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THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ORGANISATIONS: THE CASE OF ESTONIAN ATLANTIC TREATY ASSOCIATION

Master's thesis

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ABSTRACT

A non-conventional member of the current United Nations-based international system, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as an intergovernmental military alliance, has been considerably affected by constantly shifting global power dynamics. To maintain and further the continuous relevance of the functioning, identity creation, and development of the organisation, NATO aims for increased strategic communication to ensure its broad public support, in order to effectively counter its adversaries. This paper detects that NATO continues to strive for development of its identity, system, and policy narratives, and, in the context of this research, organisational civil society participation is analysed as a direct element of the process. This research aims at testing an argument that a unified and effective public diplomacy and communication strategy through increased civil society participation is positively beneficial in countering the numerous internal and external challenges the alliance is facing. The various soft power methods used by NATO are researched through the strategic narrative theory and supported by empirical data collected in cooperation with the Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association (EATA).

Keywords: NATO, strategic communication, strategic narrative, public diplomacy, civil society participation, Estonia

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EATA   Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association

NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization

ATA   Atlantic Treaty Association

YATA   Youth Atlantic Treaty Association

US   United States

EU   European Union

NGO   Non-governmental organisation

BRYF   Baltic-Russia Youth Forum

UN   United Nations

CSAP   Civil Society Advisory Panel on Women, Peace and Security

eFP   Enhanced Forward Presence

NAC   North Atlantic Council

HOSOSZ   Honvéd Sportegyesületek Országos Szövetsége

WPS   Women, Peace, and Security

DPPA   Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

NETICS   Network of Estonian Teachers of Informatics and Computer Science

PfP   Partnership for Peace

PDD   Public Diplomacy Division

EOP   Enhanced Opportunities Partnership

IT   Information Technology

BRI   Belt and Road Initiative

INTRODUCTION

The global political and security landscape today is characterised by constantly shifting power dynamics. As one of the direct consequences of the aforementioned shifts, the process affects the functioning and further development of key frameworks-providing international organisations, and NATO is, arguably, not an exception from the list of those. Today, the world's most powerful intergovernmental military alliance – as in the 1950s, the 1970s, and the 1990s – has to adapt to numerous internal and external challenges in order to stay relevant and well-functioning. For example, at the end of the Cold War, when the alliance was on the winning side, there was a push for NATO to adapt to a range of challenges seemingly posed by globalization – those would include "the effects of state failure, the rise of terrorism as a cause of major insecurity, and new pressures from a host of other emerging issues, including cyber security, maritime security, energy security, and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction" (Burton 2018, 8).

By now, when the framework has been broadened to the widest geographic area it has ever covered, there is still a range of legitimate academic questions on the organisation's identity, further development, and anticipated level of cohesion. Different schools of thought in the field of political science dedicate plenty of time and publishing space to answer all of those questions, taken together or separately. At the same time, these are grand-level approaches to see and visualise the alliance's place in the international system, during this current multi-polar global redesign. What is missing, however, in a major theory-associated debate is a look at NATO as a 'communicator' with the alliance-bound civil society. Therefore, utilising the discussional platform of strategic narrative theory (Miskimmon *et al.* 2013; Roselle *et al.* 2014, 74-75), this research is to make an attempt in detecting whether or not NATO achieves a greater level of institutional development and stronger internal cohesion through supporting meaningful civil society participation. In order to exemplify the process of data-collection, both the EATA (as a concrete unit in focus) and the Atlantic Treaty Association/ATA (as a network-forming alliance-wide organisation) are treated by this research as direct participants of different phases of strategic

communication, in the context of what NATO via its Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) is, according to the theory, striving to be formulating, projecting, and diffusing.

Structurally, the EATA is a non-governmental organisation, which, as declared, works towards "representing NATO values and raising awareness of security and defence questions among citizens of Estonia" ('EATA' 2020). The EATA 'lives' under the organisational 'umbrella' of the ATA, which is a network comprised of 37 national chapters of civil society associations that work towards promoting and furthering NATO's values and activities ('About Us' 2020). The importance of this particular theme for a broader academic debate in the field of international relations was first introduced to the author during her internship at the EATA. When explaining the tasks to people who were not familiar with the organisation, the author was often asked about the necessity of it. One of the main reasons behind the question was the factor of Estonia's membership in NATO for more than 15 years, and this kind of longevity in participation, presumably, denies any need to promote the values and activities of NATO in Estonia. Such enquiries generated an academic interest on how effectively important civil society participation can be given the context, especially in the time when mass media is a powerful tool in influencing factual knowledge and public opinions (Bešker 2017). Thus, it could be argued that it is a crucial task for an intergovernmental organisation to have a productive network of intermediaries in the process of arranging strategic communication within the citizens.

In October 2019, in his interview given in the framework of this research work, Robert Pszczel (2019), Senior Officer for Russia and the Western Balkans, NATO PPD, highlighted the value of civil society participation in, while stating that it is challenging for NATO to reach everyone in its member nations to educate people and engage them in NATO's actions and decision-making without the support of local governments and civil society organisations. At the same time, the aforementioned internship brought plenty of experiences on the nearly total lack of public knowledge in regards of what NATO does and what it strives to formulate as a message.

Considering the above, the aim of this research is to determine the value of civil society participation to NATO using the examples of the work of the EATA and the ATA Network gathered through qualitative research to support the analysis. The claim here is as follows: increased civil participation supported by the EATA and the ATA network is positively beneficial as well as valuable for the functioning of NATO and to the formulation of NATO's PDD-issued Strategy in the face of political climate and security threats of the XXI century. Theoretical

framework wise, this research is, as it was planned, contributes to analysing NATO as an issuer of strategic narrative, since the organisation is still a work in progress in regards of developing its identity, system, and policy narratives. The latter tri-level model, offered by Miskimmon *et al.* (2013) and Roselle *et al.* (2014, 74-75) in their seminal research works, is used in the context of the four known phases of strategic communication (formation, projection, diffusion, and reception) can deliver plenty in explaining the practical side as well as effectiveness of NATO's interactions with civil society, especially when the current international system resembles a pure chaos. The paper's claim will be tested by subjecting it to the collected data (Chigbu 2019, 12-13) using various qualitative methods. On a concrete note, the lion share of the data comes from over 20 semi-structural interviews with NATO experts, the EATA employees and volunteers, the ATA-associated employees, and people attending the EATA events. In addition, participant observations from various events and conferences organised by the EATA and other ATA network associations, discourse analysis of documents and statistical data are used.

The empirical component of the research was conducted beginning from April 2019 until March 2020 in cooperation with the EATA. Participant observation was conducted attending various public events such as 'Viimsi turvalisuse päev', charity concert 'Laulud sõdurile' and the visit of Danish Queen Margarethe II in Tallinn; attending conferences and trainings, such as 'Baltic-Russia Youth Forum 2019' and the 'Summer School for Teachers 2019'. The data was also collected from events organised with partners, for example, 'Economic and Security Talks 2020' and the 'VIII Women's Congress', and lastly, the conference 'NATO AT 70 – NO TIME TO RETIRE' on 11 November 2019 in Berlin, which was organised by Deutsche Atlantische Gesellschaft e.V. During data collection during participant observation, the author marked down field notes in each event using either a notebook or making electronic notes. The aim of participant observation was to collect and analyse direct data from each event, where the author was present in order to determine the most beneficial and valuable activities from NATO's Public Diplomacy Division Strategy formulation. After the data collection, all of it was transferred to electronic sources, where a summary was made of each's event's most influential elements from the position of the alliance.

All of the information gathered from the interviews is anonymous, unless the interviewee is an expert and/or the author obtained permission to publish the data under their name. The sample of the interviewees was chosen with a purposeful sampling method, as the aim of the interviews was to obtain most in-depth and detailed information. As the interview questions consisted of detailed

questions about the EATA and the ATA Network, extensive knowledge on both (or knowledge on a specific event or a project) was necessary. During the research, 5 employees of the EATA, 4 employees of other ATA chapters, 3 NATO experts, and 11 participants of the 2019 Baltic-Russia Youth Forum (participants in the event were chosen to be from diverse countries and from diverse genders) were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, some more general questions about NATO and the role of civil society in its functioning was viewed, but the questions went more in-depth according to the area of knowledge and expertise of each interviewee to obtain the most valuable information. Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. During three interviews, where recording was not possible, the author marked down the answers. The transcribed interviews were analysed using a thematic content analysis method, which was used to find prevailing themes and comments in order to establish the most prevalent areas of action of the association and the network. The interviews were also used to reflect emotions and experiences of the individuals.

