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Malta and its Southern Neighbours: Small State Europeanisation in the context of the ENP

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**Universiteit
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Thesis MA International Relations: European Union Studies

**Malta and its Southern Neighbours:
Small State Europeanisation in the context of the ENP**

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1. Introduction

Few policy areas are as closely guarded by the member states of the European Union as their foreign policy. This is visible on the EU-level, in the Common Foreign and Security Policy and its individual policies, as the CFSP is considered to be a salient example of intergovernmentalism's hold on aspects of EU policy-making (Nugent, 2017). Thus, EU foreign policy is based on the lowest-common denominator. However, there have been some examples of small states influencing EU foreign policy. Most notably, Poland, and Ireland are relevant cases of individual, less influential states, guiding EU foreign policies according to their national foreign policy preferences, such as the Eastern Partnership component of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the case of Poland, or the Brexit negotiations in the case of Ireland (Sus, 2015; Murphy, 2019). The member state chosen as a case study in the context of this research is Malta. It is a relevant object for this study, as it is undoubtedly a small state. So small in fact, that some scholars state that in terms of its influence on EU foreign policy formulation, Malta can only barely be considered a small state, even in comparison to other small states (Fiott, 2010). This makes it an interesting case study, as it, nonetheless, has clearly defined interests in the Southern neighbourhood. The Southern neighbourhood aspect of the ENP has itself been an under researched area in recent years, as it is widely considered a failed policy, and the interest of EU-scholars has largely shifted away from the Southern neighbourhood to the Eastern neighbourhood, where the threats to the EU, and its influence on the 'ring of friends' it aims to create, seem more pressing. Due to current developments this is unlikely to change in the future. Has Malta, despite its status as a small state, and the current general disinterest in the Southern neighbourhood, managed to capture EU policy-makers' attention and successfully Europeanised its domestic foreign policy preferences?

This study builds on research on the ENP, Europeanisation and small states, and aims to fill several gaps in these fields of study. Firstly, the Southern neighbourhood has been neglected in the literature on EU foreign policy over the past few years. As the Southern neighbourhood is by no means irrelevant, this study evaluates recent developments in the Southern neighbourhood against the backdrop of theories on EU policy-formulation. Secondly, the combination of small state literature and Europeanisation has not frequently been the object of research, as findings were expected

to be minimal. This is especially true in the context of foreign policy. While some literature has been devoted to this topic, Malta has recently been under researched in this field, as it was found to be unsuccessful in its attempts to set the EU agenda, or Europeanise its policies by several studies (Panke & Gurol, 2018; Pastore, 2013). This research aims to re-evaluate these findings. Thirdly, the method of this study is based around a mix of qualitative and quantitative content analysis, which has not yet been applied in the research of Europeanisation. The study traces discursive constructions and frames over several levels within the EU structure, starting at the domestic level, continuing to statements and speeches on the European level, before ending on a comparative analysis of the 2015 ‘Review of the ENP’ (High Representative, 2015), and the recent 2021 ‘Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood’ (High Representative, 2021). The study demonstrates that the mixed analysis applied in the context of this study can be utilised in the research of Europeanisation. Thus, the study adds to the literature of Europeanisation in multiple ways. Additionally, it is relevant to understanding EU policy-formulation, as it allows to assess the specific frames and discursive constructions that are likely to result in successful Europeanisation on an individual basis. Further, through this analysis, it is showing what tactics small states can apply in their attempts to upload domestic foreign policy preferences to the EU-level.

The study begins with an overview of the relevant literature on Europeanisation, small state strategies in Europeanising their preferences – using Ireland as an example – and literature on Malta’s role in the EU. The literature on Ireland will be linked to more general research on small state influence and agenda-setting, in order to demonstrate that the findings are generally applicable. The next section goes on to delineate the method used in the analysis. Subsequently, the relevant frames and discursive constructions are traced across the domestic political sphere, including speeches and statements by Maltese officials to a domestic, or non-EU audience, the European level, with speeches and statements to a European audience, before finally attempting to identify the frames in a comparative analysis of EU-level documents on the ENP. In this manner, this analysis will ascertain whether domestic Maltese frames and discursive constructions carried over into EU documents, which would constitute a sign of successful Europeanisation of Maltese policy preferences.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Europeanisation

Before examining whether and under what circumstances the European Neighbourhood Policy can be influenced by the preferences of a small state, several mechanisms from the study of Europeanisation, as well as the concept itself, need to be introduced. There are several mechanisms comprised within the idea of Europeanisation. The focus of this paper's research will lie on the processes of cross-loading, downloading and uploading. Downloading, or national adaptation, like uploading, is a vertical mechanism identified within the study of Europeanisation. It refers to member states increasingly orienting themselves towards norms and processes propagated by the EU in terms of their domestic policy-making and in the context of European institutions (Wong, 2017). Inversely, when member states influence EU policy and manage to have domestic policy positions adopted on a supranational level, the process is referred to as uploading, or national projection (De Flers & Müller, 2012; Wong, 2017). This happens mainly through lobbying EU institutions, adapting to EU norms in negotiations, establishing a reputation as a reliable actor and being persuasive in advocating for one's foreign policy preferences on the EU level (Pastore, 2013). Cross-loading is a horizontal mechanism of Europeanisation and is the least researched of the mechanisms presented in this study (Czulno, 2021). Cross-loading refers to member states influencing each other's policies based on intergovernmental bargaining and coalition formation. As defined by Czulno (2021), these policy changes occur within the EU, rather than due to the EU.

When the process of Europeanisation was first documented, it was exclusively applied to policy areas within the first, most supranational pillar under the three-pillar structure introduced by the Maastricht Treaty (De Flers & Müller, 2012). It has since been expanded to other policy areas and other contexts of governance. Originally the concept of Europeanisation dealt with the downloading of policy-making frameworks under a supranational authority (De Flers & Müller, 2012). For this reason, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) had been neglected in the study of Europeanisation until recently, as the findings were expected to be minimal (De Flers & Müller, 2012; Müller, Pomorska & Tonra, 2021; Hettyey, 2021). However, this has changed as the mechanisms of Europeanisation came to be observed in intergovernmental policy areas as well (Sus,

2015). Since then, it has been identified by academics in different contexts, even in policy areas officially governed by consensus, such as the CFSP (De Flers & Müller, 2012; Chrysogelos, 2019). Foreign policy is among the policy areas with the least legal power conferred onto the EU institutions, due to it being traditionally closely linked to perceptions of national sovereignty (Hettyey, 2021). For this reason, foreign policy is considered one of the major bastions of intergovernmentalism within the European Union (Nugent, 2017). However, there are ways for less dominant member states to circumvent opposition by other national governments and impose their own policy preferences on the wider context of European foreign policy (De Flers & Müller, 2012).

An example of such successful influencing of EU foreign policy positions would be Poland's preferences towards its Eastern neighbours being transferred to the European level in the wake of its accession (Sus, 2015). As a result of this process of uploading, relations with the Eastern neighbourhood within the framework of the ENP were for a long time governed by Polish foreign policy preferences (Sus, 2015). Another relevant example would be Ireland successfully keeping its concerns on the top of the EU's agenda during the Brexit negotiations, despite being a small state (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019). This process falls within the concept referred to as Europeanisation of national foreign policy. The study's focus on small states is chosen due to the proposition of some scholars that small member states would generally be less successful in shaping EU foreign policy, due to their lack of capacity, which would force them to align their policies with the EU (De Flers & Müller, 2012; Panke & Gurol, 2018; Wong, 2017). However, as the case of Ireland demonstrates, this may not necessarily be the case.

2.2. Irish Foreign Policy and the EU

Ireland's setting of the EU's agenda during the Brexit negotiations and its ability to upload its main concerns to the European level despite being a small state, is an instructive case on how small states manage to influence EU policies and preferences. Scholars recognise Ireland as always having been apt at maximising its political influence, be it through leveraging its position in multilateral venues (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019), or through Irish elites and the political system maintaining flexibility in the face of challenges (Laffan, 2018).

