trust, and so much of the conservative electorate protects against what it perceives as internal and external threats (Hutter and Kriesi 2022, 344). From this perspective, the commonly accepted literature on immigration in CEE appears to make the case that immigration is perceived as a threat to the people. However, when compared to the available literature in Western Europe about how the media has represented migrants in the Western part of the EU, there has been less analysis done in Latvia. The literature which has covered this topic draws heavily on themes of how Latvian media has framed migrants as harmful to the economy and yet they are simultaneously portrayed as a threat to the nation (Rožukalne et al. 2020, 22, 32).

On the other hand, there is also a considerable amount of literature on the immigration policies of Latvia before its independence. Namely, the literature covers the numerous efforts of the Soviet Union to increase the number of ethnic Russians living within the Soviet Republic of

Latvia (Grybauskas 2022, 482). This perspective on the Russian minority living in Latvia as a result of the Soviet Union's workers programs has been analyzed from several different perspectives, including those with an emphasis on the politics of citizenship, policies of immigration, and demographics. Throughout the 1990s, the Russian minorities in the Baltics were still referred to as "migrants", an indication of how the Baltic states wished to reassert their cultural identity within their independent countries (Ilmárs et al. 1994, 9).

The Belarus Border Crisis with the European Union

While the Belarus border crisis with the EU began in the summer of 2021, at the time of writing this crisis has persisted without a formal diplomatic resolution while migrants remain stranded at the Belarusian border. Despite the ongoing nature of this issue, there has yet to be a large and comprehensive study of the events that have taken place during the Belarus border crisis since its inception in May 2021 (Baziur 2022, 134). Additionally, since the three member states affected by this crisis in the EU, namely Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, have taken a similar approach to the issue with a united front, much of the literature does not distinguish between how the crisis has affected each individual nation. For this reason, this literature review will take a more relational approach in considering how this case has impacted Latvia by situating Latvia in relation to the EU, Lithuania, and Poland. Notably, the academic literature on this issue seems to be divided amongst different disciplines and is used to highlight specific concerns that the EU is facing. To illustrate, several papers discuss the strategic security threat that this border crisis signifies, while others discuss the implications of a large group of migrants without access to healthcare infrastructure during the time of a pandemic (Filipec 2022, 1; Devi 2021, 2064). However, broadly speaking, this issue is covered in two main categories: a security and political threat to the EU and a humanitarian crisis on its border.

A sizable amount of the available academic literature focuses on how the development and deliberate execution of the Belarus border crisis constitutes an alarming political and security threat to the EU. The unconventional nature of weaponizing migrants as political pressure against the EU has raised significant concerns about the ability of the EU to withstand such pressure, particularly when it is directed against select member states (Łubiński 2021, 2). This portion of the literature views the border crisis as 'hybrid warfare' and conceptualizes the migrants as pawns in the larger situation of Belarus using humans to achieve political means (Filipec 2022, 2). Furthermore, much attention is given to the future ramifications that this crisis poses if the EU is not able to effectively cope with the pressure of having large numbers of migrants at its borders (Filipec 2022, 2). Therefore, the literature which falls into this category is concerned with presenting a framework or series of steps to take to address future hybrid threats (Filipec 2022, 2). However, while most of these sources agree that the hybrid nature of this crisis is a modern development, there is some literature that advances the perspective that conflict along the Belarus border, particularly with Poland, has a long history related to the Russian sphere of influence (Konieczny 2022, 320). Moreover, there is also greater differentiation within this category of the literature to the extent that each source focuses on the migrants as experiencing insecurity themselves. Baziur's (2022) article acknowledges that while many of the migrants, specifically the young men seeking better economic circumstances, have been used as a "demographic weapon" (136) against the EU, it also details how the migrants face challenges like human trafficking which contributes to their bodily insecurity. Finally, there is also considerable emphasis amongst the literature on the domestic public opinion of the affected states towards the border crisis, particularly when viewing it as a security and political threat. In the case of Latvia, the public survey data has indicated that the vast majority in Latvian society is

against allowing any of the migrants from the Belarus border to enter the country (Kaprāns and Saulītis 2022, 11). Even so, the data also suggests that whether the hybrid nature of this 'attack' on the EU warrants greater sanctions and restrictions on the Lukashenko regime differs among existing social divisions within Latvian society (Kaprāns and Saulītis 2022, 11). Specifically, this situation exploited pre-existing social divisions along linguistic, ethnocultural, and socioeconomic lines in Latvia (Kaprāns and Saulītis 2022, 11).

Beyond the affected member states, the literature has also covered the security concerns of the EU and what the implications are for how the EU will deal with future border incursions by migrants. Barszcz's (2022, 90) review of the enforcement of EU border policies covers how the Belarus border crisis has highlighted several inconsistencies between how the border policies are enacted internally to the union and externally. These inconsistencies are also identified by the literature as going beyond the enforcement of border security, as they are also present in how the EU has approached the political threat of Belarus. Kascian (2022, 13) suggests that the series of events leading up to the migrant crisis with Belarus were not priorities in the EU Parliament, and thus many of the resolutions on the issue were left ambiguous and up to interpretation. Additionally, Kascian (2022, 6) has made the connection between the Belarus border crisis and the country's role in the war in Ukraine, in that Lukashenko's regime in Belarus is dependent on the interests of the Russian state. In the absence of a clear legal framework to engage Belarus, the EU compiled a set of internal instruments to deal with the migrants on its borders (Miadzvetskaya 2022, 183). However, as evidenced by the clashes with border guards from all three member states, these legal measures produced a form of indirect engagement of Belarus whereby the migrants were the most tangible form of contact with the country (Miadzvetskaya 2022, 184).

In a different vein, the other category that the majority of academic literature on this topic falls into is how this crisis affects the humanitarian conditions at the border with Belarus. These concerns stem from how humanitarian organizations have been denied access to the migrants stuck at the border and are unable to provide food or medical assistance to those in need (Devi 2021, 2064). Additionally, humanitarian concerns have also emerged over the denial of migrant's ability to claim asylum in the EU. Balicki (2022, 76), a scholar on cultural integration, analyzes how the humanitarian crisis inflicted by the Belarus border crisis has produced questions about to what extent states should be able to exclude immigrants from their territory. In an attempt to answer this question, much has been written about the human rights violations of the migrants by the EU and its member states, stranding the migrants at the border and denying them entry into the country (Wesselink 2022, 4). Although there were not as many attempted border crossings into Latvia as there were in Lithuania and Poland, all three countries were consistent in their objective to deny the migrants from entering the country (Jolkina 2022). As Jolkina's (2022) work shows, this denial of a human right to claim asylum was partially justified to the EU and the international community through the declaration of a state of emergency that extended extrajudicial measures. It is this extension of the state of exception and the discourse on the 'hybrid warfare' nature of this migration crisis that concerns the majority of the literature on the humanitarian situation (Krivonos 2021). These exceptions are criticized as enabling the practice of "pushbacks" understood as the forcible expulsion of migrants, including possible refugees, from a state's territory, by national security actors and state and EU border guards (Grzeskowiak 2022, 5). Ultimately, the literature addresses this border crisis as a humanitarian catastrophe primarily because it views the newly imposed legislation on restricting the access of

the migrants to claim asylum and fulfill their basic needs as the suspension of human rights and a violation of international law.

The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

Similar to the Belarus-EU border crisis, there has been a lack of scholarly attention towards the experiences of Ukrainian refugees — presumably partly due to the novelty and ongoing nature of the crisis. However, those academics who have covered this topic have so far analyzed how the invasion of Ukraine has led to a greater humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and has dramatically increased the number of refugees in Europe. Astrov et al. (2022, 331) suggest that the number of Ukrainian refugees fleeing to other European countries will be over three times the number that sought asylum in the EU throughout 2015-2015. Much of the focus has been placed on Poland, where over three million Ukrainian refugees have sought refuge since the beginning of Russia's invasion in February 2022 (Stępniewski 2022, 12). There has been a considerable emphasis placed on how the institutions of the EU have responded to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, with additional analysis of how the Ukrainian refugees have remained connected whilst dispersed across the EU (Best and Menkhoff 2022, 29).

On the other hand, the literature also reveals a lot of emphasis on the economics and the logistical concerns of administering education and healthcare to the influx of refugees. Chumak (2022, 536) suggests that many Western post-secondary institutions have offered numerous supports for Ukrainian students and scholars fleeing the war. The economics were touched upon in a different sense, of which Lloyd and Sirkeci (2022, 526) make the argument that part of the rationale behind Ukrainian refugees fleeing the country has been in search of better economic livelihoods. While there has been much written about the war itself, the living conditions and migratory routes of the Ukrainian refugees have not yet been subject to extensive research.

To summarize the literature on migration to Latvia, four main considerations in how Latvian immigrants are treated have been identified. Firstly, there are social considerations as evidenced by the concern in Latvia over how the ethnic Russians who migrated to Latvia during the Soviet Union will integrate with Latvia culture (Ilmárs et al. 1994, 9). Additionally, the literature also points to the security and humanitarian concerns in the treatment of migrants as shown by the approach to the Belarus border crisis. The Belarus border crisis has received little attention amongst academic literature as most academics have instead selected to focus on the political implications posed by the unpredictable actions of Belarus' President. Finally, there is also the economic consideration which was suggested by Lloyd and Sirkeci (2022, 526) as an important factor in the motivation of Ukrainian refugees to leave their country, while also presenting a challenge for their host country to find employment to support these refugees. However, despite having identified these considerations, little attention has been given to Latvia's handling of migrants individually following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. My thesis intends to address this gap in the literature by comparing Latvia's approach between these two migration crises.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Given the objectives of this research, my thesis uses the qualitative methodology of small-n case study to address the research question. This thesis begins with an intensive qualitative comparison between the case studies of the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis to understand the political conditions and national security considerations which may have led to different treatments toward the migrants and refugees by the Latvian state.

Swanborn's (2010, 2) description of the intensive approach to case studies suggests that this method allows the researcher to study a particular phenomenon at great length while also providing context for the reader to interpret the research findings. To provide sufficient context, this research analyzes primary and secondary sources such as government documents, transcripts of government statements, and media publications. By analyzing patterns and accounts from these sources, this qualitative data will illuminate the differences between how the migration crises were approached within the social context of Latvia. Comparing two case studies within a single country provides an in-depth understanding of Latvia's border policies in a culturally relevant manner. This methodological approach considers Latvian culture, language, and history, and how these factors shape the conception of the Latvian border and migration policies. In considering these factors, a conscious effort is made to reduce bias and assumptions about why Latvia pursued a particular approach.