Qualitative approach is the most justified here, as it enabled the author to obtain most in-depth information from sources, who area field experts or connected to the association or the network professionally. Furthermore, using semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to delve deep into each of the informant's area of knowledge, which supplied the author with the most accurate and comprehensive information, which would have been impossible using a quantitative method. Participant observation provided the author the possibility to be immersed into association's activities through direct participation in events and projects, but also having the possibility to observe further interaction through various online platforms, which are pivotal for international networking. It is impossible to quantify the success of a civil society organisation without conducting years of constant research to achieve statistical data. Thus, the aim of this research is not the representation of Estonia's civil society as whole, but to provide an effective reflection of the activities of an organisation and analyse the ways in which they benefit NATO.

This paper is featured by a good balance between primary and secondary sources, with some of the latter, in a few cases, were selected from documents available exclusively at the Tallinn-based EATA office (permission to use the materials was granted by Krista Mulenok, Secretary General of the organisation). The secondary data (such as document, data, and statistics analysis) was used to support the empirical research through process tracing in order to explain and evaluate the influence of the association through its activities. As a result of analysing the empirical data, four

major areas of effective action by the association were prevalent: education, networking, and influence in policy-making and cooperation with other organisations.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The first chapter of the paper will provide an overview on the challenges NATO is facing and the role of the ATA and the EATA in the alliance. The first section provides a discussion on the internal and external challenges NATO is facing, which is followed by an analysis on the alliance's future. The third section is focused on introducing NATO's PDD and its strategic communication efforts. The chapter finishes with an overview on the ATA and the EATA. In the second chapter, an overview of civil society dimension is provided. The chapter commences with a discussion on the importance of civil society participation, which is followed by an overview on the current state of civil society in Estonia. The chapter culminates with an inquiry into the role of civic participation in policy-making. The third chapter provides a thorough overview on the empirical chunk of the research and is divided into three sections: education, networking, and influence in policy-making and the importance of cooperation. The paper is completed with a discussion and a conclusion on the role of the ATA and the EATA in the development of NATO's strategic narratives and possibilities for further research.

1. NATO'S CHALLENGES IN THE XXI CENTURY AND THE FUTURE OF THE ALLIANCE

The following chapter will commence in a discussion on the internal and external challenges NATO is facing. This is followed by the analysis of the alliance's future, as well as its public diplomacy and strategic communication efforts. The fourth part is focused on introducing the Atlantic Treaty Association network, which is the body responsible for introducing and furthering the values of the alliance through education and civil society participation. In the fifth section, the Estonian Atlantic Treaty shall be introduced as a direct participant in the alliance's strategic communication efforts.

1.1. NATO's Challenges in the XXI Century

Today, the global political and security landscape is distinctly characterised by a shift of political, economic, and military power, which is "drifting" away from the West-originated paradigms, most prominently, towards Asia (Schwarzer 2017, 18). The indicated undoubtedly affects NATO, which has to continuously adapt to the vastly contrasting conditions from which it was created. Furthermore, various dynamic and fluid threats, such as violent non-state actors, cross-border flows, developments in technology, communication systems and weapons, hybrid warfare, and climate change, pose increasing challenges to NATO's capacity for crisis management (Puhl 2016, 5).

The year of 2019 marked the 70th anniversary since NATO has projected peace and prosperity while maintaining its values and principles. From its founding in 1949, while having no geo-strategic 'life' within the United Nations-based international system, NATO has been one of the most effective politico-military alliances in modern history. However, the geo-strategic climate today is vastly different from the time NATO was established. Today, the alliance is facing a number of internal and external challenges and instabilities. Consequently, these developments

have been followed up by comments about NATO's growing irrelevance, especially in recent years. One of the most notable examples of this was the French President Emanuel Macron's comment, made in his interview to *The Economist*, regarding the absence of management and strategy causing NATO to suffer from "brain death" (Macron 2019). His polemical declaration was clearly successful in initiating lively debates on NATO's future and possible approaches to tackling its internal and external challenges in the long run. Again, countering the statement made by Macron afore the NATO 2019 Summit in London, NATO has not yet achieved a stable relationship with Russia and to this day, Russia can still be considered a great threat for some individual member countries (especially in eastern, northern, and central parts of the European continent).

In February 2020, while attending the Economic and Security Talks 2020 in Tallinn, Mikk Marran (2020), the Director of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, stated that Russia remains the only existential threat to Estonia (Marran 2020). To counter that, as it was argued by him, NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence on the borders of the Baltic states and Poland can be considered an effective deterrence. However, for some countries, especially in Southern Europe, Russia is not a top security threat, but they are more affected by the threat of terrorism and the migration crisis in the Middle East and North Africa ('Countering terrorism' 2019). When talking about external threats to the alliance, however, it is impossible to delve into the topic of hybrid warfare without regard to Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine. The concept of hybrid warfare is by no means a new one, but globalisation and developments in technology have reinstated nonlinear means of warfare in much greater intensity, scale, and velocity than ever before (Veljovski *et al.* 2017, 294). Thus, the threats that the alliance are facing are not necessarily determined by a geographical location. Non-military actions, such as producing and promoting fake news and conspiracy theories, as well as supporting political entities to serve one's agenda are also powerful tools for actors like Russia to manipulate Western opinions (Besch, Bond 2019; Nocetti 2018, 438; Dempsey 2019). Furthermore, when talking about collective threats, advances in technology and weapons (for example the advancements in robotics, biotechnology, and nanotechnology, space-based warfare, artificial intelligence, others) is certainly a growing issue, in which the advancements are very difficult to predict (Kasapoğlu, Kırdemir 2019; Zandee 2018). Furthermore, while research has shown that NATO as a whole has had the resources to cope with the aforementioned advances, various opponents to the alliance can have access to new technologies as the civilian market is at the forefront of the development process, making it increasingly easier for individual or small groups to acquire exceedingly dangerous weapons

(Breedlove, Kosal 2019; Zandee 2018; Kasapoğlu, Kırdemir 2019; Talmadge 2019, 879-883; Efthymiopoulos 2019, 4-5). Thus, the internal cohesion and equal development of NATO member countries are crucial for maintaining the alliance's institutional development and continuous relevance (Gottemoeller 2019; Chuter 2019).

Coming back to the topic of changing global power dynamics, the geo-strategic rise of China has become one of the greatest security challenges for the alliance, never having been on the agenda of a NATO Summit before 2019 (Ellyatt, Reid 2019). Before the Summit, Jens Stoltenberg (2019) stated that "the rise of China has security implications for all allies. There are some obvious opportunities but also some obvious challenges". At the same time, for many NATO member countries, China is an imperative partner. For example, China has heavily invested in various industries (for example in ports and railway systems) in Central and Eastern European countries through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the 16+1 cooperation (Matura 2019; Woody 2019). China has also been making substantial investments in 5G technology and telecommunications (Köse 2019). Furthermore, both the United States (US) and European Union (EU) are both relying on the import of military appliances and materials from China (Stewart, Stone 2018; Joyce 2018). The COVID-19 crisis has shown that the EU's dependence on China-bound supply chains is of security-threatening scale. It is clear that the individual relationships of NATO member countries with China will affect the internal dynamics of it, as for many of them, the United States is their most important security ally, but China their most important trading partner (Brattberg, Valášek 2019; Eurostat 2019). In order to achieve greater internal cohesion of the alliance, NATO countries need to develop a solid understanding and agreement on how to cooperate with China.

An additional factor inducing the growing levels of internal incoherence is the disjointedness on how different members view their commitment and role in the alliance. For example, some EU members wish for greater autonomy for the EU to develop its defence strategy (European Union Global Strategy 2016). This will continue to create clashes and controversies over the shared burden of collective defence ('Funding NATO' 2020). At the NATO summit of 2006, a goal of 2% of the gross domestic product of each member state to be spent on defence was set in place, but as of now, the development on that has only been partial (Youssef, Gordon 2018). The aforementioned has also affected the internal cohesion of the alliance, as there have been frequent criticisms of NATO's cost-sharing procedure from the US Trump administration (Welna 2019). However, a new formula was agreed upon ahead of NATO Summit 2019, decreasing the share of the US. Both Germany and the US will be responsible for approximately 16% of NATO's budget,

the rest will be divided among other member countries ('Joint press point with NATO Secretary…' 2019). Furthermore, there has been an evident increase in military operations in Europe during Trump's administration (Towell, Kazlauskas 2018). Thus, despite Trump's rhetoric the commitment of the US to NATO has so remained firm, supported also by the upcoming multinational exercise DEFENDER-Europe 20, which according to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe is "the largest deployment of U.S.-based forces to Europe in more than 25 years" (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe 2020).

