UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Tijana V. Rečević Krstić

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC IN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICYMAKERS AND PUBLIC OPINION FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БЕОГРАДУ
ФАКУЛТЕТ ПОЛИТИЧКИХ НАУКА

Тијана В. Речевић Крстић

УЛОГА ЈАВНОСТИ У СПОЉНОЈ И БЕЗБЕДНОСНОЈ ПОЛИТИЦИ: ОДНОС ОДЛУЧИЛАЦА И ЈАВНОГ МЊЕЊА ИЗ КОНСТРУКТИВИСТИЧКЕ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ

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Mentor:

Dr Filip Ejdus, Full Professor, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science, Serbia

Committee Members:

Dr Dragan Djukanović, Full Professor, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science

Dr Jenifer Mitzen, Full Professor, The Ohio State University

Dr Marko Kovačević, Assistant Professor, University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science

Defence Date:

Ментор:

др Филип Ејдус, редовни професор, Универзитет у Београду – Факултет политичких наука

Чланови комисије:

др Драган Ђукановић, редовни професор, Универзитет у Београду – Факултет политичких наука

др Џенифер Мицен, редовна професорка, Државни универзитет у Охају

др Марко Ковачевић, доцент, Универзитет у Београду – Факултет политичких наука

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The Role of Public in Foreign and Security Policy: The Relationship Between Policymakers and Public Opinion from a Constructivist Perspective

Abstract

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to deepen the understanding of why, when, and how public opinion constrains policymakers in foreign and security policy. Adopting a constructivist approach within Foreign Policy Analysis, this study integrates insights from Ontological Security Studies (OSS) to offer a novel theorisation of the role of the public and the public-elite nexus in foreign policy. Existing OSS explanations of foreign policy, which posit that a state's behaviour is driven by its need to maintain a stable self-identity over time (Mitzen 2006a), largely rest on the assumption that elites can manipulate the public's 'sense of self.' Seeking to further theorise the mechanisms and scope of elite influence on the public's ontological security, particularly in shaping whether and what proposed foreign policies are perceived as 'sensible' (Berenskoetter 2014), this dissertation introduces the concept of 'common sense' as the ultimate ontological security device.

Building on common-sense constructivism in International Relations (Hopf 2013) and further unpacking the complex interplay between the cognitive and affective dimensions of the common sense interpretive scheme (e.g., Dewey 1948; Damasio 1994; Holmes 2015; Prodanović 2022), the dissertation develops a novel theoretical model of foreign policy stickiness. It argues that the stickiness of foreign policies – the likelihood and easiness of them being accepted, rejected, or abandoned by the public – depends on their cognitive and affective resonance with the public's common sense about international relations. The proposed typology of sticky, semi-sticky, and unsticky policies captures the varying degrees of difficulty in introducing or abandoning specific foreign policies, thereby illuminating the ways in which the public constrains elites in foreign policy decision-making both in regular and times of profound crises.

The model is empirically tested through a mixed-method case study of Serbia's multifaceted foreign policy on security and defence cooperation in the period from 2000 to 2022, focusing on four key policies: cooperation with the EU, NATO, Russia, and military neutrality. The first phase examines elite's common sense regarding international relations and Serbia's position within them, employing qualitative methods such as discourse and content analysis of Serbia's strategic framework, alongside semi-structured interviews with foreign policy officials. The second phase investigates the Serbian public's common sense on international relations, drawing on original data from a purpose-designed opinion poll. Finally, the third phase employs quantitative methods, including correlation analysis, linear regression, and if-then analysis, to assess the impact of public common sense on international relations and the stickiness of the four examined foreign policies.

The empirical findings support the proposed theoretical model, elucidating the puzzling uneven stickiness of Serbia's multifaceted security and defence cooperation policy among the public – characterised by sticky military neutrality and cooperation with Russia, semi-sticky cooperation with the EU, and unsticky cooperation with NATO. The findings suggest that studying common sense as an ontological security device not only contributes to the much-needed discussion on the concept of 'sense' in OSS but also underscores the overall importance of constructivist perspectives for a more nuanced understanding of the public's role in shaping foreign and security policy. Additionally, it provides valuable empirical evidence for analysing Serbia's foreign policy, as well as that of other small states and divided societies – particularly in times of crises that disrupt various taken-for-granted orders in the international arena.

Keywords: foreign policy, ontological security, common sense, public, elites, discourse analysis, Serbia, military neutrality, European Union, NATO, Russia

Scientific field: Political Science

Scientific subfield: International Security

Улога јавности у спољној и безбедносној политици: однос одлучилаца и јавног мњења из конструктивистичке перспективе

Сажетак

Ова дисертација има за циљ да продуби разумевање околности под којима јавно мњење ограничава доносиоце одлука у спољној и безбедносној политици, те разлога и начина на који то чини. Како би понудила нову теоризацију улоге јавности, као и односа јавности и елита у спољној политици, дисертација усваја конструктивистички приступ спољнополитичкој анализи, ослоњен на студије онтолошке сигурности у међународним односима. Постојећа објашњења спољне политике из угла ове школе, која полази од претпоставке да је понашање држава вођено потребом за одржавањем осећаја стабилног сопства и идентитета кроз време (Mitzen 2006a), умногоме се заснивају на ставу да елите могу релативно лако манипулисати осећајем онтолошке сигурности код јавности. Ова дисертација, стога, тежи да додатно теоретизује механизме и домете утицаја елита на онтолошку сигурност јавности, расветљавајући зашто и када се предложене спољне политике перципирају као „смислене“ (Berenskoetter 2014). У том циљу, дисертација уводи концепт „здравог разума“ као кључног механизма онтолошке сигурности.

Ослањајући се на конструктивизам здравог разума у међународним односима (Hopf 2013) и додатно разлажући сложен однос когнитивних и афективних димензија интерпретативне шеме здравог разума (нпр. Dewey 1948; Damasio 1994; Holmes 2015; Prodanović 2022), дисертација развија теоријски модел „лепљивости“ спољне политике. Основна претпоставка је да лепљивост спољних политика – односно вероватноћа и лакоћа њиховог прихватања, одбацивања или напуштања од стране јавности – зависи од њихове когнитивне и афективне сагласности са здравим разумом јавности о међународним односима. Предложена типологија лепљивих, полу-лепљивих и нелепљивих политика осветљава различите нивое лакоће или тешкоће увођења и напуштања одређених спољнополитичких оријентација. На тај начин, указује се на различите механизме којима јавност ограничава елите у доношењу одлука у области спољне и безбедносне политике – како у уобичајеним околностима, тако и у временима дубоких криза.

Емпиријска провера модела спроведена је кроз мешовиту студију случаја вишедимензионалне спољне политике Србије у области безбедносне и одбрамбене сарадње у периоду од 2000. до 2022. године, са фокусом на четири кључне политике: сарадњу са ЕУ, НАТО-ом и Русијом, као и политику војне неутралности. У првој фази анализирана је интерпретативна здраворазумска шема која преовлађује код доносилаца одлука у погледу међународних односа и позиције Србије у њима, коришћењем квалитативних метода, као што су анализа дискурса и анализа садржаја стратешког оквира Србије, као и полу-структурисани интервјуи са спољнополитичким одлучиоцима. У другој фази, анализиран је здрав разум јавности у Србији о међународним односима, ослонцем на оригиналне податке из наменски дизајниране анкете јавног мњења. Коначно, у трећој фази су примењене квантитативне статистичке методе, укључујући корелациону анализу, линеарну регресију и „ако-онда“ анализу, како би се проценио утицај здравог разума јавности о међународним односима на „лепљивост“ четири анализиране спољнополитичке оријентације.

Емпиријски налази потврђују валидност предложеног теоријског модела, расветљавајући неравномерну лепљивост различитих аспеката безбедносне и одбрамбене сарадње Србије међу јавним мњењем – од лепљиве војне неутралности и сарадње са Русијом, преко полу-лепљиве сарадње са ЕУ, до нелепљиве сарадње са НАТО-ом. Ови налази указују на то да проучавање здравог разума као механизма онтолошке безбедности не само да доприноси преко потребној расправи о концепту ‘осећаја сопства’ у студијама онтолошке

безбедности, већ и наглашава општу важност конструктивистичких перспектива за боље разумевање улоге јавности у обликовању спољне и безбедносне политике. Осим тога, дисертација пружа вредне емпиријске увиде за анализу спољне политике Србије, али и других малих држава и подељених друштава – посебно у временима криза које нарушавају различите подразумеване поретке у међународној арени.

Кључне речи: спољна политика, онтолошка безбедност, здрав разум, јавност, елите, анализа дискурса, Србија, војна неутралност, Европска унија, НАТО, Русија

Научна област: политичке науке

Ужа научна област: међународна безбедност

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1. Introduction

November 11, marks the Armistice Day, the day when the truce was signed between France and Germany for the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front of the World War I. This event announced the conclusion of what would become known as the First of the Great Wars, highlighting the victory of the Allied nations. The first Armistice Day was celebrated in France already in 1919 and, over time, the date was declared a national holiday in many Allied nations. Almost a hundred year later, in 2012, it was officially introduced as a state holiday in Serbia as well.[1] News headlines and news feeds on social media get covered with photos of the Serbian Army crossing the Albanian mountains and returning to liberated Serbian cities, while the lapels of the people on the streets are covered with the *Ramonda serbica* pins,[2] a flower that symbolises the struggle and revival of the Serbian Army in the WWI. A contagious outburst of pride for Serbia's sacrifice to having been on 'the right side of the history' is applauded on every corner of the Serbian society, both by the political elites and the citizens. Although to a lower level, due to the unsettled memory battles around the 'fratricidal war' in Yugoslavia, similar waves of pride overflow the society on the occasions of the World War II anniversaries, ringing the tropes of anti-fascist bravery and the continual right-sidedness of the Serbian people.

As of 2007, Serbia, nonetheless, awaits this day as a military neutral country, a country that does not officially aspire to join any of the existing military alliances. Military neutrality was introduced almost over the night, in response to the crisis within all segments of the Serbian society sparked by the anticipation of the unilateral proclamation of independence by Kosovo. Nevertheless, while introduced without any wider political, let alone public discussion, military neutrality got immediately attached to the Serbian society and turned into one of the strongest pillars of its current foreign policy identity – so strong that it is often heard in the public that Serbia 'has always been neutral' and is, therefore, determined to 'jealously preserve' this course. No foreign policy in Serbia for the last decade or so has enjoyed stronger and more constant public support than this one, nor any foreign policy has received fewer open debates or questioning by the relevant political actors and parties since its introduction in 2007, regardless of the changing global and regional circumstances. Therefore, judged by the consensus among the elites and by the public's vetoing power for preserving this policy – both happening 'without saying' – Serbia's policy of military neutrality appears to be one of its most firmly established stances in foreign and security affairs today.

How come? How did this foreign policy change appear so sensible to the public so quickly, especially considering that the Serbian national identity narrative is largely based on stories of military bravery? How did military neutrality resonate so immediately and strongly with the Serbian public, continuing to feel right even during moments of great national pride about Serbia's historical decisions to take sides – and, in the public's view, the right ones? The swift acceptance of this policy was particularly striking, given the context of a wounded national identity in need of quick healing, as Serbian officials often described Kosovo as the 'heart of Serbia' being taken away. By introducing

[1] The very first 'official' lines of this dissertation were written on Armistice Day in 2022, in Graz, Austria. It was Austria (then the Austro-Hungarian Empire) declaring war on Serbia that sparked World War I. By 1918, Austria had become a defeated monarchy, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire had disintegrated, while Serbia emerged as one of the victorious Allies, soon uniting with other South Slavs into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. On this day, Serbia observed a public holiday, while I was at the University of Graz library, which remained open as Armistice Day was not observed, let alone celebrated, in Austria. Today, both Serbia and Austria are militarily neutral countries, with their populations firmly committed to maintaining this stance despite the turbulent international affairs that have led even some of the oldest neutrals, such as Sweden and Finland, to join NATO. Military neutrality has become an integral part of the national identity narrative for the vast majority of people in these former World War I enemies, as if they have always been neutral. Austria's military neutrality is a subject I hope to explore further in the future.

[2] *Ramonda serbica,* commonly known as the Serbian Phoenix Flower, is a rare and resilient plant endemic to the Balkans, renowned for its drought resistance and ability to revive upon contact with water. Symbolising endurance and rebirth, it is used as a symbol of Armistice Day, commemorating the end of WWI. It is often conflated with *Ramonda nathlalie,* a similar flower also endemic in this region, which has slightly different shape and number of leaves.

military neutrality, it was as if foreign policy elites managed to offer a fitting band-aid to the rising societal anxiety, one that clung so strongly to the wound of national identity that removing it had apparently become too painful. The 'stickiness' of this policy is even more intriguing, given that the Serbian public is not easily swayed by policymakers on foreign policy issues – there is a spectrum of policies, some considered major strategic goals, that do not resonate as strongly as this one, despite the efforts of foreign policy elites to highlight their benefits. Despite decades of policymakers' efforts to foster public attachment to the EU integration process, and despite public awareness of the benefits of Serbia's potential EU membership, support remains fragile, swiftly wavering in response to strong anti-EU momentum both domestically and internationally. So, why did military neutrality make immediate sense to the Serbian public, even though they knew little, if anything, about it? Did the elites anticipate this popular support? If so, on what basis? If not, how did they so effortlessly find a sensible way forward that deeply resonated with the public, and why did it become so firmly embedded that even discussing its abandonment has remained largely off-limits for policymakers in today's Serbia?

While military neutrality has proven surprisingly 'sticky' among the public in Serbia – becoming immediately entrenched remaining very difficult to remove – it has not been universally so across all contexts, either in terms of how easily policymakers introduced it or how readily they managed to shift away from it under public pressure. In some countries, such as Switzerland, Austria, and Ireland, neutrality has been strongly defended by the public despite evolving security environments and regime changes, with any attempt to alter it meeting strong societal resistance. For instance, although Austria's neutrality was imposed after World War II as a condition for sovereignty, the Austrian public has largely treated it as sacrosanct, resisting discussions of change even during the war in Ukraine, when other long-standing neutral states swiftly joined NATO. Conversely, while Finland and Sweden maintained neutrality throughout the Cold War, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine triggered a rapid shift in public opinion, leading to smooth NATO accession with minimal resistance. At the opposite end of the spectrum, there are cases where neutrality was not easily introduced among the public but was later abandoned without significant pushback. For example, Ukraine's neutrality prior to 2014 was swiftly discarded following Russia's annexation of Crimea, demonstrating that it had little inherent stickiness. Argentina's Cold War-era neutrality also proved unsticky, as successive governments alternated between non-alignment and closer ties with the U.S. without major public opposition. Hence, while often considered particularly appealing for its normative and practical features (Agius and Divine 2011), even the stickiness of military neutrality has been neither absolute nor universal across different societies – sometimes proving unexpectedly easy to introduce despite challenging circumstances, while at other times being surprisingly easy to abandon despite long-standing public support.

In the realm of security and defence cooperation, policies related to the EU, NATO, and broader security frameworks have also demonstrated uneven speed, strength and nature of public entrenchment across different contexts. NATO membership, for instance, has been particularly sticky in Poland, where any attempt to question or reverse the country's alliance with NATO would face overwhelming public resistance. In contrast, NATO's stickiness in Türkiye has been weaker, with public sentiment toward the alliance shifting in response to domestic and international developments. A similar pattern emerges in EU integration, even among Western states. While Eurosceptic movements occasionally gain traction, the EU remains a fundamental pillar of French foreign policy and calls for a 'Frexit' have struggled to gain widespread public support, even during economic downturns. However, Brexit demonstrated the semi-stickiness of European integration in the UK: while some segments of the British public strongly identified with EU membership, others were swayed by the emotional appeal of 'taking back control,' leading to the policy's eventual reversal. Meanwhile, in Iceland, public opinion to EU membership has remained rather prohibitive, despite the elites' occasional efforts in the opposite direction. Japan's military normalization efforts have also faced persistent public resistance due to the country's deep-rooted pacifism following World War II, making the policy difficult and slow to fully implement. Similarly, Germany's post-2022 military

expansion under the 'Zeitenwende' policy reflects a policy shift constrained by strong pacifist traditions, particularly among older generations, limiting the extent of militarisation despite growing security concerns. Beyond security and defence cooperation, specific foreign policy decisions have also demonstrated uneven stickiness. A recent example is the U.S. approach to the Iran Nuclear Deal, where the Obama administration signed the agreement, Trump withdrew from it, and Biden attempted to renegotiate – all with minimal public backlash, underscoring the policy's low stickiness among the American public. Hence, beyond military neutrality, history is replete with foreign policies exhibiting varying degrees of stickiness, largely shaped by public attitudes toward them. What drives these immediate (dis)connections between the public and policymakers in foreign policy?

The role of the public, and consequently the relationship between the elites and the public in decision making, is integral to understanding of politics since it reveals how the social contract is made, legitimized, and sustained at any level. Central to the concept of national interest, the essential concept of international politics, the elite-public nexus remains one of the fundamental issues in International Relations (IR) as well, as a question that cannot be avoided, even when overlooked. While the debates on the boundaries of IR subject are still open – including those on whether every theory of international relations is inherently a theory of foreign policy (e.g. Smith, Hadfield and Dunne 2008, Hudson and Day 2020) – the importance of domestic factors, including the role of the public and public opinion, is rarely dismissed today as a non-IR matter, as might have been the case a century ago. While interest in the role of the public naturally varies across different schools and niches within the IR discipline, the growing attention to this issue over the past few decades has significantly clarified and strengthened arguments regarding the causes, consequences, and mechanisms underpinning world politics in many realist, liberal, and constructivist theories of state behaviour. Moreover, with the 'domestic turn' that emerged in the 1990s (e.g. Kaarbo 2015), insights into the importance of the public-elite nexus in foreign policy have become so omnipresent in contemporary IR debates that it is difficult to locate or engage with them directly.

Nevertheless, even with the recent proliferation of this research across all schools and theories, the 'home field' for studying the role of public in foreign policy has always been Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). The gradual disunion of International Relations (IR) and FPA led to a specific division of labour and FPA became primarily focused on researching foreign policy decision-making processes and, consequently, the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy (Kubálková 2001, 17-18). The role of the public and the relationship between policymakers and the public opinion has been one of the core issues in the FPA from the onset of the sub-field, significantly shaping its development and contributing to its reputation as the most interdisciplinary niche in IR. Over the past seven decades, inspired by various branches of psychology, sociology, media studies, organisational science, and other disciplines interested in the relationship between the public and decision-makers, elites and the masses, governors and the governed, administrators and constituents, FPA scholars have provided most of what we today know both theoretically and empirically on whether, when, why and how the public influences foreign policy making.

The starting point, centred around the so-called Almond-Lippmann consensus from the 1950s, posited a highly pessimistic view that public opinion on foreign policy was so limited, uninformed, volatile, and incoherent as to be considered irrelevant (Almond 1950, Lippmann 1922; 1925; 1955). Yet, responding to critical world events, as was the Vietnam war, and embracing novel tools in opinion polling, researchers soon managed to show that the public can and often does hold sufficiently solid, stable, and coherent views on foreign policy to be considered attitudes, warning that policymakers' responsibility does not end 'at the water's edge' and that the public indeed can play significant role in shaping foreign policy making (e.g. Page and Shapiro 1982; 1988; Russet 1990; Herrmann et al. 1999). Most importantly, it became clear that the public does not always follow whatever foreign policy elites offer them, especially in the modern information and communication environments, but that 'foreign policy disconnects' between the elites and the public are far more common than previously assumed (e.g. Aldrich et al. 2006). Investigating whether, when, and why the public listens to elites in foreign policy, scholars continued exploring diverse top-down and

bottom-up cues and processes that influence public's opinion formation and mobilisation in this domain, from personality traits, via partisanship, to media environment. In parallel, they continued investigating whether, when, and why policymakers themselves listen to public opinion, examining internal psychological and normative factors, as well as more exogenous influences that make foreign policy elites either susceptible or resistant to public views on international affairs.

Nevertheless, the empirical evidence regarding the 'who listens to whom' question, provided in the rich body of both public-centred and elite-centred studies, has constantly yielded mixed results. The varied evidence suggests that the relationship between the public and elites is by no means straightforward and one-way (either way), whether in autocracies or consolidated democracies, but complex and reciprocal (e.g. Telhami 1992; Doeser 2013; Park and Hawley 2020; Tomz, Week and Yahri Milo 2020). With the evidence that keeps suggesting that both public and elites listen to each other most of the time, it has, however, become clearer that instead of searching for a definitive answer to this 'chicken and egg' problem, a shift beyond 'all-agent' and 'agent-centric' toward more relational research designs would be beneficial. Criticising the predominant materialism, positivism, and individualism in the FPA literature on the role of public opinion in foreign policy – often attributed to its heavy reliance on psychology – scholars have called for more focus on the structures and conditions that shape this dynamic, dialectical relationship (e.g. Kaarbo 2015). Hence, being "strong where the other one is weak" (Houghton 2007, 34), joint constructivist and FPA approaches seem to offer the most fruitful way of understanding how, when, and why public opinion constrains policymakers in the realm of foreign policy while at other times policymakers can immediately gain public support for their foreign policy endeavourers.

While the focus on agents, whether the public or policymakers, illuminates important processes among (aggregated) individuals, their rather 'asocial' treatment in the majority of existing FPA approaches has created the impression that, even when they mutually constrain each other, policymakers and citizens are somewhat 'free-floating' and unconstrained by the larger social and relational sediments they are embedded in. By facilitating a more comprehensive exploration of identity, values, norms, and the broader social structures and interactions in which agents participate, constructivist theories and approaches offer more nuanced accounts of the social dynamics that influence the varying degrees and directions of mutual constitution and constraints between elites and the public. At the same time, however, FPA keeps 'human agency' in the analyses of international relations, an element that has been lacking in mainstream IR theories, including constructivism, for decades. Without more sustained attention to agency, constructivist scholars often "find themselves unable to explain where their powerful social structures come from in the first place, and, equally important, why and how they change over time" (Checkel 1998, 339). In other words, their common ability and willingness to unpack the state to understand its behaviour in international relations, albeit with different tools, suggest that constructivist foreign policy analysis should be a valuable way to enhance understanding of why the elite-public nexus in foreign policy sometimes ends in immediate agreement and other times in persistent disconnect. This, in turn, helps explain the puzzling variations in the stickiness of different foreign policies across contexts.

1.1. Research Subject, Questions and Hypotheses

Aimed at joining the scholarly debate about one of the fundamental issues of international politics and foreign policy, the major research subject of this dissertation is the role of the public and, hence, the relationship between policymakers and public (opinion) in foreign policy. As summarised above, the existing literature reveals that both foreign policy agreements and disagreements between the two are possible, showing that policymakers can sometimes introduce or abandon foreign policy with relative ease, while at other times, they fail to receive sufficient popular support despite considerable efforts. To contribute to the existing theoretical knowledge about the still puzzling influence of public (opinion) in foreign policy, the dissertation aims to trace the social mechanisms and processes

underlying the mutually constraining relationship between foreign policy makers and public opinion. While the adopted theoretical framework enables further specification and additional sub-questions, the central puzzle and primary question guiding the research in this dissertation is: Why, when, and how are policymakers constrained by public opinion in foreign and security policy?

Intended to take a more relational and constructivist perspective, thus circumventing the 'who listens to whom' trap in understanding the relationship between the public and elites, the study shifts its focus from agents – whether the public or elites – to the 'sites' where they interact and navigate the social structures in which they are embedded. Placing the investigation of the relationship between these agents into the social context in which they meet or split – namely, the conceptions of foreign policies themselves – the dissertation highlights *the puzzle of uneven stickiness of foreign policies*. In other words, to further illuminate the mixed results on why, when and how the public and elites listen to each other by taking a more relational, interpretivist approach, the dissertation proceeds to investigate why certain foreign policies, proposed by policymakers, demonstrate varying levels of 'stickiness' among the public. Following the original meaning of 'stickiness' as a quality of adhering, holding, staying attached, (e.g. Collins Dictionary n.d.) the uneven stickiness of foreign policy, in line with the vast literature on the public-elite nexus in foreign policy as well, is expected to reveal in two important ways: how easily policymakers can introduce some foreign policy and how easily they can abandon it. In this context, *sticky foreign policies* are those that can be easily and immediately introduced by policymakers but are difficult to reverse or abandon. Conversely, *unsticky foreign policies* are challenging for policymakers to implement but once adopted, can be relatively easy to withdraw. Foreign policies that fall somewhere in between – either easy to introduce but not enduring, or hard to introduce yet difficult to abandon – might be considered *semi-sticky*. A deeper comprehension of foreign policy stickiness sheds light on the drivers, resilience, as well as the pace of the public-elite agreement or disagreement throughout the foreign policy lifecycle, thereby underscoring the public's pivotal role in shaping foreign policy adoption, preservation, or abandonment. The inquiry into the puzzle of uneven stickiness of foreign policies, therefore, forms the central research puzzle of this dissertation, aiming to elucidate why, when and how policymakers are constrained by public opinion.

To offer a novel understanding of the central research question concerning the role of the public and the relationship between policymakers and public opinion in foreign and security policy, as captured in the puzzling of uneven foreign policy stickiness, this dissertation primarily draws on Ontological Security Studies (OSS) in IR. Emerging just at the time when stronger calls for enhanced dialogue between FPA and social constructivism could be heard, OSS became recognised for its insistence that there was one other sort of security than physical and material – the security of the self or of subjectivity. Derived from psychoanalysis (Laing 1965), with a premise that individual identity "is not best understood as a set of properties or a core essence that we simply have, but as a social construct, formed and sustained via practices and relations with others, including our embeddedness in social structures", ontological security approach first scaled-up to sociology (Giddens 1991). Following the original meaning of ontological security in psychoanalysis, that treats "a stable sense of self" as one of the fundamental psycho-social needs, Giddens defined ontological security as "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1991, 92). Put that way, the sense of continuity of being is what makes people ontologically secure, regardless of whether their identity is changing or not: as long as we feel our identity is stable, we are ontologically secure.

This everyday "courage to be" (Tillich 1952) enables us to go on with our daily activities and lives without constantly thinking about our fragility and being paralyzed by the thoughts of our mortality. Because sustained self-narratives and routines are of crucial importance for maintaining a stable sense of self, even a thought about their destabilisation floods us with profound anxiety and make actors ontologically insecure. When their routines are suddenly ruptured, and their self-narratives fundamentally called into question, actors can begin to feel as they no longer know who they are. In order to overcome these "ontological crises" and preserve 'biographical continuity,'

agents attempt to reassert the broken routines and re-establish the self-narratives as quickly as possible. In other words, different to the pursuit of physical and material security, which is often treated as an intentional and calculated quest, ontological security-seeking "means engaging self-consciously in practices that remind us of and reproduce who we feel ourselves to be" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 3). Moreover, since actors' attachments to rigid and fixed self can sometimes be extremely strong, this conservative ontological need to restore stability over a change can often go against the material well-being and personal growth and, therefore, manifest as 'irrational.'

Building mostly on Giddens, several authors in the late 1990s and early 2000s started using the concept of ontological security to examine conflict and violence in international relations (Wendt 1994; Huysmans 1998; McSweeney 1999). What started as a conceptual innovation has, however, soon turned into a burgeoning scholarship that has convincingly proposed that "the security states seek is more multifaceted than conventional IR analysis has assumed" (Mitzen and Larson 2017). While not all ontological security scholarships in IR have been about foreign policy, the emerging literature has investigated how states endogenize their self-understanding and identities into their foreign policy processes, choices and outcomes. As Mitzen and Larson conclude in their valuable review of ontological security studies on foreign policy, two major questions have occupied the scholars: "how do foreign policy outcomes, when considered from an ontological security perspective, deviate from outcomes that would be predicted from IR's conventional perspective on state interests?" and "how is the process of making foreign policy complicated by ontological security demands?" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 5). Drawn from a variety of cases where material and ontological interests were either reconcilable or irreconcilable, the existing studies have indeed provided extensive evidence about the ways in which ontological security needs matter in foreign policy, and how the demand 'for a stable sense of self' impacts foreign policy stickiness in various context.

The insights on whose 'sense of self' exactly matters when it comes to states' foreign policy are not, however, easily tracible across OSS since the insights on the public-elite relationship are not available only in the OSS scholarship on foreign policy but in almost all of its areas. Even within the literature focused primarily on foreign policy, key debates – such as those concerning levels and units of analysis, degrees of consciousness, the concept of the 'self,' and the role of affects – remain open, offering various insights into whether, why, and how the sense of self among elites or the public matters. Nevertheless, while there is a diversity of state-centric and other approaches in OSS on foreign policy, suggesting that the elites' and the public' sense of self matter both, and while some scholars explicitly argue that ontological security concerns equally affect leaders and decision makers (Steel 2008), most of the OS scholarship depicts elites as rather unaffected by the self-identity narratives and able to influence the public perceptions. Often discussing ontological security management "in terms of elite 'activation' of particular elements of a narrative, invoked specifically to suit their purposes at a given moment" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 11), the existing foreign policy studies, hence, imply that manipulation of narratives by elites is what provides society with ontological security. By portraying elites as unconstrained and powerful, this prevailing trend implicitly suggests that any prolonged ontological crisis or persistent disconnection between their foreign policy narrative and the public's feeling of (in)security seems unlikely. What contributes to such impression is that the majority of the findings have been drawn from the cases in which elites indeed managed to successfully manipulate the ontological security narrative and mitigate ontological crises which erupted in the public (Subotić 2016, Selden and Strome 2016).

Nevertheless, while the argument on elite manipulation is suggestive and supported with diverse evidence, it remains rather "underdeveloped theoretically" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 13). Although the previously presented FPA literature provides solid support that elites do have leeway to manipulate the foreign policy views of the public, it also warns that this leeway must not be easily assumed and that "the mechanisms that give them that leeway are still little understood" (Aldrich et al. 2017). Only rare OS studies have, however, implied that elites' manoeuvres must not always be successful, or at least as immediately as it is often suggested, by investigating certain conditions that

hamper elite manipulation over the public's feeling of ontological security and return a solid level of autonomous and bottom-up dynamics to the public's ontological security needs (Gustafsson 2014, Solomon 2012, 2018). In other words, while they suggest that elites can introduce 'all sorts of change as long as a sensible link from 'before' to 'after' is maintained' (Berenskoetter 2014, 279), there are very few attempts in illuminating and theorising the logics and mechanisms which influence the public's receptiveness of the elites' narratives or make the elites' narratives more or less sensible to the public. In other words, while everything ultimately hinges on whether the environment appears 'sensible' and whether the 'sense of self' remains stable, little is known about the factors that govern this 'sense', underpinning the so called 'basic trust system' (Mitzen 2006a, 346).

In order to further illuminate the meaning of 'sensible' in OSS and hopefully spark a needed debate on what 'sense' stands behind the stable sense of self in OSS, the dissertation relies on the concept of 'common sense'. As will be discussed in detail, 'common sense' today is often regarded as the fundamental level of practical intelligence or the ability to make immediate and sound judgments based on a combination of experience, logic, and innate reasoning abilities (e.g. Rosenfeld 2011). Rooted in the deeply sedimented individual and collective unconscious, it is experienced as a blend of intuition, observation, and understanding of social norms and conventions which enable the world to appear natural and predictable most of the time. This foundational interpretive system, built upon the inherent knowledge that individuals may not always be consciously aware of how they possess or acquired it, enables people to live in a manner that is perceived as 'reasonable,' 'appropriate, and 'acceptable' by default – it helps people instinctively identify what 'feels right' in any given moment. Delivering what Giddens' calls 'natural attitudes', common sense draws on "a shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality" (Giddens 1991, 36) consisting of ready-made answers to the "questions about ourselves, others, and the object-world which have to be taken for granted in order to keep on with everyday activity" (Giddens 1991, 37). Despite not being the most sophisticated tool, or perhaps precisely because of this, common sense appears to fulfil many of the fundamental functions that support a stable and continuous sense of self in the world, including the international realm. Thus, combining various findings from philosophy, psychology, sociology, political theory and history about the genesis, mechanisms, epistemic value, social and political effects of common sense, the dissertation argues that common sense could be viewed as one of the fundamental ontological security mechanisms – the first and the last layer of the 'protective cocoon', or the ultimate 'sense' underpinning stable sense of self.

The concept of common sense is not unfamiliar in foreign policy studies but was introduced through 'common sense constructivism' by Ted Hopf (2013). It was further explored and promoted by the research team around the Making Identity Count project (Hopf and Allan 2016), with an aim exactly to investigate the relationship between elites and masses in foreign policy identity. Exclusively relying on Gramsci (1971), Hopf's conceptualisation, however, emphasises the cognitive dimension of common sense, while the affective aspect remains largely undertheorized. By drawing on various accounts of common sense in philosophy, psychology, and even social-neuro science (Dewey 1948; Greenwood 1991; Damasio 1994; Bloom 2005; Ratcliffe 2006; Bogdan 2008; Andrews 2012; Holmes 2013; 2015; Prodanović 2022), this dissertation attempts to advance the current conceptualisation of common sense in foreign policy studies by illuminating the affective part that, notably, must not be aligned with the cognitive component. Enriching the existing theorisation of common sense by insights from the literature on the cognitive and affective interplay shaping belief and non-belief systems that influence decision-making in international politics, common sense in international relations is, in this dissertation, understood as a set of taken for granted views about the principles of international relations that provide a cognitive-affective interpretative scheme for judging how the self (usually a state) should behave at such international scene, in other words, what foreign policy is sensible. Exploring the power, nature, and mechanisms of common sense can, therefore, help us better understand what 'sensible' means in the context of OSS of foreign policy and why some policies are more successful in becoming more entrenched than others, both in ordinary times and during periods of profound ontological crisis.

Therefore, relying on the improved concept of the common sense about international relations as a par excellence ontological security device, I propose *the model of foreign policy stickiness* that aims to contribute our understanding of the relationship between the public and elites and the existing knowledge about when, why, and how foreign policy makers are constrained by the public (opinion) in foreign policy. The stickiness of foreign policies is theorised as dependent on the cognitive-affective interplay behind the prevailing common-sense interpretive scheme in society. The core assumption is that the more a foreign policy proposed by policymakers aligns with the fundamental answers about how international relations function – embedded in the public's common-sense interpretive scheme – the more immediately and effortlessly it will appear 'sensible' to the public, and the stickier it will be. Given the dual nature of the common-sense interpretive scheme, the more a foreign policy resonates with both cognitive and affective frameworks, the stickier it becomes. Consequently, the stickiest foreign policies are those that align with both cognitive and affective common-sense schemas, whereas the least sticky ones fail to correspond with either. In between lie those that predominantly resonate with only one aspect of public common sense, whether cognitive or affective. Explaining why some foreign policies or foreign policy changes immediately make sense and others never do regardless of how much the elites attempt to make them known and accepted, as well as why public sometimes gets strongly attached to some foreign policies, while it easily lets others go, the proposed model provides novel insights on the relationship between policymakers and the public that are of crucial importance for understating both foreign policy continuity and changes in the global affairs.

Based on the proposed model, there are three major types of foreign policies, each of which is characterised by a different public-elite relationship. If a foreign policy resonates with both cognitive and emotional scheme of the public common sense, it will most likely be a *sticky foreign policy*, meaning that elites are able to easily introduce the desired foreign policy, but are highly constrained to abandon it afterwards due to the strong public attachment to it. If a foreign policy resonates with neither cognitive nor emotional scheme of the public common sense, it will most likely be an *unsticky foreign policy*, meaning that elites will be highly constrained to introduce that policy but will be able to easily abandon it since public is unlikely to attach to it. If a foreign policy resonates with either cognitive or emotional aspect of public common sense, the proposed foreign policy will most likely be a *semi-sticky policy*. If a foreign policy resonates with the cognitive scheme, but not the affective scheme, the elites will be able to both introduce and abandon the foreign policy relatively easily. If a foreign policy resonates with the affective scheme of common sense, but not the cognitive scheme, the elites will face difficulties to introduce the foreign policy, but also to abandon it. The diversity of foreign policies is far more complex and nuanced than a simple two-by-two framework suggests, as the varying degrees of stickiness – and the cognitive-affective dynamics underlying them – exist along a spectrum rather than within a rigid binary categorization. However, the primary goal of this dissertation is not to provide an exhaustive classification of all foreign policies but to shed light on the intricate interplay between the public and elites in foreign policy-making. Given this focus, the proposed simplified framework serves as a reasonable and productive tool.

The subject of this dissertation, therefore, broadly falls under the study of International Relations, a discipline within Political Science. More specifically, it lies at the intersection of two sub-disciplines of International Relations: Foreign Policy Analysis and International Security Studies. Investigating the relationship between the public and elites within society, and their agency in the political process, this dissertation largely draws on theoretical concepts and insights from sociology (general and political) and psychology (social, cognitive, and political), while the overall approach could be described as interdisciplinary, or even multidisciplinary. In pursuit of a more 'social' understanding of the public-elite nexus, the dissertation adopts a subjective, inclusive, and context-dependent understanding of power in society, adopting the ontological position rooted in social constructivism and critical security studies within IR. This ontological position leads to an inclination toward relationism in IR that acknowledges that social arrangements function as wholes, that selfhood is processual, and that agency is transactional (e.g., Jackson and Nexon 1999, Dépelteau 2013,

McCourt 2013, Pratt 2017, Rumelili 2015a). By focusing on the affective, cognitive, and discursive processes that emerge and unfold within durable social arrangements, this approach is particularly suited to understanding the mutually constitutive engagements between actors, "neither specified apart from the other, and without either one independently pre-existing" (Pratt 2017, 4).

1.2. Research Elements, Design and Methods

In line with the defined theoretical subject and scope of the dissertation, there are several key elements of the research subject: foreign policy, security policy, foreign policy makers and public (opinion). While there are numerous definitions of foreign policy, each aligning with various theoretical approaches to its study, the model of foreign policy adopted in this dissertation is grounded in three key insights from prominent foreign policy theories. First, while it accepts that foreign policy, in the broadest terms, represents "the way in which states understand and respond to the world around them" (Hansen 2006, 15) and covers "the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually state) in international relations" (Hill 2003, 3), this research joins those who acknowledge its borderline nature. Agreeing that "those making policy straddle two environments: an internal or domestic environment and an external and global environment" (Evans and Newnham 1998, 179), foreign policy in this dissertation will, hence, account for processes and influences which arrive at the policymakers' level from both 'above' and 'bellow.' Second, in line with the prevailing attitudes that "foreign policy decisions should be seen primarily as heightened moments of commitment in a perpetual process of action, reaction, and further action at many different levels and involving a range of different actors" (Brighi and Hill 2008, 166), foreign policy in this dissertation will also be treated as a constellation of decisions which occur over time in relation to a specific issue. Finally, in order to illuminate the complex policy-identity relationship, foreign policy model in this dissertation comes close to "the model of combinability" (Hansen 2006) which allows blending of insights from different theories and approaches. Positing that "the goal of foreign policy discourse is to create a stable link between representations of identity and the proposed policy," this model highlights "the importance of the stability of combinations and their response to contestations, and the role of 'facts' in stabilizing or undermining established constructions of identity and policy" (Hansen 2006, 15, 16) seeks to illuminate these facts through the lens of various theoretical perspectives. In sum, while still agency-oriented, the model of foreign policy in this dissertation inclines towards structuralist and even posts-structuralist accounts, encompassing not only foreign policy decisions and events, but how they exist in foreign policy narratives at different levels.

Security policy is here observed within the framework of the foreign policy. Centred around ambiguous terms of "national security" and "national interests" (Wolfers 1952), security policy has traditionally differed from foreign policy by its military emphasis, as "national security purposes were narrower and more focused on security and safety, and national security was primarily concerned with actual and potential adversaries and their use of force, whether overt or covert" (Sarkesian, Williams and Cimpbala 2008, 4). In other words, security policy has often been closely associated with national defence, emphasizing preparedness to use force in order to protect national territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence from potential external threats. The changing nature of security threats and challenges in the post-Cold War era has, however, lead to the widening and deepening of the concept of security to include not only conventional military issues but a wide spectrum of non-conventional threats whose addressing must not rely on military force (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). Encompassing risks, challenges and threats which stem not only from the military sector but also from political, economic, societal or ecological sectors, security policy in times of peace now almost overlaps with foreign policy. Recognising the changed conception of security but also attempting to slightly sharpen the blurred distinction between foreign and security policy, this dissertation will treat security policy as "primarily concerned with formulating and implementing national strategy involving the threat or use of force to create a favourable environment

for national interests" (Sarkesian, Williams and Cimbala 2008, 5). In other words, while the dissertation deals with foreign policy in the broadest terms, security policy is treated as its integral part which is primarily concerned with a state's security and defence arrangements in international relations.

Foreign policy makers, the third major element of the dissertation subject, have traditionally been a central locus of FPA. Convinced that the point of theoretical intersection between crucial determinants of state behaviour – material and ideational factors – is not the state, but human decision makers, FPA scholars have devoted significant effort to "ground" IR into the individual officials who act in the name of the political society. Investigating who the "decision makers in positions of authority to commit the resources of the nation state" (Hudson and Day 2019, 4) are and how they operate in a "dual-aspect setting so that apparently unrelated internal and external factors become related" (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin 1954, 53), FPA strives to return human agency into the analysis of international relations, lacking in mainstream IR schools for decades. As Checkel once noted in his critical account of constructivism: "Without more sustained attention to agency, [constructivist] scholars will find themselves unable to explain where their powerful social structures come from in the first place, and, equally important, why and how they change over time" (Checkel 1998, 339). Building on these concepts to explore both the power and limitations of human agency in the context of the elite-public nexus in foreign policy, this dissertation investigates the actions and perceptions of individuals in positions of authority who influence the formulation and implementation of foreign policy – specifically foreign policy officials and bureaucrats. Nevertheless, the research occasionally includes other relevant political actors who participate in foreign policy making in order to reveal potential horizontal contestations of the official foreign policy conceptions that as well interact with the vertical ones coming from the public. For this reason, the term 'foreign policy elites' will occasionally appear in addition to the term 'foreign policy makers' or simply 'policymakers.'

Finally, the public is the fourth key element of the research subject. Although it is one of the oldest concepts in social science, the public (opinion) continues to be among the least understood ones, perplexing scholars from communication studies to many other fields. Driven by a "syntactical internal contradiction" of public opinion – "while 'public' denotes the group and the universal, 'opinion' on its own is typically associated with the individual and considered a somewhat internal, subjective formulation" (Glyn and Huge 2008, 1) – scholars continue disagreeing on who the public is, what is meant by opinion and how it should be measured. Two major conceptions of public opinion have, however, seem to emerge out of this over-six-decades-long debate. The most common one, which followed the rise of survey research in the early 20th century, tends to quantify public opinion as simple mathematical aggregation of individual survey responses. The proponents of this "one person, one vote" formula believe that such conception of public opinion is not only more scientifically rigorous and reliable, but normatively superior since it better resonates with the fundamental assumptions of democracy. On the other hand, arguing that such mathematical reductionism is not only misleading and unrealistic, but "for the most part quite irrelevant to any serious study of public opinion" (Blumer 1948), the second major conception of public opinion sees it as "a group-level social force iteratively constructed through interpersonal interaction and media use" (Glyn and Huge 2008, 2). Insisting on a deliberative and "public" quality of public opinion, proponents of such definition believe that the aggregation of survey results is exactly what the public is *not.* Some scholars in this camp go a step further, including the criteria of political effectiveness by saying that public opinion is not only something generated by interactions, but is effective "in the sense that people in positions of power judge it to be worth of taking into account" (Converse 1987, S13). Inspired by the recent attempts towards multi-level modelling of public opinion (e.g. Lax and Phillips 2009), which aims to better capture dynamic and iterative processes of public opinion formation, this dissertation will strive to bridge between the two conceptions. While taking the public moods captured with opinion poll surveys into account, public opinion in this dissertation will be mostly viewed through the lenses of affective and discursive processes of interpersonal interactions occurring on different horizontal and vertical levels among the members of the public.

Incorporating these elements into the research design, the dissertation investigates the stickiness of foreign policies as its dependent variable, exploring why, when and how a foreign policy proposed by policymakers gets immediately or easily accepted, rejected, or abandoned by the public. The independent variable is the public's common sense, understood as the cognitive – affective interpretative framework through which people make sense of international relations. The central argument is that policies aligning with both dimensions, cognitive and affective, are more likely to be sticky (easily accepted and difficult to abandon), while those that fail to resonate in either dimension are more likely to be unsticky (difficult to introduce, easily abandoned). The causal mechanism underlying this relationship is, therefore, the interplay between foreign policies and the public's common sense, their resonance with the cognitive-affective interpretative scheme that shapes how international relations are understood. The research hypothesizes a causal relationship in which the degree of resonance with common sense (IV) determines the level of policy stickiness (DV), which in turn affects how much public opinion constrains policymakers. Rather than being the primary cause of policy stickiness, the public-elite nexus, or the extent to which public opinion constrains elites, is conceptualised as a consequence or even a manifestation of policy stickiness, reflecting its level and nature rather than determining it. In this context, 'constraint' refers to the extent to which public opinion limit or influence the actions of political elites regarding the introduction, implementation, or abandonment of a policy – it reflects the degree of control or pressure the public exerts over foreign policy decision-makers.

The empirical probe is offered through the case study of the Republic of Serbia's foreign policy of security and defence cooperation. As mentioned, this case has from the very beginning been an 'representative anecdote', the puzzling case that inspired the quest for the theoretical explanation of the foreign policy stickiness. What makes Serbia's security and defence policy particularly suited for investigating how common sense influences the uneven stickiness of foreign policies within a society – and offering a novel theoretical framework for analysing the interplay between policymakers and public opinion in foreign policy – is its multifaceted nature. Specifically, Serbia's approach to security and defence cooperation encompasses four distinct policies: cooperation with the EU, NATO, Russia, and its stance on military neutrality. By comparing these four dimensions (units, cases) within the same case study, it becomes possible to trace the mechanisms through which common sense impacts the relationship between the public and elite in foreign policy decision-making. This multiple-case design within a single case study enables it to serve as a typical or representative example of broader phenomena, as outlined by Gerring (2006), emphasising key characteristics that contribute to the stickiness of certain foreign policies.

The temporal scope of the study spans from 2001 to 2022, analysing these four foreign policy dimensions both chronologically and synchronically. The year 2001 marks a significant starting point, following a transitional period that saw the formation of a new government in Serbia, signalling the end of the Socialist Party of Serbia's rule under Slobodan Milošević. It was during this period that the first official positions regarding the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's stance on security and defence cooperation were articulated. Despite Serbia's status as one of two constituent states until 2003 and its membership in the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro until 2006, 2001 represents a pivotal shift in its approach to major international actors and security arrangements. The year 2022 serves as the endpoint, coinciding with the last parliamentary elections in Serbia before the commencement of this dissertation. Election years are particularly insightful due to heightened political discourse, including discussions on foreign and security policies. They provide a current snapshot of the foreign policy positions of relevant political entities, complemented by the results of frequent opinion polls conducted during these periods, offering valuable insights into public sentiments and perspectives on these issues.

The empirical research unfolds through three major phases: mapping Serbia's foreign policy of security and defence cooperation and its uneven stickiness among the public; extracting elites and public's common sense about international relations, as well as about security and defence cooperation; and examining the relationship between the two. Each of three phases is based on

relevant qualitative and quantitative data collection and data analysis methods. Key data collection methods include desk research of the relevant secondary (e.g. academic and non-academic literature) and primary sources (e.g. Serbia's strategic framework), semi-structured interviews with foreign policy elites, and an opinion poll on a representative sample for Serbia. In line with the aim of each phase, the collected data are then analysed using relevant qualitative and quantitative methods. For extracting the elite common sense from the strategic framework, the combination of (emotional) discourse analysis and content analysis is performed, while survey results are used for analysing the public's common sense. Finally, descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, are used to determine whether the public's common sense cognitive-affective interpretive scheme is strongly connected to their attitudes toward the observed foreign policies, thereby verifying the hypothesised model of foreign policy stickiness.

1.3. Research Objectives

By providing a novel theoretical explanation of the role of public and the relationship between policymakers and public opinion in foreign and security policy, captured in the proposed model of foreign policy stickiness, this dissertation contributes back to several relevant literatures it relies on. Essentially, its aim is to contribute to one of the most enduring and vibrant debates in FPA about the role of public opinion in foreign policy, approached here from a constructivist perspective of OSS. By engaging with both public-centred and elite-centred research in FPA and seeking to bridge these perspectives through an exploration of common sense as an ultimate ontological security device, this dissertation's theoretical framework aims to contribute to some of the ongoing discussion in both OSS and FPA. Empirically, it enhances the study of Serbia's foreign policy and, thereby also offering insights into the foreign policies of small, post-conflict, Southeast European, and military neutral states. Finally, addressing one of the fundamental questions of politics, the societal aim of this research is to promote more accountable foreign policy making, where both the public and elites assume more responsibility for their agency and roles in global politics.

Most broadly, relying on OSS insights, the proposed theoretical explanation insists on a more robust account of identity in FPA debates on public-elite nexus. Doing so, it offers a credible alternative to the predominant materialism and positivism in the debate on the role of public (opinion) in foreign policy, suggesting that interpretivist approaches can help us with a better account of the social processes with a drive in different directions and on different levels between elites and public, mutually constituting and constraining them. Second, deriving from the proposed theoretical explanation of foreign policy stickiness, a novel scientific typology of foreign policy issues is also developed, emphasising the often overlooked category of speed and ease of (dis)agreement between the public and elites. The theorisation of foreign policy stickiness, stemming from the original theoretical explanation of the processes and conditions which make foreign policy elites most constrained by public opinion, contributes not only to this particular debate but also to a broader knowledge on foreign policy issues, roles and making. Ultimately, tying it more tightly to constructivist approaches in IR, this research responds to the calls for "moving beyond eclecticism" in FPA and better integration of its findings into the mainstream paradigms in IR – in a manner which would not stifle its "free-floating" focus on actors, but would help it avoid "intellectual asphyxiation" (Morin and Paquin 2018, 341).

Building upon the assumptions of OSS through the theorisation of common sense as the ultimate ontological security device, the proposed theoretical argument offers novel contribution to key debates in this burgeoning scholarship, as well. It prompts reflection on what kind of 'sense' underpins the stability of the self and how common sense facilitates immediate alignment between public and elite perceptions on sensible foreign policy, which is crucial for maintaining ontological security in the society, both in regular and critical situations. Moreover, arguing that affective force of national self-narratives is at least as equally important as their discursive form, this research

advances the understanding of diverse affects and emotions play in sustaining ontological security. These efforts, however, aim to illuminate "theoretically underdeveloped" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 12) mechanisms which enable elites to manipulate the public's 'sense of self" and their feeling of ontological security. By enhancing our understanding of both elites' and public's responsiveness to cues from the natural attitudes, which serve to sustain the 'basic trust system' (Mitzen 2006a), this research helps explain when, why and how ontological crises emerge, as well as how ontological security is restored and preserved in the realm of international relations and foreign policy. In other words, by theorising common sense as a socially constructed, taken-for-granted framework that reinforces trust in everyday life, we can further unpack the basic trust system that sustains our sense of self and the continuity of the world, thereby enabling ontological security.

The primary empirical contribution of this research is the provision of original data on a key foreign policy of the Republic of Serbia. While public opinion is frequently highlighted in existing literature as a significant factor shaping this policy – and often as a barrier to change – a deeper investigation into the social structures and processes that grant this veto power to the public remains absent. Although the consequences of these policies have been explored, primarily through realist and rationalist frameworks, this research offers fresh empirical insights into the underlying social and political consensus (or its absence) that drives the formulation and implementation of these policies. Moreover, mapping the common sense shared by elites and the public is particularly valuable, as its implications extend beyond this specific case, shedding light on various foreign policies in Serbia. A broader empirical contribution of this study lies in its alignment with growing calls for more evidence on the role of public opinion outside the U.S. context. Thus, by presenting original data on Serbia's foreign policies, this research aims to contribute not only to ongoing debates in FPA but also to the wider study of foreign and security policies in small, weak, post-conflict, or illiberal states.

The societal relevance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the practical and normative significance of public opinion in foreign policy. Recognising why certain policies resonate deeply and immediately with the public, while others are dismissed as 'unsensible' despite policymakers' efforts, is crucial for developing more realistic and nuanced communication and negotiation strategies at all levels. Identifying the interpretive frameworks that enable or hinder a policy's stickiness is crucial both for rapid decision-making during unexpected crises triggered by critical international events and for strategically shaping public opinion before gradually implementing major foreign policy shifts. Furthermore, insights into the forces that shape and activate public opinion on foreign affairs can help policymakers and the broader policy community address 'disconnects' between public and elite perspectives while also fostering greater citizen engagement in political and policy processes, from public diplomacy, via peace negotiation to conflict resolution. Timely and effective policy and societal responses to these challenges are essential for upholding the core principles of political and social responsibility and for strengthening the social contract at all levels and in all contexts. This dissertation argues that examining common sense, one of the key drivers of foreign policy stickiness, offers a promising avenue for research. Integrating the concept of stickiness enables policymakers to develop more evidence-based and nuanced foreign policy strategies in Serbia and beyond, ensuring a balanced approach between domestic legitimacy and international strategic imperatives.

1.4. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation comprises eight chapters, including introduction (Chapter 1) and a conclusion (Chapter 8). Chapter 1 (Introduction) presents the central theoretical and empirical puzzle addressed in the dissertation, along with the research objectives it aims to achieve. Providing a concise overview of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological framework for exploring the role of the public in foreign policy, it outlines the structure of the dissertation.

Laying the ground for a novel framework for understanding the elite-public relationship in foreign policy, Chapter 2 begins with an overview of Foreign Policy Analysis literature on the relationship between policymakers and public opinion, given FPA's traditional focus on this area. The chapter then justifies a more relational and interpretive approach to this issue, aligning with recent efforts to integrate FPA and constructivist approaches more effectively. It concludes with the outline of the puzzle of uneven stickiness of foreign policies that reflects the mixed evidence in the existing literature on the public's role in foreign policy and encapsulates the central research question on why, when, and how the public constrains policymakers in foreign and security policy.

Building on these foundations, Chapters 3 presents the theoretical framework for the research. It builds upon the Ontological Security Studies in International Relations by introducing the concept of 'common sense' as the ultimate ontological security device that both the public and elites rely on to make sense of the world and state behaviour. The argument is summarised in the novel model of foreign policy stickiness, aimed to clarify the cognitive and affective mechanisms that influence the potential (dis)connection between policymakers and the public regarding foreign policy.

Chapter 4 explains the research design, outlining the key qualitative and quantitative methods used in data collection and analysis. The methods are presented according to the three major phases of the empirical research aimed at understanding whether and how the prevailing common sense schemes among the public and elites in Serbia influence the uneven stickiness of Serbia's security and defence policy.

The empirical probe of the proposed model is offered in the Chapters 5, 6 and 7 through the case study of Serbia's multifaceted foreign policy of security and defence cooperation primarily based on the policy of military neutrality, cooperation with the EU, cooperation with NATO and cooperation with Russia. Chapter 5 begins by presenting an overview of Serbia's complex security and defence cooperation policy and introduces the puzzle of the uneven stickiness of its four main components, which vary based on public support or resistance to their adoption and potential abandonment by policymakers.

Chapter 6 presents the first part of the original empirical analysis, outlining the tripartite common-sense interpretive schemes of both policymakers and the public in Serbia. It identifies the common-sense truths regarding whether, how, and with whom it makes sense to cooperate in security and defence matters, shedding light on the cognitive-affective interplay that underpins them. This is followed by a brief discussion on areas of convergence and divergence between the two schemes, analysed through the lens of the proposed theoretical model.

Building on this framework, Chapter 7 examines how the public's common-sense influences the stickiness of four pillars of Serbia's foreign policy of security and defence cooperation. The analysis outlines the interpretive frameworks that make these policies either immediately resonate or seem nonsensical to the public, providing profiles of the common supporters and opponents of these policies.

Chapter 8 (Conclusion) summarises key theoretical and empirical findings, discussing how the introduction of the concept of common sense in OSS in IR enhances current explanations of the public-elite nexus in OSS and foreign policy studies, as well as the study of Serbia's foreign policy. It outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed model and draws avenues for future research.

2. The Puzzling Role of Public in Foreign and Security Policy

Tackling the very essence of politics and the political, the role of the public and, hence, the relationship between the elites and the public, stands as one of the meta-theoretical issues in IR that remains unavoidable even when sidestepped. When IR theories omit discussion on the role of public in international politics, this is rarely due to a complete lack of attitude, but more a 'loud silence' that implies either that the public is considered so relevant that this goes without saying or that it is so irrelevant that it should not at all be a subject of international relations studies. With the prevalence of analytical eclecticism in contemporary IR literature, scholars often focus on very specific and narrow puzzles and problematics, leaving metahistorical and metatheoretical debates behind. However, they often fail to recognize the extent to which their explanations are deeply shaped and structured by assumptions on fundamental questions like this one. Lying at the core of the social contract at every level of political sphere, from the most local to the most global ones, the role of the public and its relationship with the policymakers most certainly qualifies as one of those issues about which "one can bracket meta-theoretical inquiry, but this does not free one's work, theoretical or otherwise, of meta-theoretical assumptions" (Reus-Smit 2013, 590). Therefore, especially if the desire is to produce more practical and engaged theorisations of foreign and international affairs, as it is often outlined today, constant reflections on big questions like this one and more ambitious forms of eclecticism still seem essential.

The gradual separation of IR and FPA,[3] fostered by various factors (Kubálková 2016, 15–38; Schmidt 2002; Kaarbo 2015), eventually resulted in a specific division of labour according to which FPA turned into an area reserved primarily for the research on the decision making processes in foreign policy and, consequentially, for the nature and impact of domestic politics on foreign policy. A decadal lack of interest for domestic sources of international relations among all three major IR theories, which were for quite a long motivated to understand only systemic level factors and long term tendencies in international relations,[4] meant that the role of public in international politics was in a 'full custody' of FPA for nearly half a century. During this period, the elites-mass relations grew into one of the core areas of FPA research (Hudson 2003), shaping and sharing the larger tendencies in this subfield, for which FPA is often treated as a specific approach to studying international relations. After Rosenau's failed attempt to formulate a grand theory of foreign policy (Rosenau 1968), instead of stronger engagement with IR theories, FPA researchers entered into a stronger dialogue with different branches of psychology primarily. While this contributed to FPA's image of 'a leader of interdisciplinarity' in entire IR, FPA research, including the research on the role of public in foreign policy, remained rather outward-looking, with a dynamic that was far more influenced by the developments in psychology and other supporting disciplines than in the rest of IR (Kaarbo 2015).

[3] In IR, the division between domestic and international politics was first articulated through Kenneth Waltz's levels of analysis framework in the 1950s and later reinforced by his distinction between reductionist and systemic approaches in *Theory of International Politics* (1979). This separation became formalised over time through academic structures and the way IR handbooks are organised, for instance. The general distinction lies in their focus, with IR theories addressing broader systemic patterns and foreign policy theories explaining specific state actions. FPA's initial emphasis on domestic factors, such as cultural influences, institutions, decision-making processes, and psychological contexts, aligned it more closely with comparative politics and public policy, and ultimately differentiated it from the broader field of IR (Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne, 2008). Of course, its boundaries are neither clear nor rigid, often overlapping with areas like security studies, human rights studies, and the study of international organisations.

[4] In the late 1980s, realism, liberalism, and constructivism had largely separated international politics from domestic decision-making. Waltz's structural realism deliberately excluded foreign policy from the framework of neorealist theory (Waltz 1979, 1986). Despite his suggestion that a separate, supplementary theory of foreign policy was needed, most IR theorists continued focusing instead on systemic dynamics. Liberalism also evolved in a manner which fogged the role of domestic factors – while the concept of complex interdependence proposed by Keohane and Nye initially included domestic factors, neoliberalism later emphasised states as unitary, rational actors (Keohane and Nye 1977; Keohane 1984). Similarly, although Wendt acknowledges that structures influence outcomes through agents' attributes and interactions, Wendtian constructivism also takes a systemic approach. His focus, like Waltz's, is on international politics rather than foreign policy (Wendt 1999, 11).

While some assumptions on the role of the public in international and foreign policy have always been there, after the 'domestic turn' that emerged in the 1990s (Ikenberry 1996; Fearon 1998; Brummer and Thies 2014; Kaarbo 2015),[5] when each of three major IR paradigms looked for ways to move from a systemic level of analysis towards more 'home-based' factors, the notions about the role of public in international politics have become far clearer. Although the discussions on whether every theory of international relations is immediately a theory of foreign policy, and vice versa, never ceased (Waltz 1996; Alden and Aran 2016, 2–5; Kaarbo 2015, 6–7),[6] the role of domestic factors, including the role of public, has become a legitimate research puzzle of many realist, liberal and constructivist theorizations of states' behaviour. Today, thanks to this proliferation of interest into domestic factors within foreign policy studies, theoretical cues on the role of the public in foreign policy appear to be dispersed across the IR discipline, even to the point where the knowledge on this issue falls into the paradox of being everywhere and nowhere, and, therefore, exceedingly difficult to locate, evaluate, and advance.

The following section starts with a concise overview of the 'home' FPA literature about the role of public in foreign policy, focusing on the relationship between the public and policymakers. While it is impossible to provide an exhaustive, clear, and unflawed presentation of such a diverse and dispersed research efforts, the selected literature is here organised in the public-centred and elite-centred camps of research, tied by the common interest in examining whether and to what extent citizens and policymakers lead and/or constrain each other in foreign policy matters. The second subsection offers a few general remarks on the existing FPA knowledge about the public-elite nexus in foreign policy, emphasising the need for moving beyond the dominant 'who listens to whom' approach towards more relational approaches that assume constant co-constitution of actors. Joining the general appeals for a stronger dialogue between FPA and constructivism, the section further outlines the major reasons for which constructivist perspective seems as a promising way forward in this particular niche of FPA, as well. Finally, leveraging these insights, the chapter ends by outlining the major research puzzle concerning the uneven stickiness of foreign policies, along with the key research questions it generates.

2.1. The Relationship Between the Policymakers and the Public in Foreign Policy Analysis: Who Listens to Whom, if at All?

Over nearly seven decades of FPA research, an impressive wealth of theoretical and empirical insights has significantly advanced our understanding of the role of public (opinion) and its relationship with policymakers in foreign policy. Despite the mounting evidence collected over decades, FPA scholars have, however, found themselves increasingly distant from a consensus regarding the degree of influence exerted by the public on foreign policy, as well as the precise mechanisms through which this influence manifests. For numerous reasons,[7] primarily stemming from the extensive utilisation of theories and methodologies rooted in psychology – renowned for their diverse and atomistic nature – many fundamental inquiries concerning the role of the public in foreign policy, as well as the dynamic between the public and the elite, persist open. Consequently, a spectrum of viewpoints emerges not only on the significance of the public in foreign policy formulation but also on whether its influence is substantial at all. If ever scholars interested in the public's role in foreign policy were

[5] For instance, research on the democratic peace theory reintroduced domestic politics into liberalism, emphasising institutions, cultural values, norms and public opinion as key factors explaining dyadic peace (Maoz and Russett 1993; Dafoe, Oneal, and Russett 2013).

[6] Not all IR theories, however, are confined to explaining broad systemic patterns. Even Waltz often offers explanations and predictions regarding foreign policy (see also: Fearon 1998). Mearsheimer explicitly asserts that his version of neorealism addresses both international outcomes and states' foreign policy decisions (Mearsheimer 2001, 422). Likewise, Moravcsik (1997) makes a similar claim for liberalism, while many constructivists also apply their frameworks to foreign policy analysis (Katzenstein 1976; Hopf 2002).

[7] Discussed in detail later in the chapter.

close to any kind of agreement, it was, moreover, in the earliest stages of this discussion, when the so-called "Almond- Lipmann consensus" (Almond 1950, Lippmann 1922; 1925; 1955) emerged in the literature.

This pioneering consensus was deeply sceptical about the nature of public attitudes on foreign policy. Arguing that they "lack intellectual structure and factual content" (Almond 1950, 69) so much as they can at best be considered "moods", Gabriel Almond described the public views on foreign affairs as irreparably volatile, unstructured, and unreasonable. Firmly convinced that the American public was incapable of holding stable preferences and interests in foreign affairs, Almond went as far as to argue against any formulation of foreign policies based on something as unpredictable as were these mood swings. In line with his unflattering stances on the public's role in domestic matters and democracy in general, Lippmann (1955) himself also gave an equally dismal portrait of public opinion on foreign policy, arguing that public opinion on foreign affairs not only lacked reason and structure but had proven to be dangerous. Being "destructively wrong at critical junctures", the emotional and ill-informed public has, according to Lippmann, "compelled governments (...) to be too late with too little, too long with too much, too pacifist in peace or bellicose in war" (1955, 20). Hence, arguing that, being "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind" (Lippmann 1922, 18), foreign issues were too distant and complex for the public to care and understand enough, the Almond-Lippmann thesis raised serious doubts about whether the public should at all be a subject of foreign policy studies.

Most of the studies in the following two decades supported such gloomy inferences on the lack of structure and coherence in the public attitudes on foreign policy. In their seminal work on the Americans' voting behaviour, Campbell et al. (1960) found almost no connection between public attitudes on specific foreign policies and traditional attitude dimensions, such as liberalism *vs* conservativism, isolationism *vs* interventionism, or even the divisions on the party lines. In one of the most comprehensive studies at the time, based on the evidence from the late 1950s and early 1960s, Converse (1964) pointed towards the striking absence of ideological coherence in the mass public views on foreign policy, as well as to the lack of consistency between their views on foreign and domestic spheres. Illuminating a variety of factors, including limited political knowledge, the influence of social groups, and the reliance on cognitive shortcuts individuals employ to navigate the complex world of politics, Converse went so far as to provocatively conclude that public stances on foreign affairs are best described as "non-attitudes" (Converse 1964). These, and many other studies that similarly emphasized the public's ignorance of the issues which are "crossing the water's edge", in a way reflected the then dominant realist understanding on international relations (Erskine 1963; Mueller 1973). As George F. Kennan, one of the most influential realists who shaped the US foreign policy during the Cold War era, coined it in a widely cited metaphor, the public was considered to be similar to "one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin" (Kennan 1951, 59). Nevertheless, it was not long after the culmination of the Vietnam War brought the first serious challenges to this pessimistic consensus.

Proving to be relatively stable over time and thus contradicting the prevalent assumptions on the volatile nature of mass attitudes about foreign affairs, the persistent public opposition to the Vietnam War in the US sparked a new wave of research about public's involvement in foreign policy. Alongside these 'real life' developments, what contributed to new insights on the matter were significant advances in public opinion research at the time (see the discussion in, for example, Aldrich et al. 2006). Incentivised by both political and scientific developments, one of the earliest – although subtle – challenges to Almond-Lippmann thesis came from Verba *et al.* (1967), who argued that public views on foreign policy were far more complex and far less "random phenomenon" than it was previously assumed. Based on extensive survey data on the public attitudes on the Vietnam War, this group of authors claimed that public attitudes on foreign affairs not only formed "meaningful patterns" but were fairly reasonable since they involved rather moderate stands about both potential capitulation and ever-increasing involvement for the sake of victory. In a similar manner, Caspary (1970) soon argued that Almond's conclusions were of "dubious validity" since the Americans had

far more logical attitudes toward international involvements. Nevertheless, while they were among the first to ascribe sufficient level of stability and coherence to the public opinion on foreign policy to make it a legit subject of foreign policy studies (Caspary 1970; Achen 1975), most of the Vietnam-era studies did not immediately or directly portray public's agency in foreign policy in an optimistic manner. Caspary (1970), for instance, argued that the public's stable 'mood' was the most stable in its "permissiveness", providing policymakers with a blank check for their foreign policy adventures.

The following decades, nonetheless, brought more direct empirical evidence for a bolder shift away from the initial pessimistic portrait of mass attitudes on foreign policy. Seminal steps in this direction were made by Page and Shapiro (1982; Shapiro and Page 1988; 1992) who relied on the dataset of over 6,000 questions, out of which over 400 were repeated at least twice in the period 1935-1982, to investigate the stability of public opinion, as well as the causes and consequences of its eventual shifts. The results of their studies clearly indicated that the majority of public views remained constant over time, as 51% of answers remained the same over the course of the study (with 'constant' being defined as an opinion shift of no more than 6% (Shapiro and Page 1988; 216)), and additional 22% of responses varied by less than 10%. Secondly, the study showed that opinion shifts did not result from caprice, but from individuals' intellectual efforts and changed perceptions caused by the access to new information about the actions of friends and enemies in international sphere, or changes in the US position in the international system. The compelling evidence on public's prudence in the matters of foreign policy provided by Page and Shapiro, were soon supported by other studies that showed that the American public responded rationally to the developments concerning arms control (Russet 1990), Central America, the Arab – Israeli conflict, terrorism (Hinckley 1990; Sobel 1993), or military interventionism (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Chanley 1999). Overall, the general tendency in the research switched to suggest that the population reacts quite reasonably to global events (Nincic 1992; Herrmann et al. 1999; Kertzer 2013).

A growing number of scholars thus aimed to shift the focus of the debate away from whether foreign-policy attitudes possess structure towards understanding how they are structured, looking into alternative drivers of this relative stability and coherence of the public opinion on international issues. Exploring the foundations that might be underlying it, a number of studies agreed that, largely as a consequence of Vietnam, the American public falls on the continuum between cooperative and militant internationalism (Mandelbaum and Schneider 1979; Maggiotto and Wittkopf 1981; Wittkopf and Maggiotto 1983; Oldendick and Bardes 1982; Mayer 1992). Some, like Wittkopf and Maggiotto (1983) attempted to further specify this spectrum, identifying accommodationists, internationalists, isolationists, hardliners. While there are some differences in their focus and findings, most of them come to a similar conclusion that the majority of the public, the same as elites, strongly supports international engagement, especially when it comes to traditional foreign issues, yet they remain divided on their stance regarding the various forms of militant approaches versus cooperative internationalism.

In the context of the same inquiry, Hurwitz and Peffley (1987; 1993; Peffley and Hurwitz 1992) propose a hierarchically organised foreign-policy belief structure that traces the 'core' values (i.e. morality of warfare, ethnocentrism) that derive general postures (i.e. militarism, anti-communism, isolationism) which then give rise to these foreign policy orientations. According to Rathbun (2007), for instance, conservative values are primarily associated with a strong inclination towards assertive internationalism, characterised by a general proclivity for assertive foreign relations. In contrast, the value of universalism holds the utmost significance in predicting a cooperative internationalism stance, charactarised by an inclination toward multilateral cooperation and a cosmopolitan approach to international relations. Similarly, relying on the knowledge from social psychology, some recent attempts were made towards understanding how sets of moral values influence individuals' foreign policy attitudes. Kertzer, Powers, Rathbun and Iyer (2017) reveal that cooperative internationalism and militant internationalism are equally motivated by moral values, although by different ones – while 'idealistic' foreign policies are rooted in Enlightenment principles

that prioritise individual values, militaristic ones are driven by principles focused on safeguarding the community.

Besides exploring the importance of individual traits, from genes (Hatemi and McDermott 2016) to sets of values (Goren et al. 2016; Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016), scholars also turned to psychological knowledge on different kinds of heuristics to investigate what cues and, more importantly, whose cues the public relies on in forming its opinion on foreign issues. Arguing that 'information asymmetry' between the elites and the public is even greater in foreign than in domestic issues (Baum and Potter 2008; Baum and Groeling 2010; Colaresi 2007), most studies offer a rather "top-down" portrait of the public, representing 'ordinary people' as bare cue-takers who almost blindly listen to the elites when it comes to foreign policy. Being rationally ignorant about all, and especially about issues that are distant from their daily lives (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin 2000), citizens turn for opinion to political elites and experts whom they trust. The vast majority of research highlights the importance of party elites and cues (Brody 1991; Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2007; 2009; Reifler, Scotto, and Clarke 2011), especially when party differences in regard to prominent international issues are clear and sufficiently covered in media (Baum and Groeling 2009; Groeling and Baum 2008). Some recent studies imply that public's ability to informationally catch up with party leaders in foreign policy is actually getting worse in times of social media since algorithms make information environments far more fragmented and soiled, inhibiting a breakthrough of any views that contradict citizens' beliefs (Baum and Potter 2019).

In addition to the importance of party affiliation, studies point towards other elites from which the public "learn what they need to know" (Lupia and McCubbins 2000) – from military establishment (Golby, Feaver and Dropp 2017), via foreign leaders (Murray 2014), to relevant international institutions (Thompson 2006; Chapman 2011; Grieco et al. 2011). Regardless of the type of elite source, however, they all suggest that "the balance of public opinion on foreign policy issues is largely driven in a top-down fashion by the balance of elite opinion" (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017, 2). Despite admitting that the public "are not lemmings" (Berinsky 2007, 975), their portrait of public's role in foreign policy is, therefore, not overly optimistic either since the credits for the stability or coherence in the attitudes are attributed to the public's susceptibility to allegedly swallow whatever the elites serve. These and similar elite-driven conceptualisations of public opinion, nevertheless, face challenges to explain the so-called 'foreign policy disconnects,' which refer to the discrepancies in perceptions of the public and policymakers in regard to the shaping and implementing foreign policy, and which have proven to be far more often than it was initially considered.

In other words, if the public was led by elite cues only, no disagreement between the elites and the public could ever emerge. Yet, a plenty of evidence over years has showed that the public can hold a divergent viewpoint even in situations of a solid consensus among elites or political parties. Hayes and Guardino (2010), for instance, show how despite the fact that voices opposing the Iraq War were 'barely audible' in the news, the public opposition to the war was sizeable and consistent. Similar evidence was found in relation to the war in Afghanistan beyond the US, as Kreps (2010) shows that the war was highly unpopular among the citizens in the participating countries even though their foreign policy elites were on board. Investigating the public's responsiveness to the top-down narratives, Mayer and Armor (2012) also show that public support to torture in America remained constant and resilient to the heightened criticism of torture in public and media. Not even the change in the government, from an administration that strongly advocated for 'enhanced interrogation methods' to the one that opposed them, managed to sway the supportive public sentiment. Demonstrating that the public was capable of holding opinion divergent from the official foreign policy even in the situations of elite consensus, these and similar research clearly suggest that elite cues might not be the sole driving force of public views about foreign policy, or at least not all the time.

Recognising the evidence that elite cues do not automatically or universally translate into public opinion, researchers' efforts to better understand the factors that influence the connection

between elite and public foreign policy positions have gone in very different theoretical cues, mostly from political and social psychology. Some, for instance, investigate what constrains or amplifies the resonance of elite frames among the public, pointing towards the citizens' perception of credibility of the elite source (Druckman 2001) or the extent of cultural congruency between elite cues and schemas habitually employed by most citizens (Powlick and Katz 1998; Enteman 2003). Others, however, explore the impact of alternative cues on the influence of elite or party cues. Experimentally measuring support for the Iraq War, Gelpi (2010), for instance, establishes that real-life events consistently hold greater sway than political elites' cues. Similarly relying on the experiments involving partisan participants, Bullock (2011) argues that the policy information impact is at least as influential as party cues, as even dedicated partisans do not automatically accept the statements made by their party leaders. Boudreau and MacKenzie (2014) further confirm that strong partisans are actually more, rather than less inclined to consider policy information when forming judgments.

Among those who are puzzled with whether and what cues might 'disturb' elites' influence on the public, there is a rising literature that reminds that the information, even on foreign affairs, never cascade only top-down, but also bottom-up. Several studies show how citizens' conversations and peer relations can substantially weaken the effects of elite rhetoric (Steenbergen, Edwards, and de Vries 2007; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017; Druckman and Nelson 2003). Druckman and Nelson (2003), for instance, provide experimental findings that interpersonal conversations, especially those containing conflicting perspectives, can override elite framing effects. Kertzer and Zeitzoff (2017) similarly emphasize the significance of individuals' social context and general orientations toward foreign policy in shaping their responses. They suggest that the public may possess a greater capacity for forming judgments in foreign affairs than conventional top-down models imply and signal that more attention should be given to the dynamic "meso-level" social contexts in which individuals deliberate and shape their views about the world around them. Studies that investigate the impact of social media networks on the news consumption also belong to this group, with several of them providing evidence that social media platforms prioritize the social worth of content over its party origin. While they acknowledge that selective exposure on social media exacerbates the fragmentation among citizens, Messing and Westwood (2012) provide evidence that stronger social endorsements enhance the likelihood of individuals choosing the content and, hence, diminish the partisan selective exposure to a degree where it becomes indistinguishable from random chance. In sum, while they are far from being a 'camp', what is common to these bottom-up theorisations of public opinion about foreign policy is that they in different ways show that citizens can not only go beyond or around the cues provided by various elites but are often 'cue givers' themselves. With this, they return an important level of autonomy to the public in espousing judgments on foreign issues.

While the case studies have been incredibly diverse, being the most common, the issue that can best reveal the rising complexity of scholar's knowledge of the structure public opinion on foreign policy has been the understanding of the Americans' tolerance to the US soldiers' casualties in the combats across the world.[8] Initially, the link between the number of US combat casualties and the support for the war appeared rather straightforward based on the research on the Americans support to Vietnam (Mueller 1971, Milstein 1974), Korean War (Mueller 1971, 1973), Gulf War (Mueller 1994, Gartner, Sigmund and Segura 1998) or Iraq War (Klarevas, Gelpi and Reifler 2006). It suggested a somewhat mechanistic reaction from the public towards casualties: support for war diminishes steadily and unwaveringly in response to casualties. Later studies, however, started revisiting and improving this thesis. First, some argued that the American's casualty-sensitivity rose in post-Cold War for various wider social, cultural and technological reasons, such as the changes in the weapons technology (Sapolsky and Shapiro 1996), the almost live television coverage of military operations (Livingston 1997), the awareness of the lower birth rate (Luttwack 1996) or unequal risk of casualties among the children from ordinary and elite families (Moskos 1995). Secondly, more nuanced research also suggested that, despite its general aversion to combat casualties, the public's tolerance to casualties is not as straightforward as initially thought, but far more context specific "as

[8] Mueller (1994), for instance, describes war as "the mother of all polling events".

the public does not evaluate events or elites' rhetoric in a vacuum" (Baum and Groeling 2010, 446). Investigating the circumstances under which the public is more resilient to the escalating combat casualties, scholars point towards the public's perception of the clarity and legitimacy of the operation's principal objective (Jentleson 1992, Jentleson and Briton 1998), perception of the likelihood for the operation's success (Eichenberg 2005; Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2006; Gelpi, Reifler, Feaver 2007; Klarevas, Gelpi and Reifler 2007), or the existence of the consensus among either domestic (Larson 1996) or international elites (Kull and Destler 1999). Therefore, while the ongoing research into this delicate foreign matter will continue to shape the discussions concerning the public's role in foreign policy, the so far progress underscores a cautionary reality: notwithstanding scholarly disputes, it has become very difficult to argue that the public (opinion) on foreign policy is as volatile, erratic, inconsistent or heavily influenced from the top-down as initially suggested by those inclined to dismiss the public from foreign policy research.

Once it became clearer that the public indeed had opinion on foreign policy, among the major questions to arise next was whether this opinion affected the policymakers' foreign policy decisions or not. Studying individuals' inclination to employ this opinion in a politically significant manner, particularly in shaping voting decisions, emerged as a crucial method for understanding the influence between public opinion and foreign policy. Examining electoral outcomes of congressional and presidential elections in the US, the initial studies suggested that foreign issues had either modest or no influence on citizens' votes (Miller and Stokes 1963; Page and Brody 1972; Aldrich et al. 1989). The results typically indicated that domestic concerns held greater sway over voting behaviour, with international affairs playing a sporadic and secondary role in decision-making, echoing the Almond-Lippmann consensus regarding the limited influence of the public in foreign policy matters. What, however, many later critics emphasised is that these initial studies were conducted from the 1940s to the 1960s, which were the times of a solid bipartisan consensus in the US foreign policy. Although the disagreements on foreign affairs between two major parties existed, there were not substantial, but most often about how – not whether – the US should peruse its role of 'the leader of the free world' and continue with containment against the Eastern Block. In other words, without exposure to the dissonant foreign policy proposals by presidential candidates, the public did not even have the opportunity to rely on its foreign policy attitudes on the election day.

Nonetheless, the division along partisan lines that arose during the Vietnam War, particularly after the Democratic Party underwent a shift in its foreign policy positions in 1972, presented American voters with an opportunity to make choices between candidates based on their stances on foreign policy. According to the substantial evidence, the issue of the Vietnam War greatly influenced the vote in the 1972 election, much outweighing any other topic (Aldrich and McKelvey 1977). Based on the ANES data from 1980 and 1984, as well as their own national survey from 1984, Aldrich et al. (1989) showed that similar situation repeated in the 1984 presidential elections as well, as foreign policy views once again influenced vote choice at least as much as domestic issues did. The studies investigating presidential approvals during this period also provided further support to these findings, revealing that foreign policy issues were more closely aligned with overall approval ratings compared to economic ratings (Hurwitz and Paffley 1987, Wilcox and Allsop 1991, Nickelsburg and Norpoth 2000).

Following election cycles brought similar evidence, confirming that Americans' attitudes toward foreign policy goals indeed mattered in their evaluations of candidates quite predictably (Anand and Krosnick 2003, 36), especially when there was some critical event that caused the rift among the parties, as was the Iraqi War. While there were some dissenting findings (Wlezein and Erickson 2005), a general agreement in the literature emerged that the Iraq war had a substantial impact on the 2004 election outcomes (Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2007; Campbell 2004). Gelpi et al. (2006), for instance, showed that approximately one-third of voters indicated that foreign policy issues were the primary factor influencing their vote in the 2004 elections, significantly outweighing their concerns about which candidate would better manage the economy or social issues. Sometimes aimed at capturing the retrospective and other times prospective influence of foreign policy on

elections, the theoretical frameworks of these studies remained quite diverse. One particularly promising area of research was explored through the lens of the Audience Cost theory, although with similarly mixed evidence on whether citizens genuinely hold leaders accountable for their actions in the realm of foreign policy (Tomz 2007; Potter and Baum 2014; Kertzer and Brutger 2016).

Driven to comprehend the persistently inconclusive outcomes on whether and when policymakers and election candidates "waltz before a blind audience" in relation to foreign policy, scholars have delved into examining various circumstances that lead citizens to prioritize foreign issues over domestic ones on election day. Inspired by their findings on the 1984 elections, that showed not only that voters were able to accurately identify their own and the candidates' foreign policy stances, but also that voters perceived greater differences between the candidates on foreign and defence issues than on domestic ones, Aldrich et al. (1989), for instance, formulated three conditions for foreign policy influence over electoral outcomes. According to them, the connection between foreign policy and election results depends on whether the parties made their foreign policy stances available to the public, whether citizens had access to those attitudes, and whether parties and candidates presented citizens with different policy options instead of converging on the same ones. Two decades thereafter, Gelpi et al. (2006) largely reiterated these findings, demonstrating how the Iraq war and its substantial media coverage during the 2004 campaign enabled voters to develop well-defined and coherent perspectives on the war and subsequently elevated foreign policy as a significant concern.

In the following decades, many authors continued investigating foreign policy as a key predictor of voting behaviour, often suggesting that the public becomes 'attentive' only when parties and candidates make dissenting positions available to the public (Annand and Kosnick 2003; Baum and Groeling 2010; Berinsky 2007, 2009). Expectedly, the importance of media coverage of the elites' debates and disagreements, as an important condition for the public's access to foreign policy attitudes, was also studied far more extensively (Groeling and Baum 2008; Baum and Groaling 2009). One of the most promising theoretical syntheses of the extensive and disparate knowledge about the relationship between media, public opinion and foreign policy came from Baum and Potter (2008). Inspired by the concept of market equilibrium, they propose a compelling framework for understanding how critical the role of media is in shaping the public opinion about, and influence on, foreign policy, not only during the election cycles, but also beyond. Other scholars also pointed that whether the public votes based on foreign policy views very much depends on the salience of the very issue (Guisinger 2009), although not much discussion on the criteria for salience followed.

Given the increasing consensus that the general public can indeed formulate informed opinions on foreign policy and utilize them in electoral choices, scholars have redirected their focus towards elites, aiming to ascertain whether policymakers take public perspectives and electoral ramifications into account when crafting foreign policy decisions. Since acquiring data on the policymakers' beliefs and motivations is a particularly challenging endeavour due to researchers' limited access to state leaders, this part of scholarship is, however, significantly smaller in scale than the public-oriented studies. The earliest assumptions on whether policymakers care about public opinion on foreign policy was rather consistent with the Almond-Lipman consensus and general realist disregard of public opinion in international matters that "required secrecy, flexibility and other qualities that would be seriously jeopardized were the public to have a significant impact" (Holsti 1992, 440). Scarce empirical evidence available at the time supported such gloomy assumptions, showing that, different to the internal matters of social welfare and civil rights, the public opinion on foreign involvement had almost no influence on the behaviour of politicians (Miller and Stokes 1963). "To Hell with public opinion... We should lead, not follow" (Cohen 1972, 62, in Aldrich 2006), is an often cited reply by a State Department official that aptly captures the prevailing sentiment among policymakers of that era who sought to be seen as independent thinkers who ought to have free hands in leading the nation.

Some scholars from this period already held slightly more optimistic reflections on the elites' responsiveness to public opinion, pointing towards the public opinion capacity to constrain

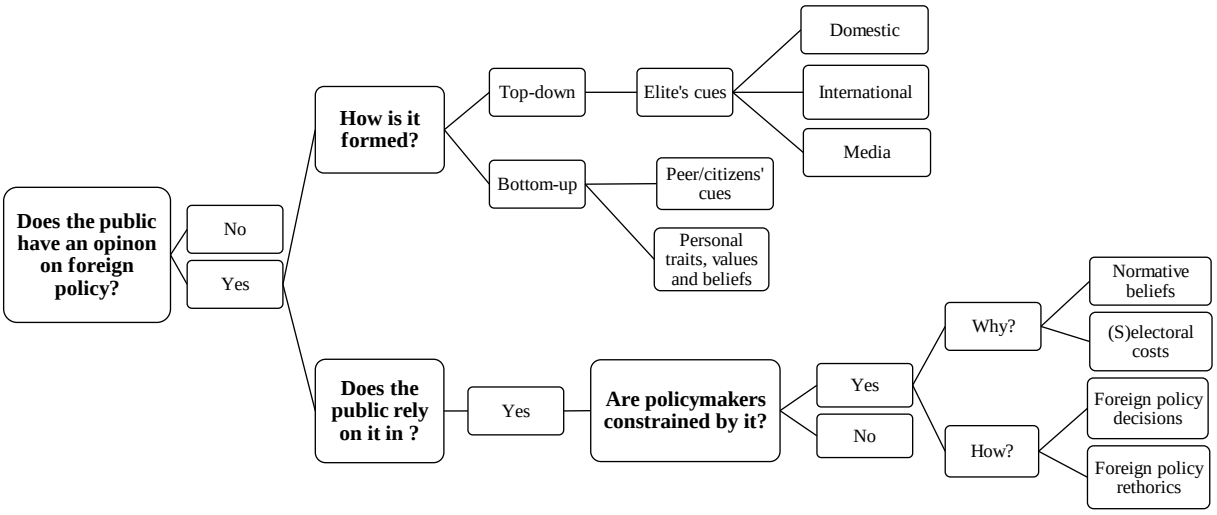
policymakers at least to some extent. The general thesis was that being relatively stable, coherent, and prudent, public opinion set the boundaries of thinkable policy options in which policymakers had to maneuverer. Key (1961) depicted the public as a "system of dikes" that directed foreign policy, while Rosenau compared it to a "slumbering giant" (Rosenau 1961) who was dormant most of the time, retaliating only when foreign policy change threatened the prevailing normative beliefs and values in the community. Relying on comprehensive sets of data, many scholars in the following decades provided evidence about this extremely important constraining capacity of public opinion to channel and balance elites' foreign policy stances. While acknowledging that elites do have public opinion in mind when formulating foreign policy options, some studies, however, devalued this already modest influence of public views by claiming that political leaders used opinion polls mostly "to determine how to craft their public presentations and win public support for the policies they and their supporters prefer" (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, 1). In essence, these studies suggested that decision-makers took public opinion into account when making choices regarding international affairs, not necessarily to directly respond to it, but rather to adapt and avoid it in a manner that would give the impression of being responsive.

Nevertheless, a number of studies in the following decades signalled that foreign policy elites are actually constrained by public opinion in a more direct and significant manner. Contributing to the findings on the electoral significance of foreign policy, several studies found that foreign policy decisions were in line with the public opinion precisely because elites responded to citizens' electoral behaviour (Page and Shapiro 1983). The previously mentioned literature on the casualty aversion among the American public was also extremely valuable in this regard, as many studies suggested that policymakers from all sides of ideological spectrum were clearly reluctant to engage militarily when they were aware of the rising public intolerance to combat casualties (Feaver and Gelpi 2004). Other important issues, from Cuban missile crisis (McKeown 2000), via arms control (Russet 1990) and interventionism (Sobel, Furia and Barratt 2012), to trade treaties (Aldrich et al. 2004), similarly showed that public opinion had a direct influence on how US politicians acted. Some studies even demonstrated that public disapproval of presidential decisions in foreign affairs had a substantial constraining impact on their power in domestic policy as well, for instance, by limiting their ability to move legislation on domestic issues (Gelpi and Grieco 2015). Provided direct evidence that the public was able not only to stop unpopular foreign policy endeavours but to prevent policymakers from even thinking of defying public opinion, these studies showed that elites' hands in foreign policy could be constrained far tighter than it was initially assumed. While the evidence on the elite's responsiveness to public opinion was obviously far from consistent, it became clear that, the same as voting, the accountability of political elites to their voters did not "end on the waters' edges" either.

Given the conflicting evidence regarding the level and consistency of constraints that public opinion imposes on decision-makers in foreign policy, researchers have shifted their focus towards gaining a better understanding of the conditions that influence the degree of autonomy decision-makers have in their actions. While some authors, like Graham (1989) offered more quantitative "thresholds" by predicting percentual levels of public support that affect foreign policy makers in distinctive ways, most studies point towards more contextual factors. Domestic political and party configurations have been emphasized as a crucial, particularly in relation to the existence or the lack of elite consensus on a particular foreign policy problem. This is because, according to several studies (Doeser 2013; Parka and Hawley 2020), elites are much more likely to disagree with the general people when there is no vocal pushback to their own stances. While almost all of the studies assume democratic environments, some rare attempts have been made to show that even in authoritarian regimes – where neither the accountability nor replaceability of leaders is a rule – foreign policy makers also feel constrained by public opinion (Telhami 1992). Sidestepping the nature of the domestic political contexts, some scholars, however, zoom onto leaders' personal characteristics (Foyle 1997, Jacobs and Shapiro 1999). Foyle (1997), for instance, attributes the responsiveness of leaders towards the public opinion to their personal normative beliefs on whether it is desirable for public opinion to affect foreign policy choices, as well to their personal practical beliefs on whether

public support of a policy is necessary for success. Finally, the issue 'domain' and issue 'salience' also emerged as one of crucial factors for determining whether and to what extent elites ignore or listen to the public opinion (Doeser 2013, Park and Hawley 2020; Tomz, Week, and Yahri Milo 2020). While it appears that the issues that involve use of force tend to be more salient than the issues of trade and development, the evidence suggest that issue salience is highly context contingent (Doeser 2013) and needs to be further explored and theorised.

Graph 1. *Key public-centred and elite-centred inquiries in the FPA literature, exploring the role of the public and its relationship with policymakers (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*



In sum, the knowledge gained from both public-oriented and elite-oriented FPA research has significantly evolved since the early stages of the field. Various perspectives have contributed to the gradual dismantling of the initial pessimistic Almond-Lippmann consensus, reinforcing the idea that the public deserves to be a subject of foreign policy and international relations studies. While evidence on the public's susceptibility to elite cues remains inconclusive, it is now clear that the public can form stable and coherent opinions on foreign affairs, enabling its agency in the policymaking process. In more democratic contexts, this often means that the public values its foreign policy opinions enough to shape party preferences, voting behaviour, and political activism, particularly during major international events and crises. More broadly, even in non-democratic contexts, public opinion serves as a stable and independent signal that defines the boundaries of acceptable policies to decision-makers, therby constraining their foreign policy moves and rhetorics. While they never give up on shaping the public opinion according to its views, elites, indeed, appear to be far more responsive to and constrained by public opinion than initially assumed. According to existing FPA literature, policymakers, for various normative and practical reasons, tend to consider public opinion when making foreign policy decisions and generally seek to avoid alienating the public on international matters. Nevertheless, while the existing FPA literature suggests that elites and the public listen to each other, it also shows that they do not always align – at times, their attitudes converge seamlessly, while in other instances, they remain disconnected.

Hence, while the literature initially focused on whether the public and elites listen to each other, and who listens to whom, the evidence suggests that it is rarely an either-or situation. More often than not, both the public and elites listen to and, consequently, constrain each other to some extent. As many studies have shown, they are simultaneously exposed and receptive to various horizontal and vertical cues, which – depending on individual, collective, and contextual factors – can lead to both agreement and disagreement on the desired foreign policy course. Simply put, the broad scope of FPA suggests that elites and the public typically constrain each other in foreign policy, though rarely to an extreme degree – where elites fully adopt public preferences, or the public

immediately accepts all elite proposals. As a result, the FPA research suggests that foreign policy elites sometimes propose policies that the public embraces outright, while at other times, their ideas fail to resonate despite sustained efforts to gain public support. Altogether, while the old Almond-Lippmann consensus has clearly eroded, the mixed and often conflicting evidence suggests that a new consensus on the role of the public in foreign policy and its relationship with policymakers has yet to emerge – and likely never will. However, given the breadth of approaches this issue continues to inspire, the lack of consensus on which policies are adopted, maintained, or reversed due to the public-elite nexus can be seen as a positive development.

Although the literature has here been organised around the most relevant questions that arose in both public-oriented and elite-oriented studies, the summary provided above offers merely a rough map of the area rather than a comprehensive and exhaustive list of all approaches, issues, and cases studied. Since the existing FPA knowledge on the public-elite nexus has not emerged from a theoretically coherent and issue-focused debate, as it is often the case in IR, but rather from a collection of theoretically 'free floating' and often inductive and eclectic approaches that address various aspects of this relationship, identifying traditionally narrow 'research gaps' seems like a vain endeavour. The questions that have been posed across the FPA literature largely remain open and require further evidence, allowing scholars interested in the public-elite relationship to explore the topic from virtually any starting point and contribute through either conventional FPA approach or other, more typically IR approaches. Therefore, instead of attempting to write a comprehensive and study-by-study literature review, the following section will offer some general remarks that are common to most of the FPA studies on the role of public in foreign policy. The characteristics emphasized there should not, however, be viewed as weaknesses of the FPA knowledge but as guidelines for where next one could look for new clues for understanding some of the greatest questions that underpin our understating of states' behaviour in international relations. Building on this the general FPA approach, the following section argues that embracing a more relational and predominantly constructivist perspective offers the most promising path to understanding why foreign policy elites and the public sometimes reach common ground – at times even immediately – while in other instances, they remain persistently at odds.

2.2. Foreign Policy Analysis and Constructivism 'Hitching Wagons': The Puzzle of Foreign Policy 'Stickiness'

The nature of the study of the role of the public and the relationship between the public and policymakers within FPA attracts many of the criticisms levelled against FPA research as a whole. Above all, while FPA and mainstream IR can and should never be separated,[9] the theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed in the FPA studies on the role of public in foreign policy have indeed been very loosely tied to major IR theories. The knowledge on this issue resembles the general situation across FPA which, as Kaarbo concludes in her overview of 25 years of the "domestic turn" in IR, has remained largely "focused on single-country, single-case studies and islands of middle-range theories, with little cross-fertilization, accumulation of knowledge, or attempted connections to IR" (Kaarbo 2015, 5). Although the shadow of classical realism faded over time,[10] the dialogue between FPA and major IR theoretical approaches has remained more an occasional 'greeting in passing' than a meaningful debate. Instead, the research design of the majority of FPA studies in this area, as shown above, continued to be heavily "psychologically-oriented and agent-based" (Kaarbo 2015, 1). In light of these merits and drawbacks of the previously summarised FPA explorations of

[9] With FPA scholars often situating themselves simultaneously in FPA and some other IR subfield.

[10] Classical realism acknowledged the need for statesmen to secure domestic support for legitimacy, but cautioned against being swayed by changing public opinions, which could divert attention from national interests. Early realists generally argued that, since external threats posed the greatest danger to states, domestic politics should be secondary to ensuring state survival in foreign affairs (Lippmann 1922; Morgenthau 1946).

the public-elite nexus in foreign policy, the following paragraphs should, therefore, facilitate the identification of theoretical, methodological, and empirical starting points for new research into the nature, origins, and role of the public (opinion) on international matters, primarily through their influence on policymakers. The attention will be focused to three aspects: the prevailing treatment of the public, the elites, and their relationship.

First, most FPA research tends to overlook or skip providing a clear definition or theoretical inquiry of the public and public opinion. Very rarely the study provides its theoretical, philosophical or normative considerations of what the public is or should be. Despite this, however, the public and its attitudes on foreign issues have, however, been approached in a fairly consistent manner across both public-centred and elite-centred studies. The theoretical individualism, which stems from the FPA's focus on the decision-making process but is also decisively supported by the psychological underpinnings in most studies on public-elite relations, largely shapes how the public and its opinion have been understood and studied. Typically, the public is perceived as a collection of individuals, and the public opinion as a bare aggregation of these individuals' views on foreign affairs, both examined through and reflected in the results of opinion polls. Taking individual as a unit of analysis allowed the researchers to identify different types of cognitive and affective mechanisms that shape the way they filter information and respond to foreign policy cues they are exposed to, coming either from the elites or other citizens around them. The reliance on the knowledge of different branches of psychology about the mechanisms of identification, information processing and action taking, this 'atomisation' of the public provided incredibly valuable insights how factors, such as party affiliation, perception of the credibility of source, cultural congruency of media frames – as well as the variations and contradictions among them – shape the people's interest in and understanding of global affairs and their states' position towards them. Basically, FPA researchers tend to analytically dissect the public into individual members or actors, conduct as neat as possible investigation of how various factors impact individual foreign policy attitudes, and then aggregate those attitudes into the whole. In other words, the dominant FPA understanding views the public a sum of individuals whose individual preferences and decisions ultimately amalgamate into broader patterns and exert influence on policymakers and, via them, on states' behaviour in international relations.

Such theoretical conception of the public has naturally led to methodological individualism, which often translates into a reliance on opinion polling in the FPA studies. Opinion polls have over time rightfully become an indispensable method for the estimation of citizens' views in all areas, including foreign policy, since opinion polls served well to aggregate the views of thousands, even millions, of citizens into a single actor, with 'a modest margin of error.' The revolution which occurred in the polling technics in the first half of the 20th century brought great advancements to the studies dealing with the role of public in foreign policy which emerged about exactly that time, accelerating the revision of several initially pessimistic assumptions. The possibility of generalising findings across entire populations, but also replicating studies over the long time span, on the one side, allowed the researchers to show the relative stability and coherence in public attitude and, thus, claim that the public was far from ignorant and capricious when it comes to foreign issues. At the same time, the accessibility and efficiency of polling enabled researchers to collect data from a large number of respondents within a relatively short time frame, facilitating timely and swift analysis of shifts and differences in public opinion in relation to a specific foreign event or policy. A significant number of studies was, thus, able to explore how attentive the public is to different types of issues and how responsive to different types of cues. With this, opinion polls allowed researchers to eventually disaggregate among the population based on different criteria, showing how, for instance, responsiveness to elite cues depends on party cleavages, how casualty aversion varies depending on the economic background or gender, or how more educated were far less resilient to motivated reasoning than commonly thought. Finally, opinion polls also allowed for comparison between different regions and states across the US, and, although extremely rarely, the contexts outside the US. Therefore, aligned with the prevailing theoretical understanding of the public, the robust

utilization of opinion polls facilitated the examination of correlations and isolation of linear cause-and-effect relationships between various factors and prevailing public attitudes toward foreign affairs.

Despite many benefits, the theoretical and methodological positivism and individualism embraced by the majority of FPA studies interested in the role of public in foreign policy might have, in a way, dimmed the 'public' quality of the public opinion. Remaining a body of micro- and mid-range theories mostly grounded in cognitive and political psychology, the vast majority of the existing research on public's foreign policy attitudes has been rather "asocial" and blind to the broader social environments, social learning, and socio-cultural constructions in which citizens are embedded. Regardless of whether citizens are portrayed as 'cognitive misers', 'cue takers' or 'cue givers', psychological explanations underpinning this part of the FPA literature have generally taken 'all actor' approach, thus treating individual traits as sufficient for understanding their foreign policy views. As if the public were comprised of individuals who lived in a vacuum, the importance of intersubjective identities and shared representations which citizens acquire through engagement with collective structures of meaning has been rather side-lined in the FPA research. Very few studies investigate wider structures, such as identities, at least as a form or source of cognitive shortcuts which help and shape citizens' understanding of the world, let alone as a more constitutive and constraining force. While the public has been nominally portrayed as an organic whole interwoven by "complex communication patterns and interrelationships" (Converse 1987, 513), the predominant individual-level approach might have diminished the deliberative and intersubjective dynamics which characterizes opinion formation in the real world. Some of the recent FPA studies have, however, started to voice this need, arguing that the only way to move forward with understanding the role of public in foreign policy is to stop treating it in an atomistic and static fashion, but instead recognise their inherently collective nature by exploring "broader group contexts in which individuals are embedded" (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017, 13).

Since the public is not simply a collection of individuals, but rather a complex and socially constructed phenomenon influenced by various factors such as shared social context, cultural norms, and political discourse, examining it through survey results has in a way reduced the public to its very opposite. Treating public opinion as a fixed entity that can be accurately measured and represented by numerical data leads to limited capture of those contextual and subjective elements inherent in public opinion. While there are studies that, for instance, explore the way certain citizens' values shape their foreign policy attitudes, the way they do it through opinion polls neglects the symbolic meanings attached to them and the role of interpretation in citizen's understanding of social phenomena. As respondents are often limited to pre-determined response options, opinion polls overlook the nuances and underlying meanings embedded within individuals' beliefs and values, thus failing to capture the richness and depth of both individual and shared perspectives. Rather than relying solely on aggregated survey data, a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the public and public opinion seems necessary, calling for approaches that delve deeper into the social and interpretive dimensions of public opinion and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex processes through which opinions are formed and expressed in society. The research on how, when, and why public matters in foreign policy should, therefore, pay more attention to dynamic structures and processes in which citizens are embedded through theoretical and methodological approaches that would, without denying the agency of citizens, better appreciate the societal structure, enabling us to view them less as individuals collected into the public and more as members of the society.

Similar remarks could be extended to the treatment of foreign policy elites or makers, as well. The research on whether, to what extent and under what conditions the elites are constrained by the public in foreign policy have also heavily relied on cognitive and political psychology and, hence, prioritised an individual level of analysis. While the majority of these studies nominally talks about the nexus between the public and 'elites', they have mostly been focused on individual policymakers and candidates. This approach has allowed them to identify motivations that govern policymakers and trace the mental processes underpinning their decision-making, which has become a central focus

in FPA. While the evidence remains mixed, the complexity of findings is far lower than in public-centred studies. This is primarily because the evidence is scarcer, due to limited access to policymakers. However, the growing knowledge of the practical and normative beliefs that influence policymakers' susceptibility to public opinion has clearly suggested that they are far more responsive and accountable to the public than was believed in the 1950s. This mixed character of evidence suggests, however, that policymakers appear unequally constrained by the public – sometimes very much, other times far less, sometimes more and other times less directly. Revealing a spectrum of possibilities, from a permissive consensus by the public to situations where policymakers do not dare to challenge the public opinion, this approach has offered compelling evidence countering the initial assumption that policymakers are indifferent to public opinion and therefore possess unchecked authority in foreign policy matters. Largely, but not exclusively, thanks to their psychological foundations and strong reliance on elite surveys, the elite-centred camp of FPA studies has also adopted an 'all agent' perspective, only focused on the other side of the nexus.

Hence, policymakers have also been largely studied as detached from the social structures in which they emerge and act, why many processes driving their (dis)connect to public opinion in foreign affairs remain unilluminated. By extracting individual policymakers from milieus which they belong to and treating them most often as rational cue givers and cue takers motivated only to collect votes and remain in power, these studies have portrayed elites' behaviour in a rather simplistic, static, and deterministic manner (see: Aldrich et al. 2009). While the explanations based on individual traits have provided valuable insights in the unequal individual responsiveness to public opinion among policymakers, by leaving out structures and power relations that shaped these beliefs, they seem to tell only a part of the story. Without understanding how these beliefs are formed and shared, whether and why they change, or how policymakers interpret situations when applying these beliefs, we are unable to understand often mixed evidence on the foreign policy disconnect between policymakers and the public. Even more eclectic, set-list theorisations of policymakers' susceptibility to public opinion often point towards very static and asocial variables, such as percentual thresholds of public support/opposition to some foreign policy (Graham 1989) or the existence of the elite consensus/dissensus about it (Annand and Kosnick 2003; Groeling and Baum 2008; Baum and Groeling 2009). Moreover, even scholars who incline towards more contextual factors, such as issue salience, leave the issue of 'salience' and its context dependency rather undertheorized (Doeser 2013; Park and Hawley 2020; Tomz, Week and Yahri Milo 2020). Very few studies, and usually those going beyond elite surveys to explore elite narratives, have emphasized the importance of social and cultural structures that shape public-elite nexus, although without a deeper dive in this direction. Therefore, while a lot has been and is yet be gained through the individual-level explanations of policymakers' behaviours, it is equally important to study them more wholistically, as foreign policy elites within the larger societal structures and power dynamics, instead as individual actors detachable or detached from the whole of society.

The way the public and policymakers have been treated in the existing FPA research has naturally shaped the way their relationship has been depicted and studied, as well. Chasing a definite answer to the 'who influences to whom' question, the existing research has often presented them as entirely separate entities. While the evidence from both public-centred and elite-centred camps suggested that each side hears the other most of the time, by overlooking and undertheorizing the complex, dynamic relationship between these two poles, the research has not managed to escape the 'chicken and egg problem' of correlation between public opinion and policymakers' attitudes and actions on foreign affairs. The conflicting evidence on both agents' responsiveness makes it quite challenging to determine whether the correspondence between the leaders' and public views on foreign policy results from the public's influence over policymakers or the other way around, why many studies end up either overestimating or underestimating the effect of public opinion on foreign policy. As said, even those studies which acknowledge agents' unequal and conditioned responsiveness, often point towards some static, materialistic, and deterministic factors. If the existing FPA knowledge on the relationship between the public and elites is, hence, viewed through the lenses

of the perennial agent – structure problem, it seems like the existing theoretical and methodological approaches have provided either 'all agent' or occasionally even 'all structure' explanations, while the option of structuration's has remained mostly unexplored.

Aiming to solve the problem of reversed causation, the existing research on the relationship between the public and elites has also to slightly fallen into the problem of selection bias, inclined towards the cases of foreign policy disconnect. The existing elite-centred research appears to have mostly investigated the cases in which leaders suffered open public's backlash or even lost elections after making unpopular foreign policy choices. Such focus has, however, left out the, on the one hand, cases in which the potential and anticipated costs of public resistance were as high as to prevent leaders from even attempting to take that path, thus "depriving the researchers of the opportunity to observe the penalties and causing them to underestimate the risks of going against public sentiment" (Tomz, Week and Yahri Milo 2020, 4). In other words, very little is known about whether and how leaders' expectations of a punishment or reward by the public affect their stands and behaviour in the foreign policy arena (Tomz, Week and Yahri Milo 2020). Conversely, the cases of foreign policy connect and latent disconnect have also been understudied. This problem has been recently recognized by scholars interested public opinion on foreign policy, with some studies conducting experiments to estimate how unpopular foreign policy choices would potentially affect public opinion. Nevertheless, while cases of an apparent "disconnect" between policymakers and the public remain precious for studying, more attention should also be given to the cases in which a social consensus exist, or appears to exist, since they can provide equally valuable insights on the drivers of convergence and divergence between the foreign policy views of elites and the public. Instead of seeking an ultimate answer to the who listens to whom, it seems more important to increase efforts toward better understanding of what makes their connect or disconnect possible and likely.

In line with all previous remarks, developing more relational perspectives that acknowledge and attempt to unpack complex interconnectedness between agents seems like a necessary way forward in acquiring a more nuanced understanding of the public-elite nexus and, consequentially, the role of public in foreign policy. Prioritising internal factors, the existing public-centred and elite-centred FPA approaches face difficulties in explaining the mixed evidence since their rather static explanations overlook the impact of the social context which are not fixed and predetermined but continually negotiated and reproduced through social interactions. Moving beyond those limitations requires an approach that provides a better account of a dynamic, dialectic and mutually constitutive relationship between foreign policy makers and the public by illuminating the social and discursive structures that shape and structure the interactions and expectations among actors. Even though already early realists, wanting to downplay the role of public in foreign policy, signalised that the public opinion acted as 'a system of dykes' or like a 'slumbering giant' who reacts only when policymakers cross the boundaries of acceptable and thinkable policies, FPA scholars have not still sufficiently theorised the nature, origin and content of these dykes and boundaries that decide the outcome of public-elite nexus in foreign policy. What are the dikes made of, how the elites navigate thought them to keep this giant dormant and what happens when it wakes up? What makes the connect between the elites and the public sometimes so immediate and other times so impossible? Putting forward the intersubjective ideas, norms, representations, identities as constantly changing, but still solid structures and processes that shape and constitute the interaction between actors, constructivist perspectives in IR seem to offer the highly needed account of structure which the FPA approaches to elite-public nexus most lack.

The calls for a stronger integration between FPA and constructivism have been present and explicit for more than two decades now (Hudson 2005; Garrison 2003; Kaarbo 2003, Houghton 2007). With the 'domestic turn', which marked the 'reunion' of interests between FPA and IR theories, scholars of foreign policy kept inviting for a stronger dialogue between FPA and all three grand theories and perhaps the most vocal were arguments for the dialogue between FPA and constructivism. Arguing that "constructivism provides the most logical base from which to launch a revitalized approach to FPA" (Houghton 2007, 24), that "social construction and foreign policy

analysis look made for one another" (Smith 2001, 38) or that that "the active mode of foreign policy expressed even in the term 'making' (…) resonates with the constructivists' stress on processes of social construction" (Kubálková 2001, 19), constructivist scholars kept digging into one after another niche of FPA that proved useful for the improvement of their theorizations. Pointing out that "the one is strong where the other is weak" (Houghton 2007, 34) scholars highlighted the mutual dependence between the constructivist concept of structure and the FPA notion of agency, arguing that each approach required elements from the other to comprehensively explain their shared assumption that actors create and shape their worlds. Nevertheless, while FPA and constructivism have indeed "hitched wagons", and constructivist FPA accounts are present all across the foreign policy studies, this integration has not penetrated all the debates evenly. Since most constructivist foreign policy studies themselves still favoured a state centric approach – and most often operationalized it to investigate the level of elites – the research on the public-elite seems to considerably lag in its response, missing chances to influence formative constructivist research agendas. Some extremely important steps in investigating the public-elite relations in the context of foreign policy from constructivist efforts have, however, been made.

Among the first and most influential swings in this direction came from Ted Hopf and his intention to show that international politics was not driven mainly by international systemic factors but starts 'at home'. Naming the introductory theoretical chapter of his seminal book *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Hopf 2012) as "Constructivism at Home", Ted Hopf made clear his aspiration to bring "society within states rather than the society between states" back into the study of the world politics and thus move beyond the predominant systemic constructivism (i.e., Wendt 1999) in IR. Criticising constructivist tendency to suspend some of the basic constructivist principles by keeping the "units sufficiently homogenous and invariant so as to be able to theorize at the systemic level about them" (Hopf 2012, 292) and by assuming a "boundary between meanings within and outside the state's official borders" (Hopf 2012, 289), Hopf provided compelling ontological and epistemological arguments against constructivists' long avoidance to theorise the role of masses in the social construction of national identity. Determined to "bring the society in," Hopf made remarkable effort to inductively reconstruct the prevailing domestic identities in the Soviet Union in 1955 and Russia in 1999, what made this book "perhaps the leading constructivist account of identity" (Houghton 2007, 36) in the study of foreign policy. While Hopf was by no means the first to point toward the unfortunate irony of many disciplines and schools of thought bearing the prefix social that eventually end up neglecting the social structures and milieus, his studies were among the harbingers of what would become a "domestic turn" in IR. Unpacking the relationship between elites and masses in the construction of state identity, Hopf started directly conversing with some of the major concerns of FPA literature, and, according to some reviews, immediately went "further than anyone else's in forging links across the two traditions" (Houghton 2007, 36) .

Hopf's overarching theoretical argument is that societies are socialized into specific cultural, ideological, and historical contexts which shape their identities and foreign policy preferences, thus influencing states' behaviour in international relations. To operationalise this argument, Hopf unpacks the dynamic relationship between the elites and 'masses', positing that masses' self-understanding (the independent variable) affects elite understandings (intermediate variable) which, in turn, affect external relations (dependent variable). In order to show how a particular way that Soviet Union and Russia came to understand itself shaped its behaviour in international relations, Hopf attempts to carefully identify the socializations drivers and, in this sense, highlights the significance of discursive practices, arguing that the language and narratives play a crucial role in shaping how states perceive themselves and others, as well as their understanding of what is right, just, or appropriate. Tracing identity discourses across time and different sources, he emphasized that shared worldviews are not fixed but can be contested, transformed, or replaced through social and political processes. In his later works, Hopf strives not only to show that new discourses are possible when "a previous discourse has been discredited or abandoned" (Hopf 2012, 23), but also where they

come from, how they are mobilised and why they prevail, either gradually or incrementally. Therefore, taking a constructivist view on the public-elite nexus, Hopf highlights the interplay between agency and structure, as he argues that while structures, such as norms and institutions, provide the context within which states operate, agency, represented by the public and elites, influences how states interpret and respond to those structures. To this end, he charts a medium course of analysis in which foreign policy is driven not mainly by individual agency but by identity discourses that inform/predispose for decisions, make them possible, but do not determine them. Developing a research design aimed at tracing causal social mechanisms, Hopf showed how the analysis of the public-elite nexus could be perfectly coherent with interpretive approaches like constructivism. In Guzzini's words, Hopf's explanation of how identity impacts foreign policy, as well as how public constrain elites, is not causal "in terms of efficient causality (if X, then Y) but in terms of "how-causality" (how X can lead to Y) (Guzzini 2013, 133).

Then and later, some other prominent constructivist approaches and mid-range theories in the foreign policy studies have also touched upon the dynamic between the public and elites. To different extent engaging with FPA research on the matter, scholars interested in the adoption and change of ideas, norms, identities, roles, or policies have incorporated the role of domestic public in their explanations. In some, as in the securitization theory, this relationship even made the essence of the proposed explanation, since the public approval was what decided the ultimate success of the elites' securitization attempts (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde 1998). While the original conceptualisation of the theory paid very little attention to this link despite its seemingly central role, many later studies strived to better theorise conditions that foster or hinder the public responsiveness to the elite's securitization moves – although still only tangibly engaging with the FPA knowledge on why policymakers are sometimes able to manipulate the public and other times are constrained by it (Balzaq 2011; 2019).

In other cases, such as in the role theory (RT), FPA literature on the public-elite nexus served as a direct inspiration for the incorporation of this issue on the RT research agenda. Embracing Holsti's foundational definition of national role conceptions as "the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions, suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems" (Holsti 1970, 246), RT literature has until recently been inconsistent with much of what is known about the influences of domestic politics on foreign policy from FPA (Cantir and Karbo 2012). By assuming that policymakers either do not care about public opinion or that they can easily manipulate it, the existing RT literature has, for instance, given almost no attention to potential "vertical contestation" of role conceptions that might be coming from the public.[11] While the appeal for a more robust domestic turn in RT has triggered some efforts towards unpacking the state as a unitary actor in the following years (Beasley et al. 2021; Brummer and Thies 2015; Wehner and Thies 2014; Cantir and Karbo 2016), there is considerable room for theoretical advancement as most studies that investigate the public's conceptions of foreign policy roles usually settle with confirming that citizens' attitudes indeed matter to policymaker and that gaps between the elites' and masses' attitudes do appear (Whener and Thies 2014; Hintz 2015; Vieria 2016; Yom 2019; Breuning and Pechenina 2020).