The second method of data collection in this research is semi-structured interviews with Latvian university students to discuss their perceptions on how their state handled both the Belarus border crisis and the influx of Ukrainian refugees. These interviews provide additional insight into how the domestic population of Latvia views itself as distinct from other cultures and from migrants attempting to cross into Latvia. The collection of this data is important for interpreting the patterns revealed by the comparative analysis and how these can be considered within the social framework of Latvia. Consequently, the data from five interviews completed with students will be qualitatively analyzed to contextualize the findings of the comparative analysis. This method of data collection has received ethics approval from the University of Alberta for the purposes of this study.

Latvia was selected as the primary country from within to conduct this comparative analysis given its unique geopolitical position as a small Baltic nation and a member of the European Union. Latvia was formerly part of the Soviet Union, and I anticipate that this shift from the Soviet Union to an independent member of the EU has social, political, and cultural implications which have impacted Latvia's response to the issue of migration as compared to much of Western Europe. Latvia also has a significant Russian-speaking population which it regards with distrust over their suspected allegiance to Russia instead of an independent Latvia (Ilmárs et al. 1994, 12). This is an influential factor which distinguishes Latvia from other Eastern European and Baltic nations when discussing these migration crises because of the role that Russia and its ally Belarus have in influencing these events. Furthermore, as discussed in the literature review, there has been little consideration given to Latvia independently of the other Baltic states without assuming similarities between Latvia and other Eastern European states. Therefore, this thesis has elected to focus on a nation which has been understudied thus far and may offer unique insights into the interplay between migration and national security given its strong national identity.

The Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis were selected as case studies for this comparative analysis because despite occurring with a similar temporal range, beginning within a year of each other, the approach of the Latvian state to these prolonged crises was markedly different. On one hand, the Belarus border crisis and subsequent humanitarian crisis amongst migrants on the border were uniquely orchestrated by the Belarusian government as part of a targeted attack on the EU. Conversely, the Ukrainian refugee crisis was a spontaneous development of millions of refugees fleeing their country in response to military aggression. My thesis has selected these particular crises through which to analyze migration politics and

national security because of the language used by the Latvian government to distinguish between their motivations for seeking entry into Latvia. Notably, the state has emphasized the asylum seekers during the Belarus border crisis as 'migrants' while the asylum seekers from the Ukrainian refugee crisis were referred to as 'refugees' by the EU and media alike. Additionally, these case studies were selected for comparison due to common security concerns surrounding Russian influence, which provides a baseline for comparison. As part of this research, my decision to examine these two cases was informed by the different political and social factors influencing how these events of mass migration were securitized by the state. For this reason, the decision to compare both of these migration crises was made to best isolate the state's response to the specific migration crisis given the restricted time frame and geographical location.

Research Methods

As discussed in the research design, this thesis employs two research methods to achieve its research objectives. The primary research method used is a qualitative comparative analysis of the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis as small-n case studies. Although this comparative study analyzes two migration crises as case studies, both cases occur within the context of a single country, Latvia, which is intended to be the unit of analysis in this research. Traditionally, case study methods have been used to compare political institutions or systems, however, focus on the state as the unit of analysis in this comparison is intended to draw focus to the distinctiveness of Latvia's political expressions of national security (Stake 2009, 23). While singular country case studies have been critiqued for their lack of generalization and application of findings to other cases, these studies produce unique insights into a specific cultural context (Pepinsky 2019, 193). As Stake (2009) suggests, a case study can refer to any "bounded system" (23) that is self-contained. Given that both the Belarus border crisis and Ukrainian refugee crisis

are a series of self-contained events as they occurred in Latvia, this research intends to produce an in-depth understanding of migration and national security in Latvia. Additionally, this case study method interacts with the theoretical framework of critical border studies and critical security studies by drawing on a shared ontology which questions assumptions about universal truths and the generalizability of such cases when considering the transferability of phenomena like state borders.

This thesis also uses the method of semi-structured interviews to supplement and contextualize the findings of the comparative analysis. These semi-structured interviews are informed by Galletta's (2013, 9) work which emphasizes the importance of the interviews being designed to explore the individual context behind each answer to the guiding questions. Such focus on the individual nature of the responses will yield better insight into the discursive similarities between the answers based on shared external factors which can influence an individual's response (Galletta 2013, 10). To ensure that there is a valid sample size to achieve similar themes amongst interviewees' responses, I aimed for 5-8 interview participants. In this case, I utilized the "snowball sampling" method to recruit interview participants given the pragmatic constraints of lacking immediate access to a geographically and demographically distant population (Raifman et al. 2022, 39). All data and transcripts from these interviews are stored on a private and secure Google Drive. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of interviewees, I also assigned pseudonyms to each participant whose contributions are recognized in this thesis. Moreover, the eligibility criteria for participation in these interviews are that the individual must currently attend university in Latvia and hold or be eligible for Latvian citizenship. The reasoning for this inclusion criteria is that Latvian university students have proficient English skills which allow them to hold a conversation so that the interviews can be

conducted in a language spoken by both the researcher and participant. Such criteria also exclude non-citizens of Latvia from participating in this study since they are expected to have different perceptions of cultural identity given that many of these individuals share stronger cultural ties with Russia as opposed to Latvia. This thesis makes use of statements and quotes from the interviews by including some throughout each chapter to contextualize the analysis of the case studies in a culturally relevant manner. Thus, the intention of using this method is to complement the emphasis of single country case study methodology on cultural relativism.

Positionality Statement

To position myself as the researcher within the context of this topic, I am an outsider to Latvian politics and identity. With this in mind, my ethnocultural background is of Eastern European heritage and as such I am highly conscious about the important role that national identity played in restoring independence in former Soviet spaces such as Latvia. In addition, I spent time in Latvia in summer 2022 studying its national security and defence structures, and thus I possess familiarity with the popular conceptualization of the 'Russian world' and how it is viewed as a threat to the sovereignty of many Eastern and Central European states. Although the interviews were not conducted in the participants' native language of Latvian, their fluency and capability to speak English as postsecondary students is an important consideration of the interview inclusion criteria. This was essential to the conduct of the research method given that I, the principal researcher, am not a Latvian national nor do I speak Latvian. However, my thesis aims to bring an outside perspective to the national security elements of Latvia's migration and border policies.

Chapter Three "The Belarus Border Crisis"

INTRODUCTION TO THE BELARUS BORDER CRISIS IN LATVIA

In the summer of 2021, the events that unfolded on the Belarusian border as migrants attempted to cross into Latvia were largely confined to the border region itself. Although several articles were published in local and international news outlets on the 'hybrid warfare' tactics used by Belarus in weaponizing the flow of migrants to politically pressure the EU, the migrants were shuttered at the border from all sides (Henley, Roth, and Rankin 2021). Similar to occurrences along the Polish and Lithuanian borders with Belarus, any migrants who attempted to cross into Latvia were turned back to Belarus by state authorities and many were denied the opportunity to claim asylum (Amnesty International 2022, 4). This firm enforcement of the Latvian border was well-received by the domestic population since many of the negative preconceptions about immigrants in Latvia have been exacerbated by the actions of Belarus in fueling illegal immigration (Kaprāns and Saulītis 2022, 11).

Based on these initial conditions of the border crisis, the intent of this case study analysis is to question the right of the state to enforce its own borders, particularly when it puts the lives of migrants at risk. To illustrate, one of the migrants stranded at the Belarusian border was quoted by Amnesty International (2022) as saying "if I go back to Iraq my life will be in danger" (4). It is this deliberate prioritization of national security over the sanctity of human life that critical security studies aims to problematize because of how certain biases stemming from white supremacy routinely give precedent to the hierarchical domination of white epistemologies. Hence, this chapter covers how the response of the Latvian state to the Belarus border crisis was informed by national security concerns.

NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

In order to examine how national security was considered as part of the government's response in this case study, this section begins by presenting an overview of the common national security concerns in Latvia as depicted by the media and literature. Subsequently, this chapter analyzes how these national security factors were regarded by the Latvian government, media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout this crisis.

When considering the discourse and terminology used to describe the Belarus border crisis, some of the most frequent and recurring terms include 'hybrid warfare' and 'illegal immigration'. Both of these terms are important in how they frame the overall crisis and security environment of Latvia, since they presuppose that this matter of immigration intimately involves the state through reference to the legality and war-like nature of the crisis. For these reasons, a state of emergency was first introduced in Latvia on August 10, 2021, in the administrative regions of Ludza, Krāslava, Augšdaugava and Daugavpils on the border with Belarus (Ministry of the Interior 2022). Significantly, according to Latvian legislation, the introduction of the state of emergency permits the government and state authorities to supersede the law if acting in the best interests of the state and its people.[1] Under these conditions, the term 'hybrid warfare' becomes increasingly important as it signifies a departure from the international norms surrounding warfare (Łubiński 2021, 3). Although there is no commonly accepted definition of what hybrid warfare is, it is considered to encompass a variety of tactics and strategies intended to obtain a political objective (Łubiński 2021, 4). Similarly, 'illegal immigration' carries several connotations about the security concerns related to immigration, particularly as it denotes the

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[1] Latvia, Saeima, *Par ārkārtējo situāciju un izņēmuma stāvokli*, 2013, c. 2 (s. 8). 2016/61.1, Riga, https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/255713.

bypassing of the legal processes. However, a report by Amnesty International (2022) on the Belarus border crisis deems Latvia's characterization of the 'illegal' nature of immigration as "inconsistent with the principle of non-penalization of asylum-seekers and refugees" (12). Such inconsistency can be contested, however, as the UNHCR (2017, 9) claims that restrictions on the freedoms of migrants and asylum-seekers are permitted under international law if it is a proportional response to the situation and does not violate human rights. While the UNHCR (2017, 7) acknowledges that asylum seekers face challenges when seeking refuge, including legal challenges, Amnesty International's (2022) assertion that Latvia pursues punitive measures against refugees distorts some of the ways in which these restrictive measures were used. Despite the differing perspectives on the extent to which Latvia's response to the crisis was justified, this chapter considers all factors which may have contributed to Latvia's political expressions of national security.

