

Media Narratives and Foreign Policy Shifts: Dutch Newspaper Portrayals of the Soviet Union's Dissolution (1988–1991) and its Impact on Dutch Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between the Dutch newspapers, public opinion and foreign policy. More specifically, it investigates the Dutch newspaper coverage of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the subsequent influence on Dutch public opinion, and the potential impact on changes in Dutch foreign policy during this period. The role of the media is pivotal in both historical and contemporary during conflicts, serving as the primary source of information for individuals regarding global events, especially those beyond the personal experience of the reader. By uncovering how the Dutch newspapers portray foreign events, this paper aims to increase our understanding of the methods used by the Dutch media to influence the opinion of the public towards foreign issues.

The role of the media in influencing Dutch foreign policy is determined through two analyses. First, four of the largest Dutch newspapers at the time, the *NRC*, *Volkskrant*, *Telegraaf*, and *Parool* are used to see how these covered six key moments during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These key moments, or case studies are: 1) Estonia declaring its sovereignty, 2) the fall of the Berlin Wall, 3) the reunification of Germany, 4) the end of the Warsaw pact, 5) the August coup attempt, and finally 6) the official dissolution of the Soviet Union. The research investigates the framing mechanisms utilized by the Dutch newspapers. Additionally, an analysis of Dutch foreign policy documents is conducted, ranging from parliamentary debates, letters from the minister of foreign affairs and transcriptions from meetings of the European Community (EC) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

This paper finds that the Dutch newspapers consistently employed a variety of frames in their coverage of the different case studies. However, determining the exact influence of these frames on Dutch public opinion and subsequent changes in Dutch foreign policy proved challenging. The analysis suggests that multinational alliances, specifically the EC and NATO, played a more critical role in shaping Dutch foreign policy strategy during the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Key words: Dutch newspapers, public opinion, foreign policy, Soviet Union, framing, agenda-setting, European Community, NATO

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Introduction

Most Western observers did not anticipate the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. When it happened, scholars such as Francis Fukuyama declared the end of history with the triumph of liberal democracies.¹ The Dutch public relied on the Dutch media to inform them on the events happening inside the Soviet Union. As the main source of information, the Dutch newspapers can influence the experience and opinion of their readers. This thesis explores how the collapse of the Soviet Union was covered by the Dutch newspapers and what influence this coverage had on the Dutch foreign policy at the time. The focus on foreign policy is because newspapers are the primary sources of information for people in that period, especially regarding foreign events that occur outside of their personal experiences. The goal is to learn about how some of the largest Dutch newspapers cover key moments of the collapse of the Soviet Union. By exploring the perspectives and frames used by the different newspapers we can better understand the attitudes of the Dutch public towards the events in the East.

In total, four prominent Dutch newspapers at the time are analysed: *de Telegraaf*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant*, and *Het Parool*. By choosing four of the largest Dutch newspapers, a holistic view of the public opinion at the time can be presented.² This research looks at the period from 16 November 1988 to 26 December 1991. This period is chosen because, on 16 November 1988, Estonia became the first Soviet Republic to declare sovereignty from the Soviet Union, and on 26 December 1991, the Soviet Union officially dissolved itself. The Estonian case is the starting point of the analysis as it was the first Soviet republic that started influencing their own state policy. Nevertheless, it is important to note that various protests, resistance and independence movements already originated before, but the Estonians are the first to organize and form a political platform. In total, the newspaper coverage on six case studies is analysed. The Estonian declaration of independence, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the end of the Warsaw pact, the August Coup attempt and the official dissolution of the Soviet Union. To understand the foreign policy position of the Dutch government at the time, three coalition agreements around the chosen

¹ Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History?" In *Conflict After the Cold War*, Routledge. 2015. p. 16-27

² Rodney Benson. "Shaping the Public Sphere: Habermas and Beyond." *The American Sociologist* 40 (3): 2009, p. 175-197.

time period and a variety of parliamentary documents are analysed. The documents consists of parliamentary debates, letters from the minister of foreign policy, as well as EC and NATO conferences attended by Dutch foreign policy workers.

Understanding the role of the media, in this case, newspapers, and how the media can influence public opinion and in turn foreign policy is crucial to comprehending contemporary conflicts like the war between Ukraine and Russia or Hamas and Israel. This relationship was also important earlier, think of the American media coverage of the Vietnam war and interventions in the Middle East, turning the public opinion against the foreign policy position of the United States. The case of the dissolution of the Soviet Union occurred during a time when newspapers were the primary source of information for individuals. Today, many sources provide information to the public, ranging from traditional newspapers to television and social media. In the twentieth century, the options were more limited in gaining knowledge of foreign events. By looking at the Dutch newspaper coverage of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the position of the articles, and the frames used, we can shed light on the tools and tricks applied by the Dutch media to influence Dutch public opinion. Recognizing what some of these tools are helps uncover similar tricks used by the vast array of information sources today.

Most studies that focus on the relationship between the media, public opinion, and foreign policy use the American media as its focus area. Therefore, choosing to focus on the Dutch media can help uncover the differences between American and Dutch media coverage of foreign events. Moreover, scholars are still examining how the public comes to hold their opinion regarding foreign events, what role the media plays in this, and whether those opinions of the public influence foreign policy.³ Therefore, this research aims are twofold: adding on the progress that scholars have already made in researching the relationship between the public opinion and foreign policy as well as revealing whether the Dutch newspaper coverage and public opinion are the most important determinants of the foreign policy, or whether Dutch foreign policy makers react more to the real-time changes and events that occur in the world.

³ Matthew A. Baum and Philip BK Potter. "The Relationships between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 11: 2008. p. 39-65.

Literature review

This research aims to understand how newspapers influence public opinion on foreign events and whether this extends to policymakers. It begins by examining the literature on media framing and agenda-setting, which highlights how newspapers shape narratives and impact public opinion, especially on international issues. The study also explores how the media influences policymakers, who, like the general public, rely on newspapers for information. Understanding this influence is crucial for assessing its impact on foreign policy. Lastly, the research compares changes in foreign policies among NATO countries after the Soviet Union's dissolution, allowing for a comparison between the Netherlands and its NATO allies.

Framing, agenda-setting & priming

Framing

The media often use frames to tell a story. But what exactly is a frame? There are many disputed definitions of framing, with most focusing on the communicative aspects of framing. For example, the decision to portray an event as a robbery instead of a misunderstanding. This research uses Entman's definition of framing. He sees framing as to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context."⁴ Although the definition is becoming older it remains commonly used in framing research.⁵ Because Entman's definition is broad it works well for this research as it is able to encompass a wide variety of frames that are identified in the newspapers. Furthermore, the definition corresponds to the goal of this research as it regards frames as organizing principles that help an author to provide meaning to a set of events and connect these events to a broader narrative.⁶ Frames can be observed in newspapers in several ways. The presence or absence of certain keywords, images, sources of information, quotations, and headlines.⁷ A frame does four things according to Entman, a frame defines the problem, provides a causal interpretation

⁴ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): p. 52

⁵ Jörg Matthes. "Framing Politics: An Integrative Approach." *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 249

⁶ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): p. 52

⁷ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 365-375.

or analysis, incorporates a moral evaluation, and provides a remedy promotion.⁸ Not every frame accomplishes all of these tasks; for instance, a frame might solely provide a problem definition. The problem definition is the most important element of a frame and can be found by looking at the key argument, keywords or headline of a newspaper article.⁹ To get a better understanding of how to identify frames Tankard's research provides us with a list of 11 framing mechanisms ranging from 1) headlines and kickers, 2) subheadings, 3) photographs, 4) photo captions, 5) leads, 6) selection of sources or affiliations, 7) selection of quotes, 8) pull quotes, 9) logos, 10) statistics, charts, and graphs, 11) concluding statements or paragraphs of articles.¹⁰ Of these mechanisms points one, two, three and seven are the most common in the Dutch newspapers.

There are also differences in types of frames. A first distinction is between substantive and procedural frames. Substantive frames address a specific issue or perspective within a frame. For example, a news article that discusses a political debate might cover multiple types of policy, ranging from economic, social or military policy. Each substantive frame highlights a different aspect of the debate. Procedural frames focus on the process, actions or methods that are involved in addressing issues instead of focusing on the specific content. Think of a newspaper article that covers the results of an agricultural policy implemented two years ago, focusing more on the effects of the policy instead of on what the policy exactly entails. Another distinction is between issue-specific and generic frames. The issue-specific frames focus on a certain topic or event where generic frames apply to a broader range of topics.¹¹ Think of the November 2015 attacks in Paris, it is a specific event to which issue-specific frames can apply, but also generic frames by for example identifying religious extremism as a motive of the terrorists. Both types of frames are important to this research: issue-specific frames help recognize each case study's nuances, while generic frames identify trends across multiple case studies.

⁸ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): p. 52

⁹ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 367

¹⁰ James W. Tankard Jr, "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing," in *Framing Public Life*, 2001, p. 100

¹¹ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 367

Journalists who write newspaper articles use a set of frames when writing a new article. De Vreese labels these as journalistic news frames and compares them to more generic news frames. The most common frames used by journalists are the human impact, economic and conflict frames. The media tends to focus on conflicts between two sides where one actor can be put against the other actor. There are two reasons for this, conflict sells, and writing about a conflict forces the author to provide a balanced account of the events. The effects of these frames and how long they are effective is unclear.¹² Multiple empirical studies provide different results with one study claiming that the effects of framing were still significant three weeks after the initial exposure.¹³ In contrast, other empirical studies suggest that the effects of framing only last up to two weeks¹⁴ and in some cases only ten days.¹⁵ Finally, another important question is how repetitive frames influence its effectiveness. Some political communication scholars argue that by repeating frames more people will have access to them and the effectiveness of these frames will increase, especially regarding political topics where newspaper most often repeat frames.¹⁶

Agenda-setting

The term agenda-setting was coined by Eugene Shaw and Maxwell McCombs in 1972.¹⁷ Both authors have been crucial in developing the agenda-setting theory and have continued to adapt it to the changing media landscape.¹⁸ Shaw discusses the agenda-setting theory in his literature and highlights the role of the media in determining what importance people attach to

¹² Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 369

¹³ David Tewksbury, Jennifer Jones, Matthew W. Peske, Ashlea Raymond, and William Vig, "The Interaction of News and Advocate Frames: Manipulating Audience Perceptions of a Local Public Policy Issue," *Journalism & Mass Communication* 77, no. 4 (2000): p. 804-829.

¹⁴ James N. Druckman and Kjersten R. Nelson, "Framing and Deliberation: How Citizens' Conversations Limit Elite Influence," *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (2003): p. 729-745.

¹⁵ Claes De Vreese, "The Effects of Strategic News on Political Cynicism, Issue Evaluations, and Policy Support A Two-Wave Experiment," *Mass Communication & Society* 7, no. 2 (2004): p. 191-214.

¹⁶ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 369

¹⁷ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2), 1972. p. 176-187.

¹⁸ Maxwell E. McCombs, Donald L. Shaw, and David H. Weaver. "New Directions in Agenda-Setting Theory and Research." In *Advances in Foundational Mass Communication Theories*, Routledge, 2018: p. 131-152

public matters. He finds that Western media does not actively try to persuade individuals in a particular direction. Shaw sees the effects of the media as a process of the day-to-day work of newspapers trying to inform their audiences on opportunities or dangers, whether real or imagined, in their environment.¹⁹ More recent research from McCombs finds that the power of the agenda-setting role of the media lays with determining what issues or topics the public focuses on. McCombs identifies certain tricks newspapers use to ascribe importance to a topic. For example, newspapers put their most important topic on the front page. Here, the reader can find a picture of the topic with a short description, while the whole story can be read on the first page of the paper. A large and catchy heading often accompanies this lead story.²⁰ Finally, Gunther's research concludes that anecdotal cues, like political cartoons, letters to the editor, and reported poll results, also have a more substantial influence on public opinion.²¹ According to Shaw, McCombs and Gunther, the repeated effects of these cues focuses the attention of the public to a small set of issues whilst leaving out others.²² Agenda setting can thus be seen as performing the first function of framing, defining the problem. More specifically, defining the problems that need the attention of the public and the government. By doing so, the strategic use of agenda-setting is highlighting the causes of problems, encouraging moral judgements and promoting favoured policies.²³ This is even more so in the case of foreign affairs as the newspapers determine what foreign issues are more important than others, focusing the attention on one issue over another.

Priming

Building on the newspapers' agenda-setting role, priming was an effective tool in making specific issues more salient. Priming was first introduced by Iyengar and Kinder in 1987 in

¹⁹ Eugene F. Shaw. "Agenda-Setting and Mass Communication Theory." 25 (2), 1979. p. 96-105.

²⁰ Maxwell McCombs. "The Agenda-Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion." In *Mass Media Economics 2002 Conference*, London School of Economics. 2002. p. 1-21

²¹ Albert C. Gunther. "The Persuasive Press Inference: Effects of Mass Media on Perceived Public Opinion." *Communication Research* 25 (5): 1998. p. 486-504.

²² Maxwell McCombs. "The Agenda-Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion." In *Mass Media Economics 2002 Conference*, London School of Economics. 2002. p. 1-21

²³ Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): p. 164

their political communication research.²⁴ It was quickly adapted to the effects of media by Brosius, who found that the mass media can influence individuals' judgments on topics when featuring one more prominently in the news than the other. This is especially true in the case of foreign news, which occurs outside the reader's personal experience. Therefore, the information the reader receives from the news is most likely to form the reader's opinion, as other sources of information are unavailable. For priming to be effective, the newspaper article needs to meet four conditions: recency, repetition, applicability, and subjective relevance.²⁵ For example, taking the Cold War context into account, these fictional headlines can be interpreted very differently just because of the language used in the title: (1) The United States launches a bold initiative to promote democracy worldwide; and, (2) the Soviet Union increases global influence with a string of strategic alliances. Both articles describe the same thing. However, one is perceived as something good, and the other as bad. As most of the information regarding foreign events is only accessible to individuals through the media, this means that there is much responsibility for journalists to decide what people think about.²⁶ This makes priming an important tool for journalists in raising the salience of the importance of certain topics. It allows journalists to persuade the reader to think about an issue in a certain manner.²⁷

On the whole, priming plays the least important role in contrast to framing and agenda-setting in this research. The effects of priming are closely related to that of agenda-setting, but to uncover the effect of priming it depends on certain micro-level characteristics that can differ from individual to individual, for example personality traits, existing cognitive networks, or social networks.²⁸ The scope of this research approaches the Dutch newspaper coverage not close enough to gain knowledge of these characteristics and understand the

²⁴ Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder. *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion* University of Chicago Press. 2010. p. 2

²⁵ Patricia Moy, David Tewksbury, and Eike Mark Rinke "Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing." *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*: 2016. p. 1-13.

²⁶ Elizabeth Ayowole. "How News Media Influences Foreign Policy through Public Opinion." *Helms School of Government Conference (HSOG)*: 2022. p. 1-14

²⁷ Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): p. 164

²⁸ Patricia Moy, David Tewksbury, and Eike Mark Rinke. "Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing." In *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*, 2016. p. 1-13.

different forms of priming that took place. Nevertheless, it remains important to acknowledge the position of the priming theory in media studies.

Media, public opinion, and foreign policy

The relationship between the media, public opinion, and foreign policy is fluid in the sense that every single part is able to influence the other. Baum and Potter summarize the relationship between these three as follows: “media influences public opinion, public opinion influences the media, public opinion influences decision makers, decision makers influence public opinion, decision makers influence the media, foreign policy influences public opinion, decision makers influence events, and the media influences foreign policy.”²⁹ Although simplified, it shows how the media, public opinion and foreign policy are all intertwined. The relationship also becomes more complex when foreign actors and events intervene within this relationship.³⁰ Ayowole clarifies that this relationship is also unfair as the public relies on the information in the media to create an opinion on foreign affairs. This makes the media susceptible to framing by the decision makers who influence what is distributed in the news and what is not.³¹ This is especially the case in countries where media censorship is the norm. However, Habermas finds that market forces and media commodification also play a significant part in shaping public opinion. For example by prioritizing certain foreign issues over others, limiting the scope of information available to their readers. Habermas is well-known for his research on the transformation of the public sphere and has continued discussing the role of mass media in shaping public opinion. Highlighting the dangers of the concentration of media ownership and advocating for a diverse and inclusive media landscape.³²

²⁹ Matthew A. Baum and Philip BK Potter. "The Relationships between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 11: 2008. p. 41.

³⁰ Matthew A. Baum and Philip BK Potter. "The Relationships between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 11: 2008. p. 39-65.

³¹ Elizabeth Ayowole. "How News Media Influences Foreign Policy through Public Opinion." *Helms School of Government Conference (HSOG)*: 2022. p. 1-14

³² Nicholas Garnham. "Habermas and the Public Sphere." *Global Media and Communication* 3 (2): 2007. p. 201-214.