Both of these features were noticeable during the Brexit negotiations. Scholars agree that the uploading of its position to the EU level was mainly achieved through a concerted domestic and external effort (Murphy, 2019; Rees & O'Brennan, 2019; Laffan, 2018). Domestically, a Brexit Task Force was created, which brought together interest groups (Laffan, 2018), and a direct line of communication was established between the Irish government and key stakeholders, such as political parties and industries which would be most affected by Brexit (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019). This helped to establish key objectives to be achieved during negotiations and created a coherent and unified Irish position. This is relevant, as a unified position on a domestic level increases the intensity with which a position can be promoted, and builds credibility, which contributes to the likelihood of influencing the EU agenda (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019; Princen, 2011).

Additionally, Ireland underwent a process of downloading of European norms and practices into its domestic institutional and political structure (Murphy, 2019). The national adaptation to European practices – or 'Brussels game' – preceding successful uploading of policy preferences has been identified by researchers as a necessary precondition to successful Europeanisation (Sus, 2015; Pastore, 2013). This adaptation to EU practices, also referred to as socialisation, occurs as a result of extended contact with other policy-makers in the Brussels-context, and is important due to the increase in legitimacy and reputation on the European level it engenders (Wong, 2017). These allow for more influence on the EU-level (Czulno, 2021). Thus, visible downloading of European norms and values is a necessary condition of the uploading of policy preferences. This requirement is identified in the Polish attempt at uploading its foreign policy to the European level, as it initially failed (Sus, 2015). This was the case in parts, due to Poland not having committed itself to European practices yet, and it not having garnered enough support for its initiative with other member states. A mistake it remedied (Sus, 2015). This element was also crucial in Hungary's attempts at uploading its foreign policy, as it committed itself to various European ventures that ran counter to its interests, in order to garner enough legitimacy and support from other member states for its own policy preferences (Hettyey, 2021). The literature distinguishes between thick and thin Europeanisation in this context, based on whether national adaptation is merely symbolic or of a deeper nature, but as downloading

will generally not be focused on during this study, this distinction will not be applied here (De Flers & Müller, 2012).

In the domestic response to Brexit, the speed and coherence with which the Irish position was formulated was a key factor in the successful Europeanisation of the national preferences, as it allowed Ireland to frame the issue according to its own preferences, without existing narratives (Laffan, 2018; Rees & O'Brennan, 2019). Externally, Ireland needed to convey the importance of its preferences to the other EU member states. Especially the Good Friday Agreement was crucial in this regard, as it safeguarded peace on the island (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019). That this framing of any threat to the Good Friday Agreement as a potential security crisis would be increasing the likelihood of influencing EU policies, is congruent with research on agenda-setting (Blumenau & Lauderdale, 2018). Briefings and meetings with EU institutions and other member states were the main tools the Irish applied in order to sway the EU position in their favour (Laffan, 2018). Further, Ireland sought to strengthen informal alliances with like-minded member states within the EU on cultural and economic matters, in order to increase its influence in the Council and commit itself more visibly to the EU (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019). Thus, cross-loading of domestic foreign policy preferences is among the main tools member states can apply in influencing EU foreign policy. This is supported by the relevant literature (Czulno, 2021; Pastore, 2013; Aggestam & Bicchi, 2019). The intensity with which the Irish position was promoted throughout every European member state and EU institution played a key role in garnering broad support for the Irish preferences and elevating them to the EU-level (Murphy, 2019). Focusing on a limited number of issues was also identified by the relevant literature as important, as it builds the perception of expertise and reliability and allows the state to claim authority in a policy area (Panke & Gurol, 2018; Princen, 2011). These cross-loading efforts were especially relevant in the case of Central and Eastern European member states, which were less familiar with the possible consequences of a hard border between the two parts of Ireland (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019).

2.3. Recent Research on the ENP

Recently, literature on the European Neighbourhood Policy has been scarce. This is the case even more so regarding literature on the Southern Neighbourhood, which has been largely replaced with a focus on the Eastern Partnership. The challenge posed by Russia in the context of the Eastern neighbourhood and the apparent return to geo-politics are the most salient topics of the current literature on the ENP. Many perspectives have been taken in the analysis of this conflict, and the EU's response to the geo-political challenge (Cadier, 2019; Vieira, 2021; Stefanova, 2021; Dekanozishvili, 2020; Rabinovych, 2021). In the literature on the Eastern neighbourhood, the EU is generally described as resilient and the ENP as effective in countering Russia's challenge (Rabinovych, 2021; Stefanova, 2021). Further, the ENP is evaluated as successful in achieving implementation of its proposed policies in the Eastern neighbourhood (Badalyan & Vasilyan, 2020; Guérin & Rittberger, 2020). Thus, much of the study on the ENP has been consumed by the EU's conflict with Russia. Notably, the ENP has been judged successful in bringing about democratic reform in the Eastern neighbourhood (Badalyan & Vasilyan, 2020; Guérin & Rittberger, 2020). However, as with the Southern neighbourhood, a certain 'policy inertia' has been identified in the Eastern neighbourhood as well (Crombois, 2019).

This has not been the case in the study of the Southern neighbourhood, where the ENP has been judged a clear failure by most scholars, as its implementation is being considered rigid, and not matching the expectations of the partner countries, consequently leading to the ENP's influence being contested by other actors (Schumacher, 2018; Kourtelis, 2019; Dandashly & Kourtelis, 2020; Abbot & Teti, 2021; Keukeleire, Lecocq & Volpi, 2021). This reveals that the lack of success the EU's approach has had in the Southern neighbourhood is among the main concerns of the current research on the Southern component of the ENP. Some studies on the lack of success the ENP has had in the Southern neighbourhood are worth emphasising; despite making no significant moves towards democratising its political system, or increasing its commitment to the respect for human rights, which are considered the goals of the ENP (European Parliament, n.d.), Morocco receives preferential treatment (Govantes, 2020). This preferential treatment is found to be solely the result of the Moroccan government's cooperation on matters of security and migration, thus circumventing the ENP's usual system of positive

conditionality (Govantes, 2020). Even further, several studies find evidence that this shift away from the EU's goal of transforming the neighbourhood, by bringing about political, social and economic change, to creating stability and security, has been guiding the EU's entire approach to the Southern neighbourhood (Roccu, 2018; Hatab, 2019; Góra, 2021; Loschi & Russo, 2021). Additionally, the increasing focus of cooperation on migration management has granted considerable leverage to the governments of the Southern Neighbourhood countries. This allows them to receive more concessions from the EU and make more extensive demands, circumventing the traditional conditionality-framework of the ENP (Jäntti & Klasche, 2021). As a result, democratisation efforts have taken a back seat in the ENP in the wake of the refugee management crisis and previously vital parts of the ENP have been practically suspended as a result. An overall shift of the ENP towards addressing security issues over promoting economic welfare and the rule of law is apparent in the relevant studies. Thus, next to issues of implementation and general policy formulation, the main reason for the failure of the Southern component of the ENP is considered its shift in focus towards creating stability at all costs, which impedes the promotion of democratic norms in the partner countries (Roccu, 2018; Hatab, 2019; Góra, 2021; Loschi & Russo, 2021; Jäntti & Klasche, 2021). For this reason, it is considered a failure, and recent literature has been overwhelmingly dealing with the Eastern neighbourhood. As a result, this study fills a gap in the literature by considering the current situation of the EU's foreign policy towards the Southern neighbourhood. As the goal of the study is to determine whether Europeanisation has occurred in this context, the country to be focused on in the research will be Malta, as it has considerable interest in the Southern neighbourhood, due to its geographic location and historical ties.

2.4. Malta in the EU

Malta joined the EU in 2004 (Harwood, 2014a). Membership in the EU offered several benefits to the small state in the middle of the Mediterranean, for example, the prospect for economic growth and the resulting stability and security, were deemed to be significant and offered a considerable incentive for joining the Union (Pace, 2002). However, more important, is that the Middle East and Southern Mediterranean region came to be considered as the origin of security threats to Malta, due to concerns regarding irregular

migration and organised crime (Pace, 2002). EU membership would increase Malta's ability to influence states in the Southern Mediterranean through raising the international profile of the small state, as it could now funnel its domestic foreign policy objectives through the EU institutions (Pace, 2013). This was especially relevant at the time of Malta's accession, as it found itself facing the prospect of diminished relevance in the Southern Mediterranean, as a result of Middle Eastern and Northern African attempts at regionalising (Pace, 2002).