Latvian Government Policies and Statements

On August 23, 2021, the Latvian Prime Minister Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš released a joint statement with the governments of Poland, Estonia, and Lithuania regarding the "hybrid attack" against them organized by Belarus (Chancellery of the Prime Minister 2021). This statement was announced following the state of emergency declared on August 10, 2021, in the four regions bordering Belarus for the initial duration of three months (Ministry of the Interior 2021). In both statements, the Government of Latvia displayed a clear indication that it considered the massing of migrants on its border a "hybrid warfare operation" and an infringement on its territorial sovereignty by Belarus (Ministry of the Interior 2021). Arguably, these actions were taken by Latvia with the intent of conveying to the EU and other states that its first priority in this crisis would be to ensure the political stability and security of Latvia. Soon thereafter, the European

Court of Human Rights ruled that the governments of Latvia and Poland were responsible for temporarily providing aid to meet the migrants' basic needs for a period of three weeks (DW 2021). In response to this ruling, the Latvian Minister of the Interior, Marija Golubeva, made a statement on Twitter that border guards were working alongside NGOs to deliver assistance to the migrants (Eng.LSM.lv 2021). However, Minister Golubeva also mentioned that the border remained fraught with tension as illegal crossings were increasing (Eng.LSM.lv 2021). Suggestively, these statements from the Ministry of the Interior reveal a clear set of priorities: first, that the border sovereignty of Latvia is maintained and that migrants are provided with temporary humanitarian assistance. It should also be noted that the court ruling did not establish a government mandate to allow migrants to enter these countries, simply that those on the border were given the necessary provisions to survive under their existing conditions (Eng.LSM.lv 2021).

That same month, Prime Minister Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš made a statement to the press that Latvia would take decisive action against Belarus in its hybrid war against the EU (Baczynska 2021). To this end, he stressed the responsibility of the EU to make it clear to Belarus that importing migrants to "cross into the bloc is pointless" (Baczynska 2021). In calling on the EU to respond to this crisis, the statement of Prime Minister Kariņš demonstrates that Latvia is prepared to go to great lengths to ensure that Belarus does not view the weaponization of migrants to exert political pressure as a viable tool in the future. From Latvia's perspective, such lengths are easily justifiable as any attempt to exert foreign political influence may be viewed as threatening to Latvia's national security given its history as part of the Soviet Union, which exerted control over Latvia's domestic and internal affairs. Furthermore, this form of political influence was thought to have been supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin, an

ally of Belarus and President Lukashenko (Baziur 2022, 133). To avoid the conceivable erosion of their sovereignty, Latvia continuously extended the state of emergency to allow for adaptable and extreme measures. Thus, the state of emergency was extended every few months throughout the year 2022 and has most recently been extended until May 2023 (Ministry of the Interior 2023). Later extensions of this state of emergency have encountered significant resistance from the Ministry of Justice, which disapproves of using a temporary measure for an extended period (Kairis and Eng.LSM.lv 2022). In voicing their concerns, the Ministry of Justice can be viewed as advocating for more accountability from the executive branch of government in how this crisis is handled. Specifically, given the extended time frame for which this crisis has persisted without any significant developments, it could be argued that there is no longer a crisis facing the state and rather this state of emergency is an abuse of government power. To this end, Anda Smiltēna, the Deputy Secretary of State for Legal Affairs, suggested that other laws could be amended to fulfill the current need for the state of emergency, particularly if the ongoing border crisis is indicative of future security concerns about illegal immigration (Kairis and Eng.LSM.lv 2022).

When the United Nations Security Council met in 2021 to discuss the crisis orchestrated by Belarus, the Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs described the border situation as retaliation for Latvia's support to Belarusian society following the 2020 presidential elections (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). Minister Rinkēvičs also accused the regime in Minsk as profiting from human smuggling in this orchestrated migration crisis (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). While Minister Rinkēvičs mentions several key national security concerns surrounding the attempted entries of these migrants into Latvia, he also fails to address the concerns of human rights abuses by Latvian border authorities. Instead, deliberate emphasis was placed on the "brutal violations of human rights in Belarus" in the violence following the 2020

elections (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). Indicatively, this statement prioritizes certain

accusations of human rights abuses over others, particularly as it relates to the rights of

Belarusians as opposed to the migrants at the border. It is not made entirely clear as to why

certain groups are prioritized, although this may have to do with the suggested goal of the

Belarusian government to portray the states affected by this crisis as committing violations of

human rights (Łubiński 2021, 5). The European Commissioner for Human Rights wrote to the

Latvian Minister of the Interior to express concern about the investigation of human rights

abuses and misconduct of security forces on the Belarusian border (Council of Europe

Commissioner for Human Rights 2022). In his response, the Minister of the Interior Kristaps

Eklons assured the Commissioner that all human rights and laws of the EU were upheld by

Latvian (Republic of Latvia Ministry of the Interior 2022, 1). As evidence, Minister Eklons

pointed to EU case law which outlined notable examples of lawful pushbacks, the suspension of

the right to claim asylum in specific regions, and mass migration threatening internal order

(Republic of Latvia Ministry of the Interior 2022, 4). Most cases pointed to the state's ability to

protect itself and refuse entry to migrants to maintain domestic stability, notwithstanding other

immediate considerations which permit migrants to enter the country (Republic of Latvia

Ministry of the Interior 2022, 4). When asked about the capability of the Latvian government to

cope with admitting large numbers of migrants, Ēriks (pseudonym) said:

> It is dealing with this problem a lot better than it was dealing with other immigrant-related problems in the past. And as we currently know, they are still building… the fence between the borders. And they're trying to establish a mutual agreement between Lithuania and Poland, about how many immigrants to Latvia and at what rate and when…to close the borders. (Author's Interview, January 19, 2023).

However, the response of the Latvian government overlooks how human rights for those

on the border have the potential to be readily abused in the face of few options available to

migrants. Most notably, the ability to claim asylum was suspended in the regions bordering

Belarus and relocated further inland, with no viable routes from the border to get there (Republic of Latvia Ministry of the Interior 2022, 3). All three administrative zones in the Latgales region bordering Belarus have been under a state of emergency since August 2021, which suspended operational procedures for claiming asylum (Republic of Latvia Ministry of the Interior 2022, 3). Migrants who were able to transit through the border region and Latgales administrative zones are brought to asylum centres such as the Mucenieki Centre, which serve to register the migrants and provide temporary accommodations (Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs 2021).

By applying a critical security studies lens it can be suggested that the individual agency of migrants who were involved in the border crisis was superseded by the involvement of other states who acted with limited restraint to protect their national security. Crucially, these state actors and government officials established that it was EU states and their citizens (including Latvians) who were viewed as needing to be secured, and not the migrants on the border. Indeed, this was further reinforced by the Latvian government's deferral of concerns surrounding human rights violations on its border by referring to earlier precedents of Belarus' human rights violations against its own citizens. By framing this border crisis as a matter of national security, the Latvian government and its EU partners assumed that each state was responsible for protecting the integrity of its borders and, by extension, dealing with the migrants was also assumed to be a domestic responsibility. Moreover, the deliberate construction of this series of events as a 'border crisis' as opposed to a 'migration crisis' serves to highlight how state and other non-state actors emphasized this crisis as an attack on national sovereignty as opposed to the migratory flows of people. This is best illustrated by the Latvian Ombuds' letter to the Latvian parliament (Saeima) and the Cabinet Ministers at the end of 2022 about the state of emergency (Tiesibsargs 2022). The Ombuds voiced its concern about whether the migrants have

genuine opportunities to apply for asylum and questioned if force was used only when strictly necessary and with proportionate measure according to international law (Tiesibsargs 2022). However, perhaps most importantly, the Ombuds office also called on the Latvian government to treat each migrant's case for asylum individually and to give special consideration to those most vulnerable (Tiesibsargs 2022). Arguably, this letter from the Ombuds was intended to provoke a shift in the treatment of migrants by Latvian authorities from a uniform threat to public order, to individuals with unique circumstances that should be considered independently of one another.

NGOs and Media Coverage

One impact of introducing the state of emergency in Latvia was that it permitted the restriction of NGOs and foreign media correspondents from accessing the border region where the crisis was taking place. Irrespective of this limitation, several media agencies such as the BBC, Reuters, the *Globe and Mail* have reported on the conditions and events that have come to shape the Belarus border crisis. Following the declaration of the state of emergency in August 2021, Reuters confirmed that its correspondents had witnessed the Latvian state guard pushing migrants back across the border into Belarus (Baczynska 2021). These witness accounts of the crisis have come to form the basis of many reported concerns and purported violations of human rights and international law given the restricted access to the border region. Reuters also included statements from interviews with migrants and Latvian authorities regarding the situation; while the Latvian Interior Ministry announced that only 59 migrants were pushed back since the state of emergency was introduced, a far greater number were taken to migration centres (Baczynska 2021). Early depictions of the situation by the media provide a more comprehensive account of how the crisis was first handled and has since evolved as a matter of border security, with Latvian authorities policing which migrants cross its border. This approach has enabled the

media to paint a chaotic picture of migrants sleeping in the forest while Latvian authorities make plans to enhance border security as though to ward off an imminent threat (Porterfield 2021). However, the reasoning behind Latvia's fortified approach to managing this crisis may be indicated by the statement of a Lithuanian judge who asserted that the Baltic states have limited available resources and have resorted to pushbacks as the least wasteful counter to the hybrid attack from Belarus (Jilani 2021). This idea has been reinforced by recorded interviews with the Latvian State Border Guard that the country is fighting unconventional warfare tactics used by Belarus with the intent of disrupting Latvia's internal order and depleting its resources (Chase 2022).