Soroka finds that the prominence of foreign affairs in the media influences their importance to the public, as the media is a key source of information on international events. Soroka identifies two effects on policymakers when a foreign issue is prominently featured: issue priming and direct responses to public debate. Policymakers indirectly react by priming the issue to politicians and directly by adjusting policies, such as defence spending. However, Soroka notes the difficulty in establishing a direct link between media coverage and policy changes, as it is challenging to determine if changes result from media coverage or the events themselves.³³ This conclusion can be extended to the research of Ayowole as well. She concludes that public opinion can influence foreign policy in varying degrees and often indirectly.³⁴ Both authors agree that media coverage of foreign affairs is essential for public understanding and that real-world events also significantly influence foreign policy. This research, therefore, cautions against attributing changes in foreign policy solely to media coverage, as real-world events cannot be ignored. While reacting to real-world events is crucial for foreign policy, understanding the media and public opinion's role in influencing policy remains relevant. These events are integral to the relationship between foreign policy, public opinion, and the media.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union: Impact on NATO and EC foreign policy strategies

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War significantly influenced the foreign policy strategies of many NATO and EC countries. The US, UK, France, and Germany all adjusted their strategies, with NATO shifting focus from defending against communism to addressing economic, social, and environmental issues, and envisioning a future peacekeeping role. This period also tested the EC's ability to act as a cohesive political entity beyond its economic focus. Comparing the foreign policy changes among member countries reveals how each interpreted the alliance's new purpose and adjusted their strategies accordingly.³⁵ By analysing the Dutch foreign policy, a comparison can be made between the

³³ Stuart N. Soroka. "Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 8 (1): 2003. p. 27-48.

³⁴ Elizabeth Ayowole. "How News Media Influences Foreign Policy through Public Opinion." *Helms School of Government Conference (HSOG)*: 2022. p. 1-14

³⁵ Luca Ratti. "Back to the Future? International Relations Theory and NATO-Russia Relations since the End of the Cold War." *International Journal* 64 (2): 2009. p. 399-422.

response from the Dutch government and that of its allies in NATO and the EC. Increasing our understanding of how states respond to the collapse of empires like the Soviet Union.

Haas and Ratti argue that the US is more proactive in adjusting its foreign policy than European counterparts. Key US policymakers anticipated the Cold War's end and, convinced of Gorbachev's commitment to liberal reforms, pursued a new approach to the Soviet Union. Haas notes Ronald Reagan's shift in rhetoric at the 1988 Moscow summit, where he described his earlier "evil empire" comment as belonging to "another time, another era," despite making it only five years earlier.³⁶ Ratti agrees with Haas that the United States pursue a strategy of trying to include the Soviet Union, and later Russia, into the international fold. Ratti clarifies this by addressing the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991, created to discuss potential issues between NATO countries and former Soviet bloc states.³⁷ Dutch scholars note that the commitment of the Netherlands to NATO is a priority as a good relationship with the United States is still seen as valuable to the international position of the Netherlands. That is why the Dutch act when the Americans do so, often pursuing NATO's line of policy in how it would act towards Russia.³⁸ To both Haas and Ratti, the change in the foreign policy strategy of the United States is apparent. As the threat of the Soviet Union died down significantly after the Cold War, attempts were made to include Russia in NATO's institutional network to avoid future issues. An example was Russia joining the Partnership for Peace program in 1994.³⁹ Looking back, contemporary scholars believe that NATO's view of Russia at the time was too optimistic. Only after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 did NATO realize the dangers that Russia still presented to the alliance.⁴⁰

A similar strategy is expected from the UK, but its situation differs from that of the US. Wallace explains that the end of the Cold War significantly impacts British foreign policy, emphasizing democratization in former socialist countries and their inclusion in European

³⁶ Mark L. Haas. "The United States and the End of the Cold War: Reactions to Shifts in Soviet Power, Policies, Or Domestic Politics?" *International Organization* 61 (1): 2007. p. 145-179.

³⁷ Luca Ratti. "Back to the Future? International Relations Theory and NATO-Russia Relations since the End of the Cold War." *International Journal* 64 (2): 2009. p. 399-422.

³⁸ Ramses A. Wessel. "The Netherlands and NATO." In *Legal Implications of NATO Membership: Focus on Finland and Five Allied States*, Erik Castrén Institute: 2008. p. 137-161

³⁹ Luca Ratti. "Back to the Future? International Relations Theory and NATO-Russia Relations since the End of the Cold War." *International Journal* 64 (2): 2009. p. 399-422.

⁴⁰ Justin Magula, Michael Rouland, and Peter Zwack. "NATO and Russia: Defense and Deterrence in a Time of Conflict." *Defence Studies* 22 (3): 2022. p. 502-509.

institutions. The UK's international role shifts, focusing on defence and diplomacy to maintain its global status despite declining economic influence. As an EC member, the UK balances its domestic interests with those of its European allies. Their strategy prioritizes continuous support for NATO while reducing defensive collaboration with Western European states.⁴¹ This balancing act between NATO and EC interests also occurs in the Netherlands. For the Dutch, NATO is central to foreign policy, while the EC focuses on economic interests, prioritizing the creation of today's internal market. Besides economic benefits, involvement in NATO and the EC gives the Netherlands a new role on the world stage after relinquishing their colonies post-World War II.⁴²

Germany and France's foreign policy strategies are heavily influenced by the Soviet Union's dissolution. The similar positions of France, Germany, and the Netherlands offer valuable insights for comparing policy changes. Le Gloannec discusses German foreign policy, while Vernet highlights French policymakers' concerns about Germany's unification, which threatens France's economic dominance. The unification shifts the power balance within the European Community, prompting France to counterbalance Germany's influence by integrating West Germany into NATO and EC frameworks, thereby limiting its regional sovereignty and power.⁴³ History significantly shapes the relationship between France and Germany. Despite efforts to secure economic and political stability through European markets and American protection, as noted by Le Gloannec, West Germany and later unified Germany emerged as the largest economy and military power on the continent.⁴⁴ Today, the Franco-German relationship is central to the future of the European Union, especially with the United Kingdom leaving the EU in 2020. The relationship of both countries to NATO, however, is different. While France views NATO as one of the many formats ensuring their security, Germany sees NATO as the ultimate military life insurance.⁴⁵ In this sense, the Dutch

⁴¹ William Wallace. "British Foreign Policy After the Cold War." *International Affairs* 68 (3): 1992. p. 423-442.

⁴² Duco Hellema. "De Historische Betekenis Van De Nederlandse Toetreding Tot De NAVO." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 23 (2): 1999. p. 9-12.

⁴³ Daniel Vernet. "The Dilemma of French Foreign Policy." *International Affairs* 68 (4): 1992. p. 655-664.

⁴⁴ Anne-Marie Le Gloannec. "The Unilateralist Temptation Germany's Foreign Policy After the Cold War." *Internationale Politik Und Gesellschaft* (1): 2004. p. 27-40.

⁴⁵ Ronja Kempin. "France's Foreign and Security Policy Under President Macron: The Consequences for Franco-German Cooperation." 2021. p. 1-55

compare more to the Germans in that both could rely on the American military umbrella to create enough deterrence against potential threats from the Soviet Union.

The foreign policy strategies of these countries undergo significant changes with the disappearance of the common enemy, the Soviet Union. The United States has to develop a new strategy for its future involvement in European affairs. The UK faces the challenge of balancing its role as the closest ally of the US, a member of the European Community, and a nation that has recently lost much of its global influence. France and Germany, as traditional powers on the continent, seek new roles as potential leaders in further European integration. As a smaller state in NATO and the EC, the Netherlands aims to strengthen its international position by emphasizing alignment with American foreign policy decisions. The roles of multinational frameworks like NATO and the EC are crucial determinants influencing Dutch foreign policy during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as explored through the analysis of newspapers and foreign policy documents.

Sources and methods

The digital archive Delpher is used to access newspaper articles. Utilizing digital archives like Delpher offers researchers several advantages and disadvantages. It provides easy access to a vast array of sources, including approximately two million newspaper articles spanning from 1618 to 1995, encompassing major Dutch media outlets and smaller regional papers. Delpher is chosen over individual newspaper archives due to its free accessibility, the capability to compare newspapers directly within the same archive, and its advanced search functions. Researchers can specify the time period, search terms, and type of content (article, column, advertisement) within Delpher's interface.⁴⁶ However, using these easily accessible digital archives also has drawbacks. For instance, selective digitization may perpetuate unequal representation in academia, with a focus on digitizing mainly English-language articles. Additionally, the selection process for newspaper articles can introduce bias.⁴⁷ For instance, focusing on newspapers with higher circulation over smaller regional papers, typically read in smaller municipalities versus cities, can introduce bias. Other large Dutch newspapers like *AD*

⁴⁶ Cheryl Mason Bolick. "Digital Archives: Democratizing the Doing of History." *International Journal of Social Education* 21 (1): 2006. p. 122-134.

⁴⁷ Lara Putnam. "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows they Cast." *The American Historical Review* 121 (2): 2016. p. 377-402.

and *Trouw* are omitted from this research due to its focused scope as analysing the selected four newspapers already provides a substantial volume of relevant articles.

In total, 153 newspaper articles are analysed across the six case studies. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of articles analysed per case study. Variations in article counts reflect differences in newspaper coverage volume, subject prominence, and case study duration.

Table 1.

Number of newspaper articles analysed per case study.

Case study	Number of newspaper articles
1. Estonia declares sovereignty.	23
2. Fall of the Berlin Wall	17
3. The reunification of Germany	30
4. The end of the Warsaw pact	21
5. The August coup attempt	40
6. The dissolution of the Soviet Union	22

Source: own calculations.

A pragmatic approach is taken to analyse the discourse in articles from NRC, De Volkskrant, De Telegraaf, and Het Parool. Emphasis is placed on understanding the intended meaning of words in the context of each article. Context is crucial as it determines the varying interpretations of words.⁴⁸ Each newspaper article is analysed systematically: examining the main heading, subheadings, lead paragraph, and quotes/anecdotes. Additionally, factors such as the article's placement in the newspaper, section, and use of photography are considered. The main heading provides the article's topic, subheadings add supplementary information, the lead paragraph summarizes key information, and quotes/anecdotes offer insights, often presented separately or in italics. For example, in a 1991 article in *Het Parool* about Gorbachev's position in the Soviet Union, an American expert was interviewed, raising questions about the choice of an American perspective. All articles are catalogued in an Excel spreadsheet detailing title, author, newspaper, publication date, and main arguments.

⁴⁸ Elena Buja. "The Discourse Analysis of a Newspaper Article." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica 2* (2): 2010. p. 259-271.

The media's pivotal role in informing the public about late twentieth-century foreign events cannot be overstated. Prominent newspapers, in particular, play a critical agenda-setting role by determining which foreign events are highlighted. They employ tactics such as prominent front-page placement, large bold headlines, and accompanying visuals to underscore the importance of a topic.⁴⁹ Key sections of the newspaper for this research include the front page, foreign news, and opinion sections. The front page is crucial for highlighting the most significant news. The foreign news section is particularly important because articles on the Soviet Union are predominantly placed there, making the newspaper's framing of these issues especially relevant.⁵⁰ The opinion sections provide a platform for authors to critically address case studies and stimulate discussions among readers. These sections are crucial for discussing foreign issues, which often lie beyond readers' personal experiences. Readers frequently form their opinions on these matters based on expert opinions presented in these articles.⁵¹

This research also examines whether Dutch foreign policy changed in response to media coverage of the Soviet Union's dissolution. Coalition agreements and parliamentary records are used to trace Dutch foreign policy positions. Specifically, three coalition agreements are analysed: Lubbers 2 (1986), Lubbers 3 (1989), and Kok 1 (1994). Lubbers 3, written in the middle of the period under study, holds particular significance. Lubbers 2 and Kok 1 serve to establish Dutch foreign policy positions before and after the Soviet Union's dissolution, allowing the identification of any changes. Parliamentary records include debates, ministerial letters, and transcripts of EC and NATO meetings, all accessible through the Dutch government's digital archive of the Tweede Kamer. By comparing newspaper articles and foreign policy documents, this research seeks to uncover whether trends align or diverge between them.⁵²

⁴⁹ Maxwell McCombs. "The Agenda-Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion." In *Mass Media Economics 2002 Conference*, London School of Economics. 2002. p. 1-21

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Ayowole. "How News Media Influences Foreign Policy through Public Opinion." *Helms School of Government Conference (HSOG)*: 2022. p. 1-14

⁵¹ Albert C. Gunther. "The Persuasive Press Inference: Effects of Mass Media on Perceived Public Opinion." *Communication Research* 25 (5): 1998. p. 486-504

⁵² For example: Douglas Charles Foyle. *The Influence of Public Opinion on American Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Context, Beliefs, and Process*. Duke University, 1996; Piers Robinson. "The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?" *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): p. 301-309; Aasima Safdar, and

In the following sections of this thesis, the analysis focuses on the newspaper coverage and Dutch foreign policy during the six chosen case studies. The first results chapter examines the coverage of the Estonian declaration of independence and the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is followed by an analysis of the coverage of the reunification of Germany and the end of the Warsaw Pact. The final results chapter covers the Dutch newspaper coverage of the August Coup attempt and the official dissolution of the Soviet Union. The decision to focus on the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany stems from their symbolic significance and the close geographical, cultural, and financial ties between the two countries. The end of the Warsaw Pact and the August coup attempt were also pivotal moments in the Soviet Union's dissolution, offering insights into how Dutch newspapers portrayed these events to the public. Following the case study analyses, a conclusion discusses how the four chosen Dutch newspapers covered the Soviet Union's dissolution and whether this coverage influenced Dutch government foreign policy.

Adrian M. Budiman. "Media Conformity to Foreign Policy: Coverage of War on Terror by the British Press." *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 51, no. 1 (2014).

Chapter 2

Estonia was the first Soviet republic to declare independence from the Soviet Union, prompting Dutch newspapers to intensify their coverage of events in Estonia. The newspaper coverage was minimal and slow at the start. Slowly increasing in volume as the development of civil movements and resistance against the central government in Moscow rose. The Dutch newspapers used a combination of frames to portray Estonia. First, as a victim of the repression of the Soviet Union, as well as the historical injustice of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Secondly, as a group of brave individuals that dared to go against Moscow. By placing the civil movements and Estonian parliament against the central government in Moscow, the newspapers used conflict frames to describe the situation in the Baltic state. Going forward, the newspaper coverage on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe increased during the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Dutch newspapers made effective use of photography to give their readers an insight in the developments in Berlin. Furthermore, the newspapers combined their coverage of the fall of the Berlin Wall with other examples of resistance against the DDR and Soviet regimes, giving the reader the experience in which the collapse of the Soviet Union was beginning. The fall of the Berlin Wall, more so than Estonia declaring its sovereignty, was a key moment for the Dutch government in rethinking their foreign policy. Dutch foreign policy makers now had to think of a future global order without the Soviet Union as its main adversary.

Estonia declares its sovereignty

Coverage in the Dutch media

Dutch newspapers began their coverage on Estonia's process towards sovereignty by detailing their denial of the changes in the constitution proposed by Moscow. On 16 November 1988, *de Volkskrant* covered the decision of the Estonian parliament to accept a motion from the Estonian People's Party, a civilian organization, to not accept changes proposed by the Soviet Union to change the constitution. The Estonians worried that the changes proposed by Gorbachev would centralize control over the Soviet republics in Moscow. Next to rejecting the constitutional changes, the Estonian parliament decided to make a change in the constitution of the Estonian Soviet Republic, giving itself the authority to reject proposed laws from Moscow.⁵³

⁵³ "Estische Parlement Buigt Zich Over Plan Voor Soevereiniteit." *De Volkskrant*, November 16, 1988, p. 4.

Dutch newspapers presented the refusal of a decision from the central government as a significant move made by the Estonian Soviet republic. *De NRC*⁵⁴ and *Het Parool*⁵⁵ provided a summary of the events on the front page with an in-depth article in the foreign news section of the paper. *De Telegraaf* reported on the events in an article in the foreign news section of the paper.⁵⁶ The significance of the placement of the articles in the newspapers is limited. The developments in Estonia were one point on the agenda in a collection of events happening in the Netherlands and abroad. Nevertheless, as events unfolded, the newspapers would continue reporting on events happening in Estonia and the other Baltic States and place these events in the broader context of the Cold War. An example of this can be found in *Het Parool*, in their first report on 17 November 1988, which connected the events happening in Estonia to the new policies of Gorbachev, calling it the 'paradox of perestroika.'⁵⁷ The newspapers explained how the pursuit of reform and openness has inspired the Estonian parliament to strive for more autonomy from Moscow.

The Cold War context was applied by the Dutch media to show the importance of the events in the Baltic States. *NRC Handelsblad* wrote about the actions taken by the Soviet presidium, calling the decisions made by the Estonian parliament 'unconstitutional' and recalling the highest Soviet from the Estonian Soviet Republic back to Moscow.⁵⁸ *De Volkskrant* discussed the upcoming meetings in the Latvian parliament and whether the added pressure by the decision of Estonia will lead to a similar response from the other Baltic states.⁵⁹ *Het Parool* provided an analysis of the internal struggles within Estonia. It addressed the distrust between the political leadership of Estonia and the people,⁶⁰ the 'decolonization' of economic ties between the Soviet Union and Estonia, and the increasing tensions between native Estonians and Russians and Ukrainians who migrated to the republic.⁶¹ The goal of the newspapers was to show that anti-Soviet sentiments existed in multiple Soviet republics.

⁵⁴ "Soeverein Estland Kent Zich Vetorecht Op Sovjet-Wet Toe." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 17, 1988, p. 1.