1.2. The Future of the Alliance

For over 71 years, NATO has remained almost unassailable as one of the most successful intergovernmental alliances in modern history. With the end of the Cold War, the bipolar global structure in which the alliance was created had disintegrated, compelling the latter to accustom and evolve (Pedersen 2011, 1). Today, the geostrategic landscape is characterised by the rapid and dynamic shifts of global power axis and the onslaught of unconventional and hybrid security threats. This added to various other external and internal challenges the alliance faces have been precisely the reason for uncertainty over the future relevance of NATO. However, the debates over the growing insignificance of the alliance are imprudent, as considering military capabilities, no member of the alliance holds the capacity to achieve the levels of knowledge, dexterity, or resources as the alliance as whole commands. With qualified personnel from 30 member countries, NATO can be at the forefront of research and development of new military technologies and means of hybrid warfare (Stavridis 2019; '2020 CIVIL BUDGET...' 2020; 'Funding NATO' 2020; Breedlove, Kosal 2019; Zandee 2018; Kasapoğlu, Kırdemir 2019; Talmadge 2019, 879-883; Efthymiopoulos 2019, 4-5).

According to Jüri Luik, Estonian Minister of Defence in an interview during the 2019 NATO Summit "Russia has shown with its actions that it is a serious security threat"; this statement was supported by Raimundas Karoblis, Lithuanian Minister of Defence, who noted that "Russia is the only external existential threat we have" (both cited in Wemer 2019). Thus, for many members (especially in eastern, northern, and central parts of the European continent) collective solidarity and collective defence (also in the form of invoking Article 5) is among the supporting pillars of national defence (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2011, 3). Among this is the necessity to create strategic communication narratives to counter the spread of misinformation by Russia and to

ensure a broad public support for NATO. James Stavridis (2019) demonstrates NATO's competence in responding rapidly to unanticipated threats by describing its actions to counter Russia's aggressive actions in Georgia and Ukraine. Stavridis recalled, that before the aforementioned developments, Russian intervention was considered of a low probability, but after assessing the events and holding meetings with the Chiefs of Defence from the Baltic states, the likelihood of growing aggression became progressively probable. Thereupon, the alliance acted accordingly, enhancing its presence in the region, conducted more trainings and modernized the armed conflict plans (*ibid*). According to Stavridis, The Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) offers security assurance for countries like Estonia and with extensive operations like upcoming DEFENDER-Europe 20, the military capabilities of the alliance are irrefutable (*ibid)*.

However, without internal cohesion and strategic leadership along with a unified communication strategy, which have been central of the critical notes striking the alliance, the military and technological strength might not be lasting and the decisions made might not reach the desired levels of effectiveness for the alliance (Tardy 2019). The wavering commitment from certain members of the alliance has undermined the unity of NATO. Thus, an increase of strategic planning of communication, partnerships, cooperation, and dialogue (both internal and external) is called for. The conference 'NATO AT 70 – NO TIME TO RETIRE', on 11 November in Berlin took place shortly after Emanuel Macron's controversial statements and partly due to that, increased unity and cohesion was emphasised numerous times in the course of the event. Siemtje Möller, Deputy Spokeswoman for Security and Defence Policy of the SPD parliamentary group emphasised the necessity for growing focus on networking and diplomacy, not just focus public debates around defence spending (Möller 2019). Similarly, Frank A. Rose (2019) called for a new investment strategy for a more successful adaptation in a new security environment. Unity is a key force for the alliance, as NATO's role is not solely to provide defence cooperation, but it is also a political alliance, with a purpose to "promote transatlantic cooperation, promotion of democracy, human rights, individual liberty, rule of law, and continuous peace and stability" ('NATO's purpose' 2018). The political function of the alliance calls for a revitalization in the sense of constructing a structure, which enables a platform for dialogue and consideration for national concerns. An increased focus on cooperation and negotiations aid in building trust, enhancing transparency, and avoiding internal clashes and misunderstandings (Dugué, *et al.* 2016). Signs of shifting objectives can already be witnessed in NATO's budget for 2020, with an estimation of Civil Budget gaining a 1,7% increase compared to 2019 ('Funding NATO' 2020; '2020 CIVIL BUDGET…' 2020).

Strengthening partnerships is another crucial step for the alliance in order to maintain relevance in the future. After the publishing of 'Joint Declaration' at the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, the NATO-EU cooperation gained more substance on the strategic partnership concerning hybrid threats (especially cybersecurity), maritime security, synchronized trainings, security sector reform, greater defence research and industrial cooperation, and raising the levels of neighbouring countries' resilience ('Joint Declaration' 2016; Howorth 2017, 455). Another "Joint Declaration" was signed in 2018 to implement the purposes stipulated in 2016 ('Joint Declaration on EU-NATO...' 2018). Since then, the cooperation has gained added political layers with 74 common actions being advocated by all EU members and NATO allies, and with NATO policies increasingly taking into account the different aspects of the cooperation (Papaioannou 2019). While the abovementioned cooperation is successful, to achieve more relevancy and interconnectedness, develop cooperation with countries outside of the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP) programme. The alliance could increase its global relevancy by strategic enhancement of regional partners. Furthermore, collaboration with private sector organisations would be effective in keeping up with the development of technological advancements, for example in IT (Ellehuus 2019). According to Alexander Wendt (1999, 297, 301-302), one of the long-term goals of NATO has been the projection of permanance and the development of a unified political culture, the latter of which is characterised by "team-play" and "non-violence".

1.3. Nato's Public Diplomacy Division and the Efforts in Strategic Communication

It is evident, that in order for the alliance to ensure its cohesion and continuous relevance, increased emphasis has to be placed on implementing soft power and tightening cooperation and partnerships with various actors. The NATO's PDD was created in 2003 with the purpose of furthering the alliance's soft power through strategic diplomacy and communication (Tomescu-Hatto 2014, 89). Successful implementation of public diplomacy strategy is of a pivotal soft power tool for NATO. NATO's PDD is functioning though three major strategic narratives identified in international relations: identity narrative, system narrative, and policy narrative. Identity narrative of the alliance is important for describing its purpose and achievement since its creation, as well as for the continuous construction of its global purpose and internal stability by achieving a common identity (Flockhart 2014, 79-81). System narrative contributes to the establishment of the alliance's place and role in the international system and which actors change and affect it

(Miskimmon *et al.* 2017, 57). Lastly, policy narratives are strongly linked with system narratives, with the latter being either supported or weakened by the creation and development of policy narratives (*ibid,* 58). These narratives offer a possibility of the creation of a structure for tracing processes, through which historical development and future advancement of NATO according to the constantly shifting global power dynamics is possible (*ibid,* 1). The advancement of public diplomacy and strategic communication are pivotal for an intergovernmental organisation to engage with a wider audience and create shared meaning. Roselle *et al.* (2014) adopted the model of three phases – formation, projection, and diffusion to display the narratives of the strategic communication process implemented by NATO in order to capitalize its soft power resources. According to the authors, the aforementioned model is effective in pinpointing how soft power narratives could be used strategically to create meaning and influence target audiences (*ibid,* 74-76).The main outlets and activities through which NATO's PDD strives to reach its goals in raising awareness and promoting dialogue in corresponding topics of Alliance-related issues, as well as furthering its underlining ambitions is through contacts with the media, engagement by way of the alliance's website and various social media outlets, creating broadcasts and publications, and organising various events and projects, such as seminars and conferences (Melissen 2005, 4; Tomescu-Hatto 2014, 89; 'Communications and…' 2016).