Within the EU, Malta is the smallest state, both in terms of population and geographic size (Harwood, 2014b). Additionally, Malta has the least influence of any member state in the Council, due to its weak voting power, resulting from its small demographic size (Vinciguerra, 2021; Harwood, 2014b). Further, Malta is being seen as a negligible player in terms of European foreign policy-shaping as well (Fiott, 2010). Despite this, or perhaps because of it, Malta embodies an exceedingly pro-European stance within the Union (Harwood, 2014b). This is due to Malta being aware that it is vulnerable on the international stage as a result of its small size, and multilateralism being its main avenue for increasing its international influence (Pace, 2013). As foreign policy on the EU-level is generally governed on an intergovernmental basis, the small state needs to rely on political manoeuvring, in order to not have its foreign policy preferences disregarded. Thus, it is considered to be cooperative within the Council, as it forms informal coalitions with other states, in order to avoid becoming isolated (Harwood, 2014b). A frequent partner that Malta allies with in questions of foreign policy is Italy, due to both states having overlapping concerns in regards to the Mediterranean (Mainwaring & DeBono, 2021). Due to its geographic location, Malta has relations with many other Mediterranean countries, both on the Northern and Southern side of the sea. As such, it perceives itself as an intermediary between Europe and Northern Africa and *vice versa*, as it has ambitions to represent Europe in the Southern Mediterranean countries, while also conveying the Arab countries' situation to European states (Pace, 2013). As a result, Malta has been considered within the EU to be a country with strong ties to the countries of Northern Africa and the Middle East.

Due to its material weakness on the global stage, Malta's foreign policy has been judged as reliant on outside support in terms of security (Pace, 2013). This changed with Malta's shift to multilateral cooperation, where Malta can avoid relying on bilateral relations with

third countries. Despite the new preference for multilateralism, Malta harbours ambitions of neutrality, and has subsequently avoided joining NATO. Thus, it is also not allowing foreign militaries to establish outposts within its national borders (Pace, 2013). Due to its pronounced pro-European stance, it is also a strong supporter of the CFSP, which clashes with its status as a neutral power (Harwood, 2014b; Pace, 2013). However, this has stopped to be serious constraint on Maltese foreign policy (Dobrescu, Schumacher & Stavridis, 2017).

Malta's closest relations on the Southern side of the Mediterranean are with Libya, with whom diplomatic ties date back to the 1960s. This is exemplified by the fact that Libya was among the first countries to establish an embassy in Malta upon its independence, and Malta doing the same only a few years later (Bishku, 2015). The relations continued to be close, as evidenced by several cooperative efforts, such as intensifying trade relations and a treaty on security and military cooperation. Additionally, Malta was considered to be a gateway to Europe in the wake of the Libyan civil war, as it was the first country to have its airlines resume flights to the latter (Bishku, 2015). The strength and longevity of the relations between the two states are partly due to the geographic proximity of the two, and many of the important issues in the Mediterranean requiring cooperation in order to be addressed (Bishku, 2015).

Among the most salient issues in Maltese politics during the recent decade was the topic of irregular migration, which, according to Malta, threatened to overwhelm domestic security forces (Mainwaring, 2014). The latter are stretched notoriously thin, due to their relatively small number as compared to the large area that Malta is responsible for in the context of Search and Rescue (SAR) operations (Pace, 2013). Additionally, due to the high population density – which is the highest among all EU member states –, Malta is in favour of the Dublin system being replaced by a framework of responsibility sharing, even more so than most other Southern European states (Pace, 2013). However, this solution is not popular among EU member states (Mainwaring, 2014). Nonetheless, the size of the area Malta finds itself responsible for in SAR, along with the issue of high population density have been identified by the literature as useful discursive tools, which allow Malta to gain traction for its foreign policy preferences within the EU (Mainwaring & DeBono, 2021). The framing of the issue as a crisis, has allowed Malta to push the narrative of the necessity

of solidarity from other EU member states in the context of managing migration (Mainwaring & DeBono, 2021). This is supported by relevant literature on agenda-setting (Blumenau & Lauderdale, 2018) However, even as early as 2014, a certain amount of fatigue among EU member states had been identified by the literature in response to Malta's repeated framing of migration as a crisis, regardless of whether there was an actual influx in irregular migration in reality (Mainwaring, 2014).

In conclusion, the literature has found evidence that small states can upload their national foreign policy to the European level and put forward a number of tactics governments can apply, to put their foreign policy preferences on the EU agenda. Further, several salient issues were identified by the literature in Malta, which will be included in the analysis. With the Southern Neighbourhood having been neglected by the literature on EU studies in recent years, this paper aims to evaluate this often overlooked, yet relevant policy from the perspective of the study of Europeanisation and small state literature. This is novel, as – demonstrated by this overview of the relevant literature on the ENP – most research conducted on the ENP focuses on the Eastern component, issues of implementation and the geo-political contestation of the EU's normative influence by other actors. Uploading of the national foreign policy of a small state in the context of the ENP, and thus, tracing the origin of certain aspects of the policy will be the focus of this study. As such, the research will attempt to answer the question, as to whether small states can influence EU foreign policy through uploading and cross-loading in the context of the neighbourhood.

3. Methodology

This chapter will introduce and define some of the key concepts used in the analysis of the primary documents. In order to establish, whether and under what conditions small states can Europeanise their domestic foreign policy and influence EU-level foreign policy initiatives, such as the ENP, the study will examine the case of Malta. The focus in the study of Europeanisation within the ENP has so far mostly been on Poland in the context of the Eastern neighbourhood, and Italy and Greece in the context of the Southern neighbourhood (Chryssogelos, 2019; Sus, 2015; Dobrescu, Schumacher & Stavridis, 2017).

As a result, small states, such as Malta have been neglected by the study of Europeanisation, or simply framed as unsuccessful in their attempts to conduct foreign policy on a European level (Panke & Gurol, 2018; Pastore, 2013; Dobrescu, Schumacher & Stavridis, 2017). This is due to the assumption that small states cannot influence EU policies to any meaningful degree, due to their negligible political weight and capacity (Vinciguerra, 2021; Wong, 2018). However, this has been proven to be inaccurate, as the case of Ireland is evidence that small states can indeed influence EU foreign policy and set the EU agenda (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019; Laffan 2018).

The definition of what constitutes a small state will be based on Tomás Weiss' definition. While there is no universally accepted definition of a small state, relevant scholars on the study of small states consider states to be small based not exclusively on their geographic or demographic size, but also on the basis of the influence they exert in the context of a certain policy issue, as well as the country's self-perception (Weiss & Edwards, 2021). The latter is important, as the understanding the country has of its position in any given context determines the extent to which it will attempt to make up for its shortcomings through other means (Weiss & Edwards, 2021).

The object of the case study fits this definition of a small state, as Malta is small in both geographic and demographic terms, being the smallest member state of the EU and consequently having the least voting power in the Council of the EU (Vinciguerra, 2021). Malta is a relevant case study as it is not considered a key player in terms of European foreign policy-shaping (Fiott, 2010). Despite this, Malta takes steps to compensate for its disadvantages in international negotiations. For example, it has been suggested that Malta joined the EU primarily in order to prevent losing influence on the international stage (Pace, 2013). This gives it plausible incentives to Europeanise its foreign policy preferences. Additionally, Malta held the Council Presidency in the first half of 2017. This is relevant, as the role of the presidency has been identified as a key factor in a small state's ability to influence EU policy, making Malta even more relevant as a case study, due to its increased potential for uploading its national policy preferences (Bjoerkdahl, 2008). As a result, Malta fits the definition of a small state and fulfils all other relevant criteria of this study, making it an ideal case for the research on the Europeanisation of small state's national foreign policy preferences.