Nonetheless, regardless of the extent to which particular constructivist accounts of foreign policy have incorporated decades of FPA research on how the public influences policymakers' choices, and vice versa, significant progress has been made compared to twenty years ago. On the one hand, constructivist accounts of foreign policy have greatly benefited from a stronger

[11] While acknowledging the arguments that policymakers, through their national role conceptions, ultimately represent the state (Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot 1996; Adigbuo 2007), Cantir and Karbo contend that the failure to identify the nature and extent of role contestations significantly weakens the explanatory power of role theory. They were among the first to highlight that the existing RT literature has underexplored "horizontal contestations" of foreign policy roles, such as conflicts among domestic political elites, between ruling elites and the political opposition, within multiparty coalitions, or across bureaucratic agencies, as well as "vertical contestation" between elites and the public.

acknowledgment of both the public's and elites' agency, as this has enabled more direct insights into how identity actually activates in foreign policy – when and where it enters the policymaking process. Without appreciating the agentic capacity of identity bearers, constructivist accounts of foreign policy face challenges in explaining foreign policy changes, especially unexpected ones. By better acknowledging the dynamic interplay between elites and the masses, constructivists can explain the entire foreign policy cycle – from how certain foreign policy options emerge to why they survive and how they are eventually abandoned. On the other hand, by providing knowledge about the social and political contexts, processes, and interactions in which elites and the public are embedded, both from 'the bottom' and from 'the top,' constructivist accounts equip FPA with theoretical and methodological tools for unpacking the relational, deliberative, and iterative dynamics that characterize the attitude formation of all actors in reality. FPA's traditional focus on individual and idiosyncratic beliefs, traits, and decision-making processes, largely rooted in its heavy reliance on psychology, reflected an almost exclusively realist ontology, positivist epistemology, and methodological individualism (White 1999, Morin and Paquin 2018), often reducing the public to exactly what it is not: the pure aggregation of unrelated individuals. By elucidating the relational and intersubjective nature of identity formation and diffusion, constructivism offers guidance for the promising 'meso-level' approaches to studying the role of the public in foreign policy that have recently emerged in the FPA literature. In other words, constructivism and FPA contribute to the theorization of the public-elite nexus, in which neither the public nor elites are sluggish or omnipotent.

To navigate the ambiguous FPA findings from a constructivist standpoint and avoid the limitations of a binary 'leader-follower' framework, it has, therefore, proven more useful to shift attention to the sites where the agency of both the public and elites intersects with the social structures within which they operate. In other words, to accommodate a constructivist research design of the public-elite nexus in foreign policy, research should focus on the conceptions of foreign policies themselves – what makes policymakers' and the public's foreign policy conceptions align or diverge. By exploring the uneven resonance of specific foreign policies within a society, this dissertation aims to unpack the social structures within which the dynamic relationship between the public and elites unfolds and, consequently, trace how their interpretations of international events emerge, are negotiated, compete, and ultimately converge or diverge. In doing so, it highlights the crucial role of the public-elite nexus in explaining why certain foreign policies are adopted, maintained, or, at times, discarded. Therefore, by seeking to answer why some foreign policies are 'stickier' than others, the proposed research puzzle of uneven stickiness reflects the major research aim of this dissertation: to understand why, when, and how policymakers are constrained by public opinion. The term 'sticky' refers to 'having the property of adhering' (Collins Dictionary, n.d.) or 'staying attached to any surface that is touched' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). While the term has various literal and figurative meanings in both scientific and colloquial contexts, in almost all instances, stickiness reflects two major dimensions or features of an object – the ease with which it attaches to a surface and the difficulty of removal due to its adhesive, tacky, or glue-like properties. In simple terms, developing a deeper understanding of foreign policy stickiness enhances our comprehension of the drivers, strength, but also the puzzling pace of the (dis)connection between the public and elites at all stages of the foreign policy lifecycle.

In this sense, *sticky* foreign policies are those that can be easily introduced by policymakers but not easily abandoned. The least sticky or *unsticky* ones are, on contrary, those foreign policies that are difficult to introduce but, if ever adopted, can be relatively easily abandoned. In between, accordingly, stand *semi-sticky* foreign policies that, theoretically, can be easily introduced, but do not have a strong staying power or, the other way around, are difficult to abandon but yet were also difficult to introduce. The reality of diverse foreign policies of states is evidently far more complex and less clear-cut than the suggested two-by-two square implies since the varying degrees of stickiness exist along the spectrum rather than a simple binary categorisation. Nevertheless, since the major aim of this dissertation is not to offer an exhaustive classification of all foreign policies out there, but to illuminate the puzzling interplay of the public and the elites in the process of foreign

policy making, the proposed simplified scheme of the research puzzle seems fair and more productive for illustrating the dynamical relationship between the public and elites at this stage, as compared to the model with an infinite number of variations. While the insights we can acquire by investigating why some foreign policies appear to be 'sticky', 'unsticky' or 'semi-sticky', might not capture the utmost level of nuance, they are valuable in comprehending the factors that facilitate or hinder agreement between the public and policymakers, influencing its feasibility, likelihood, and level of difficulty.

Graph 2. *The Puzzle of Uneven Foreign Policy Stickiness (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*

Abandonment / **Adoption**	**Difficult**	**Easy**
Easy	Sticky	Semi-Sticky
Difficult	Semi-Sticky	Non-sticky

3. Foreign Policy Stickiness Through Ontological Security Lenses

Seeking to provide a more relational and ideational context to the mixed evidence on whether, how, when, and why public opinion constrains policymakers, this dissertation adopts a constructivist perspective that gained prominence in IR just as calls for a stronger dialogue between FPA and constructivism intensified. Arguing that the need for 'a stable sense of self' – a core principle of OSS – significantly shapes actors' behaviour in the international arena, this chapter demonstrates how OSS offers a valuable framework for analysing elite-public dynamics in foreign policy and explaining why certain policymakers' choices resonate more with the public than others. Furthermore, by illuminating the cognitive-interpretative frameworks through which both elites and the public make sense of the world, thus preserving or restoring ontological security, the chapter introduces the concept of common sense as a crucial mechanism that determines why some foreign policy proposals appear immediately sensible (or not) to the public. This theoretical argument positions common sense as a fundamental ontological security device – the 'sense' behind the 'stable sense of self' – that shapes foreign policy stickiness and influences the public-elite relationship. Accordingly, the chapter concludes by proposing a novel theoretical model of foreign policy stickiness. Grounded in a constructivist framework that integrates insights from OSS in IR with the study of common sense in IR, social theory, and philosophy, this model strengthens the conceptual bridge between FPA and constructivism. By doing so, it contributes to a more robust integration of the two approaches – a step many argue is necessary for FPA to be more genuinely recognised outside the subfield itself.

3.1. The Ontological Security Studies and Foreign Policy

The concept of 'ontological security' derives from psychoanalysis, where Robert Laing first used this term in his 1960 book *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* to explain the incapacity of schizophrenic persons to confront the outside world due to their inability to experience themselves and the others as 'real' or 'whole'. Only if a man has "a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person" he will be able to live out into the world and meet others, experiencing them as "equally real, alive, whole and continuous" (Laing 1960, 39). Precisely this "firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity" (Laing 1960, 39) is what Laing considered ontological security. Although he was focused on the individual human being, Laing's understanding of the individual was, however, never isolated, disconnected and asocial but, on contrary, based on the premise that individual identity "is not best understood as a set of properties or a core essence that we simply have, but as a social construct, formed and sustained via practices and relations with others, including our embeddedness in social structures" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 3). This intersubjective nature of the ontological security allowed the concept to travel from psychoanalysis to social psychology (Erikson 1968) and further to sociology, where Giddens adopted and adapted it to further illuminate its intersubjective, socially constructed, structural and conditioned nature (Giddens 1991).

Defining ontological security as the "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1991, 92), Giddens portrayed ontological security as an intersubjectively constructed 'natural attitude' that allows people to keep on with everyday life without constantly questioning its own and others' identity and actions. Consisted of "a shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality" (Giddens 1991, 36), those natural attitudes provide ready-made answers to the "questions about ourselves, others, and the object-world which have to be taken for granted in order to keep on with everyday activity" (Giddens 1991, 37). Continuously internalised

from the earliest days of our lives and awareness of the external reality,[12] those taken-for-granted answers foster our trust in the reliability and predictability of our social interactions and enable us to live in an 'appropriate' and 'acceptable' manner by default.

Ontological security, therefore, enables people to keep off the table many 'fundamental questions' about the means-ends relationships that govern the social and material life in their environment and, thus, enables them to confidently act towards it on a daily basis. Without this basic trust system, actors are incapable of sensing which developments in the external environment are threatening and which can be simply disregarded and moved on from. As a result, they are doomed to waste their energy on contemplating immediate, basic needs and issues, let alone addressing less ordinary developments. Thus, regardless of some impartial, objective level of accuracy of these taken-for-granted answers about the surrounding, the subjective sense of "confidence and trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity" (Giddens, 1984, 375; 1990, 92-8; 1991, 184-5) is what critically impacts the level of agency one assumes throughout life.

This cognitive and affective certainty which people need in order to know how to act and, therefore, be themselves, is, according to Giddens, mostly sustained by routines which people establish and relay on daily. By keeping the fundamental questions in the unconscious and practical consciousness,[13] routines allow people to go on with daily lives without constantly thinking about their fragility and being paralyzed by the thoughts of their mortality. Since the "self-identity is not a collection of objective traits of a person but rather the self as reflexively understood in terms of her or his biography" (Giddens 1991, 53), the most important routines are the routinized relations with 'significant others' – those who are of great importance to individual's life, well-being, identity, or self-conception. Thanks to the routinised autobiographical and biographical narratives they lean on, ontologically secure individuals are able to preserve the continuity of self-identity and move on through life confident that what themselves and the others are today what they were in the past and what they will be in the future. Like a 'protective cocoon', routines and routinised narratives enable people not to perceive all changes in the environment as threatening but to be able to 'keep the narrative going' despite the constant fluctuations in the social setting. Imposing an order in the chaos of the everyday, routines prevent that "the ordinary circumstances of everyday life constitute a continual and deadly threat" (Giddens 1991, 40) and equip people with "the persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body' (Giddens 1991, 55).

Nevertheless, since one's routinised reading of reality and its own biography is still only one and may always be subjected to different and potentially 'hostile' readings, the sense of self, no matter how robust, is inherently unstable and never entirely immune to disruption. As the everyday life remains contingent far beyond people's ability to grasp it at every possible moment, social actors remain forever aware that 'chaos lurks', and this chaos might not be "just disorganisation but the loss of sense of the very reality of things and of other persons" (Gidden 1991, 37). The painful reminder comes whenever something suddenly and radically ruptures these routinise and routinised readings of the self and the reality. During the 'critical events' that represent "circumstances of a radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind which affect substantial numbers of individuals, situations that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalised" (Giddens 1984, 61), actors begin to feel as they no longer know who they are, and all the previously taken-for-granted answers about the world, the others, and the self, rush back into discursive consciousness.

This "inability of agents to 'go on' by relying on the unspoken know-how unleashes an upsurge of profound anxiety" (Ejdus 2018, 7) that can, if the attachments to routines and habits are extremely strong and rigid, be as paralysing and regressive as to undermine their material and physical

[12] In accordance with Giddens's (1991) observation that the search for fundamental answers begins once an infant develops an understanding of the external reality outside of the self, most ontological security scholars assume and treat it as a universal human need.

[13] Opposite to the purposive choices occurring at the level of 'discursive' consciousness.

well-being. To overcome this unbearable 'dread', people are motivated to reassert the routinised biographical narratives and regain the cognitive and affective control over the changing environment as quickly as possible. Different to the pursuit of physical and material security, which is often treated as an intentional and calculated quest, ontological security-seeking means engaging rather unreflexively in practices that re-establish people's sense of 'stable' or 'good' self. Only when they manage to alleviate anxiety to a tolerable level, social actors can move on and reclaim its lost agency in the social environments they are embedded in. In reversed order, to realise a sense of agency in life, people need to have a stable sense of self, and this sense is ultimately dependent on how much of the reality at any given time they can simply take for granted – literally 'as a matter of fact'. Relying mostly on these and other Giddens's impositions about ontological security,[14] several scholars in the late 1990s began discussing the concept of ontological security in the IR discipline (Wendt 1994; Huysmans 1998; McSweeney 1999), specifically to highlight the international actors' need for stability and predictability of the international environment.

In his pioneering article about the formation of collective identity and the national state, Wendt (1994) identified ontological security, or the 'predictability in relationships to the world,' as one of the 'basic interests or appetites' that arises from states' corporate identity and motivates them to hold onto the existing conceptions of the self and the others. Further emphasizing to what extent legitimacy of the state depends on its ability to perform the 'function of ordering' of international relations, Huysmans (1998) differentiated between 'daily security' and 'ontological security' as two major forms of states' 'mediation' between life and death. While daily security "articulates a strategy of survival, which consists of trying to postpone death by countering objectified threats" ontological security, is "a strategy of managing the limits of reflexivity – death as the undetermined – by fixing social relations into a symbolic and institutional order" (Huysmans 1998, 242). Thus, while enemy construction is not a problem for states legitimacy and may even offer an escape from the lurking 'chaos' of international reality, the inability to identify the sources and objects of threats, as well as to hierarchise among them, is what leads to fundamental political crises among international actors. The post-Cold War world, characterized by the expansion of security issues and multiplication of threats, enemies, and – perhaps, most importantly – 'strangers' is, therefore, doomed to a permanent experience of angst and chaos, according to Huysmans. Sharing the view that ontological security is far more than differentiation between *us* and *them*,[15] McSweeney treats ontological security as 'security-of-being' that reflects actors' fundamental ability to establish sense of cognitive control over the international environment, apprehending it as normal and consistent with their expectations and skills to go on in it. Therefore, despite subtle differences, all the authors of this 'first wave' have used the concept of ontological security with the same aim of emphasizing that there is another form of security which international actors seek and which rest upon their sense of symbolic or intuitional order and stability in this overwhelmingly complex environment.

Emerging into what is today often referred to as the Ontological Security Studies, or even Ontological Security Theory in IR, the 'second wave' of interest for the concept of ontological security in the study of international politics arose already in the early 2000s.[16] Interested to see how the need for a stable sense of self impacts the behaviour of actors – from individuals (Kinnval 2004) to states (Mitzen 2006, Steel 2008) – in the matters that shape world politics, scholars started to invest more efforts into developing the concept of ontological security for the IR purposes. What has perhaps

[14] But also, on Garfinkel (1967), Goffman (1961), Erikson (1963).

[15] The analysis of social division and identity conflict must begin with the shared identity that enables the exchange of meaning in social interactions. The division of this common identity into self and other, often resulting in conflict, is a secondary development rooted in an underlying sense of sameness. From this perspective, the tools and processes that create social divisions are seen as human capacities, deliberately utilised in ways that could have followed different paths.

[16] Kinnvall and Mitzen argue that "there is no single overarching Ontological Security Theory of World Politics" and, in fact, "resisting the urge to articulate such a theory" is what reflects their own dispositions as scholars (2017, 5). They argue that "there is not one correct way to theorise how ontological security is constituted on a collective or global scale; there is not one correct way to think of the implications of this posited need for world politics" (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2017, 5).

contributed to a louder echo of this wave of theorisations of ontological security in IR, is that the authors initially used it to flip upside down some of the concepts that are often considered major forces of the realist understanding of the world – such as nationalism, security dilemma and survival. Shedding a completely new light on many questions that have, from the theoretical point of view, seemed either almost closed by realism and liberalism, or stuck at a deadlock in constructivism,[17] ontological security offered an innovative framework for studying the internationally relevant behaviour of various actors not only on the national level, but also levels below and above. Centred around the aim "to articulate the relationship between identity and security, and between identity and important political outcomes in world politics, with the premise that political subjectivity is socially constituted in ways that have reverberating effects at many levels" (Kinnval and Mitzen 2017, 5), ontological security studies have sparked remarkable conceptual and theoretical discussions about the ontological security framework in IR. These studies, with an incredibly diverse empirical focus, have opened up a wide array of discussions that remain ongoing.

Perhaps the first and 'core' debate has been exactly the one about an adequate unit of analysis. Led by different takes on whether an individual human need can and should be attributed to collectives, OS scholars focus on different ontological security seekers. The more 'orthodox' reading is inclined to keep the individual as the key unit of analysis (Abulof 2009; 2015; Krolikowski 2008; Kinnvall 2006; Roe 2008; Croft 2012) and view collectives only as ontological security providers. On the other hand, most authors believe that scaling up the analysis does more good than damage to the concept of ontological security and brings a great added value in understanding different aspects of international relations, so they continue treating collective actors, such as states (Wendt 1994; 1999; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008; Rumelili 2015; Subotić 2016, Ejdus 2018, 2020) alliances (Greve 2018) supranational organizations (Della Sala 2017) or bureaucracies (Steele 2017), as major ontological security seekers. Attempting to evade this division, some authors attempt to illuminate how different levels and scales of ontological security communities have been interconnected in a less fixed and linear way due to the emergent nature of ontological security (Ejdus and Rečević 2021).

The second point of divergence in the OS scholarship, echoing the eternal agency – structure problem, is about the major source of ontological security. While almost all OS scholars in IR generally follow Giddens' notion of the social self, they have different views on the dimension of inter-subjectivity. Some authors take a more external approach to self-identity construction by assuming that actors, be it individuals or states, establish and maintain their self-conceptions primarily in and through social relationships in the international society (Mitzen 2006a; Zarakol 2010). Some go as far as to claim that the inter-subjectivity is so central for understanding the ontological security dynamics that, instead of the self, the social arrangement itself should be considered the major referent of ontological security (Pratt 2017). Other scholars, however, take a more internal, endogenous, intra-subjective approach that puts focus on the introspective construction of biographical continuity through what Steele terms "the dialectics of the Self" (Steele 2008; 50; Subotić 2016; Ejdus 2020). Taking a 'middle ground', the third group of scholars treat external and internal, biographical and autobiographical dimensions mutually constitutive and inseparable (Zarakol 2010; Kinnvall 2004). As Zarakol stresses, to be ontologically secure, "it entails having a consistent sense of self and having that sense affirmed by other" (Zarakol 2010, 6)

What has crystalised as the third significant area of contention among researchers has been the relationship between modernity and ontological security. Some scholars argue that the need for ontological security in international politics is a par excellence characteristic of the fundamental changes caused by contemporary societal processes, globalization in the first line (Kinnvall 2004). This reading directly resonates with Giddens' thoughts on high modernity, a society "full of hazards

[17] "In contrast to constructivist and/or post-structural understandings of identity and security, however, ontological security studies treat individuals as linked not only structurally, but also through their reasoning and perceptions, their scripts, schemas and heuristics, as well as through their emotional inter-subjectivity in which they continually receive and give emotional messages – often unconsciously" (Kinnval and Mitzen 2017, 5-6).

and dangers," in which crisis is not only an interruption but rather "a more or less continuous state of events," which generates the need for ontological security and practically makes ontological insecurity pervasive and unavoidable (Giddens 1991, 12). Others, however, believe that ontological security is a cross-historical or, better say, ahistorical need, shared by both individual and collective agents. According to Zarakol (2017), the modern state is only one among many historical institutional sources of ontological security, and all of them either relied on the predominance of secular or religious authority or merged the two. While Giddens did put emphasis on the age of high modernity, his general takes on ontological security (let along the fact that the concept was borrowed from psychology) support the view that the need for ontological security is indeed a universal human and societal need that can exist even where high modernity has not yet arrived.

Besides these discussions that have evolved into 'debates' with more or less opposing sides, important conceptional clarifications and theoretical advancements have continued emerging across different niches of the OS scholarship. Moreover, as the literature grew in a rather loose framework with little conceptual restrictions, some scholars have recently started calling for 'going back to the basics' and reopening of some of the basic concepts. For instance, some scholars attempt to clarify the very meaning of anxiety, as the central affect or emotion of the ontological security framework (Krickel-Choi 2022). To do so, some differentiate between 'normal anxiety', that arises in regular crises, from 'profound anxiety' (Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020), that outbreaks only in critical situations (Ejdus 2018). Others, however, do it by explaining the relationship between anxiety and other negatively or positively charged emotions that play critical role in ontological (in)security (Chernoborov 2016, Gellwitzki 2022, Solomon 2018). In a similar vein, the authors try to investigate the difference between the concepts of self and the identity (Krickel-Choi 2024) that hides some important ontological security dynamics although it remains often conflated across constructivism in whole.

Finally, to what extent ontological security need is a conscious or unconscious process remains one of the most challenging issues into which a very few brave ones have ventured (see Mitzen and Larson 2017, 17-19). This issue, also reflected in the discussion about intentionality and habituality of ontological security seeking, has been tackled in the recent attempts for a better theorisation of the routines, as one of the critical concepts of ontological security framework (i.e. conference "What States Do, Who States Are: Routines, Foreign Policy, and International Politics", hosted by The Ohio State University in April 2022, and participated by the author of the dissertation). Although most of this 'maieutic' efforts in the OS scholarship starts with a return to Giddens or Laing, scholars have also been taking steps further, towards the very readings that inspired these two authors themselves (Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020, Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020). These endeavours, meant to add a little more rigorous conceptual and theoretical order to the ontological security 'toolbox', seem highly needed and timely if the concept of ontological security is to keep its analytical value in the flurry of studies that interpret, investigate, and utilise it.

Cataloguing these two-decade-long discussions across the IR can, however, never be exhaustive and neat – less because of the volume of the scholarship (which is by no means small), and more because of the cross-fertilisations between them. While some of the mentioned disagreements are indeed fundamental, most are a matter of emphasises or degree, which is why it seems far more productive for the ontological security scholarship to remain as immune as possible to the sectarian divisions about the central concepts. Probably thanks to this openness to different approaches, the ontological security framework has over time managed to 'fit into' and 'cut across' many different 'turns' that thrived throughout the discipline – from critical, via emotional, domestic, to a vernacular turn – thus proving to be an incredibly constructive site for their dialogue and fusion (Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2017). The enviable body of theoretical, conceptual, and empirical analyses conducted through the ontological security lenses have provided fresh insights to many important fields and issues across the discipline of IR, such the studies of peace (e.g. Rumelili 2014), conflict (e.g. Ejdus 2020), war (e.g. Steele 2008), reconciliation (e.g. Mitchell 2014, Mälksoo 2019), memory (e.g. Mälksoo 2015, Gustafsson 2014, 2015, 2016), or international organisations (e.g. Cupać 2012).

Among the most fruitful intersections has most certainly been the one with the Foreign Policy Studies.[18] Investigating whether, how, when, and why the need for a 'stable,' 'healthy' or 'good' sense of self governs the behaviour of states in international relations, studies employing OSS framework have in the last two decades substantially enriched constructivist foreign policy accounts. The burgeoning research suggested that foreign policy, emerges as one of the crucial dimensions and sites for preserving (auto)biographical continuity necessary for a state to function as a 'real, alive and whole' actor on the global stage. Suggesting that states' need for a stable sense of self impacts the formulation and salience of foreign policies, the gathered insights on how ontological security matters in foreign policy, and particularly whose sense of self matters, promise to improve our comprehension of the varying degrees of stickiness observed in foreign policies.

3.1.1. How Ontological Security Needs Impact Foreign Policy Stickiness?

Even though it had already started to feel like common knowledge that identity matters in foreign policy, at least among constructivists, ontological security paved a viable path for moving beyond the 'identity matters' argument and taking a closer look at why it matters at all, as well as how and when it matters the most. Pointing towards the actors' need for cognitive and affective control over the environment that enables the self to assume agency, OSS provides new insights into why certain identities, and, by extension, certain foreign policies are perceived as natural and appealing, while others are deemed unacceptable – despite the rational calculations suggested by conventional IR theories. Advocating 'security-as-being' that is focused to the security of the self and subjectivity rather than 'security-as-survival,' OSS provide an alternative perspective on the 'rationality' and 'sensibility' of actors' foreign policy choices. In contrast to the ideas of mainstream IR theories, according to which states make their foreign policies primally to protect their territorial integrity, political autonomy, and the lives of the people, ontological security put forward the security of the self and the subjectivity which is not always in line with the demands of material and physical safety.

The interplay between material and ontological security has remained the fundamental light motif of the OS scholarship on foreign policy.[19] Illuminating the ways in which actors on various levels make sense of the world and its own place in it, and act on the basis of that notion, OSS have revealed alternative motivations behind the level and type of agency which actors, typically states, assume in foreign policy. The alternative interpretations of many historical events and the actors' attitudes and choices in relation to the issues that international affairs bring on a regular basis and in times of crises, OSS have shed new light on foreign policies that appear even irrational from the perspective of conventional IR theories.[20] As Mitzen and Larson sum up in their thorough review on 'how ontological security met foreign policy' (Mitzen and Larson 2017), the two major questions that have occupied scholars were "how do foreign policy outcomes, when considered from an ontological security perspective, deviate from outcomes that would be predicted from IR's conventional perspective on state interests?" and "how is the process of making foreign policy complicated by ontological security demands?" (Mitzen and Larson 2017). In other words, the stickiness of any foreign policy largely to crucially depends on whether it makes sense not only from the perspective of physical survival, but ontological security. Tracing these tensions between material and ontological demands, and the actors' attempts to reconcile them, the existing literature provides a range of

[18] Mitzen and Larson (2017), for instance, propose that OS scholarship and foreign policy scholarship should be viewed as two distinct bodies of work that, over time, have developed areas of overlap and came together, akin to a Venn diagram.
[19] Rumelili (2015) argues that distinguishing between ontological and physical security does not require framing certain threats as purely physical or existential. Instead, as a critical security theorist, she emphasizes the importance of examining how survival concerns are constructed and how they shape political discourse and policy. Rumelili highlights that the politics driven by concerns for survival differ from those motivated by concerns for being.
[20] By material, they typically refer to the state's interest in preserving its military or economic power. When the state's physical security is invoked, it tends to be in the context of maintaining the integrity of state borders, protecting institutions, and ensuring the safety of its citizens.

empirical situations – from those where they are mostly incompatible, via those where some accommodation is possible, to the cases where ontological and physical need are complementary or even mutually reinforcing.

The earliest theoretical and empirical studies were, expectedly, mostly puzzled by the incompatibility between ontological and physical security. In her already mentioned pioneering article, Mitzen (2006) offers a theoretical look into this by applying the ontological-seeking assumption to nothing less than the concept of security dilemma. While the traditional, realist reading says that states strive to escape security dilemma but are prevented by uncertainty and fear of others' offensive intentions, Mitzen claims that the opposite is also possible due to states' ontological security needs. As the need for a cognitive and affective certainty can be maintained even by harmful routines, sates can get attached to conflict and actually become extremely reluctant to escape security dilemma. Illustrating this with the failure of Oslo peace process and Israelis' and Palestinians' behaviour after it (as neither intrinsically valued aggression, despite both being willing to fight), Mitzen claims that the 'learning the way out of conflict' was unsuccessful because it failed to foster 'the basic healthy trust' between the adversaries which would prevail over the rigid sticking to identity-stabilizing relationship (Mitzen 2006, 362). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained a source of inspiration to several other articles that have in various ways demonstrated to what extent ontological security demands hinder peace process (Lupovici 2012, 2014). Moreover, inspired by the strength of ontological security demands in this case, Lupovici (2012) pointed towards the ontological dissonance, a situation in which states are forced not only to prioritise this security of self-identity over the physical security, but also to rank among conflicting identity demands.

Similarly puzzled by the cases in which states seem to adopt foreign policies that deviate from their material interests, Steel's early works (2005, 2008) point to different foreign policy directions in which this conflicting relationship can go. In his 2008 book, Steel investigates why Great Britain remained neutral during the American Civil War although its prolonged duration had terrible economic consequences on its citizens and its outcome was obviously to have a great effect on Britain's future global position. Exposing how the Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation increased British anxiety over slavery and thus reframed the political debates, Steel explains how ontological security reasons eventually disclosed intervention from viable options despite initial considerations. Since the Brits understood itself as a truly anti-slavery state, the recognition of Confederacy would spark a great anxiety and shame among them, critically disrupting the Britain's 'self'. For the same reasons, according to Steel, Belgium made an opposite decision, to enter a war and fight Germany in WWII even though it was obvious that this battle was already lost. Not resisting Germany would shake Belgium's self-understanding as a neutral state so profoundly that no physical survival cold outweighs the shame brought by such a decision. By showing how the need for preserving self-identity can lead to opposing decisions on war – none of which in line with the realist and economic-based arguments, Steel illuminates the power of ontological security needs in foreign policy. Moreover, while the previous cases show how 'prospective' shame can motivate states to take unexpected actions, he emphasises a similar power of 'retrospective' shame (Steele 2008).[21] According to him, this was the case with Western intervention in Yugoslavia where, as a consequence of the shame over past inactions in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, US and major European powers were more eager to intervene in Kosovo.

Zarakol (2011) also points towards the power of shame that comes along with any perceived loss of self-identity by investigating the 'after defeat' behaviours of Turkey between 1918 and 1938, Japan between 1945 and 1974, and Russia between 1990 and 2007. Major powers in the 'premodern' world, these three countries "were not organic participants in the 'modernization' processes taking place in Western Europe" (Zarakol 2011, 30) and ended up as the outcasts of the new global order. Torn between material interests and identity demands, these three countries were trying to navigate

[21]Retrospective shame involves seeking to make amends for past wrongdoings, whereas prospective shame focuses on avoiding future misdeeds.

their international behaviour in a way which would keep their Self stable, but also their chances for integrating into the new international society real, and this was not always achievable. Investigating Turkey's reluctance to apologise for the Armenian genocide despite the fact that doing so would not incur any material expenses for it and might even result in material gains, Zarakol claims that, in Turkey's eyes, making an apology for the committed crimes would imply embracing the 'barbarian' stigma imposed by the West. Drawing on Herzfeld (2005), Subotić and Zarakol further elaborate on the disconnect between national and international components of state identity by pointing towards the 'existential dilemma' which modern nation-state face when they find themselves between the popular beliefs, customs, and narratives, on one side, and the standards that a state must abide by as a member of international society, on the other. Similar to Subotić and Zarakol's (2020) argument that states emotional responses become particularly rife when they result from ontological fissures between negative external representations from powerful international sources and established internal understandings of self, Ilgit and Prakash (2016) show how such criticism can eventually solidify the identity of the criticised states. Using Turkey's relationship with Israel under President Erdoğan as an illustration, they show how unwanted shame, embarrassment, or guilt stemming from the external criticism, portrayed by leaders as hypocrite and bogus, can eventually turn upside down, into pride, indignation, anger, self-righteousness, or scorn that only stabilise a state's sense of self.

Over time, scholars have provided many such examples of foreign policies that have been driven primarily by status-seeking or status-preserving ontological security needs, although primarily among the 'big players.' Cupać (2012), for instance, makes a compelling case that practically all NATO interventions in post-Cold War period have been motivated by anxiety that NATO lost the Self with the disappearance of the Soviet threat. Its actions in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Horn of Africa, and Libya have all been carried out as a part of the Alliance's introspection rather than to defend its material interests. Similar to this, Mälksoo sees the recent NATO's and EU's focus on hybrid warfare, resilience, and strategic communication as their tactic to transform growing concerns over the vulnerability of the West into manageable and understandable threats (Mälksoo 2020). Many geopolitical disputes, such as those between China and the US over the South China Sea (Heritage and Lee 2020) and China and Japan over the Senkaku Islands (Suzuki 2023; Hwang and Frettingham 2018), have also been motivated by ontological security needs primarily. Investigating why China is determined to claim ownership over "uninhabitable rocks and features in many cases" (Hertigate and Lee 2020, 2), and why the US is willing to relentlessly contest China's territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea – both running a risk of having direct confrontation, Heritage and Lee point towards the underlying attachments that both actors have not only to their national identities, but also to a specific international and regional order in which those identities are embedded. Digging deeper into the 'love-fear' relationship between Russia and the EU, Akchurina and Della Sala (2022) also give an interesting take on how the material interests of these actors have also been stranded by their conflicting ontological security needs. While Russia and EU seemingly derive their ontological security in different ways, with the Russia firmly rooted in narratives of territory and material power while the EU defines itself as a post-territory, post-sovereign polity, they, however, both create narratives of love and fear that are essential to their ontological security and may lead to ontological insecurity in the other, cause more damage than good to the mutual material interests.

Serbia's steadfast opposition to Kosovo's independence, that was unilaterally proclaimed in 2008, is another often studied case of states' readiness to make foreign policy choices that jeopardize their physical and material wellbeing in order to live up to their standards of self-integrity and understanding of self-identity (Ejdus and Subotić 2014; Subotić 2016; Ejdus 2018, 2020). Trying to realise why Serbia continues to defy formal recognition of Kosovo despite significant political costs, Ejdus and Subotić (2014) draw attention to the long-term discourses which constructed Kosovo as 'sacred space', 'holly land' and 'heart of Serbia' and made it seem that losing Kosovo means the end of Serbia and Serbianhood as known. Causing "radical disjunctions that challenge the ability of collective actors to 'go on' by bringing into the realm of discursive consciousness four fundamental

questions related to existence, finitude, relations and autobiography" (Ejdus 2018, 883), Kosovo's secession was a 'critical situation' for Serbia's ontological security that has produced consequences on Serbia's foreign policy. Not only that Serbia's counter-secessionist policy has decisive impact on the prospects for accomplishing peace with Kosovo but has shaped Serbia's overall foreign policy course by further tying it to Russia because of Russia's veto power in the UN and further hampering its already difficult path to the EU (Ejdus 2014).

Striving to make this complex relationship between ontological and physical security theoretically clearer, especially in the contexts of protracted conflicts, Rumelili (2014) conceptualises them as two separate but interrelated layers of security and proposes an analytical matrix based on their combination.[22] Illuminating the different dynamics, processes, acts, and discourses that lie beneath physical and ontological security and govern the actors' behaviour in peace processes, her goal is to understand how the Self can transition away from a securitized connection with the Other, especially when its identity is intertwined with this relationship to the Other. Different to the physical security, that entails the identification and naming of threats to survival and, therefore, often involves the securitisation of an Other, the pursuit of ontological security does not require securitisation of the Other, but only a stable relationship to it. While hostile relationships obviously can strengthen identity and ensure ontological security at the expense of physical, Rumelili draws attention to the potential for desecuritisation which the heightened anxiety at the end of conflict can bring and, therefore, highlights that ontological insecurity can be 'harnessed' for the good, for transforming conflictual into peaceful relations. She illustrates this point by claiming that most internationally negotiated peace agreements, related to the Cypriot issue, kept failing because they assumed a shared Cypriot identity which caused ontological insecurity within both Greek and Turkish-Cypriot communities. If, on contrary, peace agreements, along the elimination of physical violence, also aimed at a reconstruction of Greek and Turkish Cypriot identities that would allow them to "construct one another as distinct in the present but acknowledge the Other's capacity to Cypriotize in the future", ontological security could have been restored. Otherwise, the physical security promised by peace processes produces ontological insecurity as a consequence, eventually leading to a new cycle of conflict and violence, as many cases of peace processes around the globe show (Rumelili 2015, 2015a; Kay 2012, Kinnvall 2007).

Tracing the tensions between ontological and physical security, many studies, however, show that states attempt and often succeed to deal with situations in which ontological and physical demands call for divergent foreign policies that might aggravate one or the other. Instead of making 'all in' choices towards either material or ontological needs, states attempt to 'hedge' between physical and identity threats as long as possible and reconcile them as much as possible. Most often, studies point towards the so-called critical situations, where the conflict between divergent concerns becomes the strongest and clearest in the face of a sudden event. However, some studies also investigate the everyday strategies that states deploy to sustain the minimum of all aspects of their security – even a 'regular day' in international relations necessitates constant balancing between the different interests of sustaining physical survival and maintaining the narrative of the self. The studies on the reconciled demands of ontological and physical security, therefore, often highlight various self-restriction, self-adoption, self-deception strategies to which states resort in order to acquire the minimum on both securities.

Lupovici (2012), for instance, investigates the strategies which states have at disposal when faced with both physical and identity threats. Moreover, he points towards the cases of "ontological dissonance" when, according to Lupovici, states are forced not only to arrange the security of self-identity with physical security, but also to rank among conflicting identity demands. According to him, understanding foreign policy decisions from OS perspective requires acknowledging that a state's identity is never simple and homogenous but always made up of multiple identities. Because of this, states frequently find themselves in situations where a solution to a threat to one identity may

[22]She differentiates between ontological (in)security, physical (in)security and asecurity.

exacerbate another identity, forcing states to seek for strategies of either avoidance or identity shift. The Second Intifada represented a serious physical threat to Israel, but it also challenged several Israeli identities, and in a way which called for different solutions. The unilateral measures which Israel undertook were, according to Lupovici, a way to address physical security threats to a certain level, but "also a means of placating the ontological dissonance" stemming from Israel's Jewish, democratic, and 'security provider' identities that would ideally require very diverging foreign policy solutions to the Palestinian actions.

Subotić (2016) shows how Serbian political elites also look for ways to reconcile the material and ontological security interests in relation to the 'normalisation talks' with Kosovo by adjusting its discourse as much as need and altering its behaviour as little as possible. She contends that during period of significant crises and when various aspects of state security are threatened, such as physical, social and ontological, specific narratives are strategically employed to facilitate understanding and acceptance of policy changes aimed at resolving physical security concerns while simultaneously upholding state ontological security by ensuring continuity in the narrative. Trying to balance between ontological security needs, which automatically removes the option of recognising Kosovo from the table, but also to advance its material interests in relation to the EU integration process, which require significant concessions to Kosovo (as was the 'critical event' of signing of the Brussels Agreement), the Serbian political elites keep turning to behavioural and discursive manoeuvres that allow them to limbo dance as long as possible. Selectively activating and deactivating different segments of the storyline about Serbia's historical right and struggle for Kosovo, they manage to foster a sense of normalcy, familiarity and reassurance.

Selden and Strome (2017) make comparable claims regarding India in the post-Cold War era, also touching on the strategies for reconciling material and ontological security interests. With an identity pillared on the nonalignment, quasi-socialism, and suspicion of the United States, India maintained an antagonistic relationship with the United States throughout the Cold War. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, India's economic and military priorities shifted, leading to a necessity for assistance from the United States in dealing with emerging threats from China and Pakistan. As a result, according to Selden and Strome, the national narrative in India started to change away from nonalignment and quasi-socialism, and toward democracy, making India's geopolitical shift and greater cooperation with the US ontologically acceptable to the Indian public and ultimately self-sustaining. Through a content analysis of Indian media spanning a decade, they demonstrate a shift in the portrayal of the US-Indian relationship, increasingly emphasizing the shared democratic values of both nations, while downplaying those elements that were incompatible. Importantly, the authors also remind that the discursive and behavioural adjustment have eventually resulted in a transformation of Indian state identity, tracing a path for a different interplay between security interests and state identity and different future foreign policy decisions.

Nevertheless, some scholars reveal that ontological and physical security interests must not be divergent in the first place since the threat or a treat to material security can simultaneously also a be threat or a treat to ontological security. Some of the above mentioned examples, such as Serbia's fight against Kosovo secessionism (Ejdus 2020), could also fall into this category since Kosovo's secession, like any secession, indeed represents a physical threat because it assumes the loss of part of a territory and population. Nevertheless, the level of ontological component is so high that the material losses of losing this 'heartland' look far greater, leading to policy responses that would probably be different if driven only by material concerns.[23] Discussing the relationship between China and Japan, Gustafsson also argues that the problem of "perceived misrecognition" – China's failure to acknowledge Japan's identity as a peaceful nation and Japan's failure to acknowledge China's identity as a former victim of Japan (Gustafsson 2015, 2016) – is far more responsible for the increasing antagonism between China and Japan than their undeniably growing material disparities.

[23] Serbia would likely be physically more secure if its borders were clearly defined and firmly controlled, rather than having territories where control is absent or unlikely to ever be reestablished.

Gustafsson demonstrated how perceived misrecognition exacerbates security dilemma because material capabilities are seen as more threatening than they would be if each state recognized the other in accordance with its own self-conceptions, thus evoking Mitzen's (2006) inspiring take on the relationship between ontological security and security dilemma.

Similarly, studying the Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in relation to the rise of Islamist governments in Iran in 1979 and Egypt in 2012, Darwich (2014) also shows how ontological and material interests can reinforce each other. With the rise of Islamist governments in the neighbourhood, the Saudi Arabian regime, which justified its style of rule by claiming to be the "protagonist of 'true' Islam," felt not only physically threatened, but also profoundly anxious due to its identity's resemblance to other Islamic models (Darwich 2016). The eroding distinctiveness of its rule led the Saudi government to adopt foreign policies that discredited the Shia government of Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt as the "unfaithful, treacherous, and radical" (Darwich 2016, 19). With each new generation of challengers, the Saudi identity narratives, which had initially been pan-Islamic, became more restrictive until they were just Salafi-Wahhabi. By maintaining their distinctiveness, these narratives played a crucial role in shaping Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, ensuring the preservation of its ontological security during crucial junctures, while not conflicting with the kingdom's physical security interests (although it was not solely driven by them). In a similar vein, tracing foreign policies which are primarily driven by ontological security needs of states, rather than by its material benefits, Vieira (2016) explains the resilience of the Non-Aligned Movement. Although material benefits of membership are not negligible, Viera argues that the Non-Aligned Movement persists in the post–Cold War era primarily because it continues to serve as a "community of shared meaning" for post-colonial states whose status within the international community is still insecure (Vieira 2016, 3).

Finally, focused more on prospective losses than gains, the OS research also shows how material needs can call for foreign policies that are not only compatible with, but beneficial to its ontological security, and vice versa. Browning (2015), for instance, discusses the adoption of policies of "nation-branding," or strategic campaigns to market a national brand to a global audience, such as "Cool Britannia," "Incredible India," and "Chile, Always Surprising". While these campaigns are indeed justified with reference to the economic and political benefits that can accrue because of a country's positive reputation, Browning contends that these campaigns also foster nation's ontological security, providing citizens of the advertising country with an appealing narrative of their society. Similar to Chernobrov, who claims that ontological security does not require the stability of any versions of the self but "a continuously positive version of the self" (Chernoborov 2016, 1), Browning highlights the importance which the national self-esteem and proud have in foreign policy making. According to them, ontological security is not only about the stable sense of self, but also about national dignity, that can indeed be boosted through the recognition which a successful nation-branding campaign foster.

Often puzzled by tension between material and ontological security, the existing OS literature has, therefore, provided extensive theoretical and empirical evidence that ontological security has a considerable impact on foreign policy making and outcomes. While the OS scholars do not claim that material interests are unimportant for understanding states' foreign policies, they caution that acknowledging ontological needs can shed light on why some foreign policies are not even considered, while others are so readily accepted and fiercely protected, regardless of or despite material calculation. This trade-off is not always striking or visible because ontological and physical security are not always conflating, but also because states manage to keep the manoeuvring space wide enough to allow its reconciliation. Nevertheless, the effect that ontological security has on foreign policy becomes particularly evident when this space rapidly narrows as a result of internal or external shocks that fundamentally challenge a state's biographical or autobiographical continuity and their need for cognitive and affective control over the international environment appears to be great that it sometimes dictates their entire foreign policies course at the expense of their physical and material wellbeing. In those critical situations, states search for foreign policies that will help them

alleviate the sparked anxiety, avoid shame, preserve national pride, and to do so, they can start a war, foster peace, maintain status quo, or make a foreign policy shift. However, although it's clear that a stable sense of self significantly shapes foreign policy stickiness, to fully understand why, how, and when it influences foreign policy making, it appears crucial to delve into whose sense of self holds relevance in foreign policy contexts.

3.1.2. Whose Ontological Security Needs Impact Foreign Policy Stickiness?

In a modern state society, foreign policy making appears as a rather centralised process with locatable authority and tracible decision making chain. Nevertheless, exactly because someone has the authority to officially speak and act in the name of the entire domestic society towards the entire international society, it seems important to unpack whose 'sense' of self we consider, or consider most, when explaining a state's behaviour from the OS perspective. While it seems impossible to ever detangle all different 'selves' that emerge, meet, and compete to impose its 'sense of situation' and sense for the right foreign policy response to it, understanding some basic dynamics around the 'titular' of ontological security appears necessary to fully understand how precisely ontological security matters in foreign policy. It is very difficult to make a thorough and straightforward review of the existing scholarship in this regard, however, since the insights on whose sense of self matters are usually implicit and 'spread' throughout the entire OSS literature, and not always related to foreign policy but state-society or inter-societal relations in general. Nevertheless, researchers' valuable remarks and the very way in which foreign policy has been typically studied in OS scholarship allow tracing important insights in this regard, revealing new cues on the public-elite nexus in foreign policy.[24]

While OS scholarship in IR adopts many different levels and units of analysis, the majority of OS scholars who are concerned with foreign policy expectedly take a state-centric perspective in line with the conventional wisdom in foreign policy studies in general. The arguments in defence of studying state behaviour with a concept that has been developed to explain the behaviour of individuals, consistently justified by many in different IR schools, has been repeated by OS scholars as well (McSweeney 1999, 151; Mitzen 2006, 351–353; Steele 2008, 15–20). Echoing decades-long discussions on agent-structure problem and appropriate level of analysis in IR (Wendt 2004), they often refer to the fact that states are among the major sources of its citizens' ontological security and that focusing on the state's behaviour helps in explaining macro-level patterns in international relations. Nevertheless, while they share the state-centric approach to ontological security, scholars have attempted to unpack it in different ways. Mitzen and Larson (2017), thus, point to at least four ways in which the notion of a state's ontological security can be approached. First, it could be taken literally, assuming that a state is the type of entity that actually has its own ontological security needs. Second, it could be taken in an 'as-if' sense, with a premise that this imaginary brings useful insights into the dynamics of word politics. Third, it could be taken to refer to the ontological security of individual decision-makers involved in a specific foreign policy situation at the given moment. Finally, it could be that state's ontological security is a shorthand for the society's ontological security needs.

Nevertheless, while this distinction seems theoretically and empirically appealing, in practice, the state-centric approach most often means elite-centric approach as well, suggesting that elites' sense of self is the one that matters most for how a state will behave in international relations. Even when they nominally advocate 'state as a person' or 'as if' approaches, scholars who apply them

[24]As previously noted, approaches to the level of analysis issue in Ontological Security Studies (OSS) have been highly diverse, and it appears beneficial for the discipline to maintain this plurality. Automatically discrediting or prioritizing the ontological security needs of any potential Self—whether individual or collective—offers little insight into the complex ways and scales on which international relations unfold. The same principle applies to OS studies in the context of foreign policy.

usually end up doing what the third approach states and that is investigating state agents, policymakers or some other individual members of the policymaking elite. In his convincing elaboration of the 'agents-as-state' position, Steele (2008), however, warns that such approach does not focus on state officials because it is interested in their individual ontological security needs or differences among them, but because they "all share the same collective commitment to state self-identity" (Steele 2008, 19). While personal ontological insecurities of leaders are not deemed irrelevant, what is "more relevant is how leaders recognize the position of their state's 'Self' in international society" (Steele 2008, 19) and feel about it since, according to Steele, anxiety over their state's place in the world must be evident no matter how each individual feels about his or her own sense of integrity. Recalling Laing (2002), who argues that state agency actually comes into existence only in the moment of diplomatic (or military) actions of its representatives (otherwise, it exists only in potential), Steele finds it particularly justified to look into how state leaders 'actualise' the state's agency and power in the moments when state is ontologically challenged and when they strive to meet its the self-identity needs. Because state officials "not only represent the interests of the citizens of a state, they also represent the state to the representatives, and thus citizens, of other states" (Laing 2002, 16-17), Steele (2008) believes that elites' sense of self is the closest we can analytically come to the state's sense of self in foreign policy.

With ontological (in)security understood as a need for self/identity continuity, and most often operationalised as the continuity of the biographical narrative, the dominant focus on elites is further reflected in the scholars' attention to the foreign policy elites' narratives. With the premise that self-identity narratives are, if not entirely constructed by elites, at least largely shaped by what they say, and that official foreign policy positions are also crafted and communicated by elites, scholars exploring the complex relationship between ontological security and foreign policy naturally turn to leaders' statements to understand states' ontological security. To trace whether and to what extent have states' foreign policies been impacted by the ontological needs, scholars look for signs of profound anxiety, shame, but also self-esteem, and pride among their leaders. Investigating the elite's foreign policy discourse, they attempt to realise whether and to what extent foreign policy has been put in the service of behavioural and identity adjustments that states' need to do make in order to maintain or regain its biographical continuity. Sometimes, the research is focused on the leaders in power, and other times a wider spectrum of political or other elites, such as intellectual or religious are included. It, thus, appears that state foreign policies depend on whether its current leaders and elites' sense that state's self-identity narrative is challenged, how they articulate those threats and whether and how they device a (discursive) way out of them.

Eventually, the dominant focus on the elites can sometimes leave an impression not only that elites' sense of self matters the most, but that investigating the elites' discourse is sufficient to understand the entire states' ontological security dynamics. Given the array of case studies exploring foreign policy decisions that managed to address societal anxiety, the prevailing scholarship implies that elites, whether intentionally or not, consistently possess the ability and positioning to anticipate and express the societal ontological security needs, as well as find a foreign policy that will satisfy them. The scarcity of studies that highlight how elites might also fail to find a foreign policy option or justification that restores ontological security further strengthens this impression. Regardless of the level of consciousness on which this 'sense' is supposed to operate, some scholars treat the pursuit of ontological security as a conscious, intelligent, deliberate process (Steele 2008; Subotic 2016; Ejdus 2020; Ejdus and Rečević 2021). Others, however, believe that elites can be affected by ontological security needs without always being aware of it (Mitzen 2006; Zarakol 2010; Cash 2017). Either way, it appears that elites are most of the time able to find a foreign policy 'band-aid' that immediately sticks and heals ruptured routines. In other words, the existing literature suggests that the elites' sense of self ultimately determines a state's foreign policy as elite-proposed foreign policies somehow tend to quickly and easily 'stick' with the public, why elites appear rather unconstrained in their efforts to preserve states' sense of self through foreign policy. To put it differently, the current body of literature implies that a state's foreign policy is largely shaped by the elites' sense of self.

Elite-driven foreign policies tend to gain rapid and widespread public acceptance, suggesting that elites enjoy considerable freedom in safeguarding a state's identity through their foreign policy initiatives.

Nevertheless, a deeper look across the OS literature reveals that even though elites' sense of self appears to be always important in foreign policy, the public sense of self matters a lot, as well. Important indications in this direction comes from scholars who avoid taking a state-centric approach to studying ontological security in world politics and whose general view of international relations does not fit the "standard IR framework of states interacting in anarchy" (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 4; Croft 2012; Skey 2010). Instead of anthropomorphising states and treating states as major ontological security seekers, these studies view states more as one of frameworks in which individuals accomplish their ontological security (Abulof 2009; 2015; Kinnvall 2004; Krolikowski 2008; Roe 2008) and, therefore, choose to focus on state-society relations or inter-societal relations instead. Although not all scholars from this camp explicitly oppose the application of the ontological security concept to states, but simply skip justifying their viewpoint, some of them, however, outspokenly defend this approach as a more suitable or 'orthodox' in relation to the original Laing's theorisation of OS. According to them, those who resort to assumption of state personhood in studying the impact of ontological security on world politics inevitably reify state and 'freeze' the social processes that need to remain treated as processes, obscuring the essential reliance of ontological security on the broader theory connections within which it was originally situated. Treating states as unitary ontological security seekers, in their opinion, 'impoverishes' the concept of ontological security, limiting rather than enhancing its power to explain the patterns of international affairs (Krolikowski 2008; Croft 2012; Croft and Vaughan Williams 2016).

Even though they do not take a state-centric approach common for foreign policy studies, this part of OS scholarship still provides extremely valuable insights into the OS influence on foreign policies, primarily by highlighting the role of the society, the public. Explaining how, especially in times of rapid changes and uncertain futures, different identity constructions, such as religion and nationalism provide individuals with powerful "identity-signifiers" for stabilizing the self, scholars illuminate various foreign policy repercussions of individual ontological security needs in international affairs. Krolikowski (2008), for instance, shows how China's societal nationalism provokes foreign policy consequences by tracing the nationalistic foreign policy moves back to the personal ontological security needs of the majority of society members. Illuminating the identity-reinforcing function of nationalist foreign policy practices, these studies shed light on a wide range of often overlooked sub-state and society actors whose strong attachment to a specific national or religious identity and its external posture can generate or perpetuate a specific foreign policy course. While not all of these studies directly investigate how bottom-up (in)securities (Guillaume and Huysmans 2013; Noxolo and Huysmans 2009) scale up to the official foreign policy, by investigating what security and identities mean for the people at the level of the everyday, they provide extremely valuable insights in how non-elite meanings, experiences or narratives of the self can both strengthen and undermine state's ontological security. In other words, instead of ignoring ordinary society members or assuming that their ontological security needs can best be viewed from the elites' attitudes and actions, these studies place the state's sense of self directly into the public, treating its ontological security needs as decisive, or at least as east equally important as those of the elites. Rather than disregarding the ontological concerns of everyday citizens or assuming that understanding their basic need for security is best done through the perspective of the elites' attitudes and actions, this research places the state's sense of self directly into the public, considering their sense of self as crucial or equally significant as that of the elites.

The previously mentioned studies which adopt a state-centric approach and treat states as persons confirm that states "ontological security that matters is that of the mass public" since elites themselves are aware of and, consequently, led and constrained by the ontological security needs of the public. This is by far the clearest in the so called 'internalist' or 'endogenous' readings of state's ontological security which are "based on intrinsic, self-organizing, and auto-biographical aspects of

the state". Different to 'exogenous' branch which assumes that states social interactions with other states are the major source of routinised foreign policy roles, the endogenous camp is interested in the needs that emanate from the domestic, ideological, political, and socioeconomic context of most of the society's key members or, in other words, from a sense of national affiliation with others inside the state. Steele, for instance, notably articulates this perspective by demonstrating how autobiographical narratives inside the Belgium society are of crucial importance for preserving stable and consistent self-conceptions that manifest in different foreign policy roles and decisions. In a similar vein, Subotić (2016) and Ejdus (2020) analyse Serbia's ontological security, Zarakol (2010) Turkey's, Russia's and Japan's, Gustafsson (2015, 2016) Japan's and China's, Lupovici (2012) and Mitzen (2006) Israel's ontological security. Studies that adopt a combined approach, assuming that domestic and international dimensions are deeply interconnected, as Vieira (2016) suggests, clearly demonstrate that 'domestic pressures' from society are equally significant in the formation and enactment of new narratives and foreign policies. States foreign policies, thus, become an outcome of the constantly and consistently accommodating narratives that come from outside, from other states, and from inside, from the domestic public. While they do not outspokenly recognize the public's agency in foreign policy as other perspectives do, even the exogenous readings never argue that foreign policies which states pursue can be entirely independent of or contrary to the public conception of the self and the world.

In other words, whether they position the public at the forefront or in the background, the existing 'state as person' studies on foreign policy generally agree that the public does influence state foreign policy, because elites are concerned with the public's sense of self-identity. When deciding whether and how to react to the changing or upsetting circumstances in the international arena, policymakers care that their actions need to meet the publics' understanding of the national self-identity and the world in order to serve the purpose. When the imperatives of physical survival and material wellbeing require foreign policy changes that could threaten a state's biographical continuity, policymakers appear to be led by the public's ontological security needs and look for foreign policy options that will meet their insecurities. While it is not always clear from the literature if the public is aware of its own ontological security needs, most studies suggest that self-identity narratives are so deeply internalised that the public is largely unaware of how they influence their foreign policy attitudes. However, there appears to be greater consensus that elites are indeed aware of the public's ontological security needs. Thanks to this 'ability' to sense the public's sense of self, leaders can anticipate which foreign policy options are viable based on their potential to resonate positively with the public. This enables them to avoid escalating public anxiety and prevent it from morphing into anger directed towards themselves. The elites' awareness and constrainedness by the public's sense of self is, obviously, most explicit in the studies which take a discursive consciousness approach which assumes that leaders are aware of the need for stable sense of self in general, and, above all, of the public's ontological security needs.

For instance, by illuminating the multi-layered nature of the Israeli self-identity narrative, Lupovici (2012) points toward different foreign policy strategies that elites can resort to in order to solve the ontological dissonance the society faces. While behavioural changes and identity shifts are the most frequent strategies, the costs they carry might be deemed as too big, why states can turn to a strategy of avoidance that will make any big changes unnecessary, at least for the time being. Evading any big changes in identity and behaviour, the strategy of avoidance offers 'a mental compromise' between the conflicting Israeli identities of being a Jewish, democratic and a 'security provider' state. Although the Israeli elites were "aware that their choice of action will not fully resolve the dissonance or the core elements that produce the dissonance" (Lupovici 2011, 819), they turned to it because it could ease the boiling identity tensions and avoid the outburst of the public anxiety and backlash. While he does not fully unpack the state in the elite-public nexus, Lupovici also implies that the public matters in foreign policy by highlighting the elites' discourses that "appealed to a large audience" and supporting them with public opinion polls about the major foreign policy moves taken during the Second Intifada but also before. He, therefore, showed that elites cared for the boiling

among the public enough to choose among foreign policy strategies based on their ability to help members of the public to deal, or avoid dealing, with discomforting inconsistencies within the national identity.

When avoidance, however, becomes impossible and international circumstances urge foreign policy changes, the elites strive to make them ontologically palatable to the public primarily by deliberately manipulating the self-identity narrative. All OS studies that take a conscious discursive approach which implies that ontological security needs are known to the elites, in a way automatically imply that the elites are in a position to manipulate the public ontological insecurities. Since the elites are largely equipped with the ability to read the public's ontological security needs, the elite-public nexus is dominantly portrayed in terms of elites deliberate and intelligent orchestration of the public's sense of self. The best example is Subotić's study of the discursive manoeuvring through which states attempt to justify its foreign policy changes by creating "a cognitive bridge" between the elements of the ruptured autobiographical narratives (Subotić 2016). To illustrate this point, Subotić shows how the Serbian' political elites managed to preserve the sense of continuous national self-identity despite a historical turn made with the signing of the Brussels Agreement with Kosovo in 2013. While Serbia essentially gave up on important elements of its statehood in Kosovo, its leaders successfully fostered an illusion of the untouched Serbian national self among the public by selectively activating some and deactivating other segments of a multi-layered national identity narrative. Suggesting that national identity narratives represent "foundational cognitive frameworks that give meaning to political action" (Subotić 2016, 611) and set the "cultural cognitive boundaries which sanction or constrain activities of political actors" (Subotić 2016, 613), Subotić argues that elite manipulation rests upon cognitive manipulation of the storyline. Bringing the narratives down to cognition primarily (on a couple of occasions, these two words are put in the brackets next to the other which emphasizes their synonymous meaning), Subotić proposes that foreign policy narrative which cognitively fits "within the overall narrative schematic template" (Subotić 2016, 611) on the national identity narrative will make sense to the public and help it restore ontological security. Thus, even if some foreign policies do not stick by default, elites can manage to eventually make them cognitively appealing and 'sensible' from the point of biographical continuity.

Trying to unpack this public-elite conundrum, some scholars, however, take a more bottom-up approach, warning that "the societal need for ontological security, although not excluded, remains under-theorized" in the existing scholarship (Chernobrov 2016, 582). Drawing on the interviews with students in Russia and the United Kingdom, Chernobrov (2016) investigates how ontological security needs shaped the Russian and British public attitudes towards the Arab Spring, offering two important notions about why some foreign policy narratives proposed by the elites resonate with the public. The first one is related to the "illusion of recognition" motivated by ontological security needs, which makes people engage in political (re)imagining that does not care for the accuracy or 'reality' of the representation of unexpected or unfamiliar events, but can instead, allow the self to live 'in a world of phantasy' if that allows it to avoid anxiety, uncertainty, and discontinuity. The second and, perhaps, more interesting notion is that this illusion of continuity is not preserved just by cognitive (re)imagining of uncertainty, but also by emotional assessment that seeks to maintain not only any self-identity, but the best possible one. Ontological security is, according to Chernobrov, not only a conservative need, but also a narcissistic one, since both cognitive and emotional evaluation work to uphold the self-loving identity narratives that kill any self-doubt and elevate oneself above others. Pointing towards the (mis)recognitions of the Arab Spring in the narratives about "the 'normal' 'West' in British responses or the stable self temporarily pure of its inner problems in the eyes of Russian participants" (Chernobrov 2016, 13), he confirms how resonance of elites' narratives depends not only on cognitive, but also affective mechanisms that drive the need for biographical continuity. While he offers more bottom-up evidence by relying on the interviews with the society members, Chernobrov's remarks on the importance of self-endorsing affects and emotions, such as self-esteem or pride, well resonate with similar remarks in earlier (Lebow 2008, Steele 2008) and later studies.

More insights on the public's actorness in foreign policy can be found in several other studies that also deal with affective underpinnings of ontological security. Investigating collective emotional reactions in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Hall and Ross (2015) point towards different pathways in which collective affective experiences can spread across the society, fostering important political consequences and subjectivities. Spreading not only top-down, but also bottom-up and horizontally, collective affective experiences – be it negative or positive, low-level or highly intense – are capable of upending established social norms and opening new political windows. While some can act "as glue, binding alliances, institutions, and allegiances even as their original impetus fades," others can "impede trust and cement rivalries – even where interests would predict cooperation" (Hall and Ross 2015, 874). Nevertheless, while Hall and Ross do illuminate how collective affective experiences allow for the public's ontological subjectivity to emerge in a less orchestrated and more autonomous manner than the elite manipulation argument tends to assume, they do not deny the power of elites to direct the public's ontological security. Although not dealing with ontological security in particular, some of their previous work about collective affects and emotions provides valuable insights in how elites use different processes of deeply political and manipulative framing, projection, and propagation to aggregate unpredictable 'mass emotion' into the manageable 'communal emotion' that supports desired foreign and security policies. Here, unpredictable and unguided mass emotions are treated as "politically threatening deviancy or excess" that must be tamed into politically salient markers of difference, whether national, religious, class-based, gender, or racial. In other words, while anxiety and other affective circulations and moods spark agentic potential among the public, the elites will strive to channel it into more directional emotions stabilise the relationships with significant others, whether trust-worthy or hostile (Bilgic, Hoogensen Gjørv, and Wilcock 2019).

Following Hall's and Ross's interest in public moods that "as a form of affective experience, orient, direct, and motivate cognition and guide attention, perception, and behaviour" (Hall and Ross 2015, 856), Gellwitzki (2022) aims to show that anxiety outbursts do not have to impede subjectivity but can actually enable subjects to perform radical agency in foreign policy. Instead of pushing the self into the unpleasant dread, anxiety can release the space for radical affective reinvestments and novel interpretations of pre-existing self-identity narratives that will then allow, or even urge, foreign policy changes. By investigating the transformation of public anxieties into euphoria, Gellwitzki shows how public moods impacted the border opening and the encounters between locals and refugees in Germany, ultimately allowing the policymakers' 'open door' policy towards refugees to stick in Germany. Inspired by the power of affects to foster and shape agency in foreign policy, Gellwitzki further calls for a more robust engagement with affect research that will "explore what else 'the body can do' to establish feelings of ontological security-as-becoming", and for a better theorising of the role of different affective and emotional states because "after all, subjects are predominantly in moods other than anxiety and it is these other moods that OSS has yet to explore" (Gellwitzki 2022, 31-32). A stronger integration of the knowledge on how affects and specific emotions circulate and transform in the society, in his opinion, would allow us to better understand the processes through which the society's sense of self is stabilised or destabilised, as well as to trace the processes through which agency in foreign policy is (re)negotiated between the elites and the public.

In a similar vein, Solomon (2018) emphasizes the important role which affects play in the matters of subjectivity in ontological security. In his opinion, the ontological security literature has largely been focused on the identity and subjectivity of agents, be it individual or collective. Yet, in his reading of the Arab Spring, many of the key socio-political dynamics were arguably not agent-centred but rather trans-agential – as were the spread of protests across states, the contagion of affective orientations across individuals, and the transmission of embodied affective dispositions during the protests in public spaces across Tunisia, Egypt, and other states. Due to the centrality of affective investments and atmospheres in shaping the international relations, Solomon, therefore, wonders if analytical leverage could be gained by shifting the focus of ontological security away from

subjects towards the more fluid affective conditions and processes from which security-seeking subjects emerge on different sites, levels, and scales. Investigating the affective atmospheres and regimes that connect ontological needs and subjectivities on micro and macro levels, we could perhaps be able to better understand the mutually constraining relationship between the elites and public and realise how, by whom on what criteria the 'sensible' policies are decided. This call leans on Solomon's earlier efforts to explain the attractiveness of soft power, or the resonance of neoconservatism and the Global War on Terror in the United States, by focusing to the society's "affective investments" into the self-identities (2014). As Solomon says, the attraction of soft power, and therefore, the resonance of some foreign policy, "stems not only from its cultural influence or narrative construction, but more fundamentally from audiences' affective investments in the images of identity" (Solomon 2014, 720) that political institutions and policies produce. Warning that the current approaches largely focus on 'discursive form', building on Laclau, Lacan, and Mouffe, Solomon, suggests that scholars of identity should pay more attention to the affective force in which the foreign policy resonance is rooted (Solomon 2014).

While it can explain why some foreign policy stick, this emergent nature of ontological security, however, helps us also understand why and how the public seems to be able to time-to-time escape or, at least, hedge the elites' manipulation of self-identity narratives. Drawing on the complexity theory in natural and social science to illuminate the 'emergent' nature of ontological security, Ejdus and Rečević (2021) show how the meso-level networks and narratives arising from different horizontal, unilinear, vernacular, everyday interactions among the public can limit the top-down elite narratives. Their analysis of the public's response to the migration crisis in Serbia shows how the official two-fold narrative – about Serbia being a welcoming and only a transitory country on the migrants' route – was interpreted differently among various segments of the Serbian public, depending on their varying cognitive and affective rootedness into the national self-identity narrative. Positive and negative 'feedback loops' that allow the circulation of narratives and accompanying affects foster the creation of various ontological security communities on the levels that intersect – sometimes supporting, other times limiting – the official foreign policy narratives. Moreover, the anxiety sparked through rumours across different communities and cities eventually boiled enough to induce the change in the elites' narratives and, later on, country's policy towards the crises. While she looks more into the foreign policy outcomes than making, Kay (2012) also points to the public's resilience to anesthetising narratives coming from the elites, showing how public can have its own way of making sense of the changing international environment, independent or even contrary to the elite's one. Clinging to the former friend-enemy differences, deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the people, the Irish public continued struggling with anxiety brought by the end of the Irish border conflict, despite the changes in the changes in the elite's official narrative.

Based on the preceding discussion, it seems that untangling whose sense of self matters in foreign policy does not yield a straightforward or definitive answer. This is not only because OS scholars adopt different approaches to studying states' behaviour in international relations, but because ontological security appears to be an emergent phenomenon that resists rigid structure and fixed location. The cues provided in the OS literature on foreign policy, in essence, suggest that both the elites and public sense of self matter most of the time, as both remain susceptible to the interpretations of the self-identity coming from the other. While the central position which the elites' narratives have in the existing OS literature on foreign policy suggests that the elites' sense of self-identity is the one that matters the most, a more careful reading reveals that the elites, consciously or unconsciously, always seem to be attempting to either anticipate or meet the public's ontological security needs, as well. Some scholars go as far as to suggest that the elites' quest for states' ontological security comes down to their quest for foreign policy options and strategies that are or at least can be made cognitively and/or affectively appealing to the public. On the other hand, while the 'elite manipulation' argument remains the dominant outlook of the elite-public nexus in the OS literature on foreign policy, many studies show that the public's sense of self is never entirely dependent of the 'official' self-identity narrative proposed by the leaders. Pointing towards

autonomous, grass-root, non-linear, and non-orchestrated cognitive and affective processes behind the public's sense of self, OS scholars attribute the public with a significant agency in deciding what foreign policy protects or restores the self-identity in both regular and critical times. In other words, the existing scholarship suggests that elites' and the public's perceptions of foreign policy are also interdependent, either reinforcing or constraining each other, resulting in at least three possible outcomes regarding the public's acceptance or rejection of a foreign policy move proposed by policymakers.

The first one is the immediate congruence between the elite's and the public's conceptions of foreign policies that make sense from the point of preserving the national self-identity narrative, posited by OSS as another basic need which actors attempt to satisfy in international arena. As discussed above, this can happen because elite' 'sense' of self is so fused with the collective sense of self that what the leaders consciously or unconsciously find sensible is equal to what appeals to the public's ontological security needs and therefore, immediately sticks with them (i.e. as in Steel's approach). This can, however, also happen because the elites are consciously aware of the public's ontological (in)security and able to ingeniously design foreign policies that will resonate with the public's sense of self. Most of the existing studies imply this (i.e. Subotić 2016, Chernobrov 2016, Ejdus and Rečević 2021), arguing that policymakers rely on different cognitive and affective 'maps' underlying the national self-identity to manage and manipulate the public's needs for biographical continuity and thus turn some critical situations into ontologically tolerable or palatable to the public. In other words, even when some foreign policy might not be immediately sensible to the public's understanding of the world or event, it can become so if and when the elites find successful behavioural and discursive manoeuvres to make it look like a natural proceeding of the national biographical continuity. Finally, the literature suggests that some foreign policies proposed by elites can remain 'nonsensical' to the public and, as a result, fail to resonate within the national self-identity narrative because the public's sense of self has its own cognitive and affective sources, which make it resilient to the elites' manipulation of self-identity narratives. While OS studies on the foreign policy disconnect remain scarce and sporadic (i.e. Krahman 2018), this is likely not only due to their infrequency but also because of a prevailing analytical bias toward critical situations and the success stories of overcoming them. In other words, in addressing the puzzle of the uneven stickiness of foreign policy, the OSS literature suggests that the extent to which the public embraces a foreign policy proposed by policymakers depends on how well the elite's sense of self, or at least their narrative conception of foreign policy, aligns with the public's sense of self.

Summarising these mixed results, in Berenskoetter's words (2014, 279), policymakers sometimes manage to provide "a sensible link from 'before' to 'after'," and other times fail to do so. While the existing scholarship suggests that resonance of the elites' narratives rests in both cognitive and affective maps comprised in self-identity narratives, the mechanisms which lay beneath this accordance still remain "underdeveloped theoretically" (Mitzen and Larson 2017). To advance our understanding about why foreign policies proposed by the elites sometimes appear 'sensible' and therefore stick with the public and other times do not, it therefore seems important to continue unpacking not only whose sense of self matters, whether the publics or policymakers', but also what governs this 'sense'. Nonetheless, while the conventional definition of ontological security as 'the need for a stable sense of self' has sparked many attempts towards clarifying the meaning of the 'self', the concept of 'sense' has not yet received much attention and remains fluid across the literature. When it comes to what this sense refers to, some scholars argue that ontological security is mostly about identity, meaning that the sense of ontological security is preserved primarily by maintaining the stability of their identity narratives.[25] Others, however, imply that ontological security is perhaps less about identity and more about the stability in understanding the world. As Mitzen herself posits in her pioneering article, ontological security is all about humans' need to "make sense of their world" (Mitzen 2006a). In this wider sense, ontological security comes close to the meaning of 'epistemological security', that Adler defined as "the experience of orderliness and safety that results

[25]In the context of international relations and foreign policy, this often takes the form of national identity narratives.

from people's and institutions' shared understandings of their common-sense reality" (Adler 2021, 359). Therefore, in the context of OSS in IR, the term 'sense' generally refers to the mechanisms that govern the actors' feeling of confidence in who they are, what their place in the world is, and what their relationships with others are and should be. By performing these functions and keeping these fundamental questions 'off the table' in daily interactions, this sense – or these senses – underpin what is known as the 'basic trust system' (Mitzen 2006a).

Returning to the basics of 'basic trust' in Giddens' writings on ontological security to understand the 'sense' that sustains it, one encounters the concept of 'natural attitudes' (Giddens 1991). According to Giddens, these form the foundation for "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1991, 92). As frequently cited in the OSS literature in IR, he concludes that "to be ontologically secure is to possess, on the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, 'answers' to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses" (Giddens 1991, 47). Giddens emphasizes that natural attitudes operate at a pre-reflective level and are often tacit, unarticulated, and unquestioned in day-to-day activities, functioning as the cognitive and affective background assumptions and shared understandings that guide people's behaviour. Acquired through lived experiences and social interactions within a specific cultural and social context, these natural attitudes encompass implicit understandings, routines, and skills that, thus, allow individuals to set aside identity needs, at the level of 'practical' consciousness, and focus on the 'task at hand', at the level of 'discursive' consciousness (discussed in Mitzen 2006a). By providing fundamental truths about the natural and social environment that individuals can 'take for granted' and rely on by default, natural attitudes, according to Giddens, serve as essential mechanisms through which individuals and collectives make sense of the world – allowing them to navigate it without constant reflection or relearning of what the world is like and who they are within it.

Defining 'natural attitudes' as "a shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality" (Giddens 1991, 36), which allows individuals to sustain fundamental trust in the stability of both the self and the world without having to reconstruct it from scratch, Giddens comes strikingly close to the concept of 'common sense' – a long-standing notion in philosophy, social theory, and even political thought (see: Rosenfeld 2011). So close, in fact, that it is somewhat surprising he opted for the lesser-known philosophical term 'natural attitudes,' which has never gained significant traction in sociology, either then or since. As will be discussed in the following section, common sense is often understood as a baseline of practical knowledge that individuals rely on in everyday situations, enabling them to navigate challenges and make reasonable choices without needing specialized expertise, formal education, or complicated calculations (Schutz 1962). More than just an individual cognitive capacity, as initially thought, common sense is a socially embedded phenomenon, deeply rooted in the political and cultural subconscious, shaped by shared experiences, social norms, and cultural conventions that allow the world to appear stable, familiar, and predictable. Experienced as a blend of logic, intuition, and practice, it ensures that most events are processed as natural rather than disruptive, thus preventing individuals from descending into existential uncertainty when confronted with sudden disruptions. Helping them almost immediately assess which identity or behavioural changes are sensible, common sense reinforces the self-evident nature of personal judgments and decisions, making certain responses to world events appear natural and unquestionable. Applied to the field of politics, common sense shapes how policymakers and the public immediately perceive policy choices. Consequently, when unexpected disruptions challenge the stability of the self and its surroundings, policymakers' ability to introduce new policies – whether through discourse or action – seem to depend on their capacity to reconfigure the public's basic trust into the environment, making it once again appear 'commonsensical.'

The relationship between common sense and basic trust in OSS, thus, reflects a dynamic interplay between cognitive-affective structures and existential stability that together form the basis for how individuals and societies sustain a coherent sense of self and a predictable social reality. Basic trust, as per Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, refers to the fundamental belief that the world is

predictable and that others are generally reliable. Originating in early childhood and is shaped through stable social relationships, it provides individuals with the deep-seated belief that the world is predictable, reliable, and orderly. Without this foundational sense of trust, as Giddens notes, individuals would experience persistent existential anxiety, making it difficult to form stable identities or engage confidently with the social world. In this sense, it appears as basic trust enables common sense to function – if individuals lacked trust in the continuity of social life, the implicit knowledge, norms, and expectations that constitute common sense would not be perceived as reliable or self-evident. For example, the assumption that traffic lights function as expected, or that one's local grocery store will be stocked with goods, is underpinned by an underlying fundamental belief in the stability of social systems. Nevertheless, while basic trust enables common sense, common sense, in turn, reinforces basic trust by providing individuals with a predictable framework for interpreting the world. Through habitual social interactions and routines, people develop and sustain common, shared understandings of how the world operates. These understandings, often unquestioned, serve as stabilising forces that affirm an individual's sense of self, environment, and, hence, ontological security. For instance, the belief that governments, financial institutions, and healthcare systems will function as expected is a product of common sense. When these systems operate smoothly and predictably, they validate and strengthen basic trust in social order. In this way, common sense acts as a buffer against existential anxiety by practically reinforcing the perception of a stable and comprehensible world – it, hence, acts as a sense that underpins basic trust.

Their reinforcing nature, however, can also work in the opposite direction, as both common sense and basic trust can be disrupted. When common sense assumptions are challenged, when the world stops 'making sense', such as during unexpected war or peace announcements, economic crises, or pandemics, people may begin to question the fundamental reliability of the world around them. This questioning, in turn, can undermine basic trust, generating feelings of uncertainty and existential anxiety. For example, during financial collapses, individuals who previously took economic stability for granted may suddenly find themselves questioning the legitimacy of financial institutions and the broader system that governs their lives. Political actors and movements often even exploit such disruptions to reshape 'common sense' narratives and target basic trust. Populist leaders, for instance, frequently challenge established knowledge structures by asserting that 'the system is rigged' or that 'elites are lying,' urging the public to rely on their own common sense instead. By doing so, they aim to erode common sense understandings of governance, democracy, and expertise, leading people to distrust traditional institutions. Therefore, when common sense frameworks break down, basic trust in societal structures weakens, leaving individuals vulnerable to alternative narratives. While these alternative narratives may temporarily alleviate rising individual and collective anxieties, they do not necessarily restore ontological security; instead, they may deepen existential insecurity. Moreover, the literature discussed earlier provides abundant examples of how global events, political upheavals, ideological shifts, or information manipulation systematically erode both common sense and basic trust, ultimately leading to deep-seated ontological crises. Hence, if basic trust serves as the deep emotional foundation of ontological security, and common sense operates as the cognitive-affective structure that maintains predictability, then disruptions to common sense – however mild – can even be seen as 'early warning systems' of ontological insecurity.

By examining this interplay, OSS can better account for how individuals and societies respond to crises and why some political actors succeed in mobilising the public's need for a stable sense of self in support of their foreign policy actions. Though not the most sophisticated cognitive-affective tool – or perhaps precisely because of its simplicity – common sense appears to fulfil many of the foundational functions that sustain a continuous and stable sense of self in the world, a key assumption in ontological security studies. Analysing the power, nature, and mechanisms of common sense, thus, provides deeper insights into what is considered 'sensible' within the ontological security framework of foreign policy. Furthermore, this exploration helps explain why certain foreign policies are immediately effective in alleviating societal anxieties, while others struggle to gain traction or

become more deeply entrenched over time – revealing their varying degrees of stickiness among the public. To that end, by integrating insights from philosophy, psychology, sociology, political theory, and history, particularly regarding the genesis, mechanisms, epistemic value, and socio-political effects of common sense, the following section outlines why common sense can be viewed as a fundamental ontological security device: the 'sense' behind a stable sense of self.

3.2. Common Sense as an Ultimate Ontological Security Device

While concepts often appear in a mind of a gifted individual, they take form and acquire authority not just in texts but also in social life, and there are not many terms in the history of philosophy and social science has demonstrated such a remarkable 'staying power' as 'common sense' has.[26] The prevailing meaning of 'common sense' today is rather far from its original formulation, offered by Aristotle as early as in the 4th century B.C. in his third book of *De Anima* (Of the Soul). According to him, in addition to five basic senses, every human is endowed with a kind of a central or 'common' sense *(koinè aisthèsis)* in which the basic five meet and intersect. Instantly comparing, coordinating, and systematising the "perceptible" or "sensible" received through vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, 'common sense' enables individuals to make basic judgments about sense objects without employing the reflective reasoning. While common sense is common to all animals, only humans can go beyond it and, instead of identifying only 'the shared forms' of things through common sense, they can also identify 'the true forms' of things through reason. Aristotle, thus, saw that it is "in common sense that consciousness originates, for it first makes us aware of having sensations at all" (Brann 1993, 42), preparing us for higher-order functions of imagination and intellect.

Such a mechanistic understanding largely persisted in psychology, medicine and aesthetics in Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, French and English texts from the medieval and early modern periods (Rosenfeld 2011, 19-21). Like Aristotle, who occasionally named it as 'the first of the senses' (*prôton aisthētikón),* philosophers continued viewing common sense as a chief of internal senses and as the "fundamental link between sensations, on the one hand, and reason and cognition, on the other" (Rosenfeld 2011, 19). Drawing from a metaphor found in Plato's Timaeus, later philosophers, such as Al-Farabi, Themistius, and Galen expanded upon this idea and referred to it as 'the ruler or ruling sense,' and Augustine and certain Arab writers also referred to it as the 'inner sense'. In the Middle Ages, this concept was further developed, identifying multiple 'inner senses', plural (Gregorić 2007).[27] Following suit, medical doctors and anatomists kept trying to locate this sense in the body as precisely as possible, eventually moving it from heart, where Aristotle envisioned it, to the brain. In other words, despite minor modifications, most commentators on common sense during the Middle Ages held that common sense was a primarily a physiological cognitive faculty, locatable in the body and essential to the most fundamental of human tasks: the ability to recognize the nature of objects, people, and situations and make a basic comparison between them without actively using the intellect (Gregorić 2007). Nonetheless, with the gradual demise of the ancient conception of human psychology in the early Modern Ages, this 'ancient' meaning of common sense also started to wane.

A deciding move away from the Aristotelian notion of common sense is often attributed to Rene Descartes, whose *le bon sense* (good sense) did not signify a specific faculty rooted in cognition, but rather "the rudimentary ability to form clear perceptions, make elementary judgments, and engage in simple reasoning about everyday practical matters without falling into bald-faced contradictions and inconsistencies" (Rosenfeld 2011, 22). Such watered-down Aristotelian notion of common sense

[26]Common sense continues to be explored in different braches of philosohy, from classical to philosophy of knowledge. See: Moore 1925; Popper 1973; Kekes 1979; Kingwell 1995; Rescher 2005; Ledwig 2007.

[27]According to Gregorić (2007), under the influence of prominent Persian philosophers such as Al-Farabi and Avicenna, Thomas Aquinas and John of Jandun identified four internal senses: common sense, imagination, *vis cogitativa*, and memory. In contrast, Avicenna, followed by scholars like Robert Grosseteste, Albert the Great, and Roger Bacon, proposed five internal senses: common sense, imagination, fantasy, *vis aestimativa*, and memory.

in a way merged with the Roman conception of *sensus communis* that endured from Stoics, through the writings of Cicero, Horace and Quintilian and was revitalised with the revived interest in these sources at early Modern Ages. The Roman interpretation of common sense did not resemble the Aristotelian 'animal judgment' but inclined more towards a pre-rational sensibility that comes close to *humanitas*, a Roman concept for an ethical framework that every citizen could recognize as fair and right (Bugter 1987; van Holthoon and Olson 1987). In other words, having common sense or good sense meant relying on general beliefs about the world that could be understood without the need for in-depth analysis and sophisticated justifications because they resonate so well with the fundamental cognitive and the affective experiences of the entire social body.

Following Cicero, many other prominent philosophers of the early Modern time, including John Lock, David Hume and George Berkeley, started accepting this less mechanistic, less anatomic, and less rigorous notion of common sense (Rosenfeld 2011, 60). Medical professionals and anatomists themselves, albeit gradually, also abandoned their search for a particular corporeal site of common sense. Many historical, social, political, and religious circumstances in Europe of that time – including the Protestantism's emphasis on the moral superiority of everyday, profane concerns and its reluctance to identify any privileged locus of the sacred – significantly fostered this new valuation of common sense. 'Divorced' from anatomy and psychology, the meaning of common sense thus began to broaden in the 17th century, evolving into the modern understanding we today hold. In this essentially social and intersubjective connotation, in which it signifies some 'everyday knowledge of everyday people', common sense reached the social and political sphere, meriting the attention of philosophers, sociologists, social and political theorists.

Defining something so omnipresent, yet so elusive, so universal, and yet so particular, so basic, and still cryptic, somehow still eludes ambitious scientific endeavours of different ontology and epistemology for centuries, which is why "common sense remains more an assumed phenomenon than an analysed one" (Geertz 1992). Conceptions of 'common sense' in today's studies about its role in knowledge, society, or politics are far from rigorous and definite, but often revolve around its 'common-sense understanding' as the knowledge characterised by the quality of being 'self-evident', taken-for-granted', 'fundamental', 'unquestionable'. Both in academia an 'real world', the term is used to describe those universal and elemental judgments that are "maximally plausible without any further evidence or even discussion being required" (Rosenfeld 2011, 4). The epistemic authority attributed to common sense rests upon the conviction that some 'truths' are so evident that everybody else shares them, that no reasonable man could or should doubt, deny, and go against them. As Rosenfeld sums it up, common sense assumes "that certain basic, largely unquestioned notions were common (in the sense of shared or jointly held) to common (in the sense of ordinary) people simply because of their common (again, shared) natures and, especially, experiences" (Rosenfeld 2011, 24). Relying on ready-made, truth-value propositions and conventional wisdoms, people navigate through everyday life, effortlessly avoiding many deadlocks. They make immediate judgments about what is 'sensical' and 'nonsensical' in all spheres of life, all the time. These propositions, that allow immediate judgments about what is 'sensical' and 'nonsensical' in all spheres of life, all the time, however, often pass unsaid, unnoticed, and remain invisible to the naked eye. Like many of the great forces of history, it is this invisibility that makes them such a powerful social and political phenomenon. Moreover, this is what makes common sense a par excellence ontological security device.

Like ontological security, common sense "generally only comes out of the shadows and draws attention to itself at moments of perceived crisis or collapsing consensus" (Rosenfeld 2011, 24). Only rarely, if ever, one thinks and talks about 'common sense' when the surrounding appears natural and sensible but usually feels the need to do so only when it already stopped making sense and when overcoming the flooding anxiety becomes a top priority of all of people's senses. When sudden or unfamiliar events interrupt the 'autopilot' mode of living, people consciously and sub-consciously start appealing to different self-help mechanisms for re-making the sense of the word, and common sense is among the first and last ones they resort to. Appealing to common sense, people search for

some fundamental, undeniable truths that will help them inscribe an order into the sudden and random developments in their environment. Outlining the principles that no one can doubt, common-sense manifest like an intuition of the collective body a person is embedded in, which at the first glance discovers the truth or absurdity of events causing the anxiety. Unspoken and unwritten in regular times, these interpretative schemes become summoned, named, and visible in times of troubles because they help people preserve the minimal level of confidence in the stability and continuity of the Self and the environment. In the critical situations in which other, more advanced ontological security devices also get interrupted or fundamentally shaken by unexpected events, people naturally turn to what 'no one can take away' from them – and that is common sense. Wordlessly leading from behind, common sense, thus, seems to serve like a base layer of the ontological security 'protective cocoon' – the first one to be built and the last one to get destroyed. To explain why common sense acts as such a fundamental ontological security mechanism in a society, it is perhaps best to look at the qualities implied by the very terms that its name is composed of.

While not a 'sense' in physical sense, but a set of taken-for granted ideas about the world, common sense stands out as an ontological security device exactly because its ability to act as a 'sense' – to provide immediate and confident guidance, almost as automatic and straightforward as that provided by the basic five senses. The same way people trust their eyes and other senses, they trust their common sense. Different to reasoning, which requires complex, back-and-forth process based on the weighting of the arguments for the sake of making rarely definite judgments about the world and the self, common sense is in charge of delivering ready-made and straightforward judgments without an intelligent step-by-step procedure – or, at least, without a noticeable trace of it. These given, self-evident, universal truisms, "even if arrived at without prior formal training and unprovable to the standards of science, offer an unusually high level of certainty or truth-value" and appear "maximally plausible without any further evidence or even discussion being required" (Rosenfeld 2011, 4).

Similar to intuitions and instincts,[28] common sense seems to operate in what Kahneman calls the 'System 1' – an automatic, effortless, gut-reaction mode of decision making. Different to a 'System 2', which assumes slower, conscious reasoning, the fast System 1 enables people to live most of their days on 'auto-pilot', responding to external stimulus in a near-instantaneous way with no sense of voluntary control (Kahneman 2011). This immediateness of common sense, thus, stands against dangerous levels of everyday relativism and scepticism that can make it seem like there were no grounds for accepting one thing as correct rather than another. Common sense, thus, prevents the collapse of people' cognitive and affective conception of the world or the Self in that world, providing them with a basic sense of constancy in the situations of both information scarcity and heady information overload. One who would refuse to rely on 'common sense' in a daily life, would be condemned either to a full-time quest for the 'true form' of everything surrounding him – with a good likelihood that, in most circumstances, the conclusions reached would still be consistent with 'common-sense' ones – or to a life of crippling anxiety and isolation. Paraphrasing the father of 'common sense philosophy', Thomas Raid (1764), Barbara Rosenfield well captures this power of common sense to guide people in a specific 'you-know-it-when-you-see-it" style:

> *They [the tenets of common sense] actually thwart and exceed all efforts at demonstration, which means there is no point in arguing about them even when we are conscious of holding them (which is not all the time). Nevertheless, we know them to be true on several grounds. They feel obvious or self-evident to us. They also cannot be denied; to do so would be not only to propagate a falsehood but also to lead others to conclude we are engaged in "lunacy" and belong in a "mad-house." And even when we try on an individual basis to doubt them, we quickly find we have no choice but to accept them just like everyone else in order to go about leading our lives.* (Rosenfeld 2011, 72)

[28] There is a growing literature on the differences. For instance: Boyd and Heney 2017; Cacioppo 2015.

What, however, needs to be immediately made clear is that this instantaneousness and undeniability of common sense does not stem only, or even primarily, from its accuracy but from the deep embeddedness and internalisation of the principles it comprises. The ordinary language itself does not often make a sharp difference between a 'sensible,' 'reasonable' and 'rational', allowing for actions that are not necessarily or purely oriented in a 'means-to-an-end' manner to be sensible. Schutz, for instance, emphasises that "a strong emotional reaction against an offender might be sensible and refraining from it foolish" (1962, 27). This does not, however, mean that common sense is unavoidably 'inaccurate' either. Moreover, for an idea to get so deeply ingrained to become a 'no-brainer', it usually takes abundant, not necessarily personal, experience of success – or an exposure to the narrative about it. While System I is often misunderstood as reckless or purely emotional (with emotions being unfairly seen as the antithesis of reason), the 'fast' mode of decision-making can also appear in the form of expert's 'gut instinct' or 'intuition' that was nurtured over years of learning and practice. As Kahneman himself illustrates, a skilled fireman can often only reconstruct why he felt that something was wrong and why it made sense to abandon a house right away even if there were still no visible indicators of a fire at the time. In other words, while the judgments based on 'common sense' do come quickly and without reflection, the actual process of or arriving at them is usually far, far slower – sometimes as old as the mankind itself (Kahneman 2011, 13).

This special blend of accuracy and persistency gives common sense notion special validity and impartiality, distinguishing it from prejudice, superstitions, and other forms of popular credulities which people rely on in everyday matter. While some commentators, as Albert Einstein, argued that common sense was "nothing more than a deposit of prejudice laid down in the mind prior to the age of eighteen" (Oxford Reference n.d.), the aura of prudence (that is, again, not necessarily based on utilitarian calculation) around common sense is what attributes it "with the potential to go head to head with considerably more established forms of authority, including history, law, custom, faith, logic, and reason, especially when it came to matters of social or moral life" (Rosenfeld 2011, 4). While common sense could be seen as a 'meta-epiphenomenon' of all the knowledge, norms, beliefs, or value systems that an individual or group has ever come into touch with, it somehow causes all other systems to appear as its epiphenomena, dependant on whether they eventually 'make sense' to common sense. Therefore, shielding people from an irrational level of scepticism, on one side, but still providing them with a confident sense of prudence and accuracy in judgments, on the other, common sense carries significant workload behind the 'sense' that sustains cognitive and affective control over the daily environment.

The true epistemic value of common sense has, however, remained subject of fierce intellectual debates on the role of common sense in the production of knowledge. Referring to different criteria for qualifying something as knowledge – from empirical grounding and falsifiability to clarity and consistency – philosophers, psychologists and sociologists are divided on whether these unquestioned common-sense notions should be left unquestioned and, therefore, taken as the data in scientific knowledge, or they must not only be questioned, but ultimately destroyed (see Watts 2014). The first group consists of different sorts of 'optimists' – from those who believe that people simply have no alternative but to take these propositions as data, to those who suggest that such propositions are, for various psychological reasons, 'irresistible,' and that we cannot give up our belief in them (Lemos 2004). This group also includes those who truly believe in the epistemic value of common sense, seeing it as "a perfectly sufficient cognitive resource for regulating our daily political and social life, preventing us from overlooking evident practical problems and escaping the fancy talk found in scientific or philosophical knowledge that 'muddies the clear waters'" (Holthoon and Olson 1987, cited in Prodanović 2022, 212). Whether they refer to its practical utility, its evolutionary value, cultural universality, efficiency and accessibility, resilience and adaptability, optimists see it as an extremely valuable guide to navigating the complexities of everyday life that should not be underappreciated, let alone demonised. ser

On the opposite side stand pessimists, who find common sense knowledge so shallow, contradictory, incoherent, culturally biased, and populistic that any reliance on it is dangerous. In one

of his rather pessimistic tirades on the social and political effects of common sense, Kant marked common sense as "one of the subtle discoveries of modern times, by means of which the most superficial ranter can safely enter the lists with the most thorough thinker and hold his own" (Kant 1783, 7). In the face of unexpected or unfamiliar developments, common sense, thus, enables people to maintain and regain a basic level of continuity of the world and the Self by arming them with 'quasi-theories' whose abstraction is not despised because it is purported to result from the direct cognitive and affective experience of common people, them included. Highlighting common sense's limitations and shortcomings as a source of reliable knowledge, like subjectivity and bias, inconsistency and contradiction, resistance to change, vulnerability to manipulation, limited scope and depth, pessimists argue that relying on common sense is at best suboptimal, and at worst hazardous (Bachelard 1985; 2006; Bhaskar 2010; 2014; 2016). The ultimate mission of science should, therefore, be, to completely deconstruct common sense and replace it with scientific knowledge eventually.

Finally, 'pragmatists' believe that common sense should serve as both the beginning point and the final aim of scientific knowledge, regarding the relationship between common sense and science more as a partnership than as an antagonistic one (Dewey 1948; Schutz 1953; 1962; 1962a; Hookway 2006). The middle-ground view on the epistemic value of common sense within pragmatism recognizes its usefulness as a practical guide in many situations and appreciates its ability to provide quick judgments and navigate social interactions when searching for formal logic or theoretical frameworks would actually be inefficient and counterproductive. It, however, also acknowledges the need for critical reflection and openness to revising one's beliefs in light of new evidence or insights, calling for vigilance and responsibility primarily of the intellectual elites. "No matter how technical the vocabulary of science might get, for it to make a difference in the society it still must remain relevant and transferrable to practical problems that are selected and defined using commonsense vocabularies", Prodanović (2022, 2013) recalls this 'middle-ground', wholistic view. Nevertheless, either thrilled, upset or sceptical about the 'accuracy' of common sense, only by being interested in this question, all authors admit people's heavy addition to the 'oracle' of common sense in resolving all kinds of issues they encounter, thus acknowledging its powerful social role.

While the epistemic value of common sense is obviously not the only source of its epistemic authority, what stands behind such tone and temper of truthfulness is the impression that everybody else shares it. Not only accessible to everyone, but also open to everyone's verdicts and inputs, common sense is probably the most egalitarian type of 'knowledge' there is. In contrast to the abstract knowledge of philosophers, experts, intellectuals, politicians and other 'peddlers of dangerous nonsense', the reliability of common sense arises from its alleged freedom from ideology, partisanship, metaphysics, insincerity, verbiage, and other distortions of reality that are uncommon to common people. The 'epistemological egalitarianism', based on the premise that everyone has the capacity to notice the obvious because of their first-hand experience with profane everyday life, provides people with important self-confidence in going about their lives (Rorty 1996). Not only that people live convinced that they have the minimum of what it takes to 'make sense' of whatever the reality brings, but also to recognize and stand against all 'false authorities' that advocate all kinds of 'absurd' orders and policies for their own particularistic sake. In the face of unexpected or unfamiliar developments, common sense, thus, enables people to maintain and regain a basic level of continuity of the world and the Self by arming them with 'quasi-theories' whose abstraction is not despised because it is purported to result from the direct cognitive and affective experience of common people, them included. The same way we only rarely stop to ask the 'have-you-seen-what-I-have-seen' questions but live our lives with an assumption that the reality in front of us appears the same to others around us, common sense also produces this feeling that some basic 'common ground' is always shared with everybody else in the surrounding.

The power of this ontological security device, therefore, largely stems from the sense of its 'commonness', in all the meanings of this word. In the original Aristotelian conception of common sense, in which it signified a body faculty, this 'commonness' had an explicitly universalistic

meaning. Nevertheless, even in the contemporary understanding, that signifies not only the "universal and mutually shared cognitive and/or emotional capabilities of our mind that enable us to follow a common interpretive scheme" (Prodanović 2022, 213) but more the interpretative scheme itself, common sense still carries 'universalizing pretensions' (Rosenfeld 2011, 10). Woven of the self-evident, plain, and undeniable truths that everybody sees, common sense appears much like it enjoys the acceptance of the "generality of mankind", like the collective unconsciousness that reflects the "consent of ages and nations, of the learned and unlearned" (Rosenfeld 2011, 81), the "portion of inherited wisdom which all men have in common in any great civilization" (Arendt 1954, 317). Convinced that there exists at least a low-level kind of consensus about the obviously 'true' and 'false' that is common to everybody else in the surrounding – to the mankind as such – is what keeps people confident that the world of tomorrow and the self of tomorrow will stay the same, thus not only serving as a foundation of sure knowledge in every domain of life, but also shoring up their basic sense of belonging to the world. "A thing is only right when a man feels it to be at all times and (. . .) finds the feelings of the rest of mankind correspond", as David Skene illustrated the value of common sense by paraphrasing the old argument of the Universal Truth (*consensus gentium*) (as quoted in Rosenfeld 2011, 81). Nevertheless, even in their most universalistic form, common sense notions, however, remain inherently intersubjective in nature – shaped by others, shared with others, inherited from others. While major cognitive science and developmental psychology studies of 'folk psychology' (a concept that is in psychological studies often treated as synonymous with 'common sense'), such as the theory-theory and the simulation theory, give opposing views on how this intersubjectivity is attained in the first place,[29] they all still agree that common sense is an intrinsically intersubjective and relational phenomenon.

The idea that common sense is intrinsically intersubjective is deeply rooted in modern sociological theory of common sense which is more interested in finding out how and what social factors foster or hamper the reproduction of its intersubjectivity than in how people initially attain it. In *Common-Sense and Scientific Explanation of Human Action,* Schutz (1953) argues that we cannot reduce common sense simply to the issues of ascribing beliefs and desires to others, since the course of social life in our everyday interactions assumes an already established community with already given intersubjective norms of interpretation of these interactions. As Schutz further clarifies, common sense is "intersubjective because we live in it as men among other men, bound to them through common influence and work, understanding others and being understood by them", and it is 'a world of culture' because, "from the outset, the world of everyday life is a universe of significance to us, that is, a texture of meaning which we have to interpret in order to find our bearings within it and come to terms with it"" (Schutz 1953, 7). Because it ultimately always refers to the external world of social interaction we are born into and obliged by, common sense is, thus, to a great degree socially determined.

This accent on the social determination of common sense is predominant among the sociologists who try to provide a theoretical understanding of this 'hybrid' type of knowledge. Taylor, for instance, defines common sense rather broadly as "the knowledge possessed by those who live in the midst and are a part of the social situations and processes which sociologists seek to understand" (Taylor 1947, 1). Similarly, Manis speaks of native common-sense sociology as "interpretations of social phenomena by participants in social relationships" (Manis 1972, 12). Recalling that only a very small proportion of our knowledge of the world derives from our personal experience, Schutz (1953, 10) hints at the origins of this 'sense' and long-term processes of its refinement:

> The greater part is socially derived, handed down to me by my friends, my parents, my teachers and the teachers of my teachers. I am not only taught how to define the environment … but also how typical constructs have to be formed in accordance with the system of relevances accepted

[29] According to proponents of the first school of thought (e.g., Bloom 2005), humans naturally form hypotheses about their environment and others' mental states, refining these hypotheses through social interactions. In contrast, simulation theory posits that during social interactions, individuals mentally simulate the relevant beliefs and desires of others to reach mutual understanding and determine the most appropriate course of action. See: Prodanović 2022.

> from the anonymous unified point of view of the in-group. This includes ways of life, how to come to terms with the environment, efficient recipes for the use of typical means for bringing about typical ends in typical situations.

Thus, through social interaction in our everyday lives and various mechanisms of idea diffusion, which mostly occur through language, people acquire multiple layers of 'typification and generalization' that correspond to various relevance systems currently prevailing within their (linguistic) in-group. The pre-scientific vernacular, manifested in and shared through the everyday language, serves like "a treasure house of ready-made pre-constituted types and characteristics, all socially derived and carrying along an open horizon of unexplored content" (Schutz 1953, 37). Through everyday communication with the members of the immediate social settings, from family via peers to professional and religious fellows, people get rooted in different 'communities of common sense' on different levels and of different scales, that equip them with "efficient recipes for the use of typical means for bringing about typical ends in typical situations" (Schutz 1953, 10) Relying on idealisations of social interaction – particularly the idealisation of the interchangeability of standpoints and the congruency of systems of relevance – people continuously assume that, despite individual differences in interpretation, their understanding of a conversation aligns sufficiently to allow them to discuss the same thing.

This reciprocity of perspectives, which represents the basic rule of "quasi-rational conditions of everyday communication",[30] leads people to accept, reproduce and, eventually, solidify the notions that allow these mutual understandings to coincide 'far enough', turning them into "a solid, emotionally persuasive core against which we test both what happens to us, and how others explain the world to us" (Crehan 2016, 47; 2011). Because common sense is essentially intersubjective, shaped by the social sediments in which our social networks are entrenched, and disseminated through those very social networks, it inevitably has a narrower social base than what its universalistic name suggests. "In a sense, we all have our own particular stock of common sense. Much of this will be shared by others in our immediate environment, diverging as those others become more distant", as Crehan (Crehan 2016, 47) recalls. This immanent tension between its context-dependency and universalistic aspirations, between particular and general, practical and abstract, statis and flux, further points to two important features of common sense that make it such a powerful ontological security device.

First, common sense, even in the mind of an individual, is never perfectly coherent and cohesive, because the interactions between different horizontal and vertical communities of common sense and their interpretation schemes never stop. The complexity of experience and shifting systems of relevance that people daily experience makes common sense "a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsistent, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is" (Gramsci 1971, 419). Mixing and blending truisms that people acquire while daily playing different roles on different scenes – with often opposing methods of truth-seeking – common sense becomes like a derivate of various systems of learnt and unlearnt knowledge, "a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions" (Gramsci 1971, 422), "a heterogeneous bundle of taken-for-granted understandings of how the world is" (Crehen 2011, 286.) Like a landscape "shaped both by deep structural forces and more contingent history" (Crehen 2016 57), common sense serves as the 'middle ground' between the particular, concrete ad hoc situations people come across and grand social structures which they perceive as their own. This further means that common sense should never be viewed as a perfectly executed minimal denominator of all 'truth systems' people or societies have been exposed to and embedded in, but more as a reservoir in which one can find that one likes in order to keep different taken-for-granted cultural worlds of quotidian life together. One cannot empirically uncover and conceptually formulate common sense "by sketching out some logical structure it always takes, for there is none", neither

[30] See: Koch 2020.

can "do so by summing up the substantive conclusions it always draws, for there are, too, none of those" (Geertz 1992, 240).

The magical ability of common sense to give the world and the Self the appearance of stability and naturalness, as well as to automatically guide one in right and wrong, does not come from it being a system of perfectly structured, coherent, and homogenous knowledge (or a perfect intersection of various systems of knowledge), but rather from its ability to ground the converging and diverging conceptions of the world in at least one 'truth' that will make them stick together. Common sense, thus, remains far less consistent than the various systems of knowledge from which it emerged, such as science and religion. However, its ability to inscribe resemblance and consistency between them all is what gives common sense its ahistorical tone and holistic nature, from which ontological security benefits so greatly.[31] Crehan (2016, 47) nicely captures this homogenising heterogeneousness of common sense:

> At any historical moment, even within the same place, there will be multiple narratives, some closely connected and overlapping, some conflicting and contradictory, but all of which are, to some rational beings, self-evident truths. One way to think about this tangle of narratives, which seem in certain ways to resemble each other and yet may not share any single characteristic, is as sharing what Wittgenstein termed "family resemblances." When we look at the multitude of apparently self-evident truths defined as common sense, it is hard to identify any one constant feature. We see rather "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" that, as with "the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc, etc. overlap and criss-cross" (Wittgenstein 1968, 32). Similarly, while there is no one characteristic that all instances of common sense share, they seem, nonetheless, related. And it is these seemingly obvious similarities that help persuade us that there is indeed a single entity, common sense.

The second, related point is that common sense is never static either. While the background social sediments make common sense highly stable, they at the same time make it inevitably susceptible to changes – the same as the body of prevalent values, norms, customs, or institutions is never fixed, definite, or of the same density even within one society at the given time, neither can common sense be. The inevitable incoherence between the layers of common sense that stems from its intersubjective nature asks for constant wiring and rewiring of its notions and keeps common sense in a constant flux. Before they became 'common sense', all the principles once had to be new, but like "the material debris that gradually accumulates in any area of human habitation, new ideas are continually drifting down to join the existing agglomerate of common sense" (Crehan 2016., 57) Common sense, thus keeps continually changing in piecemeal ways, adding new bits, and ejecting parts that lost their plausibility for different reasons that previously made its cognitive and affective interpretative scheme so sticky.

The change can happen bottom-up, when common sense judgments stop providing intelligibility to everyday situations of ordinary people, and the non-sense of some common sense becomes so self-evident that itself becomes common sense. Commentators from Cicero to Gramsci pointed to this ability of common sense to pave the wave of its transformation, claiming that common sense always carries 'the healthy nucleus' – "the part of it which can be called 'good sense' (*bon sense*) and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent" (Gramsci 1971, 328). Contrary to these bottom-up changes – but more often in parallel to them – common sense is also being changed top-down, through different centripetal currencies coming from all kinds of elites striving to plant or water the seed of that good sense among the public and navigate in a direction they find more

[31] In other words, quasi-theory refers to common-sense insights embedded in tradition and culture, making them inherently historical. However, for actors who habitually act based on such quasi-theories, these cultural resources are not seen as products of complex, uncertain historical development shaped by conflict and struggle. Instead, they are perceived as "self-evidently" valid and eternal. This tendency to essentialize and ossify culture is what makes common-sense quasi-theories metaphysical.

sensible.[32] While changes are by rule slow and gradual, extraordinarily they can happen rapidly and radically, especially in the moments of fundamental crises that contest every possible sense. Either way, due to the contingency of everyday practice and language, this constant wiring or rewiring of concrete situations into intersubjective schemes occurs mostly through framing of different type and scale, through linguistic experimentations or "shuffling through vocabularies" (Scheff 2005, 382).[33] Thus, "common wisdom, born of experience and custom, neither irrefutable nor permanent but evolving right along with the popular language that expresses it" (Rosenfeld 2011, 251), common sense can never be fully and truly universal, unitary, and static.

This unique flux between individual and collective, local, and global, particular, and universal, cognitive and affective, is what makes common sense such a fundamental ontological security device and a base for more advanced, complex and particularistic ontological 'senses' to emerge. Gathering a society around plainly stated truths that are allegedly obvious to everybody, "common sense promised to provide a minimal form of authority on which a common identity could be founded" (Rosenfeld 2008, 11). In a way, whenever people underscore that something 'makes sense to *them"*, they imply the awareness that there are some other *them*, who do not share the same sense and, consequentially, identities (at least, not all or the salient ones in the given moment). Equipped with ready-made typologies and generalisations of the material and social world, people are able to perceive identity narratives as naturally occurring from the outset, which allows them to intuitively sense which narratives feel natural and which seem immediately absurd, without the need for further reflection.

Moreover, the cognitive-affective interpretative scheme offered by common sense allows people to hold and shuffle between multiple, sometimes diverging identities, as well as to feel when it makes sense' to change or abandon some or all of them. What particular changes will immediately appear right or wrong is also largely decided by this collective intuition. Therefore, by distributing the 'sensible' in one society, common sense critically influences what identities, roles, politics, policies and different forms of governance, association, or engagement (could) appear 'natural' in each specific society and stick among its members, and, if this social glue is destroyed, a window of opportunity opens for any identity to make sense to the public. Trying to explain how the horror of World War II even came to be, Hannah Arendt says that it is precisely the gradual withering of common sense, "the peculiar and ingenious replacement of common sense with stringent logicality" (Arendt 1954, 317) along with any sense of community or connection to others that results in the rise of totalitarianism.[34] In other words, the loss of common sense automatically makes the sense of continuity or stability not only impossible, but irrelevant because once everything becomes relative, nothing needs to be preserved. If one could ever fully grasp what 'common sense' in one society is, he would hold the key to its ontological security. Although "cataloguing its content," "sketching out some logical order it always takes" or "summing up the substantive conclusions it always draws" (Geertz 1992, 240) might often seem like a futile task to the researchers of common sense,[35] the idea of knowing – let alone defining – what a particular society takes for granted has been too alluring for intellectual and political elites to resist trying to do so.

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[32] In Prodanović's words (2022, 222), "we have a much greater degree of mutual understanding about the fact that norms are nonsensical than about what norm should be in their place. We also must have in mind that this potential of good sense to see beyond common sense needs a "jump start" and, as we shall see, this is one of the roles of engaged social theory."

[33] The framing process, according to Goffman, refers to the way social experience is organised through common sense, or more specifically, how contingent situations are translated into intersubjective schemes of meaning. However, as Prodanović (2022, 217) notes, in contrast to Garfinkel, Goffman argues that common sense cannot be considered a stable form of knowledge that can be "taken for granted." This is because framings of a given situation can vary so significantly that one could contend that the individuals involved in a face-to-face interaction are not experiencing the same event.

[34] And, conversely, any viable countermeasure has to start with the revival and cultivation of common sense.

[35] "To uncover the informing, constitutive rules of everyday behaviour would be to perform the sociologist's alchemy – the transmutation of any patch of ordinary social activity into an illuminating publication" (Goffman 1974, 5).

The goals of these social and political 'experiments' varied in different historical circumstances, but the rationale behind them was the same: the power of common sense to transform some rule into the self-rule, and the most 'natural' one – so natural to appear like a pure product of the senses, both the reason and heart.[36] One of the first project-like appearances of 'common sense' in social life occurred in the postrevolutionary England, in which a century of religious war and political revolution fundamentally undermined all old centres of authority and methods of truth-finding and decision-making, spurring a chaos of fractionalism, enmity and mistrust. To upper and middle classes of London of that time, 'common sense' appeared like a perfect mean "to achieve basic social and intellectual cooperation and to sow the seeds of a common culture and identity – without resorting ever again to those artificial and tyrannical sources of unanimity that were absolutism and a related censorship apparatus" (Rosenfeld 2011, 26), so they started looking for ways to sketch this common sense and 'octroy' it back to the people.[37] This idea of conveying people what they supposedly already knew, based on the premise that for the sake of establishing a low-level consensus and basic identity in a society halting profound anxiety quickly echoed in many points across the island and the old continent.

The most intellectually ambitions venture of this type came from the so called "Wise Club", the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen, formed in 1758 with a vision that promoting 'common sense' would "lead to self-improvement on the part of members and, more importantly, to progress or reform in the world at large" (Rosenfeld 2011, 66). Led by the premise that "the 'unlearned' person was actually less likely to be misled than the overeducated person, and the collective sentiment trumped the individual or the isolated genius every time" (Rosenfiled 2011, 82), these Common Sense Philosophers turned into odd 'specialists of common sense' who were investing tremendous efforts in discovering and prescribing what the society was (supposed to be) taking for granted. Regardless of the immediate results of this endeavour, the Aberdonian leitmotif of the epistemic authority of common sense to act as a social glue and a court of final appeal in a society, due to its arising communal roots and immediacy, truly shaped the history of 'common sense' and launched it into a political force we know today.

Invoking a shared capacity of people to make practical judgments because they are not so different from the kinds of questions people daily confront in private life, the notion of 'common sense' has historically served to justify the expansion of the political power of ordinary people and, hence, the rethinking of the politics as such. While it was initially a domain reserved only for those with higher 'upbringing' and 'capacities', over time, politics became a recast as the domain of simple, quotidian determinations and basic precepts, of truths that should be self-evident to all, and which enable the active participation of all "the people" in community-making and policy making. Trust in common sense – referring both to the common faculty of discernment and the few fundamental, inviolable principles universally recognized and agreed upon – has, in over the course of different social and political revolutions, itself became commonsensical. In the words of Hannah Arendt, common sense has become the foundation and the goal of politics. Moreover, by setting the parameters in which the public life can unfold, common sense acts like "a noncoercive but vital form of social glue suitable to a pluralist and talkative world that democracy requires" or, even more metaphorically, as a 'lifeblood of democracy" (Arendt 1953, in Rosenfeld 2011, 3, 252).

[36] Thus, hypothetically, allowing the rulers to rule without ever having to restore to coercion or imposition of any kind.

[37] The core idea behind these clubs was rooted in a widely accepted communitarian epistemology: the belief that sharing knowledge and reasoning together would ultimately benefit the greater good, leading to intellectual, moral, medical, and even economic improvements on both a collective and individual level. This social experiment drew on an optimistic view of human nature promoted by the emerging science and certain Protestant traditions, as well as earlier state-led efforts to control knowledge through official academies. It also reflected the rise of informal public spaces like coffeehouses and salons, which became key elements of an expanding urban middle class culture. In Britain, this ideal was revived by journals like *The Spectator*, where Addison sought to bring "philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges" (Rosenfeld 2011, 66) and by popular essays like those of Shaftesbury, who envisioned a beneficial common sense emerging from free-flowing conversation in this format (see: Rosenfeld 2011, 66-71).

At the same time, while this conception appears sensical, it becomes equally evident that reliance on common sense – or more precisely, the rule justified in the name of common sense – lays the foundation not only for a specific form of governance, popular democracy, but also for a distinct style of rule: populist democracy. Appeals to 'common sense' and references to the 'obvious' truths, have over time become a trademark of what we today view as populism and evaluate as one of the most important threats to true democracy. In other words, while the idea that all people have what it takes to participate in politics played a critical role in the development of participatory democracy, it has also come with the price. It has proven vital to the development of the 'inverted inegalitarianism', a notion that ordinary people are deemed not equal to but superior to their rulers and social betters – a notion that was destined to become a staple of modern populist politics.

A major historical appearance of this complex marriage between the political form we call democracy and the populist appeal to the people's common sense and in the (international) politics, occurred with the American Revolution. This was spurred by Thomas Paine's 47-page pamphlet titled "Common Sense" (Paine 1776). Advocating the independence of the Thirteen Colonies from Great Britain, Pain claimed that he was offering "nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense" (Paine 1776, (edition 2004, 19). Outlining the 'first principles' that made the need for separation from Britain obvious and sure – like the one saying that there was "something absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island" – Pain at the same time rejected every other option, including the current status quo, as unnatural, useless, even ridiculous. A publishing phenomenon even in modern standards (sold in more than 100,000 copies in the first year alone), this pamphlet became so influential that "most Americans thought *Common Sense* was the revolutionary document, not the Declaration of Independence" (Kiger 2021). What seems to be behind this unprecedented success, less in publishing and more in political terms, was Pain's extraordinary ability to intuit what form of rule and politics people were able to grasp as natural or, better said, to use the "common sense" as both the rationale and the name for the political sensibility that he hoped to instil. The story of the American Revolution, thus, tells an unfamiliar story of how 'common sense' provided a popular face to the constitutional face of democracy that will, from Philadelphia, soon spread across the new and old continent.

While common sense as a political and rhetorical device may not have replicated the glory it had on the other side of the Atlantic during the French Revolution, this historical event nonetheless kept the relationship between common sense and the elites, the people and the state, the status quo and change, at the forefront of public consciousness (and academic attention). It demonstrated how common sense could work both for the people and for policies that disempowered them – sometimes supporting the existing order, and other times legitimizing radical change (Rosenfeld 2011, 195-197).[38] The magical power of common sense kept animating the rest of the 19th and 20th century, up to the 21st-century 'age of anxiety', in which appeals to common sense became more frequent than perhaps ever before. The rise of populism on all sides of the ideological spectrum, the flood of conspiracy theories, but also the resilience people showed in the face of crises of different kinds, only confirmed that common sense was indeed the political sense par excellence and the one with a "high rank in the hierarchy of political qualities" (Rosenfeld 2008).

In sum, what 'common sense' seems to own this high rank to is its gift to immediately inscribe naturalness or absurdity in everything that occurs in reality. Like an antheap of all kinds of experiences, cognitive and affective, personal and inherited, common sense comprises ideas that became so deeply ingrained that they developed into a 'sense', into intuition-like, gut-like judgments that do not require an intelligently designed process of inference. Unaware what these ideas are, when, where and why they 'took' them for granted, people become conscious of them only in situations that

[38] The 'common sense' that Paine articulated in his pamphlet was clearly not common at the time it was published; in fact, it was almost the opposite of what was widely accepted. Over time, however, different elites were able to shape and adapt it for various political and social purposes. For such a top-down transformation to occur, though, the existing common sense must cease to resonate with a critical mass of people, and the proposed change must appear reasonable within the framework of the prevailing common sense.

profoundly shaken their trust into the stability and continuity of the self and the world around them – only when things stop making sense people deliberately turn to common sense as to the first and last solution. As a result, common sense provides what Giddens refers to as the 'proven but unprovable framework of reality,' enabling people to confidently navigate life by allowing them to know what is right or wrong by simply seeing it, rather than having to constantly question oneself, others, and the object-world. Based on the confidence that those truisms are so self-evident and obvious that they must appear as such to everybody else in our surrounding, common sense provides people with the minimal sense of belonging from which different communal identities can develop and, therefore, represents the rudimental, but fundamental ontological security mechanism in society. Serving as an important source of ontological security, common sense becomes an *ex officio* source of social, political, international or any other order in a society and, as a result, a powerful political device. As an ultimate authority to which all new ideas and projects come for verification – whether 'from the bottom' or 'from the top', common sense remains one of the major sites where the power struggle between the people and the elites is fought and decided. Because the authority of common sense is so pervading and unquestioned that it has become invisible, "to this day, we rarely notice the multiple, contradictory purposes to which this familiar abstraction lends its authority" (Rosenfeld 2011, 155).