Between August 2021 and February 2022, the media covered the pushback of 5800 migrants by Latvian border authorities and the subsequent limbo these migrants were left in (Chase 2022). The media reports also included a more candid description of Latvian surveillance and border policing methods, including the use of heat sensors and observation towers, when compared to government statements (Chase 2022). Perhaps what is most illustrative of the assumed individual state's authority in the crisis is that the media has shown how various EU leaders and institutions have sent conflicting messages about the crisis and have failed to produce any resolution using political or normative power. On one hand, EU Commissioner Schinas was quoted as justifying the restrictive measures imposed on migration in the region due to the exceptional circumstances (Barigazzi 2021). On the other hand, EU Home Affairs Commissioner Johansson has encouraged affected member states to reform their legislation and refrain from using pushbacks to stem the flow of migration (Nielsen 2021). Based on these examples, the media has played an integral role in presenting a transparent account of how the EU treaded the

line between respecting the national security concerns of its member states while also championing human rights of the migrants.

Moreover, the media has provided vital insights into the effects of the crisis beyond the border region. In cooperation with Latvian police, Europol was reported to have arrested several human traffickers who were transporting people from Turkey, through Belarus, and into the EU during the border crisis (Euronews 2022). Such reports have also lent credibility to Latvia's rhetoric that migrants and the act of migration posed considerable threats to national security. By the end of 2022, authorities reported that 61 people had been arrested in connection with smuggling activities near the Belarus border (Europol 2022). The Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics also hinted at evidence that suggested Russian and Belarusian authorities were using the migration crisis as a cover to smuggle their own foreign operatives into the country, as well as individuals with well-known connections to terrorist organizations (Brennan 2021). These actions severely undermine the national security of affected states, including Latvia, by placing dissidents living in exile from Russia or Belarus at risk of persecution by covert operatives (Brennan 2021). While only speculation, the media has also raised the possibility that foreign agents could threaten state security through acts of espionage (Brennan 2021). Furthermore, the media amplified the concerns of the Latvian Foreign Minister that the simultaneous occurrence of the Zapad 2021 military exercises between Belarus and Russia posed a risk of escalating the border crisis due to the proximity of armed forces along the border (Whitmore 2021). Considering the various factors presenting a risk to national security in the context of the border crisis, the media has played an important role in keeping the public informed.

NGOs have also been active in responding to the Belarus border crisis through their efforts to deliver aid and advocate on behalf of migrants. While most NGOs were barred from accessing the border region, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was one of the first organizations to begin monitoring the activities of Latvian security services when pushbacks were regularly conducted against the migrants (IOM 2021). Other large NGOs such as the Red Cross have operated in both Latvia and Belarus to provide necessary aid such as food and hygiene kits to the migrants (IFRC 2021). However, despite earlier claims by the Latvian government to the contrary, the actions of NGOs were seemingly uncoordinated with the actions of the Latvian state. At the start of the crisis in August of 2021, the Latvian government met with several NGOs to discuss how to administer aid and register migrants who had crossed the Latvian border (Ministry of the Interior 2021b). Following this meeting, government transparency regarding the situation on the border did not improve, prompting local NGOs such as Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem (I want to help refugees) to criticize the government for its lack of transparency and imposed restrictions on visiting the border despite relying on the resources of NGOs to assist migrants (CIVICUS 2022). The issue of transparency has been further strained by the fact that only the Latvia Ombudsman and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have independently observed the border zone; even so, the UNHCR was unable visit the border between August 2021 and June 2022 in part due to national security concerns (CIVICUS 2022). Despite the interruption in its observations, the UNHCR (2021) reported that all asylum claims were observed under the state of emergency in Latvia.

The ability of NGOs to fulfill their objectives to provide aid to the migrants was further undermined to the extent that Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announced in early January 2023 that it was suspending its activities in Latvia over the pushbacks and their inability to access

migrants (ECRE 2023). As evidenced by the decision to prematurely end its life-saving activities, the exit of MSF from Latvia raises questions about the extent to which Latvian authorities are enacting restrictions as required for national security. Further complicating the cooperation between the Latvian state and NGOs, the Latvian state border guard has initiated criminal charges against two members from Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem for violating the state of emergency and visiting the border to help migrants (ECRE 2023). Since the initial phases of the crisis, the IOM has also tacitly adjusted its role in the crisis from monitoring to assist with the voluntary returns of migrants to their countries of origin (IOM 2022, 4). Arguably, the longer the state of emergency has persisted in Latvia, the more restrictive measures permitting the operations of NGOs have become. Ultimately, these restrictions have been implicitly justified by the overarching focus of the state on guaranteeing national security.

Perhaps the most prominent NGO to report on the situation in Latvia has been Amnesty International, which released its findings in October 2022 and claimed to show that migrants suffered rampant abuse and human rights violations from Latvian authorities. The report focuses on three main topics: the state of emergency, detention and encampments on the border, and the 'voluntary' returns of migrants (Amnesty International 2022). At the beginning of the report, Amnesty International (2022, 14) argued that the state of emergency in Latvia had been overextended and did not exist to protect against threats to the state. The report went on to indicate that Latvian special forces had regularly committed physical and psychological abuse against the migrants to intimidate them and deter them from crossing the border into Latvia (Amnesty International 2022, 25). According to Amnesty International (2022), the state of emergency was "an attempt to legitimize derogations from fundamental rights [of migrants]" (13). However, this language almost entirely neglects the origins of the crisis beginning with the

political conflict between the EU and President Lukashenko, therefore absolving Lukashenko's personal responsibility in placing the migrants' safety at risk. This report also implicated the activities of the IOM over claims that many of the migrants who were returned to their countries of origin were coerced against their will by the IOM (Amnesty International 2022, 37). In releasing a report that is highly critical of the efforts made in Latvia to assist the migrants, Amnesty International overlooked many factors which shaped how the crisis has unfolded. The report has been heavily criticized by governments and organizations alike, which emphasize that genuine concerns for national security have been downplayed and that the named abuses were heavily embellished (Heins 2022). A reply to this report from the International Centre for Defence and Security defends Latvia's concern about security and notes that political stability, national security, and the orchestrators of the crisis were not considered in the report by Amnesty International (Heins 2022).

A critical border studies perspective can assist with understanding how NGOs and the media have reacted to the political expressions of national security in Latvia in relation to the Belarus border crisis. Firstly, this lens can assist with problematizing how Latvia undertook the securitization of its borders without oversight from independent observers for a significant period of time. Amid an ongoing humanitarian and migration crisis, the government restrictions which prevented civil society and media from visiting the border strongly asserted state authority and control over the crisis. Moreover, it can be argued that the Latvian government used the restricted access to the border regions performatively to create a symbolic social and political distinction between Latvia and Belarus. The intent of wielding border performativity in this manner would be to signal the comparatively greater number of rights and freedoms enjoyed in Latvia than in Belarus. Finally, the narrative that Latvia is under attack was repeatedly stressed

to international actors and the international community by Latvian authorities using language such as hybrid warfare to justify the enhanced presence of armed forces along the border. Even under these conditions, the internal order of the state remained very much intact with the issue out of sight and out of mind for most Latvians. Given the overall limited impact that this crisis had on the everyday experiences of Latvians, the state's efforts to retain supreme sovereignty over its borders despite the efforts of foreign actors to exploit them can be interpreted as a significant success for Latvia.

Chapter Four "The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis"

INTRODUCTION TO THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

The Ukrainian refugee crisis was triggered by the events of February 24th, 2022, when Russia began its military invasion of Ukraine (Ramzy 2022). Consequently, many Ukrainians were displaced from their homes as airstrikes and shelling inflicted casualties and property damage alike (Ramzy 2022). In response to Russia's aggression, the governments of the Baltic states condemned President Putin's special military operation and urged its allies in the EU and NATO to take swift action to support Ukraine, including to support those displaced by the crisis (Bergmane 2022). On the first day of the invasion, the Latvian cabinet of ministers held an emergency meeting to discuss the reception of Ukrainian refugees and which measures could be enacted to provide temporary accommodation (Eng.LSM.lv 2022). In the following weeks, Latvia arranged a hotline to coordinate support for Ukrainian refugees and provide information to Latvian citizens on how they could support Ukraine (Cabinet of Ministers 2022a). As of December 2022, upwards of 43,893 refugees from Ukraine have been registered in Latvia under temporary protection (IOM 2022a).

When considering the prompt response of the Latvian government and the immediate action of Latvian citizens to support Ukraine, it can be suggested that much of the desire to aid Ukrainian refugees came from humanitarian beliefs and a desire to act in solidarity with a former Soviet state. In the shadow of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Latvia strongly opposes Russia's ambitions to re-establish its sphere of influence across Eastern Europe (Bergmane 2022). As part of this resistance, the Latvian government has sought to support Ukraine's effort in fighting by also supporting Ukrainian refugees. Latvia also implemented extensive social policies to accommodate the influx of refugees, including free accommodation and meals for their first 120 days in Latvia (We Stand With Ukraine 2022). Similar to the previous case study, this chapter covers how national security concerns were expressed politically in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Moreover, the use of participant statements from interviews are used to provide additional insight into how the refugee crisis impacted the perception of Latvia's borders.

NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

To address how national security has been a persistent concern throughout the Ukrainian refugee crisis for Latvia, this chapter presents some of the major security concerns as outlined by the media and literature on the subject. Following this, a close examination of government policies and statements related to national security during the crisis is presented along with a similar analysis of content from the media and NGOs.

One of the most pressing security concerns about Ukrainian refugees entering Latvia as outlined by the media is how the minority Russian population will react to living alongside a significant population of Ukrainians. To this end, there are recorded instances of Ukrainian flags and symbols being forcibly removed from public display and accounts of vandalism on cars with Ukrainian license plates (Eng.LSM.lv 2022a). It has also been well-documented that Putin has

been spreading propaganda and disinformation to the Russian-speakers in the Baltic states in hopes of inciting ethnic tensions within Latvia (Robitaille 2023). In response, the Latvian government has enacted stricter laws around public broadcasting and other Russian media to limit the amount of propaganda consumed by Putin's target demographic (Robitaille 2023). As the number of criminal proceedings involving hate crimes against Ukrainians surpasses 30, national security and preventing ethnic tensions from growing remains top of mind for the Latvian government (Robitaille 2023). In addition, human trafficking is a threat to Ukrainian refugees and the national security of their host countries. To combat this, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022) is providing support to countries which accept large numbers of Ukrainian refugees to target criminal networks which may be trafficking refugees. Similar to security concerns surrounding the Belarus border crisis, there is evidence to suggest that the Russian government and its security services are exploiting the mass movement of refugees crossing into the EU to covertly insert their own foreign operatives (Maddox 2022). This is of particular concern to Latvia's national security as authorities have gone to great lengths in the past to convict Russian agents accused of espionage (Duxbury 2022). However, despite the multitude of national security concerns, Latvia is resolved to offer Ukrainians refugees asylum and a chance to resist Russian aggression.

