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The Case of Russia's War in Ukraine

Masterarbeit, Wintersemester 2024

Gutachter*in: PD Dr. Weiß, Moritz

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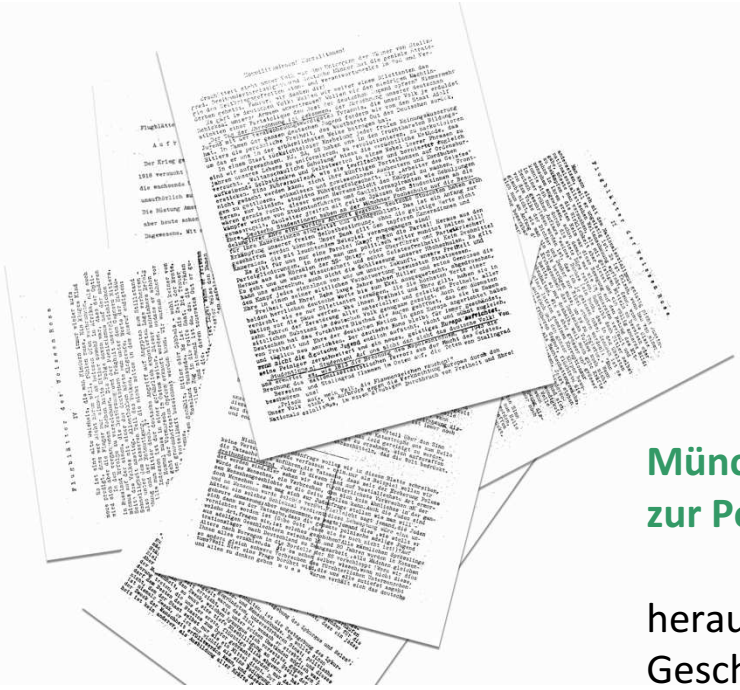

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PD Dr. Moritz Weiß
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Abstract

Against the backdrop of Russia's illegal military intervention of Ukraine in February 2022, this thesis poses the following question: *How does the emergence of an external military threat produce an enhanced security cooperation among the Western countries?* Examining the intricate causal relationship between external military threats and security cooperation and drawing on the within-case inferences derived from the *typical case* of Russia's war in Ukraine, this work uncovers a six-part *causal mechanism (CM)* linking the external military threat to enhanced security cooperation among the Western countries. By addressing the key shortcomings of the two prevailing theories - the realist and liberal-institutionalist strands - and utilizing the existing empirical account to craft a plausible CM, this thesis synthesizes deductive and inductive approaches. In order to allow the broader applicability of the proposed CM to other comparable cases and improve its explanatory leverage, the CM incorporates *systematic* (non-case-specific) mechanisms only. The collected causal process observations turned into supporting evidence *(account evidence, pattern evidence, sequence evidence, trance evidence)* enables the verification of all six parts of the hypothesized CM. Accordingly, the empirical findings of this thesis reveal that when the scope conditions of geographic proximity and conflict scale and intensity hold, external military threats are inclined to stimulate a causal process that starts with identification of the external threat and its source and ends with countries polling resources, thus, increasing their defense and security expenditures and culminates in the enhancement of security cooperation.

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List of abbreviations

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CM	Causal Mechanism
CPO	Causal Process Observation
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DSO	Data-set Observation
EAA	European Armaments Agency
EC	European Community
EDA	European Defence Agency
EEC	European Economic Community
EFP	Enhanced Forward Presence
ERRF	European Rapid Reaction Force
EU	European Union
EUBAM	European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine
EUBGs	EU Battlegroups
EUROFOR	European Rapid Operational Force
EUROSUR	European Border Surveillance system
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
G7	The Group of Seven
IO	International Organization
IR	International Relations
ISO	International Security Organization
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
NRF	NATO Reaction Forces
OCCAR	Organization for Joint Armament Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PFP	Partnership for Peace
PT	Process Tracing
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SIAC	EU Single Intelligence and Analysis Capability
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UN	United Nations
WEAG	Western European Armaments Group
WEU	Western European Union

1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, studying security cooperation has hardly been as relevant as it is today. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which led to one of the largest and most intense wars of 21st century, has posed the gravest threat to peace and security of European continent. Even though the Russian external military threat initially challenged the European and transatlantic security cooperation to properly respond to this imponderable security crisis, the Western security cooperation[1] has not deteriorated. On the contrary, against this backdrop the European and transatlantic security cooperation has been enhanced in several ways: the Western countries collectively imposed comprehensive restrictive measures against Russia and provided coordinated policy responses and enhanced military support to Ukraine; European countries pledged to raise their defense budgets and the Allies, in cooperation with the EU and Ukraine, agreed to create a coordination mechanism to enhance weapons production. Moreover, since the end of the Cold War, the relevance of NATO as an institutional representation of transatlantic security cooperation has never been as pronounced as it is in the context of the war in Ukraine. In May 2022, Finland and Sweden, two Scandinavian countries that had maintained their military neutrality until that point, submitted their applications for NATO membership, and shortly thereafter, Ukraine requested an accelerated accession process as well. As of April 2023, Finland has become the 31st member of the Alliance, enjoying the benefits of NATO membership. While these examples are not exhaustive, they underscore that the Western security cooperation has indeed been stimulated after the war outbreak in Ukraine.

The causal relationship between external threats and security cooperation has often become a subject of International Relations (IR) studies and the causal logic of how these variables interact with each other is rather straightforward: States tend to pool their capacities and opt for security cooperation when they are confronted with external threats because they expect to be stronger and more resilient together. For example, a substantial body of IR literature delves into the ways in which states engage with each other to safeguard their collective security and establish alliances in the face of external challenges (e.g. Walt 1994). Moreover, there is a literature that attributes the capacity of Western liberal order to function as a security community to the risks and security vulnerabilities posed by the Soviet Union as an external

[1] The term 'Western security cooperation' is used in this thesis to describe European and transatlantic security cooperation. Accordingly, the expressions 'Western countries' and the 'West' are employed to encompass the western liberal democracies, the members of the transatlantic alliance, and the European Union collectively.

challenger (e.g. Ikenberry 2018). A strand of literature even ascribes NATO's continued resilience after the Cold War to the willingness of Western countries to counterbalance the remaining military threat posed by post-Soviet Russia (e.g. Duffield 1994). Moreover, recent studies provide important findings that security threats can generate heightened public support for military spending (DiGiuseppe *et al.* 2023) and that national threat perceptions contribute to increased NATO defense spendings in Europe (Béraud-Sudreau & Giegerich 2018).

The dominant IR theories provide significant contributions in elucidating the linearity of relationship between external threats and security cooperation. On the one hand, the realist perspective views cooperation as a self-interested act of states in which they combine their capacities to enhance their chances of survival in an anarchic world (e.g. Waltz 1979). Realists maintain, that the coherence and formation of instances of security cooperation, particularly Alliances, are driven by external threats and national security concerns (e.g. Mearsheimer 1990). On the other hand, the liberal-institutionalist perspective implicitly acknowledges the role of external threats as an unlocking factor for cooperation. However, it sees the cooperation as a process that is facilitated by institutions, which in turn, manage and mitigate emerging distributional conflicts (e.g. Keohane & Martin 1995). What is less extensively explored in existing theoretical scholarship is a more refined and explicit account of the causal process that exemplifies *how* the emergence of external military threats produce security cooperation.

Having established the aforementioned context, the purpose of this thesis is to shed light to the dynamics of security cooperation among Western countries in response to the emergence of external military threat in the immediate neighborhood. Therefore, my thesis seeks to uncover the causal mechanism (CM) that connects the occurrence of an external military threat in the immediate neighborhood of Western countries to the strengthened European and transatlantic security cooperation. The guiding research question that I address is following:

How does the emergence of an external military threat produce an enhanced security cooperation among the Western countries?

In order to address the research question posed, I adopt the process-tracing (PT) method, specifically theory-building PT in this thesis. This type of PT requires assessing given empirical material to "detect a plausible hypothetical causal mechanism whereby X is linked with Y" (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 16). Theory-building PT is particularly useful (1) when there is a correlation between the cause and the outcome, yet the potential mechanisms connecting

these two are unspecified, or (2) when the cause itself remains unidentified (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 16). The objective of this thesis, focused on unraveling the causal mechanism linking external military threat (X) to the enhancement of security cooperation (Y), aligns best with the first scenario. Following Gerring's advice, studying a typical case enables the identification of a causal mechanism that is both generalizable and testable in subsequent research (2007: 91–97). For this reason, this thesis examines a typical case of the Russian military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022. The selected case, according to Beach and Pedersen, is to fit into the X-Y setting and specific scope conditions have to be given as well (2013: 154). The case of war outbreak in Ukraine fulfils both of the above criteria.

To comprehend the advancements in security cooperation, I break down this concept into five different dimensions (security institutions, economic sanctions, arms production and management, armed forces[2] and border security). These dimensions are then depicted on a three-level spectrum: low, medium and high and each of these levels has specific indicators assigned. This approach enables a more comprehensive qualitative evaluation of the enhancement of security cooperation.

With the aim of providing a more detailed insight into the causal pathway to the enhanced security cooperation, this thesis contributes to the existing theoretical scholarship in several ways. Firstly, by integrating conceptional components from realist and liberal-institutionalist perspectives into the causal mechanisms, the thesis establishes a theoretical synthesis that is better suited for comprehending the reality of security cooperation. Secondly, by formulating indicators for the levels of cooperation across, this thesis adds considerable analytical depth to the study of security cooperation. Lastly, the theorized and verified causal mechanism paves the way for future comparative analyses, enabling assessments of temporal or inter-case variations.

In the next chapter, theoretical assumptions are derived from the prevalent realist and liberal-institutionalist theories. I reconstruct the causal mechanism in accordance with these derived assumptions, parts of which I later integrate into the theorized causal mechanism of this thesis. The subsequent chapter provides insights into the selected methodological approach, the selected case, the conceptualization of the variables, the expected causal process observations

[2] The conceptualization of the first four dimensions of security cooperation (security institutions, economic sanctions, arms production and management, armed forces) originates from Jones (2007). The fifth dimension (border security) has been introduced by me.

and the utilization of empirical tests that are characteristic to PT studies. Moreover, Chapter 3 provides the conceptualization of the levels and dimensions of security cooperation and the illustration of the theorized causal mechanism. In order to allow the identification of the expected changes in the levels of cooperation, Chapter 4 sets the foundations for Western security cooperation in the proposed five dimensions and Russia's interaction to this cooperation up until the invasion of Ukraine. The causal process to the enhanced security cooperation is traced in Chapter 5 in such a way that it maps the successive sequence of the hypothesized causal mechanism. Following the empirical analysis, in Chapter 6 I reevaluate the levels of Western security cooperation against the background of the outbreak of war in Ukraine. In the concluding chapter, I summarize my findings, outline the theoretical contributions and address some of the limitations of this PT study.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter elaborates on the central theoretical assertions stemming from realist and liberal institutionalist theories. These two frameworks have long dominated the understanding the international affairs and state interactions and are considered the most prominent contenders within the international relations. In this chapter, I introduce the key propositions regarding international security cooperation that have been advanced by these two schools. Although both theories offer hypotheses regarding the emergence of cooperation and conflict, they still fall short of presenting a consistent framework that outlines how international security cooperation actually occurs. To maintain an analytical and systematic approach and comprehensively grasp the shortcomings of these theories, I formulate causal mechanisms deduced from realist and liberal institutionalist premises.

2.1 Cooperation in realist theory

> *"The Soviet Union is the only superpower that can seriously threaten to overrun Europe; it is the Soviet threat that provides the glue that holds NATO together. Take away that offensive threat and the United States is likely to abandon the Continent, whereupon the defensive alliance it has headed for forty years may disintegrate." (Mearsheimer 1990: 52)*

In order to understand how realists assess the potential for international cooperation between states and how they explain the factors that drive cooperation, it is necessary to provide a brief realist overview about the nature of the international system and the state-to-state interactions. Grieco distinguishes the following three premises of realism: the primary role of states in the global arena, their behaviour as unitary actors and the influence of anarchy as a fundamental

motivating factor (Grieco 1990: 3–4). Realists maintain that states are the primary actors capable of exerting significant influence on the international stage, while non-state actors such as international institutions, multinational corporations and organisations hold less significance (Stein 1990: 5). Thus, for cooperation to develop, it must be in line with the interests of the states. These interests are exclusively determined by the states themselves and naturally, each state would prioritize their own interests over those of the other actors. Given that the interests of multiple actors are not always aligned at all times, the international arena becomes a site where these interests clash (Stein 1990: 5).

Furthermore, realists hold the perspective that states operate as rational entities.[3] They engage in the assessment of potential gains and losses and strive to optimize their outcomes within various global scenarios (Stein 1990: 5). Because states are goal-oriented, they thoroughly weigh the costs and benefits of their actions to pursue those goals, balancing potential gains against possible risks. States are concerned to both maximize their relative power and improve their position in the global power hierarchy and to prevent the rise of the relative power of others (Grieco 1988: 602). According to realist thinking, this is only feasible if their actions are supported by rational calculations. Although it is impossible to judge the intentions of others, states assume that other states would follow the same strategy of maximizing benefits and minimizing potential risks.

Realists argue that states judge their gains not in absolute terms, but in relation to the gains of others: "When faced with the possibility of cooperating for mutual gain, states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided . They are compelled to ask not ‘Will both of us gain?‘ but ‘Who will gain more?‘ (Waltz 1979: 105). The reason behind this is that the power of a state can only be defined in comparison to other states, and that any change in the existing balance of power will directly affect a state’s position in the power hierarchy.

For realists the foremost priority for states revolves around ensuring their own autonomous survival. They provide two explanations. Firstly, the global system lacks a centralized authority and is characterized by a state of anarchy and hostility. Secondly, states face uncertainty regarding the intentions and actions of other states, contributing to their focus on self-

[3] It should be noted that Waltz, one of earliest neorealists/structural realists, does not uphold this point of view. In his book Theory of International Politics he explicitly asserts, that “the theory requires no assumptions of rationality or of constancy of will on the part of all of the actors. The theory says simply that, if some do relatively well, others will emulate them or fall by the wayside. Obviously, the system won't work if all states lose interest in preserving themselves.”(1979: 118). For Waltz, therefore, the rational actor assumption is rather limited to states’ determination of self-preservation.

preservation. Accordingly, Waltz maintains that states will only pursue other objectives, such as peace, profit and power, if their continued existence is guaranteed (Waltz 1979: 126). Even power maximization becomes of secondary importance, if the state is unable to uphold its position in the system and safeguard its physical security (Waltz 1979: 126).

Table 1: Causal mechanism deduced from theoretical assumptions of realism (own illustration)

	Cause	***Part 1 →***	***Part 2 →***	***Part 3 →***	***Part 4 →***	***Part 5 →***	***Outcome***
Theoretical Level	Emergence of an external military threat	Identification of a threat	Identification of adversaries and allies	Identification of gaps in resources between the adversaries and ourselves	Selection of a strategy: counterbalance, deter or join the adversary	Alliance formation	Emergence of a self-interested, temporary security cooperation
Entities		States	States	States	States	States	
Activities		Identifying a threat	Identifying adversaries and allies	Calculating gaps	Choosing a strategy	Creating alliances	

Thus, according to realist thinking, it is the structure of the international system that limits cooperation between states. In the absence of higher authority and binding rules governing interactions between states, this anarchical system constrains nations to consider each other primarily as competitors, or even rivals. In this way, the states operate and navigate in a self-help system wherein they can have no certainty about the intentions of the others (Waltz 1979: 105). States are concerned about ending up in an unfavorable position relative to others when the benefits of cooperation are distributed and fear becoming too dependent on the exchange of goods and services from other states as well (Waltz 1979: 106). Moreover, concerns that others may be cheating also constrain the cooperation: “States are often reluctant to enter into cooperative agreements for fear that the other side will cheat on the agreement and gain a relative advantage” (Mearsheimer 1994: 13).

But if survival is a primary goal for states, would they cooperate when their existence is at risk? The realist response in this case is positive. Security cooperation between states would be guided primarily by common interests consistent with their national security. For example, Waltz maintains, that "states, because they are in a self-help system, have to use their combined

capabilities in order to serve their interests." (1979: 131). Thus, realists attribute this kind of cooperation to strategic considerations and regard it as a sporadic and temporary phenomenon. Certainly, the realist argument of common interests and strategic calculations can to some extent explicate the emergence of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. However, the theory falls short when it comes to accounting for long-term cooperation and lacks systematic explanations for scenarios in which not all parties have converging interests, but cooperation nevertheless takes place.