⁵⁵ "Parlement Estland Trotseert Moskou." *Het Parool*, November 17, 1988, p. 1; "Talinn in Actie Tegen Centralisatie - Esten Nemen Het Recht Wetten Moskou Nietig Te Verklaren." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 17, 1988, p. 5.

⁵⁶ "Esten Dagen Moskou Uit." *De Telegraaf*, November 17, 1988, p. 9.

⁵⁷ "Parlement Estland Trotseert Moskou." *Het Parool*, November 17, 1988, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Laura Starink. "Opperste Sovjet Eist Uitleg Van Leider Estland." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 18, 1988, p. 5.

⁵⁹ "Opperste Sovjet Tegen Verlangen Naar "Soeveriniteit" in Estland." *De Volkskrant*, November 18, 1988, p. 4.

⁶⁰ "Kremlin Toetst Besluiten Estland." *Het Parool*, November 18, 1988, p. 9.

⁶¹ Martin van den Heuvel. "Esten 'N Stap Verder Naar Soeveriniteit." *Het Parool*, November 18, 1988, p. 9.

The Baltic states, remained in the spotlight in the Dutch newspapers because new civil movements similar were being created in Latvia, Lithuania, and Belarus.⁶² The parliaments of these Soviet republics had to decide whether to accept the constitutional changes proposed by Moscow or not.⁶³ To show their position, 7.5 million individuals from the Baltic states signed a petition as a signal to the people in power in Moscow.⁶⁴ The reports on these events were often short summaries on the front page with an additional article in the foreign news section. The feelings of nationalism remained and grew in the Baltic states, gaining a lot of coverage from the Dutch newspapers. Highlighting the preference of the Dutch media towards Baltic independence from the Soviet Union.

Dutch newspaper coverage specifically focused on the tensions between the Baltic states and Moscow. More specifically the tensions between the Baltic parliaments and the central government in Moscow. Moscow decided to concede to the demands from Tallinn, deleting a sentence that gave the Soviet presidium in Moscow the ability to declare laws, agreed upon and implemented in Soviet republics, as invalid.⁶⁵ In contrast, the parliaments of the two remaining Baltic states Latvia⁶⁶ and Lithuania,⁶⁷ backed down from a confrontation with Moscow. It is important to note that only small parts of the foreign news section were dedicated to these events, as news from South Africa, Israel, and Palestine dominated the news at the time. The attention from the media towards these other foreign issues showed that the ongoing situation in the Baltic states is one of the many topics that the Dutch newspapers focused on. The developments in Estonia and the other Baltic states were on the agenda of the Dutch media, but not the priority. *De Telegraaf* provided a more extensive analysis of the tensions between Moscow and several Soviet republics in a newspaper article on 24 November 1988. The article covered the concerns of the Soviets in Moscow and addressed the national needs of these smaller republics that wanted to maintain their language and have their flag and currency.⁶⁸ The use of economic frames by *De Telegraaf* is interesting as it portrays the Baltic states as more developed Soviet republics, providing an extra element that

⁶² "Wit-Rusland: Nationalisme Steekt Kop Op." *Het Parool*, November 19, 1988, p. 6.

⁶³ "Litouwen Mijdt Botsing Met Het Kremlin." *De Telegraaf*, November 19, 1988, p. 9.

⁶⁴ André Roelofs. "Miljoenen Balten Tekenen Petitie Eigen Grondwet." *De Volkskrant*, November 21, 1988, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Laura Starink. "Moskou Doet Concessie Aan Balten." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 22, 1988, p. 1.

⁶⁶ "Letland Schrikt Terug Voor Direct Conflict Met Moskou." *De Volkskrant*, November 23, 1988, p. 5.

⁶⁷ "Litouwers De Straat Op Voor Autonomie ." *De Telegraaf*, November 22, 1988, p. 9.

⁶⁸ A. G. Brouwer "Crisis Tekent." *De Telegraaf*, November 24, 1988, p. 10.

explained the strive for independence there. All four newspapers would continue to report on the national sentiments in the Baltic states, the attempts of Moscow to repress them, and the broader consequences of these internal pressures on the Soviet Union.⁶⁹

News from Estonia and other Soviet republics would remain in all newspapers. Most of these articles were positioned in the foreign news section and discussed Estonia's resolve to retain its own culture and language, as well as the structure of the Soviet Union itself. An interesting opinion article in the *NRC* discussed how the Dutch media lost the Baltic states out of sight since their annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940.⁷⁰ Moreover, on 3 February 1989, the *NRC* published a summary on the front page and an in-depth article in the foreign news section about the developments in Estonia. The Estonian parliament had decided to legitimize the Estonian People's Party, allowing the party to provide their candidates during the elections in the Soviet republic.⁷¹ The newspaper framed the legitimization of the Estonian People's Party as a victory in its fight for recognition against the communist party in Estonia. This frame in combination with the articles position on the front page was an example of how a Dutch newspaper placed the small anti-Soviet victories higher on its agenda.

The Dutch newspaper coverage was characterized by its attempt to portray itself as neutral and by its foundation in the reports from international news stations. The newspapers attempted to portray their coverage on Estonia as neutral. Documenting the decisions made by the governments of the Soviet republics and Moscow. However, any developments in the new civil movements were placed more prominently in the newspapers as well as decisions made by the Estonian government that pursued the goal of Estonian sovereignty from the Soviet Union. International media reports functioned as the foundation for most articles that the Dutch media published. Especially the international news stations *Reuters* and *AP* were mentioned often as the source of the articles. This was important as *Reuters* is based in London and *AP* in New York, making these sources favour an anti-Soviet frame.

⁶⁹ André Roelofs "Gorbatsjov Valt Fel Uit Naar Estland." *De Volkskrant*, November 28, 1988, p. 1; "Volksfront Van Estland Negeert Gorbatsjov." *Het Parool*, November 28, 1988, p. 1; "Nationalistische Splijtzwam Woekert in Sovjet-Unie." *De Volkskrant*, December 3, 1988, p. 5; Maarten Levendig. "Esten Teleurgesteld in Gorbatsjov." *De Telegraaf*, December 3, 1988, p. 11; "Estland Blijft Vasthouden Aan Zijn Vetorecht." *NRC Handelsblad*, December 8, 1988, p. 7.

⁷⁰ H. J. A. Hogland. "De Baltische Staten Zijn Taai." *NRC Handelsblad*, January 18, 1989, p. 9.

⁷¹ "Oppositie Estland Gelegaliseerd." *NRC Handelsblad*, February 3, 1989, p. 1.

Initially the frames used by the media consisted of putting a smaller Soviet republic against the central government that is Moscow. Estonia was framed as a victim of the Second World War and the continued Soviet rule. In combination with the victim frame, the resistance by the Estonian parliament, civil movements and citizens were framed as brave actions against communism. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the conflict frame is quite evident as two parties, the civil movements in the Baltic states fight for their independence against the central government of the Soviet Union. The conflict frame could also be extended more broadly to the Cold War context, as the anti-Soviet developments in the Baltic states were pushing them towards autonomy whilst Moscow attempted to regain control over its Soviet republics.

Finally, certain patterns could be found in the positioning of the newspaper articles. Most articles consisted of small summaries on the front page and reports on the foreign news section of the paper. Especially from the moment that new civil movements began in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus. Foreign news journalists connected the events in the Baltic states and Belarus to the context of the Cold War. These civil movements, especially once legitimized, provided a clear example for the newspapers to refer to when discussing the changes occurring in Estonia and the other Baltic states. Allowing the Dutch newspapers to focus on their fight for independence from the Soviet Union.

The Dutch foreign policy position

The Soviet Union was not mentioned at all in the Dutch coalition agreement of 1986, which showed the lack of attention of the Dutch government towards any development in the region. In the foreign affairs section of the agreement, the following items were the priority for the Dutch government at the time. First, the Dutch government found the creation of a European Community (EC) essential for the Netherlands and for Europe as a whole. At first, the government would prioritize the creation of an internal European market and was in favour of strengthening the European Monetary System. Second, the Dutch government addressed the situations in several countries and regions in the coalition agreement. The Dutch government emphasized that it was against any form of discrimination or suppression that stemmed from the apartheid policy in South Africa. Moreover, the Dutch government wanted to continue its attempts, in collaboration with the United States, to create peace in the Middle East. The perspective of the Dutch government on the issues between Israel and the other Arabic states was that: “both Arab states and the PLO should accept the existence of Israel within secure,

recognized, and guaranteed borders. Meanwhile, on the other hand, Israel must demonstrate willingness to cooperate in the concrete realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians." All in all, potential issues in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union were not a priority at the time for the Dutch government and were not featured on its agenda.⁷² This lack of attention was because in 1986 and before, the situation in the Soviet Union remained relatively stable. Gorbachev just became the party leader, initiating his ideas of glasnost and perestroika. The Dutch government did not expect the status quo of the Cold War to change anytime soon.

This was confirmed by the lack of discussion regarding Estonia in the Dutch parliament. Only one document in the archive of the Tweede Kamer mentioned the developments in Estonia. In a meeting on 30 November 1988, two weeks after Estonia declared its sovereignty from the Soviet Union, the developments in Eastern Europe were mentioned. This singular meeting was attended by the standard foreign affairs committee where the main topic discussed was the foreign policy approach to the developments in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia and Albania.⁷³ Parliament member Jaques Wallage questioned whether the Dutch government would recognize the sovereignty of the Baltic states. He argued that recognizing the national identities of these Soviet republics could put more strain on the structure of the Soviet Union.⁷⁴ Meindert Leerling, a one man faction in the Dutch government, addressed the economic opportunities that could arise if the communist block continued to 'melt'. Leerling recognized the lack of action from the Dutch government when it came to the developments in the Baltic states. He questioned whether it would be possible for the Baltic states to receive similar recognition as other Eastern European countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.⁷⁵

The contrast between the amount of attention given towards the developments in Estonia between the Dutch newspapers and government is evident. Although the media

⁷² Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Kabinetsformatie 1986*. July 11, 1986. [Regeerakkoord 1986 - Parlement.com](#)

⁷³ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Het Beleid Ten Aanzien Van Oost-Europa, Joegoslavië En Albanië* (1988), p. 1. [Informatie over 0000092791 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

⁷⁴ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Het Beleid Ten Aanzien Van Oost-Europa, Joegoslavië En Albanië* (1988), p. 5-6. [Informatie over 0000092791 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

⁷⁵ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Het Beleid Ten Aanzien Van Oost-Europa, Joegoslavië En Albanië* (1988), p. 18. [Informatie over 0000092791 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

coverage regarding Estonia was limited, the Dutch government focused on completely other foreign issues. The discussions within the Dutch parliament mentioned above focus on economic opportunities and the geopolitical consequences of the Netherlands recognizing the Soviet republics. The Dutch media also addressed the economic differences between the Soviet republics to a certain extent, but focus more on the actions of the Estonian civil movement and parliament in their fight for independence. Therefore, the Dutch government does not seem to be influenced by the Dutch media coverage as the development and actions of the civil movement in Estonia was not mentioned in the parliamentary records.

The fall of the Berlin Wall

Coverage in the Dutch media

In comparison to the events in Estonia, the fall of the Berlin Wall received significantly more coverage by the Dutch media. This was because of several reasons. Germany was closer to the Netherlands geographically, but also psychologically. Both shared a similar language, culture and history, as well as being close partners in trade.⁷⁶ Therefore, the events precluding the fall of the Berlin Wall as well as the consequences after the fall occurred were covered in detail by the Dutch newspapers. Approximately five months before the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, *Het Parool* published an article on their front page with the title “The Soviet Union no longer rules out the reunification of Germany”. In this article, a trip from Gorbachev to Germany was highlighted as well as the changing attitude of the Soviet leader on the possible reunification of the Eastern and Western parts of the German nation.⁷⁷ Three months after this initial article, *De Volkskrant* published an article in their foreign news section reporting on the migration wave from Eastern to Western Europe. Connecting this development to the increased ease with which East Germans could attain an exit visa from the West German government.⁷⁸ Finally, three days before the fall of the Berlin Wall, *NRC* published a report on the mass demonstration that occurred in East Berlin and other areas of

⁷⁶ For example: Yaacov Trope, and Nira Liberman. "Construal-Level Theory of Psychological Distance." *Psychological Review* 117, no. 2 (2010): p. 440; Jacob A. Bikker. "Interdependence between the Netherlands and Germany: Forecasting with VAR Models." *De Economist* 141, no. 1 (1993): p. 43-69 ; Bianca B. Szytniewski, Bas Spierings, and Martin Van der Velde. 2018. "Socio-Cultural Proximity, Daily Life and Shopping Tourism in the Dutch-German Border Region." In *Proximity and Intraregional Aspects of Tourism*, p. 60-74: Routledge.

⁷⁷ "Sovjet-Unie Sluit Hereniging Duitslanden Niet Langer Uit." 1989. *Het Parool*, June 12, p. 1.

⁷⁸ "Grootste Aantal Emigranten Sinds 1945 Vertrekt Uit Oost-Europa." 1989. *De Volkskrant*, September 11, p. 5.

East Germany against the DDR regime. The title “Over a million people take to the streets against the East German regime” showed the reader how large this protest was. *NRC* published one main article on the front page, accompanied by several smaller articles spread across this edition. The article discussed why East German citizens were protesting and what kind of consequences the protest would have.⁷⁹ The news coverage on Germany prelude the fall of the Berlin Wall showed how important East and West Germany and its role in the Cold War were to the Dutch media.

Therefore it was logical how the Dutch newspaper coverage looked at the broader context by analysing the tensions between East and West Germany. Not only the upheaval in Berlin and the tensions between the West and East Germany but also the consequences of the migration of Germans from East to West were covered. Articles on other communist countries like Hungary and the Czech Republic highlighted how the influx of migrants was difficult to manage for these states.⁸⁰ Any Soviet response to the issues in Germany was covered by the Dutch media. For example, *De Volkskrant* discussed how Gorbachev was dealing with conspiracies of a coup d'état or even a civil war. The newspaper touches upon the dissatisfaction in Moscow of several elites in the Communist Party that would like to see Gorbachev exit similarly as one of his predecessors Nikita Krushchev.⁸¹ This discussion tells the reader that the situation in Eastern Europe was putting more pressure on the Soviet Union to regain control over the Soviet republics. With the knowledge of hindsight, the articles on the Berlin Wall and divided Germany read like a kettle that was slowly reaching its boiling point.

The volume of newspaper articles on the fall of the Berlin Wall were significantly more than that of Estonia declaring its sovereignty from the Soviet Union. *De Volkskrant*,⁸² and *NRC*⁸³ both published articles on 10 November 1989, writing about the events occurring in Berlin, whilst *De Telegraaf* published an article on 11 November. The fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in widespread news coverage in the Dutch media, with the *NRC* dedicating almost all

⁷⁹ J. M. Bik. 1989. "Ruim Miljoen Mensen Straat Op Tegen Regime DDR." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 6, p. 1.

⁸⁰ "Grootste Aantal Emigranten Sinds 1945 Vertrekt Uit Oost-Europa." 1989. *De Volkskrant*, September 11, p. 5.

⁸¹ André Roelofs. "Gorbatsjov Wijst Geruchten Over Coup Van De Hand." *NRC Handelsblad*, September 11, 1989, p. 1.

⁸² Jos Klaassen. "Oost-Duitsland Zet Berlijnse Muur Open." *De Volkskrant*, November 10, 1989 p. 1.

⁸³ "Berlijners Feesten Bij De Open Muur." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 10, 1989, p. 1.

of its front page to the events happening in Germany. Next to the main articles on the front pages, smaller articles on the responses of world leaders⁸⁴ and on the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall could be found spread across the papers.⁸⁵ The sheer volume of newspaper articles published on the fall of the Berlin Wall showed how important this event was. On the ninth and tenth of November alone, the front pages of all prominent newspapers in the Netherlands were covered with the events occurring in Berlin. The reason why there was such a difference between the two case studies was due to the close geographical, economic and cultural linkage between the Netherlands and Germany.⁸⁶ This linkage is far less between the Netherlands and Estonia.

Furthermore, the Berlin Wall itself was the most iconic symbol of the Cold War era. A tangible wall that clearly showed the division between East and West making it almost impossible to not notice the changes occurring in Germany.⁸⁷ In November 1989, there were front-page articles on the mass migration out of the DDR to West Germany remaining prominent in the papers for weeks as neighbouring countries continued to harbour more German refugees.⁸⁸ Newspapers like *NRC* and *De Volkskrant* often accompanied these articles with pictures of large lines of East Germans waiting to cross the borders. In general, pictures provided an extra element that influenced how the reader interpreted a newspaper article.⁸⁹ For example, pictures of smiling and celebrating Germans reunited with their friends and family in West Berlin, intended to show the happiness regarding the fall of the wall.⁹⁰ An enormous group of people standing on top of the Berlin Wall, showed how widespread the disdain against the wall was.⁹¹ Or a large protest with people holding up signs with the text

⁸⁴ "Kohl Onderbreekt Polen-Reis Vliegt Naar West-Berlijn." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 10, 1989, p. 1.

