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EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY ROLES: A CASE STUDY OF THE LATVIAN PRESIDENCY IN 2015

Analysis of the Council of the European Union Presidency
Roles and National Interests

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ABSTRACT

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The presidency of the Council of the European Union occurs every six months. It provides all member states, regardless of state size, with the equal opportunity to be in the centre of EU decision-making. The presidency performs a wide range of roles, which include organizer/administrative, agenda setter, broker and political leader. National interests are also an inherent part of the presidency and they can influence the role performance of several of the roles.

Such national interests and their impact on the other roles are the subject of this thesis. The roles that the presidency performs are also the focus of this thesis. These subjects are examined using the case study method in the Latvian context. In particular, the focus is on the Latvian presidency that took place from 1 January to 30 June 2015. While the study is based on a single case study, the findings can be applied to other small member state presidencies.

Interviews were conducted with individuals who worked closely with the presidency and press releases by the Saeima and Latvian permanent representation were analysed. As a result, it was shown that in the organizational/administrative role, Latvia was able to plan the presidency in a timely manner and it focused on logistics and training of the civil service. In agenda-setting, it was able to push forward their fairly modest agenda and was able to reach agreements between member states regarding the agenda points. Latvia did not take a strong political leadership approach but rather aimed to mediate various positions. Latvia undertook the broker role admirably and they were able to frame their interests as European wide ones as is expected from the presidency.

National interests were found to influence the Latvian presidency term in several ways. What helped Latvia in realizing the national interests was agenda-setting because it is the biggest power the presidency has. Holding a successful first-time presidency was a national interest because they started the preparations early and spent a lot of resources on planning. It was found that national interests influenced the role performance for several roles.

Keywords: Council presidency, presidency roles, national interests, Latvia, European Union, Social Constructivism, identity

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Petra Elg: EU:n neuvoston puheenjohtajan roolit: tapaustutkimus Latvian puheenjohtajakaudesta vuonna 2015.

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Euroopan unionin neuvoston puheenjohtajakausi kiertää jäsenmaiden välillä puolen vuoden välein. Se tarjoaa kaikille jäsenmaille, niiden koosta riippumatta, yhtäläiset mahdollisuudet olla EU:n päätöksenteon keskiössä. Puheenjohtajavaltiolla on monenlaisia tehtäviä ja rooleja. Näihin rooleihin kuuluu välittäjänä toimimista, poliittista johtajuutta, hallinnollisia tehtäviä ja esityslistan laatimista.

Kansalliset edut ovat olennainen osa puheenjohtajuutta, ja ne voivat vaikuttaa useiden roolien hoitamiseen. Tämän tutkielman aiheena on puheenjohtajamaan roolit ja kansalliset edut sekä niiden vaikutus muihin rooleihin. Työssä keskitytään erityisesti Latvian puheenjohtajuuskauteen 1.1.-30.6.2015. Vaikka tutkimus perustuu yksittäiseen tapaustutkimukseen, tuloksia voidaan soveltaa muihin pienten jäsenvaltioiden puheenjohtajuuskausiin.

Latvian puheenjohtajuuskauden aikana työskennelleiden henkilöiden haastattelujen ja Saeiman ja Latvian pysyvän edustuston lehdistötiedotteiden perusteella kävi ilmi, että Latvia pystyi organisatorisessa ja hallinnollisessa roolissaan suunnittelemaan puheenjohtajakauden ajoissa. Suunnittelussaan se keskittyi logistiikkaan ja virkamieskunnan koulutukseen ja käytti paljon resursseja suunnitteluun.

Esityslistan laatimisessa se pystyi edistämään melko vaatimatonta ohjelmaansa ja sai aikaan jäsenmaiden välisiä sopimuksia esityslistan kohdista. Latvia ei omaksunut vahvaa poliittista johtajuutta, vaan pyrki pikemminkin sovitteluun eri kantoja. Latvia hoiti välittäjän roolinsa hyvin ja pystyi muotoilemaan etunsa Euroopan laajuisiksi, kuten puheenjohtajavaltiolta odotetaankin.

Kansalliset edut vaikuttivat Latvian puheenjohtajuuskauteen monin tavoin. Niiden toteuttamisessa Latviaa auttoi asialistan määrittäminen, johon liittyy puheenjohtajamaiden suurin valta. Latviassa ei ollut esityslistallaan monta aihetta, mikä auttoi sitä keskittymään sen kannalta keskeisiin aiheisiin. Latvian vahva kansallinen etu oli onnistua ensimmäisen puheenjohtajuuskauden järjestämisessä. Tutkimus osoittaa, että nimenomaan kansalliset edut vaikuttavat useiden roolien toteutumisessa.

Avainsanat: EU-puheenjohtajuuskausi, puheenjohtajamaan roolit, kansalliset edut, Latvia, Euroopan unioni, sosiaalinen konstruktivismi, identiteetti

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck -ohjelmalla.

List of Abbreviations

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union	presidency
European Union	EU
European Commission	Commission
Treaty of Lisbon	ToL
Eastern Partnership	EaP

List of Interviewees

Interviewee	Position	Date
A	Former Latvian civil servant	21.04.2021
B	Former Latvian civil servant	05.05.2021
C	Former Latvian civil servant	07.05.2021

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union (presidency) provides all 27 European Union (EU) member states an equal opportunity to be at the centre of the EU decision-making. Historically, the presidency has lasted for six months and every member state, big or small, has the chance to be at the helm of the EU (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). The rotation of the presidency was established in the 1950s, and as such has been present since the beginning of the EU and it remains a key instrument for ensuring the representation of the diversity of member states in an enlarged Union (Batory & Puetter, 2013). The rotating presidency “is the most far-reaching mechanism in guarding equality between the EU’s ‘big and small’” (Bunse, 2009, p. 19).

The presidency performs many roles such as organizational and administrative, setting political priorities and agendas and mediating situations where controversies arise (Thomson, 2008, p. 594). As the Treaties of Rome (1957), which established the presidency, did not specify any task related to the presidency, they have been developed over time (Elgström, 2003, p. 4; Thomson, 2008, p. 594; Schout & Vanhoonacker 2006). The presidency can provide member states with a position to set an ambitious agenda for the term and it provides an opportunity for other to get familiar with the member state holding the presidency and to gain other member states trust (Bendel & Magnúsdóttir, 2017).

The presidency’s decision-making powers have been contested and it has been characterized as being a position of “responsibility without power” (Dewost, 1984, p. 2). The Lisbon treaty (ToL) entered into force in 2009, and it brought major changes to the functioning of the presidency. These changes included for instance: creating a permanent position of the president of the European Council to chair meetings of national leaders, strengthening the high representative’s role in foreign affairs and them chairing foreign ministers’ meetings and diminishing the freedom of agenda setting of the presidency (King, 2016). It has been argued that the formal tasks of the Presidency have been limited and are more administrative in nature in the post-Lisbon setting (Bossuyt, Orbie, Vandecasteele, 2013, p. 2). The agenda setting powers have also been contested especially in the post-Lisbon presidencies (King, 2016). The presidency’s political influence has been contested as well (Thomson, 2008, p. 595). This is linked to the presidency having to “suppress its national interests” (Elgström, 2003, p. 1) that means that they cannot forward their own interests and have limited power (Bendel & Magnúsdóttir, 2017, p. 28). The presidency is expected to act as a silencer of their national preferences and to act as a neutral mediator.

There are scholars who argue that the presidency can yield influence and have an impact on the outcome of decisions (Elgström, 2003; Bunse, 2009). When holding the presidency it can give smaller states, such as Latvia, the chance to influence the EU agenda and it is an important arena through which they can make their voices heard in the EU. This is especially the case for new member states since they have an opportunity to enhance their reputation in the EU and gather respect from other member states (Bendel & Magnúsdóttir, 2017, p. 28). The presidency is a chance for the countries show that they can work together with the other EU institutions and member states and build relationships with them (Bunse, 2009). The presidency also gives member states a position in which they can leverage negotiation outcomes regardless of the state size (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 10).

In the EU, there are many states with various geographical, economic, and population sizes. Out of the 27 EU member states, Latvia has the fifth smallest population (Eurostat newsrelease, 2020). Later in the thesis a more accurate definition of a small state will be given for the context of this thesis. The size of states has some impact on the presidency behaviour. Larger states have the opportunity and means to “use power resources” and they are usually interested in all policy areas whereas smaller states more often follow the “formal norms of presidency conduct” (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 13). As a result, larger states can push for their own national preferences more than smaller, and especially newer small member states (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 13). Holding the presidency can be a challenge especially for the smaller and new member states that do not have prior experiences, as need to invest vast amounts of time for preparations and allocation of resources (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). Small states have been said to be overburdened by the various organizational, administrative and mediation roles (Bunse, 2009, p. 1). The structural disadvantages of small states such as smaller staff, less resources and less bargaining power (Panke, 2010, p. 10) can potentially have an impact on the presidency term and create challenges. Small member states can be in a weaker negotiating position when taking on the presidency; therefore, pushing for an ambitious agenda and national interests can be limited. Smaller states must ensure that they maintain their bargaining power through, for example, closer cooperation and contact with the European Commission (Commission) and through prioritizing of the agenda and activities before and during the presidency (Panke, 2010, p. 8).

Some claim that the presidency provides an opportunity where national interests can be pushed for and the agenda can be set in their favour (Bengtsson, Elgström, Tallberg, 2004, pp. 311-312). Others claim that this is not acceptable, as the presidency should work to mediate positions between member states and work for the common interests of the EU and remain neutral (Bengtsson, Elgström,

Tallberg, 2004, pp. 311-312; Elgström, 2003). It may however be expected that member states want to pursue their national interests to an extent at least (Scout & Vanhoonacker, 2006; Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015). This also means that the national interests have to be framed as European interests in order to receive the support of other member states in the decision (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 11).

The presidency undertakes various roles and these can be categorized into organizer/administrative, agenda setting, broker and political leader (Elgström, 2003; Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). The role of representative also exists but this will not be within the scope of the thesis due to its limited influence after the entry of force of the ToL.

This thesis will focus on these roles of the presidency and bring insights into the Latvian presidency in the first half of 2015 lasting from 1.1.2015 until 30.6.2015 and how it undertook the various roles. This thesis analyses these traditional roles of the presidency in the Latvian context and how national interests impact the performance of the other roles. In this thesis, it is assumed that the national interests are inherent to member states and the presidency. This is because it is not a question of whether member states have some national preferences but more about how they manage them (Tallberg, 2003).

Through the analysis of the presidency roles, this thesis shows how Latvia undertook the roles as a small state first time presidency holder and whether they used this position to amplify or silence their national interests. This thesis answers the following research questions:

- How did Latvia undertake the presidency roles?
- How do national interests influence role performance of the other roles?

The theoretical lens of social constructivism will be used to get insights into the type of identity Latvia had during its presidency. Through the analysis of the type of identity, it can be seen if Latvia was leaning towards more cooperation with other member states or if it took an approach to try to protect its own interests. The discussion of the type of identity can shed light on whether Latvia acted as a silencer or amplifier of these national preferences, and it can also shed light on the motivations that guided Latvia in the other presidency roles. This thesis does not focus on a specific policy field but examples of policies are examined in relation to the roles.

In order to answer the research questions, this thesis is structured as follows. The following chapter is the conceptual framework, which consists of the definition of small states, national interest representation and the various roles of the presidency. In this section, the theory of social

constructivism and more specifically the types of identity are outlined. In chapter three, the methods of case study, content analysis and interviewing are introduced and the sources used for this thesis will be presented. Chapter four presents the case study of Latvia and outlines the domestic and external situation. Chapter five includes the empirical section of the thesis including the findings and analysis. Here, the data from the interviews and sources are presented and analysed in relation to the roles of the presidency in the Latvian context. In chapter five, the national interests are analysed in relation to the other roles. In chapter six, it is discussed what type of identity that Latvia adopted during its presidency. Finally, the conclusions of the thesis are presented in chapter seven.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section begins with defining small states by outlining the various existing definitions. Here, it is also explained that traditionally small states have been in a marginalized position to their larger counterparts. Secondly, social constructivism is used as the theoretical basis due to its focus on ideas, norms and identity. The main focus of social constructivism is that the various interests of actors are formed by the interactions with other actors and these interests are not given. Therefore, this theoretical perspective is used to understand the identity Latvia adopted during its presidency and how this shaped the roles. Thirdly, the various roles allocated to the Presidency will be outlined. The roles are in the theoretical framework because they are at the focus of this thesis and how Latvia undertook them. Lastly in this section, national interest representation is defined.

2.1 Definition of a small state

What actually constitutes a small state? The definition is not straightforward and it is a debated topic among scholars, as no consensus of the definition exists. The lines between the definitions of microstate, small state and middle power are often blurred and the definitions often focus on great power definitions (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006, p. 652; Neumann & Gstöhl, 2004, p. 6). International relations (IR) literature focuses “almost exclusively on great powers, while small states have been a residual category, defined by the alleged non-greatness of its members” (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2004, p. 7). The focus was always on large powers because of empires and colonization and the success of states was considered in terms of military capacity and territorial expansion (Thorhallsson, 2006, p. 8).

Traditionally, the size of states is determined by four categories: size of the population, size of territory, gross domestic product and military capacity (Thorhallsson, 2006, p. 7). Thorhallsson (2006) argues that these variables are the best criteria to analyse the behaviour of states in the international system. Based on these aforementioned variables, the economic, administrative and military capabilities can be measured and the opportunities and limitations of the state can be examined (Steinmetz, 2010, p. 20). These criteria also indicate absolute and relative capabilities and there can give indication on how the state can handle challenges (Steinmetz, 2010, p. 20).

When decline and decolonization occurred in the 20th century due to the fall of the Habsburg Empire in 1919, British and French empires in 1950s and 1960s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was growth in the number of smaller states (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006, p. 4). These changes in

the international environment caused the emergence of states that could not be categorized as big states or great powers (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006). These small states that emerged were defined by concepts of vulnerability, capacity and limited diplomatic power (Thorhallsson, 2006, p. 9). Small states were characterized as having very limited international power and being reactive in the international arena, whereas large states were reactive (Thorhallsson, 2006, p. 9). As a result, Neumann and Gstöhl (2006) outline that, “small powers are defined by what they are not” (p. 4). For a long time, small states have been defined in negative ways and they have been associated with being weak (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2006, p. 4). Traditionally, they were seen as being no threat to neighbouring states and they were “seen as fragile creatures in the rough sea of international relations” (Goetschel, 1998, p. 13). Bendel and Magnúsdóttir (2017) add that it was considered that the security of smaller states was determined by states with larger military capacity and did not have control of their own security. Small states are generally characterized as having fewer financial resources at their disposal as larger states and having disadvantages in negotiation situations (Panke, 2012, p. 7).

Even if small states face disadvantages compared to larger counterparts, they can still change the outcomes of negotiations by for instance focusing on issues of high importance (Panke, 2012, pp. 7-9). By focusing and prioritizing policy areas small states can strategize and have “administrative force” to push for their own interests (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006, p. 659). Simultaneously, small states can be defined according to Durkheim (1992) "societies can have their pride, not in being the greatest or the wealthiest, but in being the most just, the best organized and in possessing the best moral constitution" (p. 75). According to Neumann and Gstöhl (2006) this can mean that small states can be a strong model for other states (p. 5). In moral arguing, small states can have leverage over larger states because small states can be regarded as maintaining impartiality better than big states (Panke, 2010, p. 11).