2.2 Cooperation in liberal institutionalist theory

Alternatively to realism, liberal institutionalist theory draws the focus towards international regimes and institutions. For example, prominent liberal institutionalists, Keohane and Martin, maintain, that cooperation can occur even in the absence of a hegemon and can be facilitated by international regimes (1984: 50). Such regimes combine various rules and norms and entail intricate decision-making processes. The shared norms and values serve as a foundation for building trust and collaboration among partners. Institutions are created to manage and oversee these processes. Moreover, Keohane and Martin, emphasize the pivotal role of institutions in generating information, enhancing the credibility of commitments, facilitating coordination, and promoting reciprocity (1995: 42). The creation of international regimes is more costly than their maintenance, which is why countries with common interests favor their maintenance (Keohane 1984: 50). Consequently, cooperation, once established for a specific purpose, will persist if it continues to benefit the interests of the respective parties.

Thus, the liberal institutionalist stance is to negate states as central players and accentuate the growing significance of institutions. Concurrently to realism, the theory challenges the approach of viewing states as unified and rational actors, and emphasizes the superior function of decentralized authority. As states shift away from perceiving each others as adversaries and open up to potential collaborations, their enthusiasm for international institutions deepens (Grieco 1990: 5–6).

The institutionalist theory do not dismiss the importance of military power, because it recognizes that states have to co-exist in a self-sustaining system. However, institutionalists acknowledge the need to broaden the concept of security to incorporate interdependence and advocate the introduction of instruments of power such as communication, institutions and organizational capabilities to manage these complex global dynamics (Nye 1990: 157–58). In this context, cooperation becomes an essential factor to effectively manage and cope with the

complexity of interdependence. Interdependence does not always mean that the parties hold the same positions on different issues. Thus, interdependence needs to be balanced and the approach to achieving this balance varies from area to area and depends on the vulnerabilities and interests of the parties involved (Nye 1990: 157–58).

Table 2: Causal Mechanism deduced from theoretical assumptions of liberal institutionalism (own illustration)

	Cause	***Part 1 →***	***Part 2 →***	***Part 3 →***	***Part 4 →***	***Part 5 →***	***Outcome***	
Theoretical Level	Emergence of an external military threat	Identification of a threat	Identification of common values and norms	Creation of international organizations	Creation of international legal framework, treaties and agreements	Information-sharing and interstate dialogue	Emergence of security cooperation	***Path Dependence***
Entities		States	States	States	International organizations	States		
Activities		Identifying a threat	Identifying values and norms	Creating IOs	Creating legal foundations	Engaging in interstate dialogue		

The institutionalist theory has often faced criticism from realists, particularly regarding its explanatory power about security-related matters compared to their effectiveness in addressing political-economic and environmental issues (Mearsheimer 1994: 15). Institutionalists counter this criticism by asserting that security concerns remain relevant within their framework. International institutions, with their function as information providers, can reduce uncertainty among countries, allowing them to better comprehend each other's intentions (Keohane & Martin 1995: 43). Moreover, institutions play a role when it comes to distributional struggles, as they "mitigate fears of cheating and so allow cooperation to emerge" (Keohane & Martin 1995: 45). In addition to reducing uncertainty, institutions also play an important role in establishing coordination mechanisms that are essential for capturing the benefits of cooperation (Keohane & Martin 1995: 45).

2.3 Shortcomings of realism and liberal institutionalism in depicting the causal relationship between external threats and security cooperation

In the preceding sub-chapters, I have outlined some presumptions derived from both realist and liberal-institutionalist theories in relation to international cooperation, particularly with regard to security. While these two theoretical perspectives offer valuable insights into the interplay

of interests, power and security in international relations, they each face certain challenges when it comes to unraveling the precise causal chain from external threats to collaboration. For this reason, I have derived the most central theoretical assumptions from these two theories in the previous sections and crafted the ideal-types of theoretical causal mechanisms according to these prevailing theories. The rationale behind this deduction of theoretical assumptions is to comprehend how much resemblance my theorized causal mechanism has with the prevailing IR theories and to pinpoint which specific theoretical omissions it addresses.

The realist perspective, as elaborated above, approaches the matter of cooperation by highlighting the impact of the anarchic international system and states' pursuit of autonomous self-preservation in the absence of a higher supranational authority. Moreover, for realists security cooperation and the formation of alliances are driven by the underlying motive to achieve a balance of power among adversaries (e.g.Waltz 1979). These balance of power set-ups constitute the major motivation and influence the 'voluntary' willingness among states to collaborate. I argue that the realist perspective on security cooperation does not capture the full complexity of cooperation for two reasons. Firstly, the realist understanding of uncertainty, namely states' concerns of being unaware of other states' intentions in the context of self-help system, may be oversimplified. States continue to engage in cooperative activities and institutionalize this cooperation, which evidently is not always temporary, but also enduring and expanding, as reflected in the resilience of Western security cooperation following the Cold War. The realist strand perceives uncertainty as an omnipresent factor at the system level and regards it as its permanent feature. Alternatively, I maintain that a reduction in uncertainty can occur in the context of external threats when the responses of both adversaries and allies become more pronounced.

Secondly, realism inherently underestimates the function of international organizations as facilitators of international security cooperation. According to the realist view, institutions are mere tools that reflect power politics and can easily be manipulated by self-interested states to pursue their individual interests. Realists maintain that institutions are established and maintained only as long as they serve the specific purposes for which they were established. The ability of institutions to independently influence the behavior of states is considered to be minimal (Mearsheimer 1994: 7). Departing from a classical liberal institutionalist view, I argue that such a realist view tends to overlook the fact that international institutions can influence the interactions and cooperation of states in nuanced ways that cannot be explained by realist power dynamics. For example, realist thinkers perceived NATO as an American tool to deal

with the Soviet threat on the European continent and expected it to dissolve or be reconstituted after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer 1994: 14). Such a realistic prediction undoubtedly lost its explanatory power in the 1990s and early 2000s, when NATO demonstrated its ability not only to fulfil the task of collective defense but also to facilitate cooperative security through non-military means such as diplomatic dialogue. To address this theoretical omission, I integrate the ascending role of international security organizations (ISOs) into the causal pathway and contend that ISOs not only help to reduce uncertainty caused by external threats, but also create channels through which states reach consensus on contested security issues.

Similarly, liberal institutionalist theory encounters some limitations when it comes to deciphering the causal mechanism between external threats and security cooperation. This theory considers cooperation more as an internal process, strengthened by shared norms, values and rules, with less emphasis on security concerns. I contend that the role of national security concerns is somewhat understudied in liberal institutionalism. This limitation highlights the need for a more detailed examination how external threats impact security cooperation.

Another shortcoming of the institutionalist strand is that, while it deals with distributional conflicts and the part placed by institutions in mitigating them, it overlooks the key point that institutions can become more relevant in the face of reduced uncertainty in the first place. Therefore, I develop an argument that with a clearer understanding of the hostile actors' intentions and increased confidence in their strategic partners, Western actors are inclined to focus more on ISOs. Subsequently, these institutions contribute to mitigate distributional conflicts and facilitate cooperation.

Departing from the key insights of the two prevailing theories, this thesis seeks to provide a complementary framework for security cooperation and to incorporate the points that have been previously overlooked. The mentioned shortcomings constitute a guideline that helps to comprehend the unfolding of the theorized causal relationship between external threats and increased security cooperation. In this thesis, the external military threat, treated as an independent variable, is perceived as an incentive that stirs a process wherein countries acknowledge the strategic importance of security cooperation.

3. Research design and methodological approach

This chapter provides insights into the selected methodological approach and the research design. In the first section, I present the arguments why the chosen method of theory-building process tracing best fits the objectives of this thesis. Moreover, I provide reasons for the selection of the case and conceptualize the independent and dependent variables. Contending that the change (enhancement in security cooperation) occurs in the dependent variable, I provide a breakdown of the dimensions and levels of security cooperation. Last but not least, this chapter presents the theorized causal mechanism as well as the scope conditions and expected observable manifestations for each part of the mechanism.

3.1 Theory-building process tracing

In order to understand the operation of the causal mechanism that contributes to producing the outcome (enhanced security cooperation), a *theory-building process-tracing analysis* is conducted in this thesis. Process-tracing, in essence, is a method that goes beyond the mere detection of correlations and seeks to uncover and trace causal mechanisms linking X to Y (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 1). This method is commonly utilized in single-case research designs, and unlike other small-n case study methods, that aim for cross-case inferences, it seeks to draw within-case inferences (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 2–4). There are three types of process tracing: Theory-testing, theory-building and explaining outcome. The first two are theory-centric, implying that the theorized causal mechanisms are crafted with only systematic parts and the mechanism can be generalized across other comparable cases (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 24). The latter one is case-centric, implying that it ambitions to craft a minimally sufficient explanation that is consistent with inductive reasoning, which is also characteristic to explaining-outcome PT (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 18).

Although theory-building PT is theory-centric, the initial steps of the process is to learn the empirical material and use it for a structured analysis to construct a hypothesized causal mechanism (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 16). Collier maintains that the evidence must be diagnostic, i.e. it must serve as the basis for a causal inference (2011: 824). This depends largely on prior knowledge, e.g. conceptual frameworks, recurring empirical regularities and theories (Collier 2011: 824).

There are several reasons why this method fits best to the objectives of this thesis. First and foremost reason is, that in this thesis the correlation between X and Y is known, but the

potential mechanism linking these two variables are unidentified. In such cases, theory-building process tracing is a suitable method (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 167–68). This choice further guides the inductive path selected, that is "working backward from the outcome by sifting through the evidence" (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 20).

Secondly, the objective of the thesis is to craft the causal mechanism that connects the independent variable to the dependent variable. Process tracing method is particularly suitable for this purpose, as it focuses on unfolding "events or situations over time" (Collier 2011: 824) and allows a sequence of events to be observed in order to characterize the crucial steps of the causal process. Since I lack an ample number of cases for comparison, tracing the empirical process, will rely on studying the „transmission of causal forces from X to produce Y" (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 77).

Thirdly, the thesis aims to furnish a *mechanismic* explanation for a particular political phenomenon that can adequately explain the observed outcome (enhanced security cooperation within the Western countries). The ontology of mechanismic causation is defined by Beach and Pedersen as a situation when "we are interested in the theoretical process whereby X produces Y and in particular in the transmission of what can be termed causal forces from X to Y" (2013: 25). For the given study, this entails dividing the process into smaller components, which consists of the systematic mechanisms. The intention is that only the most essential mechanisms are incorporated into the causal mechanism, the omission of which would hinder the comprehension of the process.

Lastly, in line with Bayesian logic of subjective probability, the thesis studies the *deterministic* causal relationship between X and Y, meaning that X is both necessary and sufficient condition for Y to occur. The deterministic causality in qualitative social science does not imply complete absence of error term (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 27). Rather, it refers to the presence of deterministic relationship, that can be observed in small-n case studies (in individual case in this thesis).

3.2 Case selection

Since the causal mechanism is developed from empirical observations of an individual case, it is essential that the selected case not only demonstrates the relationship between the cause and the outcome, but also allows a broader applicability of the theorized mechanism to other cases: "For all theory-focused research, the relevance of a case study would primarily be that it sheds

light on a broader relationship between a cause and outcome across a broader set of cases of a phenomenon" (Beach & Pedersen 2020: 20). According to Beach and Pedersen, the choice of case depends on whether the research is focused on uncovering the causal mechanism or whether the study aims to identify the cause of a known outcome (2013: 154). The objective of my thesis corresponds to the former scenario, which is why a *typical case* is the most appropriate one. A typical case is the one that is selected "by virtue of representing features that are common within a larger population" (Gerring 2017: 56). For this reason, the causal mechanism in theory-building PT studies only includes systematic mechanisms, that are "theorized to have causal effects in the whole population of the phenomenon, instead of being limited to a particular case" (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 181–82). The remaining redundant parts, which can be observed but are non-systematic in character, shall be excluded from the proposed causal mechanism.

The selection of typical cases has further added values: (1) typical cases allow thicker and more in-depth analyses to draw within-case inferences; (2) as the process is unfolded and broken down in smaller parts in PT studies, typical cases allow for better identification of patterns and trends at each stage of the process, increasing the comparability of cases for future research; (3) Typical cases allow a better understanding of how different mechanisms contribute to the causal process and thus facilitate the identification of systematic mechanisms. For these reasons, this thesis explores an instance of an enhanced security cooperation as a result of an external military threat based on the case of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022.

Besides choosing the aforementioned case due to it being a typical case, there is another methodological justification that supports its eligibility. The objective of theory-building PT studies is to develop a midrange theory with a causal mechanism that can explain the observed outcomes, however, this theorized causal mechanism is bounded either by time (temporally) or regional context (spatially) (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 16). Because the thesis seeks to find out the underlying mechanism about enhanced security cooperation within the Western countries, I concentrate on building a mechanism that is bounded by region. This however, does not mean, that the time span in which the mechanism is supposed to operate is left undefined, rather that the mechanism is not expected to always operate in an identical tempo. The *time span* of my analysis amounts to just over a year, starting in November 2021 with Russia mobilizing the

military forces near Ukrainian borders and ending in April 2023 with Finland's accession to NATO.

3.3 Independent variable: Defining external threat

In this section of the thesis, I conceptualize the independent variable: external military threat. Initially, I address certain conceptual challenges associated with this term and provide several definitions of it derived from the existing scholarship. Building upon the insights of prominent scholars, I subsequently introduce the working definition of an external military threat, that is in essence a synthesis of various aspects from existing definitions.

The problem associated with conceptualizing external threats is that they vary in their character, source and intensity and are often bounded with specific geopolitical contexts. This complexity explains why some definitions tend to encompass a wide range of factors, potentially limiting the scope of threats considered relevant to the security of the unit that one studies. On the other hand, alternative definitions take a broader approach, which makes it difficult to identify and assess the specific threats that directly impact the security of the unit. An example of a comprehensive conceptualization that takes into account a set of factors is the one proposed by Bak et al (2020). They suggest that for a threat to have a significant impact it must be severe in its potential impact; it must have a high visibility and perceived importance; and its sources must be explicitly identified (2020: 707). At the same time, external threats tend to have greater resonance when they originate from a known rival - one that is already perceived by the domestic public as a potentially dangerous enemy (Bak *et al.* 2020: 707). Rather broader definition is provided by Johnson, who suggests that external threats arise "when a potential challenger can credibly threaten to go to war if the status quo is not revised in its favor" (2017: 738).

Gehring (2022) introduces two other aspects into the conceptualization of external threats when the unit of analysis shifts from individual states to a larger political community: the threat must be common to all members and it must pose a risk to the territorial integrity of the unit (2022: 1492). Such an understanding of external threat is especially relevant to my thesis because it implies that while a threat must affect all members collectively, the territorial integrity of individual members does not necessarily have to be threatened for the threat to be considered pertinent.

In the context of this thesis, an external military threat is understood as a credible threat that can be attributed to a known external source, possesses a high level of intensity, raises concerns among all members of a community and holds the credibility to threaten their territorial integrity. I contend that substantial advancements in security cooperation are demonstrated in response to external threats that align with the above-outlined criteria.

3.4 Dependent variable: Security cooperation

This section examines security cooperation as a dependent variable. The sub-chapter is structured as follows: First, two definitions of cooperation are given and two important components that form the conceptual framework of cooperation are described. Second, security cooperation is presented as a progressive continuum comprising three different gradations: low, medium and high. Third, the comprehensive categorization of security dimensions related to levels of cooperation is introduced, followed by a characterization of each level within this scheme.

3.4.1 Defining security cooperation

The task of defining international security cooperation is complex, as its definition should encompass the crucial aspect of voluntary willingness on the part of involved parties to align their positions with one another. As posited by Keohane, when states automatically adopt congruent positions on a given event, there is a *harmony* of interests (1984: 51). However, such a state of affairs does not inherently constitute genuine cooperation, as cooperation requires divergence of initial positions as a prerequisite. Once the involved parties successfully overcome the disparities in their positions and proceed to take concerted actions in accordance with their aligned interests, genuine cooperation will ensue: „Cooperation occurs when actors adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination.“ (Keohane 1984: 51).

Chernoff expands upon Keohane's definition and incorporates the notion of issue significance as an additional dimension in the conceptualization of security cooperation: „Thus, to be true cooperation, the issue must be one in which states have different interests (shown by the presence of opposing positions at the outset of the case) and the interests must be of some significance to them.“ (Chernoff 1995: 19). Incorporating the element of issue significance is imperative in my thesis, especially as I am adapting the definition of cooperation to the context of security cooperation. For this reason, Chernoff's definition emerges as more preferable for my research.

