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Neutrality or NATO? Understanding Austria's and Sweden's diverging paths of neutrality

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Universiteit
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Bachelor Thesis

**Neutrality or NATO? Understanding Austria's and Sweden's
diverging paths of neutrality**

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Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation started a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has fundamentally altered the post-World War II order. Ukraine is a neighbouring country of four North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states. Both NATO and the European Union (EU) strongly condemned the invasion on the same day it commenced (Council of the EU, 2022; NATO, 2022). This means that the five neutral EU member states, namely Ireland, Sweden, Austria, Finland and Malta have also condemned the war. Neutrality is a topic that has, according to Cottey (2013, p. 7) been given relatively little scholarly attention. Now, that the Russian Federation is invading a sovereign European country, attention has to be shifted towards the role of neutrality in world politics and European politics. While all neutral EU states condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, only Sweden and Finland have decided to send lethal military aid to Ukraine. In addition, both countries applied for NATO membership, formally ending their traditional policies of neutrality. Austria and Ireland, on the other hand, insist on neutrality. In order to disentangle the process that led to the decision of the neutral countries to either maintain their neutral status or abandon it, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

Why did the war in Ukraine lead to a change in the neutrality policy of some EU member states but not others?

The research question will be addressed through the lens of historical institutionalism focusing on the concept of path dependence. In essence, the main idea of path dependence is that events that occurred in the past will have an effect on the choices of agents in the present and the future (Djelic & Quack, 2007). This thesis will qualitatively compare the political paths (regarding neutrality) taken by two neutral European states, namely Sweden and Austria. The underlying hypothesis of this paper is that the degree of softening of neutrality in the past has an effect on the choice to either remain neutral or abandon neutrality in response to the war in Ukraine. Through a comparison of five indicators, namely the discourse around neutrality, the norm of neutrality, as well as the relationship with the EU, Russia and NATO, the argument developed throughout the thesis will be the following: despite both states being neutral countries prior to the War in Ukraine, Sweden and Austria, historically, went on two different paths when it comes to their neutrality. Sweden softened its neutrality to a much higher extent than Austria did, which eased the decision to join NATO and abandon neutrality. To show the process of neutrality softening, this thesis will use excerpts from

multiple primary sources such as government reports, speeches and statements by the political elite, barometers of public opinion and newspaper articles. The method used for this thesis is explaining outcomes process tracing. While generalisations are not a goal of this thesis, the study nonetheless contributes to the literature on neutral countries since it shows that neutrality is characterised by path dependence and that it is not a binary concept. By highlighting the importance of examining the historical development of a certain policy or long-term political project, this study also serves as a contribution to the literature of historical institutionalism. In addition, the findings have important policy implications for neutral countries' politicians: the non-binary nature of the concept of neutrality leaves room for steering states on a certain path, giving politicians a high degree of responsibility over the future course of their country's neutrality policy.

This thesis is structured in the following way: first, a literature background of the relevant concept of neutrality will be provided. Then, a theoretical framework will address historical institutionalism and its related concept of path dependence as the approach taken to answer the research question. Subsequently, there will be a section on the research design justifying the methodology utilised for this thesis. What follows is the empirical section looking at the five indicators of neutrality: discourse around neutrality, norm of neutrality in the public, participation in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), relations with Russia, and relations with NATO. Lastly, a conclusionary part will summarise the thesis.

Literature Background

The main concept of interest in this thesis is neutrality as a distinct type of foreign policy. In order to understand neutrality as a policy, it is first important to conceptualise the term. The concept of neutrality is centuries old and has evolved over time (Joenniemi, 1993, p. 289). It is a contested concept among scholars of political science due to its multidimensional nature as it includes legal, political, ideological and military properties (Devine, 2011, p. 335).

Defining neutrality

A simple definition of neutrality "is not taking part in war", while in formal terms, "permanent neutrality" means for a state to stay neutral both in wartime as in peacetime (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 267). The authors engage in the conceptualisation of several related concepts such as non-belligerency, military neutrality, non-alignment, non-allied and military non-alignment.