Alongside the various definitions and characterizations, another more subjective definition exists for small states. That is that size of states is a social construct and it is context dependent (Panke, 2015, p. 2). This means that small states can be defined through how others view it and through how it views itself, and not necessarily based on its material possession or qualities it possesses. Therefore, the size of states does not determine if it is weak or strong (Neumann and Gstöhl, 2006, p. 4). Characteristics such as economic power, military power or voting power can define a state big or small but the definition of size is also “an inherently relational concept and therefore only meaningful in regard to a specific group” (Panke, 2012, p. 4; Panke, 2015, p. 2). Thorhallsson (2006) also examines “perceptual size” as a criterion by which it can be analysed how size can impact the action

of states (p. 8). He explains that “the view of domestic and international actors concerning a state’s size, particularly in comparison with other states, is of essential importance in determining its internal and external actions” (p. 24).

This contextual background is to show the varying definitions of small states. Moreover, it shows that small states exist in large amounts in the international arena and they are “an empirically relevant unit of study for the discipline of international relations” (Maass, 2009, p. 65). More specifically, in the EU context “ten out of the twelve highest ranked small and medium sized states in the world as a whole in terms of competitiveness are small states in Europe (states with less than 20 million inhabitants is small)” (Thorhallsson, 2006, p. 9). In the institutionalized context of the EU, power such as military power does not define a state’s position and that does not allow for it to have a “strong voice”, what matters is the share of votes they have in decision-making (Panke, 2015, p. 2).

Small states in this thesis are defined based on the amount of votes: “all states that possess less than average votes in qualified majority voting in the EU’s Council of Ministers as the venue in which states’ interests are expressed during EU secondary law making are regarded as being small” (Panke, 2015, p. 2). The amount of votes in the Council of Ministers is linked to yielding an influence in the EU policy matters. Those member states that have less votes have a harder time in creating coalitions in the Council whereas larger member states more often form winning coalitions (Panke, 2010, p. 4). According to Panke (2010) small states are characterized as those who have less than the average number (12.78) of votes in the Council and this means that 19 out of the 27 member states are in this category (p. 4). In this context, as small states constitute a large amount of the EU member states, the role of small states is an important field of study.

2.2 Social constructivism and identity

This section of the thesis outlines social constructivism and its underlying ideas. Social constructivism, as a meta-theory of IR, aims at explaining the role of ideas and identities in shaping systems and actors’ behaviours (Thorhallsson, 2018, p. 25). This thesis focuses on identity, norms and ideas and therefore, social constructivism as a theoretical framework is applicable because it focuses on these ideological factors. In order to analyse small state behaviour at the helm of the Council Presidency, identity formation and integration into the EU are important aspects to consider since examining those can provide insight into how the EU shapes the identity formation of small states and whether or not this impacts the presidency. Moreover, social constructivism can help in understanding the significance of Latvia’s national identity and how has the EU shaped it. This in

turn, can help in analysing whether Latvia approached the presidency as a silencer or amplifier of national interests.

Before moving on to explaining social constructivism, a short overview of the historical development is outlined, and it is explained where social constructivism can be placed in the field of IR. The 1980's and late 1990s IR and EU studies were characterized by a new "great debate" between rational choice and constructivism (Jung, 2019, p. 1; Pollack, 2006, p. 44). This debate was the result of scholars wanting to show that the analysis of norms and ideas would allow for widening of the intellectual space (Peltonen, 2017, para. 37). By opening the theoretical debate in IR and including norms into the discussion, the perceptions of actors and how these perceptions affect behaviour can be studied (Peltonen, 2017, para. 37). Jung (2019) outlines three reasons for the emergence of the constructivist IR theory that are firstly, that it emerged as a response to dominating theories of neorealism and neoliberalism and this new reflectivist theory could provide alternative insights into IR (p. 1). Secondly, with the end of the Cold War, the dominant theory of realism showed its failure because a new world order emerged (Jung, 2019, p. 1). Thirdly, new scholars emerged in the field of IR that were inspired by the new emerging theories in IR (Jung, 2019, p. 1).

Up until the 1990's, the dominating theory of realism posits that states are the main actor in the field of IR and their nature, goals, interests and needs are given and these are exogenously determined (Chwedczuk-Szulc, 2019, p. 88). Moreover, in realism the interactions of states and actors in the IR field do not change its structure and therefore, these interactions are not important and not taken into account (Chwedczuk-Szulc, 2019, p. 88). Lastly, the society is not characterized as a dynamic changing actor but the only purpose of states is to achieve egoist interests (Chwedczuk-Szulc, 2019, p. 88). The 1990's and the post-Cold war era witnessed the emergence of social constructivism and this period in time can be characterized as the "constructivist turn in IR" (Jung, 2019, p. 1). This change in the theoretical thought was in response to the changing world order as realism and liberalism were criticized as not explaining the changing world with new phenomenon's (Chwedczuk-Szulc, 2019, p. 87). Chwedczuk-Szulc (2019) highlights that the former dominating theories lacked explanatory power of the "constantly changing, globalising world and its transition to a predominantly multi-polar and unstable world order" (p. 87).

Social constructivism focuses on international norms, identity and ideas (Neumann and Gstöhl, 2006, p. 12). It aims to explain how various actors interpret their reality and how human interactions such as norms, rules, ideas and institutions, are produced by human interaction (Tuominen, 2016, p. 10). The underlying thought of constructivism is that the various interests of actors are formed by the

interactions with other actors and these interests are not given (Tuominen, 2016, p. 10). The social reality created by these interactions is subject to constant change and people are responsible for creating and constructing their realities (Tuominen, 2016, p. 10). Tuominen (2016) explains that for the constructivists “the process of interaction between agency and structure are essential in understanding social reality” (p. 10). Moreover, “structures are not about distributing material capabilities, but about distributing ideas” and “structures not only constrain; they are also able to constitute the identity and interests of actors” (Tuominen, 2016, p. 10). Actors within structures can act in a way that is opposing the externally perceived interests and ways of acting. These actions and ideas of actors are not produced exogenously (Saurugger, 2014, p. 147). Tuominen (2016) further explains that “social institutions have a constitutive effect on actors’ identities and define the rules of the game and actors cannot be analysed without reference to the social structures in which they are embedded” (p. 10). This means that in the constructivist thought all actors are guided by the logic of appropriateness which posits that actors aim to do what is considered right and not trying to maximize their own interests and this viewpoint is opposing the rationalist view of the logic of consequences (Tuominen, 2016, p. 10).

How then can the meta-theoretical perspective of social constructivism be applied to the EU and small state context? Social constructivism highlights ideological factors of integration and EU policy-making such as rules and norms, formation of identities and language (Christensen et. al., 2001, p. 12). Thus, constructivism focuses on ideational factors rather than material ones and it emphasizes the importance of ideas and identities in forming systems and individual behaviours (Thorhallsson, 2018, p. 25). This focus is important because it can be argued that social constructivism can explain the constantly changing world order and accounts for the interaction between various actors. Social constructivism shifted the discussion away from relative power and it brought about the idea that this type of power was not considered to be the defining factor, but it gave rise to ideational factors through which small states could maneuver in their foreign policy (Neumann and Gstöhl, 2006, p. 12). Wendt (1999) outlines one of the fundamental principles of constructivism as “the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature” (p. 1). Therefore, social constructivism helped small state studies by redefining the traditional notions and points of analysis of small state studies.

In relation to small state studies, social constructivism enables the analysis of how the EU has shaped the identity of these states and has this had an impact on the presidency. In social constructivism, the state is not only analysed based on what their foreign policy decisions are but also based on how the

domestic and international structures have an impact on them. In the EU context, this theoretical perspective allows for a closer examination of how the member states behave under the influence of the domestic and on the other hand institutional and EU level structures. Identity formation also ties in with the national interests of states and they act in a certain way based on the ideas they have of themselves and others (Thorhallsson, 2018, p. 25). Moreover, Neumann and Gstöhl (2006) posit that small states can socially construct new and also more favourable identities in their relationships (p. 12).

In sum, according to constructivists, interests of actors are not given and they appear when in interaction with other actors “which in the EU context would mean that member states shape each other’s national interests” (Bendel & Magnusdottir, 2017, p. 33). Moreover, the constructivist school explains that the interests of actors are formed in the interactions with others and they cannot be predetermined (Svetlicic, Cerjak, 2015, p. 9). In the context of the presidency, social constructivism can help in explaining how Latvia behaves during the presidency, to what extent it is guided by national identity and whether and how the EU has shaped Latvia’s identity, norms, and ideas.

2.2.1 Various types of identity

Above, social constructivism and its underlying ideas were outlined. This section goes more in depth into identity as one of the elements within social constructivism. As was highlighted above, social constructivism theorizes that the world and reality is constructed through the social interactions of actors. Ideas and interests influence these actors and this in turn, impacts their identities. In this thesis, the concept of identity is analysed in relation to the Latvian presidency to examine the importance of its national identity and how the EU possibly shapes small state identities while in the presidency and how these identities influence the roles they undertake. In this section, identity will be outlined through the framework presented by Wendt (1999). He introduces four types of identities that are 1) personal or corporate, 2) type, 3) role, 4) collective (p. 224). The theory presented by Wendt fits the framework of the EU and its member states and therefore provides a good addition to the theoretical framework for this thesis.

One of the most prominent constructivists Wendt (1999) explains identity as “a subjective or unit-level quality, rooted in an actor’s self-understandings” and states “the meaning of those understandings will often depend on whether other actors represent an actor in the same way” (p. 224). Therefore, actor’s self-perception and the views of other actors have an impact on identity and it can be said that, “identities are constituted by both internal and external structures” (Wendt, 1999,

p. 244; Bendel & Magnúsdóttir, 2017, p. 33). Bendel and Magnúsdóttir (2017) link the perception to Thorhallsson's (2006) perceptual size of states. Perceptual size explains how the domestic and external actors view the state in question and this can determine its internal and external actions. Therefore, the "state's identity or perceptual size is especially important within the EU, where the member states meet repeatedly in negotiations and therefore have a chance of building a reputation or image known to the other actors" (Bendel & Magnúsdóttir, 2017, pp. 33-34). Moreover, smaller states should perceive itself as a strong state to shape its international identity and influence the perception of other actors' regarding that state (Goetschel, 1998; Bendel & Magnúsdóttir, 2017, p. 34).

It is important to establish what the specific identities are for the purpose of the analysis section. Identity for Wendt is formed by self-perception and the perception of others (Wendt, 1999). These identities can take various forms in actors and they can also change their identity depending on the situation (Wendt, 1999, p. 230). All the above identities except the first one can exist in an actor at once (Wendt, 1999, p. 230). The first identity personal and corporate, consist of "self-organizing, homeostatic structures that make actors distinct entities" (Wendt, 1999, p. 224). Wendt (1999) explains that the personal identity refers to an individual identity but this can also be called "corporate" identity if one is referring to community identity. Wendt (1999) further explains that whether the actor is a state or an individual, the actors can only have one personal or corporate identity at once. This identity is linked to a material base and this means that this type of identity is characterized by a state having a territory and maintaining boundaries between Self and Others (Wendt, 1999, p. 225). In order for states or individuals to have a personal or corporate identity, the actor must have "a consciousness and memory of Self as a separate locus of thought and activity" (Wendt, 1999, p. 225).

The second identity is the "type", and it is characterized by being a social category (Wendt, 1999, pp. 225-226). This can be applicable to individuals who share similar traits such as attitudes, language, values, appearances, experiences and similar histories (Wendt, 1999, pp. 225-226). In the type identity, the characteristics matter and it is not enough to have merely shared ones, the characteristics must have a social context and meaning (Wendt, 1999, pp. 225-226). It is also important to note that actors can have multiple type identities at the same time (Wendt, 1999, pp. 225-226).

In the role identity the dependency on culture and on other actors is key. The main difference between the above type identities is that in role identity the identity is not pre-existing but only exists in relation

to other actors (Wendt, 1999, p. 227). An actor cannot enact this identity by itself and role identities depend on the sharing of expectations (Wendt, 1999, p. 227).

Collective identity enables the extending of boundaries of the Self to include the Other (Wendt, 1999, p. 229). This means that the lines between the self and the other become blurred and transcended (Wendt, 1999, p. 229). Collective identity is a combination of the type and role identities. It allows for actors to have altruistic capabilities to consider the Other's interests as a part of the Self's self-interests (Wendt, 1999, p. 229). In the EU, context the collective identity would increase the sense of security and belonging among member states. Constructivists also see European integration as a result of the ideational factors moulded by collective ideas, norms and values.

2.3 The many roles of the Presidency

This section presents the various roles of the presidency. Later in the thesis, the roles will be analysed in relation to Latvia and how it approached them. It will also be examined whether Latvia used the roles to amplify or silence its national interests.

The formal roles of the Presidency are outlined in EU Treaties. Article 16(9) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) establishes the Council rotation "the Presidency of Council configurations, other than that of Foreign Affairs, shall be held by Member State representatives in the Council on the basis of equal rotation". Moreover, Article 48 of the TEU enables the Presidency to convene conferences. Up until the Lisbon Treaty, the tasks of the Presidency were not clearly outlined in the legal framework of the EU (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 4). Overall, "the role of the Presidency has gradually increased until it has become a key element in the functioning of the life of the Union" (Kurpas et al., 2007, p. 42) and it is therefore key to examine the roles allocated to the presidency and what are their opportunities and challenges for small states in the EU.

The member states holding the presidency perform a wide range of tasks from mundane ones such as chairing meetings and taking minutes, to key priorities such as agenda setting and brokering different agreements (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). This variety of tasks of the Presidency places the member state in charge to the centre of the EU negotiation process and makes it an important actor (Niemann & Mak 2009). The roles of the presidency can be divided into organizer or administrator, broker and political leadership (Schout & Vanhoonacker, 2006, p. 1055). Agenda-setting is a key role of the presidency because they can decide which agenda points are included in the presidency programme and what not (Tallberg, 2003). In this thesis, it is assumed that Latvia undertakes the presidency roles that are already known, as it is at the helm for the first time. Therefore,

the roles that are analysed are organizer/administrative, agenda-setting, political leadership and broker.

2.3.1 Organizer and administrative

In the organizer and administrative role, the member state in charge is responsible for chairing meetings, organizing meetings and collecting minutes of meetings. Additional responsibilities are distributing documents, creating agendas and convening all meetings and the presidency has to ensure coordination between other EU institutions (Elgström, 2003, p. 5). It is expected that there is a clear division of tasks among actors at home and in Brussels in the Permanent Representation. The Permanent Representation is an important part of the presidency since it allows being close to the decision-making and other EU institutions (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011). The role of organizer should not be noticed and if it is not, it can be a sign that the presidency is performing this task well (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). Often, the tasks of the presidency fall under the administrative role.