I posit, that such an understanding of security cooperation is not limited solely to the initial inception of cooperation; rather, it encompasses scenarios in which countries possess a firmly established and institutionalized record of security collaboration. This cooperation can vary in dynamics, may fluctuate in intensity, diminish, intensify, or even expand into new spheres. For example, when faced with new events, in particular with security-relevant issues, countries may change their priorities and positions spontaneously. In cases where the issue holds significant relevance and an initial disparity in interests and positions is subsequently reconciled, the context becomes conducive to identifying it as an instance of security cooperation. It is important to note, that divergent positions don't necessarily indicate a lack of alignment in parties' strategic objectives, resulting in low cooperation levels (as shown in Table 5). States could have similar circumstances and share common strategic goals, yet their stances might differ. The essential factor for fostering security cooperation is their willingness and readiness to address and resolve these differences.

3.4.2 Levels and dimensions of security cooperation

Following the definition of security cooperation, it is important to conceptualize the levels of it and identify their indicators. A substantial part of the existing research relies on the approach of assigning values and codes to low, medium and high levels of cooperation (e.g. Chernoff 1995). As the core objective of my research resides in attaining a qualitative comprehension of the implications embedded within these levels, I chose to formulate indicators for each identified level. This step is important for two key reasons: Firstly, such conceptual framing facilitates the assessment of cooperation levels as a foundation for the analysis, notably in this instance, shortly prior to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Secondly, in process tracing studies, the analysis involves tracing occurrences, making it crucial to establish such indicators for the purpose of categorizing specific observations and discerning varying degrees of progression. Given that my study seeks to comprehend the nuanced variations encompassed by these levels, this breakdown can serve as a valuable analytical tool.

In order to effectively assess the advancements in security cooperation and gain a precise understanding of the overall enhancement, it is essential to deconstruct this extensive concept into comprehensible dimensions. Following the guidance of Jones, who offers a structured framework, security cooperation can be delineated into four distinct categories: *security institutions, economic sanctions, arms production and military forces* (Jones 2007: 13). [4] Given

[4] Unlike in this thesis, where the dimensions are introduced primarily for analytical purposes, Jones utilizes these categories because they serve as tools that states use within the domain of security.

that my case study revolves around a military conflict occurring at the borders of the EU and east and northeast of NATO members, I introduce an additional fifth category - *border security.*

Table 3: Dimensions and levels of the Western security cooperation (own illustration)[5]

Dimensions of Security Cooperation	**Low**	**Medium**	**High**
Security Institutions	Limited alignment of strategic goals and uncoordinated responses	Moderate alignment of goals, coordinated decision-making and responses	Extensive alignment of goals, united strategic planning and highly-coordinated responses
Economic Sanctions[6]	Uncoordinated and sporadic use of sanctions	Coordinated multilateral sanctions through the EU	Comprehensive multilateral sanctions through the EU along with alignment of the EU sanctions with Western countries outside the EU
Arms Production and management	Independent production and management of arms	Occasional collaboration on the European level	Coordinated arms production and management along with cooperation with Western countries outside the NATO and the EU
Military forces	Sporadic joint exercises with little coordination	Regular joint exercises but no unified command structures	Intense joint exercises and missions with multinational command structures
Border Security	Limited formal agreements and integration between agencies	Bilateral agreements and higher level of integration between agencies	Comprehensive agreements and highly integrated border management

While the initial four dimensions may hold equal relevance for European as well as transatlantic security cooperation, one could argue that the dimension of border security is less pertinent to transatlantic and more so to European security cooperation context. However, given the intricacies of security cooperation and the complexity of interconnections of different areas in it, I opted to incorporate this dimension for methodological reasons, recognizing its greater relevance to security cooperation in Europe, rather than in North America. Overall, such an approach of breaking down the concept into multiple dimensions does not only facilitate a systematic evaluation but also enhances the clarity of assessing the relationship between the independent and dependent variable and variation within these dimensions. Furthermore, it enables a more straightforward determination of which of these categories show minimal or substantial fluctuations while tracing the process.

[5] The dimensions of security cooperation have been adapted and modified from Jones (2007).

[6] In characterizing the indicators for the dimension of economic sanctions, I have drawn inspiration from the insights provided by Jones (2007). Jones outlines that in the post-Cold War period, the EU member states have had three primary choices at their disposal: implementing unilateral sanctions, engaging in multilateral sanctions independently from the EU, and participating in multilateral sanctions facilitated by the EU (2007: 113).

3.5 Theorizing the causal mechanism

After the case selection and variable definition, the next step is to elaborate on the causal mechanism. In this phase, the reconstructed theoretical assumptions are combined with empirical observations. In order to move beyond the descriptive inferences and conduct a theory-guided PT analysis, selecting mechanisms that transmit causal forces from cause to outcome is crucial (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 34). Beach and Pedersen define such causal mechanism as a "theorized system that produces outcomes through the interaction of a series of parts that transmit causal forces from X to Y. Each part of a mechanism is an individually insufficient but necessary factor in a whole mechanism, which together produces Y. The parts of causal mechanisms are composed of entities engaging in activities" (2013: 176).

The formulation of a set of causal components is structured in such a way that it outlines which entities are involved in which activities. This formulation allows the empirical testing to determine whether the found evidence support the existence of theorized components. At the same time, such formulation directs analytical attention to the transmission of causal forces from one component to another (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 6).

Table 4 illustrates the causal components of the mechanism on theoretical as well as empirical levels. To construct my theoretical argument, I have brought together (and adapted) certain components from the realist theory, such as the 'identification of an external military threat' (Part 1) and the 'reduction of uncertainty' (Part 3). Additionally, I have incorporated elements from liberal institutionalism, including the 'identification of an external military threat' (Part 1) and the 'growing relevance of International Security Organizations' (Part 4). Furthermore, I have introduced several novel components into the CM, drawing inspiration from existing empirical accounts. These include 'convergence of threat perception' (Part 2), 'increase in unity within Western countries to attain consensus about contentious security matters' (Part 5) and 'increase in expenditures for defense and security' (Part 6). Thus, in formulating the underlying CM, I synthesize the existing theoretical and empirical pieces, which I later systematically re-examine in the empirical analysis phase.

Table 4: Theorized causal mechanism (own illustration)

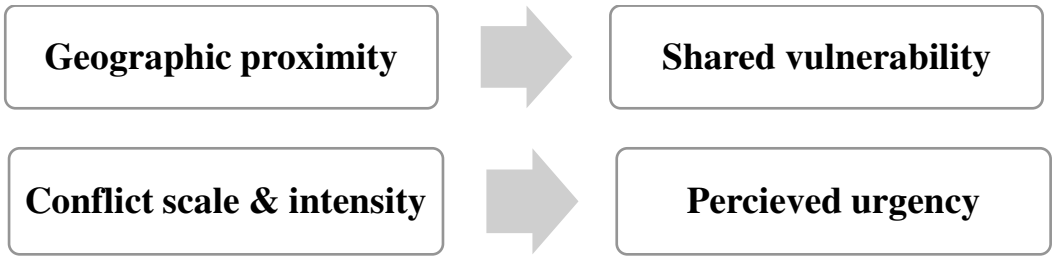
	Cause	***Part 1 →***	***Part 2 →***	***Part 3 →***	***Part 4 →***	***Part 5 →***	***Part 6 →***	***Outcome***
Theoretical Level	Emergence of an external military threat	a) *Identification* of an external military threat b) *Identification* of the source of the threat	Convergence of *threat perception*	Reduction of *uncertainty*	Increase in *relevance* of international security organizations (ISOs)	Increase in *unity* within Western countries to reach consensus about contentious issues	Increase in *expenditures* for defense and security	Enhanced security cooperation
Empirical Level	War outbreak in Ukraine in February 2022	a) Recognition of the external military threat originating from the military war in Ukraine b) Identification Russia as the source of it	Western political actors agreeing about the scale of the threat and urgency it creates	Western political actors gaining certainty about the intentions and anticipated responses of their partners and Russia	a) Non-member Western countries applying for a membership in ISOs b) Existing members investing resources in ISOs	European Union imposing restrictive measures unanimously against Russia in response to illegal invasion of Ukraine	Western countries boosting their military budgets	Changes on dimensions: institutions, sanctions, arms production, military forces and border security
	Entities	U.S. and EU officials and experts	Western political actors	Western political actors	Western countries	European Union	Western countries	
	Activities	Identifying the external threat and its source	Having converged threat perception	Gaining more certainty	Pursuing membership; Investing resources	Imposing restrictive measures	Increasing budgetary allocations for defense	

3.6 Scope conditions

Process-tracing studies require an explicit definition of the context and conditions in which the transmission of causal forces from independent to dependent variables can occur. Scope conditions are tools that pinpoint the context incorporating "the relevant aspects of a setting (analytical, temporal, spatial, or institutional) in which a set of initial conditions leads (probabilistically) to an outcome of a defined scope and meaning via a specified causal mechanism or set of causal mechanisms." (Falleti & Lynch 2009: 1152). In this thesis, I identify two scope conditions, the first of which concerns the spatial dimension and the second the temporal dimension.

First condition is the *geographic proximity* of an external threat, thus the immediacy of a military conflict. Logically, a military threat deriving from a geographically remote country that does not share direct borders with any of the Western countries would not be perceived as a formidable power, in comparison to the threat emerged in or at the borders of Europe. Geographic proximity, as a scope condition, serves as a channel through which the causal force of X is transmitted to Y. It does so by generating a perception of shared vulnerability among Western countries, as they all become exposed to the common threat. This condition also clarifies why a large-scale study is not conducive to achieving the research objectives: In the recent past, most of the Western countries have not encountered a significant number of military conflicts in Europe or in its direct neighborhood.

Figure 1: Scope conditions (own illustration)



Additionally, I propose that the validity of the causal mechanism is contingent exclusively upon full-scale military invasions conducted by one neighboring country against another. Prior to the military invasion in Ukraine in 2022, there were several instances of regional conflicts in Eastern Europe (e.g. Annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the August war in Georgia in 2008). While these events elicited significant political reverberations and sporadic imposition of sanctions by individual Western countries and the North Atlantic Alliance, it remains challenging to assert a clear and measurable increase in security cooperation directly

as a response to these developments. For this reason, I suggest that *the scale and intensity of the conflict* are of crucial importance for the functioning of the given mechanism. This scope condition facilitates the transmission of the causal force from X to Y by prompting the countries to acknowledge the urgency for taking actions to address the issue.

3.7 Data Basis

To unravel the web of aforementioned causal events, I analyze data from firsthand accounts as well as scholarly literature. The thesis draws on primary sources particularly European Parliament and European Council conclusions, as well press releases, reports and public opinion studies of the European Commission. In addition, a substantial part of the empirical analysis is based on official statements, speeches and opening remarks delivered at press briefings and conferences by EU and NATO heads of state and government, as well as specific Western countries. Speeches are particularly informative with regard to the development of arguments in part 2 (Convergence of threat), part 3 (Reduction of uncertainty) and part 5 (Increase in unity within Western countries) of the causal mechanism, as they best illustrate the rhetorical specificities in the course of causal process. Additionally, I consult official internet resources and websites of Presidents of Russia and Lithuania, as well as Finnish and Swedish governments. Regarding secondary sources, the thesis integrates scholarly literature, consistent with methodology of theory-building PT. Finally, the thesis references newspaper articles from renowned media sources such as BBC, CNN, Reuters, etc.

3.8 Causal process observations and types of evidence

The phase of empirical testing is considered to be one of the most challenging steps in PT studies. This is partly to account to possible selection bias when it comes to gathering empirical evidence. In their guidelines, Beach and Pederson suggest, that it is required to strategically search for evidence that supports the functioning of the predicted mechanism (2013: 123). At the same time, it is essential to avoid excluding evidence that could potentially disprove the whole mechanism. Below, I provide a set of expected causal process observations for each of the theoretical components of the causal mechanism. The subsequent phase involves transforming these observations into tangible evidence, which can be classified into four types: pattern, sequence, trace and account (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 99). Collier, Brady, and Seawright differentiate two types of observations: data-set observations (DSOs), that are typically gathered in statistical analysis and causal process observations (CPOs), typical for

process-tracing studies (2010: 184–88). In order to transform CPOs into evidence, they need to be assessed and understood in light of given case-specific context (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 73). The assessment process for classifying an observation as evidence involves evaluating each observation against the case-specific knowledge (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 73).

Table 5: Expected causal process observations and types of evidence (own illustration)

Theorized parts of causal mechanism	**Causal process observations**	**Types of evidence**
Part 1 - Identification of an external threat	Recognition of emerging external threat by the intelligence agencies and other relevant actors	*Sequence Evidence*
Part 2 - Convergence of threat perception	Statements, speeches, remarks of Western actors that manifest high degree of convergence among the Western actors about the assessment of the threat, similar approaches in the exploration of solutions and responses as well as possible coping processes	*Account Evidence*
Part 3 - Reduction of uncertainty	Statements, speeches, remarks of Western actors that demonstrate increased certainty about intentions and anticipated responses of their partners and Russia	*Account Evidence*
Part 4 - Increased relevance of the international security organizations	a) Countries that are not yet parts of the most important ISO, applying for its membership b) Increase in defense expenditures of ISO members	*a) Trace Evidence* *b) Pattern Evidence*
Part 5 - Increased unity of the Western countries to reach consensus about contentious issues	Countries, that had reservations about imposing strict sanctions against Russian Federation joining the EU restrictive measures	*Trace Evidence*
Part 6 - Increased budgetary allocations for defense	Western countries mobilizing and polling resources; boosting their military budgets	*Pattern Evidence*

The evidence in part one primarily revolves around statements issued by U.S. officials, such as the U.S. Secretary of State, as well as statements from NATO Defense Ministers and the European Council, as well as threat assessment of intelligence agencies regarding the potential military threat posed by Russia towards Ukraine. This type of evidence constitutes *sequence evidence*, as it deals with temporal chronology of events (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 99). In Part two, the analysis focuses on official statements and speeches the political leaders of Western countries, to substantiate the claim of about the presence of convergence of threat perception. These observations constitute *account* evidence, as the analysis pertains to the empirical content of the sourced material (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 100). In Part four I acquire two types of evidence: *trace* evidence for the first aspect (Finland and Sweden pursuing NATO

membership) and *pattern* evidence for the second (increasing defense expenditures for NATO). Trace evidence is a type of evidence the presence of which confirms that the presumed part of the CM actually exists while pattern evidence refers to statistical patterns (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 99–100). The fifth part also draws on trace evidence, as the events that led to initially reluctant countries joining the sanctions prove that the existence of greater unity within Western countries to reach a consensus. Finally, Part 6 is reinforced with statistical *patterns* as evidence, such as observed increases in defense expenditures among Western countries.

3.9 Empirical tests

In the careful process of developing case-specific predictions, my goal has been to optimize the inferential strength of each piece of evidence. Van Evera suggests that the effectiveness of empirical tests depends on their level of certainty and uniqueness (1997: 31). When predictions are certain and anticipated to occur inevitably, and when these forecasts are unique, meaning they are not proposed by other existing theories, the researcher can have greater confidence in the validity of the theory (van Evera 1997: 31). My objective has been to formulate the predictions in a way that maximizes their levels of certainty and uniqueness. Achieving a high degree of uniqueness, where the predictions about empirical observations do not coincide with those of other theories, turned out to be a more demanding task. This challenge arises in part because certain theorized components of the causal mechanism exhibit resemblances to deduced expectations from the realist and liberal institutionalist theories. Nevertheless, it is important to note that both of these theories primarily articulate predictions at the system level. To enhance the uniqueness of empirical outcomes, I have included a set of predictions pertaining to the unit level as well (states). Moreover, to achieve the highest degree of certainty, I have included case-specific predictions, observance of which are decisive for ensuring that the theory does not fail the empirical test. These two dimensions of the test (confirmatory and disconfirmatory powers) also underpin the strength of the empirical test in the empirical analysis part (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 166–67).