Europeanisation, as mentioned above, is comprised of three mechanisms: national adaptation, national projection and cross-loading (Wong, 2017; Aggestam & Bicchi, 2019). As the study focuses on whether small states can influence EU foreign policy, the most relevant mechanisms for the purposes of the research are national projection, also referred to as uploading, and cross-loading. Though, national adaptation may be referred to as required throughout the study. National projection refers to national policy preferences, in this case national foreign policy, being incorporated into European foreign policy, or European foreign policy being conducted on the basis of a member state's foreign policy preferences, consequently resulting in other member states also adapting to the foreign policy preferences of another member state (De Flers & Müller, 2012). Cross-loading is focused on the relationships between member states, which coordinate among each other, build consensus and coalitions, in order to maximise their influence on European foreign policy. As a result, the main assumption behind cross-loading, as defined by Czulno (2021), is that changes within member states are not the result of EU influence, but that of other member states (Czulno, 2021).

Based on Czulno (2021), the assessing of successful Europeanisation starts with the identification of a domestic policy issue that the member state in question wants to address in the context of European foreign policy. This is done through analysing primary sources as to a declared intention of uploading a policy issue (Czulno, 2021). This study will complement this approach with the inclusion of issues to be Europeanised encountered by the relevant literature. As identified by the relevant literature on Europeanisation, in order to upload domestic foreign policy preferences onto the EU agenda, a government needs to have a coherent and unified position on the national level, allowing for the necessary intensity in the advocacy for the policy preference (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019; Laffan, 2018; Princen, 2011). As a result, the study will ascertain whether the policy preference in question was supported across party lines. Related to this point, small state literature has emphasised the importance of prioritising few select issues in order for small states to have an influence on the EU agenda (Panke & Gurol, 2018). Thus, the research will focus on how frequently and how prominently the policy issue featured in the primary sources. Further, the country needs to adhere to European practices in negotiations, visibly commit itself to other European initiatives and demonstrate awareness of its position within the

EU, in order to garner legitimacy and goodwill for its position (Sus, 2015; Hettyey, 2021; Czulno, 2021; Pomorska, 2017). As the pro-European stance of Malta was identified by the literature, this will not be researched further in the primary sources (Harwood, 2014b; Pace, 2013). Additionally, the country has to raise awareness of its national policy preferences through cross-loading and forming unofficial coalitions with other states, in order to gain the support of other member states (Princen, 2011; Aggestam & Bicchi, 2019). Thus, the study will focus on signs of attempted cross-loading and evaluate whether they were met with success. Signs of attempted cross-loading include meetings of foreign ministers and the organisation of conferences. Success is measured by commitments and publications of support by other member states on the policy area in question. Finally, the member state can take advantage of a perceived crisis, in order to gain traction within the negotiations and impress urgency onto the other European states (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019; Blumenau & Lauderdale, 2018). For this reason, attention will be paid to the strategic framing of policy issues as crises, requiring an urgent EU response.

The analysis will be based on an inside-out approach, meaning that evidence will be collected on what the salient political issues in relation to the Southern neighbourhood were in Malta at the time, before analysing EU documents as to any signs of the latter. However, the relevant frames and discursive constructions are identified both inductively and deductively, based on what frames and discursive patterns are found throughout the analysis of the primary sources, and those that were highlighted in the relevant literature. Salient issues are defined as policy issues which are widely discussed on the domestic level and across party lines. The Southern Neighbourhood has been chosen as it has been neglected by the literature in recent years. The timeframe of the analysis will be the period between 2015 and 2021, as this would include the refugee management crisis, the Maltese Council presidency and allow for sufficient time for any uploading or cross-loading to show effects on the level of the ENP. Whether uploading has occurred, will be ascertained through a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative content analysis of domestic political publications, such as transcripts of speeches by relevant politicians in front of the national parliament or the European Parliament, as well as press statements. Documents detailing Council presidency priorities, press statements and debates will also be analysed. Relevant speeches and statements to this study are defined as those that include frames

and discursive constructions relating to the Southern neighbourhood. Further, political publications on the EU level, will be analysed. Specifically, the focus will lie on strategy documents in the context of the ENP. These documents are chosen based on the notion that strategy documents are stating policy goals and principles, and are not just reports on progress or implementation, but instead, articulate an 'ENP narrative', which makes them more relevant to the purposes of this study (Cianciara, 2017).

Whether uploading has occurred will be measured based on the tracing of the relevant frames and constructions. The frame to be focused on is that of irregular migration across the Mediterranean as a humanitarian crisis, with sub-sections dedicated to framing the lack of a redistributive system in the context of migration management as the abandonment of Southern European member states and the reform of the system as solidarity, and a discursive equation of irregular migration and human trafficking. The latter would be relevant according to literature on agenda-setting, which posits that in the context of politically contentious issues, a state may frame an issue putting the focus on a non-controversial aspect of an otherwise contentious topic, in order to reduce discussions and achieve its preferred outcome in the issue as a whole (Prince, 2011). Secondly, attention will be paid to the discursive construction of a connection between stability in the Southern neighbourhood and security in Europe, as well as the strategic framing of certain sub-topics, such as the relations between Malta and Northern Africa as privileged and cooperation with a stable Libyan government on border controls and maritime security as vital. As stated above, these frames were chosen both inductively and deductively. Whether these constructions and frames carry over onto the EU-level and specifically, into official EU strategy documents on the ENP, will be the benchmark for successful Europeanisation of Maltese foreign policy. However, the analysis will begin with the evaluation of documents and statements on the level of domestic politics.

4. Domestic Politics

The following section will outline the main foreign policy concerns found in Maltese domestic politics. The focus will be on the framing of the issues and any discursive constructions that are relevant in the context of the Southern neighbourhood, as discussed in chapter 3. The focus will first be on the framing of irregular migration across the Mediterranean as a humanitarian crisis, with the relevant sub-frames being the framing of a lack of reform in the Dublin System as a lack of European solidarity, and the equation of irregular migration with human trafficking and support for criminal organisations. Subsequently, the discursive construction to be focused on will be the interdependence Maltese politicians construct between Mediterranean stability and European security. This overarching construction also includes several sub-frames, focusing on individual components found in relation to salient issues in Maltese domestic politics. These include: the framing of cooperation with a stable Libyan government as vital in ensuring European security and the framing of Malta's relationship to Northern Africa as privileged.

In the context of migration, the prevalent frame is that of crisis. Especially the former Prime Minister and MEP Joseph Muscat, frequently refers to drownings in relation to irregular migration across the Mediterranean as a humanitarian crisis in his speech to the national parliament (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015). This framing is later used to invoke the EU's aid in stopping irregular migration across the sea. Further, based on the framing of irregular migration as a humanitarian crisis, Muscat calls for solidarity from other European member states and the EU, as the crisis cannot be handled by Southern member states alone (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015). This is a veiled call for a reform of the Dublin System, a policy preference Malta has represented vehemently, due to its high population density (Pace, 2013). Though a reform of the Dublin System is not explicitly mentioned, it is implied, making this an example of framing the absence of a redistributive mechanism as a lack of European solidarity. He goes on to state that EU-wide willingness to address the issue is currently present, due to the acknowledgement that irregular migration is indeed a humanitarian crisis, conveying success in uploading the issue to the European level to the domestic audience (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015). It is important to note that Muscat appeals to the unified position on the domestic level on this matter, as he states that the opposition party shares the Labour Party's position on irregular migration (Hon. Joseph

Muscat MP, 2015). This projects a strong national position on this topic to the domestic audience.

Additionally, irregular migration is discursively linked to criminal organisations, who profit from migration across the Mediterranean, calling for support from security organisations, such as EUROPOL and Frontex among others, and especially the cooperation with law enforcement of Northern African countries (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015). In a later speech in the Maltese parliament, Muscat repeats the discursive equation of irregular migration to human trafficking, using this as another incentive for a reform of the Dublin System (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2016). The former minister of foreign and European affairs, Carmelo Abela also mentions ‘the challenge of migration’ and human trafficking in conjunction with each other, reinforcing the discursive link between migration and criminal networks (Hon. Carmelo Abela, 2018).