2.3.2 Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting role of the presidency entails setting political priorities during their time at the helm (Langdal & Sydow, 2009, p. 3). This position allows them to advance priorities they deem important and further the EU agenda. The country that holds the presidency together with the European Commission set the priorities of the agenda (Vilpišaukas, Vandecasteele, Vaznonyte, 2013, p. 16). However, the presidency is in charge of deciding which of these it keeps on the agenda. Tallberg (2003) explains that Presidencies have a great ability to decide what issues are included in the agenda and what are not (p. 21). This is a privileged position and the presidency has “the prerogative to undertake considerable political entrepreneurship” (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 5). Moreover, Tallberg (2003) outlines three types of agenda-shaping that are agenda-setting, agenda-structuring and agenda exclusion (p. 1). Agenda-setting can be defined as introducing new issues to the agenda, agenda-structuring means that the presidency can put special emphasis on some topics already on the agenda and finally, agenda exclusion can be defined as removing issues from the agenda (Tallberg, 2003, p. 2). Presidencies plan their agendas well in advance but external events can change their window of opportunity and take a toll on their initial agendas. The European Council also plays a role in the agenda setting of the Council of the EU. Some have argued that it is merely an illusion that the presidency can plan what is on the EU agenda but this is not the whole truth since, despite the external

shocks presidencies “have a long history of setting ambitious goals for their respective semesters” (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 5).

2.3.3 Political leadership

The Council Presidency provides political leadership in thinking about what would be the best outcome for everyone. The presidency needs to avoid biases and remain neutral but this does not mean it cannot provide political leadership and guidance (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). Political leadership includes also agenda setting, which means that the presidency can prioritize certain topics and influence the outcomes of discussions between member states.

The presidency is in a position to influence the agenda, it can give preference to some dossiers and steer the negotiations in a certain direction (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). This type of behaviour from the presidency is welcomed. However, the choices made by the country at the helm have to represent European and not national interests (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). According to Vilpišaukas, Vandecasteele and Vaznonyte (2013), political leadership of the Council can lead to a better functioning EU and increase integration (p. 16).

2.3.4 Broker

The broker role for the Council of the EU means that the country at the helm has to facilitate conversations and aim for problem solving. The presidency must reach agreements between member states and find common positions. The country holding the presidency should follow the neutrality agreement, which means that it should act as an honest broker and this is outlined in the handbook of the presidency (2018), that states “the Presidency is, by definition, neutral and impartial” (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 10). The presidency should not defend national interests but instead mediate decisions. The agenda of the Council matters can be shaped by the presidency and it can prioritize certain dossiers and can guide the negotiations (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011). However, the decisions made by the presidency needs to be in accordance with European interests and not national ones. According to Vilpišaukas, Vandecasteele, and Vaznonyte (2013), the broker role means that consensus efforts are key and that this needs to occur between the member states and different institutions (p. 16). Vanhoonacker, Pomorska and Maurer (2011) explain that for those member states that have national interests to defend “it requires a delicate balance of devising solutions acceptable to all delegations without alienating the public at home” (p. 5).

The above roles are interconnected and can influence one another. For instance, if a presidency does not fulfil the organizer role it can negatively impact its brokerage role (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011, p. 6). The organizational role is key for the smooth fulfilment of all the other roles as it consists of timely arrival of documents, setting up meeting rooms and manages time. In case there are done in a sloppy manner, it can lead to irritation and this in turn can negatively influence reaching consensus (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011, p. 6). Moreover, being a neutral broker and providing political leadership can conflict one another and depend on the state of negotiations (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011, p. 6). Organization is always necessary, however, the type of dossier and negotiations will determine which of the other roles to use (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011, p. 6). However, not all the roles have to be fulfilled but the presidency faces a difficult decision when deciding according to which role to act (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, 2011; Schout and Vanhoonacker, 2006).

The roles mentioned above “point to both the neutral administrative and mediation tasks as well as to the political agenda-setting and initiation functions” (Schout, 1998, p. 3). This means that member states perform a wide range of roles and with the role of agenda setting they can promote national initiatives. Member states holding the presidency can have national interests and this can impact the behaviour at the helm (Schout, 1998, p. 4). Although the extent to which a presidency can push for national interests while at the helm is a contested issue, the opportunity still exists for some states to push for them. Member states have national interests while at the helm and these affect the behaviour and agenda of the presidency however, this is often ignored (Schout, 1998, p. 4). As the chair is expected to act as a neutral broker and silence its national interests, it should not push for national preferences since it affect how others view the state as a neutral broker (Schout, 1998, p. 4). Nevertheless, as Tallberg (2003) argues, member states are strategic actors that aim to “satisfy national preferences within the confines of their formally delegated role” (p. 5). This thesis shows that national interests influence the role performance for several roles.

2.4 National interest representation

National interests are important in the context of the EU because they can be considered a key part in small state negotiation strategies to maximize their own bargaining position (Bendel & Magnúsdóttir, 2017, p. 32; Svetličič and Cerjak, 2015). Some argue (see Schout & Vanhoonacker, 2006) that national interest representation also needs to be included in the list of roles even though it is controversial. In this thesis, national interest representation is considered to be an inherent part of what guides actor’s behaviour and therefore, it is not analysed as a role that the presidency performs. It is not a matter of

whether the member states holding the presidency have national preferences, but rather how they handle them (Tallberg, 2003). Schout and Vanhoonacker (2006) also claim that the presidency represents national interests.

The presidency, regardless of their size is expected to act as a neutral actor and not as one that promotes particular national interests (Svetličič and Cerjak, 2015, p. 10). During the presidency the state can however be in a position in the EU decision making where it can pursue national interests by focusing on topics that are valuable for them. It can be expected that states do want to pursue these national interests by launching initiatives but these should be presented as common European interests that can lead to member states support (Svetličič and Cerjak, 2015, p. 11). There are various views on the ability of the presidency to pursue its national interest and its power overall. On the one hand, Dewost (1984) argues that the position is “responsibility without power” (p. 2) and on the other hand, it is argued that as chair they have the ability to choose whether to take a position of amplifier or silencer of national interests (Bengtsson, Elgström, Tallberg, 2004).

Size is a factor that has an impact on the presidency behaviour and the size of states determines the extent to which they can pursue national interests (Svetličič and Cerjak, 2015, p. 6, 9, 13). Larger member states are expected to use the presidency as a position to pursue their own interest whereas smaller states “compromise their own national preferences by following in more detail the formal norms of presidency conduct” (Svetličič and Cerjak, 2015, p. 13). For smaller and especially for new member states, they face challenges in “adapting to and integrating into the EU’s system of decision-making” (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 13). Smaller states typically have limited resources to further national interests (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 6, 9). In order for states to realize their national interests, they need to have influence and power and these can stem from either formal or informal power sources (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 10). These power resources can give member states increased leverage in negotiations especially during the presidency (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 10). Large member states use the power resources better than smaller states (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 13). Large states have interests in a vast amount of policy areas and they are in a position where they pursue their national interests and they are expected to do so (Bengtsson, Elgström, Tallberg, 2004). Small states do not have such specific national interests and therefore, they are in a better position to reach compromises between member states in negotiations (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 14).

Smaller states often pursue a conflict-avoiding tactic in negotiations as a source of power (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 14). This means that they need to prioritize some sectors and they often remain inflexible in those (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 14). Small states focus on a few important sectors

and allocate their limited resources to those (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 14). When smaller member states want to pursue those few national interests that they have, other member states “tend to show greater tolerance and understanding” (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 14). As a result, the smallness of the member states allows them to “play the role of a compromise-oriented honest broker” (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 14). This position allows small states to include some national interests in the presidency (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015).

The following sections of the thesis will discuss the relationship of the roles and identity formation. More specifically, these roles are part of the evaluation of the Latvian presidency. It will be analysed how Latvia undertook these presidency roles, how do national interests influence the role performance for the roles and whether it acted as a silencer or amplifier of national preferences.

3. METHODS AND SOURCES

Before moving on to the analysis of the case study, the methods and sources used in this thesis are outlined in this section. The main research method of this thesis is case study research, and the analysis method that is used in support of this is content analysis. As a data collection method, interviews are conducted and they are analysed using content analysis. The analysis method of content analysis is a suitable method for this thesis since it allows for the gathering of data from a vast amount of sources through categorization of the data. This thesis is a qualitative study that focuses on a single case study of the Latvian presidency that took place from 01.01.2015 until 31.06.2015. The topic of the EU Council Presidency in itself is extensive and therefore, focusing on one single case study allows for an in-depth examination of one particular member state.

3.1 Case study

Case study is one of the many ways to do research within the political sciences (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Case study research is the main methodological focus in this thesis, but it contains in itself various research methods and it can be classified as a research strategy or a way to conduct research (Laine, Bamberg, Jokinen, 2007, p. 9). It can also be classified as an approach to research and therefore, in this thesis the research strategy consists of focusing on a single case study and using the data collection method of interviews and data analysis method of content analysis. Many definitions of case studies exist and it can be defined as being “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Robson, 2002, p. 178). Creswell (2013) explains that case study research is a qualitative approach where real-life situations are explored through a case or cases through multiple sources of information such as interviews and documents (p. 97). The case study research has to be defined in terms of a specific time, place and by the entity for example and individual or organization (Creswell, 2013, p. 98; Gerring, 2004, p. 342). The case study research is a detailed description of an object under study for example an individual, community, state or chain of events (Laine, Bamberg, Jokinen, 2007, p. 9-10; Berg, 2009, p. 317). It can shed light on individuals, groups, organizations and on social and political phenomena (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Yin (2003) explains that the need for case studies comes from the desire to understand complex social phenomena (p. 2). Moreover, this method enables “investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as organizational and managerial processes and international relations” (Yin, 2003, p. 2).

Case study research provides an opportunity for in-depth analysis of a social phenomenon and therefore, it can be applied in the context of this thesis and to the single case study of the Latvian presidency roles and limited to the time period ranging from 1.1.2015 until 30.6.2015. The case of the Latvian presidency sheds light to the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework. The goal is not to merely describe what a small state is and what are the functions of the presidency, but to also present a case study through which the concepts and phenomenon can be analysed (Laine, Bamberg, Jokinen, 2007, p. 11). Therefore, the case study research strategy fits this thesis. The qualitative case study research method was selected for this thesis because it allows flexibility. The topic of the EU Council presidency in itself is a large phenomenon and narrowing the focus to one member state allows for a more in-depth analysis. Latvia was selected for this thesis because as a first-time presidency holder it can shed light on a new member state's presidency and how a small state can undertake the roles. The case of the Latvian presidency roles is an underresearched topic and at the time of the Latvia presidency in 2015, there were many events internally in the EU and externally that make the time period of the presidency an interesting point of study. The council presidency is a relevant topic due to it taking place every six months and concerning all EU member states. Within the limited framework of the thesis it is not possible to analyse multiple presidencies.

When conducting qualitative research, and more specifically in the context of this thesis when the case study research is conducted, the design type or research purpose has to be selected. Stake (1995) outlines three case study methods: intrinsic, instrumental and collective case study (pp. 3-4). The case study can also be categorized as descriptive, explanatory or exploratory (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, pp. 10-11). This thesis employs a combination of the intrinsic and instrumental case study. In the Intrinsic case study the case is the main interest of exploration (Stake, 1995). The aim in this type of case study is not necessarily to understand a larger phenomenon (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2005, p. 9). Instrumental case study is used when the case can be used to understand other cases as well (Stake, 1995). It can be used to gain a broader understanding of a phenomenon. While the focus of this thesis is the Latvian presidency and the specific roles, the case can be used to explain other small state presidencies and therefore, this study fits the instrumental case study as well. The presidency occurs every six months and it gives all the member states the opportunity to be in the position and is a continuous rotation. This is why the study can be considered an intrinsic one because it concerns all the member states and the presidencies undertake the same roles.

3.2 Content analysis

In order to analyse the sources used in this thesis and to provide an in-depth analysis, qualitative content analysis is used as a method to analyse qualitative data that emerges from the sources used for this thesis. Content analysis can be defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). It is a method of analysing written, verbal or visual communications and it is used in order to gain new insights of a particular phenomenon (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 107). When doing content analysis, the sources are categorized and organized in order to find commonalities or differences in them. As a method for analysis, content analysis allows for the categorization of data in a fairly free manner and it is applicable to the analysis of various types of sources.

There are many ways to do content analysis and it can be done with either a inductive, deductive or abductive way (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018). In the inductive approach, the research is focused on the research material and the units of analysis are not predetermined and the theory is also not predetermined and is built from the research material. In other words, the inductive research is focused on individual observations and from those make more general claims. The deductive approach can be characterized as being opposite to this, as it focuses on existing theories or frameworks and testing them. The analysis of the research material is guided by predetermined theoretical positions and testing them in a new phenomenon. In the abductive approach, both the theory and sources being crucial for the analysis. This approach can be called the theory-guiding one, where the theory is not the only aspect guiding the research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Here, the units of analysis can emerge from the sources but the interpreting and analysis is guided by the theory and the theory is used as a help but the analysis is not solely based on the theory (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). This research falls in between these two approaches and applies an abductive approach because the analysis of the research material is not solely based on the finding that emerge from it or only based on predetermined theoretical frameworks. In the abductive approach, the empirical observations and the theory complement each other and intertwine in the research. What makes this study an abductive approach is also that this approach can combine terms together that have not been previously associated with each other (Reichertz, 2014, pp. 126-127). In this thesis, the theory of social constructivism and more specifically identity is linked to the Latvian presidency roles.

Qualitative content analysis in this thesis followed the structure in which first the research questions were identified after which the source materials were chosen and the coding scheme of the categories

and sub-categories was formed (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). After this process, the findings are analysed and presented (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). In the beginning of the content analysis, the information that was looked for in the sources was determined by the categories derived from the theoretical framework. After determining this, the sources were read through and analysed. This step was the most time consuming due to the amount of sources and interviews that needed to be analysed. The sources were categorised based on the theoretical framework which includes the four roles of the presidency and national interests. The categories that guided the content analysis are presented below:

1. Organizer/administrative
2. Agenda-setter
3. Political leadership
4. Broker
5. National interest representation: holding a successful presidency, EaP

The categories are the ones that were looked for in the source materials and they drive the content analysis however, in the source materials these roles are rarely mentioned as such. When analysing the sources, themes rose from the data such as sharing of experiences, values, national interests, timely preparation and many others by which it was possible to determine which roles were discussed. Through these themes it was possible to better categorize the vast amount of data under the main categories. These five main categories presented above formed the basis for the categorization because in this way, the large amount of research data could be organized. In the interviews the categories could be more clearly identified but in the source materials the sub categories that were formed helped to understand and make more sense of the content of the press releases. When the key sources were analysed, implicit and explicit references to the above roles were looked for. References to identity and national interests were also looked for in order to determine if Latvia pursued national interests and whether it acted as a silences or amplifier of national preferences. The national interests representation is not analysed as a presidency role but it was added to the categories that guided the content analysis. Through the analysis of the source materials and interviews, holding a good presidency and the EaP policy were identified as key national interests and they guided the content analysis.

3.2 Interviewing

Interviewing as a method allows for flexibility and an in-depth gathering of the subject or case under study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) in order to gain as much

information, the questions can be sent to the interviewee before. This is also ethical to do so that the interviewees are aware of what the interview is about (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). There are various interview types and the one chosen for this thesis is semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the central themes of the interview were pre-determined (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). This type of interview allows for further questions to be asked during the interview (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The themes and questions have to be focused to the study at hand (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

In this thesis, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with officials working with the Latvian presidency. It was difficult to begin the interviewing process due to the lack of contacts. Some individuals were contacted and asked if they would be available for an interview. These three interviewees were chosen because they worked closely in the presidency and were aware of the various procedures and responsibilities of the presidency. The interviews were conducted via videochat and the questions were sent well in advance before the interview for the interviewees to have time to prepare. A declaration of confidentiality was also sent to the interviewees guaranteeing anonymity. Since the interviewees were individuals working in the Latvian presidency, some bias in the responses may occur. For this thesis, it was not possible to conduct more interviews due to the time and resource restrictions but in further research this can be done. However, in this thesis a combination of sources was used in addition to the interviews in order to support the data gathered from the interviews.