Van Evera outlines four categories of tests to evaluate predictions about the evidence: hoop tests, smoking-gun tests, doubly decisive tests and straw-in the wind tests (1997: 31–32). These tests vary in terms of their degrees of uniqueness and certainty. Hoop tests, have high certainty, however, no uniqueness (van Evera 1997: 31). In the process of constructing expected observable outcomes, I employ this test to eliminate evidence that do not align with the hypothesized mechanism. However, it is important to note that evidence consistent with the

theorized mechanism may not always lead to robust inferences. Straw-in-the-wind tests are utilized for probabilistic predictions and are marked by their low degrees of uniqueness and certainty (van Evera 1997: 32). Given that this thesis is focused on examining deterministic causal relationships between X and Y, I do not incorporate straw-in-the-wind tests when formulating the predictions. Smoking-gun tests are characterized by high uniqueness and low certainty (van Evera 1997: 31–32). Identifying evidence that meets this criteria strongly supports the hypothesis. However, the evidence failing this test should not be entirely disregarded. For this reason, it is recommended to formulate the predications in a way that they successfully pass both the hoop and smoking-gun tests. The combination of these two creates doubly-decisive tests, that are rare to encounter in real social science research (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 104). Employing doubly-decisive tests is not feasible for formulating the predictions for the outcome of enhanced security cooperation. This is due to the complex interplay of multiple factors influencing the outcome, which complicates the identification of predictions that are both highly unique and certain in their empirical observance. This is why the thesis aims to offer a mechanismic explanation of the phenomena in combination with the above-mentioned scope conditions.

4. Establishing the points of departure

This chapter, divided into two sections establishes two important departure points for the empirical analysis. On the one hand, it provides a concise overview of the key developments within the five dimensions of the Western security cooperation up until the war outbreak in Ukraine in February 2022. Drawing on the indicators presented in section 3.4.2 (see table 3), I characterize the levels of security cooperation in all dimensions. On the other hand, the second section of this chapter provides an empirical mapping of the sequence of events that trace Russia's transformation into an external threat to Western security cooperation. In chronological order, I present Western-Russian relations and integrate various standpoints from Western as well as Russian sides and discuss the implications arising from landmark events since the dissolution of the Soviet Union to February 2022. The incorporation of the second section serves to enhance the overall inferential power of the causal mechanism by pinpointing the reasons behind the absence of enhanced security cooperation during previous instances of military conflicts initiated by Russia and underlines the distinctive nature of the case of outbreak of war in Ukraine.

4.1 Dimensions and levels of Western Security Cooperation

The term 'Western security cooperation' also referred to as 'transatlantic security cooperation' refers to the collaboration on security matters between European and North American countries. Although the primary focus of this thesis is on security affairs in Europe, the scope of cooperation extends beyond European countries and a substantial part of the analysis centers around the north-Atlantic alliance. To establish a starting point for the empirical analysis, this section elaborates on five dimensions of security cooperation: security institutions, economic sanctions, arms production and management, military forces and border security. It has to be acknowledged that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a comprehensive account of the entire development of security cooperation. This section mainly serves as a brief summary of the situation up to 2022 for the five dimensions to allow the following empirical analysis and identify the changes in cooperation levels on the example of the selected case. It is worth noting that these five dimensions do not fully encompass Western security cooperation. In this thesis, they are seen as key aspects of cooperation and serve an analytical purpose.

4.1.1 Institutions

The dissolution of the Soviet Union triggered some important shifts in the institutional arrangements of the Western security cooperation. With the disappearance of the Soviet threat, the reunification of Germany and concerns about the potential withdrawal of U.S. presence from Europe new challenges came to the fore. NATO, a central institution of transatlantic security cooperation, had to redefine its mission and goals. The Alliance's New Strategic Concept, which was adopted in London in 1991, characterized the new threats as 'multi-faceted' and 'multi-directional', stemming from economic, social, and political instabilities, as well as territorial disputes in central and eastern Europe (NATO 1991). Thus, among others, NATO had to undertake new functions in containing militarized conflicts in Europe as well as engage in conflict prevention within the former Soviet bloc and general international stability. Apart from NATO, European security revolved around two other key institutions: European Community (EC) which later was transformed into a political union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)[7]. While NATO and OSCE both constituted international security organizations (ISO), their operational scopes differed, with the former primarily focusing on organizing armed forces and conducting peacekeeping operations in

[7] Compared to NATO and the EU, less attention is dedicated to the OSCE in this thesis. This is because the five dimensions of security cooperation can better be discussed in the context of NATO and the EU.

Europe and the latter centering around issues of conflict prevention, post-conflict peace-building efforts, but also around economic, environmental and human aspects of security. The EC, formerly referred to as the European Economic Community (EEC), was originally established to facilitate economic cooperation between European states. With the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, which transformed the EC into the European Union (EU) and introduced the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as one of its three pillars, the EU also became an integral stakeholder in the advancement of European security.

The third wave of democratization after the collapse of the Soviet Union offered an unprecedented opportunity to create a more stable Euro-Atlantic space together with the newly independent countries. The admission of these post-Soviet countries to the OSCE succeeded rather straightforward from 1991 onwards since, unlike NATO and the EU, there were no membership conditionality. However, NATO and the EU had to first create new channels to activate cooperative relations with the newly independent states and only considered eventual membership later on. The establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1991 was an attempt to create such a forum for dialogue with the former Warsaw Pact countries (NATO 2022e). On the part of the EC, The Commission initiated negotiations on association agreements - also referred to as 'European agreements' as early as the end of 1990 with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland (European Commission 1991). Later in 1995, as these partnerships became more ambitious, NATO published the Study on NATO Enlargement to clarify its new enlargement policy and invite European non-members to join the Alliance (NATO 1995). The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became NATO members in 1997 and part of the EU in 2004 along with seven other countries in Europe. NATO continued to expand in the first two decades of the 2000s in with a slower pace, with four new members joining between 2009 and 2020.

While it is true that NATO has considerably expanded and adapted institutionally over the past 30 years, and the EU has introduced the CFSP strengthening its role in security matters, one can still argue that Western security cooperation at the beginning of the 2020s can best be characterized as *mid-level*. On the example of several conflicts and crisis one could see how the divergence of interests among the cooperating parties has hampered fast and coordinated decision-making at the institutional level. The stark differences in stances regarding the U.S. intervention in the Iraq war (2003), NATO operation in Libya (2011) and the migration and refugee crisis (2015) can serve as illustrative examples of such an assessment.

4.1.2 Economic sanctions

In contrast with the institutional dimension, the level of the Western security cooperation in its dimension of multilateral use of economic sanctions can be considered as *high* during the same period. This is of course the case if the difference between the medium and high levels in this dimension is benchmarked by whether or not the EU coordinates its multilateral sanctions with other parties or organizations, for example, the U.S. and G7 (see Table 3, section 3.4.2). The EU sanctions against Russia, which were aligned with the U.S. sanctions serve as evidence of a high degree of cooperation. The shift from the low level of cooperation in the dimension of economic sanctions to the medium level can be observed in the early 2000s when the European Union laid foundations for collective enforcement of restrictive measures. The sanctions imposed earlier in the 1990s were the outcome of individual member states coordinating their foreign policies. In 2003 the Council adopted the 'Guidelines on implementation and evaluation of restrictive measures (sanctions) in the framework of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy' (Council of the European Union 2003). This was followed by the adoption of the 'Basic Principles on the Use of Restrictive Measures (Sanctions)' in 2004 (Council of the European Union 2004). Subsequently, there has been a notable increase in the imposition of sanctions by the EU. For example, the Union imposed sanctions against Belarus in 2004 and against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2006, enforced UN sanctions against Iran in 2006 to address nuclear proliferation concerns, and initiated sanctions against Russia in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea from 2014 (European Council 2023).

4.1.3 Arms production and management

About the production and management of arms, that is another dimension of Western security cooperation, the conventional wisdom is that in post-Cold War Europe, there has been a progressive effort to reduce Europe's reliance on the U.S. defense industry (Jones 2007: 145). Several pieces of evidence, particularly those about rapid institutional development of European armaments agencies, support this assumption. For example, the establishment of the Western European Armaments Group (WEAG) in 1992, the formation of the Organization for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR) by French, German, Italian, and UK Ministers of Defense in 1996, and the intentions to create the European Armaments Agency (EAA), which, although it was never realized, paved the way for the subsequent establishment of the European Defence Agency (EDA). Most of the instances of Western collaboration in arms production and management have occurred within these institutional frameworks, that is either at the EU level or through separate arrangements involving specific European countries. So far, there has been no single, coordination mechanism for arms production among Western countries, not

even through NATO. The Alliance itself does not have its own arms production facilities and does not engage in direct weapons manufacturing. However, it does encourage defense investment and contributions from its member states. The member countries commit to provide the alliance with weaponry and ammunition (Leistner 2023). Moreover, member countries commit to dedicating a minimum of 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defense spending, to ensure the readiness of the Alliance's military forces (NATO 2023e). Emphasizing the absence of a coordinated approach to arms production and management among Western countries, the level of cooperation in this dimension by the early 2020s can be described as *medium*.

4.1.4 Military forces

Soon after the end of the Cold War, European countries started to discuss the perspectives of establishment of an European army. On the one side, these discussions were guided by NATO's reform process, on the other side due to the Western European Union's recognition of the need to fulfill its role as a stabilizing and peacekeeping actor together with the EU (Western European Union Council of Ministers 1992: 2). As part of the 1992 Petersberg Declaration, the members of the Western European Union (WEU), which preceded the EU, agreed upon a set of commitments to make their military units available to the WEU NATO and the EU for different tasks, including conflict prevention, joint disarmament, post-conflict stabilization, and other operations (Publications Office of the European Union 2017). Following on from this, five WEU member states - France, Germany, Belgium, Spain and Luxembourg - founded the Eurocorps, a force with a multinational command structure. Nonetheless, Eurocorps did not fully evolve into a larger Europewide force, as at that time other European countries did not participate in it.[8] Another attempts to establish a pan-European force was made in 1995 with the creation of the European Rapid Operational Force (EUROFOR) and in 1999 with the European Council reaching agreement on the creation of the European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF). EUROFOR consisted of military forces from Portugal, Italy, Spain and France and later became integrated into the EU Battlegroup framework before eventually terminated in 2012. ERRF was created within the EU and was far more ambitious project, as it envisaged that the member states would be able to deploy military forces of around 60,000 persons within 60 days by 2003 (European Parliament 1999). Due to the demonstrated limitations in the operational capacity of ERRF, the European Union, motivated by a French-British-German initiative in 2004, introduced the concept of 'Battlegroups'. Since 2007, the EU Battlegroups

[8] Poland became the 6th framework country of Eurocorps in 2022.

(EUBGs) have been fully operational, however, challenges related to financing these operations and the lacking political will[9] have often been named as obstacles to their deployment (European Union External Action 2017). EUBGs were created based on a similar concept to NATO reaction forces (NRF), which were founded in 2002. However, unlike the NRF, EUBGs are considerably smaller in size[10] and are primarily focused on Petersberg tasks, which does not include the management of collective defense. Apart from that, their command structures differ as well: the operational commander for EUBGs is appointed by the Council based on the case, while command of the NRF is the responsibility of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), which reports directly to the NATO Military Committee. Both EUBGs and NRF are multinational forces and engage in frequent and intensive joint exercises and training. Moreover, in order to qualify as EUBGs, the battlegroups must meet specific military standards and successfully complete a certification process that is monitored by the EU Military Committee with support from the EU Military Staff (European Union External Action 2013: 3–4). Given the regular joint training and the presence of multinational command structures in both the EU battlegroups and NATO forces, the level of Western security cooperation in terms of military forces, can be characterized as being at a *high* level by the early 2020s.

4.1.5 External border security

The European Union has a highly institutionalized system for controlling external borders. The strengthening of the EU's competences can be traced back to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which introduced the concept of EU citizenship and established the fundamental right of freedom of movement for citizens of all member states. Following this, the creation of the borderless Schengen Area in 1995 enabled European citizens to travel among participating member countries without passports. The 1995 Amsterdam Treaty enabled the integration of the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union. The four rounds of EU enlargement in 1995, 2004, 2007 and 2013 led to a further enlargement of the Schengen area and to alterations in the EU's external borders. In 2005, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) was established and became the cornerstone for the security of the EU's external borders. Frontex started to operate in close cooperation with the national authorities and took over the operation of border surveillance systems like EUROSUR.[11] During the years

[9] For the deployment of EU forces the Council has to vote unanimously.
[10] EUBGs consist of 1500 personnel per battlegroup, while NRF has around 40 000 soldiers in total.
[11] The European Border Surveillance system that was established in 2013.

2015-2016, the EU had to confront a substantial increase in refugee flows at its borders. In order to provide an immediate response to the crises, in May 2015, the EU introduced the European Agenda on Migration. This agenda intended to enhance the management of migration, increase the capacities of Frontex, and ensure the unified implementation of the 'Common European Asylum System' (European Commission 2015). The agenda also brough up some structural changes, for example, reforms in the Common European Asylum System.

After briefly detailing these developments, we can classify the Western security cooperation as notably *high* in the area of border security up until the beginning of the 2020s for two reasons: First, the EU has an integrated border management system, which means that relevant national and international authorities and agencies, such as border surveillance and customs authorities, work closely together. Second, the EU has developed a comprehensive legal framework and arrangements to coordinate activities among members.

To sum up this section, we observe medium levels of cooperation in the dimensions of institutions and arms production and management, while we see high levels of cooperation in economic sanctions, military forces, and external border security. It is important to note that this thesis, through its characterization of the five dimensions with the above outlined historical evidence, does not aim to comprehensively cover all aspects of Western security cooperation from the 1990s to the early 2020s. Instead, its purpose is to create a mapping of key elements of security cooperation. Moreover, while the indicators developed for measuring the levels of cooperation may be theoretically sound, a certain shortcoming lies in their practical application, as they appear to have overly distinct boundaries between them.

4.2 Russia as an external military threat

During the Cold War, the Soviet threat was the major source of consolidation for Western security cooperation, as it posed an immediate and substantial threat to the territorial integrity, stability and values of Western democracies. The geopolitical landscape was characterized by the rivalry between two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. To counter the Soviet threat, Western countries had to consolidate their collective security and institutionalize it in the form of NATO. The principal purpose of the latter was to counterbalance the military superiority of the Soviet Union and to counter Soviet influence in Europe.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the most important ideological and military adversary of the West ceased to exist. Profound changes began to take place in Russia and other former Soviet states. The first president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, initiated the

implementation of market-oriented economic reforms and the promotion of political liberalization of the country. These economic and political shifts were accompanied by a reduced emphasis on prior expansionist policies and military expenditures, leading to less confrontational posture towards Europe and the US.

In parallel with these fundamental reforms in Russia, NATO launched a series of efforts in the 1990s that aimed at building relations with former Warsaw Pact countries and certain former Soviet republics.[12] Even though, peace and stability in Europe no longer seemed to be threatened from the outside, the prospect of NATO's future enlargement became an important subject of discussion in the early 1990s. The emerging democracies in Europe expressed their willingness to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures as they sought new security guarantees to protect their newly obtained independence and political sovereignty. As the NATO enlargement process transitioned from a mere consideration to a concrete reality, Russian government started to repeatedly express their concerns regarding the military presence of the alliance in close proximity to its borders. From the Russian perspective, these newly independent countries have historically been situated within its sphere of influence. In order to address these concerns and create a foundation for more cooperative relations with Russia, EU and NATO leaders attempted to accommodate Russian foreign policy interests. As a result, Russia signed the 'Partnership for Peace' (PfP) programme framework of NATO in June 1994 and, in December 1997, entered into the 'Partnership and Cooperation Agreement' (PCA) with the EU. Furthermore, NATO leaders took another step in May 1997 by initiating the 'NATO-Russia Founding Act'. This decision was based on the intention to move beyond past confrontations and rivalries and foster trustful relations between NATO and Russia (NATO 1997). These three events marked the most important points in Russia's rapprochement to Euro-Atlantic institutions in history.

Despite the above-mentioned institutional efforts taken by the Western countries to prevent Russia's isolation from the integration processes, neither the population of Russia, nor the government appeared reassured about the feasibility of comprehensive partnership with NATO. Quite the opposite, the opinion polls conducted in Russia in March and April 1997 revealed that the majority of the population (62%) viewed NATO Eastern expansion as harmful to Russia (Light *et al.* 2000: 80). Surprisingly, this condemnation was primarily directed towards NATO, whereas the enlargement and integration of the EU was generally perceived

[12] For example, the 'Partnership for Peace' (PfP) programme, that was launched by NATO in 1994 to allow bilateral cooperation between NATO and individual partner countries.

as benign, allegedly because European integration was considered to be economic and technical in nature (Light *et al.* 2000: 81). Such critical attitudes towards NATO and Euro-Atlantic security integration in general, led to the increasing criticism directed towards President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who were reputed to be 'atlantists' by their political opponents, who considered themselves to be 'realists' (Zonova & Reinhardt 2014: 503).