⁸⁵ "Al Sinds 28 Jaar Gehaat Symbool Koude Oorlog." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 10, 1989, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Jacob A. Bikker. "Interdependence between the Netherlands and Germany: Forecasting with VAR Models." *De Economist* 141, no. 1 (1993): p. 43-69 ; Bianca B. Szytniewski, Bas Spierings, and Martin Van der Velde. 2018. "Socio-Cultural Proximity, Daily Life and Shopping Tourism in the Dutch–German Border Region." In *Proximity and Intraregional Aspects of Tourism*, p.60-74: Routledge.

⁸⁷ "Al Sinds 28 Jaar Gehaat Symbool Koude Oorlog." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 10, 1989, p. 4.

⁸⁸ "Grootste Aantal Emigranten Sinds 1945 Vertrekt Uit Oost-Europa." *De Volkskrant*, September 11, 1989 p. 5.

⁸⁹ James W. Tankard Jr, "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing," in *Framing Public Life*, 2001, p. 100

⁹⁰ Jos Klaassen. "Oost-Duitsland Zet Berlijnse Muur Open." *De Volkskrant*, November 10, 1989, p. 1.

⁹¹ "Berlijners Feesten Bij De Open Muur." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 10, 1989 p. 1.

‘neues forum’, the name of a new political movement that was created several months before the collapse of the DDR government.⁹²

From the newspaper articles it became clear that the Cold War context overshadowed the local context. The articles on the events in Estonia and Berlin not only described the events that were taking place but also provided an explanation of why it is happening. By framing the fall of the Berlin Wall in the Cold war context, it became not just a German issue, but an issue that received global attention. Furthermore, similar to the reporting style on the events in the Baltic states, newspapers combined different styles of reports with factual coverage of events, think of decisions made by foreign governments, and more opinionated articles where foreign news analysts explained the events that happen abroad. These types of articles placed foreign news in a wider range of developments that occurred abroad.

The combination of the conflict frames, volume of articles and strategic use of photography characterized the coverage of the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁹³ West Berlin versus East Berlin, the migration from East to West Germany, democracy versus autocracy were all examples of this. Next to these conflict frames, the Dutch newspapers repeated these frames continuously. These types of frames reiterated the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative that was dominant throughout the Cold War and maintained the negative perception against the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ The coverage on the situation in Estonia pales in contrast to that on the Berlin Wall. The fall of the Berlin Wall is remembered vividly to this day by people who lived during the event. Most pictures described above have become iconic when looking back at the period of the Cold War. In part this is because of the closeness of the Netherlands and Germany, as Estonians remember their fight for sovereignty just as much as a Dutch person remember the fall of the Berlin Wall. The combination of effective framing, volume of articles and closeness of the event to the audience made it more impactful.

Finally, the positioning of the newspaper articles on the events in Berlin was also placed more prominently in the newspapers than their Estonian counterparts. As mentioned before, during November 1989 it was almost impossible to miss what was going on in Berlin.

⁹² J. M. Bik. "Ruim Miljoen Mensen Straat Op Tegen Regime DDR." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 6, 1989, p. 1.

⁹³ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 369

⁹⁴ Michael C. Paul "Western Negative Perceptions of Russia: 'The Cold War Mentality' Over Five Hundred Years." *International Social Science Review* 76, no. 3/4 (2001): p. 103-121.

Almost daily would the newspapers post an article on the conditions of the migration from East to West Germany, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the consequences of the collapse for the Netherlands and the geopolitical arena. These articles would not only be placed on the front pages, often with a small summary, but also in other parts of the newspaper like the domestic and foreign news sections. On the whole, the positioning of the newspaper articles, the volume of newspaper coverage, effective use of frames and photography ensured that the fall of the Berlin Wall would not only be remembered vividly in Germany but also in the Netherlands.

The Dutch foreign policy position

The events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were on the agenda of the Dutch government in 1989, even before the fall of the Berlin Wall as a new government was installed three days before it occurred. Although the Soviet Union was only mentioned once in the coalition agreement, 'Eastern Europe' was mentioned seven times. In the foreign affairs section of the coalition agreement, the opening sentence immediately addressed the 'new questions' surrounding the developments in Eastern Europe. The Dutch government framed these questions as a concern for national safety and would address these within the framework of the EC, UN, or NATO. A priority of the government was to increase unity within NATO as well as within Europe to strengthen the European component of NATO and increase the effectiveness of the alliance. Concerning Eastern Europe, the Dutch government was in favour of supporting political and economic reforms in the region and would provide financial support to ensure that these changes could happen. Moreover, the Dutch government planned to collaborate with Eastern European nations in common interests like the environment, terrorism, and drugs. The Dutch government reserved an amount of 200 million 'gulden', the Dutch currency before adopting the euro, in case it needed to support Eastern European states.⁹⁵ In contrast to the Estonian case, the Dutch government was now more responsive to the changing situation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The role of public opinion in explaining this difference was limited. The Dutch government is more focused on responding in collaboration with its partners in the EC, NATO and UN. These multinational frameworks were deemed crucial for formulating a response to the evolving geopolitical circumstances.

⁹⁵ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Kabinetformatie 1989* (1989). October 26, 1989. [Regeerakkoord 1989 - Parlement.com](https://regeerakkoord1989.parlement.com)

Therefore, in the parliamentary documents there was an emphasis on how fast the Soviet Union was changing. Making the creation of a plan to deal with these changes a priority. On 22 November 1989, the minister of foreign affairs send a letter to the chair of the Tweede Kamer informing about the developments in Eastern Europe. This letter addressed the historical significance of the events in Eastern Europe, especially the opening of the Berlin Wall. It acknowledged the speed with which change is occurring and its implications for the stability within Europe. The foreign minister emphasized restraint when it came to seeking advantages at the cost of stability.⁹⁶ On 27 November 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall was discussed during a meeting of the Tweede Kamer. The Dutch governments recognized a process of liberalization and democratization in this region with the fall of the Berlin Wall being a symbol of the nearby end of oppression in the other half of Europe.⁹⁷ The day after on the 28th the significance of the fall of the Berlin Wall was recalled again by VVD leader Voorhoeve. He saw the fall of the Berlin Wall as the closing remark of the post-war era. More interestingly he argued that ‘the reverse effect of the domino theory’ was occurring as the communist systems were being replaced by political systems that emphasized the multitude of political parties, human rights and a free economy. The party leader of D66 Hans van Mierlo called the changes in Eastern Europe of the utmost importance, putting them above the internal issues in the Netherlands.⁹⁸ At this time, both the VVD and D66 were in the opposition, which showed that the sitting Dutch government, as well as the Dutch opposition parties agreed on the importance of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Again in early 1990, on the 23rd, 24th and 25th of January the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall were discussed by the Tweede Kamer. More specifically in the context of the possible reunification of Germany, something which the Dutch government was in favour of. These discussions highlighted the Cold War way of thinking as the alliances of NATO and the Warsaw Pact dominated the discussions on foreign policy.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Hans van den Broek, "Brief Van De Minister Van Buitenlandse Zaken" November 22, 1989. [Informatie over 0000038456 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

⁹⁷ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. *14de Vergadering*. November 27, 1989. [Informatie over 0000035199 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

⁹⁸ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *15de Vergadering*. November 28, 1989. [Informatie over 0000035200 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

⁹⁹ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. *30ste Vergadering*. January 23, 1990. [Informatie over 0000035216 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#); Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. *31ste Vergadering*. January 24, 1990. [Informatie over 0000035217 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen](#)

On the whole the coverage of the events in Estonia was limited in comparison to the coverage of the fall of the Berlin Wall. There were differences in the frames applied in both case studies. Conflict frames were prominent in both cases, but a broader range of frames were used to cover the fall of the Berlin Wall, with a focus on the Cold War context and the role of the Cold War alliances. The events in Estonia were covered in all of the four prominent newspapers analysed in this research. Most articles were found in the foreign news sections of the newspapers with some also providing a small summary on the front page to spark the reader's interest. Over time, coverage of the events in Estonia would slow down and the type of article would change. At first, more neutral and factual reports on the decisions of the governments in Tallinn and Moscow could be found. Down the line more opinionated articles placed the developments in Estonia and the other Baltic States into the wider Cold War context. These opinionated articles were often given a more prominent position in the newspaper, like the front page. In contrast, nearly all of the news coverage on the fall of the Berlin Wall was front-page news. Articles on the fall of the Berlin Wall were also more numerous and longer and were often accompanied by pictures. Furthermore, these articles also discussed issues connected to the fall of the Berlin Wall like the mass migration from East Germany to neighbouring countries, the possibility of German reunification, and the consequences of this reunification for the Netherlands and the wider geopolitical landscape. By comparing both coalition agreements from 1986 and 1989, as well as the parliamentary documents around the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is clear that the events in Eastern Europe gained the attention of the Dutch government. Whether this was because of the news coverage of the Dutch media, the public opinion of the Dutch regarding the issues in Eastern Europe, or the larger Cold War context which demanded a change in strategy was unclear.

[\(\[officielebekendmakingen.nl\]\(https://officielebekendmakingen.nl\)\)](https://officielebekendmakingen.nl); Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. *32ste Vergadering*. January 25, 1990. [Informatie over 0000035218 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(\[officielebekendmakingen.nl\]\(https://officielebekendmakingen.nl\)\)](https://overheid.nl/informatie-over/0000035218)

Chapter 3

The reunification of Germany was a topic where the agenda-setting role of the media became evident. This was because the possibility of reunification was covered in the newspapers extensively during 1989 and 1990. The articles covering this topic often discussed the consequences of the reunification for the EC and whether a united Germany should join NATO, the Warsaw Pact, or neither. Most of these articles were opinion articles, giving the authors more freedom to voice their opinion and provide different perspectives on whether a unified Germany was a good or bad thing. Similar to the media coverage on the reunification of Germany, the end of the Warsaw Pact was covered extensively and in detail by the Dutch media. The Dutch newspaper framed the end of the Warsaw Pact by comparing the alliance to NATO. Especially after the Warsaw Pact ended the focus was put on the future and what role NATO would fulfil now its main opponent ceased to exist. Next to the Cold War alliances, the Dutch newspapers zoomed in on the individual Soviet republics, highlighting the situations there now that the Warsaw pact ended. From the coalition agreements and parliamentary documents it became clear that the Dutch government focused on the economic consequences of the reunification of Germany for the Netherlands. Furthermore, it was evident that the Dutch government wanted to respond to the changing circumstances in Europe through the multinational frameworks of the EC and NATO.

The reunification of Germany

Coverage in the media

The possibility of German reunification was a topic discussed by the Dutch newspapers throughout 1989. First, by looking at the attitudes of other European nations regarding the reunification of Germany. In early 1989, the Dutch media discussed the possibility of a unification between West and East Germany by publishing an article in which a public official in Poland declared that the Polish government would not resist the reunification of Germany if the current Polish borders were respected.¹⁰⁰ However, it remained an idea, and shortly after visits from US President Bush to Europe, the media talked down the possibilities of reunification. It was necessary to ensure that all the necessary pieces fell in place so other countries could accept a unified Germany again. There was still much trauma from the Second World War, and many political elites were worried that the process of unifying Europe

¹⁰⁰ "Polen Niet Langer Tegen Hereniging Beide Duitslanden." *De Volkskrant*, May 19, 1989, p. 4.

in the form of the EC would fail if Germany was a unified country again.¹⁰¹ One opinion article in the *NRC* analysed the struggles surrounding German reunification. The author saw West German integration into the EC and the reunification of Germany as a political goal that was mutually exclusive. Whoever pushed for Western European integration was most likely against the idea of a unified Germany, and whoever pushed for the reunification of Germany was unsure whether Western European integration was possible.¹⁰² What was evident was the differences in opinion between ordinary civilians and the political elites. Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, an article published by the *NRC* in their foreign news section discussed a poll conducted in France to see how French citizens viewed the idea of a unified Germany. The poll results were surprising as most French citizens did not oppose German reunification, while the political elites in France did.¹⁰³ French government officials worried that the unification of Germany would harm the EC's creation process. A unified Germany could directly challenge the influence and power of the French within the EC, with French government officials labelling Germany as a threat from the inside.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the French, the Dutch politicians appeared less preoccupied with the role of a unified Germany in the EC, instead placing more emphasis on the recent history between the Netherlands and a unified Germany with a particular focus on the Second World War.¹⁰⁵

The fall of the Berlin Wall was the catalyst that sparked many conversations about the possibility of West and East Germany becoming one country again. An article from *NRC* states that the fall of the Berlin Wall was the first piece of foreign news that gained widespread attention from the French media.¹⁰⁶ Dutch newspapers also started publishing significantly more articles on the reunification of Germany. Several articles covered foreign news sections that discussed the possibility of reunification and its consequences for the

¹⁰¹ Ben Knapen. "Bush Stak De Rubicon Over." *NRC Handelsblad*, June 5, 1989, p. 11.

¹⁰² J.L. Heldring. "Westeuropese Integratie En Duitse Hereniging." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 8, 1989, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Peter van Dijk. "Fransen Voor Hereniging, Franse Politici Tonen Zich Blij En Bezorgd." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 13, 1989, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Rob Sloot. "Franse Zorgen Over Duitse Hereniging." *De Telegraaf*, November 16, 1989, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Duco Hellema. "De Historische Betekenis Van De Nederlandse Toetreding Tot De NAVO." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 23 (2): 1999. p. 9-12.

¹⁰⁶ Peter van Dijk. "Fransen Voor Hereniging, Franse Politici Tonen Zich Blij En Bezorgd." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 13, 1989, p. 5.

Netherlands and Europe.¹⁰⁷ What occurred in Germany was more important to other foreign issues as Germany was a neighbouring country of the Netherlands. Newspapers did this to inform the Dutch audience of possible opportunities and dangers. For example by discussing the nationalist sentiments in Germany and how these could be tempered.¹⁰⁸ The articles were effective in conveying their message because the media determined what the public focused on, which could change as real-world events influenced it.¹⁰⁹

After the Berlin Wall fell, the Dutch newspapers shifted their focus towards the possible reunification of Germany. In an opinion article in the *NRC*, the author references the German newspapers to strengthen his arguments on why Germany would unite sooner rather than later, highlighting the economic incentives for East Germany to join their Western counterpart to avoid a potential financial disaster.¹¹⁰ The coverage of the reunification of Germany in the Dutch media was similar to how the developments in the Baltic states and the fall of the Berlin Wall were covered. Newspaper articles in the foreign news section of the paper would address the developments in foreign governments, as well as reports from international news stations like *Reuters* and *ANP* published by the Dutch media. However, one significant difference was the volume of opinion articles on the reunification of Germany.

In the case of the reunification of Germany, opinion articles covered the historical significance of a reunified Germany, focusing on the earlier occasions when this happened and the negative view that still existed of a unified Germany due to its role in the First and Second World Wars.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the opinion articles allowed experts to analyse the current situation and provide the reader with options that could occur in the future. In two opinion articles, one author describes three ways in which a reunification of Germany can be

¹⁰⁷ For example: Peter Jenkins. "Westen Moet Duitse Hereniging Steunen." *Het Parool*, October 6, 1989, p. 7; Friso Wielenga. "Duitse Hereniging Ligt Niet in Verschiet." *Het Parool*, November 13, 1989, p. 7; S. Rozemond. "Enige Juridische Vragen Over Een Duitse Hereniging." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 27, 1989, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ G. van Benthem van den Berg. "Indammen Europees Nationalisme Niet Eenvoudig." *NRC Handelsblad*, December 30, 1989, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Eugene F. Shaw. "Agenda-Setting and Mass Communication Theory." *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)*, 1979, 25 (2): p. 96-105.

¹¹⁰ S. Rozemond. "Enige Juridische Vragen Over Een Duitse Hereniging." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 27, 1989, p. 8.

¹¹¹ J. H. Brinks. "Fantasieën Over Anschluss Zijn Uit Den Boze." *NRC Handelsblad*, July 14, 1989, p. 11.

successful¹¹², and the other writes about what consequences a reunified Germany has on the geopolitical arena.¹¹³ The effect could be powerful when combined with more factual and objective articles, especially in 1990, where German reunification, the developments in the Baltic states, and the democratic movements in Eastern Europe are topics found in almost every newspaper. For example, the edition of *NRC Handelsblad* on the 23rd of January contained two articles from the same author in the domestic and opinion sections. The article in the domestic section provided a description of the discussions in the Dutch government regarding the varying positions taken up by different politicians.¹¹⁴ In contrast, the article in the opinion section focused on the perspective of the author and how he perceived that the Dutch government should approach the topic of German reunification.¹¹⁵

In their coverage of Germany's reunification, Dutch newspapers also used the strategy of repeating frames and revisiting past events, often to reaffirm a narrative to the reader. At the end of 1989, on 28 December, the *NRC* published an article that reflected on all of the developments in Eastern Europe, Berlin, and the Soviet Union. The article covered the whole page on the foreign news section.¹¹⁶ The newspapers showed that this was a critical historical moment and that a future without a clear division between East and West was possible. They recognized the significance of Europe's division into two alliances, possibly changing after forty years. Newspapers watched every development in Germany closely. Covering foreign trips of German officials to the Soviet Union and the United States and foreign leaders' visits to either Bonn or Berlin.¹¹⁷ Similar to the effects of the agenda-setting role of the media, by publishing a multitude of articles every week on the situation in East and West Germany, the public's attention was focused on the small sets of issues presented by the media. Examples of these issues were, the discussions among international leaders, the possible economic and political integration into the EC and the fear in Europe of a unified Germany. By highlighting

¹¹² S. Rozemond. "Enige Juridische Vragen Over Een Duitse Hereniging." *NRC Handelsblad*, November 27, 1989, p. 8.