The major value of common sense is that its 'manual' does not come with any restrictions in terms of issues in which it works. While unavoidable in everyday matters, common sense appears even more needed in the matters that are distant from everyday experience, surrounded by a lot of 'unknowns' that need to be embraced and a lot of information gaps that need to be bridged, as is the case with international affairs. Even those with many resources at the disposal, like policymakers, still often find themselves overwhelmed with the complexity and ambiguity of information that characterise foreign affairs and, thus, end up relying on some 'gut feeling' or 'healthy reason'. While the people are aware that events in the international environment affect their life to a great extent, they usually lack time, expertise or access to abundant information that is necessary for comprehending of such complex and distant developments. Even so, people must be able to make sense of international politics in order to preserve a certain level of stability in their sense of self, especially during times of global changes or crises. Moreover, the information that come from elites are also often incomplete and contradictory, thus appearing insincere, filtered, or biased. Common sense, thus, becomes the first, the last and sometimes the only tool which the public can rely on to sustain a minimal control over the constantly changing international environment, as well as to hold policymakers accountable for their actions at the international scene. Equipping the public with truths that are so self-evident that they must be valid in the international politics as well, common sense is among the most important sources of the public opinion about the international relations and, therefore, their agency in it.

3.2.1. Common Sense and Foreign Policy: Making Sense of International Relations

The concept of 'common sense' has not been a complete stranger in the literature on international relations and foreign policy but even made it to the headlines of a number of articles and books until today. One of the earliest publications on the matter was undoubtedly *Common Sense in Foreign Policy*, written by Sir Henry Hamilton Johnston, a British explorer, colonial administrator and linguist who published extensively on the British imperial policy in Africa (Johnston 1913). A 1967 article by one of the most influential IR theorists in history, Hans Morgenthau, was titled "Common Sense and Theories of International Relations" (Morgenthau 1967). Published in 2010, the book *Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy* (Gelb 2009), nonetheless, appears to be the most recent book on foreign policy to include common sense in the title role, confirming that even a hundred years later some foreign policy thinkers attribute common sense with important, even missionary role in international affairs. Nevertheless, while they indicate that common sense might be among the forces that in different ways and on different levels shape the outlook of the

world politics, the mentioned publications can hardly be considered theorisations of common sense in foreign policy. Moreover, none of the three titles even stops to define common sense but instead assumes that the meaning and content are self-evident, made up of the equally self-evident rules in international affairs that should inspire both the study of international relations (in Morgenthau's case) and the practice of foreign policy (in the case of the other two authors). In other words, while they send a strong signal that common sense should be studied by IR and FP scholars, these readings do not provide many clear guidelines on how this could be done.

The major discovery of common sense in the study of foreign policy came, quite tenable, from the abovementioned "constructivism at home" camp. Naming the introductory theoretical chapter of his seminal book *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Hopf 2002) as "Constructivism at Home", Ted Hopf revealed his aspiration to bring "society within states rather than the society between states" back into the study of the world politics and thus move beyond the predominant systemic constructivism (i.e., Wendt) in IR. Criticising constructivist tendency to suspend some of the basic constructivist principles by keeping the "units sufficiently homogenous and invariant so as to be able to theorize at the systemic level about them" and by assuming a "boundary between meanings within and outside the state's official borders", Hopf provided compelling ontological and epistemological arguments against constructivists' long avoidance to theorise the role of masses in the social construction of national identity. Determined to "bring the society in," Hopf made remarkable effort to inductively reconstruct the prevailing domestic identities in the Soviet Union in 1955 and Russia in 1999, what made this 2002 book "perhaps the leading constructivist account of identity" (Houghton 2007, 36) in the study of foreign policy. While Hopf was by no means the first to point toward the unfortunate irony that many disciplines and schools of thought bearing the prefix "social" eventually end up neglecting the social structures and milieus, his studies were among the harbingers of what would later become a 'domestic turn' in IR. Unpacking the dialectic relationship between elites and masses in the construction of state identity, Hopf started directly conversing with some of the major concerns of FPA literature, and, according to some reviews, immediately went "further than anyone else's in forging links across the two traditions" (Houghton 2007, 36).

Following his instinct to "bring masses back into world politics" and move beyond the systemic level of analysis in the studies on how identity affects foreign policy, Hopf eventually landed on "common-sense constructivism" (Hopf 2013). In the seminal book from 2002, the phrase "common sense" indeed appears only once, in Hopf's quote of Berger and Luckmann's warning that "commonsense ideas … must be the central focus" (2016, 13–14) of anyone attempting to reclaim the topography of identity. Nevertheless, continuing to explore national identity narratives at the societal level, Hopf returns to "common sense" a full decade later. This time, he was inspired by Gramsci's warning that *senso commune,* viewed as masses' "own commonsensical view of the good life, of how to go on in the world, of a desirable daily life" (Hopf 2013, 323), represents a critical obstacle to elite's ideological project, meaning that the elites' conceptions of the world that do not resonate with the public common sense are doomed to fail. Impairing these insights with his own rich findings on the diversity and strength of the domestic sources of the national identity narratives, Hopf indeed traced an innovative and inspiring way to "bring the masses back into world politics". Perhaps the most ambitious research project that follows this path has been "Making Identity Count" (MIC) a large-scale undertaking managed by Ted Hopf, Bentley B. Allan and Srđan Vučetić (Hopf and Allan 2016; Vučetić and Hopf 2020), since it continues to theoretically and empirically unpack the sources, nature, and strength of constrains that the public poses to elite's conceptions of world affairs, and consequentially states' foreign policies. While MIC is a work in constant progress and is not about common sense per se, but about national identities in general, its results enabled scholars to make this 'commonsensically' seductive argument more solid in both theoretical and empirical sense. Therefore, mostly thanks to this far-reaching project and, in the first line, the three of its abovementioned investigators, the concept of common sense in foreign policy can be outlined and further developed.

As said, Hopf's inspiration to apply the concept of common sense in his explanation of the Russian position in the international relations in his article from 2013 came from Gramsci's theory of hegemony.[39] Responding to Cox's neo-Gramscian theorisation of hegemonic authority, Hopf argued that Cox's reading of the Gramsci's theory of hegemony was too narrow since it reduced ideas, or ideology, exclusively to the elite's views on political economy, leaving out one of the most important elements in the Gramsci's theory – the common sense of the masses. Gramsci, like the majority of other theorists of common sense (see Boyd and Heney 2017), did not make sense of his view of common senses by providing a coherent and academically rigorous definition of common sense. Instead, he referred to common sense as to a "taken-for-granted world of the masses", "popular beliefs", "the philosophy of non-philosophers", "the conceptualization of the world that is uncritically absorbed" and in similar ways that reveal the potency of common sense without disclosing its very content, structure, or sources (Hopf 2013). For instance, one of Gramsci's rhetorical questions, often quoted by Hopf and colleagues, enquires whether "modern revolutionary theory [can] be in opposition to the spontaneous feelings of the masses, what has been formed through everyday experience illuminated by 'common sense,' that is, by the traditional popular conception of the world" (Gramsci 1971, 432). The concept of common sense, thus, implies a set of *ideas* that stem out of the everyday *experience* and manifest themselves as spontaneous *feelings*. Nevertheless, Gramsci never explicitly proposed such a three-part definition, but kept simultaneously using many different depictions of common sense that would emphasise one the aspects.

Hopf himself also did not attempt to make sense of Gramsci's patchwork in order to offer a comprehensive and coherent definition of common sense. Instead, he used all the above sentences alternately and cumulatively, with the major aim to illuminate the potency of common sense which stems from it omnipresent, uncontested, and automatic application to different matters, including the world affairs. These very traits, according to him, bring common sense very close to habits and practices in international relations, contributing to our understanding of "how states automatically perceive, feel, and act without conscious reflection on either costs or benefits or normative proscriptions and prescriptions" (Hopf 2013, 318). Only when justifying his methods, Hopf admits that common sense represents "a kind of consensus about what the world is, or should be," that is usually unarticulated, uncontested, and unspoken. "But when it is said, most people say more or less the same thing. That is the aspect of common sense that I explore", he concludes. The situation remains very similar in the following studies since they all remain centred on the Gramsci's conceptualisation of common sense only. While they provide a far more detailed reading of Gramsci's notes on the role of common sense in world hegemony, the new details mostly relate to Gramsci's methodological guidelines for a sound selection of texts from which this set of "the taken-for-granted ideas about the world" could and should be extracted. Nevertheless, although the definition and, hence, content and structure of common sense remain somewhat hazy, both initial and later studies offer extremely valuable insights into the traits of the common sense that significantly enhance our understanding of what it does in international relations.

First and foremost, by exposing this all-pervading, uncontested, and automatic nature of common sense, Hopf and colleagues provide novel insights about the public's agency in international relations, which was Hopf's major reason to reach for common sense in the first place. Explaining the power of common sense, which Gramsci elevates even to the level of 'material force', to equip the masses with the ability to resist elites' conceptions of world and their country's role in it, scholars portray common sense as one of the major "weapons of the weak" in shaping the distribution of power in international relations. Any ideological project that fails to resonate with "the mass quotidian common sense" will be at best unstable, and at worst overthrown, as scholars repeatedly argue. Concerned to explain Russia's material position in the world at the beginning of the new millennium, Hopf comes to claim that the Russian public's common sense represents the major "bulwark of

[39] Therefore, Hopf's understanding of common sense initially – but also later on – relied almost exclusively on the Gramsci's view of common sense.

Russia's semi-peripheral position in Western hegemony, and hence a significant obstacle to Russia's elite aspiration to join the neoliberal core" (Hopf 2012, 280).

Likewise, interested in explaining the stability of the global hegemonic order, Allan, Vučetić and Hopf later show how the consent of elites with the dominant or alternative ideology is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for understanding why some international order succeeds or persists since popular beliefs can play both the first and the last line of defence against hegemonic ideologies that do not make sense (Allan, Vučetić and Hopf 2018). China's hegemonic prospects are, thus, very low because of its difficulty to offer an alternative to the existing Western hegemonic ideology that would be compelling to the national publics across the globe – despite the publics' decreasing attachment to neoliberalism. Nevertheless, although Hopf's primary motivation for introducing common sense into the study of international affairs was to show that the public can confront and resist elites' conceptions of the world and foreign policy in various ways and at practically all stages of the policy process, he includes an important caveat regarding the distribution of common sense across society. This caveat further illuminates the relationship between elites and the public, as well as its implications for foreign policy making and outcomes.

Positing it as intersubjective structure, Hopf warns that common sense must by no means be limited to masses per se but should instead be viewed as a structure in which both the public and elites can be embedded. Leaving the possibility that political elites themselves – or at least a part of them – share and rely on the very same common sense as masses do, Hopf emphasizes that common sense does not put elites and the masses in a necessarily antagonistic relationship. On one side, yes, common sense can bring them into the conflict, both open and indirect. Providing the public with the means to 'make sense' out of the world affairs even when they lack information and knowledge about them, these taken-for-granted wisdoms enable the people not only to define the boundaries of policy options that could come into consideration, but also to decide whether any changes are wanted in the first place. The public can directly challenge and contest the elites' foreign policy conceptions by protesting or by imposing heavy selectoral or electoral costs on them, or it can also engage in less direct and formal resistance through countless routines that consciously and unconsciously undermine the elites' intentions on a daily level. Either of those would, at least in the societies that imply a certain level of political accountability of the elites to the domestic public, eventually force elites to adjust to the policy conceptions desired by the public. Nevertheless, Hopf and other authors keep reminding that policymakers, state officials or bureaucrats are also citizens and, as such, they may also be inclined to deploy common-sense conceptions and 'folk philosophy' about the desired world life in making their own beliefs and actions. This further means that, if shared and applied by both 'agents' in a similar way, common sense can also result in a vocal or tacit agreement between the public and elites about how the state should go on in international relations. By emphasizing that common sense knowledge can be and often is shared among the elites and public, the authors highlight another crucial characteristic of common sense's impact on the distribution of power in the international system – its multifinality in terms of policy outcomes.

Outlining these myriad ways in which the relationship between the elites and the public can play out in the political arena, Hopf confirms that common sense can be both a *status quo* force and a force for change and should therefore "be construed as a structural variable that both enables and constrains the exercise of global hegemony in general" (Hopf 2013, 349). Since the very existence of the world order of any kind supposes the existence of "the intersubjective structures of taken-for-granted ideas about the good life *that undergird all societies and polities*", then "the capacity of any hegemony to persist, or any hegemonic challenger to succeed, could depend on whether their hegemonic ideology resonates with mass common sense in the world" (Hopf 2013, 349) as well. The scholars should, therefore, change the habit of thinking that the world order was maintained by the distribution of material power, as in (neo)realistic theories, or by the distribution of identity, as in Wendtian constructivism, but instead investigate the worldwide (and/or regional) distribution and density of the taken-for-granted worlds of masses, since these might be the critical pillars holding the world in its current appearance. To understand when and how the world order is changing or going

to change, we, therefore, need to shift our attention back to the public's sense of the word and its resilience to the internal or external efforts to manipulate it. While MIC has been primarily interested in the distribution of identity (and not common sense per se), it keeps unpacking the domestic distribution of identity into the 'elite beliefs' and 'mass common-sense understandings' across a significant number of countries, thus providing valuable empirical data for further theoretical clarification of the capacity of common sense to sway continuity and change in international relations.

Namely, covering ten great powers over the course of eight decades from the 1950 to 2020 (so far, but the intention is to go all up to the 1810), MIC is inspired by the idea that the stability of the hegemonic orders depends on a legitimating ideology. "A hegemonic order is stronger to the extent that its ideology appeals to both elite and mass understandings of national identity among great powers" and, conversely, "when there is a disjuncture between the hegemonic ideology and the distribution of identity, then a hegemonic transition is more likely" (Allan, Vučetić and Hopf 2018, 840). Attributing the public at least an equal agency in shaping the world order, MIC places the mass common sense among the crucial factors that not only constrain or enable but also direct the international change. First, any misfit between the dominant ideology and mass common sense shakes the equilibrium that is underpinning the existing order, increasing chances for a policy change – either top-down or bottom-up. Based on the empirical insights into the uneven fit between the existing Western hegemonic ideology and the mass common sense in nine observed countries, it appears that "mass-level discontent with neoliberal markets that could be harnessed to a social democratic, populist, and democratic counterhegemonic coalition in a number of countries" (Allan, Vučetić and Hopf 2018, 841).

Second, common sense that is "waiting to be harnessed" is somewhat passive and reactive, still holds a significant power for shaping international regime by remaining not only the ultimate source of resistance to the existing order, but also of resiliency towards the alternative ones. In other words, if it fails to draw ideological strength from the taken-for-granted ideas about the desirable way of life, the challenging ideology will not become sufficiently appealing to the national audiences and the challenger will not be able to build the critical support for it. Led exactly by the empirical insights about the gap between the public common sense and Chinese ideology across the great powers of today, Allan, Vučetić, and Hopf dare to conclude that, despite its great material power, the rise of China will not trigger a hegemonic transition and that "China is unlikely to become the hegemon in the near term" (2018, 839).

Although Hopf on one occasion explicitly assumes that there must exist some universal common-sense beliefs "that undergird all societies and polities," both him and other scholars interested in the mass common sense in international relations continue investigating the 'Russian', 'Chinese', 'Brazilian', 'Indian' and other nationally bounded common senses, leaving an impression that there are at least as many common senses as there are states or societies. The idea that these sets of taken-for-granted ideas are nation-specific and, automatically, context-specific, is the next important characteristics of common sense that becomes evident from the existing theorisations of common sense in international relations. This notion was evident already in Hopf's (2013) article since he made a number of comments about the Russian mass common sense being significantly shaped by Russia's specific geopolitical and cultural sphere and, among other things, by its "relative isolation from the Western propagation of its hegemonic ideology" (Hopf 2013, 349) This implicit assumption about socially constructed nature of common sense was further elaborated in the later studies and supported by the relevant theoretic traditions of theorizing the intersubjective, relational, and shared background knowledge which makes social order possible in the first place.

Extensively relying on Berger and Luckman's theory of the social construction of reality and their notion of the "shared stock of knowledge", Allan, Vučetić and Hopf (2018) suggest that common sense itself is bounded by the assumption that societies are ideationally integrated. Through different stages and forms of socialisation, people adopt "similar ideas about what reality consists of, how it works, and how everything is embedded in the overarching symbolic universe" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 115). Playing the function of "historically defined consciousness that indicates what

is natural and what is not in one society" (Gramsci 2007, 321), these ideas eventually become 'taken for granted' patterns of conduct and thus become a stable basis for people's intentional and less intentional actions. Used in all aspects of everyday life and transmitted mostly through language, this social stock of knowledge gets widely understood, legitimised, and reproduced in a specific community and its different identity categories. "Mass common sense, where the practices and ideas of day-to-day nationalism reside, is socially *constructed in history and place"* (Vučetić and Hopf 2020, 3, emphasis added by the author of the dissertation), they conclude.

Proposing that "we can examine common sense by analysing the identity categories that circulate in modern states" Hopf, Vučetić and Allan (2018, 848), further suggest that national identity discourses represent one of the most important sites, manifestations or 'proxies' of the common sense in one society and, therefore, one of the most important channels of its reproduction. Saying that "common sense plays a necessary role in constituting discourses of national identity" (Hopf, Vučetić and Allan 2018, 848), the authors once again confirm that common sense represents a broader and more abstract structure of "background knowledge" behind national identity discourses. It functions like a tailoring pattern, according to which national identity discourses in one nation are, and can be, sewn to fit its members. To justify their focus and scaling up of identity narratives to the level of national identities, authors remind that national units are ideationally integrated entities, that decision-makers in international politics act from the socially constructed stock of knowledge in the societies that raised them, and that, ultimately, the distribution and diffusion of ideas in modern societies happens predominantly within the borders of national units.

Nevertheless, the authors explicitly disclose that "common sense is about *more* than national identity" and that national identity "might not even be part of many communities of common sense in a country" (Vučetić and Hopf 2020, 3). In addition to ethnonational differences that separate one nation from one another there exist other salient differences and identities of different scale, both within and beyond the national borders, from family, neighbourhood, and profession, to class, religion, and language. In other words, while investigating identities and commonsense beliefs on the national level makes sense, especially in the study of international relations, there can and usually do exist multiple 'communities of common sense' fluctuating and overlapping in any society, in any historical time and place.

Moreover, defining national identity as "a discourse of national identity categories and concepts that actors draw upon to constitute action, construct meanings, and make claims in social and political life" (Allan, Vučetić and Hopf 2018, 10), authors suggest that national identity in a country is never single and uniform, but represents a constant struggle between competing and overlapping identity discourses emerging from above and below. This assumption which, ultimately, means that more than one national identity discourse can 'make sense' at the same time in one society, represents a natural echo of Gramsci's warnings that common sense itself is "necessarily incoherent and multifarious" (Gramsci 1971, 846). Being rooted in the everyday practices on countless sites and in numerous spheres of life, common sense gets reproduced in a non-orchestrated, non-linear, and non-consistent manner even on the individual level, let alone in a society. Being omnipresent, this rootedness is extremely complex and multi-layered, with common sense going from "knowing, to understanding, to feeling" (Gramsci 1971, 418), thus comprising different cognitive and emotional investments that people have towards different environments in which they are embedded. Even if people's perceptions of the world were perfectly rational and reflective all the time – which they never are – it would be difficult to draw any coherent and systematic set of lessons about the world.

The ultimate worth of common sense does not, however, stem from its inherent coherence and consistence, but from its ability to make the world look coherent and consistent – and for that, it needs to sometimes provide contradictory instructions. Therefore, this intrinsic tension between the ideas of the common sense seems to be what hides and provides its stability, on the one hand, and its ability to adapt and endure, on the other. While changes are possible, they are usually limited in scale and gradual in pace. In line with Gramsci's thoughts, Hopf concludes that, to sustain or succeed, "hegemonic and counterhegemonic movements need to begin with an ideology that already enjoys,

or could enjoy, a certain diffusion … and elaborating it so that it becomes a renewed *senso commune,* possessing the coherence and sinew of individual philosophies" (Allan, Vucetic, Hopf 2018, 846) In other words, while common sense does change under circumstances, this change also needs to be 'make sense' to the people, meaning that common sense needs to legitimise its own conversion.

Finally, to operationalise common sense's influence on international affairs, Hopf once again turns to the Gramsci's own thoughts on the diffusion of ideology, as well as to the others' readings of Gramsci's notes. Most directly, he relies on Keck and Sikkink's book on transnational norm entrepreneurs and their view that ideas being propagated by elites must "resonate or fit with the larger belief systems and real life contexts within which the debates occur" (Keck and Sikkink 1998) of the target societies. Rooting this *fit* into the rich constructivist literature about discursive resonance, Hopf eventually conceptualises *discursive fit* as the major mechanism through which common sense is actually put into force. Further following Gramcsi, Hopf divides this discursive fit into two major components: one of *intelligibility*, and one of *legitimacy* (Hopf 2002, 14-15). While intelligibility is concerned with whether the ideas and positions enunciated by the political elites are comprehensible to the broader public (thin intersubjectivity), legitimacy entails not only whether the masses understand the elite's ideology, but if this ideology is compatible with their own commonsensical view of a good and desirable way of living (thick intersubjectivity). This way, by illuminating the discursive resonance between the elite and popular conceptions of world, Hopf strives to unpack how exactly common sense constrains and enables policymakers by making some foreign policies seem more 'natural', 'self-evident' and easy to justify to the public than others. In Vucetic's words, "the policymakers will find it easier to marshal domestic support for foreign policy when that policy is taken for granted or otherwise acceptable in identity terms for both elites and masses" (Vucetic and Hopf 2020, 1008; Vucetic 2011). Hollowing the taken-for-granted ideas about what it means to be a member of a nation, national identity discourses end up serving as a 'bridge' between common sense and foreign policy, as a set of heuristic categories and concepts that constitute and guide foreign policy dispositions of both elites and masses. Catalysing common sense, the national identity discourses, thus, outline what policies can appear natural to both elites and public and, conversely, which ones can hardly "stick" due to their low resonance with the public common sense.

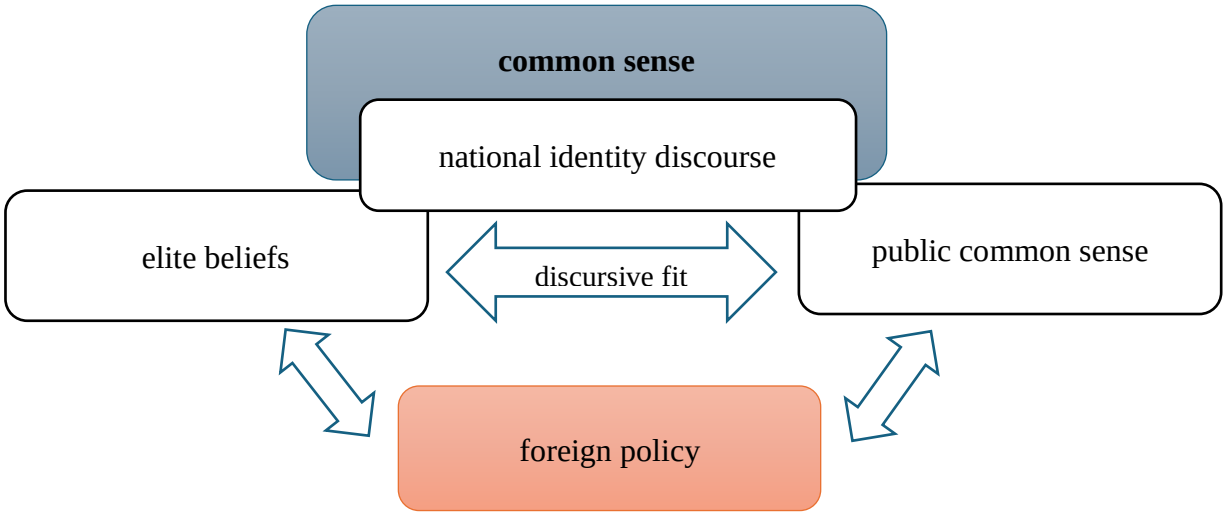
Several probes of this mechanism of 'discursive fit' in explaining the outlook of the world and foreign policy have all confirmed its plausibility and fruitfulness. These studies vary in scale – while Hopf's analysis of Russian foreign policy at the start of the 21st century was comprehensive, it remains smaller in scale compared to the multi-case and mixed-method studies conducted under the MIC. However, they have all been conducted in a similar manner, through the mapping of the elite and public conceptions in relation to the Western hegemonic ideology. In all studies, therefore, the misfit between elite conceptions and public conceptions was determined indirectly, through their (mis)fit with the third set of beliefs, usually consisted of standard elements of the Western hegemonic ideology of neoliberal democratic capitalism. In Hopf's 2013 study, the gap between the elite and public beliefs was captured through the Russian political elite's commitment to the Western hegemonic ideology of neoliberal democratic capitalism, on one side, and the misfit between this ideology and the public's views about how their own local worlds function and should function. Likewise, the conclusions about the (in)stability of the existing world order have been made based on the tracing of the misfit between the Western ideology with elites' beliefs, on the one side, and public commons sense, on the other, in nine observed countries. In other words, in the existing operationalisations of the discursive fit, there has always been a standard, a benchmark in relation to which the discursive fit between elites and the public was actually investigated and determined.

Moreover, in his 2013 article, Hopf goes a step further, by assuming that there exists some kind of objective reality, reflected in the objective military and economic position of the state in the world capitalist economy (determined through its material resources and global connectivity) in relation to which the gap between the elites' beliefs and public common sense can be traced. The utility of introducing this 'objective' benchmark seems to lie not only in its ability to reveal the gap between the elite ideology and the public common sense, but also to say whose conception of the

world is more 'accurate.' As Hopf says, "Russian mass common sense mostly contradicts elite neoliberal discourse and *more accurately* reflects Russia's objective semi-peripheral position" (Hopf 2013, 344, emphasis by the author of the dissertation). Nevertheless, this observation about the capacity of the public's common sense to be "more consistent" with the 'objective' reality than the elites' beliefs was not elaborated upon later. For instance, it was not used to illuminate the prudence of the public's common sense, either on its own or in comparison to the elites. Instead, it remained primarily as another proof that the public can be a strong 'bulwark' of a country's behaviour and power in international affairs.

All in all, the existing theorisation of the common sense in foreign policy, proposed by Ted Hopf and researchers around the MIC project, provide extremely valuable insights into its characteristics and influence in international relations. Relying exclusively on Gramsci, common sense is, in essence, understood as a set of the taken-for-granted ideas about how to move on in the world, as a conceptualization of the world that is uncritically absorbed in a society. Common sense is treated as a relatively stable intersubjective superstructure that is socially constructed, contextually contingent, incoherent, and unfixed. While both elites and public are embedded in it and can, therefore, rely on it, common sense is largely depicted as the "weapon of the week", the first and last resort of the masses who, in comparison to the elites, often lack resources and knowledge to directly and daily follow international affairs. Due to its omnipresent, uncontested, and automatic nature, the mass common sense, therefore, represents a strong source of public's agency in world politics and a constraint to the elite's foreign policy conceptions and actions. In relation to foreign policy, the power of common sense can best be understood via national identity discourses that represent a set of the taken-for-granted ideas that people rely on to understand the nation and themselves as its members. Catalysing common sense, the national identity narratives outline what foreign policy can be easily accepted by the public as natural and self-evident, and which foreign policies cannot 'stick' among the public. According to the proposed operationalisation of common sense, the power of common sense in the international society can best be investigated by trading *the discursive fit* between the elite beliefs and public common sense that can reveal whether the public, first, understands and, second, views the elites' conceptions of foreign policy as legitimate. The fit between the elites' and public's conceptions of identity or foreign policy is, however, to be determined indirectly, in relation to some more or less objective "benchmark", like the dominant world ideology or the material position of a country.

Graph 3. *Theorisation of common sense in FPA and its operationalization through the 'discursive fit' between elites and the public, as discussed in several articles by Hopf, Allan, and Vučetić (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*



However, some additional clarifications and theorisations can be made to better understand the power of common sense in international politics. The one from which all others appear to flow is about the very content of common sense and its distinction from, in the first line, national identity. According to the previously reviewed literature, common sense is more than national identity, a background knowledge in which all, including national identities, are embedded and, therefore, common sense plays a necessary role in constituting national identity discourses. In line with this assumption, by which national identity is a part of common sense, and in line with the logic that every part resembles the whole, the authors conclude "that we can examine common sense by analysing the identity categories that circulate in modern states" (Allan, Vučetić, Hopf 2018, 848). In other words, the authors suggest that we can 'extract' or 'reconstruct' common sense from one of its most important derivates – from (national) identity discourses. Doing so, we would be able to trace the way in which different national identity discourses are wired in the social stock of knowledge which allows them to 'make sense' in a society, as well as how they get rewired during their constant competition and overlap within the constantly changing circumstances. While this set of taken-for-granted-ideas about the world is never finished and exhaustive (the same way the national identities never are), this way we would be able to grasp its important stock, the one which governs the attitudes and actions of one society toward the rest of the world, making some (national) identity discourses and, hence, some foreign policies more sensible than others.

Nevertheless, while they suggest this conceptual distinction and suggest the possibility of tracking the common sense, the authors do not truly follow up on this, but remain mostly focused to the national identity discourse per se. Moreover, by interchangeably using the terms "mass beliefs", "mass public sense", "mass national identity", "mass common sense identity", the authors of the existing studies completely blur the distinction between these two structures. While common sense and national identity undoubtedly stand in a mutually constitutive relationship and while any clear-cut separation would be artificial and false, treating them almost synonymously, it becomes questionable whether the introduction of this new term has any added value, or it only contributes to the terminological confusion in the field. In other words, although the mutually establishing relationship between common sense and national identity was evoked on several occasions, the way it has been operationalised leaves it insufficiently clear what the added value of studying common sense (or even introducing the term itself) in addition to studying national identity discourses is. It would be, therefore, important that this relationship is further illuminated.

Some important clues about their conceptual difference can, however, be found in the existing studies, even though they were not operationalised later. In line with Gramsci, common sense is referred to as 'the conceptualisation of the world', 'the collection of ideas about how to go on in the world in a good and just way'. On the other hand, national identity is the conceptualisation of the nation-self and includes those taken-for-granted ideas about 'what it means to be a member of the nation'. This kind of definition seems to align with the assumption that common sense is a broader structure in which national identities are entrenched since, providing the understanding of the world, common sense enables us to conceptualise ourselves in relation to that very world and its present rules. Bottom line, the very idea that we define ourselves through the national categories presumes our understanding that the world functions in a way in which belonging to a nation makes sense and a good way to go on in the word. Based on the conceptualisation of the world, we can tell the story about who we are and how we came to be, with all our strengths and weaknesses. The autobiographical story that contradicts our assumptions about the world we live in would open a schism that would make our lives difficult because it would force us to pause at every intersection to find a way to reconcile our existence with the surroundings. In contrast, the autobiography that 'makes the most sense' enables us to continue with our lives and the rest of the world without worrying about who we are all the time and second-guessing everything we do. In other words, common sense seems to be the first and last to 'judge' between the competing stories about the self, much like a collective intuition generated from conscious and unconscious lessons that the society learned about the world.

If so, then common sense would include the country's general lessons about how international relations function and how one should behave in a good and just manner in such a world, while national identity captures the part of common sense which conveys the lessons about how one specific society relates to these rules. In other words, while common sense provides the conception of the world, national identity captures the distinctive story of how one society is rooted in that (conception of) world. This further means that the relationship between national identity and common sense is not only about scale, in a way that national identity represents a downsized mirror version of common sense, but their relationship is far more complex since how (national) identity discourse is embedded into the shared conception of the world can take different ways. Moreover, the knowledge of the ways in which our national self is embedded in the word is also part of that conception and, therefore, a part of common sense. This further means that some aspects of our national self can, in theory, make sense even when they seem to contradict the lessons about how it would be 'good' to go on in the world since part of the nation's taken-for-granted conception of the self might be that the world 'is not according to its measure' – for better or worse.

Therefore, if we somehow zoom the differences between common sense and national identity in, we might be able to better understand how various national identity discourses emerge, how they compete with one another and win out, how they evolve over time, and, ultimately, how precisely common sense "plays a necessary role in constituting discourses of national identity" (Allan, Vucetic, Hopf 2018, 848). Otherwise, if we neglect these differences by simply equating mass common sense with mass identity discourse, using national identity discourse as the ideal 'proxy' for common sense, we will be caught in the loop in which every national identity (change) will be equally sensible, self-evident, and natural, and that is obviously not the case. Therefore, if common sense's explanatory capacity in understanding foreign policy is to be enhanced, scholars of common sense constructivism must insist more strongly on its analytical distinction from national identity and work to fully capture it.

If this distinction is further illuminated, another important aspect of the current theorisation of the distribution of common sense and identity would benefit. Namely, even though common sense appears to be a broader structure than national identity, this taken-for-granted understanding of the world is formed through daily practical experience, which is ultimately distinct for each group and shaped by each group's own identity. As authors themselves repeat on several occasions, common sense 'is socially constructed in history and place,' meaning that each (national) group's conception of the world is maintained, reproduced, and occasionally challenged through everyday experience or, better said, the interpretation of this experience. The conception of the world, as well as what 'good' and 'just' means, differs from the perspective of small, big, European, African, stigmatized, militarily powerful, or failed state. While some knowledge about the world must be 'universal' – or hardly would any order in the world exist – each state encountered unique historical conditions, reflected on them in different ways, and drew distinct conclusions as a result. Those interpretations are shaped through narratives that emerge from the top, from elites, but also from the bottom, through different everyday interactions among the people and peers on the various meso and macro levels. While new experience is coloured by the previous conceptions of the world and self, these conceptions themselves are never complete and fully stable, which means that at some point, frequently during times of major crisis, common sense may 'stop making sense' and necessitate gradual or severe change. Furthermore, it is commonly argued that common sense is only invoked when something has already ceased to make sense, or, in other words, when common sense has failed to immediately evaluate the situation and offer prompt instructions for action. This experience of cognitive and emotional misfit and unease can appear, spread and scale-up through various horizontal and vertical networks to point where change is likely to occur. Following these feedback loops, expressed primarily through (national) identity discourses among both elites and mases, we can better understand how common sense itself is constructed and reconstructed. What made sense at one point in history in one society does not make sense anymore and national identity narratives can show us how common sense historically changed in a way that seemed reasonable enough to be accepted.

The warning against reductionism works in both directions. While common sense is clearly portrayed as being more than just identity in the conceptualizations mentioned above, national identity also cannot be reduced to common sense. This is because both the public and elites may hold other identity or foreign policy beliefs, which may not necessarily appear to be commonsensical either immediately or at all. The very idea of the gap between elite beliefs and popular common sense relies on this assumption. Nevertheless, although the authors repeat that common sense is a structure in which both the elites and public are embedded, in the operationalisation, common sense is completely expelled from elite's identity beliefs, and the public's identity beliefs are completely reduced to common sense, leaving no space for a mixed picture which probably best corresponds to reality. The analytical value of common sense should not be judged on its ability to explain how all beliefs comprised in the mass national identity came to be, but to illuminate why some conceptions immediately appear 'natural' and 'self-evident' to the public and some never do.

In other words, by illuminating the uneven stickiness of identity (and foreign policy) conceptions, in terms of how quickly they can be introduced, changed, or abandoned, common sense should help in understanding why and how elites sometimes manage and sometimes fail to reconcile its policy proposals with the public. Revealing the power and mechanisms which differentiate common sense from other forms of belief systems – and that is its ability to make people immediately know even they do not know how they know – we will be able to understand why the public accepts some identity and foreign policy narratives so automatically, unreflexively, and uncontestably. Like a sieve that strains sand particles into a basket, common sense seems to swiftly filter elite cues that can even be taken into consideration by the public. Even they pass the sieve, they remain unequal. The largest grains take the longest to pass but will first fall out if the basket is turned upside down, whereas the finest grains are the quickest to pass but are the most difficult to remove later. Understanding what this sieve is made of is understanding why some policies immediately 'feel right' or 'feel wrong' to the public, even when the public itself is unaware where this 'sense' comes from, is actually understanding the true analytical value of common sense in explaining the relationship between the elites and the public in foreign policy.

This brings us to the concept of the discursive fit, which is proposed as the mechanism by which the power of common sense manifests itself and is best captured. As previously discussed, by illuminating to what extent the public discursive conception of the world corresponds with the 'objective' Russia's position in the world economy, or with the principles of the Western hegemony, the existing studies (primarily Hopf and MIC) demonstrate that the public can be a strong 'bulwark' against the elites' opposing conceptions of world and, thus, that it can significantly tie their hands in foreign policy making. Capturing this discursive (mis)fit between elites and public in such an indirect way by comparing their identity beliefs with the 'objective reality' or with standard principles of the ruling ideology, one can indeed capture a gap between them. Nevertheless, while the public-elite disconnect is obvious, the major reason behind it remains rather blurred. The fact that the public beliefs are, for instance, more 'accurate' and 'consistent' with the objective reality, does not per se reveal much about its potency towards the elites or vice versa. Even if the public's understanding of reality is less accurate than that of the elites, this would not diminish its power in relation to the elites. Therefore, in line with the previous critiques, common sense beliefs and mechanisms should be captured more directly if we want to be sure that these taken-for-granted ideas are what drives the public's resilience to elites' conceptions. A more direct and dynamic picture of the public – elite nexus would become available, allowing the investigation of how elites, for instance, adapt or adjust their discourses to fit the public common sense, making the desired foreign policy changes more 'sensible' and, hence, thinkable to the public. We would be able to see whether background knowledge indeed provides cues that make some identity and foreign policy narratives immediately self-evident or, conversely, whether the public can at all get attached to foreign policies that do not 'make sense' or 'feel right' to them.

Finally, while 'discursive fit' appears to be a suitable way to investigate the resonance of elite narratives among the public, it seems like this 'fit' requires further unpacking to illuminating the

specific possibility of common sense to playing out so automatically and unreflexively. By pointing out two major components of the fit, its 'intelligibility' and 'legitimacy', Hopf makes an important step in this regard (Hopf 2002). Nonetheless, these two components mostly outline a cognitive aspect of common sense, the one that is more guided by reason, reflection, and comprehension, while the affective aspect remains rather disregarded despite being mentioned on several occasions either through Gramsci's quotes or in the words of Allan, Hopf and Vučetić themselves. By emphasizing that common sense goes "from knowing, to understanding, to feeling" (Allan, Hopf and Vučetić 2018, 8), the authors explicitly suggest that common sense is a complex, multi-layered sense shaped by different kinds of heuristics – including the affective ones, that enable the public to quickly determine the 'sensibleness' of some policy proposal. In his most recent book on the British national identity and foreign policy, Vučetić himself emphasizes the importance of emotions by arguing that discursive fit could be evoked to theorise the "processes through which … emotional registers became a social and political force" since national topographies are "helpful for understanding not only why some emotional representations performed by political figures become salient within a community while others do not but also why some emotional representations emerge in the first place" (2021 ,162). Although only mentioned in the conclusion, these remarks clearly imply that 'affective force' behind the 'discursive form' should be better understood and, thus, integrated into the concept of discursive fit which illuminates the power of the public common sense.

Unpacking both the cognitive and affective scheme underlying common sense would illuminate where they stand in relation to one another since affective cues and lessons about the world and the self must not be in line with cognitive. Insights into the possible tensions between them could further illuminate the nature and scale of common sense's incoherence, which allows it to not only offer contradictory hints, but also to evolve over time. Regardless of how it is theorised in relation to foreign policy, common sense is never defined solely by reason,[40] but is often described as both a 'feeling and understanding". Illuminating the affective aspect of the fit, therefore, appears to be a natural and necessary step in further theorising the power of common sense to make some conceptions 'feel right' to the public.

3.2.1.1. Unpacking the Cognitive – Affective Interplay in Common Sense

Gramsci is by no means the only common-sense scholar implying that common sense rests upon cognitive – affective underpinnings. The 'hybrid' character of common sense, viewed as an "abstract knowledge that both cognitively and emotionally denotes concrete practical problems (Dewey 1948: 208)" or as "cognitive and/ or emotional capabilities of our mind that enable us to follow a common interpretive scheme, and allow us to interact with each other and our natural surroundings" (Prodanović 2022, 213), is invoked by many scholars of common sense. Moreover, since it "cognitively and emotionally expresses" the processes of interaction between the self, community, and surroundings, this hybrid character of common sense is often considered "crucial for our abductive intuitions regarding the process of collectively selecting and solving problems" (Prodanović 2022, 2015). Relying on the rich literature from developmental and cognitive psychology (Greenwood 1991; Bloom 2005; Ratcliffe 2006; Bogdan 2008; Andrews 2012) that investigates common sense, as well as other related phenomena, such as 'intuitions' and 'folk psychology', common sense scholars escape the trap of reducing its interpretative scheme to cognitive cues. Instead, they emphasize the importance of emotional knowledge that necessarily follows the intrinsically intersubjective nature of common sense. When someone urges common sense, he calls for the "'everyday grounded doubt' that takes into account both the "mind and heart" when questioning the current social norms" (Prodanović 2022, 221), according to pragmatist scholars of common sense, since everyday practical issues are always "both affective and factual". By sharing

[40] Despite its misleading translation into 'healthy reason' in some languages, such as in German (*gesunder Menschenverstand*) or Serbian (*zdrav razum*).

the assumption of the social and intersubjective nature of common sense, common sense scholars recognise that it is, on the one hand, formed and cultivated through communities of universal intersubjective schemes of interpretation, while on the other hand, it can be influenced by particularistic common sense insights under certain conditions. With this, common sense scholars value the importance of both cognitive and affective investments that enable common sense to move the agency both towards *status quo* and change.

Such multi-layered structure of common sense, implied by its dominant conceptions in the literature, resonates well with what has now become 'conventional wisdom' in many disciplines interested in belief systems and their impact on behaviour – either first-hand, such as neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy, or second-hand, such as political science, organisational science, or economics. For very long, fierce debates over the relative causal weight of 'cold', calculative cognition, which is associated with *thinking*, on one side, and 'hot', visceral affects that are linked to *feeling* processes, on the other side, kept these two not only separated, but also locked in a hierarchy in which affects were addressed largely pejoratively, as a low-order distraction to a high-order cognition, reason, and rationality. Even the field of psychology was 'purely cognitive' at the time, paying little attention to questions of affect without subsuming them to the reason (Bleiker and Hutchinson 2008).

The gradual progress in the research of emotions, principally in neuroscience, eventually eroded the common belief in the split of cognition and affect. The more recent and advanced studies suggested that rather than constituting different and competing modes in the brain, rationality and emotion represent 'two sides of the same coin' since "the mechanisms of emotion and cognition appear to be intertwined at all stages of stimulus processing and their distinction can be difficult" (Mercer 2010, 5). Moreover, thanks to the numerous experiments with brain-damaged patients who retained their intelligence and cognitive capabilities but lost the ability to process emotional cues (Damasio 1994; Bechara 2004; Fellows and Farah 2005),[41] it eventually became clear not only that emotions were not a 'disruption' of rationality, but a necessary ingredient of it. This is so because "higher cognition requires the guidance provided by affective processing" (Adolphs and Damasio 2001). This brought a fresh perspective to longstanding debates on the cognitive-affective interplay in belief formation and decision-making, such as discussions on whether emotion and cognition operate in tandem (Damasio 1994; Pham 2007), whether one precedes and influences the other (Ellis 2005; Loewenstein et al. 2001), or whether they function independently (as seen in the debate between Lazarus (1984) and Zajonc (1984)) gained renewed attention and a new analytical lens (also see: Sesley 2006).

The cognitive-affective interplay was then integrated in theoretical frameworks used for studying belief systems and their impact on decision making processes. Different analytical tools that have been used to illuminate mental processes people daily rely on when 'making sense' out of the inherent ambiguity and informational complexity of the world – such as schemes, maps, or heuristics – were largely focused on cognitive aspects only. Providing "the conceptual structures that people use to represent important aspects of the world" (Homer-Dixon et al. 2014, 2; Kitchin 1994; Özesmi and Özesmi 2004), these cognitive schemes serve as memory units that interpret, evaluate and store past cognitive experience in a way which allows decisionmakers to swiftly and orderly respond to the contemporary environment in an optimal manner instead of having to intellectually cope with entirely new situations all the time. Accepting, however, that semantic cognition is grounded in and often strongly affected by affective associations (Haidt 2001; Thagard 2002; 2006; Thagard and Aubie 2008; Heise 2007; Homer-Dixon et al. 2014; von Scheve 2018), affective mapping pays equivalent attention to the schemes and heuristics that highlight the intuitive or emotional meaning of objects, events, people and other aspects of the decisionmaker's environment. Instead of cognitive appraisals,

[41] Incapable of inducing positive or negative emotions, these patients lost the ability to anticipate and calculate risks and rewards of their behaviour and, consequentially, became unable to make rational decisions. "It is now evident that people who are "free" of emotion are irrational.", as Mercer (2010, 2) concludes.

emotional 'tags' and 'affective labels' provide the interpretation of the environments and guidelines for action based on the how we feel and how we felt in similar situations in the past (Slovic at al. 2002; Hancock et al., 2005; Tiedens and Linton, 2001; Lodge and Taber 2005). Since emotions have been found to produce stronger and longer impressions and beliefs, enabling emotional memory to easily influence recall, use analogy, evaluate past choices, and consider counterfactuals (Crawford 2000), affective schemes are by some considered even more powerful heuristics than cognitive ones (i.e. Slovic et al. 2002). Synthesising both components, the cognitive-affective maps, however, seem to provide the most comprehensive understanding of why some options not only appear right but also 'feel right' to decisionmakers by illuminating the interactions between their rational justifications and intuitions. The echo of these game-changing findings, went far beyond the neuroscience and psychology, resonating in all disciplines cantered around decision-making, including political science and, inevitably, International Relations.

Mirroring the above-described treatment of emotions, IR and FPA studies have also been marked by the "the dictate of the reason" and "the dominance of cognition for a very long time (see: Crawford 2000; Marcus 2000; Herrmann 1988; Young and Mark Schafer 1998; Jervis, Lebow and Stein 1985). Despite often named as major 'culprits' of many historical events and phenomena, emotions – in the first line, fear – remained 'demonised' and fairly understudied for quite a long. Nevertheless, stirred by the breakthrough findings in neuroscience and psychology, IR scholars started urging a more comprehensive study of affects in international politics that would give emotions the theoretical place they deserve in explaining the outlook of international affairs (Sasley 2011). Once neglected, the study of affects soon turned into an 'emotional turn' in IR that quickly become one of the most vibrant theoretical and empirical areas in the IR literature. Some of the earlier impediments to the research, such as the "rife with basic disagreements about crucial conceptual definitions" (Marcus 2000, 224) of affects, emotions, or similar concepts, such as feelings and moods, were now turned into the strengths, paving the way for many fruitful theorisations of various roles these complex phenomena play in the international sphere.

Embracing the novel findings on the cognitive-affective nexus, IR scholars dared to propose concepts and theories that would earlier be considered blasphemy, such as 'emotional rationality' (McDermott 2004) or 'emotional beliefs' (Mercer 2010), all in order to better capture the ways in which emotion and cognition meet in the beliefs that shape the action of individuals, collectives, and, eventually, states in international relations. Various important issues in IR, such as security dilemma (Holmes 2015, Mitzen 2006), status-seeking (Larson and Shevchenko 2014), peace negotiations (Holmes and Yarhi-Milo 2017), reconciliation (Long and Brecke 2003), nuclear proliferation (Solomon 2020), significantly benefited from the rising interest in the affective, cognitive, latent, and emergent properties of emotions in IR. When Jervis once declared that he "would very much like to produce a study that shows how emotions and cognitions interact in politics, but at this point the challenge is simply too great" (Balzacq and Jervis 2004, 565), he foresaw that this topic would soon become one of the most inspiring terrains for discussion about the major questions of agency and, ultimately, power in international relations. In the meantime, more openly embracing the findings from other disciplines, IR scholars have become far more theoretically and methodologically equipped (Koschut et al. 2017, Koschut 2018, 2018a, Bleiker and Hutchinson 2018; Lynggaard 2019; Clément and Sangar 2018) to deal with the links between cognition and affects that govern the behaviour of major actors at the international scene – from the public to decisionmakers, from non-state actors to the most powerful states. While any attempt to classify the burgeoning literature on such a complex and elusive phenomenon unavoidably conceals more than it reveals, the existing literature captures the cognitive-affective interplay in at least two ways, both valuable for understanding how common sense drives the societies' resistance to either status quo or change.

The first camp, which essentially covers the vast majority of the literature on emotions in IR, represents studies that look at the ways in which affects and cognitions meet in a belief, often understood as "a proposition or collection of propositions, that one thinks is probably true" (Mercer 2010, 3). Inseparably intertwined, affective and cognitive propositions serve as 'evidence' to each

other, leading to a perpetual, synchronized loop in which 'feeling is believing' and vice versa. "Nationalism makes one feel pride, and a feeling of pride is evidence that one's country is good. Cooperative behaviour leads to a feeling of trust, and the feeling of trust is evidence that one should cooperate", as Mercer illustrates (Mercer 2010., 5). Arguing that important phenomena of international politics, such as nationality, trust, justice, or credibility, should be best understood as 'emotional beliefs', Mercer is among the first and finest representatives of scholars who use beliefs to study how affects impact judgments and decision-making in international politics, but is far from the only one. Regardless of whether they investigate individuals (Sasley 2010) or entire societies, continuity or change, whether the outcome is deemed as good or bad, evaluated as rational or irrational, much of the subsequent IR research (Sasley 2010, Kertzer and McGraw 2012; Ariffin, Coicaud and Popovski 2016) continues this trajectory by considering how this cognitive-affective interplay constitutes beliefs and "can drive beliefs in surprising directions" (Mercer 2010, 23).

By looking into specific emotions or more ambiguous affective states, into their valance or intensity, scholars outline different ways in which this unavoidable rendezvous between cognition and affection ends – sometimes in competition and sometimes in mutual reinforcement of cognitive and affective schemes (see: Mercer 2010). While they make it clear that the stronger the cognitive-affective fit, the stronger the belief, scholars, however, insist that beliefs, as the most conventional and potent sources of political judgments and actions, always represent the blend of cognitive and affective components. While "something both believed propositionally and also felt emotionally may seem especially valid", Mercer summarises, "even in the case of purely logical argumentation, people need to feel that the case against their position is compelling before they change their minds" (Mercer 2010, 6-7). In other word, if one wants to understand how beliefs govern behaviour, she needs pay attention to both cognitive and affective propositions, as well as the 'chemistry' between them.

While it would be too much (or too soon) to call it a 'camp', the second group of studies investigate the ways in which cognitive and affective predispositions of decision-making meet outside beliefs. Interestingly, only two years after Hopf published his first article on common sense constructivism, a very interesting attempt of theorising intuitions in international politics was made by Michael Holmes (Holmes 2015), who has become known for his notable attempts to integrate the insights from neuroscience into the study of emotions in IR (Holmes 2013, 2015). Pointing towards a heavy "belief bias" in IR, Holmes warns that even (most of the above mentioned) scholars who study emotions in international politics largely fail to escape this trap because they often consider emotions important exactly due to their ability to influence and, in most cases, strengthen beliefs (Mercer 2010, 2013). Attempting to overcome this bias by illuminating 'non-belief' mental states that motivate individual and state actions in international politics, and at the same time to move beyond this usual 'feeling is believing' approach, Holmes turns to a framework in the philosophy of mind which insists on the differences between beliefs and "aliefs" (Gendler 2008, 2008a; 2010). An 'alief' represents a specific mental state that comprises "representational-affective-behavioural content and is strongly influenced by affective intuition" that enables people "to solve high-level social and political problems automatically without the type of searching and weighing of evidence that beliefs require" (Holmes 2015, 714). Thanks to their affective dispositions, aliefs increase "speed, accuracy, and efficiency" (McDermott 2011, 514), reflecting peoples' "natural tendency to reach conclusions mostly based on 'gut feelings' and intuition, without testing them against others with a different range of knowledge, experience, culture, or ideology," (Siniver and Collins 2015, 228). Enabling agents to operate on 'autopilot' most of the time, according to Holmes, intuitions come close to habits and practices which scholars of the "practice turn" put forth. Nevertheless, exactly because they largely originate in affective predispositions, different to habits and practices that are "too structural", intuitions, according to Holmes, can better capture the unconscious determinants of these automatic

actions and reactions, thus providing a more accurate and dynamic explanation of the agency and change in international politics (2015).[42]

Puzzled primarily with cases of belief-discordant behaviour that happens because people are "believing this and alieving that," Holmes (2015) illuminates how the power of these affective attachments may lead to situations in which emotional appeal is extremely difficult to overcome, making leaders 'intuit' some decisions as the right ones, regardless of their cognitions about a particular issue or object. As Gendler says, aliefs involve "the activation of an associative chains – and this is something that can happen regardless of the attitude that one bears to the content activating the associations" (Gendler 2008, 650). This further means that, although intuitions are particularly helpful in showing how the interplay between the affective and cognitive dimensions of decision making is not always a harmonic one, they do not, however, undermine cognitive or, if one wants, rational beliefs and actions either.[43] Besides, the very term of alief is coined exactly to illuminate that intuitions are "*a*ssociative, *a*ction-generating, *a*ffect-laden, *a*rational, *a*utomatic, *a*gnostic with respect to its content" (Gendler 2008, 557–8), meaning that they allow for the reflective and the unreflective components to sometimes come together and sometimes part ways. Having many sources, from affective processes via learned experience to reason, intuitions, therefore, represent 'psychological substrata' that are, at the point of conception, "a downstream product of rationality, on the one hand, and emotional predispositions, on the other."

In other words, intuitions a "preanalytical nonreasoning-based *knowing without knowing how you know*" (Holmes 2015, 713) that serves as a forerunner to beliefs, as an instant response to environment that is formed through different processes over time – and recalibrated through individual and communicative reasoning – and as such plays important part of decision-making, including the rational one. "This does not imply that all intuitions result in optimal decisions, but, perhaps counterintuitively, rational decisions often have an intuitive component", as Holmes (Holmes 2015, 713) concludes. Convinced that theorizing intuitions can offer a more adequate way of capturing the cognitive-affective fit and misfit behind agents' attachment to continuity or change in international politics, Holmes argues that this approach is more effective than focusing on beliefs, on one side, or habits and practices, on the other. In this context, Holmes outlines the "logic of rational intuitionism" (Holmes and Traven 2015) of action in international relations, providing additional insights into important questions in IR – such as why states cooperate with each other, why they fall into security dilemmas, why they comply with international norms, and how they change international institutions or the system as a whole.

Providing insights into the affective-cognitive interplay behind ideas and actions, both beliefs and aliefs seem be relevant for understating how common sense plays such a powerful driver of agency in international politics. As a set of taken-for-granted ideas about the world, common sense represents a set of beliefs that have become so rooted, uncontested, and automatically applied that they developed into a 'sense', like a 'collective intuition'.[44] While Holmes, somewhat surprisingly, does not engage with Hopf's conceptualization of common sense[45] but instead theorizes intuitions directly in relation to Hopf's conceptions of habits and practices, there is a lot of resonance between the way in which their role in international politics is depicted. First, both common sense and intuitions enable agents to make automatic judgments about foreign policy by knowing the 'right' policies without knowing how they know and without a conscious step-by-step process. Nevertheless, although the judgments may be quick, the processes that led to their formation were much longer and

[42]"Because intuitions are not merely reflections of social structures, they can be a crucial source of innovation and change", Holmes (2015, 432) argues.
[43]They can exist alongside beliefs.
[44]While he proposes that 'aliefs' can be experienced both individually and collectively as an emergent phenomenon (Holmes 2015), the logic of rational intuitionism is theorised as a useful model of agency at the individual level of analysis.
[45]He references it in one instance, but only as a secondary source to support his point that Hopf himself draws on insights from neuroscience. The reason for this could be that Holm's article was already in its final stages when Hopf's article was published.

more winding. Both intuitions and common sense appear to be 'products' of long-term cognitive and affective learning about the world and the self, meaning they are rooted in a set of abstract beliefs, even when these beliefs are not actively recalled or reconstructed in the moment of speaking. Second, neither common sense nor intuitions are predetermined to a particular outcome in terms of rationality, normative valance, or in any other way. While common sense can serve as a 'good sense' and while intuition can lead to best outcomes, they can both result in judgments and actions that are far from optimal according to different criteria. Third, although slowly and difficultly, common sense and intuition can both change. At some point, the costs of following intuition or common sense can critically overcome the benefits, leading to either gradual or radical modifications in their underlying schemes of beliefs and interpretations about the reality. Finally, they both seem to be embedded in affective and cognitive repositories on different levels and of different scales that continuously reinforce and undermine each other, interpreting the environment in a way that does not always lead to perfectly coherent and consistent judgments and actions.

Echoing everything that has been said about the multi-layered structure of common sense, one of the leading neuroscientists in the field of emotional processing summarises the tasks and interaction of the affective, cognitive and, and memory-oriented components of intuition, by saying:

> Emotion ha[s] a role to play in intuition, the sort of rapid cognitive process in which we come to a particular conclusion without being aware of all the immediate logical steps... The quality of one's intuition depends on how well we have reasoned in the past; on how well we have classified the events of our past experience in relation to the emotions that preceded and followed them; and also, on how well we have reflected on the successes and failures of our past intuitions. Intuition is simply rapid cognition with the required knowledge partially swept under the carpet, all courtesy of emotion and much past practice. (Damasio 1994: xviii–xix)

Keeping all of this in mind, the existing theorization of common sense can be enhanced by incorporating insights from the literature on the cognitive-affective interplay that governs belief and non-belief states, which influence decision-making in international politics. The public common sense on foreign policy could, therefore, be understood as a set of taken for granted views about the principles of international relations that provide a cognitive-affective interpretative scheme for judging how the self (usually a state) should behave at such international scene, in other words, what foreign policy is sensible. The common-sense interpretive scheme represents a layman method of everyday "making sense" out of the complex, distant and often overwhelming affairs at the international scene, as well as about its state's role in them and position towards them, by defining our contemporary situations in light of our past experiences and knowledge. The public's common sense represents a derivative of different historical lessons drawn from defining moments and events for one state and society. These "lessons learned" offer general, but immediate guidelines on how to act right in different kinds of situations in international relations. In times of crises or sudden changes, common sense, therefore, becomes the very first and often the very last resort of coping with the crisis. It guides our "feels-right" attachment to specific attitudes or courses of action.

While some common sense stands on foreign policy have obviously become universal, providing the basis for the existing world order, the largest part of its content is contextually contingent and far from coherent, linear and fixed across societies and across time. The narrative about (national) Self represents the autobiography, a "compelling story of where we came from, how did we come to be who we are, what brings us together in a group, what purpose and aspiration does our group have" (Subotić 2016, 612). Every group has, however, came to be through victories and losses, through rises and falls, through bright and not so bright moments, through good and bad decisions, drawing some 'lessons' from history. While all national identity-self narratives are narcissistic, even the most narcissistic ones contain segments where their states made, if not bad, then at least wrong decisions. Those 'lessons' have been, mostly through socialization, both top-down and bottom-up, ingrained in political and strategic culture of the society, as an important field of the entire cultural context of the society. These lessons about the 'right' foreign policy contain sedimented scripts that define the 'sensible' approach to foreign policy, making it easy to recognize which foreign

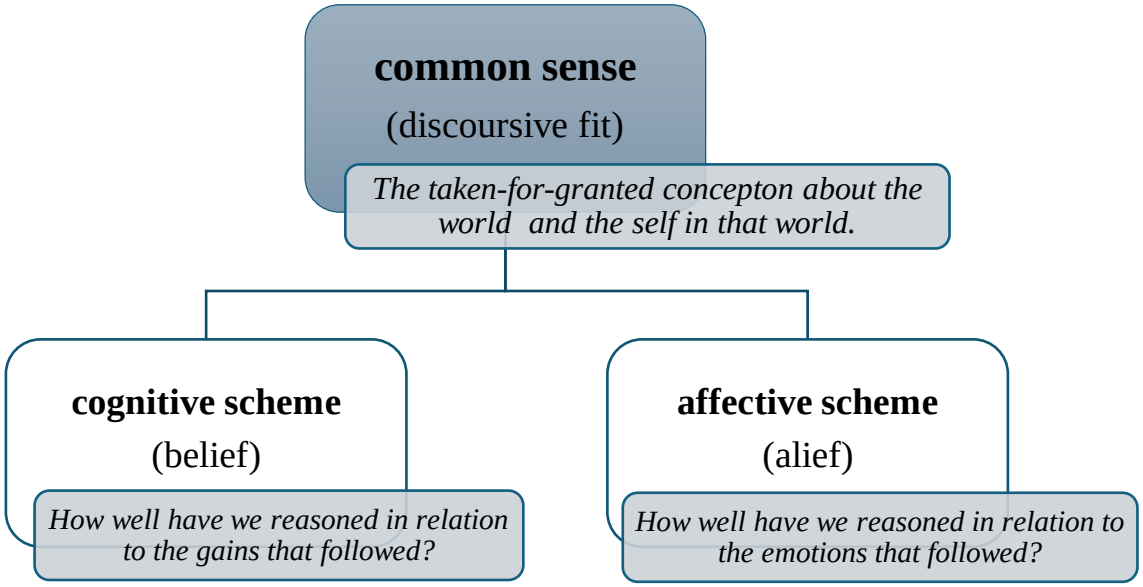
policy is the right one. Every state has passed through different historical circumstances and therefore drew different lessons, reflected on them in different ways and different in intensity and frequency. While there must exist some universal lessons about international relations, every society (and, down the line, every segment of every society) has its own lessons about history that have been shaped by and shared through group narratives that are emerging from the top, from political elites, as well as from the bottom, among citizens. Those lessons, drawn from important historical events and the country's reaction to it have turned into a shared knowledge, a script, common sense about what foreign policies is sensible what not, setting the boundaries what foreign policies can automatically appear right and stick, and which ones appear as straight 'non-sense' and can hardly come into consideration.

Due to the interconnectedness of cognitive and affective aspects of any interpretative scheme, the public common sense about international politics comprises two aspects, cognitive and affective scheme, each deciding how 'sensible' a policy is in its own way. Together, the cognitive and affective schemes of common sense work in tandem to guide individuals in making decisions in their daily lives. To immediately 'make sense' and "feel right", a policy should resonate with both aspects of the overall scheme. The *cognitive scheme* of common sense is the wisdom derived from conscious intellectual activity, such as thinking or reasoning, employed for the pursuit of a goal. The cognitive scheme of common sense automatically offers 'reasonable' solutions to problems which a state encounters and needs to overcome to survive. Rooted in the shared knowledge on the previous foreign policy successes and failures – or, better said, the way these were interpreted – common sense outlines principles that should govern a state's reasoning in international relations for the sake of its well-being and the accomplishment of national interests. It provides a prepared template of the right foreign policy based on the sedimented knowledge about what governs international relations, how major actors behave, and, therefore, what options can even come into consideration and considered 'sensible'. Even prior to defining what policies for attaining goals are reasonable and sensible, the cognitive scheme first "distributes the sensible" among the goals themselves, outlining which ones can and should be pursued, which are ultimate, and which can be sacrificed. In sum, the cognitive scheme of common sense is the one that derives from the accumulated beliefs centred around the question: *How and how well have we reasoned in situations in international affairs? What is the most practical way to interpret and respond to this situation based on past experiences?*

The *affective scheme* of common sense offers the affective map for navigating the complexities of world affairs, consisting of emotional tags that different historical lessons arouse, either in relation to others or to the self. Various affective and emotional investments that underpin the public common sense about international relations reveal why exactly those events and lessons were remembered in the first place. Carrying the information about how the society felt in some defining international moments and what the sources of those emotions were, this emotional scheme automatically filters potential foreign policy options based on conscious or unconscious associations about what emotions would be repeated or avoided. The emotions that preceded and followed certain international event and foreign policy acts in the past, regardless of those acts' success, become engrained in what can be considered sensible foreign policy. Whether the society was proud, ashamed, angry, disappointed, happy or sad in times of important historical moments and in relation to its own country's conduct during them remains in-built into the collective emotional memory that shapes how we understand both others and our own acts at the international scene. The same as with the cognitive scheme, the emotions are never homogenous, coherent, and linear, but involve a spectrum of different affective layers, states and arousals that colour the lessons about international affairs and, hence, inject varying doses of affective sensibleness into different foreign policy options, inevitably and immediately excluding some. Moreover, the potency and force of emotions behind common sense does not stem from valence only, since even negative emotional tags can make some foreign policy feel sensible and self-evident. It is not always enough that foreign policy evokes positive affective associations to make sense, and the affective "fit" that makes some policy "feel right" can be of any valance. In sum, the emotional scheme of common sense revolves around the

underlying questions: *How well have we reasoned in relation to the emotions that followed these decisions? What is the right course of action based on the affects and emotions that accompany them?*

Graph 4. *An enhanced conception of 'common sense' and 'discursive fit' illuminating its dual, cognitive, and affective nature (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*



By appreciating the dual structure of common sense and incorporating it into the mechanism of discursive fit that enables its tracing, we can better capture many of the common sense's characteristics – from its immediateness to its incoherence, from its stability to its ability to change. Without paying sufficient attention to the affective force behind the 'discursive form' and, hence, the interplay between cognitive and affective cues that common sense provides, we could get only a partial picture of its potency in shaping the elite – public nexus in relation to foreign policy and world politics. The same way 'beliefs' and 'aliefs' about international relations do not always coincide, but coexist in tensions, the cognitive and affective scheme behind common sense can sometimes undermine and sometimes reinforce each other. Judgment about what foreign policy 'makes most sense' depends not only on what we can, in the existing conception of word, get from it but also how we will feel about it, based on our experience throughout history. Different circumstances and events put common sense in front of different tasks, challenging its ability to immediately restore the cognitive and affective control over the environment by informing the self how to behave to ensure its cognitive and affective continuity in world in which it is embedded. Reducing common sense to any of those components, either cognitive or affective, would deprive common sense of what distinguishes it from other sets of comprehension – of its power to enable public to unreflexively accept or reject foreign policies based on the taken-for-granted understanding of the world and the self in that world.

Based on such an enhanced understanding of common sense and upgraded mechanism of the discursive fit, the following section outlines *the model of foreign policy stickiness*, which aims to illuminate why some foreign policies immediately stick among the public and others do not, thus further illuminating the relationship between the public and elites and our understanding of when, how, and why the public constrains policymakers in foreign policy.

3.3. The Model of the Foreign Policy Stickiness Based on the Common Sense Cognitive – Affective Scheme

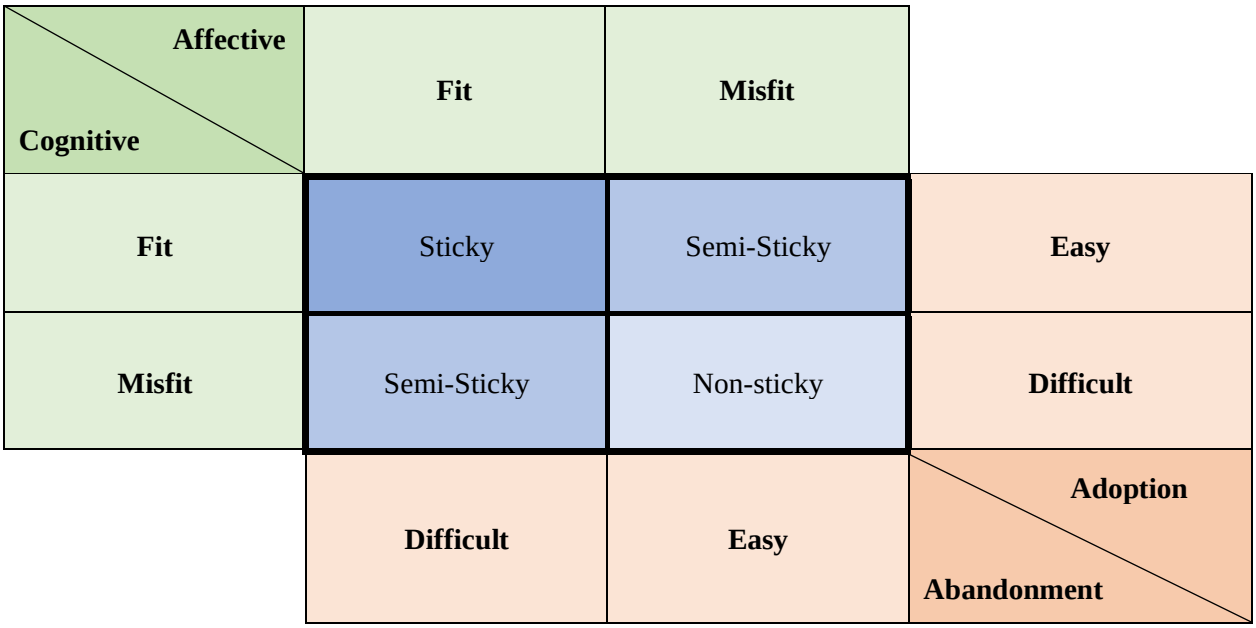
To explain the puzzling stickiness of foreign policies, illuminating how, when, and why policymakers are constrained by the public in foreign policy, this dissertation relies on the concepts of ontological security and common sense in IR, as theorised in the previous sections. Specifically, to further unpack the basic trust system, which is necessary for a stable sense of self as proposed by OSS in IR (Mitzen 2006a), the concept of common sense is posited as a fundamental ontological security device. Building on Hopf's common-sense constructivism (Hopf 2013), which primarily emphasises the cognitive aspect of common sense, this dissertation also draws on literature that highlights its affective dimension as an equally important component of common sense's influence on the public-elite nexus in foreign policy (Dewey 1948; Greenwood 1991; Damasio 1994; Bloom 2005; Ratcliffe 2006; Bogdan 2008; Andrews 2012; Holmes 2013; 2015; Prodanović 2022). The stickiness of foreign policies is, therefore, theorised as dependent on the cognitive-affective interplay behind the prevailing common-sense interpretive scheme in society. The core assumption is that the more a foreign policy proposed by policymakers aligns with the fundamental answers about how international relations function – embedded in the public's common-sense interpretive scheme – the more immediately and effortlessly it will appear 'sensible' to the public, and the stickier it will be. Given the dual nature of the common-sense interpretive scheme, the more a foreign policy resonates with both cognitive and affective frameworks, the stickier it becomes. Consequently, the stickiest foreign policies are those that align with both cognitive and affective common-sense schemas, whereas the least sticky ones fail to correspond with either. In between lie those that predominantly resonate with only one aspect of public common sense, whether cognitive or affective.

Therefore, by relying on the concept of common sense about international relations as a *par excellence* ontological security device, the dissertation proposes *a model of foreign policy stickiness* that aims to enhance our understanding of the public's role in foreign policy and contribute to existing knowledge on when, why, and how policymakers are constrained by public opinion in foreign policy decisions. As explained in Chapter 2, following the conventional meaning of *stickiness* – as the quality of adhering, holding, or staying attached – the stickiness of foreign policy manifests in two key ways: how easily policymakers can introduce a foreign policy and how easily they can abandon it. According to the proposed theoretical model, the likelihood of a foreign policy being accepted by the public, and the speed and ease with which this occurs, depends on its resonance with both the cognitive and affective dimensions of their common-sense understanding of international affairs. The model explains why some foreign policies immediately appear *sensible*, while others require significant efforts by elites to gain traction, and still others fail to be accepted regardless of how much elites attempt to promote them. Similarly, it sheds light on why the public sometimes becomes strongly attached to certain foreign policies, while letting go of others with ease. As a fundamental sense that underpins the basic trust system, allowing the world to appear orderly and predictable, common sense is central to how sensible a foreign policy appears to the public and, consequently, how they respond to what policymakers propose. Based on this model, three major types of foreign policies are identified, each characterised by a distinct public-elite relationship. This typology explains why the public alternates between permissiveness and resistance toward policymakers' foreign policy decisions, providing a novel framework for understanding both continuity and change in foreign policy.

If a foreign policy resonates with both cognitive and affective scheme of the public common sense, it will most likely be a *sticky foreign policy*, meaning that elites are able to easily introduce the desired foreign policy, but are highly constrained to abandon it afterwards due to the strong public attachment to it. If a foreign policy resonates with neither cognitive nor emotional scheme of the public common sense, it will most likely be an *unsticky foreign policy*, meaning that elites will be highly constrained to introduce that policy but will be able to easily abandon it since public is unlikely to attach to it. If a foreign policy resonates with either cognitive or affective aspect of public common

sense, the proposed foreign policy will most likely be a *semi-sticky policy*. If a foreign policy resonates with the cognitive scheme, but not the affective scheme, the elites will be able to both introduce and abandon the foreign policy relatively easily. If a foreign policy resonates with the affective scheme of common sense, but not the cognitive scheme, the elites will face difficulties to introduce the foreign policy, but also to abandon it.

Graph 5. *The Hypothesised Model of Foreign Policy Stickiness Based on Common Sense Cognitive – Affective Scheme (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*



The reality, of course, does not fit neatly into a rigid four-square scheme of 'fit' and 'unfit' categories when considering affective and cognitive aspects. While it is evident that cognitive and emotional factors decisively shape how much a given policy makes sense to the public, each of these dimensions contributes varying degrees of 'sensibleness' to different policy options. Hence, policy resonance exists on a spectrum, a continuum of fitness influenced by multiple factors, ranging from the pervasiveness of a given 'common sense' to diverse cognitive and affective psychological and sociological mechanisms (e.g., cognitive heuristics, appraisal components of specific emotions). In practical terms, this suggests that in any given situation, multiple policy options can simultaneously make sense to the public, albeit to varying degrees and in different ways, compelling common sense to prioritise among them. In other words, it is often the case – indeed, more often than not – that all policy options presented by elites hold some degree of plausibility for the public. This remains true even when treating the public as a monolithic entity and assuming a single, uniform common sense within a society – an assumption that, as previously discussed, is never entirely accurate. Therefore, much like the conceptual puzzle behind it, where stickiness is tied to the four potential outcomes of the public-elite nexus, the two-by-two model that theorises it serves an analytical purpose. It illustrates the mechanisms of common sense rather than exhaustively capturing all possible variations of the cognitive-affective interplay that underpins policy resonance and stickiness.

If multiple policy options can simultaneously make sense to the public, how does the public prioritise among them? What determines whether a policy with moderate affective and cognitive fit appears more sensible than one with strong affective fit but weak cognitive fit, or vice versa? These questions remain open at this moment, but it seems likely that prioritisation is context-dependent – one of the foundational propositions of common sense regarding international affairs must be the implicit or explicit hierarchy it establishes between ultimate goals in the international arena, such as whether a society prioritizes material survival or ontological security. Moreover, it is questionable

whether this process is entirely a function of common sense. In addition to 'commonsensical,' 'self-evident,' 'taken-for-granted' perspectives about international relations, people rely on other cognitive and affective mechanisms that shape their judgments and behaviour, as well. As illustrated at the beginning, these factors vary widely, and all of them influence how the public forms opinions on foreign policy. The core function of common sense, in essence, is to delineate the boundaries of "self-evident sets of perceptions based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible, as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done" (Rancière 2004, 85). As such, it serves as both a mechanism of inclusion – determining which options are perceived as viable – and exclusion – filtering out those that fall outside the realm of sensible in public discourse. If we succeed in outlining this mechanism, we will gain significant insights into the agency of the public in foreign policy and international politics, as well as the fundamental relationship between the public and policymakers in shaping foreign policy decisions.

Hence, whether something is deemed 'sensible' is understood here as being aligned with common sense, or more specifically, the dominant cognitive-affective interpretive scheme of common sense. Conversely, 'non-sensible' in this context refers to something that does not resonate with the public's common sense, or as posited here, common sense cognitive-affective scheme. A policy or judgment is considered sensible when it fits within deeply ingrained cognitive and affective interpretive frameworks about how the world, and specifically, international relations, functions – it reflects shared perceptions of what brings gains and what results in losses, both cognitively and emotionally. In this sense, the notion of 'sensible' particularly highlights the quality of common sense that enables immediate, automatic judgments or feelings of 'rightness' without requiring detailed knowledge or information about the matter – it is the feeling that something "makes sense" or 'feels right,' even without consciously knowing why or how. On the other hand, something that does not make sense evokes a similar intuitive judgment, where a person perceives something as 'wrong' or 'off' without needing detailed information, complex calculations, or a thorough weighing of arguments and counterarguments. This immediacy of judgment, this 'gut feeling' that bypasses extensive reasoning, is a distinctive feature of how foreign policy, or any matter, is evaluated as 'sensible' in this context. For this reason, the term 'sensible' is particularly apt for explaining the quality of foreign policy stickiness as the property of adhering quickly and strongly to public perception.

The proposed model, however, does not argue that policies misaligned with common sense cannot resonate among the public and gain public's acceptance. While the public's specialised knowledge in foreign policy is generally lower than in domestic matters, people rarely rely solely on common sense when forming judgments. As discussed, other mechanisms and factors, both conscious and subconscious, play a role in shaping public opinion. However, as elaborated in the previous section, common sense functions as both the first and last resort for 'making sense' of the world – all other belief systems must pass through the filter of common sense to acquire epistemological and ontological legitimacy. In practical terms, when proposing foreign policies, it is risky to have common sense working against you. While it is not impossible for policymakers to introduce or abandon foreign policies that contradict public common sense, it is unlikely to be an easy task. History offers numerous examples of elites failing to garner public support for foreign policies due to a deeply ingrained 'gut feeling' that prevents the public from resonating with elite cues. Conversely, there are examples where policymakers successfully implemented foreign policy changes, even significant shifts, by garnering public support for introducing or abandoning policies that were initially unpopular or not considered by the public. The common sense framework establishes the cognitive and affective boundaries of 'sensible' self-identity narratives, and by extension, foreign policies. Even when changes in foreign policy, and consequently in identity narratives, are necessary, they must remain within the interpretive boundaries set by common sense. Functioning like a collective intuition, common sense represents the accumulated collective wisdom of a society, forming cognitive and affective heuristics that help individuals and groups make sense of the world. In doing so, it preserves the society's sense of self-identity, maintaining it as stable and as positive as possible.

As Giddens (1991, 36) describes, common sense operates much like "natural attitudes," providing "a shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality."

From an analytical perspective, it is, therefore, not easy to isolate common sense, which raises the question: what is *not* common sense? Ideally, this would imply that people either have nothing else to rely on – which is impossible – or that people lack common sense entirely, which is equally implausible. It is difficult to examine this distinction because decisions are rarely made without some degree of common sense judgment. However, individuals do not possess equal or equally developed common sense, nor is it equally nuanced across different areas of life. For instance, most children likely have less developed and nuanced common sense judgments compared to adults, while some adults may lack well-developed common sense in specific domains, including foreign policy. Furthermore, the level of common sense regarding foreign policy may not be equally developed across societies, owing to various historical and political factors, as previously discussed. Building on this, it could mean that some judgments are not necessarily *against* common sense but are not significantly shaped by it either. Therefore, as one scholar suggests, you recognize common sense when you *feel* it – analytically, when you observe the effects that characterise a common sense judgment. This is particularly relevant in foreign policy, where people often lack information, knowledge, or direct experience, yet still hold strong opinions. As discussed earlier, the hallmarks of common sense judgment likely include its immediacy, the strength of a 'gut feeling,' or a sense of something 'feeling right' or an 'a-ha' moment that occurs without, or regardless of, specialised knowledge. Conversely, when you observe a slow and measured reaction that requires more evidence and deliberation, it likely indicates that common sense did not play a significant role and that other mechanisms were at work. This does not imply an immediate loss of ontological security, however, as basic trust, as previously noted, does not rely solely on common sense.

In line with the modern understanding of common sense and drawing on Hopf's conceptualisation, common sense is theorised as an interpretative scheme consisting of taken-for-granted ideas about international relations that provides a cognitive-affective framework for interpreting cues and forming judgments about how the self (typically state) should behave on the international stage. Common sense functions as a form of collective intuition, which, when articulated, often draws upon historical tropes or perceived lessons from the past. The following subsection outlines the research methodology, beginning with an explanation of the case selection process, followed by a discussion of the primary data collection and analysis methods used to operationalise common sense in the context of international relations and to test the proposed model of foreign policy stickiness.

4. Methodological Framework

Although the conventional structure of this dissertation might suggest a predominantly deductive approach to constructing the hypothesised model of foreign policy stickiness – reducing it to empirical testing of pre-existing theoretical hypotheses – the overall research methodology has been far more iterative and grounded. As revealed in the introduction, initial thoughts on the topic were sparked by the puzzle of how military neutrality became so entrenched so quickly in Serbia, especially among the general public, despite policymakers making little effort to explain its meaning. Early desk research on public attachment to military neutrality revealed a low level of understanding among the public and a wide range of interpretations of the policy. This suggested that public opinion was largely shaped by pre-existing 'common sense' notions about international relations and what was considered sensible behaviour for Serbia within them. These pre-existing interpretive schemes appeared to immediately shape the public's judgment of a policy they knew and still know very little about, which in turn decisively influenced policymakers' decisions and behaviour. These initial findings prompted an exploration of the existing literature on the public-elite nexus in foreign policy and ontological security studies, leading to a multidisciplinary investigation of common sense. This process eventually resulted in the hypothesised model of foreign policy stickiness, which was continually refined through further empirical research, as discussed in the following sections.

Seeking for a more relational examination of the public-elite nexus in foreign policy by tracing how common-sense interpretations of international relations by both the public and policymakers in Serbia align and diverge, leading to the uneven foreign policy stickiness, this research employs a mix-method approach. In addition to the fundamental methods of scientific reasoning, inferencing, synthesis, and analysis, used in the phases of literature review and the development of the theoretical argument, the empirical research relies on several qualitative and quantitative data collection and data analysis methods. Collecting relevant insights into public and policymakers' foreign policy attitudes involves both qualitative methods, such as desk research and semi-structured interviews, and quantitative methods, primarily opinion polls. The major data analysis methods include qualitative methods of case study, interpretive process tracing, and (emotional) discourse analysis, as well as quantitative methods of content analysis, and descriptive and inferential statistics. The following paragraphs elaborate how these methods were combined throughout three major phases of the empirical probe of the hypothesised method: mapping Serbia's multifaceted foreign policy of security and defence cooperation and uneven stickiness of its major components; extracting elites and public's common sense about security and defence cooperation; and examining the relationship between the two. Before detailing the methodological framework of these three phases, including their limitations and suggestions for improvement, a few remarks on case selection and design are presented.

The baseline method of the research is the case study method, understood as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin 2014, 16). The case study method is commonly utilized in the FPA literature on the relationship between the public and elites.[46] As elaborated in detail earlier, both public-centred and elite-centred studies have had dominantly positivist case study design, most often with individuals as units of analysis and traditional process tracing conducted through advanced statistical methods. On the other hand, the case study design is the most common in the constructivist foreign policy studies as well since it best responds to the constructivists' general interest to capture the social processes involved in the construction of meaning and the shaping of foreign policy decisions. For the proposed constructivist FPA approach, aimed at understanding of the 'common sense' structures that influence

[46] While the research aims obviously vary to great extent, from ones looking into the electoral significance of foreign policy to those investigating leaders' personal characteristics, only rarely the case study research in this literature included more than one state (and only rarely that state was not the US) or even more than one foreign policy under investigation (to the best of my knowledge, no big-n study on the public-elite nexus in foreign policy has been conducted so far).

the interplay between the public and elites in relation to foreign policy, hence, the case study approach has also been considered optimal. Enabling the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis, the case study best allows the identification of interpretative schemes and mechanisms that contribute to the understanding of how policymakers and public construct and negotiate meanings in foreign policy settings.

The case study under examination is the Republic of Serbia's foreign policy in relation to security and defence cooperation. As mentioned, this case has from the very beginning been an 'representative anecdote', the puzzling case that inspired the quest for the theoretical explanation of the stickiness of foreign policies. In line with the previously elaborated intention to provide a novel theoretical explanation of the relationship between policymakers and public opinion in foreign policy, the focus to this foreign policy issue is considered optimal for several reasons. First, the foreign policy of security and defence cooperation is, by definition, one of the pillars of any state's position in international relations. The decision on whether, how and with whom to cooperate in these matters is an umbrella foreign policy choice that impacts almost all other moves a country makes in international affairs. Moreover, not only that it is the one with the most far-reaching consequences but is among the foreign policy choices that are most directly linked to the national identity or national self-narrative of a state – be it a small, big, weak, or a strong one (Hansen and Wæver 2002, Carey 2002, Kovács and Wodak 2003, Wivel 2005, Devine 2011). Inseparably tied to sovereignty – the central issue in the contemporary international relations – the policy of security and defence cooperation unavoidably tackles the major components of a state's and national identity since it materialises a state's vision of itself, of its allies and potential enemies. In other words, the policy of security and defence integration serves as a country's ID card, providing basic, but fundamental information on its position in and towards international relations. Hardly any foreign policy so immediately reveals more about how one state interprets the nature and rules of international relations and its own position in that environment than the policy of security and defence integration.

Another reason for looking into this particular foreign policy is that security and defence orientation of states are usually long-lasting, to the extent that they might be considered foreign policy roles (Holsti 1970) which states perform on a continuing basis in the international system. The relative stability of states' policies of security and defence cooperation make them a suitable playground for analysing the stability and cohesion of the self-narrative which has developed around these policies. Such long-lasting nature of this policy allows better studying not only of the stability of national self-narratives but the mechanisms behind their changes since the security and defence policy, despite its relative stability, had to adapt over time to the changing and often contradictory demands coming from the international affairs. Finally, being among the core foreign policies, this issue is often more familiar and important to the public than most other foreign policy issues. Even when they lack information about it, they are usually very opinionated about this issue, which is why this policy seems further suitable to investigating the role of the public and its relationship with policymakers. Moreover, the policy of security and defence cooperation, at least at the point when its scale and nature come close to integration, falls under rare foreign policy issues on which citizens are usually invited to vote on a referendum only adds to its relevance for investigating the still puzzling role of public opinion in foreign policy.

In terms of the number of states under consideration, this case study focuses on a single case of the Republic of Serbia. Although this design is conventional and not particularly robust for the goal of theory building, the case of Serbia holds significant value for research in several key areas. Overall, it diverges from existing studies, which have predominantly focused on the U.S. and a few other Western democracies, examining relatively similar political, party, and societal contexts. Being a small, post-conflict, unconsolidated democracy with fragmented party system, Serbia represents a rather different case for the study of the impact of the public and public-elite nexus on foreign policy, in which many of the usual factors and mechanisms (e.g., partisanship) matter differently, if at all, while some other factors might be more salient. What furthermore makes it a great case for studying the role of common sense in particular is the fact that, different to most great powers that have been

commonly investigated, Serbia has undergone several transitions in the last century, from shifts in the political system and state borders to shifts in security and defence policy. Therefore, while the single case study might be a typical design, the case of Serbia can in many ways be considered critical for investigating the role of common sense in the public-elite nexus concerning foreign policy.

Crucially, what makes the case of Serbia's policy of security and defence particularly suitable for tracing whether and how common sense impacts the uneven stickiness of foreign policies in one society is that Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation is so multifaceted that it actually comprises four different policies that can be considered separate units of analysis within this case study. More precisely, Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation comprises at least four important pillars: Serbia's cooperation with the EU, cooperation with NATO, cooperation with Russia and its policy of military neutrality. This comparison of these four cases withing the case should allow for tracing the mechanisms that underpin common sense influence on the public-elite nexus in foreign policy and allow this case study, despite being single, to serve as a typical or representative instance of a larger phenomenon (Gerring 2006, 20), highlighting key aspects or qualities that make some foreign policies sticky. While the availability of the data does not allow a perfect diachronic comparison (by observing the case and the subset of within-case units over time), the four foreign policies are analysed both diachronically and synchronically (by observing within-case variation at a single point in time).

In terms of temporal frame of the study, the period between 2001 and 2022 is observed. The year of 2001 is taken as the beginning since that is when, after a short transitional period, the new government in Serbia was formed, officially ending the rule of the Socialist Party of Serbia headed by Slobodan Milošević. This is also when the first official stands about the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's positions and aims in relation to security and defence cooperation were adopted. Although Serbia was one of two constituent states of this federation until 2003, and a member of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro all until 2006, the year of 2001 is the major watershed in its positioning towards the major international actors and arrangements, including the security and defence ones. The year 2022 is taken as the year in which the last parliamentary elections in Serbia were held before the beginning of the dissertation writing process. Being the periods of heightened political debates on all issues, including foreign and security policy ones, election years are convenient for making an up-to-date capture of foreign policy stances of relevant political actors. On the other hand, the results of frequent opinion polls conducted in the election years and, ultimately, the election results, offer valuable insights into the public views and sentiments on those issues. Another strong reason for which 2022 is considered an optimal end-year of the case study is the beginning of the war in Ukraine that put Serbia's policy of security and defence integration on a serious test. While the war, unfortunately, exceed the end year of the dissertation research, the parliamentary elections captured some of the initial public reactions and the official positioning of the Republic of Serbia in relation to the crises that, even until the moment of the submission, did not significantly change. Nevertheless, while the in-depth empirical analysis covers the period of 2001 – 2022, some historical events and periods from the 20th-century history of Yugoslavia were inevitably reflected upon due to their long-term impact on Serbia's foreign and security course.

As said, the case study unfolds in three major phases. The first part of the empirical research, presented in the Chapter 5, aims to analyse Serbia's foreign policy of security and defence by identifying its four major pillars and their varying degrees of stickiness. By highlighting the official stance on these four areas over the past two decades and exploring public opinion towards them, this section of the analysis sheds light on the disconnect between policymakers and the public in Serbia's foreign policy. The contrast between official cooperation and public sentiment helps to uncover the uneven stickiness of these four policies in Serbia. Presenting the overview of these policies and public attitudes toward them, this phase is primarily based on desk research, drawing from the relevant secondary sources. The secondary data includes relevant academic and policy literature, official data published by relevant government bodies (i.e. the Government of Serbia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of European Integration), international organisation (i.e. European

Commission, NATO, CSTO), specialised civil society organisations in Serbia (i.e. ISAC Fund, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy) that provide information about these policies, as well as data on the public attitudes (i.e. opinion polls conducted by different government institutions and non-government organisations. However, in addition to secondary sources, the overview of the existing policies and their stickiness is supplemented by the insights from the semi-structured interviews with foreign policy officials involved in security and defence policy in Serbia.[47] Interviews included ten policymakers at the time serving in relevant government bodies, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of European Integration, the Office of the Prime Minister, and members of the National Assembly Defence Committee (list of interviewees provided in Appendix 1). These interviews are used primarily to illustrate ongoing institutional positions and not as primary sources for conclusions.

The second phase includes the attempt of mapping common sense interpretative scheme among the elites and public, and the discussion on their (mis)fit. The elites' common sense is primarily extracted from the strategic framework relevant for Serbia's overall foreign policy course, including security and defence policy, from the last two decades (2000 – 2023). After considering several options for potential sources or sites of policymakers' common sense, the strategic framework was viewed optimal for its purpose of outlining what guides long-term goals, priorities and actions in foreign policy in general, including security and defence matters, to both domestic and international audience. Unlike more spontaneous decisions, short-term plans, and day-to-day statements, the strategic framework is meant to convey a broader, long-term vision of the world, the immediate environment, and Serbia's role within it, which serves as the basis for shaping specific policies. Designed to endure for several years, the strategic framework typically highlights both continuities and changes, offering a coherent narrative that links the nation's past, present, and future identity.

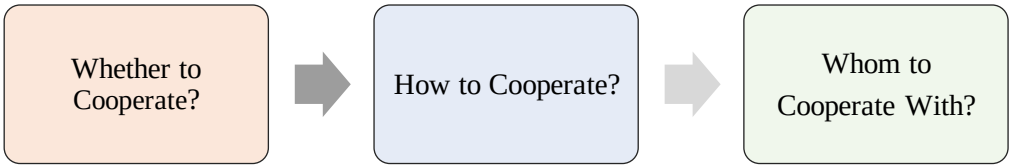
Here, strategic framework is defined more extensively, to include two major types of primary data. First, it includes important written strategic foreign policy documents, like National Security Strategies, National Defence Strategies, different program documents (i.e. White Paper of Defence), action plans and reports adopted by the relevant institutions with authority in foreign policy making, especially in regard to the policy of security and defence cooperation. These documents are particularly valuable since, although their adoption is in the authority of one ministry, the process of their writing often involves the collection of inputs from various relevant government bodies and experts, therefore, representing a consensus of institutional attitudes. Moreover, since the strategic framework proved to last longer than specific governments and even outlived the change of the regimes in mid-2010, they seem to express wider political consensus. Secondly, the important source of strategic framework are important oral foreign policy addresses of the officials involved in foreign policy making, such as the exposes of the presidents, prime ministers, foreign policy ministers, defence ministers, as well as their yearly addressing or interviews, speeches in front of the UN, or similar occasions when they were in the position to communicate Serbia's strategic orientation, especially in regard to the security and defence policy in the period from 2000 to 2022. Like strategic documents, these speeches often convey messages grounded in historical experience and enduring wisdom, meant to last longer than routine political manoeuvres. In addition, for the sake of more vivid illustrations of the policymakers' common sense in international relations, and their routine reliance on it, the extracted 'truths' and 'wisdoms' about international relations are illustrated with some examples from their more everyday statements. Also, while the focus is on the foreign policy officials, the analysis is occasionally widened to include the statements by other officials if given in a relevant context.

[47] Interviews were conducted in the period January 2020 – January 2021, within the project titled "Fighting Together, Moving Apart: European Common Defence and Shared Security in an age of Brexit and Trump", supported by Volkswagen Foundation. The project went through the ethics screening and was approved by the University of Exeter Ethics Committee (number 201920-067). More details: www.secEUrity.eu. Interviews in Serbia, used in this dissertation were conducted by prof. dr Filip Ejdus and the author of the dissertation.

For extracting the elite common sense from the strategic framework, the combination of (emotional) discourse analysis and content analysis is performed. Searching for 'truths' and 'lessons' about international relations and Serbia's position in them – especially those related to security and defence – which policymakers recall explaining or justifying the proposed foreign policy choices, several rounds of coding of the collected text were conducted. In other words, the idea was to map some fundamental claims that immediately appear sensible, self-evident, optimal, undoubtful, and can be taken for granted. Only rarely, these truths were expressed explicitly and in the same way, which is why their identification required contextual analysis and deeper understanding of the hidden meanings, perpetuating norms, structures, ideologies, and beliefs about international relations. The analysis was dominantly guided by the theoretical and methodological conceptions of intertextuality in foreign policy discourse developed by Hansen (2006). Since the aim of this dissertation is to investigate the mutually constituting and construing relationship between foreign policy makers and the public, discourse analysis in this dissertation is mostly centred around the official foreign policy discourse (Model 1). While the common sense is neither shaped nor comprised in what the officials say only, for the current stage of the theoretical model, focusing on the strategic framework and those who are in position to directly shape foreign policy framework and make specific decision, seems optimal. Finally, since the proposed theoretical framework requires better illuminating the role of affects in common sense, the guidelines for emotion discourse analysis in IR (Koschut et al. 2017, Koschut 2018, Solomon 2012, Holland and Solomon 2014) were also of great importance.

The coding was conducted in NVivo software, manually. After two rounds of analysis and refinement, which involved eliminating and merging certain codes, ten key 'common-sense' themes emerged as the primary codes. Distinguish and separating the 'truths' was challenging especially since some of them appeared quite similar in wording.[48] However, they differed in meaning, as well as in their cognitive and emotional tone, warranting the creation of distinct codes. These claims are of different level of abstraction and precision, and by no means represent a coherent whole with clear-cut parts. Some of the claims are of more declarative nature, stating the obvious, while some others are more prescriptive, giving more direct instructions on sensible behaviour. The same applies to the affective analysis, where some codes are more neutral, while others carry a stronger emotional charge. Despite the interconnected nature of the codes, making a clear-cut separation impossible, the lessons can be grouped into three overarching themes. Those three topics practically correspond to basic questions in regard to the security and defence policy: whether to cooperate, how to cooperate, and with whom. The codebook, which lists the themes and corresponding codes and subcodes, along with their descriptions and examples, can be found in Appendix 3. Finally, after using NVivo for discourse analysis coding, it was applied for content analysis as well. This allowed tracking the frequency of the identified common-sense truths, enabling comparisons of the most frequently recalled truths, as well as their frequency over time. The content analysis results, displaying the occurrence of codes and subcodes across themes, were visualised using NVivo and are presented in the corresponding sections.

Graph 6. *Three key parts of common sense scheme about security and defence policy in Serbia emerging from a discourse and content analysis of the strategic framework (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*



[48] Identified claims are formulated either based on some direct quote used in the strategic framework or in the form of platitudes and phrases often heard in public, primarily for the sake of easier opinion polling.

The public common sense, at this moment, was investigated primarily in relation to the elites' common sense. More precisely, the current research design aims to capture whether and to what extent the common sense interpretive scheme about international relations proposed by elites through strategic framework actually resonates among the public in Serbia. While it would be ideal if the public common sense was captured in some more autonomous and inductive way (i.e. through focus groups, for instance), instead of being deduced from what the elites propose, these findings are far from irrelevant and futile for the purpose of initial testing of the proposed model. By investigating whether the public shares the truths proclaimed by the elites and to what extent, we are able to make an initial investigation in how common the worldview among the public end policymakers in Serbia is when it comes to foreign policy and, hence, do they at all rely on similar basic assumptions on the world when judging about sensible foreign policies for Serbia. While this approach leaves us without knowing what else matters to the public and what other common sense truths govern their judgments on of foreign policy, we can at least understand to what extent their attitude about foreign policy is impacted by those that the policymakers find relevant and sensible. The explored (dis)connect can serve as source for further analysis of the public truths that would be more inductive.

The opinion poll was conducted on a representative sample for Serbia (details about the survey and sample available in Appendix 2). This part of the questionnaire included the ten common sense truths formed as statements about the international relations and Serbia's position in it, which the respondents were supposed to evaluate on a scale from 1 (strong disagreement) to 5 (strong agreement), with the value of 3 being a neutral position. The criteria for evaluating if a specific statement could be considered common sense, two criteria are set, in accordance with the practice in the literature on social consensus (Barrios et al. 2021; Hackett, Masson and Phillips 2006; Christie and Barela, 2005; Rayens and Hahn, 2000). First, the mean value above 3 suggests a solid agreement, and bellow 3 suggests a solid disagreement – the further from the neutral position, the more intensive the agreement or disagreement with the truth. In addition to the mean, descriptive statistic in regard to the percentage of the populations sharing or opposing to a specific statement suggest whether the there is a social consensus around some statement. In essence, the absolute majority (above 50%) of the respondents agreeing or disagreeing with some statements suggests that there is a minimum criterion to conclude that there is social consensus around it. In other words, those statements from the policymakers that are shared among more than a half of the population can indeed be considered common sense.

The third step finally attempts to explore the relationship between the stickiness of specific foreign policies and public common sense. This part of the analysis relies on statistical analysis conducted via SPSS software, including correlation analysis, linear and multiple regression, to determine whether the truths that qualify as common sense among the public are in strong connection to the public attitudes about each of the four identifies foreign policies. In line with the proposed model, the uneven stickiness of four policies, initially identified through desk research in the first phase, is then evaluated based on public opinion. This assessment focuses on two dimensions of stickiness: how sensible the public perceives it to be to maintain each policy, or how sensible they find it to discontinue them. Then, the analysis shows whether there exists statistically relevant relationship between the public attitudes revealing each dimension of stickiness and their endorsement of common-sense truths. If such a relationship exists, whether positive or negative, it allows us to determine whether the common-sense interpretative framework influences the persistence of foreign policies. By uncovering the list of common-sense beliefs that seem to influence whether a particular foreign policy appears immediately reasonable to the public, or conversely, whether its abandonment appears justified, we can gain insight into whether and how this fundamental tool of ontological security affects immediate foreign policy judgments. Decision trees further demonstrate the typical sequence of logical reasoning used to form opinions on whether specific foreign policies, or their abandonment, are perceived as sensible. This analysis ultimately identifies a typical common-sense framework for both supporters and opponents of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU, NATO, Russia, and its military neutrality.

Additional support for the model is sought by examining the public's affective attachment to four specific foreign policies, based on the original data obtained through the opinion poll conducted for this purpose. Analysing these immediate emotional reactions can provide insights into the cognitive-affective interplay that shapes judgments of foreign policy. A strong alignment between cognitive and affective responses can lead to more durable policies, whereas a mismatch may result in significant resistance. This alignment is assessed not only through the valence of emotions but also by evaluating how the structure of affective attachment to a policy corresponds with previously analysed affective patterns underlying the common-sense beliefs related to the topic.

The research design for probing the proposed theoretical model is far from perfect and requires significant methodological improvements, of which three seem most important. First, the mapping of elite common sense can be improved and broadened beyond the strategic framework. While the strategic framework is suitable for many reasons explained above, a more comprehensive analysis should include other 'repositories' of common sense, such as more immediate, natural discourse of officials, as well as other segments of relevant elites, including all relevant political parties, foreign policy experts, and public intellectuals. This would capture a wider range of truths the public is exposed to, regardless of who governs the official foreign policy-making process. Second, as mentioned, the approach to mapping public common sense should, in future efforts, be more inductive and bottom-up, methodologically independent of the study of elite common sense. Instead of investigating it in the second stage based on the map of elite common sense, a more bottom-up approach would allow for a more genuine understanding of the cognitive-affective lessons the public relies on when judging international events and foreign policy propositions, regardless of what elites think or say. Third, while the conducted statistical analysis provides stronger evidence of the importance of common sense in understanding the public-elite nexus in foreign policy, as well as for theorizing the self in ontological security studies of foreign policy, more advanced statistical models should be developed to capture the steps in the process of judgment. This is particularly true for the cognitive-affective interplay, which is currently determined mostly indirectly. Conducting a series of surveys, rather than relying on a single momentary snapshot, would yield more reliable and stable data while reducing the risk of results being influenced by significant events, such as the war in Ukraine in this case.

Capturing something as elusive as common sense is a highly challenging task, and the process inevitably involves trial and error. While this model does not fully succeed in capturing common sense in an ideal way, it offers novel and more concrete evidence of the (mis)alignment between public and elite worldviews on international relations in Serbia. This contributes to our understanding of the foreign policy-making process and the significant role that identity plays in it. The common-sense framework, operationalized as a cognitive-affective scheme functioning as a core ontological security mechanism across various domains – including international politics – appears to influence whether the public perceives policies as sensible, and consequently, whether they support or reject them both immediately and in the long run. The empirical analysis based on the explained methodology aims to determine whether the worldviews of elites and the public resonate and, more importantly, how this influences the public's foreign policy attitudes both in the short and long term. This, in turn, critically affects the stickiness of foreign policies proposed by decision-makers, as suggested by the theoretical model.

5. Serbia's Multifaceted Policy of Security and Defence Cooperation and Its Stickiness

On the morning of 27 March 1941, a large number of citizens took to the streets Belgrade, shouting "Bolje rat nego pakt (*Better war than pact!*)" and "Bolje grob nego rob! (*Better a grave than a slave*)", and "Grobom ikad, robom nikad!" (*In the grave ever, slave never!*). Demonstrations also took place in Cetinje, Podgorica, Split, Skoplje, Kragujevac and other major Yugoslav cities. Two days earlier, on March 25, the then Government Cvetković-Maček and Regent Prince Pavle decided to give up neutrality they were trying to manoeuvre until then and, under Hitler's pressure, accede to the to the Tripartite Pact. Dissatisfied with that decision, many among the opposition politicians, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and, most importantly, the army, staged a coup on the night between March 26 and 27, overthrew the government, abolished the viceroyalty, and proclaimed the minor heir to the throne as the king. On the wings of the public's discontent with the government's foreign policy moves, evident in the outbreak of civil discontent across the country, Yugoslavia found itself on 'the right side of history', a determination that profoundly influenced the fate of the nation and its people in far-reaching ways. The then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, whose country supported the coup and Yugoslavia's "no" to Hitler, declared on the same day that "Yugoslavia found its soul" (Stafford 1977, 399). In his memoirs, King Peter II later said: "For every true Serb could be the only way out – the revolution, which took place on March 27" (Karađorđević 1954).

While the event from the onset of the World War II has been a unique moment in the Yugoslav and Serbian history, it has remained a powerful reminder to the elites, the public and researchers, that, despite the varied historical and political circumstances experienced by the people in these regions, the public's interest and power over the government foreign policy decisions should never be disregarded. Foreign policy has remained important to the public in Serbia in the contemporary circumstances as well, to the level that some researchers argue "that foreign policy has figured as one of the main reasons for the ascent or fall of almost every Serbian government since 1990" (Novaković 2013, 11). The October Revolution that took place in 2000 against the Slobodan Milošević and the Socialist Party of Serbia was largely caused by the foreign policy moves that took Yugoslavia into the wars and out of the deepening and widening European integration project. Even the current ruling regime, that came into power in 2012, became 'elective' only after a U-turn in the foreign policy domain. Both the Serbian Progressive Party, created in 2008 by the most prominent members of the Serbian Radical Party, and its consistent coalition partner, the Socialist Party of Serbia, eventually endorsed the European integration as Serbia's strategic foreign policy priority despite their long and fierce opposition to this trajectory. Moreover, if the policy on the Kosovo issue is regarded as an aspect of foreign policy,[49] the overall significance of foreign policy to the Serbian public could be considered substantial.

One of the reasons for such situation might exactly lay in the fact that foreign policy has in Serbia been less 'foreign' than it is usually the case. Thanks to the war legacy of the 1990s and the ongoing struggle over the final status of Kosovo, there is hardly any foreign policy issue in Serbia that is not at the same time domestic, or even personal. Most of the traditional foreign policy issues, from the neighbourhood policy, via regional integrations, to security and defence cooperation, have been 'domesticated' in Serbia by a bare fact that the vast majority of the public has very direct and rather intense experience with them. Moreover, thanks to the irresponsible and self-centred behaviour of successive political elites in Serbia and entire region, all these open issues have become convenient diversionary tool to distract public's attention whenever there is a need to distract from domestic political and economic problems. This blurring boundary between domestic and foreign policy also extends in the opposite direction, as many of the traditionally domestic issues are 'foreignized' in Serbia, exemplified by the widespread belief among the public that essentially domestic matters, such as the level of democracy, are determined from outside and ultimately hinge on Serbia's relations

[49] While the Kosovo issue is officially regarded as a domestic issue and policy, in practice, negotiations with Pristina have predominantly taken place within the framework of foreign policy.

with foreign countries (Rečević 2021). In other words, while foreign policy is never and nowhere fully detached from the domestic sphere, the public's engagement with foreign policy. Therefore, the relationship between the public and policymakers in Serbia might be even more immersed and intensive than it is typically observed.

This, however, does not mean that foreign policy in Serbia does not function as 'high politics.' On the contrary, despite the omnipresence of foreign topics in the domestic political sphere and despite the rather inclusive nominal process of foreign policy making established by the law, foreign policy in Serbia has remained extremely exclusive and non-transparent, reserved for only few at the top and distant from the eyes of the expert and general public. While the situations have obviously worsened with the overall democracy backsliding and erosion of media freedoms as of the second half of the 2010s, foreign policy making has not been particularly open to the public even in the prior times of democratic rise and optimism. The debates on foreign policy were sporadic, and important strategic decisions were often made over night and behind the closed doors, with no public debate, let alone referendum.[50] The discourse of officials and politicians in general has usually been framed in 'either or' and 'no alternative' fashion, and the Kosovo issue has only made this even more difficult as many foreign policy options are immediately ruled out. Moreover, the elites' reluctance to increase transparency in foreign policy seems aligned with broader public attitudes and trends in political participation, both generally and in foreign policy specifically (CRTA 2021; 2023; 2024, Greenberg 2010; Elez 2019).[51] According to some survey results, although scarce, the public knows little about foreign affairs. For example. in 2012, 59% could not identify major external threats (BCBP 2012) and seldom prioritises foreign policy in their party preferences or voting decisions. In the same survey, while the differences are rather small, and the issue of Kosovo was included in the category of societal topics, the foreign policy ranked as the least important in comparison to economic topics, crime and corruption, and societal topics.

Discussing the agreements and disagreements between the public and elites is therefore very challenging in the Serbian context as it raises the question of whether the focus should be on how the practical implementation of foreign policy or how the policymakers' rhetoric about it align with public opinion, given that these often diverge significantly.[52] The officials have shown limited enthusiasm for informing or persuading the public, particularly regarding unpopular foreign policy decisions, but instead often let citizens think what they want and try to stay, at least rhetorically, inside the their boundaries of sensible. In such circumstances, strong public-elite agreements and disagreements are rarely a consequence of deliberate consideration and informed arguments but rather stem from the public's 'gut feeling' on whether some foreign policy proposed by officials make sense within the given historical moment. Consequentially, the relationship between the public and policymakers in Serbia regarding foreign policy, thus, fluctuates between 'the taboo' and 'the obvious', leaving much unspoken by policymakers and unknown to the public. The formulation of foreign policy navigates the shared understanding of international relations, with policymakers

[50] One of the most important illustrations of the relationship between the public and elites is the history of the referendums, as the most direct expression of the public's will on the matters of national interest. The history of referendums has not been rich neither in Yugoslavia, nor in Serbia. Since 1945, only eight referenda have been held in Serbia – in 1945, 1963, 1990, two in 1992, in 1998, 2006 and 2022. Except for the one held in April 1998, when citizens were asked whether they accept the participation of foreign representatives in solving the crisis in Kosovo and Metohija, was directly about foreign policy. Most of them had, of course, foreign policy dimensions and repercussions (i.e. confirming the establishment of the new state, like in 1945, or recon in 2006) and were campaigned in that way. Even the most recent referendum on the constitutional changes, held in 2022 was presented in the EU referendum atmosphere, as the judicial reform were needed for the sake of the EU and potential failure would jeopardize Serbia's path toward the EU.

[51] The study aimed to explore citizens' views on different models of democracy – participatory, representative, and elite. Approximately 48% of Serbian citizens express a preference for the participatory model, advocating for active involvement of all citizens in politics. In contrast, about 27% believe that voting in elections is sufficient for citizen involvement (representative model), and 24% think that politics should be left to politicians and not ordinary citizens (elite model of democracy) (CRTA 2022).

[52] This is evident even in the democratic contexts with well-established culture of transparency and accountability, let alone in Serbia's fragile democratic setting, where the media are often the subject of direct or indirect government control.

working to minimise disruptions to the public's perception of how the world functions and what Serbia's role within it is. Since most interpretative frameworks remain implicit, tacit, taken for granted, and continuously evolving within society, it is not always easy to predict whether a foreign policy will be perceived as sensible, which makes it more challenging for foreign policy elites to manipulate public perception than it may sometimes appear. This complexity helps understand why different foreign policies in Serbia have continued receiving varying levels of support over the previous two decades.

Formulating a foreign policy course after a decade in which almost all foreign relations came down to war or sanctions was not an easy task for Serbia's policymakers at the beginning of the 21st century (Đukanović 2019; Dašić 2020; Krstić 2020; Kovačević 2019; 2016). Knowing who your friends and enemies in international relations are after a decade of fighting with countries which you previously formed a federation with, in which your allies from both World Wars bombed you, in which your 'eternal friends' and 'brothers' did not protect you, raised all possible fundamental questions and challenged or fundamental answers about biographic continuity for Serbia. Moreover, after a decade of bloody civil wars, the state of conflict almost turned into a new routine that was now being interrupted by a truce in the region. The democratic revolution of October 2000 sparked euphoria among political elites and Serbian society, but it also brought a sense of anxiety, as Serbia faced the opportunity to transform itself while grappling with the challenge of preserving its identity. Moreover, although armed conflicts were over and those who dragged Serbia into them were no longer in power, many issues in the region, including the Kosovo issue, remained open, limiting the manoeuvring space in which Serbia's self was to be repaired. Finding suitable foreign policy which made sense and felt right to the domestic society, but also to the international society in the changed global and regional environment, was an urging task (Mladenov 2014; Đukanović, Simić and Živojinović 2013; Ponomareva 2020; Džankić, Mladenov, and Stahl 2021; Kovačević 2021). In the words of Milošević's successor as leader of the Serbian Socialist Party and then-Prime Minister:

> Serbia has gone through a historical crisis in which our national and state interests were questioned, facing the disintegration of our former common state, wars, the violent secession of part of our territory, double standards from the international community, economic impoverishment, and the loss of any perspective. (Dačić 2013)

5.1. Serbia's Multifaceted Policy of Security and Defence Cooperation Policy

The Republic of Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation is perhaps the most illustrative of Serbia's overall foreign policy course since it encapsulates Serbia's response to the essential question of how to survive in international relations, in both physical and ontological security sense. While Serbia's contemporary policy of security and defence cooperation might have a short history, dating to the years following the democratic transition in 2000, it has a very a long past, reflecting various historical positions and roles in international relations which different forms of the Serbian state have taken from medieval times to today. Considering both the past and future, Serbia's current position regarding whether, how and who to rely on in security and defence matters is everything but simple, encompassing at least four major elements: its cooperation with the EU, cooperation with NATO, cooperation with Russia and, above all, maintaining military neutrality.[53] Such conglomerated security and defence strategy is certainly unique, drawing vastly opposing views within policy and academic circles, with very little middle ground (Ponomareva 2020). Before delving into the differing perspectives on why Serbia's foreign policy in security and defence matters is often seen as either perfectly logical or completely contradictory by observers, and the widely shared understanding of the role public opinion plays in shaping these policies, a brief overview of

[53] While it is challenging to arrange these four policies chronologically from oldest to newest, the order presented is based on key formal steps in the establishment of official cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and the other side in the contemporary period, starting from 2000, the year of democratic changes in Serbia.

the policies themselves is provided. The purpose is to illustrate how these policies have been implemented in practice, emphasising key moments and aspects of their development.

5.1.1. Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation with the EU

According to all relevant strategic documents, including both National Security Strategies and Defence Strategies from 2009 and 2019 (Republika Srbija 2009a; 2009b; 2019a; 2019b), the Republic of Serbia's major strategic goal and foreign policy aim as of 2000 has been to become a full member of the EU. By proclaiming this, Serbia automatically expressed its readiness to align with those EU policies, positions and actions that involve the coordination of member states' foreign, security and defence policies. All strategic documents from the early 2000s made this explicit, including the National Security Strategy from 2009, stating that Serbia's aim to "harmonise its foreign and security policy with the positions and activities of the EU in all the major issues of global, European and regional character" and "its willingness to build capacities and capabilities of its national security system, in accordance with the standards and obligations deriving from the European Security and Defence Policy" (Republika Srbija 2009a). As of the early 2000s, thus, Serbia has been reiterating its readiness, both in terms of operative capacities and political spirit, to harmonise its behaviour in international relations with the EU's goals and ways of preserving peace, preventing conflicts, and strengthening international security. While the overall Serbia's geostrategic positioning has made this process even curvier in comparison to typical EU candidate states, the nature and pace of Serbia's pre-accession alignment in this area has, however, also been impacted by a specific nature and position which the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and its subset Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), has had within the overall EU architecture (Tardy 2018; Smith 2017; Tocci 2017; Pishchikova and Piras 2017; Brommesson and Ekengren 2020).[54]

As candidate states are required to conform to a policy that still lacks a clear definition and universal obligations for member states, the acquis in the CFSP and CSDP is notably less intricate and rigorous when contrasted with the traditional chapters (or, as of 2020, clusters). The absence of very clear criteria for assessing progress in this field can lead to challenges that extend well beyond the explicitly defined benchmarks (Samardžić, 2010). This is particularly relevant in light of the substantial geopolitical challenges and policy shifts in recent years, which have amplified both the importance and the demands of aligning the policies of EU candidate countries in this area.[55] Instead of long and complicated approximation in the classic 'article by article' sense, the alignment with CFSP is not limited to the passive fulfilment of strict, well-defined obligations – as they are scarce – but requires from candidate states to prove that they meet standards which would enable their active participation in the EU foreign, security and defence policy. This further means that the candidate

[54] Since the inception of the European integration project, foreign and security policy has consistently set the EU apart as a unique entity compared to other regional organisations (Tardy 2018; Smith 2017). Every new wave of integration optimism (or, perhaps, overall pessimism caused by the external shocks, threats, and global crises), has led to different institutional changes and improvements that have slowly moved this European policy towards something that can be called 'common'. The most recent impetus, as outlined in *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, published in 2016, has led to additional efforts to strengthen certain long-dormant mechanisms and establish new ones (Tocci 2017; Pishchikova and Piras 2017). Nevertheless, at least for now, CFSP and CSDP remain an intergovernmental corpus of EU policies by almost all criteria, from decision-making to funding mechanisms (Brommesson and Ekengren 2020). Consequentially, the set of rules in CFSP which all candidate states must adhere to for EU accession substantially diverges from the conventional *acquis communautaire.*

[55] The European Commission conducts regular monitoring of EU candidate countries' alignment with pre-accession requirements, which is reported annually. During the EU accession process, it assesses candidate countries' alignment with the CFSP, focusing on their compliance with EU foreign policy objectives and actions. This is monitored under Chapter 31 in annual progress reports, which evaluate alignment (expressed in percentages) with EU declarations, sanctions implementation, and institutional capacities, highlighting progress and areas needing improvement.

country must take care that its foreign and security policy does not conflict with the EU CFSP policy in any sense but is fully harmonised with it in the moment the state becomes a full member.