The NATO intervention in the Kosovo War in March 1999 exacerbated the already tense relationship between Russia and the Alliance. This decision of NATO to engage in military actions in Kosovo was met with strong official criticism from President Yeltsin, who considered NATO's intervention to be a demonstration of power: "They (NATO) want to bring in ground troops, they are preparing for that, they want simply to seize Yugoslavia to make it their protectorate … we cannot let that happen to Yugoslavia" (CNN 1999: n.p.). The official reaction of Kremlin included accusing NATO of violating the UN Charter with regard to the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states (Tsygankov 2018: 104). As a result, the NATO intervention in Kosovo war became a turning point for Russia's foreign policy, that generated a renewed defense consciousness and further solidified anti-Western rhetoric in the country (Zonova & Reinhardt 2014: 505). The popularity of Yeltsin and his cabinet declined rapidly, and in the early 2000s Vladimir Putin, who previously served as prime minister, took over the presidency.

At the beginning of Putin's presidency, relations between Russia and the West appeared to be more promising. During an interview with the BBC, Putin mentioned that he did not rule out the possibility of profound integration into NATO, including eventual membership, provided Russia was seen as an equal strategic partner (Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia 2000). Furthermore, at the beginning of his presidency, his official statements reflected a greater enthusiasm for cooperation between Russia and the Western countries. After the terrorist attacks on 11th of September 2001, Putin was among the first political leaders to convey his condolences to the people of the United States. Moreover, he agreed with President Bush to enhance cooperation in the global effort to combat international terrorism (Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia 2001).

The Kremlin's initially mild, almost friendly rhetoric altered shortly thereafter. Several events contributed to Russia's gradual distancing from the West. Firstly, towards the end of 1999, Russia launched anti-terrorist measures in Chechnya that led to the destruction of the capital

Grozny. The brutality of this conflict and accusations about human rights violations by Russian military forces drew increasing criticism from Western states against the newly formed Russian government.

Secondly, although Russia was initially one of the strongest supporters of the USA-led war on terrorism, it sharply criticized the USA decision to invade Iraq. Russia's opposing stance, motivated by its ambition to maintain its position as the leading world power, led to a shift away from the course of rapprochement that had been achieved between Washington and Moscow after the events of 9/11 and marked a major change in the dynamics of the USA-Russian relations (Ambrosio 2005).

Thirdly, the further eastward expansion of NATO was becoming increasingly problematic for Russia at this point. In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland made history as the first former Warsaw Pact countries to become the members of NATO (NATO 2023d). This constituted the first NATO enlargement after the end of the Cold War, followed by the second enlargement in 2004, when the three Baltic states as well as Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia were admitted to NATO (NATO 2023a). Furthermore, all of these countries aspired to integrate with the European Union as well, most of them successfully attaining the membership in 2004 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia) and in 2007 (Bulgaria, Romania). Russia focused on mitigating the potential damage of successive waves of enlargement, because it lacked the internal stability and economic strength to prevent them. However, as Russia gradually evolved into a more economically stable and assertive power in the late 2000s, its rhetorical responses to the mentioned developments also started to change (Tsygankov 2018). In his well-known speech at the 2007 Munich Conference on Security policy, the president of Russia addressed what he considered to be international security problems, highlighting in particular concerns related to the stationing of NATO frontline forces close to Russia's borders: "I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust." (Putin 2007: n.p.).

Last but not least, the Rose Revolution in Georgia in November 2003 and the Orange Revolution that began in Ukraine in November 2004 contributed to an increased perception of the Western threat in Russia. This event was particularly pronounced as the Western threat, because the civil society groups in these two countries were largely backed by Europe and the

USA. Moreover, the newly formed pro-Western governments of these countries aspired to join NATO and were promised at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 that they would be granted a Membership Action Plan (MAP) and eventually NATO membership thereafter. However, the absence of consensus among the members of the alliance resulted in these two countries receiving only a mere promise of membership.

In less than four months following the Bucharest Summit, Russian forces invaded Georgia. This Russian-Georgian conflict was relatively short,[13] spanning only a few days and ending with a ceasefire agreement that was mediated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. This conflict became a landmark event in the shift from peaceful cooperation between Russia and the West towards a more adversarial relationship (Dickinson 2021). The conflict revealed the preparedness of the Russian government to use military force against neighboring states in order to reinforce the country's status as a powerful regional actor. Moreover, this event made it apparent that Russia was capable of disregarding international norms and principles when this served its own interests,[14] and showed that the international reaction to the war - condemnation and economic sanctions - would not deter Russia from pursuing its foreign policy interests. The Russian-Georgian conflict was the first sharp indication that Russia was starting to evolve as an external threat to Western security. Therefore, NATO leadership attempted to address the issue of Russia's exclusion from European security cooperation and some efforts for this were made at the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon. In the Lisbon Summit declaration NATO members jointly expressed their willingness to resolve the existing differences to build trust and understanding with Russia (NATO 2010b). NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, adopted at the Summit, further intended to reassure Russia by emphasizing that NATO posed no threat and was ready to build a genuine strategic partnership with Russia (NATO 2010a). The declared goal was to intensify political consultations, to make full use of the potential of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC)[15] and to cooperate in various areas such as missile defense and counter-terrorism (NATO 2010a). President Medvedev was skeptical about the prospects of building NATO's missile defense system in Europe, convinced that NATO would benefit more from it than Russia.

[13] Also referred as the August War, Russo-Georgian War and the South Ossetia conflict.
[14] Three weeks after the Russian-Georgian conflict Russia became the first UN member which recognized the independence of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
[15] The NATO-Russia Council in May 2002 and replaced the Permanent Joint Council, that was created by the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997.

The relations between Russia and NATO remained strained following the Lisbon Summit and the already limited cooperation continued to gradually deteriorate, leading to the eventual suspension of all practical cooperation with Russia as a result of the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This event had severe and long-lasting implications for the Russian-Western relations on the economic, political and military levels. The European Union and the United States issued condemnations of Russia's actions and issued economic sanctions to deter Russia from further aggression. NATO members had to reorient their policies towards collective defense, as the newer Eastern European members needed to be reassured about their security guarantees. Thus, in 2016, NATO members agreed to launch the 'Enhanced Forward Presence' (EFP)[16] initiative as an immediate consequence of Russia's aggressive actions vis-à-vis its neighbors and the wider transatlantic community (NATO 2023f).

While there was a broad consensus among Western countries that Russia's military actions in Crimea were alarming and required a unified response, there were some indications that the West still did not uniformly perceive Russia as a credible external threat at this point. Firstly, the conflict in Crimea appeared not to have sufficient impact for Western countries to prioritize security considerations over economic ones, e.g. Germany initially had serious reservations about imposing sanctions on Russia and break off the economic ties with Moscow. Secondly, the annexation of Crimea did not trigger concerns among all Western countries/NATO members equally because of the isolated geographical location of the conflict and the resemblance of the annexation scenario to that of the South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria[17] conflicts. Similar to its actions in the cases of invading the above-mentioned territories, Russian government justified its military intervention in Crimea with the intention of supporting already existing separatist movements on the Crimean peninsula and with the urgency to protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking part of population in the region. Thus, the Western expectation at that time was that the conflict in Crimea would not erupt further and follow a similar pattern to other similar cases and lead to a frozen conflict. Subsequently, in March 2016, the European Union unanimously agreed on the principles that would guide the EU's approach towards Russia. These principles included setting the

[16] The EFP was deployed in 2017 in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (NATO 2023f).

[17] The Transnistria conflict, which began in September 1990, was not discussed earlier in this section because my goal was to show the logic of gradual deterioration of the relations between the Western countries and Russia after the collapse of Soviet Union. However, Transnistria, that claims independence from Moldova, remains a further issue of dispute to this date, as Russia troops are still stationed in the region.

implementation of the Minsk Agreement as a key condition and recognizing the need for selective engagement with Russia on matters of interest to the EU (European Parliament 2023).

To shortly sum up this section, Russia's evolution as an external threat took place over more than two decades and the events discussed in the above pages all played a role in this process to different extents. The argument presented here is that Russia was not generally perceived as a credible external threat to European security up until February 2022, when the full-scale war in Ukraine broke out. This was the case because neither the August War nor the conflict in Crimea covered all of the criteria mentioned in the section 3.3. In particular, these conflicts did not exhibit high levels of intensity, nor did they generate substantial concerns about the territorial integrity of Western countries because of their geographical remoteness.

5. Tracing the causal process to enhanced security cooperation

This chapter provides the empirical analysis of this thesis and its sections are organized in a way that it reflects the order of the hypothesized causal mechanism. The main purpose of this empirical chapter is to examine the existing empirical record and verify the supporting evidence to verify the presence of each theorized part of the underlying causal mechanism.

5.1 Part 1: Identification of an external military threat

This section delves into the first component of the hypothesized causal mechanism – the identification of the external military threat and its source. In the very first part of this section, I trace the progression of how Western countries recognized and acknowledged the military threat posed by Russia prior the breakout of the war in Ukraine in February 2022. Drawing on the collected observations, I provide a chronological account of events. Subsequently, I reflect on my empirical findings and discuss two patterns that emerge in the process of tracing events.

The early indications of Russia's intention to invade Ukraine had appeared several months before the actual outbreak of the conflict. Already by November 2021, Russia had gradually increased its deployment of troops near the Ukrainian borders. One of the first statements on this situation was made by the U.S. Secretary of State Blinken during the news conference with the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Washington, D.C. on 10th of November: "Our concern is that Russia may make a serious mistake of attempting to rehash what it undertook back in 2014, when it amassed forces along the border, crossed into sovereign Ukrainian territory and did so claiming falsely that it was provoked." (Blinken: 15:15-15:31). Kremlin speaker Dmitry Peskov rejected accusations that Russia intended to invade Ukraine

and claimed that the redeployment of Russian troops should be of no concern (POLITICO 2021).

As the Kremlin's motives for deploying forces near Ukraine's borders were interpreted differently in Western countries, uncertainty kept growing in Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelensky announced at a press conference on 12th of November that about 100,000 troops had been mobilized near Ukraine's borders (Reuters 2021). Two days later, at the NATO-Ukraine meeting in Brussels, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg conveyed NATO's position on this deteriorating situation and expressed that the Alliance was following Russia's actions with great caution (Brezar 2021). This cautiousness on the part of the Alliance was largely reflected in the statements issued by the US officials. Already in November 2021, the Biden administration held consultations with the Congress to consider measures to dissuade Russia from launching an attack on Ukraine. By that time, the Biden administration was even considering providing military assistance to Ukraine in anticipation that the war could begin as early as January. But the risk that further support for Ukraine would cause even more resentment in Kremlin and escalation was real (Bertrand *et al.* 2021). In early December 2021, an unclassified U.S. intelligence document was published which revealed the positioning of Russian armed forces and equipment, with an estimated troop count of nearly 175,000 (Crowley 2021: n.p.). Following this, on 7th of December, President Biden and President Putin conducted a virtual conference to state their positions. While Putin stressed the need for legal assurances that NATO would not expand eastwards towards Russia and that no additional missile systems would be stationed in Russia's neighboring countries, the U.S. position was to underscore Ukraine's right to independently determine its security courses (Borger & Roth 2021). Following this, during the G-7 meeting held in Liverpool on 12th of December, the G7 member countries warned Russia about "massive consequences" in the event of an attack on Ukraine (Hudson 2021: n.p.).

It has to be mentioned, that the U.S. officials, based on the threat assessments of intelligence agencies, issued warning signals earlier than their European political counterparts.[18] Europe, collectively, appeared to have a somewhat delayed recognition of Russia's intentions regarding a potential invasion of Ukraine and the magnitude of the threat it posed. This was later

[18] It is true that four of the G-7 member countries are European, and they jointly conveyed their stance during the Liverpool meeting. However, this coordinated response can also be seen as part of President Biden's efforts to mobilize more support for Ukraine within Europe (see e.g. Hudson 2021 and Sestanovich 2021).

acknowledged by Josep Borell, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign and Security Policy during his opening speech at the EU Ambassadors Annual Conference 2020: "First, we did not believe that the war was coming. I have to recognise that here, in Brussels, the Americans were telling us "They will attack, they will attack", and we were quite reluctant to believe it. And I remember very well when [US Secretary of State] Tony Blinken phoned me and told me "well, it is going to happen this weekend". And certainly, two days later, at five o'clock in the morning, they started bombing Kyiv." (Borrell 2022b: n.p.). One of the first indications that the EU leaders unitedly acknowledged the scale of the threat and the necessity of a coordinated reaction can be found in the European Council meeting conclusions from 16th of December 2021, which included a call on Russia to "de-escalate tensions caused by the military build-up along its border with Ukraine and aggressive rhetoric", reaffirmed EU's full support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and cautioned the Kremlin about "massive consequences and severe costs in response" in the event of further military aggression (European Council 2021: 7). Yet, it seemed that the U.S government took the upcoming external threat much more seriously than the EU, as evidenced by the fact that, when the U.S., UK, and Canada initiated the process of temporarily withdrawing their diplomatic personnel and their families towards the end of January 2022 in anticipation of an imminent outbreak of war, the EU members chose not to do so (BBC 2022: n.p.). The Biden administration played an important role in alarming the rest of the Western world of the oncoming danger and in consolidating the collective Western response. This was especially evident in the statement by NATO Defence Ministers on 16th of February 2022, which carried a strong message of Western solidarity: "We are prepared to further strengthen our defensive and deterrent posture to respond to all contingencies. Our commitment to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is iron-clad. We stand united to defend each other." (NATO 2022a: n.p.).

This initial delay to identify the military threat by some of the European countries can be explained by the argument that threats tend to generate greater resonance when domestic publics perceive the source as potentially dangerous (e.g. Bak *et al.* 2020: 707). Various factors could account for the temporal differences in how European and U.S. officials, as well as their respective domestic publics, perceived the potential threat deriving from Russia. Prior to the outbreak of the war, European public opinion generally was far more favorable of Russia compared to the public opinion in the United States (see the table 'Sharp decline in favorable views of Russia' in Wike *et al.* 2022: 27). At that time, the majority of the central European countries had established economic ties with Russia, and up until the outbreak of the war,

Russia was one of the EU's primary trade partners. Moreover, the reliance of countries such as Germany and France, who as main EU players also set the tone of the European security agenda, on Russian supplies of gas, oil, and coal was an important contributing factor. In addition to the divergent levels of economic dependencies, the different political interests and concerns of the EU member states towards Russia also contributed to the EU's delayed recognition of the threat. Eastern European countries - e.g. Poland and the Baltic states - have historically had a more strained relations with Russia and often advocated a stricter stance, while Greece and Italy, for instance, have frequently made Kremlin-friendly political decisions.

To sum up, this section provided sequence evidence, drawn from the chronology of events, supporting the presence of the first hypothesized systematic mechanism. Despite variations in time scopes, the observations outlined above illustrate that Western actors acknowledged Russian external threat as a credible threat right before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Accounting for temporal and cross-country variations falls outside of the scope of this thesis. However, based on the observations discussed above, the following pattern emerges when we talk about the systematic mechanism of identification of an external threat that are noteworthy and require further research. Firstly, there is a variance of pace among countries, meaning the timing and extent to which countries identify a particular threat as credible can vary significantly and can be influenced by historical, economic and political factors. This suggests that not only the initial resonance, but also the speed with which an external threat is identified as credible can vary from country to country. Moreover, whether the public generally holds favorable or unfavorable views about the source of the threat might be another relevant factor for the pace of threat identification. Secondly, there might be an effect of economic dependence, suggesting that, the states that have stronger economic ties and greater economic dependence on the country from which the external threat emerges may have a delayed recognition of that threat. This might be attributed to concerns about potential consequences of disrupted economic relations.