¹¹³ Friso Wielenga. "Duitse Hereniging Ligt Niet in Verschiet." *Het Parool*, November 13, 1989, p. 7

¹¹⁴ Rob Meines. "Kamer Ontvankelijk Voor Snel EG-Lidmaatschap Van DDR." *NRC Handelsblad*, January 23, 1990, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Rob Meines. "'Duitse Gevaar' is Geen Argument Tegen Duitse Eenwording." *NRC Handelsblad*, January 23, 1990, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ W.H. Weenink. "Europa Ligt Opnieuw Op De Tekentafel." *NRC Handelsblad*, December 28, 1989, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ "Kohl Naar Moskou En Washington." *Het Parool*, February 8, 1990, p. 5 ; Rob Meines. "Russische Beer is Nu Een Knuffelbeer." *NRC Handelsblad*, June 14, 1989, p. 5.

certain issues over others, the newspapers framed the way the readers thought about the unification of Germany. This tactic is frequently used by the media, determining what foreign issues were most important to them, which could change according to the changes that occur in real life.¹¹⁸ What was interesting is that of all the articles published on the reunification of Germany the Dutch media does not cover how the Dutch government looks at the possibility of having a unified Germany as its neighbour. Of all the articles analysed, only one opinion piece in the *NRC* argued that the Dutch government needed a more active stance in favour of a unified Germany.¹¹⁹

Thus, the frame applied to the possible reunification of Germany focused more on its impact on Europe as a whole instead of focusing on the national consequences. By positioning the reunification of Germany on a European level, it made the topic more urgent, but it also placed the decision outside of the personal experience of the reader. This frame was not unique to one newspaper but was found in all four. By focusing on the impact on an European level instead of national level, the newspaper explained that not only does it have consequences locally, there needed to be an effective response to the problem on a European level. In addition, the conflict frame was applied here as discussing the reunification of Germany could not be done without looking at the Cold War context.¹²⁰ Questions regarding what alliance a unified Germany should join, if at all. As well as what role a unified Germany should play in the EC were among the most important questions asked. These ‘Cold War’ frames were traditionally found in US newspapers¹²¹ but crossed the Atlantic to the Netherlands. This could be seen in the number of articles that covered the issues in the Soviet republics, which was something that became more prominent after the events in Estonia discussed earlier. The articles followed a similar pattern: the struggle for independence was highlighted (problem definition), the source of the problem (communist rule), moral judgement was provided (fight for independence and freedom), and solutions were given

¹¹⁸ Maxwell McCombs. "The Agenda-Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion." In *Mass Media Economics 2002 Conference*, London School of Economics. 2002. p. 1-21

¹¹⁹ Rob Meines. "'Duitse Gevaar' is Geen Argument Tegen Duitse Eenwording." *NRC Handelsblad*, January 23, 1990, p. 9.

¹²⁰ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 369

¹²¹ Oksan Bayulgen, and Ekim Arbatli. "Cold War Redux in US–Russia Relations? The Effects of US Media Framing and Public Opinion of the 2008 Russia–Georgia War." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46, no. 4 (2013): p. 513-527.

(Dutch, or in most cases support from the West against the communist side).¹²² Finally, it was interesting that a lack of economic frames could be seen in the newspapers. Traditionally, economic frames were found throughout the Dutch newspapers. Now, some smaller articles that covered the consequences of the German reunification for Dutch farmers as well as the economy as a whole were given a less prominent place in the papers.

On the whole, a significant increase in volume can be seen after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The fall of the wall, in combination with the increasing migration from east to west and the diminishing role of the iron curtain, created a condition where German reunification seemed feasible. After the reunification occurred, the Dutch media reflected on whether it was the right decision. The newspapers did not answer this question specifically, often providing different options and opinions for the reader to decide for themselves. In one of these articles, the author makes a fascinating argument, pointing out that Germany could only have unified this fast with Gorbachev as the leader of the Soviet Union. This argument showed how highly Gorbachev was regarded by the author in maintaining closer ties to the West than his predecessors. At the time of writing, Yeltsin had just taken charge of the Soviet Union, and the author questioned whether the process would have been the same with him as the leader.¹²³ The Cold War context and earlier events in the Baltic States and Berlin ensured that the discussion regarding the reunification of Germany was covered extensively by the Dutch media. A combination of front-page articles, foreign news section pages, and opinion articles from experts attempted to inform the Dutch public about these events. The coverage of the Dutch media showed the power of newspapers in taking a discussion from Germany to the Netherlands and keeping it a prominent topic in the public debate for an extended period.¹²⁴

The Dutch foreign policy position

The German unification was not named specifically in the coalition agreement of 1989. This was not surprising as the Berlin Wall still stood firm at the time of writing the agreement. Nevertheless, the Dutch government explicitly stated that the developments in Eastern Europe would be supported politically and financially. This statement resembled the position of the

¹²² Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): p. 52

¹²³ J. L. Heldring. "Overhaast En Geforceerd?" *NRC Handelsblad*, December 28, 1990, p. 7.

¹²⁴ Eugene F. Shaw. "Agenda-Setting and Mass Communication Theory." *Gazette* (Leiden, Netherlands), 1979, 25 (2): p. 96-105.

Dutch government towards the democratization and liberalization of Eastern Europe. The Dutch government also stated that it aimed to collaborate with Eastern European nations in areas where common interests aligned. For example, in fighting climate change, terrorism and the drug industry. The coalition agreement often referred to multinational frameworks like NATO and the EC. Most foreign policy decisions were influenced by these frameworks. For instance, the Dutch security and disarmament policies followed the line set during the NATO conference. The only foreign issue specifically mentioned in the agreement was the policy towards South Africa.¹²⁵

Discussions regarding the possibility of German unification were prevalent in the Dutch parliamentary documents. At first it was called the ‘German matter’ by political leaders and it was discussed on 24 January 1990. Similar to the newspaper coverage, the RPF leader Leerling acknowledged the right of Germany to be sovereign, but questioned how a unified Germany would be integrated into the European fold. He mentioned the historical significance of having a unified Germany again in Europe. He believed that the EC and NATO were necessary to provide a framework for the integration of a unified Germany to be successful.¹²⁶ The day after on the 25th the discussion regarding the German reunification was seen again in parliamentary documents. Foreign minister van der Broek listed his priorities regarding the possible German reunification. There needed to be clarity regarding the western border between Germany and Poland, the reunification of Germany needed to happen democratically, and a unified Germany needed to become member of NATO and the EC.¹²⁷ On 19 February 1990, the foreign minister wrote a letter to the Tweede Kamer. In this letter he reflected on his meeting in Ottawa with the other NATO foreign ministers and explained how the possible unification of Germany was the main topic discussed during this meeting.¹²⁸ Van der Broek explained that he pushed for a unified Germany, encased within the frameworks of NATO and the EC, making it safer for the Soviet Union and Poland than a neutral Germany at the heart

¹²⁵ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Kabinetsformatie 1989*, October 26, 1989. [Regeerakkoord 1989 - Parlement.com](#)

¹²⁶ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *31ste Vergadering*, January 24, 1990. [Informatie over 0000035217 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹²⁷ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *32ste Vergadering*. January 25, 1990. [Informatie over 0000035218 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹²⁸ Hans van den Broek. *Brief Van De Minister Van Buitenlandse Zaken*. February 19, 1990. [Informatie over 0000040502 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

of Europe. In his report on the Ottawa convention minister van der Broek highlighted the positions of James Baker and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the American and West-German foreign ministers. It became clear that for a possible German reunification to happen, both Germanies needed to agree on how they would do this, with the four ex-occupation powers being included in this conversation.¹²⁹ Here, the Dutch media coverage and discussions in the Dutch parliament align. With the Dutch news coverage also presenting the role of the four ex-occupation powers as crucial in the process of the reunification of Germany.

The discussions in the Dutch government would often focus on the economic integration of Germany into the EC. Revealing the priorities of the Dutch government in improving bilateral trade relations with its neighbour. It was mentioned in a parliamentary document on the 4 October 1990, one day after the official reunification of Germany¹³⁰ and highlighted again in a document of parliament on 23 October where the economic consequences of the German unification were mentioned. These consequences focused on the agricultural sector, which was an important sector in the Netherlands.¹³¹ Going back to 9 October, we find the role of NATO at the core of the discussion between political leaders. Should NATO expand into Eastern Europe? Should NATO become more of a political organization? These are some of the questions discussed in parliament that day.¹³² On 31 October, the initial excitement of the German unification seemed to be tempered. The ambitious goals set by European political leaders were more difficult to achieve and finding consensus between the members of the EC remains hard. Especially regarding the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) agreements on agricultural policy.¹³³

On the whole, the Dutch media had limited influence on the foreign policy regarding the unification of Germany. The media is not mentioned in either the coalition agreements or the parliamentary documents analysed. Furthermore, the Dutch government discussed the

¹²⁹ P. Dankert. "*Brief Van De Staatssecretaris Van Buitenlandse Zaken.*" October 23, 1990. [Informatie over 0000029915 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹³⁰ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *Verslag Van Een Mondeling Overleg.* October 4, 1990. [Informatie over 0000029884 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹³¹ P. Dankert. "*Brief Van De Staatssecretaris Van Buitenlandse Zaken.*" October 23, 1990. . [Informatie over 0000029915 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹³² Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *7de Vergadering.* October 9, 1990. [Informatie over 0000027107 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹³³ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *17de Vergadering.* October 31, 1990. [Informatie over 0000027117 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

possible German reunification at length well before it actually occurred. Finally, the international frameworks of NATO, the EC and the OECD seemed critical for the Dutch foreign policy position. Making these frameworks more influential than the coverage of the Dutch media.

The end of the Warsaw pact

Coverage in the media

Similar to the reunification Germany, the end of the Warsaw pact was covered in depth by the Dutch media. With large articles on the front pages and foreign news sections, combined with a multitude of opinion articles the Dutch media highlighted the significance of the Warsaw pact slowly deteriorating. The first signs of a significant change in military policy was seen at the end of 1987 and is explicitly noted by Dutch defence and international relations expert Rob de Wijk who wrote a large article for *de Volkskrant* published on 18 November 1988. In his article, de Wijk reflects on the change in military policy of the Soviet Union with at its core having an adequate defence. Experts believed that this change in strategy would decrease the risk of either the Warsaw Pact or NATO to start a surprise offensive against the other. The article is quick to note why Gorbachev decided to make such a change, the Soviet economy could not afford to keep up with the military developments in Western nations, in particular the United States. Therefore, changing their military strategy was vital to keep the Soviet economy afloat.¹³⁴

The Cold War alliances were prominent in the Dutch newspapers. Most newspaper articles were biased in favour of the NATO alliance, which was logical as the Netherlands was a founding member of NATO. However, opinion articles allowed authors to be more critical and provided different analyses on the relationship between NATO and the Warsaw pact as well as the military prowess of the Warsaw pact. An example of this contrast were the newspaper articles published by *de Telegraaf* on 26 November 1988 and *het Parool* on 30 November 1988. The title of the article from *de Telegraaf* was: “NATO: increasing Warsaw Pact superiority”, whilst the title of the article in *het Parool* was: “The countdown has

¹³⁴ Rob de Wijk. "Leiders in Kremlin Willen Af Van Offensieve Militaire Strategieën." *De Volkskrant*, November 18, 1988, p. 5

started”, referring to the decrease in power of the Warsaw Pact.¹³⁵ This contrast was especially evident at the end of 1988 and early 1989 but decreased as time went on. The prominence of the NATO alliance in the Dutch newspapers showed how dominant the alliance was in the Dutch discourse during the Cold War. It was not the case of how the Dutch government would respond to the end of the Warsaw pact, but how NATO would respond. By using the NATO alliance as a frame, the Dutch newspapers approached the end of the Warsaw pact through a broader lense. Focused more on the effect of the end of the Warsaw pact on NATO than on the individual member states of the alliance.

From 1990 onwards, there is a change in the newspapers where the future of NATO is addressed, with articles that discussed what kind of role the alliance would play in a post-Cold War world. Several international conferences between the Soviet Union and the United States took centre stage during the coverage of the Warsaw Pact in the Dutch media.¹³⁶ One of these was a conference organized by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) which took place in Vienna. This was the final conference in a series of meetings between the United States, most European nations, and the Soviet-Union. *De Volkskrant* published two articles, one in the foreign news section and the other in the opinions section, on the conference in Vienna. The first, compared the conference to the ones that were held in Belgrade (1977-1978) and Madrid (1980-1993), and it highlighted the role of Gorbachev and his reforms which until that point were not made by any former Soviet leader.¹³⁷ The opinion article provided an in-depth analysis of the Warsaw Pact. Why was it created? What was its goal? This article answers these questions and provides an analysis of the three main functions of the alliance. The author concluded that the Warsaw Pact was never the strong military alliance feared by Western governments. There was no collaboration between the armies of the Soviet republics and these were not ready to actively operate in military conditions. The authors explained that the Warsaw pacts main functions were politically, disciplinary and military-strategically. The Warsaw pacts political function was for the Sovietization of Eastern Europe, the disciplinary function was to intervene during events like the Hungarian revolution or Prague Spring, and the military function was mainly to deter

¹³⁵ "NAVO: Overmacht Van Warschaupact Groeit." *De Telegraaf*, November 26, 1988, p. 9; Bart Tromp. "Het Aftellen is Begonnen." *Het Parool*, November 30, 1988, p. 7.

¹³⁶ Paul Brill. "Gorbatsjov Kondigt in VN Eenzijdige Reductie Van Sovjet-Troepen Aan." *De Volkskrant*, December 8, 1988, p. 1.

¹³⁷ Hella Rottenberg. "Verzoening in Wenen Na Koude Oorlog." *De Volkskrant*, January 17, 1989, p. 5.

NATO as well as form a Soviet bloc against the West. The frames applied to the coverage of the Warsaw Pact portray the alliance as a bigger danger than it really was.¹³⁸

The Dutch newspaper coverage started using frames that tried to address the future geopolitical landscape with a unified Germany. Most of the articles that tried this were found in the opinions section of the paper. The author Ben Knapen did just this in the *NRC* edition of 1 March 1989, with the title of his article: “The United States has to learn how to live without an enemy”. Knapen, looks back in history at the strategy of containment employed by the United States against the Soviet Union, with the goal of decreasing the influence of the Soviet Union in foreign states. The author asked the question what the United States would do when the Soviet Union was not there anymore.¹³⁹ A similar article was published by the *NRC* just over a month later. The author this time, the American George F. Kennan. Kennan, was regarded as the brainchild of the containment strategy employed by the United States against the Soviet Union. He reflected on the relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union and called for a change in the future, which according to him should focus more on friendly negotiations between the two nations instead of fear of each other’s militaries.¹⁴⁰ The decision of the *NRC* to publish an opinion article from an American instead of a Soviet author is an example of the different relationship between the Netherlands and the United States compared to that of the Netherlands and the Soviet Union. The use of American experts, as well as international news stations, based in New York and London, implied that this perspective was also represented more in the Dutch newspapers. Nevertheless, more critical articles can also be found. *Het Parool* published an opinion article where the author argued that it was the fault of the West for the tensions with the Soviet Union. The article was called; “Warsaw Pact is a defence against NATO aggression”. The author argued that all of the initiatives to create peace between the two alliances have come from the Soviet Union. Moreover, the author questions the morality of how most Western countries have gained their wealth. Highlighting the colonial histories of these countries and how the exploitation of these colonies was the only reason that countries like England, France and the Netherlands had gotten rich. It provides a refreshing perspective against most Dutch newspaper articles that more often than not focus

¹³⁸ C.A. Voesenek "Militaire Betekenis Van Warschaupact Neemt Af." *De Volkskrant*, January 17, 1989, p. 15.

¹³⁹ Ben Knapen. "Amerika Moet Leren Leven Zonder Erfvijand." *NRC Handelsblad*, March 1, 1989, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ George F. Keenan. "VS Hebben Niet Voldoende Gereageerd Op Russische Initiatieven." *NRC Handelsblad*, April 17, 1989, p. 9.

on the histories of other countries instead of reflecting on their own.¹⁴¹ Overall, this article was unique as the other newspaper articles that cover the end of the Warsaw Pact do not reflect on NATO and Dutch history this critically. It provided the reader with a different, more critical perspective regarding the issues in Eastern Europe. However, this critical element remained underrepresented in the Dutch newspapers.

Instead of reflecting on the Dutch position, the newspapers reported more on the unrest within Eastern European nations like Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.¹⁴² All of the articles were similar in that they described how civil movements in these countries were pushing away from the central authority of the Soviet Union. Another element in these articles was the lack of response from the Soviet leadership, which normally was quick to deal with unrest in the Soviet republics, the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968 are well-known examples of this.¹⁴³ *De Telegraaf* published the following article on their front page: "Sinatra doctrine for Warsaw Pact". The article discussed the new so-called Sinatra doctrine introduced by the Soviet Union where each Soviet republic could decide their own future without interference from Moscow.¹⁴⁴ This article, published on 26 October 1989 was quickly followed by two front page articles from the *NRC* and *het Parool* on 30 October. In these articles, Soviet spokesmen were quoted saying that every member of the Warsaw Pact was free to leave the alliance whenever they wanted.¹⁴⁵ The newspapers framed this choice more negatively, emphasizing that although the Soviet republics were free to make their own decisions there were still internal pressures at play that ensured the cooperation of the Soviet republics in the Soviet Union.