Whereas neutrality is the non-participation and impartiality in wars between states, non-belligerent states are those abstaining from fighting in a conflict, though still favouring one side over another (Raymond, 1997, p. 125). Non-alignment, on the other hand is a political position that originated during the Cold War with the implication of non-involvement in conflicts between great powers (Fischer et al., 2016, p. 8). Interestingly, despite remaining outside of bloc structures, non-alignment is not a legal status. Rather, longing for international peace and security outside of great power politics serves as the basis for non-aligned countries (Fischer et al., 2016, p. 9). A position of non-alignment does not mean that a country does not involve itself in non-great-power conflicts that affect its national interest (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 268). Non-alignment simply comes with the non-membership of any military alliance (Agius & Devine, 2011, p. 268).

According to Ferro and Verlinden (2018, p. 42), a law-oriented definition of neutrality posits that neutral states are prohibited from using their military in a conflict. In addition, neutral states are also legally prohibited from providing any assistance that might have an impact on the military capabilities of one of the belligerent parties. Furthermore, neutral states are not allowed to take economically coercive measures to significantly weaken one of the warring entities.

Agius and Devine (2011, p. 269) claim that there are several differences with regard to the implications of neutrality as a legal position on the one hand, and neutrality as a political position, on the other. Whereas the legal position is concerned with a states' duties and responsibilities enshrined in international law during wartime, the political position encompasses states' attitudes and practices during peacetime. The political position is less instrumental and is therefore more permissive than the legal position. It allows for violations of neutrality due to normative reasons such as the protection of the sovereignty of a state.

Neutrality as contextual

Agius and Devine (2011, pp. 267-269) argue that neutrality has changed throughout history, since the context in which it is applied changed as well. The authors suggest that neutrality is not a steady concept and that it must be studied depending on the issue of interest. The codification of neutrality emerged with the rise of the state. Recognition of neutrality in the Middle Ages was linked to the justness of the cause of the war but it was respected for neutral

merchant ships in the 15th century, only to be deemed a failure during World War II (with the invasion of Belgium, Norway and Denmark) and then to be respected again during the Cold War (Agius & Devine, 2011, pp. 269-271). Looking from a historical perspective, Joenniemi (1993, p. 289) argues that the concept of neutrality has been defined by security and insecurity with the intention of regulating the use of force as a means to resolve interstate disputes.

Meaning and norm of neutrality

Neutrality can also be seen as a norm that is embedded in the politics and the society of European states (Beyer & Hofmann, 2011). Looking through realist and constructivist lenses, the authors explain how the nature of this norm of neutrality differs from state to state and how it is embedded in the state's identity. This is important because neutrality has clear policy implications, as it constrains and enables agency of policy makers (Beyer & Hofmann, 2011, p. 292). Over time, norms become embedded in society because of the construction of a narrative of the past which creates a basis on how to act in the future (Berenskoetter & Giegerich, 2010, p. 420). This is also consistent with the theory of path dependence which argues that past events affect the choices of agents in the present and the future (Djelic & Quack, 2007).

In conclusion, this section on the literature background serves as a basis to understand that the concept of neutrality is multifaceted and multidimensional. It is therefore an oversimplification to categorise states into neutral and non-neutral countries. Each states' neutrality status and importantly, the history of that status, must be studied individually to fully understand political outcomes. This thesis will holistically address the differences of neutrality policies of Austria and Sweden to explain that neutrality, in practice, is a non-binary concept.

Theoretical Framework & Hypothesis

Historical institutionalism

Every country's policy of neutrality had a starting point in which the subsequent development of the policy is rooted. Neutrality can not only be seen as a legal or political status, but it can also be interpreted as an institution and a norm that constrains political action and steers policies towards a certain direction (Cottey, 2013, p. 447). Literature on neutral states' policy has focused on rational/positivist explanations that claim that the a country's neutrality status

is determined by exogenous factors that are followed by a rational response (Cotter, 2013, p. 449). However, Green and Shapiro (1994) emphasise that rational explanations are not well suited to explain real observed events.

This is contrasted by historical institutionalism which emphasises that institutions, such as neutrality, emerge out of temporal processes and are embedded in such temporal contexts (Pierson, 2000, p. 265). As the name suggests, therefore, the focus of historical institutionalism is temporality, as it provides an explanation of how the source of political outcomes is rooted in historical processes and constellations (Thelen, 1999, p. 382). Cotter (2013, p. 447) claims that neutrality is an institution that is deeply embedded in domestic politics and national identities, although to a different extent, as will be argued later throughout the thesis. The mechanisms of this embedment are explained by Zucker (1977), who argues that “[t]he young are enculturated by the previous generation, while they in turn enculturate the next generation.” (p. 728). In politics, many long-term political projects, such as the welfare state and Keynesianism, can be explained by historical institutionalism: they can “be understood as the institutionalization of a set of persuasive ideas about social and political reality that have been successful in describing reality over long periods of time, as well as prescribing means of “solving” problems within that reality” (Peters et al., 2005, p. 1276).