As exemplified above, Maltese politicians frequently refer to a direct interdependence between stability in Northern Africa and security in Europe. This discursive link underpins the other frames analysed in this section. In a speech in front of the domestic Parliament, Joseph Muscat referred to instability in Northern Africa fuelling international crime networks and irregular migration (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015). Abela, refers to stability in the Mediterranean as being among Malta’s primary national interests and perceives a ‘firm connection’ between security in the two regions (Hon. Carmelo Abela, 2018). Notably, Abela shares his vision of the ENP, which he claims to be based on the idea of promoting ‘security, stability and prosperity’ in the neighbourhood (Hon. Carmelo Abela, 2018), rather than the support of democracy and human rights, as stated by EU institutions, such as the European Parliament, and the High Representative (European Parliament, n.d.; High Representative, 2015). This implies the importance, stability in the Southern neighbourhood has for Malta and fits the notion of stability in Northern Africa being intrinsically linked to security in Europe. Additionally, the call for a stable Northern Africa is echoed by members of the opposition, such as MEP Roberta Metsola, who advocates for European solutions to organised crime networks and terrorist groups in the Southern neighbourhood (Barry, 2015). These statements further exemplify the direct ties Malta perceives between stability in Northern African countries and security in Europe, often in relation to illegal activity, such as irregular migration and organised cross-border crime.

Not directly related, but of note is the fact that Abela also emphasises the positive role, that regional fora, such as the Union for the Mediterranean, play in achieving objectives set in these areas, adding that the regional forum ‘amplifies’ Malta’s work in the region (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2018).

Especially relevant in the context of Northern African stability and European security is Malta’s self-perception as a mediator between the two regions. This framing of Malta’s Northern African relations as privileged is exemplified by the former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, George Vella, who in publications by the Maltese ministry of foreign affairs is quoted as appealing to this role of the small country (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2016b). In his statement, Vella propagates the notion of Malta being able to understand the concerns of the two regions, due to the country’s historic ties to both (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2016b). This role of Malta as a mediator, the ministry of foreign affairs claims, resulted in concrete results, such as the formalisation of meetings between foreign ministers of the two regions being held in Malta (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs 2016b). This lends credibility to this notion. This perception is echoed by Abela, who speaks of Malta’s ‘Mediterranean vocation’, and its role as a mediator between Northern Africa and Europe, due to its geographic location (Hon. Carmelo Abela, 2018). This serves as another example of the common perception of Malta holding a special position in the mediation between the two regions. Similarly to these politicians, Muscat also makes reference to Malta’s vocation as a mediator between Europe and the Southern neighbourhood, especially in the context of issues related to migration (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015).

In the context of stability in Northern Africa, the focus is often put on Libya. As such, a number of statements by politicians put the focus on the need for a stable government in Libya, with which Europe could cooperate in managing migration and matters of general security. For example, Metsola stated that only a unified Libyan government would be able to fight organised crime and terrorism (Barry, 2015). Vella emphasises the issues faced by Libya as especially important in the context of the Mediterranean and the stabilisation of the Southern neighbourhood (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2016b). Muscat, during a speech in front of the national parliament, also emphasised the importance of having a stable government in Libya, which would be able to control the national borders

of the latter (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015). Muscat makes the perceived connection between stability in the Southern Mediterranean and migration to Europe more explicit, by making direct reference to the link between the stability of Libya, and irregular migration across the Mediterranean (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2015; Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2016). Further, the EU-Turkey Deal is portrayed as a positive step towards the limiting of migration flows towards Europe, implying that a similar solution should be applied in the case of Libya. For this reason, support for the installation of a stable government in the latter is a priority in Maltese domestic politics (Hon. Joseph Muscat MP, 2016). Whether this is a democratic government respecting the rule of law seems questionable, as some estimates of the Malta-Libya relations even went as far as referring to Simon Busuttil, a former member of the European Parliament and former leader of the Nationalist Party and also of the opposition in Malta, as Qaddafi's closest ally in Brussels (Anon, 2010). Thus, the framing of stability in the Southern neighbourhood and security in Malta as being directly linked to stability in Libya is apparent across party lines. Further, the discussion on Libya is where issues of migration and stability intersect.

Results and Discussion

In conclusion, from the statements by Maltese officials, one can infer that Malta's foreign policy preferences in the Mediterranean are predominantly aimed at providing stability, especially in Libya. Discursively, a strong connection between stability in Northern Africa and security in Europe is constructed, which acts as a backdrop to the Maltese notion that the creation and support of strong and unified governments in the Southern Mediterranean, and especially Libya, should be among Europe's main foreign policies. The fact that these objectives outweigh considerations of promoting democracy and the rule of law is apparent in the speech by Abela, as well as Busuttil's support for the former Libyan dictator Mu'ammarr Qaddafi. The reason for stability in Northern Africa being a priority for Malta is illustrated by Joseph Muscat's direct linkage of issues, such as irregular migration to instability in Northern Africa. The strong focus on Libya may be chosen due to geographic proximity, as small member states of the EU often have a narrow foreign policy agenda (Pastore, 2013). Further, Abela's framing of regional fora as 'amplifiers' implies that multilateralism is presented as a medium for Malta to promote its own foreign

policy preferences on a wider scale. This perspective is in line with literature on small states, as the latter often rely on multilateral venues in their foreign policy, in order to not be relegated to insignificance in the face of more powerful states (Pace, 2013). Additionally, the framing of multilateral fora as foreign policy tools acts as a justification for the pro-European stance of the country.

Malta portrays itself as in a position of authority on matters regarding Northern Africa, due to the discursive construction of its identity as a gateway between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean, as well as frequent allusions to its 'Mediterranean vocation'. The long-term involvement in the relations between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean also grants legitimacy to Malta's perspective on the issues faced in the Mediterranean, thus increasing its persuasiveness, which has been identified by the literature as a tool for successful Europeanisation (Pastore, 2013). Additionally, the view that Malta is a gateway or stepping stone between Europe and Northern Africa seems to be shared across the political spectrum, as both members of the Labour Party and the Nationalist Party reference this alleged particularity of Malta's identity, as well as the direct link between stability in Libya and security in Malta, and Europe in general. In conclusion, the discursive framing of Malta as a mediator and the construction of a link between Maltese security and Libyan stability are shared by high-ranking officials from both Maltese parties and can thus be promoted more intensely on the international level, due to the absence of domestic opposition (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019).

Irregular migration itself forms the background to many of the other considerations, as it is discursively linked to instability in Northern Africa and European security. It is framed as a humanitarian crisis, requiring European solidarity, and as a result, a reform of the system of migration management to a system of redistribution. Due to the focus on criminal activity related to irregular migration, such as human trafficking, the issue is securitised and presented as needing to be addressed in the context of European security, by organisations, such as EUROPOL or Frontex. In order to reduce the burden on European security actors, Muscat will later propose a deal with a strong Libyan government, similar to the deal with Turkey. As the next chapter shows, this is where the multiple policy preferences voiced towards the domestic audience intersect. However, it is

noticeable that the focus on the domestic level is not on the framing of migration as a humanitarian crisis, but instead, lies on the security-stability link.

5. European Audience

The following section analyses whether the same frames and discursive constructions identified in speeches and statements in politics on the domestic level are also found in speeches and statements at the European level. What frames and constructions are more prevalent on the European level and which are more salient on a domestic level will be analysed as well. The result is that most of the patterns identified by the analysis of domestic political discourse, still persist in speeches directed towards a European audience, though, some discursive constructions are only implied and made explicit less frequently. Further, attempts at cross-loading foreign policy preferences will be paid particular attention to.

After the crisis of 2015, and during the first month of the Maltese presidency of the Council, Joseph Muscat, urges the EU to prepare for another wave of immigration (Tajani, 2017). Further, in his speech, Muscat mentions the country's size, as well as a perceived abandonment by the more powerful EU member states in the face of this crisis, going on to call for more European solidarity in the face of increasing migration (Tajani, 2017). Thus, immigration is repeatedly framed as a crisis that is time sensitive, and exacerbated by the lack of solidarity between the member states. In response, he pushes for closer relations with Northern African countries, emphasising that the conclusion of agreements with countries of the Southern Neighbourhood would be the only way to address the crisis (Tajani, 2017). This would have considerable impact on the ENP, as it would shift relations with Northern African countries towards migration control. The prime minister also repeatedly alludes to time constraints in finding a solution to the issue of irregular migration, claiming that, unless the EU addresses it swiftly, it would be benefitting Eurosceptic actors (Tajani, 2017).