The complexity of this process, however, is largely determined by the candidate country's past foreign policy positions or, more precisely, the extent of their divergence from the EU foreign and security policy. In certain instances, the accession process has necessitated profound changes in the candidate's foreign policy, extending beyond the adoption of the acquis to include the implementation of additional, and sometimes politically sensitive, measures to align their foreign policy with that of the EU. These measures have involved cancelling international agreements falling under the EU competence, accepting new international obligations, and adjusting to EU restrictive measures and sanctions by candidate states (Đurđević-Lukić 2010, 60-61). In the case of Serbia, the flexibility of regulation and conditionality in this area has perhaps been the most evident of all the candidate states since it has led to varying rates of alignment in different facets of CFSP and CSDP, often characterised by advancements in some areas and simultaneous setbacks in others.

While the willingness for the security and defence cooperation within the EU framework was continuously underlined by the Serbian policymakers (but also the EU officials) already as of the early 2000s, the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2008 has marked the official Serbia's contractual relationship with the EU and provided for the country's obligation to harmonise its policy in different areas with that of the EU, including the relevant expectations with respect to the CFPS and CSDP. Following the SAA, further foundation for Serbia's cooperation and active participation in CFPS, and particularly CSDP, was established in 2011 with the signing of several crucial agreements with the EU, including the Agreement Establishing the Framework for Serbia's Participation in EU Crisis Management Operations (European Union 2011a) and the Agreement on Security Procedures for the Exchange and Protection of Classified Information (European Union 2011b). These agreements established the legal foundation and fostered essential trust for Serbia's engagement in various areas of the CSDP (Ministry of Defence Republic of Serbia n.d.). The policy of military neutrality, proclaimed in 2007, was consistently presented as neither a formal nor substantive obstacle to Serbia's cooperation with the EU in security and defence matters. As summarised by an interviewee from the Ministry of European Integration, that is in charge of Serbia's accession process:

> Being neutral according to the Lisbon treaty is not a problem, but an opportunity for a country. Because if you remember, in the same article, you have a paragraph which stipulates that every country should have its national defence policy, arguments, interests. So, being neutral is not a problem for a country joining the EU and all of its aspects of integration, including PESCO, where we already showed the interest to join. (Ministry of European Integration Officer A, personal interview, February 2021)

Indeed, despite certain initial restraint and 'half-hearted' engagement with the CSDP – mostly related to the immediate recognition of Kosovo by most EU member states, the establishment of EULEX in Kosovo, but also some of more financial and administrative nature (Đurđević-Lukić 2010) – Serbia has soon made considerable progress in actively collaborating with EU institutions and member states in nearly all areas available to the third countries within the CSDP framework (Prodanić 2023; Jović-Lazić 2020; Cvetković 2022). First, Serbia has been participating actively in crisis management missions and operations under the CSDP. As of 2012, the Serbian Armed Forces have participated in three EU multinational operations: EUTM Somalia (6 personnel, participating since April 25, 2012), EUNAVFOR Somalia – Operation ATALANTA (4 personnel, participating since April 6, 2012), and EUTM RCA (7 personnel, participating since December 15, 2016) (Ministry of Defence n.d.). In September 2023, Serbia gave green light for her miliary staff to joint he EUTM in Mozambique (Narodna skupština Republike Srbije 2023). Serbia's contribution is often praised by the EU officials, and in recognition of a noteworthy contribution to the CSDP at the time, the EU approved the appointment of a Serbian officer as a liaison with the Military Staff in Brussels in late 2017, which was the first time a military officer from a non-EU member state held such a position

(Ministry of Defence 2017). The perception of benefits from Serbia's cooperation with the EU are well summarised in one of the interviews:

> The political benefit is huge, because it shows the good will and readiness of our country to be everywhere where EU member states are present despite limited resources. In addition to the political story, we also have an exchange of experiences, which makes some of our members interoperable, and experiences are passed to our people who were not in those places. In addition, excellent contacts are made in the missions, and our people then go to many important world institutions. (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Internal Affairs Committee A, personal interview, March 2020)

Secondly, Serbia has joined the concept of EU Battle Groups, specifically the HELBROC Battle Group led by Greece, with other members including Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania, and Cyprus (Ejdus, Savković and Dragojlović 2010). HELBROC Battlegroup made its capacities available to the EU in the first half of 2020, thus becoming one of eighteen EU Battlegroups that were ready to be deployed in its operations and missions but had never been used (now being transformed into the Rapid Deployment Capacity). Serbia joined this battlegroup in 2016 by signing technical agreement with the participating states. The participation of the Serbian Armed Forces in the HELBROC is often named by the Serbian foreign and security officials as a confirmation of Serbia's orientation towards sharing responsibilities with the EU partners when it comes to security in the region and beyond (Jović-Lazić 2020), as well as another opportunity for the improvement of the Serbian security and defence capacities. One of the interviewees reflected on the evolving role of Serbia within the EU security and defence framework:

> This EU battlegroup in which we are placed, I hope that it will function in an adequate way and that our forces will benefit from it. What would be very good is that through greater engagement in third, fourth generation of peacekeeping operations, that we develop our potential for emergency response. We see that peacekeeping operations are increasingly being transformed into humanitarian operations, in terms of resolving post-crisis problems, to re-establish government, the communal system, education, health care or electricity supply. (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Internal Affairs Committee A, personal interview, March 2020)

Thirdly, Serbia has made efforts towards establishing the legal and institutional framework for Serbia's participation in the EU civilian missions, guided by UN Security Council resolutions and EU Council decisions (Cvetković 2022). Although there were no legal barriers for deploying military forces to multinational operations, the legal framework in Serbia had not for long considered deploying civilian experts from Serbia to international peacekeeping missions. To enhance Serbia's capacity for civilian mission participation, the government first adopted a report in May 2017, emphasizing the need for a national legislative framework, that was followed by The Action Plan for Developing Civil Contributions, adopted in June of the following year, that outlined Serbia's commitment to contributing to EU, OSCE, and UN multinational operations. In 2018 and 2019, Serbian institutions conducted multiple training cycles for civilians participating in multinational operations. Eventually, the Law on Civilian Participation in International Missions and Operations Outside the Borders of the Republic of Serbia was adopted in 2023, giving foundation for the establishment of the national base of civilian experts and all other important organisational units (Republika Srbija 2023). Different to the deployment of military staff, where the Ministry of Defence is in charge, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is placed in the driving seat for the civilian participation. One of the interviewees who participated in the drafting of this Law reflected on its future benefits:

> We have a very good cooperation and give huge contribution and additionally we are planning to extend our participation in multilateral missions and operations to civilians because we have military, police, and we now want to have civilians. People from the ministries, state institutions, but I think we can broaden this circle to include people from academia, civil society, local government, NGOs. There are a lot of needs for judges, engineers in post-conflict areas and we should use these opportunities. Currently we are working on establishing institutional and legal framework. We adopted the Action Plan and established a working group, and we are now

working on the legislative framework. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020)

Finally, Serbia has expressed support and interest in the recently initiated changes aimed at strengthening the CSDP, as outlined in the adoption of the EU Global Strategy and the Security and Defence Implementation Plan – European Defence Action Plan (Glišić, Đorđevic and Stojković 2020). Projects and initiatives such as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) are actively monitored and supported by Serbia, demonstrating readiness for active involvement, although the framework for the third-party participation is not fully clear and developed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020). In addition, Serbia also strives to improve cooperation with the European Defence Agency (EDA), being one of only five non-EU member states that have concluded Administrative Arrangements with the EDA by 2023 (European Defence Agency n.d.). Through participation in various EDA initiatives and programs, Serbia aims to improve interoperability with EU member states, enhance the defence industry and research potential of domestic institutions, achieve technological modernisation of the Serbian Armed Forces, and consequently improve military and defence economy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020). Also, under the framework of the EU-NATO Joint Declarations, the Republic of Serbia has the opportunity to further improve cooperation with these two organizations, primarily in two areas of cooperation – exercises and supporting partners' capacity-building efforts, as the Serbian Armed Forces conduct several exercises with the EU and NATO every year to improve interoperability and conduct pre-deployment training. An officer from MEI outlined the potential benefits of cooperation:

> We can say that this interest is at least twofold or threefold. One is military technical, whether we can produce something or we can improve our technical capacities. Second is research, whether we can employ more our Military-Technical Institute. And we, at time had several projects in mind which could be easily compared with what was going at the EU level. And third, which is mostly talked about is military economy aspect. Whether we can produce exports, both to the EU states and, here basically we are speaking about raw materials, unfortunately, like, exporting the materials that are needed to produce the ammunition, and to the third states. So, if I had to draw the line, we had the interest to discuss these arrangements with the EU, military economic, military technical and research. (Ministry of European Integration Officer B, personal interview, February 2021)

Nevertheless, while Serbia has tried to become credible and valuable partner to the operational part of the CSDP, there are still significant, and perhaps rising challenges to its alignment with the political framework of CFSP. While the European Commission Screening Report for Chapter 31 has not yet been adopted,[56] the annual reports published by the European Commission represent the major mechanism for tracking Serbia's, apparently decreasing, alignment with CFSP and CSDP. Serbia's level of compliance with the EU policy in this area, according to the European Commission Reports for 2012 and 2013, was estimated at high 99% and 89% respectively (European Commission 2012; 2013). Ten years later, however, Serbia's alignment rate with CFSP High Representative statements and Council Decisions was 46% in 2022, marginally increasing to 51% by August 2023, which makes Serbia a candidate country with the lowest alignment percentage in the region (European Commission 2022; 2023). The primary source of divergence arises from Serbia's disagreement with the EU regarding the restrictive measures against Russia (Novaković and Plavšić 2023). Reflecting on the growing misalignment with the EU's positions in this area, one of the interviewees offered a different perspective on the methodology of the tracking mechanism, as well as on Serbia's specific stance in this regard:

> There are some remarks that percentage is still low and not so encouraging. This is because of sanctions to Russia and some other issues. Legally speaking, we are not obliged to align with this since we are just supposed to progress until the membership, and I am joking sometimes

[56] Explanatory and bilateral screening meetings between Serbia and the EU in the Common Foreign, Security, and Defence Policy occurred in 2014.

> with them and say: "Let us see what we can do. One year we will not align with any of your statements, and next year we will align with all of them, and we will have a huge progress". So, it should not be a question of numbers, it is a question of commitment and readiness to be on board with you, to cope with security challenges, and participate in these policies as much as possible as a candidate country. So, I don't see alignment as a main issue. Of course, there are differences between European countries, some of them have more understanding than others. It's up to them, of course, and we have to stick to our national interests, especially regarding the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020)

Although Serbia has been verbally supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity as of 2014, it has refrained from endorsing any round of the EU's sanctions against Russia and maintained robust relations with the Russian Federation, evident in frequent top-level visits and intensified technical and defence cooperation. Moreover, Serbian authorities failed to align with Council decisions on other issues such as Venezuela, China, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Iran, Hong Kong, and sporadically Syria, in cases when these decisions directly targeted Russian interests in these conflicts (European Commission 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020). In particular, 2019 and 2020 witnessed Serbia's non-alignment with decisions related to Myanmar and Iran, as well as disregard for the declarations on Hong Kong and Russia (European Commission 2019, 2020). The European Commission has, however, been more resolute than ever in its appeals to Serbia to demonstrate a clear commitment to EU as its main political and economic partner, restrain the Eurosceptic rhetoric of the high governmental officials and step up its efforts towards a full alignment with the EU CFSP. In the 2023 report, EC clearly states that "no progress was made during the reporting period as Serbia's alignment patterns remained unchanged and some of Serbia's actions and statements went against EU positions on foreign policy", warning that Serbia' needs, as a matter of priority, to make serious additional efforts regarding its alignment with the EU CFSP" (European Commission 2023). Following the escalation of the war in Ukraine in 2022, Serbia started aligning with the EU declarations, but only those that rhetorically condemn Russian aggression and annexation of parts of Ukrainian territory, while still avoiding aligning with those imposing material sanctions (Novaković and Plavšić 2022). It has, however, aligned with the EU material sanctions imposed to Belarus due to its supportive role to Moscow in this conflict.[57]

In summary, as a candidate country, Serbia bears obligations to align with the EU's common positions in CFSP and CSDP by supporting its positions in international organisations, participating in its military and civil missions, and imposing sanctions and other restrictive measures. While Serbia promises to do so, it currently adheres to these obligations rather strategically and partially. On the one side, Serbia's contribution to the EU's missions is far from negligible for a candidate country, and its readiness to place its military, and soon civilian capacities at the further disposal for the EU's currently developing CSDP instruments is clear and appreciated in Brussels. Nevertheless, what overshadows these efforts and accomplishments is Serbia's very limited compliance with the political framework that governs these operational capacities. The ongoing concerns over Serbia's relations with Russia, especially in light of Russia's invasion in Ukraine and its efforts to exert influence in the Western Balkans, remain crucial. Although the EU cannot impose legal sanctions in the case of non-compliance with the CFSP and CSDP issues, Serbia's growing non-compliance with EU statements and measures is perceived as politically dubious in Brussels. Therefore, while Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU is set at the major strategic aim in this area, the current approach is far from 'all-in'. No strict obligation of aligning with everything within the CFSP and CSDP framework before the moment of accession allows the Serbia to dose its security and defence cooperation with the EU, adjusting it strategically to the overall balancing foreign policy course (Marciacq 2019). The lack of clear perspective of membership makes this dosed cooperation prolong. Once, if ever, Serbia joins the EU, this tailored-made security and defence cooperation would, however, need to cease even if Serbia preserved the policy of military

[57] Although this decision might seem as counterintuitive, they present a continuity in Serbian ambivalent policy towards Belarus, in which Serbia sometimes aligns with the EU declarations, but more often omits to do so.

neutrality which would nominally allow it some opt-outing from CFSP and CSDP decisions and actions. Whether or not it reflects reality, the prevailing perspective on Serbia's specific position in this regard, along with the primary reason for it, is effectively summarised by one of the interviewed MFA officials:

> There are some countries who have understanding, but generally speaking, European institutions want to see more percentage, more alignment, and everybody advise us that we have to accelerate that, etc. So, yes, I don't see any kind of specific blockade, but we still don't have any report on the bilateral screening since 2014. But everything is so connected with the overall situation with opening the chapters. Everything is connected to the question of Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia is in a really strange position. We are always in a strange position, we have this kind of Chapter 35 [referring to its focus on the Kosovo issue], and no one had this chapter. Among NATO partners we are the only partner, which was bombed by NATO in 1999. I mean, we are always specific. But, yes, everything is always connected to Kosovo and Metohija directly or indirectly. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020)

5.1.2. Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation with NATO

Historically, Yugoslavia's and Serbia's relations with NATO have always been complex and far from straightforward. There has not been a period when advocating stronger cooperation, let alone membership in NATO, has been easy for policymakers. In 1951, the American administration allegedly offered NATO membership to its new 'ally' but the Yugoslav Chief of the General Staff Koča Popović declined, arguing that it would be counterproductive for the overall security of the region (Simić 2008). Even in the moments when some indirect contractual relationship between Yugoslavia and NATO was established in 1953 and 1954 through Yugoslavia's Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation (the so called Third Balkan Pact) with Greece and Turkey, the membership in NATO was never officially on the table in Yugoslavia.[58] The subsequent decades of the Cold War, marked by Yugoslavia's policy of non-alignment, made it restrain from joining any alliance, a globally known and accepted position (Mates 1982, Jakovina 2018). What, however, made its reluctance to join NATO far stronger, among both the elites and the public, is what happened following the fall of the Iron Curtin and the collapse of the bipolar order in international relations. NATO's operations in the Bosnian War in 1995, under the UN mandate, and its bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, without the UN Security Council approval, demonstrated the shift in NATO's decision to engage outside the borders of member states, promoted by its strategic concepts in 1991 and 1999 (Ejdus and Kovačević 2019). These missions have, however, marked a dark and unprecedented twist in the relations between Yugoslavia (and, by extension, Serbia) and NATO, as they became adversaries in a war for the first time.

Following the unsuccessful peace negotiations in Rambouillet – where allegedly former Serbian President Milan Milutinović endeavoured to prevent NATO bombing by advocating Yugoslavia' membership in the alliance (RTS 2020) – NATO initiated a 78-day airstrike campaign against Yugoslavia on March 24, 1999. With Russia openly declaring its intent to veto any UN Security Council decision concerning the bombing of Yugoslavia, NATO opted to bypass the UN, and this decision remains one of the key factors contributing to the prevalent portrayal and perception

[58] Yugoslavia found this status suitable because it allowed the country to maintain the image of an independent communist state outside the main Western military-political alliance, while establishing practical connections with NATO through the formation of the Balkan Pact with two member states. It should be emphasized that Yugoslavia's stance on NATO membership at that time was not permanent, and it was emphasized that "in case of danger from aggression, Yugoslavia would adjust its position in accordance with that danger and in line with the defence of Europe as a whole." This particular position led some prominent intellectuals in Serbia, such as Predrag Simić, to argue that Yugoslavia effectively became a NATO member in 1954 without formal accession (Simić 2008).

of the operation "Allied Force" as aggression in Serbia to this day.[59] While there is no official state record of military or civilian casualties during the NATO bombing, estimates from a Belgrade-based CSO suggest approximately 754 fatalities, comprising 454 civilians and 300 members of the armed forces (Fond za humanitarno pravo 2018). Military casualties include 274 members of the Yugoslav Army/MUP and 26 members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), and among the civilian casualties were 219 Albanians, 207 individuals of Serbian and Montenegrin nationality, 14 Roma, and 14 from other nationalities (Fond za humanitarno pravo 2018). A large number Albanians (approx. 860,000) (UNHCR 2000) and Serbs (approx. 200,000) (UNHCR n.d) fled Kosovo and Metohija during this period, many of whom, especially Serbs, has never returned. Despite the international obligations of both Belgrade and Pristina authorities, the number of missing persons remains alarmingly high, estimated at 1,619 in 2023, with a couple of cases closed yearly at most. The war ended with the signing of the Military-Technical Agreement on June 9 (also known as the Kumanovo Agreement) and the adoption of the UN Resolution 1244 on 10 June 1999, which had formally reiterated Yugoslavia's sovereignty, but established international administration in Kosovo. In accordance with the Chapter 7 of UN Charter, the responsibility of peace enforcement in Kosovo was assigned to NATO's Kosovo Forces (KFOR), which have maintained a presence in Kosovo ever since, turning into one of the crucial channels of Serbia's cooperation with NATO.

The complete withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian security forces from Kosovo and Metohija, and limited presence in the safety zone next to the administrative line in south Serbia in 1999, created a security vacuum. besides leading to the violence against ethnic Serbs and their mass exodus from Kosovo during the summer of 1999, the vacuum also led to the gradual arming and subsequent armed incidents by the self-proclaimed Liberation Army of Bujanovac, Preševo, and Medveđa (OVPBM). KFOR's assistance in suppressing the activities of the OVPBM from March 2001, and in stopping later cycles of renewed violence against Serbs and Serbian cultural and religious heritage in March 2004, contributed to the growth of cooperation between Serbia and KFOR (Human Rights Watch 2004). The ground safety zone and the air safety zone were relaxed eventually, and as of 2008, joint patrols by the Serbian Army and KFOR have been monitoring the administrative line separating Kosovo and Metohija from the central Serbia.[60] Although occasional spikes of violence, as were those in 2004, 2011, and the most recent ones in December 2023, prompted NATO to temporarily deploy additional troops, the number of KFOR troops has incrementally decreased from approximately 15,000 in 1999 to approximately 4,500 in 2023. Despite occasional clashes between local Serbs and KFOR (BBC 2023), the role of KFOR in Kosovo has proven to be crucial for maintaining stability and a sense of security among the local Serbs on both sides of the Ibar River (Stojanović 2023). Explicitly designating KFOR as 'the only legal military force in this province', both the first and the latest National Security Strategy of Serbia advocate for its continued presence in Kosovo and Metohija (Republika Srbija 2009a; 2019a).

Not all cooperation with NATO has, however, been obligatory by the international law, but undertaken on a more voluntary basis. While the membership in NATO has never been explicitly stated as such, the term 'Euro-Atlantic integration' permeated the political discourse in the early 2000s (Đukanović 2016). Moreover, they are explicitly stated as a goal in the Defence Strategy of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro from 2004, which emphasizes that the new "commitment to membership in international security structures, primarily for accession to the Partnership for Peace Program, NATO alliance based on the democratic will of citizens, and other European and Euro-

[59] It was not the sole reason for such perceptions among the Serbian public; civilian casualties, deemed by NATO as collateral damage from the targeting of military objectives, also played a significant role.

[60] As an immediate response to the threat of renewed violence, the Kumanovo Agreement was established ground and air safety zones of 5 km and 25 km, respectively. These zones restricted access to the Serbian military and police near the administrative line with Kosovo. Direct collaboration on the field between the former Yugoslav Army and KFOR forces was established in 2001 and 2002, progressing steadily and resulting in the gradual relaxation of restrictions on the presence of Serbian security forces in the Ground Safety Zone The return of the Joint Security Forces, comprising members of the Serbian Police and Army, facilitated Serbia's gradual return to all sectors of the demilitarized zone from March to May 2001, albeit not at full capacity. The air safety zone was eventually suspended in 2015 (Kossev 2015).

Atlantic integrations" (Ministarstvo odbrane Srbije i Crne Gore 2004). A similar provision is reiterated in the draft of the National Strategy of Serbia and Montenegro for EU Accession, where integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is cited as the "primary goal, alongside the preservation and enhancement of national interests" (Kancelarija Vlade Republike Srbije za pridruživanje Evropskoj uniji 2005). Nevertheless, that even this term became too much for the Serbian officials was evident already in 2007, a year after the accession to the Partnership for Peace (PfP) NATO program. In the Presentation Document on Serbia's future participation in PfP, membership in the Alliance as a future possibility or prospect was not mentioned (Republika Srbija 2007). Soon, the National Security Strategy and Defence Strategy from 2009 reconfirmed this stating that Serbia had no intention of becoming a member of NATO (Republika Srbija 2009; 2009a). Ten years later, the strategies adopted in 2019 reiterated that "Participation in the Partnership for Peace program represents the optimal form of cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and NATO" and is compatible with its cooperation the accession process of Serbia to the EU (Republika Srbija 2019; 2019a).

Serbia formally joined the PfP in December 2007, by signing the PfP Framework Document.[61] Upon joining PfP, Serbia followed the standard procedures, gaining the rights to participate in the activities of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the NATO committees and working bodies, in a format available to partner countries. The nature of collaboration shifted from being somewhat *ad hoc* to a more systematic approach, guided by the defined components of the program (Savković and Novaković 2019). In July 2007, Serbia gave its Presentation Document, outlining areas of cooperation with NATO. Subsequently, the first Individual Partnership Program (IPP) was defined in December of the same year, officially initiating the implementation of collaborative reform programs. In July 2008, Serbia signed a security agreement with NATO, establishing the legal foundation for information exchange with the Alliance. Immediately before entering the program, the NATO Liaison Office was established in the Ministry of Defence building, serving as a crucial communication link on political and military matters between the Government of Serbia and NATO. The Mission of the Republic of Serbia to NATO was officially opened in December 2009 (for the timeline regarding PfP, see: Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova n.d.). While NATO Parliamentary Assembly operates separately from NATO, the delegation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia has been engaged as an associate member in the activities of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly since 2007.

In 2011, the Government of the Republic of Serbia decided to initiate the process of developing an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO, aiming to elevate and intensify collaboration with the Alliance. Like a 'buffet' of a diverse range of collaboration forms, programs, and activities, allowing partners to choose according to their own needs and priorities, the IPAP enables NATO to create an enhanced, tailored program focused on further reforming the defence and security sectors, as well as broader institutional and political reforms (Novaković and Savković 2019). The first IPAP, initially conceived for a two-year period, 2015-2016, was launched in January 2015, consisting of four chapters (including (1) Political and Security Framework, (2) Defence and Military Issues, (3) Public Diplomacy, Scientific Cooperation, Crisis Management System, and Emergency Planning, and (4) Protection of Classified Information) and specific activities (Ministarstvo spoljnih polsova 2014). Significantly, the IPAP activities have forged a direct connection with Serbia's reform

[61] The Collaboration between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and NATO commenced in the spring of 2002 when the Federal Government of the FRY initiated the process of joining the PfP. The formal request was presented in 2003 following the transformation of the federal state into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG). Initially, the invitation was withheld due to insufficient cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, NATO promptly introduced a specialized Technical Cooperation Program (TCP) for the SCG, allowing its engagement in selected PfP activities across three cycles. In the context of improved cooperation, the SCG signed and ratified the Agreement on Transit Arrangements with NATO in 2005. This agreement delineated the status of NATO forces and contributing states during transit through the SCG territory, streamlining the execution of peace operations in the Balkan region. The agreement was elevated to the Status of Forces Agreement in 2015, permitting not only transit but also the temporary stationing of NATO forces. At the NATO Summit in Riga in November 2006, Serbia was invited to officially join the PfP, together with Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

process for EU accession, so by implementing all outlined activities, Serbia not only enhances collaboration with NATO but also advances its EU accession procedures simultaneously. The second cycle of the IPAP for the period 2019-2021 was adopted in November 2019, confirming the upward trend of Serbia's partnership with NATO (Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova 2019). However, despite frequent media portrayals, Serbia does not meet the criteria for being termed a 'most advanced non-member', primarily due to its non-participation in NATO-led crisis management missions.[62]

Serbia's cooperation with NATO is, according to the assessments of both national and international institutions, beneficial in many aspects.[63] The most general benefit is related to the positive impact of this cooperation on the process of security and defence sector reform in Serbia, "facilitating a more efficient adjustment to the generally accepted principles of democratic control of armed forces and reinforcing the country's preparedness to respond to contemporary security challenges and threats" (Ministry of Defence Republic of Serbia n.d.). Joining the PfP has allowed access to NATO committees and working groups, fostering military capability development, peacetime cooperation, mutual trust, and joint training exercises, with the concept of operational capabilities being a notably effective cooperation mechanism. The key mechanisms for partnership and collaboration in military cooperation and defence system reform include the Trust Fund, the Planning and Review Process (PARP), the Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC), the Building Integrity Programme (BI), the Science for Peace and Security (SPS) programme, and the Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP). Each of these highly diverse and branched forms of cooperation between Serbia's security and defence sector and NATO is, according to domestic and international assessments, highly beneficial for the education, training, operability, and organisation of both civilian and military segments of the Serbian forces (Ministarstvo odbrane n.d.). Nonetheless, the officials' level of public praise is restrained due to the unpopularity of this policy among the public (discussed in detail later), which is why the public diplomacy segment of cooperation remains the only aspect negatively assessed by NATO (EWB 2017). An interviewee from the Serbian MFA confirmed this:

> Nobody evaluates it [Serbia' cooperation with NATO] as insufficient neither from our side nor from their side. Some insist on additional increase in joint exercises and actions but taking care that the measure of this does not upset the public in Serbia. I am sorry that when people think about cooperation with NATO, they think that we will wear their suits and become the ones who bomb someone like they bombed us. Why wouldn't we strengthen cooperation in scientific research projects? Or in improving standards in security structures, or increasing the number of women in the security sector? We need to take everything what is positive and apply it to us. (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Internal Affairs Committee B, personal interview, March 2020)

Another important and certainly most noticeable aspect of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with NATO is its participation in NATO military exercises. Since joining the PfP, Serbia has regularly participated in exercises organised by NATO.[64] Participation has gradually evolved, starting from the observer status, through the command level, to involvement at the operational and tactical levels. In order to fully participate in the exercises conducted by NATO,

[62]Serbia, however, indirectly aids these efforts by engaging in missions and operations under the auspices of the UN and EU, which allows NATO member and partner countries to allocate additional resources to alternative missions and operations.

[63]In addition to institutional cooperation with NATO through the PfP program, Serbia has developed bilateral and ad hoc multilateral collaboration with NATO member states (Vlada Republike Srbije 2011). This collaboration predominantly occurs through the Ministry of Defence, utilising instruments of international military cooperation, especially military cooperation plans negotiated by the ministries responsible for armed forces. Notable collaborations include partnerships with the Ohio National Guard and the armed forces of neighbouring countries, as well as military forces of some of the most significant NATO member states, such as the UK. Of course, as previously mentioned, one of the most important aspects of Serbia's cooperation with NATO is its cooperation with KFOR, based on the Resolution 1244 and the Military-Technical Agreement signed in June 1999.

[64] It participated in some exercises earlier, during the periods of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

the Serbian Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence had to implement certain reforms to achieve the desired level of interoperability. Since joining PfP, Serbia has participated in over 150 military exercises with NATO members and partners, most often with the neighbouring Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria (Dragojlo 2023). An increasingly prominent aspect of Serbia's relationship with NATO involves cooperation in civil protection and emergency response, facilitating the exchange of best practices, enhancing organizational structures, and bolstering response capacities during natural disasters and other emergencies. In October 2018, for instance, Serbia was the host of the international crisis management field exercise "SERBIA 2018", the first field exercise in Serbia organised by the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) and the Emergency Management Division of the Ministry of Interior of Serbia, with around 2,000 participants representing 40 NATO member and partner countries (Ministry of Defence 2018). While Serbia's moratoriums on participating in military exercises introduced following Russia's aggression to Ukraine (further discussed in the following section) also applied to its engagement with NATO (Ministarstvo odbrane 2020; EWB 2020, Popović 2020), the only exemptions from this moratorium were made in June 2023 and 2024 for the sake of military exercises "Platinum Wolf" with NATO (Radio Free Europe 2023a). As summarised by the MFA official in an interview: "As for the military exercises, I think it is important that we are doing the best we can, given the bombing in 1999" (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Internal Affairs Committee B, personal interview, March 2020).

Finally, in contrast to regular participation in the PfP, the IPAP introduced a significant change by initiating high-level political dialogue involving various ministries of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Following the reception of the IPAP, Serbia hosted multiple visits from high-ranking NATO officials, reciprocating with Serbian high-ranking officials visiting NATO almost annually. These interactions also included meetings with prominent NATO representatives on the sidelines of various events. In 2011 Serbia hosted annual Military Strategic Partnership Conference of NATO and partner states. A crucial milestone in advancing relations between the Republic of Serbia and NATO occurred during Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg's visit to Belgrade in November 2015. During this visit, he met with the then Prime Minister of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and other senior officials, using the occasion to express remorse for the innocent casualties resulting from the 1999 NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and to offer condolences to the affected families (Tomović 2015). The momentum of reinforcing high-level political dialogue persisted with Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić's visit to NATO Headquarters in November of the following year. In 2017, multiple meetings took place between representatives of the Republic of Serbia and NATO, and Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg made another official visit to Serbia in October 2018. His latest visit was in November 2023, following the incident in Banjska and heightened tensions in northern Kosovo (NATO 2023). Before reaching Belgrade, Stoltenberg also visited Pristina, emphasizing that the deployment of an additional 1,000 troops to KFOR underscored NATO's serious commitment to addressing the violence that had erupted that autumn in Kosovo (Radio Free Europe 2023). Recalling the importance of both political and operative cooperation, an MFA official says:

> The meetings and statements of NATO officials during their visits to Serbia are a sign that they are doing the most they can to fix this action, not to justify it – because there is obviously no justification, and that is clear to them as well – but to explain what the context was at that time and to show that not everything is evaluated positively. Where it hurts us, we will not cooperate, but many exercises we jointly conduct do help our army, to staff performance and the members themselves who get the chance to use some new kinds of weapons in the field. (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Internal Affairs Committee B, personal interview, March 2020)

In sum, Serbia's cooperation with NATO was not straightforward even before 1999, let alone after it. Nevertheless, the level of contemporary cooperation is by no means low, but regular, intensive, and diverse. While they are not very vocal and outspoken about it, Serbian officials acknowledge both the necessity and the benefits of various forms of cooperation with NATO, refraining from questioning it even during the most severe disagreements over Kosovo. However,

there is a clear ceiling, both in the political framework and in the officials' narrative, as NATO membership has remained off the table. Over time, this position has been institutionalised through key strategic documents reaffirming Serbia's decision to remain outside the alliance in order to preserve its policy of military neutrality. While officials continue emphasising that Serbia's cooperation with NATO is not incompatible with its military neutrality, the reality has largely been the opposite from the outset – military neutrality was primarily introduced to rule out NATO membership, with the current level of cooperation reaching its maximum under this framework.

5.1.3. Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation with Russia

Serbia's relations with Russia have historically been both special and perceived as such within Serbia, with Russia traditionally portrayed and perceived as the greatest friend and protector of Serbia's national interests (Proroković 2020, 197-200). The contemporary history of their military relations dates back to the early 19th century and Serbia's uprisings against the Ottomans when Russian military aid, expertise, and presence contributed to the efforts of the Serbian army (Milosavljević 2014, 236-238). While the Serbian-Russian relations experienced different ups and downs by the end of the long 19th century, the outbreak of WWI positioned them on the same side in the war, with Russia once again becoming one of the major suppliers of armaments, expertise, and food to Serbia. Emerging as different states with different political and ideological systems, Serbia (Yugoslavia) and Russia (Soviet Union) would, however, terminate all relations, diplomatic and military, in the interwar period (Životić 2021).

Not until the outbreak of the WWII, when they once again fought the same enemy, their relations were re-established and relatively normalized (Životić 2021) and then revived through the common ideology and societal system following its end. In the immediate aftermath of the WWII until Tito's conflict with Stalin in 1948, military cooperation between these two countries was very strong and versatile, ranging from military aid, via credits to the education of Yugoslav officers in the USSR (Dimitrijević 1997). While the events of 1948 left long-lasting consequences – primarily by incentivising Yugoslavia's policy of non-alignment – the relations after 1960 quickly recovered in the military sense, and the USSR remained undoubtedly the major military-technical partner of Yugoslavia until the end of the century (Vuković 2023, 62). Despite the signing of a military-technical cooperation agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Russian Federation in December 1997, the crises and collapse that both countries experienced by the end of the 20th century minimised this cooperation and left it at that level for about two decades (Vuković 2023).

Despite the overall turn towards the European (and, for a moment, even Euro-Atlantic) integration after 2000, Serbia's general foreign policy course towards Russia took a rather different outlook than for most Eastern and Central European states that strived towards very strong departure from it for the sake of quicker Europeanisation. As already mentioned, Serbia's pursuit to preserve Kosovo, and Russia's support in this matter, in the first line through its veto in the UN Security Council, meant that no government since 2000 dared to challenge any aspect of relations with Russia. The dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro only facilitated this foreign policy course. In the following years, Serbia's gratitude for this support resulted in different forms of special treatment of Russia's political and economic interests in Serbia and the wider region, extending to the area of security and defence cooperation, as well (Reljić 2009, 11–15). While the geopolitical circumstances created a certain ceiling to the scope of their military cooperation, the nature and level of Serbia's engagement with Russia in the area of security and defence is still exceptional for Europe, but also for the Western Balkans. Portrayed as not only compatible with military neutrality, but even equivalent in scale to the cooperation with the West, as previously discussed, Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia has been developed through different political, technical, and operative forms throughout the last two and so decades.

The intensification of Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation with the Russian Federation in the most contemporary era can be traced to the early 2012 and the establishment of the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre (RSHC) in Niš, southern Serbia. The next step was the signing of the Declaration on Strategic Partnership in May 2013, that, among other areas, "implies the cooperation of the ministries of defence and the armed forces of the two countries, scientific-technical and industrial-technological cooperation, cooperation in the field of education and culture, prevention of emergency situations and elimination of their consequences" (Ambasada Ruske Federacije 2013, 1). This general framework was made more specific already in November same year, when the Agreement on the cooperation between Serbia and the Russian Federation in the field of defence – proposed cooperation in many areas and forms, from exchange of staff, experience and information in the matters of defence and peace operations to military education – was signed. In the words of the then Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, this confirmed that "the relations between Russia and Serbia gained a new character in the recent times" (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2013). In mid-October 2014, an agreement on military-technical cooperation between Serbia and the Russian Federation was also signed, covering the areas of the delivery of arms and military equipment, maintenance and modernization of military goods, exchange of experts, training of personnel, and consultative assistance in the combat application of weapons.[65] Finally, in 2013, Serbia became an observer in the CSTO, enhancing the framework for the cooperation in combating terrorism, illegal migration, trafficking, and participating in peace missions (Narodna skupština Republike Srbije 2013).

In the following years, a growing acquisition of Russian military equipment by Belgrade has indeed become one of the most visible areas of their security and defence cooperation. According to the SIPRI global arms transfer database, Serbia has engaged in intensive procurement of Russian weaponry, as the procurement of weapons from Russia has surpassed that from all other countries since 2015 (SIPRI 2019). The financial significance of Serbia's procurement of Russian weaponry is apparent, elevating it to the third position in Europe for the purchase of Russian weapons and equipment during the period 2018/2019–2021, following Turkey and Belarus (see: Rečević i Krstić 2019). Russian donations in military equipment were notably significant, as well. According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, the first Russian donations were recorded in 2014 (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2019a, 112–114). Since then, there have been several instances of donations, with the most notable being the gifts of six MiG-29 aircraft (necessitating repair and modernisation), armoured reconnaissance vehicles BRDM-2MS, 30 T-72S tanks to Serbia, and four Mi-35 helicopters, with complimentary training (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2019b). As per media reports, Serbia also acquired six Pantsir air defence systems with missiles and additional equipment from Russia (Banković 2020). While these acquisitions at the time sparked accusations against Serbia for starting an arms race in the region (Ejdus, Rečević and Kovačević 2022), and aligning with Russia in the contemporary global turbulences, Serbia's officials denied any offensive intentions. Belgrade attributed this trend to the need for regular modernisation and the fact that the Serbian army still heavily relies on inherited Russian (Soviet) platforms and equipment, which makes the acquisitions from Russia the most economically sensible option (Rečević and Krstić 2019).

Another important and probably most visible part of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia had been joint exercises involving Serbian and Russian military units. The first joint military exercise between Serbia and Russia took place in 2012, and since 2015, multiple joint exercises have been conducted annually (Novaković and Savković 2019, 73). Since 2015, the trilateral military exercise "Slavic Brotherhood" has been regularly conducted, involving the armed forces of Serbia, Russia, and Belarus. Serbia abstained from the exercise in 2020 due to strong

[65] The agreement is set to be implemented through an intergovernmental commission and is initially valid for five years, with automatic renewal for an additional five years unless either party decides to terminate the agreement.

political pressure from the EU but rejoined the following year.[66] Likewise, there is a longstanding tradition of joint Russian-Serbian exercises known as "BARS" (Brotherhood of Aviators of Russia and Serbia), which are flight and tactical exercises in which Russian and Serbian pilots exchange expertise. The latest BARS exercise was held in 2021, (Banković 2021) on which occasion Russia transferred one battery of the Pantsir-S1 air defence system to Serbia, and Russian and Serbian soldiers executed combat tasks related to the detection, tracking, classification, and destruction of airborne targets simulating enemy forces (Vuković 2023, 70). Since 2014, tank biathlons in Moscow have also attracted significant attention, with Serbian tank crews participating. Nevertheless, while military cooperation between Serbia and the Russian Federation has grown steadily each year since the signing of relevant agreements (Vuković 2023, 70), the reality is that a complete balance in cooperation with NATO and other actors definitively does not exist. For example, in direct indicators of collaboration, such as joint military exercises, Serbia participated in 98 exercises with NATO or its members from 2012 to 2017, compared to only 12 with the Russian Federation (Novaković and Savković 2019). The media gives considerably more attention to statements highlighting cooperation with Russia compared to other partners (2019, 3-10).

Finally, although outside the military domain, the establishment of the RSHC in Niš was at some moment an indicator of increased collaboration in the security sector. Based on the 2009 Agreement between Serbia and Russia, or, more precisely, between the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations and the Serbian Ministry of Interior, on cooperation in the field of humanitarian response in emergency situations, prevention of natural disasters and man-made disasters and elimination of their consequences, (Narodna skupština Republike Srbije 2010) the RSHC was established in 2012. Throughout the first century of its existence, the RSHC had some, although not as robust as some might have expected, engagement in the training of the members of the emergency response teams from Serbia. In particular, it handled natural and man-made emergencies, or in the crises as were migrant crisis or the Covid-19 pandemics. It has, however, remained criticised by the domestic civil society and international partners from the West, with allegation that the RSHC could serve as a Russian spy or even a military base. While both Russian and Serbian officials rejected these allegations, the Serbian and Russian authorities on several occasions asked for diplomatic status (Novi magazin 2016). This status, similar to what the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO that regulates the rights of its armed forces members in Serbia, was, however, never granted by the Serbian government.

One of the most direct and visible moments of the Russian military personnel assistance in the security sector in Serbia, as mentioned, occurred during the fight against the pandemic caused by Covid-19 in 2020. Upon the invitation of the Serbian authorities, in less than a month during April 2020, Russian military staff implemented disinfection of facilities and public spaces amounted to over 1.5 million square meters (Vuković 2023, 71). Additionally, Russian military medical experts provided recommendations for implementing epidemic control measures in medical institutions within those cities (Vuković 2023). Opposite to the EU's assistance to Serbia during the pandemics, that was downplayed by the officials to the level of 'a fairytale on paper', the support coming from Russia, and even more so by China, was praised by the policymakers (Šterić and Bjeloš 2021) as yet another proof that Serbia was 'never alone.' During the ceremonial farewell of the Russian contingent from Serbia, the then Serbian Minister of Defence, Aleksandar Vulin, said that the Russian and Serbian military leadership "renewed and confirmed once again the centuries-old friendship of two nations, which has never been separated in times of good, and has rarely been separated in times of evil" (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2020a). Emphasising the contrast in how Russia and others treated Serbia, he stated: "You came to us when it was most difficult for us. At the moment when many much larger and wealthier nations were giving up the struggle and hope. Serbia felt that

[66] As announced on the Serbian Ministry of Defence website, it was described as a tactical exercise of special units with live firing, focusing on the execution of complex counter-terrorism tasks in conditions involving information operations (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2021).

it was not alone in those moments, and that Russia was with her." (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2020a).

In summary, certain key aspects of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia stem from events predating Kosovo's declaration of independence, such as Serbia's reliance on Russian military equipment due to its earlier dependence on Soviet arms. However, without the Kosovo issue, this cooperation would likely have diminished over time rather than intensified. Many other aspects of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia appear to be a direct result of Serbia's dependence on Russian support regarding Kosovo. Although significant at the political level, they are far less extensive at the operational level than officials portray or the public perceives, as will be demonstrated later. Despite efforts by officials to present Serbia's cooperation with Russia as equal to that with Western partners, in reality, the level of cooperation with Russia in security and defence matters is much lower. While Serbia's desire to maintain security and defence cooperation with Russia played a major role in Serbia's decision to adopt military neutrality and its ongoing commitment to this stance, the nature and extent of this cooperation has so far been influenced and limited primarily by its strategic objective of joining the EU. Nevertheless, even if Serbia's prospects of EU membership become less certain, it is hard to envision, within the current geopolitical landscape, how deeper cooperation or integration between Serbia and the distant Russia or the CSTO would materialise – the same as its abandonment.

5.1.4. Serbia's Policy of Military Neutrality

Whether and what experience of military neutrality Serbia has had throughout history is not easy to evaluate not only because it is difficult to trace the foreign policy continuity of different states that Serbia was part of in the last hundred years, but also because the meaning of 'military neutrality' itself has also been evolving and adapting to different historical circumstances (Radoman 2021; Devine 2011; Agius and Devine 2011). In certain historical contexts, the concept of military neutrality, even among the oldest neutral countries in Europe, evolved into military non-alignment, while some forms of political non-alignment came very close to what military neutrality represented. Yugoslavia's participation in various *ad hoc* alliances in the early 20th century sharply contrasted with the then conception of military neutrality, as Yugoslavia aligned itself to counter immediate war threats. Some of them, like the Yugoslavia's alliance with Bulgaria, Greece, or Montenegro from 1912 (the First Balkan War), or with Greece in 1913 (the Second Balkan War) had indeed resulted in wars. Others, like the Little Entente (with Romania and Czechoslovakia) from 1921,[67] Balkan Alliance from 1934 (with Romania, Turkey, Greece) and the so-called Balkan Pact (with Greece and Turkey) from 1953 have collapsed without a war. While Serbia was not constantly in alliances in this period, it had not, however, even declared military neutrality either.

Only at the beginning of the World War II, after the fall of Czechoslovakia and Poland, and with the entry of France and Great Britain into the war, Yugoslavia attempted to secure its position by declaring itself 'neutral' in the European conflict. However, for many internal and external reasons, the Yugoslav government eventually shifted towards an agreement with the Axis Powers, seeking security guarantees in exchange for joining the Tripartite Pact under special conditions. The conditions under which Yugoslavia officially joined the Tripartite Pact on March 25, 1941, were, however, derived directly from the status of neutral states and the legal framework provided by the

[67] First bilateral treaty which included the collective defence was signed between Czechoslovakia and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in 1920. Both countries signed same bilateral treaties with Romania in 1921, which was initially reluctant to sign such agreements a year before. Finally, in 1930 these mutual bilateral military alliance agreements were changed with a codified multilateral alliance agreement between Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

Hague Convention V of 1907.[68] The Yugoslav Army was not obligated to participate in armed conflicts outside its borders, other members of the Tripartite Pact were not allowed to move their troops across Yugoslav territory, and guarantees were given that Yugoslav sovereignty would be respected in its entirety. This was likely a unique case in history where the entry of a state into a military-political offensive alliance was conditioned on its treatment as a fundamentally neutral state by other alliance members. Nevertheless, this 'special treatment' lasted a day, since already on March 27, high-ranking military officials in Yugoslavia organized a coup that was accompanied by mass demonstrations in Belgrade, leading to the formation of a new Yugoslav government and the policy of 'better the grave than a slave, better a war than the pact'. The ultimate outcome of the coup was an attack on Yugoslavia by the German air force on 6 April 1941, followed by the occupation and disintegration of Yugoslav territory between the Axis powers and their satellites. This further meant that, similar to Serbia in World War I, Yugoslavia would wage and eventually end the war as a member of the victorious alliance.

After World War II, Tito's political conflict with Stalin from 1948 marked the beginning of Yugoslavia's non-aligned path that sought to create a 'third way' for nations not aligning with either NATO or the Warsaw Pact. In September 1961, Yugoslavia, along with Egypt, India, and Indonesia, initiated the first Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Belgrade (Mates 1982). This gathering laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement, a group of countries that aimed to remain independent of the major power blocs during the Cold War. The Non-Aligned Movement was based on several principles, including respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, advocating for peaceful coexistence, disarmament, and the resolution of conflicts through diplomacy. Yugoslavia, under Tito's leadership, played an active diplomatic role in promoting non-alignment by engaging in shuttle diplomacy, mediating between conflicting nations, and promoting dialogue (Jakovina 2018, Petković 1977; 1985). The membership in the Movement and the entire ideological framework crafted through the external political actions of Tito and Yugoslav diplomacy, closely aligned with permanent neutrality of the European states, perhaps even more than with the non-alignment policy of Asian and African states (Vukadinović 1970; Petković 1977; 1981).[69] In addition to Tito's exceptional diplomatic skills, this policy of non-alignment, according to some scholars at the time, had deeper social and class roots among the Yugoslav population since Yugoslav national liberation and unification was based "on the rich experience in relying on one's own strengths" (Stojković 1977, 14; Tadić 1975; Mates 1966). However, after Tito's death in 1980, Yugoslavia faced internal challenges and civil war, and the coherence of its non-aligned stance weakened. Following the suspension of its Non-Aligned Movement membership in 1992, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was granted observer status in the movement in 2001, following its UN membership confirmation.[70] Dormant for considerable time, Serbia's engagement with the movement has increased as of the latter half of the 2010, mostly in the light of Serbia's diplomatic campaign for international derecognition of Kosovo (MIND n.d.).

Nevertheless, although early 2000s foreign policy platforms suggested that NATO membership might still be an option alongside EU integration, Serbia officially declared a stance of military neutrality toward military alliances with the adoption of the Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and Constitutional Order in July 2007 (National Assembly 2007). As it is clear already from the title of the Resolution, this decision was directly tied to the developments in regard to resolving the Kosovo issue. When UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the future status of Kosovo-Metohija Martti Ahtisaari delivered his "Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement" in early 2007, which the Serbia government assessed as disrespectful

[68] The Yugoslav Army was not obligated to participate in armed conflicts outside its borders, and other members of the Tripartite Pact were not allowed to move their troops across Yugoslav territory. Guarantees were given that Yugoslav sovereignty would be respected in its entirety.

[69] In the 1970s, Yugoslavia established ties with permanently neutral European states, creating the N+N group under the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

[70] With the eventual dissolution of the country, all former Yugoslav states, except North Macedonia, eventually regained the observer status.

to sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia since it "proposed that Kosovo-Metohija be given a series of rights and prerogatives that belong only to sovereign states" (Government of Serbia 2007), anti-NATO discourse strongly revived. Naming and shaming NATO as the "future supreme authority in independent Kosovo", a part of the ruling elites started making a stronger discursive shift away from the "Atlantic" part of Serbia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations (Koštunica 2012). Very soon thereafter, the ruling Democratic Party of Serbia adopted the Declaration on Military Neutrality in October 2007, pulling out of the hat a foreign policy concept that has not been heard on the Serbian political scene for at least a half a century (Demokratska stranka Srbije 2007).

Only two months later, following the failure of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, mediated by the international troika in Vienna in November 2007, these party stances on military neutrality as "the best and most reliable way for Serbia to preserve state sovereignty, integrity and independence as the foundation of its free and overall progress and to ensure the dignified life of its citizens" (Demokratska stranka Srbije 2007) found its way to the National Assembly Resolution on the Protection of the Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia. The text of the resolution was, apparently, a result of the compromise between the two major coalition parties, in which the Democratic Party accepted the inclusion of the military neutrality, while the Democratic Party of Serbia gave up on the provision about not signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, whose signing was expected in January 2008 (Čekerevac 2007). Marking the beginning of Serbia's foreign and security course of a military neutral state in the contemporary international affairs. Article 6, the only article of the Resolution that deals with military neutrality, proposes:

> Due to the overall role of NATO, from the illegal bombardment of Serbia without a Security Council decision to Annex 11 of the rejected Ahtisaari's plan, which determines that NATO is "ultimate supervisory authority" in an "independent Kosovo", the National Assembly hereby declares the neutral status of the Republic of Serbia towards effective military alliances until a referendum is called, at which the final decision on this issue will be made." (National Assembly 2007)

While everything obviously happened in a rush due to the upcoming Kosovo's proclamation of independence, such a vague definition and a weak legal and political institutionalisation, however, might have been intentional. In addition to the officials' statements that framed military neutrality as something temporary rather than as a lasting strategic commitment of Serbia (Brozović 2010; Radio televizija Vojvodine 2010), a compelling indicator of the lack of a desire for more precise definition and further institutionalisation of military neutrality is the fact that this concept was not included in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia in 2009 (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2009; 2009a).[71] Military neutrality for the first time appeared in a strategic document twelve years after its proclamation, in the National Security Strategy and Defence Strategy from 2019 (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2019; 2019a), signalling that a broader and stronger political and social consensus around military neutrality arose in the previous decade and so.

A more precise definition of the military neutrality policy, however, still lacked since the new Strategy only stated that the military neutrality of the Republic of Serbia "implies the absence of membership in military-political alliances" but is compatible with security and defence cooperation with them (Republika Srbija 2019). Namely, the 2019 Strategy mentions in several places that the Republic of Serbia "develops partnership cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) based on the policy of military neutrality", as well as that Serbia collaborates with and enjoys observer status in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) "in accordance with the policy of military neutrality" (Republika Srbija 2019). As one interviewee put it: "the cooperation with the EU was even less problematic, especially since under the Chapter 31, it is important that we participate in operations which are led under the EU framework, and those UN operation" (Member

[71] Serbia's three key foreign policy priorities delineated by this document are the commitment to preserving Kosovo as an integral part of Serbia, advancing the European integration process, and fostering good neighborly relations and regional cooperation.

of the National Aseembly Defence and Internal Affairs Committee B, personal interview, March 2020), and Serbia does. The latest White Paper on Defence of the Republic of Serbia (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije, 2023) only reaffirmed that, being a military neutral state, Serbia's response to security challenges "primarily relies on its own capabilities and resources." In this context, it also introduced the concept of total defence within Serbia's defence policy, a framework that would be further elaborated (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije, 2024). In other words, the initially negative determination of the concept of military neutrality is slightly enriched only towards emphasising a certain balance in cooperation with all sides, making it official that Serbia's military neutrality does not mean isolation, but cooperation with everyone. As summarised by an MFA officer in an interview:

> But military neutrality doesn't mean isolation. I always say what the Swiss minister of defence said when the Swiss joined Partnership for Peace, that Swiss neutrality is perfectly aligned with PfP cooperation because neutrality doesn't mean isolation and it helps state and other organizations to foster cooperation on mutual benefit. I think that there is no controversy there. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer B, personal interview, January 2020)

The interpretation of military neutrality as compatible with cooperation with everyone has, over time, evolved into a cooperate-with-everyone-equally framework (Rečević and Krstić 2019). In addition to the newest National Security Strategy from 2019, officials frequently attempt to downplay differences in the level of security and defence cooperation between Serbia and NATO on one side and Serbia and Russia or, more recently, China, on the other, in order to present these security and defence partnerships as having equal intensity. They consistently emphasize that Serbia cooperates "with both NATO and the CSTO" and remains open to "collaboration with partners both in the West and in the East" (Vlada Republike Srbije 2017). They praise Serbia's "partnership with both NATO and the Russian Federation" and stress the country's commitment to maintaining good relations with NATO "just as we have those relations with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and others" (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2018). This tendency to equate the level of cooperation with all sides is most noticeable regarding military exercises. Holding joint exercises with both NATO and Russia within the framework of military neutrality is frequently portrayed as the optimal way to safeguard its "independence, autonomy, and sovereignty" (N1 2019b). The media amplifies these balanced cooperation messages (Nedić 2019, 3-10).

The 'balancing' approach to military neutrality, under the increased pressures on Serbia to constrain its relations with Russia after its aggression on Ukraine, meant that cooperating with everyone could, if necessary, temporarily shift into cooperation with none. Justifying it directly with references to protecting and preserving military neutrality, Serbia's Ministry of Defence decided to introduce a moratorium on military exercises with any of the partners. The first moratorium was introduced in 2020, just before a joint exercise involving Russian, Belarusian, and Serbian paratroopers, which was supposed to take place in a particularly charged context. Russia had fully supported Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko following his re-election, while Serbia joined the EU Declaration on the Presidential Election. The Declaration stated that the people of Belarus had expressed a desire for democratic change during the campaign, but that the election itself was neither free nor fair. "In the coming period, we will not participate in any exercises or military activities, not with NATO, not with CSTO, not with Russia or the U.S., not with China, not with the European Union, neither with the East nor the West. Our participation in peacekeeping operations will be separately considered and, as needed, suspended", the then Minister of Defence Aleksandar Vulin said (Popović 2020). The second time, Serbia introduced moratorium as soon as the crisis in Ukraine outbroke in February 2022. At that time, the official Belgrade announced that the Serbian Army, was suspending all military exercises with foreign partners, "both from the East and the West" until further notice "bearing in mind its policy of military neutrality" (Dragojlo 2023).

Thus, left without clear meaning, military neutrality is often evoked as a major justification of the certain foreign policy moves. Most often, this occurred in regard to its refrainment from adopting some restrictive measures or resolutions, justifying this with the policy of military neutrality and

politicians explaining that Serbia does not want to jeopardise its policy of military neutrality by 'choosing sides' in a particular context. This happened in relation to Libya, Syria, and most recently with the Ukrainian crisis. Despite many reasons for which Serbia decided to remain the only European country which has not imposed sanctions against Russia, maintained its direct air traffic with Russia and, also, the only country where Russian media influence was not extinguished by coercive state measures, the policy of military neutrality was frequently used as an explanation for this position (Nedeljnik 2022). Furthermore, decisionmakers would even claim that the war in Ukraine directly shows how important it is to be militarily neutral despite pressures and be strong enough and not depend on anyone' (Slobodna Evropa 2024). "Our military policy is that we are militarily neutral, and our policy is that we are on the European path, we continue cooperation with Russia and China, we will not give up on our traditional friends, that is Serbia's permanent policy, and it must remain so", the President Aleksandar Vučić said on one occasion in regard to the war in Ukraine (Slobodna Evropa 2024).

Finally, besides the framework of balancing, Serbia's military neutrality is often brought into the connection to its participation in international security and defence efforts within the UN framework. As the greatest contributor to UN peace operation in the region, Serbia remains committed to supporting the UN in its mission to promote and maintain peace and security by actively participating through its representatives in dozens of the contemporary and past peacekeeping operations across the globe (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije n.d.a; Vojska Srbije n.d.). Serbia's troops are engaged in a wide range of tasks under the UN flag, from patrolling and securing specific areas to combat capabilities, and including intelligence, logistical, and above all medical tasks. Serbia has also endorsed the Declaration of Shared Commitments that forms the basis of the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative urges Member States, the Security Council, host countries, troop- and police-contributing nations, regional collaborators, and financial supporters to collectively reinvigorate their involvement in UN peacekeeping and pledge to strive for excellence. In addition to the participation in peacekeeping operations, which is often praised by the UN officials (Ujedinjene nacije Srbija 2021), Serbia is also dedicated to various other UN frameworks aimed at addressing modern security threats and challenges at the national, regional, and global levels. This includes efforts to fully implement all relevant UN resolutions, conventions, and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Additionally, Serbia participated in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije n.d.b).

In summary, over the past fifteen years, the policy of military neutrality has been made more official, especially with the latest strategic framework, adopted in 2019. However, opportunities for further institutionalisation and clarification of Serbia's military neutrality have largely been missed. In the words of the interviewed MP, Serbia's military neutrality "does not even have content, but is actually exhausted by the fact that we will not submit an application for NATO even though our level of cooperation that often exceeds the cooperation that some members have" (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Internal Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020). Moreover, it appears that military neutrality has been intentionally left vague, defined mostly in negative terms – not certifying what it represents but rather emphasising it 'is not incompatible' with Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU, NATO, or Russia. It is often used as a label to smooth over tensions or 'glue together' various elements of its multifaceted security and defence policy. Therefore, it has over time become clear that military neutrality does not mean isolation, with its main boundary being non-membership in alliances, but beyond that, its definition remains ambiguous. While many interviewed foreign policy officials agreed that this "should not change until we have this kind of disarray in the relations between the NATO, Russia, China" (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, March 2021), some criticised Serbia's decision to refrain from officially aligning with any side in the current global security structure. As one member of the National Assembly said:

> That is what Serbia has been suffering from since 2000. This is not a new problem, this strategic disorientation. So, then the name for that disorientation was found in neutrality, and that

> disorientation is very harmful to us internationally, even in relation to Russia. (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Internal Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020)

* * *

Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation is undeniably multidirectional and multifaceted, marked by a non-linear trajectory, occasional impulsive shifts, and an alleged commitment to engaging with all while aligning with none. As presented, this cooperation spans varying directions and levels, suggesting that Serbia aims to keep all options open. However, it remains unclear to what extent this approach reflects a deliberate and pragmatic strategy, a constant struggle to reconcile irreconcilable positions, or mere inertia. As such, it has become a subject of scholarly study, particularly following its proclamation of military neutrality which added a unique layer of complexity and set Serbia apart from the typical transitional trajectory observed in most East and Southeast European states. The aims of these studies have been diverse, most often discussing either their overall compatibility, or specifically in regard to Serbia's strategic aim of joining the EU. While rarely have they been conducted with the major aim of discussing whether such multifaceted policy is optimal or not, two distinct camps appear to emerge in the literature regarding the justification and effectiveness of its current design and performance. The first and larger camp holds predominantly a negative view, while the other demonstrates a greater level of understanding, if not appreciation, for the vision of Serbia's policymakers in this regard.

The prevailing tone in the literature is rather critical, characterising Serbia's multifaceted security and defence strategy as, at best, unsustainable (Novaković 2011; 2019; Ejdus 2011; Milosavljević 2016; Teokarević 2018) and, at worst, schizophrenic (Ejdus 2008, 66; Varga 2017, 43). Within numerous arguments presented, there is an underlying suggestion that Serbia cannot continue 'sitting on two or four chairs' but must finally and decisively pick a side. More specifically, a majority of critics advocate for Serbia to align with its Western counterparts. The major argument asserts that Serbia should prioritise joining the EU and fully align with the EU framework for security and defence policy, as developed under the CFSP and CSDP. By enhancing its alignment with EU foreign policy and bolstering its capacity for participation in EU security and defence mechanisms, missions, and industries, Serbia could not only improve its prospects for EU membership but also secure an optimal position within the European security and defence architecture. Consequently, to expedite this process, Serbia should minimize its security and defence cooperation with Russia and CSTO, rather than treating them on par with the EU both rhetorically and operationally (Milosavljević 2016, 159-160). Russia's military involvement in Ukraine, beginning in 2014 and escalating in 2022, has only heightened this criticism, particularly following Serbia's decision to abstain from imposing sanctions on Russia – a stance unique among European nations (Novaković 2016, 13; Ejdus 2014; 2014a). Additionally, there are occasional suggestions that Serbia should not only reduce its reliance on Russia but also pursue NATO membership (Ejdus 2007). Observing that no state from Central and Eastern Europe, including Croatia – the sole Western Balkan EU member – joined the EU before NATO, some scholars argue that full integration into the European security complex practically necessitates embracing the Atlantic dimension of the Euro-Atlantic security and defence framework (Milosavljević 2016, 155-156).

An important factor highlighted in this camp is also Serbia's geostrategic 'reality' (Beriša 2014, 275-276). Surrounded by NATO members or aspiring candidates, Serbia's position as a non-member, isolated among politically and militarily aligned states, appears to make little strategic sense, especially given its relatively modest size and limited military capabilities (Forca 2016, 143). Scholars often mention the NATO intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 as a compelling example of the strategic vulnerability Serbia faces without NATO membership, recalling that Russia's plans to help Serbia were thwarted when neighbouring countries – Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania – refused Russia's requests to use their airspaces due to diplomatic pressure from the

United States (Reljić 2009). Furthermore, those who see value in Serbia's potential membership in NATO membership argue that it could facilitate resolution of regional issues, even the dispute over Kosovo's independence, by positing that NATO membership would grant Serbia a seat at important diplomatic and military negotiations, where Kosovo currently lacks representation (Đukanović 2016, 280-281). Advocates of Euro-Atlantic integration, therefore, argue that embracing both pathways – towards the EU and NATO – is the most sensible approach for Serbia's future, criticising policymakers' reluctance to take it as irrational, irresponsible and populist. While Serbia's participation in initiatives like the Partnership for Peace is lauded, each new crisis, such as the conflict in Ukraine, reinforces the case for Serbia's NATO membership in the eyes of some scholars as it reveals the military, political and economic vulnerabilities of this 'island' position.

Similar arguments are presented regarding Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia. Many view the prospect of joining the CSTO, or even the current level of cooperation, as contradictory to Serbia's geopolitical position and stated strategic objectives (Reljić 2009). Not only is closer alignment with a Russia-led organization incompatible with EU membership aspirations, but it could also result in diminished cooperation or even isolation from Western, EU, or regional security and defence frameworks, leading to adverse security, political, and economic consequences. It is often recalled that, geographically distant, Russia and other CSTO members offer limited practical assistance to Serbia in the event of any conflict. Moreover, there is a concern that Serbia might become embroiled in conflicts or disputes involving other CSTO members, which may not align with Serbia's interests and where Serbia, from its side, could also offer little material aid. Identifying Russia's support on the Kosovo issue and the public sentiment towards Russia as two major drivers of this aspect of Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation, the critics argue that a responsible government should refrain from populist impulses and dismiss such considerations in favour of more pragmatic and sustainable foreign policy strategy (Teokarević 2016).

Serbia's declaration of military neutrality in 2007 sparked considerable criticism within this literature as well, to the extent that some researchers consider it outright 'nonsense' (Beriša and Barišić 2016, 266). The primary line of critique questions the relevance and efficacy of military neutrality in contemporary international relations. Many scholars argue that the concept and practice of military neutrality have evolved significantly in recent decades, particularly in light of European integration processes. Even in longstanding neutral countries, military neutrality is increasingly viewed as outdated (Teokarević 2016, 106), obsolete (Litavski 2012, 3; Teokarević 2016, 95), and even unethical (Stojanović, Šaranović 2022, 15), which is why some had decided to initially rebrand it as military non-alignment, and later abandon it in response to the Ukrainian crisis. Such comparisons with the 'old neutrals' serve as a foundation for another critique of Serbia's military neutrality, highlighting its unilateral nature. Many scholars, namely, emphasize the lack of international recognition, typically secured through formal treaties, of Serbia's unilaterally declared military neutrality, rendering its meaning vague and essentially void (Litavski 2012; Teokarević 2016; Novaković 2019). Thirdly, critics argue that military neutrality is fundamentally incompatible with EU membership, despite the formal option to opt out of certain aspects of CFSP and CSDP, as seen in neutral EU member states like Ireland and Austria. Fourthly, some point out the substantial political and financial costs associated with implementing military neutrality effectively, making it potentially the most expensive strategic option that Serbia can pursue in this domain (Ejdus 2008; Ejdus 2014; 2014a; Beriša 2014). Lastly, criticism extends to the officials' reluctance to question or abandon military neutrality, which has become a taboo subject despite its questionable legality and effectiveness. Politicians' tendency to cater to public opinion regarding military neutrality is highlighted as particularly problematic, indicating a longlastiing reluctance to confront its shortcomings (Đukanović 2016, 272-273).

Some scholars, however, present opposite assessments of Serbia's multidirectional foreign policy, characterizing it as 'wise,' 'foresighted,' or even 'the only viable option' (Vuković 2016; Kovač 2016; Blagojević 2016, 2022; Gaćinović 2018; Jovanović 2019, 2022; Forca 2022). While they may not unanimously agree on the benefits of each of four directions, their overarching view is

that the current strategy of balancing relationships makes sense for Serbia, regardless of policymakers' intentions and motivations. Opting for any single side, akin to abandoning military neutrality, is viewed as a mistaken path for several reasons. Firstly, a prevalent argument in this discourse emphasizes the concept of geostrategic rationality, contending that Serbia's geographical position necessitates a security and defence policy that seeks cooperation with all parties. Drawing on narratives depicting Serbia as 'between East and West,' 'at the gates of Europe,' and 'at the crossroads,' scholars highlight the historical significance and vulnerabilities inherent with such a position, arguing that choosing sides is imprudent for a small country like Serbia (Jovanović 2022, 84-87). While this argument has persisted in literature for some time, it is increasingly updated with references to the shifting world order, wherein Western dominance may diminish or evolve. Consequently, aligning with the EU, and especially NATO, is deemed short-sighted and unwise (Gaćinović 2018). Although only few advocate against Serbia's potential EU membership, membership in NATO is more frequently and openly contested in this camp. Unsurprisingly, this scepticism is fuelled not only by Russia's (and China's) support on the Kosovo issue but extends beyond it. Critics of NATO membership argue that it does not serve Serbia's interests, cautioning against the risk of being drawn into conflicts for others' interests or condemning the perceived unethical nature of NATO missions globally (Gaćinović 2018). Consequently, while this group of scholars rarely advocates for reducing Serbia's current cooperation with NATO, let alone the EU, they believe that given the current dynamics in international relations and Serbia's geopolitical position, heavily investing in these alliances exclusively holds little strategic sense.

A logical culmination of this argument points towards the endorsement of military neutrality as a cornerstone of Serbia's approach to international relations as it enables Serbia to actively participate in diplomatic initiatives and collaborations with a diverse array of partners, effectively weaving together and balancing these cooperative efforts. In addition to geopolitical arguments (Vuković 2016; Forca 2016; Blagojević 2022), supporters of this stance highlight the historical rationale behind Serbia's choice of military neutrality (Stojanović, Šaranović 2022, 31-35; Jovanović 2022, 84-87; Gaćinović 2018, 32).[72] Rather than aligning with any specific faction, according to some scholars, Serbia's historical record reveals a propensity for non-alignment, marked by a lack of aggressive expansionism and a tradition of avoiding entanglement in conflicts. As for the argument of weak foundation of Serbia's military neutrality, they argue that international recognition must not be codified but can come in the form of 'soft recognition' which Serbia had over time garnered from all major states and alliances, including NATO, whose officials had often publicly acknowledged Serbia's policy of military neutrality (Jovanović 2022; Forca 2022, 170). Moreover, the ethical dimension of military neutrality is emphasized, as it safeguards Serbia's sovereignty and autonomy, preventing it from being ensnared in conflicts contrary to its national interests and power struggles of major military alliances or superpowers. Finally, the widespread public support for military neutrality is not dismissed as irrational and populist but rather celebrated as a constructive force (Forca 2022, 170). Acknowledging the traumatic history of NATO bombings, it's understandable that Serbia's public would be cautious about aligning with the alliance and, hence, military neutrality emerges as a pragmatic middle ground, maintaining distance from both NATO and opposing factions, thereby safeguarding Serbia's interests while promoting internal cohesion in the society.

Nevertheless, while these two strands of literature diverge significantly on how sensible Serbia's multidirectional security and defence cooperation policy is, they converge in one point – acknowledging the significant impact of public opinion on its current outlook. Whether they perceive the influence of public sentiment on policymakers positively or negatively, the majority of scholars in each camp recognise that all four policies comprising Serbia's strategic positioning in this domain heavily rely on prevailing societal attitudes. At times, public opinion acts as a formidable barrier to the introduction of certain policies, such as NATO membership, while in other instances, it serves as a compelling deterrent against policy abandonment, as observed with military neutrality. In other

[72] This argument is criticised by some authors, claiming that Serbia was historically military alligned in many occasions (Ejdus 2014, Novaković 2019).

words, regardless of the scholars' individual perspectives on how sensible each of policies or their coexistence is, the literature vastly suggests that the multidirectional policy endures largely due to its resonance with the public. In essence, although scholars hold differing opinions on the merits of each policy or their combination, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that the multidirectional policy, the way it is, endures largely because it resonates with the Serbian public as it is. Policymakers in charge of determining the extent and nature of Serbia's cooperation in security and defence with diverse partners must, apparently, weigh not only the direct benefits of these policies or expectations of external actors, but also the domestic public's expectations and perceptions of what policy in this area makes sense for Serbia. Over the past two decades, some perceptions have remained static, while others have evolved, warranting closer examination.

5.2. Stickiness of Serbia's Multifaceted Policy of Security and Defence Cooperation

While, legally speaking, no foreign policy decision in Serbia requires a referendum, as the most direct mechanism of the citizens' involvement in policymaking, the policy of security and defence cooperation (and potentially integration) is the one where referendum is perhaps the most likely. At present, the basis for a referendum is established in the National Assembly Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia which declared "military neutrality in relation to the existing military alliances until a possible referendum is held to make a final decision on this matter" (Narodna skupština Republike Srbije 2007). Hence, by the Resolution's language, merely abandoning military neutrality does not necessitate a referendum, but elevating cooperation with NATO or CSTO to the membership status – an alternative way to effectively terminate military neutrality – would require one. It is, however, worth noting that this Resolution is not legally binding and its provisions can be altered or discarded simply by the adoption of a new resolution by any parliamentary majority.[73] The procedure with the security and defence cooperation with the EU is, on the other hand, tied to the EU membership in general and, according to the EU legislation, it falls upon the government of the acceding country to determine whether to hold a referendum. While presently there is no strict regulation obliging Serbia to organise a referendum on the EU membership, the officials' rhetoric has strongly hinted at the likelihood of a referendum if and once Serbia reaches this stage. Hence, as it currently stands, only a significant foreign policy change in the domain of security and defence cooperation, and primarily its strengthening with any of the 'sides', would even formally necessitate policymakers to hear what the public has to say about it.

As previously discussed, the existing literature suggests that, with or without referendum, policymakers in Serbia do consider and care about the public opinion when it comes to these matters. While no specific study has focused primarily on investigating whether any or all of four policies directly result from public opinion, many have offered valuable insights that, over the past two decades or so, officials have been adapting not just their rhetoric but also their foreign policy decisions in response to public attitudes regarding security and defence cooperation with the EU, NATO, Russia, and military neutrality. Although the multifaceted policy may seem rational to both domestic and international experts, they have noted that Serbian policymakers often strive to project an image of aligning with the public's perception of what constitutes a sensible security and defence policy for Serbia. Direct evidence suggesting that public sentiments about Serbia's security and defence policy have been paramount to policymakers is, however, scarce and sporadic in the reviewed literature, warranting further research. Insights from the interviews with policymakers conducted for this research make a step in this direction, providing support for the assumption that public opinion has been a significant factor shaping the trajectory of Serbia's foreign policy course, at least in the area of security and defence cooperation.

[73] While this is not an easy task, it should be noted that the list of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party has held the absolute majority since 2014.

First, despite some differences, all interviewees generally agreed that foreign policy makers, themselves included, consider public opinion when making foreign policy decisions. The strongest agreement emerged about whether policymakers adjust the presentation of foreign policies to the public. While specific policies will later be discussed, almost all interviewees confirmed that policymakers try to rhetorically stay inside the boundaries of the public mood as much as possible. In practice, for instance, when preparing their own or high-ranking foreign policy officials' speeches, interviewees confess that they generally strive to talk as little as possible about unpopular foreign policy choices, while emphasising the popular ones – and also trying to separate between them as much as possible (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, B, C; Ministry of European Integration Officer; Member of the National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A and B, personal interviews, January 2020 – January 2021). As one interviewee stated, "Sometimes, when I am writing some speeches for the minister, I obviously try to ensure that the message aligns both with our policy and what the public opinion wants to hear" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020). Arguing this, some go as far as to claim that "whoever says the opposite, lies" (Member of the National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020), alluding that many of their colleagues change to unrecognition in front of the cameras. As stated by the former member of the MEI Negotiation Team for the accession to the EU:

> Policymakers follow trends. I have no doubts about that. At least that is the case now. Current political elites, those in power, conduct opinion polls maybe even on a daily basis. In that sense, they follow. (…) Sometimes, however, they do not follow public opinion but try not to harm it. And we see that, we face that reality. We have a dominant political party which is following the dominant political opinion of the public. But still, not all the foreign policy decisions follow what the public says because there are many, many stakeholders influencing that decision. (Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member, personal interview, February 2021)

In addition to the adjusting their rhetoric, however, interviewees also confirm that policymakers' decisions are also influenced by the public opinion. In other words, although none of them argued that the public was the sole 'stakeholder' influencing foreign policy decision, many interviewees held that policymakers are not only careful about how they present their foreign policy decisions but often avoid even considering foreign policy changes that are not favoured by the public. As one of the interviewees expressed, "when I insisted on some views for a while and see that it is unacceptable, I stop and wait for the situation to mature" (Member B of the National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020). Admitting that some courses may need to be abandoned if public resistance persists, an MP stated:

> Of course, you correct your ideas, everyone who follows the reality in politics corrects their ideas. I have my views, but I correct them to some extent. But I think that a lot can be done with our people, that they are not fanatics when it comes to foreign policy. If I think that my position is the right one, I'll try to convince them (…). I once said po the President: "Listen, if you think this way, never put me as the Minister of Defence." And then he said: "Well, that's why you're not the Minister of Defence," laughing. (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee B, personal interview, March 2020).

The reasons for listening to the public, based on the interviews, appear twofold. Most explained that public opinion matters in foreign policy primarily for general, normative reasons, highlighting the essence of democracy and people's sovereignty. While some noted that certain foreign policy decisions might be too specific and distant for the public to fully grasp, almost all agreed that "it is important to see what people think and hear their voices" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer C, personal interview, January 2020). None of the interviewees said they would blindly follow public opinion over their own expert judgment, but they all acknowledged that public input serves as an important corrective factor in the decision-making process. As one interviewee from the MFA stated, "This is not just about public opinion research on specific options, but also the overall opinion about some foreign policy. And then we will see if it will change our policy. But it is important to

hear what people have to say" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer C, personal interview, January 2020). Such normative justifications were common among interlocutors from the executive branch of the government, and even more so among MPs. Some interviewees, recalling their position as direct representatives of the people, claimed they were 'obliged' to follow public opinion to the extent of giving up on certain topics. "It is important for me not to deviate much from the position of the majority of people while I am an MP of the ruling majority" (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee B, personal interview, March 2020), said one interviewee, providing an example related to the less popular aspects of Serbia's security and defence policy.

The second set of reasons provided by the interviewees was of a practical and pragmatic nature, related to the (s)elective costs of ignoring the public will. With some of the interlocutors, this pragmatic rationale was more related to the (re)election prospects of the parties they were members of. Among those from the executive branch, the arguments also went in the direction of challenges of implementation of any foreign policy which, even if adopted, would face. Interestingly, whenever they were asked to name any example of policy which could trigger the public discontent if their attitudes were ignored, most of the interviews named one or more foreign policies related to Serbia's security and defence cooperation, which best signalises to what extent this policy is indeed a suitable case for understanding the public-elite nexus in foreign policy in Serbia. "Specifically, about joining NATO, we should ask people. But even when we ask them, you will ask them at a time when you think it is convenient to ask them, when you are already projecting the answers you want, because a defeat in a referendum on that matter would be a suicide for the government", one MFA official concluded (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020). In a similar vein, an interviewed MP noted:

> I think that it is always useful to check the will of the citizens, it can't do any damage - on the contrary, it can only do good to the politicians. Of course, MPs, as representatives of citizens, do have legitimacy to make these decisions on their own – they were elected to make such decisions, but I would not rule out a referendum. I think it is good to check the will of the citizens – why not. I don't see why that would be bad, that's my general assessment. (Member B of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020).

Nevertheless, while most of the interviewees expressed positive attitudes about the public's greater role in foreign policy since "informed, engaged and inquired public is an ideal" and since "people who are sitting in the government are not necessarily the smartest, but only have more information" (Prime Minister Cabinet Staff, personal communication, January 2021), their views on the referendum as a form of public's participation varied greatly. Some interviewees saw referendums as an effective tool for overcoming both normative and practical obstacles, arguing that foreign policies with strong public support would be easier to implement. For others, however, referendums were seen as an unnecessary complication and a potential opportunity for public manipulation. Recalling the experience of Brexit, that was "decided based on a very narrow difference between yes and no, but the consequence was huge" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020), several interviewees cautioned that referendums must be conducted responsibly, with a proper informational campaign and a well-formulated question, if public opinion is to be taken seriously. For most interviewees, a direct experience with referendums in Yugoslavia, particularly those under the Milosevic's regime, caused the greatest concern regarding the holding of a referendum on foreign policy matters, or any policy matters, except for the constitutional changes. Therefore, while some would condition a possibility of holding a referendum in foreign policy matters with a fair campaign and "ensuring that the public is informed and not guided by their emotions" (Prime Minister Cabinet Staff, personal communication, January 2021), others were explicitly against entrusting any issue to citizens instead of politicians and experts, especially those beyond public experience and common knowledge. Justifying his scepticism toward referendums by referencing past experience, an MP noted:

> We had referendums during Milošević times, which served as an alibi for politicians who did not have the courage to make some decisions. We can by no means have a referendum on the

> issue of security integration which even security students do not understand. It is the issue for experts to be decide. So, when it comes to formulating complicated foreign and security policy – if it wasn't complicated, there would not be so many faculties for these issues – this is a narrow issue that must made by political elites in consultation with experts. And those experts exist in MFA, army, security services, academic communities. Maybe this is an elitist view, but citizens give their trust to elites in elections, and those elites need to show the courage to make decisions that citizens don't like, or to show the ability to convince citizens that some decision is a good one. The issue of foreign and security policy is absolutely an issue that should be in the hands of the government. (Member A of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020).

Policymakers' trust in the level of public's foreign policy knowledge in Serbia is, hence, one of the major concerns about their greater role in policymaking. Most of the interviewees expressed significant reservations about the level of knowledge the public has about foreign policy, especially if the matter is abstract and does not immediately improve their living standard or produce benefits that the public sees clearly. The impression of most interviewees is that "the public is generally not that much acquainted with day-to-day work when it comes to foreign policy, because it is not transparent, so public does not have the possibility to access information, and not that many people are trying to go into details" (Prime Minister Cabinet Staff, personal communication, January 2021). According to the majority of interviewed policymakers, security, defence, military cooperation does not seem to be something that the public generally knows a lot about. For instance, most of the interviewees believed that the public would not be able to give an informed answer to any specific question about the major security and defence organisations, arrangements, or mechanisms of cooperation, let alone the details on the procedures of decision making in those (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, B; Ministry of European Integration Officer; Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member; Member of the National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A, personal interviews, January 2020 – January 2021). Namely, the prevailing stance among the interviewees is that the general public would not be able to differentiate between the mandates of the major security and defence organisations, as the UN, OSCE, NATO, EU and CSTO, let alone be regularly informed about Serbia's cooperation with all of them.

> Public is generally less much concerned about these foreign policy issues. For example, when you are negotiating an agreement, like we negotiated recently an Incentive investment agreement with USA, which was a pre-requirement for the establishment of DFC office in Belgrade – I am not sure anyone really cares if you are signing or not this agreement, it just comes as one piece of news that you see on TV and that's it. Neither the ordinary public, nor the professional public are dealing too much with details when it comes to these issues. (Prime Minister Cabinet Staff, personal communication, January 2021)

None of the interviewees, however, believed that the public's lack of knowledge hindered them from forming opinions on foreign policy. On the contrary, even if they lacked knowledge or detailed information, policymakers believe that the public still holds some general beliefs to rely upon. While they may not know specifics, the public is still "acquainted with general strategic and long-term questions – should we join the EU, should we cooperate with Russia, etc." (Prime Minister Cabinet Staff, personal communication, January 2021), that give them enough cues to form an attitude on more specific questions. For instance, "even if they hear about European Army, they definitely will not know what it is and what would it serve to", but they can still form judgments based on what they know "at the basic level" (Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member, personal interview, February 2021). As one interviewee said, when prompted to give opinion on the security and defence cooperation with the EU, "some would say "huh, some of them bombed us", and some of them would say that it is very important for Serbia to be part of Europe. Many, many, many reasons… And this is the way how regular people are thinking" (Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member, personal interview, February 2021). In other words, interviewees suggest that policymakers believe that, in forming opinion on things they lack knowledge – and they often do when it comes to the policy of security and defence cooperation – citizens rely on the historical

experience and interpretations of this experience which provides them emotional and cognitive cues that result in strong attitudes. Thus, even without concrete facts, people rely on their general beliefs, which come in the form of their 'personal feelings' and impressions, that might be in a constant struggle:

> It is a mix of everything, so it is difficult to measure which one has bigger role, and which one has less important role. Overall, facts definitely have to play a role, because as much as media can sometime distort the facts, at the end of the day they are going to see the facts. So, facts do play a role, emotions do play a role, some kind of historical memory or the way how people understand history. (Prime Minister Cabinet Staff, personal communication, January 2021)

The extent to which shaping or even manipulating public opinion is possible and easy seems to be a point of contention among policymakers, according to the interviews conducted. On one side, some argued that "it certainly seems that it is easier to manipulate in foreign policy in the domain of interpreting the geopolitical environment and the international scene" (Member A of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020) since "not everyone has access to foreign policy, and politicians can then say whatever they want, which is harder to verify" (Member B of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020). Some interviewees, hence, attributed the public's lack of knowledge exactly to irresponsible and self-centred politicians who do not see an informed public as beneficial, believing that an uninformed populace is more susceptible to manipulation. The role of the media appeared many times in the interviews, generally in a negative tone due to its sensationalistic tendencies. Several interviewees pointed to the paradoxical situation in Serbia, where the media, possibly controlled by the government, fosters a strong negative campaign against certain aspects of the government's official policy, particularly regarding Serbia's cooperation with NATO or even the EU, as part of pandering to public sentiment instead of attempting to inform them. However, the dominant perception among the interviewed policymakers was that changing public opinion on matters of security and defence policy would not be an easy task, but likely needs to be gradual, requiring a devoted effort from politicians, and "medicine in small doses" (Member B of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020). This is believed to be especially true since the public does not react to new information as strongly as they rely on deeply rooted beliefs about international relations, both cognitive and affective. If the change were not gradual, it would only provoke resentment, which is why politicians need to "be smart, understand people, and realise that certain attitudes can only change gradually and slowly" (Member B of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020). Echoing this, a member of the PM Cabinet said:

> Policies which are good for country and people are inevitably going to be understood by the public as good. Even though foreign policy is something very abstract and far away from the people, at the end of the day – if you are doing something that is good for the people, I think they would be able to see that and to feel that. (Prime Minister Cabinet Staff, personal communication, January 2021)

Finally, based on the interviews, it appears that the Serbian foreign policymakers usually inform themselves through opinion polls conducted by government institutions (and, most frequently, that is the regular polling by Ministry of European Integration), independent polling and research agencies, CSOs, or think tanks. Some interviewees, that are members of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, also mentioned the polls conducted by the party itself, which are allegedly conducted "on a monthly basis or even on a daily basis during elections" (Member A of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020). For some, mostly MPs, personal, anecdotal impressions gathered from interactions with family, friends, and citizens also appeared important. However, apart from the Ministry of European Integration, none of the other institutions in the foreign policy apparatus in Serbia appears to conduct their own polls, with interviewees often attributing this to the lack of dedicated units, staff, or resources. Even an interviewee from the MFA press service confirmed that this ministry neither conducts its own polling nor participates in the formulation of

those surveys related to foreign policy conducted by other ministries, as are the often referenced MEI surveys (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer C, personal interview, January 2020). Moreover, all interviewees seemed unfamiliar with polls specifically related to security and defence policy. Interviewee from MEI, which is known for conducting the most relevant and regular foreign policy surveys within the Serbian government, confirmed that their surveys "never ask these questions on security and defence, but maybe they should be included" (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021). Given that the MEI opinion poll has been standardised for the past two decades, it appears that Serbian policymakers generally form their impressions on security and defence matters based on the overall public stance on general foreign policy issues.

> So, Ministry of European integration conduct opinion polls twice a year according to the methodology of the European Statistics Agency (EUROSTAT), Eurobarometer methodology, where you measure the public attitudes according to different age structures and education. The last poll was conducted in December last year. The polls are usually conducted in June and December. We rely on those polls because they are ours, we pay for them, and we know that the methodology is approved by the European Commission. We, however, always consult some other polls conducted by institutes, CSOs, which often deny our findings. (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021)

Therefore, according to the interviews, it appears that public opinion in Serbia influences foreign policy significantly, with policymakers more often than not adjusting their actions and rhetoric to align with public sentiment. Although it is suggested by some interlocutors that elites, with enough effort and over time, can impact and even manipulate public opinion due to the public's lack of specialised knowledge, policymakers do not seem particularly eager to do so, according to interviewees. Fearing the potential costs, policymakers in Serbia appear to have largely accepted public opinion on foreign and security policy in this domain as a given, viewing it as static and unchangeable, at least for the time being. To explore whether this holds true and how the interaction between the policymakers and public impacts foreign policy stickiness – the ease of their adoption or abandonment – the following sub-sections look at the available data on the public support or opposition to each of the four selected policies during the previous two decades. In addition to available opinion polls, original insights from interviews with policymakers are also used to illuminate how policymakers view public opinion on particular issues and its effect on their choices.

5.2.1. Public Opinion on Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation with the EU

Due to the possibility of a referendum and other factors related to the democratic nature and legitimacy of the enlargement process, EU integration is likely the most extensively researched foreign policy issue from the perspective of public opinion and the public-elite relationship in most European countries. This is most certainly the case in Serbia, as the public mood about the EU membership has been a subject of extensive and constant surveying by the domestic and international, governmental, and intergovernmental organisations as of the early 2000s, allowing for a rather confident and detailed tracking of the public attitudes across time and aspects of the integration process.[74] Nevertheless, while the evidence on the public attitudes about many aspects of Serbia's EU integration process have been available, not much has been known about the public mood about Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU in particular, as confirmed in interviews as well. The absence of detailed and specific data regarding public sentiments on the security and defence aspects of Serbia's cooperation with the EU, resulting in its often conflation with or assumption from public opinion about EU integration in general, can be attributed to various factors. One reason for the lack of detailed or continuous tracking of public's sentiments towards Serbia's

[74] Conducted according to the methodology of Eurobarometer. Some opinion polls, like the one conducted by the Office for the European Integration (which transformed into the Ministry of European Integration in 2017), have been carried out twice a year for nearly two decades with only minor changes to the questionnaire and are, therefore, particularly valuable for making longitudinal comparisons.

security and defence cooperation stems from the researchers' assumption that the public knowledge about this specific area is very limited. This assumption seems grounded since, despite multi-decade efforts towards raising public's knowledge of the EU framework and activities, surveys show that it is still far from comprehensive and nuanced to shape their preferences towards specific fields of action and cooperation (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije Republike srbije n.d.; Institut za evropske poslove n.d.).[75]

Consequentially, simply equating the attitudes about security and defence integration and membership in the EU in general stems from the policymakers' and researchers' belief that the public's 'hearts and minds' on these two issues do not substantially differentiate indeed. On one side, this belief can stem from the researchers' or practitioners' assumption that the public does not have some specialized understanding of the CFSP and CSDP, but its opinion about it is largely aligned with their overall impression about the desirability of cooperation with the EU – or vice versa. Those who support the EU membership rarely have some specific aspect they are strongly opposed to, or the other way around, those who oppose EU membership in total, usually have negative sentiments about most of its aspects. Those few studies that do attempt to capture the public attitudes about the cooperation with the EU in the security and defence matters seem to confirm a significant spillover effect, showing that the general support or resistance to Serbia's membership in the EU does extend to the sphere of security and defence, as well (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012, 2017).[76] Several interviewees confirmed this impression:

> Honestly speaking, public is not aware of our entire European process. There are more concentrated to visa liberalisation and similar things which are more visible to them. I think this area is not… They see security and defence area as a part of our entire European process, meaning that we have to advance in any area. I am not so sure whether they differentiate it. The public just want to see smooth process, which is why the opening of the chapters is important. Nobody can remember what happened during the negotiations, but they want to see that chapters are open, and everything goes smoothly. When you have a blockade and delays, they raise disappointment. It is important that our partners send positive message, and what we agreed to be implemented. (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021)

While, again, the picture might be different depending on whether one investigates the (dis)connect between public opinion and the policymakers by examining the officials' practices or their discourse, one could say that the sentiments of the public and the elites regarding Serbia's potential membership in the EU have, over time, been in fair harmony. Overall, during more than two decades, it appears that, despite fluctuations, the public opinion on the potential membership in the EU has never become prohibitive but has in the moment of the highest and lowest support remained at the level of acceptable (in)tolerance towards what elites do or say in this regard. In other words, different to some other foreign policies, the question of the membership in the EU has never grown into a taboo – either as a path that must not be questioned or the one that by no means should be followed – but has always remained one of rare playgrounds for the foreign policy debates between different political opinions in Serbia. Moreover, regardless of the quality of the debate, hardly any foreign policy has ever been so widely and constantly debated, or at least discussed, at the Serbian political scene as this one. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the evolution and pace of public perceptions of different aspects of the EU integration process, in parallel to what the policymakers have done, can certainly assist in understanding how 'sticky' this policy has been in Serbia.

[75] On top of it, this aspect of integration is generally the youngest and still "under construction". Many of the key CFSP and CSDP mechanisms and instruments that are moving this field from the 'cooperation' towards 'integration' track of European integration have not been familiar even to the population in the EU member states (there is, though, a possibility of a paradox that they CFSP and CSDP instruments better known outside the EU since this is where they are implemented by rule), which makes a study on this matters appear as not only difficult but also unproductive to the researchers.

[76] While this dissertation will also greatly rely on existing data regarding public opinion about EU integration in general, it will, however, attempt to take steps toward a more nuanced understanding of public sentiments regarding Serbia's cooperation with the EU in the security and defence domain specifically.

Expressing confidence in the stability of public support to EU membership over the years, an interviewed MEI officer stated:

> The support has been stable at above 50%, which is important in order for the credibility and legitimacy of the process. Since we started conducting these polls in a serious manner, the support has been indeed stable. (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021)

Emerging from the turbulent period of the Yugoslav Wars and the rule of Slobodan Milošević, Serbia found itself in front of the extremely difficult task to once again 'find its soul'. Turning to the membership in the EU as the best way toward political stability, economic development, and reintegration into the international community was rather expected among both the domestic and international public. Even before some substantial discussions and party profiling had emerged in the aftermath of the regime change, one could say that public opinion was not only anticipating, but generally endorsing this foreign policy shift since the winning coalition of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia had already campaigned on the narrative of 'return to Europe' that, although not always and solely, implied pro-EU orientation. In other words, the very results of the 2000 elections signalled that, after a full decade of wars, sanctions and isolation, the domestic 'demand' for Serbia's return to international community and, more specifically, to Europe, appeared to be sufficiently high at the beginning of the millennium to allow policymakers to formulate stronger ties with the EU as Serbia's a foreign policy course. As explained earlier, not much time has passed before the membership in the EU was officially adopted as the 'major strategic aim'.

The results of public opinion polls from this period confirm that EU membership made sense to a large portion of citizens even before political elites began explaining in detail why this was the case. Moreover, time would show that the early 2000s was a period of great enthusiasm for EU membership in Serbia. Some of the earliest available relevant opinion polls, dating back to 2002 (three years before the official launch of negotiations for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement), recorded that public support for EU membership was over two-thirds. For instance, according to a survey conducted by the then Office for European Integration, public support in 2002 was as high as 68%, rising to 72% in 2003 (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2006). Despite some fluctuations (71% in 2004, 64% in 2005, 70% in 2006, 69% in 2007), public acceptance of this foreign policy remained remarkably high (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009), although still lower than in Croatia (Franc and Medjugorec 2013) and Slovenia (Republic of Slovenia 2024) at that time. Furthermore, among the remaining one-third of the population who did not express support for EU membership during these years, the undecided group (comprising those who would not vote in a referendum and those who chose the 'do not know' option) was at least equal in number to those who explicitly opposed EU membership. In 2003, the category of undecided voters considerably outnumbered those against EU membership, with the former totalling 21% and the latter only 8% (European Integration 2006). Thus, although the reasons were by no means homogeneous (discussed later), it appears that support for EU membership was growing among the Serbian public long before the regime change, enabling an immediate, rapid, and solid emergence of social consensus in favour of EU membership after the new government took power. In other words, at least in terms of numbers, Serbia's future in the EU appeared as a very promising prospect among the Serbian public in the early 2000s.

What made the idea of stronger cooperation and eventual integration with the EU stick so immediately among the Serbian public can to a certain extent be inferred from the available surveys from the 2000s.[77] The survey questions, including the most regular polls by MEI, tend to focus on more tangible, immediate, and personal benefits or drawbacks, rarely including options directly related to Serbia's foreign policy or international politics. The answers which immediately jumped to the top of major motivations, and remained there ever since, are those related to the higher quality of

[77] The overall estimates are based on a comprehensive review of MEI survey results during the 2000s, with three randomly selected references provided to illustrate the trends observed during this period.

life, manifested in the right to work, reside, study, or obtain health and social care in the EU countries (Ministry of European Integration 2006; 2007; 2010). In addition to highly appreciating opportunities that obviously imply leaving Serbia, if and once Serbia acquires membership, citizens were at the same time very supportive of the reform process inside Serbia that was needed for the sake of it approaching the EU. According to more than two thirds of the Serbian public (Ministry of European Integration 2006, 2008, 2010), the reforms incentivised by the EU accession process are necessary for the improvement of the political and social life in Serbia regardless of the membership. Among the categories of the reforms, those directed towards the fight against corruption traditionally ranked by far the highest, followed by the better protection of human rights, health, justice, and educational system. The citizens, hence, had high hopes of the EU membership and the reforms that its perspective was supposed to stimulate in Serbia. In essence, the EU membership seems to have appealed to the Serbian public because, for the majority of citizens, the EU has been an immediate synonym for good governance and quality life. Nevertheless, as the surveys show and some interviewees also warn, the support to the reform process has not immediately and entirely translated to the overall public support to Serbia's membership in the EU. As noted by an interviewed MFA officer:

> There is a situation which is constantly repeating. And that is when responsible ministries are looking into the surveys asking, "Do you support European integration process?", and the other question is "Do you support the overall reforms processes in Serbia?". The second received above 70% of support, while the first only 50%. Where is the difference? Why are the overall reforms not related to the European integration process, or vice versa? That is the problem we are facing, and that is why I blame the EU and the national public administration not to communicate with public, because you should not sell EU integration itself, or overall reform process for itself and something else, but you have to explain every single day what the links are, and that there are pros and contras. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer B, personal interview, January 2020)

On the other hand, those who oppose Serbia's accession to the EU also cite various potential losses that the country would supposedly incur from membership. The most common answer reflected the citizens' general impression that Serbia's full membership in the EU would 'bring more damage than good' or even 'nothing good' (Ministry of European Integration 2006, 2007). Over the years, almost a third of the public has felt that the EU was not an optimal option without being able to identify specific reasons behind this stance. Among those who could identify more specific losses, the main concern was economic, with approximately 15% of the opponents believing that membership in the EU would lead to indebtedness and eventual economic collapse. Other reasons related more directly to Serbia's nationhood, including the loss of sovereignty and independence (10%) and the loss of identity (5%), while some simply referred to the alleged experiences of other countries (8%) (Ministry of European Integration 2007). Finally, among those who would vote 'no' if a referendum were held in the early 2000s, there were those whose reasons stemmed less from what Serbia would specifically gain or lose, but more from their general impression of the EU and its treatment of Serbia. Some cited a general mistrust and dislike of the EU, believing that the EU was an enemy to Serbia, while others pointed to the EU's policy of pressuring, conditioning, and blackmailing (Ministry of European Integration 2006).

This 'screenshot' which reveals why and to what extent this foreign policy appeared sensible or senseless to the public in the early 2000s, remained essentially true for the entire first decade of the integration process. This is particularly true for the rankings of preferences and views on the potential benefits and costs of eventual membership, as they have hardly changed over the past two decades. While the general support to the EU membership was in a gradual decline, it remained above 60% all up until 2010 (Ministry of European Integration 2009), with bigger oscillations usually following some critical events, either negative or positive. The blockade of the integration process due to Serbia's troublesome cooperation with the ICTY, followed by the Kosovo's unilateral proclamation of independence which was straightaway recognised by the vast majority of the EU states, had immediately downgraded the level of Euro-optimism among the Serbian public (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2008, 2009, 2010). On the other side, some positive

developments that had tangible effect on citizens' lives or marked an important step forward in the integration process – as was the lifting of the visa requirements for the holders of the Serbian passports travelling to Schengen countries in December 2009, or the signing of the SAA and Interim Trade Agreement which was ratified in 2011 – likely caused the support to bounce-back. The opposite trend was recorded on the side of the Eurosceptics during the 2000s, whose percentage gradually rose, although never over 20%. The overall picture of the EU has also remained rather stable through the first decade of 21st century,[78] particularly among those who held neutral view of the EU. A gradual rise of scepticism was, however, becoming evident. The sensitivity of the public support to 'critical events' was pointed out in the interviews, as well:

> Regardless of the relevance of these polls, we can see that we have stable support to the EU membership, which, depending on the processes and events that are occurring, can slightly vary. For instance, if something is going on with Kosovo and Metohija, the support immediately drops if you conduct the opinion poll in that period. On the other hand, if you open some negotiation chapters and do polls in that period, you will see that the support increased. So, the support is susceptible to the momentum. (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021)

The following decade, however, brought an acceleration of this downward trend, resulting in the significant drop of support to the EU membership in Serbia. A glance at the charts shows a gradual, but clear shrinking of the public's optimism about Serbia's membership in the EU over two decades. First, the overall picture about the EU itself has stared oscillating more than before. While the portion of those with neither positive nor negative views of the EU has remained very similar through the time, comprising at about the third of the population, the share of those with the overall positive or overall negative sentiments has waved, although with a generally negative trend. On one side, the share of population with the generally positive views about the EU has dropped from close to the half of the population during the 2000s (even 54% in 2008), to barely a third of population in early 2020s (even 28% in 2021) (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2000, 2021). The share of population with the overall negative reaction to the EU has, on the other hand, risen equivalently. The first peak, recorded in 2013 (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2013), with 37% of population with negative attitudes towards the EU, almost repeated ten years later despite a short-lived decline, getting to 35% in 2022 (Minstarstvo za evropske integracije 2022). In other words, while the perception of the EU has never been overwhelmingly positive in Serbia, over time it has split the Serbian public into nearly equal thirds. This means that, even twenty years after Serbia began its integration process, those with a favourable view of the EU remain significantly outnumbered by those who do not have an immediately positive reaction to it.

While the number of undecided when it comes to Serbia's membership in the EU has shrunk, the rise of Euroscepticism became even more evident in the second decade of 2000s. Expect for a short period in the late 2010s, the number of those who would vote yes on the EU referendum had never jumped over 60% since the initial phase of optimism. Two full decades after some of the first surveys had been conducted, the support had dropped for almost 30% – from 73% in 2002 to 43% in 2022 (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2002, 2022). Furthermore, the number of those who would vote 'no' to Serbia's membership has only risen over time. While the number of those who opposed the membership was for the entire first decade bellow 20%, it never fell below that after 2011, but kept oscillating with an upward trend, eventually reaching 32% in 2022 (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2011, 2022). Therefore, while the outcome of the EU referendum was unquestionable in the early 2000s, the EU membership over time made less and less sense to the Serbian public, to the point that, at least based on the numbers, the Serbian public could be the ultimate veto player to Serbia's accession to the EU. The numbers suggest that, while the EU membership still 'sticks' among the Serbian public, it is not as firmly attached as it appeared in the early 2000s. Despite the fact that

[78] The general perception that citizens held about the EU was not perfectly aligned with their responses in the case of a referendum since there was always a significant portion of citizens whose view of the EU was not overwhelmingly positive (probably leaning toward neutrality) but who would still support Serbia's membership in the EU.

EU membership has remained the Serbia' foreign policy priority, the overview of the public opinion polls shows that not only that this policy failed to attract new but stopped making sense to a significant number of those who considered it a reasonable way forward for Serbia in international relations.

Based on the available surveys, several factors seem to have contributed most to this decline in support. The slowness of the process is one of them since opinion polls show that the expectations of the public about the potential year of accession have been constantly failed over two decades, leading to the rise of a cynical stand that Serbia would ever join the EU (Ministarstvo evropskih integracija 2005, 2015, 2022). The blame for such a lengthy process, according to the Serbian public, is more on the EU than on Serbia. While some name objective obstacles', such as the complexity of the reform process, or the situation inside the EU itself, the EU's policy of 'constant conditioning and blackmailing' has been viewed as the major reason for Serbia's sluggish and difficult process of integration. Moreover, at least half of the population – and, occasionally, this proportion came close to the two thirds of the population, and only once dropped under 40% – believed that conditions which the EU posed to Serbia were not clear and fixed but would continue to expand and change (Ministarstvo evropskih integracija 2005, 2015, 2022). This sentiment was particularly strong in the late 2000s and early 2010s, capturing the perception that conditions regarding the Kosovo issue had only replaced the condition of the cooperation with the ICTY as critical for the pace of Serbia's integration into the EU (Ministarstvo evropskih integracija 2011). Although during the early 2000s the percentage of population who believed that 'the incapacity of the domestic authorities' rose to 20% (Ministarstvo evropskih integracija 2009), domestic actors were never seen as the dominant reason among the Serbian public, and over time only about a tenth of the population was left with this attitude (Ministartstvo evropskih integracija 2022). The 'mentality of the people' and their unreadiness to change would follow as another domestic source of the prolonged integration process in Serbia. Thus, while a part of the Serbian public considered the Serbian elites and people as the most responsible for Serbia's failure to join the EU timely, the drop in public's support seems to stem from the resentment among a significant portion of the public who sees the EU's conditions to Serbia as at best non-transparent. There has been a shared sentiment that the EU would never accept Serbia, using constantly new conditions as alibies (Belgrade Centre for Security Policy 2017).[79]

In addition to the widespread scepticism about the EU's treatment of Serbia, there is also a considerable cynicism about the EU's future as such. Only about a fifth of the Serbian public foresees favourable future for the EU and believes in the possibility of its enlargement (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2018, 2020, 2022). The rest of the population, however, has considerable reserves about whether the EU will be capable of overcoming the problem it faces. Close to a half of the population believes that EU will manage to survive, but that the consequences of the current challenges would be so severe that the enlargement is either unlikely or that the EU would change so much that the benefit of the eventual membership would not be as significant for Serbia as in the current moment (Ministarstvo za evropske integracija 2022). Finally, approximately a third of the population believes that the EU will not even manage to overcome the increasing problems it faces, which is why it was more likely that the EU would not shut for new members but even fall apart (Ministarstvo za evropske integracija 2022). The numbers, therefore, suggest that scepticism is high in all segments of the population, not only among those who would vote no or abstained in the situation of a potential referendum, but also among a significant number of those who would vote for Serbia's membership in the EU. The public imaginary of Serbia's future in the EU or the EU itself appears so gloomy that even the current levels of support appear somewhat favourable.[80] Put simply, the waning enthusiasm for the EU among the Serbian public is evident, as it's illogical for them to

[79] According to BCSP (2017) survey, 45% of citizens believes that Serbia's progress towards the EU is slow, and 18% that it practically not moving. Moreover, 41% considers that Serbia would never join the EU.

[80] In 2020, 58% of citizens believed that Serbia would never achieve full membership status, and roughly two-thirds of survey participants exhibited indifference towards the EU's future and would not mind if the EU dissolved as a result of internal issues. This survey also reconfirmed that that a significant part (nearly half) of the Serbian public believed that the EU was unwilling to embrace Serbia as a member (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2020).

support Serbia's EU membership if they believe either the EU itself or its expansion efforts are destined to fail. In the research from 2017 (Belgrade Centre for Security Policy 2017), half of the population would feel indifferent if EU fell apart, 15% said that they would be glad if that scenario occurred, and only 21% they would feel sorry.

The steadiness of the public opinionS about the EU membership is evident from the level of the public's information about this matter. At least based on the citizens' self-evaluation in surveys, the level of their knowledge and interest in Serbia's membership in the EU has remained almost unchanged despite remarkable resources and efforts towards raising thy public awareness about the importance and benefits about Serbia's membership in the EU. At the end of 2000s, the share of those who consider themselves as uninformed or poorly informed, those who consider themselves informed and those in between are almost equal, with the first being in slight advantage (Ministarstvo za evropske integracija 2010). A decade later, the numbers are almost identical, with only a slight increase in the number of those who consider themselves informed (Ministarstvo za evropske integracija 2020). The true level of the public knowledge, if measured by the occasional survey questions that trace publics' familiarity with specific steps that Serbia made in the recent past or general EU instruments or mechanisms, such as IPA funds. The most cited, as truly illustrative, are the citizen knowledge about the EU donations to Serbia. Despite the enormous money which the EU has donated Serbia for the reforms needed for the accession to the EU, and enormous money invested in making these donations visible to the public, at best the third population was aware of this (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2022; Institut za evreopske poslove 2020). The public is rather resilient to learning about the EU, remaining stuck with their predefined views on the EU. In other words, regardless of how much information was offered to the EU, their impression on the EU remains largely dependent on what they had already believed they knew. Several interviewees expressed this in different ways:

> It is too difficult for all citizens to understand everything. Honestly, sometimes it's too hard for me to understand everything, even though I try to follow everything. But the key advantages and disadvantages are what citizens are most interested in. They do not have to know every function, agency, institution, articles of the Lisbon Treaty etc., but they should know both positive and negative aspects, such as budget allocations – not everything is ideal and that should be said, but both positive and negative consequences should be measured at the end. (Member A of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee, personal interview, March 2020).

> I don't think that they are concentrated that much on this issue. Probably, if we had some more concrete results, which are visible to the public, they would probably realize that. I think that public is predominantly concentrated on the overall process. When they see some blockade, disagreement, when they hear that somebody is criticizing Serbia, probably unfairly or less fairly… that are the circumstances in which they create their opinion. But what would be visible results in this area"? (…) Anyway, sincerely speaking, general public is not very much interested in this and has different, concrete interests. Whether something will improve their living standard, that is what attacks them. And they like to feel accepted and recognized. (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021)

The MEI survey indirectly captures some of the public's views about EU as a global actor, as well. While not much is available, it is evident that beyond the quality of democracy and the rule of law, the Serbian citizens do not have very high opinion on the EU's power in global arena. Even in terms of the economic power in general, or more specifically, the credibility of the investors or the development of new technologies, citizens rank the EU far below China, Russia, or USA. In 2017, when asked to rank global powers based on their economic success, the EU was ranked far worse (with only 12% of respondents having an overall positive attitudes), than the US (with 58% of respondents with positive attitudes), China (46%) and Russia (37%) (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2017). When it comes to other types of power, only the ranking of the three big powers change, while the EU still lags far behind. In the domain of political power, the best ranked in 2017 among the Serbian public were USA (80% of population with positive views), Russia (70%), China (14%) and, finally, the EU (10% of positive attitudes). In the domain of military power, the difference

is even more striking. The greatest military power according to the Serbian public is Russia (79%), followed by the US (58%) and China (29%) (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). The share of citizens who believe that the EU is successful in the military domain in 2017 was as low as 6%, while those who would evaluate it as unsuccessful is as high as 71% (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). The overall attitude is that the EU is hardly considered a great power in Serbia, or at least among its citizens. The greatest aspect of its soft power in Serbia stems from the projection of its normative power, while the EU's overall political and military power are highly appreciated.

The role of the EU on Serbia's foreign and security policy is not overly positive either. Less than a third of population evaluates this influence as positive, while the rest two thirds are split between the neutrals and those with a negative perception (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). Security benefits are appreciated by slightly more than a third, according to MEI studies (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2021).[81] In terms of foreign policy, the greatest asset of Serbia's membership in the EU would, according to the citizens, be 'an improved image' and, above all, the increase in the direct foreign investments (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2021). When asked about the participation of the Serbian Armed Forces in foreign missions, about 15% would support the participation in the missions under UN or EU mandate. Since 20% would support participation in the UN missions, and only 3% under the UN, EU or NATO mandate, it seems that the participation in the EU missions is less popular than the participation under the UN flag, but still more popular than under the NATO mandate. The interviewees expressed similar views about the popularity of the deeper security and defence cooperation with the EU, including the participation in the EU missions and operations, emphasising that this is not something that politicians are eager to talk about in the public. Nevertheless, the scepticism in this regard was not as high as with the NATO. "We are, of course, clinging to the EU, not NATO, and participating in these European operations, for purely domestic political reasons. Not because of something else", as one interviewee suggested (Ministry of Foreign Affairs B, personal interview, January 2020). Instead, it stems more from a general concern about foreign and security issues as such, since "promoting EU missions is not popular in the sense that citizens do not see any immediate benefits from this" (Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member, personal interview, February 2021). Reflecting on the insufficient attention and limited popularity of this aspect of cooperation with the EU, an interviewed MFA officer stated:

> We participate in missions in high numbers and figures, percentage of women in missions also, this is something we are very proud of. Unfortunately, we do not sell it enough in the EU and here in public. We do not sell it, unfortunately. I am telling you this as a civil servant, and I am proud of it, but it is not only my obligation to share this. I can sell it with researchers, NGOs, etc., but I would like to have this more in the media, because it is great. But, it is still, I think, sensitive for some politicians mostly to sell this. You are part of mission? What do you do somewhere in Rwanda, Afghanistan, Mali? That's not your job! This is still something which is in the head of an average citizen in our country, and it should change. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020)

Finally, when compared to other Serbian foreign policy goals, the stickiness of this policy is particularly evident in how readily the public might accept its abandonment. Asked to rank Serbia's foreign policy goals, only 9% of citizens said that the EU was Serbia's foreign policy priority, 24% chose preserving Kosovo and Metohija in Serbia, and 20% cooperation with Russia (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2020). As soon as these priorities were directly opposed among themselves, the lower stickiness of the EU becomes even clearer. A huge majority of 81% would refuse to accept losing Kosovo for the sake of EU membership (Institut za evropske poslove 2018, 2023), and if Serbia were by any chance recognised Kosovo as an independent state in exchange for

[81] A survey from 2012 gives a more optimistic story with 44% believing that Serbia's security would improve if it joined the EU, 25% believes the opposite and the rest is neutral (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2012).

becoming a member of the EU, the majority of citizens, two-thirds of them, would feel concerned, a fifth would remain indifferent, and only one in ten citizens would be pleased. While to a lesser extent, the EU's attractiveness drops drastically when it clashes with Russia, as well. When asked directly about how they would feel if Serbia were to abandon the EU integration path and establish an alliance with Russia, about 35% of citizens would be worried, 33% would feel indifferent, while even 28% would be pleased. This has become further evident with the Ukrainian crisis, as all opinion polls, with minor differences, portrayed the same picture, with very low share of citizens who believe that Serbia should introduce sanctions to Russia in order to align with the EU or support the EU overall stands when it comes to the Ukrainian crisis (CRTA 2022).[82]

In essence, the available surveys suggest, and interviews seem to support, that although cooperation with the EU was readily embraced and is still officially regarded as the foremost foreign policy objective, the public does not seem particularly attached to it. Answers to the direct question about suspending Serbia's negotiations with the EU confirm this directly, as only slightly above a third (35%) would be concerned, while 43% would feel indifferent, and 19% would even express joy (CRTA 2022). Similar sentiments arise with the idea of the EU falling apart (CRTA 2022). Despite the policymakers' efforts to advance the citizens' support for this policy and knowledge about it, widespread scepticism and cynicism towards Serbia's path in the EU and the EU itself persist. Hence, while the policymakers do not feel constrained about pursuing the policy and talking about it, they do not feel that this is something that resonates immediately either. Therefore, it appears that security and defence cooperation with the EU is not something that the public resists, but not something they would resist abandoning either – while they know this is the right policy, they do not appear to feel so. This level of stickiness in this EU policy, which makes both adhering to it and abandoning it appear equally sensible, is aptly summarised by one of the interviewees as being somewhere between NATO and Russia:

> Our public opinion at this juncture is very pro-Russian and in this way everything that is connected with direct security cooperation, if you ask people directly, they would be against. But somehow the EU is perceived as much more neutral than NATO, which is some kind of an absurd, because those are more or less the same countries, except for the US. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer C, personal interview, January 2020)

5.2.2. Public Opinion on Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation with NATO

Data available on public views regarding Serbia's cooperation with NATO have not been as robust as those related to the EU membership but usually come down to the insights on the overall support to Serbia's potential membership in the alliance. Nevertheless, for a foreign policy that has never been officially established as a goal and has not even been on the agenda of dominant political parties, the data concerning Serbia's potential NATO membership and the existing level of cooperation has, however, been consistently updated. This special monitoring arises from several factors that place Serbia's cooperation with NATO in the spotlight compared to most other foreign policies. In the broadest sense, the historical legacy of NATO's role in the division between the global West and East has framed the question of membership in this organisation as a symbolic way of asking where Serbia stands in the geopolitical landscape. Along with the EU, NATO membership was often considered a natural path for 'returning to Europe' and reintegrating into the international community after the Cold War for all states in Central and Eastern Europe.[83] More specifically and significantly, however,

[82] For instance, according to the only 14% believed in that Serbia should introduce sanctions to Russia in order to align with the EU, and only 5% believes that Serbia should support the EU overall stands when it comes to the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. Moreover, when asked about who is responsible for the sanctions against Ukraine, 66% believed it was the West (CRTA 2022).

[83] This perception is widespread among the Serbian public as well. A survey from 2016 shows that 24% of the public views the membership in NATO as a precondition for the membership in the EU, 34% does not hold this true, and 22% is undecided.

the legacy of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 made this issue far more contentious than in other non-member or military-neutral states. The memory of the 1999 events rendered the public highly sensitive to this foreign policy option, creating a spectre of 'creeping membership' among the public, wherein there have been concerns about the foreign policy elites' intention to introduce Serbia into NATO 'through the back door,' incrementally, without openly declaring it as an aim. Exemplifying how constraining this memory is on policymakers' rhetoric, a MEI officer stated in the interview:

> But it is important how elites mitigate the impact of positive messages they are saying. For instance, they will always say "Ok, Serbia will never become a member of NATO, but we have to cooperate with them because of this and that reason." So, they will always have some "but", because this is unpopular. Just mitigating the fears of the public, saying "don't worry, we will not become a member of NATO, but we have to cooperate because KFOR is in Kosovo, or we participate with the countries from which we can learn some important things because they are military powers. (Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member, personal interview, February 2021)

The public opinion polls about Serbia's security and defence cooperation with NATO have, therefore, been conducted regularly, reflecting remarkably stable attitudes with only minor fluctuations over more than two decades. More specifically, what makes it stable is a very strong and even steadily growing opposition to membership in this organisation, spanning from its early days to the present moment. While the percentage of the Serbian public supporting this option was never particularly high, it reached its peak in the early 2000s. While even at that time this support was far below the support for EU integration, the public backing for Serbia's NATO membership allegedly hovered between 20% and 30%.[84] However, starting in the late 2000s, especially after the developments regarding Kosovo's unilateral proclamation of independence, support for NATO membership dropped to below 20% and continued to decline throughout the 2010s. In the early 2020s, based on nearly all available survey results, support fluctuated around one-tenth of the population (Institut za evropske poslove 2020; 2021; 2022). Only once during this period, in 2013, a survey registered support to NATO membership at 27% (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017).[85] While there is no research to support this, it might be the case that the signing of the Brussels Agreement between Belgrade and Pristina sparked some short-lived enthusiasm this year. It was, however, short-lived because, just two years later, support had fallen to as low as 12% (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). The lack of popularity of the idea of NATO membership is further evident from the proportion of the population openly opposing it, which typically accounts for about two-thirds of the public (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012a; 2017; 2020). While the share of undecided individuals has slightly increased in absolute numbers in recent years, this has traditionally been the foreign policy area with the smallest proportion of unopinionated or neutral individuals, making it the undoubtedly least popular foreign policy direction among the Serbian public.