Path dependence

As previously mention, a key concept in historical institutionalism is path dependence, of which the main idea is that events that occurred in the past will have an effect on the choices of agents in the present and the future (Djelic & Quack, 2007). While change, in the form of agency and choice, is possible, situations arise in which once a certain path is taken, the path becomes “locked in” and influences agency of actors (Thelen, 1999, p. 385). Decision makers subsequently have to adjust their strategies and policies in order to conform with prevailing patterns (Thelen, 1999, p. 385). Perhaps the simplest and yet most intuitive explanation comes from the sphere of economics: arguably, the reason why the contemporary layout of the QWERTY keyboard is widely used today, is not due to it being superior to other constellations, but due to a path dependent process (David, 1985). Policymaking is characterised by path dependent processes as well, in which stability can be explained by the “lock in” of policies from the previous generation of political elites (Peters et al., 2005, p. 1276). Change, on the other hand, can be explained by “formative moments” or “critical

junctures” during which new policies emerge which will then be continued by the new political elite (Peters et al., 2005, p. 1276). However, the degree to which historical institutionalism and the concept of path dependence can account for institutional change, is disputed (Thelen, 1999, p. 388). Thelen and Steinmo (1992) argue that institutional change can come through exogenous change that is followed by a shift in goals and policies. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 serves as an example of exogenous change, which led to the rapprochement of Sweden and Finland to NATO (Alberque & Schreer, 2022, p. 67).

Path dependence and policies of neutrality

Applying the concept of path dependence to policies of neutrality, Cottey (2013) analyses the relationship of different neutral European states with NATO and comes to the conclusion that there are major differences in the proximity of given states to NATO. More precisely, Sweden and Finland have a history of close relationships with NATO, while Austria, Ireland and Switzerland are politically more distanced to the alliance (Cottey, 2013, p. 446). This finding serves as the baseline of this thesis. Following from the literature on neutrality, the concept of path dependence and the War in Ukraine in 2022, the main hypothesis of the thesis is the following:

Hypothesis: The degree of softening of neutrality in the past has an effect on the choice to either remain neutral or abandon neutrality in response to the war in Ukraine.

This, however, is not competing with realist arguments, who claim that geopolitical threat assessment is the main reason why Sweden applied for NATO membership whereas Austria did not. The argument developed throughout the thesis is of a complementary nature. From the perspective of a neutral European country, the degree of softening of neutrality in the context of Russia’s aggression on Ukraine is characterised by five indicators. First, a universal indicator of softening of neutrality is the discourse around neutrality and to what degree the political elite changed the meaning of neutrality. It shows the willingness of politicians to change the tradition of neutrality. Second, and connected to the first indicator, is the public opinion on neutrality and the strength of the norm of neutrality. Third, the relationship of a given country with the CSDP matters for neutrality, as it shows the willingness to give up its autonomous foreign policy and its stance on mutual defence. The CSDP aims to possibly generate a “common European defence of the EU” (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.). Fourth, linked to autonomy of foreign policy, is the country’s

relationship with its relatively biggest state “threat”, Russia. Fifth, and most importantly, the degree of cooperation with the main potential military alliance, NATO matters as well. The operationalisation of the indicators will be provided in the next section, the research design.

Research Design

To answer the research question and to find evidence for the hypothesis, this thesis employs a qualitative comparative case study approach. As the research question already suggests, the softening of neutrality of the EU member states will be analysed.

The case selection will focus on Austria and Sweden on the basis of a most similar systems design (MSSD). This approach is characterised by the occurrence of apparent similarities between two cases but also by surprisingly different outcomes (Gerring, 2009, p. 26). The reason for choosing this method is that the two countries share many similarities: First, both countries remained neutral during the Cold War (Beyer & Hofmann, 2011). Second, both countries joined the EU in 1995 while still being neutral, meaning that they have not joined any military alliance. Nonetheless, both countries pro-actively contribute to the CSDP (Devine, 2011). Third, both countries are not neighbours of Russia, unlike Finland, nor are they too far away to be isolated from the conflict, unlike Ireland which would not be regarded as an eastern expansion of NATO. This thesis therefore argues that Austria and Sweden are the most similar neutral countries within the European Union, which is the reason why the past neutrality policies of the countries will be compared.