These attempts at uploading its foreign policy preferences were supported by the fact that Malta held the rotating Council presidency in 2017. In the declaration of its goals for the presidency, Malta made it clear that addressing migration through relations with the Southern neighbourhood would feature prominently on the agenda (Ministry of Foreign

and European Affairs, 2016a). This is also visible in the program published jointly by the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta on their – at the time – upcoming Council presidencies (The future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies, 2015). While the issues of migration and the neighbourhood are included, they are not front and centre at this point, due to the fact that the program is co-published with the other Council presidencies. Nonetheless, a system of relocation of asylum seekers within the EU is framed as solidarity between EU member states, and the focus lies on human trafficking, when irregular migration is addressed (The future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies, 2015).

Finally, the speech in the plenary of the European Parliament was accompanied by Maltese attempts at cross-loading the issue to other national capitols through discussions between the Maltese minister of foreign affairs and the French minister of foreign affairs, with whom the role of Libya, migration in the Mediterranean and the Southern Neighbourhood were discussed (Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs, 2016a). Vella also emphasised the importance of migration in discussions with the French minister of foreign affairs (Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs, 2016a). In Muscat's speech in front of the Maltese Parliament, he also alluded to attempts at cross-loading concerns regarding migration, as he visited Rome and, together with the Italian Prime Minister at the time, convinced other EU member states to meet in the format of a European Council, in order to discuss the issue of migration (Hon. Joseph Muscat, 2015).

That Maltese attempts at cross-loading were successful is exemplified by the Malta Declaration, issued by the European Council in February 2017. In the declaration, the members of the European Council voice their commitment to supporting the efforts of Malta in the realm of migration policy (European Council, 2017). This is simultaneously a sign of many of the policy initiatives in migration management originating in Malta and of Malta's successful attempts at cross-loading the latter. This is also apparent in the fact that many of the frames and constructions applied by Maltese politicians on the domestic level and in the European Parliament carry over into this document. The framing of irregular migration as a humanitarian crisis is visible in the focus on the urgency of the situation, as well as the fact that the high number of people who died on the Mediterranean route is accentuated (European Council, 2017). Contrary to the speeches in the European Parliament, the crucial role of Libya that Malta conveyed to domestic audiences, as well as

to like-minded member states is included in the declaration (European Council, 2017). Further, migration is often equated with human trafficking and people smuggling in the Declaration (European Council, 2017).

The discursive construction of the link between Northern African stability and European security is hinted at on multiple occasions throughout the documents, but not explicitly included in the latter. For example, Muscat, during his speech at the European Parliament Plenary, acknowledges that development aid and agreements with third countries would form the basis of a long-term approach to addressing irregular migration (Tajani, 2017). He claims that the deal with Turkey was the only short-term approach the EU could implement in order to deal with the crisis, going on to say that this would need to be replicated in the Mediterranean as well. However, in this context he states that it is common knowledge that the countries of Northern Africa are different from Turkey (Tajani, 2017). This implies that the instability of the countries in the Southern neighbourhood as compared to Turkey would make cooperation difficult. However, this is the only hint at the discursive link between stability in the Southern neighbourhood and security in Europe, which was so prevalent on the domestic level. Notably, even the implied link between stability in Northern Africa and security in Europe, which stood alone on the domestic level, is embedded in discussions on migration. The topic of Libyan stability in particular is not mentioned in the speech. However, according to the European Parliament Magazine, Muscat especially considers Libya's role as vital in this context, though the country is not mentioned directly in the speech to the plenary of the European Parliament, contrary to speeches directed at a domestic audience (Banks, 2017). George Vella also mentioned the Southern neighbourhood as a key priority in the upcoming presidency and does address Libya as an important factor (Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs, 2016a). Nonetheless, despite not referring to Libya directly, Muscat explicitly calls for a form of deal, similar to the EU-Turkey Deal, to be applied in the context of the Southern Neighbourhood (Tajani, 2017).

In the document on the Council presidency, just as on the domestic level, European security and instability in the neighbourhood are described as closely linked (The future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies, 2015). As a countermeasure, cooperation with the countries of Northern Africa is proposed here as well, just as it is on the domestic

level and in speeches to the European Parliament, which also implies that Malta aimed to address some of its foreign policy preferences through the Council presidency (The future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies, 2015). That the efforts to cross-load concerns regarding Libya mentioned in the previous part of this section were successful, is visible in the Malta Declaration, as in the Malta Declaration, Northern African – and specifically Libyan – stability is portrayed as vital in the context of addressing the issue of migration (European Council, 2017). As such, cooperation with a Libyan government, stabilisation of the country and support for its security system is portrayed as the way to control Libyan borders and reduce the number of migrants using the Mediterranean route. Libya is front and centre of the document (European Council, 2017). However, again, security and stability are not addressed as topics in their own right but only in relation to migration management.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the relevant primary sources shows that the frames and constructs identified in speeches to a domestic audience are found in the speeches to the European audience as well. In Muscat's speech to the Parliament, the link between European security and Mediterranean stability is not mentioned as explicitly, nor is the focus in the Southern neighbourhood put on Libya as overtly as on the domestic level. However, the rhetoric of abandonment – though also present in the national parliament – is more pronounced on the European level, as would be expected, due to fact that it is a discursive tool aimed at the European audience. The same applies in regards to the framing of irregular migration across the Mediterranean as a humanitarian crisis, which is more pronounced in the context of the European audience. As this frame would also be directed at receiving EU support, it was expected to be more explicit in the European Parliament. However, on the national level, it may serve as a tool to garner domestic support for policy objectives, in order to have a unified national position, which has been identified by small state literature as a vital component of uploading foreign policy preferences to the European level (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019). Regardless, the increase in focus on framing irregular migration as a humanitarian crisis is in line with expectations.

Thus, this speech in front of the plenary of the European Parliament is yet another example of Malta strategically framing irregular migration as a crisis, requiring immediate EU action. A strategy frequently used by small states in order to Europeanise their foreign policy preferences (Rees & O'Brennan, 2019; Blumenau & Lauderdale, 2018). The perception of Muscat's framing as predominantly a discursive tool may be supported by the fact that, while there was indeed a slight influx in migration, Eurostat statistics posit that immigration from non-EU countries to EU member states remained largely the same across 2017 and 2018, despite Malta's warnings (Eurostat, 2019; Eurostat, n.d.). Throughout the analysis, it also became apparent that Muscat is using Malta's status as the smallest member state as leverage, showing awareness of its position within the EU. Thus, this speech is evidence of Malta attempting to influence European foreign policy towards the European neighbourhood through strategic framing, appeals to solidarity and the leveraging of its status as a small state, in order to garner more goodwill from other EU member states. Additionally, Muscat starting the speech with the topic of migration and devoting the largest share of the speech to it, as well as reminding the other members of parliament of the frequency with which Malta has brought up the matter throughout the years (Tajani, 2017), are evidence of Malta's awareness that it needs to prioritise select issues and push them intensely on the EU-level, which is identified by the literature as a strategy to Europeanise foreign policy preferences (Panke & Gurol, 2018; Rees & O'Brennan, 2019).

It can be noted that in the attempts at cross-loading analysed in the context of this study, it is apparent that Malta's foreign policy preferences were presented as a united front in both bilateral and multilateral venues. The fact that Libya was directly addressed in negotiations with like-minded states, but not on the level of the European Parliament may be due to the fact that France may share Malta's concerns regarding an unstable Libya, and would feel responsible for the instability due to its former colonial ties. Thus, France may be more receptive to constructions of a link between European security and Mediterranean stability. Additionally, these instances of bilateral meetings with other member states are signs of Maltese attempts at building informal coalitions and cross-loading common concerns to other EU member states. As identified by Europeanisation literature and literature on small states, this intensity in promoting national foreign policy objectives, as

well as the focus on cross-loading are common features in the Europeanisation of national foreign policy preferences of small states (Aggestam & Bicchi 2019; Pastore, 2013). Thus, Malta follows the patterns identified by small state literature in its attempts to upload its domestic foreign policy preferences. That Maltese domestic frames and constructions are replicated to a considerable extent by the European Council in the Malta Declaration is an indicator of Malta having been successful in cross-loading its foreign policy preferences. Though they may have been helped by the fact that the Malta Declaration is not a binding document, but merely a declaration of support, and thus less politically contentious. Nonetheless, the analysis of European level speeches and statements by Maltese officials have yielded enough evidence to expect uploading to be successful. Thus, the following section will analyse whether these successful efforts to cross-load foreign policy preferences resulted in the latter being uploaded to concrete EU foreign policy documents.