5.2 Part 2: Convergence of threat perception

In this section, I present CPOs that verify the presence of the second part of the mechanism - convergence of threat perception among Western countries. To start with, it is important to clarify the notion of threat perception. Cohen describes this concept as "the decisive intervening variable between action and reaction in international crisis. When threat is not perceived, even in the face of objective evidence, there can be no mobilization of defensive resources." (1978: 93). Cohen provides an operational definition of threat perception based on

the following four indicators: 1) statements made by decision makers and assessment of the threat cue; 2) descriptions by contemporaries of the statements made by decision makers; 3) evidence that decision makers explore solutions and responses to the threat; and 4) 'coping processes', such as resource strengthening (1978: 95). Guided by these insights, I propose that the convergence of threat perception implies a high degree of agreement between the Western actors about the assessment and characterization of the threat cue, similar approaches of decision makers in the exploration of solutions and responses as well as possible coping processes . In my empirical analysis of this part of CM, I look at the statements of key Western actors and expect to find causal process observations that support the presence of high level of convergence in line with above described indicators.[19]

There are numerous observations supporting the prevalence of high convergence between the Western countries from the actual beginning of the war. To start with, the given evidence suggests that the majority of the Western countries were in alignment about the magnitude of the crises and the particular urgency for an immediate action. A glimpse at the statements made by the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the US President Joe Biden on 24th of February shows that these two countries shared a very similar perception of the larger scale of the external military threat and that the unfolding scenario had less resemblance to previous regional conflicts (for instance Crimean, Transnistrian or South Ossetian conflicts). As an example, the Prime Minister spoke of "the urgent need to protect other European countries that are not members of NATO and could become targets of Putin's Playbook of subversion and aggression." (Johnson 2022: n.p.). Similarly, the US President referred to the US taking steps to defend other "NATO Allies, particularly in the east." (Biden 2022: n.p.). Likewise, in his policy statement of 27th of February 2022 the Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz, mentioned that preventing Putin's war from spilling over to other countries would be one of the major challenges (Scholz 2022a: n.p.). Likewise, in his addressing statement to the nation, the French president characterized the situation as an increasingly "difficult moment unlike any we have seen in decades". (Macron 2022a: n.p.). CPOs of this kind indicate the high convergence of threat perception about the scale of the threat among key Western actors.

Furthermore, there is supporting evidence indicating that against the backdrop of the outbreak of war, there was increased convergence in perceiving Russia as an increasingly threatening actor. Before the war, the Western perception of Russia was relatively heterogeneous. While

[19] I omit the second indicator about the descriptions provided by contemporaries of the statements, as the events that I study are recent and primary sources are available and have greater inferential power.

some countries, such as the Baltic states, saw Russia as a considerable potential threat, the majority of central European states, such as Germany, had a more ambivalent perceptions about the destructive potential of Russia. Germany's security stance towards Russia had long been marked by an unwillingness to view Russia as a hostile actor (Marangé & Stewart: 13). However, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked one of the most significant occasions since the end of the Cold War, when Russia's imperialistic ambitions were recognized and outlined in official state-level responses. For example, in his well-known statement of 27th of February 2022, the Chancellor of Germany pointed out that the outbreak and of war in Ukraine marked a 'watershed' ('Zeitenwende' in German) in European history and characterized Putin's aggressive actions as reminiscent of the 19th century, which was shaped by great power rivalries (Scholz 2022a: n.p.). The Chancellor contended that President Putin's intentions were to reshape the European order: "He wants to fundamentally redefine the status quo within Europe in line with his own vision. And he has no qualms about using military force to do so." (Scholz 2022a: n.p.). Taking as a whole, this statement highlighted an important aspect of Germany's past foreign policy towards Russia, which was characterized by the reconciliation efforts after the Second World War that was an important chapter in the shared history of these two countries. Similarly, in his addressing statement to the nation, the French president explicitly referred to Russia as the aggressor: "This war is not a conflict between NATO and the West, on one hand, and Russia on the other, as some have written. NATO has no troops or bases in Ukraine. These are lies. Russia has not been attacked. It is the aggressor." (Macron 2022a: n.p.). Lastly, the British Prime Minister named the Russian President as "a bloodstained aggressor who believes in imperial conquest" (Johnson 2022: n.p.).

The high degree of convergence in the characterization of the external threat, its scope and urgency, is evident not only at the national level but also on the international level. As an example, in his remarks at the European Parliament debate, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, referred to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine as "an unjustified and unprovoked war based on despicable lies" and as "geopolitical terrorism" (Michel 2022: n.p.). Also, concerns that the war might have transcended the national borders of Ukraine and directly affect the security of other European countries were expressed by the High Representative of the EU for Foreign and Security Policy in the press statement on 27th of February. Borell emphasized the importance of comprehending the severity of the situation for global and European security, given in particular the fact that Russia had set its nuclear deterrent forces on 'high alert' (2022a: n.p.). Similarly, during the press conference on 25th of

February 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg referred to the war in Ukraine as "the gravest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades" and "an attack on the whole European security order." (2022b: n.p.). Moreover, the Secretary General explicitly characterized Russia as an aggressor: "The world will hold Russia and Belarus accountable for their actions. Russia as the aggressor. Belarus as the enabler." (Stoltenberg 2022b: n.p.).

Further, there is robust evidence suggesting that Western actors maintained converged threat perception when exploring possible responses and "coping processes" to the emerging external threat. On 1st of March 2022, the President of the European Council stated that the EU with close collaboration with the members of G7 would engage in "an anti-war coalition" and step up "to support Ukraine and the Ukrainian people" (Michel 2022: n.p.). Evidently, the mostly referred Western response was the imposition of severe restrictive measures on key sectors and actors of Russian economy. While most of the Western Heads of the State and Government further announced the further imposition of economic sanctions, we can observe the progression of concerns about possible unintended costs of sanctions on the EU itself, particularly in the statements dating back to February and March 2022. For instance, on 1st of March 2022, Charles Michel mentioned that the planned sanctions would have massive and grave consequences for Russia, but also acknowledged that the sanctions would generate negative financial effect on the EU states as well: "But, ladies and gentlemen, we must be honest and frank with one another. Those sanctions will also come at a cost to ourselves. And we will have to shoulder that cost." (2022: n.p.). Concerns of this kind were also by political leaders of individual member states. In his speech of 2nd of March, the French President mentioned the dependence of French industry on Russia and economic insecurities: "Hikes in the price of oil, gas and raw materials are impacting our purchasing power and this will continue to be the case. In the days to come, the cost of filling the tank, paying our heating bills and purchasing certain products will likely grow even steeper." (Macron 2022a: n.p.). Further, in his speech to the Bundestag on 27th of March, Olaf Scholz also spoke of the need to gradually end dependence on Russian oil, coal and gas. The Chancellor mentioned that this transitory phase of bringing this dependence to an end would require time so as not to cause a recession in Germany and the whole of Europe and that the sanctions should not affect the European states more severely than the Russian political leadership (Scholz 2022b: n.p.).

To shortly sup up this section, Western countries indeed shared a common threat perception regarding the magnitude of the crises in Ukraine and the urgency it necessitated. This

convergence is further evident in their examination of potential responses and 'coping processes' to address that escalating threat.

5.3 Part 3: Reduction of uncertainty

In this section, the third systematic part of the theoretical causal mechanism is tested. Before proceeding to the discussion of the empirical material, I first briefly establish an important theoretical reference to the realist theory and explain how this part of the CM interacts with the previous mechanism. Afterwards, I furnish supporting account evidence in the form of speeches, statements and remarks of key Western actors. Lastly, I reflect on how the transmission of causal forces from the 'reduction of uncertainty' to subsequent component 'increase in relevance of ISOs' proceeds.

When discussing the notion of 'uncertainty' in the context of international relations studies, the theory of realism is often immediately brought to mind. Realists assume that while the primary concern of states is to ensure their own autonomous survival and that they function in a self-help system in which they cannot be certain of the intentions of other states. Waltz refers to this as "the condition of insecurity-at the least, the uncertainty of each about the other's future intentions and actions works against their cooperation." (Waltz 1979: 105). Accordingly, this implies that a certain degree of uncertainty inherently characterizes the dynamics of international relations and hinders cooperation. Mearsheimer further accentuates this notion of 'uncertainty' by stressing that "states can never be certain about the intentions of other states. Specifically, no state can be certain another state will not use its offensive military capability against the first." (Mearsheimer 1994: 10).

Recognizing the realist contribution to understanding the concept of 'uncertainty' and informing this component of my hypothesized CM, 'uncertainty' is not considered an invariant constant element in the context of this thesis as realism sees it. Alternatively, I hypothesize that it can be reduced under certain conditions, in this case against the backdrop of the emergence of external military threat. I hypothesize that the presence of external military threats, combined with the identified source of the threat and converged threat perception among Western countries, contributes to the reduction of uncertainty among them: it accentuates clarity regarding their allies and partners and their anticipated responses and brings in greater clarity about what to be expected from rivals. In terms of evidence, I expect to observe Western countries being certain about the intentions and responses of their partners, as well as the intentions of Russia, as their rival. Evidently, Western countries had already been aware of

their allies and strategic partners before the onset of the war and had established institutionalized security cooperation over the course of decades. However, the key argument I advance in this section is that when confronted with factual information that confirms another country's hostility, this not only strengthens the certainty about the intentions of the hostile actor(s) but also reinforces *confidence* and enhances *clarity* regarding future intentions of strategic partners.

Starting with the reduced uncertainty about the intentions of decision makers in Russia, there is sufficient account evidence that verifies the presence of this component. The British Prime Minister, for instance, explicitly pointed out his conviction about Putin's intentions to invade Ukraine: "I am driven to conclude that Putin was always determined to attack his neighbour, no matter what we did. Now we see him for what he is: a bloodstained aggressor who believes in imperial conquest." (Johnson 2022: n.p.). The German Chancellor's statement also offers a clear perspective on Putin's broader strategic goals of disrupting existing geopolitical stability of Europe: "With the attack on Ukraine, Putin is not just seeking to wipe an independent country off the map. He is demolishing the European security order that had prevailed for almost half a century since the Helsinki Final Act." (Scholz 2022a: n.p.). Likewise, by the beginning of March 2022, in his speech Dutch Prime Minister maintained that Russia's attack on Ukraine served as an eye-opener for the West and dispelled doubts about the Russian government's intentions: "It's a loud wake-up call. Russia has willingly ignored diplomacy at every turn. It was simply beyond our powers of imagination. And we failed to see it for what it really is: pure aggression that will not stop if left unchecked." (Rutte 2022: n.p.). Further, the Italian Prime Minister evaluated Russia's intentions as territorial ambitions to conquer Ukraine and seeking to create divisions among the West: "Moscow's plan was to conquer Kiev in a few weeks. […] Moscow immediately tried to divide our countries, to use gas as a means of blackmail." (Draghi 2022: 4–5). Also, in the press briefing following the extraordinary meeting of the NAC on 24th of February the NATO Secretary General stated: "Despite its litany of lies, denials, and disinformation, the Kremlin's intentions are clear for the world to see." (Stoltenberg 2022a: n.p.). Lastly, remarks made by the U.S. President on the day the war broke out reveal that the West had reached a point of recognizing that Moscow's intentions were far beyond foreign policy goals that the West could address by diplomacy a dialogue: "He rejected every good-faith effort the United States and our Allies and partners made to address our mutual security concerns through dialogue to avoid needless conflict and avert human suffering." (Biden 2022: n.p.). The Secretary General also expressed his skepticism about

Kremlin's willingness to organize relations in the framework of official agreements stating that Russia had demonstrated "no respect for the NATO-Russia Founding Act" in an "extremely blatant and flagrant" way (Stoltenberg 2022b: n.p.).

In addition to this, there is ample evidence that Western countries had gained greater confidence and clarity about each other's intentions. Firstly, they demonstrated a steadfast collective determination to provide support to Ukraine that contributed to the transparency of their actions. This is particularly reflected, for example, in the collective statement of the G7, that followed the virtual meeting on the first day of the invasion. In this statement they condemned Russia's military intervention and pledged their support for Ukraine: "We are united in our support for the people of Ukraine and its democratically elected government." (European Council & Council of the European Union 2022: n.p.). Secondly, the evidence shows that the Western countries trusted that the crises would be tackled together in cooperation with their partners. As an example, the U.S. President stressed his confidence in partners: "And I want to be clear: The United States is not doing this alone. For months, we've been building a coalition of partners representing well more than half of the global economy." (Biden 2022: n.p.). Similarly, the German Chancellor expressed his assurance that the West would manage to maintain cohesion of the EU and NATO: „I am utterly confident that we can succeed in this. Because rarely have we and our partners been so resolved and so united." (Scholz 2022a: n.p.).

To summarize, the above CPOs highlight that the Russia's illegal attack on Ukraine became an eye-opening occasion for the actors of Western security cooperation that contributed to increased confidence and resoluteness about Russia's intentions as well as their partners' responses. Both aspects contribute to the increasing relevance of ISOs, as with greater certainty about the hostile actor's intentions and more confidence in their strategic partners, Western actors tend to refocus on ISOs.

5.4 Part 4: Increase in relevance of International Security Organizations

„In December 2019, I made a severe comment about NATO, highlighting the divisions that, at the time, as you will recall, were present within it between Turkey and several other powers, describing it as "brain dead". I dare say today that Vladimir Putin has jolted it back with the worst of electroshock." (Macron 2023: n.p.)

Before delving into the empirical analysis of this section of the theoretical causal mechanism, it is important to briefly define what is meant with the term 'relevance of ISOs' in this thesis.

There exists a gap in International Relations research in terms of understanding the relevance of international institutions, and 'significance' and 'importance' are often used interchangeably to describe this concept. Still, the existing scholarly literature provides some guidance on what marks this relevance. For example, in *The Promise of Institutionalist Theory* Keohane and Martin ask: "How are we to account for the willingness of major states to invest resources in expanding international institutions, if such institutions are lacking in significance?" (1995: 40). This suggests that for liberal institutionalists, the significance of international organizations is characterized by their expanding nature and the willingness of the main states to contribute to them.

I depart from the liberal institutionalist premise that the increase in relevance is closely tied with membership growth and countries investing more resources in the ISOs. In methodological terms, this suggests that the transmission of causal forces from declined uncertainty to increased ISO relevance is stirred by Western countries' concerns regarding the trajectory of the war and its impact, as well as potential spillover. In light of reduced uncertainty countries actively seek ISO membership, while already existing members upgrade the organizations' resources and capacities. Thus, on an empirical level, I expect to observe CPOs that demonstrate that NATO has not only increased in membership, but that existing members have also begun to strengthen the alliance with more resources.

To begin with the initial aspect of membership expansion, I below elaborate on the empirical evidence using the cases of Finland's and Sweden's changed stances to NATO membership. Both of these countries had maintained their military neutrality and were hesitant to join NATO until Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine. Even in mid-February 2020, when the Western countries were reporting on the build-up of Russian troops on Ukraine's borders and all the indications pointed to the start of a war, these countries were still holding back from joining the alliance. On 16th of February 2022 the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden presented the Statement of Foreign Policy containing the following message: "The Government does not intend to apply for NATO membership. Our security policy remains firmly in place. Our non-participation in military alliances serves us well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe." (Linde 2022: 1). Finland continued a similar stance even after the actual invasion and it appeared that the Finnish government pinned its hopes on the EU's defense capabilities and close cooperation with the EU. In her speech during the parliamentary debate on 15th of March, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin set a major focus on the EU in ensuring Finnish security: "Finland's most important frame of reference and security community is the

European Union, which is acting with unprecedented determination in the current situation." (Marin 2022a: n.p.). She also pointed to the importance of the EU strengthening its defense capabilities, preparing more effectively for hybrid threats and improving its technological and industrial capacities (Marin 2022a: n.p.). Moreover, this speech, the Minister addressed the Finnish reservations about membership of the Alliance, based on concerns about giving up certain national autonomy: "We have managed to preserve our national room for manoeuvre and our options, including the opportunity to apply for NATO membership." (Marin 2022a: n.p.).

The following evidence suggests that the Swedish government substantially changed its attitude towards NATO membership within the following three months: In March the government initiated discussions in Riksdag on Sweden's security policy and set up a working group for parliamentary consultations. It was decided that a report on the repercussions of the war outbreak on Sweden would be published by the 13th of May. Consequently, this report concluded that further development of bilateral defense alliances outside the European and transatlantic structures would be unrealistic and stressed the fact that NATO's collective defense only applied to its members and that NATO's commitments to non-allied partners had been too limited. Thus, the scope of Swedish cooperation with the Alliance at that time was not regarded as sufficient to protect Sweden in the emerging security environment (Government Offices of Sweden Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022: 39–40). As a result, the government decided on the 16th of May to apply for NATO membership.

A very similar scenario unfolded in Finland: the Finnish government changed its stance towards NATO within the following two-three months after the war outbreak. The Prime Ministers speech on 16th of May 2022 provides a detailed account of why Finland had reconsidered its security policy and why NATO membership was regarded as the most optimal choice for the country to safeguard its national security: "The European Union does not have the structures of a defence alliance nor does it make common defence plans. The majority of the Member States of the European Union have relied on NATO in organising their defence. Supported by NATO security guarantees, the deterrent effect of Finland's defence would be considerably stronger than it is at present." (Marin 2022b: n.p.).