The method of analysis of process tracing will be utilised to answer the research question. Beach and Pedersen (2019) explain that there are three distinguishable variants of process tracing (PT): theory-testing PT, theory-building PT and explaining outcomes PT (EOPT). The latter is the method used in this thesis, as it is best suited to explain the causal mechanisms that led to the Sweden’s decision to abandon neutrality and Austria’s decision to remain neutral. The purpose of EOPT is to “build a minimally sufficient explanation of a particular outcome” (Beach & Pedersen, 2019, p. 282). In contrast to the other two variants of PT, EOPT is case-centric, which means that it is limited in the possibility to generalise (Beach & Pedersen, 2019, p. 285). Data will be used from a variety of sources, such as national and European treaties, government reports, foreign ministry statements, newspaper articles as well as opinion polls.

The independent variable in this study is the softening of neutrality prior to the War in Ukraine. As will be argued later, Austria and Sweden had varying degrees of neutrality upon the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This softening of neutrality and its path dependence can be observed through the following five indicators:

Indicator of neutrality softening	Operationalisation of the given indicator and path dependence
Discourse around neutrality by political elite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the political elite framed neutrality? • Has the meaning given to neutrality by the political elite been consistent throughout decades?
Norm of neutrality and public opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How strong is the norm of neutrality among the population? Is neutrality part of national identity? • Has public opinion on neutrality been consistent throughout the years?
Relations with the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What relationship does the country have with the EU's CSDP? • Has the country followed a consistent approach towards the EU's CSDP?
Relations with NATO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the level of cooperation between the country and NATO? Is the country involved in many regional defence partnerships? • Has the country pursued a stable policy towards NATO?
Relations with Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the country developed a hostile relationship towards Russia? • Has the country pursued a stable policy towards Russia?

Table 1: operationalisation. For each row, the first question refers to the indicator and second question to path dependence.

The dependent variable in this study is the outcome of the decision to either remain neutral or abandon neutrality. Prior to the War in Ukraine, both Austria and Sweden remained outside any military alliance. However, in May 2022, Sweden applied for NATO membership, while the Austrian government insists on neutrality (Embassy of Sweden, 2022; "Nehammer: Österreich bleibt neutral", 2022).

The next sections will examine the individual indicators of neutrality softening in detail to show that the independent variable (the softening of neutrality), has an effect on the dependent variable (the outcome of the decision to either remain neutral or abandon neutrality).

Two diverging paths: Austria's and Sweden's individual roads of neutrality policy

This section shows the empirical observation of path dependence regarding the different paths undertaken by Sweden and Austria. In essence, it will compare the five indicators of neutrality: the discourse and norm around neutrality, as well as the relations with the EU, Russia, and NATO. The analysis reveals that past policies affected subsequent policies. It is important to note that due to the use of mainly primary sources throughout the empirical part, quotations are subject to own translations. Translated sources are indicated as "own transl.". The original wording can be found in the appendix.

Austrian and Swedish discourse around neutrality

To understand what role neutrality plays in the countries' politics, it is important to briefly analyse the discourse of the political elite on the topic. The discourse around neutrality illustrates the softening of neutrality, as it shows politicians' willingness to maintain or abandon neutrality and it sets the direction for discussions. Political discourse in the late 1990's and early 2000's was influenced by Austria's and Sweden's membership in the EU, which will be addressed in another section. This section looks at longer-term patterns of discourse.

It is first important to highlight that neutrality was a condition for the existence of the sovereign state of Austria, as the Soviet Union demanded neutrality in exchange for troop withdrawal from the country in 1955, which led to the signing of the declaration of neutrality (Devine, 2011). On the day of the signing of the declaration, Chancellor Julius Raab, early on tried to lock-in Austrian neutrality by stating that "[t]he decision we make today binds not only us, but also our children and our children's children" (Raab, 1955, own translation). Furthermore, Raab mentions that Austria is "in constant readiness to stand up for peace and understanding" (Raab, 1955, own transl.). In the early 2000's, however, Austria's government set its priority for full participation in European policies with Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel claiming that the complexity of the 21st century makes neutrality obsolete (Schüssel, 2001). Nonetheless, ten years later, Austria was still formally neutral with Chancellor Werner Faymann explicitly stating that "nothing will change with regard to neutrality", further locking in the country's foreign policy type ("Faymann Neutralität", 2011, own transl.). As Raab's speech from 1955 shows, Austrian neutrality rests on the assumption that it would benefit peace and understanding. Geopolitical events regarding infringements of sovereignty,