Successful implementation of soft power tools enables to shape public perceptions and opinions without the necessity to use forceful or highly costly means (Tomescu-Hatto 2014, 90). In the time where intergovernmental organisations face increasingly challenging global landscape, deterioration in public trust in institutions, and mass media enabling a platform for information warfare, unified and comprehensive public relations strategy is essential (Bešker, 2017; Hayes 2019, 235). According to Andew T. Wolff (2014, 73), NATO is not unaffected by the latter, facing the problems of lack of public awareness and/or support, increased doubts on its purpose and relevance, and increased internal challenges caused by the infusion of domestic interests of member countries. All of the aforementioned have caused numerous internal incoherencies (*ibid,* 79-83). In order to counter the various challenges the alliance is facing, a unified communication and public relations strategy both directly through NATO PDD, but also between member countries, to ensure a collective synchronised communications and public relations structure (Blahzevska 2015, 146-148). In order to achieve efficient means of communication both between and inside member countries, the maintaining of effective flow of information is pivotal (*ibid,* 147). As emphasised by Robert Pszczel, it is impossible for NATO Headquarters to maintain the level of communication and information flow without the cooperation with domestic actors

(Pszczel, 2019). However, NATO's public diplomacy strategy should not involve only govermental actors, but be supported by civil society actors, which have the resources to build and maintain networks among different non-govermental parties (Melissen 2005, 22).

1.4. What is the Atlantic Treaty Association Network?

The Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA) Network is an umbrella organisation, which connects 37 national member organisations from NATO countries and Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries ('About Us' 2020; 'Partnership for Peace' 2020). The ATA was created on 18 June 1954, as a participant in the alliance's communications and public relations ambitions. The network was created with the purpose to combine various voluntary and non-governmental associations, as well as national organisations, which were already working towards the aforementioned goals ('About Us' 2020). While in the beginning the topics of discussion were connected with NATO's actions during the Cold War, the focus and role of the network changed considerably after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Nowadays, the focus of the ATA has been increasingly on cooperation and research of security issues in the Balkans, Central and Eastern European countries, Caucasus, Central Asia, as well as the Middle East and North Africa ('Atlantic Treaty Association and Youth…' 2019).

Today, over 500 activities and events per year are organised by various national branches. The main focus of the network is to "provide meaningful cooperation and connections both inside and beyond the borders of the alliance and provide quality education" ('About Us' 2020). The knowledge is spread through various public and private events, meetings, trainings, and other educational activities on the topics of defence, security, and international relations. Thus, the aim is to bring together researchers, field experts, militaries, policy-makers, young professionals, and other relevant actors to advocate the values of NATO and provide education to the public (*ibid*). Three core sections make up the umbrella of the network. The Assembly is responsible for the top decision-making. The aforementioned is assisted by the Bureau, the members of which aid the other bodies in carrying out their decisions, as well as in policy-making and developing cooperation. The last section is the Council, which consists of members of the Bureau and maximum of three delegates of every ATA Member, Observer Member, and Associate Member associations. The Assembly elects a president for the ATA in every three years, the current President is Fabrizio W. Luciolli. The president is in charge of the general policy of the association,

they also act as a public spokesperson ('Atlantic Treaty Association and Youth…' 2019). Furthermore, it is necessary to introduce the YATA, established in 1996, which is the youth network of the ATA. It is active in 24 countries (including Estonia) and is focused roughly on the same topics as the ATA, but the focus of it is mainly on youth involvement and the transparency, and public debate on international relations and transatlantic security issues (YATA 2020).

The ATA Network has also initiated a number of Task Forces, which act in areas of special interest for both NATO and the ATA. The current three most important Task Forces are as follows. In 2018, 'Women, Peace and Security' was created with a purpose to empower women and create more inclusivity in the fields of defence and security. Aforesaid Task Force is led by Krista Mulenok, who is the Secretary General of the EATA. 'ATA–YATA Integrated Task Force for Communication' is designed to develop strategic communication with NATO Public Diplomacy Division, and reach a wider audience in different languages. Lastly, 'ATA Task Force on Disinformation and Malign Influence' was created to analyse various aspects and developments in connection to malign influence and disinformation, as well as to implement trainings and build the capacity of studying them ('ATA Network &…' 2020). Through its activities, the network is able to connect with thousands of policymakers and officials. Thus, a crucial element of the network's strive is to reach out to decision-makers on a national and a global level. Some of the most important topics in the ATA's policy focus are cybersecurity, NATO/EU cooperation, hybrid warfare, counter-terrorism, and defence investments ('Policy Focus' 2020).

1.5. What is the Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association?

The Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association belongs to the ATA Network since its establishment on 2 February 2001. The organisation started as a non-profit establishment with an ambition to support Estonia becoming an official member of NATO and it connected people who believed in the cause, and were interested in furthering the values of the alliance. Similarly to its umbrella organisation, the activities and goals of the EATA have changed and developed over the years. Today, the purpose of the association is to educate the public about NATO and the EU, as well as Estonia's defence and security policies and interests both on a national and international level, to "further its values and raise awareness about the activities of the alliance, to advance international cooperation, and to increase unity and integration in order to establish and maintain safety and stability" ('EATA' 2020). All of the regulations and objectives of the association are marked down

in the Constitution. The Constitution, along with the Development Plan (currently for 2019-2023) are the foundations on which the activities are built. To fulfil its goals, the EATA organises various events and projects (public events, conferences, seminars, movie evenings, roundtable discussions, lectures, and trainings). International cooperation with other chapters and various other contributing partners (such as NATO Headquarters, Estonian Ministry of Defence, Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and many others) is crucial for the success of the association ('Contributors and Partners' 2020). With strategic communication being among the most important ambitions for the organisation in its Development Plan for 2019-2023, the endeavours of the EATA are published in various social media platforms (*Facebook*, *Instragram*, *Youtube*, and *Twitter*) ('Eesti NATO Ühingu...' 2018).

2. CIVIL SOCIETY DIMENSION

The second chapter is focused on the importance of civil society participation. In the first section, the author introduces some of the most prominent theories on social capital and the importance of community and cooperation. This is followed by an analysis on the current situation of volunteering and civil society participation in Estonia. The final section is focused on the importance of civil society in the processes of policy-making.

2.1. The Importance of Civil Society Participation

The importance of civil participation and its link to democracy has been the subject of hundreds of studies since Alexis De Tocqueville established a strong affiliation between the two while analysing active civic engagement in America (De Tocqueville 1840, 275-294). Among the most prominent theories on social capital and the importance of community and cooperation in the development of democratic practices are introduced in the works of Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman and Robert D. Putnam (Guðmundsson, Mikiewicz 2012, 57). Pierre Bourdieu defined the term as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1986, 248). According to him, networks of cooperation do not form naturally, but a meaningful investment into the formation of them is necessary. Alejandro Portes (1998, 3-4) analysed the works of Bourdieu and he found the two most essential factors of social capital according to the latter were the possibility for individuals to access certain resources, and the quality of those resources. James S. Coleman, however, argued that being active in civil society does not only benefit the individual, but also the community which they are a part of (cited in Guðmundsson, Mikiewicz 2012, 59). The most prominent example of arguments for the benefits of civic participation in furthering cooperation and the quality of democracy are presented in Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Although repeatedly criticised for being too broad and simplistic, for example by Gavin Smith (2006, 623-625), Putnam

makes a concise case for the value of social networks as the building blocks for democracy. Furthermore, the increase in trust and reciprocity help to create a vibrant culture of cooperation and meaningful action. Thus, according to Putnam, flourishing civil society will teach citizens democratic norms and how to voice their concerns, as well as have their views represented accordingly (Putnam 2000, 48-64). As such, the author finds Putnam's work to offer a concise representation of activities, which take place in the realm of mobilizing citizens on behalf of certain causes. However, the aforementioned definition can be too broad and lack a certain amount of political and economic background, and a more precise definition is necessary.

Thus, in the context of the present research, civil society participation is defined not merely by the most general use of the term, but as a phenomenon of a consistent and continuously evolving cluster of meaningful activities organised in a non-profit structure, which are aimed at pursuing common goals such as increased democracy, transparency, and access to information (Avril, Neem 2014, 1-2). As aforementioned, one of the purposes of the ATA network is to represent and further NATO's values and provide education on its policies and activities among citizens through the operation of national branches. Thus, increased participation among the general public is the final objective, as it is a crucial component of democracy, enabling pluralism and providing citizens knowledge and awareness on the issues of security and defence, as well as possibilities to influence decision-making on a national and international level (Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development 2014, 7). Research shows, that by providing individuals a platform to voice their ideas and concerns, as well as to engage in a dialogue with decision-makers, politicians, experts, academics, and other actors, the activities of an intergovernmental organisation will become more transparent and people's trust in them will grow (Käger *et al.* 2019, 19-36; Kübar, 2010; Gillespie *et al.* 2013, 1079; Newton 2001, 206-208). While the development of democracy is under the responsibility of a country or a state, cooperation with civil society organisations has proven to be effective in creating sustainable policies, increasing participation and reducing inequalities and social exclusion (European Commission 2012, 3; Putnam 2000, 51-52; Andrews 2012, 49-50; Cusack 1999, 1). Furthermore, organisations linked to specific areas of policy tend to show higher engagement in their corresponding topics both with citizens and decision-makers. In addition, these types of organisations are especially successful not only in their lobbying efforts but also in mobilizing and educating citizens on certain topics. Through this, civil society organisations have the power to become powerful intermediaries in advancing communication and action between policy and opinion (Rasmussen, Reher 2019, 1649,1667-1668; Boix, Posner 1998, 690).