Since NATO membership has never been officially designated as a foreign policy goal and has only sporadically and mildly featured on the top parties' agendas, there has been no official foreign policy disconnect between the elites and the public. On the other hand, cooperation with NATO, particularly in its tight and advanced form, has been an official and rather successful foreign policy since the early 2000s, as previously explained. Nevertheless, despite decades of cooperation and consistent rhetoric from the elites advocating the necessity and benefits of cooperation with various entities, including NATO, more than a half of the Serbian public remains strongly opposed to any form of cooperation with NATO (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017, Institut za

[84] This particular data circulates across many publications and experts' statements related to Serbia's relationship to NATO since 2000, but is not publicly available, so it is difficult to give more detailed information on the structure of the public opinion (i.e. the share of undecided, those against, etc.) BCSP notes that at the beginning of 2010, according to Gallup's Medium survey, the support stood at 21% (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017).

[85] This short-lived increase was recorded in 2013. While there is no research to support this, it might be the case that the signing of the Brussels Agreement between Belgrade and Pristina sparked some short-lived enthusiasm.

evropske poslove 2021). In the series of surveys conducted in the 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, the opposition to the cooperation with NATO was even higher – 66%, 61%, 57% 59% respectively (Institut za evropske poslove 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). Among the rest, there has been a nearly equal share of those with neutral stances and those supporting the current level of cooperation (Institut za evropske poslove 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). With the support of bellow of the third of the population, cooperation with NATO, even without the prospect of membership, stands as one of the least popular foreign policy approaches in Serbia. To gauge the extent to which this policy lacks public support, it is worth noting that even cooperation with Pristina's authorities for the purpose of finding a final solution to the Kosovo issue enjoys far stronger public backing (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). Therefore, while the public objection to NATO membership already well illustrates the intensity of anti-NATO sentiment among the Serbian public, citizens' resistance to mere cooperation with alliance talks even more about its limited stickiness. Expressing concerns about the prohibitively high and persistent public opposition to cooperation with NATO, an MFA interviewee stated:

> I don't know. I cannot explain even for NATO, which should be even easier one. This is a paradox. Everything we do on the political level is the highest we can, and then public opinion is completely against and any cooperation. You and your team and the government, or whoever is responsible for that, should tackle the gap which exists between the two just because they do not want to share that we have that high cooperation with NATO, and it is great because NATO is not only the military intervening somewhere, because it is today more than military, it is science, agriculture, strategic communication, everything is within NATO. So, we have to explain this to public, you just choose because NATO is not just about military, we just remember it as such because of aggression and bombing of Yugoslavia and so on, but we have succeeded somehow to have great relations with Germany very briefly after WWII. Was it wrong to have that kind of relations with Germany? No, I don't think so. They have already suffered. But then we should kind of restart the relations we had before. The same goes with NATO. Was it easy for our citizens in early 60s to explain why do we have relations with Germany which was an occupying power? It is about explaining what the costs and benefits are of being part of the EU, being part of NATO, not being part of EU, not being part of NATO. And, how to explain this gap is the governments and public administration job. Government is not being willing to sell cooperation with NATO to the public because they are losing at the elections if they mention NATO too many times. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer B, personal interview, January 2020).

A more nuanced understanding of these attitudes can be obtained by delving deeper into what NATO signifies to Serbian citizens, both generally and concerning Serbia's cooperation with it. The prevailing negative sentiment regarding Serbia's cooperation with NATO, let alone its membership, aligns well with the Serbian public's perception of the alliance's global mission and historical track record. Apart from those who remain undecided when queried about NATO's global role (typically accounting for around one-fifth of the respondents in such questions), two primary perspectives tend to emerge, which mutually reinforce each other. Firstly, nearly 40% of those surveyed believe that NATO functions primarily as an instrument of the US global interests (Institut za evropske poslove 2018, 2023). Secondly, one in five individuals holds the view that this organization serves not just the interests of the US but those of powerful and wealthy nations in general. In essence, over two-thirds of the Serbian public perceive NATO as nothing more than 'an extended arm' of the most powerful Western states (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012, Institut za evropske poslove 2016). If this is considered together with the fact that the policy of the NATO alliance and major world powers is the prevailing external threat to Serbia's security among the citizens who have opinion on this matter,[86] the overall attitude towards the NATO is far clearer. For one out of every ten respondents, NATO is seen as having deviated from its original purpose. Finally, only 10% view it as a defensive alliance that promotes peace, which well resonates with the proportion of citizens

[86] A significant number of undecided individuals, as many as 59%, do not know the answer to this question (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012).

supporting Serbia's membership in the alliance (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012, Institut za evropske poslove 2016). When this overall attitude toward NATO relates to specific events, such as the Ukrainian crisis, the majority of citizens – comprising nearly 66% – attributes primary responsibility for the armed conflict in Ukraine to 'Western actors,' which prominently include the US and NATO, along with the EU (CRTA 2022).

In other words, the overall anti-American and anti-Western attitudes among the Serbian public significantly foster a widespread perception of NATO as an instrument of powerful nations – and vice versa – creating a strong synergic effect towards the negative sentiments about the alliance as such. Overall, the impact of the public perception is that the US influence on Serbia is by far the worst of all 'great powers' (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017) and the US is often perceived as Serbia's greatest adversary. The public believes that Serbia's membership in alliance would overall bring bad things to Serbia, its defence industry (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). Overall, the two thirds of the public believes that NATO membership cannot benefit Serbia, while approximately one fifth considers the opposite (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). A more nuanced view into the citizens' cost-benefits NATO membership. The survey reveals that 48% of respondents are concerned that joining NATO could lead to a loss of Serbia's independence and 41% believe that NATO membership might potentially entangle Serbia in conflicts with other countries and elevate the risk of terrorism, while only 34% of respondents believe that NATO membership would lower the threat of external attacks (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012). Even if Russia were to become a NATO member one day, two thirds of citizens would still not support Serbia's membership in that organization (Institut za evropske poslove 2016). The positive views are more pronounced only in two specific areas: 43% of respondents anticipate that NATO membership would modernise the Serbian Armed Forces and, additionally, 47% of the public believes that NATO membership would positively impact Serbia's defence industry, enhancing the opportunities for its improvement and export within this sector (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012). In other words, while the Serbian public seems aware of more tangible, material benefits of NATO membership, the overall costs remain prohibitively high for the vast majority of the public to consider even cooperation with the alliance (Institut za evropske poslove 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020).

Of course, the picture of the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999 is the 'elephant in the room' when talking about the public attitudes to NATO in Serbia. While assessing the evolution of opinion twenty years later is difficult, not much appears to have changed. While the reasons for the 1999 NATO bombardment are, according to the Serbian public, diverse, the blame is still dominantly attributed to external factors. This, in the first line, includes the geopolitical, military, and economic interests of the US, NATO, and other great powers in general, or in creating independent Kosovo, but also some more general anti-Serb politics in the West (Institut za evropske poslove 2016, 2018, 2020). The strength of these sentiments is evident in the fact that almost half of the population would not accept NATO's apology even if offered (Institut za evropske poslove 2016, 2018, 2020).[87] Nevertheless, while obviously strong, the relationship between the 1999 NATO bombardment and public support should not be seen as straightforward, as the support for NATO was apparently higher in the immediate aftermath of the bombardment, in early 2000. While there have been some explanations as to why this is the case (e.g. the theory of chosen trauma by Volkan (2001)),[88] it seems that the anti-NATO sentiment among the Serbian public is perhaps even more related to the loss of Kosovo and the previously mentioned perceptions of NATO's overall role in the global security

[87] "A couple of Stoltenberg messages had very strong effects. NATO didn't apologize because of bombing, despite of the fact that media said so. But Stoltenberg offered condolences, he was the first Secretary General who said that. His predecessors didn't say that, and I think it is huge. This kind of messages are important." (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal communication, January 2021).

[88] As one interviewee suggested: "*Our public opinion is more and more against NATO with the time. So, we are closer today in our mental approach that we were 10 years ago. In 2005 it was "long time ago" and now it was "yesterday"* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official 3, personal communication, January 2021)

architecture among the Serbian public than to the bombardment itself.[89] Highlighting the paradox of growing opposition to cooperation with NATO over the decades, an MFA interviewee stated:

> It's not just 1999. 1999 is the reason, but I will tell you, you are aware that in 2002 the percentage of public support to NATO membership was higher, but shortly. Yes, its NATO bombing, but another thing is recognition of Kosovo. But, in fact, what I oftentimes try to explain is that NATO did not recognize Kosovo. There are four countries, like five in EU, who did not recognize Kosovo, and which are for us very important, because these four countries stopped a lot of initiatives going from bigger countries and going from Pristina. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020).

All this contributes to the policymakers' feeling of being strongly constrained in this foreign policy since changing public opinion on this matter has proven to be extremely difficult. Despite the solid level of official cooperation for over two decades and the policymakers' emphases on the "benefits that not only help our armed forces but other institutions and capacities" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer B, personal interview, January 2020), the cooperation with NATO is viewed as rather unsuccessful by the public. The policymakers' dominantly believe the public "is not receptive to this information", stating that "their attitudes are more based on a lot of unfortunately disinformation, and on very bad personal experiences from twenty years ago, and that is mostly modelling their ability to judge on what kind of integration we are heading to" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer C, personal interview, January 2020). According to policymakers, this is most visible in the paradox of persistent unacceptability of cooperation with NATO and the acceptability of cooperation with the EU, despite overlapping membership of these organisations. Despite "a lot of agreements and cooperation with NATO, a number of joint exercises, and so on (…) the EU-led ones are much easier and more convenient for the government to promote itself and its activities in the defence area with EU institutions," as summarised by an MFA official (Ministry of Foreign Affairs A, personal interview, January 2020).

In order to prevent negative effects from spilling over to public attitudes towards the EU, policymakers often try to separate those issues when talking about Serbia's security and defence policy in public. Therefore, while they all "try to at least mention NATO" and the necessity of cooperation with it, they also say that "it is not very pragmatic and smart to go out with it" and "to express too positively about NATO" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020). In other words, the interviews reveal that public opposition to NATO pushes political elites into some form of 'crypto-Atlanticism' (Ejdus and Hoefler 2024) as, according to the interviews, the opinion among the foreign, security, and defence staff across the institutions is far more favourable to Serbia's cooperation with, or even membership NATO than among the general public. One of the interviewed MPs argued even that "the mood for Euro-Atlantic integration in the ruling coalition is much higher and, if we could count the MPs, there would be undoubtedly incomparably more Euro-Atlantic MPs within the ruling coalition than in the opposition" (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020). Therefore, the policymakers refrain from talking much about this pillar of Serbia's security and defence policy, let alone opening the debate about potential membership in NATO:

> Coming back to the point of NATO, what we are doing in public policy, it is our part of the job, just to present to the people, what does it mean, why is the cooperation with NATO important to us. We hear that "NATO bombed us, we can't cooperate", but this is not aligned with our overall policies. How can you cooperate with big countries, US, UK, Germany, France, etc. on a bilateral level, and then say I won't cooperate with NATO because it is something evil. Come on, it is not possible. That is the point. We are open to the public, we want to explain what the substance of our policy is. We are not promoting NATO, that is not up to us, that is up to NATO, we are just

[89] When asked what NATO should do to improve the relations, the majority of respondents named things related to Serbia in particular, such as paying war reparations (33%) or apologising (15%), while a significant number had more universal requirements that would make NATO stop intervening in other countries for the sake of its member's interest (23%) or without the UN approval (10%) (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017).

> promoting cooperation. We explain to the people why it is important. So, yes, we take public opinion into account. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020)

In summary, the public in Serbia exhibits strong resistance to any form of cooperation with NATO, creating "a significant stigma around discussing Serbia's potential membership in NATO" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer C, personal interview, January 2020) among the policymakers. With policymakers' personal and professional attitudes appearing more favourable towards this policy, as the official foreign policy ultimately confirms, the foreign policy disconnect between public opinion and elite actions remains the highest in Serbia's overall foreign policy course. Despite policymakers' efforts, however mild, to inform the public about cooperation with NATO, public opinion remains strongly opposed, with the opposition even rising over time. When asked on whether this could ever change, the policymakers rarely say 'never', but condition this possibility with tremendous efforts, strong social and political consensus, and very often, passage of a lot of time – confirming that engaging the public in the idea of cooperation with NATO is extremely challenging, whereas abandoning the idea would require no effort. Therefore, unsurprisingly, this aspect of Serbia's security and defence policy is the least sticky in both its dimensions. Several interviewees directly confirmed this, along with the constraining effect it has on policymakers' decisions and rhetoric:

> There are few politicians who talk about the positive aspects of NATO membership. And when such politicians appear, they are awaited negatively by the public and colleagues - even by colleagues from the same political group. There are topics that are not opportune to raise if you want support from your colleagues or citizens. (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020)

> This is what we saw through the communication with our partners. I think that all other parts – military exercises, all kind of joint activities – are going smoothly and everyone is fine with how the things are going, except for the promotion of these activates and the awareness of people on these activities. It is the matter of the, it is the obligation of Serbia to promote these activities. I couldn't say there is none of it, there is some activities on different levels, some reporting and inviting media to report and cover on some activities, and that is it, more or less. I am sure that there could be more activities in this area. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A, personal interview, January 2020)

5.2.3. Public Opinion on Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation with Russia

Despite the conflict between Tito and Stalin from 1948 to 1953[90] and Russia's support for imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the UN Security Council in May 1992,[91] Russia has consistently been regarded as a significant security and defence partner for Yugoslavia and Serbia. Perhaps exactly because there has never been a 'turn' or 'return' towards it, as in the case of the EU

[90] While the reasons behind it are multiple, the Tito-Stalin dispute stemmed primarily from Tito's refusal to conform to Soviet demands for strict political and economic alignment. Stalin perceived Tito's independent policies, such as supporting revolutionary movements without Moscow's approval (for example, in Greece) and pursuing a unique model of socialism, as a threat to Soviet hegemony. This culminated in Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Communist Information Bureau in June 1948, with Tito being accused of nationalist deviation. Despite the ensuing Soviet-led economic blockade and political isolation, Yugoslavia survived by fostering ties with Western powers and later cofounding the Non-Aligned Movement.

[91] Sanctions against the FRY were imposed on May 30, 1992, by the United Nations Security Council due to allegations of its involvement in the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Security Council Resolution 757 introduced a comprehensive international economic embargo on the FRY, which included a ban on trade and financial transactions, a complete prohibition on flights to and from the FRY, restrictions on servicing FRY-registered aircraft, the reduction of diplomatic presence in Belgrade, the exclusion of FRY sports teams and individual representatives from international competitions, and the suspension of scientific and technical cooperation. The sanctions led to a severe economic crisis in the country, marked by hyperinflation. After the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in December 1995, the EU and the UN suspended the sanctions against the FRY, while the US maintained what was referred to as the 'outer wall of sanctions,' including restrictions on accessing IMF loans. In early November 1996, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1074, formally lifting sanctions against the FRY.

or NATO, the public opinion polls about Serbia's cooperation with Russia have far scarcer and more irregular. Moreover, revealing historically favourable public sentiments towards Russia among the Serbian population, the available data also suggest why policymakers and researchers might often take the public opinion about Serbia's cooperation with Russia for granted, without the need to test it as frequently as it is the case with other pillars of Serbia's security and defence course.[92] Therefore, similar to Serbia's cooperation with the EU, there is limited data on Serbia's cooperation with Russia specifically in security and defence. However, the available insights into how the Serbian public views Russia's overall role and influence in international relations and within Serbia itself provide significant understanding of the persistence of any foreign policy towards Russia, including in the security and defence sector.

Overall, the assessment of the relationship between Serbia and Russia is highly favourable among the Serbian population, consistently hovering around 4 on a scale from 1 to 5 (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). While there has been a slight decrease since the late 2010s, the average score remains significantly higher than that of any other state or partner. This preference for cooperation with Russia, compared to other entities, is further underscored by public sentiment regarding the future of Serbia-Russia relations, which is brighter than the abovementioned cynicism about Serbia-EU relations. Despite some decline in recent years (from 78% in 2020 to 52% in 2023),[93] along with an uptick in those expecting relations to remain unchanged, over half of the population still maintains an optimistic outlook on the future of these two countries' relations (Instititut za evropske poslove 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). A closer examination of public perceptions of Russia offers insight into why this foreign policy direction resonates so strongly with the Serbian public.

Firstly, according to Serbian perceptions, Russia wields substantial, if not the greatest, power in international affairs and its global influence continues to be viewed very positively in Serbia. In the domain of military power, in the eyes of the Serbian public, Russia ranks higher than any other individual global power (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). More than three quarters of the public believe that Russia is the greatest military power in the world, far ahead the US. Even in the domain of political power, according to the data from 2017, the US and Russia are tie in the eyes of the Serbian public. Apart from the economic domain, the EU lags significantly behind both Russia and the US in the eyes of the Serbian populace. Moreover, it appears that this is the case not only with hard, but also soft power. While exact percentages vary across surveys, Russia consistently ranks no lower than third as a suitable societal model for Serbia, trailing only behind Switzerland (not an EU member state) and/or Germany (e.g., Institut za evropske poslove 2018). When directly compared with the overall 'EU model,' the Serbian public overwhelmingly favours the Russian model – e.g., 49% compared to 34 (Institut za evropske poslove 2019; also evident in all surveys published by MEI).

Secondly, Russia's overall influence in Serbia garners the most positive assessment among all major world powers. While some surveys indicate a slight downward trend in recent years, the prevailing sentiment is that Russia is viewed as a friend of Serbia, with between 70% and 85% of respondents expressing this view (Institut za evropske poslove 2016, 2018, 2020). Remarkably, approximately 40% of those surveyed consider Russia to be Serbia's closest ally, while the percentage of the population perceiving Russia as an enemy is consistently low, typically only a few percentage points (Institut za evropske poslove 2016, 2018, 2020). Moreover, the existing findings underscore a prevailing positive perception of Russia's role in Serbia among the surveyed population, with a noticeable increase in the perceived positivity of Russian influence over time. Moreover, over two-thirds of participants express confidence in Russia's friendly policies toward Serbia, while a quarter of the public believes that Russian support for Serbia is driven by its own interests, and a few precents of citizens perceives Russia's stance toward Serbia as unfriendly. One of the most illustrative

[92] Most of the opinion polls about Serbia's relationship with Russia is available from the late 2000s, perhaps following the intensification and further institutionalisation of their cooperation.

[93] The question asked in the survey is: "Do you believe that relations between Serbia and Russia will improve in the future?"

examples of the biased perception of Russia's positive influence in Serbia is related to the public's perceptions of its financial assistance to Serbia. Despite rather modest financial support to Serbia, the public in Serbia has traditionally overestimated this support, rating Russia as the greatest donor in Serbia, far ahead several states whose financial aid to Serbia exceeded Russian aid several times over (Minstarstvo za evropske integracije 2011, 2015). Over time, most likely due to continuous communication and visibility campaigns by the EU in Serbia, the EU's and Russia's donations were perceived as almost tied in 2019, while in 2022, Russia dropped to the third place (18%), behind the EU (28%), but behind China as well (25%) (Ministarstvo za evropske integracije 2019, 2022).

> One of the greatest illusions of the public is that Russia is our biggest donor, although they give so little, almost nothing. But, somehow, politically, via Russia Today, or for instance, when floods occur, they immediately send some people, boats, take pictures and manage to sustain this image of the great helpers of Serbia. On the other hand, until the EU makes decision, like in the former Yugoslavia, a lot of time passes… Have this in mind. All those people in the Commission, they are delegated by the national key, not only the commissioners, but also heads of departments, heads of directorates. Every decision is, therefore, so slow that even those who are put on positions need to consult with their own government, so the decision come late for several months. Russia does not has to go through this… The bureaucracy is its own greatest enemy when it comes to the EU popularity. (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021)

As for the strengthening of military cooperation with Russia specifically, the citizens of Serbia mostly perceive the strengthening of military cooperation with Russia as non-threatening and view it as a beneficial foreign policy choice. About a half of the population is satisfied with the current level of cooperation (i.e., in comparison to over a half of the population's stand that no cooperation with NATO should be perused), while a quarter contend that strengthening cooperation with Moscow should be a priority in the realm of security policy (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). Only a quarter of the public believes that this would threaten Serbia's sovereignty, while more than a half disagrees. This is best viewed in the public attitude toward the participation of Serbia's army in international military missions, as the deployment of the Serbian Armed Forces outside its borders is often perceived as unnecessary renunciation and jeopardy of state autonomy and sovereignty. Despite the general scepticism about the idea of involvement of the Serbian troops outside the state borders, 17% of the public would engage together with Russia, which is only a couple of precents bellow the 20% of those who would agree the Serbian involvement in missions only with the UN mandate (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). Exemplifying the immediate positive reaction to cooperation with Russia among the public, an interviewed MP stated:

> Just as a century-old friendship with Russia was created in 2008, so now you have a narrative that Russia has always been on the Serbian side, although you have examples that Russia was directly against us. If you say so, you get the answer: "Yes, but at least it didn't bomb us in 1999". (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020)

More broadly, a significant number of citizens (from 39% to 48%), believe that such cooperation would benefit Serbia (Institut za evropske poslove 2016, 2018, 2020). For instance, 48% of the public believes that it would improve modernization of the Serbia's army, 47% that it would benefit its defence industry, 46% expects this to enable a better response from the Serbian Armed Forces in emergency situations, while 38% of the public believes that this would even decrease the danger from external threats (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012). While it refers to a very specific aspect of cooperation, the solid support of the public for the possibility of granting the diplomatic status to the staff of the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre in Niš (Institut za evropske poslove 2019) also signalises the public's favourable mood towards increase of cooperation with Russia in the security domain. Nevertheless, regarding the potential alliance with Russia, almost half of the population believes it would enhance Serbia's security, around 40% its political stability, and about a third believes it would improve Serbia's image in the world, as well (Institut za evropske poslove 2019). However, while these general attitudes suggest a favourable inclination toward such a stronger cooperation or even alliance with Russia, almost half of the population would abstain from

voting in a potential referendum on Serbia's entrance to the Russia-led Eurasian Union (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). Among those willing to vote, a third would support it, while the remaining 20% would oppose it (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017).

Finally, the public's stance on the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent Russian aggression towards Ukraine in 2022 has not been marked by hostility toward Russia. This was particularly evident in 2017, when nearly 90% of the public opposed sanctions on Russia if they were contingent on EU membership (Institut za evropske poslove 2017). Regarding the war that erupted in March 2022, the situation is more complex, with a significantly higher percentage – around half of the public in most surveys – not finding Russia's aggression justified (Institut za evropske poslove 2023, CRTA 2022). Approximately a third of the public still sees Russia's actions in Ukraine as justified. Nonetheless, regardless of their stance on the war, a significant majority (between two-thirds and three-quarters) remains explicitly opposed to Serbia adopting sanctions against Russia (CRTA 2022). Conversely, about a tenth of the respondents typically advocates for Serbia's alignment with the EU alongside the implementation of sanctions on Russia. Therefore, while the public is obviously guided by some other principles when judging international relations than pure emotional attachment or friendship, allowing them to recognise that Russia is not always right in security and defence matters, there remains a strong reluctance to oppose it. Instead of siding against Russia with the EU, the public prefers to remain neutral (CRTA 2022).

In sum, while not much data on the public opinion about Russia is available, the public has a rather positive gut reaction to Serbia's cooperation with Russia. Different to the situation with NATO and the EU, the public perception of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia exceeds the official security and defence cooperation, meaning that the gap between them is different than in the previous cases – the public wanting more than the officials do. While the officials talk on Serbia's cooperation with Russia is always positive, not much effort seems to be invested or is needed in nurturing these views and, according to several interviewees, any favourable talk on the security and defence cooperation with Russia continues to bring very easy political points among the public in Serbia. On the other hand, challenging this policy seems unthinkable for the majority of the policymakers. "If you want to govern in Serbia, you need also Russian support, but you can't be against the EU. I think that this was consistent for any government since 2000", as one interviewee summarised (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021). Therefore, based on the existing data, the policy seems rather sticky, both in a sense that not much effort was needed in maintaining the public support to it, and in a sense that abandoning it or even considering this would by no means be an easy task for the officials – far more difficult than is the case with the EU or NATO. Most interviewees confirmed this, often emphasizing the emotional component contributing to the stickiness of this policy:

> People approach these matters emotionally. If you ask people where they would educate their kids, nobody will say in Moscow. Everybody would say Germany, Switzerland, other Western countries. Hardly anybody would say Russia although there are mouth are full of praise for Russia. This shows that we, as a society, did not really became mature in a sense that we understand values of the western civilization we want to be part of, in relation to what we should accomplish in this process. I am not saying that people would vote no on the referendum, that has nothing to do with this. But the connection with the church, with the Slav brotherhoods, and the fact that Russia did not bomb us, although it did not help us much either, in the heads of the citizens awakes some kind of empathy. ON the other hand, they perceive the West as someone who was pushing its caprice and anger on us. That is how I see this. I see this in my family, as well. They always se Russia as our protector, although they cannot give any examples. (Ministry of European Integration Officer, personal interview, January 2021)

5.2.4. Public Opinion on Serbia's Policy of Military Neutrality

Different from the other pillars of Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation, which were publicly debated both before and after its introduction, the policy of military neutrality was introduced almost overnight. The fact that not a single survey on public sentiments about the policy of military neutrality before the late 2000 is available testifies to the extent to which this policy was introduced without any serious preparation or assessment of the public mood. Unlike the other three policies, there is no data on public opinion about military neutrality from the period preceding the introduction of this policy. Later, military neutrality began to be regularly included in opinion polls, but there is little knowledge about the public's understanding or attitudes beyond overall approval or disapproval. Despite this, public opinion on military neutrality has remained stable, with support showing an upward trend, suggesting strong adherence to this policy among the Serbian public. For most interviewees, the lack of knowledge about military neutrality was unsurprising, given that the strategic documents themselves leave it vague:

> Neutrality is now mentioned in security and defence strategies, but it is still missing – there may be a new resolution which will explain what neutrality actually means in detail. Therefore, it is not surprising that citizens are not familiar with all aspects, when it is not specified enough in the strategic documents of the state. (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020)

Even though it was practically given to the citizens, the public accepted this policy change immediately and widely. The earliest data that is publicly available is from 2012, when, asked to choose between four options for the improvement of the security situation in Serbia, the vast majority chose military neutrality (45%), while the rest split between the option of strengthening security cooperation with the Russia (18%), EU (16%), or NATO (4%) (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2012). Over the time, the support for military neutrality only grew in comparison to other options (by rule, at the expense of cooperation with the EU, NATO or 'the West' as such), reaching 69% in 2022, opposed to 17% who believed that Serbia should make a military alliance with Russia (17%) or with the West (9%) (CRTA 2022). When asked about military neutrality as such, the share of public support to military neutrality has almost always been at about two thirds of population and has never recorded any significant oscillation. Moreover, even though in the earliest stages the EU membership attracted slightly higher support, the portion of population opposing military neutrality has never crossed 10%, which makes it perhaps the most popular foreign policy of all in average (Belgrade Centre for Security Policy 2017).

The stickiness of military neutrality is further evident from the fact that this high level of support is sustained despite the lack of knowledge among the public about what this policy means in practice. Based on data from 2017, half of the supporters of military neutrality said that this policy should be preserved but that it needs further specification (Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku 2017). While there is not much data available about precise knowledge regarding military neutrality, survey results related to all other aspects of Serbia's security and defence integration reveal a great deal of confusion about the meaning of military neutrality. This confusion results in freestyle interpretations of the ongoing policy aligned with overall political or ideological preferences among the public. One of the most evident disconnects is between how foreign policy looks in practice and what the public thinks it looks like. As discussed, when asked to evaluate the level of security and defence cooperation with NATO or Russia, there is a consistent exaggeration in the perception of the extent to which Serbia cooperates with Russia and an underestimation of the level of cooperation with NATO. Regardless of the elites' talk on the necessity of 'cooperating with everyone,' the majority of public still reduces this to cooperation with the East and refuses to accept cooperation with the West as something that Serbia's military neutrality should or already entails – and policymakers are aware of this:

> Military neutrality, as I see it, is a kind of defence that we are not fully with someone, being NATO, because I don't see ODKB as another side. This is more of a legacy of the past. Even

> being non-aligned in the past, in 60s and when it was established, this is not neutrality, this is a third block, because if you don't want to be part of this and that other block, you still have the other one. So, this is more of a political message, you are just not part of NATO, or part of ODKB, but you are a third one, you are still a block. So, I don't think this is an obstacle. Still a legacy of the past, but I think it can change. Because this is not Finland, Switzerland, Austria, this is completely different, for obvious reasons. I think it will change. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer B, personal interview, January 2020)

Further indication of the public's limited grasp of military neutrality becomes apparent in their interpretation of Serbia's optimal behaviour during specific crises, such as those in Syria or Ukraine. While these crises have caused policymakers and public opinion in some countries to reconsider their stance on military neutrality, in Serbia, they seem to reinforce it since the available data suggests that the majority of Serbians prefer maintaining a neutral stance or avoiding interference. For example, regarding the recent conflict in Ukraine, a significant portion of the Serbian public believes that Serbia's military neutrality should also entail political neutrality (CRTA 2022). They argue against aligning too closely with EU policies on the conflict, including resolutions or sanctions. However, while these attitudes may indicate a misunderstanding of the principles underlying military neutrality, they may also reflect a broader anti-Western sentiment among the Serbian populace. Similar to policymakers who sometimes blur the lines between political and military neutrality as circumstances dictate, people in Serbia may also be interpreting it as it suits the current moment. In this case, the interpretation of military neutrality as a position of not taking positions might simply be an 'alibi' for not standing against Russia, regardless of whether they believe that military neutrality precludes political alignment or not. Commenting on why and how military neutrality stuck so easily among the Serbian public, one of the interviewees said:

> I have no final answer. But there were some events that happened prior this self-proclamation of military neutrality which are, to my opinion, related. It became sticky due to them. The first one is the issue of Kosovo and the decision in the parliament, the famous resolution, which is mostly about protecting territorial sovereignty and Kosovo. But remember, at that time, everybody was speaking about it was about proclaiming military neutrality. And it was about territorial integrity. At that time, we had a political compromise between the two strongest political parties which represented more than 50% of public. And if you have these two, as everybody would agree on protecting territorial sovereignty, having Kosovo in Serbia, and this becoming prevailing political view, it will easily become sticky. (Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member, personal interview, January 2021)

When asked about the popularity of this policy, the policymakers seem to be rather puzzled themselves, without a clear and complete answer as to why the public got so quickly and strongly attached to this policy. Most often they explain that this rapid embracement was due to a 'mixture of everything, history, the current understanding of international environment", as a blend of different historical lessons that made military neutrality feel immediately right to the public. Many interviewees attribute the acceptance of military neutrality to the moment of introduction and the fight against Kosovo's independence, since military neutrality is viewed as some kind of a guarantee of the Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity by the citizens. According to policymakers, for many citizens, military neutrality represents the idea of statehood and self-reliance, of 'being on your own'. They note that even in ongoing debates about reintroducing conscription (widely supported by the public), arguments centre around building a strong army as a means of protecting military neutrality. Another frequently mentioned source of attachment to military neutrality is the public's association of Serbia's policy with Yugoslavia's non-alignment history, which evokes positive memories of the welfare and reputation Yugoslavia allegedly enjoyed at the time and makes them "feel as there is a link between policy of non-alignment and military neutrality" (Prime Minister Cabinet Member, personal communication, January 2021). Expanding on this point, one interviewee remarked:

> The policy of non-alignment is also used in a similar manner, and the Russians do it very skilfully and use the policy of non-alignment and equate it with neutrality, so they say that Serbia has always been neutral. There then comes a talk on Tito's Yugoslavia which the majority of older

> population remember with sympathies not because these were really good times, but simply because they were young then. So, it is believed, on the basis of some fabrications, that those times were good because Serbia was neutral. And Serbia was not neutral, but non-aligned. The problem is in the fact that we can now make a tradition, start constructing it, deconstructing it, and making a tradition. That is now some claim that Saint Sava is the father of neutrality… For anyone who had B from history in the fifth grade of elementary school, this sounds ridiculous. But it is a narrative, a propaganda that is carried out. And I think that as this propaganda was created, so it can change. (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee A, personal interview, March 2020)

Finally, the interviews with policymakers reveal a strong sense of public 'ownership' over the policy of military neutrality. On one hand, they acknowledge that support for military neutrality is maintained effortlessly, with little need to promote or even explain its meaning. Given that there is no strong desire to change this course, it seems to currently present a win-win scenario for policymakers: they receive unconditional, blanket support for the policy without needing to take significant action. On the other hand, they recognise that the public has become so deeply attached to the concept of military neutrality that even initiating a debate on the subject would provoke public discontent. According to all the interviewees, any attempt to change or abandon military neutrality would likely be perceived as a threat to national identity. Consequently, policymakers – regardless of their popularity – feel quite restricted in their ability to address or alter this policy. In other words, similar to the cooperation with Russia, military neutrality appears to be sticky both in its easy maintenance and in the difficulty of its potential abandonment. This seemingly 'self-evident' and 'natural' appeal of military neutrality among the Serbian public was aptly captured by one interviewee:

> I try to influence public opinion to better accept some of my ideas, policies or forms of politics. At the same time, I think that the story about military neutrality is something that people take for granted. I don't think we have explained well the advantages or disadvantages of belonging to a military alliance, or military neutrality but they still support it. We would have to work harder to explain to people that we should join NATO, but at this moment, the government is not thinking about it at all, let alone dealing with it. (Member of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee B, personal interview, March 2020)

5.3. The Puzzle of Uneven Stickiness of Serbia's Policy of Security and Defence Cooperation

The current outlook of Serbia's multifaceted security and defence policy, considered irrational or unsustainable by many experts, therefore, appears to be largely shaped by the prevailing public opinion, be it supportive or opposed. Public opinion on Serbia's security and defence cooperation policy has remained relatively stable, with only certain elements shifting gradually over the past two decades. Apparently, all of this was largely independent of the level or nature of official cooperation at any given time, as well as the public's knowledge of it. According to the available data, their opinion in this area has been mostly based on overall impression about these policies, then on the knowledge and information – moreover, every next information was interpreted in the light of previous experience or beliefs. In addition, or in line to this, the data show that the four main pillars of Serbia's security and defence policy receive varying levels and types of public support, highlighting discrepancies between policymakers' actions and public opinion differ across each of these pillars. This does not pass unnoticed, as many interviewees confirmed that policymakers are aware of such uneven public opinion on these matters, trying to align their rhetoric and actions with public sentiment when feasible. Therefore, the preliminary research suggests that Serbia's multifaceted policy of security and defence cooperation is not equally sticky among the public, but rests on specific areas of alignment and divergence, which in turn influences the extent to which policymakers are constrained in shaping Serbia's foreign policy direction in these areas. Delving into its uneven stickiness among the public – with one pillar being highly unsticky (cooperation with NATO), two being very sticky (military neutrality and cooperation with Russia), and one falling

somewhere between (cooperation with the EU) – hence, seems important for understanding how and why policymakers sustain this multifaceted policy.

Based on the preliminary research, Serbia's policy of security and defence cooperation with the EU could be qualified as *semi-sticky.* Serbia's membership in the EU appeared to be rather immediately accepted among the public in early 2000s, even before it was introduced and before arguments for and against this aspect of the EU integration process could have been heard in the public. As their knowledge did not become highly specialised over time, despite some (although not extensive) government and EU's efforts in this regard, the public continued to interpret events according to their one view of the world, coming to some very explicit and final conclusions on the Serbia's future in the EU, and the EU's future as such. Although EU membership, along with participation in the CFSP and CSDP, remains Serbia's primary official foreign policy goal, public support for EU membership has waned over time and remained highly volatile in times of crises. Over the past two decades, this policy has shifted from one of the most supported to one that now struggles to maintain critical public backing. Insights from interviews with policymakers align with this trend, as they indicate an awareness that while public sentiment toward the EU is generally more favourable than toward NATO, the public is also increasingly sceptical about the EU's role as a global actor. This has all led to a rise in views supporting the potential abandonment of Serbia's further alignment with the EU. Paradoxically, despite this being Serbia's primary foreign policy objective, foreign policy elites, or politicians more broadly, appear relatively unconstrained by public opinion on this matter. They faced limited public constraints when initially pursuing this policy and would likely encounter minimal opposition if they decided to abandon it.

The situation in relation to Serbia's cooperation with NATO is somewhat different as this policy can be easily qualified as unsticky in both dimensions. The immediate reaction to cooperation with NATO, not to mention the idea of membership, remains largely negative among the majority of the public, who view this policy as unlikely to benefit Serbia. Despite the fact that Serbia's cooperation with NATO has intensified over the years, already low popularity of this policy only dropped over time. The level of public resistance to NATO remains constraining high, making policymakers almost silent on this part of Serbia's security and defence policy. The interviews indicate that, while policymakers generally hold more favourable views toward Serbia's relationship with NATO, this is seldom communicated publicly. Additionally, various discursive strategies are employed to separate Serbia's cooperation with the EU from its cooperation with NATO, aiming to prevent any negative sentiments toward NATO from affecting public' more favourable perceptions of the EU. According to policymakers, the experience of the 1999, but also the general attitudes about the role of NATO in world affairs, make any cooperation with NATO immediately unacceptable to the public. Apparently, citizens do not have to – nor they want to – hear and know much about what this cooperation entails to be decisively against it. Therefore, looking from the perspective of how easily the policymakers can have the public on their side, this foreign policy appears rather *unsticky*, meaning that policymakers are constrained in introducing it, but would be very unconstrained in abandoning it.

At the very opposite way stands Serbia's cooperation with Russia, which appears to be very *sticky.* While the knowledge on this aspect of Serbia's security and defence cooperation policy does not stand out from the rest, Serbia's cooperation with Russia appears immediately natural, taken for granted as something that is generally beneficial for Serbia, while abandoning this policy seems as something immediately unacceptable. How immediate and natural this reaction of the Serbian public was further evident in the crises, as was the Russian aggression to Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, as the significant part of the Serbian public from the first moment opposed any foreign policy moves that would put Serbia on the side against Russia. Therefore, while the policy of security and defence cooperation might not be extremely familiar, their immediate reaction to anything that leads to decrease in cooperation with Russia is immediately rejected. In that sense, this pillar of Serbia's policy of security and defence policy seems particularly sticky among the public, allowing the introduction and strengthening of the cooperation with this partner but disapproving any backward

trend, especially when conducted for the sake of getting closer to the West – the EU not less than NATO. Unlike military neutrality, which would require a formal abandonment similar to its introduction, changes to this policy are less clear-cut, making them less explicit and visible. As a result, it is challenging to predict what could trigger the public's resistance and how it might manifest. Nevertheless, it seems certain that policymakers would need to invest significant efforts in making any security and defence distancing from Russia sensible or acceptable to the large portion of the public if they want to avoid great political costs.

Finally, perhaps the most intriguing is how *sticky* military neutrality has proven to be. Without a wide political discussion prior to it, the introduction of military neutrality went remarkably easy, immediately attracting the overwhelming majority of the Serbian public. Despite the public's obvious lack of real understanding of military neutrality even two decades later, and the policymakers' obvious lack of will to clarify it during all this time, the Serbian citizens have over time became even more attracted to the policy of military neutrality as a sensible position for Serbia in the global arena. How prohibitive this support has become is evident from interviews, in which policymakers explicitly attribute the public's opinion on this aspect of Serbia's security and defence policy with 'tabooing' and vetoing power, admitting that no politician would dare to discuss abandoning military neutrality due to the fear of immediate public backlash. Thus, it seems that the public has readily accepted the notion of Serbia being militarily neutral, and policymakers have likewise taken this public sentiment for granted. While policymakers did not need to spend time persuading or explaining the rationale behind military neutrality, they would likely have to invest significant effort to justify any potential abandonment of this stance. Military neutrality seems to possess a unique ability to unify the other foreign policies in the public's perception, making it a significant constraint on any changes to foreign policy that policymakers would attempt.

Hence, considering the previous sections that discuss Serbia's the official security and defence cooperation policy, public opinion on it, and the perspectives of the elites regarding this public sentiment, it appears that Serbia's security and defence policy is heavily influenced by the relationship between the public and political elites. The current multifaceted policy of security and defence cooperation features solid agreements alongside ongoing disagreements and disconnections between the public and policymakers about what is a sensible way forward for Serbia in this regard. What is particularly intriguing is that much of this dynamic unfolds largely 'without saying.' In cases where a connection exists, such as with military neutrality, cooperation with Russia, and to some extent, the EU, public support for these policies has not arisen from specialised knowledge or detailed information, regardless of what or how much policymakers have communicated on these issues. Furthermore, public support appeared to be in place even before any formal introduction of the policies, which made the policymakers' task relatively straightforward. Maintaining the support for the first two policies appears equally easy, while sustaining support for the EU pillar seems far more difficult, despite the officials' efforts to make the public more attentive and attached to it. Where disconnects persist, on the other hand, such as with cooperation with NATO, the public's opposition seems rather independent of what the policymakers do and speak. More importantly, this opposition seems so formidable that policymakers tend to avoid publicly discussing their actions, taking the 'red lines' established by public opinion for granted.

Graph 7. *A schematic representation of the uneven stickiness of Serbia's multifaceted policy of security and defence cooperation (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*

Abandonment / **Adoption**	**Difficult**	**Easy**
Easy	Military Neutrality Cooperation with Russia	Cooperation with EU
Difficult		Cooperation with NATO

In other words, given the public's lack of knowledge on security and defence policy, and the policymakers' lack of particular interest in improving it, it seems that the current public – elite nexus behind Serbia's policy of security and defence is primarily based on deeply rooted interpretations of international relations and Serbia's position within them, shaped by some 'truths' and truisms circulating in the society. As repeated many times during the interviews, historical experience and lessons drawn from various events in Serbia's and world history seem to guide their interpretations of current events, providing a needed sense of stability and predictability of the international environment and, consequentially, the national self-identity. Even when the policymakers, and more often the public, does not have perfect information about foreign relations and events, they still have some 'truths' to rely on in judging the 'sensible' foreign policy. The available cues on how the world functions and what behaviour is sensible for Serbia in the world, coming both from the elites and from the public itself, seem to enable a 'permissive consensuses' from both sides. The public can think what they want, and the policymakers can do what they want – as long as certain boundaries of sensible behaviour are respected. Understanding these boundaries, within which immediate agreements and persistent disagreements are possible or likely, can help us comprehend the uneven stickiness of different foreign policies. The prevailing interpretations of international relations in Serbia, which are so dominant as to be considered 'common sense,' can illuminate why some foreign policy changes proposed by policymakers – whether introductions or abandonments – sometimes immediately resonate with the public, aligning with their sense of the world and the self in that world, while other times they remain nonsensical regardless of policymakers' persuasions. This significantly shapes the efforts required for policymakers to secure legitimacy in their decision-making, whether in times of stability or crisis, shedding light on the mechanisms of agreement and disagreement between policymakers and the public in Serbia.

6. Common Sense and International Relations in Serbia

As outlined in the preceding chapter, Serbia's history of security and defence cooperation has shown significant diversity in all aspects. It spans from ad hoc and relatively enduring military alliances to periods of military non-alignment, or, at moments, 'standing alone' positions on the global stage. This trajectory showcases a range of outcomes as well, including expanding territory by almost double with minimal losses during the Balkan Wars or emerging victorious in both World Wars despite significant human casualties. Conversely, it also encompasses setbacks, such as failing to meet war objectives during the conflicts of the 1990s, leading to isolation from longstanding allies and partners. In terms of strategies, Serbia has not always resorted to outright warfare, but has engaged in various forms of bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral security and defence agreements of different extents and purposes during both peacetime and conflict situations, encompassing activities such as intelligence sharing or involvement in UN peacekeeping missions. The international image of Serbia has also, consequentially, undergone significant fluctuations during the last century only. From being perceived as a globally respected and courageous ally, often regarded as 'a guardian of Europe,' Serbia was at later moments labelled derogatorily, with its leader Slobodan Milošević even being called the 'Balkan butcher.' Considered a highly significant military-political buffer zone during the Cold War, it has transformed into a far less relevant 'island' within the context of the new European architecture. During the last century only, Serbia has been perceived, both externally and internally, as a part of the West, the East, both and neither.

The lessons from such a rich experience, passed on to the generations who have not directly experienced the mentioned historical events, of course, depend significantly on how these events have been interpreted over time. The 'official' interpretations of significant moments in the Serbian history have changed several times in the last hundred years (Stojanović 2007; 2011;), driven by the passage of time and even more so by the geopolitical and ideological transformations experienced by Serbia, the region, and the world during that period. The state composition itself has undergone several changes throughout the last century with the creation and collapse of different Yugoslavias, accompanied by shifts from a monarchy to republic, from a federal to unitary state, from a communist autocracy toward a liberalizing and democratizing state, and state of mind. Parallel to the official interpretations provided by political, intellectual, and other national elites, collective memory was continuously influenced by layers of experiences and narratives, ranging from personal and familial perspectives to those originating from peer networks and broader scales beyond the national level. Historians, sociologists, culturologists, legal and political scientists, along with other researchers, have offered invaluable insights by examining various facets of Serbian identity narratives, aiming to understand how both the elites and ordinary citizens have perceived, interpreted, and reacted to Serbia's victories and defeats on the international stage over time (i.e. Matić 1993, Bakić Hyden 2006, Đokić 2023, Milutinović 2011).

As every new generation has had a different experience of Serbia's conduct in international relations in terms of security and defence policy, the 'guidebook' about the optimal way to go on in international relations that each generation learns by heart and mind through different phases and sites of socialisation into the society is expected to be multifaceted. Serbia's history of security and defence cooperation has evidently been so diverse and interspersed that encountering homogenous 'truths' and 'lessons' about international relations is even more unlikely than it is often the case. While it is challenging to clarify the common sense emerging from the dynamic and evolving landscape of understandings and interpretations regarding the best path for Serbia in international relations, attempting to do so could shed light on the interpretative frameworks that guide policy decisions and the public's attitudes toward them. Catching the complex and incoherent network of truisms behind the common sense understanding of international relations in the contemporary Serbia should help us understand the obvious 'multifinality' of judgments based on it, where seemingly conflicting policies can simultaneously achieve coherence and relevance. Through this, we can

understand how national self-identity is made and remade stable despite the internal and external changes.

The following presentation, therefore, explores some of the prevailing views on the functioning of international relations and their relevance to Serbia, as perceived by two key groups: contemporary Serbian foreign policymakers and the general public. It aims to reveal the 'truths' about international relations that the Serbian policymakers and the public hold and, consequentially, what foreign policy of security and defence cooperation they perceive to be sensible in the given moment. By examining these claims, we aim to assess how shared or common the common sense about international relations among both elites and the public in Serbia is, and in what way this guides their short- and long-term attitudes towards security and defence cooperation. The (mis)alignment between elite and public common sense is to reveal whether, why, and how different foreign policies proposed by elites gain traction among the public, impacting the degree to which policymakers are constrained by public opinion. Shedding light on the natural, common-sense truths about international relations and Serbia's role in them should allow us to gauge whether the distribution of sensibility among the public and elites is sufficiently aligned to foster agreement on Serbia's foreign policy directions and provide the stability to its national self-identity at the world scene.

As clarified in the chapter on methodology, based on the discourse and content analysis of the strategic framework, the common sense interpretative scheme is organised around three major questions relevant for the policy of security and defence cooperation. The first question addresses the fundamental issue of whether cooperation in security and defence matters makes sense at all, echoing the dilemma of whether it is sensible to rely solely on its own capacities or to collaborate with others. The second question focuses on the best approach to this cooperation, whether by balancing different relationships or by choosing sides. Finally, the third question concerns the selection of partners, reflecting the ideas about which partners are considered natural for Serbia in security and defence matters. One should not, however, await a tidy, coherent, or exhaustive list of answers to these three questions. Such an expectation would present an unrealistic view of how common sense operates in any sphere of life – including international and foreign politics – whether in Serbia or elsewhere. Even more so, one should not expect an exhaustive list. The following scheme is just a snapshot of what can be found in the strategic framework for the last two decades only. It should serve as an empirical probe of the argumentation, that would in future stages need far more comprehensive and ambitious effort for thorough validation and implementation.

Graph 6 (repeated). *Three key parts of common sense scheme about security and defence policy in Serbia emerging from a discourse and content analysis of the strategic framework (illustrated by the author of the dissertation).*

6.1. Policymakers Making Sense of Serbia's Policy of Security and Defence Cooperation

A country's strategic framework refers to a structured approach or plan that guides its overall direction, priorities, and actions in various aspects of the international life. Typically developed by the government in collaboration with key stakeholders, it reflects the country's vision, values, goals,

and unique challenges in international relations. The strategic framework of Serbia, outlined by major strategic documents and the officials' addresses aimed at explaining Serbia's short-, mid- and long-term plan of action in international relations, illuminates the policymakers' more permanent vision on how international relations function and what strategies of behaviour for a state like Serbia are sensible at the given moment. This world vision serves as a map that, ideally, represents and binds different aspects of Serbia's foreign policy into a sensible whole, loading its foreign behaviour with coherence and consistency.

By synthesising cues about what is sensible to do in order to go well and feel right in international relations, the strategic framework should cognitively and affectively guide Serbia's interpretation of and reaction to foreseeable and unforeseeable events in international relations without losing itself or the necessary stability of the self-narrative. Thus, instead of detailed information about dimensions, benefits and costs of each specific foreign policy component, the strategic framework traditionally rests upon some general historical lessons and wisdoms that strive to place state's major foreign policy goals and instruments into a boarder experience and context. Summoning the timeless truths about the world and Serbia, these claims should be able to ultimately make Serbia's multifaceted policy of security and defence cooperation also appear sensible and natural regardless of its potential incoherencies and inconsistencies. In other words, strategic framework should straightforwardly suggest what foreign policy makes sense for Serbia and why, at least according to common sense of policymakers.

6.1.1. Whether to Cooperate: To Rely on Oneself or Others?

Perhaps the most immediate and fundamental question in deciding on a sensible security and defence policy is whether a state should cooperate and rely on others or rely solely on itself in security and defence matters. While all states share some universal or 'core' national interests, their roles, aims, and principles in foreign affairs are very diverse in both scope and nature, ranging from maintaining global or regional stability, perusing global or regional leadership, managing deterrence, fighting terrorism, keeping monarchy, or preserving countless other values that states over time adopt as necessary preconditions for the survival of their subjectivity in international relations. Consequently, depending on what they aim to preserve, and how they have managed or failed to do so throughout history, the immediate answers to whether and why cooperation in security and defence matters is sensible also vary across states, or within states over time. Although Serbia's strategic framework over the past two decades does not imply a tendency toward self-isolation, the predominant interpretations of historical experiences suggest that Serbian policymakers have remained notably cautious about relying on others for matters of security and defence, as well. Based on the discourse and content analysis of Serbia's strategic framework, at least four common-sense claims can be invoked in regard to whether cooperation makes sense, and for Serbia in particular.

Cooperation with Others is Necessary, Regardless of Differences

By far the most common reference in Serbia's strategic framework is that, in security and defence matters, cooperation is necessary, and Serbia should cooperate with others regardless of differences. From the early 2000s to the latest periods, all policymakers' general depictions of Serbia's security and defence policy have started or ended with a strong emphasis that Serbia was 'eager', 'willing', 'ready', or 'determined' to cooperate in security and defence matters, and that cooperation with other states, 'regardless of differences' or 'despite the past' is a must. Whether in the period before military neutrality, and even more so afterwards, the policymakers consistently endeavour to list all relevant actors in international relations as important partners in security and defence matters for Serbia. While the order of partners varies depending on the occasion, these comprehensive lists are often followed by an explicit disclaimer that the cooperation with some does not prohibit the cooperation with other

actors. As explicitly stated in almost all strategic documents (Republika Srbija 2009; 2009a; 2019; 2019a), Serbia's aspiration to join the EU 'does not preclude' its cooperation with other actors, especially Russia or China, while its cooperation with NATO 'is not incompatible' with its policy of military neutrality and does not diminish the importance of its cooperation with Russia. Overall, the notion that states must cooperate with all parties to realise their full potential in the areas of security and defence is the most common truism, and it is commonly referenced to alleviate or smooth over the evident tensions between key aspects of Serbia's strategic position. Several more specific observations about the international environment and Serbia's roles and goals in it are particularly communicated with the echo of the necessity of cooperation in these matters.

First, in the immediate aftermath of the regime change, during the early 2000, the necessity of establishing relations with all actors was primarily contrasted to the costs of isolation which Yugoslavia, and Serbia, had experienced earlier. Referencing to the times when Serbia was in "confrontation with the whole world", "left alone", sanctioned and isolated, policymakers kept emphasizing the "obvious and absolute necessity" of cooperation in all areas, and especially in security and defence, as a precondition of the long-awaited return to the international society. Frequently invoking costs that Serbia suffered during the times of wars and international sanctions served to emphasize that "extends a hand of reconciliation" (Dačić 2012) to everyone was the only sensible way to make up for the lost time and resources and, at some point, catch up with the rest of the continent in political, economic and security terms. After times where solutions to the problems were sought almost exclusively in military options and confrontations, leading Serbia to 'historical loses' and 'quicksand', officials acknowledged that "Serbia must no longer allow itself to be a country of disappointed expectations and missed opportunities, which continues to fight the battles of lost wars" (Dačić 2013). Only by 'looking into the future' by normalising relations and establishing security and cooperation with all countries and international organisations was seen as the first and necessary step on Serbia's way out of international isolation and moving on, according to all important strategic documents and statements from this period. Often emphasising that cooperation and even reconciliation was needed with 'everybody' sent a signal that the hatchet had the be buried with the enemies from the recently ended wars, primarily because the opposite way had proven to be detrimental for Serbia's interests. While no big words of regret or remorse were expressed in this context, policymakers indeed used the strategic documents to emphasise that cooperation in security and defence makes sense at least because non-cooperation, especially in the light of the lessons from the 1990s, does not. As the then Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica stated in his 2001 exposé:

> Ten years after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia and a decade of international isolation, Yugoslavia's foreign policy is starting anew. (…) Changes in our immediate and broader international environment, along with the proximity of major European and Euro-Atlantic integrations to our borders, are fundamentally altering the international position of the FRY. In other words, our country must find its new international identity and establish a new foreign policy strategy that will address the changes within it, as well as its new position on the political map of the Balkans, Europe, and the world. (Koštunica 2001)

While negative justification through direct references to the costs of international isolation weakened over time, the necessity of Serbia's establishing and strengthening cooperation with almost all relevant security and defence actors has continued to be presented as a way to regaining the status Serbia' had enjoyed earlier. Instead of being a security consumer of international peace and security efforts, Serbia should become a 'constructive player' and security provider, expressing readiness "for active participation in the processes of cooperation and joint action with other countries and subjects of international relations in building and improving national, regional and global security" (Republika Srbija 2009). While improving its reputation as a relevant actor in international security architecture is an aim of almost every country in the world, image improvement becomes one of the central foreign policy aims in the aftermath of the conflict for a country that has been stigmatised as a troublemaker. By "strengthening key alliances, building partnership relations and developing new innovative ways to deepen key relations between the military forces" (Brnabić 2022), Serbia should be able to "find its new international identity and establish a new foreign policy strategy that will respond to the

changes within it, as well as its new position on the political map of the Balkans, Europe, and the world" (Koštunica 2001). Occasionally, as a direct support to the lesson about how cooperation with everyone contributes to the country's reputation, references are made to the status which Yugoslavia once enjoyed primarily thanks to its active contribution to solving the global security crises. In other words, according to Serbian policymakers' worldview, cooperation with everyone is, among other reasons, sensible because it has historically been instrumental in earning respect in international relations. It could, therefore, help Serbia to once again ensure its "grand entrance return to the region, in accordance with its role, significance, and magnitude onto the European and world stage" (Bogojević 2001). As written in the National Security Strategy adopted in 2019:

> The engagement of members of the Serbian Armed Forces and other defence forces in multinational operations under the UN and EU represents a significant element of foreign policy and a concrete contribution to the preservation of international peace and security. By participating in multinational operations, the Republic of Serbia demonstrates that it is an active contributor to the preservation of international peace and security, reaffirms its own reputation, and strengthens confidence in the Serbian Armed Forces in the international environment. (Republika Srbija 2019)

In addition to the issues of international peace and security, the policymakers' talks about regional security as well are followed by appeals that cooperation with all relevant actors is necessary. Reflecting on security, political, economic, and other negative legacies of the wars, policymakers emphasize that the bloody history in the region had shown the costs of non-cooperation and confrontation. Reminding that European security is impossible without the stable Balkans, policymakers often conclude that security and defence cooperation in the Western Balkans region "is the fundamental prerequisite for stability and long-term prosperity in our part of Europe" (Cvetković 2011). This is further bolstered by constant repeating that, "all misunderstandings, all open issues must be resolved peacefully and in the spirit of cooperation" (Vučić 2014). While the tone is usually the tone of necessity and inevitability, rather than some genuine eagerness and enthusiasm about the cooperation, Serbia's strategic framework is abundant of references that without regional cooperation in all aspects, including security and defence, no progress for Serbia's security is possible. Moreover, justifying the necessity of the regional cooperation is very often supported with notions that through regional cooperation Serbia upholds its 'crucial' and 'historical' position for maintaining peace and stability in the Western Balkans. Holding the keys for solving the major security issues in the region, "the Serbian Army will remain one of the key factors for security and stability in the region and Europe" (Koštunica 2007).

Next, the unresolved status of Kosovo and Metohija, as the major threat to Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity is also read as one of the major aims that shape Serbia's policy of security and defence integration. Protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, primarily by preserving Kosovo and Metohija inside Serbia has been marked as the major strategic aim of Serbia's entire behaviour in international relations. From every written piece of strategic framework and every officials' expose it is evident that the Kosovo issue is probably the single most important factor of the today's outlook of Serbia's security and defence policy, having in mind that all four of its aspects have been directly shaped by it. Military neutrality was introduced for this reason, membership in NATO is out of the table mostly for this reason, while EU integration pace is critically determined by it and the cooperation with CSTO is also strongly incentivised by it. The policymakers suggest that isolating itself from key actors in the resolution of the Kosovo issue would not be optimal, but that siding with any particular party would also be senseless. Regardless of their true attitudes, policymakers have often emphasized that cooperating with everyone, regardless of past differences, is the only way to break the vicious cycle of violence and enmity. In his expose, the then PM Aleksandar Vučić said:

> We can, with hard work, common sense and self-earned luck, to create a region where differences are an advantage, not a basis for conflict. By working and connecting, we can finally understand each other, realise how much we depend on each other, and create the kind of future where the basis of our relationships will never again be fear and animosity, which have led us to take up arms so many times in history, instead of getting down to work. (Vučić 2017)

Finally, the appeal for the necessity of cooperation with everyone is further supported with the references to the complex dynamics of international relations and nature of security threats and challenges in the contemporary world. The long list of threats offered in both rounds of strategic documents from 2009 and 2019 resembles similar lists in many other states, which, at least declaratively, brings Serbia close to a shared worldview with relevant members of the international society. Indispensable remarks on the interconnectedness of the world and the hybrid nature of the threats which no country is able to independently solve, are usually followed by conclusions that preservation and strengthening of national security 'requires', 'necessitates', 'urges' cooperation in security and defence domain. All strategic documents and officials' addressing implicitly or explicitly infer that Serbia must conduct its foreign policy "on realistic and pragmatic assumptions", meaning that it "will cooperate with all countries of the world in the interest of Serbia" (Dačić 2012). It is often emphasized that the policy of military neutrality also carries "an obligation to foster diverse and improved relations with all parties" (Vučić 2017), even though Serbia does not seek to be part of any alliance. As stated in 2009 National Security Strategy:

> Due to the changed geostrategic circumstances and the increasingly strong influence the impact of global trends on the security of individual countries the policy of the Republic of Serbia is based on integral and multilateral approach to security problems, which affirms concept of cooperative security. (Republika Srbija 2009)

Therefore, Serbia's strategic framework univocally suggests that a key historical lesson has been the importance of broad cooperation in security and defence matters, even with former adversaries. While some foreign policy officials seem to have been more vocal and eager to emphasise this (i.e. Goran Svilanović, Minister of Foreign Affaris (2000-2004), or Aleksandar Vučić, Prime Minister (2014-2017) and President of the Republic (2017-)), the message on the necessity of cooperation regardless of differences has been consistently sent from the early 2000s to the upcoming period (Chart 1). This approach is seen as sensible in international relations overall, and especially relevant for Serbia, for several outlined reasons. Ultimately, the nature of the international world and contemporary security and defence threats and challenges makes the option of non-cooperation too costly, if at all possible. Although explicit references to Serbia's losses and defeats are rare, there are occasional but clear indications that past efforts to achieve core national interests through isolation or confrontation with established security and defence systems have been detrimental. By reintegrating into relevant security and defence arrangements, along with mechanisms of cooperation with key actors, Serbia can build trust and solidify Serbia's position as a dependable partner in regional and international affairs and regain the reputation Yugoslavia and Serbia had enjoyed not that long ago. The cooperation with everyone, regardless of differences, is thus presented as the necessary strategy to strengthen Serbia's national security system and enhance its capacity to pursue optimal, non-violent solutions to critical issues. Hence, while the cognitive rationale behind it is clear and vocal, the affective undertone is not overly enthusiastic and optimistic, but remains rather neutral, tinged with necessity, inevitability, or even a grain of remorse for being in the situation where cooperation is not only the only sensible, but the only way forward. Chart 2 presents the results of an emotional discourse analysis of references to this common-sense belief, highlighting the most frequently associated emotions.

Chart 1. *References to the necessity of cooperation regardless of differences, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

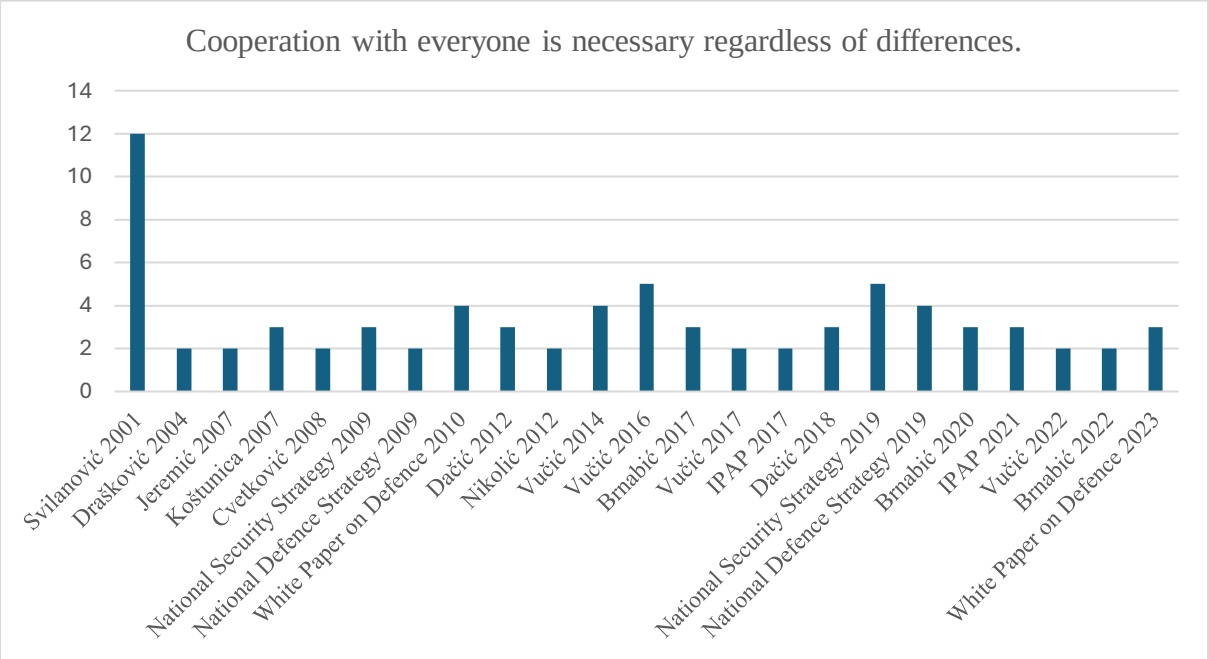
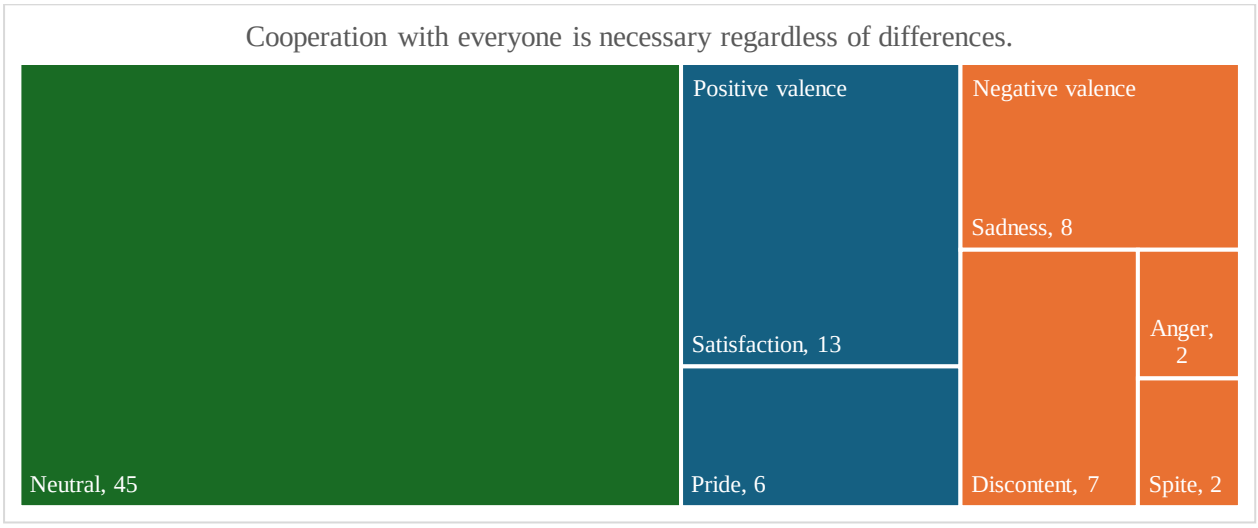


Chart 2. *Affective scheme behind references to the necessity of cooperation regardless of differences, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



The Strong Do What They Want and the Weak Suffer What They Must

Another common assertion within the strategic framework is that international relations are inherently biased. Echoing the famous quote by Thucydides, this viewpoint implies that powerful states act according to their desires while weaker states must endure their circumstances. While this realistic or pessimistic depiction of international relations is not always explicitly expressed, Serbia's strategic framework is abundant of statements that states are not equal in international affairs, with some being 'more equal' than others. With references to double standards and the power language, international relations are portrayed as full of unjust solutions tailored to the will of great powers, "powers whose actions are driven more by their interests than by principles of justice or fairness" and "conditioned

by the competition for realising their conflicting interests and changing the existing spheres of influence" (Republika Srbija 2019). Most often, this is done through warnings about "the gross violations Charter of the United Nations and generally accepted norms of international law" (Republika Srbija 2019). Seen as ultimate guarantor of equality in international relations, the threatened integrity of international law is, according to the Serbian policymakers, the best revealer of how global stability and trust in international order and institutions is undermined and compromised with the selective enforcement by powerful countries. Resentment that stems from the perception of international relations as unjust, unfair and discriminating is firmly 'institutionalised' in the major strategic documents and foreign policy programs, but also consistently revived in policymakers' daily statements. Bylines often imply that for great powers, "tears of regret and mistakes do not exist; they are reserved for smaller countries" while claims that even the rare admissions by great powers "mean nothing" to Serbia, indicate that policymakers accept this state of international relations as the "reality we must navigate with caution and strategic foresight" (Vučić 2022). As the then PM Aleksandar Vučić stated in his 2017 exposé:

> To ensure our survival, we must engage in dialogue with everyone, while also strengthening our defensive capabilities. Only in this way can we protect our country from those who threaten us daily, both openly and publicly, as well as quietly and covertly. (Vučić 2017)

In addition to the general perception that not all states are equal in international relations, there seems to be a general perception that not all powerful states are equal either. While rarely named, the usual suspects for being unconstrained and unfair in the Serbian strategic framework is implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, reserved for the Western states. Although the remarks on the biased nature of international relations are kept general, leaving no space for particularly altruistic great powers, it seems that interpretative scheme of international relations of the Serbian policymakers is still, however, rather binary in which the global West 'takes the lead' in imposing its will to the rest of the world. This is most clearly illustrated by what is frequently identified as the primary threat to international law and order: military or humanitarian interventionism and external state-building efforts. Allegedly allowing the powerful states to present their national interests as global interest for protecting international peace and security, this form of interreference is portrayed as the ultimate expression of organised hypocrisy in international relations which leaves small and weak states with very little power to protect its sovereignty, while listening the lectures on fairness and justice in international relations (Republika Srbija 2009; 2009a; 2019; 2019a; Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2010; 2023). Even the recent Russia's attack on Ukraine the Serbian policymakers used to remind that while this was indeed the violation of public international law, "the truth is that this has happened dozens of times in the modern world, and that the key protagonists and today's great fighters for respecting the norms of public international law were often Western powers" (Vučić 2022). Of course, the claims about unjust world in which the small are doomed to suffer the unrestrained advantage the powerful states have is most directly tied to the situation with the Kosovo issue, depicted as the ultimate proof of injustice, unfairness and 'dangerous precedent for the enforcement of international law' in international relations which shows how the big can do what they want while the small suffer what they must. During his presidential inauguration at the start of his second term, in 2022, Vučić stated:

> In 1999, our country was attacked without the decision of the United Nations Security Council, and our country had not previously occupied any other country. After that, our country was robbed even further. Despite the existence of Resolution 1244 and the existence of that resolution in the legal order, they continue to steal part of our territory from us, claiming that they are right, and we, if we happen to say that we think differently, at that moment we are no longer for the future, we are not democratic enough, we do not understand the present moment , we are already dealing too much with the past. If someone else did that, he would immediately be someone who destroys the international legal order, who destroys all institutions and who destroys peace in the world. (Vučić 2022).

While the dominant affective force behind this 'truth' about international relations are negative, inducing dissatisfaction and anger, some positive emotions of pride and spite also seem to

follow as reaction. While acknowledging its disadvantage to the big ones, strategic framework is abundant of references to how Serbia has always tried to resist the attacks of 'foreign invaders' and malicious interests of the great powers who "came to us without respect and consideration and have left with hidden or open admiration for our small, yet so great nation and for our small, yet so proud Serbia" (Vučić 2022). Not only, but especially in the light of the Kosovo issue, references are often made to Serbia, which is not silent, but "acts in accordance with the principles of international public law and knows how to condemn the violation of international public law, unequivocally and clearly" (Vučić 2022). Even the EU integration process or cooperation with NATO is often followed by emphasis that Serbs do not bend or 'kiss chains,' and that Serbia will "continue on this path, begging no one for anything, but firmly believing in ourselves" (Vučić 2017).

> Serbia is nobody's colony and nobody's backwater. As a small country of proud citizens, we know how to protect our freedom, defend our integrity and the right to our own political position and making sovereign decisions. (Vučić 2014)

> We are partners with everyone, we are no one's servants and no one's greatness or power is sufficient justification to do anything against our own interests, against our freedom, our independence, our way of life. We are partners with many, we are no one's servants. There is no size, no strength, no numbers, no wealth that would make us deviate from the policy of military neutrality, from the jealous guarding of our own territory, from the desire for our people to be safe and peaceful. (Vulin 2018)

> Because of all the above, I will pray to God in the same way that the wonderful Rebecca West did while Nazi bombs were falling on her homeland: Lord, allow me to hold myself like the Serbs! Long live Serbia!" (Vučić 2022).

Hence, the second common lesson in regard to whether cooperate is at all sensible, is that, despite nominal anarchy and the formal equality of all sovereign states, international relations are generally hierarchically structured, with the big and powerful at the top. The interests of the big powers often lead them to bend the international order and international law to their advantage. In such a world, Serbia apparently among the less fortunate, as its interests have frequently suffered for the sake of the major powers, often Western ones. This dynamic has always been present, but the situation with Kosovo has solidified this reality in the eyes of the Serbian foreign policy makers. Again, while some references to the unjust behaviour of Western powers towards Serbia and its territorial integrity intensified since Kosovo's unilateral proclamation of independence, they have been very frequent in the strategic framework at all times, both written and oral. This breeds resentment and even anger, accompanied by a sense of pride and defiance regarding Serbia's alleged endurance and bravery in not giving up on its interests and striving to fight back whenever possible, even to the most powerful ones. This acknowledgment is, however, simultaneously used to reflect a realist view that states, especially small ones, cannot afford non-cooperation. Therefore, similar to the first lesson in this section of the framework, cooperation in security and defence matters is essential for small states like Serbia if they wish to be active subjects rather than mere objects in international relations. Chart 3 illustrates the frequency of references to this common-sense claim within the strategic framework documents, while Chart 4 presents the results of an emotional discourse analysis of these references, showcasing the most commonly associated emotions.

Chart 3. *References to the notion that the powerful states do what they want and the weak suffer what they must contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

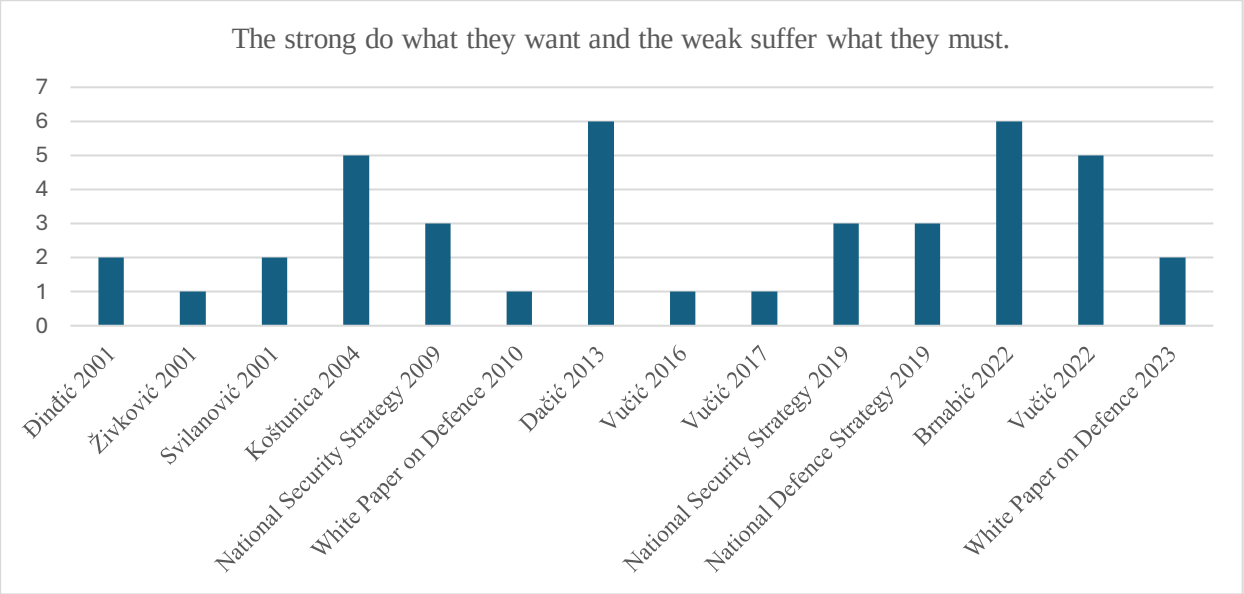


Chart 4. *Affective scheme behind references to the notion that the powerful states do what they want and the weak suffer what they must, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

Serbia's Role in History Has Not Been Appreciated

Finally, what makes a quick judgment on whether cooperation makes sense a bit more complicated is the widespread sentiment that the nation's historical contribution to the world and European history remains undervalued on the global and, in particular, European stage. In line with the resentment about the unjustly structured world, there is a perception that "great sacrifices that Serbian people have made for the building of a free and stable Europe" (Republika Srbija 2019) warrants greater recognition. Creating a historical timeline that spans for almost ten centuries, policymakers often make a point that Serbia's positive contributions resilience in the face of adversity has shaped the course of European history, by far "transcending its size" (Koštunica 2006). Sometimes, this timeline

spans as far as to Serbia's struggle against Ottoman expansion, highlighting iconic moments such as the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 as cornerstones of European history, where Serbian forces faced overwhelming odds to defend not only their homeland, but also the 'Christian Europe'. More often, Serbia's sacrifices during both World Wars are also mentioned as integral and crucial contributions which Serbia gave to the European security and defence that should not be overlooked, but by rule go without the deserved acknowledgment and respect in contemporary discourse. Assuming the position of Prime Minister in 2012, Ivica Dačić stated:

> We cannot overlook the sacrifices made by the Serbian people in defending Europe from various invasions and preserving regional stability. It's time for the world to recognize our contributions and give them the attention they deserve. (Dačić 2012)

Discontent arises from the fact that, due to the wars of the 1990s, Serbia's rich and complex history, described as "a tapestry woven with threads of courage, sacrifice, and resilience" (Koštunica 2003) is often simplified or marginalised in global discourse. This dissatisfaction and sadness are frequently expressed, pointing to "the scars that run deeply in the Serbian collective memory" (Vučić 2022). This sentiment also extends to the issue of Serbia's European integration, serving as further evidence of how Serbia's role has been "overshadowed by misperceptions" and underappreciated, why "the generations of Serbs have been forged through the most difficult times over long centuries, often alone, but always upright" (Vučić 2022). However, alongside this bitterness is a sense of pride and defiance about the "unbroken resilience" shown by the Serbian people, who have endured unspeakable suffering with an unwavering commitment to peace and stability in the region. The bitterness often transforms into pride or even spite, expressed in assertions that Serbia's historical legacy merits "a more nuanced understanding of our country's place in European history" (Koštunica 2007), According to the Serbian policymakers, it is "a story that deserves to be told and remembered, not just by Serbians but by the world" (Koštunica 2007). Many references to the Serbia's sacrifices and endurance appear in exposés and inauguration speeches:

> Ladies and gentlemen, we are a small country for such a quantity of injustice and defeat that we celebrate. We do not need more victims than those we have already endured. Therefore, Serbia must now play to win. (Dačić 2013)

> There is no goal more demanding, but also more honourable, than the goal for Serbia to continue on its path, unique, toward the future it has long deserved through its sacrifices and renunciations. (Vučič 2022)

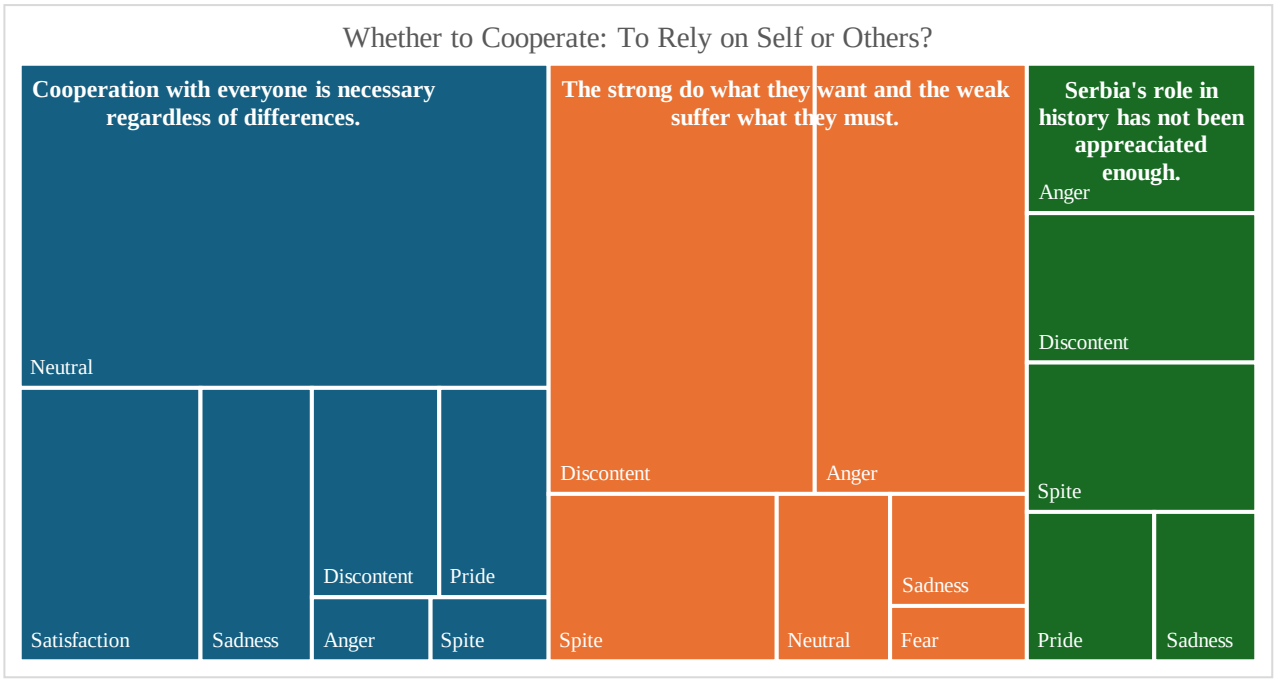
Chart 5 depicts how often this common-sense claim is referenced in the strategic framework documents, while Chart 6 highlights the outcomes of an emotional discourse analysis of these references.

Chart 5. *References about Serbia's role in history not been appreciated enough contained in in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

Chart 6. *Affective scheme behind references about Serbia's role in history not been appreciated enough contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

In sum, the common-sense framework is neither entirely coherent nor straightforward when it comes to whether cooperation makes sense, as not all shared common-sense claims about international relations align in the same direction. Reflecting on events from both recent and distant national and global history, the policymaker's common-sense reasoning about whether Serbia should cooperate in security and defence matters seems to provide a mixed signal: acknowledging the necessity of cooperation with everyone, but with a grain of salt. Cognitively, the rationale is certainly clearer since isolation is deemed as either impossible or too costly, especially for smaller and weaker states. However, the affective baggage that comes with these lessons complicates matters, as a mix of immediate emotions does not equally incentivise cooperation. The resentment about an unjust world makes cooperation, especially with Western security and defence partners who have proven to be deaf to the interests of smaller states and Serbia in particular, only conditionally sensible. the dominant common-sense framework suggests that cooperation in security and defence could be sensible, but requires some cognitive and, especially, emotional impetus to feel immediately natural, according to the Serbian strategic framework.

Chart 7: *Illustration of the relative frequency of three major 'truths' (codes) concerning the first part of the common-sense interpretive scheme (whether to cooperate), based on the (emotional) discourse and content analysis of Serbia's strategic framework. Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



6.1.2. How to Cooperate: To 'Hedge' ore 'Bandwagon'?

If isolation does not make sense, the next essential question is what kind of cooperation makes sense. Should a state pick side and ally in security and defence matters, or should it try to stay out of firm arrangements with any partner, pursuing a more balanced approach in international relations? As discussed, during its modern history, Serbia has not only witnessed but has had diverse 'first-hand' experience with being in and out of alliances in times of both war and peace. It had joined pacts, changed allies, and eventually even fought against some of the former security and defence partners. It had also spent significant time non-aligned, including periods when remaining outside of alliances was anything but easy. Eventually, in 1999, it even fought against the most powerful alliance in the contemporary world. After all this, the policymakers' common-sense views on how states, particularly Serbia, should position themselves seem to promote some strong, but also some strongly opposed ideas about sensible approaches to security and defence matters. Further revealing how complex interpretative framework guiding Serbia's behaviour in international affairs is, the conducted discourse and content point towards four claims that seem to carry some cognitive and affective cues about what approach states, and Serbia in particular, should take in cooperating with other states in security and defence matters.

While it was not as explicit immediately after the regime change in 2000, the claim that states should not pick sides in international relations has over time become increasingly prominent in Serbia's strategic framework. In the immediate aftermath of the democratic revolution and Serbia's return to the international society, neither the option of choosing sides nor balancing was explicitly portrayed as necessary or particularly sensible, good, desirable. As if policymakers were not entirely sure what lesson to draw from all what had happened to Serbia and the world by the end of the 20th century, none of the exposes of foreign policy makers or strategic documents from this period strongly articulated arguments or propositions for and against picking sides in international relations at the start of the new millennium. The overall narrative about security and defence policy was, as previously discussed, centred around the claim that the cooperation in security and defence matters was beyond necessary, which became the most frequent reference, repeated in practically every possible opportunity by all foreign policy officials. While the necessity of Serbia's cooperation with other states was conveyed to nominally include all relevant actors, a closer look into the narrative suggests that this did not always mean the same thing but hid a changing attitude about whether Serbia should 'pick a side' or, on contrary, strive to balance in security and defence matters.

For a few years after the change in regime, it genuinely appeared that there was a growing sentiment that Serbia might finally need to choose a specific direction — and not just any direction. The broader narrative of Serbia's 'return' to Europe suggested that this was, in a sense, a natural choice for the country, as the European security community was seen as its rightful place within the global framework. There was frequently an implication that this return represented a shift from the wrong to the right side, with the expectation that Serbia should make every effort to catch up with its European family "from which it was excluded for a long time due to unfortunate historical circumstances" (Cvetković 2008). Joining the EU and establishing the cooperation within the EU CFSP and CSDP was officially made a strategic goal and foreign policy officials Serbia did not waste an opportunity to make a clear and straightforward answer to where Serbia wants to stand. This was within the European security community, as "the commitment to Europe reflects the political realism that we so desperately need after decades of wandering" (Koštunica 2004). In one of his speeches, the then PM Vojislav Koštunica stated:

> Actually, over the past two centuries, Serbia has politically, culturally, and economically rooted itself in Europe, only to be torn apart from this natural environment, Europe, after the end of the Second World War. It gradually began to return to it three years ago; unfortunately, with a significant delay compared to other post-communist countries. (…) And once again, from a different perspective, I want to emphasize the importance of EU membership. Membership is not only something desired, it is also something that must be, something without which one cannot proceed. What is desired usually brings benefits, what must be, may not always be

beneficial, but the European path for Serbia and Montenegro has no alternative. (Koštunica 2004)

While often references to Serbia's belongingness to Europe did not necessarily have to imply 'picking a side', what was contributing to this impression was that, at the time, the European security community was – and, it would turn out, far more than it would later be the case – portrayed as the Euro-Atlantic community by the Serbian officials. While membership in the EU was made a strategic aim, and the membership in NATO was not, the two pillars of the Euro-Atlantic security community were frequently mentioned together at the time. The necessity of Serbia's cooperation with NATO followed almost immediately whenever the outline of Serbia's security and defence policy was presented by foreign policy officials either in statements or strategic documents. Following the necessity of joining the EU security and defence framework, the necessity of cooperating with NATO was the second most frequent reference in the strategic framework in the early 2000s, according to the content analysis.

While the membership in the only existing alliance at the time was not made an explicit goal, it was not explicitly excluded either but often portrayed as momentarily impossible. Some of the statements made by foreign policy officials signalled that it was not only the lack of political will, but that Serbia was 'not yet ready', and that it first needed to work hard to establish the cooperation with the EU and NATO in these matters and then see what next (Svilanović 2001). In other words, some of the statements signalled that the cooperation was the first and currently the only possible step towards something that could later increase and place Serbia not only in the European, but in the Western security community, as a whole. Occasional references to the success stories and lessons of other states post-socialist countries which 'of course' picked a side, were also there to support this direction as a wise and practical (Drašković 2004).

While the Serbian closeness to Russia was never openly questioned or portrayed in some negative manner, the frequency and intensity of emphasis on the necessity of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with it was notably lower than the cooperation with the EU, and NATO as well. Although the cooperation with Russia was emphasized as an important partner, especially in the strategic documents dealing with the military cooperation, in particular due to Serbia's heavy reliance on the Russia weaponry, Serbia's reliance on Russia was occasionally framed in a way that implied Russia's power was currently weakened. In other words, while Serbia's distancing from Russia was never fully articulated, it also seemed that Russia was not perceived as strong enough to be a significant ally or global counterbalance at that time. The prevailing view in the Serbian strategic framework was that the global, or at least European, security architecture had been significantly transformed in comparison to the previous decades and now centred around the Washington-Brussels axis (Ministarstvo odbrane Državne zajednice Srbija i Crna Gora 2004; Republika Srbija 2009; Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2010). Following this course didn't seem entirely unreasonable to Serbian policymakers, at least on the surface. However, it was far from being immediately appealing or instinctively natural to them.

Such an uncertain shift towards sidelining soon, however, faded. Once the situation with the Kosovo's unilateral proclamation of independence in 2007 incentivised Serbia's decision to immediately proclaim military neutrality, the voice against alliances became more and more explicit and louder. The Declaration by the Democratic Party of Serbia, which later turned into the National Assembly Resolution, repeated that Serbia would abstain from joining any of the existing alliances, and that potential decision to do so had to be taken to the national referendum. This proclamation of neutrality was not, however, immediately portrayed as something that was there to stay, but more as something temporary, that could be revoked in future. Occasional time references that military neutrality was sensible 'for now' or 'for some time' by certain foreign policy makers confirmed this. Even more so, this impression was bolstered by the complete absence of military neutrality in the National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy adopted two years after the proclamation of military neutrality, in 2009 (Republika Srbija 2009; 2009a). Only the new round of strategic documents, adopted ten years later, finally institutionalised military neutrality at the strategic level

(Republika Srbija 2019; 2019a). While the references to military neutrality still lacked a detailed explanation about what this policy meant in practice, it became clear that, over the course of twelve years since its introduction, balancing prevailed as a more sensible option in contrast to picking sides.

During this time, the purported shift of the world towards multipolarity was frequently cited in support of balancing. A constant reminder that we live in the world of uncertainty, unpredictability, and "the world is dramatically changing before our eyes on a daily basis, faster and more intensely than ever before" (Vučić 2022), reflect the overall belief that the option of balancing for a small country like Serbia to appears more and more sensible. In comparison to the early 2000s, when the narrative of the 'end of history' echoed in Serbia's strategic framework as well, far more in the recent times have become remarks about "the reconfiguration of relations among states and their geostrategic regrouping on the world stage, contributing to the construction of a multipolar world", "the emergence of new power centres at the global and regional levels indicates that the state of international relations is moving towards multipolarity" (Ministarstvo odbrane 2023), as the increasingly significant role of regional actors, is leading to a redistribution of power and a change in the balance of forces, which could be a source of heightened tensions between major powers." In light of these changes or 'turning points' that suggest, according to the Serbian strategic framework, that the West is not as dominant as it used to be, or that "despite the greater influence of the USA compared to other countries, their influence is neither absolute nor unlimited" (Dačić 2013), the idea of picking sides does not make much sense.

Instead, the multipolarity and the changed "global architecture at the beginning of the new century and millennium" (Minstarstvo odbrane 2010) according to the Serbian strategic framework, have "imposed the need to strengthen the principles of cooperation and a cooperative approach to the defence and security of nation-states" (Ministarstvo odbrane 2009). Cooperating with everyone seems to be a more sensible option in the changing global circumstances, since in the world of today, alliances are not seen as a guarantor of security and defence, on the contrary, can make the small suffer because of rising conflicts between the big powers. Explicit references that the "the changes in Serbia's strategic environment necessitate the modernisation of key strategic documents in the field of security and defence" (Republika Srbija 2019) also strengthen this impression that policymakers' dilemma on how sensible picking sides in international relations is in a way which still favours balancing. Suggesting that membership in a military alliance does not guarantee absolute security in the contemporary world, the 2019 National Security Strategy states:

> In the context of existing interdependence and unpredictability in the world, the fundamental characteristic of the contemporary strategic environment, from the aspect of security and defence, is that complex challenges, risks, and threats that, under certain circumstances, can jeopardize the defence of any state, regardless of its size, strength, international position, membership in international organizations, and political-military alliances. (Republika Srbija 2019)

Finally, different to the early 2000s when picking a side was rather affectively mild, neutral, and 'rational', the emotional appeal behind the idea of balancing is both strong and positive. This sentiment is particularly reinforced by Yugoslavia's non-alignment experience, which serves as a direct reference for why refusing to pick sides has been the best path for Serbia's prosperity. These historical references foster an impression of a deeply rooted or even continuous tradition of balancing in Serbian security and defence matters, strengthened by frequent assertions that Serbia will 'remain' neutral as it has always been. This emotional resonance, underscored by national pride, is evident in Serbia's emphasis on 'jealously guarding' its neutrality, portraying it as a morally superior stance while implying that this position is under threat. Such a viewpoint is especially persuasive when considering typical views of major powers, particularly those in the West. Unlike the cognitive appeal, where certain cues have shifted over time, the emotional appeal of neutrality seems stable and more natural than taking sides.

> Therefore, we do not wish to enter military alliances and pacts or participate in actions against other nations and states, as some of them participated in the aggression against our Serbia. We

want to be our own masters, to have a well-equipped and modern army, the Serbian military, which can and knows how to preserve and defend what is ours. (Vučić 2016)

And thank you to Serbia for acting as a pillar of stability, for never threatening anyone, and for never asking anything from anyone, except for the right to be itself on its own land, to have the right to safeguard its freedom, its skies, and its land, alone, without anyone's help. (Vučić 2022)

Chart 8 depicts the frequency of this common-sense claim within the strategic framework, while Chart 9 highlights the outcomes of an emotional discourse analysis of these references, emphasising the most frequently associated emotions.

Chart 8. *References to the notion that states, Serbia included, should not pick sides in international relations, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

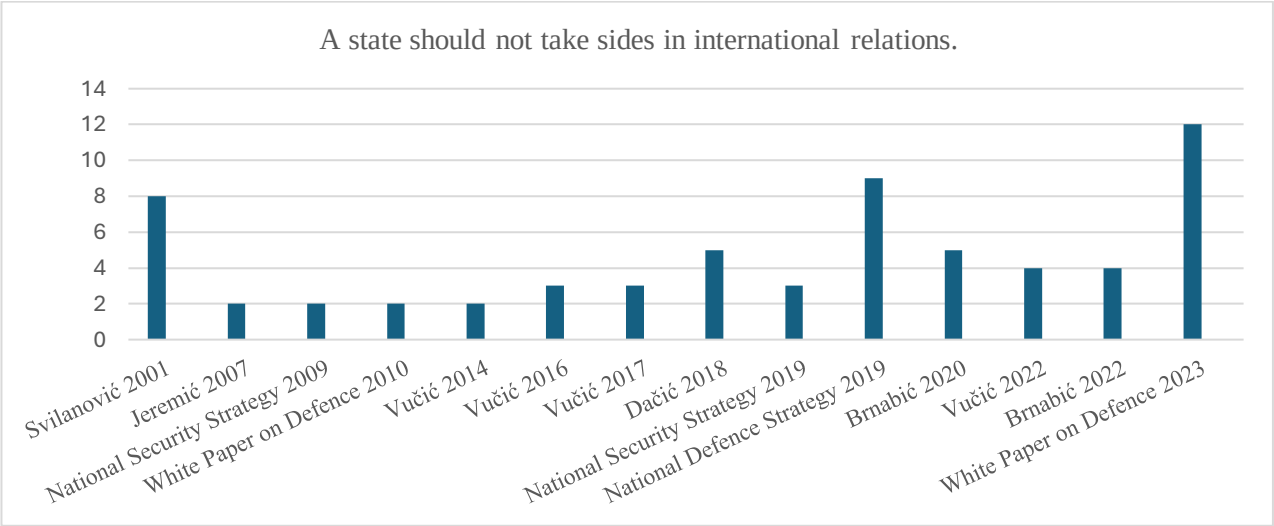
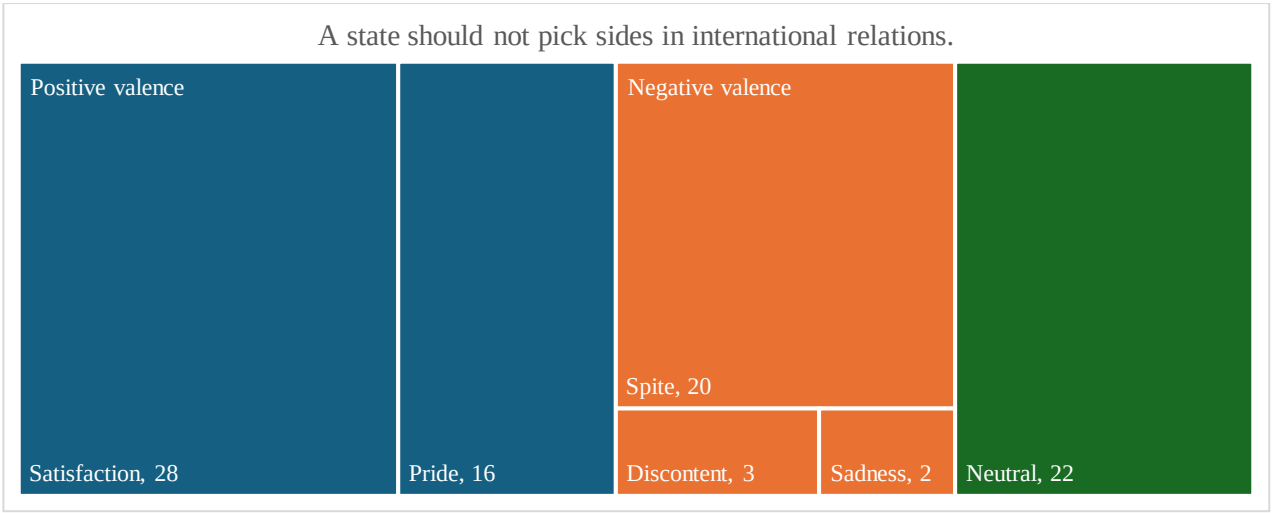


Chart 9. *Affective scheme behind the references to the notion that states, Serbia included, should not pick sides in international relations, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



Serbia is at the Crossroads and Therefore Important to Great Powers

In line with the lesson that picking sides is not sensible often goes the 'fact' that Serbia's position at the crossroads of important pathways makes it a constant interest of great powers. Often quoting the widely known reference that Serbia 'built its house on the road', attributed to the Serbian 20th century geographer Jovan Cvijić, the Serbian officials in different ways pinpoint that Serbia's geopolitical

position has decided its 'destiny' in security and defence matters. References to different great powers throughout history, whose interests and conquests have crossed over Serbia has made an object of desire, conquest of whoever rose to be a great power in that historical period. While this position could have been interpreted in different ways, even to justify the position of picking sides, the Serbian strategic framework typically suggests that Serbia should remain neutral and independent to avoid entanglement in external conflicts and protect its own interests. Emphasizing that these routes have historically been battlegrounds for clashes between great powers and blocs further reinforces this impression. To avoid being pulled into conflicts unrelated to Serbia's national interests – that have "shaped our history and continue to define our future" (Koštunica 2004) – the strategic framework advocates for balancing between competing parties as the most prudent approach. On the occasion of his second presidential inauguration, President Aleksandar Vučić said:

> There is, therefore, no word big enough for our Serbia, which has always stood at the crossroads of different civilizations, religions, and cultures, thus enriched in the best possible way. This encourages us to preserve that heritage even stronger, firmer, and more resolute today than ever before. Similarly, through us, the paths of others' interests and ambitions, conquests and retreats, as well as our victories and defeats, have always intersected, leaving deep scars in the overall existence of Serbia. Many have come to us without respect or consideration, but they have left with hidden or overt admiration for our small yet great people and for our small yet proud Serbia. (Vučić 2022)

The previously mentioned references to the ever-changing global circumstances further contribute to the dominance of such interpretation of Serbia's geopolitical position. With increasing warnings about "the altered geopolitical circumstances, with pronounced antagonisms between major powers" (Republika Srbija 2019), the strategic framework underlines that Serbia's position in the zones of conflicting interest affirm cooperative, multilateral approach to security and defence through dialogue and practical cooperation within international security and defence initiatives, implementing international agreements and conventions, as well as participating in multinational operations. There is a firm belief that the world and the "the great powers recognize Serbia's pivotal role in maintaining stability in the Balkans and beyond" and that its "historical significance as a buffer zone between competing interests underscores the importance of preserving our sovereignty and independence" (Koštunica 2004). In order to succeed in preserving itself, Serbia, according to the Serbian foreign policy officials "must engage in dialogue with everyone, but also strengthen our defence capacities because only in that way can we protect the country from those who threaten us daily, publicly and openly, but also quietly and covertly" (Vučič 2017). In other words, the 'fact' that Serbia was on the crossroads is viewed as a proof that Serbia should be a strong buffer that would balance instead of joining any side. This is a frequent trope in policymakers' strategic addresses:

> And when you build a house at the crossroads, you have various people as guests. And those who want to be good guests, and those who intend to conquer your house". Serbia is exactly at such a place, at the crossroads, where collisions are frequent, said Vulin, but he emphasized the readiness to offer resistance to any invader. (Vulin 2018)

> In the interests of Serbia, I will cooperate with everyone, both in the east and in the west, because Serbia only gains and cannot lose anything. (Nikolić 2012)

The affective appeal behind this common sense claim about Serbia's position in international relations appears rather strong, filled again with the mixture of pride and spite. While this position is represented as particularly challenging and burden, it is often portrayed as unique, special, and of strategic importance that cannot be 'overlooked' or 'overstated.' Although such a challenging position could have been seen or understood as a weakness that needed some mitigation, Serbia's strategic framework dominantly represents it as a strength which Serbia needs to "leverage this position for the benefit of our nation and our allies" (Đinđić 2001). The dominant interpretation is that Serbia is at the crossroads, "through which important energy and communication routes pass, the conflicting interests of states in the use of transit routes and the use of resources can lead to the emergence of regional

crises and endanger the security and stability of the states of the region, as well as outside it" (Republika Srbija 2019). However, instead of being frightened, Serbia needs to embrace this and make it "imperative to engage constructively with the great powers to safeguard our national interests and promote regional cooperation" (Vučić 2014). In other words, rather than invoking more negatively charged emotions like sadness or dissatisfaction, which might prompt a call for change through reimagining the borders or the Balkans or Europe, the prevailing interpretation of Serbia's buffer or crossroad position is one of pride. In some cases, it even merges with a lingering resentment towards historical invaders, serving as a source of spite. While small in size, being on the crossroads has "historically made it (Serbia) a crucial player in European affairs" (Koštunica 2007) and protecting this position is by all means sensible. Assuming the position of PM in 2022, Ana Branbić stated:

> As a bridge between different cultures and civilizations, Serbia occupies a unique position in the geopolitical landscape. Our strategic importance cannot be overstated, and it is incumbent upon us to leverage this position for the benefit of our nation and our allies. (Brnabić 2022)

Chart 10. *References about Serbia being positioned at the crossroads and therefore important to great powers contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

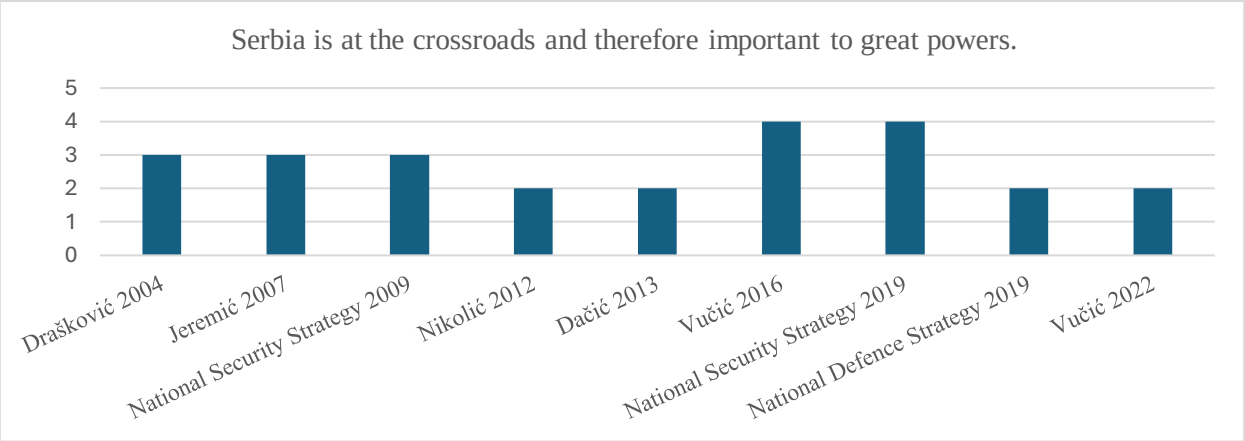
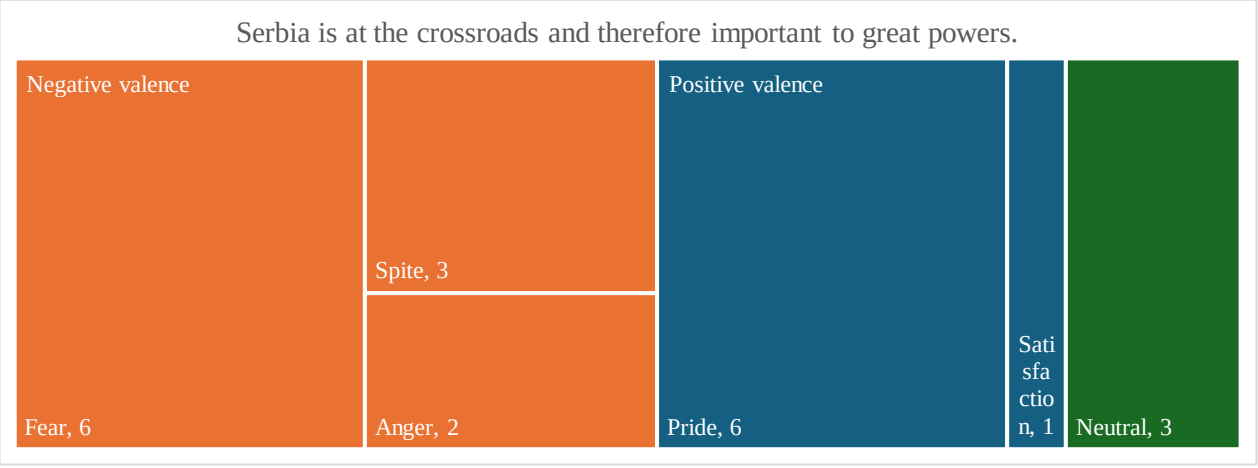


Chart 11. *Affective scheme behind references about Serbia being positioned at the crossroads and therefore important to great powers contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



Ideals are Worth Fighting For

Another general lesson about international relations is that, when deciding what kind of security and defence policy is sensible, it appears awarding to follow ideals and values. Despite a very Hobbesian view of international relations in which interests are eternal and the right of the stronger rules, Serbia's

strategic framework still suggests that ideals and values must not be neglected. Moreover, according to the Serbian' strategic framework, fighting for values and ideals appears to be one of the ways through which Serbia has historically managed to transcend its size. While choosing sides was not good *per se*, the sensible side is not necessarily the stronger one but the one with a stronger ideational and ethical appeal. The success or victory is not understood as bare physical survival or even expansion, but that protecting values and ideals is more rewarding. Moreover, different versions of the Kosovo pledge 'earthy kingdom' for the 'heavenly kingdom' echo in different ways in strategic framework, with references to different historical events when ideals and values prevailed over material interests.[94] Moreover, fighting for ideals is often portrayed as the major driver of Serbia's military and defence success throughout history. The most recent White Book of Defence, adopted in 2023, states:

> Historical experiences, nurturing of combat, liberating, and religious traditions, patriotism, as well as readiness to fight for them and sacrifice for them, are fundamental motivational factors in carrying out tasks in defence of the country. (Republika Srbija 2023)

The ideals and values that are most often mentioned as fighting for freedom, truth, and justice. While they are rarely closer described, most often they are used close to the meaning of protection of independence, sovereignty and even non-interference in international affairs. The justice "that is woven into the first words of our beautiful national anthem and still stands as an imperative without which there is no progress for dignified individuals or the entire world" (Vučić 2022). Often arguing that Serbia is an independent and sovereign country, and that "only as such can Serbia be a source of pride for all its citizens", policymakers suggest that those nation-building ideals have no price since "freedom is a value that our citizens have always placed on the highest pedestal" (Vučić 2017). Upholding these principles is the best, if not the only, way to shield Serbia from "defeats and humiliation" in international relations, as it is "undisputable that, in terms of power, many have an advantage over Serbia; however, we are resolute in ensuring that no one has an advantage when it comes to rights and justice" (Koštunica, 2007). Arguing that Serbia is prepared to do whatever it takes to remain self-reliant, President Vučić, on the occasion of the oath-taking ceremony at the beginning of his second term, stated:

> And thank you to Serbia for acting as a pillar of stability, for never threatening anyone, and for never asking anything from anyone, except for the right to be itself on its own land, to have the right to safeguard its freedom, its skies, and its land, alone, without anyone's help. (Vučić 2022)

Enduring in hardships is portrayed as a rule, a fact for Serbia which "will continue to work for the common good, while boldly moving forward despite all adversity, as we have done so far", although "the world may never be the same again" (Vučić 2022). There is strong affective connection to this lesson, since there is "no goal more demanding, yet more honourable" than the goal for Serbia to continue its unique path into the future, a "future that it has long deserved through its sacrifices and hardships" (Vučić 2022).

> Just like the Miroslav Gospel, our country has had a strange and difficult historical journey. Generations of Serbia have been tempered through the toughest moments over the centuries, often alone but always upright. It is precisely those generations that, throughout history, have shown incredible human, royal, artistic, military, moral, and spiritual heights, weaving this unyielding, liberating, sometimes even defiant spirit into all present and future generations of our people. (Vučić 2022)

[94] The Kosovo Myth centres on Prince Lazar's legendary choice between an 'earthly kingdom,' symbolising temporal power and victory, and a 'heavenly kingdom,' representing spiritual salvation and eternal glory, epitomising a moral sacrifice for faith and nation. This narrative, however, was not contemporaneously recorded in 1389, but it developed over centuries through Serbian epic poetry and oral tradition, portraying Prince Lazar as addressing his soldiers with this choice before the Battle of Kosovo, where Serbian forces were ultimately defeated by the significantly larger Ottoman army.

Since Serbia's path through the past and into the future is most often seen as Serbia's fight against the bigger and stronger, "much more powerful enemy", the strongest emotion behind is spite and pride for its bravery. Often emphasising that "all pressures are in vain, and all offers are meaningless" (Koštunica 2007) if it is expected from Serbia to give up on its ideals – the sentiments look like a direct response to those aroused by the previously discussed claim that that the weak suffer what they must. Referencing to Serbia's historical readiness to fight the stronger from itself strengthen this appeal that Serbia's alliances are based on the common values and ideals. One of the major take-aways from 1999 war is exactly about Serbia's bravery and readiness to confront the strongest existing alliance and "fly against a much more powerful enemy, defending the lives and freedom of their homeland's skies" (Koštunica 2007). In the words of the then PM Vojislav Koštunica:

> With us Serbs, you can achieve much through friendship, but it has never been possible through force. That is what has been passed down to us from our ancestors. If we agree to force and fear, every sacrifice of those who built Serbia will be in vain. If we agree to such violence, we will lose every battle our ancestors won today. (Koštunica 2008)

Hence, Serbia's strategic framework deeply intertwines ideals and values with historical perseverance, portraying them as worth fighting for at any cost. Rooted in historical and cultural memory, this narrative celebrates resistance against stronger adversaries, framing hardship as a moral test and honouring sacrifices made in the defence of principles. By invoking the Kosovo pledge and other historical symbols, it highlights the transcendence of physical might through ethical and spiritual resolve. Such narratives foster a profound emotional connection to Serbia's legacy, portraying the nation's enduring resilience and defiance against external pressures as essential to its identity. Ultimately, this proud and defiant sentiment helps to make sense of many of Serbia's decisions to confront stronger opponents, often at the cost of significant human and material losses. The prevalence of this common-sense claim in the strategic framework is presented in Chart 12, while the most dominant emotions behind references to it are shown in Chart 13.

Chart 12. *References to the notion that ideals are worth fighting for, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

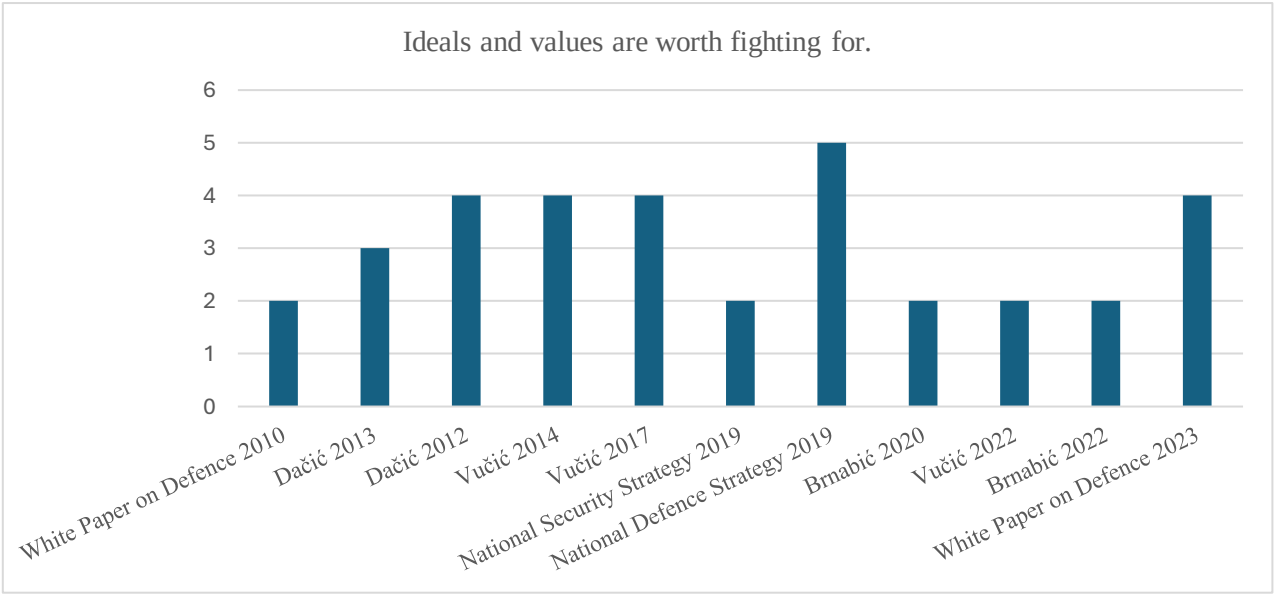
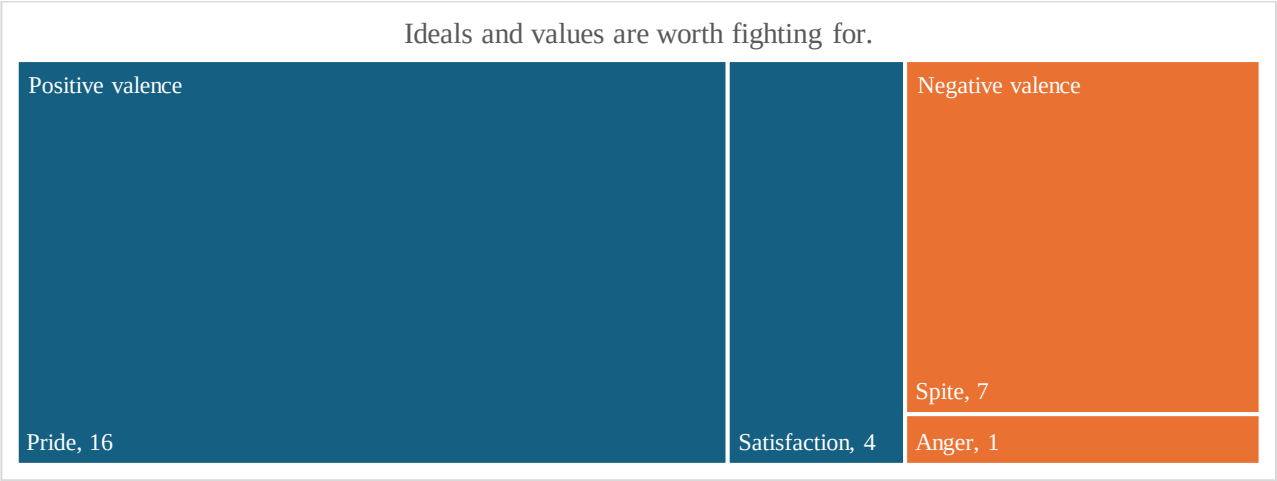


***Chart 13**. Affective scheme behind references to the notion that ideals are worth fighting for, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



Serbia Has Always Been on the Right Side of History

Often accompanying the claim that ideals and values are worth fighting for in international relations follows some reassurances that Serbia has always done so. Omnipresent references to Serbia's history of fighting for the principles of justice, sovereignty, self-determination and freedom from foreign domination and oppression usually end on a note that Serbia has always 'been on the right side of history time and again'. From resisting the Ottoman rule in the Middle Ages, via extraordinary bravery to stop German invasion in World War I, to combating fascism during World War II, the dominant narrative about military victories and losses is one of unwavering courage and resilience in the face of adversity. In the eyes of Serbian policymakers, their nation's historical trajectory aligns with the pursuit of noble ideals, positioning Serbia as a force for positive change in the world. As the then Prime Minister Ana Brnabić once encapsulated, "throughout history, Serbia has stood firm in defence of its values and rights, aligning itself with the forces of justice and righteousness" (Brnabić 2022). In other words, while picking sides is generally not viewed as sensible, the strategic framework equally suggests that Serbia has historically indeed picked a side, and the side which was allegedly the force for positive change in the world, "defending principles that are fundamental to the advancement of civilisation" (Koštunica 2008).