6. Maltese Foreign Policy Preferences in the ENP

The following chapter is based around an analysis of the 2015 ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy’, and the 2021 ‘Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood’. These ENP strategy documents will be reviewed as to whether they apply similar frames and discursive constructions, as found on the domestic level politics of Malta, and the European level speeches and statements of Maltese officials. All quotes and references to primary sources in chapter 6.1. are taken from the 2015 ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy’ (High Representative, 2015), while all quotes and references in chapter 6.2. are referring to the 2021 ‘Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood’ (High Representative, 2021). Chapter 6.3. will evaluate the findings of both documents and discuss whether similar constructions and frames were indeed encountered on the level of the ENP.

6.1. 2015: Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy

While the recent refugee crisis is mentioned, irregular migration across the Mediterranean is not inherently portrayed as an urgent crisis in this document (p.15). Nonetheless, migration does feature prominently in the document, but the main focus is on creating

economic and social stability in the neighbourhood (p.3; p.5). It could be argued, that the so-called ‘root causes of migration’, which are mentioned in the document as issues to be addressed (p.15), are seen as another source of instability. This would imply that migration is a symptom of instability, making the reduction of instability a way of limiting irregular migration to the EU. However, this is not explicit in the document.

The security component of the 2015 Review does commit itself to supporting the neighbourhood countries in tackling organised crime, such as human trafficking and smuggling (p.12-13). The goal to increase the border management capacities of neighbouring countries is stated, and features somewhat prominently, with a dedicated sub-chapter being devoted to the topic (p.17). Nonetheless, the focus of the part on irregular migration lies on return and readmission, as it is mentioned more frequently and, in more depth, as compared to border management (p.17). There are no mentions of solidarity between EU member states or between the EU or Northern African countries in the document. Thus, the analysed frames regarding migration as a humanitarian crisis, promoted by Malta, are not found in the 2015 document to any considerable degree.

As stated above, the topic of stability features especially prominently in the 2015 Review of the ENP. In fact, the ENP considers the stabilisation of the neighbourhood to be its main objective (p.2). For this reason, it evaluates all of the included topics through the perspective of stability and instability. This is visible in the document stating the desire to address a large number of issues, such as poverty, corruption, insufficient economic development and others, due to their perceived negative effect on stability in the region (p.3). Especially terrorism, radicalisation and organised crime feature strongly in the context of creating stability (p.13). Additionally, the sub-chapters each contain a commitment to creating stability, such as the chapters on good governance and the rule of law, the chapter on energy security, as well as the sub-chapter on employability, which all aim to improve economic and social stability (p.5; p.7; p.11). Consequently, stability is designed to be main goal of the ENP, according to this document.

While the interdependence of Europe and its neighbouring regions is acknowledged, the explicit link between stability in the neighbourhood and security in Europe, that Malta invoked frequently both on the European level and domestically, is not addressed explicitly (p.2; p.18). Instead, the document states that the goal of the ENP is to make partner

countries more resilient in the face of security challenges they face (p.12). Thus, any form of security cooperation is framed as in support of neighbouring countries, instead of the EU's own security interests. Thus, any potential interdependence in the context of security is not acknowledged, though it is implied and it can be assumed that it is the underlying thought of the document. Libya itself does not feature at all in the 2015 Review of the ENP, despite other countries of the Southern neighbourhood being specifically mentioned in the context of cooperation with Northern Africa (p.4).

6.2. 2021: Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood

Despite Maltese attempts at uploading, and contrary to what would have been expected, the 2021 document exclusively refers to irregular irregular migration as a challenge, instead of a crisis (p.16-17). Still, 'too many people' are travelling to the EU irregularly, according to the document (p.1), which implies a sense of being overwhelmed, and is a tactic frequently applied by Malta in its pleas for solidarity from other member states. Further, the document states that there is urgency in addressing the challenges facing the neighbourhood (p.2), which also instils a sense of crisis-like circumstance. Additionally, it is stated that the migrants crossing the Mediterranean were risking their lives (p.1). Nonetheless, the term humanitarian crisis is not used explicitly in relation to irregular migration across the Mediterranean throughout the document.

However, irregular migration is frequently described as supporting criminal activities, such as people smuggling and human trafficking (p.1; p.17). Further, besides framing irregular migration as a common challenge for both regions, the document states that the criminal networks fuelled by migration, contribute directly to the destabilisation of the region (p.1). Conversely, even the combatting of people smuggling is presented as a way of reducing irregular migration in general (p.16). Thus, the phrasing conveys the notion that the attempt to enter the EU irregularly itself is directly connected to criminal organisations and *vice versa*. As a result, irregular migration is portrayed as intrinsically linked to support for criminal networks, which is also a common form of framing applied by Maltese officials.

Most strikingly, managing irregular migration is accompanied by appeals to solidarity, both from other EU member states, and third countries (p.3; p.16). In this context, the document calls for increased cooperation in the fields of return, readmission and reintegration with the countries of the Southern neighbourhood (p.17-18). Further, the document puts great emphasis on supporting Northern African countries' capacity for migration control, and especially border management (p.17-18). Crucially, it is referred to as a 'key element' in the EU's and its neighbourhood's common efforts in addressing organised crime and human trafficking (p.17). As a result, a clear link between irregular migration and criminal organisations is evident in the wording of the document.

The document alludes to the interdependence of the two regions on multiple occasions, a construction frequently found in Maltese statements, and also encountered – though only implicitly – in the 2015 ENP Review (p.1; p.2). Based on this interdependence, the document proposes the need to strengthen cooperation between the two regions (p.3; p.13). However, it is apparent that the focus of this document is not the discursive construction of a link between Mediterranean stability and European security specifically, as European security is not explicitly mentioned throughout the document. This absence is compensated for by the document referring to security issues in the Mediterranean as 'common challenges' for both regions, that need to be addressed through heightened cooperation between the EU and individual countries of Northern Africa, as well as regional organisations (p.1; p.13-14).

Notably, the document states a 'renewed commitment' to addressing 'shared security concerns' in cooperation with countries of the Southern neighbourhood (p.3). These security concerns include terrorism and organised crime in the region (p.1; p.14). Further, irregular migration and its alleged link to organised crime are claimed to act as destabilising factors to the Southern Mediterranean (p.17). A separate chapter is dedicated to the topic of stabilisation, where stabilisation of the neighbourhood, through security cooperation and conflict prevention and impact mitigation, is stated to be the EU's main tool in supporting development in the Mediterranean region (p.13-15). Additionally, that stability is a focal point of the document, is visible in the fact that even the promotion of the rule of law, and democratic principles is considered a means to fostering stability in the long term (p.3). In creating stability in Northern Africa, the EU also aims to cooperate with

other regional organisations (p.13-14). Libyan stability is given specific attention in the context of security and stability, and the situation in the country is referred to as a crisis (p.13). However, this reference is only brief. The chapter also proposes that cooperation between the two regions should be strengthened in the realm of law enforcement, coastguard cooperation and maritime security in particular (p.15). Interestingly, the EU insists on its role as a mediator in addressing concerns in the Mediterranean, referring to itself as a ‘trusted partner’, and being ‘uniquely placed to bring together conflicting parties’ (p.13), which echoes Malta’s self-perception as a mediator between the two regions.