The Cold War frames used focused on the unrest in the Soviet republics and the response from Moscow. Combined with more historical frames of earlier revolutions, newspaper journalists tried to connect the events that happened to earlier attempts at

¹⁴¹ R. ten Hagen. "Warschau-Pact is Verdediging Tegen Agressie Van De NAVO." *Het Parool*, April 3, 1989, p. 7.

¹⁴² Hans Renner. "Elk Oostblokland Gaat Zijn Eigen Weg Naar Het Socialisme." *NRC Handelsblad*, March 13, 1989, p. 8.

¹⁴³ Peter Michielsen. "Moskou Terughoudend Over Polen - En Met Reden." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 22, 1989, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ "Sinatra Doctrine Voor Warschaupact." *De Telegraaf*, October 26, 1989, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ "Uittreding Uit Pact 'is Oosteuropese Landen Toegestaan'." *NRC Handelsblad*, October 30, 1989, p. 1; "Hongarije Mag Los Van Warschaupact." *Het Parool*, October 30, 1989, p. 1.

revolution.¹⁴⁶ The conflict frame was used to paint the opposition in Poland or Hungary as freedom fighters against the tyrannical Soviet Union. Highlighting the harsh responses of the Soviet army reaffirmed this frame. The Cold War frame was also evident in the comparison between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In most newspaper articles analysed, one could not be mentioned without the other. In this sense, the failure of the Warsaw pact was used to diminish the power of the Soviet Union. Finally, often connected to conflicts, a security frame could be seen in the Dutch media. Several articles went into depth on the possible safety concerns if the Warsaw Pact collapsed. How do the United States and the EC respond to this? Should the Central and Eastern European nations be incorporated into NATO? How will the Soviet Union respond to this? These are all questions that the reader was confronted with.

As the end of the Warsaw Pact drew closer, the future role of NATO became a more important topic in the media and at the end of 1990 several newspaper articles covered this subject. On 15 December 1990, a NATO conference in London occurred where the new relationship between NATO and the Warsaw Pact became clear. Next to the sixteen NATO members, delegates from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria were also present at the conference. Furthermore, a Polish representative called the NATO assembly ‘our assembly’, this slip of the tongue was also reported on by the Dutch media.¹⁴⁷ On 17 December the *NRC* published an opinion article on the NATO meeting which zoomed in on the relationship between Western Europe and the United States. The author addressed the changing circumstances as the Cold War came to an end and emphasized the importance of creating a united Europe that was less reliant on US military aid. Organizations like the EC, or the CSCE should be given a more prominent role.¹⁴⁸

The final articles on the end of the Warsaw Pact also focused on the future relationship of former Warsaw Pact nations and NATO. *De Telegraaf* published an article in their foreign news section on 17 January 1991 titled: ‘Czechoslovakia wants to leave Warsaw Pact’. This article was based on international reports that the government of Czechoslovakia accepted a motion to discuss the direct cancellation of the Warsaw Pact after Moscow intervened in the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius, killing 14 people. A meeting was scheduled between the Soviet

¹⁴⁶ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): p. 52

¹⁴⁷ Jan Gerritsen. "Toekomst Van NAVO Ligt in Handen Van EG." *NRC Handelsblad*, December 15, 1990, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Herman Amenlink. "Verenigde Staten En Europa Drijven Steeds Verder Uit Elkaar." *NRC Handelsblad*, December 17, 1990, p. 9.

leader Gorbachev and the leaders of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to discuss the future of the Warsaw Pact.¹⁴⁹ The NRC reported on this meeting by writing an article in their foreign news section called: 'Military role of the Warsaw Pact ends on the 1st of April'. The article reflected on the decisions made during the meeting and it quotes the Czechoslovakian president Havel, who pushed for closer cooperation between NATO and the Eastern European nations that were part of the Warsaw Pact. Havel argued that only NATO could guarantee the safety of these nations against Moscow.¹⁵⁰ By framing the issue around Havel the Dutch newspapers presented the opinion of a central European leader who was crucial in overthrowing the communist regime in Czechoslovakia as the leader of the independence movement there. Two weeks later the NRC published an article, similar to what they did after the German reunification which reflected on the Warsaw Pact. The article goes into detail how the alliance came to be, what it did during its time in existence, and whether the alliance was an effective one. It highlighted the military aspect of the alliance and how the Warsaw Pact determined the foreign and defence policies of several nations. With the end of the Warsaw Pact, the purpose of NATO changed from defending nations against the spread of communism to more of a peacekeeping role. This change in purpose also meant that NATO members adjusted their foreign policy to match these changes.¹⁵¹ This change in purpose of NATO is not presented as either something good or bad, but it does create an amount of uncertainty for the future of the alliance.

The Dutch foreign policy position

The position of the Dutch government regarding the end of the Warsaw pact was difficult to retrieve. The Warsaw pact was not mentioned at all in the coalition agreement of 1989.¹⁵² During the 1990s, the Warsaw pact was mainly mentioned in parliamentary documents that discussed how much money the Dutch government should spend on its defence sector. From early 1991 onwards the Warsaw pact was mentioned more often in the parliamentary documents. Similar to the Dutch media coverage, these parliamentary documents prioritized

¹⁴⁹ "Tsjechoslowaakse Parlement Wil Van Warschaupact Af." *De Telegraaf*, January 17, 1991, p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ "Militaire Rol Van Warschaupact Op 1 April Ten Einde." *NRC Handelsblad*, February 12, 1991, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ Peter Michielsen. "Socialistische Broederhulp Warschaupact Nu Echt Voorbij." *NRC Handelsblad*, February 26, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁵² Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Kabinetsformatie 1989*, October 26, 1989. [Regerakkoord 1989 - Parlement.com](https://regerakkoord1989-parlement.com)

the role of NATO. On 17 January 1991, a report from the NATO conference was published which showed what topics the different committees within NATO were discussing. In the political committee of NATO a special report from the UK was covered that looked at how NATO should engage with the Soviet Union, the future of the Warsaw pact nations and the future vision of NATO. This report showed us that discussions regarding the future of Warsaw pact nations were already being discussed before the alliance ended. Next to the future of the Warsaw pact nations the political committee discussed the implications of the Gorbachev doctrine and how NATO should collaborate with the Soviet Union.¹⁵³

The importance of NATO is reaffirmed in the discussion of the foreign affairs committee of the Dutch government. On 28 January 1991, it published a report on the Dutch position regarding a new Central and Eastern Europe. In this document, the committee stated that the military power of the Warsaw pact had significantly decreased over the last years. Nevertheless, the Russians were still spending between 13 to 15% of its GDP on its defence. The committee asked the Dutch government several questions. What would the role be of US troops in Europe in the future? Does the Dutch government already have a vision about how NATO would respond to the changing circumstances?¹⁵⁴ These questions showed what the committee deemed most important, creating a strong security structure in Europe by determining the future role of the US and NATO in Europe.

In the parliamentary records, debates on the consequences of the end of the Warsaw pact were found. These debates revealed that the attitudes of the Dutch newspapers and the government towards the end of the Warsaw pact are similar. The main difference was the nervousness of the Dutch parliamentary members of the idea that no security structure is in place in Eastern Europe. On 26 February 1991, a day after the official end of the Warsaw pact, the Dutch government discussed the consequences of the end of the Warsaw pact. Throughout these discussions a level of uncertainty was noticed. CDA member Anton Maris explained his concerns by stating that “the recent end of the Warsaw pact organization, without developing a successor presents us with some uncertainties. After all, the end of the Warsaw Pact was certainly not due to a better functioning of the United Nations. What kind of

¹⁵³ Staten-Generaal. *Noord-Atlantische Assemblée*. January 17, 1991. [Informatie over 0000028329 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹⁵⁴ Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal. *Vaststelling Van De Begroting Van De Uitgaven En De Ontvangsten Van Hoofdstuk V (Ministerie Van Buitenlandse Zaken) Voor Het Jaar 1991*. January 28, 1991. [Informatie over 0000026820 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

security structure will replace the Warsaw pact in Eastern Europe? In the short term there simply is not a solution.” Maris questions how the Dutch government sees this. Frans Uijen discussed the end of the Warsaw pact by looking at the consequences of its collapse for NATO. He questioned the role and purpose of NATO in the future and plead that the Dutch government should prioritize its trans-Atlantic relationship if the Netherlands wanted to have any influence on the future security system in Europe.¹⁵⁵ The role of the Dutch media in the parliamentary documents remained minimal. The role of the press was mentioned in the NATO report. The general committees of NATO discussed the role of the media in the civil affairs committee, but no further detail was provided in the report.

¹⁵⁵ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. *16de Vergadering*. February 26, 1991. [Informatie over 0000026354 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

Chapter 4

The August Coup attempt was the most covered moment analysed during this research. The newspapers used a new method of covering the coup attempt by creating large sections in the newspaper, specifically for articles that covered the August Coup attempt. In these sections a variety of frames and perspectives were used to explain the coup attempt and its consequences to the reader. For the first three days of the coup attempt the Dutch newspapers used these sections, repeating frames and perspectives as the coup unfolded. Although the coup ultimately failed, it was a fatal blow to the communist party in the Soviet Union. The coup exposed the tensions within the leadership of the party, as some party members were behind the attempt, as well as the different visions for the Soviet Union. In comparison to the August Coup attempt, the newspaper coverage regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union decreased. However, the focus on the future within the newspaper articles provided the reader with the sense of not ‘if’ but ‘when’ would the Soviet Union collapse. The Dutch government responded in a similar manner to both case studies, placing the EC at the centre of an unified European response. The importance of the EC for the Dutch government provided another example of the importance of these multinational frameworks for the Dutch foreign policy.

The August Coup

Coverage in the media

The Dutch newspapers framed the conditions in the Soviet Union as unstable highlighting the risks of the large Soviet military on European soil as well as its nuclear capabilities. This concerned some authors but there were also several articles that approach the instability in the Soviet Union as an opportunity for the West to end the Cold War and establish better relationships with the Soviet republics. Especially Hubert Smeets, the correspondent of the *NRC* in Moscow, and Hella Rottenberg, the correspondent of *De Volkskrant* in Moscow continued to pay attention and write about this. Smeets and Rottenberg highlighted in their articles how the attempts of Gorbachev to increase the central authority of Moscow over the independence movements in the Soviet republics was decreasing his support internationally and locally. In these articles, the name Boris Yeltsin is nearly always mentioned as the most prominent critic of Gorbachev. Smeets highlighted these internal struggles in opinion articles and articles in the foreign news section of the paper. For example the titles he used for his

articles were: “Vilnius was the mistake Yeltsin was waiting for”¹⁵⁶, “Yeltsin has learned a lot from Gorbachev”¹⁵⁷, and “The net is closing around the Great Party Leader”.¹⁵⁸ Rottenberg differs from Smeets as she wrote less opinion articles and more articles for the foreign news section of the paper. In these articles she explained the developments in the Soviet Union to the reader and provided special attention to the power struggle within the Kremlin. In articles like “Yeltsin-Gorbachev agreement”¹⁵⁹ or “But everyone knows Yeltsin will be president”¹⁶⁰ she provided in-depth information regarding the political decisions made in Moscow, as well as the potential candidates that could be chosen during the first democratic elections in Russia. Yeltsin was presented as a figure who wanted to democratize the Russian Soviet republic as well as privatize state property. He was framed as the most likely candidate for the position. Due to his anti-communist and pro-democratic agenda Yeltsin was a favoured candidate in comparison to the others who were depicted as more conservative individuals who wanted to centralize power in Moscow.

Not only did the August Coup receive more coverage numerically, but also the event itself received its own section in all of the newspapers analysed. We could first see this in the *NRC* edition on 19 August 1991. The headline that could be read on the front page was “Gorbachev ousted by military. Tanks in Moscow; state of emergency declared”.¹⁶¹ The next five pages of the newspaper were all focused on the events in the Soviet Union, fittingly called ‘Gorbachev’. Gorbachev was framed positively by the Dutch media with most articles describing how international leaders in the West wanted Gorbachev reinstated as soon as possible. The articles, in total numbering around twenty, covered a wide range of topics. There were articles on the coup attempt itself,¹⁶² of reactions from other countries,¹⁶³ NATO

¹⁵⁶ Hubert Smeets. "Vilnius was De Fout Waarop Yeltsin Wachtte." *NRC Handelsblad*, Januari 15, 1991, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Hubert Smeets. "Jeltsin Heeft Veel Van Gorbatsjov Geleerd." *NRC Handelsblad*, April 5, 1991, p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ Hubert Smeets. "Het Net Om De Grote Partijleider Sluit Zich." *NRC Handelsblad*, April 10, 1991, p. 9.

¹⁵⁹ Hella Rottenberg. "Akkoord Jeltsin-Gorbatsjov." *De Volkskrant*, May 1, 1991, p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ Hella Rottenberg. "Maar Iedereen Weet Dat Yeltsin President Wordt." *De Volkskrant*, June 7, 1991, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ "Gorbatsjev Afgezet Door Militairen. Tanks in Moskou; Noodtoestand Uitgeroepen." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 19, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁶² "Gorbatsjev Afgezet Door Militairen. Tanks in Moskou; Noodtoestand Uitgeroepen." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 19, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁶³ "Wereld Reageert Met Verbijstering." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 19, 1991, p. 1.

and the EC,¹⁶⁴ as well as an analysis of why the coup occurred¹⁶⁵ and short biographies of the key players during the coup attempt.¹⁶⁶ Although more common today, where we can find newspaper sections committed to the war in Ukraine, or the war between Hamas and Israel. During the time period analysed by this research there had never been such a large section of the newspaper dedicated to the situation in the Soviet Union.

These sections were to a large extent similar to each other with all of them portraying a chaotic image of the situation in Moscow and the Soviet Union. The *NRC* called their section “crisis in the Soviet Union” and covered the first six pages of the newspaper.¹⁶⁷ *De Volkskrant* followed suit with their edition on 20 August with the headline “Confusion in Moscow after coup attempt”. Similar to the *NRC*, the first six pages covered the coup attempt in the Soviet Union, with the section fittingly called ‘Crisis in the USSR’.¹⁶⁸ *De Telegraaf* and *het Parool* did not create a specific section like the *NRC* and *De Volkskrant*. However, both published many articles on the coup attempt and spread these throughout their newspaper on the 20th of August. The front page article of *Het Parool* was “Tanks on route to Leningrad”¹⁶⁹ and in *De Telegraaf* the front page article was “Fear after Gorbachev’s fall”.¹⁷⁰ From the headlines mentioned above, fear, confusion and panic were the dominant frames used by the media. The perception given to the reader was that of chaos in the Soviet Union, a situation that could change at any moment. Not only through the language used by the newspapers, but also with pictures of Soviet tanks, citizens in Moscow barricading the streets and Yeltsin himself standing on top of a tank.

As the coup attempt continued, it remained the most important topic in the Dutch media. On 21 August, all of the four newspapers published articles regarding the coup on their front pages. The *NRC*’s front page article was “Perpetrators coup attempt Moscow on the run”¹⁷¹, *De Volkskrant* followed with “Tanks attempt to break resistance”¹⁷², *Het Parool* with

¹⁶⁴ Redacteuren. "EG Bezorgd, Hoopt Op Voortzetten Hervormingen." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 19, 1991, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Laura Starink. "Gorbatsjov: Slachtoffer Van Zijn Eigen Revolutie." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 19, 1991, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ Redacteur. "Gorbatsjovs Koekoeksjong." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 19, 1991, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Redacteur. "Gorbatsjov Moet Terug." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 20, 1991, p. 1

¹⁶⁸ Hella Rottenberg. "Verwarring in Moskou Na Coup." *De Volkskrant*, 1991, p. 1

¹⁶⁹ "Tanks Op Weg Naar Leningrad." *Het Parool*, August 20, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ "Angst Na Val Gorbatsjov." *De Telegraaf*, August 20, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Hubert Smeets. "Daders Coup Moskou Op De Vlucht ." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 21, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁷² Hella Rottenberg. "Tanks Proberen Verzet Te Breken." *De Volkskrant*, August 21, 1991, p. 1

“Protestors fight off first attack”¹⁷³ and *De Telegraaf* opened with “Junta is crumbling”.¹⁷⁴ Again, the *NRC* and *De Volkskrant* continued their special sections called ‘Crisis in the Soviet Union’ and ‘Crisis in the USSR’ which both filled up the first six pages of the newspaper. Both papers used pictures of burning barricades and mass protests at the square in front of the Winter palace in Leningrad to provide a picture of the unrest. *Het Parool* and *De Telegraaf* also used these pictures, but did not create a specific section with just articles on the crisis in the Soviet Union. Both papers chose to spread articles on the Soviet Union throughout the paper, with *De Telegraaf* providing the least attention to the issues in the East. Nevertheless, with around twenty articles in all of the four newspapers, the August Coup attempt and its consequences were covered in detail by the Dutch media. Several different perspectives were provided ranging from the economic consequences of the coup attempt¹⁷⁵, the responses of the EC to the coup¹⁷⁶, and an analysis provided by a Dutch defence expert.¹⁷⁷ Also the repetition of frames, through similar use of language and pictures, reinforced the feeling of fear and conflict.