What is particularly important is that the most important role in Serbia's place on the right side of history has been primarily attributed to the Serbia's military and its extraordinary bravery. Often portrayed as the pillar of Serbia's statehood and progress, the Serbia's military is seen as a force that managed to save Serbia from losing. Occasional cynical remarks that Serbia has historically 'won in wars but lost in peace' were also supporting the idea that the brightest moments of Serbia's national history have been won by the army's ability to follow noble ideals and values. Hardly any talk on Serbia's role in the European history, and especially military history goes without reminding that Serbia has through history waged only defence and liberation wars and "has never in history started an offensive war" (Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2023). The 2010 White Book of Defence highlights this:

> The tradition of the Serbian Army is firmly rooted in the liberation uprisings (First and Second Serbian Uprising) in the 19th century. The beginning of modern military organization in Serbia is tied to the Sretenje, February 15, the day when the fight for liberation of the Serbs commenced in Orašac in 1804, and when in 1835 Prince Miloš Obrenović proclaimed the first Serbian Constitution, considered one of the most liberal and modern in Europe at that time. Since 2007, this date, declared as the Statehood Day of the Republic of Serbia, is also marked as the Day of the Serbian Army. This proclamation signifies the continuity of military organization in Serbia and underscores the bond between the Serbian state and its army. (Republika Srbija 2010)

The wars of the 1990s, and particularly the war in 1999, are often represented in the light of fighting against aggression, and the great powers intended to defeat Serbia. The fight over Kosovo's final status is particularly emphasised in this regard, as a proof that Serbia remained on the side of international law, order and justice, while the powerful states attacked not Serbia, but the entire international order. Frequent references to the 1999 bombardment of Yugoslavia suggest that it unleashed Pandora's box, with the narrative portraying Serbia as the defender of the international order against those blatantly undermining it through unilateral, self-interested actions. The legacy of the wars that led to Yugoslavia's dissolution is largely ignored or, when mentioned, treated as an aside – something outside the scope of Serbian military history. In other words, the legacy of these wars is not viewed as an exception to the rule but is instead 'outsourced' to the entities not directly under the command of the Serbian Armed Forces. Moreover, Serbian policymakers emphasise their nation's role in promoting peace and stability, particularly in the Balkans region. They highlight Serbia's efforts to foster dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation among neighbouring countries as further evidence of its commitment to being on the right side of history. Serbia's long "struggle for independence and sovereignty, as well as our efforts to promote reconciliation and cooperation in the region, exemplify our dedication to being on the right side of history. Our actions speak louder than words, demonstrating our commitment to peace and justice" (Stefanović 2018). According to Vuk Drašković, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2004:

> There is no reason not to be proud of our history. We have fought many wars, but we have never been accused of war crimes. We were victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide, but we never sought revenge. The bravery and honour of Serbian and Montenegrin soldiers and officers were recognized by both wartime allies and enemies. Then, in the early 1990s, we faced an anti-Serbian history. For the first time in our existence, Serbs and Montenegrins found themselves among international fugitives and defendants. Those who were responsible committed, above all, crimes against our history. In Srebrenica, not only Bosniak civilians and prisoners of war were killed, but also Serbs who were victims of genocide during the darkness of the Second World War. So, why should our people be protectors or hostages of the accused? (Drašković 2004)

The affective force underpinning this discourse is predictably one of pride and overall satisfaction (see Chart 15). Referencing resistance to foreign invasions and the fight for human rights and democracy, the elites' passionate narrative on Serbia's historical and military legacy is one of courage and moral integrity. Emphasizing Serbia's role in world wars while downplaying its engagement in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s or portraying them as further proof of Serbia's "commitment to justice and righteousness," the elite's narrative promotes an immediate sense of pride in Serbia's history, presenting it as flawless. Moreover, "as a nation that has endured its share of trials and tribunals, Serbia understands the importance of standing up for what is right, even in the face of adversity," taking pride in knowing that its history "is a testament to our moral compass and our unwavering commitment to the principles of fairness and equality" (Koštunica 2007). Together, these declarations craft a compelling narrative of a nation that stands strong, self-assured, and resolute in its principles, boldly moving forward while embodying a legacy of moral fortitude and integrity – rather unaware of its past mistakes or even the possibility of making them.

***Chart 14**. References to the notion that Serbia has always been on the right side of history, contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

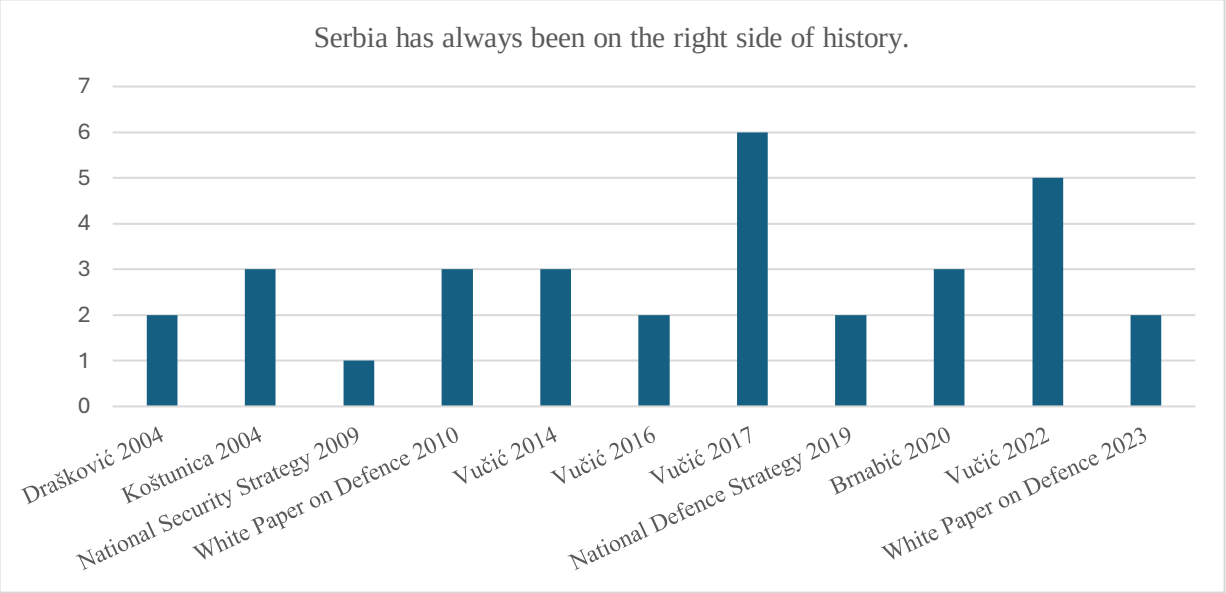
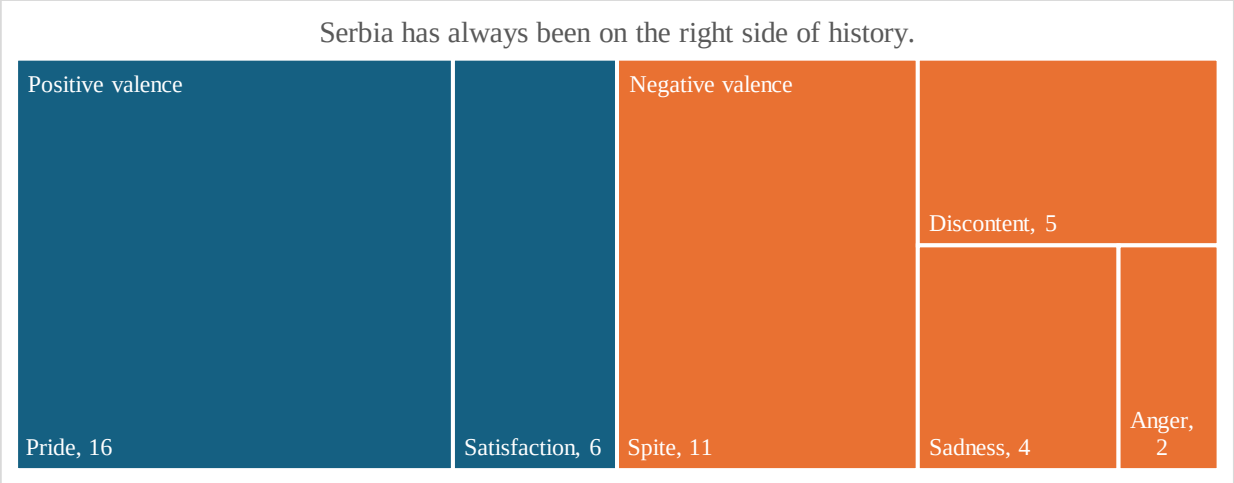


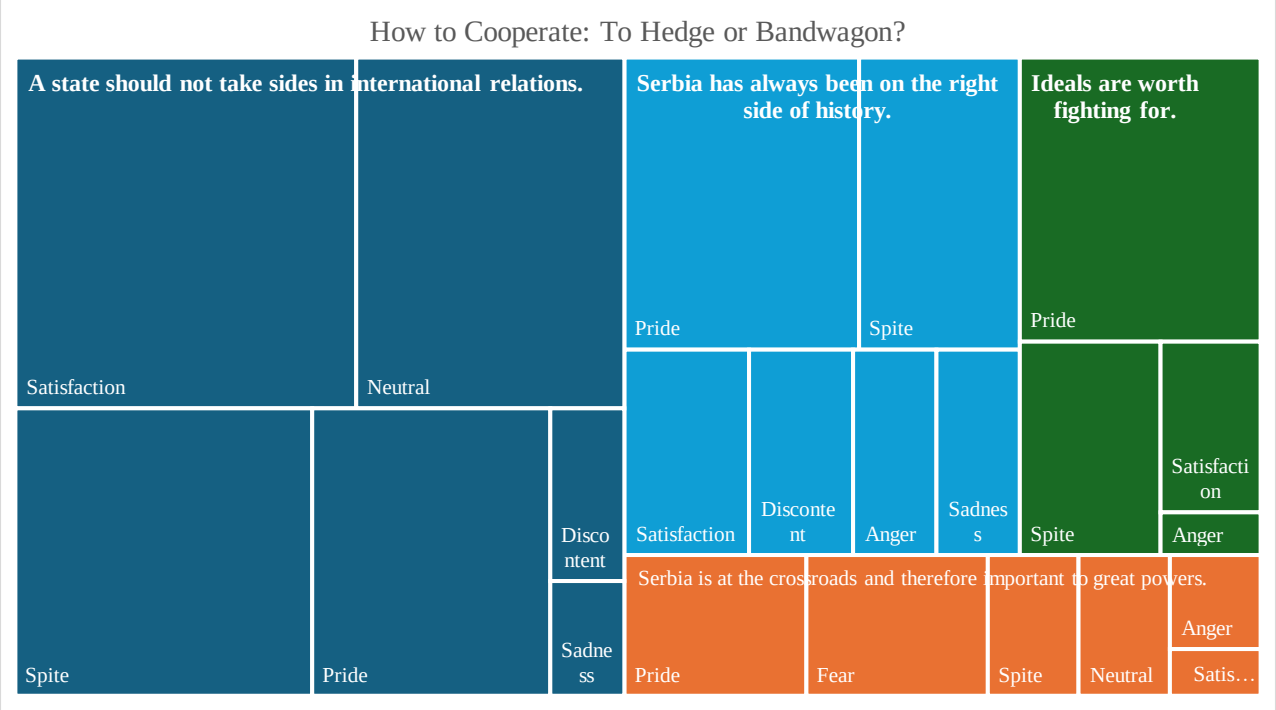
***Chart 15.** Affective scheme behind references that Serbia has always been on the right side of history contained in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



In summary, although small and weak states are generally inclined towards 'bandwagoning' in international relations, Serbia's common sense judgment on how a state should cooperate in security and defence appears not to be entirely typical. Despite its limited size and strength, Serbia's policymakers do not immediately or strongly favour 'picking sides' in these matters, especially in times of peace, but are, overall, both cognitively and affectively inclined to favour balancing. While no explicit cues on what approach is more sensible, Serbia's strategic framework has over time reflected a rising consensus that aligning with one faction is not a sensible foreign policy option, especially in the contemporary world of increasing tensions and unpredictable changes. Moreover, even Serbia's unique geopolitical position at the crossroads of conflicting interests of great powers is evoked in support of the option of balancing – instead of joining some side and abandoning this position, the difficult option of buffering prevails as more rewarding in terms of material gains since it protects Serbia from entanglements in broader geopolitical conflicts of the great powers. While the

affective appeal behind these two lessons is not particularly strong, it is, overall, rather positive, arousing the sense of pride for its unique geopolitical position in the European history and honour for maintaining equidistance from all major powers throughout history. Nevertheless, at the remaining neutral is not always portrayed as sensible according to the lessons that Serbia's drew from its national history. Perhaps the affectively strongest 'truth' about international relations is the one that ideals and values are worth fighting for since, according to the Serbia's strategic framework, following this logic placed Serbia on the right side of history over and over again. The dominant interpretation is that sacrifices are worth, regardless of how big, if the cause is as high in terms of values and ideals. Thus, according to the elites' common-sense interpretative framework, choosing sides is not seen as particularly beneficial in regular times, but can become justifiable in extraordinary circumstances, especially if it feels right, regardless of costs.

Chart 16: *Illustration of the relative frequency of four major 'truths' (codes) in regard to the second part of the common-sense interpretive scheme (how to cooperate) based on (emotional) discourse and content analysis of the Serbia's strategic framework. Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



6.1.3. Whom to Cooperate With: Eternal Interests or Eternal Friends?

If cooperation proves more beneficial than isolation and both balancing and allying are viable under certain circumstances, who would be Serbia's 'natural' partners in security and defence for these strategies? Serbia's turbulent history, particularly its military history, offers a wealth of strategic lessons for determining sensible partnerships in this realm. This history, however, also complicates matters, as a review of its allies, partners, and adversaries over the past century reveals a lack of clear patterns – no important security or defence partner has consistently been either an ally or an enemy. Given such historical experiences, to understand the elites' immediate appeal regarding whom should Serbia balance with, balance against, or potentially ally with or against, it is essential to first understand whether Serbia's worldview implies the existence of clear sides in international relations in these matters, and what those 'sides' are. Ultimately, where does Serbia fit within the global landscape, as shaped by its autobiographical narrative? Content and discourse analysis provide some insights into Serbian elites' interpretative scheme of international relations, pointing to one general

criteria for selecting security and defence partners, as well as two lessons about Serbia's natural geopolitical environment and, consequently, its natural partners.

No Eternal Friends or Enemies, Only Interests

A depiction of international relations in Serbia's strategic framework is far from a romanticised one, governed by common interests, trust, good intentions and friendships. The variety, scale and nature of threats that are listed as imminent to the international order in the Serbian strategic framework during the last two decades indicate a gloomy, even cynical view on the possibility of moving towards the Kantian global order, in which states would respects each other's sovereignty while committing to mutual aid and perpetual peace. In the Serbian elites' interpretation, the current global affairs are far from the triumph of liberal order in which states are friends, and interests are shared, but a more realistic worldview predominates – the one in which Hobbesian rules, like the previously described belief that the powerful do what they want, while the rest suffer the consequences, prevail. Most importantly, although the references to the increasingly complex and faster world suggest that part of this pessimism stems from 'threats without enemies', like climate change and pandemics, and the imminent nature of the international relations as such, the major security threats outlined in the Serbian security and defence strategies are often attributed to the deliberate intentions and behaviour of other states.

Some threats are viewed as threats to the entire global order and wellbeing, as is the violation of international law, with by far the most mentioned one of interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states via preventive attack and military interventionism. Many of them are, however, perceived as being directly opposed to Serbia's national interests. Moreover, in comparison to the first round of strategic documents from 2009 (Republika Srbija 2009; 2009a), the framework proposed in 2019 was even more pessimistic, especially in relation to the regional environment (Republika Srbija 2019; 2019a). Often and inflammable references to the 'separatist', 'expansionist' or 'revisionist' tendencies of neighbouring countries, "especially when it comes to the creation of 'Greater Albania'" are mentioned as proof of persistently hostile environment, in which "an armed aggression against the Republic of Serbia cannot be ruled out in the foreseeable future" (Republika Srbija 2019). In other words, the dominant worldview among the Serbian foreign policy makers is that neither a global nor a regional security community has been firmly established, why states, and Serbia in particular, must adopt a realistic approach and not delude itself into thinking that other nations genuinely care about its interests, as it might have believed in the past. Signaling that it was time for Serbia to adopt a more pragmatic approach, Ivica Dačić stated in his 2013 Prime Ministerial exposé:

> For the destiny and future of the people of Serbia, the essential question is whether we know where we are going, what Serbia is like today and what we want it to be, and what is the Serbian dream we want to achieve. And who our allies are on that path. (Dačić 2013)

Such a portrayal that international relations are not understood an overly friendly place, but a place of eternal and selfish interests is often explicitly acknowledged and allegedly incorporated in Serbia's behaviour. In the strategic documents, but also foreign policy exposes, it is regularly mentioned that Serbia as well adopts "a pragmatic approach that prioritizes our national interests above all else", that "our interests remain constant" (Dačić 2013). Occasionally, this is followed by explicit references that Serbia "engage with other nations based on mutual benefit, recognizing that alliances may shift, but our interests endure" (Jeremić 2007), that "Serbia understands that in the complex landscape of global politics, alliances can shift, and adversaries can become allies" (Mrkić 2013). Aware that "friendships and enmities may ebb and flow, Serbia's commitment to advancing its interests remains resolute", and it "remains focused on protecting and advancing its interests, irrespective of temporary alliances or rivalries" (Brnabić 2020). In other words, Serbian policymakers suggest that Serbia has allegedly learned from history to prioritise its own interests over traditional

friends and partners, which are changeable, and to choose its partners based solely on strategic interests. This point was reinforced by Ivan Mrkić, Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2013:

> The essence of our foreign policy is known to everyone – the interests of our country. Territorial integrity, sovereignty – that is the foundation. We know what the pillars are and what the priorities are, and that is what we are issuing, and in that we are no different from the previous period, our path to full membership in the EU and we will continue like that. (Mrkić 2013)

While there are often remarks that, in order to accomplish its national interests, Serbia needs to "to build and secure its defence, its borders, land, air, and water on its own" (Vučić 2017), this pragmatic approach is dominantly operationalised in the view that cooperation with everyone is necessary. As discussed earlier, the most often, consistent, and vocal claim across all relevant documents and statements is that Serbia needs to cooperate with 'everyone' in dealing with threats and challenges that characterise today's world. In the immediate aftermath of regime change in 2000, and in the first security and defence strategies, it appeared that policymakers found that this was important to emphasise, as these documents explicitly outlined the widest possible range of security and defence partners, emphasising that Serbia "does not consider, in advance, any state or alliance the enemy" (Republika Srbija 2009). Later on, policymakers kept repeating that 'Serbia does not have enemies, like in the past', or even that "Serbia cannot afford to have enemies" (Nikolić 2012), arguing that the lessons learned was those states, and Serbia need to cooperate even with its foreign adversaries and look into the future. In one of his statements as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ivica Dačić emphasized:

> In achieving its foreign policy goals, the Republic of Serbia is guided by legitimate national interests, using diplomatic activity and dialogue as a tool, in order to deepen traditionally good relations with friendly countries, and at the same time establish qualitatively better relations with those partners in the international community with whom we do not share the same positions on certain issues, understanding differences in opinion. Such a policy of independent decision-making, which we are convinced is realistic and correct, requires a lot of effort to nuance the position and find a balance in a multitude of different interests, often in conflict with each other. (Dačić 2018)

The portrayal of hostilities as avoidable and surmountable, without explicitly marking any state as an enemy, however, complicates the identification of Serbia's stance on friendships in international relations. While the pragmatic perspective suggests that friendships 'ebb and flow,' the Serbian strategic framework at the same time indicates that some friendships are both possible and genuine. For instance, although security and defence cooperation are predominantly described using the term 'partnerships,' the word 'friend' also appears in Serbia's strategic documents, albeit less frequently than in daily political statements. The strategic framework often highlights Serbia's goal to strengthen relations with both 'friends' and 'partners,' suggesting a nuanced distinction in the closeness of these relationships (Republika Srbija 2019). This perspective suggests that some forms of cooperation are more natural than others, even though Serbia claims a desire to cooperate with everyone. Thus, while international relations are inherently competitive and driven by interests, Serbia's foreign policy officials maintain that there is room for genuine friendships. As Nikolić puts it, "Serbia has no enemies in the world but has bigger and smaller friends. It tries not to create enemies, and to make bigger friends out of smaller ones." (Nikolić 2012).

The emotional tone behind this "truth" appears predominantly neutral, lacking strong affective force. The emotions that do emerge are marked by a certain cynicism, disappointment, and dissatisfaction with the way the world is arranged. It is as if Serbia wishes for a different world but, being a small nation, can only reconcile with the existing reality and adapt reluctantly. This pragmatic, reluctant compliance with the cognitive lesson is best understood through the mixed affective cues it carries, indicating that not all relationships are equal or genuine. Emotional discourse analysis reveals that some friendships are considered eternal, while certain partnerships will remain merely partnerships due to unresolved issues from the past, encapsulated in the famous statement that 'we can forgive, but we cannot forget'. In other words, while this perspective makes cognitive sense, both

cognitively and affectively, some partnerships come more naturally than others. Illustrative of this is Minister of Defence Aleksandar Vulin's statement in 2014:

> Serbs are a people who are used to bearing their misfortune alone. Serbs are used to being silent about their misfortune, not to talk about it, to deal with it as they know and know how... they are used to not having many friends and that friends are rare and therefore they have to be guarded… This is precisely why, during the Great War and the time of the great tragedy, the Serbs remained contrite and humble before the courage and greatness of the sacrifice of their friends because they were not used to others sharing misfortunes with them and having many friends, and that is why they carefully guarded … And that's a lesson for us... keep friends, make friends, keep the great and human in them because without them there won't be us either. (Vulin 2014)

Chart 17. *References to the notion that in international relations there are no eternal friends, only interests, as reflected in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

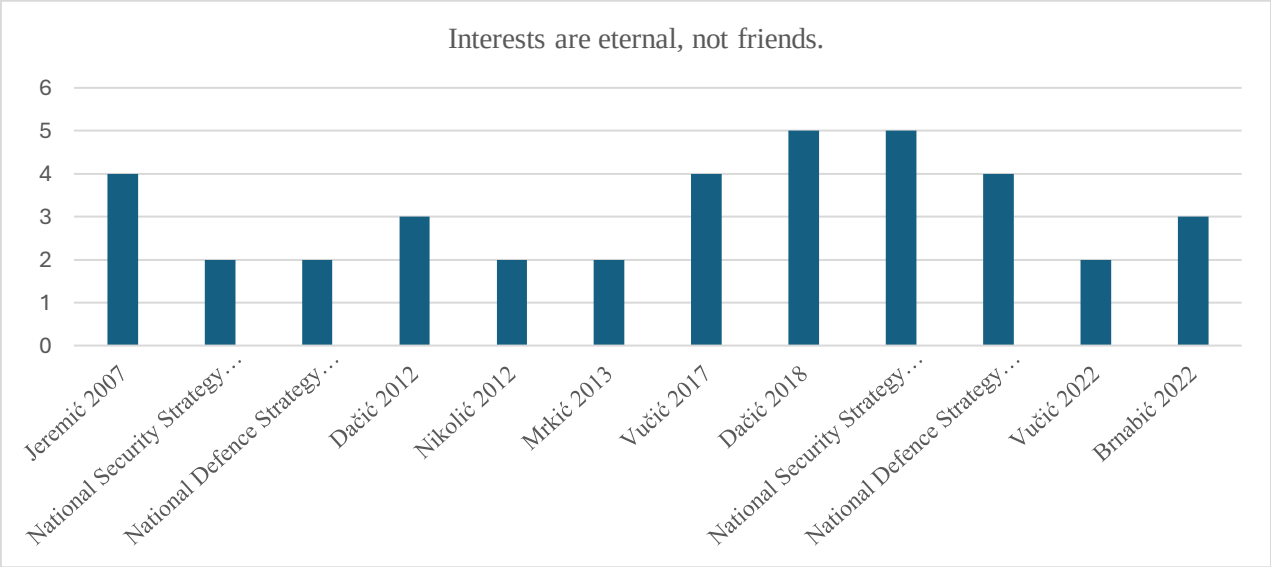
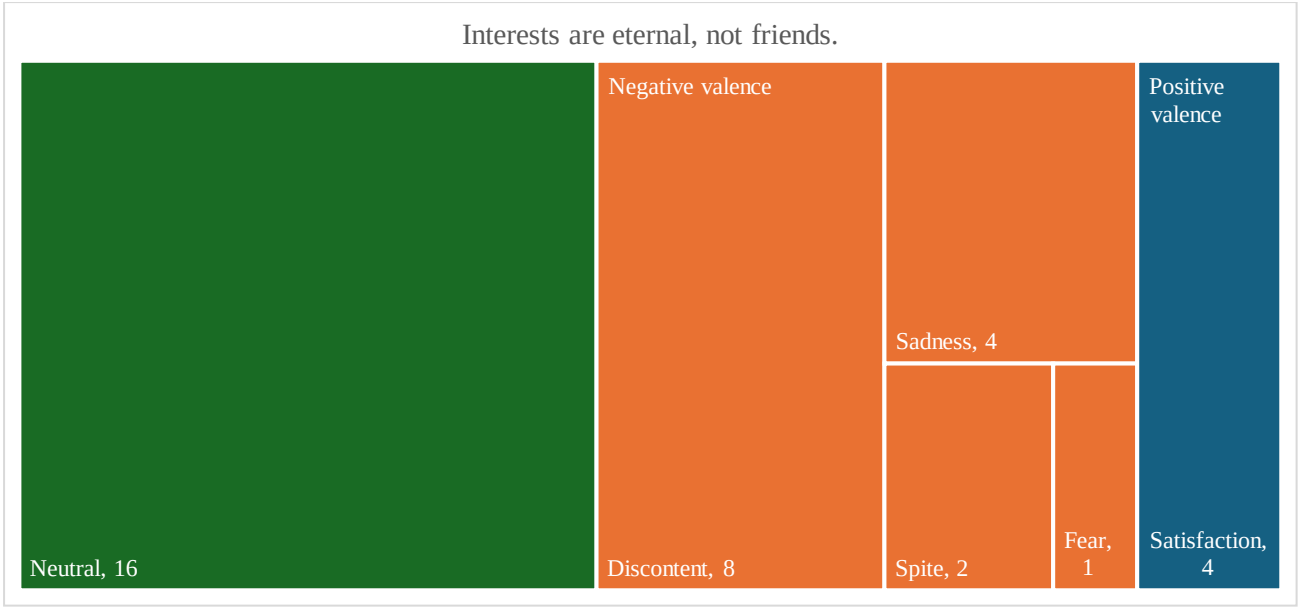


Chart 18*. Affective scheme behind references that in international relations there are no eternal friends, only interests, as reflected in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



Serbia Belongs to Europe

By far the most frequent depiction of Serbia's 'natural' position in the global security architecture in Serbia's strategic framework is that it belongs to Europe. Naming Serbia as a European state, Southeast European state, part of European space, European area or European family is very frequent. The conflation which, however, over time globally occurred between the connotation of Europe and the EU is evident in Serbia's interpretation of the global security architecture, as well, since it is clear that, in order to belong to the European security community, Serbia still needs to access the latter. Moreover, so frequent insistence on belongingness to Europe appears to be viewed as an ultimate proof that it should belongs to the EU, as well, for mutual benefit. On one side, it is often said that "despite all the problems and many disagreements on significant issues", Serbia needs to "continue its European path because Serbia belongs to the family of European nations and countries" (Brnabić 2022). On the other hand, it is often recalled that neither can European security community be firm and complete without Serbia. Insisting on the indivisibility of the security space and the complexity of the contemporary security threats and challenges, the Serbian officials often warn that "only with the full integration of the Western Balkan region can the EU project be successfully completed, which will start the possibility of unifying the European continent" (Dačić 2023). Therefore, while it is obvious that Serbia is not yet there, Serbia's belongingness to Europe is viewed as an ultimate confirmation of 'undeniable', 'natural', 'obvious' and in different words described sensible place in the European security community – Serbia and the EU have "common destiny and a common future" (Brnabić 2020). As stated by the PM Vojislav Koštunica back in 2007:

> This membership is not only something that is desired, but also something that is necessary, something without which we cannot proceed. What is desired usually brings benefits; what is necessary is not always beneficial, but the European path for Serbia and Montenegro has no alternative. (Koštunica 2007)

One major commonsense rationale for this perspective is, expectedly, geography. Serbia's position on the European continent – situated in 'the heart of Europe' or at 'the gate of Europe' – is often seen as its fate. Various references highlight that "Serbia's foreign policy is determined by our regional position" and that "while it has not always been the case in the past, Serbia is now firmly oriented towards a future vision of a modern, democratic, and prosperous Serbia that fully contributes to stability in the Balkans and Europe" (Tadić 2004). In other words, while open and explicit admissions of mistakes are extremely rare, occasional references that overlooking, 'oversleeping', denying or going against the security dynamics in the rest of the continent it belongs to, as was the case in the contemporary past, has proved senseless for Serbia. Underscored by the belief that "the security of the Republic of Serbia is inseparable from the security of the European area" (Cvetković 2008), countless references in the strategic frameworks imply that only by aligning with the European security framework, Serbia can address its national security concerns in an optimal manner. This alignment is most often operationalised through Serbia's cooperation with the EU on security and defence matters, which is portrayed as an 'absolute geostrategic priority' and 'a priority of the defence policy' (Ministarstvo odbrane Državne zajednice Srbija i Crna Gora 2004; Ministarstvo odbrane Republike Srbije 2010; 2023; Republika Srbija 2009; 2009a; 2019; 2019a). Fully embracing its geostrategic position by doing best to join the EU security community "reflects the political realism that we need so much today after decades of wandering" (Koštunica 2001). References to Serbia' rootedness in European area very frequently appear in the policymakers' statements:

> The security of the Republic of Serbia is inseparable from the security of the European area. Therefore, the development of good relations with the key factors of global, European and regional security, and especially with the neighbours, is a priority of the defence policy of the Republic of Serbia. (Cvetković 2008)

> It [Serbia] is the product of our thoughts, our dreams, and our actions, our ideal, our goal, our consciousness, our knowledge of where we are both geographically and historically, and great care to never confuse, as has happened to us so many times in history, history and reality, geography and reality, empty desires and reality (Vučić 2022)

In addition to 'unrelenting' geography, what further support the impression that Europe is where Serbia belongs to is the alleged normative alignment with what Europe represents, including in security matters. Within the strategic framework of the elites, there are constant reminders on Serbia's "European character", its place in European history, underlying "that it is not only about political pragmatism and rational assessment of the situation, but about our commitment to those values and principles that the EU dreams of and about the measure to get closer to European standards in all spheres of our social life" (Svilanović 2001). The naturalness is further strengthened with the general societal commitment to the European values and principles, as admits 'all legitimate disagreements and disputes among relevant political forces, there is an undisputed belief in the Serbian public that Serbia fundamentally belongs to Europe and that a formal confirmation of this belonging is needed, meaning full membership in European structures" (Koštunica 2004). Therefore, the strategic framework emphasises that the Republic of Serbia is committed "to build its security on democratic standards, a policy of cooperation, and a European foreign policy orientation" (Republika Srbija 2009). It is often emphasized that Serbia's policy has been and will remain focused on the European path and acquiring the place it deserves in the community of European values and norms that shape its security and positioning in the world. In her first expose as PM in 2020, Ana Brnabić stated:

> Full membership in the EU is Serbia's absolute foreign policy priority. Serbia is connected to the EU not only by the country's European character (in terms of geography and cultural civilization), but also by common destiny and a common future. Serbia was, is, and will be a part of the European family of nations whose stronghold is common values and civilizational achievements. (Brnabić 2020)

The affective underpinning behind this truth about Serbia's natural place in the global security architecture is, expectedly, mixed. On one side, there is an overall satisfaction, and even pride, about Serbia being a European country. Europe is mentioned with admiration towards what the European civilisation has contributed to the world. Moreover, there is a strong feeling of immodesty about Serbia's contributions to European civilisation, which "extend far beyond its borders," from rich cultural heritage to its role in preserving European security. References to Serbia's contributions to European civilisation, both in the past and present, are frequently evoked by policymakers:

> Whoever is truly supportive of Serbs and Serbia knows that Serbia is in Europe and that Serbs are a European people. Two centuries ago, it wasn't just Serbia discovering Europe, but Europe discovering Serbia. And when it did, it found European ideas and values in Serbia, with Kosovo as another name for the most valuable contribution Serbs made to Christian civilisation. Therefore, no one can introduce or exclude Serbia from Europe, and Serbia should enter the European Union intact, just as all other member states entered into that union. (Koštunica 2008)

> Honourable MPs, as an old European nation, we will invest our most valuable traditions – freedom, democratic spirit and respect for European values – in the process of unifying Europe and fulfilling the conditions for admission to the European Union. (Dačić 2012)

Nevertheless, despite occasional reminders that "there is no time for vanity" (Đinđić 2001), there is an overall discontent, accompanied by sadness and resentment, about the unrecognised and forgotten role that Serbia has played on the European continent, especially in security and military terms. The perception of unfair treatment of Serbia during the wars of Yugoslav secession by European states, especially regarding the Kosovo issue, contributes significantly to this sentiment. Serbia's strategic framework is full of references to its awareness of being the backward part of the European security community, described as a "disconnected, inflamed blind spot" (Dačić 2013) or that "Europe is at the doorstep, but it's not yet in Serbia" (Dačić 2013). While there is some reflection on its own responsibility for the fact that "over the past two centuries, Serbia has been politically, culturally, and economically rooted in Europe, only to be uprooted from this natural environment, Europe, at the end of World War II," the sadness and anger for unfair treatment prevail. "After everything Serbia has done for Europe", it is forced to "sit at the table of European families as the only state that obtained its seat at the European table through unworthy trade, by renouncing our

memory and identity" (Koštunica 2008). Chart 19 shows the frequency of references to this common-sense claim within the strategic framework documents, while Chart 20 presents the results of an emotional discourse analysis, highlighting the emotions most commonly associated with these references.

Chart 19. *Frequency of the references suggesting that Serbia belongs to Europe, as reflected in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

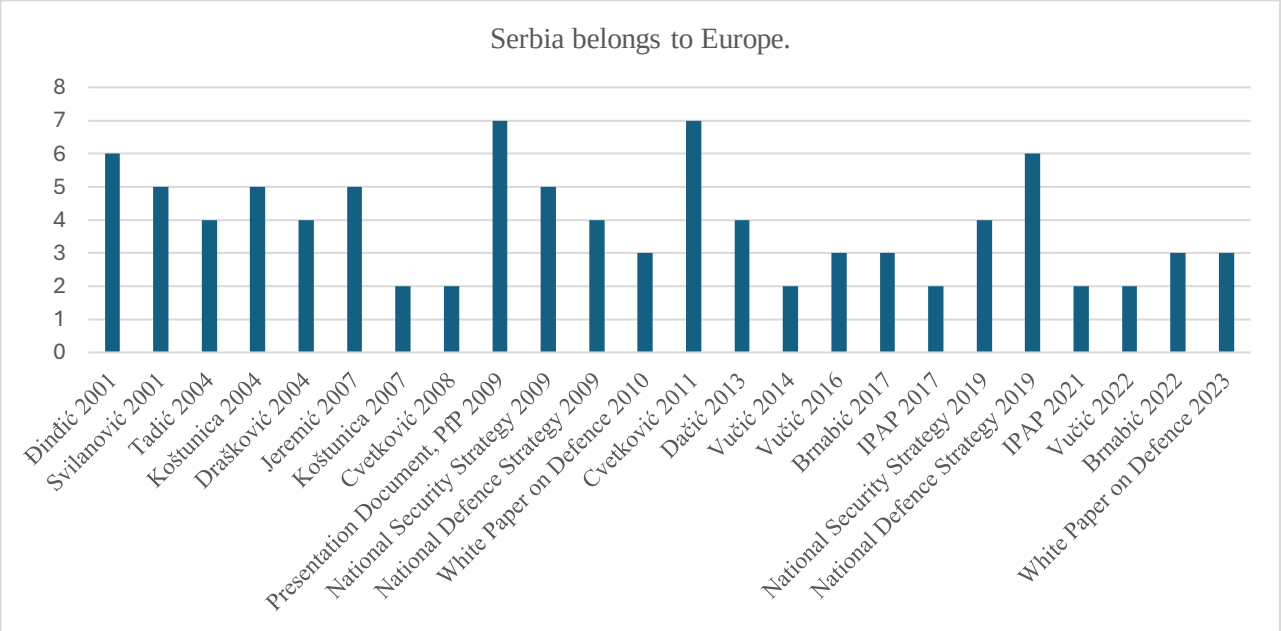
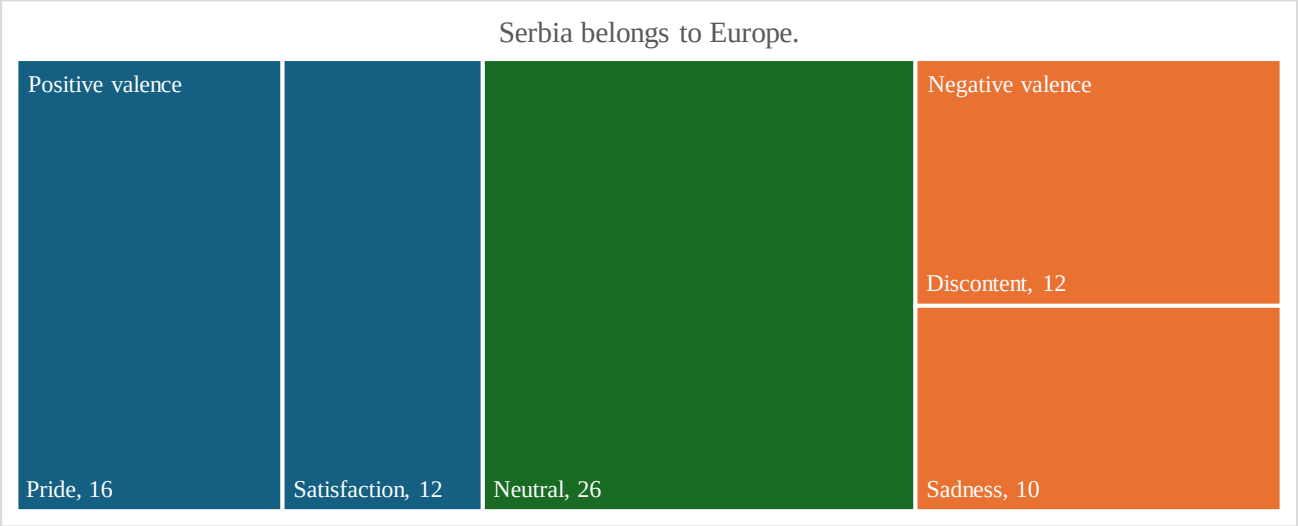


Chart 20. *Affective scheme behind references suggesting that Serbia belongs to Europe, as reflected in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author*



Serbia is Between East and West

The fundamental reality of international relations remains that the world is still divided into 'sides,' which, in security terms, are the West and the East. Despite frequent calls for 'united global efforts' and for the world to come together in addressing contemporary security threats and 'common enemies,' Serbia's strategic framework continues to depict international relations predominantly as a

confrontation between different sides or even blocs. This division appears rather 'frozen,' both in terms of the centres of these opposing sides and Serbia's position on this map. The signs of revision evident in the early 2000s have since weakened, reverting to a Cold War discourse where these two sides are seen as part of a rising conflict, while Serbia remains in a position of being "in between". The most recent developments, particularly the rise of China's power, have not yet altered Serbia's perspective on the global security architecture and its position in it – if anything, they have reinforced it.

The West is primarily seen as the US-centric world, with NATO as its direct manifestation in security terms, and the EU as its 'younger' partner in this security community, known as the Euro-Atlantic community. Security strategies and Defence White Books from 2000s emphasize that the EU and NATO together are of key importance for the security of Southeast Europe where Serbia naturally belongs, and the necessity of cooperation with the countries within the EU security structures and the Partnership for Peace were by rule mentioned jointly. In other words, being European was equated with joining the EU, which was in the early 2000s considered part of the Western security community. Over time, this perspective has noticeably changed, and cooperation with the EU was discursively separated from cooperation with NATO. The EU has increasingly been mentioned in the context of its complementarity not only in regard to Serbia's cooperation with NATO, but with its policy of military neutrality. In other words, while the NATO – EU nexus was still seen as the centre of the Western security community, Serbia's position in the European security community was portrayed as somewhat separate.

The 'gut feeling' about the US-centred West from the Serbian strategic framework, for obvious reasons rooted in contemporary history, is far from positive. NATO's bombing of Serbia is viewed as evidence that the big and powerful do what they want while the weak, usually outside the West, suffer what they must. This sentiment is tied to Serbia's own experience and often extends to other instances of NATO interventionism worldwide. While cooperation with NATO has existed and Serbia's relationship with NATO is formally and informally described as a partnership, it has always been framed within a discourse of necessity. This contrasts with security and defence cooperation with the EU, which is conveyed as natural or as a 'return' to the international and European community to which Serbia has always belonged. Cooperation with NATO is considered sensible, as it is unwise, if not impossible, to avoid cooperating with the alliance that surrounds Serbia. Nevertheless, the overall appeal towards the West, or the notion of Serbia being part of it, is neither cognitively nor affectively attractive and sensible.

The East, according to the Serbian officials' worldview has, on the other hand, remained Russia-centred. Although references to China have increased since the late 2010s, Russia remains synonymous with the East – more importantly, Russia and China are viewed jointly as a unified Eastern bloc. Cognitively, security and defence cooperation with the East is explained as sensible for seemingly not so different reasons than the cooperation with the West, as it makes no sense to turn back on a great power. While the reality of Russia's distance from Serbia is not denied, contrary to NATO, Russia is portrayed as 'traditional ally'. Moreover, while it is not explicitly said like that, the entire strategic framework suggest that Russia is closer and more traditional ally in security and defence matters than any other – regardless of "gaining new friends, we retain the old ones and do not forget them" (Nikolić 2012), Most importantly, the East, and Serbia's cooperation with Russia is often portrayed as a courageous choice that prioritises morality and principles in international relations over pure material benefit. Opposite to the West, this 'side' is portrayed as more principled and noble, more determined to protect the international order as such. Of course, the major cognitive and affective underpinning of this belief comes from the support for Serbia's struggle over keeping Kosovo inside Serbia. In other words, while Serbia is not portrayed as part of it, Serbia's cooperation to the East looks even more sensible, as "giving up friendship with the Russian Federation is not wise, and it would not be moral either" (Vučić 2014). In his 2016 PM expose, Vučić pointed out:

> Some say that we have to choose between Europe and Russia, and while our trade exchanges and connections with Europe are strengthening, we are cultivating with Russia not only historical ties

> that have been built by many generations, but we are also looking at how and in what way we can improve our economic and trade ties. Our progress on the EU integration plan will not be driven by recklessness. (Vučić 2016)

In such world in which Serbia has been cognitively and affectively torn apart between the two relevant 'sides', together with the widespread perception that it is already geographically placed 'on the crossroads', Serbia's position in the strategic framework is most often described as being 'between the West and the East'. While this belief has been present in Serbia's strategic framework ever since, references to it both in strategic documents and forein policy makers' exposes have intensified over time, coinciding with the introduction of military neutrality and the slowdown of the European integration process. One of the most direct policy expressions to this truism is prioritisation of security and defence arrangements which transcendent this division or at least appear to do so by including both sides. Whenever elaborating the components of Serbia's approach to security and defence cooperation, the engagement within the UN comes first with no exception, often followed by the OSCE, and then come the rest. By insisting on its commitment to the multilateral security regimes that have global mandate, and legitimacy comes as a natural expression of Serbia's natural position in the global security architecture. Participation in UN peacekeeping operations is consistently emphasized as evidence of Serbia's commitment to serving as a cooperative and constructive partner in addressing threats to international security.

Very similar to the previously discussed belief that Serbia is placed at the crossroads, the affective force behind this belief is mixed. On one side, references to Serbia's position between East and West and its historical ties to both Eastern and Western civilizations are underpinned with a sense of pride for holding a special, unique position. "Endowed us with a unique perspective on global affairs" (Republika Srbija 2019), Serbia is naturally offered with "opportunities to facilitate communication and collaboration between different geopolitical actors" (Vučić 2016). It is, of course, mentioned that this position "presents both challenges and opportunities," which is why Serbia "understands the importance of maintaining balanced and constructive relations with both sides" and the necessity to "carefully balance our relations with various actors while safeguarding our national sovereignty and pursuing our strategic objectives" (Dačić 2018). To do, it is sensible for Serbia to remain "committed to pursuing a foreign policy that reflects our position as a bridge between different cultural and political spheres" (Tadić 2004).

> Our friendships in the East and the West are our wealth and our strength, and they do not change the fact that Serbia was, is and will be part of the European family of peoples whose stronghold is common values and civilizational achievements. (Vučić 2016)

At the same time, there is also a level of apprehensiveness in regard to the possibility of a rising conflict between the East and West which would have negative consequences on Serbia. Building upon the belief that the powerful to what they want and the weak suffer what they must, there are often references that 'when the elephants fight, the grass gets trampled,' which is why any major conflict between the great powers is not in favour of Serbia. In the interest of Serbia. As once summarised, "when our friends clash with each other, we don't see an opportunity to gain anything. Serbia does not want to be part of those tensions" (Vučić 2014). Since only the "ability to navigate between different geopolitical interests allows us to pursue a foreign policy that serves our national interests while contributing to regional stability", foreign policy officials keep repeating that they "will cooperate with everyone, both in the East and in the West, because Serbia only gains and cannot lose anything" (Nikolić 2012). The ability and willingness to cooperate with both East and West is a special source of pride for Serbia's policymakers:

> I am proud of Serbia today, which behaves in accordance with the principles of international public law, which knows how to condemn violations of international public law, unequivocally and clearly. But I am also proud of Serbia, where there is neither anti-Western nor Russophobe behaviour. We welcome Dostoyevsky, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Hemingway. This is something

that Serbia can be proud of, even if it is one of the few countries in the modern world. (Vučić 2022)

Our friendships in the East and the West are our wealth and our strength, and they do not change the fact that Serbia was, is and will be a part of the European family of peoples whose stronghold is common values and civilizational achievements. This is precisely why Serbia wants and will build the best relations with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, the USA, but it will also do the same with Korea, Japan, the UAE and all other important and not always important countries, but those with which we have built friendship for centuries and for decades in political and economic cooperation. (Vučić 2016)

Chart 21 displays the occurrence of this common-sense claim within the strategic framework, while Chart 22 illustrates the predominant emotions associated with its references.

Chart 21. *Frequency of the references suggesting that is between East and West, as reflectedin the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

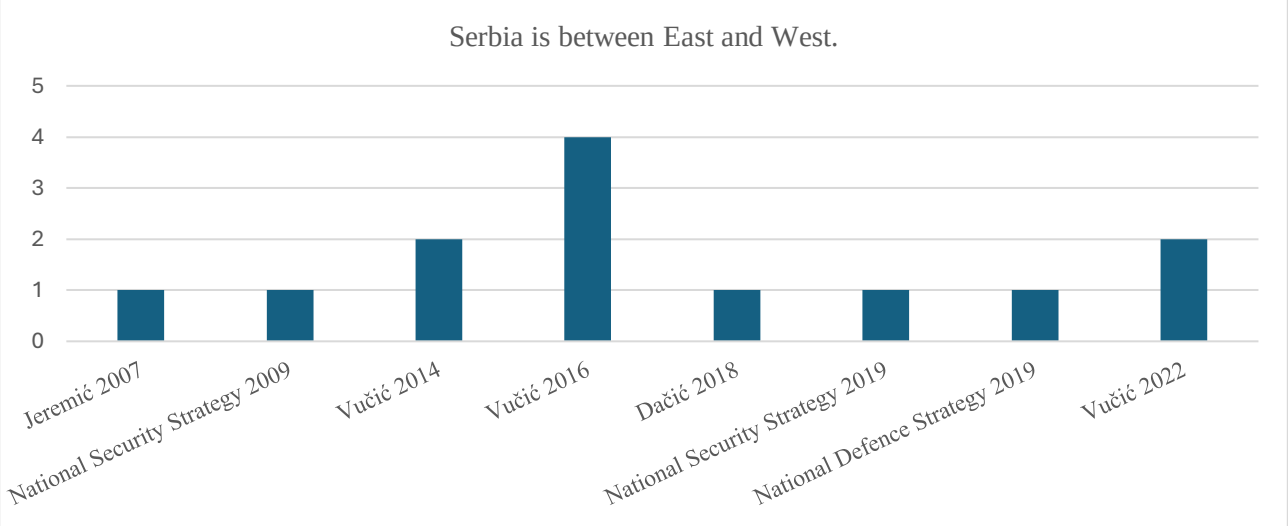
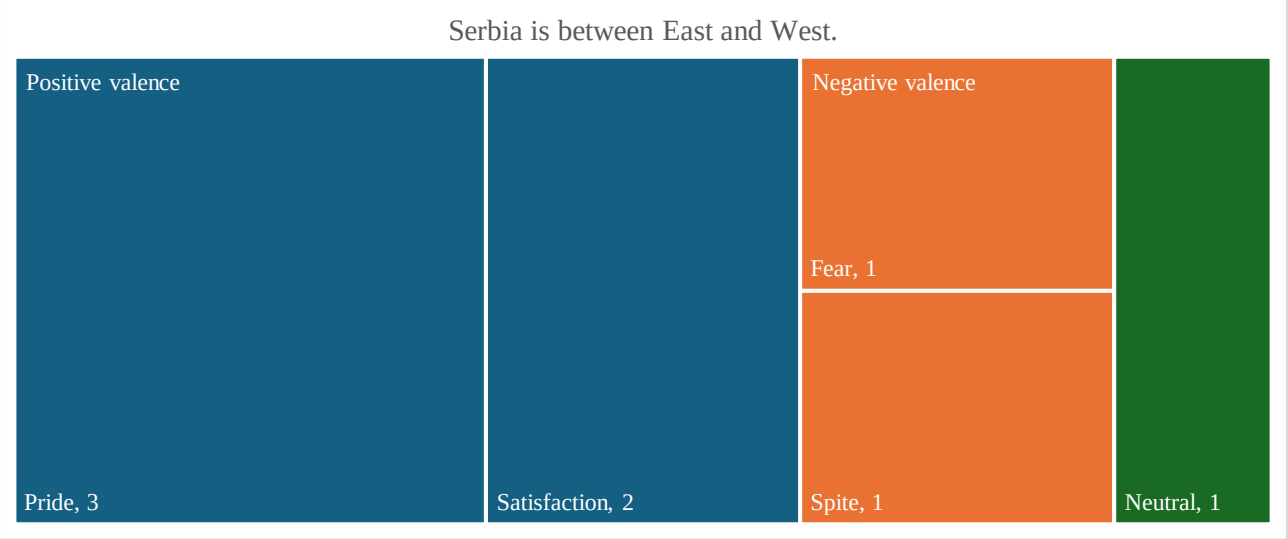


Chart 22*. Affective scheme references suggesting that is between East and West, as reflected in the Serbian strategic framework (2000-2023). Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*

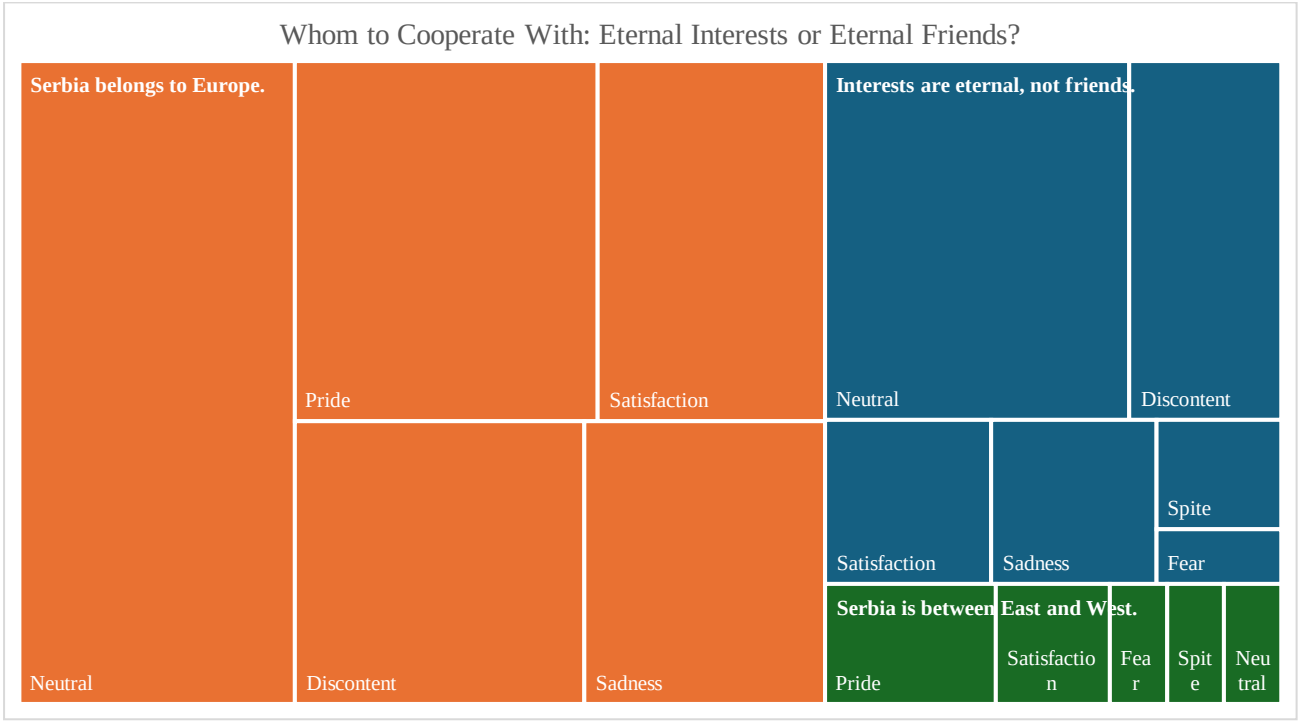


Hence, the strategic framework presents a complex and nuanced picture of Serbia's 'natural' position within the global architecture, reflecting both cognitive understanding and emotional

resonance. A central theme is Serbia's firm belief that it belongs to Europe – an idea that has persisted since the early 2000s and continues to resonate today. This cognitive alignment suggests that Europe represents Serbia's natural environment, not only geographically but also politically, in terms of security, culture, and civilisation, and that Serbia benefits from being under the European security umbrella. However, the emotional undertones of this positioning are far more ambiguous. On one hand, there is pride in Serbia's historical role in defending Europe. On the other, there is deep-seated resentment over the need to constantly prove its European identity and its role in European security. This resentment arises from the perception that Serbia's heroic past in defending European values is often overlooked, fostering a mix of pride, spite, and dissatisfaction. This internal flux regarding its place under the European umbrella is closely linked to Serbia's positioning between the East and the West. This balancing act is seen as an effort to reconcile Serbia's long-standing belief that it does not fully belong to either side. Over time, this dual positioning has become more pronounced, particularly since the late 2010s, with policymakers keen to emphasize that Serbia neither has, nor can afford to have, enemies on any side of the world. Despite aspirations for a clearer European identity, a persistent message, hence remains: Serbia must be pragmatic rather than idealistic, aligning its alliances and enmities to serve its national interests. While Serbian policymakers are not entirely comfortable with this pragmatism, the country's size, strategic position, and unresolved issues prevent it from adopting a confrontational stance. Consequently, Serbia feels compelled to cooperate with all parties, despite its underlying dissatisfaction with the necessity of such pragmatism. This discontent periodically surfaces in the public discourse of policymakers, who express frustration with the status quo. Within the strategic framework itself, subtle distinctions are made between friends and partners, as well as between old and new allies. Ultimately, the overarching message remains that Serbia belongs to Europe, but even this message feels incomplete, underscoring the profound disorientation and uncertainty that define contemporary Serbian foreign policy leadership. A sentence from Prime Minister Vučić's first exposé well illustrates this sense of disorientation:

> One of the greatest prerequisites for Serbia's progress is changing our way of thinking. Until now, we have been known as a people who know what we are against, but not what we are for. We cannot continue like this. The country is exhausted, and only together can we help it. (Vučić 2014)

Chart 23. *Illustration of the relative frequency of four major 'truths' (codes) in regard to the third part of the common sense scheme (whom to cooperate with) based on (emotional) discourse and content analysis of the Serbia's strategic framework. Source: NVivo analysis and illustration by the dissertation author.*



* * *

Considering the content of all three parts of the framework, several observations about the elites' common-sense on international relations in Serbia can be made already now. Overall, the common sense interpretative scheme contained in the Serbian' strategic framework since 2000, capturing the policymakers' ideas about whether to engage, how, and whom in security and defence matters, emerges in a rather pale and weak manner. For a country with such a turbulent history, and especially in the domain of security and defence cooperation, one would expect to see a more pronounced, bolder reflection on what Serbia's right and wrong moves were, what led it to victories and losses of different kinds, and how international relations function in general. Serbia's strategic framework, however, lacks genuine reflections that would indicate a mature and developed collective or institutional intuition regarding the most sensible approach for states to navigate this realm. While drawing lessons from a turbulent history is challenging, the current strategic framework does not indicate that this has even been substantially attempted in the last couple of decades. Instead, a rather vague depiction of the world, comprising of very few and rather timeworn reflections on international relations and Serbia's position in them best illustrate a lack of will or courage of the Serbian policymakers to stop and openly and honestly deliberate on what has Serbia gained and lost from its past decisions, to revise or update its system of knowledge and truths about the world. Despite constantly insisting on how unique or specific Serbia's position within the global and regional security architecture is, hardly any depiction of global security threats and challenges, or on the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to addressing them through security and defence cooperation, seem unique or tailor-made. In other words, for a state with quite a long and diverse history of security and defence cooperation, there is a disappointing scarcity of genuine reflections that offer immediate vision on what states, particularly Serbia, should do when it comes to security and defence cooperation in order to survive and thrive. Those very few that emerge are mild and universal – most of the truths and truisms present in the strategic framework offer passive, inert descriptions rather than practical prescriptions on how to act.

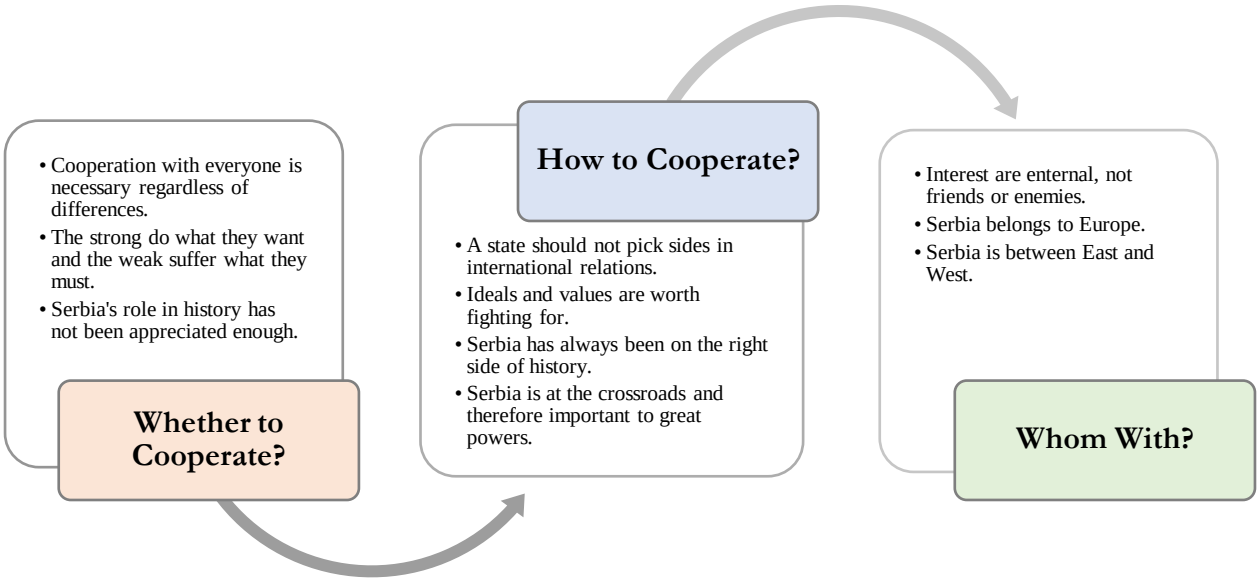
The common sense scheme extracted from the strategic framework appears rather incoherent, as well. While some level of incoherence in a common-sense framework is unavoidable for any individual, let alone the collective, in Serbia, each aspect of the proposed threefold scheme includes nearly contradictory claims about the world and what constitutes sensible behaviour for Serbia. As demonstrated, it simultaneously makes sense for Serbia to maintain a stance of 'neutrality' while also being 'on the right side of history,' both of which it has apparently 'always been.' The wars of the 1990s are referenced as an example for both sensible and detrimental behaviour, in the very same strategic documents or exposes by foreign policy officials. In other words, only a glance at the extracted lessons from the elites' common sense shows that Serbia's strategic framework offers a buffet of often conflicting truths on what the position of small states is and should be, whether having friends is possible or impossible, or whether Serbia belongs to some side or is and should be a buffer. Therefore, not only the prevailing common-sense scheme does not appear particularly strong or bold, the elites' interpretative scheme of international relations – at least as offered in the strategic framework – is also bursting with inconsistencies and contradictions. Holding conflicting views creates cognitive and affective dissonance, making it challenging to navigate life with confidence, as contradictory beliefs pull problem solving in different directions, leading to poor choices and less effective responses to challenges. While flexibility in thinking and judgment is beneficial, a complete lack of internal consistency in the belief system often arouses discomfort, stress and anxiety due to a constant struggle to reconcile conflicting thoughts, values and purpose. The level of incoherency in the common sense interpretive scheme, as observed in the Serbian strategic framework, might lead to a fragmented sense of self, making a stable self-identity difficult to form or maintain.

This incoherence is further highlighted when examining the interplay between the cognitive and affective dimensions underlying the prevailing common sense interpretative framework: emotional discourse analysis suggests that certain 'truths' with a strong cognitive foundation can

elicit markedly different immediate affective reactions, sometimes of opposing valence. Some of the truths and lessons are communicated in more a neutral manner, or with a tone of an overall satisfaction or discontent. Others, as demonstrated, are articulated in a more intensive and more specific manner, even though those emotions are often mixed. In other words, while not all truths and lessons produce as immediate, as strong, and as clear affective reaction, the overall common sense scheme about international relations, as appears in the Serbian strategic framework, is very affectively charged. The affective view of the world appears quite gloomy, as well: while some claims are understandably filled with pride, prevailing emotions seem to include resentment, anger, sadness, and spite. As if the portrayal of the world does not align with the vision Serbian officials wish to project: Serbia may 'know' its rightful place, but it doesn't entirely 'feel' that way. For instance, it acknowledges how a small state should operate in a world ruled by larger powers, but this view lacks emotional appeal, as ideals are considered worth fighting for, and so on. Consequently, very few elements of the elites' interpretive framework align perfectly – the reality of the world and the appropriate behaviour within it regarding security and defence policy do not provide a clear or consistent picture; instead, there exists an equally prevalent narrative that suggests the opposite. Thus, the incoherence in this framework creates ample room for various combinations of truths, allowing for interpretations of Serbia's security and defence cooperation to both make sense and seem nonsensical.

Third, despite stability over the last two decades, policymakers' common sense about international relations has undergone some changes. While the list of truths that policymakers have considered 'natural' and 'self-evident' has remained almost the same from the immediate aftermath of the regime change to the early 2020s, the frequency, order, and tone of their presentation in discourse have changed. Some critical events, such as Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, were pivotal for the interpretative scheme of international relations and Serbia's position within it, bringing to the surface and challenging established truths. Policymakers had to find ways to make sense of reality anew, leading to some rewiring of the existing interpretative scheme, with some 'truths' about the world and Serbia's history being introduced and others relegated to the background, both cognitively and affectively. For instance, references to the principle that states should avoid taking sides have significantly increased following the introduction of military neutrality. Therefore, while consistently incoherent, the policymakers' common sense interpretative scheme has not been entirely static over the last two decades. It has changed more in structure than in substance, with some lessons and truths being 'reinvented' and emphasised, shifting the overall cognitive and affective appeal about optimal security and defence cooperation policy in different directions. In other words, in policymakers' major strategic and political addresses, both written and oral, one can observe that the common-sense understanding of the world among foreign policy elites has, probably also thanks to its incoherence, been responsive and adaptable in the face of critical events – however pale.

***Graph 8**. Elites' Common Sense Interpretive Scheme: Three-partite common-sense interpretive scheme containing cognitive and affective cues about international relations that indicate sensible security and defence cooperation (whether, how and with whom to cooperate), based on the Serbian strategic framework.*



Such outlook of policymakers' interpretation of the world, deprived of bolder and genuine reflections on how international relations work and Serbia's sensible positioning in them likely stems from numerous factors. This perspective may be a direct result of a complex history marked by wars, conflicts, and shifting alliances, making it challenging to establish a consistent and coherent strategic framework for security and defence cooperation. The situation could have been further exacerbated by a lack of time for pause and reflection after decades of wars, compounded by a sense of lagging behind and the pressure to catch up with the rest of Europe. Additionally, it may reflect the policymakers' own confusion about a constantly changing world, which resists permanent judgments. This could also be symptomatic of a deficiency in long-term thinking about international relations and a lack of vision regarding Serbia's direction, influenced by specific 'short-sighted' type of political, strategic, and other cultural factors in the region. Alternatively, it may simply be part of the elites' strategic use of discourse to influence public perception. The reasons behind this, however, remain beyond the purview of this study, warranting further attention and research in future.[95]

Despite all limitations, the captured selection of common sense provides valuable insights into policymakers' interpretive framework for comprehending assessments of the overall sensibility of Serbia's security and defence cooperation, strategies for such cooperation, and preferred partners. It outlines the process of judgment, or at least, justification of the current multifaceted policy, based on at least four pillars. Understanding to what extent the public in Serbia shares a similar common-sense interpretative scheme can tell us whether their vision of sensible foreign policy aligns, which, in turn, influences whether the foreign policies which policymakers propose will receive immediate public support and stick or face rejection, immediate or long term. This sheds light on the current uneven public support for the existing Serbia's security and defence policy, as well as the potential for and direction of future changes.

[95] As said, that the richness of the elite common sense interpretive scheme might also be influenced by the selection of the primary sources. While the strategic framework is a logical first and unavoidable place to look for lessons learned, there is no doubt that a more vivid and comprehensive scheme will be available once the search is widened to include the everyday statements of officials, let alone the wider elite circles in political, cultural, intellectual, and other sectors.

6.2. The Public Making Sense of Serbia's Multifaceted Policy of Security and Defence Cooperation

Understanding whether policymakers and the public hold the same 'natural attitudes' and fundamental answers to fundamental existential questions about Serbia's role and place in international relations allows us to assess whether they rely on similar tools for evaluating specific foreign policies that are supposed to ensure "the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1991, 92). Determining the points of convergence and divergence does not suggest that the public has adopted these views simply because the elites proposed them, nor the reverse. Instead, it helps us understand whether elites and the public share a common sense of how international relations operate and what constitutes 'sensible' behaviour, particularly for Serbia. By illuminating the connection or disconnection between how the public and elites make sense of the world, we can reveal whether, when, and how the public constrains elites in introducing or abandoning certain foreign policies, shedding light on the varying degrees of foreign policy stickiness. Understanding whether, how, and with whom it is sensible to cooperate to the public, in comparison to the policymakers, helps us better comprehend some immediate agreements and persistent disagreements between them discussed earlier. This, in turn, clarifies how the current foreign policy course was introduced, why it persists, and the likelihood and direction of future policy changes and adjustments.

Following the extracted tripartite elite common-sense scheme, the following sections examine whether, how, and to what extent policymakers' worldviews are shared among the general public. As discussed in the section on methodology, determining what constitutes public common sense, or more precisely, setting a 'threshold' value for saying that there is a consensus around something within a society, is challenging. As a first step, the basic descriptive statistics and significance tests help assess the overall degree of agreement or disagreement within the population, giving a percentage of the public that shares some view or opposes it – if more than a half of the public shares some view, it qualifies as common enough to be considered 'common sense' among the public. Furthermore, interpreting mean values in opinion polls on a 1 to 5 scale reveals the existence of social consensus – if the mean is close to 5, indicating strong agreement, or close to 1, indicating strong disagreement, it may suggest a consensus, especially if there is a significant deviation from the midpoint of 3. A mean significantly higher than 3 may indicate a consensus in favour of a statement, while a mean significantly lower than 3 may indicate a consensus against it.

6.2.1. Whether to Cooperate: To Rely on Oneself or Others?

When it comes to the historical lessons on whether it is good for a state, particularly Serbia, to rely on itself or others for security and defence affairs, the strategic framework offered three major lessons which, however, conveyed mixed signals both cognitively and affectively. In sum, cognitively, cooperation in security and defence matters made sense for many reasons, but primarily because isolation did not make sense. However, affectively, self-reliance seemed more appealing due to the disappointments Serbia has faced throughout its history. The survey results suggest that the public's common understanding of cooperation in security and defence matters appears to be quite mixed, as well. Moreover, while the elite's common-sense interpretive scheme does not entirely favour cooperation over self-reliance either, the public's reservations appear even more pronounced.

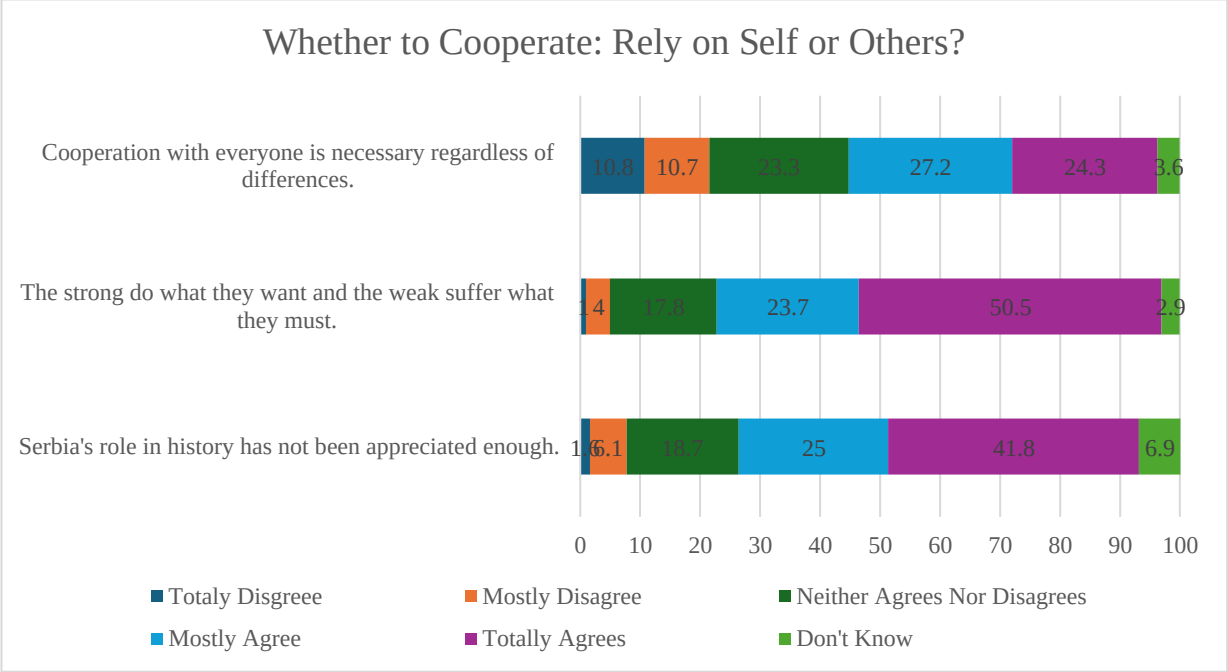
The most direct answer to this question is comprised in the public opinion attitudes on the elites' often claim that *cooperation with everyone is necessary, regardless of differences*. While by far most frequent and voiced reference in the strategic framework, this truism has mixed resonance among the public, with the mean of 3.45 value. On one hand, more than a half of population (51.5%) shares this view – close to half of them completely (24.3%) and slightly more (27.2%) mostly. In that sense, supported by about half of the population, this lesson is, by set criteria, sufficiently common

to be considered common sense among the public, as well. Nevertheless, while half of the population shares this view, what lowers the mean to only slightly above the middle is the fact that a significant portion of the public is not only indifferent (23%) but openly opposed to this claim. In comparison to most other claims, this 'truth' is among the most resisted one among the Serbian public, with about fifth of the population disagreeing with it, either completely (10.8%) or mostly (10.7%). Therefore, although this claim is prominent among the elites, it seems to resonate less strongly with the general public. While it can be considered common enough to be taken as common sense, its appeal is not extremely strong according to the results, neither in terms of prominence (with a rather thin absolute majority of 51%), nor in terms of appeal (with only a fourth of the public completely agreeing). If we consider those who are indifferent and opposed, nearly half of the population lacks an immediate sense that it is logical for a state to cooperate with all parties in international relations, regardless of differences.

The second truth about international relations that policymakers evoke in attempt to make sense of Serbia's multifaceted foreign policy of security and defence cooperation, there is the claim that *the strong do what they want and the weak suffer what they must*. While no claim is as prominent in the strategic framework as the previous one, references to the unfair and unequal conditions also fall under some of the most prominent ones in the strategic framework. Different to the previous one, however, the resonance of this claim among the public is among the strongest of all by both criteria. First of all, 74.2% of the population agreeing with this claim. Moreover, among these three quarters of the public, a quarter of the public mostly (23.7%) agrees with, and as much as half of the population totally agreeing with it (50.5%). Additionally, a remarkably high mean of 4.22 is observed, indicating minimal public resistance to this claim. Only 5% of the population disagrees with this realistic claim, with only 1% completely and 4% mostly. The share of those who neither agree nor disagree is at 17.8%, which is below the share of undecided for the majority of surveyed statements. The realistic view of international relations, prevalent in the strategic framework, appears dominant among the Serbian public, as well.

More directly tied to Serbia's military history, the third claim within the strategic framework, which is relevant for assessing the value of cooperation in security and defence matters, suggests that *Serbia's role in European history has gone unappreciated.* While not mentioned as frequently or as explicitly as the previous two points, policymakers often convey a sentiment that Serbia's significant contributions to Europe's defence have been largely forgotten, mainly due to the events of the 1990s. Similar as with the previous truism, this policymakers' common sense conception appears to be widely shared among the public as well, with the mean of 4.07 value. About two thirds of the Serbian public (68%) believe that Serbia's role in the European history and everything Serbia has done for Europe is not appreciated, with as much as 41.8% agreeing completely and 25% mostly. On the other hand, the share of those who mostly disagree with this claim is only at 6.1% and only 1.6% completely disagrees with this claim. Again, similar to the previous statement, less than a fifth of the public (18.7%) is undecided or indifferent to this claim. From the perspective of both criteria of prevalence and impact, this claim appears widely and deeply embedded among the public, making up an important part of the interpretative scheme of international relations and Serbia's position it.

***Chart 24**. Public opinion on major notions about international relations and security and defence matters from the first part of the elites' common sense interpretive scheme (whether to cooperate).*



6.2.2. How to Cooperate: To 'Hedge' or 'Bandwagon'?

As discussed above, this part of elites' common-sense interpretive framework offers four historical truths or lessons. Once again, these lessons do not offer clear cognitive and affective guidance on what type of cooperation is most sensible overall – it remains uncertain whether a state, particularly Serbia, should pursue integration within existing security and defence frameworks or seek to balance between different sides in global affairs. While there is a general belief that balancing is more sensible, especially given Serbia's position 'at the crossroads,' there is also an emotional inclination not to remain on the sidelines when ideals and values are at stake. There is also an affective appeal towards not remaining aside if ideals and values are at stake. Moreover, that is how, according to the elites, Serbia has historically aligned itself with 'the right side of history.' The survey results indicate that this ambiguity, along with the mixed cognitive and affective cues, is also present in the public's common-sense.

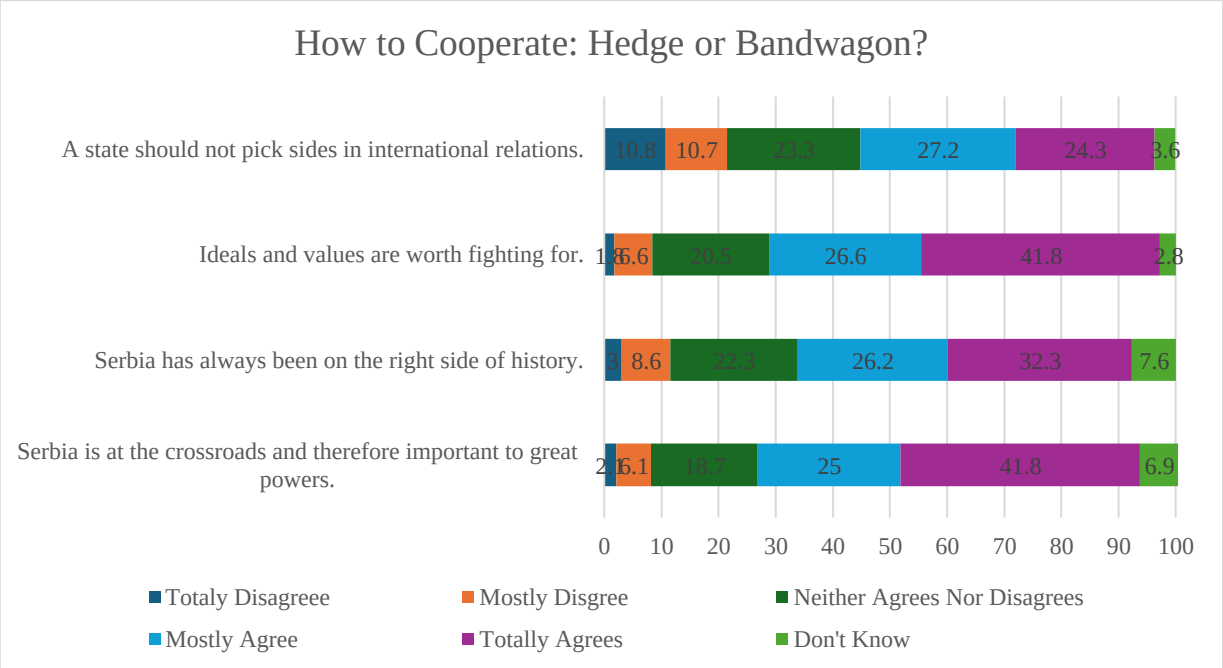
Concerning the most straightforward question of *whether it is necessary to choose a side in international relations*, the survey results reveal a societal consensus that somewhat contrasts with the message of the strategic framework. Although the mean is not particularly high (3.63), above a half of the population (52.5%) believes that states should pick a side in international relations, with 26.1% completely agreeing with it, and 28% mostly. The resistance to it is also weaker than one might expect having in mind the strategic framework, as only 14.2% of the Serbian public disagrees with this statement, some of them totally (5.1%) and some mainly (9.1%). In other words, while the elites advocate for balancing as the most sensible option, only about 15% of the public shares this view, and they do so with varying degrees of decisiveness. Finally, more than a quarter of the Serbian population (27.8%) neither agrees nor disagrees, indicating that, at least for a third of the population this is not an immediate or perhaps even relevant 'truth' when judging some foreign events or policies. Overall, having in mind that about the third of population has a very strong attitude on how rewarding picking sides in international relations is (regardless of agreeing or disagreeing), that about a third finds this claim mostly true or false, and about a third is undecided, it appears that this lesson indeed holds significant importance within the interpretive framework of the public in Serbia.

A far stronger consensus appears around the lesson that the ideals and values are worth fighting for at any cost, with a mean of 4.03. Over two-thirds of the population shares this view, among whom as high as 41.7% completely, and 26.6% mostly. Less than a tenth, or precisely 8.4%, expresses disagrees with such depiction of international relations, 6.6% mostly and only 1.8% completely. The remaining fifth of the population (20.5%) has no strong attitude toward this claim, neither affirmative nor negative. Having in mind that public believes that picking sides is sensible, and that ideals and values are worth fighting for, it looks like their interpretive scheme is less 'practical' in a sense that, different to what the strategic framework suggests, staying aside is something that does not necessarily makes the most sense. Most likely, the normative component, underpinned with strong affective elements prevails in the public's understanding, so what is right needs also to feel right from the perspective of the endorsed norms and values.

Nevertheless, perhaps surprisingly, the policymakers' view that Serbia has always been on the right side of history is not as high as one might have expected, (with a mean of 3.82 value), especially knowing that the there is a widespread reading that Serbia's role in history has been insufficiently recognised and rewarded. The percentage of those directly rejecting this idea is slightly more than a tenth, with 11.6% of the public opposing this claim either entirely (3%) or mostly (8.6%). However, close to a quarter of the public (22.3%) has ambivalent attitude, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. The remaining 58.5% agree with this depiction of Serbia's role in history, with about the third of the public agreeing completely (32.3%) and 26.2% mostly. While there are some evident reservations, nearly two-thirds of the public hold an overall positive view of Serbia's historical track record when it comes to choosing sides during critical moments.

Finally, a widely resonant belief among the public is the notion that Serbia is 'at the crossroads' and thus holds strategic importance to the great powers, with this sentiment scoring a mean of 4.06. More than two thirds of the public agree with this depiction of Serbia's position in the world (69.7%), out of whom 27.8% agrees mostly and as high as 41.9% agrees totally. Less than a fifth of population (8.3%) disagrees with this claim either completely (2.1%) or mostly (6.2%). No specific attituded is evoked among 17.4% of the Serbian public. Having in mind the criteria of both prevenance and strength of this truth among the public, it indeed qualifies as one of the pillars of their interpretive scheme of international relations and Serbia's position in them.

***Chart 25**. Public opinion on major notions about international relations and security and defence matters from the second part of the elites' common sense interpretive scheme (how to cooperate).*



6.2.3. Whom to Cooperate With: Eternal Interests or Eternal Friends?

When it comes to the position of Serbia in international relations, the obvious disagreement among elites about where Serbia belongs is mirrored by the public, testifying to the incoherent 'common sense' about Serbia's natural place in the world. In essence, the strategic framework suggests that Serbia belongs to the European security community, but this Europe is seen as neither East nor West, remaining in between. An extremely high share of the public remains ambivalent about any claim regarding Serbia's natural position (close to or above a third), signalling that, besides political, a social consensus about Serbia's natural position in the world is also far from being achieved.

First, the claim that there are no eternal friends, only interests, is widely shared (mean 3.69) among the Serbian public. About 60% of the Serbian public agrees with this depiction of patterns of amity and enmity in international relations, half of which completely (30%) and half mostly (29.5%). The share of the Serbian public who disagrees with this statement is about 15%, with 9.4% strongly disagreeing and 4.8% disagreeing to a certain extent. Slightly more than a fifth of the population is ambivalent to this claim (22%). Similar to the public perception that cooperation with everyone is necessary despite differences, the results suggest that about two-thirds of the Serbian public are ready for some kind of pragmatic compromise and cooperation without considering any nation as a 'natural' ally or enemy. Again, similar to the public attitude on whether cooperating with everyone is sensible, there is also a more exclusive segment of the public who believes that alliances and enmities are a far more relevant category in deciding a sensible strategy in international affairs over shifting interests.

When it comes to the issue of Serbia's natural environment in global security architecture, the overall impression from the public opinion poll results is very similar to the confusion noticed in the strategic framework proposed by the elites. The most common belief, and actually the only one which can be considered common enough, is that Serbia belongs to Europe (3.79). More than half of the population (57%) agrees with this statement, out of which 27.6% completely and 29.4% mostly. Less than a tenth of the Serbian public, on the other hand, resists this claim, most of them to some degree (6%) and a small part of them completely (3%). A quarter of the public (25.4%), however, has mixed feelings about this statement, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with it. If the 'don't know' answers (8.6%) are added, it appears that a third of the population (34%) does not endorse this claim as an immediate truth that comes to mind when thinking about how international relations look and what is the most self-evident truth about Serbia's position in them. While the idea about Serbia's belonging to Europe is frequently endorsed in the strategic framework and seems to enjoy a very strong political consensus on the elite level, the public, however, appears more divided on this matter.

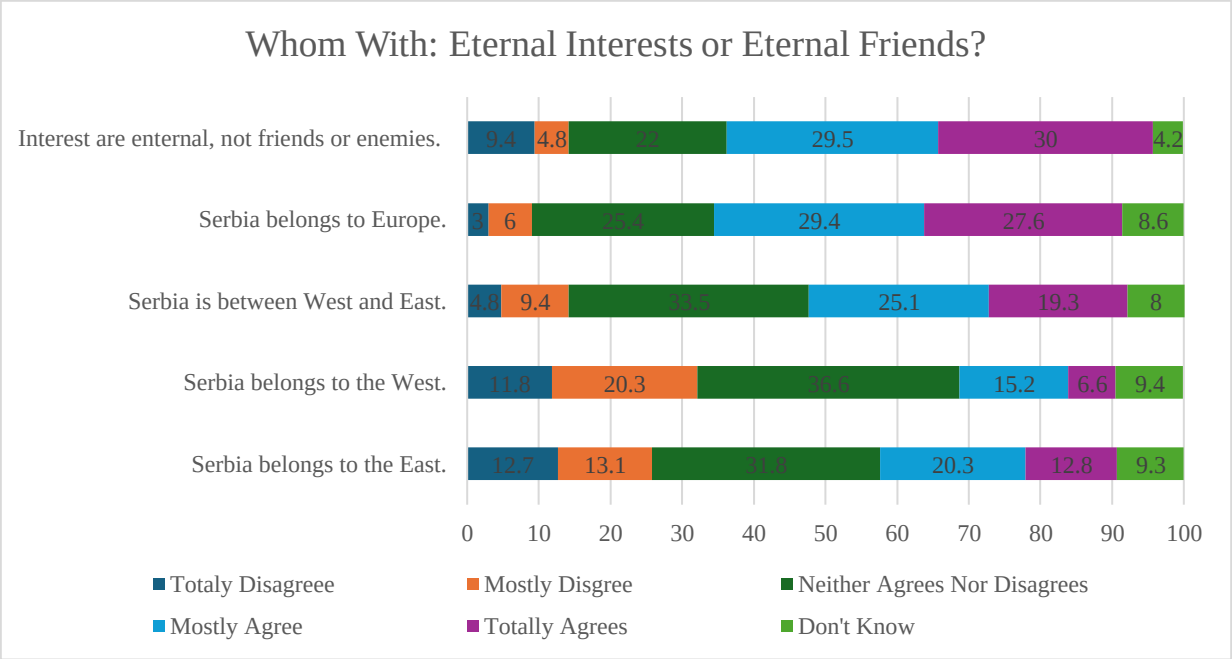
The idea that Serbia is between the East and the West is common among the public (3.49), although not to a sufficient extent to be considered common sense since less than half of the population (44.5%) shares this view, most of whom mostly (25.1%) and others completely (19.3%). The share of 14.2% of the public resists this claim, some entirely (9.4%), others mostly (4.8%). A third of the population, however, neither agrees nor disagrees (33.5%), and together with 8% of those who opted for 'don't know', a significant portion of the public (41.5%) does not find this sufficiently relevant, whether in an affirmative or negative manner. In other words, while the strategic framework increasingly pinpoints this notion of Serbia being between the East and the West, and while this is indeed an often-heard reference, it appears that not even half of the public believes that it depicts Serbia's position in the world, at least at the current moment. Nevertheless, the survey results suggest that none of these options separately attract wider support either.

More specifically, the public agreement with the claim that Serbia belongs to the East remains below the threshold to be considered common sense, both from the aspect of the share of the population that agrees with this claim (33.1%) or from the point of intensity of that support (the mean is almost at the perfect middle with the score of 3.08). Out of the third of the public who endorses this depiction of Serbia's natural environment in the global security architecture, 12.8% agree completely and 20.3% keep some reservations. A quarter of the Serbian public, however, disagrees completely (12.7%) or mostly (13.1%), while the remaining third says neither (31.8%). Moreover,

the usual number of 'do not know' answers is almost double, making up a tenth of the Serbian public (9.3%). Therefore, a relative majority of the public (41.3%) appears to find this statement largely irrelevant and is unlikely to consider it when assessing what constitutes sensible behaviour for Serbia in international relations.

Nevertheless, the survey results suggest that, according to the public, Serbia's natural place is even less within the West, as this is the least supported statement (mean 2.83). Only about a quarter of the Serbian public shares this view, with most agreeing to some extent (15.2%) and a very small portion completely agreeing (6.6%). The resistance to this claim is notably strong, the highest among all claims regarding Serbia's natural position. Namely, close to a third of the public is against this view (32.1%), composed of those disagreeing with this statement entirely (11.8%) and mostly (20.3%). Finally, almost half of the public (46%) does not seem to find it relevant at all, as 36.6% said they neither agreed nor disagreed with this claim, and 9.4% chose the 'do not know' option.

***Chart 26**. Public opinion on major notions about international relations and security and defence matters from the third part of the elites' common sense interpretive scheme (whom to cooperate with).*



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Before examining the (dis)connect between the elite and public common-sense interpretive schemes, a few comments on the survey results can be made, immediately revealing some indications of the puzzlingly uneven stickiness of the four policies under research. First and foremost, the Serbian public clearly does not appear to hold a unanimous perspective on international relations or Serbia's role within them, both current and aspirational. While most of the identified claims meet the criteria for being considered common sense (as outlined in the methods section), the majority gather a "thin" consensus, shared by only about half of the population. These thin majorities do not indicate immediately deep polarisation, with society split equally for and against, but rather a lack of strong consensus. Nevertheless, out of the ten claims analysed, four do exhibit a broader or "thick" consensus, with two-thirds or more of the public in agreement. These claims have a very high average score (exceeding 4) and encounter minimal opposition, with fewer than 10% of the public disagreeing, approaching near-universal social consensus. Hence, the public's common sense about

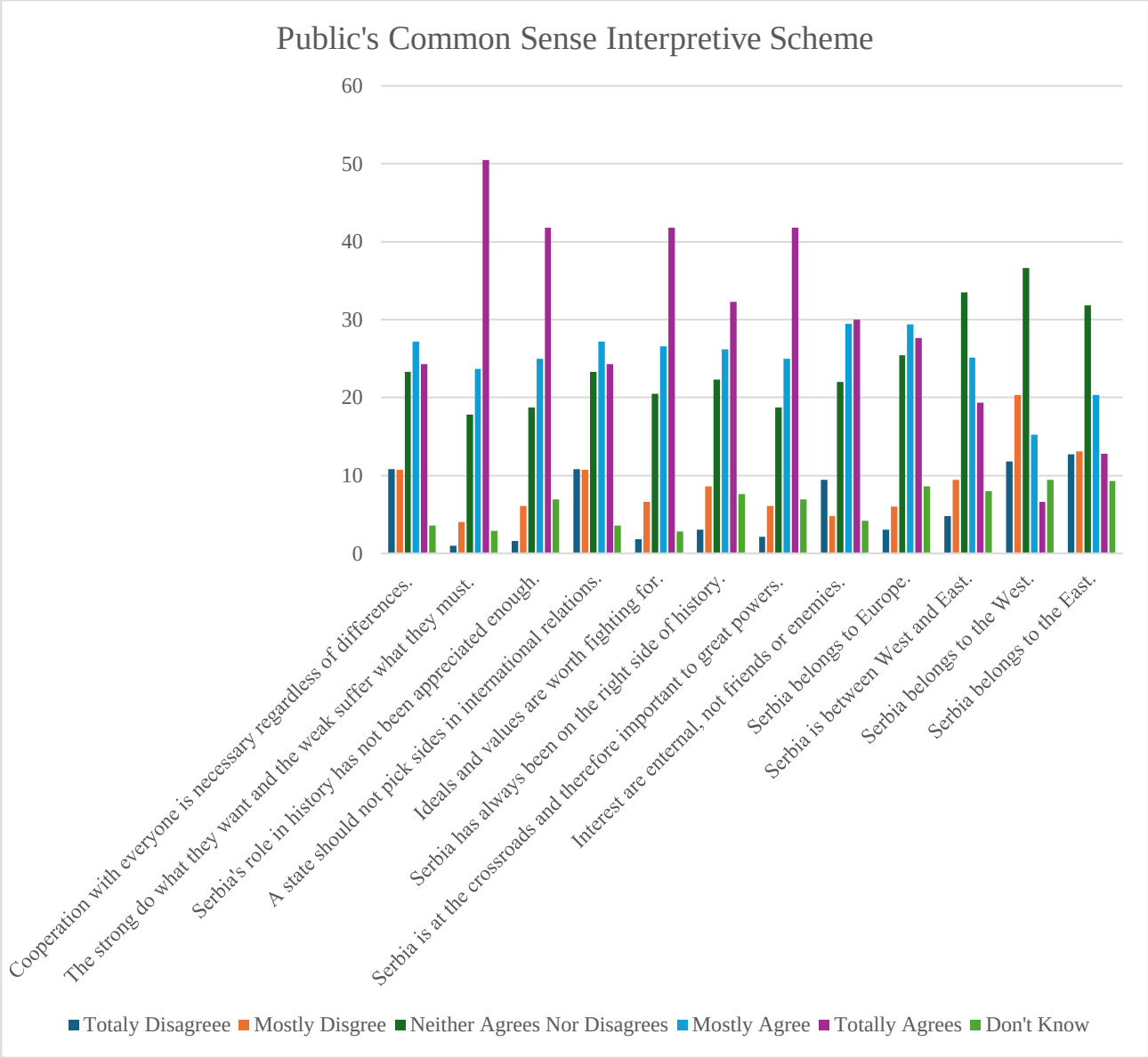
international relations, regardless of elites, does not appear to be uniform or homogeneous, yet it seems to be cohesive enough to bridge many traditional divisions in the Serbian society.

Second, the public's interpretive framework is also characterised by internal inconsistencies. While there are some differences in regard to the elites' common sense, discussed later, the public's common sense framework is not particularly straightforward either, offering mixed signals on all three major questions – cognitively, affectively, or both. While the uneven support for different statements allows for assessing which lessons are strongly endorsed or deemed highly relevant, almost all of them are, however, relevant enough to be present in the framework and waiting to be mobilised. While the ways in which affective-cognitive interplay plays out will be discussed later, it is worth noting here that the most endorsed claims seem to be those with stronger emotional underpinnings rather than neutral ones. Moreover, claims expressing a certain level of resentment toward the current world order, whether as anger or spite, appear more widespread than those conveying positive sentiments. This suggests that the Serbian public's common sense scheme is primarily affective, with a significant portion likely feeling frustrated with the status quo. While their sense of stability and predictability of the world and their self-identity may not be diminished – since even negative attachment can produce strong stabilisation effects – it is important to note that this is not the stability and predictability they favour, particularly when anticipating their reactions to potential foreign policy changes or shifts in the world order.

Finally, a considerable portion of respondents remains undecided across all surveyed statements. The proportion of individuals who neither agree nor disagree rarely falls below one-fifth, and when including those who selected 'do not know,' the total share of undecided individuals can reach nearly one-third of the population. While some general statements related to the international relations receive strong support, those directly addressing Serbia's geopolitical orientation usually leave a substantial number of respondents unsure. Particularly, statements that involve Serbia's position in regard to the East and West result in over 40% of respondents expressing uncertainty about their views. While the proportion of undecided respondents may signal that the definitions of the West and the East are not as clear or relevant to the Serbian public as they once were, it is more likely that, similar to the elite perspective, the Serbian public does not associate the concept of Europe exclusively with either side. What is particularly perplexing, however, is that there appears to be no consensus about the idea of Serbia existing in a space between these two sides either. All this indicates a significant level of public confusion and unease regarding Serbia's position within the current global landscape of East-West conflicts, even among those who consider Serbia's European affiliation to be self-evident. If a large share of the public is unable to provide any answer to some of the basic questions on the international order, and particularly where Serbia belongs in it, it is unlikely that a stable sense of the world and self-identity can exist or emerge among the Serbian population.

While future, more bottom-up research on the public's common sense interpretive framework is needed, as discussed in the methods section, the presented survey results provide valuable insights into the dominant worldview among the Serbian public. Moreover, by further highlighting the points of convergence and divergence between the publics and elites' common sense – serving as a form of ultimate ontological security – these findings make a significant contribution to the main research aim of understanding the stickiness of foreign policies in Serbia. Therefore, a brief discussion of the public-elite common sense (dis)connect in Serbia follows.

Chart 27. *Public Common-Sense Interpretive Scheme: Distribution of public support for the claims within three-partite common-sense interpretive scheme containing cognitive and affective cues about international relations that indicate sensible security and defence cooperation (whether, how and with whom to cooperate), based on the Serbian strategic framework.*



6.3.The Public – Elite Common Sense (Dis)Connect in Serbia

Given the central role that security and defence play in shaping a country's identity and position in international relations, the fundamental principles, truths, and lessons derived here regarding whether to cooperate, how, and with whom – according to Serbian policymakers and the public – are broadly applicable and likely exert significant influence on other aspects of Serbia's foreign policy. Therefore, the analysis of the public-elite nexus within the dominant common sense interpretive framework of international relations in Serbia should be viewed more broadly, as it offers valuable insights into the overall worldview and Serbia's place within it. Understanding the points of convergence and divergence in common sense at both elite and societal levels (Graph 9) will, in turn, deepen our

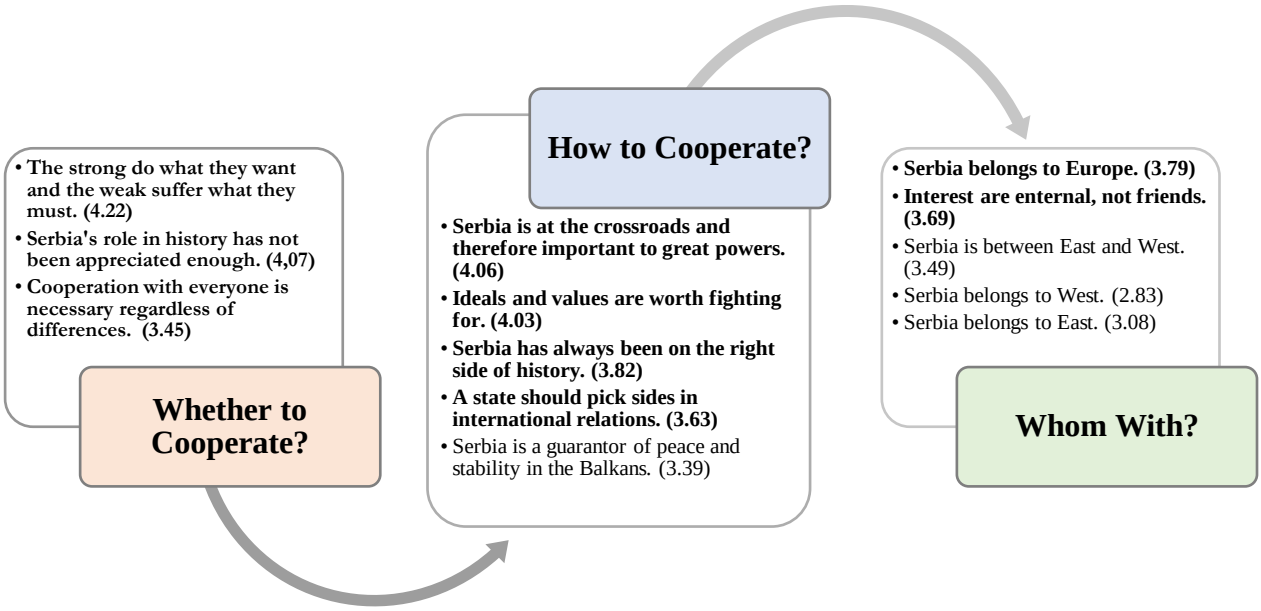
understanding of the policymaking process, the boundaries of 'sensible' and 'natural' roles that shape the current trajectory, and the likelihood of potential changes in Serbia's foreign policy.

Public opinion on the key lessons from the strategic framework reveals that there is likely no uniformed perspective on international relations within the Serbian society, shared by the elites and the public. On one hand, the results indicate that the general public does not uniformly accept all of the 'truths' that have been put forth by policymakers over the last two decades. Not only is public agreement with these ideas inconsistent in terms of breadth and intensity, but in some cases, the public's stance opposing those of the elites is strong and widespread enough to be considered public's common sense. Conversely, not everything regarded as common sense by the general public in Serbia is openly endorsed by policymakers – judged by the strategic framework, it appears that some widely accepted public views have not received official acknowledgment from the foreign policy elites. The lack of support for certain elites' statements, coupled with a significant portion of the public remaining undecided or indifferent about many aspects of these statements, further highlights the issue. In other words, a rough look on the overall survey results indicates that, the political and social consensus between the Serbian public and foreign policy elites on the functioning of international relations and what constitutes a 'sensible' path forward for Serbia is not the strongest possible. At least, it is not as strong as to foster an immediate agreement about any foreign policy that policymakers formulate or justify relying on the interpretive scheme outlined in the contemporary strategic framework.

However, there seems to be no striking disconnect between the elites and the public common sense interpretive scheme in Serbia either. Moreover, keeping in mind that most of the elites' truths do enjoy support from the absolute majority of the public, and some are shared by more than two-thirds of the public, one could say that there is a fair and solid distribution of sensible in Serbian society regarding the major lessons on how security and defence cooperation function and what is rewarding in international relations as they appear today. While, in absolute numbers, the majority is not as 'thick' with all aspects of the elite interpretive scheme, in relative terms, the share of those who agree with the elites' worldview is significantly higher than those opposing it, considering the share of the undecided. Additionally, aside from one significant point of contention – whether it makes sense to pick sides, on which the public differs from the elites – most of the truths that are not openly endorsed by the public simply do seem relevant to the rest. In other words, while the convergence between the public and elites' common sense interpretive scheme is not total, the results do not indicate a striking disconnect either, which would suggest an immediate public opposition to specific foreign policies that may arise from the elites' common sense perspective.

Moreover, the apparent association between the public's and elites' common sense suggests that the incoherence observed within the elite framework also extends to the public's perspective. As reviewed, many of the elites' statements convey mixed signals, both cognitively and emotionally, often even within the same belief. Practically, no part of the tripartite scheme proposed by the elites offers a clear direction on how to act. The general level of public agreement with such elites' scheme suggests that public opinion on Serbia's cooperation – whether, how, and with whom – is similarly unclear, incoherent and confusing. Given the scheme's inherent incoherence among both the public and elites, the varying stickiness of the investigated policies seems clearer as well, including the fact that even the most supported policies, such as military neutrality and cooperation with Russia, lack unanimous and unwavering public backing. A closer examination of each of the three components of the framework provides deeper insights into the (dis)connections between public and elite interpretive frameworks, which can significantly influence and limit elites' ability to shape public attitudes toward specific security and defence cooperation policies, as it is now, or as it might be.

Graph 9. *The Public – Elite Common Sense (Dis)Connect: Public opinion (mean values) concerning the three-part elite common-sense interpretive scheme about international relations that indicate sensible security and defence cooperation (whether, how and with whom to cooperate), as reflected in the Serbian strategic framework. Statements that surpass the common-sense threshold are highlighted in bold.*



When it comes to the first scheme part on *whether cooperation makes sense* at all, there seems to be a solid convergence since all three lessons from the elites' framework pass the threshold of being considered public common sense, both in scale and intensity of support. Nevertheless, although the frequency and intensity of policymakers' references suggest a tendency towards cooperation (even under a tone of necessity), the public's reservations seem even more pronounced. The most frequent claim from the elites' framework – and also the most direct one regarding the question of whether a state should rely on others in security and defence matters – suggests that cooperation with everyone is necessary, resonates the least among the public. While the other two claims are invoked by elites less frequently and often in between the lines, they seem to be considered true by a wider part of the public, and with more certainty. Acknowledging the power dynamics in international relations and the general lack of recognition of Serbia's contribution to world and European history, these statements appear to reflect that the public's 'gut feeling' about security and defence cooperation is filled with dissatisfaction, disappointment, and resentment. These affects, apparently, stand in the way of viewing cooperation as necessary and beneficial, as the elites propose. In other words, when it comes to the fundamental question of whether it makes more sense to rely on oneself or others in security and defence matters, the public also seems torn between the awareness of the necessity of cooperation and the rules of the game that do not allegedly benefit a country like Serbia. It appears, however, that the public's intuition tends to lean in the opposite direction, largely driven by the emotional aspect of common sense reasoning. In other words, survey results indicate that public opinion could be easily swayed to support policies emphasising self-reliance since this aligns better with the cognitive and affective making sense of the world and Serbia's place in it – as, bottom line, evidenced by a quick acceptance of country's sudden proclamation of military neutrality.

A disconnect between the public and elites' interpretive schemes is more pronounced regarding the cues on *how the necessary cooperation should look like*, since they seem to disagree on the most direct lesson in this regard. Contrary to the increasingly clear and vocal stance that Serbia should maintain neutrality in international relations within the strategic framework, more than half of the public holds the opposite view, favouring the idea of taking sides. While not the entire public supports this claim, there is still sufficiently widespread and intense support for this claim to be considered common sense. The 'sides' appear to be normatively judged by the Serbian public since

the public also seems to be strongly convinced that ideals and values are worth fighting for and, to a lesser extent, that Serbia has always been on the right side of history. In this sense, the public's reasoning may be more straightforward than the elites'. The public believes that distinct sides exist, defined by ideals and values, and that Serbia should establish its position by choosing the right side, rather than trying to maintain good relations with everyone, since this approach seems to be one of the strongest sources of pride and self-worth for the Serbian public historically. Nevertheless, while they are more ready to pick a side, they still strongly agree with the elites' depiction that Serbia is at a crossroads and therefore important to great powers, since this is the most supported statement of all in this part of the interpretive scheme. Hence, the cognitive-affective misfit between knowing what is right and feeling what is right remains unresolved, even among the public in Serbia. This misfit creates a state of limbo where neither cooperation (let alone integration) garners immediate or widespread public support, nor does the policy of pure balancing escape these challenges. The current perception of the four pillars indeed mirrors this, as even the most supported aspects of security and defence cooperation fall short of achieving a qualified majority in the Serbian society.

Finally, when it comes to the part of the scheme on *who to cooperate with*, there again seems to be a solid divergence as none of the claims proposed by the policymakers appeared particularly true or relevant to the public. More than half of the public acknowledges the pragmatism in international relations, conforming to the elites' often claim that there are or should be no natural friends, only interests. However, regarding where Serbia belongs, the public seems to be even more confused than the elites. Despite the strong and continuous reassurances in the strategic framework that Serbia belongs to Europe, the public does not seem to be as convinced since only a thin majority agrees with this depiction of Serbia's natural geopolitical and strategic environment. Moreover, while the elites' confusion is settled by the claim that Serbia is between the East and the West, the public is unsure about this as well. Based on the survey findings, the exact location of the Europe that Serbia belongs to remains ambiguous – it's neither in the East nor the West, nor in between. While the elites assert that Serbia occupies a space between East and West – suggesting that the country should aim for balance in international relations – the public's uncertainty about Serbia's natural place in the global security architecture is particularly interesting. This is especially true given that the public tends to prefer aligning with one side over hedging. In sum, while the public feels that balancing does not make particularly sense, it does not seem to have a clear cue what is a sensible side to choose – the cues against whom appear clearer, with the dominant anti-US and anti-Western sentiment, but they are not straightforward or widespread enough to be considered common sense either. The fact that half of the public responds with 'neither nor' and 'do not know' when asked where Serbia belongs best testifies to the erosion of its fundamental trust in its natural environment and reflects a profound crisis of self-identity in the Serbian society.

Overall, the degree of convergence or divergence between the elites' and the public's interpretive frameworks, along with corresponding inconsistencies, suggests considerable societal confusion on all levels about how international relations truly operate and Serbia's natural role and position within them. Both elites and the public hold differing, even divergent views on global security and defence cooperation, and how Serbia should navigate these domains. Although 'out of tune', the elite's interpretive framework leans towards balancing in international relations, advocating for cooperation with all parties irrespective of differences, as the most suitable stance for Serbia, situated as it is at the crossroads between the West and the East in Europe. The public is aware of Serbia's strategic position at the crossroads but apparently recognises the wisdom of aligning with one side in the realm of great power politics. Nevertheless, while it appears to believe that aligning based on ideals and values could be the most beneficial approach, the public does not view any particular alignment as inherently natural for Serbia. While there is broad (not so strong, though) enough consensus that Serbia is a part of Europe, the public appears to be uncertain or, more likely, dissatisfied with where this positioning leads within the global security and defence architecture. It appears that Serbia, according to the public, does not belong to the West, nor it belongs to the East either – however, positioning itself in between does not seem appealing either cognitively or

emotionally. Therefore, despite some differences, neither framework appears fully coherent or comprehensive, while the boundaries of what is sensible seem to remain unsettled, indicating a weakening of common sense and a deep state of anxiety among the Serbian public and policymakers. The degree and nature of cognitive and emotional alignment suggest that negotiating a sensible middle ground between policymakers and the public is both possible and likely necessary, as perfect alignments are unlikely to emerge, either in the short or the long term. This is further evidenced by the uneven stickiness of Serbia's multifaceted security and defence cooperation policies, to which the next chapter turns.

7. Uneven Stickiness of Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation Policy: An Assessment of the Proposed Model

Assessing the extent to which the public relies on common sense when evaluating specific foreign policies can shed light on how effective, adaptable, or rigid this ontological security mechanism is in addressing the often competing demands of material and ontological security. Uncovering the interaction between cognitive and affective cues within the common sense interpretive scheme can illuminate the unequal acceptance of specific directions within Serbia's multifaceted security and defence cooperation policies among the public. The common sense schemes behind the support or resistance to policies of cooperation with the EU, NATO, Russia, or military neutrality, can show how common sense performs the 'making sense' of Serbia's security and defence cooperation policies – what parts of common sense interpretive scheme are triggered by specific foreign policy proposals and in what way. This, in turn, reveals the space within which policymakers in Serbia can manoeuvre and show why and how some existing or potential foreign policies immediately resonate with the Serbian public, while others remain unaccepted regardless of the information provided by the policymakers. This could importantly highlight whether inconsistencies within the interpretive framework, or public indecision, hold potential for transformation, improvement, and progress in policymaking and public-elite consensus – whether these factors contain the seeds of change or the emergence of *bon sens*e.

7.1. Semi-Sticky Security and Defence Cooperation with the EU

As said, the preliminary insights from the literature into both dimensions of stickiness of Serbia's cooperation with the EU among the public are initially tested with two simple questions on how 'sensible' is for Serbia to, first, cooperate and, second, abandon its cooperation with the EU. While public perception of certain foreign policy changes as 'sensible' does not necessarily guarantee support to it (e.g. voting yes on a potential referendum), it significantly increases the likelihood. More importantly, from the perspective of ontological security, our primary focus, this perception holds greater relevance than exact vote counts.

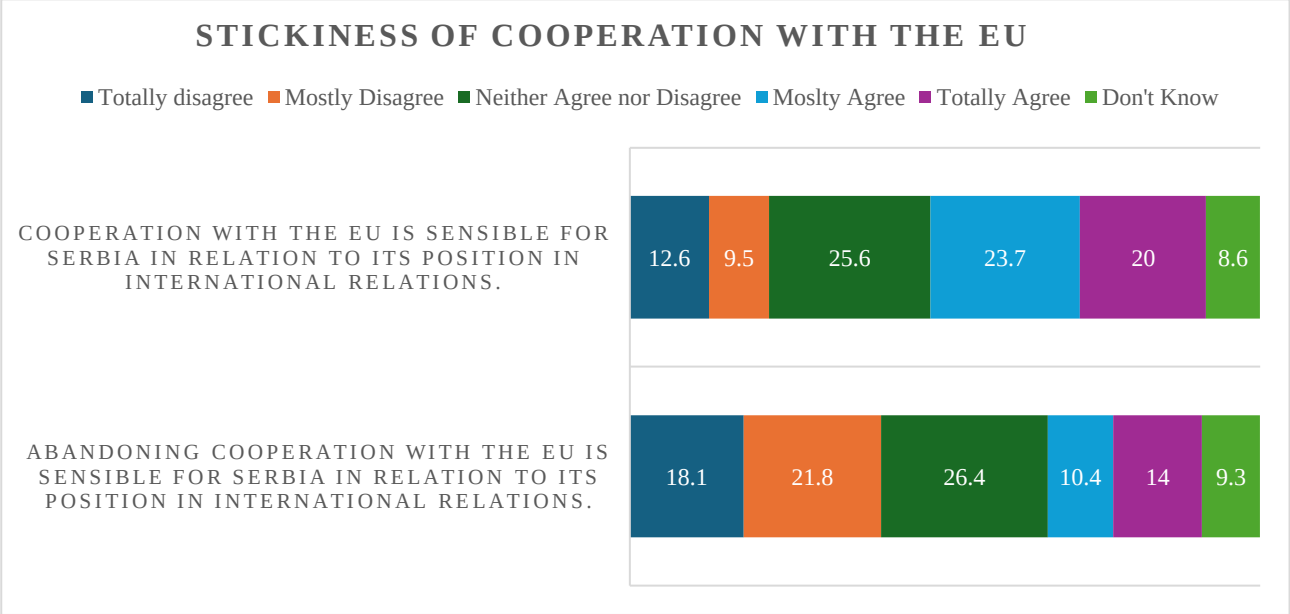
First, when asked to what extent the cooperation with the EU is sensible for Serbia with regard to its position in international relations, the results indicate that introduction of this foreign policy is to be relatively easy, since even today, for a solid share of the Serbian public this policy makes sense (mean 3,32). About 43.7% find this aspect of Serbia's security and defence policy sensible, either completely (20%) or mostly (23.7%). On the other hand, 22.7% does not find this foreign policy sensible, either not at all (12.6%) or mostly (9.5%). A quarter of the population (25.6%) opted the option of 'neither nor', while 8.6% remained unopinionated, making over a traditional third of undecided.

When asked if the abandonment of cooperation with the EU is sensible based on Serbia's position in international relations, the results are rather consistent (mean 2.78). A quarter of the public (24.4%) supports abandonment of the cooperation with the EU, some strongly (14%) and some mostly (10.4%). For 39.9% of the public, this policy does not make sense, at all (18.1%) or mainly (21.8%). Again, even more than a quarter of the public is somewhere in between (26.4%) while close to a tenth refused to express any opinion (9.3%).

Overall, with more than a half of the public who are not immediately supportive of cooperation with the EU and are not opposed to its abandonment either, the results suggest that this aspect of Serbia's multifaceted security and defence policy can be aptly characterised as 'semi-sticky.' According to the means, its adoption (3,3) is more sensible than abandoning (2,78) to the Serbian public, but not significantly more, as is the case with some other aspects of Serbia's multifaceted security and defence cooperation. In other words, the survey results appear to support

the general impression from the secondary literature about the partial stickiness of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU – while the initial introduction of this policy to the public was relatively easy, increasing public support has proven difficult and, additionally, the support tends to decline easily. Moreover, the survey results suggest that the persistence of public opinion on this matter may be influenced by how sensible the policy immediately is judged to be by the public. Statistical analysis, including correlation analysis, linear and multiple regression analysis, and decision trees based on 'if-then' analysis, confirm that this stickiness is strongly influenced by the extracted public common sense scheme.

Chart 28. *Two dimensions of stickiness of the cooperation with the EU among the Serbian public.*



The correlation analysis shows that the stickiness Serbia's cooperation with the EU is, in both dimensions, strongly correlated with almost all of the claims (seven out of nine) that have been identified as elements of the public common sense interpretative scheme, indicating a strong linkage between the public's attitudes to this foreign policy and their common sense interpretative scheme. While the degree to which the attitude towards cooperation with the EU and each specific 'truth' about international relations and Serbia's position in them varies, the correlation coefficients are very low (see Table 1) for all the statements that are found statistically significant, signalising a strong association. The sign of the correlation between the public's agreement or disagreement with the identified common sense claims and their attitude on maintaining or abandoning the cooperation with the EU, however, provides the most insightful cues on the stickiness of this policy. Namely, only a glance at the table shows that the corelation coefficients between the common sense statements and the support to cooperation with the EU is extremely mixed, with three positively (Q34_2, Q35_4, Q34_4) and four negatively (Q35_9, Q35_7, Q34_1, Q35_8) correlated statements. In simple words, unlike other foreign policies, the prevailing view among the Serbian public is that cooperation with the EU in security and defence matters can both make sense and seem unreasonable at the same time, based on cognitive and affective common sense cues. As said and presented and the table below, neither the coefficient values nor Rho values are uniformed, signalling that some cues provide stronger, more immediate, and straightforward reaction among the public, whether positive or negative.[96]

[96] The table organises statements into three parts: "whether to cooperate" (in gray), "how to cooperate" (in blue), and "with whom" (in green). Within each part, the statements are further sorted based on the strength of their correlations. Uncoloured are those that do not qualify as common sense based on the set criteria.