3.3 Source materials

The source material for this thesis consist of various other sources in order to gain in-depth knowledge on how Latvia performed in the presidency roles. The source materials consist of press releases issued by the Latvian government Saeima and the Latvian Permanent Representation that is under the auspices of the Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia. The sources were found on both websites in English. The search was mainly focused on the time of the presidency that took place 1.1.2015-31.6.2015 however, press releases outside of this timeframe were also chosen for analysis. The search words that were used in both websites were “presidency” and “presidency of the Council of the EU”. On the Saeima website, all together 26 press releases were gathered for analysis. On the Latvian Permanent Representation website, the search provided a vast amount of documents with over a 1000 results out of which 23 were gathered for analysis. In the analysis of these documents, and what is searched for are implicit or explicit references to the roles of the presidency and national interest representation. The press releases, together with the interviews are the primary sources of this thesis.

Further sources used in this thesis consist of mostly secondary sources that are academic reports, journals, and books analysing small states and the presidency as a phenomenon. The sources also consist of academic articles analyzing small states and the Latvian presidency. These were found in Google and library databases through search words such as “EU Council presidency, “rotating presidency” and “small states and EU Council presidency”. These sources were used to gain a deeper understanding of presidency. For instance, articles that discussed other countries presidencies and the fulfilment of the roles were used in the analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of presidency behavior. The primary sources that were used in this thesis are the data gathered from the interviews because it is first hand accounts of individuals involved in the presidency.

In this thesis, the three interviews that were conducted are the most significant source used for the analysis of the Latvian presidency. The interviews provided in-depth and first-hand reviews of the roles of the presidency, which were beneficial for answering the research questions. Most of the role analysis and descriptions are based on what the Latvian representatives recalled afterwards. With the interviews, the press releases are important for the analysis as well as they provided first-hand accounts of the presidency. The press releases were not always extensive and therefore, the data from the interviews was key for the conclusions and analysis in this thesis.

4. CONTEXT OF THE LATVIAN PRESIDENCY

Before moving on to analysing the functions of the presidency, the case study of Latvia is presented and the context of the time leading up to its presidency is outlined. The background information outlines events and development of the time leading to the presidency and major historical, external and domestic events. Through a brief historical account of Latvia, the roles and national interest representation can be better understood in the context of the presidency and what influenced their choices during the presidency.

4.1 Latvia's road to accession into the EU

Latvia gained its independence in 1991 after almost 60 years of Soviet Union's occupation. Latvia's foreign policy objectives between the 1991 and 2004 were focused on securing itself from threats from Russia and joining the EU and NATO (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 1). Latvia saw integration into the EU and other IO's as a guarantee of prosperity, democratization, human rights, the rule of law, and geopolitical security (Eihmanis, 2009, p. 1). In the beginning of the 1990s, EU membership was not on the table for Latvia because the EU had concerns on a variety of issues that were obstacles to Latvia's accession (Galbreath & Lamoreaux, 2013, p. 112, 113). Latvia's economic dependency on Russia, border disputes that were unresolved, and the rights of the large Russian minority were all issues that prevented accession (Galbreath & Lamoreaux, 2013, p. 114). Majority of these issues were resolved and this resulted in easing Latvia's accession into the EU and Latvia's economic dependency on Russia (Galbreath & Lamoreaux, 2013, p. 114).

From the 1990s onwards, the EU has had a vast impact on Latvia's institutions, society, and policy. As integration into the EU deepened on the road to accession, Latvian elite considered it a push towards safeguarding prosperity, democratization, human rights, rule of law, and geopolitical security (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 1). This was the view of the political elite in Latvia, who were supportive and enthusiastic of the EU membership but popular support for the accession was below 50 per cent (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 7). This was due to the pressures for liberalization from the EU especially towards ethnic minority policy (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 7). Nevertheless, it was the action of elites that compensated the lack of popular support for the EU (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 8). The Latvian government began to change the public's opinion and created an information campaign for EU support (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 8). However, this campaign has been characterized as being a one-sided debate where the identity of Latvia was compared between the growing West and declining East (Eihmanis, 2019, p.

8). At the time of the accession, there was a deep ethnic divide in Latvia even though the EU accession seemed to be taken positively. In reality, EU accession was supported by 57 per cent of Latvian speaking individuals and only 20 per cent of Russian speakers in the country supported it (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 8). The Russian minority in Latvia is vast and in 1989, before its independence they were 34 per cent of the population and still form a large part of the population when in 2011 they were 27 per cent of the population (Wieclawski, 2015, pp. 121-124).

Since its independence in 1991, it can be said that Latvia made increasing efforts to integrate into the EU even though the road to accession was long. Even though in Latvia there are issues related to economics, minority politics and lack in public interest towards the EU, it remains “one of the more successful cases of postsocialist transitions” (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 12). These integration efforts can be characterized as “return to Europe”, which meant that Latvia made efforts to reform their country and it had wider European interests in mind (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 14). Then in 2004, Latvia joined the EU with nine other countries in one of the biggest enlargements of the EU. The accession was important because it enabled the country to improve its democratic state, enhance security and increase cooperation with like-minded states (State Chancellery of Latvia, 2019, p. 1). However, during the economic crisis in 2008 Latvia’s economy fell into a recession and the GDP decreased by 24 per cent in less than two years and it was in a poor economic situation (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 83). Then in 2013, Latvian economy grew significantly even though most EU member states were experiencing slow economic growth (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016, p. 2). In January 2014, Latvia joined the Eurozone and this was another significant step towards integration into the EU. Overall, if Latvia did not have a close relationship with the EU, it would most likely be a “different polity, economy, and society” (Eihmanis, 2019, p.12). The presidency was another significant step into further integration into the EU. For Latvia, the presidency was an opportunity to “bridge the gap in the “us vs. them” notion” and build a stronger European identity (Bendel & Magnusdottir, 2017, p. 40). While further integration into the EU brought opportunities, Latvia also faced challenges such as holding the presidency and actively participating in discussions about future EU integration (Saeima Press Service, 2013a).

4.2 External situation

The presidency can face a complex international environment when their six-month term begins. Countries can be well prepared for the presidency but unpredictable events can occur during that time. Some external developments can have an impact on the success of the presidency and have an effect on the roles. The presidency can plan their agendas well in advance but external events can change

their window of opportunity and take a toll on their initial agendas. Prior to the Latvian presidency in the first half of 2015, the EU was facing external challenges and the time leading up to the presidency can be characterized as a turbulent one. The EU was facing challenges such as EU-Russia relations, the migration crisis and border security in general, terrorist attacks in Europe and the Ukraine crisis that all overshadowed the presidency (Tepsa background paper, 2014). The geopolitical environment in the EU's eastern and southern borders changed rapidly and there was instability (European Council, 2014, p. 7). The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 led to increases in military expenditure in Latvia and the sanctions imposed by Russia on the western countries led Latvian businesses to enter European markets because they were more stable (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016, p. 3). Simultaneously, Latvia and Russia have significant trade ties and Latvia's large Russian minority population maintain close relationship with Russia (Bērziņa, 2015, p. 25). The historical experiences of Latvia make it "sensitive to Russia's annexation of Crimea while at the same time making policy with regard to Russia especially challenging" (Bērziņa, 2015, p. 26).

4.3 Internal EU situation

The internal situation within the EU can be characterized as being challenging prior to the Latvian presidency. At the time, the EU was facing long-term and immediate challenges to "meet the needs of its citizens" in terms of well-being and safety (Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 3). The Latvian presidency was framed by various elections that had a potential to impact the presidency and these were the 2014 European Parliament elections, new European Commission and a new President of the European Council (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85). Therefore, "the Latvian presidency came at the beginning of the leadership cycle which meant that the Commission and Parliament's own policy priorities were also at the initial phase of the policy-making process" (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85). Regarding the new actors created by the ToL, there were also some controversies that created difficulties. Some Eastern European countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland protested the selection of Federica Mogherini as the HR due to her soft stance towards the Russian aggression and the crisis in Ukraine (Čegodajevs, 2015, p. 23). Some of the Eastern countries opted for the selection of the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk because his position was tougher (Čegodajevs, 2015, p. 23). In 2014, Donald Tusk became the President of the EU European Council, and this can be considered as a positive development in EU affairs for Latvia since he is a representative from an Eastern country.

4.4 Domestic situation in Latvia

The economic recession between 2008 and 2010 led people questioning the upcoming presidency and the funds allocated to it became a topic of debate (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84) and the government was divided on its possible benefits. Government officials were generally arguing that the EU presidency is a key element of the EU membership (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). However, simultaneously some were concerned that the limited post-recession resources would be used on intangible results of the presidency (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). Andris Bērziņš, who was the Latvian president at the time, stated that in his opinion the EU presidency is a waste of money and there are no real benefits to Latvia (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). What further created possible turbulence for the upcoming presidency were the 2014 Parliament elections in Latvia that were scheduled only months before its start. However, in Latvia and other Eastern Europe states there was a pro-European atmosphere and this translated into voting results when in Latvia the pro-European Party “Unity” won the vote and half of their European Parliament seats were filled with representatives from this party (Čegodajevs, 2015, p. 22-23). In the parliament elections, three pro-European parties maintained a majority in the parliament and they decided to stay in the coalition that was led by the Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). Čegodajevs (2015) states that during the time up until the Presidency Latvia remained a reliable member state in the field of EU foreign policy and it maintained consistency and brought attention to the interests of its partners (p. 25). Čegodajevs (2015) adds that during the election year, Latvia also maintained political stability (p. 25). Despite the events leading up to the presidency, Latvia is in a good and stable position to hold the presidency of the Council (Čegodajevs, 2015, p. 25).

Despite the external and internal challenges to the Presidency and the EU, Latvia was expected to succeed in its Presidency. Latvia’s accession into the Eurozone in 2014 was a positive starting point for the upcoming Presidency because it improved Latvia’s stance and made it a “core” country of the Union (Čegodajevs, 2015, p. 22). In 2014, a trend in Eastern Europe was the election pro-European parties and this can be due to Russian aggression in Ukraine (Čegodajevs, 2015, p. 23). Even in these challenging times, Latvia “continued to be a reliable member state within the realm of EU foreign policy, maintaining consistency and bringing attention to the interests of its partners” and it maintained political stability (Čegodajevs, 2015, p. 25). For Latvia, the presidency is an important mission because it is a new and smaller EU member state that has the potential to be put “on the political map” (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 3).

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: THE ROLES OF THE PRESIDENCY AND NATIONAL INTERESTS

Against this background of Latvia and the internal and external events, this section is the analysis of the roles of the presidency and how Latvia approached them. The above overview of events provides a good starting point for the analysis of the various roles because they shed light on Latvia's motivations and behaviour during the presidency. All of the roles of organizer/administrator, agenda setter, political leader and broker will be discussed due to their interconnectedness and it will be analysed how Latvia undertook them. In this section, it is shown that national interests influence role performance for several roles.

5.1 Organizer and administrative

Holding the presidency presents an enormous logistical effort for each member state and they need to have vast human and financial resources (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011). To achieve this, it requires training officials and preparing them with the necessary know-how and skills before the start of the presidency (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 18). The organization of the presidency is time consuming and there is a great deal to prepare from dividing meeting rooms to logistical planning and presenting the plans for the presidency with everyone involved (Interview B, 2021; Interview C; 2021). The organizational matters include also interpreting and distribution of documents during the meetings, which are important aspects in logistics (Interview B, 2021). Pre-meetings are sometimes held where various actors or other institutions such as the Commission and Council Secretariat are consulted (Interview A, 2021).

5.1.1 Early planning and training

The need to start planning early was emphasized by the Latvian government and the need to have civil servants who have the necessary skills for the presidency (Saeima Press Service, 2011). Latvia begun the preparations well in advance of the presidency and already in 2011 the foreign ministry's annual report had its own section on the presidency and what needed to be done in advance (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2011). The early preparations enabled them to have things going smoothly in the logical aspects of the presidency. The Latvian government emphasized the need for early planning, as it was their first-time presidency (Saeima Press Service, 2013b) and interviewee B (2021) confirmed that "we started to prepare very early". Prior to the Latvian presidency, in 2014 Martin Schulz complimented Latvia on their preparations and "readiness" to undertake the presidency

and stated that the smaller countries often fulfil this aspect the most successfully (Saeima Press Service, 2014d, para. 3). During the presidency, working groups were hosted in both Riga and Brussels and member state representatives from many countries were present and therefore, human resources were focused on during the planning stage of the presidency (Saeima Press Service, 2011).

Working groups were set up already in 2011, which were in charge of allocating funding for the presidency and other budgetary matters, for creating a joint computer network system for easy distribution of documents and one in charge of planning and recruiting people (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2011; Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2011a). The Latvian presidency took many preparatory actions such as drawing up the presidency programme, logistical issues, thinking about the cultural and communication aspects of the presidency and discussing the venues in which the events will take place (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2011). The official preparations begun in 2012 with intensive training of civil servants on EU matters, skills and knowledge and the discussion on the presidency priorities begun (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84; Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2012). In 2012, when the first discussions were held on the possible priorities of the presidency, all together 13 public discussions took place focusing on the priorities and then a follow-up discussion on the priorities was held in 2013 (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 86; Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2012). In 2012, arrangements for the administrative and preparatory issues related to the presidency were started. Discussions were also focused on how Latvia can protect its own interests and how this could be done through cooperation with member states and other actors such as non-governmental organizations and public consultations (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2012a; Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2013b).

A key organizational aspect for Latvia was the training of officials in order to ensure that they were prepared. The training started already in 2012 and it was intense and required a lot of resources as it was much more expensive than Latvian diplomats in the public administration would generally receive (Interview C, 2021). The officials who took part in the presidency and the training stated that “I am very thankful that we really spent the money on that” and “that is the best investment we can get and let’s really use it because that’s the investment in our people and in our civil service” and this demonstrates that the officials appreciated the training they received (Interviewee C, 2021; Interview B, 2021). The civil servants who took part in the training assessed their EU affair knowledge and competencies rise from 4.8 to 7.3 by the end of the course (self assessment based on a ten point scale) (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). The training and taking part in the presidency could be considered

beneficial also because many officials who took part in the Latvian presidency continued to work for EU institutions.

Another important preparatory aspect and what the training also facilitated, was that civil servants were given ownership of files (Interview C, 2021). This meant that the civil servants managed their own working parties and were fully responsible for them and did not rely on ambassadors of some committees and this led to civil servants also “blossoming in their role” and enhancing their skills (Interview C, 2021). From the organizational and administrative perspective Latvia was able to “ensure smooth running of things from a logistical perspective” (Interview B, 2021). What interviewee C (2021) emphasized, is that you cannot take the logistics for granted because they have to be organized, planned and delivered by the upcoming presidency.