Latvian Government Policies and Statements

Since the initial days of the invasion of Ukraine, the Latvian government has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine's sovereignty and its capability to resist Russian subjugation. One of the ways that the Latvian government demonstrated its support was through the introduction of the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians on March 3, 2022, which outlined several provisions to help Ukrainian refugees in Latvia (Raubisko 2022). Interestingly, the law notes that

official documents are not required for entry into Latvia if they cannot be recovered from Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict.[2] Arguably, this effort to limit the barriers Ukrainian refugees face in claiming asylum comes at a greater security risk to Latvia, however, it increases the likelihood of Ukrainian refugees being afforded protection. This law also establishes which services are responsible for tracking the regional distribution of Ukrainian refugees, however, refugees have freedom of movement within the country and wider EU.[3] Additionally, this legislation is compatible with both the Latvian Asylum Law and the EU Temporary Protection Directive (Raubisko 2022). One of the participants in the interviews, Aleksejs (pseudonym), commended the quick instatement of this law, noting:

> …the response from [the] government was rapid, fast and timely… because a new law was passed… there were specified, like, where to place the refugees… how to feed them, how to house them… where will they work and [where] they live, where they can stay… and so on. So I think the response was… quite rapid, quite timely and effective. (Author's Interview, October 8, 2022).

Although the material cost of the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians likely came at great financial expense to the Latvian government, it only further serves to demonstrate that Latvia's priority was to establish a sustainable system for receiving Ukrainian refugees. While the war in Ukraine provided reason for the Latvian government to be threatened by Russia's future intentions, this law was introduced without delay to symbolize Latvia's solidarity with Ukraine. Despite its expedited timeline for adoption, the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians complimented existing legislation from both the EU and Latvia on asylum procedures. Comparatively, the EU Temporary Protection Directive provides Ukrainian refugees with access to education, protection, and other basic needs while allowing refugees to travel freely throughout the Schengen Area for a period of 90 days (Yayboke, Strouboulis, and Edwards

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[2] Latvia, Saeima, *Ukrainas civiliedzīvotāju atbalsta likums,* 2022. 2022/45A.1, Riga https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/330546-law-on-assistance-to-ukrainian-civilians.
[3] Saeima, *Ukrainas civiliedzīvotāju atbalsta likums.*

2022). However, the limitation on the freedom of movement for Ukrainian refugees in the EU has encouraged many to return to Ukraine instead of remaining in one country (Yayboke, Strouboulis, and Edwards 2022). Even though this measure of limiting visa-free travel exists to secure EU borders outside of the Temporary Protection Directive, its continuation under these circumstances has nonetheless demonstrated that the EU views the controlled movement of people across internal borders as necessary for its own security (EU Commission 2022). In this respect Latvia has gone one step further than the EU by enacting a law that permits Ukrainian refugees to apply for a Latvian visa without the usual stipulations from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and requires fewer documents (Cobalt 2022). When compared to other application processes for visas in Latvia, this law greatly reduces the number of protective barriers in place to prevent fraudulent or deceptive applications.

Furthermore, the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians is also notable in how it makes an exception in refugee law whereby Ukrainian refugees are not required to apply for refugee status in Latvia.[4] Despite the potential security oversight this law represents since it could prove challenging to determine the country of origin without a formal application process, this law will offer asylum to those who are unable to prove that they are Ukrainian nationals until it is proved or disproved.[5] Significantly, this law allows for the potential exploitation of Latvian aid seeing as those who are not Ukrainian refugees could make a false claim for asylum. This requires a large commitment to the security of Ukrainian refugees by the Latvian government, as Aleksejs (pseudonym) mentioned of Latvians' trust of outsiders:

> …I believe that some parts of Latvian identity can be… we're kind of closed to other, to unknown, closed to unknown. I wouldn't call it xenophobia, but it's more like knowing your kin… we can selflessly give to those that we know, for most part, but to others, we're kind of closed because we don't know what they can do or what could happen, or what are their inner thoughts… (Author's Interview, October 8, 2022).

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[4] Saeima, *Ukrainas civiliedzīvotāju atbalsta likums.*
[5] Saeima, *Ukrainas civiliedzīvotāju atbalsta likums.*

Once most of the Ukrainian refugees had settled in Latvia, the Prime Minister acknowledged that the regional distribution of refugees was "problematic" due to their high concentration in some areas burdening available resources (BNN 2022a). Despite the additional strain on their resources, the Saeima also extended the validation period for expired documents belonging to Ukrainian refugees until February 2024 as well as extending their residence permits until the end of 2022 (BNN 2022b). These actions were extremely consequential for Latvia since they effectively confirmed that the presence of Ukrainian refugees would be a long-term commitment with long term effects for Latvia's population. From the perspective of Latvian citizens, their national security can also be understood in terms of economic stability. To illustrate, Jānis (pseudonym) suggested:

> If we take the immigrants in such… huge quantities, then our economic stability is under attack. It's not even about stability anymore, because we don't have any stability… I think that it could influence socialist ideology representatives and come up with a plan to to break down [the] government in some sense… (Author's Interview, November 17, 2022).

In this sense, economic security is closely related to the purview of political stability and informs an overall perception of national security. Due to the continuation of high levels of material and financial aid provided to Ukrainian refugees, there is a discernible concern amongst Latvians about the effect this will have on the Latvian economy and individual economic well-being. Jānis continues that:

> When there was a question about renting places out, a lot of people didn't want to rent them out to the Ukrainians… even if they have this agreement, then there's no basis that they're going to pay up the money. And they might just go off back to Ukraine at any point, anytime and Latvians would be left out with that, or lost money. I don't know, there's a lot of risks that individuals take upon. (Author's Interview, November 17, 2022).

Even in the face of such risks, the Latvian government has gone on to supply and coordinate a significant financial and material contribution to Ukrainian refugees, budgeting 116,000,000 EUR for the Refugee Support Plan and reducing barriers to refugees in securing employment

and accessing other services (Cabinet of Ministers 2022). Based on their efforts to accommodate Ukrainian refugees, Latvia has prioritized the human security of Ukrainian refugees beyond   traditional realist thinking. To illustrate, Latvia could have easily limited their assistance to refugees to granting them asylum in their country. However, concerns about the ability of the refugees to provide for themselves elicited a strong policy response from the government. This firm policy-oriented response from the government suggests that at minimum, Latvia understands its economic security to be connected with the security of the refugees.

Conversely, many the state's security concerns around admitting Ukrainian refugees were not out of concern about the refugees themselves, but rather the geopolitical implications that the war might have on migration to Latvia. The Latvian government has issued several statements about their concern of Russian tourists entering the EU through Latvia, including taking measures to officially designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism in August of 2022 (EURACTIV.com 2022). By September 2022, the Latvian government officially announced that it would restrict Russian citizens from entering the country, due to the cited concern that "free travel of citizens of an aggressor state… is not only immoral but also poses risks to public order and security at the level of both political provocations and aggression in the public space" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). While Russians who sought entry over humanitarian concerns were exempt from this legislation, Latvia has limited its acceptance of Russians fleeing mobilization (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). In this approach, the Latvian Prime Minister had stated that allowing Russians dodging the draft into the EU was a security threat due to the many "unknown loyalties" (Rankin 2022). Suggestively, the Latvian government conceived the movement of Russian citizens as posing a greater threat than Ukrainian refugees to its national security, and by extension, its national interest. The demand for EU visas in Russia has also

grown significantly since July 2022 (LETA 2022a). Yet, the opposition by the Latvian government to allow Russian citizens to enter Latvia apart from humanitarian reasons remains strong, suggesting that the perceived security cost is greater than what Latvia might gain from the situation. One such cost could be understood as the Russians fleeing mobilization are not guaranteed to oppose Putin's objectives in Ukraine (Tahanovych 2022). In this manner, the Latvian border permits only certain groups deemed worth the security risk entry into the country, serving as the first layer of state administration in filtering migrants and refugees according to national interests.

NGOs and Media Coverage

When considering its impact on Latvian civil society, the Ukrainian refugee crisis prompted a large response from NGOs even going so far as to inspire the creation of new organizations to support refugees. The "Twitter Convoy" was one of these locally driven movements which oversaw the delivery of more than 900 vehicles to the Ukrainian army (Djatkovica 2023). As a result of this convoy, Latvia was able to demonstrate their resolve to help Ukraine win the war and prove to those refugees residing in Latvia that "Ukrainian troops are fighting for the freedom of Latvia and Europe" (BNN 2022). While Latvian civil society and NGOs were working to aid the reception of refugees, they received a great deal of support from the government. To effectively facilitate this support, the Latvian government held a meeting in June of 2022 to discuss deepening their cooperation with local NGOs to coordinate volunteer efforts and fundraise in support of refugees (Ministry of the Interior 2022a). The government had also suggested improvements to ensure NGOs had a support framework for capacity building, as well as a platform to discuss the concerns of NGOS about improving Latvian refugee policies (Ministry of the Interior 2022a). However, the basis of such cooperation between the government

and civil society is outlined in the Memorandum on Cooperation as informing decision-making to support "the national society and internal security guidelines" of Latvia (Ministry of the Interior 2021a). This selective emphasis on order and security within the memorandum between the government and NGOs is curious since it frames security and public order as the common interest of each party. From the perspective of critical security studies, this interest can be scrutinized in how it explicitly places security above other interests related to the well-being of citizens or asylum-seekers, or at least to the extent that it assumes 'security' is a concept which encapsulates such interests. Likewise, this cooperation is premised on the assumption that civil society and the government share the same understandings of these security guidelines.