6.3. Results & Discussion

In regard to the 2015 Review, it can be concluded that cooperation with the neighbourhood in terms of reducing migration to the EU is not exclusively based around more effective border control, or a scenario along the lines of an EU-Turkey Deal, but instead on promoting stability through economic development and human rights promotion, and some security cooperation in regards to addressing human trafficking and smuggling. Libya is not mentioned. While the security cooperation’s focus on border management is along the lines of Maltese politicians’ preferences, it is expressed in a noticeably weaker form as compared to the focus put on readmission and returns. The document contains few elements that would fall within the scope of the analysis, besides the explicit and frequent desire to create stability in the neighbourhood. This is not necessarily relevant to the study, but it could be argued that irregular migration is portrayed as a symptom of instability in the neighbourhood, making the promotion of stability a way of reducing migration, but this is not explicitly stated. Further, no direct link between neighbourhood security challenges and EU security is made, as security challenges are framed as pertaining mainly to neighbourhood countries, and not to the EU. Thus, even here, similarly to Muscat’s speeches to a European audience, the link between neighbourhood stability and European security that Malta insists on domestically, and in the Malta Declaration, as well the communication on the Council Presidency, is not explicit. Additionally, the focus on migration as a crisis is not evident in the 2015 review, though there are allusions to a previous refugee crisis, migration is not currently handled from the perspective of addressing a future crisis. It is not even referred to as a challenge in the 2015 document.

Additionally, contrary to Malta's framing, irregular migration is not used only in conjunction with human trafficking and smuggling. Instead, these are a minor aspect of the topic of migration, which are addressed through various means. Thus, the 2015 document does not include many of the frames and constructions this study focuses on.

Similarly, at first glance, only few of the frames and discursive constructions applied by Malta on the domestic level carry over into the 2021 document. Irregular migration is not directly framed as a humanitarian crisis, and the link between Northern African stability and European security is not explicit. However, the fact that irregular migration is referred to as an urgent challenge, constitutes a noticeable shift from its portrayal in the 2015 document, especially when considering the statement that the migrants were endangering themselves. This signals that the Maltese framing of irregular migration as a humanitarian crisis has had an impact on the formulation of the ENP document. Additionally, though the link the Maltese officials construct between stability in Northern Africa and security in Europe is not as prevalent, the fact that the document considers security challenges to be affecting both regions, and as having to be addressed in cooperation, is also a move away from the 2015 document portraying European security as distinct from neighbourhood security.

The influence of Malta on the ENP also visible in the relevant sub-frames; while Libyan stability is not directly mentioned as crucial to European security, it is one of the few countries, whose situation is addressed in the section on security and stability, signalling successful uploading of Maltese concerns regarding Libya. Libyan stability, though not directly linked, is still mentioned in the same section as the objective to strengthen cooperation in the realm of law enforcement, maritime security and border control. These are all relevant fields to migration management. While this is not an echoing of Maltese foreign policy preferences, it is in line with them and may constitute a move towards Maltese objectives in the Southern neighbourhood.

Crucially, irregular migration is portrayed as inherently linked to criminal organisations, as the attempt to enter the EU irregularly alone is considered supportive of criminal networks. This is a sign that Maltese framing carried over, as Malta frames EU action against irregular migration as action against criminal organisations, in order not to generate political discussions. That the EU also portrays itself as a mediator in the context

of cooperation between Europe and the Southern neighbourhood is a sign of having incorporated Maltese rhetorical strategies, and of Malta having impacted the wording of the 2021 document to a considerable degree. This influence Maltese framing had on the ENP is also visible in the frequent commitments to solidarity between the two regions in the context of migration, which reflect Maltese calls for solidarity between member states in managing migration. While not exclusively aimed at a reform of the system of migration management, the appeal to solidarity between the regions is reflecting Maltese framing of the issue. Thus, the EU's call for solidarity both between member states and countries of the Southern neighbourhood is another sign of Maltese framing being uploaded to the EU-level, especially since no such appeals are voiced in the 2015 document. Thus, these appeals to inter-regional burden sharing are new. For this reason, Maltese attempts at uploading its foreign policy preferences to the EU level can be considered successful.

7. Concluding Remarks

This study demonstrated that Maltese policy preferences were uploaded to the level of EU foreign policy, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, which traced frames and discursive constructions across the domestic level, to the European level, before concluding with a comparative analysis of two EU foreign policy documents. The latter of these documents on the ENP shows indications of Maltese frames having been successfully uploaded. However, the most success in terms of uploading was found in the context of rhetorical strategies applied by the small state, aimed at increasing legitimacy in a certain field and reduce political contestation. This includes the self-perceived role as mediator between the two regions, which the EU subsequently claimed to occupy as well, the call for solidarity, which was an element found frequently in speeches and statements given by Maltese officials on the domestic and European level and featured in the ENP document of 2021, and the equation of irregular migration and support of criminal organisations, which is another discursive link constructed by Malta that was incorporated into the ENP document. This demonstrates recognition from the EU's side of Malta's strategies for increasing its legitimacy having merit. Consequently, the EU incorporated the frames and discursive constructions applied by Malta that served to increase its persuasiveness. As these frames and discursive constructions were promoted with the same

vigour as others, this demonstrates EU agency in choosing which frames and policy preferences to admit into its foreign policy formulation.

Despite expectations to the contrary, the role of Libya and the discursive construction of a link between European security and Northern African stability were not encountered as prominently in the ENP documents. On the one hand, the link Malta constructed between stability in the Southern neighbourhood and security in Europe was implied, but not directly addressed. The reference to common challenges and increased focus on security cooperation imply a link, but this is not explicitly addressed. On the other hand, while included, the crucial task of stabilising Libya, in order to cooperate effectively on matters of migration was not the focus of the either document. Even though cooperation in the fields of migration management, border control and maritime security with the Southern neighbourhood was generally set as a goal of the ENP, the focus on Libya was not uploaded successfully. This may be explained by the fact that, while important to Malta due to historic ties and geographic proximity, Libya's individual importance for the entire EU may be negligible as compared to the role of the entire Southern neighbourhood, and would thus not require special focus. The fact that despite Malta engaging in cross-loading its concerns regarding Libyan stability towards other member states, these concerns were not successfully uploaded to the extent that would have been expected, implies that Malta would have had to focus on promoting its preferences more in the EP. The framing of irregular migration as a humanitarian crisis having carried over more prominently – though also not completely –, and also having been promoted vehemently in the EP, signals that this may be a contributing factor. This begs further investigation into the EP's role in the process of Europeanisation. In fact, the role of the EP in Europeanisation is not commonly researched and was not encountered in any study during the research for this analysis. As it has the capacity to lobby other institutions during the policy-making process, it may be beneficial to include it more explicitly in the study of Europeanisation in the future.

Further, the effectiveness of the role of the EU presidency, as well as the act of cross-loading concerns to other member states, which may not necessarily fully support the policy, is called into question. The analysis demonstrated that the Malta Declaration contained an explicit focus on Libya's role. Despite this, the focus on Libya was still not

found as explicitly in the ENP as would have been expected as a result of the successful cross-loading, which led to all member states issuing a joint declaration. This implies that non-binding declarations, issued as a result of cross-loading, may not necessarily contribute to effective uploading of a policy. Similarly, future research may focus on whether the preferences that were uploaded featured on the foreign policy agendas of other member states, and whether this may have contributed to the successful, or unsuccessful uploading of the latter. The lack of research into the foreign policy agendas of other member states with interest in the Southern neighbourhood may be considered a limitation of this study, as it could have offered further explanations for the success or failure in uploading of policy preferences.

Nonetheless, the study demonstrated that Malta has managed to upload some of its domestic foreign policy preferences to the EU-level, despite being a small state and not being considered a traditionally influential foreign policy shaper. Additionally, Malta succeeded in capturing policy-makers' attention despite the current general disinterest in the Southern neighbourhood, due to the EU focus mostly being directed towards the Eastern neighbourhood. The study also demonstrated that a mixed qualitative and quantitative content analysis can be a suitable method for the research of the process of Europeanisation, as it indicates the process of the specific preferences across multiple levels on the basis of their framing, and allows for the individual evaluation of their application as well their successful uploading, cross-loading or downloading. This offers valuable insights both to the study of Europeanisation and small state literature, as it shows what frames and discursive constructions may be more likely to result in successful uploading of domestic foreign policy preferences. Future research could offer insights into whether this method could be applied in the study of downloading, which had not featured in this research. Further, the study conducted research into the EU cooperation with the Southern neighbourhood, which has been neglected in recent years. More research could be conducted on how the concrete implementation of the policy preferences tracked in the context of this study progressed. In conclusion, this study contributed to the understanding of the process of EU foreign policy formulation in several constructive ways, and demonstrated that foreign policy on the EU-level can be influenced even by small member states, including the smallest.

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