2.2. Civil Society Participation in Estonia

However, despite the growing presence of civil society organisations both in contemporary policy debates and in the operation of intergovernmental organisations, there is still a lack of research about the links between them in Estonia. Moreover, there has been no qualitative research on the importance of civil society participation in the functioning of the alliance through the work of the EATA. According to the Estonian Human Rights Centre and Statistics Estonia, the third sector has experienced noticeable growth in the XXI century, but the development of civil society is still uneven. Even though the number of organisations has been growing over the years, it is still difficult for starting non-profits to continue long-term, due to the lack of members, funding, partners, public knowledge, and so on. Even though there are numerous new non-governmental organisations (NGO's) formed every year, the average number of members in each organisation is decreasing. Furthermore, most people connected to different non-profits are being engaged to help out on event or project-basis, and there is a lack of long-term active members and connections with experts (Hallermaa,Servinski 2008; Kübar 2010).

According to the survey on volunteering activities commissioned by the Estonian Ministry of Interior in 2018, the number of volunteers in Estonia has increased from 31% to 49% in the last five years. The report also stated, that the individials who were more likely to engage in volunteering activities were the ones who had knowledge and interest in specific fields, but also in civil society in general, thus emphasising the importance of wider public dialogue of the existence and necessity of different NGO's. In addition, the data showed that there has been an increase in the number of people volunteering in several areas simultaneously (a jump from 36% to 47% in the last five years) (Käger *et al.* 2019, 5). Another development has been the evolving meaning of volunteering activities among citizens, who are increasingly looking for meaningful action and opportunities to be engaged in the creation of genuine changes. However, occasionally the organisations are not prepared to accommodate a growing number of volunteers, and therefore individuals can volunteer in an unstable manner. Furthermore, as mentioned before, many smaller NGO's lack the means and the tools to cooperate with partners outside of the third sector, as well as engage in policy-making. In the future, the purpose is to increase civil society activity in general. Thus, it is crucial to raise the various capabilities of organisations and to further the support the cooperation with strategic partners in both public and private sectors (Käger *et al.* 2019, 19-36; Kübar, 2010). In conclusion, constant revision and development are needed in order to keep the

methods and practices in achieving the abovementioned goals as effective and achievable as possible (Zeegers 2016, 34).

2.3. The Role of Civil Society Participation in Policy-Making

According to Michael Zürn (2004, 260-261), the decision-making processes of intergovernmental organisations tend to lack democratic representation and accountability, with decision-making bodies often not being held accountable for decisions affecting large communities, because the implemented policies can be highly invasive into national decision-making. Along with the development of international community and the relationships between nation states and intergovernmental organisations becoming increasingly complex, the function of civil society participation has followed, with it becoming increasingly intertwined with policy-making (Anheier 2017, 1). In contemporary global politics, civil society organisations can be perceived as actors, who strive towards shaping policy-making through bringing together individuals and interest groups (Scholte 2004, 214). Bernauer and Gampfer (2013, 448) argue, that greater civil society involvement is favoured both by individuals, but also by governments in increasing support for certain policies (such as connected to climate change). Similarly to this, according to Joachim and Dembinski (2011, 1164), the engagement of NGO's in the creation of EU's foreign and security policy can increase transparency and representativeness in the decision-making processes, as well as facilitate the information exchange processes between international organisations, local governments, and individuals. The authors argue, that even though organisations related to narrower areas of interest may start resembling think-tanks more related to policy-advisory and the creation and spreading of research (and not so much the representation of the voice of opposition), it is still important not to forget their influence in representing the interests of member states in the intergovernmental decision-making (*ibid,* 1164-1165). Thus, NGO's do not completely fix the problems with democratic deficits in policy-making activities of intergovernmental organisations, but if managed and supported effectively, they have the resources to provide expert opinions and professional research on local issues. Furthermore, civil society organisations can act as intermediaries between local governments and intergovernmental organisations (Dembinski, Joachim 2014, 461-462). Thus, the effectiveness of civil society participation in intergovernmental organisations also depends on the support of the local governments, for example on acquiring resources and building networks (Etzioni 2004, 352). In terms of a more effective policy creation in intergovernmental organisations, it is also in the

interest of local governments to increase the participation of NGO's in intergovernmental decision-making. Even gaining access as observers can enable in the creation of global networks and a more competent flow of information between different actors. Increased representation in the form of civil society participation can lead to greater representation of national interests, but also support the implementation of soft power ambitions of NATO on a local level (Böhmelt *et al.* 2014, 31-32).

The presence and role of non-governmental inclusion have become increasingly relevant in global governance and intergovernmental organisations. The process of globalisation has strongly contributed to the sense of common purpose and solidarity among people. Transnational values, such as human rights, social empowerment, gender equality have allowed for various civil society organisations gain legitimacy and become important actors in the international system (Marchetti 2010). Thus, civil society associations have the power to bridge the gap between citizens and intergovernmental organisations (Heidbreder 2012, 5). The support of civil society actors can also make the functions and actions of NATO more transparent and understandable for people, as well as making it possible for people to be "a part of meaningful participation and decision-making in the field of security" ('Atlantic Treaty Association and Youth…' 2019). The ATA and the EATA more specifically have various task forces in the areas of strategic interest for NATO (for example, 'Women, Peace and Security'; 'Cyber Defence and Security'; 'YATA Integrated Task Force for Communication'). Furthermore, to further education, cooperation, and networking, the ATA developing cooperation with regions outside of the alliance, for example, North Africa and the Middle East, Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia ('ATA Network &…' 2020; 'EATA' 2020).

3. THE ESTONIAN ATLANTIC TREATY ASSOCIATION IN THE FUNCTIONING OF NATO

The value of the ATA Network stems from informal information exchange, talking without reservations or diplomatic ties, understanding each other's perceptions. The ATA can educate, but also learn from people. It's necessary to intensify cooperation, but it's a process. (Theile 2019)

The extract above sublimely captures the essence of the ATA Network and the EATA. National and international civil society cooperation provides a platform for exchanging and constructing knowledge and creates a global network of academics, young professionals, military and economic actors, policy-makers, and other relevant parties. During the research for this paper, three major fields of activity were distinguishable in creating value for NATO's strategic goals. They are education, networking, as well as influence in policy-making and the importance of cooperation. In the following three sections various events and activities organised (and participated) by the EATA shall be introduced and analysed. The sections were formed on the basis on analysing the empirical data and categorizing it into most influential chunks. The data gathered for this chapter of the thesis derives primarily from the empirical research, but also secondary sources, such as documents as complementary and definitive source. Regardless of the division into separate sections, it will become clear that all of the activities of the association are intertwined with one another, creating a unified value system which is beneficial on an individual, national, and international level.

3.1. Education

Providing education both inside the organisation (and the network) as well as for the general public has been one of the foundations of the EATA since its establishment in 2001. In this section of the research, the most influential and outstanding projects and events will be emphasised. The first

project being analysed is the annual 'Baltic-Russia Youth Forum' (BRYF). The aim of the 'Baltic-Russia Youth Forum' is to bring together around 75 young leaders and experts from the Baltic states, Russia, Scandinavia, and Eastern Partnership countries to discuss and hold workshops on transnational security and defence policy challenges, as well as analyse the future unfolding of Baltic-Russia relations. I conducted participant observation, as well as interviews in the 2019 event held in Vilnius, Lithuania from 23 to 26 October. During the three days, it became apparent that the event has become a constant, and a trademark for many young professionals, as well as experts. Numerous participants have attended the event for years (some as much as 5). Most of the interviewees emphasised that the value of and uniqueness of the event stem from pluralism, which despite heated discussions, is the fertilizer for increased dialogue and understanding.