On the penultimate day of the August Coup, the Dutch media’s focus remained on the situation in the Soviet Union. Similar to the reports from the Dutch media on 20 and 21 August, the *NRC* and *de Volkskrant* continued with their special sections on the crisis in the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁸ In both papers the first six pages were reserved for articles on the August Coup attempt. *Het Parool* continued to publish articles on the August Coup attempt with a similar number of articles as the other two newspapers.¹⁷⁹ Only *de Telegraaf* decreased their reports on the Soviet Union significantly. *De Telegraaf* provided several articles on the coup attempt on their front page as well as in the foreign news section of the newspaper.¹⁸⁰ All of the newspapers made it clear that the August Coup had failed by only looking at their

¹⁷³ "Betogers Slaan Eerste Aanval Af." *Het Parool*, August 21, 1991 p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Phillippe Remarque. "Junta Brokkelt Af." *De Telegraaf*, August 21, 1991, p. 1

¹⁷⁵ Alfred van Cleef "Handel Blijft Prioriteit Van Rode Leger in Duitsland." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 21, 1991, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ "EG: Banden Oost-Europa Versterken." *Het Parool*, August 21, 1991, p. 3

¹⁷⁷ Jeroen Trommelen. "Ook Nederlands Defensie-Expert Volten Verrast Door Moment Van Coup in Sovjet-Unie. "in Rusland Staat Meer Dan Alleen Macht Op Het Spel". *De Volkskrant*, August 21, 1991, p. 3

¹⁷⁸ Hubert Smeets. "Jeltzin Stelt Eisen Na Falen Coup." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 22, 1991, p. 1; Hella Rottenberg. "Gorbatsjov Keert Terug in Moskou." *De Volkskrant*, August 22, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁷⁹ "Coupleider Pleegt Zelfmoord." *Het Parool*, August 22, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Phillippe Remarque. "Gorbatsjov Terug, Coupleiders Op De Vlucht." *De Telegraaf*, August 22, 1991, p. 1.

headlines. *The NRC* posted “Yeltsin makes demands after the failed coup”,¹⁸¹ *de Volkskrant* stated “Gorbachev returns to Moscow”,¹⁸² *het Parool* continued with “Couple leader commits suicide”¹⁸³ and in a similar manner *de Telegraaf* opened with the headline “Gorbachev is back, coup leaders on the run”.¹⁸⁴ Due to the multitude of articles published by the Dutch media, a wide variety of perspectives were used to look at the August Coup. There are articles that discussed the consequences of the coup attempt for both the positions of Yeltsin and Gorbachev,¹⁸⁵ how the coup attempt remained a secret for so long,¹⁸⁶ and provided special attention to the roles of the Red Army and the KGB during the coup attempt.¹⁸⁷ Next to these articles that discussed the events within the Soviet Union, the reactions of world leaders from the West as well as from the Soviet republics were covered by the Dutch media. Special attention was given to the economic consequences of the coup attempt, with articles discussing the stock exchange returning to pre-coup levels.¹⁸⁸

Only on the final was there a decrease in newspaper coverage. Because the coup attempt had failed the newspapers shifted their focus. From this moment, the *NRC* and *de Volkskrant* stopped with their special sections on the crisis in the Soviet Union. Similar to *het Parool* and *de Telegraaf*, all four newspapers published several articles on their front pages and foreign news sections. More interestingly, each newspaper focused on a different aspect of the coup. The *NRC* gave more attention to the Baltic states banning the communist party in their countries due to the coup attempt.¹⁸⁹ *De Volkskrant* zoomed in on the celebrations in Moscow now the coup had officially ended.¹⁹⁰ *Het Parool* discussed the future of the communist party in the Soviet Union as the members of the party who supported the coup

¹⁸¹ Hubert Smeets. "Jeltzin Stelt Eisen Na Falen Coup." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 22, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁸² Hella Rottenberg. "Gorbatsjov Keert Terug in Moskou." *De Volkskrant*, August 22, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁸³ "Coupleider Pleegt Zelfmoord." *Het Parool*, August 22, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Phillipe Remarque. "Gorbatsjov Terug, Coupleiders Op De Vlucht." *De Telegraaf*, August 22, 1991, p. 1

¹⁸⁵ Maarten Huygen. "Jeltsins Ster Stijgt Razendsnel in De VS." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 22, 1991, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ Dick van der Aart. "Sovjet-Leger Bereidde Coup Ongemerkt Voor Dankzij Radiostilte." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 22, 1991, p. 2.

¹⁸⁷ Hans Steketee. "Sovjet-Legertop Gokte Tevergeefs Alleen Op Discipline Van Militairen." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 22, 1991, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ "Markten Vlakken Janajev-Effect Weer Uit." *De Volkskrant*, August 22, 1991, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ "Riga En Vilnius Verbieden De Communistische Partij." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 23, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Hella Rottenberg. "Sovjet-Unie Viert Mislukken Coup Als Einde Communisme." *De Volkskrant*, August 23, 1991, p. 1.

attempt were being dealt with.¹⁹¹ Finally, *de Telegraaf* highlighted the increase in power of Boris Yeltsin now the coup had ended.¹⁹² What was similar across the Dutch newspapers was how much significance was given to how the political situation had changed in the Soviet Union due to the coup attempt. From now until the end of September 1991 the August Coup attempt was mentioned sporadically in the newspapers. Most of the articles were opinion articles from the correspondents of the newspapers or invited experts. However, the Dutch media would remain to pay close attention to any developments in the Soviet Union until its end in December 1991.

The sheer volume and repetition of newspaper articles on the August Coup attempt was different from the previous key moments analysed. Not yet were specific sections created in the newspaper that only discussed the August Coup attempt. What specific effect this had on the public opinion was unclear, but it could be concluded that the readers of the newspapers had to be aware of the events in Moscow. Where the repetition of frames often had more influence on less knowledgeable individuals it decreased in strength when the reader was well versed in the topic and more interested in a deeper understanding of the problem.¹⁹³ The large sections that could be seen in the newspapers tried to satisfy both groups. More general information was seen on the front page with in-depth analyses being positioned in the latter pages of the sections. For a lot of people the Soviet Union was either a complex entity or simplified as the communist East. Following the developments during the coup and the different goals of the Soviet republics could therefore be difficult to understand. By clustering all the articles on the August Coup, the newspapers provided a better overview of the unfolding events to the reader. Within these sections some smaller frames could also be seen. The most prominent of these smaller frames was the economic frame. In all of the four newspapers analysed, most of the smaller articles focused on the economic consequences of the coup attempt, especially on the stock market. In addition to the economic consequences, the human impact frame was used effectively by the media.¹⁹⁴ Think of the pictures of individuals fighting against the coup attempt, most notably the protestors fighting against the

¹⁹¹ "Afrekening Met Partij SU Begonnen." *Het Parool*, August 23, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁹² Remarque, Philippe. "Boris Yeltsin Wint Aan Macht." *De Telegraaf*, August 23, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁹³ Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "A Theory of Framing and Opinion Formation in Competitive Elite Environments," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): p. 112

¹⁹⁴ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 369

military in front of the Winter Palace in Moscow. These pictures reinforced the frames used in the newspaper article, in the case of the human impact frame, the protestors were depicted as brave in their attempts to fight against the Soviet military. These smaller frames were spread throughout the sections used by the newspapers to cover the August Coup attempt.

Dutch foreign policy position

The role of the EC was central in the Dutch foreign policy position regarding the August Coup attempt. The Dutch foreign policy position regarding the August Coup attempt could be retrieved from a letter from the Dutch foreign minister to the Tweede Kamer on 21 August. At this moment in time, the coup attempt was still ongoing. The foreign minister van der Broek said that: “the current Soviet authorities are now required to restore constitutional order without delay and reinstate president Gorbachev as head of state”. This position was chosen after an emergency meeting of the foreign ministers of the EC. The letter of the foreign minister provided more detail regarding this position. It deemed that the censoring of the media, as well as the replacements of democratically elected individuals and institutions have shown the true nature of this new Soviet government. The foreign ministers of the EC discussed and looked at the consequences of the coup attempt for Europe’s stability, security and relationships in the international arena. As a response, the foreign ministers wanted to increase the support of the EC to other nations in Central and Eastern Europe. More specifically, the association agreements with Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia would be finalized as soon as possible. As well as support would be given to the reforms in Bulgaria and Romania. Finally, in this letter it was made clear that the foreign ministers of the Netherlands and the other EC members would stop its financial aid as well as food deliveries to the Soviet Union as long as the coup was ongoing. Overall, this strategy aligns with the Dutch vision of the economic role of the EC.¹⁹⁵ It is evident that the initial foreign policy position of the Dutch government was created in collaboration with the other EC members and was not influenced by the Dutch media coverage of the coup attempt.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Duco Hellema. "De Historische Betekenis Van De Nederlandse Toetreding Tot De NAVO." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 23 (2): 1999. p. 12

¹⁹⁶ H. van den Broek. "Ontwikkelingen Sovjet-Unie. Brief Van De Minister Van Buitenlandse Zaken." August 21, 1991. [Informatie over 0000034310 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

The Dutch government recognized the differences between the Soviet republics in their goals and future relationship with Moscow. This became evident from a second letter written by the foreign minister on 3 September 1991. In this letter he reaffirmed the uncertainty that existed regarding the developments in the Soviet Union. However, he made a set of statements regarding the coup attempt and its consequences. First, the foreign minister explained that the relationship between the different Soviet republic and the government in Moscow had changed significantly. He pointed to the declarations of independence that were made in most Soviet republics after the coup. Second, the foreign minister highlighted the differences between the Soviet republics in which manner these want to be independent. Where the Baltic States want to completely cut their ties with the Soviet Union and were already recognized by the EC. Other Soviet republics were yet to do so and wanted a different relationship with the government in Moscow. Third, the foreign minister discussed the consequences of these developments on the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. The party was banned by Gorbachev due to its inactivity during the coup attempt against him. Finally, the foreign minister listed the personnel changes within the Soviet Union at key positions. The foreign minister ended his letter to the Tweede Kamer with this final sentence: "However, it may be assumed that the Soviet Union as it was known recently, both in terms of the relationship between the different parts themselves, as well as the former monopoly on power of the Communist Party has ceased to exist."¹⁹⁷

The Dutch parliamentary records showed that the coup attempt came as a surprise. In earlier parliamentary documents, the unstable situation in the Baltic states and the military response of Moscow in Vilnius and Riga were mentioned. For example on 28 May 1991, a report was published by a Dutch delegation that visited the capitals of the Baltic states and Moscow. The goal of these meetings was to gain more information about the current situation, to provide political support to the democratically elected parliaments in the Baltic states and to gain an impression of the dialogue between the Baltic states and Moscow. The report provided summaries of their meetings in all the capitals and provided a set of recommendations to the Dutch government. In their recommendations the Dutch foreign delegation highlighted the following points. The Dutch government should push the EC to continue their negotiations with the democratically elected representatives of the Baltic states. The EC needed to make clear that further military interventions would significantly harm the

¹⁹⁷ H. van den Broek. *"Ontwikkelingen Sovjet-Unie. Brief Van De Minister Van Buitenlandse Zaken."* September 3, 1991. [Informatie over 0000034312 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

relationship between the EC and the Soviet Union. The OSCE should initiate extra meetings where the situation in the Baltic states as well as potential human rights violations needed to be discussed. Finally the EC should invest in sharing its knowledge with the Baltic states in creating a market economy as well as invest in an EC information centre in the Baltic states.¹⁹⁸ From these recommendations it was evident that the focus of the Dutch government was on the Baltic states, not on a potential coup attempt. Similar to the Dutch newspapers, the government could only react to the changes occurring within the Soviet Union.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union

Coverage by the media

After the August Coup attempt failed, coverage regarding the end of the Soviet Union became more prominent in the Dutch newspapers. On 26 August 1991, the *NRC*, *Volkskrant* and *Telegraaf* published newspapers that covered the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The main headline on the front page of the *NRC* was “Central Soviet authority is collapsing”. The article, written by Hubert Smeets, mentioned how the decision of Gorbachev to step down as the leader of the Communist Party resulted in widespread chaos within Moscow and the Soviet republics. Prominent members of the communist party committed suicide or were either forced to step down from the public positions they held.¹⁹⁹ *De Volkskrant*'s front page headline is very similar to that of the *NRC* with it being “Central authority in the Soviet Union has collapsed”. The article, written by Hella Rottenberg, is more focused on the role of Yeltsin in pressuring Gorbachev to step down from his position. She framed Yeltsin as a man who almost had unlimited power and pointed out that Gorbachev needed a miracle to survive this politically. She did not go into detail whether it was a good or bad thing if Yeltsin would come into power. Moreover, Rottenberg declared that the end of communism was the end of the Soviet Union. She argued that the August Coup attempt had caused the central authority of Moscow to collapse. In turn, the Soviet republics started to declare their independence from Moscow, with national guards and civilian militias being created in the cities and villages of these republics. This article from *de Volkskrant* shows how large the chaos was within the Soviet Union with the communist party being banned nearly everywhere as well as public

¹⁹⁸ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. *Verslag Van Een Delegation Naar De Baltische Republieken En Moskou (7-17 April 1991)*. May 23, 1991. [Informatie over 0000029884 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

¹⁹⁹ Hubert Smeets. "Centraal Sovjet Gezag Stort In." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 26, 1991, p. 1.

officials losing their jobs if they were members of the party.²⁰⁰ *De Telegraaf* followed this trend as well, with their headline being “Soviet Union is falling apart”. The article, written by Phillippe Remarque, highlighted how Ukraine, the most important Soviet republic economically, as well as Belarus, the Soviet republic traditionally most loyal to Moscow, both declared their independence from the Soviet Union. According to Remarque, this only could have occurred due to the aftermath of the August Coup attempt which led to Gorbachev stepping down as the leader of the communist party.²⁰¹

The implosion of the Soviet Union was framed through the declarations of independence from the Soviet republics. Revealing the positive attitude of the Dutch media towards these changes. One article, which returns in all newspapers analysed, was the decision of the EC to recognize the independence of the Baltic States. With Yeltsin also having recognized the independence of the Baltic States, the EC had moved quickly by issuing an emergency meeting to discuss the events in the Soviet Union. Within these articles the position of each member nation of the EC was discussed with how they perceived the events in the Soviet Union and how the EC should respond to them.²⁰² Furthermore, all of the newspapers their foreign news sections covered the dissolution of the Soviet Union almost exclusively. For example, only the *NRC* discussed the ongoing civil war in Yugoslavia.²⁰³ Each newspaper discussed the future of communism in a new Soviet Union and how the communist party and the ideology were impossible to change to ensure its survival.²⁰⁴ It could be argued that the Dutch media already declared the end of the Soviet Union after the August coup attempt. The declarations of independence of the Soviet republics, in combination with the implosion of the communist party were portrayed as consequences of the failed coup attempt.

²⁰⁰ Hella Rottenberg. "Centraal Gezag in Sovjet-Unie is Ingestort." *De Volkskrant*, August 26, 1991, p. 1.

²⁰¹ Phillippe Remarque. "Sovjet-Unie Valt Uiteen." *De Telegraaf*, August 26, 1991, p. 1.

²⁰² "EG Landen: Balten Erkennen." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 26, 1991, p. 1; "EG Overweegt Erkenning Baltische Staten." *De Volkskrant*, August 26, 1991, p. 1; "EG Praat Morgen Over Erkenning Baltische Staten." *De Telegraaf*, August 26, 1991, p. 1.

²⁰³ Raymond van den Boogaard. "Escalatie Van Burgeroorlog in Joegoslavië." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 26, 1991, p. 7.

²⁰⁴ "Communisme Scheldwoord Geworden in Het Russisch." *De Volkskrant*, August 26, 1991, p. 4; "Sovjet-Unie 74 Jaar in De Greep Van De Communistische Partij." *De Telegraaf*, August 26, 1991, p. 6; Peter Michielsen. "Partij En Ideologie Niet Te Hervormen." *NRC Handelsblad*, August 26, 1991, p. 4.

The civil war in Yugoslavia became a more prominent foreign issue in the newspapers in September, shifting their focus from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless in the foreign news sections of the papers articles could still be found that discussed the future of the newly independent Soviet republics as well as the responses of other communist countries like Cuba to the revolution in Moscow. News coverage was less prominent than during the August Coup attempt but more prominent than during 1988, 1989 and 1990. The reason for this was the massive implications of the dissolution of the Soviet Union to all other European nations. The *NRC* highlighted this with a foreign news article on 21 September. The title “Central Europe feels free but unsafe” covered the concerns of European countries like Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia now they were independent from the Soviet Union. Dutch journalists visited policy makers of these countries who explained what dangers they were facing that could stop peace from happening on the continent. The reunification of Germany, the distrust towards the Soviet-Union as well as potential civil wars in neighbouring countries were all named as potential threats to the peace by these policy makers. Regional cooperation and joining the OSCE were named as potential solutions that could decrease these threats.²⁰⁵ Until then the Soviet Union continued to unravel further as next to the European Soviet Republics also the Asian Soviet Republics started to declare their independence from Moscow. On September 2nd the *NRC* posted an article in their foreign news section focusing on the developments in this region. At that time a total of nine of the fifteen Soviet republics had declared their independence.²⁰⁶ By framing the solution through regional cooperation, the Dutch newspapers shift the focus to the European level, falling in line with the strategy chosen by the Dutch government.