These two examples serve as an evidence, that the outbreak of war became the landmark moment for Swedish or Finnish governments to opt for the Alliance membership. Both of these countries handed in their applications on 18th of May 2022, less than three months after the war

outbreak. At the NATO summit in Madrid at the end of June, both countries were offered with membership by the allies. Accession talks for both of them were finalized on 4th of July and all 30 members signed their accession protocols on 5th of July. In the subsequent months, the accession protocols for Finland were ratified by all NATO members and the country became a full member of NATO on the 4th of April 2023. In the case of Sweden, Turkey and Hungary did not ratify the protocols, putting Sweden's accession on hold.

One could contend that NATO had been an expanding defense community prior to the Ukraine war and the accession of new members to the alliance doesn't necessarily indicate its increased relevance. My argument is that Finland's and Sweden's pursuit of NATO membership differs from previous cases of enlargement in two aspects. Firstly, none of the NATO enlargements after the Cold War have occurred immediately following a war outbreak in Europe. The fact that two Scandinavian countries sought NATO membership directly in response to the Russian military threat underlines the importance of NATO's collective defense and the importance of Article 5 for the Allies. Secondly, among the previous aspirant countries, none have displayed such reluctance or hesitation to join NATO as observed in the case of Sweden and Finland. The decisions of these countries were fueled by the deteriorating and the concern that guaranteeing security and stability would only work collectively with other Western countries. Thirdly, both countries already had comprehensive partnerships with NATO prior to the war. Their prompt decision to accede to NATO demonstrates that even a strong partnership in the realm of security may not suffice in the face of external military threats. It also shows that international security organizations such as NATO constitute more than mere partnership agreements, in that they create defense guarantees. All these aspects together imply that NATO's core purpose of acting as a deterrent against external military threats has been revived.

As a next step, I present some CPOs that show how the Allies began to increase their investments in NATO in response to Russian aggression.[20] On the 24th of March 2022, at the extraordinary meeting of the North Atlantic Council, the Heads of State and Government announced that the Allies would significantly increase their defense spending and step up their efforts to fulfil the commitments under the Defence Investment Pledge[21] (NATO 2022b: n.p.).

[20] It is important to note that this section does not center around individual member states boosting their investments for defense and security at their national level. Rather, the focus is on Allies increasing their contributions to ensuring NATO's overall operational readiness and its defense and deterrence capabilities.

[21] The Defence Investment Pledge established the 2% defense investment guideline that was initially introduced by NATO Defense Ministers in 2006. The pledge was agreed at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, which followed Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.

This included not only individual defense capabilities, but also collective efforts in accordance with Article 3 of the Washington Treaty (NATO 2022b: n.p.). Subsequently, the Heads of State and Government adopted the new Strategic Concept at the NATO Madrid Summit on the 29th of June. The strategic concept further envisioned increased national spendings and shared contributions: ”We will ensure our nations meet the commitments under the Defence Investment Pledge, in its entirety, to provide the full range of required capabilities. We will build on the progress made to ensure that increased national defence expenditures and NATO common funding will be commensurate with the challenges of a more contested security order.” (NATO 2022d: 11).

The willingness to step up engagement is reflected not only in the declarations at NATO level, but also in the statements made by the national leaders. Throughout the timeframe of the analysis, numerous instances can be identified in which political leaders consistently expressed their commitment to uphold their obligations to the Alliance. For example, at the Munich Security Conference, the German Chancellor reaffirmed that Germany would adhere to the 2% guidelines permanently and unconditionally: “Germany is committed to living up to its responsibility for Europe’s security and that of NATO Allied territory – without any ifs or buts.” (Scholz 2023: n.p.). Even the French President, known for his pessimistic outlook on the future of NATO and his advocacy for expanding European defense capabilities on the European continent without major security dependencies on other continents, conveyed more positive messages about enhancing NATO capabilities. In his speech addressing the French nation at the beginning of March 2022, Macron advocated for increased investments for European security to reduce dependence on other continents, emphasizing the importance of greater national and European sovereignty (Macron 2022a: n.p.). Macron’s later statements reveal that he remained supportive of strengthening the European security dimension, however, his skepticism towards NATO had notably decreased. At a press conference in mid-March, Macron stated that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine had provided NATO with strategic clarity and was an important wake-up call for the Alliance (La Baume & Saint Remy 2022: n.p.).

Expressed in figures, such heightened support for NATO translated into an increase in its defense expenditure from 1,036 to 1,100 billion US dollars[22] between 2021 and 2023 (NATO 2023b: 4). This constituted a greater increase compared to 2019 (999 billion US dollars) to 2021 (1,036 billion US dollars) (NATO 2023b: 4). Comparing the individual countries, across

[22] According to the NATO press release cited above, the figures for 2022 and 2023 are estimates.

the European NATO members, in 2023 Poland had the highest defense expenditure (3,9%) as a percentage share of GDP, followed by Greece (3,01%) and Estonia (2,73%). Overall, 11 out of 30 NATO members succeeded in meeting the NATO guideline of spending 2% of their GDP on defense by 2023. In 2014, this number stood at 3 (NATO 2023b: 3).

That being said, not all members (e.g. Canada) are fully aligned or are exhibiting the political will to meet NATO defense expenditure guideline.[23] However, the given pattern evidence suggests that in previous years, particularly among some European countries, the political will to pool more resources in NATO was not as strong as it has been after the outbreak of the war. Overall, these developments demonstrate that an increasing number of Allies have shifted from an inert to a more active stance in order to fortify the transatlantic alliance and enhance its resilience.

Certainly, the conceptualization of relevance outlined in this sub-chapter is rather bounded, yet it does not intend to exclude other facets that could be incorporated into the concept. Considering the lack of scholarship related to the definition of relevance in the context of international organizations, I depicted this notion with reference to a liberal institutionalist approach. Although proposing such conceptualizations is not the primary objective of the thesis, it creates an added value in this regard as well. On this basis, in this empirical section, I presented the CPOs that validate the existence of the third systematic mechanism - the increased relevance of ISOs due to the outbreak of war in the immediate neighborhood. These observations demonstrate both the quantitative expansion of NATO membership as the most important ISO of the Western security cooperation and the stepped-up allocation of resources to this organization.

5.5 Part 5: Increase in unity to reach consensus about contentious issues

> *"Our Union is showing a unity of purpose that makes me proud. At the speed of light, the European Union has adopted three waves of heavy sanctions against Russia's financial system, its high-tech industries and its corrupt elite. This is the largest sanctions package in our Union's history." (von der Leyen 2022b: n.p.)*

Turning to the fifth systematic mechanism of the hypothesized CM, here I zoom in upon the increased unity within Western countries with regard to issuing restrictive measures as a

[23] Although explaining the cross-country variation is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to stress that, in Europe, the 2% guideline is primarily met by the Eastern European Allies.

response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. For the empirical analysis, I look at the example of economic sanctions, a highly relevant but contentious issue for Western countries, and trace the process through which consensus was made on this matter. The example of economic sanctions is well-suited as it shows the intricate nature of contentious issues and illustrates the tension between the urgent need for taking measures in response to acute security crises on the one hand, and the reservations of the parties imposing them about being penalized by those measures on the other.

The emphasis on European and transatlantic unity is quite characteristic to speeches and statements by the EU and NATO representatives as well as leaders of most Western countries. Such professed unity had been particularly evident immediately after the invasion of Ukraine. One of the notable examples includes Jens Stoltenberg's speech at the press conference on 25th of February 2022, in which he emphasized that the emerging crisis underlined the importance of strengthening the transatlantic bond and the need for North America and Europe to stand together for European security (2022b: n.p.). Likewise, in the opening speech of EU Commission President Von der Leyen during the press conference on 25th of February, there was a robust message of European unity, with a clear expression of full alignment among EU members in condemning Russia's illegal attacks (2022a: n.p.). This unity entailed the Western states remaining cohesive while formulating unified and consistent policy responses to weaken Russia's economic capacities and thus, deter the country from further escalating the military conflict. The extensive and unprecedented sanctions were the most decisive among these joint responses.

Despite the declared unity and firm support from citizens, certain European countries remained hesitant to endorse joint sanctions against Russia during that period. For instance, the Hungarian government had spoken out against the sanctions from the very beginning of the onset of the war. The Hungarian government, leaded by the ruling party Fidesz and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had attempted to avoid joining the EU and NATO sanctions on multiple occasions. The declared justification for withholding support for the sanctions was that they were anticipated to hit European citizens harder financially and generate political discontent (Orbán 2022: n.p.). In one of his speeches in July 2022, Orbán maintained that the sanctions were ineffective and were not achieving the intended goal of destabilizing Moscow as the West had hoped (Orbán 2022: n.p.). Orbán considered the EU restrictive measures to be counterproductive and was of the opinion they were contributing to escalating the Russia-Ukraine war into a global economic conflict that disproportionately harmed the EU (About

Hungary 2022: n.p.). The government even sought to remove three individuals[24] affected from the visa ban and asset freeze lists in September 2022. However, after facing political pressure from the EU, it ceased these efforts (Jozwiak 2023).

In formal terms, it is the Council of the European Union that employs the unanimity rule when deciding on the adoption, renewal, or removal of sanctions. However, the implementation of these measures falls under the competence of individual member states. The European Commission plays a role in ensuring the consistent enforcement of sanctions by monitoring their proper application and overseeing uniformity across member states. Despite occasional threats from the Hungarian government to veto sanctions in the EU Council, Hungary only exercised this power on limited number of occasions within the time span covered by this empirical analysis. For instance, Hungary vetoed planned sanctions against the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church - Patriarch Kirill (Verseck 2022). Consequently, the Patriarch Kirill was indeed excluded from the EU‘s blacklist. Hungary further managed to exert its political influence by delaying the agreement on the EU's proposed oil embargo against Russia and the sixth package of sanctions in spring 2022 (Rankin 2022). The negotiations within the Council of the EU lasted approximately one month before Hungary finally got on board during the Council meeting on 30th and 31st of May 2022.

It is widely acknowledged, that the Hungarian government had been using its opposition to sanctions as a leverage tool within the EU institutions and exerted pressure on the European Commission to reduce its conditionality regarding rule-of-law violations in the country (e.g. Jozwiak 2022). Behind Hungary's willingness to waive its veto power to thwart sanctions could therefore be the expectation of gaining access to EU funds. Nevertheless, these attempts mostly proved unsuccessful, as the EU, in response, employed its conditionality power. For example, in December 2022, the Commission announced its intention to withhold 22 billion euros of cohesion funds for Hungary until Budapest fulfilled met some rule-of-law conditions related to judiciary independence, LGBTQI+ rights etc. (Abnett & Strupczewski 2022). Although other factors might have contributed to Hungary's choice to abstain from vetoing the EU sanctions more frequently, it remains true that the EU managed to uphold a certain degree of cohesion in its sanctions policy and successfully imposed unprecedented restrictive measures against Russia.

[24] Budapest demanded three oligarchs - Alisher Usmanov, Pyotr Aven and Viktor Rashnikov - to be removed from the sanctions list before it would agree to the extended sanctions package.

It has to be noted, that not only Hungary, but other EU states also had compelling incentives to oppose such rigorous measures, as economic sanctions and energy embargo are known to inflict economic damages to both parties involved (Chen *et al.* 2023: 3082). Despite these incentives, the EU has remained cohesive in its approach. Remarkably, within the span of just one year, from February 2022 to February 2023, the EU unanimously agreed on ten sanctions packages affecting almost all of the Russian Federation's key sectors, such as finance, energy, technology, media broadcasting etc.

The increased unity within the EU was also reflected in the rapid decision-making of the Union. The first package of sanctions was agreed on 23rd of February, just one day after the Russian invasion, and three further packages quickly followed within the next month (European Council & Council of the European Union 2023b). One contributing factor for that might be that the imposition of sanctions was broadly welcomed by European citizens. The Standard Eurobarometer survey conducted in the summer 2022 revealed that 78% of Europeans supported the economic sanctions imposed against Russian government, companies and individuals by that time (European Commission 2022a: 17).

In summary, the gathered CPOs merge into robust supporting evidence for the presence of the fifth component of the theorized CM. Three key pieces of evidence have been outlined above: Firstly, the EU managed to mitigate the divergence of interests and reach an agreement on the sanctions, although there might have been strong incentives for members to oppose them. Secondly, the EU was able to gain Hungary's consent to the sanctions through strategic use of its conditionality power. Thirdly, the EU was remarkably quick in these processes.

5.6 Part 6: Increase in allocations for defense and security

In this final empirical part of my process-tracing analysis, I test the presence of the sixth systematic mechanism of my hypothesized mechanism. Consistent with the analytical logic of the fourth part of the CM, in this section I present the existing pattern evidence about the increased defense expenditures by Western countries as part of the causal chain set in motion by the emergence of the external military threat. Here I present the supporting data in figures of the EU and NATO members as a whole, but also look at examples of a set of individual countries.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine not only served as a catalyst for many Western countries to reconsider their foreign policy stances towards Russia and strive for less energy dependencies,

but also highlighted the urgency of boosting their defense resources. Germany was one of the first countries to announce the planned increases in defense spending. Only five days after the invasion began, Olaf Scholz stated that the ruling coalition would seek to establish the special fund for the Federal Armed Forces: "It is clear that we must invest much more in the security of our country. In order to protect our freedom and our democracy. […] The 2022 federal budget will provide a one-off sum of 100 billion euro for the fund. We will use this money for necessary investments and armament projects." (Scholz 2022a: n.p.). On 3rd of June 2022, the German Bundestag voted in favor of a constitutional amendment to allow the credit authorization for 100 billion fund for the armed forces. Around 33% of this fund was intended to be allocated for air force procurements and equipment, approximately 17% for the 'land' sector, and about 9% for the 'sea' sector (Website of the Federal Government 2022: n.p.). Furthermore, the monthly report issued by the Federal Ministry of Finance in February 2023 confirms that federal defense spending increased by 19.8% year-on-year between January 2022 and January 2023 (Federal Ministry of Finance 2023: n.p.). A year prior, this indicator for the positive change in defense expenditure was at 0.1% only (Federal Ministry of Finance 2022: n.p.).

France has also opted to initiate the increased investment quite early on. On 2nd of March 2022, President Macron announced his intention to provide more funding for the French defense sector: "We must meet history's sudden return to tragedy with historic decisions. Therefore, our country will increase investments in our defense that were decided upon in 2017 and will pursue its strategy founded on independence and investments in our economy, research and innovation, which have already been strengthened in light of the pandemic." (Macron 2022a: n.p.). Later that year, in September, Macron emphasized that France would pursue a so-called "three-tiered strategy" (Macron 2022b: n.p.). The first stage would consist of strengthening defense capabilities at national level within the framework of the 'Military Programming Act' by the beginning of 2023, while the second and third tiers would relate to joint projects and expenditures in the European and NATO context (Macron 2022b: n.p.). Moreover, on 20th of January 2023, at the Mont-de-Marsan air base, the French President announced a proposal to for boosted military spending for the period of 2024-2030 amounting to 413 billion euro, marking an approximate 119 billion euro surge compared to the 2019-2025 period (Le Monde 2023: n.p.).[25] The proposed budget was intended to target modernizing the country's nuclear

[25] The French National Assembly adopted the proposal with the first reading in June 2023. However, since this occurrence extends beyond the time-span of my analysis, I have incorporated only President

arsenal, increasing the number of military personnel and upgrading critical infrastructure (Le Monde 2023: n.p.).

In terms of overall European military spending, the trend of military expenditure growth in 2022 was also remarkable as it recorded the largest annual increase since the Cold War (Tian *et al.* 2023: 1). In 2022, total military expenditure of Europe grew by 13% and amounted to 480 billion dollars, with the largest share (345 billion dollars) being accounted for by Central and Western Europe (Tian *et al.* 2023: 8). In the previous year, the equivalent figure totaled 418 billion dollars, marking a slight increase of 3.0% compared to 2020, with Central and Western Europe accounting for 342 billion dollars (Da Lopes Silva *et al.* 2022: 7). The data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) from April 2023 reveals some interesting trends and patterns in European military expenditure. The SIPRI findings suggest that the invasion of Russia was the main driver for this drastic increase compared to the previous year and that Central Europe recorded a higher rate of increase than the Western European countries (Tian *et al.* 2023: 1). The most pronounced shift was seen in Eastern Europe, where military expenditure rose by 58% in 2022 (Tian *et al.* 2023: 9). The difference between 2020 and 2021 in Eastern Europe was only 2.3 % (Da Lopes Silva *et al.* 2022: 8). A comparison of these two differences demonstrates best the magnitude of the rise in this part of Europe. According to SIPRI, this dramatic increase is due to the rise in military spending in Russia and Ukraine, with Russia accounting for 64% and Ukraine 33% of the overall sub-regional growth (Tian *et al.* 2023: 9). Predictably, substantial growth was monitored in Finland (4,8 billion dollars; +36 % compared to 2021), Sweden (7,7 billion dollars; +12 % compared to 2021) and Poland (16,6 billion dollars; +11 % compared to 2021) (Tian *et al.* 2023: 2–9). Altogether, the SIPRI data reveals that among the 36 Central and West European countries covered by the figures, 23 boosted their military expenditures in 2022 (Tian *et al.* 2023: 5). In essence, these trends possibly imply that countries facing an external threat in close proximity tend to see themselves as more vulnerable and, as a result, might be more inclined to respond with increased urgency.