Table 1. *Correlation analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the public attitude on how sensible Serbia's cooperation with the EU is, outlining the common sense of common supporter of this policy in Serbia.*[97]

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of their differences.	2.2e-16	0.3033013
Q35_9		Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	1.979e-05	-0.1303531
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	3.442e-05	-0.1272172
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	0.003906	-0.0876195
Q35_8		Serbia is located at the crossroads and is therefore very important to major powers.	0.01058	-0.0776097
Q35_4	Who to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	2.2e-16	0.4416003
Q34_4		There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	0.002602	0.09158293
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	2.2e-16	-0.3716936
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	2.2e-16	0.4196936
Q35_3		Serbia is between the East and the West.	5.837e-15	0.2363419

The correlation analysis between statements from the public common sense scheme and citizens' attitudes towards abandoning cooperation with the EU shows a mirrored relationship. There is an equally strong, mixed-direction correlation between seven out of nine (Q34_2, Q35_9, Q35_7, Q34_1, Q35_8, Q35_4, Q34_4) identified statements and public opinion on this policy abandonment. This suggests that the persistence of this aspect of Serbia's multifaceted security and defence policy is strongly influenced by the common sense interpretative scheme of international relations, as perceived by the public. In other words, the cognitive and affective inconsistencies within the public's interpretative framework can lead to situations where opposing policies may seem immediately sensible or nonsensical.

Table 2. *Correlation analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the public attitude on how sensible abandoning Serbia's cooperation with the EU is, outlining the common sense of common opponents of this policy in Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of their differences.	2.2e-16	-0.2469578
Q35_9		Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	0.00057	0.1056058
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	1.334e-07	0.162035
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	0.0001806	0.1138163

[97] The regression analysis illuminates some of the statements form the elite common sense interpretative scheme that appear relevant to the public even though they do not pass a threshold to be qualified as the public common sense.

Q35_8		Serbia is located at a crossroads and is therefore very important to major powers.	0.009192	0.07919322
Q35_4	Who to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	2.2e-16	-0.3543206
Q34_4		There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	0.01471	-0.0744912
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	2.2e-16	0.3654448
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	2.2e-16	-0.3724134
Q35_3		Serbia is between the East and the West.	2.525e-06	-0.1441658

The results of linear regression, in which common sense statements are posited as an independent variable and the attitude to the cooperation with the EU as dependent variable, go beyond correlation by quantifying the extent to which changes in one variable can predict changes in another, suggesting a strong linear relationship between the variables involved. Similar to correlation analysis, however, the strength and the direction of the relationships is diverse. When it comes to how sensible this policy appears to the public, eight out of nine common sense statements appear to have as significant influence on how they value the cooperation with the EU, although with different predictive capability, with some explaining even half of the dependent variable. Out of these eight, three appear to have a positive influence (Q34_2, Q34_4, Q35_4), aligning with the support to cooperation to the EU, while the remaining five are negatively associated (Q35_9, Q35_7, Q34_1, Q35_8, Q34_3), diminishing the chances that Serbia's cooperation with the EU appears immediately sensible to the public.

Table 3. *Regression analysis between the public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible cooperation with the EU is for Serbia, outlining the common sense of common supporter of this policy in Serbia.*

No.	**Scheme Part**	**Statement**	**Coefficient**	**P-value**
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of their differences.	0.33428	<2e-16 ***
Q35_9		Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	-0.20121	<2.19e-07 ***
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	-0.16962	<2.04e-06 ***
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	-0.13374	0.000162 ***
Q35_8		Serbia is located at a crossroads and therefore important to great powers.	-0.12294	0.00125 **
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at any cost.	-0.07443	0.0468 *
Q34_4	Who to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	0.51424	<2e-16 ***
Q35_4		There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	0.13818	<3.5e-05 ***
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	-0.3994	<2e-16 ***
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	0.51839	<2e-16 ***
Q35_3		Serbia is between the East and the West.	0.28731	<3.38e-15 ***

Similar regression analysis results are received for the opposite foreign policy option, on how sensible the abandonment of Serbia's cooperation with the EU is. With five statements that are directly aligned with the attitudes that abandoning cooperation with the EU makes sense, and three statements that are inversely related to the opinion whether abandoning military neutrality is sensible, it is clearer why the stickiness of the cooperation with the EU is lower than some other policies that appear in a stronger harmony with the dominant interpretations of the Serbian public on how the world functions and what is Serbia's natural place in it. The coefficients suggest that some statements have stronger predictive power and therefore influence on judging to what extent cooperation with the EU or its abandonment makes sense for Serbia, according to its citizens.

Table 4. *Regression analysis between the public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible abandoning cooperation with the EU is for Serbia, outlining the common sense of common opponents of this policy in Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	Coefficient	P-value
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of mutual differences.	-0.27848	<2e-16 ***
Q35_9		European countries today do not appreciate everything Serbia has done in the past.	0.15160	0.000113 ***
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	0.20689	1.07e-08 ***
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	0.15961	7.62e-06 ***
Q35_8		Serbia is located at a crossroads and therefore important to great powers.	0.12570	0.00109 **
Q34_3		Ideals and values are worth fighting for at any cost.	0.10475	0.00539 **
Q35_4	Who to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	-0.40967	<2e-16 ***
Q34_4		There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	-0.10676	0.00161 **
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	0.39460	<2e-16 ***
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	-0.46484	<2e-16 ***
Q35_3		Serbia is between the East and the West.	-0.17698	1.98e-06 ***

A zoom into the results according to three parts of the scheme revolving around three major questions – whether, how, and with whom to cooperate, reveals a bit more about what strengthens and weakness the stickiness of this policy in cognitive and affective sense. The influence of common sense lessons about *whether cooperation in security and defence is sensible* on the public attitude on whether the cooperation with the EU makes sense is already mixed. Expectedly, the cooperation with the EU is strongly influenced and supported by the widespread belief that that cooperation with everyone is necessary, regardless of differences. The more someone believes that a state should cooperate with everyone, the more they support the cooperation with the EU (0.33428, p<2e-16) and oppose the abandonment of this policy (-0.27848, p<2e-16). While this policy has not appeared particularly widespread or strong among the general public mostly due to its weak affective impulse, it still appears as one of the strongest sources of stickiness for the cooperation with the EU. The general appeal of 'necessity' of cooperation, primarily in cognitive sense, appears to spill over on the public judgment of the cooperation with the EU.

Nevertheless, a strong hampering effect on the stickiness of cooperation with the EU comes from one of the most widespread and strongest common sense beliefs – that European states do not

appreciate what Serbia has historically done for Europe in many aspects, including security and defence. The more they believe that Serbia's role in Europe's history is not sufficiently appreciated, the less cooperation with the EU makes sense to them (-0.20121, p<2.19e-07), and the more they find its abandonment sensible (0.15160, p<0.000113). The perception that Serbia has many times played the role of protector of the 'Christian Europe,' and that this has been easily forgotten, is among the strongest beliefs and historical lessons influencing whether cooperation in security and defence matters makes sense at all, regardless of the partner. Bearing in mind Serbia's European position, the resentment about insufficient appreciation of Serbian contributions and sacrifices is understandably directed most towards European states, and therefore the EU, significantly diminishing the stickiness of this aspect of the Serbian foreign policy in security and defence domain. The process of Serbia's so-called 'Europeanisation', and a very slow one, only adds to this resentment.

Finally, the claim that the strong do what they want and the weak suffer what they must appears irrelevant for the public's perception of how sensible the cooperation with the EU according to regression analysis. While this needs further analysis, it might be the case that their belief about the power dynamics does not come as immediate and tangible for their attitude on Serbia's cooperation with the EU. This is so because the Serbian' public does not yet perceive the EU as either sufficiently unitary or sufficiently powerful actors in this domain to be judged through these lenses. Therefore, in sum, when it comes to the public interpretive scheme about the first question, on whether to cooperate at all, the common sense suggests a solid cognitive fit, but at least as equally strong affective misfit with the idea of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU. Conversely, abandoning such cooperation evokes the opposite response: emotional alignment but cognitive dissonance.

In regard to the identified common-sense lessons on *what cooperation makes sense* in the domain of security and defence, Serbia's cooperation with the EU does not make particularly sense, as all four beliefs that produce a statistically relevant impact on public opinion about this policy carry a negative sign. First, the regression analysis shows that those who believe in the necessity of picking a side in international relations appear to hold more reservations towards Serbia's stronger integration with the EU in security and defence affairs. The more they endorse picking sides as sensible, the less they find cooperation with the EU sensible (-0.13374, p<0.000162) and the more they think that its abandonment makes sense (0.15961, p<7.62e-06). It appears that cooperation with the EU is perceived as something that allows Serbia to balance without necessarily aligning with any of the 'sides.' Despite the elites' reassurances that hedging is an optimal policy for a state with Serbia's position, size, and history, and that especially security and defence cooperation with the EU is compatible with this, the majority of the public still believes that choosing sides is generally sensible in the international relations as they appear today, and that the EU is apparently not that side. The stickiness of this policy among the overall population in Serbia, hence, appears to be weakened both cognitively and affectively in this respect.

The presumed Serbia's alignment with what is considered the 'right side of history' is also inversely related to the support for cooperation with the EU. The more they are convinced that Serbia has always been on the right side, the more they believe that cooperation with the EU should be abandoned (0.20689, p<1.07e-08). Conversely, the less they find this depiction of Serbia's historical role as true, the more they support this policy (-0.16962, p<2.04e-06). Those who believe that Serbia should cooperate with the EU are probably more inclined to interpret Serbia's role in history as more ambivalent, acknowledging its mistakes. Moreover, they might believe, in line with the policymakers' discourse from the early 2000s, that the best way for Serbia to 'return' to the right side of history is through returning to Europe, operationalised through Serbia's aim to cooperate with the EU in all spheres to the point of integration. On the other hand, in addition to the resentment for Serbia not being appreciated enough for its contribution, there might be a public perception that European states have not been on the 'right side of history' recently, which is why those who are most convinced of the pureness of Serbia's national biography find cooperation with the EU nonsensical primarily in affective terms. Although weaker, a statistically significant negative relationship (-0.07443,

p<0.0468) between the perception that ideals and values are worth fighting for at any cost and attitudes toward cooperation with the EU supports this finding.

Intriguingly, the public's attitude toward Serbia's cooperation with the EU is also negatively linked to the widespread belief about Serbia's geopolitical position of being located at a crossroads and, therefore, remaining very important to major powers. More precisely, individuals who strongly believe in Serbia's unique location and geopolitical importance to major powers are more likely to view cooperation with the EU unfavourably (-0.12294, p<0.00125). Conversely, the less they believe that this is an accurate description of Serbia's position in the global security architecture, the less they find abandoning the cooperation with the EU sensible (0.12570, p<0.00109). A possible interpretation of this puzzling correlation could be traced to the public's anger over foreign influences on its territory, distrust towards external actors, and the corresponding spite for independence in decision-making. It could also be a symptom of caution when it comes to aligning security and defence policies to maintain a balance between different geopolitical alignments. This is in line with the finding on the resentment the Serbian public has towards how important Serbia was for Europe's interests and how little its commitment and contribution were appreciated. On the other hand, the evidence on the widespread perception that picking sides is generally wise seems to contradict this kind of interpretation, which is why this paradox needs further investigation. It may also reflect a cautious approach to aligning security and defence policies, consistent with findings about public resentment over the perceived undervaluation of Serbia's significance to Europe's interests and the lack of recognition for its commitments and contributions in alliances throughout history. However, the widespread perception that choosing sides is generally prudent appears to contradict this interpretation, presenting a paradox that warrants further investigation.

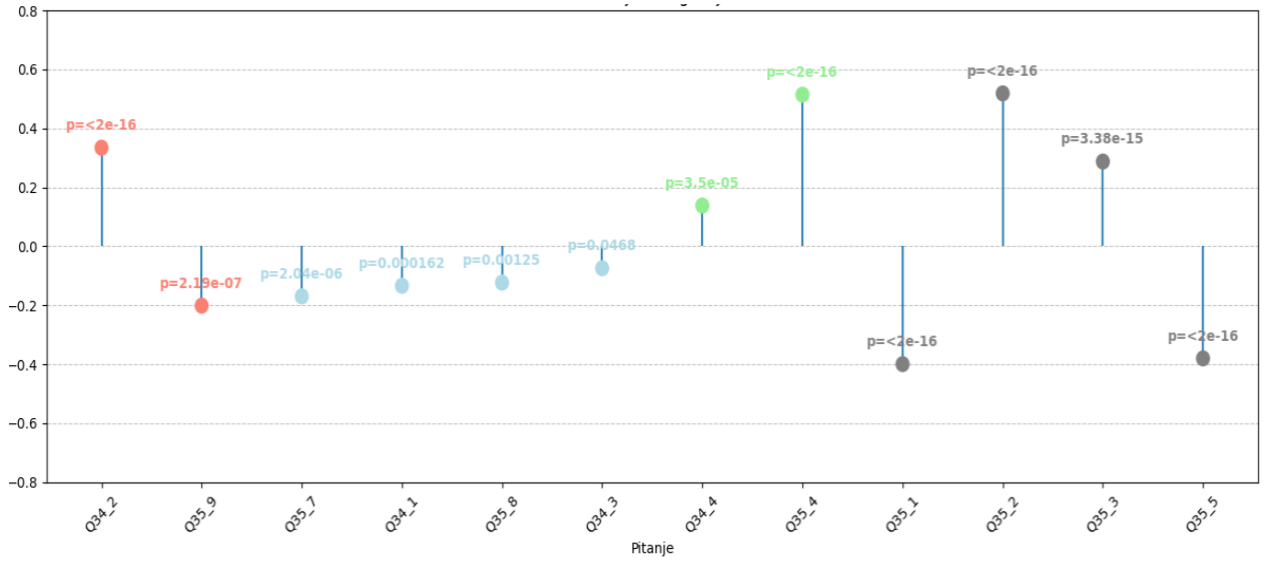
Finally, the support to cooperation with the EU is negatively correlated with the widespread belief that ideals are worth fighting for. Once again, it appears that most people in Serbia do not perceive the EU as the personification of the 'the right side' or the genuine fight for ideals in international relations. The less they consider ideals and values an imperative in the behaviour in international relations, the more they opt for the cooperation with the EU (-0.07443, p<0.0468). On contrary, to those who are inclined to believe that ideal and values are worth fighting for at any cost, cooperation with the EU is unacceptable (0.10475, p<0.00539). There are different ways in which this could be interpreted, having in mind the rest of the results. On the one hand, it might be the symptom of cynicism directed toward the EU among the Serbian public, signalling that most of the public doubts the sincerity of proclaimed ideals or the effectiveness of fighting for them within the context of EU security and defence cooperation. Some people might even perceive the values promoted by the EU as divergent from their own ideals which could lead them to prioritise defending their own ideals over supporting cooperation with an entity they see as fundamentally different. It might, however, be the case that people who do not see the value in fighting for abstract ideals but prefer the type of cooperation which seemingly offers tangible rewards without the need for struggle, actually see the cooperation with the EU as optimal choice. Although this specific connection is weaker, it still influences the general perception of what type of cooperation seems logical to the Serbian public and reinforces the overall impression that cooperation with the EU does not align well with their common-sense views, cognitively and even more so affectively.

The part of the public common sense scheme on *who to cooperate with* is the most direct contribution to the stickiness of Serbia's cooperation with the EU since both common sense statements contribute to the perception of this foreign policy as a sensible one. The common sense claim which most contributes to the impression that the cooperation with the EU appears immediately sensible is the belief that Serbia belongs to Europe. Expectedly, the more they believe that Serbia belongs to Europe, the more sensible the cooperation with the EU in security and defence matters to them (0.51424, p<2e-16) and the less its abandonment makes sense (-0.40967, p<2e-16). While this is not the only variable that determines whether the cooperation with the EU or its abandonment appear immediately sensible or senseless, it is by far the most influential one, reflected also in the fact that a share of the public that aligns with one or other side of the spectrum corresponds very well

with the division of the public based on the attitude on whether Serbia belongs to Europe or not. Although these claims do not qualify as common sense, the perception of the EU also aligns directly with the attitude on whether Serbia belongs to the West, while it is inversely related to the attitude that Serbia belongs to the East. What is particularly interesting is that the belief that Serbia is positioned between the East and West also makes the cooperation with the EU sensible.

Finally, the prevailing perception in international relations, where interests are the sole enduring component, makes cooperation with the EU more sensible (0.13818, p<3.5e-05). Conversely, those who believe abandoning cooperation with the EU is sensible are largely influenced by perceptions that states should consider not only interests but also friendships or enmities (-0.10676, p<0.00161). This linkage aligns with earlier findings suggesting that EU cooperation is primarily supported by those who value pragmatic, cognitive rationality that prioritizes cognitive rewards above all. Therefore, among the three stages of the common sense scheme, the last one provides the strongest adhesive layer to the policy of security and defence cooperation with the EU, appealing both cognitively and affectively. While perceptions and accompanying resentment over Serbia being perceived as backward or underdeveloped, needing further "Europeanization," hinder a widespread and natural sense of belonging to Europe, simultaneous Serbian public pride in its European character is an undeniably important factor in its stickiness.

Graph 10. *Regression analysis graph depicting the relationship between the three-partite common-sense framework (independent variable) and public perception of the sensibility of Serbia's cooperation with Russia (dependent variable).*



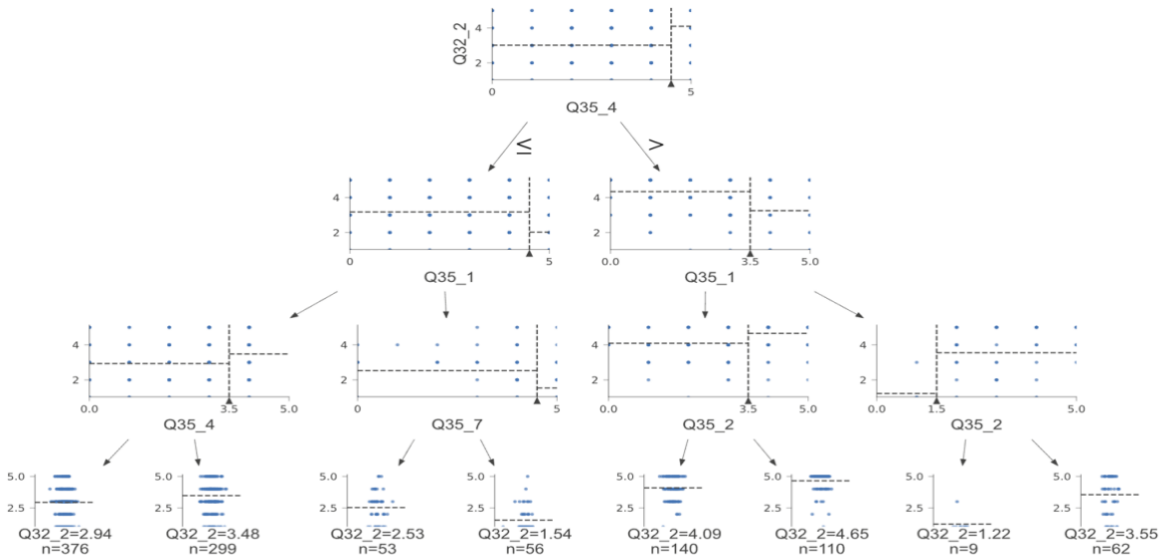
The decision tree output regarding the sensibility of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU, as well as the possibility of abandoning it, also highlights the relationship between public common sense and the semi-stickiness of this foreign policy (see Box 1 below). It not only confirms the relevance of this relationship but also outlines the sequence of steps in common-sense judgment, specifying which truths are commonly triggered and in what order, among both supporters and opponents of these two policy options. In sum, the key to assessing the sensibility of cooperation with the EU lies in answering whether Serbia belongs to Europe, whether it aligns more with the East or the West, and whether it has been on the right side of history.

Box 1. *The decision tree output regarding the sensibility of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with the EU, as well as the possibility of abandoning it, in relation to public's common sense.*

Q32_2 How sensible is it for Serbia to cooperate with the EU?

The key to determining the sensibility of cooperation with the EU lies in answering whether Serbia truly belongs to Europe.

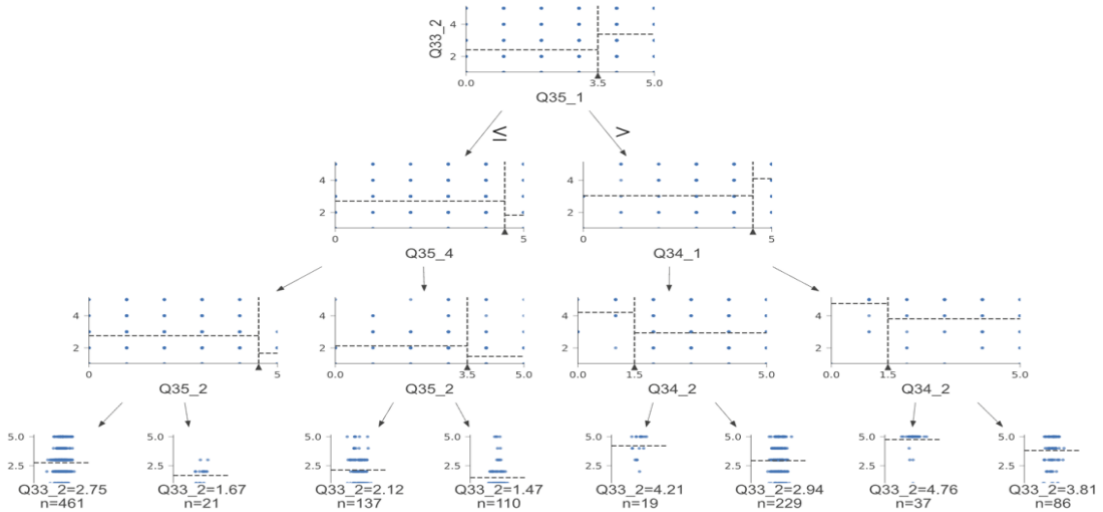
- For those who answer this question with less than or equal to 4.5, the average score for the meaningfulness of cooperation with the EU is 3.5. They further examine whether Serbia belongs to the East. (784)
    - For those who answer this question with less than or equal to 4.5, the average score is slightly above 3.5, and they further examine whether Serbia belongs to the East. (675)
        - Those who answer this question with less than or equal to 3.5 are 376, and their average score is 2.94.
        - Those who answer this question with above 3.5 are 299, and their average score is 3.48.
    - For those who answer this question with more than 4.5, the average score is slightly above 2. They further examine whether Serbia has always been on the right side of history. (109)
        - Those who answer with less than or equal to 4.5 are 53, and their average value is 2.53.
        - Those who answer with more than 4.5 are 56, and their average score is 1.54.
- Those who answer the question with more than 4.5 have a value slightly above 4 and further examine whether Serbia belongs to the East.
    - Those who answer less than or equal to 3.5 have an average score above 4 and further examine whether Serbia belongs to the West. (250)
        - Those who give scores less than or equal to 3.5 are 140, and their average score is 4.09.
        - Those who give scores greater than 3.5 are 110, and their average score is 4.65.
    - Those who answer the question with more than 3.5 have an average score around 3 and further examine whether Serbia belongs to the West. (71)
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 1.5 are 9, and their average value is 1.22.
        - Those who answer more than 1.5 are 62, and their average value is 3.55.



Q33_2 How sensible is ir for Serbia to abandon its cooperation with the EU?

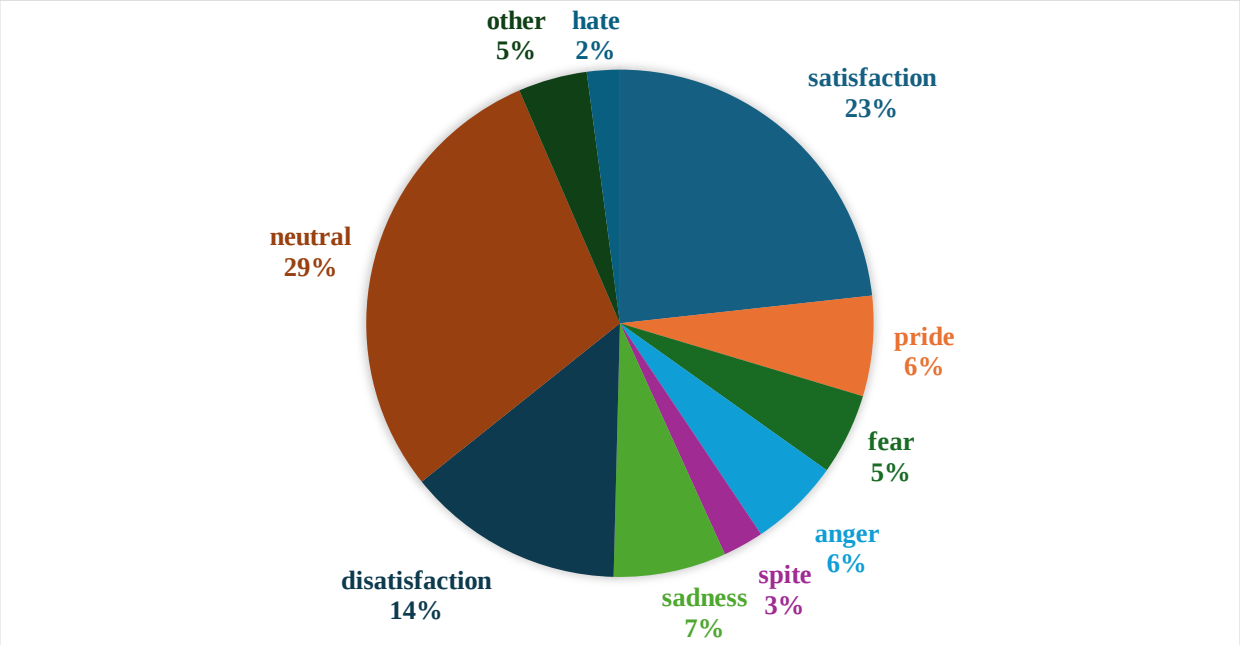
To answer the question of abandoning European integration, the most important question is whether Serbia belongs to East.

- For those who respond with less than or equal to 3.5, the average support for abandoning European integration is around 2.5, and they continue to the question of whether Serbia belongs to Europe (729).
    - For those who answer with less than or equal to 4.5, the average score is just below 3, and they continue to the question of whether Serbia belongs to the West (482).
        - Those who respond with less than or equal to 4.5 have an average score of 2.75, numbering 461.
        - Those who respond with more than 4.5 have an average score of 1.67, numbering 21.
    - For those who answer with more than 4.5, the average score is just below 2, and they continue to the question of whether Serbia is culturally part of the West (147).
        - Those who give less than or equal to 3.5 have an average score of 2.12, numbering 137.
        - Those who give more than 3.5 have an average score of 1.47, numbering 110.
- For those who answer with more than 3.5, the average support for abandoning European integration is slightly above 3.5, and they continue to the question of whether to choose a side in international relations (371).
    - Those who answer with less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score of around 3, and they continue to the question of whether to cooperate with everyone (248).
        - Those who give a score of less than or equal to 1.5 give an average score of 4.21, numbering 19.
        - Those who answer more than 1.5 give an average score of 2.94, numbering 229.
    - Those who answer higher than 4.5 give an average score above 4, and they continue to the question of whether to cooperate with everyone (123).
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 1.5 have an average score of 4.76, numbering 37.
        - Those who answer more than 1.5 have an average score of 3.81, numbering 86.



Finally, the structure of the public's affective attachment to the cooperation with the EU, obtained through survey, further reveals the complex picture behind the common-sense scheme which impacts the strength of stickiness of this foreign policy. The structure of the emotions that citizens have towards this policy significantly resemble the structure of common sense interpretative scheme that seem to stand behind their immediate judgments on whether preserving or abandoning this policy makes sense. When it comes to the valence only, the proportion of positive and negative emotions is very close, with negative ones (34.2%) prevailing over positive (32.2%) for a little. Close to a third of the public is affectively neutral (29.3%) in relation to membership with the EU. Among the positive emotions, general satisfaction (23.2%) is dominant, followed by pride (6.4%). Among the negative emotions that are prevailing are general discontent (13.9%), followed by sadness (7.2%), anger (5.8%), fear (5.2%), spite (2.6%) and hatred (2.1%). This very much corresponds to the affective tone of the relevant common sense truths, as per discourse analysis presented above. In comparison to the public's affective attachment to Serbia's military neutrality, for instance, there are approximately ten percent of population who more emotionally invested into Serbia's foreign policy of cooperation with the EU, and that share seems to have spilled over into the pull of negative emotions.

Chart 29. *The affective framework behind the public's opinion on the sensibility of cooperation with the EU.*



Therefore, the statistical analysis seems to support the hypothesised model. It suggests that the semi-stickiness of cooperation with the EU is influenced by the nature and content of the public common sense scheme regarding international relations and Serbia's position in it. The analysis shows that considerations according to the prevailing common sense framework – whether (cognitive fit, affective misfit), how (cognitive and affective misfit), and with whom (cognitive and affective fit) – indicate that cooperation with the EU makes immediate sense but not entirely, especially in the affective sense. On contrary, the abandonment of this policy seems affectively appealing, while it cognitively makes less sense. Introducing and maintaining this cooperation is not challenging, as observed in the early 2000 and the following two decades but abandoning it might be relatively easy for the elites, as well, as observed since the early 2020s, as the common sense framework allows easy and immediate mobilisation against this foreign policy, as previously discussed.

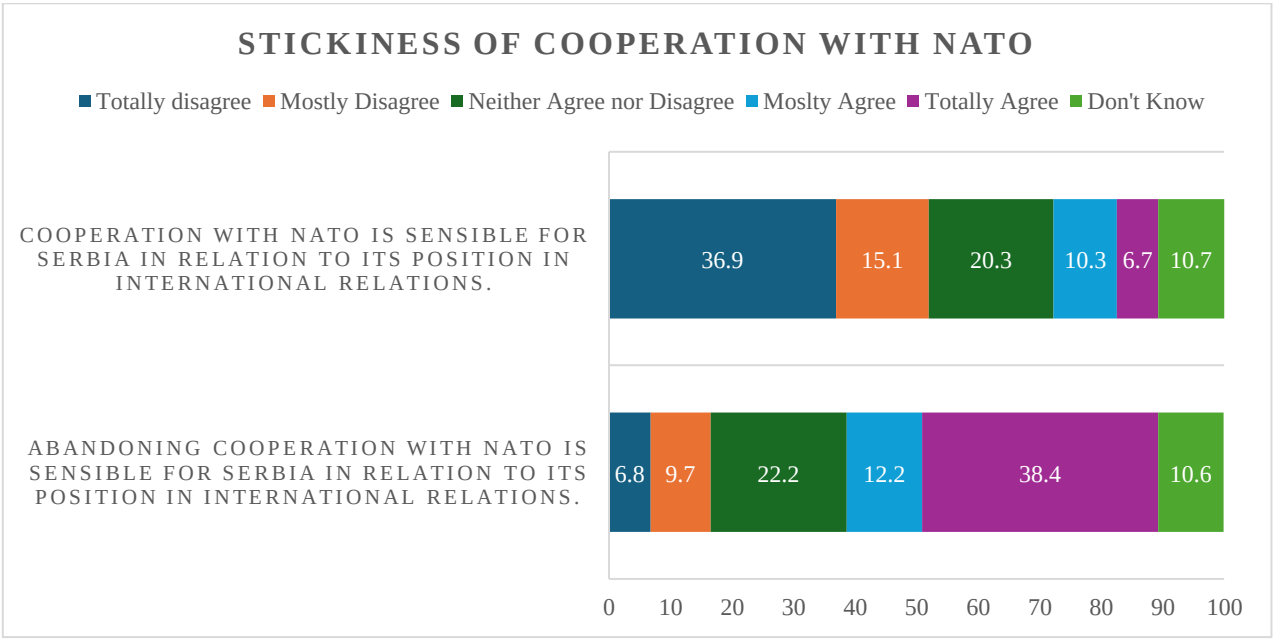
7.2. Unsticky Security and Defence Cooperation with NATO

The low level of stickiness of the cooperation with NATO among the public in Serbia, as evidenced by available opinion polls conducted over the past two decades are directly confirmed by the survey results to the question on how sensible Serbia's cooperation with NATO is and how sensible its abandonment would be. First, when asked how sensible cooperation with NATO is in regard to Serbia's position in international relations, only 17% consider this policy sensible, with some totally (6.7%) and mostly (10.3%). A notable 20.3% are ambivalent, and about 10.7% of respondents did not scale their response, indicating that close to a third of the public (31%) is not able to form an immediate judgment about this policy. An absolute majority of respondents (52%), however, believe that such cooperation does not make sense at all (36.9%) or mostly (15.1%). With almost a third of the public share of those who immediately judge this as non-sense, this policy immediately qualifies as the least sticky one.

Similarly, the public's response regarding the sensibility of abandoning cooperation with NATO further confirms the low level of stickiness of this foreign policy among the Serbian population. Notably, 40.8% of respondents express total (38.4%) or general (12.2%) support for Serbia's abandonment of the cooperation with NATO. The same as above, the proportion of citizens who 'totally' agree is the highest among all of the eight surveyed foreign policy options. On the other hand, only 16.5%, opposes the possibility of leaving cooperation with NATO, either completely (6.8%) or mostly (9.7%). With close to a quarter of the Serbian public (22.2%) who remains neutral or indecisive, and approximately 10.6% of respondents who are unopinionated, the level of unopinionated is about the third as well. With such a ratio, the cooperation with NATO is the least sticky of all four policy that make up Serbia's multifaceted foreign policy of security and defence cooperation.

Therefore, the mean values of the public's instant evaluation of how 'sensible' the cooperation with NATO (3.73) or its abandonment is (2.27) directly indicate that this aspect of Serbia's security and defence policy shows very low adherence, the lowest among all four pillars. Statistical analyses, including correlation analysis, linear and multiple linear regression, and conditional analysis, further confirm that the low adherence to NATO cooperation is largely due to the prevailing common-sense interpretation among the Serbian public.

***Chart 30**. Two dimensions of stickiness of the cooperation with NATO among the Serbian public.*



The correlation analysis already indicates a strong connection between the unstickiness of this policy with the dominant common sense scheme in the society, as the results show a strong correlation between the public's opinion on this foreign policy and eight out of total nine identified common sense statements. The number of statements that appear significant are higher than with some other foreign policy, such as military neutrality, meaning that this idea apparently immediately triggers more lessons, the 'gut feeling' is strong, more immediate than with other foreign policies. Out of those eight, only two are in a positive correlation (Q34_2, Q35_4) with the attitude on how sensible cooperation is, and the remaining six are negatively correlated (Q35_9, Q34_5, Q35_8, Q34_3, Q35_7, Q34_1), although to a different strength. The prevailing negative sign reveals why the cooperation with NATO might appear so unsticky as most prevailing beliefs about the world and Serbia's position in it among the public are incompatible with Serbia's cooperation with NATO. Given that no other foreign policy is as negatively correlated with common sense, it is understandable that this policy appears as nonsense to the Serbian public.

Table 5. *Correlation analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible Serbia's cooperation with NATO is for Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	2.2e-16	-0.2833347
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.	2.974e-07	-0.1563361
Q34_2		A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.	0.0004145	0.1080489
Q35_8	How to cooperate?	Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	2.546e-13	-0.2219662
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	1.968e-12	-0.2131911
Q35_7		Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	8.062e-08	-0.1658302
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	0.0002986	-0.1107137
Q35_4	Whom to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	3.002e-05	0.1293942
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	2.2e-16	-0.3033303
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	2.2e-16	0.3524724

Conversely, the correlation analysis further shows that the abandonment of the cooperation with NATO is far more positively related with common sense interpretative scheme. Moreover, all six statements that are significantly correlated with the attitude on the cooperation with NATO are in a positive correlation with the opposition to the cooperation with NATO, with varying degrees of strength. Given that these sentiments are embraced most of the statements that are found significant correlation are those that are most shared among the population (by about two-thirds of the population), it becomes evident why the majority of the Serbian public finds it difficult to support cooperation with NATO, opting instead for what they perceive as a more reasonable course of action – abandonment.

Table 6. *Correlation analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible abandoning cooperation with NATO is for Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	2.2e-16	0.3340679
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.	2.507e-12	0.2121884
Q35_8	How to cooperate?	Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	2.2e-16	0.2500797
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	3.282e-16	0.2459778
Q35_7		Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	1.017e-12	0.2191371
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	2.204e-05	0.1295629
Q35_1	Whom to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to the East.	2.2e-16	0.2758275
Q35_2		Serbia belongs the West.	2.2e-16	-0.3123354
Q35_3		Serbia is between East and West.	0.0333	0.06597692

The linear regression analysis, treating the public common sense statements as independent variables and the judgment of Serbia's cooperation with NATO as a dependent one supports the major assumption of the paper that common sense indeed guides the attitude on this foreign policy. The previously showed correlation between eight out of nine common sense statements is further illuminated, as the regression analysis indicates statistically relevant relationship between all of these eight statements and the public opinion on this foreign policy and all except one with very low P-values. The same as in the correlation analysis, six out of these eight statements are inversely related to the support to the cooperation with NATO, indicating a strong and immediate negative reaction to the idea of security and defence cooperation with NATO among the Serbian public.

Table 7. *Regression analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible cooperation with NATO is for Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	Coefficient	P-value
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	-0.30977	1.1e-15 ***
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.	-0.1435	0.000585 ***
Q34_2		A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of mutual differences.	0.13119	4.06e-05 ***
Q35_8	How to cooperate?	Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	-0.22560	3.08e-09 ***
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	-0.20809	2.99e-08 ***
Q35_7		Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	-0.14369	7.14e-05 ***
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	-0.09810	0.00609 **
Q35_4	Who to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	0.1966	2.39e-07 ***
Q35_2	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia is a part of the West.	0.44449	<2e-16 ***
Q35_1		Serbia is a part of the East.	-0.31453	<2e-16 ***

The same holds true for the results of the regression analysis regarding the option of abandoning cooperation with NATO. Seven statements are found to have a statistically significant influence, with six of them showing very low P-values, indicating a strong connection. These six statements, which have the greatest impact on public attitudes toward NATO cooperation, are positively associated with the belief that cooperation with NATO should be abandoned. Conversely, the weakest connection is found in the only common sense statement negatively related to the perception that abandoning NATO cooperation makes sense. Therefore, a glance at the regression analysis results reveals that, based on the prevailing 'truths' among the Serbian public about international relations and sensible approaches for any state, and Serbia in particular, abandoning cooperation with NATO appears sensible very easily and immediately.

Table 8. *Regression analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible abandoning cooperation with NATO is for Serbia.*

No.	Part Scheme	Statement	Coefficient	P-value
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	0.37393	<2e-16 ***
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.	0.23250	3.1e-08 ***
Q34_3	How to cooperate?	Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	0.25364	2.39e-11 ***
Q35_8		Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	0.24425	2.56e-10 ***
Q35_7		Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	0.20412	1.91e-08 ***
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	0.12242	7e-04 ***
Q35_4	Who to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	-0.08148	0.0353 *
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	0.28779	<2e-16 ***
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	-0.39847	<2e-16 ***

The part of the common sense interpretive scheme focused on *whether cooperation in security and defence is at all sensible* appears to have a strong influence on how sensible Serbia's cooperation with NATO seems. All three claims identified as relevant have a strong influence on the attitude toward whether cooperation with NATO makes sense, with one being directly connected and the other two inversely connected. The strongest, and negative, impulse seems to come from the claim that Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough. Similar to the cooperation with the EU, the public's disappointment and resentment regarding how Serbia's contributions to regional and global history have been perceived by major international partners drive them against cooperation in security and defence matters. NATO, perhaps even more than the EU, is perceived as the major 'culprit' for the diminished legacy of Serbia's contributions to throughout history, as this negative connection is very strong (2.2e-16, p=0.2833347). Carrying primarily affective cues of resentment, anger, sadness, and spite, this 'truth' is likely the major source of affective misfit and unstickiness of this policy among the Serbian public.

A similar situation is related to the widespread perception that the strong do what they want and the weak suffer what they must. On the one hand, this widespread realistic view of the world could, theoretically, strengthen the perception that cooperating with the strongest alliance there is makes sense. Nevertheless, while the public in Serbia indeed believes in this truth, primarily due to the bombing of Kosovo in 1999 and subsequent events related to Kosovo's proclamation of independence, NATO is most likely the strongest association with this unwanted truth. This is why it

emerges as so important for the judgment of how sensible cooperation with NATO is. In other words, while they believe that cooperation with everyone is sensible and that power dynamics favour the strong, the public in Serbia thinks that cooperation with the strongest one is senseless due to some other truths they hold about the world as it is. Moreover, the more they believe that the world is as the great powers want it to be, the more they believe that cooperating with NATO is nonsense (0.1435, p=0.000585). While there is a cognitive fit between common sense and this policy, the affective fit seems to prevail in the immediate gut reaction.

Finally, the only claim from this part of the common sense scheme that contributes to the sensibility and, hence, stickiness of cooperation with NATO is the belief that a state should cooperate with everyone regardless of differences. While this is not a truth that enjoys extraordinarily strong social consensus, and while its predictive power drops below the level of statistical relevance when people are asked about the sensibility of abandoning cooperation with NATO, it remains one of the rare, primarily cognitive cues that contribute to a favourable perception of this foreign policy. The two statements from this section of the common sense interpretative scheme that appear to capture the sentiment of resentment and unfair treatment of small states, and Serbia in particular, remain strongly and positively connected to support for abandoning cooperation with NATO. Therefore, while cooperation with NATO gains some points due to the public's solid belief that cooperation with everyone is beneficial, this signal is immediately overshadowed by the other two 'truths' that render this cooperation nonsensical due to the accumulated perception of unfair treatment of Serbia by this alliance.

The common sense 'truths' that offer cues on *what cooperation makes sense* provide very straightforward impulse against the cooperation with NATO as all four statements are found statistically relevant, and all in the same negative direction. The strongest negative connection exists between the favourable perception of cooperation with NATO and the claim that Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore is very important to the great powers. The more they endorse this depiction of Serbia's position in the global security architecture, the more they consider the cooperation with NATO sensible (-0.22560, p=3.08e-09) and vice versa (0.24425, p=2.56e-10). While this truth does not necessarily exclude the possibility of cooperation, as seen in the results related to cooperation with Russia and the EU, the affective cues clearly outweigh the cognitive ones in the case of cooperation with a power perceived as the embodiment of recent and unfriendly foreign interests in the region, making such cooperation seem immediately nonsensical. For those who do not share this view of Serbia's junction geopolitical position and importance, cooperation with NATO appears more sensible.

The strength of immediate affective reaction is evident from two other truths in this part of the scheme, which are strongly negatively connected to support for cooperation with NATO. First, the more people believe that history has taught Serbia that ideals are worth fighting for at any cost – a belief held by the vast majority of the public (over two-thirds) – the less they find cooperation with NATO sensible (-0.20809, p=2.99e-08). Similarly, the widely shared belief that Serbia has always been on the right side of history is also strongly negatively related to support for Serbia's cooperation with NATO (-0.14369, p=7.14e-05). In simple terms, cooperation with NATO does not make sense to those who believe that ideals and values are worth fighting for, as Serbia has done throughout history. NATO, predictably, is seen as the opposite of these values and ideals, perceived as an alliance that pursues its own interests, making cooperation with it senseless to the Serbian public. Conversely, to those with a less romanticised perception of both international relations and Serbia's role in history, cooperation makes far more sense. This further provide evidence for the negative cognitive and affective cues signalling that NATO is not the right side they would choose, despite believing that choosing sides is sensible.

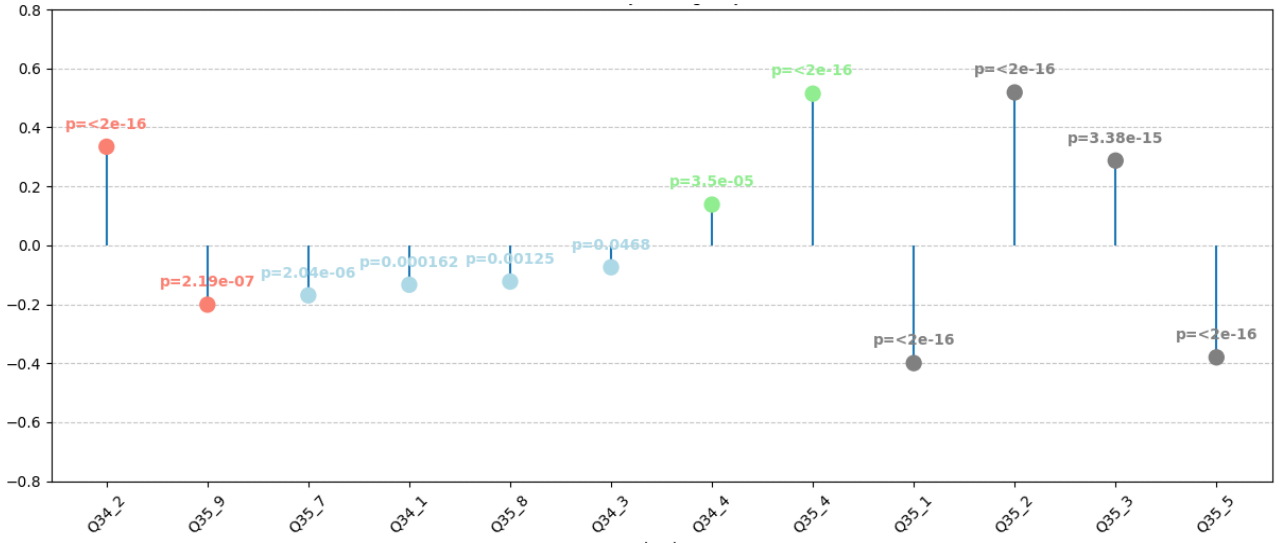
This is ultimately evident from the inverse relationship between the belief that picking sides in international relations is necessary and the view that cooperation with NATO is sensible. According to both correlation analysis and linear regression, the more someone believes that choosing sides in international relations is sensible, the less they find Serbia's cooperation with NATO

reasonable (-0.09810, p=0.00609). Thus, the results suggest that Serbia's cooperation with NATO is more sensible to those in the Serbian public who believe that choosing sides is unwise and unnecessary. In other words, cooperation with NATO is most supported by those who believe that balancing is a sensible option for Serbia, which aligns with other findings indicating that supporters of cooperation with NATO are not strongly inclined toward alliances. As confirmed by the structure of the military neutrality interpretive scheme as well, the strongest opposition to military neutrality does not come from those who support cooperation with NATO, but from those who support cooperation with Russia. Therefore, while this part of the common sense interpretative scheme is rather incoherent itself and tends to provide mixed signals (standing in both positive and negative correlation with other three foreign policies), here it provides very uniformed and straightforward hints against the cooperation with NATO. The cognitive and emotional insights gained from lessons learned about effective cooperation in security and defence apparently contribute to the widespread perception that the cooperation with NATO is nonsense, while its abandonment makes a lot of sense to the Serbian public, both cognitively and affectively.

The part of the scheme with cues on *who Serbia should cooperate with* provides additional insights into why this policy is so unsticky. Out of two statements that are widespread enough to be considered public common sense, only one appears relevant for the public's attitude on common sense judgment about Serbia's cooperation with NATO. Interestingly, there is no correlation between the attitude on Serbia's cooperation with NATO and the realistic, pragmatic view that in international relations only interests are eternal. In other words, even among those who believe that interests are the ultimate guide to selecting sensible security and defence policy, the cooperation with NATO fails to qualify as sensible. The only relevant and favourable cue from the common sense scheme, therefore, comes from the belief that Serbia belongs to Europe. Expectedly, the people who find cooperation with NATO sensible tend to believe that Serbia belongs to Europe and (0.1966, p=2.39e-07), vice versa, the less they see Serbia as a part of the European sphere, the more they support the abandonment of the cooperation with NATO (0.08148, p=0.0353). Considering that this truth does not hold a significant position in the interpretive scheme, based on how widely shared and intensely the public is attached to it, it is evidently not strong enough to prevail over other truths that oppose this policy.

Among the remaining claims about Serbia's 'natural' geopolitical orientation, which are not widely shared or considered 'common sense', the cues are also expected. Statistically relevant connections indicate that cooperation with NATO appears sensible to those who agree that Serbia belongs to the West, but not the East. Conversely, the idea of Serbia as a border between the East and the West is not statistically relevant to a positive attitude about cooperation with NATO, suggesting that people's judgments about Serbia's cooperation with NATO have very varied and random attitudes on this statement. Those supporting the abandonment of cooperation with NATO believe that Serbia belongs to the East, while there is a strong negative association between this belief and the stance that Serbia belongs to the West and, interestingly, Europe. Although statistically relevant, the negative coefficient with the belief that Serbia belongs to Europe is substantially weaker than the one with the West. This once again confirms the previously discussed cognitive and affective detach between the idea of the West and Europe among the Serbian public, likely based on strong anti-US sentiment, which illuminates also the uneven stickiness of these two policies in Serbia, as well.

Graph 11. *Regression analysis graph depicting the relationship between the three-partite common-sense framework (independent variable) and public perception of the sensibility of Serbia's cooperation with Russia (dependent variable).*



The decision tree output analysing the sensibility of Serbia's cooperation with NATO, as well as the potential for abandoning it, sheds light on the interplay between public common sense and the lack of stickiness of this foreign policy (see Box 2 below). It not only validates the significance of this relationship but also maps out the sequence of steps in common-sense judgment, identifying which 'truths' are activated and in what order, among both proponents and opponents of these two policies – one currently in place and the other a potential, though unlikely, alternative. In sum, the stance on how sensible cooperation with NATO is largely depends on public beliefs on whether Serbia's role in history has been adequately recognised, whether Serbia aligns with the East or West, and whether choosing sides is truly necessary.

Box 2. *The decision tree output regarding the sensibility of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with NATO, as well as the possibility of abandoning it, in relation to public's common sense.*

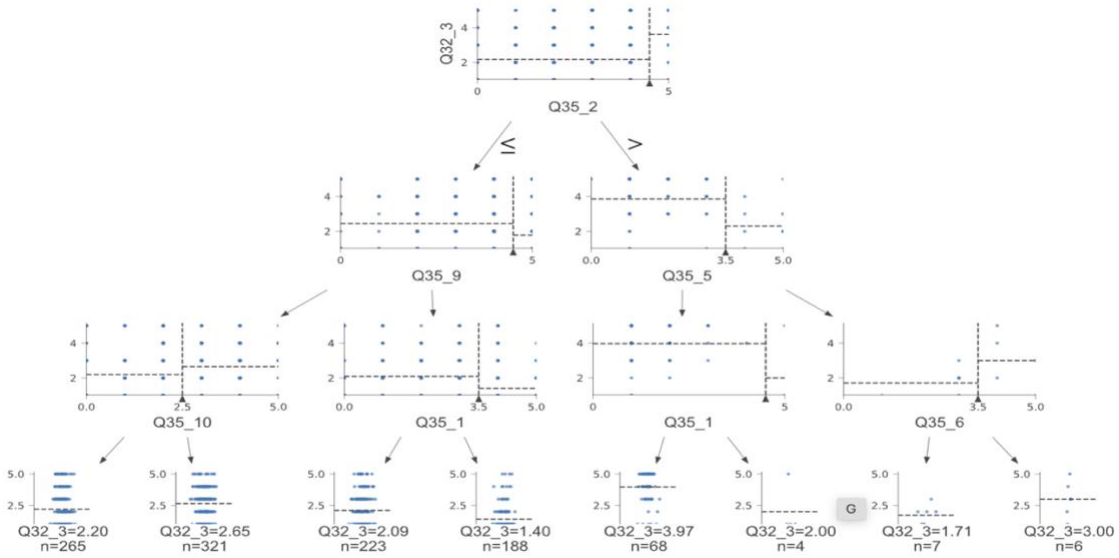
Q33_3 How sensible is it for Serbia to cooperate with NATO?

The key question in determining the sensibility of cooperation with NATO is whether Serbia belongs to the West.

- Those who answer this question with a value lower than or equal to 4.5 give an average rating to this question just above 2 and still consider whether European countries today appreciate everything Serbia has done in the past. (997)
    - For those who answer this question with less than or equal to 4.5, the average value is around 2.5 and they still consider whether Serbia's role in European history is appreciated. (586)
        - There are 265 people who answer the question with less than or equal to 2.5 and their average rating for sensibleness of the cooperation with NATO is slightly below 2.2.
        - There are 321 people who answer the question with more than 2.5 and their average rating is 2.65.
    - Those who give a score higher than 4.5 give an average rating lower than 2, and they still consider whether Serbia belongs to the East. (411)
        - There are 223 people who give a score less than or equal to 3.5 and their average rating is 2.09.

        - There are 188 people who give a score higher than 3.5 and their average rating is 1.4.

- Those who answer with more than 4.5 have an average rating just below 4 and still consider whether Serbia belongs to the East. (85)
    - For those who answer this question with less than or equal to 3.5, the average rating is around 4 and they still consider whether Serbia belongs to the East. (72)
        - There are 68 people who answer this question with less than or equal to 4.5 and their average rating is 3.97.
        - There are 4 people who answer this question with more than 4.5 and their average rating is 2.
    - For those who answer this question with more than 3.5, the average rating is just above 2 and they still consider whether Serbia is a guarantor of peace and stability in the Balkans. (13)
        - There are 7 people who answer this question with less than or equal to 3.5 and their average rating is 1.71.
        - There are 6 people who answer this question with more than 3.5 and their average rating is 3.

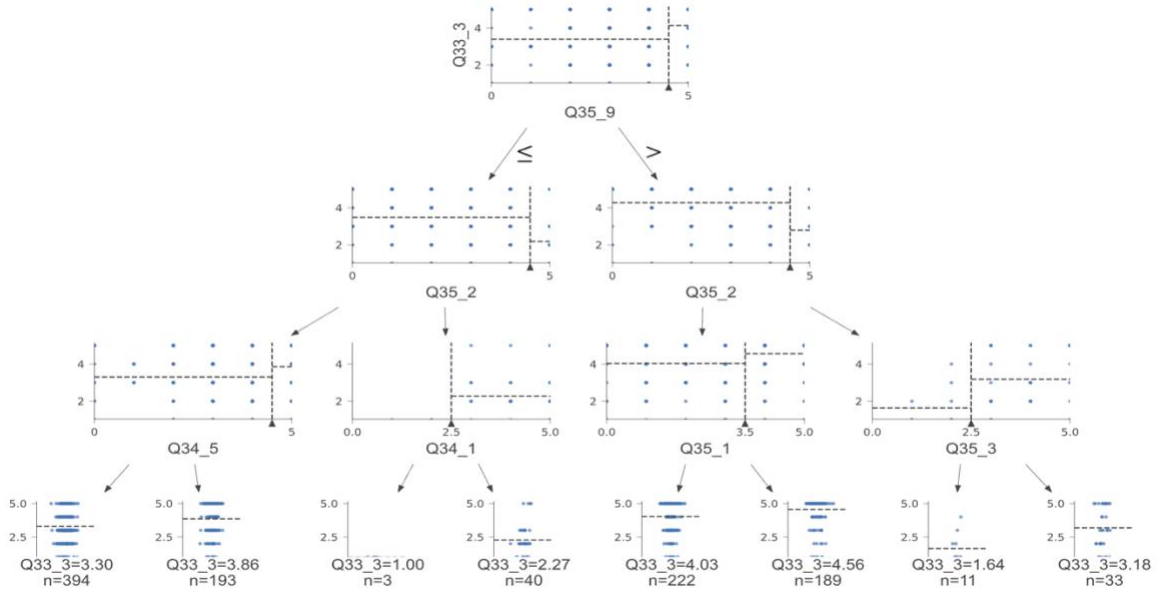


Q33_3 How sensible is it for Serbia to abandon its cooperation with NATO?

For the stance on ending cooperation with NATO, the most important question is whether Serbia's role in history has been sufficiently appreciated.

- For those who give a score of less than or equal to 4.5, the average support for ending cooperation with NATO is above 3 and they continue to the question of whether Serbia belongs to the West. (630)
    - For those who give a score of less than or equal to 4.5, the average score is around 3.5 and they continue to the question of whether what the strong do they want, and the weak suffer what they must. (587)
        - Those who give a score of less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score of 3.3 and total 394 people.

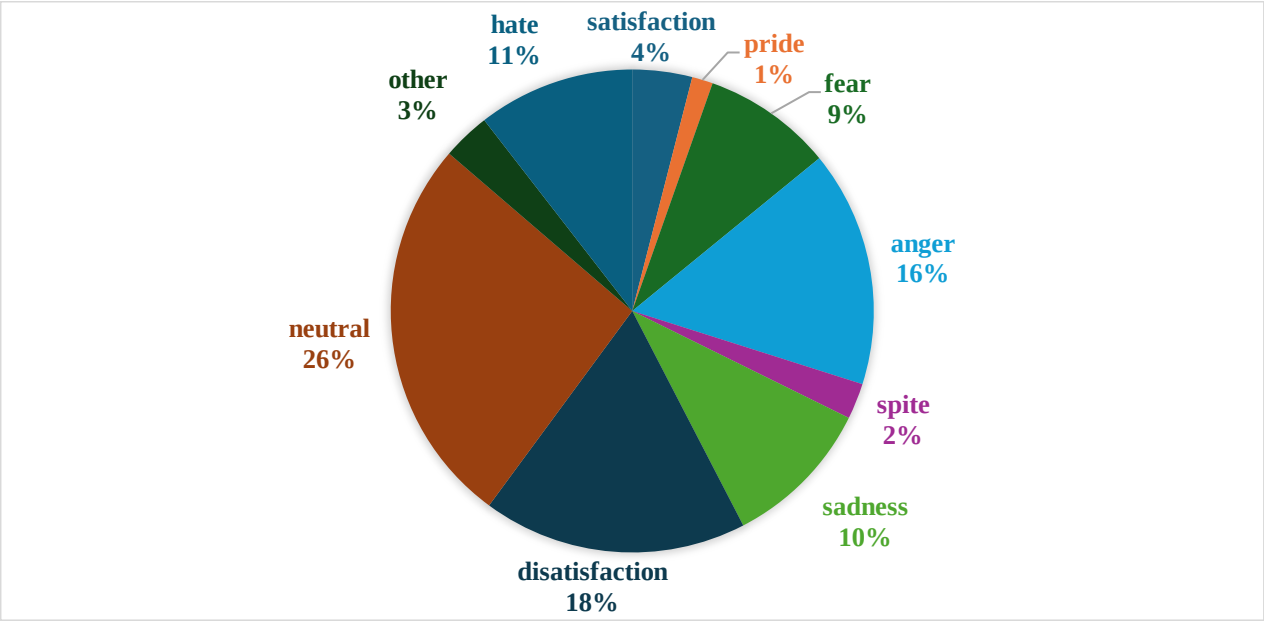
        - Those who give a score greater than 4.5 give an average score of 3.86 and total 193 people.
    - Those who give a score greater than 4.5 give an average score slightly above 2 and continue to the question of whether it is necessary to choose a side in international relations. (43)
        - Those who answer with less than or equal to 2.5 give an average score of 1 and total 3 people.
        - Those who give a score above 2.5 give an average score of 2.27 and total 40 people.
- Those who give a score above 4.5 give an average score above 4 and continue to the question of whether Serbia belongs to the West. (455)
    - For those who give a score of less than or equal to 4.5, the average score is above 4 and they continue to the question of whether Serbia is part of the East. (411)
        - Those who give a score of less than or equal to 3.5 have an average score of 4.03 and total 222 people.
        - Those who give a score above 3.5 have an average score of 4.56 and total 189 people.
    - For those who give a score above 4.5, the average score is around 3 and they continue to the question of whether Serbia is between East and West. (44)
        - Those who give a score of less than or equal to 2.5 give an average score of 1.64 and total 11 people.
        - Those who give a score above 2.5 give an average score of 3.18 and total 33 people.



As for Serbia's cooperation with NATO, the share of population with negative emotions is 62.8% and only 7.8% feels a positive emotion. The share of the public with neutral stands is 26.2%, which is the lowest share of neutrals in comparison to other three policies. In other words, the affective attachment to this foreign policy is stronger. Among the positively charged emotions, general discontent (17.7%) is the prevailing emotion, closely followed by anger (15.8%), hatred (10.5%), sadness (10.1%), fear (8.7%) or spite (1.4%). The positive emotions what people associate with Serbia's cooperation with NATO is a share of those general satisfaction (4%) and very small percentage of those feeling pride (2.4%) This is very much in line with the cognitive-affective

interplay of the common sense interpretative scheme that governs the judgment on how sensible Serbia's cooperation with NATO, or its abandonment, are to the Serbian public.

Chart 31. *The affective framework behind the public's opinion on the sensibility of cooperation with the NATO.*



In summary, the statistical analysis indicates a strong link between public common sense and attitudes toward cooperation with NATO since the majority of the identified statements get activated by this question, providing important cognitive and affective cues for the immediate judgment. Except for two cases, the direction is negative, highlighting that this policy is the least supported one based on both dimensions, consistent with preliminary analysis from secondary sources. The cognitive cues, from all three parts of the scheme are notably misaligned, while the affective cues strongly reinforce this misalignment. This is further evidenced by the fact that this policy has the smallest proportion of neutral responses when people are asked about their feelings towards it. NATO is seen as embodying everything that Serbia considers wrong in the world, both cognitively and affectively. While there is a confusion about where Serbia belongs, what actually makes this policy so unsticky is the cognitive and affective certainty where it does not belong, and that is 'the West,' personified in NATO. For the Serbian public to not judge the cooperation with NATO as immediately as nonsense, many cognitive and affective links in the commonsense interpretive scheme would have to be altered or broken. As with other policies, the inherent incoherence in the common sense scheme, as well as the considerable share of those with no gut reaction even to this part of Serbia's security and defence policy, does not rule out the possibility of change.

7.3. Sticky Security and Defence Cooperation with Russia

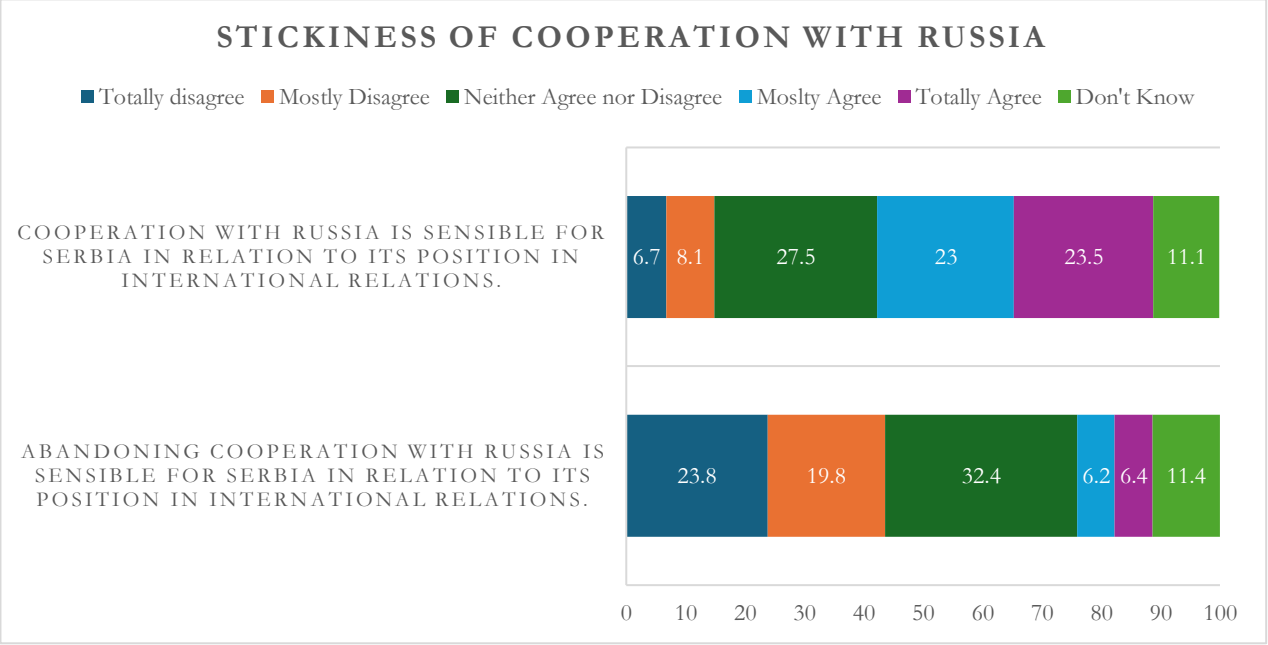
The public's immediate judgment of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia is consistent with evidence discussed in the secondary literature, categorising this policy as a sticky one. When asked how sensible the cooperation with Russia is, close to a half of the public (46.5%) finds this policy sensible either completely (23.5%) or mostly (20%). On the contrary, only 14.8% of the public believes that this policy does not make sense, either at all (6.7%) or mostly (8.1%). The share of 'neither nor' in the public is, however, the highest of all four policies, with 27.5% without an immediate sense on whether this policy makes sense or is nonsense. When a share of 11.1% added, there is about 40% of the public that has no immediate reaction to this foreign policy. While this policy has a relatively high mean (3.55), with almost half of the public finding it easily sensible, it

seems to that its stickiness is also maintained due to a low level of immediate resistance to it rather than a high level of appeal to it.

Therefore, while the share of the public that finds the cooperation with Russia sensible is solid, what makes it stand out as particularly sticky is the share of the public that would not be inclined to support that abandonment of this policy. Only slightly above the tenth of the public (12.6%) finds the abandonment of Serbia's cooperation with Russia sensible, half of them totally (6.4%) and half (6.2%) mostly. On the other hand, 43.6% of the public does not find abandoning cooperation with the public sensible, either at all (23.8%) or mostly (19.8%). The share of the public with neutral attitude is the highest of all eight investigated foreign policy options, with close to a third of the public opting neither sensible nor senseless. With 11.4% who are entirely unopinionated, there is 43.8% of the public with no immediate gut reaction on whether the abandonment of the cooperation with Russia makes sense or not.

Therefore, these two control questions indicate that the perceived stickiness of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia, reflected in the public's general support to it, aligns with how readily the public deems it sensible (mean score: 3.55) or views its abandonment as nonsense (mean score: 2.45). The statistical analyses further reveal a strong correlation between such public attitudes toward Serbia's cooperation with Russia and common sense interpretations, shedding light on the potential source of this persistence.

***Chart 32**. Two dimensions of stickiness of the cooperation with Russia among the Serbian public.*



The results of the correlation analysis suggest that public common sense significantly affects the persistence of Serbia's cooperation with Russia. Out of nine public's common sense statements, six are significantly correlated with the public's attitude towards the sensibility of Serbia's cooperation with Russia (coloured in the table). Furthermore, the correlation signs show that these common sense truths are not only relevant but are also correlated in a highly uniform manner, with none indicating a negative direction. Specifically, regarding the first dimension of stickiness, the ease of its introduction and preserving this policy, all six relevant common sense statements (Q35_9, Q34_5, Q35_7, Q35_8, Q34_3, Q24_1) are positively correlated with how sensible Serbia's cooperation with NATO is perceived to be, albeit to varying degrees. Simply put, the correlation analysis shows that the more the public endorses the prevailing depictions of the world and Serbia's position, the more they favour Serbia's cooperation with Russia.

Table 9. *Correlation analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible Serbia's cooperation with Russia is.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	2.2e-16	0.3173009
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must	7.072e-08	0.1642134
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	2.2e-16	0.3820566
Q35_8		Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	2.2e-16	0.3138034
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	3.881e-10	0.1902535
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	1.373e-06	0.1475385
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	2.2e-16	0.4350606
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	6.176e-12	-0.2115478
Q35_3		Serbia is between East and West.	0.01162	0.07822559

The answers to the opposite question, capturing the second dimension of stickiness, also appear correlated with seven of the identified statements. Expectedly, opposite to the previous chart, the attitude towards how sensible it is for Serbia to abandon cooperation with Russia is inversely correlated with all but one statement (Q35_4). Therefore, the more the public shares the interpretive scheme recognised as public common sense in Serbia, the less they are inclined to abandon this foreign policy. The correlation analysis thus indicates that both dimensions of its stickiness – the ease of its introduction and the ease of its abandonment – are strongly connected to the common sense of the Serbian public regarding international relations and Serbia's position within them.

Table 10. *Correlation analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible the abandonment of Serbia's cooperation with Russia is.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	2.2e-16	-0.304208
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.	3.665e-08	-0.1678825
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	2.2e-16	-0.3675126
Q35_8		Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	2.2e-16	-0.2968581
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	8.649e-12	-0.207368
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	0.0001638	-0.1154622

Q35_4	Whom to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	0.01427	0.07637355
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	2.2e-16	-0.3919883
Q35_2		Serbia belongs the West.	1.031e-15	0.2466574

The results of the linear regression, which uses common-sense statements as independent variables and opinions on Serbia's cooperation with Russia as the dependent variable, further reinforce these findings. They once again suggest that there is more than just a correlation between the common sense interpretive scheme and the public's immediate judgment on whether Serbia's cooperation with Russia makes sense. All six statements found to be correlated with the public's attitude towards the sensibility of this foreign policy have very strong and uniformly positive coefficients. Not a single common sense statement diminishes the immediate attachment to this foreign policy; instead, all relevant statements contribute to the perception of Serbia's cooperation with Russia as dominantly and immediately positive. While some foreign policies may have a stronger connection to the common sense interpretive scheme, none of the four explored policies resonates as uniformly as this one.

Table 11. *Regression analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible Serbia's cooperation with Russia is.*

No.	**Scheme Part**	**Statement**	**Coefficient**	**P-value**
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	0.31770	<2e-16 ***
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.	0.17948	2.23e-06 ***
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	0.36800	<2e-16 ***
Q35_8		Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	0.32348	<2e-16 ***
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	0.18995	3.19e-08 ***
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	0.1136	0.000436 ***
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	0.43672	<2e-16 ***
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	-0.24577	2.03e-13 ***
Q35_3		Serbia is between East and West.	0.11097	0.000977 ***

The results of the linear regression analysis related to the opposite question, addressing the second dimension of this policy's stickiness, further illuminate the interpretive framework shaping public attitudes on the rationale behind abandoning cooperation with Russia. Eight statements prove to be statistically relevant, mobilising almost the entire common sense interpretive scheme of international relations and Serbia's position within them. Six of these eight statements have a very

strong and negative correlation with the attitude that abandoning this foreign policy is sensible (Q35_9, Q34_5, Q35_7, Q35_8, Q34_3, Q34_1). The remaining two statements are positively connected to supporting the abandonment of this policy (Q34_2, Q35_4), although the coefficients indicate that this connection is not particularly strong. In other words, the closer individuals align with a common-sense understanding of international relations, the stronger their opposition to abandoning cooperation with Russia. While the cooperation with Russia triggers cues that uniformly support it, the question of abandonment triggers two statements in an inverse connection, creating a slightly mixed signal, albeit to a very limited extent. Overall, the cues against abandoning cooperation with Russia appear to be present and stable within the common sense interpretive scheme.

Table 12. *Regression analysis between the three-part public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible the abandonment of Serbia's cooperation with Russia is.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	Coefficient	P-value
Q35_9	Whether to cooperate?	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	-0.30605	<2e-16 ***
Q34_5		The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.	-0.15247	4.45e-05 ***
Q34_2		A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.	0.06732	0.0181 *
Q35_7	How to cooperate?	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	-0.34497	<2e-16 ***
Q35_8		Serbia is located at the crossroads and therefore important to the great powers.	-0.29421	<2e-16 ***
Q34_3		Ideals and values should be fought for at all costs.	-0.19313	7.83e-09 ***
Q34_1		A state should choose a side in international relations.	-0.07076	0.0259 *
Q35_4	Whom to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	0.09726	0.00482 **
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	-0.38024	<2e-16 ***
Q35_2		Serbia belongs to the West.	0.28577	<2e-16 ***

In the realm of common sense interpretative schemes that guide decisions on *whether security and defence cooperation is at all sensible*, two out of three identified statements significantly influence Serbian attitudes towards cooperation with Russia. The most substantial connection is between the belief in the sensibility of cooperating with Russia and the perception that Serbia's historical role has been underappreciated (0.31770, p<2e-16). Whether the Serbian public views Russia as historically fair or similarly mistreated, a sense of resentment regarding Serbia's perceived historical neglect fuels support for cooperation with Russia. Conversely, those who do not feel Serbia's historical contributions have been overlooked are less inclined to see the cooperation with Russia as sensible. This suggests that, for many in Serbia, cooperation with Russia is driven largely by spite and revanchism to the other 'side'. Regression analysis reinforces these findings, showing that the stronger these beliefs are, the less sense abandoning this foreign policy stance appears to make – a sentiment widely held among many in Serbia (-0.30605, p<2e-16).

Second, the more someone believes that the strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must, the more the cooperation with Russia makes sense to them (0.17948, p<2.23e-06). This contrasts with perceptions of Serbia's cooperation with NATO, which align in the opposite direction of this belief. This suggests that, among Russia's supporters, there is a perception that pragmatism is favourable or that Russia represents an advantageous ally to align with. They do not deny this reality

but frame it in a way that emphasizes the benefits of cooperating with Russia. Unlike the cognitive and affective dissonance evident in perceptions of NATO, this misalignment is either absent or too weak in this case, allowing the public to reconcile feelings of being small or weak and instead align themselves with a powerful actor they perceive as able to act with impunity.

The statement that cooperation with everyone is sensible regardless of differences appears statistically insignificant in relation to attitudes about cooperation with Russia. This is surprising since it positively correlates with all other foreign policies and inversely relates to their potential abandonment. Despite its common acceptance, this idea does not significantly impact opinions about cooperating with Russia, suggesting that other cognitive and emotional factors are more influential in these judgments. However, this statement becomes statistically significant when respondents consider whether it is sensible for Serbia to abandon its foreign policy with Russia. Although the connection is not particularly strong, the more respondents agree with this statement, the less they believe that abandoning the policy is sensible (0.06732, p=0.0181). Hence, when it comes to the first part of the common sense interpretive scheme, cognitive and affective cues have been fairly favourable, with the cooperation with Russia fitting in both aspects.

The part of common sense scheme that refers to *what type of cooperation* in security and defence matters is sensible also provides strong and uniform impetus to the attitude on how sensible cooperation with Russia is. Notably, the same four statements that oppose cooperation with NATO now demonstrate a positive correlation with cooperation with Russia. Again, very different to the cooperation with NATO, the cooperation with Russia appears to make sense based on the common sense statements that are perhaps led by more normative stands. The more the public believes that ideals and values are worth fighting for, the more one supports cooperation with Russia (0.18995, p=3.19e-08). And the other way around, the less they are inclined to cherish ideas and values in deciding how to behave in international relations, the less they believe that cooperation with Russia makes sense (-0.19313, p=7.83e-09). This normative underpinning is also evident from the belief that the attitude on cooperation with Russia is directly correlated with the perception that Serbia has always been on the right side of history (-0.19313, p=7.83e-09). Therefore, among those who view this foreign policy sensible, there is a strong resentment toward how Serbia is treated by other great powers, with the notable exception of Russia. The regression analysis on whether the abandonment of this foreign policy makes sense indicates the same thing as both statements stand in a negative correlation with the idea of the abandonment of Serbia's cooperation with Russia.

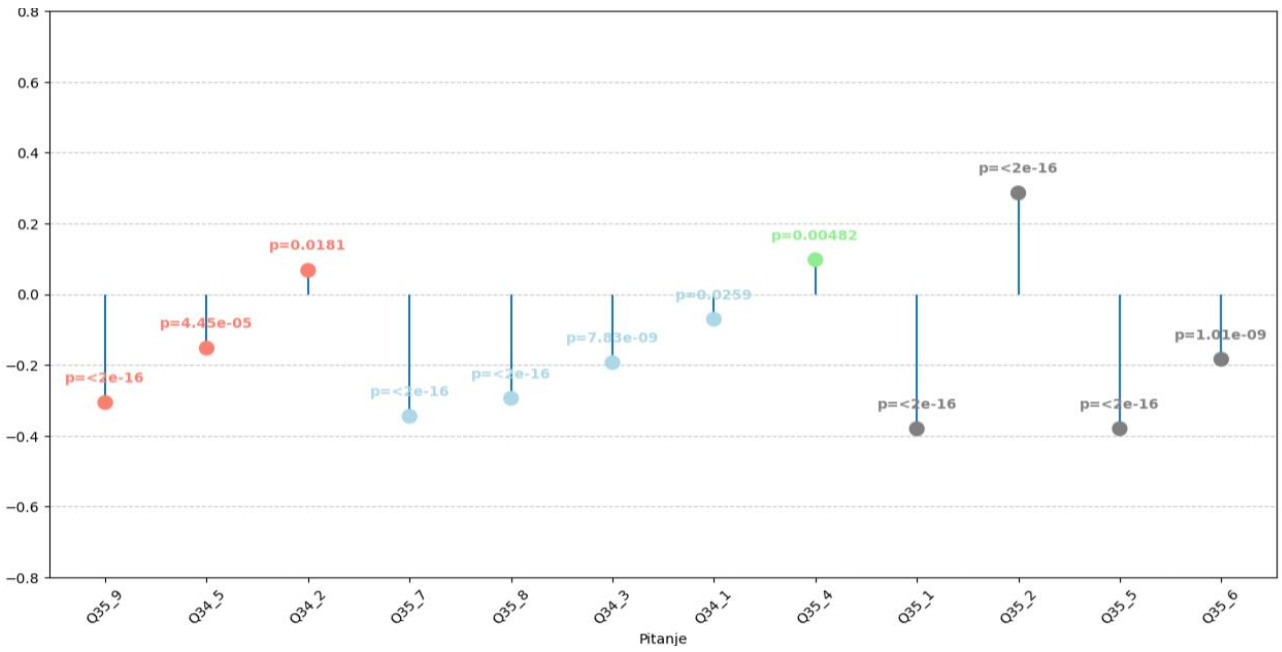
This is directly evident from the fact that the belief that choosing sides in international relations makes sense actually contributes to the perception that cooperation with Russia is sensible (0.1136, p=0.000436). Supporters of cooperation with Russia are less inclined towards balancing and more towards stronger alliances, reflecting an overall preference for a pragmatic approach to collaboration. While affective cues previously negatively affected cooperation with NATO, current alignment of cognitive and affective cues reinforces the perception of the sensibility of cooperating with Russia and the undesirability of abandoning it. Similarly, attitudes towards Serbia's cooperation with Russia are directly linked to the perception of Serbia as strategically located and thus significant to major powers (0.32348, p<2e-16). Despite acknowledging Serbia's neutral stance, the majority of the Serbian public prefers choosing sides rather than balancing when opportunities with the 'right' partner arise. Consequently, Russia is widely viewed as a protector against other major powers by a significant segment of the public.

Ultimately, the part of the common sense framework that seems to have the least impact on the stickiness of this policy concerns the statements regarding *whom Serbia should cooperate with,* as two widely shared lessons among the public are statistically insignificant. Firstly, there is no statistical relevance in the link between beliefs about eternal friends and interests, similar to the case with cooperation with NATO. This may be surprising, as one might expect the opposite due to the favourable view of Russia as Serbia's eternal and close ally. This suggests there is no statistical evidence that supporters of Russia hold a more or less realist view of international relations that would either endorse or exclude the concept of 'eternal friends' in international relations. Secondly, there is

no statistically significant association between perceptions of the policy's sensibility and the idea of Serbia being part of Europe. This means that among supporters of cooperation with Russia, attitudes towards Serbia's European identity also vary randomly. While cognitive and affective cues about Serbia's European identity do influence support for abandoning this policy, the strength of this correlation is not particularly strong (0.09726, p=0.00482). Therefore, since none of the statements from this aspect of common sense significantly contribute to or hinder cognitive or affective adherence to this foreign policy, it seems that cooperation with Russia, for most of the public, does not make sense due to their confidence in Serbia's natural place and alignment in the world.

Unsurprisingly, the support to this foreign policy is in a strong positive association with the belief that Serbia belongs to the East (0.43672, p<2e-16). Equally expected, the cooperation with Russia is in a strong and negative correlation with the attitude that Serbia belongs to the West (-0.24577, p=2.03e-13). There is, however, a positive connection between the attitude on whether the cooperation with Russia makes sense and that Serbia is placed between East and West (0.11097, p=0.000977). The more they endorse the idea on Serbia's bordering position, the more they support this cooperation. The opposite question, whether abandoning this policy makes sense, gives almost mirroring results. When it comes to Serbia's natural place, there is strong positive association with the statement that Serbia belongs to Europe (0.09726, p=0.00482) and West (-0.38024, p<2e-16), and a negative coefficient with Serbia's belonging to the East (0.28577, p<2e-16), on one side, and the support to abandonment of this foreign policy. There is no statistically relevant connection to the idea of Serbia being between the East and the West when it comes to abandoning this policy, however. These statements, which significantly impact the policy's stickiness, appear to fall outside the common-sense framework and therefore exert less influence on overall adherence to this policy.

Graph 12. *Regression analysis graph depicting the relationship between the three-partite common-sense framework (independent variable) and public perception of the sensibility of Serbia's cooperation with Russia (dependent variable).*



The decision tree analysis examining the rationale behind Serbia's cooperation with Russia and the possibility of abandoning it highlights the interaction between public common sense and the strong stickiness of this foreign policy (see Box 3 below). It not only confirms the importance of this relationship but also outlines the sequence of steps in common-sense reasoning, pinpointing which beliefs are triggered and in what order among supporters and critics of these two policies – one currently implemented and the other a potential, albeit also improbable, alternative. In sum, the public attitude on sensibility of cooperation with Russia depends largely on whether they see Serbia as part

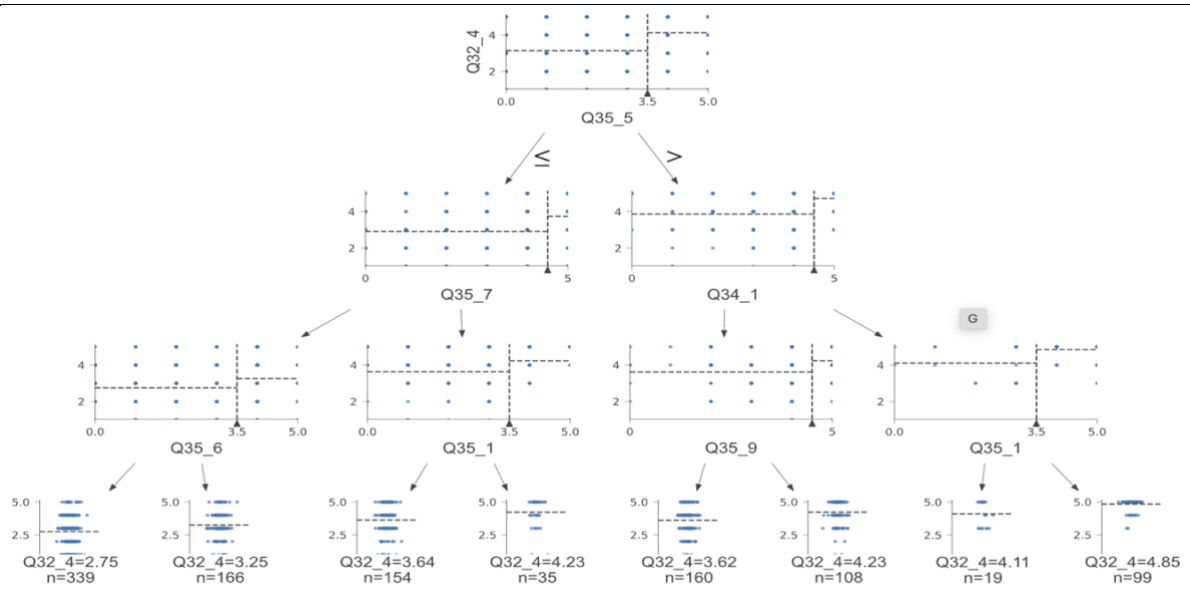
of the East or not, whether it has always been on the right side of history, and whether its historical role has been sufficiently recognised.

Box 3. *The decision tree output regarding the sensibility of Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia, as well as the possibility of abandoning it, in relation to public's common sense.*

32_4 How sensible is it for Serbia to cooperate with Russia?

The response to the question of the how sensible cooperation with Russia is hinges primarily on determining whether Serbia identifies itself as part of the East.

- For those who answered this question with less than or equal to 3.5, the average rating of the cooperation with Russia is slightly above 3, still considering whether Serbia has always been on the right side of history (694).
    - For those who give an answer less than or equal to 4.5, the average rating is slightly below 3, still considering whether Serbia is a guarantor of peace and stability in the Balkans (505).
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 3.5 have an average rating of 2.75 and there are 339 of them.
        - Those who answer greater than 3.5 give an average rating of 3.25 and there are 166 of them.
    - For those who answer this question with more than 4.5, they give an average rating close to 4, still considering whether Serbia belongs to the East (189).
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 3.5 give an average rating slightly above 3.64 and there are 154 of them.
        - Those who answer greater than 3.5 give an average rating of 4.23 and there are 35 of them.
- Those who answer this question with more than 3.5 give an average rating of around 4, still considering whether to choose a side in international relations.
    - For those who answer this question with less than or equal to 4.5, the average rating is slightly below 4, and they further consider whether European countries value Serbia's role in European history.
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 4.5 have an average rating of 3.62 and there are 160 of them.
        - Those who answer greater than 4.5 have an average rating of 4.23 and there are 108 of them.
    - For those who answer this question with greater than 4.5, the average rating is above 4.5, and they further consider whether Serbia belongs to the East.
        - Those who rate less than or equal to 3.5 give an average rating of 4.11 and there are 19 of them.
        - Those who rate more than 3.5 give an average rating of 4.85 and there are 99 of them.

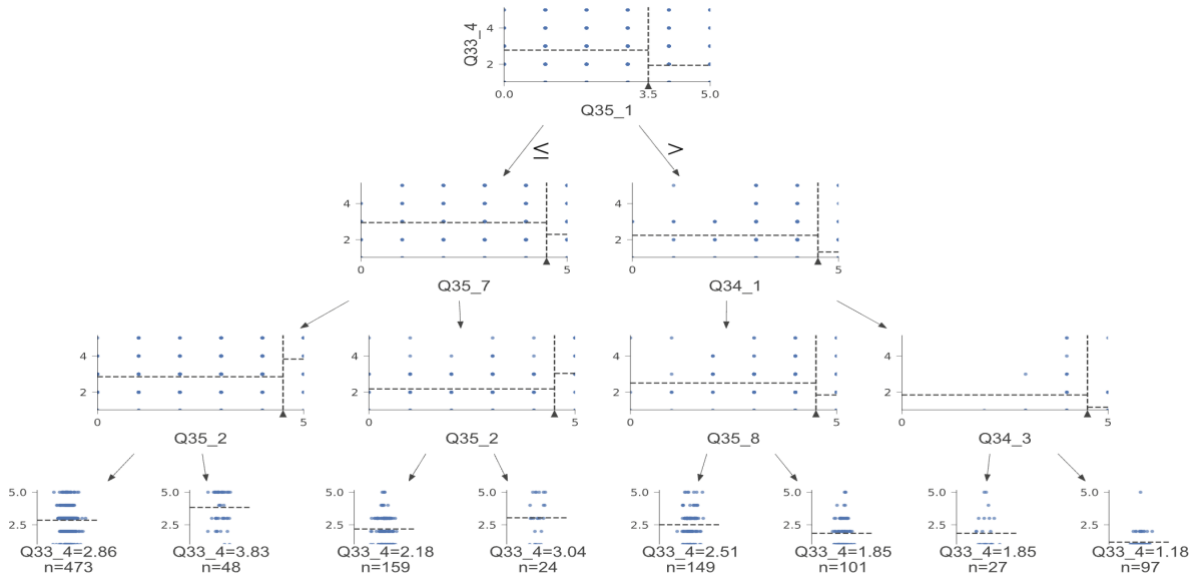


Q32_4 How sensible is it for Serbia to abandon its cooperation with Russia?

For the stance on abandoning cooperation with Russia, the most crucial factor is the answer to the question of whether Serbia belongs to the East.

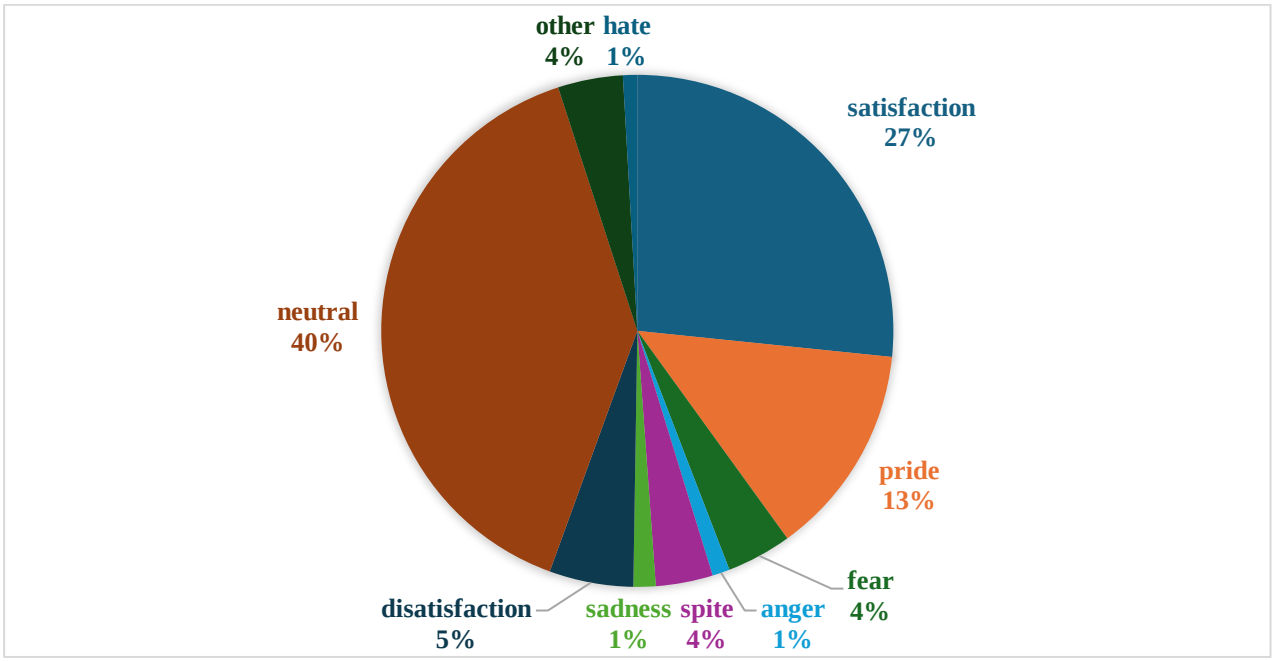
- For those who respond with less than or equal to 3.5, the average support for abandoning this policy is slightly below 3, and they proceed to the question of whether Serbia has always been on the right side of history. (704)
    - Those who answer less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score of around 3, and they proceed to the question of whether Serbia belongs to the West. (521)
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score of 2.86, totalling 473 respondents.
        - Those who answer above 4.5 give an average score of 3.83, totalling 48 respondents.
    - For those who answer above 4.5, the average score is slightly above 2, and they proceed to the question of whether Serbia belongs to the West. (183)
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score of 2.18, totalling 159 respondents.
        - Those who answer above 4.5 give an average score of 3.04, totalling 24 respondents.
- Those who give an answer higher than 3.5 give an average score slightly below 2, and they proceed to the question of whether a state should choose sides in international relations. (274)
    - Those who answer less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score slightly above 2, and they proceed to the question of whether Serbia is at a crossroads and therefore important to great powers. (150)
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score of 2.51, totalling 149 respondents.
        - Those who answer above 4.5 give an average score of 1.85, totalling 101 respondents.
    - For those who answer above 4.5, the average score is below 1, and they proceed to the question of whether ideals should be fought for at all costs. (124)
        - Those who answer less than or equal to 4.5 give an average score of 1.85, totalling 27 respondents.

- Those who answer above 4.5 give an average score of 1.18, totalling 97 respondents.



The structure of the affective attachment to the cooperation with Russia among the Serbian public well resonates with these results. Overall, the ratio is far more favourable than is the case with other three foreign policies, military neutrality included, with significantly more positive emotions (43.6%) than negative emotions (12.8%). Positively charged emotions range from satisfaction (26.6%), followed by pride (13.4%) and spite (3.6%), with the highest level of spite among all other policies. Among the negative emotions, general discontent (5.3%) is the prevailing one, followed by fear (4.1%), sadness (1.4%), anger (1.1%) and hatred (0.9). A share of those with neutral emotions is, however, by far higher (39.4%) than with other foreign policy, contributing to the impression that, similar to military neutrality, for stickiness the lack of directly negative emotions seems to be the most important thing.

Chart 33. *The affective framework behind the public's opinion on the sensibility of cooperation with Russia.*



In summary, the statistical analysis confirms that Serbia's security and defence cooperation with Russia is the most entrenched policy in both dimensions, as it significantly aligns with the prevailing common-sense framework among the Serbian public. Interestingly, the public's judgment of this policy's sensibility seems to be the least ambiguous, shaped by the shared understanding of nearly the entire public, one way or another. Negative cognitive or emotional reactions to this policy are almost non-existent, while dissenting views, when present, tend to be rare and mild. However, notably, as with cooperation with NATO, the third aspect of the common-sense framework remains the least invoked in public reactions to this policy. In other words, cooperation with Russia does not appear to be widely embraced because the East reflects Serbia's perceived natural affiliation, but rather because it stands in opposition to policies and alliances with which Serbia does not align, according to the majority view.

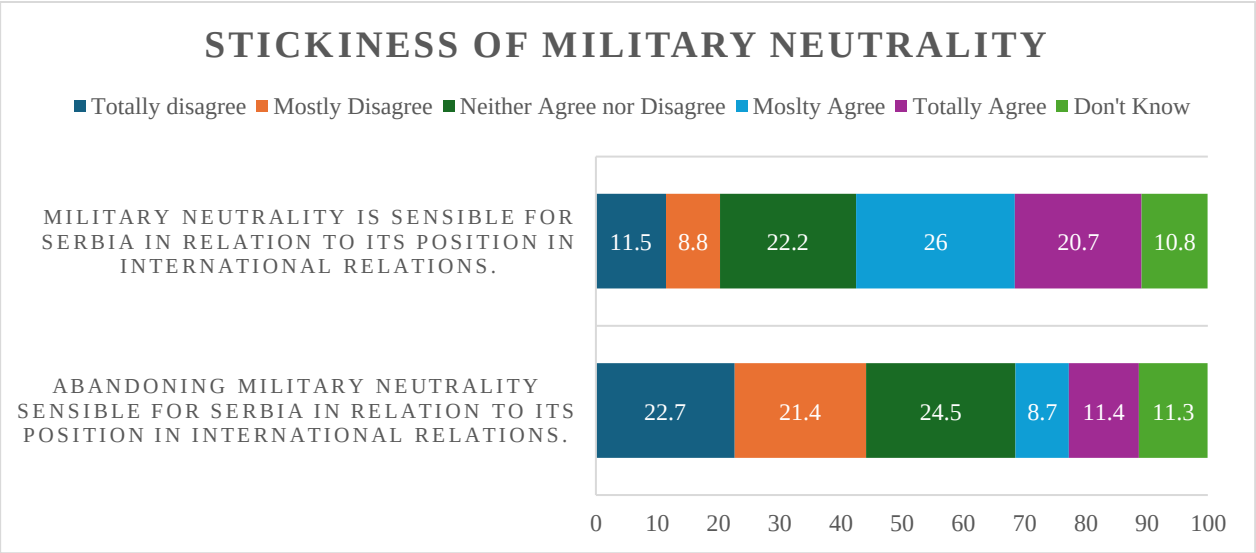
7.4. Sticky Policy of Military Neutrality

Finally, the survey results confirm that military neutrality is very sticky, meaning that its abandonment would not be so easy as its introduction was. A notable 46.7% of respondents expressed an endorsement of Serbia maintaining military neutrality, either completely (20.7%) or mostly (26%). On the contrary, a combined 20.3% of respondents asserted that military neutrality may not be sensible, either not at all (11.5%) or mostly not (8.8%). A significant 22.2% falls in the middle, choosing neither not nor yes, showcasing a more ambivalent stance on the issue. The remaining 10.8% expressed a lack of knowledge, underscoring a segment of the population that remains uncertain about the optimal path for Serbia's security and defence stance. Therefore, while the percentage of the public viewing military neutrality as sensible is rather high, there is still almost a half of the population who does not see it that way. Among that portion of the public, there are, however, more of those who are neutral or unopinionated than those to whom military neutrality does not make sense based on Serbia's position in international relations.

When asked whether abandoning military neutrality made sense given Serbia's position in international relations, public responses further reinforced the impression of this policy's stickiness. A significant portion, comprising 44.1%, expresses a clear lack of support for the abandonment of this foreign policy. On the other hand, a 20.1% demonstrates a backing for such changes, either completely (11,4%) or mostly (8.7%). A notable 24.5% falls in the middle, selecting neither yes nor no, indicating a more ambivalent stance. Overall, the majority of the public finds the idea of abandoning neutrality incomprehensible, outnumbering those who are uncertain or lack a clear stance, as well as those who find the cessation of this foreign policy reasonable, even when combined.

Therefore, the extent to which military neutrality appears sensible to the public (mean score: 3.4) versus how sensible its abandonment is (2.6) to the Serbian public reveal much about the stickiness of military neutrality in Serbia, previously suggested by the interviews and the existing literature. Data indicates that military neutrality aligns with public common sense, facilitating its adoption and maintenance by policymakers while making its abandonment challenging. This stickiness, stemming from the public common sense, is further supported by correlation analysis, linear and multiple regression analysis, and 'if-then' analysis.

***Chart 34**. Two dimensions of stickiness of Serbia's policy of military neutrality.*



The correlation analysis shows that both dimensions of military neutrality stickiness are associated with the common sense interpretative scheme since there is a statistically significant correlation between five common sense elements and the public attitude on how sensible the policy of military neutrality or its abandonment is. While the degree to which the attitude towards military neutrality and each specific claim about international relations and Serbia's position in them is different, the coefficients values are very low for all five statements that are found statistically significant, signalising a strong relationship between the variables. However, in addition to the correlation strength, the direction of the correlations in of the common sense statement and the public attitude on either maintaining or abandoning military neutrality reveal a lot about the stickiness of military neutrality. First, the corelation coefficient between almost all common sense statements (four out of five) is positively correlated with the support to military neutrality, indicating that the beneficial perception of Serbia's military neutrality is very much influenced by the general perception citizens hold about international relations. In other words, the correlation analysis suggests that is very likely that those who endorse the four out of five truths about the world listed below (Q34_2, Q35_7, Q35_4, Q34_4) are likely to judge military neutrality as sensible.

***Table 13.** Correlation analysis between the public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible military neutrality is for Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.	3.363e-15	0.2381585
Q34_1	How to cooperate?	A state should choose sides in international relations.	1.243e-10	-0.1956609
Q35_7		Serbia has always been on the right side of history.	0.01087	0.07909381
Q35_4	Whom to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	7.89e-16	0.2468195
Q34_4		There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	7.131e-12	0.208671
Q35_2	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia is a part of the West.	0.0009574	0.1023666
Q35_3		Serbia is between East and West.	5.175e-12	0.2116044

Similarly, the correlation coefficient between support for abandoning military neutrality and all but one of the common sense statements (Q34_1) is negative. In other words, while not all statements from the common sense framework appear relevant or 'activated' concerning attitudes towards military neutrality, those who adhere to the common-sense framework are inclined to perceive abandoning military neutrality is far from sensible.

Table 14. *Correlation analysis between the public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible abandoning military neutrality is for Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	P-value	rho
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.	3.124e-12	-0.2118583
Q34_1	How to cooperate?	A state should choose sides in international relations.	2.2e-16	0.2549342
Q34_4		There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	3.18e-10	-0.1922472
Q35_4	Whom to cooperate with?	Serbia belongs to Europe.	8.242e-11	-0.2005945
Q35_1	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the East.	0.04093	0.06349258
Q35_3		Serbia is between East and West.	5.63e-08	-0.1677138

The strong linkage between public opinion on military neutrality and common sense is further supported by the results of the regression analysis, which shows a strong linear relationship between the variables, whether positive or negative. Similar to the correlation analysis, the results display dominantly positive coefficients between the common sense framework and the perception of military neutrality as a sensible foreign policy. Specifically, this means that as the endorsement for each of the statements except one (Q34_1) in the table below increases the perception of military neutrality as a sensible foreign policy also tends to increase, although with varying predictability. Thus, the correlation analysis confirms that common sense contributes to the stickiness of military neutrality, reflected in strong support for its maintenance and strong opposition to its abandonment. Put simply, military neutrality remains a steadfast position among the Serbian public because it aligns with their worldview and understanding of Serbia's position in the global context.

Table 15. *Regression analysis between the public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible abandoning military neutrality is for Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	Coefficient	P-value
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.	0.24512	6.73e-15 ***
Q34_1	How to cooperate?	A state should choose sides in international relations.	-0.26631	3.26e-14***
Q34_4	Whom to cooperate with?	There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	0.26165	7.74e-15 ***
Q35_4		Serbia belongs to Europe.	0.25935	6.64e-12 ***

Q35_2	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia belongs to the West.	0.13286	0.000269 ***
Q35_3		Serbia is between East and West.	0.24150	2.95e-11 ***

Similar to the findings from the correlation analysis, the regression analysis indicates that while not all statements are statistically significant, five of the six relevant statements show an inverse relationship with support for abandoning military neutrality. The public's shared understanding of international politics and Serbia's perceived natural and sensible role within it strongly opposes the idea of abandoning military neutrality.

Table 16. *Regression analysis between the public common sense interpretative scheme and the attitude on how sensible abandoning military neutrality is for Serbia.*

No.	Scheme Part	Statement	Coefficient	P-value
Q34_2	Whether to cooperate?	A state should cooperate with everyone, regardless of differences.	-0.22678	2e-12 ***
Q34_1	How to cooperate?	A state should choose sides in international relations.	0.33338	<2e-16 ***
Q34_4	Whom to cooperate with?	There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.	-0.25967	5.36e-14 ***
Q35_4		Serbia is a part of Europe.	-0.20123	2.1e-07 ***
Q35_3	Bellow common sense threshold	Serbia is between East and West.	-0.19267	-5.209 2.29e-07 ***

Three groups of identified common sense statements regarding the cooperation in security and defence outline a common interpretive pattern among supporters or opponents of military neutrality, illuminating why and how policymakers are constrained in relation to this policy. When it comes to *whether a state should at all cooperate with others*, only one out of three identified lessons seem to be relevant for the attitude on military neutrality. Specifically, the more citizens believe that cooperation with all parties is necessary, the stronger their support for military neutrality (0.24512, $p < 0.001$). Conversely, the opposite relationship is observed for the option of abandonment (-0.22678, $p < 0.001$). The findings indicate that the Serbian public views military neutrality not as self-reliance exclusively but as a commitment to cooperating with all international actors. In line with what the elites say, in the eyes of the Serbian public, military neutrality is a policy which is not incompatible but, on contrary, a foreign policy which creates conditions for maintaining security and defence relations with everyone, regardless of differences. As discussed, while this cognitively makes sense, the affective reservations have tempered support, resulting in only a narrow absolute majority endorsing this view.

The analysis also reveals that two other statements in the common sense interpretative scheme related to whether cooperation makes sense at all, do not appear relevant to their attitude towards Serbia's military neutrality. First, while the belief that the strong do what they want and the weak suffer what they must is one of the most prominent 'truths' about international relations among the Serbian public (mean 4.22), this lesson is not strongly correlated with the public's attitude on military neutrality. In other words, the results suggest that whether military neutrality makes sense to someone is not influenced by their belief about the power dynamics represented in the statement. This could imply that their evaluation of military neutrality as a foreign policy option is not influenced by considerations of international power dynamics or Serbia's size and strength. In other words, their

views on the sensibility of military neutrality are not based on whether they perceive Serbia as weak or strong. Alternatively, it might be that they do not regard military neutrality as a particularly effective means of asserting or denying agency in international relations – military neutrality may not be seen neither as 'lay low' nor 'in your face' strategy towards major powers, as often heard.

Similarly, the stickiness of military neutrality is not influenced by the public's sentiment on the international perception of Serbia's role in history. Even though this is among the 'truths' that have the widest share and the strongest affective appeal (mean of 4.07) among the Serbian public, it appears that their view of military neutrality does not stem from this judgment. This might be surprising since the policy of military neutrality, especially in the elite's discourse, is often portrayed as an expression of some disappointment or resentment to what Serbia has done and sacrificed by always being on the right side of history. Nevertheless, neither corelation analysis nor linear regression show any significant linkage between these two variables, suggesting that support to military neutrality or its abandonment is unlikely to stem from the public's satisfaction or dissatisfaction on how Serbia's contribution to the European history been perceived by the European and international partners. In other words, military neutrality sticks among the Serbian public for cognitive and affective reasons different than these. When it comes to the first part of the scheme, this is primarily due to cognitive cues from the lesson highlighting the necessity of cooperation with everyone.

The part of public common sense interpretative scheme that gives cues on *what cooperation is sensible* in security and defence matters offers both little and mixed rationale for military neutrality. Out of four lessons that could be considered public common sense in this regard, only one appears significant for the attitude on military neutrality, and negatively. The analysis shows that the more someone believes that picking sides is good, the less they find military neutrality sensible (-0.26631, p=3.26e-14). Having in mind that the vast majority of the public believes that states should indeed pick sides in international relations, the analysis reveals that the stickiness of military neutrality is probably negatively impacted by this prevailing assumption among the Serbian public, meaning that the public supports military neutrality despite believing that picking sides is sensible. There might be a chance that the Serbian public perceives that military neutrality is compatible or, in its own way, a method of picking sides, particularly having in mind that military neutrality was not only introduced, but also for long presented as neutrality 'against' a specific side, NATO namely. Nevertheless, while this possibility needs further investigation, if this chain of reasoning was particularly strong, the coefficient would be neither strong nor negative. Therefore, it might be that military neutrality sticks simply because other common sense traits, not captured in the framework outlined here, prevail.

Interestingly, the remaining public common sense claims centred around the question what cooperation makes sense, however, is statistically irrelevant for the public's attitude on military neutrality. Both correlation analysis and linear regression show a lack of connection between the beliefs that would perhaps reveal the 'moral' and normative underpinning of the attitude to military neutrality that can be suggested by the elites. Neither the claim that Serbia has always been on the right side of history nor that ideals are worth fighting for at any cost appear relevant for the public's judgment of this specific foreign policy. These results indirectly suggest that the public might not view military neutrality as particularly morally principled stance in international relations as the elites often present it, but rather as one of the possible instruments for safeguarding Serbia's interest in international arena that is deemed more as 'amoral,' than moral or immoral. While the public agrees that ideals are worth fighting for at any cost and that Serbia managed to always end on the right side of critical world events, they apparently do not rely on these tropes when judging the sensibility of military neutrality and vice versa. While counterintuitive, especially having in mind that these figures are often mentioned particularly in relation to military neutrality, these findings do resonate with the abovementioned evidence that public attitude on military neutrality is not particularly shaped by whether Serbia's role was appreciated enough by European and international partners or not. Likewise, generally strong and widespread perception that Serbia is placed at the crossroads and

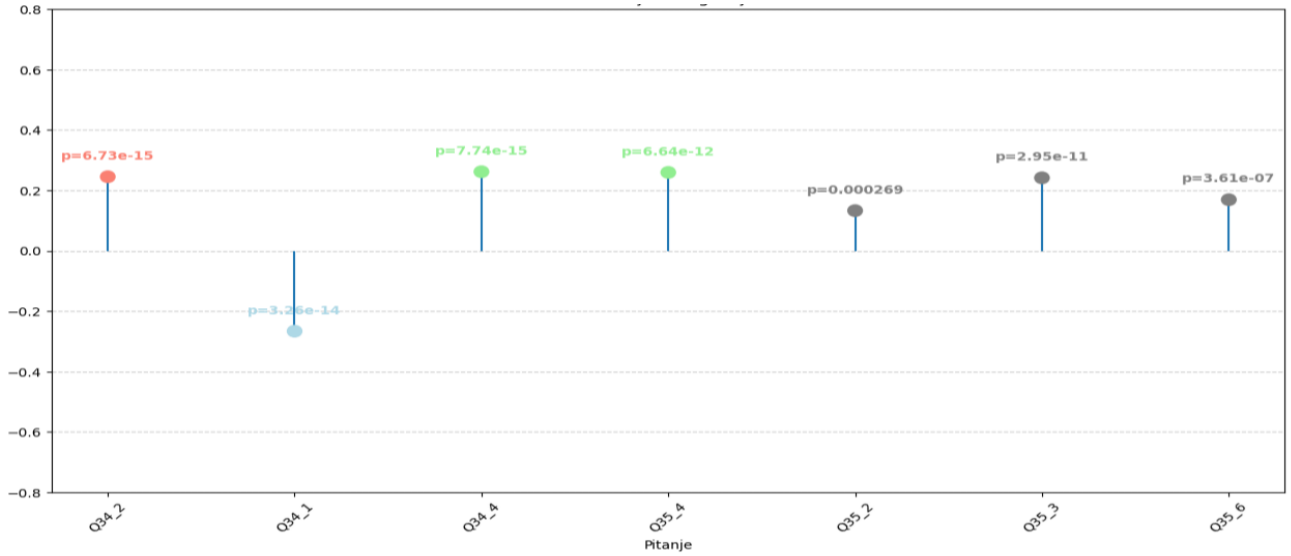
therefore important to great powers does not, however, significantly influence the public's perception of military neutrality, as their linkage is weak based on both correlation analysis and linear regression.

Finally, the part of common sense interpretative scheme that provides cues on *who Serbia should cooperate with* in security and defence matters also provides valuable insights on the solid stickiness of military neutrality among the Serbian public. Both common sense claims that have proven to be common enough to be considered public common sense in regard to Serbia's 'natural' partners in security and defence matters have proven to be significantly corelated with the public' attitude on military neutrality. Moreover, both correlation analysis and linear regression indicate positive linkage between them, meaning that military neutrality is strongly and positively influenced by the two major truths the public endorses in relation to international relations and Serbia's position in them. In other words, based on what they dominantly think about Serbia's common-sense position in the global security and defence architecture, military neutrality makes sense to the Serbian public both cognitively and affectively. The analysis revealed no 'mixed signals' in this regard, as no common sense statement was in negative relationship with the support to military neutrality.

First, the more someone agrees with the fact that there are no internal friends or enemies, but only eternal interests in international relations, the more military neutrality makes sense to them (0.26165, p=7.74e-15). On contrary, those who believe that military neutrality should be abandoned, believe that international relations might not be only about interests and are more inclined to believe that friendships are possible (-0.25967, p=5.36e-14). In line with much other evidence presented above, this is another strong signal that the logic of military neutrality supporters is more of a pragmatic or realistic one, and less a normative or idealistic, than one might assume. The acknowledgment that international relations are a place where interests prevail over friendships and emotions is, for reasons that should be further explored, supportive of military neutrality according to the Serbian public. In international relations in which states pursue their selfish interests, the Serbian public thinks that staying neutral makes sense – this aligns with findings from secondary literature, which suggest that the public perceives military neutrality as a safeguard against being entangled in the conflicts of other nations.

Second, and very important, the support to military neutrality is very much sustained by the public perception that Serbia belongs to Europe (0.25935, p=6.64e-12). This connection is very strong as the evidence suggest the reversed causation in case of support to abandonment of military neutrality (-0.20123, p=2.1e-07). The evidence becomes even more intriguing when considered alongside findings about competing claims regarding Serbia's natural community. While these claims may not align with common sense, they offer valuable insights into how the public perceives Europe and, by extension, why military neutrality appears logical to them. The support to military neutrality appears significantly shaped by the attitude that Serbia is placed between the East and West. The more they endorse this claim, the more they support military neutrality and oppose its abandonment (0.24150, p=2.95e-11). While the portion of the public who believes that Serbia belongs to the Western security community is not particularly big, this attitude makes them more supportive of military neutrality (0.13286, p=0.000269). On contrary, there is no correlation between the support to the attitude that Serbia is in the East and to military neutrality. Moreover, the correlation analysis (not linear regression, though) reveals that the part of the public which believes that Serbia belongs to the East is actually supportive of abandoning military neutrality (0.04093, p=0.06349258), while the claim about Serbia belonging to the West does not seem to correlate strongly with the attitude on the abandonment of military neutrality. While this intriguing finding deserve deeper investigation, the existing evidence suggest that military neutrality is more supported by those who are more pro-Western oriented and whose idea of Europe is less East-centred but and more West-cantered or, at least, 'in between.'

Graph 13. *Regression analysis graph depicting the relationship between the three-partite common-sense framework (independent variable) and public perception of the sensibility of military neutrality for Serbia (dependent variable).*



The decision tree analysis exploring the rationale behind Serbia's policy of military neutrality and the potential for its abandonment underscores the interplay between public common sense and the entrenched nature of this foreign policy stance (see Box 4 below). In addition to affirming the strength of this relationship, the analysis reveals the step-by-step progression typical of common-sense reasoning, identifying which beliefs are activated and in what sequence among supporters and critics of the policy. This sheds light on why policymakers were able to implement it with relative ease and why its abandonment has become a taboo in contemporary foreign policy discourse in Serbia. In summary, public opinion on how sensible military neutrality is primarily depends on their views about the necessity of taking sides in international relations, Serbia's place within Europe, and the importance of maintaining cooperation with all parties despite differences.

Box 4. *The decision tree output regarding the sensibility of Serbia's policy of military neutrality, as well as the possibility of abandoning it, in relation to public's common sense.*

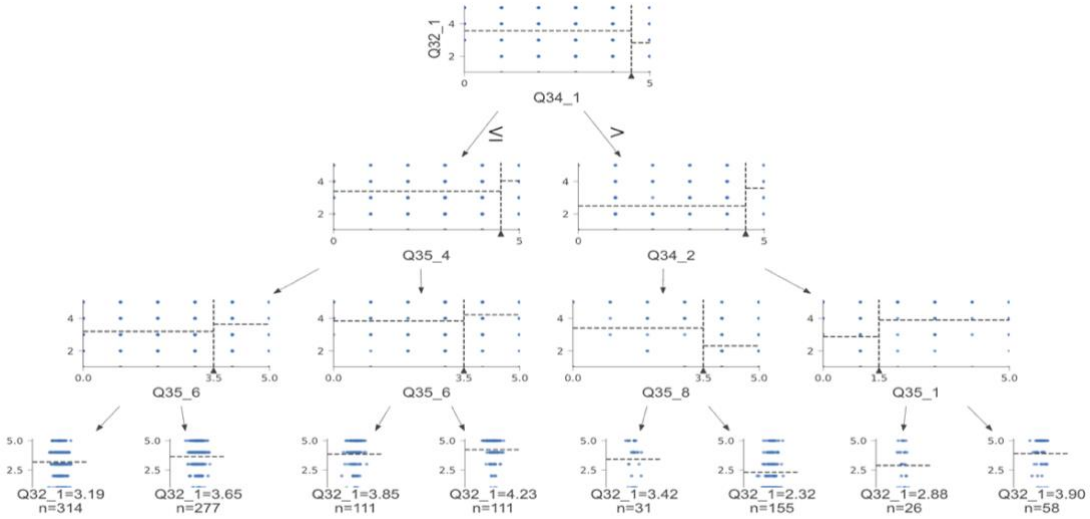
Q32_1 How sensible is Serbia's policy of military neutrality?

Public opinion on the sensibility of military neutrality largely hinges on perspectives regarding the necessity of choosing a side in international relations.

- Those who rate the question about choosing sides in international relations from 1 to 4.5 also consider whether Serbia belongs to Europe. Their average rating for military neutrality is about 3.5.
    - Those who give a rating of 4 or less to this question further consider whether Serbia is a guarantor of peace and stability in the Balkans. (592 respondents)
        - Of those who rate this question 3.5 or less, there are 314 respondents. Their average rating for the sensibility of military neutrality is 3.19.
        - Of those who rate this question above 3.5, there are 277 respondents. Their average rating for the sensibility of military neutrality is 3.65.
    - Those who rate the question about whether Serbia belongs to Europe above 4.5 also consider whether Serbia is a guarantor of peace and security in the Balkans. (222 respondents)

- Of those who rate this question 3.5 or less, there are 111 respondents. Their average rating for the sensibility of military neutrality is 3.85.
- Of those who rate this question above 3.5, there are 111 respondents. Their average rating for the sensibility of military neutrality is 4.23.