The final month of the Soviet Union only saw limited newspaper coverage. The articles were smaller and less often on the front page, with the majority of articles in the foreign news sections of the papers. The main topic discussed were the position of Gorbachev and how his attempts to prevent the dissolution of the Soviet Union were failing. An article in *de Telegraaf* on December 4th illustrated this perfectly. The title of the article “Gorbachev warns for war” covered Gorbachev attempt to have the twelve Soviet republics sign his union treaty. Economic collapse and civil war would be the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union according to Gorbachev. In contrast, Yeltsin continued to recognize the independence

²⁰⁵ Hans Nijenhuis. "Midden-Europa Voelt Zich Vrij Maar Onveilig." *NRC Handelsblad*, September 3, 1991, p. 4.

²⁰⁶ "Ook Kirgizië En Oezbekistan Onafhankelijk." *NRC Handelsblad*, September 2, 1991, p. 5.

of each Soviet republic, reinstating the importance of creating bilateral ties with them. The article made evident that Gorbachev was desperate, even calling for his colleagues in the West like Helmut Kohl to not act too quickly with recognizing the independence of Ukraine. This article was featured prominently in the foreign news section of the paper, being placed in the middle of the page with a large and bold heading.²⁰⁷ However, next to this article *de Telegraaf* was more concerned with the civil war in Yugoslavia, providing more coverage in this area. Similar coverage is provided by *de Volkskrant* on December 6. Two articles, written by Hella Rottenberg, could be found in the foreign news section of the paper named “The bomb is about to explode in the Soviet Union” and “Gorbachev connects his fate to the decision in Ukraine”. The first article was an analysis of the 100 days since the August coup attempt. It explained why Gorbachev’s plan to become a ‘neutral’ leader of all the independent Soviet republics had failed. Furthermore, the article analysed the position of Ukraine because it was one of the most important Soviet republics that needed to join Gorbachev’s plan for it to succeed. The second article goes further into detail about the position of Ukraine. It described the conversations between Minsk and Moscow about the union treaty and highlighted the importance of Ukraine to join the treaty. The reason why Ukraine was so important was due to the amount of grain the country produces and the large population that lived within Ukraine.²⁰⁸

The newspaper coverage began to use frames that focused more on the future, not questioning ‘if’ the dissolution of the Soviet Union would happen but ‘when’. On December 9 the *NRC*, *Parool* and *Volkskrant* reported that the leaders of the Slavic republics of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine decided to abolish the Soviet Union and create a Slavic triple alliance between the three nations. The leaders of the three former Soviet republics excluded Gorbachev from this process, effectively ousting him from his position as president of the Soviet Union.²⁰⁹ Fittingly *de Volkskrant*’s article on this named “Three republics blow up the Soviet Union” detailed the process of how Gorbachev was sidelined.²¹⁰ Next to Gorbachev being sidelined, in both *het Parool* and *de Volkskrant* articles were found that discussed the

²⁰⁷ Correspondent. "Gorbatsjov Waarschuwt Voor Oorlog." *De Telegraaf*, December 4, 1991, p. 11.

²⁰⁸ Hella Rottenberg, "De Bom Staat Op Barsten in Sovjet-Unie," *De Volkskrant*, December 6, 1991, p. 5; Hella Rottenberg, "Gorbatsjov Maakt Lot Afhankelijk Van Besluit Oekraïne," *De Volkskrant*, December 6, 1991, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ "Politieke Doodsvonnis Gorbatsjov Getekend." *Het Parool*, December 9, 1991, p. 1; Hubert Smeets, "Slavische Republieken Stichten Hun Eigen Unie," *NRC Handelsblad*, December 9, 1991, p. 1.

²¹⁰ Hella Rottenberg, "Drie Republieken Blazen Sovjet-Unie Op," *De Volkskrant*, December 9, 1991, p. 1.

EC meeting. The events in the Soviet Union overshadowed the meeting, where the position of a unified Germany in the EC was the main topic of discussion.²¹¹ In contrast to earlier reports, all the articles mentioned here were found on the front pages of the newspapers. These articles were all followed up in the foreign news sections of the papers, providing a more detailed analysis of the situation in the Soviet Union and its effects on the international community. The final article included in this analysis was from the *NRC* on 24 December named "Gorbachev's resignation is imminent". It explained how it was likely that Gorbachev would resign today. Although the Soviet Union was only still existing in name, the resignation of its final leader has resulted in the official end of the Soviet Union that had existed since 1922. It was a front page article that discussed how the future of the region would look and what Gorbachev's plans for the future were.²¹²

All in all, this final chapter of the dissolution of the Soviet Union was featured prominently in the Dutch media with several front page news articles discussing the events. However, in comparison to earlier key moments, like the fall of the Berlin Wall or the August Coup attempt the official dissolution of the Soviet Union felt like a formality. The frames used focus on the future of Europe without the Soviet Union. The Dutch newspapers did this in two ways, by looking at the short term consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union as well as reflecting on the Soviet Union as a whole. Multiple articles that covered the reign of Gorbachev, as well as the larger history of the Soviet Union described how it all ended in this way. There was less repetition of frames and less focus on conflicts between nations. The news articles on the dissolution of the Soviet Union focused more on the internal situation in Moscow. Specifically on the power struggle between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. In this power struggle, Yeltsin was depicted as the energetic leader of Russia whose momentum would allow him to become the next leader of what will come after the Soviet Union. In contrast, Gorbachev was framed as a leader with an expiration date, tired from internal struggles in the communist party as well as torn apart by the independence movements that have sprouted in the Soviet republics.

²¹¹ "Einde Van Sovjet-Unie Overschadwt EG-Top." *Het Parool*, December 9, 1991, p. 1; Oscar Garschagen, "Rest EG Maakt Front Tegen Engeland," *De Volkskrant*, December 9, 1991, p. 1.

²¹² Correspondent. "Aftreden Gorbatsjov Nabij." *NRC Handelsblad*, December 24, 1991, p. 1.

Dutch foreign policy position

The volume of discussion regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the Dutch government was limited. When analysing parliamentary records only a limited amount of documents specifically described the situation in the Soviet Union. Two short letters from the secretary of state of the foreign affairs ministry covered two topics. The first was the aid that the Netherlands would provide to the ex-Soviet Union. The second topic covered the new bilateral relations of the Netherlands with the former Soviet Union and the new states that now existed due to its collapse. Both of these letters were sent after the dissolution of the Soviet Union occurred, respectively on 8 and 15 January 1992.²¹³ Next to these two letters of the secretary of state, one more letter of the foreign minister to the Tweede Kamer was found. On 29 January, the foreign minister provided an analysis regarding the new bilateral relationships the Dutch government needed to establish with the former Soviet Union. One big question discussed in this letter was which former Soviet republic would continue as the new entity of the Soviet Union.²¹⁴ This was important due to the important position of the Soviet Union in the international arena, with a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. In the letter it was mentioned that the Russian Federation would take the position of the Soviet Union in the UN Security Council. The Dutch foreign minister called the situation fluid and developing, he would provide more information once the new relationships between the former Soviet republics were more clear. In all of the letters the importance of a unified position of the West European nations was seen as essential. It was evident that the perspective of the individual nations states were less important than the position of the EC as a whole.

One interesting parliamentary document that was published before the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a letter from the minister of defence to the Tweede Kamer. In this letter, the minister described the safety concerns that his ministry saw if the Soviet Union would collapse. Defence minister ter Beek saw that the changes in the Soviet Union sped up after the failed August coup attempt. Due to the speed of the events that were occurring it was difficult

²¹³ P. Dankert, *Brief Van De Staatssecretaris Van Buitenlandse Zaken. Algemene Raad*, January 8, 1992

[Informatie over 0000021281 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#);

P. Dankert, *Brief Van De Staatssecretaris Van Buitenlandse Zaken. Algemene Raad*, January 15, 1992. [Informatie over 0000021282 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

²¹⁴ H. van den Broek. *Ontwikkeling Sovjet-Unie. Brief Van De Minister Van Buitenlandse Zaken*. January 29, 1992. [Informatie over 0000022508 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

for the minister to determine what safety concerns might rise up in the future. He pointed out that: "all this against the backdrop of a collapsing Soviet Union, which is in a deep political, economic, social, and ethnic crisis. It is therefore difficult to get a picture of the developments in this country, let alone its future. This process has a significant impact on the current and future defence efforts of the former Soviet Union". The defence minister continued by listing the reforms planned by the former Soviet republics as well as the main obstacles that might provide issues. The defence minister expressed his concerns that the largest military force in Europe would become "a hostage of the political-economic and state crisis in the country".²¹⁵ The concern voiced by the defence minister was shared by more Dutch politicians and reflected the fear of nuclear weapons that still existed in the Netherlands.

On the whole, the role of the media was minimal in influencing the Dutch government's foreign policy. The role of the EC in providing a cohesive response to the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the priority of the Dutch foreign policy strategy. However, here the Dutch media and the Dutch government did align, as the importance of the EC and other multinational frameworks were reaffirmed by the Dutch media. The former Soviet Union republics also benefited more from creating a response as the EC as this made it clear what the amount and type of aid they could expect. Furthermore, the establishment of new bilateral ties with these new countries was seen as a priority. The Dutch government focused more on the future and tried to get a hold of the changing geopolitical circumstances the Netherlands and the EC would be facing now the Eastern bloc has collapsed. This focus would persist in the following years, as evidenced by the Dutch government's coalition agreement in 1994. The first sentence of the foreign policy section stated: "In the new, as yet uncrystallized, international relations, Europe is expected to assume its own role." The alignment of Dutch foreign policy with that of the European Union was evident. The multinational frameworks of the EU and NATO would shape Dutch foreign policy.²¹⁶ This commitment is reiterated in the final sentence of the first paragraph, which states: "the

²¹⁵ A.L. ter Beek. *Het Gemenebest Van Onafhankelijke Staten (GOS). Brief Van De Minister Van Defensie.* November 14, 1991. [Informatie over 0000025341 | Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen \(officielebekendmakingen.nl\)](#)

²¹⁶ Duco Hellema. "De Historische Betekenis Van De Nederlandse Toetreding Tot De NAVO." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 23 (2): 1999. p. 12

Netherlands will contribute constructively to further cooperation in the common foreign and security policy and to increasing the democratic character of the European Union."²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Kabinetsformatie 1994*, August 15, 1994. [Regeerakkoord 1994 - Parlement.com](#)

Conclusion

The influence of the Dutch newspapers in determining the Dutch foreign policy was minimal. During the analysis of the newspaper coverage and foreign policy documents, we noticed several things. First, the coverage of the dissolution of the Soviet Union increased in volume from 1988 to 1991, reaching its zenith during the August Coup attempt. It seemed that as the different events within the Soviet Union unfolded it gained more attention from the Dutch media with the newspaper coverage increasing in volume, in prominence as well as in diversity of articles. This trend of increasing coverage does not align with the volume of discussions surrounding the key moments within the parliamentary documents. Typically, more discussions were found when discussing the issues of the reunification of Germany in comparison to the August coup attempt which featured more prominently in the newspapers. An argument for this difference could be due to the closeness of Germany to the Netherlands whereas the situation in the Soviet Union was often discussed within the context of the EC or NATO. The main difference in types of coverage was during the coverage of the reunification of Germany, Warsaw Pact and the August Coup attempt where more columns were published than during the other key moments. Why this was the case is unclear. One possible explanation is that as internal unrest in the Soviet Union persisted, Dutch media coverage intensified, resulting in more opinionated articles from experts and correspondents in the newspapers during the analysis. Finally, the importance of the EC and NATO is evident from the foreign policy documents, as the Dutch aimed to respond to the changing circumstances in the Soviet Union through these frameworks. This also aligns with the relation between NATO and its role in Dutch foreign policy.²¹⁸

The frames used by the Dutch media were similar throughout its coverage of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The conflict frame was used most often which is not surprising due to the context of the Cold War in which the moments analysed took place. Specific Cold War frames were also found throughout the analysis, where special attention was paid to the different independence movements that developed in all of the Soviet republics, often portraying these movements as both victims of Soviet rule and as brave in attempting to resist the central rule from Moscow. This frame (victim / brave) was prevalent especially during the first, second and fifth case studies. However of the smaller frames found in the newspaper coverage the economic frame is by far the most prominent. The economic

²¹⁸ Duco Hellema. "De Historische Betekenis Van De Nederlandse Toetreding Tot De NAVO." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 23 (2): 9-12. 1999

frame and perspective was always included by the newspapers. Articles that covered the economic consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union as well as the effects of the internal unrest within the Soviet Union on the world economy can be found in all four newspapers. Furthermore, the economic frame was also prominent in the parliamentary documents. In these documents the focus was more on economic opportunities for the Netherlands in establishing bilateral relations with the former Soviet republics. The prominence of the economic frame could be due to the dependence of the Netherlands on good trade relations with other states for their wealth. This is also another argument for why the EC was so important to the Dutch, seeing the economic benefits of the internal market as crucial for the Dutch economy.

It remains difficult to determine to what extent the Dutch media coverage has influenced the foreign policy of the Dutch government. However, there are similarities in the topics discussed both in the newspapers and in parliament, such as the focus on Cold War alliances and the impact of the Soviet Union's dissolution on Europe as a whole. The parliamentary documents make clear that the Dutch members of parliament took the developments in the Soviet Union seriously, often discussing the consequences of the events before the media covered them. The letters of the foreign minister that were analysed often approached the situation in the Soviet Union from either an EC or NATO perspective. This is similar to what can be seen in the coalition agreements of Lubbers 2, 3 and Kok 1 where the collaboration between European states and the Dutch participation in NATO are mentioned as the cornerstones for the Dutch foreign policy. It is evident that the most important determinant of the Dutch foreign policy was its membership in NATO and the EC. Both alliances determined in large part the Dutch position towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The influence of NATO and now the European Union can still be seen in the foreign policy of the Netherlands during the conflicts between Ukraine and Russia as well as Israel and Gaza. In this sense, little has changed from the end of the Cold War until today, with multinational alliances forming the basis of the foreign policy of their members, thus limiting the role of the media in influencing foreign policy.

However, by limiting the analysis to newspaper articles and the parliamentary documents the research it remains difficult to understand what the public opinion was regarding the issues in the Soviet Union. Although the Dutch media is able to prioritize certain foreign issues over others, whether the coverage itself reflects the opinion of the Dutch

public is hard to assess.²¹⁹ In addition to this, the frames used by the media have now been determined by the researcher. Perhaps an alternative analysis can be made if the newspaper articles were shown to individuals in a survey. Gathering a variety of interpretations that form a basis for the public opinion towards the chosen case studies. Finding this connection between the media coverage, public opinion, and its influence on the Dutch foreign policy remains difficult. More general limitations of this research are that only four newspapers were analysed, instead of a wider range of newspapers. The four selected newspapers are centrist overall, with *de Volkskrant* leaning furthest left and *de Telegraaf* leaning furthest right. For example, newspapers on the extreme ends of the political spectrum might cover the dissolution of the Soviet Union differently than the largest newspapers. However, the four newspapers still provided a robust corpus for this research, portraying Dutch public opinion as closely as possible given their widespread circulation. Finally, the effect of the frames used by the media is unclear. How long does the effect of frames last and how does repeating the same frames influence the duration of its effect on the reader are both questions that have come up during this research. This limitation is not restricted to this research and is mentioned in several research papers in the field of framing.²²⁰

There are enough opportunities for future research. Next to the more general areas for future research like determining what the effects of framing are and its duration, future research should focus on the role of economic frames in the newspaper coverage of the Netherlands, or even other capitalist states. In this research the was economic frame was a smaller frame but was still seen in each newspaper and in most of the case studies. This provides an opportunity to investigate whether the economic frame has gained prominence in contemporary newspaper coverage. Alternatively, it allows for a closer examination of the German reunification case study, where the economic frame was notably prominent. Furthermore, instead of focusing on newspapers, future research could include other forms of media like television or even social media. The digital arena plays a much larger role in creating and influencing public opinion on contemporary conflicts than it did thirty years ago. The Russian and Ukrainian propaganda that pursue their own goals, as well as the role of social media in influencing the public opinion in favour or against Israel are two clear

²¹⁹ Nicholas Garnham. "Habermas and the Public Sphere." *Global Media and Communication* 3 (2): 201-214. 2007.

²²⁰ Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 3 (2012): p. 37

examples of the increased importance of digital communication. All in all, the analysis of the Dutch newspapers and foreign policy documents has uncovered the diverse frames used by the Dutch media to portray the dissolution of the Soviet Union. By looking at the discussions in the Dutch government, it is evident that the influence of the Dutch newspapers on the Dutch foreign policy regarding the Soviet Union was limited in comparison to the role of the EC and NATO. Similar to today, these alliances that consist of a multitude of states seem to play the most important role in shaping the responses of its members to foreign crises.

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