therefore, put Austria's government in a position in which they had to condemn these actions, while still maintaining the tradition of neutrality. Therefore, in the context of the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the government redefined neutrality with Chancellor Sebastian Kurz stating that: "Austria is militarily neutral, but that does not mean not recognising breaches of international law" (Lahodynsky, 2014, own transl.). Kurz also highlights Austria's role as a bridge-builder: "Austria, [...], was always eager to build bridges and keep channels of communication open to both sides" (Lahodynsky, 2014, own transl.). Similarly, Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen "strongly condemns" Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and emphasises that Austria is "not neutral to the blatant breach of international law and war crimes" as "neutrality is not indifference" ("Van der Bellen Neutralität", 2023, own transl.).

For its part, Sweden also stayed neutral during the Cold War (Devine, 2011). In a parliamentary speech from 1959, Prime Minister Erlander claimed that the policy of neutrality "can also contribute to peace and stability in our part of the world" (Sveriges Riksdag, 1959, p. 6, own transl.). After the Cold War ended and Sweden intended to join the European Economic Community, in 1992, Prime Minister Carl Bildt was of the opinion that "the word neutrality no longer applies to the policies we [Sweden] intend to pursue" (Schmidt, 1992). Prime Minister Göran Persson stated in 2000 that Sweden is "outside military alliances. That is the core of our security policy. But now that we don't have the Cold War and we don't have two superpowers facing each other, neutrality is no longer a relevant concept" ("Tiden Løbet", 2000, own transl.). In 2002, Swedish politicians have decided that the term "neutrality" will be replaced with the term "non-allied" ("Schweden verabschiedet", 2002). In fact, the 2015 Statement of Foreign Policy did not mention "neutrality" a single time, only that Sweden "does not participate in any military alliance" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015). The term "neutrality" was also not used in the Statement of Foreign Policy in 2018, only "non-participation in military alliances" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018). Since it was decided not to use "neutrality" anymore, the term has not been used in the condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Swedish Embassy in the United States (US) tweeted a picture with the text "Ukraine, like Sweden [...] has the right to make its own security policy choices" (Embassy of Sweden USA [@SwedeninUSA], 2022). Russia's invasion sparked debates in Sweden on whether the country should join NATO, and the government eventually applied for membership (Embassy of Sweden, 2022).

As can be seen from both countries, initially, neutrality served the aim of bringing about peace. Throughout the years, however, neutrality was reinterpreted as both countries joined the EU and participated in the CSDP. While both Austria and Sweden questioned their neutrality status in the early years of CSDP participation, Sweden started to distance itself from the term neutrality and maintained this distance, while Austria had gone back to the use of the term. Political discourse is linked to public opinion on neutrality, which will be examined in the next section.

Norm strength and what the population thinks about neutrality

“Neutrality is identity-forming for Austria, it was so, and it will be so” are the words of Austrian Federal Minister for the EU, Karoline Edtstadler in 2023 (“Edtstadler”, 2023, own transl.). In fact, in 2011, 46% of Austrians were proud of Austria’s neutrality and in 2022, 52% of the population were so (Seidl, 2022). In 1997, in a survey conducted by the Gallup Institut, 43% of the respondent were against Austrian NATO membership, while 30% were in favour (“Erste Gallup-Umfrage”, 1997). In a recent poll conducted after the invasion of Ukraine, 71% of the respondents claim that it is better for Austria’s security to stay neutral, while 16% say that it is better to join NATO (Das Österreichische Gallup-Institut GmbH, 2022, p. 3). When asked whether neutrality is part of Austrian identity, 54% of the respondents answered with “agree very much”, 32% answered with “rather agree” while only 10% answered with either “rather disagree” (8%) or “very much disagree” (2%) (Das Österreichische Gallup-Institut GmbH, 2022, p. 4).