> *It's very important because unfortunately the NATO Summits are predominantly for people employed in the bureaucratic system and it creates almost no opportunities for experts, scholars and researchers to take part in these kinds of events. This one is very different because it allows people like me to come here and form the networks. (...)*
>
> *I like very much is that you do not invite people from just one bubble. You know there can be a big bubble where everyone despite of their background and heritage all think the same way, they all act the same way. This forum is different because you have a lot of people who are extremely anti-Russian, then you have people who are very pro-Russian. You have people who are very proud to be Russian, but then there are people who are very critical about the country they represent. There are people from Baltics that are very narrow-minded in many situations. But then you have people from Baltics that are very much open to looking at an angle from a different scale. I think the reason I applied this year, as well as last year is that it made me rethink my approaches. Of course, I get new information but I also rethink the information that I have. This is something that doesn't happen in other conferences because we always see people who know each other, who are well aware of each other in other formats and they have comfort, in this Forum, there is no comfort zone.* (Participant from Georgia 2019)

The additional crucial aspect was the access to information from various experts, which was especially accentuated by participants from Russia. As one participant from Russia told the author

in an interview "I can hear the Russian side every day at home. I came here to listen to Western side straight from the experts" (Participant 2 from Russia 2019). After an analysing all of the interviews conducted at the event, both education and networking were the cross-cutting themes among the participants.

Another annual event aimed at young professions is the 'NATO-EU Roundtable'. The focus of the event is on the topics of defence cooperation between NATO and the EU (organised since 2013). The event hosts about 50 participants (over a 100 together with ambassadors, academics, and experts). Traditionally, the participants also visit Ida-Viru County, used as the location of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) simulations, which are aimed at increasing diplomatic communication skills and achieving consensus in negotiations ('NATO-EU Roundtable' 2020). Unfortunately, due to the emergency situation caused by Covid-19, this year's event was postponed to autumn, thus it was impossible to conduct interviews or participant observation. There was a possibility to conduct an interview with one of the organisers of the event (EATA office employee 2020). According to them, this event is beneficial for the bilateral relations of NATO and the EU due to the overlap in their member countries. In addition, NAC simulations help to construct a better overview of the working mechanisms of the decision-making body. The event is also pivotal, as many people know the EATA from the 'NATO-EU Roundtable' and young people have sought internships in the association after attending it. The EATA's Secretary General, Krista Mulenok recounted that the event was created with a purpose to increase the cooperation between NATO and the EU. In 2013 collaboration was not tight, but it changed after the 2014 events in Ukraine. Nowadays there are quite a few partnerships and agreements, especially in the field of hybrid threats. Mulenok also emphasised the cooperation the EATA has had with the European Commission Representation in Estonia on the project 'Koos tegime Eesti suuremaks – 10 aastat NATO-s ja Euroopa Liidus' in 2014 ('Together we have made Estonia bigger – 10 years in NATO and in the EU') (Mulenok 2020).

As addressed in the first chapter, NATO's relations to Russia remain unstable. Russia uses the power of hybrid warfare to produce and distribute propaganda, fake news, and conspiracy theories through various mass communication media channels (Besch, Bond 2019; Nocetti 2018, 438; Dempsey 2019). According to the report by the International Centre for Defence and Security (Dougherty, Kaljurand 2015, 4-5), almost a third Russian-speaking population in Estonia uses Russian media as their main source of information. However, many of them are also familiarised with Estonian media. Young people predominantly are also highly influenced by global pop

culture (*ibid*, 9-12). However, it was evident from the results that some groups, especially individuals with lower levels of education and insufficient work prospects, as well as little or no capacity of the Estonian language showed high levels of alienation from the Estonian society. Among them, living only in the Russian information space was at the highest level (*ibid,* 17). Further reports clearly show the correlation between consuming Russian media (not considering content in the Russian language produced by Estonian channels) and the distrust in state institutions. According to a report ordered by the Estonian Ministry of Defence, the chunk of the Russian-speaking population who watch Estonian media at least once a week have a more positive stance on NATO (Kivirähk 'AVALIK ARVAMUS...' 2018, 76). Moreover, another essential component of the attitude of Russian-speakers' towards international organisations is the manner in which the latter are covered in the Russian media (Kivirähk 'Integrating Estonia's...' 2014, 16). Continuing on a more encouraging note, there has been an evident increase towards the support for NATO (in 2018, 91% of Estonians and 44% of non-Estonians). However, the support of non-Estonians towards the alliance can be fickle. After the Arab Spring in 2011 and the Bronze Night in 2007, it barely reached over 30% (Kivirähk 'AVALIK ARVAMUS...' 2018, 57-58). Thus, it is apparent that the support of the latter is volatile, and the role civil society in this case is the one of a mediator.

Due to the abovementioned, one of the missions of the EATA has been creating a platform for education and dialogue for the Russian-speaking population in Estonia. According to Marica Lillemets, for 17 years the direct focus of the association has been on integrating students and teachers of Russian-language schools using the topics of security and defence. Teachers from both Estonian-language and Russian-language schools have been participating in the events and trainings together to encourage increased dialogue (Lillemets, 2020).

> *The EATA has a considerable role in changing perceptions about NATO, as the level of trust in social movements is higher than in the steps taken by state actors, especially among non-Estonians. (...)*
>
> *The EATA was the first to initiate the Summer School for Teachers of History and Civic Education project, which is now coordinated in cooperation with other organisations. As these fields vary in different languages, simultaneous interpretation was used until the year before last. For the last two years, no translation has been necessary. I used to speak in and compile the programmes for the Summer Schools. The most challenging part was composing the classical*

narratives, which are and will remain divergent in Estonia and Russia.
(Lillemets, 2020)

The first event for the Summer School for Teachers of History and Civic Education project took place in 2007. Over the years, some of the topics have included broad-based national defence, human rights and security, military topics and society, and others ('Õpetajate seminarid' 2020). In 2019, the focus was on prevention strategies in schools. As mentioned above, the focus on educational events for teachers has been on inclusivity. Thus, it is crucial to involve as many teachers from Russian-language schools, as possible. When conducting participant observation during the Summer School in 2019, the deep interest in the topics was palpable. It was noticeable even before the event, as the number of candidates exceeded the number of spots by quite a big number. Furthermore, the value and benefit of the project are evident from both the considerable amount of returning participants and the good results from feedback forms and analysis. In addition to the Summer School programme in 2019, the elective course 'Cybersecurity' for high school level along with an electronic textbook and other study materials was introduced at the end of the event. The project was initiated and lead by the EATA in cooperation with TalTech, Network of Estonian Teachers of Informatics and Computer Science (NETICS), and Kehtna Vocational Education Centre. The objective of the course is to provide students with an overview of the nature and various disciplines that make up cybersecurity (Küberkaitse 2020). The association also took part in the pilot project for the creation of the field of cybersecurity in Põltsamaa Secondary School ('Küberkaitse ja…' 2020). The cooperation for creating the cybersecurity textbook was far from being the EATA's first delve into producing educational materials. In fact, numerous publications have been issued by the association. Furthermore, they have an accessible office library containing various books, reports, brochures, magazines on the topics of security, defence, international relations, and other relevant fields.

The last section of educational activities of the EATA focuses on its presence in public events and giving guest lessons in schools all over Estonia with a purpose of increased engagement with the public, as well as providing information on the alliance and its purposes on a national and global scale. At schools, the most predominant instrument in transmitting knowledge was in the form of a presentation. However, in public events, the association uses short quizzes with a possibility to win a prize to provide education and awake curiosity about the alliance and the association. Participant observation was conducted in three public events: 'Viimsi turvalisuse päev' on 14 September, 2019, charity concert 'Laulud sõdurile' on 22 June 2019, and the visit of Danish Queen

Margarethe II in Tallinn on 15 June 2019. In the course of them, an initial lack of courage or motivation could be witnessed by many people. However, when a representative of the EATA introduced themselves and the organisation, encouraging individuals to try and test their knowledge, most of them ended up enjoying trying to fill the questions, actively searching for relevant facts from the materials provided to them, or engaging in a lively conversation with one of the volunteers. Furthermore, the offered prizes were undoubtedly great motivators for the participants but even more beneficial for the EATA, as hopefully the provided books (prizes) and other materials created interest to learn more about the topics of security and defence. Moreover, one can argue that being present in public events makes a civil society organisation even more transparent and accessible, as in these types of situations, any person can ask questions or voice their possible concerns about NATO, and get relevant information from an association member on the spot. The author finds the aforementioned to be especially relevant and essential with topics connected to the functioning of intergovernmental organisations, or subjects from the areas of security and defence in general, as many people tend to avoid the discussions over them, especially when not approached appropriately.