5.1.2 Brussels based presidency

The people involved in the presidency paid a lot of attention to the smooth running of the logistics and a big part of this was the decision to have a Brussels based presidency (Interview C, 2021). According to interviewee A (2021), strengthening the permanent representation of Latvia was important because it was one of the smallest ones out of the member states. Interviewee B (2021) explained that the personnel increased significantly when it was decided that the presidency would be a Brussels based one. Many people went to Brussels only for the duration of the presidency and a rough estimation of the personnel increase is from 60 expats in the permanent representation prior to the presidency to 185 during it (Interview B, 2021; Interview C, 2021). The amount of people significantly increased in the permanent representation and the reason to have it in one capital was a strategic choice for Latvia (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). The inflow of new official led to having to make staff modifications and overall adapting of the permanent representation (Interview C, 2021). Being in Brussels also allowed for the officials to be at the centre of EU decision-making and it makes the organization of presidency simpler. Most working parties are based in Brussels even though some are in Riga as well (Interview B, 2021).

The choice to have a Brussels based presidency was the only one for Latvia, because small member states “cannot have a presidency other than Brussels based” (Interview A, 2021). This was the case for Latvia because having people working in both Riga and Brussels would have been unachievable due to the limited resources. The benefit of having the Brussels based presidency according to some officials was that the chain of command can be shorter than in larger member states and decisions could be approved faster by the permanent representative (Interview A, 2021; Interview B, 2021).

Despite the Brussels based approach, the cooperation was constant between the civil servant located in Riga and Brussels especially in logistical matters. The newly elected government in Latvia was ready to cooperate on the matters of the presidency and an inter-party agreement was signed (Saeima Press Service, 2013f). This agreement was done in the preparatory phases of the presidency, and it was important to achieve continuity in decision-making, for the Saeima to keep the presidency priorities in mind and “taking into consideration the general obligations and interests arising from Latvia’s membership in the European Union in order to achieve as wide public awareness and support as possible” (Saeima Press Service, 2013f, para. 5). Cooperation also took place between the European Parliament and the Saeima (Saeima Press Service, 2014d).

Although the decision to have a Brussels based presidency seemed to be the only choice for Latvia, it also had challenges. These included finding the space for incoming officials and to ensure that cooperation and division of tasks would be successful (Interview C, 2021). As Latvia has one of the smallest permanent representations out of all the member states, the meetings that had to be held and all the preparatory aspects “on top of the daily business were a challenge and a stressful time” (Interview C, 2021). Moreover, the choice to have a Brussels based presidency can reflect weak domestic policy making capacity (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). This is because the political parties in Latvia are the smallest in the whole EU and have “short lives” and in EU affairs they are dependent on European institutions in formulation of EU policies and are dependent on cooperation with them (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, pp. 84-85). Small EU states are dependent on the information flow from the institutions and as such the Brussels based presidency was the only choice for Latvia. Larger member states might have the opportunity to have officials working from two capitals at full capacity because they might have more resources allocated for the presidency.

5.1.2 Cooperation with other actors

The importance of increasing effective cooperation between various actors was stressed by the Latvian presidency (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015a, 2015c). What was beneficial for Latvia during the organizational phase and the whole duration of the presidency was the Council Secretariat. Interviewee A (2021) stressed, the Council Secretariat was “a huge help” and biggest support during the presidency because it has been in place for years and they have seen many presidencies. They know the procedures involved, which documents to send and which year some were used so “they know it all” (Interview A, 2021). The six months term is a very short time and for a small state such as Latvia, the institutional memory of the Council Secretariat helped (Interview A, 2021). The presidency, when trying to reach agreements with member states, talks to them and sends

unofficial documents through emails (Interview A, 2021). The Council Secretariat distributes all the rest and it can be called “a machinery that keeps on going” (Interview A, 2021). The Latvian presidency relied on the experience of the Council Secretariat and there was exchange between them on the Secretariat’s working methods and what they need from the Latvian Brussels based presidency to make the presidency work (Interview C, 2021). Some of the Latvian civil servants had the opportunity to be posted in the Council Secretariat and Commission to exchange some views and to see preparations from a different point of view (Interview B, 2021; Interview C, 2021). The Council Secretariat has “an extremely well-organized way how they work with incoming presidencies” and they were an important player in the preparatory phase of the presidency (Interview B, 2021). The benefit of being posted to other institutions is that it “helped a lot in understanding the logic of institutional thinking and everything” (Interview B, 2021). For larger European member states the role of the Council Secretariat might be different but for Latvia they were an important help (Interview A, 2021).

In the preparatory phase, cooperation with other institutions - especially the Commission - is necessary. Cooperation and coordination with them is regular and discussion take place on what will be put on the agenda because it needs to be known if the presidency can move forward with something, who will block what, can an agreement be reached and to know what their plans are and vice versa (Interview A, 2021). The Commission has its own initiatives that it wants to push for and there are many new ideas (Interview C, 2021). It requires coordination in order to find the balance between the ambitions and what can actually be achieved. The Latvian presidency took office at an interesting time in the EU because the new institutional cycle began in 2014, and this meant that the new Commission and European Parliament took office. The government change in Latvia in 2014 made the time before the presidency “double of a challenge” (Interview C, 2021). For Latvia, the new Commission had a potential to be a challenge to cooperation but in reality the institutional changes are something that happen in the EU and adaptation is required (Interview A, 2021; Interview B, 2021; Interview C, 2021). The institutional cycle was something that just happened before the presidency and then they had to deal with it. In the preparatory phase, the institutional changes might not have influenced so much, because the Council Secretariat coordinates and assist the presidency so they also helped in organizing meetings and coordinating the changing of personnel and what impact that had on the presidency (Interview C, 2021). What also helps the organizational matters is that it is already known in advance who will chair which meetings for example in which is the responsibility of the presidency and which is other institution’s responsibility (Interview A, 2021).

Interviewee B (2021) described the cooperation with the Commission stating “all in all we had a very good cooperation with the commission colleagues as well”. However, the cooperation can also vary depending on the topic. The Commission is the one who believes that they drive the legislative agenda and have autonomy to do that and the Council wanted to ensure that “whenever they present things it will be managed in the council on our terms, and not the Commission’s terms” (Interview C, 2021). The topic on the digital single market can be mentioned as an example where Latvian presidency had to try to make the Commission more cooperative because they were having internal conflicts within the Commission on the matter rather than being cooperative and open from the beginning (Interview C, 2021). Overall, cooperation with the Commission was key for Latvia and building a good relationship with it. However, the cooperation was not always straightforward and some lobbying was involved to reach agreement on the things Latvia wanted to move forward (Interview C, 2021).

Even prior to the Latvian presidency, some Commission members travelled to Latvia to learn more about the politics, culture and economy in order to know more about the country (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2014a). This visit was important since the new Commission could gain more information about Latvia and to promote “mutual cooperation” and to have information exchange between the institutions (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2014a; Saeima Press Service, 2014d). This information exchange is crucial in order for the various actors to gain a deeper understanding of how the other acts and how cooperation could be increased and made efficient. After the new institutional cycle in 2014, the Latvian civil servants emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between the EU institutions (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2014b). The cooperation with the other EU institutions is important in the preparatory phase but it is as necessary throughout the presidency. When the presidency begun the College of Commissioners travelled to Latvia for a visit in which the priorities were discussed and a dialogue between various partners, the Commission and the Latvian presidency took place (Saeima Press Service, 2015). European parliamentarian who dealt with EU affairs also made an information visit to Latvia to exchange views on the Latvian priorities and the new Commission elections (Saeima Press Service, 2015b). Cooperation between Riga and the various EU institutions has been described as effective and constructive (Saeima Press Service, 2014d). This cooperation is important in the success of the presidency because coordinated actions between institutions and member states of the EU are “one of the cornerstones of the EU’s democracy” (Saeima Press Service, 2014d).

The incoming presidencies are responsible for the planning of the presidency but many things that the presidency will have to deal with are already set and the current presidency arranges them

according to how they will deal with them (Interview A, 2021). This means that the presidency does not reinvent all the topics and arrangements that are needed but some are inherited from the trio programme that Latvia shared with Luxembourg and Italy. Consulting with other member states occurs in the preparatory phase and especially Luxembourg and Latvia had close cooperation prior to the Latvian presidency (Saeima Press Service, 2013b). Latvia expressed interest to develop the cooperation with Luxembourg from the political level to also having various projects related to diplomacy and culture (Saeima Press Service, 2013b). Latvia and Luxembourg had very good cooperation and the Latvian presidency allowed the Luxembourgish team to attend the trialogues for the Juncker Plan with the European Parliament and the Commission because this would also be something the Luxembourgish presidency would have to address (Högenauer, 2016, p. 93).

5.1.3 Challenges

Latvia, as a small member state and as a first-time presidency faced some challenges in the organizational and administrative presidency function (Panke, 2010, p. 8). If a small member state is a member of an international organization or regime for a longer time, they can better counterbalance size-related disadvantages (Panke, 2010, p. 8). Learning from past experiences can help in negotiation settings because the member state would be familiar with the “conduct of shaping strategies” (Panke, 2010, p. 8). Latvia is a new member state of the EU and it is holding the presidency for the first time. Therefore, its main challenge in the organizer function during the presidency stems from the lack of experience and the fact that it does not have institutional memory (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 18). The organization of the presidency in itself was one of the most significant challenges Latvia faced in its near future (Saeima press service, 2012a). It has a small and inexperienced civil service and this can present challenges to achieve the high standards expected from successful presidencies (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 83). Interviewee A (2021) thought that the lack of previous presidency experience did not have an effect on the presidency, the training was good and that even if officials learn something the people in the next presidency would be different. Interviewee B (2021) saw the situation somewhat differently and stated that the first-time presidency can be a challenge and you have this new structure and you have to start from the very beginning. Of course, there is consultation of other presidencies and discussions take place on their approaches but all the member state administrations are unique and doing exactly what others did does not work (Interview B, 2021). Interviewee B (2021) outlined that starting from “scratch” and from the very beginning was a challenge and thought that during the next presidency it will be easier because you have also learned from past mistakes. For a small new member state, the direction in which to go with files, the role of

all the institutions, the role of the Council Secretariat, when to start consulting other presidencies and how to act as the best presidency are all considerations that make the first-time presidency challenging (Interview B, 2021). Latvia has a small and inexperienced civil service and this can present challenges to achieve the high standards expected from successful presidencies (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 83). However, what was very helpful for Latvia, was the institutional memory of the Council Secretariat and the training of officials. Latvia also did not set the expectations of the presidency overly ambitious and this also helped the small administration to be more focused (Interview B, 2021).

5.1.4 Overall

As holding the presidency was a huge effort for the Latvian civil service, the officials focused efforts on the organizational aspect in order to meet the challenges of organizing it. In this role, Latvia did well and they were able to plan the presidency in a timely manner. It can be said that Latvia wanted to do a good job in their first ever presidency and this can be seen through the extensive preparations and consultations that were held prior to the presidency. From interviews with officials, it became clear that they aimed to be adaptive when they saw necessary, they tried to plan the best they could and they gained the trust of other member states when they saw that Latvians could plan the presidency well. Trust of other member states was also gained through informing of any possible changes and being flexible and cooperative. The Latvian presidency received positive feedback for the organizational matters and they were told, “Latvian’s are excellent at planning” (Interview A, 2021).

5.2 Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting is “basically the biggest power the presidency has” and it is their responsibility to manage it (Interview A, 2021). When a member state holds the presidency, they have in theory the possibility of “influencing the agenda, shaping the bargaining process and proposing specific solutions to the problems at hand” (Elgström, 2003, p. 3). The autonomy that the presidency has in agenda-setting is their institutional and legal right and if there is a conflict on the topics of the agenda, the presidency has a say in this (Interview A, 2021).

5.2.1 More moderate than ambitious agenda

For Latvia, the defining of priorities and shaping the agenda started as early as three or four years in advance and the closer the term came, the more defined the priorities were and the idea of what should be kept on the agenda and what not (Interview B, 2021; Saeima Press Service, 2011). The Latvian

presidency did not “want to set the bar too high” but were aiming to be realistic with the things that can be achieved (Interview B, 2021). The final programme and agenda were carefully scrutinized by the Latvian civil servants in order for it to be understandable, concise and “political enough to signal our ambitions as well” (Interview B, 2021). In the planning stages of the presidency, it was discussed that Latvia should have no more than three priorities and these were 1) digital Europe 2) competitive Europe and 3) engaged Europe (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2012; Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 2). The Latvians approached the presidency pragmatically and the final priorities that the Latvian presidency settled on and believed that the “European project needs” (Interview C, 2021).

The people working on the Latvian presidency agenda wanted to ensure that they were not inventing completely new topics but that the agenda would be achievable. The list of priorities was made “compact and specific” (Saeima Press Service, 2012b) and this reflects a small state strategy where the country at the helm cannot be overly ambitious with the priorities and agenda for the presidency. The agenda of the Latvian presidency can be described as being more modest than ambitious. The time spent on agenda-setting was vast and Official B (2021) recalled that when the priorities were more defined, they compiled a table of all possible legislative and non-legislative files to see where they would be by the time the presidency came around and what could be pushed forward. In this, expert consultations took place and discussions on various tactics on how to move forward with some files and what would the approach be (Interview B, 2021). The priorities are in the presidency programme and the time spent coordinating back and forth with the capital and other actors was “maybe not worth it on such a large scale” because it took at least a year and a half back and forth with various actors (Interview B, 2021). When Latvia holds its next presidency it will have institutional memory and that can be an asset when it comes to agenda-setting and the time spent on it.

Latvia focused especially on the EU’s external and internal security. The organization of the Eastern Partnership Summit (EaP) was a key priority and high on the agenda because foreign affairs overall were at the focus of the presidency (Interview A, 2021). The Latvian presidency were also looking at what Lithuania achieved in their EaP Summit during their presidency in 2013 and hoping for the signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2013). The Lithuanian prime Minister wished Latvia success in the organization of the EaP Summit (Saeima Press Service, 2013e). The Latvian presidency emphasized that during their presidency it is “the moment of truth for the Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union” (Saeima

Press Service, 2014c). Even though Latvia focused mostly on the EaP region, they also emphasized the need for enhanced security and action on all of EU's borders. Latvian civil servants expressed that in order for Europe to be a global player it "must look in all directions because we have neighbours in all four directions – north, south, east and west" (Saeima Press Service, 2015f, para. 1). The promotion of a secure neighbourhood should be at the centre of EU foreign policy and this is also why the EaP was so important for Latvia and the policy was supported by various member states in the EU (Rinkevics, 2015). The EaP Summit was one of the priorities and as Official B (2021) outlined, if you have a special interest in something and an agenda in place for that, the presidency is a platform to do these things as well. Latvian presidency made sure that the organization of the Summit happens and that it is a top priority on the agenda and "there we did affect the agenda" (Interview A, 2021). Latvia's major policy priority was the "engaged Europe" aspect. However, in the Summit in Riga, only the cooperation with the EaP region was furthered (Rostoks & Auers, 2016, p. 89). The Latvian presidency did achieve progress in the EaP policy because it brought the six EaP countries together with Russia and that gives a strong base to increase cooperation (Rostoks & Auers, 2016, p. 87).