Despite the extensive competition between NGOs in the international realm, there have been several grassroots solutions to have come from Latvian civil society which address the Ukrainian refugee crisis within the borders of Latvian and beyond (Vaivare 2022). However, representatives of NGOs have expressed their frustration that localized NGOs are often overlooked and prevented from assisting Ukrainians due to the over-professionalization of international NGOs, which act as gatekeepers to international humanitarian work (Vaivare 2022). Although the efforts of Latvian NGOs remain localized, they have provided more than 40,000 Ukrainian refugees with aid (We Stand With Ukraine 2022). This outpouring of support from Latvian civil society suggests that the experiences of Ukrainian refugees and the deteriorating security environment in Ukraine resonates deeply with Latvians. While refraining from over-generalizing the degree to which these sentiments are shared across the Latvian population, to help over 40,000 refugees in a geographically and demographically small country is a significant feat.

Alongside local NGOs, international NGOs have come to Latvia with the explicit purpose of increasing the capacity of Latvian civil society to assist Ukrainian refugees. For example, the Polish Center for International Aid (PCPM), is one such NGO that is offering its services in Latvia (PCPM 2022). Primarily, the PCPM (2022) operates in heavily forested regions along the Latvian-Russian border to support Ukrainian refugees who cross from Russia into Latvia on foot. Frequently, these refugees are individuals who were forcibly taken or otherwise fled while their home was under Russian occupation to cross into the EU from Russia (PCPM 2022). However, Russian border guards have picked up on this practice and are making the conditions extremely difficult for Ukrainians to make it to Latvia, a challenge which is further exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure along the border to receive refugees (PCPM 2022). In this situation, the PCPM (2022) contributes their experience with receiving large numbers of Ukrainian refugees in areas lacking infrastructure from Poland. This is important, seeing that at the time of their report in December 2022, the PCPM (2022) and Latvian NGOs were receiving 2,000 refugees from across the border each week. Dr. Wilk, the president of the PCPM, described the situation as reminiscent of the 1940s when "millions of civilians were exiled into deep parts of Russia" (PCPM 2022). This connection to a historical precedent shared between Latvia, Poland, and Ukraine can be further contextualized using the theoretical perspective of critical border studies. Namely, the idea about the performativity of a border and the impact this has on internal and external signals about the security concern that migration poses. In the case of former Soviet spaces like Poland, Ukraine, and Latvia, their borders are performatively signaled in such a way that they portray themselves as a frontier against the vast Russian expanse which is conceived as a threat from its historical and contemporary imperial ambitions. This ambition is captured by the PCPM's (2022) description of Russia and its "deep

territories" which are juxtaposed against the barren front line that is the Latvian-Russian border protecting against further Russian expansion.

In Latvia, the media extensively covered the arrival of Ukrainian refugees with topics ranging from how the refugee crisis would affect the economy, society, to the overall security situation. Many articles have been written about the number of Ukrainian refugees who have registered for asylum in Latvia, most of which also mention common difficulties faced by the refugees in finding accommodation and jobs to support themselves (Kozins and Eng.LSM.lv 2022). The state-funded public broadcasted LSM.lv has been amongst the most prominent of media outlets discussing the settlement of Ukrainian refugees in Latvia and produces regular reports on their quality of life in their host country (Kozins and Eng.LSM.lv 2022). Other media that have extensively covered the Ukrainian refugee crisis in Latvia are regional networks such as the Baltic News Network (BNN) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Most media reporting focuses on the capacity of Latvia to host a significant number of refugees in a safe and orderly manner. For example, the BNN (2022c) has reported on the employment opportunities available to refugees while RFE/RL has focused on the housing situation for refugees in Latvia and raising awareness about the lack of funding and space to accommodate all refugees in the capital, Riga (Andreeva 2022). Notably, nearly all media coverage on Ukrainian refugees emphasizes the role of individuals in providing security for themselves and fulfilling their own basic needs. Suggestively, this focus stems from preconceptions about why Ukrainian refugees have come to Latvia, as Aleksejs (pseudonym) describes:

> …regarding Ukrainians, they either are waiting for a chance to return to Ukraine, or adapting into culture, into the Latvian environment. I don't know how it will go, so it could be interesting question after, after the war. (Author's Interview, October 8, 2022).

The media too appears to share these preconceptions about Ukrainian refugees, as part of these assumptions come through in their coverage that the refugees will either return to Ukraine once

the situation has changed, or they will otherwise willingly assimilate into Latvian society. It can be suggested that this shared understanding between the media and the Latvian population has shaped the state's views on the security risks in accepting large quantities of refugees. In any case, there have been few reported concerns on Latvian national security related to destabilizing the political or social order of the country as a consequence of accepting refugees. The most prominent security concern described by the media has been inadvertently increasing Russian influence in Latvia through the process of accepting Ukrainian refugees. This concern has two dimensions to it: mass migration leading to the admittance of Russian state security services and secondly, the presence of a growing Ukrainian minority population exacerbating tensions with the Russian minority in Latvia.

The concern about Russian infiltration of Latvia using state agents has been an ever-present threat since Latvian independence, however, in the context of mass migration and an active war in Europe, the threat to Latvia has increased. Since the Russian mobilization order in the fall of 2022, the Latvian government has restricted Russians from entering the country as part of a larger trend of securitizing migration in the Baltics (Golubeva 2022). These restrictions should be considered together with Russia's recent attempts to influence Latvian politics using its networks, money, and use of informants to gather intelligence on national security matters (Laine et al. 2023; LETA 2022). Aleksejs (pseudonym) offered the following as a testament to the border crossings with Russia:

> …I believe that unauthorized crossings are possessing some security risks because it's not monitored, those people are, might be connected with, for example, the secret service of other states or, and coming here to do some espionage or something like that. But if the crossing is authorized, and people go through the monitoring, then I think it does not possess such risk. (Author's Interview, October 8, 2022).

Although authorized crossings between Latvia and Russia may pose little risk to national security, the media has emphasized the increasing fortification of the Latvian-Russia border to

ensure that no unauthorized crossings are taking place. BNN has reported on the Saeima's

discussions to build a fence on the border with Russia, an installation which is described as a

"significant investment" for the "construction of a defensive system in Latvia" (LETA 2023).

This attention towards securing the border from Russian agents and other unauthorized crossings

also raises the question of how these security measures can distinguish between threats to the

public order and asylum seekers. The state's emphasis on controlling the flow of people as

demonstrated by the laws restricting Russian tourist visas and the construction of a border fence

would suggest that the Latvian government is attempting to assert its authority over who can

enter the country and for what purpose. In the context of the current war, it would appear that the

Latvian government is shaping the public order and population demographic in a manner that is

congruent with the status quo of supporting Ukraine.

However, there remains considerable suspicion among Latvians that the presence of

Ukrainian refugees will aggravate tensions with the Russian minority. Aija (pseudonym) said on

the topic of Russia's aggression in Ukraine that:

> I feel like Russia in some ways, it's, I don't want to say it's kind of in their blood because obviously there's also good people in Russia — I'm not saying that everyone's bad. But the… viewing of the historical point of view of what they're doing is absolutely wrong. And I feel like it was kind of awaited that's going to happen. (Author's Interview, February 12, 2023).

In many ways, this sentiment towards the inevitability of Russia's imperial ambitions is shared

by Latvians and citizens of other former Soviet spaces. International news outlets have made

much of what is perceived as a critical security, social, and political weakness for Latvia: its

ethnic Russian population (Robitaille 2023). In their reporting, the media has presented an image

of Latvia as desperate to avoid the repetition of history, when Soviet (Russian) forces had

occupied their country (Robitaille 2023). The minority Russian population in Latvia is a

persistent reminder to both domestic and international audiences that Latvia's weakness can be

exploited to deepen Russian influence in the country due to their close affiliations with Russia (Robitaille 2023). Consequently, the Latvian population is conscientious of how their solidarity and treatment towards Ukrainian refugees is perceived by this ethnic minority. To combat the backlash from pro-Russia populations against supporting Ukraine, the Latvian government has taken measures to ban nearly all Russian media in the country (Woods 2022). Most recently, this includes Dozhd, otherwise known as TV Rain, a Russian opposition channel which had broadcasted from Latvia in exile but was banned for expressing sympathy for the Russian soldiers (Bergmane 2022a).

The theoretical framework supplied by critical security studies is helpful when analyzing the role of NGOs and the media in Latvia since it can provide insight into how Latvia conceives of its own national security through its support of Ukrainian refugees. Namely, Latvia's unconditional backing of the restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty is signaled in part by the substantial efforts made to assist refugees. This solidarity can be attributed to the common historical experiences that Latvia and Ukraine share as part of the Soviet Union, and how these experiences have informed their current epistemologies of what the conditions for peace in Ukraine are. Critical security studies portray this shared history as intertwining the security of Latvia with the security of Ukraine. The Latvian media has also contributed to this broader conceptualization of regional security by portraying the wellbeing of Ukrainian refugees as inexplicably connected to the territorial integrity of Ukraine. To support this assertion, there is significant amount of news media discussing the wellbeing of Ukrainian refugees alongside news from the frontline in Ukraine (Birziņš 2022). As demonstrated by the efforts of the media and NGOs, this understanding of common security extends beyond assisting Ukrainian refugees. In

any case, the geopolitical landscape of Europe has been securitized in ways that the refugees were not.

Chapter Five "Discussion"

After presenting the data from both case studies, this chapter analyzes the similarities and differences between the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. This comparison is done with the intent to answer the research question of to what extent did the political expressions of national security differ in the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, and were the responses of Latvia to each situation different? Following this comparison, I identify possible reasons as to why the Latvian state took a particular approach to each case study. These case studies are first compared by analyzing how national security was expressed politically by the statements and policies of the Latvian government, and then by examining the impact of the media and NGOs on shaping this expression.

COMPARING GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND STATEMENTS

One of the primary distinguishing factors between how national security was expressed politically by the Latvian government between the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis is perceived legality of the act of migration in each case. In the Belarus border crisis, the approach to national security in Latvia was shaped by the perception that the migrants on the border were attempting to cross into Latvia through illegal means and avoid the necessary structures in place to facilitate orderly migration (Kaprāns and Saulītis 2022, 11). While this perception contributed to the state's narrative that illegal immigration was threatening the

security of Latvia, it is important to consider what factors led to the understanding that this form

of migration should be characterized as illegal. As Mārtiņš (pseudonym) said:

> Well, I think it was more about there was a certain point of pride that they are entering, first of all, illegally, and that they're not, particularly rather than being refugees, well as far… as I'm aware, they weren't exactly refugees. They were more like economic migrants who were trying to get a free pass into Europe, and they were deceived by Belarus. (Author's Interview, February 19, 2023).