- If they think that one should completely choose a side in international relations (rate above 3.5), they further consider whether Serbia should cooperate with everyone regardless of differences. Their average rating for military neutrality is slightly below 3.
  - Those who rate this question 4.5 or less further consider whether Serbia is at the crossroads of routes and therefore important to great powers. (186 respondents)
    - Of those who rate this question 3.5 or less, there are 31 respondents. Their average rating for military neutrality is 3.42.
    - Of those who rate this question above 3.5, there are 155 respondents. Their average rating for military neutrality is 2.32.
  - Those who think Serbia should cooperate with everyone regardless of differences (rate above 4.5) further consider whether Serbia belongs to the East. (84 respondents)
    - Of those who think it does not (rate up to 1.5), there are 26 respondents, and their average rating for military neutrality is 2.88.
    - Of those who think it does (rate above 1.5), there are 58 respondents, and their average rating for military neutrality is 3.90.



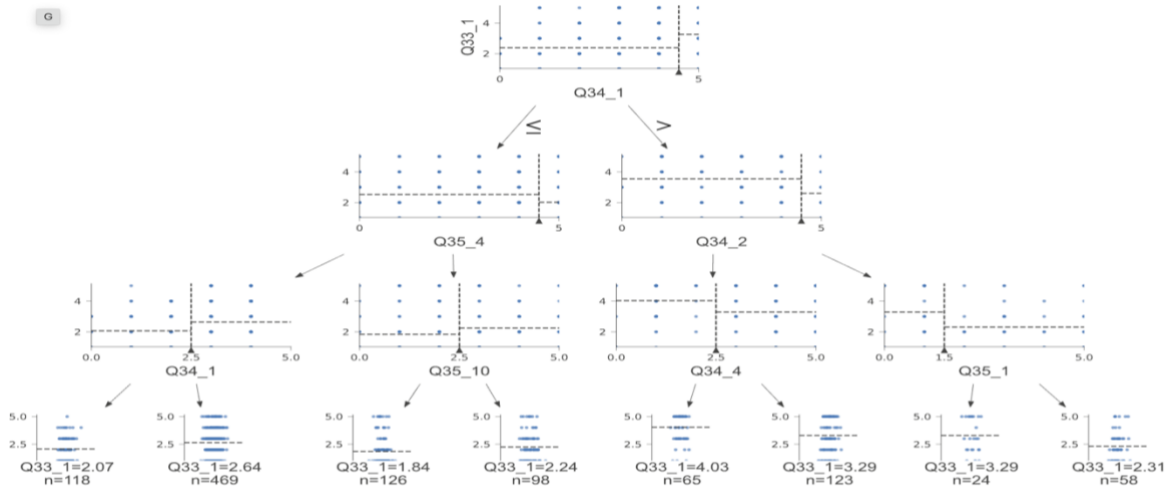
Q33_1 How sensible is it for Serbia to abandon its policy of military neutrality?

To answer the question about supporting the abandonment of military neutrality, the most important question is whether one should choose a side in international relations.

- For those who rate this question 4.5 or less, the average rating is around 2.5, and they proceed to the question of whether Serbia belongs to Europe. (812 respondents)
  - For those who rate this question 4.5 or less, the average rating is around 2.5, and they proceed to the question of whether Serbia should choose a side in international relations. (587 respondents)
    - Those who rate it 2.5 or less give an average rating of 2.07, and there are 118 respondents.
    - Those who rate it above 2.5 give an average rating of around 2.64, and there are 469 respondents.

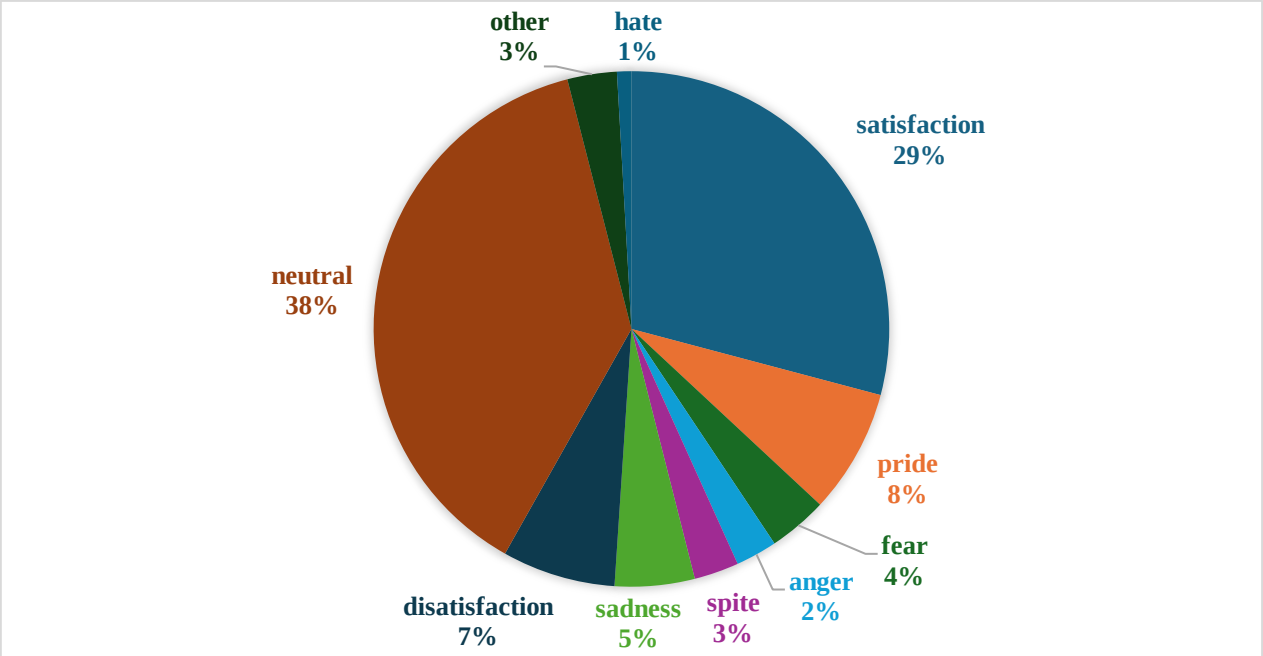
- For those who rate this question above 4.5, the average rating is slightly above 2, and they proceed to the question of whether Serbia's role in European history is appreciated. (225 respondents)
    - Those who rate it 2.5 or less give an average rating of 1.84, and there are 126 respondents.
    - Those who rate it above 2.5 give an average rating of 2.24, and there are 98 respondents.

- Those who rate the question above 4.5 give an average rating for abandoning military neutrality above 3 and proceed to the question of whether Serbia should cooperate with everyone regardless of differences. (270 respondents)
    - Those who rate this question below or above 4.5 give an average rating of around 3.5, and they proceed to the question of whether there are eternal friends or only eternal interests. (188 respondents)
        - Those who rate this question 2.5 or less give an average rating of 4.03, and there are 65 respondents.
        - Those who rate it above 2.5 give an average rating of 3.29, and there are 123 respondents.
    - For those who rate the question higher than 4.5, they proceed to the question of whether Serbia belongs to the East. (82 respondents)
        - Those who rate it 1.5 or less give an average rating of 3.29, and there are 24 respondents.
        - Those who rate it above 1.5 give an average rating of 2.31, and there are 58 respondents.



The structure of emotions towards military neutrality generally aligns with common sense scheme, suggesting that these emotions play a key role in making the policy seem logical and stick among the Serbian public. Positive emotions account for 39.7%, including general satisfaction (29.1%), pride (7.8%), and spite (2.8%). Negative emotions make up 19.3%, with general discontent (7.1%), sadness (5%), fear (3.7%), anger (2.6%), and a small percentage associating neutrality with hatred (0.9%). Despite the dominant positive affective attachment (39.7%), a significant portion (37.8%) remains neutral. While further research is needed, it appears that emotionally charged common sense truths are not particularly relevant – instead, cognitive and practical lessons prevail. The fact military neutrality stickiness much revolves the fact that people have no immediate negative affects against it – even the one which is in a reversed correlation is rather neutral, with minimal affective baggage.

Chart 35. *The affective framework behind the public's opinion on the sensibility of Serbia's policy of military neutrality.*



In sum, the stickiness of military neutrality appears to stem from its positive and strong alignment with the conceptions of the international relations and Serbia's position in them that most of the public consider true. The list of the identified common sense truths that significantly underpin the public's attitude to military neutrality is not long and appears that the idea of Serbia's military neutrality 'triggers' only half of the prevailing conceptions about the world. In other words, the interpretative scheme that governs the attitudes on military neutrality is in a way simpler than is the case with the remaining three foreign policies, probably reconfirming the low understanding of this policy among the Serbian public. While these findings require more research, a shorter and less complicated list, with very few mixed signals, apparently contributed that military neutrality very quickly appears sensible to most of the public, while its abandonment does not make sense to the large majority of the Serbian public. In sum, those who find military neutrality sensible have a rather coherent worldview that assumes that to survive in international relations, states need to acknowledge the interest-based nature, try to cooperate with everybody and prioritise its European identity and position that does not make push it necessarily towards either East or West – all what military neutrality apparently allows in their understanding of this policy.

7.5. Summary of Findings: Serbia's Security and Defence Cooperation Policy Through the Foreign Policy Stickiness Model

The uneven stickiness of Serbia's multifaceted foreign policy in security and defence cooperation, hypothesised from the secondary literature and interviews, has been initially confirmed by survey results on how sensible each of these policies, or their abandonment, appears to the public. The immediate reaction to maintaining or abandoning each of the four pillars of this policy confirms that cooperation with Russia and military neutrality are stickier than cooperation with the EU, which, in turn, is stickier than cooperation with NATO. While these results, overall, might not be surprising to those familiar with the context, the added value of this analysis is in confirmation that these attitudes is strongly related to and influenced by the prevailing common-sense framework in the society. In other words, the outlined empirical examination suggests that publics' common sense indeed plays a

significant role in their immediate judgments on specific policies proposed by policymakers, thereby influencing the stickiness of foreign policies in both dimensions. By unravelling the power of common sense in the public's immediate judgments of international affairs and foreign policy, the analysis shows how common sense helps in making sense of the international world and Serbia' behaviour toward it, acting as one of the ultimate 'stabilisers' of the national self-identity in its material and ideational environment. By understanding how this ontological security mechanism facilitates or hinders the agreement between the public and elites on foreign policy, we can gain deeper insights into the public-elite behind the current outlook of Serbia's security and defence cooperation, as well as whether and how this mechanism might enable changes in these policies.

The most general conclusion is that the uneven stickiness of Serbia's security and defence policy is closely related to the underlying common sense interpretive scheme about international relations in Serbia. Based on correlation, linear, and multiple linear regression analyses, the stickiness of all four foreign policies are impacted by how much and in what way the idea of each specific policy, or its abandonment, resonates with the widely shared claims about international relations and Serbia's position in them, which are as common as to be considered common sense among the Serbian public. Public opinion on all four policies, in both dimensions of their stickiness, is in a statistically significant relationship with the majority of the extracted common sense scheme. Policies that are directly and positively connected seem to be stickier, while those in a mixed and negative statistical relationship are less sticky. In other words, inferential statistics suggests that, as per the hypothesised model, the more a policy 'fits' with the prevailing common sense cognitive-affective scheme, the more it sticks, and the less its abandonment makes sense. With public knowledge of all four policies remaining at a similar level over the last two decades, based on secondary sources and the proportion of unopinionated and undecided citizens in the conducted opinion poll, the analysis suggests that common sense plays a significant role in why each of the eight policy options has or has not appeared 'sensible' to the public, and, consequently, how easily they have been or could be introduced or abandoned by policymakers in Serbia.

Not all policies, however, trigger and activate common sense scheme in its entirety, nor do they do so with the same intensity and manner. Some mobilise less, and some more of the spectrum of truths and lessons about the world that qualify as common sense in Serbia, while the salience of different truths varies concerning the eight tested options. The sheer number of truths does not seem to be the only factor of the level of stickiness, which seems to depend more on the nature and strength of the linkage of individual truths and their cumulative influence. Thus, one of the stickiest foreign policies, military neutrality, is in a statistically significant relationship with fewer truths than some other policies are, but the connection is more straightforward. While it might be the case that the high stickiness of military neutrality stems from the common sense truths that prevail among the public but are not reflected in the elite's common sense (which was the focus of the analysis here), it might also be the case that military neutrality is sticky primarily because not many commonsense claims go immediately against the idea of military neutrality. Nevertheless, illuminating the 'catalogue' of truths that shape the immediate judgments on whether a policy offered by policymakers makes sense or appears as nonsense, the provided analysis sketches the common interpretive scheme of common supporters and opponents of each of the four policies. The decision tree analysis further illuminates the key turning points and usual order of steps in the judgment process that show how the public commonly comes to the judgments which policymakers' proposals appear 'sensible' or not. While further research is needed on how the truths get activated and deactivated, or how people pick and choose from this 'buffet,' the provided composite sketch or 'photo-robots' reveal the array of ready-made truths that people tend to summon and draw on when making sense of policymakers' proposals regarding each aspect of Serbia's multifaceted policy of security and defence cooperation.

These sketches also reveal that the incoherence of the entire common sense scheme in Serbia, discussed earlier, resumes in regard to specific policies. The incoherent common sense interpretive scheme suggests a solid confusion and overall inability to make sense of the world and stabilise the self in that world, resulting in paralysis and failure to determine a sensible way forward. None of the

'portraits' of a common supporter or opponent of each of four policies is neat and straightforward but usually has at least one reversely correlated statement. The more straightforward the connection, be it positive or negative, the clearer the picture. In other words, the immediacy and strength with which the public perceives the cooperation or abandonment of a policy appear to be influenced by the uniformity of the connections associated with it. Policies with predominantly positive associations tend to seem more sensible and, therefore, stickier and more enduring, while those with primarily negative associations are viewed as less sensible and tend to be more difficult to introduce and easily abandoned. The most mixed scheme appears in public opinion on cooperation with the EU, which, again, remains in between in terms of stickiness – semi-sticky. The dynamics of the easy and high introduction of this policy in early 2000s, and the recent trends in the easiness of mobilisation of the support against it, as discussed earlier, align with these findings. Ultimately, showing that no foreign policy enjoys a perfectly uniform statistical connection, the analysis further illuminates why none of the examined foreign policies, including the stickiest cooperation with Russia and military neutrality has ever garnered the support of the entire populace.[98] In other words, the findings on the role of common sense help clarify the policymakers' unequal efforts and success to introduce, sustain, or possibly abandon the foreign policy changes outlined in Chapter 4.

The analysis also confirms that unpacking cognitive-affective interplay is indeed important, because it shows how the fit and misfit between these two components of common sense can contribute to the perception of the sensibility of a foreign policy option, and the immediacy of that perception. As discussed, the identified and analysed claims within the Serbian public's common sense are of different types, and not all are emotionally charged, or not to the same extent. Some claims are in the form of a statement, and some in the form of a guide, both underpinned by a mixture of emotions and both found statistically significant. While the provided analysis suggests that both cognitive and affective components in the Serbian society play significant role in judgments of foreign policy, and while further research is needed, it seems that the affective one provides perhaps stronger impulse, making some 'truths' more salient and entrenched than others. With some of claims, the harmony between the cognitive and affective component is clearer and stronger, like in those suggesting that Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough, where it makes little sense, both cognitively and affectively, to sacrifice its security for the wellbeing of others. In others, however, the link is not so straightforward, as with the claim that Serbia belongs to Europe – while this makes sense cognitively due to geographical, political, security, and other ties that the public acknowledges, there are different affective overtones arising from the perception of Serbia not being 'sufficiently European.' Similarly, while there are sufficient cognitive cues that cooperation with everyone is needed or that picking sides in the current global security architecture is sensible, the pool of affective grievances pushes the gut feeling in the opposite direction, reflecting negatively on the attitude on Serbia's cooperation with NATO, but also the EU. Although there are sufficient cognitive cues that cooperation with everyone is needed regardless of differences or that picking sides in the current global security architecture is sensible, the pool of affective grievances pushes the immediate judgment in the opposite direction, contributing to the overall attractiveness of military neutrality among the Serbian public.

Moreover, since many of the claims are opposed among themselves, as previously discussed, it remains challenging to trace the cognitive and affective (mis)fit that makes some policymakers' foreign policy propositions appear sensible within the current research design, warranting further research. What appears important at this stage is that a spectrum of affective forces behind the discursive forms of each specific common sense claim seems to match the overall distribution of emotions people feel towards each of the four policies – not only in terms of valence, but also other appraisal components of general content and discontent or more specific emotions such as pride, spite, and hatred. Such a distribution already provides several important insights into the uneven stickiness of four observed policies. First, the insights suggest that the stickiest policies in Serbia, as is the case

[98] Even if we acknowledge that common sense is not the sole criterion people use to evaluate policymakers' cues — as we argue in the theoretical chapter

with military neutrality and cooperation with Russia, appear to be those with the largest share of neutral stands among the public, once again suggesting that their popularity arises more from a lack of (in this case, affective) resistance than from strong support. Also, the affective analysis of public opinion on each of these policies shows that, while general content or discontent remain dominant affective tones, some more specific emotions have significant role in 'stabilising' these policies as sensible or non-sensible, making them more or less sticky, regardless of valence. Finally, the analysis shows an overall strong dissatisfaction with how the world functions and what Serbia's position in it is, suggest a strong and profound unease that keeps the Serbian public in a limbo in which no policy makes perfect sense. Therefore, while the cognitive-affective misfit within the public's common sense contributes to how these policies persist over time, it also explains some of the foreign policy changes in the observed period. The major foreign policy shift toward military neutrality in 2007, introduced and sustained with minimal effort by the elites, was largely facilitated by the cognitive-affective gap in the common-sense framework triggered by Kosovo's declaration of independence. This gap appears capable of driving change even without an external shock, as evidenced by recent shifts in attitudes toward cooperation with the EU.

Nevertheless, while the inconsistencies and gaps in the public's common-sense framework have created opportunities for shifts in foreign policy, the analysis reveals their notable persistence and capacity to reinforce the status quo, and public-elite disconnects. While the policymakers have been using the extracted claims to explain why the proposed policies are sensible and make a sensible whole, the public has kept refusing some of those claims as true, but also combining them in their own way, holding diverging opinion on what the policymakers' do or say in regard to security and defence cooperation. The patchwork of common sense truths behind the public's judgment of sensibility for each of the policies is very different, suggesting that public's sense of thinkable and unthinkable is not totally dependent on the elites' conceptions of the world and Serbia's position in it. While the disconnect persists in all three components of the common sense scheme on security and defence cooperation – i.e. the public is not as inclined to cooperate with everyone, or choosing sides is more sensible to the public than it appears to the elites – the greatest confusion of common sense seems to exist in regard to where Serbia belongs in the global security and defence architecture or, in other words, who its natural partners are. The only common-sense depiction from this part of the scheme that qualifies as public common sense as well – that Serbia belongs to Europe – appears to significantly shape the public opinion on each of four pillars, however, in different ways. While it is a common perception that Serbia belongs to Europe, it is far from a common agreement where this Europe is, and the competing perceptions of whether Serbia belongs to the East, West, or is situated in between, create ambiguity that undermines any clear direction this claim might provide. This persistent incoherence in public perception has not only impeded meaningful policy-driven changes – even in regard to the cooperation with EU that the policymakers have been strongly advocating – but reinforces the status quo of a multifaceted and ambivalent approach to policy of security and defence cooperation.

Therefore, the statistical verification of the proposed model reveals that fundamental answers to some fundamental questions about how the international environment functions and what Serbia's' role in them is and should be, indeed impact the public judgment of foreign policies regarding Serbia's security and defence cooperation as sensible or as non-sense, regardless of the elites' rhetorics and actions. By providing ready-made cognitive and affective cues about which behaviours are beneficial for Serbia, the common-sense interpretive framework enables the public to form immediate feels right or feels wrong assessments regarding international affairs and the foreign policy conceptions proposed by policymakers. These findings shed light on how, despite a generally low level of public knowledge, certain foreign policies, such as military neutrality or cooperation with Russia, become ingrained in public opinion without significant efforts from policymakers. Conversely, they explain why some policies, like cooperation with the EU, could be easily abandoned by policymakers, or why others, such as cooperation with NATO, fail to resonate despite policymakers' efforts. Hence, highlighting why certain policies are inherently perceived as nonsensical within the common-sense

framework, the findings indicate the costs of promoting some foreign policies is prohibitively high in Serbia, as evidenced in interviews with policymakers. Simply put, the findings confirm that common sense plays a crucial role in how the public makes sense of the world and Serbia's behaviour within it, significantly influencing the acceptance and persistence of foreign policy conceptions proposed by policymakers.

By verifying that the uneven stickiness of Serbia's foreign policy of security and defence cooperation fundamentally depends on the prevailing public's common sense, the findings have also signalised a remarkable level of incoherence in the public common sense, as well as a level of divergence between the elites and the public common sense. Unpacking the interpretive framework underlying the public's perception of sensible behaviour in international relations suggests that, in order to alter existing policies on security and defence cooperation, policymakers would need to find ways to break and rewire some of the cognitive and affective links about how the world functions that have so far hindered public support for their certain choices. Understanding the origins of public's judgments on policymakers' foreign policy moves, and the disconnect between them, contributes to understanding the dynamics of ontological security in Serbian society, both in stable periods and during crises, as agents continuously strive to make and remake sense of the world as quickly and easily as possible. The misfit between different segments of the prevailing common sense interpretive framework in Serbia – and between the cognitive and affective components within each segment – currently supports the perceived 'sensibility' of a multifaceted policy, though to varying degrees. However, the incoherence suggests that Serbia's public common sense is changeable, both top-down and bottom-up. This opens the possibility of remaking common sense in a way that would provide a more coherent understanding of the material and social environment, thereby strengthening the 'basic trust' system that sustains ontological security at all levels of Serbian society. The broader theoretical and empirical contribution of these findings, which confirm that common sense serves as a vital ontological security device, is further explored in the conclusion.

8. Conclusion

The role of public opinion and the relationship between the public and elites in foreign and security policy is one of the so-called 'big questions' in IR. It remains ever open, with further study enhancing understanding without ever offering a definitive answer. Intrigued by some immediate agreements and persistent disagreements between policymakers and the public in Serbia, this study aimed to contribute to this big debate by exploring what enables or hinders these agreements between the two – studying why, when, and how the public constrains policymakers in foreign and security policy. Investigating the uneven 'stickiness' of foreign policies, evident across a large body of FPA research, the dissertation draws on OSS, one of the emerging approaches in constructivist and critical IR. Pointing to the importance of 'a stable sense of self' in foreign policy, OSS suggest that policymakers' ability to preserve or restore ontological security in society through foreign policy choices and changes depends on their capacity to provide a 'sensible' link between the public's understanding of self-identity and the environment. To further illuminate what 'sense' governs this shared self-identity between the public and elites, resulting in its security or insecurity, this study turns to the concept of 'common sense' as the ultimate ontological security device that enables or prevents immediate cognitive and affective alignment between the public and elites in this realm. This novel theoretical and analytical model, probed on the case of Serbia's multifaceted policy of security and defence cooperation, promises to offer important insights into the role of public and the relationship between policymakers and the public in foreign and security policy.

To illuminate the research process, the conclusion begins with a concise summary of the previous chapters, highlighting key stages in the research process along with the main theoretical and empirical goals they sought to achieve. Following this overview, the major findings are discussed in the context of theoretical debates in ontological security and foreign policy studies in IR, whose dialogue served as the foundation for this study. The novel contributions to the fields OSS, FPA, and the study of Serbia's foreign policy, alongside their limitations, offer a springboard for suggesting future research directions. Finally, the chapter ends with a brief reflection on the societal impact of the presented research, underscoring the importance – and indeed the duty – of continually examining the public-elite relationship in foreign policy, as well as the role of common sense in international relations, for both policymakers and scholars.

8.1. Summary of the Dissertation's Content and Argument

The first chapter (Introduction) defines the key research questions of the dissertation, focusing on the role of the public and its relationship with policymakers in shaping foreign and security policy. It outlines the primary research objectives and details the research design intended to achieve them effectively.

The second chapter of the dissertation provides an overview of the literature on the public-elite nexus in foreign and security policy. Beginning with the 'home' literature in FPA, this chapter reflects on the major theoretical and empirical research pathways that have emerged from this big debate over the past seven decades. While the review traces back to the initial theoretical foundations and 'consensus' in the debate on the role of public opinion in foreign policy, it tracks the development of these debates not only hierarchically but also thematically and methodologically. Presenting and comparing public-centred, elite-centred, top-down, and bottom-up approaches, it captures major advancements in understanding this enduring puzzle. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the dominant positivist approaches in FPA and reflecting on the growing dialogue between FPA and constructivism within the so-called 'domestic turn' in IR, the chapter ultimately advocates for more constructivist approaches to the study of the public-elite nexus in foreign policy. Echoing the mixed findings in existing literature, which suggest that public-elite agreement is sometimes immediately possible and likely, sometimes impossible even in the long run, and at other times lies somewhere in

between, the chapter concludes with a schematic outline of the puzzle of uneven stickiness in foreign policies. Focusing on the 'stickiness' of foreign policies – the ease with which they are adopted or abandoned by policymakers in relation to the public – allows for a more relational approach to understanding when, how, and why the public constrains policymakers in foreign and security policy.

Responding to the need for a more constructivist approach to the subject, the third chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the analysis. Focusing on the existing OSS literature related to foreign policy, particularly the relevant debates on the unit and level of analysis, the chapter examines existing findings on how the need for a stable sense of self influences foreign policy, as well as whose sense of self is significant in this domain. To further explore indications in the literature that both the public's and elites' sense of self matter in foreign policy – regardless of whether ontological security needs operate on a conscious or semi-conscious level – the chapter delves into the 'sense' behind a stable self. Drawing on original theories of ontological security from psychology and sociology, which emphasize the importance of fundamental, taken-for-granted assumptions about the environment, the chapter introduces the concept of common sense as the ultimate ontological security device. Using insights about common sense from various social research disciplines that underscore the cognitive-affective interplay in common-sense interpretive schemes, the existing theorization of common sense in foreign policy and international relations is further developed. Finally, in line with the puzzle set at the end of the first chapter, the second chapter concludes by presenting a novel theoretical model of foreign policy stickiness, summarising the major hypothesis of the dissertation.

The fourth chapter outlines the methodological framework, explaining the case selection, key primary and secondary sources, data collection, and data analysis methods. In line with the theoretical model, the methods are presented according to the three major phases of empirical research. First, a preliminary analysis is presented on the varying degrees of commitment to the four pillars of Serbia's security and defence cooperation policy: cooperation with the EU, NATO, Russia, and the policy of military neutrality. Second, the prevailing common sense perceptions of Serbia's elites and the public regarding international relations are mapped. Third, the stickiness of these foreign policies is explored by analysing the relationship between public sentiment and attitudes toward adopting or abandoning the four policies under review. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of the research design are briefly discussed.

The fifth chapter is the first of three empirical chapters in the dissertation. Setting the stage for more in-depth analysis in the following chapters, it explores potential foreign policy (dis)connects across the four examined policies, focusing on the varying levels of public support to them. The chapter begins with a brief overview of Serbia's security and defence policies over the past two decades, including its cooperation with the EU, NATO, and Russia, as well as its policy of military neutrality. This is followed by a review of existing literature on the sensibility of this multifaceted, multi-vector approach. Following the light motif of the importance of public opinion's role in shaping these policies, the chapter then presents existing data on public knowledge and attitudes regarding Serbia's security and defence policies. While incomplete and imperfect, the data summarised from secondary literature offer important insights into the nature and intensity of public support for these four policies, preliminarily indicating their uneven stickiness – suggesting that military neutrality and cooperation with Russia are highly sticky, cooperation with the EU is semi-sticky, and cooperation with NATO is rather non-sticky or unsticky.

The sixth chapter offers a map of the elite and public common sense about international relations. The elite's interpretive scheme is presented first, outlining the major assumptions and 'lessons learned' about international relations that have prevailed in Serbia's strategic framework over the last two decades. Relying on the results of the discourse and content analysis, the common sense scheme is divided into three parts: the claims about whether to cooperate in security and defence matters, how to cooperate and with whom. The extracted claims are discussed in the light of their cognitive and affective cues, exemplified with relevant quotes and illustrated with graphs and figures. The chapter then shifts focus to the public's perspective, outlining their interpretive framework based on levels of public support for the identified claims, following the methodology employed. Both the

elite's and public's tripartite common sense schemes are accompanied by discussions on their key characteristics, overall outlook, and potential implications for the relationship between elites and the public in shaping Serbia's foreign and security policies. Lastly, the chapter offers a brief commentary on the (mis)alignment between the elite's and public's viewpoints, highlighting the potential consequences for the uneven stickiness of Serbia's foreign and security policies.

The seventh chapter presents statistical evidence on the association between the common-sense interpretive scheme and public opinion on specific policies – whether, and to what extent, the introduction, maintenance or abandonment of these policies appears sensible to the public in Serbia. The analysis outlines the major claims that shape the public's immediate judgment on which foreign policy options or changes make sense for Serbia. It also examines the coherence or inconsistency within the public's judgment framework, considering the richness of claims, the strength of the links between them, and how these links are activated. By mapping the common-sense scheme underlying judgments on various foreign policy options, the chapter 'profiles' the typical supporters or opponents of each of the four pillars of Serbia's security and defence cooperation policy. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on the explanatory power of the common-sense framework in understanding the stickiness of foreign policies. It also offers a broader reflection on Serbia's common sense, assessing its strengths and weaknesses in terms of ontological security, and pinpointing areas where shifts may occur in the near or distant future.

Chapter 8 (Conclusion) synthesises the key theoretical and empirical findings, discussing their contributions to the debates within OSS and FPA, as well as their relevance to the study of Serbia's foreign policy. In doing so, it evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed model and provides recommendations for future research directions.

Therefore, with an overall aim of contributing to the understanding of the role of public in foreign and security policy by responding to the major research question on when, how and why public opinion constrains policymakers, this dissertation proposed the novel model of foreign policy stickiness. The major assumption behind it is that the extent to which foreign policy conceptions by policymakers appear sensible and therefore stick to the public depends on how well they immediately resonate with both the cognitive and emotional aspects of public common sense about international affairs, which in turn affects how constraining public opinion is for policymakers. This general hypothesis provides for three specific ones, which together make up a novel typology of foreign policies, based on how easily the policymakers can introduce or abandon these policies. First, if a foreign policy resonates with both the cognitive and emotional schemes of public common sense, it is likely to become a sticky policy, meaning that the elites can introduce the policy easily, but they will face significant challenges in abandoning it later due to strong public attachment. Second, if a foreign policy resonates with neither the cognitive nor the emotional schemes, it will be considered unsticky, meaning that the elites will struggle to introduce the policy, but they can easily abandon it as the public is unlikely to form any strong attachment to it. Thirdly, if a foreign policy resonates with either the cognitive or emotional scheme but not both, it will become a semi-sticky policy – if the policy aligns with the cognitive scheme but not the emotional one, elites can introduce and abandon the policy with relative ease, and if it resonates with the emotional scheme but not the cognitive one, policymakers face difficulties both in introducing and abandoning the policy.

Using Serbia's multifaceted security and defence cooperation as a case study, this model appears broadly validated. While it may be an overstatement to claim the model was fully 'confirmed,' given the more recursive than purely deductive approach, as well as the single-case research design, the empirical examination of Serbia's policy does support the model's relevance. The empirical data on the influence of common sense interpretive scheme on the public's judgments of Serbia's foreign policy illustrate some of the major features of common sense – its immediateness, incoherence, cognitive-affective interplay – illuminating the role common sense plays in making the self-identity stable or unstable in a society. Emphasising this fundamental ontological security mechanism, the study advances constructivist approach to the public-elite dynamic in foreign policy, highlighting the role of ideational frameworks that both shape and constrain their relationship and mutual influence.

Doing so, it also explores the sources and processes that contribute to the mixed evidence on (dis)connections between policymakers and public opinion within both top-down and bottom-up theories of the public's role in foreign policy. This dissertation, therefore, improves the existing theorisations and understanding of public opinion's role in foreign and security policy, offering important theoretical contributions to the OSS and FPS, while also making an original empirical contribution to studies of Serbia's foreign and security policy. Most importantly, the progress made by this dissertation opens up space for new research.

8.2. Contribution to Ontological Security Studies

The existing OSS on foreign policy offers valuable insights into how the need for "the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1991, 92) shapes state behaviour in the international arena, sometimes aligning it with, sometimes deviating it from the pursuit of material security. To do so, most scholars adopt a state-centric or at least elite-centric perspective, focusing on how policymakers manage to preserve national self-identity narratives, particularly during critical situations. This approach often creates the impression of omnipotent elites who can anticipate, shape, and 'manipulate' the public's ontological security needs by establishing a 'sensible' link between past, present, and future self through deliberate actions or rhetoric (as discussed in Chapter 2). However, while it does not suggest that only elite's sense of self matters – since, even when manipulative, elites still consider the public's ontological security needs – the role of the public and the mechanisms behind this dynamic remain underexplored and 'undertheorized' (Mitzen and Larson 2017). Acknowledging that foundational trust in the predictability and orderliness of the self and its environment stems from "questions about ourselves, others, and the object-world which have to be taken for granted in order to keep on with everyday activity" (Giddens 1991, 37), this dissertation introduces the concept of common sense in OSS on foreign policy, arguing that it functions as a fundamental ontological security mechanism for any individual or collective actor. By unpacking this shared framework of reality, the dissertation aimed to trace the agency of both elites and the public in the context of ontological security, not only in foreign policy but also more broadly.

The empirical confirmation that the Serbian elites and public rely on a common-sense interpretive scheme in immediately evaluating and justifying different foreign policy options as 'sensible', provided in the dissertation, highlights the role of common sense as a fundamental ontological security device. Taken for granted, fundamental truths regarding the functioning of international relations, and Serbia within them, have proven to be statistically significant in shaping public's judgments, playing an essential role in negotiations – open or tacit – between policymakers and the public regarding what constitutes sensible foreign policy for Serbia. Even in the absence of extensive knowledge of specific policies, which is often the case, and especially in moments of unforeseen and rapid changes, the natural attitudes appear to serve as a 'sense' behind the stable sense of self. They immediately meet citizens' need for the "confidence and trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity" (Giddens, 1984: 375, 1990: 92-8, 1991: 184-5). In other words, to preserve or restore the public's ontological security, policymakers need to align their moves or narrative manoeuvres with the public's common sense, as a protective cocoon layer underlying all others. The dissertation's empirical confirmation that the public relies on established 'truths' to 'make sense of the world', therefore, contributes to the existing theorisations of elite manipulation in OSS on foreign policy, highlighting both its strengths and weaknesses. While these insights are compatible with current understanding of cognitive (i.e. Subotić 2016) and affective mechanisms (i.e. Gellwitzki 2022) that 'stabilise' self-identity narratives shaping foreign policy behaviour, they offer deeper understanding of how ontological security dynamics and the Self are conceptualised, shared and negotiated between the public and policymakers.

Overall, proposing and exploring common sense as a fundamental device of ontological security, the dissertation aligns with the accounts that conceptualise the Self as emergent and processual. Even when moving beyond traditional identity narratives in OSS on foreign policy, such as national identity, and examining the "the overall narrative schematic template" (Subotić 2016) in which themselves are embedded, we encounter an equally dynamic and fluid patchwork. By mapping the contours of common sense, the study reveals the presence of a "distribution of the sensible" within society at a given time, whether viewed from above or below. This distribution appears solid and shared enough to allow certain identity narratives to solidify and, hence, enables the stabilisation of the self or, in other words, ontological security. Within these parameters, policymakers can propose 'sensible' policy options that get relatively easily accepted by the public, or vice versa. However, according to the analysis, this interpretive framework appears continuously renegotiated – not only between the public and elites but also in response to shifting environmental realities. During crises, the tensions underlying common sense become exposed, prompting a renegotiation or reordering of truths and traits within it, creating space for public's or elites' identity-narratives to adjust to new realities, thereby constructing a reconfigured sense of Self. This process can result in immediate alignment, misalignment, or something partial – where an idea might appear right but not feel right, or vice versa. In this fluid process, even a Self that seems 'preserved' and 'intact' is, in fact, newly constituted, remaining so only until fresh circumstances necessitate further adjustments. In essence, the common sense interpretive scheme is a dynamic mechanism, continuously adapting to evolving contexts and crises even when those adaptation remain invisible and spark no paralysis in acting. Achieving a fully stabilised Self is, therefore, nearly impossible, and since no perfect form of common sense exists, accompanying anxiety remains an inescapable condition – not bad per se.

In line with this, the agency in foreign policy from the OS perspective, remains shared, relational and fluctuating as well. By unpacking common sense schemes within Serbian society, the study reveals points of convergence and divergence in taken-for-granted perceptions of international relations and the Serbian self-identity between the public and elites (as discussed in Chapter 5). In response to the major research question, this suggests that the public' ontological security is not as easily influenced by policymakers, warning against overemphasis on elite perspectives alone in foreign policy. What may appear as common sense to elites does not always, immediately, or necessarily align with the public's perception of 'common sense.' Moreover, the analysis showed that even when they share common sense claims, they must not apparently use them in the same way, which warns against easy assumptions on the public-elites' agreements, as well. While some policy might enjoy public support, the scheme that makes it sensible to the public does not have to be the one proposed by elites and the other way around. Hence, although the public and elites do share common sense scheme to a considerable extent, the final judgments might be rather different. The study, however, also warns against viewing the public as a homogeneous group. While certain truths may have broad support, the varying profiles of supporters and opponents of different policy options indicate that multiple common sense frameworks might coexist among the public, making the ontological security dynamics between them and the policymakers even more complex. All these insights together suggest that public can both facilitate and limit elites' attempts to shape ontological security needs through foreign policy, showcasing why some elites' efforts are more successful than others, and why some elite-driven identity projects are more effective than others. Several key features of common sense as a mechanism behind such elite-public nexus in OS prompt further inquiry.

As one of its trademarks, immediacy of common sense as an ontological security device is one important issue that this study brings into the OSS on foreign policy. One of the essential features of ontologically secure actors is their ability to move forward quickly, so quickly that the gap between encountering a situation – whether expected or unexpected – and reacting to it is almost non-existent. Common assumption in the literature is that the longer it takes to process a situation and understand one's role within it, the greater the anxiety, and 'chaos lurks.' One of the important features of common sense is exactly that it enables automatic, non-reflexive, immediate interpretation of the

world, allowing the distinguishing of what is sensible from what is nonsensical without stopping to make prolonged and complex calculations and estimations. In regular times, common sense maintains a sense of 'normality,' enabling the automatic interpretation of various worlds – how they function, and which actions are rewarding to individuals, groups, or states. This immediacy becomes so ingrained that it often goes unnoticed, much like ontological security itself – they only become visible when severely threatened. By unreflexively inscribing schemes and applying 'lessons learned' from past practical experiences to current and future situations, it sustains a stable and continuous perception of the environment. During ontological crises, this immediacy becomes even more crucial, as reconstructing a sense of stability requires finding a narrative that can reestablish disrupted routines, both cognitively and affectively, to at least a minimal level of coherence. As seen, the Serbian public appears to lean on common sense for quick judgments on Serbia's cooperation with the EU, Russia or NATO, even in the absence of major events. On the other hand, military neutrality seemed immediately sensible to the public in the moments of ontological crises despite minimal political and social debate on this significant shift in foreign policy, as it was backed by longstanding beliefs and encountered minimal opposition, both cognitively and emotionally.

The immediacy or speed with which ontological security needs are met seems to play a key role but remains rather unexplored in the existing OSS literature. By further examining the speed or immediacy of ontological security mechanisms – including common sense – this dissertation contributes to debates about the role and power all kinds of routines play in stabilising the Self. Should we prioritise a rigid, possibly 'unhealthy' routine that reduces anxiety quickly, or would a longer search for a more adaptive fit be preferable? While we often assume that flexible, healthy routines are better than rigid adherence, it's important to acknowledge the costs of adaptability, such as increased uncertainty and anxiety, especially in foreign policy contexts. In crisis situations, the speed at which public and elite actors can present a reassuring narrative is crucial to the success of a policy – if immediate support cannot be obtained, or at least opposition neutralised, ontological insecurity may arise, and alternative ontological security providers may emerge from both the top and bottom levels of society. While the literature on ontological security often centres on crises, the stability of the self in 'regular times' is just as significant and understanding what immediately sustains the self during these periods is essential, as most state behaviour in international relations occurs during times of relative stability. Thus, in the context of the public-elite nexus, it seems important to further investigate the psychosocial and societal mechanisms that enable quick, automatic responses in individuals and collectives – it is not just about making a policy appear sensible, it is also about how quickly this perception can take hold. By addressing these questions in future and better understand the role of immediacy in the maintenance of ontological security, we can better understand the nature of shared needs between the public and elites, or perhaps even the level of consciousness on which these needs appear and are met.

Closely tied to immediacy, another significant feature of this ontological security device is its incoherence, inconsistency, and disjointedness. The existing theories on ontological security mechanisms often emphasise how elites strategically manipulate self-identity (usually national) narratives, selectively activating or deactivating various elements in response to an immediate ontological crisis. While this notion of activation and deactivation is plausible, the insights here shed light on which aspects of narratives resonate with the public and why by grasping the nature and influence of the framework underlying identity narratives and their transformations. This perspective is especially useful for analysing cases of 'ontological dissonance', where an attempt to resolve one ontological crisis inadvertently triggers or worsens another. Recognising that common sense – characteristically incoherent – facilitates the reconfiguration of narratives can help in explaining how narratives can be mobilised to justify diverse and sometimes contradictory purposes. However, beyond a certain threshold, the inherent inconsistency of public common sense also limits its capacity to immediately support a change. As demonstrated by the profiles of common supporters and opponents of four policies, judgments regarding these policies often rely on selectively interconnected chains of common sense beliefs. By examining the cognitive and affective dimensions of these

beliefs, we can better understand the specific conditions under which narrative changes are feasible, as well as the limitations imposed by their incoherence on the stability of the self. In the Serbian context, the widespread ambiguity surrounding fundamental issues raises the question of whether a stable sense of self, or ontological security, can truly exist within this society.

The incoherence within common-sense interpretive schemes, from the OSS perspective, however, is more complex than it appears and warrants closer examination. On one hand, this incoherence seems to strengthen the function of these schemes as ontological security devices, providing flexibility to selectively draw upon elements that help individuals make sense of the world, thus facilitating the immediate restoration of ontological security. On the other hand, if judgments based on these schemes are incoherent, how can one truly 'know' or feel what is 'right' when basic cues about the environment and wise behaviour towards it are contradictory? This raises the question of whether incoherence within these interpretive schemes enables or hinders immediacy in judgment, or, bottom line, is the ideal common sense, from OS perspective, a perfectly coherent and straightforward common sense or the one which can, at the same time, allow more flexible adaptation to the unpredictable situations? To be able to understand this, it also appears important to further investigate the directionality of influence: do judgments derive from common-sense schemes, or do people selectively activate only those aspects of common sense that support their pre-existing conclusions? As grasped in the case of Serbia, we see the same judgments crafted to justify opposing foreign policy options. The idea that the world serves the purpose of the big and powerful at the expense of small, for instance, seems to be mobilised in support of both military neutrality and policy that assumes picking a side, as is security and defence cooperation with Russia. A more bottom-up approach, relying on in-depth and potentially experimental focus groups, would, hence, be valuable for understanding how individuals respond when faced with contradictory fundamental truths, and what principles guide their prioritisation. In such cases, do other ontological security mechanisms step in to provide additional guidance?

Further highlighting this incoherence, the theoretical framework, along with the empirical analysis, points to the interplay of cognitive and affective cues within the ontological security interpretive scheme. While most existing literature assumes that the sensibility of narratives is constructed through either "cognitive bridges" (Subotić 2016) or "affective circulations" (Hall and Ross 2015), there has been little focus on the interaction between these elements. As is the entire IR field, emotions in OSS are typically examined as emotional beliefs that support cognitive beliefs, rather than as independent, as 'aliefs' (Holmes 2015) that may diverge from them. Often, affect is also explored completely separately from cognition, viewed either as affective circulations or atmospheres. By analysing the cognitive and affective cues embedded in perceptions of the world, international relations, and Serbia's position within it, this study reveals that the interplay between these cues plays a crucial role in making certain narratives seem sensible or "feel right" to the public. The findings indicate that the policies that resonate most with the public are those where cognitive and affective cues align, making these policies both cognitively and affectively fitting. One key example is Serbia's cooperation with the EU, which appears semi-sticky due to a cognitive-affective mismatch. While the Serbian public generally perceives EU cooperation as beneficial on a cognitive level, there is only mild affective appeal, and in some cases, strong affective resistance, rooted in feelings of disappointment and anger over perceived lack of appreciation for Serbia's role in history or its 'Europeanness.' This mismatch sparks unease among the Serbian population that makes the job of promotion of the EU for policymakers uneasy as well.

One of the first questions that arises around the cognitive-affective interplay, making an intriguing angle for future exploration of the proposed typology of foreign policy stickiness, is whether 'semi-sticky' policies – those based on mixed affective and cognitive signals – are potentially more challenging or even damaging to ontological security than both sticky and unsticky policies, which maintain a consistent degree of 'fit' regardless of valence? Moreover, while the affective framework seems generally decisive, with the Serbian public overall placing greater value on affective fit than on cognitive alignment, further research is needed on the nature of emotions

involved. Interestingly, the affective scheme behind sticky policies were relatively neutral rather than overtly positive. Both military neutrality and cooperation with Russia appeared sticky largely because there was less affective opposition rather than significant support, while the unstickiness of cooperation with the EU and NATO often stemmed from strong negative emotions. From an OSS perspective, this might suggest that a relatively neutral affective stance fosters a sense of stability, implying that the perception of sensibility depends less on positive identity alignment and more on the absence of identity-threatening affective dissonance. However, the empirical analysis indicates that going beyond valence is important, as certain emotions, like pride or anger, seem to enhance the public's ability to judge whether a policy 'makes sense.' Therefore, future research should, perhaps lying on the appraisal theories in psychology, examine the appraisal components of different emotions in relation to ontological security, particularly as existing literature often assumes that ontological security is restored when anxiety transforms into a specific emotion, most commonly fear. Or, in Gellwitzki's words, "the subjects are predominantly in moods other than anxiety and it is these other moods that OSS has yet to explore" (2022, 31-32).

Nevertheless, while the relevance of both cognitive and affective cues of common sense in interpreting Serbia's foreign policy as sensible is validated, the empirical analysis also suggests that a significant portion of the public – approximately one-third – struggles to form immediate judgments. This does not imply that the same one-third of the population is consistently unable to evaluate policies; rather, for each of the eight foreign policy options examined, a similar proportion of the public finds it difficult to form judgments. Starting from the basic assumption that the overall state of ontological security relies on actors' ability to quickly discern what makes sense from what does not, an inability to make swift judgments or to take the world for granted – where one instinctively knows and feels what is right without extensive reflection – often indicates a lower sense of ontological security. In the particular case of Serbia, one possible reason for this difficulty may lie directly in the observed incoherence of the common-sense interpretative scheme, as mentioned earlier, with highly varied cognitive and emotional cues at play. Furthermore, the current framework of public common sense reflects only a segment of societal perspectives, drawn primarily from strategic frameworks and elite narratives, potentially omitting other important truths and insights that people rely on to make sense of the world. However, the consistent share of those unable to immediately judge whether some foreign policy option is sensible may also suggest that common sense, even though posited as the ultimate device for ontological security in this study, may not be so ultimate, or sufficient to stabilise the 'self'. This raises questions about how this device interacts with other sources, mechanisms, or means of achieving ontological security.

As discussed in Chapter 2, common sense is derived from various ontological devices, including ethics, religion, identity, expert knowledge, and so on. In the case of Serbia, elements of pragmatism and teleology are evident in the claims that dominate the strategic framework, ranging from highly utilitarian principles to Biblical tenets regarding moral behaviour in international relations. These influences merge in complex ways, making it essential to understand how they interact and compete in shaping ontological security within a specific society, both from the bottom-up and from the top-down. Exploring the sources, interactions, and hierarchy of different ontological security devices could yield valuable theoretical insights and empirical benefits. What is the interaction or even hierarchy among various sources of ontological security? When we refer to a particular framework as the ultimate ontological security device, we must ask whether it is the first or the last – or perhaps both. Recent discussions on the distinction between epistemological and ontological security are also crucial, especially as epistemological security is defined as the "experience of orderliness and safety that results from people's and institutions' shared understandings of their common-sense reality" (Adler 2021). Does an erosion of common sense undermine ontological security, or does the reverse hold true? Drawing on knowledge from psychology and sociology, it would be beneficial to understand the interplay or even sequence of these dynamics.

Illuminating the immediacy, incoherence, and affective-cognitive interplay underlying the common-sense scheme, the argument and model of foreign policy stickiness proposed in this dissertation offers novel theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding the public-elite relationship behind ontological security dynamics. Demonstrating that common sense is among key mechanisms that either enables or limits the manipulation of the public's ontological security needs by policymakers, this dissertation contributes to ongoing discussions on the unit of analysis, level of analysis, and level of consciousness in the OSS of foreign policy, as outlined in Chapter 3. Additionally, by highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of common sense in this role, this dissertation aims to spark a much-needed debate on the nature of, and the relationships between, the various 'senses' that underpin the stable sense of self, which proposed as one of the 'basic interests or appetites' Wendt (1994) governing international relations.

8.3. Contribution to Constructivism – FPA Nexus

By building on the OSS on foreign policy with the concept of common sense, this dissertation introduces an innovative constructivist framework for examining the role of the public and the relationship between policymakers and the public in foreign policy. With its own roots in psychology, OSS appear particularly suited to engage with FPA's traditional "cognitive psychological approach to the study of foreign policy" (Houghton 2007, 24). Hence, the constructivist FPA approach taken in this dissertation attempts to embrace conventional merits within both fields, seeking to provide a more 'structurationist' perspective that leaves space for both structure and agency in understanding the public-elite nexus. By examining the discursive expression of common sense as a shared space where policymakers and the public interact, the dissertation highlights how they mutually constrain one another, each maintaining a degree of agency in shaping the structures they inhabit. Instead of providing a definitive answer to the question of 'who listens to whom' in foreign policy, often inquired in FPA approaches to the public-elite nexus, the dissertation offers fresh theoretical and empirical insights that zoom into, but also zoom out the factors that make agreement or disagreement between them immediate, possible, likely, or unlikely. While not fully departing from the positivist tendencies within the field of FPA, this work, hence, aligns more closely with the constructivist and interpretivist camp, providing several important contributions to the study of the role of public in foreign and security policy.

Drawing attention to ontological security needs, operationalised as the actors' need for a stable narrative about the environment and the self-identity in it, the dissertation contributes to the illumination of the structures shaping public's and elites' engagement in foreign policy, highlighting their significance, functions and mechanisms of influence. By exploring the prevailing frameworks that offer 'fundamental answers' to the 'fundamental questions' about international relations and state's role within them, the study deepens our understanding of different sedimented arrangements that govern the interpretation of the material and social reality, and, hence, the range of possible responses for both policymakers and the general public in one society. Capturing the shared knowledge, beliefs and understandings of how international relations function (in the presented case, especially in the domain of security and defence cooperation), the study shows that the policymakers and public rely on these schemes to acquire a sense of stability and predictability in the world by underpinning and guiding their immediate and long-term foreign policy preferences and choices. By operationalising ontological security mechanisms through the common-sense interpretive scheme, this dissertation offers a novel perspective on the ideational structures discussed in FPA literature that define the limits of what is considered feasible and 'sensible' foreign policy within a society, shaping the space for agreement or contention among policymakers and the public. In other words, the dissertation further illuminates the conditions under which, as Rosenau described eighty years ago, the 'slumbering giant' of public opinion awakens to challenge policymakers.

Although previous studies have addressed the importance of collective identities and narratives for the public-elite nexus, the concept of common sense offers particular value in this regard as it represents a 'meta' structure that underlies or precedes all other. As a fundamental ontological security device (discussed in Chapter 2), common sense blends and intersects various societal structures, illustrating how they converge in a given society at a particular moment. By highlighting taken-for-granted claims, self-evident 'truths', and historical 'lessons learned,' the common-sense scheme uncovers the core pillars of diverse ideational structures, where different identity narratives and levels intersect. It functions as a master repository of cognitive and affective cues from all areas of life and the environment, enabling rapid judgments on both expected and unexpected events, again, across all spheres of life. While moral values, emotions, and various personal traits – often treated as heuristic devices – have been examined in the FPA literature, they are often disconnected and isolated from the narratives and contexts in which they manifest. The analytical value of mapping the common-sense framework lies in its ability to contextualise these cues, revealing the forces that either bolster or erode trust in the environment, often in divergent and nonlinear ways. Essentially, the common-sense scheme operates in the background, underpinning nearly all other frameworks that shape the public-elite nexus and have often been studies in isolation. As such, its study echoes broader research on identity and culture in foreign policy. While this dissertation focuses on security and defence policy, bringing it closest to the study of strategic culture, the concept of common sense is a more encompassing structure.

Studying the public-elite nexus in foreign policy through the concepts of ontological security and common sense is crucial not only for understanding the foreign policy status quo but also for explaining foreign policy changes. While much of the literature on the public-elite nexus in constructivism and FPA has often focused on stable policies, this framework offers insights into why some policies endure while others shift, and how these shifts occur. The common-sense scheme, while stable enough to support the stabilisation of the Self and the public-elite relationship within this Self, is neither fixed nor static. Unlike many existing theories that emphasise identity structures or offer static, fixed, or 'ideal types' – whether in terms of individual traits or structural elements – the common-sense framework, based on the qualitative and quantitative data offered in the dissertation, appears flexible and open-ended. The inherent incoherence of the common-sense scheme allows for stability within change, but also for change within stability, offering a way to understand both gradual and sudden policy adjustments in a state's foreign behaviour. Further exploration of ontological security, therefore, holds significant potential for examining foreign policy shifts from the perspective of the public-policymakers relationship. Moreover, by incorporating the common-sense scheme into a model of foreign policy 'stickiness,' it becomes possible to trace both gradual and rapid changes in foreign policy by observing subtle or swift reconfigurations in the common-sense frameworks that either support or hinder these changes.

Just as the OS approach contributes to FPA, the traditional FPA focus on the public-elite nexus allows the common-sense framework to not only deepen our understanding of structures but also enhance our appreciation of public and elite agency in foreign policy. By examining the common-sense frameworks of both the public and elites, it becomes clear that both agents – especially the public – retain a degree of autonomy in shaping foreign policy opinions. This autonomy is visible not only in areas of divergence between elites and the public but also in the ways the public selectively interprets and combines truths about the world, even when these views align with those of elites. This suggests that the public's sense of self does not uncritically accept or follow elite perspectives on international relations; rather, they may process information in ways that diverge from elite narratives. This perspective offers new insights into the nature of public-policymaker disagreements, underscoring that instances of public support for policy are not always the result of elite influence but can also reflect the public's independent interpretive framework. Ontological security, therefore, helps identify the factors that enable and constrain the diverse 'selves' and agencies at play in foreign policy, cautioning against the exclusion or overemphasis of any one group. Further research into the distinctions between elite and public common-sense frameworks – though varied and complex –

could shed light on how different societal agencies influence when and how the 'self' stabilises within foreign policy contexts.

Another important contribution of this dissertation to the foreign policy studies is in its focus on the affective forces driving narratives that facilitate or hinder agreement and disagreement between the public and elites. In alignment with the 'emotional turn' in IR, which OSS also belong to, this study argues that it is crucial to examine the affective forces behind discursive forms which elites use to make sense of the world and foreign policy to the public. However, it also emphasises the importance of studying affects not merely as emotional beliefs but as 'aliefs' – more autonomous, automatic, intuitive responses that operate beneath the level of conscious and cognitive belief. The concept of common sense, which underscores the immediate, automatic power of affects and their interaction with the cognitive aspects of belief, proves particularly insightful in that sense. By highlighting the affective component of the common-sense framework and taking initial steps to unpack its interplay with the cognitive aspect, this study makes a significant contribution to the common-sense constructivism in IR, which has remained primarily focused on the cognitive dimension. Future research should focus on more advanced designs to explore the affective-cognitive interplay, as well as develop methods for capturing both personal and collective intuitions, which are critical for forming immediate and long-term judgments about international relations. As discussed in Chapter 3, such an approach could deepen our understanding of how different identities, including the national identity, enter foreign policy decision-making, moving beyond traditional constructivist arguments that identity matters.

By examining the dynamics of why, how, and when the public constrains policymakers, this dissertation introduces a novel foreign policy typology based on their two-dimensional 'stickiness.' The degree of stickiness reflects the likelihood and ease of alignment between public opinion and elite preferences, offering insight into how public opinion can constrain foreign and security policies. Categorising foreign policies by their stickiness, therefore, enhances foreign policy studies by deepening our understanding of policy resilience, the conditions under which change is possible, and the roles both elites and the public play in shaping or maintaining foreign policy trajectories. Understanding policy stickiness carries significant analytical and practical implications, guiding strategic communication with the public and informing decisions about where flexibility may be possible. This perspective could help policymakers anticipate potential pushback or support by the public by assessing whether a policy is perceived as adaptable or non-negotiable.

Finally, the focus on Serbia contributes to foreign policy studies by examining a case that exemplifies the strong influence of national identity – and ontological security – on foreign policy behaviour. It also serves as a paradigmatic case of a small country in international relations. It would be valuable to explore whether this common sense is shared among other small countries, particularly in relation to the affective baggage they carry, full of resentment, anger and spite. This comparative approach can be applied to other components of Serbia's identity, such as investigating whether similar confusion about position or belonging exists in other East and Southeast European countries. Similarly, it would be insightful to examine whether similar truths about international relations make military neutrality a sensible choice in other countries that have adopted a balancing approach to security and defence cooperation. Ultimately, the world and regional order depend on the assumption that many states share a common understanding of how the world functions and what constitutes sensible behaviour within it – a certain level of universal common sense is needed to hold the international society together. Investigating to what extent this holds true, as the MIC project does, contributes to our understanding of the state of world order. By examining a non-mainstream case, the empirical findings also contribute to these broader efforts.

In summary, the model of foreign policy stickiness presented in this dissertation stands somewhere between a theoretical and analytical framework. Building on the OSS, it introduces a novel constructivist approach and emphasises the necessity of a stable sense of self in governing negotiations between the public and elite in the realm of foreign and security policy. It further posits that their shared interpretive framework can facilitate or hinder both immediate and long-term

agreements and disagreements, offering insight into why these dynamics are possible and likely. Additionally, by focusing on the common-sense framework and providing guidance on how it can be mapped and analysed, the model serves as an analytical tool for deconstructing complex phenomena into manageable components, enabling systematic analysis of specific foreign policy outcomes in a given state. While this model proposes universal theoretical assumptions, its validity must be established through the future dissection of specific cases, offering detailed empirical insights. Further improvement and refinement require a substantial number of cases to allow for bolder comparisons and conclusions regarding national and global common sense(s), illuminating the relevant agencies and structures at various levels.

8.4. Contribution to Study of Serbia' Foreign and Security Policy

In addition to serving as a suitable case for further theorisation of the public-elite nexus in foreign policy from the OSS perspective, the provided analysis offers important contributions to the study of Serbia's foreign and security policy as well. The case of Serbia's 'multi-vector', 'multi-faced,' 'four-pillar' foreign and security policy has, as discussed in Chapter 4, been the subject of research mostly interested in the realism theories and concepts, as well as more rationalist approaches of the Europeanisation studies (e.g. Proroković 2018; Dašić 2020). The constructivist accounts, rooted in theories of strategic culture, roles, stigma, and ontological security in foreign policy and international relations, as well as constructivist perspectives on Europeanisation (e.g. Kovačević 2021, 2019, 2016; Krstić 2020; Dašić 2020; Ejdus 2020), have also shed light on the rationale and outlook of key aspects of Serbia's international behaviour, including its engagement with global and regional organisations. As noticed in the review of the existing literature on Serbia's foreign policy, one way or the other, most studies acknowledge the importance of public opinion as critical factors shaping Serbia's foreign policy, and especially its policy of security and defence cooperation. However, studies that directly examine the role of the public and elite-public nexus in Serbian foreign policy remain rare. By offering novel qualitative and quantitative data on the relationship between the foreign policy elites or policymakers and public opinion in Serbia concerning its foreign and security policy, this research, therefore, adds valuable insights to the ongoing discussions on the agents and structures behind the Serbia's contemporary behaviour at the international scene, especially in regard to security and defence cooperation.

One of the most straightforward contributions lies in the provision of novel empirical data not only about the public opinion on major aspects of Serbia's security and defence policy in early 2020s, but also about the relationship between the public and foreign policy makers in Serbia (presented in Chapter 4.2). First, the study provides fresh data, based on the opinion poll on a representative sample, on the public attitudes about major four elements of Serbia's foreign and security policy. In addition to exploring public (lack of) support to these policies by assessing how 'sensible' they are perceived to be, the study also provides original data on public resistance to changes in these policies by capturing citizens' perceptions of whether abandoning each of the four policies would make sense to them. This dual perspective on policies' 'stickiness' confirms preliminary findings, based on the existing secondary literature, that public opinion significantly varies across policies, but also across time for some of the policies. Moreover, the uneven stickiness is corroborated by interviews with policymakers involved in foreign and security affairs, revealing that public influence on decision-making is significant, albeit varying across the four policies. These interviews offer unique insights into how constrained policymakers feel by public opinion in foreign policy, both broadly and within each specific policy area, while also exploring the key reasons and mechanisms behind these constraints. Therefore, the original survey results and qualitative data from interviews, which map the uneven stickiness of Serbia's security and defence cooperation policies, offer novel insights into public opinion on these issues, at the same time highlighting how public opinion influences policymaking in these areas and foreign policy more broadly. Overall, the original data on both public

opinion and policymakers in Serbia directly confirm that public opinion exerts a considerable constraining effect on policymakers, one way or another.

Compared with how Serbia's' policy of security and defence cooperation officially takes place (as previously described in Chapter 4.1), these results suggest that there is a persistent, and seemingly rising, foreign policy disconnect between what the policymakers do in security and defence policy and what the public thinks about it. The level of actual cooperation is almost reversed to the public's attitudes about how sensible they believe this cooperation is and how sensible it would be to abandon it. The most advanced cooperation, with NATO, appears to be the least sticky – the public's resistance to this cooperation, or even awareness of it keeps growing despite solid collaboration over the past two decades, while a significant portion of the public would likely accept its abandonment swiftly should policymakers propose it. In contrast, the least developed policies, such as cooperation with Russia and military neutrality, remain the stickiest, despite limited engagement and low public awareness. Cooperation with the EU, which was initially easy for the public to accept, now seems equally easy to reject despite remaining the major strategic goal of all policymakers since 2000s. This persistent gap between policymakers and the public influences the level of cooperation with various partners, as well as how frequently and openly these policies are discussed. Even when engagement occurs, much of what is communicated is filtered through the public's rather fixed perceptions of international relations and Serbia's position within them. As a result, Serbia's foreign policy often operates in different 'undercover' rhetorical and practical forms and based on interviews with policymakers, it might look significantly different if their decisions were not constrained by such static public opinion. The multifaceted policy of security and defence cooperation, therefore, now resembles a form of 'tightrope walking,' where policymakers strive to implement what they consider sensible while avoiding crossing the red lines set by public opinion. If they were, for instance, to glue European and Atlantic integrations back together, even rhetorically, public support for the EU would likely plummet. Similarly, merely raising the possibility of abandoning military neutrality or reducing cooperation with Russia would probably lead to a sharp decline in public support to policymakers themselves.

While these findings on the disconnect between elites and the public are relevant for understanding its implications on this specific foreign policy and Serbia's foreign policy in general, it is essential to further investigate the nature of these constraints, and the strategies policymakers use to navigate them. Serbia's case could also be theoretically significant in understanding the persistence of such disconnects – despite public disapproval and policymakers' sense of constraint, this gap endures, with neither side fully aligning with the other. To understand how these gaps persist without prompting policy shifts, it is important to further explore whether they are driven by another layer of disconnect – between official rhetoric and actual foreign policy practices. Additionally, an intriguing finding, warranting further research, is the substantial share of undecided respondents in Serbia, even regarding the most sticky and non-sticky policies. Key questions arise: Does this indecision stem from a lack of specialised knowledge, a fundamental misunderstanding of international relations, or perhaps a belief that the public should not be involved in such issues? Understanding this dynamic is essential for assessing the potential for foreign policy changes in Serbia, both in the short and long term, with or without a referendum. A more systematic study of the strategies used by both elites and the public to overlook the gap between them would enhance our understanding of the nature and strength of consensus or division within Serbian society regarding foreign policy, while also helping to avoid overstating either. Ultimately, this would provide valuable insights into Serbia's political and strategic culture, particularly since the domain of foreign policy has had pivotal role in many historical shifts in Serbia's political systems and regimes.

On this note, another key contribution of this study to the field of Serbian foreign policy is its effort to map the common interpretive frameworks of international relations shared by and between elites and the public (Chapter 5). The provided analysis did not aim to provide a comprehensive study of national identity (narratives) in Serbia, nor did it seek to offer a broad historical analysis or genesis of many prevailing beliefs within Serbian society about international relations and Serbia's position

in them. Instead, it captured what has 'survived' through various revisions of historical narratives and what seems to resonate as 'common sense' with elites and the public during, and by the end of the first two decades following the democratic changes in Serbia. By extracting 'lessons learned,' 'taken-for-granted' beliefs, and 'self-evident truths' about the world, the study sheds light on how history is interpreted and how the future of Serbia's place in the world is envisioned at this historical moment, reflecting the underlying attitudes and ideologies that shape the contemporary public discourse and political behaviour in Serbia regarding international relations. Although the primary focus is on security and defence cooperation, the lessons drawn have broader implications for Serbia's overall foreign policy behaviour and can inform analyses of various aspects of Serbia's international experience. A continuous, longitudinal mapping of common perceptions at both the public and elite levels would reveal how Serbian society has evolved – both gradually and abruptly – and identify the factors and actors that have driven these changes. In the long run, the anatomy of 'common sense' about international relations as "a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given time and place" (Gramsci 1971, 326) could help explain how the Serbian national identity forged 'sensible' connections between what Serbia has been and what it aspires to be at the global stage, without compromising its sense of Self.

While basic, the provided map of common sense among foreign policy elites offers valuable insights into why Serbia's foreign policy course since the 2000s often appears incoherent or untenable to many observers (discussed in Chapter 5.1). The common-sense claims expressed in the strategic framework by key foreign policy figures over the past two decades expose a fundamental incoherence in their worldviews, highlighting significant confusion among policymakers about critical questions of security and defence cooperation – whether to engage, how to engage, and with whom. Divergent historical lessons, sometimes presented within the same document or speech, underscore the disarray surrounding Serbia's foreign policy imaginary and vision over the past twenty years. Besides being very rare, the reflections on Serbia's historical experience in the international arena are mild and ambiguous. This is particularly surprising for the realms of security and defence which have been key aspects of Serbia's dynamic diplomatic and military history. This lack of reflection on past successes and failures, highlighting an underdeveloped common sense among foreign policy elites, suggests a persistent lack of confidence and a substantial level of anxiety among Serbian policymakers. Despite significant global changes and the acknowledgment of the world's evolving nature, the common interpretive framework among Serbian elites has remained largely unchanged over the past two decades. Even after events that seemed to deeply shake their basic trust in the international environment, such as the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence, fluctuations or revisions of fundamental answers to key questions have remained minimal. By continuing to rely on outdated and incoherent narratives about the world, policymakers in Serbia have ultimately arrived at inconsistent and unstable judgments, accompanied by equally unconvincing and fragile justifications aimed at both domestic and international audiences.

Further investigation of the reluctance of Serbia's foreign policymakers to pause and assess what has led Serbia to a 'quicksand versus what has placed it on the 'right side of history', or at least to publicly communicate this, presents an intriguing area for study. Comparatively speaking, the inclination to reflect and revise has varied across nations, with some even naming their historical period and reflecting on how well they have progressed and why within them. Common sense is and should be always 'under construction', requiring refined experience, but also the refinement of its interpretation, and it would be important to investigate how ready and vigilant Serbia's elites have been. For these purposes, as already mentioned, it would be important to go beyond policymakers themselves towards a wider circle of elites – from relevant political parties to intellectual and religious circles. Furthermore, instead of focusing solely on static repositories such as strategic documents and speeches, it would be interesting to explore key events, moments of change and situations requiring immediate reactions and judgments by foreign policy elites. In this regard, beyond investigating strengths and weaknesses of common sense among the Serbian elites, future research could examine whether elites genuinely believe the 'truths' they present as self-evident or if they primarily use these

claims strategically as rhetorical devices. An expert survey exploring the extent to which policymakers truly share the beliefs they communicate within the strategic framework could provide valuable insights into the use of common sense as rhetoric, especially in light of the rise of populism in Serbia and globally. The invocation of common sense in Serbian political discourse has risen, with even the Aleksandar Vučić in his inaugural speech in 2022 stating that all Serbia needs on its long and difficult journey to restore its place in the world is "what the great Thomas Edison swore by: hard work, dedication, and common sense" (Vučić 2022).

On the other hand, the original data on public common sense in Serbia provides equally valuable insights, revealing that there is no clear or strong social consensus about international relations among the Serbian public (as discussed in Chapter 5.2). Similar to policymakers, the public often holds conflicting attitudes regarding how international relations work and what Serbia's natural place in the global security architecture is or should be. While some findings align with expectations for those familiar with the Serbian context and its national identity narratives, others may be surprising. For instance, the social consensus around Serbia's belonging to Europe or its 'in-between' position does not appear very strong. Moreover, not only is very little about whether, how, and with whom Serbia should cooperate considered self-evident to everyone, but a significant portion of the population remains undecided on these issues. Thus, while the public and elites hold some diverging truths about the world, their incoherent interpretive frameworks reveal a similarly shaken confidence in the orderliness and predictability of the international system, as well as Serbia's natural position within it. Additionally, the results show that the public relies on common sense truths that are not only used independently of the elites' perspectives, but sometimes the same truths are employed to support opposing directions. More precisely, the profiles of supporters and opponents of the four foreign policy pillars (discussed in Chapter 6) illustrate how the public interprets these policies, adapting and bending interpretive frameworks to make sense of them or potential changes, ultimately judging them as sensible or nonsensical. The incoherence within the public's common sense framework in Serbia, therefore, leaves enough room for conflicting policies to make sense. While this can be beneficial for policymakers, it also presents challenges, as the prospects for success in foreign policy proposals are less predictable, for better or for worse.

Further unpacking the framework, the public relies on to make immediate judgments on foreign policy provides valuable insights into the outlook of Serbia's ongoing foreign policy, as well as the likelihood and potential pathways for future changes. Each of the profiles presented, and each of the observed statistical relationships between specific claims and attitudes toward preserving or abandoning Serbia's cooperation with the EU, NATO, Russia, and military neutrality, could be the subject of separate research in future. These insights would illuminate the links and chain reactions behind the public's 'a-ha' moments in relation to Serbia's foreign policy. They would highlight not only divergences but also the social consensus that makes certain policies immediately sensible to many in society, regardless of whether they are proposed by elites or not. Future research should not be limited to security and defence policy but should also address other pertinent issues, especially considering that Serbia is likely to undergo major adjustments in its foreign policy and, consequently, national narratives in the near future. How can potential changes, such as the final status of Kosovo or even the ongoing negotiations on normalisation, be made more sensible and appealing to the public? Would negotiating with Albania, rather than Pristina, over Kosovo be more 'sensible' to the Serbian public, given the common sense 'one nation, one state' rule in modern international relations? In this context, and particularly in light of disagreements with the official policies proposed by elites, further investigation into public common sense should explore the diverse sources of common sense within Serbian society. A more comprehensive, 'bottom-up' research approach, as discussed in the methods section, could be beneficial for examining what is considered sensible in Serbian society, and whether this is influenced by elites, personal experiences, or peers. Additionally, while the current research does not address demographic characteristics, future studies should explore whether common senses emerge within certain segments of the Serbian society based on age, gender, residence, or other factors.

Finally, the emotional discourse analysis of the strategic framework formulated by policymakers, combined with a survey of public affective attachment to the four pillars of Serbia's security and defence policy, further contributes to understanding Serbia's foreign policy. Both the elites' strategic framework and the public's emotional map of international relations – often overriding cognitive cues in shaping judgments about the sensibility of these policies – reveal that public perceptions of international relations are strongly emotionally charged. While some findings align with expectations, such as the generally negative sentiment toward Serbia's cooperation with NATO, others may be surprising, and particularly the emotional force behind certain 'sticky' policies. For example, military neutrality seems to resonate with the public not due to particularly positive emotions or strong and widespread pride, but rather because it faces little emotional opposition. Similarly, cooperation with Russia feels right to many, primarily because cooperation with the West often feels wrong. All this suggests that Serbia's self-identity narrative remains rooted and gets 'stabilised' by defining itself 'in opposition to' far more than through a sense of 'belonging to.' Overall, the affective framework of common sense points to a rather revisionist worldview characterised by discontent, disappointment, anger, and resentment. Unpacking this emotional interpretive framework offers important insights for future studies of Serbia's foreign policy, illuminating the immediate resonance of potential foreign policy changes as well as shifts in the global order, especially given the significant resentment toward the current one and Serbia's position within it. The affective frameworks underlying each profile of supporters and opponents of various policies can as well serve as a starting point for future research. This research could explore the factors that make the public more or less susceptible to elite cues and how these dynamics shape the agency of the public in policymaking regarding foreign and security policy.

Hence, based on the briefly discussed theoretical and empirical contributions of this dissertation, it seems that the insights from studying the ontological security needs in society, through the lens of common sense, can contribute to a more accountable foreign policy in Serbia and beyond. This is especially important if there is a gap in understanding between what elites advocate and what the public accepts or prioritises. Understanding common sense in international relations can be very valuable for policymakers, as it allows them to critically assess the assumptions underpinning their own decisions and the public narratives surrounding foreign policy. By identifying areas of convergence and divergence, policymakers can better tailor their approaches to improve 'stickiness' and reduce public scepticism or 'vetoes' on the foreign policies they find beneficial. By recognising these scripts and biases that inscribe the world with predictability and orderliness, citizens are able to make sense of international relations and view the state's actions as rational without critically examining contemporary circumstances. Policymakers can use this understanding to approach relationships with more nuance, avoiding unnecessary tensions and opening up opportunities for cooperation that may have been overlooked. Ensuring that common sense is understood as constructed rather than absolute, policymakers can more freely explore innovative strategies and foster new cognitive and affective links that will transform the Self without rupturing it. For instance, if the public believes that the world is favouring only the powerful and that picking a side makes more sense than balancing but remains unsure about their nation's place in the global order, policymakers can craft messages that respect these beliefs. At the same time, they can introduce nuanced perspectives that foster greater public understanding and support for complex policies of security and defence cooperation.

Nevertheless, studying common sense, including its implications for international relations, should not exclusively or even primarily benefit policymakers. Common sense understandings shared within a society – among the public, elites, or between them – shape how people make sense of the world, interpret social interactions, and act in daily life. By analysing 'taken-for-granted,' 'self-evident,' and 'obvious' frameworks through which people perceive and respond to social phenomena, scholars can reveal the hidden structures that maintain power structures that benefit particular groups, while obscuring complex or marginalized perspectives within societies. In this sense, studying common sense is foundational for examining how social realities are constructed and reproduced

across time and space, paving the way for critical reflection and alternative 'remapping' of common sense interpretive schemes – as discussed at the very beginning, common-sense assumptions, or 'zdrav razum' in the Serbian context, are neither as common nor as 'sensible' as often assumed. Studying common sense in Serbia, alongside broader and longitudinal studies on a global scale, allows scholars to question the international status quo and consider alternative approaches and policy options that might lead to more equitable, sustainable, inclusive national foreign policies and, ultimately, global outcomes. Moreover, it returns a significant level of agency to the public in initiating and navigating those alternatives.

In a world order where 'common sense' is increasingly summoned by those who gain power by arguing that elites are disconnected from 'ordinary people's' issues and values, analysing the 'common sense' of both elites and the public is crucial. This approach enables researchers to determine whether a perceptual gap, which populist narratives exploit, indeed exists and, if so, how it can be narrowed to serve the public rather than those in power. While common sense remains a key source of agency for citizens in the vast arena of global politics, it also leaves them vulnerable. In a society where common sense is eroding, people may be more vulnerable to misinformation, propaganda, or ideological manipulation, as they lose their ability to critically assess basic truths. If enough people feel that the world is unpredictable or that their way of life is under threat, it can lead to widespread fear, which can manifest in political radicalisation, increased social conflict, or even violence. Thus, it is the responsibility of social scientists, political scientists, and international relations scholars to protect this agency with integrity, humanity, and good faith. The recent developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence further amplify this call, sparking debates about whether AI could move "beyond efficient learning to include abilities such as self-reflection and abstraction" (Kejriwal 2024). This provokes a profound question about whether AI could ever truly rival the human 'heart and mind' – that unique, intuitive capacity to navigate uncertainty and make sense of the unknown, even in the absence of data and knowledge (Brachman and Levesque 2023).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Interviews

	Participant	Location	Time	Duration
1.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer A	Belgrade	2h 05min	February 2020
2.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer B	Belgrade	1h 21min	February 2020
3.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer C	Belgrade	58min	February 2020
4.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officer D	Belgrade	1h 11min	February 2020
5.	Ministry of European Integration Officer	Belgrade	1h 51min	March 2021
6.	Ministry of European Integration Negotiation Team Member	Belgrade	1h 38min	February 2021
7.	Prime Minister Cabinet Member	Belgrade	54 min	January 2021
8.	Member A of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee	Belgrade	1h 23min	March 2020
9.	Member B of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee	Belgrade	1h 45min	March 2020
10.	Member C of National Assembly Defence and Interior Security Committee	Belgrade	1h 03min	February 2021

Interviews were conducted in t the period January 2020 – January 2021, within the project titled "Fighting Together, Moving Apart: European Common Defence and Shared Security in an age of Brexit and Trump", supported by Volkswagen Foundation. The project was implemented by a consortium of 13 universities and faculties, including the Faculty of Political Sciences – University of Belgrade.

As per the Project Agreement, the project underwent an ethics screening and was approved by the University of Exeter Ethics Committee (approval number: 201920-067).

All interviews in Serbia used in this dissertation were conducted jointly by Prof. Dr Filip Ejdus and the author of the dissertation (Tijana Rečević).

More details: www.secEUrity.eu.

Appendix 2: Survey Methodology

Category	Details
Timeframe	Survey conducted from July 1 to July 9, 2023
Data Collection Method	Face-to-face (F2F), field survey (D2D)
Interviewer Monitoring	Google Maps (GPS) live location sharing, daily reports
Type	TAPI (Tablet Assisted Personal Interviewing)
Research Instrument	Survey questionnaire with 49 questions (140 variables)
Population	18+ in Serbia excluding Kosovo and Metohija (6,360,728 voters)
Sample Type	Representative three-stage stratified random sample
Sampling Unit	Voting district (120 units)
Stratification Criteria	Voting district size and region
Small district	Up to 396 people
Medium district	397 to 978 people
Large district	Over 979 people
Regions	Belgrade, Vojvodina, Central Serbia
Respondent Randomization Method	(1) Polling place (PPS sampling); (2) household; (3) next birthday
Sample Size	1,213 respondents
Confidence Interval	+/- 2.8 for occurrences with expected incidence of 50%
Weighting	Multinomial proportion fitting through multilinear regression
Weighting Criteria	Census & Wittgenstein Center

Demographics

Attribute	Percentage
Gender	
Men	49.1%
Women	50.9%
Average Age	47 years
Survey Setting	
Urban	60.3%
Rural	39.7%
Region	
Belgrade	25.2%
Vojvodina	25.6%
Western & Central Serbia	28.2%

Eastern & Southern Serbia	21%
Education	
Primary school	5.5%
Secondary education	73%
Higher education & academic degrees	21.5%
Employment Type	
Public sector	15.5%
Private sector	32.6%
Self-employed/business owner	6.5%
Unemployed	8%
Student	9.2%
Retired	20.8%
Housewife	6.1%
Person with disabilities	1.4%
Financial Status	
Very difficult to live on current income	11.3%
Manage somehow, but far from stable	44.7%
Situation not bad, enough for needs	40.2%
Enough money to not worry	3.8%
Nationality	
Serbian	89.4%
Other	9%
Prefer not to answer	1.6%
Religiosity	
Not religious at all	8.3%
Somewhat religious	19.8%
Moderately religious	44%
Very religious	26.5%
Prefer not to answer	1.4%

Questionnaire

How sensible are the following Serbia's foreign policies of security and defence cooperation given its position in international relations?

No.	Policy	Not at all	Mostly not	Neither	Mostly yes	Completely	Don't know
Q32_1	Military neutrality						
Q32_2	Cooperation with EU						
Q32_3	Cooperation with NATO						
Q32_4	Cooperation with Russia						

How sensible is abandoning any of Serbia's foreign policies of security and defence cooperation given its position in international relations?

No.	Policy	Not at all	Mostly not	Neither	Mostly yes	Completely	Don't know
Q33_1	Military neutrality						
Q33_2	Cooperation with EU						
Q33_3	Cooperation with NATO						
Q33_4	Cooperation with Russia						

How much do you agree with the following statements about international relations and Serbia's position in them in regard to security and defence cooperation?

No.	Policy	Not at all	Mostly not	Neither	Mostly yes	Completely	Don't know
Q34_1	States should take sides in international relations.						
Q34_2	Cooperation with everyone is necessary, regardless of differences.						
Q34_3	Ideals and values should be defended at all costs.						

Q34_4	There are no eternal friends, only eternal interests.						
Q34_5	The strong do what they want, the weak suffer what they must.						
Q35_1	Serbia belongs to East.						
Q35_2	Serbia belongs to the West.						
Q35_3	Serbia is between East and West.						
Q35_4	Serbia belongs to the East.						
Q35_5	Serbia is a guarantor of peace and stability in the Balkans.						
Q35_6	Serbia has always been on the right side of history.						
Q35_7	Serbia is at the crossroads and therefore important to great powers.						
Q35_8	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated.						

What emotion do you feel regarding the following Serbia's foreign policies of security and defence cooperation?

No.	Policy	Satisfaction	Fear	Anger	Spite	Pride	Sadness	Hatred	Discontent	Other
Q36_1	Military Neutrality									
Q36_2	Cooperation with EU									
Q36_3	Cooperation with NATO									
Q36_4	Cooperation with Russia									

Appendix 3: Discourse and Content Analysis Codebook

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
Whether to Cooperate?	**Cooperation with everyone is necessary regardless of differences**	**This notion asserts that security challenges and shared strategic interests transcend individual state differences, making cooperation essential for both national and collective security. It is often contrasted with the costly alternative of isolation.**	***In modern conditions, no country is able to independently solve the increasingly complex issues of preserving and strengthening national security, which is increasingly interconnected with the state of security in both its immediate and broader surroundings. (Republika Srbija 2019)***	**58**
	Anger	Narratives suggesting a stronger negative emotional response to perceived injustice, wrongdoing, or frustration, characterised by feelings of hostility, or irritation, usually directed at a specific actor in international relations.	*In order to succeed in preserving ourselves, we must engage in dialogue with everyone, but also strengthen our defense capacities. Only in this way can we protect our country from those who threaten us daily, both openly and publicly, as well as quietly and covertly. (Vučić 2017)*	1
	Discontent	Narratives suggesting a feeling of dissatisfaction or unhappiness, often arising from unmet expectations, unmet needs, or perceived unfairness. It reflects a sense of dissatisfaction with a situation, condition, or outcome, often milder than anger and not necessarily directed to a specific actor in international relations.	*Entry into international integration processes — economic, technological, and ultimately political — is a key interest for post-communist countries. This is driven by objective needs, not behind-the-scenes scenarios and conspiracies. Attempts to present Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as advocates, initiators, or even leaders of a new division of Europe and the world have primarily harmed our own policy and citizens. Obsession with geopolitical combinations and scenarios that view our region outside any realistic context has led not only to irrational political decisions but also to directing the general public toward isolationism, xenophobia, and distancing from European integration flows. A concrete manifestation of this isolation was the distancing of the FRY from almost all relevant international organizations, the severance of diplomatic relations with leading Western*	7

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			countries, and the lack of relations with some countries formed on the territory of the former SFRY. (Svilanović 2001)	
	Neutral	Narratives suggesting neutral affects that are neither distinctly positive nor negative, often characterised by a state of emotional equilibrium, indifference or ambivalence.	*Serbia must conduct its foreign policy based on realistic and pragmatic assumptions. We will cooperate with all countries around the world in Serbia's interest — with all European countries, the United States, Russia, China, and all other players shaping international politics, on the basis of preserving national identity and dignity. We are ready to cooperate with any state and nation in the preservation of peace, the promotion of progress, the strengthening of democracy, and the respect for universal human values*. (Dačić 2012)	45
	Pride	Narratives suggesting a positive emotional response that arises from a sense of self-worth, accomplishment, or satisfaction in Serbia's achievements, qualities, or affiliations in international relations.	*We will build Serbia as a country of peace. We will strive to ensure that members of our armed forces are actively involved in diverse peacekeeping missions in the region and around the world. From military training to military medicine, we aim to use our knowledge and extensive experience to the fullest, assisting other countries and peoples, protecting security, and advancing a policy of peace. (Vučić 2014)*	6
	Sadness	Narratives suggesting a complex emotional response to loss, disappointment, sorrow, or a sense of unfulfilled expectations and despair regarding Serbia's position in in international relations.	*The first step in overcoming international isolation was normalizing relations with numerous countries — re-establishing diplomatic ties where they had been severed — and with international organizations. The era of confrontation with the entire world is behind us, as it has become evident that normalization is an absolute necessity for us. Only in this way could our country enter modern civilizational currents — political, economic, technological, and others — which are essential for solving any of our problems. (Svilanović 2001)*	8

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
	Satisfaction	Narratives suggesting a positive emotional state that is linked to feelings of contentment, happiness, a sense of accomplishment, the enjoyment of fulfilling relationships or experiences in international relations.	*Through participation in international peacekeeping missions and operations of the UN and EU, the Republic of Serbia demonstrates its commitment to actively contributing to global, European, and regional security while sharing responsibility with its partners. This involvement reflects Serbia's strategic approach to diplomacy and security, underlining its role in maintaining stability and fostering cooperative relationships with international institutions. IPAP 2019-2014*	13
	Spite	Narratives evoking negative emotions, characterized by a desire to irritate or inconvenience others—often driven by resentment or malice—arise when Serbia perceives itself as wronged, slighted, or disrespected. This fuels a desire for revenge or actions that cause discomfort or harm to others, even at the expense of Serbia's own interests. Such narratives are often linked to an inability to forgive or move past grievances, fostering destructive behavior that ultimately harms both Serbia and those around it.	*Serbia is an independent, sovereign and freedom-loving country, and we are no one's puppet - of the US, Russia or any other country in the world - and that is how it will stay.* (Vučić 2020)	1
	The strong do what they want and the weak endure what they must	**This claim reflects the power imbalances that often shape global dynamics, particularly in security and defence cooperation. Powerful states may assert their interests through coercion or influence, while weaker states are compelled to comply or endure consequences due to their limited leverage in shaping decisions or outcomes.**	***It is true that the attack on Ukraine has violated international public law, but it is also true that this has happened numerous times in the modern world. Often, the key protagonists and today's major advocates for the respect of international law have been Western powers. After all, here in Serbia, we can confirm this in the best possible way. (Vučić 20222)***	**109**
	Anger	See above	*Therefore, all those who today criticize Serbia for how it should behave, what it should think, and what it should believe, should first ask themselves: 'Did we, who*	24

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			participated in the bombing of the FRY in 1999, have the right to attack an internationally recognized state, without consultations and a decision by the UN Security Council?' And then: 'Do we, in the case of Serbia, respect the fundamental principle of international public law, which is the inviolability of the territorial integrity of internationally recognized states?' And finally: 'Did we, in the case of Serbia, respect the relevant UN Security Council Resolution, or did we simply ignore it?' In the answers to these questions, perhaps there will be understanding for Serbia's current position, which simply asks that the principles of international law not be interpreted as convenient, depending on the time, circumstances, and opportunities, but absolutely and non-selectively. (Brnabić 2022)	
	Discontent	See above	*Serbia has, over the past ten years, been at the mercy of brutal interest groups within the country and international interests outside of our borders." (Đinđić 2003)*	30
	Fear	See above	*The general security situation in the world is significantly threatened by the blatant violation of the 'Charter of the United Nations' and universally accepted norms of international law, especially interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, as well as the concept and practice of preventive strikes and military interventionism. Particularly worrying is the tendency toward the escalation of relations between major powers, driven by competition for the realization of their opposing interests and the alteration of existing spheres of influence. In such circumstances, although the risk of a global military conflict has been significantly reduced, it cannot be completely excluded. (Republika Srbija 2019)*	1
	Sadness	See above	*For us as a country, there is nothing left but to invoke*	4

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			international public law and perhaps be the only ones to fully adhere to it. (Brnabić 2022)	
	Spite	See above	*Therefore, we are not attacking anyone, we are not endangering anyone, but I guarantee you one thing, and that is that no one will dare and no one, as easily as he once did, satisfying his geopolitical interests, will no longer be allowed to attack Serbia, not because someone likes us or doesn't like us, and not only because today he doesn't have such interests, as he used to have, but because Serbia is stronger. (Vučić 20223)*	10
	Serbia's role in history has not been appreciated enough.	**Narratives suggesting that Serbia's contributions, struggles, and sacrifices – particularly during wars and conflicts – have been overlooked or undervalued by the international community stem from the belief that Serbia has played a pivotal role in shaping the region. This perspective emphasizes Serbia's resistance to foreign powers, its cultural and historical contributions to Europe, and its central position in the Balkans.**	***Today, as Serbia marks two hundred years since the renewal of its statehood, the question is raised: what does Serbia expect from us? What does Serbia expect from us today, at the beginning of the new century? Not just from one government, but from all those in power, in various capacities—what does it demand from us as its citizens? Two hundred years ago, Serbia was establishing its state status, step by step gaining freedom, or rather the status of an internationally recognized state. At that time, Serbia began to reorganize politically, economically, and culturally, following the civilizational and democratic patterns and standards prevailing in the more developed part of Europe. In the second half of the 19th century, Serbia, along with Montenegro of course, as an independent state, became an integral part of the then European community of states (Koštunica 2022)***	**18**
	Anger	See above	*On the backs of Serbia, for the first time since World War II, an aggression was carried out on a sovereign state, a founding member of the United Nations, on the European continent. At the very end of the 20th century, in 1999, a country was bombed, without a UN Security Council decision, a country that did not step onto the territory of*	9

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			another state. A brutal aggression was committed, introducing the principle of the law of the stronger at the expense of international law. Brnabic 2022	
	Discontent	See above	*What would be more European than achieving these goals in internal development and what more does Europe and the European Union ask and expect from us? This is the basic and permanent dimension of our pro-European policy. (Koštunica 2004)*	9
	Pride	See above	*Serbian thinkers also participated in the construction of a society based on European ideas in the first half of the 20th century, and the Serbian people made great sacrifices for the construction of a free and stable Europe. By becoming a member of the European Union, the Republic of Serbia becomes part of an organization that represents one of the most important global actors and gains the opportunity to influence the decision-making process within that organization. In this way, it improves its own ability to protect and realize other national interests and goals. (Republika Srbija 2019)*	5
	Sadness	See above	*Full membership in the EU is in the deepest interest of the state of Serbia and all its citizens. By entering the EU, Serbia will become a full member of the European family of nations, from which it was excluded for a long time due to unfortunate historical circumstances. (Cvetkovoić 2008)*	3
	Spite	See above	*Ladies and gentlemen, we are a small country for the amount of injustice and defeat that we celebrate. And we don't need more sacrifices than the ones we've already made. That's why Serbia now has to play for victory. (Dačić 2013)*	9
How to Cooperate?	**A state should not pick sides in**	**The idea that a state should not pick sides in international relations emphasises a balanced**	***Such a policy of independent decision-making, which we are convinced is realistic and correct, requires a lot of***	**55**

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
	international relations	**approach where the state avoids aligning with any particular power bloc or political group.**	***effort to nuance the position and find a balance in a multitude of different interests, often in conflict with each other. (Dačić 2018)***	
	Discontent	See above	*Therefore, we do not want to enter into military alliances and pacts and participate in actions against some other nations and countries, as some of them participated in the aggression against our Serbia. We want to be our own, to have a well-equipped and modern army, the Serbian army, which can and knows how to preserve and defend what is ours. (Vučić 2017)*	3
	Neutral	See above	*Military neutrality is the defense interest of the Republic of Serbia which arose from its national values and interests and international position. With military neutrality, the Republic of Serbia expresses its determination not to join military-political alliances, which does not exclude cooperation in the field of defense. This creates the conditions for strengthening the capabilities and capacities of the defense system and improving the overall security of the Republic of Serbia and its citizens. (Republika Srbija 2019)*	22
	Pride	See above	*Serbia is like a small island and some people usually say that or state it as a problem. But let me tell you, what is the problem in the fact that you believe in your people, that you believe in the heroic gene of your citizens that we were and will be able to protect our country and that we do not want to belong to any military bloc, that we only want to have the right to guard our borders, to guard our land, to have our own soldiers and to protect our skies? (Vučič 2022)*	16
	Sadness	See above	*In the political sense, it seems more and more that emotions have overcome reason, and that the biggest problem in the future will be the problem of energy and food. In such a world, Serbia needs to position itself, maintain its stability*	2

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			and continue its growth and development in the coming years. That, in the simplest terms, is the basic task of the future Government. (Brnabič 2012)	
	Satisfaction	See above	*The engagement of members of the Serbian Armed Forces and other defense forces in UN and EU multinational operations represents a significant element of foreign policy and a concrete contribution to the preservation of international peace and security. By participating in multinational operations, the Republic of Serbia shows that it is an active factor in preserving international peace and security, confirms its own reputation and strengthens confidence in the Serbian Armed Forces in the international environment. (Brnabić 2020)*	28
	Spite	See above	*We don't want someone else's, but we won't give ours to anyone. And we will be strong, strong enough to be able to do it. The policy of military neutrality will be the policy that I will protect, but also cooperation with everyone we don't want to be a part of, but we have an obligation to build different and better relations. (Vučić 2017)*	20
	Serbia is at the crossroads and therefore important to great powers	**This claim suggests that Serbia's geographical position at the crossroads of Europe has made it strategically important to great powers in various historical periods and continues to do so today.**	**Considering the geostrategic position of Southeastern Europe, through which important energy and communication routes pass, the clash of interests between states over the use of transit routes and the management of resources could lead to regional crises and threats to the security and stability of the countries in the region, as well as beyond. On the other hand, the Balkan region, as a space for the transit of energy resources, could increase its overall geo-economic significance. (Republika Srbija 2019)**	**15**
	Anger	See above	And when you build a house at a crossroads, all kinds of people come to visit—those who wish to be good guests and those who intend to take over your house. (Vulin 2018)	2

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
	Fear	See above	The threat of armed aggression against the Republic of Serbia has significantly diminished but has not been entirely eliminated. It may arise as a consequence of global or regional armed conflicts driven by conflicting interests of major powers or countries in the region. (Republika Srbija 2009)	6
	Neutral	See above	The geostrategic position of Southeast Europe, through which energy and communication routes pass, connecting the developed countries of Europe with the regions of the Caucasus, the Caspian Basin, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean, significantly and directly impacts the security of the states on the European continent. (Republika Srbija 2009)	3
	Pride	See above	There is no word grand enough for our Serbia, which has always stood at the crossroads of different civilizations, faiths, and cultures, enriching us in the best possible way. This legacy inspires us to preserve it today more strongly, firmly, and resolutely than ever before. (Vučić 2022)	6
	Spite	See above	Likewise, throughout history, our land has always been a crossroads for the ambitions and interests of others, for conquests and retreats, but also for our own victories and defeats, leaving deep scars on Serbia's entire existence. Many came here without respect or consideration, but left with hidden or open admiration for our small yet great people and for our small yet proud Serbia. (Vučić 2022)	3
	Ideals and values are worth fighting for	**This claim suggests that some shared ideals, values and principles are enough to justify collective action and even material sacrifice, especially in security and defence cooperation.**	**Historical experiences, cherishing fighting, liberating and religious traditions, patriotism, as well as the willingness to stand up and sacrifice for them are the main motivational factors in performing tasks in the defence of the country. (Republika Srbija2023)**	**17**
	Anger	See above	We have ceased to be a country defined by a string of	1

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			historical defeats and have begun to achieve victories. We have started to believe in ourselves and our success, rather than seeking excuses for failures. We have begun to work and stopped complaining. On the international stage, Serbia has become a respected and valued country. A nation that pursues an independent and sovereign foreign policy, a reliable partner for dialogue, rather than a country subjected to conditions and ultimatums. (Brnabić 2020)	
	Pride	See above	Serbia is an independent and sovereign country, and only such a Serbia can be a source of pride for all its citizens. After all, freedom is a value that our citizens have always placed on the highest pedestal. For that beloved freedom, Serbia wishes to build and secure its own defense, its borders, land, air, and water. (Vučić 2017)	16
	Satisfaction	See above	Our red lines are entirely clear. The sacred priority is the interest of the Republic of Serbia, full independence in making decisions on all matters of domestic and foreign policy, in line with our national interests and principles of international law, and the preservation of vital interests and the security of our people in Kosovo and Metohija. (Brnabić 2022)	4
	Spite	See above	Serbia is neither anyone's colony nor anyone's backyard. As a small country with proud citizens, we will know how to protect our freedom, defend our integrity, and uphold our right to have our own political stance and make sovereign decisions.(Vučić 2014)	7
	Serbia has always been on the right side of history	**This claim suggests that Serbia's actions and decisions throughout history have been morally justified and aligned with broader ideals of justice and progress, often in the face of external pressure or injustice.**	**Today, at the beginning of the new century, Serbia stands, of course, not in the same way or for the same tasks as it did two hundred years ago. Those who remind us of our demographic and material losses, of lost time, and of historical delusions and failures are right. But so are those who argue that, despite**	**22**

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			everything, Serbia has nonetheless moved forward.	
	Anger	See above	There is no reason not to be proud of our history. We have fought many wars, but we have never been accused of war crimes. We have been victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide, but we have never engaged in butchery. The bravery and honor of Serbian and Montenegrin soldiers and officers were acknowledged by both wartime allies and enemies. And then, in the early 1990s, an anti-history happened to us. For the first time since we began to ask, Serbs and Montenegrins found themselves on international wanted lists and in indictments. Those who were responsible for this committed, above all, a crime against our history. In Srebrenica, not only were Bosniak civilians and wartime prisoners killed, but Serbs, over whom genocide was committed in the darkness of World War II, were dishonored and murdered again. So why, then, should our people be the protectors or hostages of the accused?" (Drašković 2004)	2
	Discontent	See above	Today, at the beginning of the new century, Serbia stands, of course, not in the same way or facing the same tasks as it did two hundred years ago. Those who remind us of our demographic and material losses, of lost time, and of historical delusions and mistakes are right. But so are those who argue that, despite everything, Serbia has nonetheless moved forward. (Koštunica 2004)	5
	Pride	See above	Just like the Miroslav Gospel, our country has had a strange and difficult historical path. The generations of Serbia were forged through the hardest times over long centuries, often alone, but always upright. It is these generations, which throughout history displayed incredible human, ruling, artistic, military, moral, and spiritual heights, that have woven this indomitable, freedom-loving, and sometimes	16

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			even defiant spirit into all present and future generations of our people. (Vučić 2022)	
	Sadness	See above	A divided and fragmented Serbia, torn by conflicting interests, cannot reach anywhere. Torn by ambitions, split by egos, quarreling over ideology, faith, parties, nations, and clubs, this country—and any country—does nothing but sign an eternal act declaring that it will forever remain small, forever poor in every sense, and forever free of any hope for a better tomorrow. There is no freedom in divisions. There is no progress in quarrels. There is no goal in the haze of conflicts, and no results without mutual respect. It cannot be seen, it cannot be recognized, it is unclear and, therefore, unattainable. (Vučić 2017)	4
	Spite	See above	The world may never be the same again, but I point out the fact that at least we will try to remain strong, confident, and unwavering in our principles. As a country, we will continue to work for the common good, boldly moving forward despite all adversities, just as we have done until now. (Vučić 2022)	6
Whom to Cooperate With?	**Interests are eternal, not friends**	**The claim reflects a pragmatic approach to international relations and underscores the fluid, often transactional nature of security and defense alliances. Friendships between countries may shift over time due to changing circumstances, but a state's core interests remain constant and ultimately guide foreign policy decisions.**	**The Republic of Serbia advocates for the respect of international law, the strengthening of the role of the UN, OSCE, and the EU, and the creation of mechanisms to preserve global security, while equally respecting the interests of all countries, peoples, and ethnic groups. Accordingly, it does not consider any country or alliance as hostile in advance. (Republika Srbija 2009)**	**25**
	Discontent	See above	The policy of military neutrality will be the policy I will protect, but also cooperation with everyone whose part we do not wish to be, though we have an obligation to build different and better relationships. (Vučić 2017)	8

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
	Fear	See above	The world is slowly, since February 24, 2022, sinking into World War III, with increasingly frequent and serious rattling of nuclear weapons and with fewer chances for a peace agreement to be reached in the short term. Politically, it increasingly seems that emotions have outweighed reason, and that the greatest demand in the future will be for energy resources and food. In such a world, Serbia must position itself, maintain its stability, and continue its growth and development in the coming years. (Brnabić 2022)	1
	Neutral	See above	While the central strategic priority of Serbia is the swift accession to the European Union, it is vital for national interests that we further develop our comprehensive relations not only with Brussels but also with Moscow and Washington, which represent the three main pillars of our foreign policy. We do not hesitate, because we know that our future lies in the European Union. We will continue to strive to achieve our interests in a realistic, diversified, and strategic manner that always takes into account our goals. (Jeremić 2007)	16
	Sadness	See above	We will build friendships around the world because Serbia has no right to have enemies. (Nikolić 2012)	4
	Satisfaction	See above	Serbia is on the right path today, thanks to its foreign policy and strategic choices made in recent years. On one hand, the path of reforms and membership in the European Union; on the other, the enhancement of our relations with the creators of world politics—Russia, China, and the United States; and thirdly, the development of relations with friendly countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. The key and most important priority of our foreign policy actions is the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state, with Kosovo and Metohija as an	4

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			integral part of Serbia. (Dačić 2018)	
	Spite	See above	We have given enough to death, it is time to give life to life. We have destroyed almost everything, all together, in the Western Balkans, it is time to rebuild. We have all, together, been victims of our own fears, it is time to become heroes of the future we believe in. (Vučić 2017)	2
	Serbia belongs to Europe	**The claim reflects the idea that Serbia shares deep ties with European traditions, particularly in the context of its long history within the European sphere of influence. However, it also reflects its natural position within the European security and defence environment.**	**The great idea of European civilization shapes our behavior and way of thinking; it emphasizes our humanity and allows what saves us from the surface of our character to emerge. Because in European democracy, the government relates to every citizen with empathy and understanding, sharing their hopes and dreams. European democracy of the 21st century is not a neutral, mechanical process. It is more than that. It is a shared life in a community of the same values. (Jeremić 2007)**	**66**
	Discontent	See above	What could be more European than achieving these goals in our internal development, and what more could Europe and the European Union expect and demand from us? This is the fundamental and lasting dimension of our pro-European policy. We want to enter Europe with a renewed state, a capable economy, and a self-aware society. In one word, as a proud nation. We must achieve this through our own efforts, united under the great name of Serbia. (Koštunica 2004)	12
	Neutral	See above	In fact, over the past two centuries, Serbia has politically, culturally, and economically rooted itself in Europe, only to be torn from this natural environment—Europe—after the end of World War II. It gradually began to return to Europe three years ago; unfortunately, with a significant delay compared to other post-communist countries. A deeply transformed Serbia, along with Montenegro, is now	26

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			moving toward a new Europe, fundamentally different from the one it once knew. And once again, from a different perspective, I want to emphasize the importance of EU membership. That membership is not only something desired, but also something that must be, something without which we cannot move forward. What is desired typically brings benefit, while what is necessary may not always be beneficial, but the European path for Serbia and Montenegro has no alternative. (Koštunica 2004)	
	Pride	See above	Serbia has been and remains part of the European family of nations, whose foundation is built on shared values and civilizational achievements. We are, and we want to be, a significant partner contributing to shaping the common European destiny, and in doing so, we stand for the national prosperity. We must not forget why we should be a member of the EU. EU membership provides us with the opportunity to improve our economic and political institutions, enhance the standard of living for our citizens, and strengthen regional stability. That membership is also a guarantee that we will fully protect our values, rights, and integrity, and continue to develop in line with the highest European standards. (Brnabić 2022)	16
	Sadness	See above	Of course, the inevitable question arises: what happened in the meantime, and how did we go from being a moderately developed European country to being at the bottom of the European ladder? The correct and complete answer to this question can only be given by history. (Đinđič 2001)	10
	Satisfaction	See above	Democratic processes and Serbia's European foreign policy orientation strengthen its international position and positively influence the creation and improvement of cooperation policies and confidence-building measures in the region. Based on this, the established security policy of	12

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			the Republic of Serbia makes it an important factor in regional security cooperation and a reliable partner in international relations. (Republika Srbija 2009)	
	Serbia is Between East and West	**The claim reflects Serbia's historical political and security balancing act between the Eastern and Western influences.**	**The government's policy is not about division, not about dividing between those who are for Russia and those who are for the EU. The government's policy, first and foremost, has space for those who are for Serbia and for excellent cooperation both with the EU and the Russian Federation. (Vučić 2016)**	**5**
	Fear	See above	This government will also promote good relations with other EU countries and the rest of the world. Recent unrest and conflicts between the East and the West do not benefit Serbia. When our friends are in conflict with each other, we do not see an opportunity to gain anything from it. Serbia does not want to be part of these tensions. (Vučić 2014)	1
	Pride	See above	I am proud of Serbia today, which acts in accordance with the principles of international public law, which knows how to condemn violations of international public law, unequivocally and clearly. But I am also proud of Serbia in which there is neither anti-Western nor Russophobic behavior. Both Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Hemingway are welcome here. This is something Serbia can be proud of, even if it is one of the few countries in the modern world. (Vučić 2022)	3
	Satisfaction	See above	Our friendships in the East and West are our wealth and our strength, and they do not change the fact that Serbia was, is, and will be part of the European family of nations, whose foundation is shared values and civilizational achievements. That is precisely why Serbia wants and will build the best relationships with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, the USA, but also with Korea, Japan, the UAE, and all other countries, both	1

Scheme Part	Code / Subcode	Description	Example	No.
			significant and not always significant, but those with whom we have built friendships for centuries and decades in political and economic cooperation. (Vučić 2016)	
	Spite	See above	Serbia should be a truly vocal partner in such alliances around the world, and this is our vision for the future. Some say we must choose between Europe and Russia, but as our trade relations and connections with Europe grow, with Russia we nurture not only historical ties built by many generations, but also look at how and in what way to enhance our economic and trade relations. Our progress in EU integration will not be driven by thoughtless euphoria but by a considered and serious calculation of our national interests at every moment. But people should know that our idea and our desire to belong to that society is precisely because of the type of society we want to be a part of. (Vučič 2016)	1

Author's Biography

Tijana V. Rečević Krstić (b. 1992) is a PhD candidate and teaching assistant at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. She enrolled in doctoral academic studies in International and European Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences in the 2017/2018 academic year. During her doctoral studies, Tijana was awarded a scholarship from the OSCE Mission to Serbia, as well as the *Go Styria* scholarship from the Austrian province of Styria for a doctoral research stay at the University of Graz during the winter semester of 2021/2022. In 2021, as a recipient of the U.S. State Department's "Study of the U.S. Institute for Scholars on U.S. Foreign Policy" program, aimed at young researchers and lecturers in U.S. foreign policy, she furthered her studies at the University of Delaware in Delaware, USA.

Tijana obtained her Master of Scinece degree in Conflict Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in the 2016/2017 academic year with excellent success (Diploma with Distinction), as a recipient of the UK Government's Chevening scholarship. Her thesis, titled *Transitional Justice Beyond EU Conditionality: Post-Accession Backsliding in Croatia from a Rational Institutionalist Perspective*, was awarded as the best master's thesis in her program for that academic year. Previously, in September 2016, she completed her master's studies in International Security at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, achieving a GPA of 10/10 and writing a thesis titled *The Impact of the 2015 and 2016 Migration Crisis on the Normative Power of the European Union.* She earned her undergraduate degree in International Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences in July 2014, with a GPA of 9.93/10. During both her undergraduate and master's studies, Tijana was a recipient of the Dositeja scholarship awarded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia.

In November 2023, Tijana was appointed as a teaching assistant in the Department of International Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences, in the subfield of International Security. She previously worked at the same faculty as a junior research assistant from 2018 to 2021 and as a research assistant from 2021 to 2023. During the summer semester of the 2017/2018 academic year, she was engaged as a graduate student instructor for the course Political System of Serbia. During the summer semester of the 2017/2018 academic year, she served as a graduate student instructor for the course *Political System of Serbia*. Since the winter semester of the same academic year, she has held the same position for the undergraduate courses Introduction to Security Studies and Serbia's Security Policy. Since 2022, she has been teaching seminars in the master's-level courses Critical Security Studies, European Security, Security Sector Governance, Regional Peace and Security through Cinema, and Development Studies: Approaches, Actors, and Issues. Tijana is a researcher at the Center for International Security at the Faculty of Political Sciences and serves as the executive editor of the *Journal of Regional Security* (M23), jointly published by the Faculty of Political Sciences and the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy.

Tijana's academic interests include theories of international relations, security, and foreign policy, Serbia's foreign and security policy, Euro-Atlantic security, contemporary Balkan relations, and institutional design in divided and post-conflict societies. She has published multiple academic papers in domestic and international journals, as well as book chapters. During her doctoral studies, she participated in several major international conferences, including the International Studies Association (ISA) annual conferences in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023, the Central and East European International Studies Association (CEEISA) conferences in 2019 and 2024, and the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) annual conference in 2019. Additionally, she has been involved in multiple research projects at the Faculty of Political Sciences, such as *Geo-Power Europe* (EU's Horizon Europe program), *Monitoring and Indexing Peace and Security in the Western Balkans* (supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia), *Fighting Together, Moving Apart*

at the Age of Brexit and Trump (supported by the Volkswagen Foundation), and *Regional Security Knowledge Hub* (supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia).

Beyond academia, Tijana has professional experience working at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Belgrade, as well as an internship in the political section of the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia. She has an advanced proficiency in English and basic knowledge of German and Spanish.

Биографија ауторке

Тијана В. Речевић Крстић (1992) је докторандкиња и асистенткиња на Факултету политичких наука Универзитета у Београду. Докторске академске Међународне и европске студије на Факултету политичких наука уписала је академске 2017/2018. године. Током докторских студија, Тијана је била добитница стипендије Мисије ОЕБС-а у Србији, као и стипендије *Go Styria* аустријске покрајине Штајерске за докторски истраживачки боравак на Универзитету у Грацу током зимског семестра 2021/2022. године. Као стипендисткиња програма америчког Стејт департмента под називом „Study of the US Institute for Scholars on the US Foreign Policy", намењеног младим истраживачима и предавачима америчке спољне политике, усавршавала се током 2021. године и на Универзитету у Делаверу, у држави Делавер, САД.

Мастер академске Студије конфликата, Тијана је завршила на Лондонској школи економије и политичких наука (London School of *Economics and Political Science – LSE*) током 2016/2017. академске године са изузетним успехом (Diploma with Distinction), као добитница стипендије Чивнинг (*Chevening*) владе Уједињеног Краљевства. Њен завршни рад, под насловом *Transitional Justice Beyond EU Conditionality: Post-Accession Backsliding in Croatia from a Rational Institutionalist Perspective*, награђен је као најбољи мастер рад на програму у тој академској години. Претходно, септембра 2016. године, Тијана је завршила мастер академске студије на Факултету политичких наука Универзитета у Београду, на програму Међународна безбедност, са просечном оценом 10/10 и завршним радом под насловом "Утицај миграционе кризе 2015. и 2016. године на нормативну моћ Европске уније". Основне академске Међународне студије, завршила је на Факултету политичких наука јула 2014. године са просечном оценом 9,93/10. Током мастер и основних академских студија, Тијана је била добитница стипендије Доситеја Министарства омладине и спорта Републике Србије.

У звање асистенткиње на Одељењу за међународне студије на Факултету политичких наука Универзитета у Београду, у ужој научној области Међународне безбедности, Тијана је изабрана новембра 2023. године. На истом факултету, у периоду од 2018. до 2021. године била је запослена у звању истраживача-приправника, а потом од 2021. до 2023. године у звању истраживача-сарадника. Током летњег семестра 2017/2018. године, Тијана је била ангажована као сарадник-демонстратор на предмету Политички систем Србије. Од зимског семестра исте академске године до данас, ангажована је на предметима Увод у студије безбедности и Безбедност Србије на основним академским студијама. Од 20222. године, ангажована је и на предметима Критичке студије безбедности, Европска безбедност, Управљање сектором безбедности, Регионални мир и безбедност кроз филмове, Студије развоја: приступи, актери и проблеми, на мастер академским студијама. Тијана је истраживачица Центра за међународну безбедност Факултета политичких наука, као и извршна уредница научног часописа *Journal of Regional Security* (M23) који издају Факултета политичких наука и Београдски центар за безбедносну политику.

Области Тијаниних академских интересовања су теорије међународних односа, безбедности и спољне политике, спољна и безбедносна политика Србије, евроатлантска безбедност, савремени балкански односи, као и институционално уређење подељених и пост-конфликтних друштава. Објавила је више научних радова у домаћим и међународним научним часописима, као и поглавља у зборницима. Током докторских студија, Тијана је учествовала на неколико релевантних међународних конференција укључујући годишње конференције Удружења за међународне студије (*International Studies Association – ISA*) 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023. године, конференције Централно и источноевропског удружења за међународне студије (Central and East European International Studies Association – CEEISA) 2019. и 2024. године, као и на годишњој конференцији Европског конзорцијума за истраживање политике (European Consortium for Political Research – ECPR) 2019. године. Поред тога, Тијана је била ангажована и на више истраживачких пројеката у којима је учествовао Факултет политичких наука, попут

“Geo-Power Europe” (програм Хоризонт Европа), “Monitoring and Indexing Peace and Security in the Western Balkans” (уз подршку Фонда за науку Републике Србије), “Fighting Together, Moving Apart at the Age of Brexit and Trump” (уз подршку Фолксваген Фондације), као и пројекта “Regional Security Knowledge Hub“ (уз подршку Мисије ОЕБС-а у Србији).

Поред академског, Тијана има професионално искуство рада у представништву Агенције Уједињених нација за избеглице Београду, као и праксе у политичком сектору Делегације Европске уније у Београду. Тијана има напредно знање енглеског језика, као и основно знање немачког и шпанског језика.

Изјава о ауторству

Име и презиме аутора: **Тијана В. Речевић Крстић**
Број индекса: **20/2017**

Изјављујем

да је докторска дисертација под насловом:

“The Role of Public in Foreign and Security Policy: The Relationship Between Policymakers and Public Opinion from a Constructivist Perspective”

- резултат сопственог истраживачког рада;
- да дисертација у целини ни у деловима није била предложена за стицање друге дипломе према студијским програмима других високошколских установа;
- да су резултати коректно наведени и
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Потпис аутора

У Београду, 25. фебруара 2025. године

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Изјава о истоветности штампане и електронске верзије докторског рада

Име и презиме аутора: **Тијана В. Речевић Крстић**

Број индекса: **20/2017**

Студијски програм: **Докторске студије политикологије – Међународне и европске студије**

Наслов рада: **"The Role of Public in Foreign and Security Policy: The Relationship Between Policymakers and Public Opinion from a Constructivist Perspective"**
Ментор: **проф. др Филип Ејдус**

Изјављујем да је штампана верзија мог докторског рада истоветна електронској верзији коју сам предао/ла ради похрањена у **Дигиталном репозиторијуму Универзитета у Београду.**
Дозвољавам да се објаве моји лични подаци везани за добијање академског назива доктора наука, као што су име и презиме, година и место рођења и датум одбране рада.
Ови лични подаци могу се објавити на мрежним страницама дигиталне библиотеке, у електронском каталогу и у публикацијама Универзитета у Београду.

Потпис аутора

У Београду, 25. фебруара 2025. године

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Изјава о коришћењу

Овлашћујем Универзитетску библиотеку „Светозар Марковић“ да у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Београду унесе моју докторску дисертацију под насловом:

“The Role of Public in Foreign and Security Policy: The Relationship Between Policymakers and Public Opinion from a Constructivist Perspective”

која је моје ауторско дело.

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Кратак опис лиценци је саставни део ове изјаве).

Потпис аутора

У Београду, 25. фебруара 2025. године.

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1. **Ауторство.** Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, и прераде, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце, чак и у комерцијалне сврхе. Ово је најслободнија од свих лиценци.
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6. **Ауторство – делити под истим условима**. Дозвољавате умножавање, дистрибуцију и јавно саопштавање дела, и прераде, ако се наведе име аутора на начин одређен од стране аутора или даваоца лиценце и ако се прерада дистрибуира под истом или сличном лиценцом. Ова лиценца дозвољава комерцијалну употребу дела и прерада. Слична је софтверским лиценцама, односно лиценцама отвореног кода.