Another major priority for Latvia was the establishing and enhancing of the Energy Union (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 86). After the increasing Russian aggression in 2014, the security concerns were felt in Latvia and strengthening the Union would have benefitted Latvian security because "70 per cent of Latvia's energy needs are met by gas – and in 2014, 100 per cent of Latvia's gas was imported from Russia" so Latvian's had national interests involved in it as well (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 86). During the Latvian presidency a high-level conference was organized in 2015 on the launching of the Energy Union and even though no major agreements were signed, they "made a big push to ensure that energy issues would remain on the EU agenda well into the future" (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 86). The Energy Union policy shows that it is difficult to reach concrete results during a single presidency term and it requires many further presidencies to have something concrete. In another priority, which was "Digital Europe" Latvia inherited files and was able to close many of them. Auers and Rostoks (2016) outline three major successes that are Data Protection regulation "that focuses on the security of individuals in the digital world", secondly the Security Standards Directive that deals with cyber threats and thirdly, the deal on roaming charges (p. 87). Other priorities than the ones mentioned above were also part of the presidency, but these provide some examples of policies where the Latvian presidency influenced the agenda and was able to closed files.

5.2.2 The new institutional cycle and cooperation with other actors

Many things such as the institutional changes can influence the agenda setting. For the Latvian presidency, this meant that it took office in the beginning of a new leadership cycle in which the Commission's policy priorities were in the initial policy making process (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85). The Commission had a "very thin work programme for 2015" (Lezi & Blockmans, 2015, p. 1) and this meant that the institutions of the EU had a limited impact on the presidency agenda of Latvia (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85). Close cooperation with the Commission is considered important for the smooth running of the presidency and the Latvian presidency had to form a reliable relationship with it. However, as the new Commission took office it "will take time to revise and revisit the proposals submitted by its predecessor and launch its own legislative initiatives" (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 11). This is why the legislative workload might have been smaller for Latvia than in presidencies usually (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 11).

The new institutional cycle in 2014 did not only influence the organizational matters but agenda-setting as well. As the Commission changes, their cabinet's change as well and that is the place where most political decisions are made (Interview C, 2021). This was a challenge for the Latvian presidency since they also needed to find their place with the new Commission while they were internally figuring things out. The Commission is in charge of the legislative files and this was respected by the Latvian presidency but they also wanted to manage it "on our terms and not the Commission's" (Interview C, 2021). The presidency also remained supportive of the Commission's proposals however, the presidency needed to know the files in advance and see what could be done in reality (Interview C, 2021). When the new Commission took office they came up with many proposals for new initiatives and the new Commission is always ambitious and they want to push for many things (Interview A, 2021). The Commission has its own plans and agenda and if they want to push for them, they have to be put on the Council's agenda however, the interests do not often collide or at least in the case of Latvia this was the case (Interview B, 2021).

What helped with the agenda-setting were early preparation, the trio presidency preparations and agenda and information flowing from the new Commission and Council Secretariat (Interview C, 2021). Many things had to be put on the agenda and this required close cooperation with the Council Secretariat and the Commission and this meant building a strong relationship with them in order to "reassure that we want to do the best as possible during our presidency" (Interview C, 2021). The new incoming Commission was having discussions on what initiatives they want to launch and this meant that the Latvian presidency had to mobilize more in order to push for some initiatives

themselves (Interview C, 2021). In the agenda-setting phase, personal contacts and lobbying are required in order to reach a conclusion on the agenda (Interview C, 2021). In the end, “we were good in that sense, packaging and organizing things” (Interview C, 2021). Latvia matched its presidency priorities with the ones of the new Commission. Even though the new Commission took office in 2014, there was enough time to coordinate between Latvia and their priorities and the Commission and the new Commission and European Parliament were mostly in favor of the Latvian agenda (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85-86). Prior to the Latvian presidency, Martin Schulz commented on the priorities of Latvia that they “closely related to the priorities set by Jean-Claude Juncker, the new President of the European Commission” (Saeima Press Service, 2014d).

The agenda is partly a cooperative effort with other institutions and member states because adding something to the agenda “does not get you anywhere” (Interview A, 2021). This means that the presidency needs an agreement to be reached at least from some member states if not all of them and limits the presidency in the agenda-setting role, is that they do not have legislative power (Interview A, 2021). The presidency needs to work together with the Commission and convince them to move forward with something that the Latvian presidency wanted to and overall the presidency is “more about working with others than working for yourself” (Interview A, 2021). Even larger member states, which tend to be more ambitious, need others to cooperate with them because nobody does it alone (Interview A, 2021). Even if a country has an ambitious agenda, it does not guarantee that the files will be completed and national interests are fulfilled (Interview A, 2021). The Latvian presidency consulted the Commission on various agenda related topics and despite the cooperation being good or bad, it is constant and day-to-day (Interview A, 2021). The difficulty in agenda-setting is also that the agenda is the presidency’s responsibility but at the same time the trio programme has to be considered (Interview B, 2021). The presidency trio influences the agenda-setting role and with Latvia the trio consists of Luxembourg and Italy and they have to have continuity in their programmes and cooperate for the 18-month period (Saeima Press Service, 2012c).

5.2.3 Changes to the agenda

Agenda-setting can be influenced by external shocks that can quickly change the presidency agenda. Nobody expects such shocks and they are an attack on EU values and require immediate reaction and require a common approach and finding compromises from member states (Interview B, 2021). According to Officials A, B and C (2021) the Latvian presidency came at a challenging time due to the international and domestic situations. The unexpected events were challenging the “fundamental European values” and the Latvian presidency had to react to them and revising the agenda accordingly

(Saeima Press Service, 2014c). The changes in the agenda also required restructuring of the permanent representation in order to focus more on these unexpected events (Interview B, 2021). In 2015, there were many unexpected events that made the EU exposed to various external and internal threats. This is why the Latvian presidency focused especially on Europe's security on the internal and external borders (Saeima Press Service, 2015g). The tragic event of Charlie Hebdo in France required immediate reaction and terrorism was put on the agenda and it was emphasized more than at first was expected at the beginning of the presidency (Interview B, 2021; Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015b). The migration crisis of 2015 was another unexpected event that had an impact on the agenda of the presidency. The migration crisis was mentioned as an event that "threw out all the other point in the agenda, out of the window and then you just have to deal with it" (Interview A, 2021). During the time of the Latvian presidency Russian aggression was also of concern and the risk of terrorism was constant and the people involved in the presidency thought that the presidency had to react to these events and think of how to respond to them (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015).

These events especially changed the Latvian presidency agenda, but in the end you have to "deal with what you are given" (Interview B, 2021). The Latvian presidency "reacted immediately to the terrorist attacks in Paris, Belgium and Copenhagen by revising our agenda and adding security to the list of our top priorities" (Saeima Press Service, 2015g, para. 2). The Latvian government evaluated that they were able to "respond to challenges in a rapid and effective manner" regarding challenges to the EU's internal and external security (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015e). Reacting to these events was crucial and demanded the revision of the presidency agenda. These events "underscore both the uncertainty of events and the fact that we must be ready for any challenges that may occur" (Saeima Press Service, 2015c, para. 1). That means that anything can happen during the presidency, and immediate response may be required and these unexpected events can be a challenge for EU member states. Unexpected events such as extremism emphasize the need to strengthen regional cooperation policy tools such as the EaP and Union for the Mediterranean (Saeima Press Service, 2015a). During these events the unity of the EU is tested but as an example in the response to Russian actions in Ukraine the unity of the EU has been maintained during the Latvian presidency (Saeima Press Service, 2015g). In 2014, when the occupation of Crimea occurred, there was some worry that the Latvian presidency would take a very hash stance towards Russia due to Latvia's history (Interview A, 2021). The Latvian presidency also signalled that throughout their term, they would continue to support Ukraine (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2014c). However, the presidency received positive comments of dealing with the situation and "after the

presidency, they came to us and said you were such a good presidency and we never felt that you were biased one way or the other” (Interview A, 2021).

Countries holding the presidency can also face some limitations in agenda-setting since the presidency is only held for six months. The agenda is created and set well in advance and therefore revisiting the agenda can be difficult. In the event of, for example, external shocks and events, they have the possibility to “destroy what chances there may have been to shape the political landscape” (Elgström, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, the overall ambitions of the presidency should not be too high when acting as an agenda-setter (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85-86). Simultaneously, Latvia’s agenda and priorities of the presidency were assumed to reflect the EU’s long-term priorities and that the presidency needs to stay flexible in case of new issues on the EU decision-making agenda (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85-86). This demonstrates part of the difficulty while holding the chair since it should be able in a short time span of six months predetermine the agenda and react to possible changes in the EU and externally that would result in the modification of the agenda.

The presidency priorities are “a bit funny sometimes or the topic in general” (Interview A, 2021). A priority document is created and ideas are made of what they are but the reality can be different from this (Interview A, 2021). There are many things that can influence and determine the agenda-setting of the presidencies and things also “work out completely differently than what was planned” (Interview A, 2021). One Latvian official mentioned that when other presidencies want to consult the Latvian presidency in their priorities, it can be done but the priority points are subject to change (Interview A, 2021). These consultations with others are a crucial aspect of the preparations for the presidency. Prior to the Latvian presidency, consultation with the Slovenian Foreign Ministry and upcoming presidency took place and important EU agenda topics were discussed and also the preparations and agenda for the Latvian presidency (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2012, 2014).

5.2.4 Overall

Latvia took less of an agenda-setter role and more of a manager of a pre-set agenda (Tepsa background paper, 2014). As a result, the Latvian presidency can be characterized as being “part of an ongoing process” of presidencies (Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 12). Many points on the agenda are inherited and “in a way you follow already existing policies that are set before you” (Interview B, 2021). It happens that some things that were on one presidency’s agenda are passed on to the next one (Interview A, 2021). An example of this was the agreement on mobile roaming charges in the

EU. Although the file was not originally started by the Latvian presidency, it is still considered its success (Interview A, 2021). This is because, when a presidency finishes a file, this is considered its success no matter if your presidency did not start. In fact, it can even take up to 5 presidencies to finish some file (Interview A, 2021). In agenda-setting, “you are not starting in vacuum for sure and you have to have this continuity which is also one of the principles in council and as such you cannot start from scratch something” (Interview B, 2021) which means that there are many things that the presidency cannot invent. The presidency has to choose which topics it will focus on and it chooses also topics that are important for it, for example in the Latvian case this was the Eastern Partnership (Interview B, 2021).

The agenda-setting is the power of the presidency and the country in the helm can use this power in a proportional way in order for it to be tolerated by other member states. Latvia wanted to move forward with files and reach agreements while remaining an honest broker (Interview B, 2021). This means that the presidency needs to cooperate with other member states and “you cannot just push for your own agenda” (Interview B, 2021). Latvia was successful in managing the agenda but maybe less successful in setting and influencing the agenda but Latvia as a smaller member state it fulfilled the expectations of a first-time presidency (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 89). Latvia saw the presidency as an opportunity to set the EU agenda and a platform to promote their own national interests (Saeima press service, 2012). Official B (2021) concluded that the Latvian presidency aimed to be balanced and for smaller countries the interests are not so defined or strong. Reaching agreements is difficult as for most files you need everyone to agree but there are always those who disagree, so it is challenging to reach compromises (Interview A, 2021). Overall, “Latvia was broadly successful in pushing forward its modest agenda” (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85).

5.3 Political leadership

5.3.1 Aimed to find common positions

The presidency in this role has to be a defender of wider European interests (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 24). All the agenda points need to be framed as being beneficial for the whole EU and the issues have to be of interest to other member states (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 24). Defender of these broader European interests is “undoubtedly the most challenging presidency role” and it is key to cooperate with other actors to and presidencies to achieve the presidency goals (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 24). The Latvian presidency aimed to find common position between member states and institutions and act as a mediator of various opinions. As official A (2021) stated, “it [Latvia] really tried to act as a mediator and that is your role and whatever your

decision would be” and that it would not be acceptable for a member state not to take this mediator position.

In the political leadership role, other member states perception can influence this role because if they view that the presidency is pushing for its own national interests they can block proposals (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 25). Latvia received the support of other member states in most of their priorities and agenda points. The EaP can be an example of this because it was a national interest for Latvia but it was in the interest of other member states as well and therefore, they did not block it. The modest agenda and only focusing on a few priorities also helped Latvia to get their interests through because “specialization was sought to make better progress in its priority areas” (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 30). The Latvian presidency tried to show political leadership in also other policies such as the roaming and the sanctions against Russia.

National attitudes exist and are part of the presidency. Official A (2021) explained that the member states and trio partners would categorize the presidency based on those attitudes. The presidency has to spend time justifying and “reassuring” others about the intentions on how the presidency will undertake actions in regard to those things (Interview A, 2021). National interests are present during the presidency and it is understandable that presidencies “try to provide political leadership in their areas of national expertise” (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 25) The presidency priorities have to be justified as European wide ones and to explain why they want to focus on that particular topic and what they can do in that regard (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 25).

5.3.2 Cooperation with other actors

The presidency is a joint effort and the trio programme is negotiated together and the level of ambition given to each file is discussed together with the partners (Interview C, 2021). Some more sensitive files, such as social issues that can have a north – south divide in Europe, were managed together with the trio partners (Interview C, 2021). The relationship with the trio partners was close because they worked together for years and this made the formulation of priorities easier (Interview C, 2021). Official C (2021) explained that the relationship with the trio partners was honest and direct and that they were being realistic about which files can be forwarded during the presidencies. There were some cases where member states lobbied for some topics, and the trio assessed whether or not they could be forwarded and in the case it was blocked then they moved to topics where they could deliver and where member states were willing to cooperate and reach compromises (Interview C, 2021).

5.3.3 Challenges and solutions

Prior to the Latvian presidency there were some challenges to the political leadership. The national elections in Latvia created some tensions because the incoming civil servants might have varying opinions than the presidency. The preparations for the presidency had to move forward despite the upcoming elections in Latvia. The people involved in the presidency wanted to “just really be prepared and pragmatic and a good presidency” (Interview C, 2021). The new incoming parliament was supportive of the efforts of the presidency and they relied on the expertise of the civil servants involved in the presidency (Interview C, 2021). Some disagreements took place but they were solved because there was an active dialogue on what could be done and what could not be achieved (Interview C, 2021). Latvia focused on preparations of the presidency and ensured that these occurred in a timely manner and in addition to this, have public discussions regarding the priorities and other dialogues in order to deliver on the priorities (Saeima Press Service, 2013f).

As the Prime Minister Straujuma stayed as the head of government prior to the presidency and during it, she had an idea of the agenda points by the time of the presidency (Interview B, 2021). This is not to say that the national elections did not challenge the presidency because the members of the parliament changed a great deal (Interview B, 2021). However, the elections were upcoming and that was the situation and the presidency had to adjust to it. As Interviewee B (2021) also thought that people adjust to these situations quite quickly. For Latvia, the parliamentary scrutiny does not happen for all legislative files and this is why the new parliament cannot be described as being an obstacle (Interview B, 2021). Some ministries and state secretaries were educated and trips to Brussels were organized in order to educate on the presidency project so that the line ministries and the Brussels based presidency would be on the same page and that the line ministries can pass on the information to their own staff back home and can “relate it to the new government” (Interview B, 2021).

According to Vanhoonacker, Maurer and Pomorska (2011) “a stable national context is indispensable for the conduct of a successful presidency” (p. 26). The national context of Latvia cannot be characterized as stable but what helped with this challenge was that it was decided early on, even years in advance that the presidency would be a Brussels based one (Interview C, 2021). The permanent representation had a key role in the presidency and the people from Riga came to Brussels and through this cooperation between the capital and permanent representation they were able to be on the same page most of the time (Interview C, 2021). What also helped the Latvian presidency in this role was the reliance on the Commission and especially on the Council Secretariat. Through the cooperation with these actors they were able to signal their ambitions more clearly and to frame them

as European wide ones. What became evident from the interviews was that the Latvian presidency was able to gain the trust of other member states and they did not view that they were pushing for national interests but rather working for the common good of the EU.