From this statement, two crucial conceptions about the act of migration during the Belarus

border crisis standout: the deceptive tactics of Belarus in conducting hybrid warfare and the

economic motivations of the migrants. However, the actions of Belarus to illegally weaponize

the migrants for political purposes does not in itself make their act of migration to Latvia illegal

(Baczynska 2021). It was the response of the Latvian state and the subsequent suspension of the

ability for migrants to claim asylum on the border areas without passing through controlled

border crossings that made it all but impossible for migrants to enter Latvia legally (Republic of

Latvia Ministry of the Interior 2022, 3). Based on these factors, it was not the migrants who were

committing illegal acts, but rather the political actions of states which constructed the illegality

of the situation. Using the theoretical framework of critical security studies, this classification of

illegal migration can be scrutinized due to the state focus and obsession with deeming

uncontrollable or unpredictable actions in the international system as illegal. Ultimately, this

emphasis on the legality of migration threatens the security of the migrants since it appears that

states absolve themselves of the responsibility to assist those who are neither citizens nor abiding

by the legal processes of the international system.

Additionally, the Latvian government's characterization of this migration as illegal and

the broader discussion about the hybrid warfare waged by Belarus demonstrates how the state

controls the ways of knowing about security threats (Łubiński 2021, 1). Internally, the Latvian

government had emphasized in their statements that the origins of these migrants on the border

were unknown, and thus they posed an unknown security risk to the Latvian population. These signals were then used by the authorities to enforce the border and prevent the migrants from crossing into Latvia. By conferring the status of 'other' onto the migrants, the state played a significant role in depicting the migrants as undesirable and yet their reasons for seeking entry into the EU were not viewed as severe enough to warrant refugee protection for most migrants. Ultimately, these signals uphold the white epistemologies behind understandings of security in the international system because of how the definitions of refugees and migrants uphold the Western and white status quo (Burnell 2009). Comparatively, the migration of refugees from Ukraine has not been subjected to nearly as much legal scrutiny as in the Belarus border crisis. A critical security studies perspective would suggest that the motivations of Ukrainian refugees to seek asylum in Latvia are congruent with the white epistemologies that shape international law on asylum. Under these conditions, Ukrainians seeking asylum in Latvia are easily understood to be refugees due to the conditions of inter-state conflict stipulated by international law (ICRC 2005). However, given the legal ambiguity in determining what constitutes a conflict apart from apparent inter-state conflict, the definition of a refugee does not account for factors such as colonialism, which have come to shape the regional security situation in areas such as the Middle East (ICRC 2005).

Furthermore, the lens of critical security studies adds to the discussion on how and why the Latvian government securitized the geopolitical landscape following the invasion of Ukraine without also securitizing the refugees fleeing the war. This avoidance of securitizing Ukrainian refugees was made clear in the early days of the war when refugees were immediately acknowledged by the Latvian state as victims. Latvia then demonstrated its solidarity and resolve to support Ukrainian refugees by setting up a hotline and passing the Law on Assistance to

Ukrainian Civilians (Raubisko 2022). Effectively, such a strong response from the Latvian state shows how states conceive of other states as the biggest security threat in the international system. Latvia had assumed a clear understanding of how Ukrainian civilians were made refugees by the war, although this same consideration was not collectively extended to the migrants on the Belarusian border. Similarly, while the Latvian government made several public statements in support of Ukrainian refugees, no such statements of support were made for the migrants on the border (Raubisko 2022). Latvia had also selectively focused on the involvement of the Belarusian government in orchestrating the border crisis, preferring to implicitly interpret the migrants as part of the security threat instead of victims (Chancellery of the Prime Minister 2021).

Another notable feature which differentiated between Latvia's responses to the two case studies is how the state leveraged collective identity. Firstly, the Latvian government commonly referred to the border crisis as an attack on the entire EU bloc by Belarus as opposed to simply targeting a few countries (Baczynska 2021). By applying a critical border studies framework, these statements can be interpreted as implicitly signaling that the Latvian border conceives of itself as the frontline between Western democracies and Russian despotism. This claim was reinforced by the state's condemnation of Belarus through its depiction of the crisis as an attempt at foreign interference in Latvian domestic affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). As Mārtiņš (pseudonym) suggested, it became a point of national pride for Latvia to resist any attempt of influence by preventing the migrants from entering Latvia and destabilizing the country. By symbolically comparing the crisis to previous attempts by Russia and Belarus to exercise influence over Latvia, the government was able to call upon enough social capital to justify the pushbacks exercised against the migrants.

However, this collective identity was also used by the Latvian government to ensure a warm reception of Ukrainian refugees. The government strongly encouraged its citizens to consider temporarily housing refugees and allocated significant finances to support this initiative (Cabinet of Ministers 2022). Jānis (pseudonym) said about the collective responsibility of the Latvian people towards the refugees:

> "[The Latvian people were] instrumental yeah, definitely… A lot of people have taken Ukrainian families in their houses. If they have big ones or a lot with a lot of rooms, I think a lot of hostels or that are outside of… Riga and rural areas. There are a lot of places where Ukrainian immigrants have taken in." (Author's Interview, November 17, 2022).

Suggestively, the willingness of Latvians to accept refugees into their homes was accompanied by a greater sense of responsibility towards their geographical neighbours. At the state level, the declaration of Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism is a symbolic designation meant to inspire greater solidarity between Latvia and Ukraine (EURACTIV.com 2022). This official declaration by the Saeima emphasized that the Russian state was a known aggressor, as previously experienced by Latvian people, and which later provided a basis for restricting Russian tourist visas. By legally affirming that the Russian state permits the use of violence to achieve its political aims, the Latvian government sought to justify the exclusion of Russians from its territory as necessary to ensure the security of Latvians and Ukrainian refugees.

Together, these factors informed Latvia's approach to highlighting the 'natural' social distinctions between citizens of Latvia and those from other states as a method to secure its borders. According to critical border studies, the purpose of a border serves to define a social identity and secure the sovereign authority of the state (Kolossov and Scott 2013). However, in the contemporary context the notion of de-bordering has come to refer to the erosion of sovereign authority due to globalization and growing interconnectedness between states (Kolossov and Scott 2013). Arguably, this same phenomenon of de-bordering can be applied to

the reception of Ukrainian refugees in Latvia. Due to the shared historical experiences between Latvia and Ukraine as part of the former Soviet Union and their common security interests, Ukrainian refugees were able to cross the Latvian border with greater ease than other foreign migrants since there are fewer social distinctions between Latvia and Ukraine.

COMPARING THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA AND NGOS

In both the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the media and NGOs fulfilled an important role in improving transparency and the capacity of the Latvian state to respond to the crisis. A similarity in the role of the media throughout both crises is how it drew public attention to Russia's exploitation of the crisis and how each crisis was used to further Russian political interests. To illustrate, during the Belarus border crisis the media made repeated reference to the threat that Belarus and Russia were smuggling in state agents to commit espionage (Brennan 2021). Similarly, other media reports following the invasion of Ukraine warned about Russian espionage undermining the Latvian government and security installations (LETA 2022). However, the more prominent role of the media during the Ukrainian refugee crisis was to dispel misinformation about the refugees which was achieved through extensive reporting. Latvia has also taken steps to ban Russian state-owned media which amplifies Russian political messages and disinformation (Woods 2022). As Ēriks (pseudonym) suggested:

> ...the problem is that Latvia has very… many ethnic Russians, and they are a bit further from Latvian politics as such and they tend to believe propaganda a bit more… they're still more, I don't want to say pro-Russian, but unapproving of the immigration and resource spending for [migrants and refugees]. (Author's Interview, January 19, 2023).

Despite the slight differences in its role, the media was central in both crises to sending internal and external signals which assisted in defining the threat to Latvia's security. In either case, the media reinforced many existing notions that the biggest threat to Latvian national security is the political will of Russia and its ally, Belarus. However, in their approach the media had frequently

undermined the individual agency and decision-making of the Russian minority in Latvia through the assumption that their ethnic ties to Russia were stronger than their affinity for Latvia. As an example, the media often portrayed the Russian-speakers in the country as a uniform collective who are extremely susceptible to Russian propaganda and disinformation (Robitaille 2023). While the media was critical of some methods the state used to address the Belarus border crisis, for the most part, the media provided a platform for the government to justify extensive surveillance methods and construct the migrants as part of the threat (Chase 2022).

In a manner reminiscent of the degree of difference between the government's responses, the NGOs operating in Latvia also differed in their approaches to handling each crisis. However, this difference was largely shaped by the government's restrictions imposed on civil society in either case, and how much transparency and resources the NGOs were afforded by the state. To assist the migrants on the Belarusian border, NGOs were severely restricted in their operations by state directives, to the point that MSF ended its operations in Latvia (ECRE 2023). Even accounting for security considerations, the government restrictions on the ability of NGOs to provide humanitarian aid were not always consistent with the security risk to the state or public order, which prompts the question of what other factors motivated the government to restrict NGO access to the border region? When applying the framework of critical border studies to this crisis, it can be seen how the sovereign authority was attempting to assert its supremacy in an unpredictable situation of hybrid warfare. Likewise, the lack of significant coordination between the government and NGOs despite claims to the contrary by the government meant that Latvia was acting with the intent of preventing this security crisis from being conceived of as a humanitarian crisis (ECRE 2023). Conversely, the Latvian government had met with leaders from several NGOs to discuss their cooperation in facilitating the settlement of Ukrainian

refugees (Ministry of the Interior 2022a). Arguably, the memorandum of cooperation between the government and NGOs informed the different approaches because of how the central interests of public order and safety were conceived differently by each actor in either crisis (Ministry of the Interior 2021a). Namely, what constituted public order for the government during the Belarus border crisis may not have been the same conception held in the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Finally, the NGOs have played an important role in improving awareness and transparency about the number of migrants and refugees entering Latvia in both cases. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2022a), Latvia has registered more than 43,000 Ukrainian refugees since the start of the war in February 2022. While there are no official reports on the number of migrants from the Belarus border crisis admitted into Latvia, reports from Amnesty International (2022) suggest the total is less than 500. Although this measure alone does not encapsulate the full scale of difference in how the state, media, and NGOs approached these crises, it does suggest that common patterns of behaviour exist between their interactions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

All considered, the responses of the Latvian state to the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis differ to a significant extent in how national security was expressed in each case study. Some of the key factors that distinguished their approaches are the legal status of the migrants, the characterization of the threat, and framing of who the attack was against. When considering how the state conferred a particular legal status onto the migrants and refugees, an argument can be made that in this context, structures of whiteness upheld white epistemologies which designated some migrants as asylum seekers and others as 'illegal'

economic migrants. Such ways of knowing obscure the impact of colonialism and whiteness on the migrants' countries of origin, thereby assuming that all countries have equal opportunities to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their citizens. As part of these structures of whiteness, it was also assumed that the Latvian state perceived the migrants' countries of origin to be equal with its own nation, a designation made even more unlikely by obscuring whiteness in the process of securitization. Secondly, the threat that each crisis posed to national security was characterized differently by the Latvian government. In the Belarus border crisis, Latvia called the crisis a hybrid attack by Belarus on the EU and further implicated the migrants as an irregular threat to security. Comparatively, the Latvian government constructed Russia as threatening the security of Latvia by actively harming the sovereignty of Ukraine and its citizens. Finally, between each case study there was a significant shift in which actors the Latvian government viewed as the target of each security threat. On one hand, Belarus' experimentation with hybrid warfare was conceived by the Latvian government as targeting the political stability of the EU, whereas the war in Ukraine and subsequent displacement of its people was an attack on Ukraine and the independence of former Soviet states.