In terms of increased spending amongst the Allies, a larger number of countries managed to adhere to the investment targets set out in the Defence Investment Pledge. As mentioned in section 5.4, 11 of the 30 NATO members effectively met the 2% as a share of GDP target in

Macron‘s announcement of the proposal as supporting evidence, omitting its formal adoption from the scope of analysis.

2023[26]. This represents a clear advance when compared to 2022, at which point 9 countries[27] reached the NATO guideline (NATO 2022c: 9).[28] Compared to the situation in 2014, when only 3 countries met the criteria, this rate is noteworthy (NATO 2022c: 3). When it comes to non-European Allies, Canada also did better in 2023 (1,38%) compared to 2022 (1,22%), however, still being far away from the target (NATO 2023b: 8). Whether this increase is related to the security crisis in Europe is debatable and may also be linked to growing pressure from the NATO Secretary General and other, in this respect more compliant, member states. Likewise, the percentage share of the defense sector in the United States went up incrementally from 3.45% in 2022 to 3.49% in 2023 (NATO 2023b: 8). However, in contrast to Canada, the USA consistently achieved the 2% target annually since 2014 (NATO 2022c: 8).

To summarize, the presence of the last part of the CM is strongly pronounced. The key observation within this section is that within the limited temporal scope of analysis, a mounting number of Western countries took measures to boost their defense expenditures in light of Russia's invasion in Ukraine. These observations on the examples of the individual states, as well as the sub-regional increases in expenditure constitute solid evidence that this final part of the CM indeed persists. Finally, the aforementioned speeches also provide solid evidence that this strategic shift within Western countries to strengthen their defense capabilities can definitely be traced back to the background of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

6. The outcome: Reevaluating the levels of security cooperation against the backdrop of war outbreak in Ukraine

In this chapter, I delve into the implications of the underlying causal process and its systematic mechanisms on the eventual outcome - increased security cooperation among Western states. In order to provide a robust argument supporting the outcome of the causal mechanism, I explicate the observed changes that provide an empirical basis for the claim that Western security cooperation indeed enhanced within the period of this analysis. In doing so, I outline the changes on five dimensions - institutions, sanctions, arms production, military forces and border security - resulting from Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

[26] For better comparison, it should be noted that the figure for 2023 includes Finland, while this is not the case for 2022.
[27] Romania is excluded, however, with 1,99% in 2022 almost reached the target.
[28] The observations I refer to here are based on the estimated figures for 2022 contained in the NATO press release cited above.

Starting with the *institutions*, there are two key observations that support the enhancement on this dimension. Firstly, the EU 'Strategic Compass for Security and Defence' adopted in March 2022, contains some novel initiatives within the EU. Particularly, the plan to establish an EU rapid deployment capacity with a strength of 50,000 troops, designed to address diverse crises, against the backdrop of the perceived "the return of war in Europe." (Council of the European Union 2022: 2). In addition, the Strategic Compass identified the need to strengthen intelligence capabilities, e.g. through the 'EU Single Intelligence and Analysis Capability' (SIAC) framework to better anticipate collective threats, and through the creation of an EU Hybrid Systems Toolbox to provide a structured framework for a coordinated response to hybrid challenges involving the EU and its member states (Council of the European Union 2022: 3). These CPOs confirm that, in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine, the EU recognizes the need to be a stronger and more capable actor in ensuring European and transatlantic security.

In the second place, as outlined in Table 3, one of the characteristics of high level of cooperation on the institutional dimension is the extensive alignment of interests and goals, strategic planning and coordinated responses, aspects presence of which is clearly evident in the 'NATO 2022 Strategic Concept'. This updated Concept demonstrates a strong convergence of interests among the allies. This is evident in the document through assertive statements, such as "The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area." (NATO 2022d: 4) and "While NATO is a defensive Alliance, no one should doubt our strength and resolve to defend every inch of Allied territory, preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Allies and prevail against any aggressor" (NATO 2022d: 6). The previous strategic concept document of NATO adopted in 2010 does not exhibit such indications of extensive alignment of goals, at least in rhetorical terms. Based on these observations on the examples of the EU and NATO, it is possible to assert that the degree of cooperation transitioned from a medium to high level on the institutional dimension.

Similarly, considerable changes can be observed in the dimension of *economic sanctions*. In section 3.4.2, I assessed the level of cooperation as high. This assessment was based on the fact that Western countries had adopted extensive multilateral sanctions through the EU by the early 2020s, which were further harmonized with the sanctions imposed by other Western countries outside the EU. There is strong evidence that the coordination of restrictive measures deepened and intensified against the backdrop of the Russian war in Ukraine. For instance, in their

statement of 24th of February 2023, the G7 leaders announced the establishment of a new 'Enforcement Coordination Mechanism' to ensure better compliance with the imposed measures and to exclude Russia from the benefits of the G7 economies (European Commission 2023: n.p.). This event is noteworthy given the EU does not enforce restrictive measures on its part. However, considering the EU's status as a non-enumerated member of the G7, it can be inferred from this observation that the EU might be gaining indirect influence on the enforcement process.

Increased cooperation is noticeable in the dimension of *arms production* as well. During the operationalization phase, I distinguished between medium-level and high-level cooperation on this dimension by emphasizing the coordination of arms production and management in collaboration with countries outside the NATO and EU. In February 2023, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced that Ukraine had concluded an agreement with the EU and NATO. This agreement intended to establish a tripartite coordination mechanism that facilitates cooperation between Ukrainian manufacturers and companies from EU and NATO member states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine 2023: n.p.). Its key objective is to optimize the production of weaponry to meet the specific needs of Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine 2023: n.p.). Further, in February 2023, the EU received a formal request from Ukraine seeking assistance for its armed forces to increase the supply of artillery ammunition. Following this, the Council formulated and approved a three-track approach. This approach aimed to expedite the delivery of necessary military supplies and facilitate joint arms procurement within the subsequent twelve months (European Council & Council of the European Union 2023a: n.p.). These two observations on the political commitment to allow the joint procurement of ammunition and missiles demonstrate that the external threat posed by Russia has prompted the transition from a medium to a higher level of cooperation in this dimension.

Similarly, a set of observations suggest that the emerging external threat has reinvigorated the dimension of *military forces* in a number of ways. For instance, the 'NATO 2022 Strategic Concept' emphasizes that the allies commit to significantly strengthen their "deterrence and defence posture to deny any potential adversary any possible opportunities for aggression." (NATO 2022d: 6). To this end, the NATO Secretary General announced in June 2022 that NATO intended to increase the rapid reaction force from 40,000 to 300,000 troops by the end of 2023 (Sabbagh 2022: n.p.). In addition, at the Madrid Summit in June 2022, the Allies agreed on a new NATO Force Model that provides for greater operational readiness than the NRF

(NATO 2023c: n.p.). These CPOs propose that NATO initiated its most significant transformation since the conclusion of the Cold War. This process unfolded and persisted throughout the whole time span covered by the empirical analysis.

Moreover, following Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, NATO increased the presence of its armed forces in the eastern part of the alliance. At the extraordinary NATO summit held in March 2022, the allied partners decided to set up four more multinational battlegroups and deploy them in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Simultaneously, NATO enhanced the existing battle groups stationed in its the northeast part (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland) by deploying thousands of additional soldiers, along with reinforcing air and naval infrastructure (NATO 2023f: n.p.). Additionally, upon Finland's entry into NATO on 4th of April 2023, the armed forces and arsenal of the Alliance increased. In contrast to many Western countries, Finland maintained a compulsory state-mandated enrolment to military service. For this reason, Finland has a war-time reserve of 280 000 conscripts who undergo periodic retraining. In total 870 000 Finnish people are required to serve in case of such need (Kauranen 2023: n.p.).

The high level of cooperation on the dimension of military forces was established prior to the outbreak of the war, as outlined in section 4.1.4. This categorization was based on predefined criteria (Intense joint exercises and missions with multinational command structures), which was already evident in the context of Western security cooperation in the early 2020s. However, the growth in the size of Western armed forces and the improved operational readiness of the new NATO force model point to a further deepening of this dimension, which cannot be overlooked.

Lastly, as detailed in section 4.1.5, the cooperation on the dimension of border security before the war outbreak could be characterized as high, attributable to the presence of comprehensive multilateral agreements and the highly integrated border management within the EU. Nevertheless, several observations indicate further advancements in this domain. For example, in June 2022, the EU substantially increased its support to the 'European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine' (EUBAM) to support the management of refugee influx at the borders (European Commission 2022b: n.p.). Moreover, for the first time, the EU activated the 'Temporary Protection Directive' to offer swifter assistance to the war refugees (European Commission n.d. n.p.). This directive was adopted by the Council after the conflicts in former Yugoslavia and was triggered for the first time in March 2022 (European

Commission n.d. n.p.). The directive is particularly noteworthy, as it allowed crossings at temporary border points, outside official border crossing points aiming to allow easier entry.

7. Conclusions

This final section summarizes the core empirical findings of this thesis. First, I address the answer to the guiding research question and discuss the empirical findings regarding the individual parts of the causal mechanism. I then proceed with the theoretical contributions of this study to existing academic research on security cooperation. Finally, I discuss the limitations of my work and address the shortcomings that can be addressed through further research.

7.1 Empirical findings

Considering the gap in the existing research in explaining and illustrating the causal progression from external military threats to increased and intensified security cooperation, this paper aimed to answer the following question: *How does the emergence of an external military threat produce an enhanced security cooperation among the Western countries?* Drawing on the typical case of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022, this thesis aimed to uncover and test separate pieces of the causal mechanism that connects the emergence of external military threats to enhanced security cooperation among the Western states.

Guided by the insights of the realist and liberal institutionalist theories, as well as existing empirical accounts, I constructed a six part causal mechanism. Excluding the redundant parts to make sure that causal effects hold for other comparable cases as well, I included systematic mechanisms in the presented CM. The theoretical argument that I developed in this thesis is that when the scope conditions of geographic proximity and conflict scale and intensity hold, external military threats tend to trigger a causal process that begins with identification of the threat and its source (part 1), proceeds with convergence of threat perception among the actors of the security cooperation (part 2) and the reduction of uncertainty among them (part 3). This process further proceeds with an increased relevance of international security organizations (part 4), more unity within the countries to reach consensus when it comes to contentious issues (part 5) and with resource mobilization and increased expenditures for defense and security (part 6). Subsequently, the causal process culminates in the enhancement of security cooperation.

For the empirical testing, I have defined the expected causal process observations for each part of the hypothesized mechanism (table 5). In the empirical section (chapter 5), I traced the causal progression to enhanced security cooperation and tested the presence of each hypothesized causal mechanism. Specifically, in part 1 I expected to find observations about the identification of the emerging external threat by the intelligence agencies and other relevant actors. To test the presence of the first part, I looked at various CPOs, for example, threat assessment of an unclassified U.S. intelligence document, and presented sequence evidence drawn from the chronology of events. In part 2 it was expected to find a high degree of convergence among the Western actors in characterizing and assessing the external threat. To test this part, I looked at the statements, speeches and remarks of heads of states and governments of Western countries and relevant actors of international institutions to see whether the majority of Western states indeed were in alignment about the magnitude of the external threat and the urgency for taking actions. Subsequently, I presented supporting account evidence. For part 3 I expected to observe reduced uncertainty among the West about intentions and anticipated responses of their partners and Russia. Similar to part 2, I tested this systematic mechanism by examining the statements of the Western actors and provided robust account evidence in the respective empirical section. To test the prevalence of increased relevance of ISOs for part 4, I formulated two different expectations: a) non-member countries would be expected to seek the membership in the key ISO; b) existing members would be expected to increase their defense spending within the ISO. Drawing on the examples of Finland and Sweden for the first aspect and better compliance with the Defence Investment Pledge of NATO members for the second one, I presented supporting trace evidence in the empirical section. The key expectation of part 5 was to observe increased unity in reaching consensus about contentious issues. The trace evidence was based on the example of Hungary joining the EU sanctions regime against Russian Federation. Lastly, the part 6 was based on the expectation that the Western states would mobilize their resources and boost their military budgets. To this end, I evaluated the changes in overall European military spending, as well as spending among the Allies and presented respective sequence evidence. Altogether, I was able to find supporting evidence for the presence of all systematic parts of the hypothesized causal mechanism. These empirical findings reveal that under certain scope conditions external military threats lead to increased security cooperation and that the pathway through which the causal forces are transmitted is complex and intricate.

In order to enable a structured assessment of the changes in the outcome, I divided security cooperation into five different dimensions and formulated indicators for a low, medium and high level of cooperation. This allowed the identification of advancements in the Western security cooperation. Changes could be observed in all five dimensions, but were particularly evident in the dimensions of institutions and arms production. Based on two key observations derived from the EU 'Strategic Compass for Security and Defence' and the 'NATO 2022 Strategic Concept', I was able to show that the level of cooperation on the institutional dimension has increased from medium to high. Similarly, enhanced cooperation was observed on the dimension of arms production, in particular due to increased coordination efforts in arms production and management in cooperation with countries outside the EU and NATO.

7.2. Theoretical contributions

By uncovering and depicting the causal progression from external military threat to increased security cooperation, my work contributes to existing academic scholarship in several ways. First and foremost, it provides a previously understudied mechanismic explanation for the complex political phenomenon of security cooperation. While the acknowledgment of a causal connection between these variables is a commonplace in political science research, my study stands out by offering a distinct and explicit delineation of systematic mechanisms that link these variables. Secondly, my thesis sheds lights to specific scope conditions that facilitate the transmission of causal forces from the independent to the dependent variable. By identifying spatial (geographic proximity) and temporal (conflict scale and intensity) scope conditions, I contribute to refining the generalizability and testability of the mechanism for future research. Thirdly, my study stands out by adressing shortcomings of realist and liberal institutionalist theories. Specifically, concerning realist theory, I tackle the bounded understanding of 'uncertainty' and advance the concept by demonstrating how, in the context of external threats, when the responses of both adversaries and allies become more discernible, uncertainty can be diminished. Additionally, my contribution extends to addressing a gap in the realist literature that arises by underestimating the functions of ISOs in facilitating security cooperation. Regarding the liberal institutionalist theory, my contribution involves addressing a gap in the respective research that arises from overlooking external factors when explaining security cooperation. Lastly, my study makes a contribution to the operationalization and conceptualization of security cooperation. I expand upon the categories of security cooperation established by Jones (2007) by introducing a fifth dimension - border security. In addition to this, I contributed by developing a comprehensive mapping of indicators for low, medium and

high levels of cooperation. The nuanced categorization and detailed indicators is valuable not only in terms of operationalization but also for facilitating a systematic evaluation of changes within the domain of security cooperation.

7.3 Limitations

The first limitation of this process-tracing analysis lies in its sole reliance on within-case inference as the primary analytical tool. In this thesis, I have analyzed whether the theorized causal mechanism operates as expected within the selected case. Therefore, the provided theoretical argument, hypothesized causal mechanism and inferences are confined to within-case analyses, relying on empirical data derived from the case of Russia's military invasion in Ukraine in February 2022. To draw broader and more generalizable conclusions, future research utilizing comparative methods would be necessary.

Furthermore, I have crafted the causal pathway that effectively delineates the sequence of events leading to enhanced security cooperation. Due to the theoretical ambition to extend beyond the selected single case, I have excluded the redundant components from the causal mechanism. Adhering to the guidelines of theory-building PT, nonsystematic and case-specific parts have been omitted from the CM. Thus, further research could be useful in investigating the nonsystematic mechanisms that might not have causal effects in other cases, but may be valuable for further explaining the dependent variable within this particular case.

Lastly, the causal mechanism that is uncovered in this thesis is spatially bounded. This is in particular due to the incorporation of the scope condition of 'geographical proximity'. While this condition accentuates the significance of the geographical dimension of the provided explanation, it also limits the applicability of the identified CM to other spatial configurations, especially to situations where the external military threats are too distant. Hence, further research is needed to assess how the causal process evolves in settings in which external military threats are rather remote.

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