5.3.4 Overall

Presidencies can demonstrate political leadership by reacting quickly and effectively to external events (Vanhoonacker, Maurer, Pomorska, 2011, p. 26). The Latvian presidency took place at a time when there were many internal and external challenges and the presidency was quick to react to unexpected events. European foreign policy was facing major challenges, Latvians held their first ever presidency in a professional and independent way and it received positive feedback for this (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015g). However, the impact of the international and internal EU situation on the presidency cannot be fully determined. The presidency had to react to these events but the effects on the presidency might not have been that vast. For example, the migration crisis was felt in Europe and it threatened European solidarity but it peaked during the second half of 2015 during the Luxembourg presidency (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85). Another example is Russian aggression in Ukraine that threatened EU's security and the effect of that were more immediate in Latvia because of the shared border but the situation "faded" after the Minsk Agreement was signed 11 February 2015 (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 85).

An example of the mediator role and where Latvia provided political leadership is the sanctions on Russia as a result of increased aggression in Crimea. The EU posed sanctions on Russia and "it would be a scandal of the biggest scale" if they showed favouritism towards Russia (Interview A, 2021). Here the presidency took a mediator role because some member states wanted the sanctions to be bigger and some smaller and then it is up to Latvia to find an agreement. But it is sometimes challenging to mediate because the presidency powers are limited (Interview A, 2021). During the Latvian presidency, the whole unity of the EU was being tested but the civil servants concluded that "the unity of the EU has been maintained during the Latvian Presidency – we agreed that sanctions must remain in place until Russia fully honours its commitments under the Minsk Agreements" (Saeima Press Service, 2015g, para. 3).

Latvia was able to maintain a position where it was the defender of European wide interests and provide a common and unified response to external threats. Its approach can be described as being more of a mediator of various interests rather than taking a strong leadership approach. It aimed to find compromises and facilitate discussions between various actors in order to move forward with the

presidency priorities. This mediator approach was possible because Latvia did not have such an ambitious agenda and their national interests were limited as well. The Latvian presidency was realistic from the beginning onwards to keep the agenda limited and this allowed for the mediation in the key policy dossiers. This mediator position was emphasized by the Latvian official interviews (A, B, C, 2021) and it became evident that Latvia aimed to enhance cooperation between member states and aim try to find a common ground and move on if proposals were not making progress.

5.4 Broker

5.4.1 Small states as effective brokers

Traditionally, smaller member states have fewer interests at stake during the presidency and they often succeed to be more effective brokers than larger states (Vanhoonacker, Pomorska and Maurer, 2011, p. 5; Tepsa background paper, 2014, p. 6). Size of the states impacts the role of neutral broker because it can determine the state's ability to push for national interests while at the helm (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 10). Smaller member states often have less priorities because there is not enough time or resources to "cover the whole world" as expressed by Interviewee B (2021). During the presidency, member states have to find and maintain a balance between national interests and European ones and compromises and pooling of efforts have to be done constantly in order to achieve set goals (Saeima Press Service, 2012b).

For Latvia, it was important that they find a balance between European and national interests and this was already emphasized in the planning stages in 2012 (Saeima Press Service, 2012b). From the outset, Latvia "has often had no clear national position on European policies that do not directly affect Latvia's security or economic interests" (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). The lack of clearly formulated national interests in some policy areas, including two of the three policies for the presidency (competitive Europe and digital Europe) allowed Latvia to be better equipped to be a genuine honest broker (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 84). Interviewee B (2021) confirmed that Latvia had the advantage of being a small state as they position themselves as neutral partners more than larger member states because they usually do not have such an ambitious agenda and focus on a few key priorities. The approach that Latvia took was that it focused on some nationally sensitive files while still trying to be an honest broker. It also did not push too hard on any topic and they were trying to negotiate and exchange views with others (Interview B, 2021). Each presidency has priorities they want to focus on but the key is to cooperate and find compromises between member states and other EU institutions.

The officials during the presidency were in constant communication with various actors in order to see how to best reach compromises and to be open about the working methods (Interview C, 2021). This means that the presidency put on paper that they want to act as an honest broker and want to be transparent towards other member states. The Latvian presidency also emphasized that they will not just “push for things just to for them to be delivered under our presidency” and ensure that member states will not be upset (Interview C, 2021). There might be situations, especially towards the end of the presidency term, where some topics need to be pushed for. The roaming file can be used as an example for this. What is important here is that the trust of the member states needs to be gained and after that tries to reach an agreement between member states (Interview C, 2021). The other member states need to see that the presidency is credible and have deliverables in order for the presidency to be able to push for anything (Interview C, 2021).

Latvians believed that the pooling of efforts is crucial in order to reach results (Saeima Press Service, 2012b). Maintaining the unity of EU member states is sometimes a challenge especially during unexpected events however, “the European Union is globally strong while it is united” and the Latvian presidency aimed for the EU to work together for prosperity and ensuring cooperation (Saeima Press Service, 2015a). Especially the unexpected events were challenging the unity of the EU and “we and Europe as a whole had to respond swiftly to challenges such as the terrorist attacks in Paris, Belgium and Copenhagen, as well as the Kremlin’s aggression in Ukraine” (Saeima Press Service, 2015h). The Latvian presidency emphasised maintaining the unity in light of these challenges and highlighted the need for continuous cooperation (Saeima Press Service, 2015a).

5.4.2 Overall

The broker role of Latvia can be described by what official B (2021) stated: “I don’t think we were stuck on any files just because we felt that it is going beyond our interests” and that “there was always a discussion and you cannot be alone in the room and you are not alone in the room, be it presidency or be it not presidency. You have to listen to member states.” Being an honest broker means that you either make everyone happy or everyone has to be equally unhappy with a decision (Interview B, 2021). Official B (2021) also thought that Latvia managed well in being open and having constant dialogues and they stated that “I would say we managed to stay and honest broker through the 6 months”. Even some member states that were a bit displeased that their interests were not followed were “appreciative by the end of our presidency and congratulating us on the presidency and on the job well done” (Interview C, 2021). Interviewee C (2021) also thought “I really honestly believe that we were honest brokers and we managed to convey that to the member states that we did it in

practice.” EU reports outline that Latvia’s administration was well prepared for the presidency and it undertook the function of the honest broker “admirably” (Lezi & Blockmans, 2015, p. 3). It can be said that Latvia used “the presidency to position itself as a good European and honest broker” (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 83). The first ever presidency was an opportunity for Latvia to show that it is capable of handling the presidency and it wanted to do a good job in it.

5.5 National interests and the presidency roles

In the previous section, the roles of organizer and administrative, agenda-setting, political leadership and broker were analysed in the context of the Latvian presidency. This section analyses how the national interests influence role performance for several of the roles. This section also shows how Latvia balanced its behaviour between wider European interests and national interests. Lastly, it will be analysed whether Latvia acted as a silencer or amplifier of its national narrative during the presidency.

The above functions refer to both “the neutral administrative and mediation tasks as well as to the political agenda-setting and initiation functions” (Schout, 1998, p. 2). Latvia needs to be and it can be both an honest broker and simultaneously a national interest defender (Jendeková, 2015, p. 23). It has been acknowledged that the chair inevitably incorporates a national element (Schout 1998; Schout & Vanhoonacker, 2006). The Latvian government saw the presidency as “a period of national importance, a wonderful opportunity for Latvia to prove itself as a serious political player capable of long-term thinking about national, as well as European, interests” (Saeima Press Service, 2013f, para. 2).

5.5.1 Realization of national interests

“The presidency increases the chances of influencing decision-making” and therefore, the realization of national interests is possible (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 20). For countries which have strong national interests and ones which bluntly push for them, it would be difficult to go through with them because files can move forward only in case they receive enough support from other member states (Interview C, 2021; Saeima Press Service, 2011). Countries can have special interest in some things and they want to pursue those during the presidency and the “presidency is a platform to do these kinds of things as well” (Interview B, 2021). As a small EU country, Latvia aimed to remain balanced and the interests that they had were not so strong (Interview A, 2021). This might not always be the case as it might differ between sectors, but in general the Latvian presidency tried to reach a consensus

on all files and tried to further communications by asking under which conditions this could be agreed upon (Interview A, 2021; Interview B, 2021).

Member states can materialize their national interests through the roles of the presidency (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015). In order for smaller states to do this, they can utilize “other forms of structural power” such as agenda-setting /shaping (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 6, 11). Agenda-setting is the “most important instrument” for materializing the national interest for the presidency (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 11). This is because during the presidency, the residing member state can influence the negotiation processes and they have access to information (Tallberg, 2003). According to Svetličič and Cerjak (2015) these can “enable the presidency to influence the pace of negotiations despite the agenda it inherits” (p. 11). The presidency’s influence on negotiation outcomes is typically greater while at the helm (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 12). The presidency can also pursue their national interests through launching policies and initiatives (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 11). The interviewees (A, B, C, 2021) confirmed that agenda-setting is the power of the presidency. What helped Latvia realize its few national interests was that it focused on some key areas and did not have interest in a wide range of different policies. Therefore, the lack of many national interests helped Latvia in gaining the trust of other member states (Svetličič & Cerjak, 2015, p. 24; Interview C, 2021).

The Latvian presidency realized their national interests through agenda-setting in the organization of the EaP Summit. It was a key priority for Latvia to organize and they wanted to make sure it happened during their presidency. This was important for Latvia from a national perspective and “it is something that such a thing represents national interests” (Interview A, 2021). Interviewee B (2021) thought that the EaP “was not pushed or something like that” or framed as a direct national interest. The expectations for the Summit organized in Riga were that the commitment to the region would be maintained and that the declaration that would be signed there “should provide an ambitious forward-looking view to our partners, based on their individual needs and EU aspirations” (Saeima Press Service, 2015g, para. 3). However, as with the Portuguese Summit on social issues, the EaP Summit was “just a summit” so it ends with “a political declaration at best that states that we will do something in this regard but for matters to happen in the EU you need the Commission to come up with a proposal” and therefore, “you are not the one and you do not have the legal power to come up with a legislative proposal” (Interview A, 2021). The Commission has the full responsibility of all legislative files (Interview A, 2021).

Latvia has the possibility to pursue its own interests in economy, transport and education sectors vis á vis the Eastern Partnership countries (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2013).

For example, a possible formation of a free trade area and the introduction of a visa-free regime in the future between the EU and these countries could take place (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2013). The focus on this policy was also due to the Russian aggression in Ukraine that was taking place at the time of the presidency and the efforts regarding the EaP were “more important than ever” because it strengthened Latvia’s democracy and security in the eastern neighbourhood of the EU (Saeima Press Service, 2015f). In the focus of the Latvian presidency were the EaP and Central Asia and these are “not only our historical and moral obligation, but it is also in line with our interests and the commitments we have undertaken as an EU member state” (Saeima Press Service, 2013c, para. 5). “Experience shows that Latvia’s knowledge and expertise are highly appreciated by our partner countries and they are in demand” (Saeima Press Service, 2013c, para. 6).

One of the main goals of the presidency was to work together with other member states to reinforce the role of the EU in the global arena “but any commitment to a global community begins in our own back yard” (Saeima Press Service, 2015f). This is why the Latvian presidency placed emphasis on the Neighbourhood policy as they saw the biggest challenges in the east and south border (Saeima Press Service, 2015f). Through the EaP policy Latvia wanted to guarantee their own security as well and they wanted to ensure that the EU would have “continuous engagement” in the region (Saeima Press Service, 2015d, para. 1). It can be said though that the EaP was framed as a European wide issue because of the limited power of the presidency to push for anything on their own. Latvia was lucky in the sense that they were not the only one pushing for increased efforts in the region, as there was a whole group of member states with the same interests (Interview B, 2021).

It is also important to push for some topics because this sends a strong political signal (Interview B, 2021). Presidencies are expected to focus on issues and files that have some geographical connection and focus on for instance the Southern Neighbourhood would have been somewhat surprising (Interview C, 2021). The EaP was expected to be one of their key priorities and particular interest but despite the expectations the topics have to be negotiated and lobbied in order to organize events and have deliverables in the end (Interview C, 2021). Throughout the Latvian presidency, they had to balance out proposals and “follow certain principles for it to make sense rather than just being a blunt national interest” (Interview C, 2021). Overall, “we always were approaching and balancing things out rather than just pursuing one particular thing” (Interview C, 2021).

5.5.2 Holding a good presidency as a national interest

Latvia started the presidency preparations well in advance of the presidency and they wanted to organize it well. The source materials and the interviews emphasized the need for early planning and organization and therefore, holding a successful presidency can be identified as a national interest for Latvia. Latvia seemed to be concerned of the way other member states viewed them and to meet the expectations others had of them. The presidency was also an opportunity to increase the public's interest in EU topics even after the presidency (Saeima Press Service, 2014). Latvia expected and hoped that they would hold a good presidency and that they would act as honest brokers and they really tried to do that (Interview A, 2021). This could have had an impact on the approach Latvia took for its first presidency because it wanted to prove the sceptics wrong and therefore, take an approach in which it works for the EU member states. Latvia aimed to be constructive in their approach and thinking of the conditions in which other member states could accept proposals. It seemed to be important for Latvia to take an approach where they would solve differences and work for the common good of the EU (Saeima Press Service, 2015f). This approach was emphasized in expert interviews and the source materials. Latvia was "careful not to take a position that could intrude into EU unity" (Eihmanis, 2019, p. 12) and this shows that they wanted to show that they are able to cooperate and negotiate in order to reach solutions rather than bluntly pushing for their own national interests.

5.5.3 Silencer or amplifier of national interests

Latvian civil service saw the presidency as a place in which "true political maturity is achieved by an EU member state during the six months of its presidency - during this period the state becomes a true and mature EU member state" (Saeima Press Service, 2015a). Even though Latvia has successfully integrated into the EU and NATO, it is referred to as a "former Soviet republic" and the presidency was seen as an opportunity for Latvia to show that they can do a good job and that they are able to conduct it (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015f). It was also emphasized that the Latvian presidency will work to strengthening and promoting growth in the EU (Saeima Press Service, 2015g). Amplifying of national preferences is not seen as a favourable thing to do and if a member state tries to do this, result might not be achieved. Latvia took an approach where it forwarded some nationally sensitive files while acting as a mediator of positions. Latvia demonstrated willingness for cooperation with other member states and pushing for a modest agenda during the presidency, can show that it did not at least aim to amplify its national preferences. As a first-time presidency holder the position of Latvia was delicate in the sense that they wanted to leave a good

mark on other member states on their abilities. This most likely restricted the way in which they approached the position.

However, Latvia was able to realize national interests during the presidency, and the importance of national interests were emphasized by the Latvian government “our common values dictate a moral obligation to act, but we also have to understand that the goals that have been set are directly linked to our national interests” (Saeima Press Service, 2013c, para. 4). Additionally, the Latvian government highlights that their foreign policy “has remained consistent, reasonable and balanced during the previous challenge-filled year” and adding that “if we continue this approach, we will be able to respond to challenges and take advantage of opportunities in order to protect the security of our state and promote our national interests” (Saeima Press Service, 2015a, para. 5).