3.2. Networking

Networking and creating dialogue are pivotal for the EATA on all levels, from individual to organisational, to national and international. The focal point of the previous section was on education, but one cannot ignore the aspect of networking, which is central in the operation and development of civil society organisations, as well as for an individual. Firstly, the EATA is organising traditional events for all members three times a year. The General Assembly is meant for voting new Council members, as well as for the discussion on relevant documents. In addition, the 'End of the Summer Event' and the 'End of the Year Event' focus on gathering members to hold presentations and panel discussions, as well as film showings on significant current events. For example, the author got the possibility to attend both of the latter in 2019. They were excellent in meeting and mingling with other members, thus increasing one's personal and professional circle. In 2019, the presenter at the End of the Summer Event was the Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, Major General Martin Herem, who gave an overview of the activities of the Estonian Defence Forces during the previous year, as well as directions and plans for the future. The End of the Year Event concentrated on the impact of climate change on the Arctic. It consisted of a reception, a panel discussion (panellists: Urmas Paet, Member of the European Parliament,

and Andres Tarand, President of the Estonian Polar Club, moderated by Evelyn Kaldoja, Head of International News at Postimees). The association also organises various other events for its members, such as survival camps in cooperation with Naiskodukaitse (the Estonian Women's Voluntary Defence Organization). Moreover, the EATA is a partner in the creation and coordination in numerous other events. To complete this research the author got the possibility to attend 'Economic and Security Talks 2020' and the 'VIII Women's Congress'. This type of collaboration enables the tightening of bonds between various NGO's and the reciprocal spread of information (both nationally and internationally), but as important as that, it offers active members the possibility to broaden their circles and acquire knowledge in areas and in places, which could be difficult without an affiliation to the EATA.

Additionally, the association actively participates at the annual 'Arvamusfestival' ('The Opinion Festival'). In 2019, the EATA in cooperation with the Embassy of Germany in Estonia and Friedrich Ebert Foundation led the discussion 'The Future of NATO'. Recurrently, being present and cooperating in a number of different forms enables NGO's to be more visible and transparent, and also have a wider reach among the general public, as these kinds of activities are visited by highly diverse groups. The empirical research showed, that the more knowledge about an organisation and its activities is visible, the more far-reaching its impact. The effect is not merely on the level of the association, but also the individual. Participating in the EATA's events as a researcher enabled the author to be immersed in groups and networks being formed among individuals, who have (and often continue) to attend association's projects. Without this, it would have been impossible to experience the extent the work of NGO's like the EATA can have. After conducting observation and interviews, it became clear that genuine bonds and friendships are created during the events. Participants will stay connected both online and in real life, visiting each other and sharing information. Furthermore, the networks are even more fruitful as the people are young professionals and possible future leaders in the fields of international affairs, defence, and security. While there can be disagreements among participants from diverse political and national backgrounds, this research has found that more often than not, these types of informal information exchange events will broaden one's horizons and possibly make people more open-minded, analytical, and sceptical about all the information they receive as was emphasised in the first section and also highlighted by 8 interviewees out of 11 at BRYF. Another aspect the author found worth noting is that quite a big number of people joined the EATA's event as a result of a recommendation by a friend or an acquaintance. Thus, the networking aspect of the ATA's functioning is essential in creating a global network of intellectuals who are interested in peace

and sustainable development. The value of it emerges especially in times of crises through the exchange of first-hand experiences and information sharing, as well as in the face of the increasing influence of mass media and hybrid threats in the form of propaganda and fake news.

> *I've started to participate here as a bachelor's student, then as a master's and now it is part of my work* [the interviewee works and an NGO in Russia]. *I want to connect and share with other participants who are now younger than I am. (...)* *It was a funny story*
> [Answer to where the participant heard about the event]. *I was in St. Petersburg and participated in the Model United Nations conference at a small university. I knew a girl who applied for this conference in 2013 but she failed. She told me that this conference was at a very high level and it's unique. It was my first time when I heard about the organisation or any affiliation of it to NATO. Even after I checked if there are any such associations in Russia. As far as I remember there were some organisations or only one before 2012. After President Putin came back to his presidency, all such Atlantic associations were lost. Russia does not want to recognize that our NGO's could have official contacts with NATO Headquarters. It's difficult to even organise some events officially. (...) It's a place where young people from different countries meet each other and somehow understand besides political disinformation and mass media. You can see that we were taking photos with Ukrainians, Georgians without any context or doubts because we are now friends and we still want to keep this friendship. Even if we have met each other once, we are now planning to visit each other in different countries.* (Participant 1 from Russia 2019)

So far, the focal point of this section has been on events and networking, and has been addressed mostly through first-hand connections. However, in today's digital age, engagement with the audience through media (especially social media) outlets is pivotal. Malign actors are constantly attempting to spread misinformation, propaganda, fake news, and other tactics to counter NATO's strategic communication efforts (Bešker, 2017). Therefore, it is essential for the alliance to prioritize its strategic communication and presence in the mainstream media, especially among the younger audience, who may not be informed well enough on current security issues (Rodrigues, Dubovyk 2010, 96; Hilton 2019). Placing more emphasis on communication and media was pointed out in all interviews conducted with the EATA office members, as well as from employees

in the ATA branches abroad. Therefore, the association is very active in various platforms (Facebook, Instragram, Youtube, and Twitter) and plans to develop its communication and social media strategy even further. A concrete example of this is the social media campaign #MeOlemeNATO (#WeAreNATO) in 2018-2019, the aim of which was to increase public understanding of the alliance.

The EATA is also engaging the youth through various competitions. The theme of 2020 was designing a slogan connected to NATO, the association, or on the topics of defence and security in general (it was aimed at people aged 16-19). It was organised in cooperation with NATO Headquarters, Estonian Ministry of Defence, and Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. The prize of it was a visit to the NATO Headquarters for the authors of the three best slogans. The association has held these types of contests for years. In 2014, the task was to create an educational game on NATO. The winners were from Pärnu Sütevaka High School of Humanities under the guidance of Joonas Mengel with the 'NATONIA' card game. Mengel recounted, that at first the game was used as a study material in schools all over Estonia. Over the years the game has changed and developed. It was expanded to three platforms for a global campaign 'NATONIA' Online World Championship in 2019 – card game, online game and social media games (Mengel 2020). The initiative reached 55 countries and two million people (the initial aim was 300 000). Mengel described his surprise about the huge growth of the game, "at first I thought that we have fallen victim to a click-farm. I couldn't believe that so many people are playing from countries like Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Then I started contacting the people and found out that they were all real people interested in the game" (*ibid*). This was the push to create the NATONIA Ambassadors Initiative. It was successful because according to Mengel, people believed in the idea and wanted to help. Now the game has ambassadors in 14 countries, where young people volunteer to host NATONIA playing events at their local schools. He stated, that young people are in need and hungry for a purpose and becoming an ambassador for a NATO themed game gave them that (*ibid*).

> *Games are an efficient way to reach your target group with a small budget, and we were very successful in that. A game keeps people engaged. Experience shows, that people who already know about NATO play the game, but also people who know little about NATO. We even had high engagement from countries, which are not NATO-minded or are against NATO. When young people start, the goal is not to learn, but to beat their last score. However,*

education is part of the process and learning is inevitable. NATONIA has grown into more than just a game, it's a global NATO awareness campaign using games as an instrument. (...)

Big budget is not necessary to achieve great things. Our marketing budget has been very limited and a lot of the growth has been organic – word of mouth; social media sharing etc. Feedback from our target group (successor generation aged 15-35) has been extremely positive. To think this all started from a small contest organised by Krista [Krista Mulenok – the author] and what it has grown into now, it seems impossible. It's been six years and I still run it, a small game that started from a high school in Estonia has reached millions of people globally. (...) In the future, I want to develop and perfect the game even further, the goal is for NATONIA Online World Championship to be an annual event, and to widen the Ambassadors Initiative to be the backbone of the game in as many countries as possible. NATONIA could be one of the most successful bridges between NATO and the youth, but it requires several right decisions to be made on the right time at the right place. (Mengel, 2020)

The author finds NATONIA game to be the best and one of the most unique examples of the power of sheer will and wish to create something amazing. The driving force behind NGO's is people with a mission. Organisations like the EATA can give young people the possibility and means to bring their ideas into existence.