These key takeaways provide an overview of why Latvia approached the crises differently and how the state made political expressions of its national security. In either case, Latvian border policies were invariably informed by narratives about national security. Specifically, collective identity in Latvia remains a strong source of social capital for the government to reliably use to depict threats to Latvia's security.

Chapter 6 "Conclusion"

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In summary, this thesis has answered the question to what extent did the political expressions of national security differ in the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, and were the responses of Latvia to each situation different? By comparing the differences and similarities between Latvia's approaches to conceptualizing its security and borders, my thesis holds several implications for Latvia and the field of international relations more broadly.

By juxtaposing the treatment of asylum seekers with the political expression of national security in each case study, this comparative analysis suggests that the social construction of the identity of the 'other' has reinforced the physical borders of Latvia. This is further emphasized by the cultural relativism in the critical border studies theoretical framework which demonstrates how border performativity changes in response to shifting conceptions of who is crossing the border. To summarize the findings from this analysis of the Latvian government's statements and policies in response to the Belarus border crisis, the government established a clear priority that national security was more important than the migrants' safety. In large part, this was achieved through the portrayal of events as a form of hybrid warfare initiated by Belarus, which was then used to limit Latvia's responsibility towards the migrants (Baczynska 2021). Instead, the migrants were constructed as part of the hybrid threat to Latvia's sovereignty and the government used the notion that Belarus had violated the international order to reinforce Latvian borders. In comparison, the Latvian government's policies and statements during the Ukrainian refugee crisis displayed a strong sense of solidarity with Ukraine and support for Ukrainian refugees (Raubisko 2022). The refugees were also permitted extensive freedom of movement within the EU while Russians seeking to enter Latvia were limited by the securitization of their

movement into Europe (Rankin 2022). These case studies indicate the privileging of certain collective histories and knowledge by Latvia is intended to uphold the existing legal structures differentiating the legality of migration, which in turn perpetuate the status quo in the international arena. Additionally, these findings also indicate the Latvian government's efforts to use collective identity and nationalism in the processes of re-bordering and de-bordering to endorse its treatment of refugees and migrants.

Overall, the findings from analyzing the role of NGOs and media coverage in both case studies revealed more similarities than differences in the media coverage, whereas the activities of NGOs were shaped by the legislation of the Latvian government. These findings suggest that the greatest similarity between the crises was how the media drew attention to Russia's exploitation of these events for geopolitical purposes. In particular, there was concern amongst the Latvian security services that Belarusian or Russian intelligence operatives would be smuggled into Latvia during the Belarus border crisis, or that Russia would weaponize its propaganda to the Russian minority in the Baltics during the Ukrainian refugee crisis (Brennan 2021; Woods 2022). In each instance, the media sent external and internal signals about the domestic and international threats to Latvian national security, which arguably influenced the enforcement of Latvian border policies. Furthermore, this research found that these signals impacted the ability of NGOs to carry out their missions in Latvia during either crisis. In the case of the Belarus border crisis, only those NGOs willing to work under the directive of the Latvian government were able to continue operations while other NGOs suspended their activities as a consequence (ECRE 2023). Similarly, this analysis found that the Latvian government had initiated closer cooperation with civil society to assist with the reception of Ukrainian refugees based on their shared understandings of public order and safety (Ministry of the Interior 2022a).

In either instance, the relationship between the NGOs and the Latvian government had a significant impact on the NGOs' access to resources, and subsequently their ability to assist the migrants and refugees.

LIMITATIONS

Within this thesis, there are identifiable constraints around the research methodology and data presentation. One limitation of the research methods used in this thesis was the small participant sample of the semi-structured interviews. Although this small sample was in part designed by the selective participant eligibility criteria to ensure there were no extreme outliers that would impact the cultural relativism of these interviews, it also limited which perspectives were used to ground this analysis in the context of Latvia. Most significantly, the perspectives of those from different socioeconomic backgrounds who may not have the means to attend postsecondary education are excluded from this sample. Thus, this analysis may not hold the same degree of cultural relativism for all Latvians given the lack of insight into how these crises impacted people across the socioeconomic scale.

Another limitation of this research is that given the nature of small-n studies, these findings do not distinguish between the specific characteristics of Latvia or more general characteristics of how the nation state behaves. While cultural relativism can be used to improve understanding about which characteristics are unique to Latvia, this same factor makes it challenging to discern more general behaviours that can be attributed to national security concerns. Furthermore, this research is limited by the lack of external validity and applicability to other case studies found in a small-n research design. Specifically, the findings of this comparison are not easily generalizable, nor can they be used to inform theories about why these responses differed outside the context of Latvia.

Finally, this research is also limited by the scope of its research objectives, however, these limitations invite further research to be done on this topic. While national security was the focus of much of this analysis, defining what exactly 'national security' encompasses is a broad subject area. To produce a more precise comparison, the formulation of the research objectives could have been refined to focus on particular qualities of national security present in both cases.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As a result of this research, a few important questions about this topic have been raised which would benefit from additional study. Namely, this research could be expanded upon following further significant developments in the war in Ukraine or in EU-Belarus relations. Further escalation in either of these crises would suggestively influence Latvia's border policies or its relationship with Ukrainian refugees. In this new context, further research could be conducted to measure how the performativity of the Latvian border has changed with new geopolitical security considerations. Additionally, this research can be replicated in other countries which have experienced both the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis, such as Poland or Lithuania. This future comparison would also improve the understanding of how borders in Central and Eastern Europe are socially constructed, particularly in the context of post-Soviet spaces.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has shown how the Latvian response to the Belarus border crisis and the Ukrainian refugee crisis differed to a significant extent in how the political expressions of national security influenced Latvian border policies. By comparing these case studies, this thesis has highlighted how the legal status of migrants, the classification of national security

threats, and who the attack was framed against have substantially influenced the Latvian response. Although the findings of this research are limited in their applicability beyond Latvia, this approach provides insights that are more culturally relevant to the political expressions of national security in Latvia.

As a result of the findings of this thesis, my research has many implications for the field of international relations, migration politics, and Latvia. This study would suggest that in the field of international relations, more consideration by academics and states should be given to how collective histories and culture inform perspectives on national security. The Latvian response to the Belarus border crisis has substantiated that understandings of what the state is responsible for protecting are grounded in culture, language, and identity just as much as they are in institutions and the economy. Additionally, this research indicates that the definitions of refugee and asylum seeker according to international law are outdated in how they conceive of the parameters of conflict as well as uphold white epistemologies. The impact of this research on migration politics is to show that distrust of racialized immigrants and asylum seekers is not always easily explained by the concepts of racism or xenophobia. Rather, it is important to examine how this distrust permeates institutions, epistemologies, and language in a manner that interacts with other collective histories involving distrust and fear of foreigners. In the context of Latvia, its history under the Soviet Union ingrained a strong culture of social distrust which informs the state's attitudes towards migrants as well. However, this is not to suggest that other structures of whiteness based on racism and colonialism are not also informing these attitudes but to clarify that the securitization of migration is a human construction. Therefore, it draws from human experiences and in the case of the state, its culture and history.

Borders are home to shared histories of people and nations; Latvia's border, despite being socially reconstructed following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, still retains some memory of its former internal borders. Arguably, the ease at which Ukrainian refugees were welcomed into Latvia is evidence enough that both nations were once part of the same country. In the foreseeable future, this research has implications for Latvia's management of its borders with Belarus and Russia, which are likely to be subjected to further securitization as Latvia increasingly restricts attempts at influencing its domestic affairs. In this vein, this research also matters to the EU in that its governing and political institutions should give more consideration to the perspectives of its member states who were formerly part of the Soviet sphere of influence. If hybrid warfare tactics and irregular migration continue to be used as tools by its adversaries to divide EU members and exert political pressure, the EU must demonstrate that it takes seriously the knowledge and lived experiences of all states. Finally, as Latvia continues to write its own history as a sovereign and independent state, it should critically interrogate the extent to which its epistemologies about national security are informed by its past. In seeking to guarantee its future as a nation, Latvia has arguably become distrustful of unfamiliar influences and people, particularly racialized bodies, to the extent that this impacts the state's ability to adapt to security threats. As Latvia solidifies its experiences as a sovereign nation, its border and migration policies will come to reflect this resilience as well. While borders are commonly perceived as distinguishing the physical territory of one state from another, they have a significant place in the international system as conferring the stories of people, culture, and histories.

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A. How would you describe your cultural or ethnic identity?

    a. What distinguishes your cultural or ethnic identity from others?

B. From your perspective, has the Latvian government been successful in responding to the Belarus border-crisis in 2021/2022?

    a. Why or why not? Could you point to specific government policies or examples from civil society that illustrate this?

C. From your perspective, has the Latvian government been successful in responding to the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022?

    a. Why or why not? Could you point to specific government policies or examples from civil society that illustrate this?

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