6. DISCUSSION: TYPE OF IDENTITY LATVIA ADOPTED DURING ITS PRESIDENCY

The theoretical lens of social constructivism can help to give insights into the type of identity Latvia had during its presidency. Through the analysis of the type of identity, it can be seen if Latvia was leaning towards more cooperation with other member states or if it took an approach to try to protect its own interests. The discussion of the type of identity can shed light on whether Latvia acted as a silencer or amplifier of these national preferences and it can also shed light on the motivations that guided Latvia in the other presidency roles.

Holding the presidency term has been described as the time where member states reach true political maturity and they become a true and mature member state (Saeima Press Service, 2015a). For small member states and in particular for the new east and central European ones, “the EU membership is essential to the state’s (economic) survival, and thus a unified EU is important.” (Bendel & Magnusdottir, 2017, p. 40). The presidency provided an opportunity for Latvia to become a more integrated part of the EU and enhance the European identity and raise awareness of the EU amongst the public. Overall, the perception of Latvia being capable of completing this project it left a good mark vis à vis other member states (Interview B, 2021). This shows that Latvia worked towards the common good of the EU member states and wanted to show other member states it can do well. The presidency provided an opportunity to showcase Latvia and show that it is a Western country and not an eastern periphery of the EU and it is a “proper member state” (Interview B, 2021). Latvia was able to influence the image and perception others had of it. Prior to the presidency, some member states maybe had a view that Latvia is not so modern but the presidency changed the view of these sceptics. Bendel and Magnusdottir (2017) explain that “both new and old member states appear to regard the presidency term as an opportunity for further Europeanisation of the national identity” (p. 40). This was the case for Latvia as they were eager to show that they are a modern member state capable of holding the presidency.

Many of the sources emphasize the need to cooperate with others and to create common and joint solutions in order to achieve results and that this is the key to a functioning EU. The Latvian presidency highlighted the idea that no country can solve issues on their own (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015h) and they demonstrated the will to cooperate with other member states on multiple occasions. Extensive consultations with other member states took place. With Lithuania they consulted a lot because of the similarities and also because they were the first

Baltic presidency before Latvia (Interview B, 2021). The Latvian presidency was very similar to the Lithuania and their experience was very valuable for Latvia also because they are similar nations in size and ambition wise (Interview A, 2021). Even before their presidencies, both countries agreed that the sharing of experience between them is crucial in preparing for the upcoming presidencies (Saeima Press Service, 2013). The cooperation between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania also took place. The Speaker of the Saeima emphasized the relationship between Latvia and Estonia and stated that they have successful cooperation on various matters and share a common history (Saeima Press Service, 2014b). The Baltic States have common interests and therefore, cooperation between these states can allow for forwarding issues that are important for all of them. Latvia was ready to also share presidency experiences with Estonia (Saeima Press Service, 2014b, 2016). The ones that were the most beneficial for Latvia were smaller states who had a Brussels based presidency. Interviewee B (2021) described Ireland as the “golden standard” and they had a good cooperation with Latvia. The Latvian government emphasized the relationship between these two countries, both on the bilateral basis and in international organizations (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2013c, 2015i). For a first-time presidency, these consultations were important to receive good ideas and ways to move forward with files (Interview B, 2021). Latvia wanted to strengthen its relationship with other small states such as Slovakia on EU related matters and on the upcoming presidencies (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2013a). Latvia was ready to share its experience with other member states to support them on their way to good governance (Saeima Press Service, 2014a).

Latvia emphasized the importance of EU values and the Speaker of the Saeima stated that “we have experienced both political and economic upsets, and they have reminded us that the EU is based on values. These values are difficult to strengthen but easy to lose” (Saeima Press Service, 2013c, para. 1). Latvia took the approach where it realized that despite the differences in political tools and resources between member states, they all share the same goal of promoting the wellbeing of the European Union (Saeima Press Service, 2015e). Latvia placed emphasis on coordinated activities between the institutions and other member states and this was regarded as the cornerstone of EU’s democracy (Saeima Press Service, 2014d). “By making the work of the EU institutions more efficient, more open, more accountable, we can strengthen the structures and mechanisms to enable the EU to better deliver for its citizens,” said Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, describing the Presidency’s priorities and the work done (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2015d, para. 4).

How then can the identity of Latvia during the presidency be determined? Wendt (1999) presents four identities that are 1) personal or corporate, 2) type, 3) role and 4) collective and depending on the situation, the actor can choose multiple ones. For Latvia, because of the geographical location and being a new member state, the European identity is important (Magnusdottir & Bendel, 2017, p. 34). This means that the collective European identity is the dominant one for Latvia's presidency term. Overall, Latvia used the presidency to position itself as a "good European" and work together with others to reach common solutions (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 83). This approach is in line with the social constructivist view as Wendt (1999) sees the EU where collective identity formation takes place where states see each other as being extensions of the self and not as the other. Latvia approached the presidency as an honest broker and trying to mediate many different positions to reach outcomes acceptable for all. Sources revealed that the Latvian officials saw that as the presiding country, they have to show their professionalism and "remind others that the EU is a project created by us Europeans" and it is based on "peace, security and the rule of law" (Saeima Press Service, 2012, para. 4). Latvian officials were keeping the whole of the EU in mind already in the planning phases of the presidency.

When the Union works together results can be achieved that are desired for many (Saeima Press Service, 2015h). The speaker of the Saeima was grateful for all of the contributors of the Latvian presidency and emphasized this great achievement of holding the presidency "merely 25 years after regaining independence and to be restored to its rightful place on the map of Europe after being erased from it" (Saeima Press Service, 2015h, para. 5). The speaker also emphasised that "When European nations join their efforts, they become stronger and can promote and protect their shared democratic values and desired results can be achieved only through joint action" (Saeima Press Service, 2015h, para. 5). For Latvia, working together with other member states was important and they took a cooperative approach from the beginning of the presidency. For a small and especially first-time presidency holder, this approach seems necessary because they need to build the networks and enhance their relationship with actors. Without these contacts, the agenda points would not move forward and Latvia could have lost other member states trust. Latvia demonstrated the collective identity approach to the presidency.

The Latvian presidency adopted another identity, which is the "type" identity. Bendel and Magnusdottir (2017) explain, "as small states tend to rely on international organizations and value institutionalization to a greater extent than larger states, they form a "type identity" with other small states" (p. 34). The type identity emerges from sharing of history and other similarities as values.

Small member states might have a type identity during their presidency term because many of them have been thought to be successful as mediators and problem solvers (Magnusdottir & Bendel, 2017, p. 34). The type identity can be seen in that Latvia took a similar approach to the presidency as countries of similar histories and backgrounds, especially with Lithuania. The cooperation between these countries was emphasized to a great extent in the sources and the cooperation between Estonia and Latvia. These countries share a similar history and share similar traits and a type identity can be seen in the Latvian presidency. They shared similar goals in the presidency and one such policy is the EaP. Latvia was looking at Lithuania and their organization of the EaP Summit and they made the EaP a presidency priority as well. The Baltic state presidencies have also ensured the continuity of the EaP policy (Saeima Press Service, 2013d). The cooperation of the Baltic States was emphasized by the speaker of the Saeima because they recalled that a quarter of a century ago Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians “stood hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart for freedom. However, our freedom did not come for another two years - for us World War II ended only in 1991” (Saeima Press Service, 2014a, para. 5). Adding that “back then our hope was to regain our place among the free European nations, and we see that today our Eastern Partnership colleagues are in the same position” (Saeima Press Service, 2014a, para. 5). The focus on the EaP region shows that the “type” identity is present in the Latvian presidency.

7. CONCLUSION

The presidency is an equal opportunity for member states to be in an important position in EU decision-making. It is a chance for the incumbent to enhance the relationship to EU institutions and other member states. The presidency is expected to act as a neutral broker and it fulfils various other roles as chair. For small member states of the EU, the presidency is an important platform that can allow them to make their voices heard and they can leverage negotiation outcomes despite their size. States need to decide on how they will approach the presidency. This means that they need to decide if they aim to work for the common good of the EU and cooperation or will they adopt an approach where they push for their own national preferences.

The significance of this study is that it expanded knowledge on the presidency roles in the context of a small state. The aim of this thesis is to establish how the Latvian presidency, that took place in the first half of 2015, undertook the presidency roles of organizer/administrative, agenda-setting, political leader and broker. This thesis shows that national interests are an inherent part of the presidency and they influence role performance for several roles, especially the agenda-setting and organizational roles.

In the organizer/administrative role, Latvia started planning early already in 2011 and they demonstrated that they are good planners and they received positive feedback from other member states for it. The preparations were a huge effort for the Latvian civil service but they were able to do so in a timely manner. The Latvian presidency allocated resources to training of officials and they learned from the experience, and it was beneficial as it was an investment to the civil service as many of the people involved continued working for the EU institutions. For a small state such as Latvia, the decision to have a Brussels based presidency was crucial, as it could not have been done in any other way due to limited resources. Latvia was reliant on information flow from EU institutions, especially from the Commission, and therefore, the Brussels based presidency was the only choice for Latvia. The presidency was the first one Latvia held and the lack of institutional memory could have had an impact on this role and the other ones as well. Latvia tackled this by relying on the institutional memory of the Council Secretariat and by not having too ambitious expectations of the presidency. These helped the small administration to remain more focused. Overall, Latvia spent vast amounts of time focusing on the organizational/administrative aspects of the presidency and from the interviews it became evident that extensive planning was necessary.

While setting the agenda, Latvia aimed to be more realistic and less ambitious about what they could achieve during the presidency. For a small state, having a more modest agenda is a good strategy because the allocation of personnel and resources is manageable. Agenda setting is the biggest power the presidency has but it is still a cooperative effort. This means that Latvia had to reach agreements with other member states and EU institutions because as the interviews revealed, merely adding a point to the agenda does not mean that file will move forward. The interviews also revealed that the priorities were discussed extensively between various actors and the time spent on the back and forth regarding the priorities could have been less. Here, institutional memory can help in the next presidency, as they will have more experience on setting the agenda. Agenda-setting can also be a difficult task since the points on the agenda are subject to change. The Latvian presidency took place in a challenging time due to various internal and external situations. Unexpected events such as the migration crisis and terrorism influenced the Latvian agenda and required immediate actions. Regarding agenda-setting, Latvia was somewhat successful in pushing forward its modest agenda and it has “taken advantage of all the opportunities provided to it and has made a considerable progress in the set priorities” and “being able to provide an immediate and professional response to the challenges to the EU’s internal security, and for EU migration and asylum policy” (Ministry of foreign affairs of the republic of Latvia, 2020, para, 6).

Latvia’s approach to the presidency was more of a mediator of various interests rather than taking a strong political leadership approach. As a first-time presidency holder, undertaking a strong political leadership approach can be difficult. Throughout the presidency Latvia emphasized European wide interests and it worked towards those. As Latvia did not have such an ambitious agenda, it was able to take the mediator approach and work towards further cooperation between member states and try to find common positions. The interviewees emphasized this mediator position of Latvia as they stated that Latvia always tried to find a compromise where something was not moving forward. In the political leadership role, the Latvian presidency relied on the Commission and Council Secretariat to signal their ambitions more clearly and to frame them as European wide ones.

Presidencies are expected to act as honest brokers and Latvia was able to position itself as a neutral partner. Throughout the presidency they aimed to facilitate compromises and discussions between member states. What demonstrated Latvia’s will to act as an honest broker and be as transparent as they could is that in the beginning of the presidency they outlined their working methods. What also helped them to act as a neutral broker was that they had a more modest agenda. Usually smaller and especially new member states have a more modest agenda and act as true honest brokers compared

to larger states. It can be argued that Latvia undertook the role of broker well and it managed to facilitate cooperation between member states. The presidency positioned itself as a “good European” (Auers & Rostoks, 2016, p. 83) and emphasized working together and sharing values. This is in line with the social constructivist view and shows that Latvia adopted a collective identity during its presidency. Latvia is a new member state of the EU, and the presidency was a platform to enhance the European identity. Latvia was also a first-time presidency holder therefore, it was important for them to do well and show other member states they were capable of it.

National interests influenced the Latvian presidency term in several ways. For the national interests that they pushed for, they received support from other member states. Latvia undertook this role in a way where they framed issues as being European wide ones rather than bluntly pushing for national interests. What became evident from interviews was that the civil servants saw the EaP as a national interest and they thought about how they would approach the topic vis à vis other member states. Other member states had an interest in the EaP and that helped the presidency in framing it as a common interest for the EU. Through agenda-setting Latvia was able to focus on the EaP Summit and neighbourhood policy during their presidency. The amplifying of national preferences is not a favourable thing to do, and it is not tolerated by other member states. It was shown that Latvia did not aim to at least amplify its national preferences. National interests are part of the presidency but what is important is that they are framed as ones that are beneficial for the whole EU. The goals that Latvia set for the presidency are linked to their national interests, but the presidency emphasized that they would act based on common EU values.

The results of this thesis show that the Latvian presidency focused on transparency and enhancing cooperation between institutions and other EU member states. The presidency showed that they can act as an honest broker and work for the common good of the EU. As a first-time small state presidency, Latvia succeeded in undertaking all of the roles and it met the expectations others had of it.

There are many interesting future research opportunities in the topic of the presidency and the roles it undertakes. Further research can expand on the roles that states undertake and this could be done as a comparative case study for example between a small and larger member state. In this thesis, a limited number of interviews were conducted and in future research more could be done in order to get a more holistic picture of how member states undertake the presidency roles. This is a limitation in this thesis, because biases may occur due to all the interviewees working closely with the Latvian presidency. Further research could include interviews from other member states to see what their

perception of the Latvian presidency was. Further research can also focus on a specific policy field and how the roles can be seen in that.

The topic of the EU Council presidency concerns all member states of the EU and is therefore an important point of study. It has the possibility to shed light on how member states approach the position, to what extent they can set the agenda of the Council, do they have strong national preferences, and how they cooperate with other member states and institutions.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU- Interview questions

Roles of the presidency

1. Organizer/administrative function
 - a. How did the Latvian presidency perform in the overall logistical matters?
 - b. Was the presidency a Brussels based one and did they increase the personnel in the permanent representation?
 - c. How was the cooperation and information flow between the presidency and other institutions?
2. Agenda-setter
 - a. When was the agenda for the presidency set?
 - b. To which extent was Latvia able to set the agenda?
 - c. What was the role of the other EU institutions in agenda setting?
 - d. Were there any sudden external shocks/events that led to modifications of the agenda?
3. Political leadership
 - a. Was Latvia in close cooperation with the other members of the trio while preparing for the presidency?
 - b. Did the Latvian parliament elections in 2014 influence the presidency?
 - c. Did Latvia manage to balance between providing leadership while remaining a neutral broker?
4. Broker
 - a. Did Latvia remain an honest broker during its presidency?
 - b. Did Latvia consider the wider European interests in decisions and aim to find common positions/compromises between member states?
 - c. Did Latvia push for national interests during its presidency and if so, how and in which instance?

The Latvian presidency

1. Did the lack of previous presidency experience have an impact on the above functions?
2. Did Latvia fulfil the expectations of holding the Presidency as a first-time presidency holder?
3. How was the presidency perceived in Latvia?
4. Did Latvia change its image in the EU after holding the presidency?
5. Does the size of the member state have an effect on the presidency?