3.3. Influence in policy-making and the importance of cooperation

Policy-focus and cooperation with other actors (from NGO's to Cabinet-level governmental agencies) have been of central importance to the association from its creation. Previous sections have analysed a few of the fields of activity related to policy-making, thus they will not be explained in this section anymore. For recollection, these topics were advancing the cooperation between NATO and the EU, the integration of students and teachers from Russian-language schools, and the creation of the course 'Cybersecurity'.

Broad-based national defence has been emphasised in Estonia's National Defence Strategy Reports since 2010. The goal for Estonian National Defence is to ensure a comprehensive

approach to the country's security. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to uphold two essential pillars of defence: international cooperation in the form of strong partnership with Estonia's allies and the protection of NATO's collective defence capabilities along with assuring Estonia's strong initial defence capacity. This requires cooperation from all major state authorities, as in the face of expeditiously evolving security challenges, national security cannot involve only military preparedness (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2011, 3). Thus, broad-based national defence requires all state authorities to hold responsibility for their corresponding fields of expertise during peacetime. The defence strategy for Estonia does not only involve readiness for resistance during conflict, the most efficient way to ensure peace and stability is the power of deterrence. Successful deterrence creates the image of a resistant and cohesive nation for an aggressor (Kaitseministeerium 2018). Accordingly, Estonia's National Defence Strategy Report for 2017-2026 has included a prominent section on broad-based national defence. Heretofore only the possibility of a conflict has been addressed, but the successful implementation of broad-based national defence can also significantly improve the overall preparedness for any type of conflict, and it is especially significant considering the emergency situation announced due to the outbreak of Covid-19. The implementation of broad-based national defence and civil protection is also Estonia's most important current defence problem according to Krista Mulenok, who has been involved with those fields from 2014.

> *I have been actively involved in pressuring the Government to act upon it. (…)*
>
> *The current crisis shows all of the weaknesses, people were panic buying, they don't know how to act in a crisis situation. At the same time, this has given an opportunity to hold rapid trainings. In 2018, the Government of the Republic of Estonia adopted the Estonian Civil Protection Concept. According to it, people need to possess means of independent coping (such as food supplies) for one week. The implementation of it should start by carrying out a risk assessment and the implementation of concrete plans for different crisis scenarios according to it.* (Mulenok 2020)

The EATA's Communication and Media Adviser Marica Lillemets has written an amendment proposal for broad-based national defence, some of which was directly used in the according law amendment (Lillemets 2020). The promotion of broad-based national defence is also emphasised

in the association's Development Plan for 2019-2023 and it has also been a topic in several the EATA's events over the years ('Eesti NATO Ühingu...' 2018).

The EATA has also been actively participating in the promotion of United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). According to the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), advancing women's role and presence in both peacebuilding, as well as conflict prevention and management is essential. However, despite global efforts in increasing the participation of women, the inclusion has remained low on both peace-making and conflict resolution. In addition, there is a lack of articles corresponding to women's needs in the fields. Thus, the necessity for continuous action is unquestionable. In many countries, UN cooperates with civil society organisations and women's groups to implement efficient means of increased inclusion (United Nations 2020; 'Women, Peace and Security' 2020) In 2018, the ATA created a task force under the same name, which is chaired by Krista Mulenok. She was also a member of NATO's first Civil Society Advisory Panel on Women, Peace and Security (CSAP) from 2016 to 2019 ('ATA Network &..' 2020). However, the EATA kickstarted the series of events and roundtables to support the plan of action of Resolution 1325 in Estonia already in 2012. Due to the increased popularity of the series, in 2016 the annual conference 'Women, Peace, and Security' was established ('ÜRO resolutsioon 1325...' 2020) One of the topics of discussion has been the policy focus on increasing women's participation in military service. It is compulsory for men, but from 2013, women have been granted the possibility to serve. Since then, the promotion of military service among young people has been on the agenda for the association as well. The EATA has organised different camps and events for high school students to get more acquainted to military topics and also the website of the association hosts different military service blogs from both women and men.

The EATA was also one of the founding members of the Carolin Illenzeer Fund. The purpose of the foundation is the financial support of children of members of Estonian Defence Forces, who have been gravely injured or killed while serving (Carolin Illenzeeri Fond 2012). Moreover, the association is also supporting the 'Anname Au!' ('Let Us Salute!') campaign, which has been organised annually since 2014 by the NGO Estonian Society of Wounded Soldiers to honour veterans and their families. 'The Blue Hepatica Run' is a charitable project organised in the framework of the campaign (Anname Au! 2020). In 2019, the aforementioned sporting event was the preliminary competition for the annual 'NATO Run' (NATO Futás 2020) held in Budapest on 20 October, 2019. The event gathers thousands of runners annually and is held to raise awareness

on the importance of global peace and security and is organised by Honvéd Sportegyesületek Országos Szövetsége (HOSOSZ) and the Youth Atlantic Treaty Association of Hungary (Magyar Ifjúsági Atlanti Tanács) (Budapesti Atlétikai Szövetség). The winner of 'The Blue Hepatica Run' raced in 'The NATO Run' together with the EATA Team (Mulenok 2020).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to Miskimmon *et al.* (2013, 5), strategic narratives can be considered a "tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environments in which they operate". Keeping in mind that the construct has the following three interlinked segments (*ibid*) – identity narrative (it is responsible for negotiating and contesting a particular identity), system narrative (it is all about being 'comfortable' or 'uncomfortable' in a particular international system, and policy/issue narrative (it is how a policy is shaped up and presented) – NATO as a strategic communicator has, arguably, plenty of value out of its interactions with the alliance-bound civil society? This academic paper found the increased civil society participation to be positively beneficial for NATO's strategic communication ambitions in all three parts of the strategic narrative's construct.

This research finds such a framework particularly useful in the process of enabling to delve deep into the activities of the organisation – apart from the paper-generated data, it was also proved via author's direct participation in the EATA daily activities and different types of events, projects as well as through direct observations. Furthermore, using a qualitative approach allowed the author to observe the dynamic between participants in the aforementioned events and the opportunity to conduct thorough interviews. Thus, the biggest value of the method was gaining access to the informants' emotions, views, interactions and behaviours. In other words, it enabled the author to access the data hidden from documents and numbers. Using a quantitative method (or simply secondary data analysis) would have resulted solely in superficial results and would not have provided the author with the platform to engage in meaningful participatory activities and to be immersed into the according networks even after the events. For example, similarly to other actors connected to the ATA, the author experienced being part of an international network of people connected via social media and actively communicating months (or even years) after a project. Furthermore, the qualitative method enabled the author to gain access to informants otherwise extremely difficult (NATO staff and experts, members of other ATA and YATA branches). Furthermore, even if the access was gained, participants of the events or other actors connected to

the EATA or the ATA Network would not have provided the material acquired now. These insights were pivotal in realizing the role every actor plays in the functioning of civil society support for NATO's PDD.

There are also limitations to the research. Firstly, it is clear that this kind of research can only operate in a particular context, herein within the networks connected to the EATA and the ATA network, which can create a sample bias (people connected to the association and attending its events are bound to have more information on the benefits of it). However, the research sample was chosen with a method of purposeful sampling, with the interviewees being chosen on the basis of their relevant knowledge and experience connected with the topic. This has also created the possibility of further research among the general public (or people who for some reason have a sceptical opinion on it) as to their knowledge and opinions on the EATA, and their reasons for the aforementioned, for improving areas, such as communication and topics covered. Furthermore, this thesis did not contain the comparison of several conference-type events, as they were postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Thus, the research lacks in the comparison of the reasons (and most importantly benefits for strategic communication) of different conferences. However, this thesis can serve as a basis for a more in-depth analysis of either on how one event in correlates with NATO's PDD's strategic aspirations the course of several years or the comparison of how different events/projects have achieved certain goals. This research can serve as a basis for numerous other quantitative and qualitative studies done on the topics on NATO's PDD and strategic communication, civil society participation, education, communication etc. Furthermore, it offers a foundation to further study the manner in which NATO is creating counter narratives to oppose misinformation spread by malign actors, such as Russia.

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