The Swedish SOM-Institutet has consistently conducted surveys on the opinion of the Swedish population on neutrality. In 1994, 48% of the respondents were against NATO membership, while 15% were in favour, and 37% responded with “neither nor” (SOM-Institutet, 2022, p. 68). The trend of NATO opponents being higher in quantity than NATO supporters continued until 2015, where the number of NATO supporters exceeded that of opponents. In the following years, the population seems to be very indecisive, since the biggest group of respondents consisted of people who responded with “neither nor”. In 2022, after the invasion of Ukraine, 64% of respondents were in favour of NATO membership, 14% were against, and 22% answered with “neither nor” (SOM-Institutet, 2022, p. 68).

Based on public opinion polls, the norm of neutrality is stronger within the Austrian population as it has not been influenced by geopolitical crises and it is part of the Austrian

identity. In Sweden, however, the norm of neutrality has been eroded after both instances of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Norm strength, in this context, is the consistency of public opinion towards neutrality and non-contestation of the norm of neutrality. It can be concluded, therefore, that Austria's norm of neutrality is stronger and has not been softened over time, unlike Sweden's norm of neutrality.

The neutrality-EU trade-off

In 1995, both Austria and Sweden joined the European Union as neutral countries (Devine, 2011). This coincided with the development of the CSDP, which aims to possibly generate a "common European defence of the EU" (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.). This period of time was characterised by the question on whether taking part in the CSDP and policies neutrality are compatible. In fact, the European Union has a "mutual defence clause" (Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union), in which it is stated that in the case of armed aggression, other states "shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power" (*Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, 2012, p. 40). This begs the question on whether the EU itself can be seen as a military alliance (Salmon, 2006). However, the Treaty also acknowledges the "specific character" of neutral member states (*Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, 2012, p. 40).

In July 1989, Austria formally sought admission to the European Community (later European Union) (Bundeskanzleramt, n.d.). In the admission request letter, Austrian Foreign Minister Alois Mock actively mentions that Austria assumes that the country will preserve its everlasting neutrality (Bundeskanzleramt, n.d.). Austria's willingness to contribute to the CSDP can be seen in the fact that the country's political elite amended the Constitutional Law to give the CSDP a legal basis in 1995 with Article 23f. and again in 2010 with Article 23j. (Rechtsinformationssystem des Bundes, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Austria emphasises the voluntary nature of the mutual defence (European Parliament, 2016; Parlament Österreich, n.d.). In the first years in the EU, Austrian Foreign Minister and later Chancellor, Wolfgang Schüssel was very inconsistent in his approach towards neutrality: In 1995 he claims that "neutrality is not obsolete yet", in 1996 he prioritises "solidarity over neutrality" and that neutrality is in many areas "dead law", in 1997 and 1998 he claims that the "end of the classical neutrality" has come, only to become supporter of neutrality after 2005 ("Schüssel Hintergrund", 2007, own transl.). Since then, all longer-term Chancellors and presidents of Austria have mentioned their commitment to neutrality ("Faymann Neutralität", 2011; "Gusenbauer Neutralität",

2006; "Van Der Bellen Neutralität", 2023; "Heinz Fischer", 2004; Lahodynsky, 2014). Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger clarified clashes of neutrality and CSDP by saying that Austria's foreign policy is characterised by "solidarity within the European Union, while maintaining neutrality towards the outside world" ("Spindelegger Sicherheitsdoktrin", 2008, own transl.). When the EU decided to impose sanctions on Russia in 2014, Austria implemented them despite heavy criticism from the opposition, which was of the opinion that sanctions contradicted neutrality (European Commission, n.d.; Parlament Österreich, 2014). The same pattern could be observed with regard to sanctions after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Parlament Österreich, 2022). In February 2023, however, Austria allowed 18 Russian Ministers of Parliament to enter the country for an OSCE security conference, despite them being under EU sanctions (Henley, 2023). Austria's opposition to giving up its veto power over the idea of changing the voting rule for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) from unanimity to qualified majority demonstrates its commitment to maintaining a distinct foreign policy (Koenig, 2020, p. 3).

Sweden formally sought admission to the European Economic Community in July 1991 (European Commission, 1992). However, unlike Austria's Foreign Minister, Sweden's Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson did not mention neutrality in the admission letter (CVCE.eu, 2012). A year after that, Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt stated that "policy of neutrality" does not adequately represent Swedish Foreign policy and that it should preferably be called "Swedish foreign and Security Policy with European identity" (Devine, 2011, p. 349). Sweden has consistently emphasised mutual defence within the EU: in 2002, Foreign Minister Anna Lindh stated that "Sweden cannot declare itself neutral in the event of an attack on one of the EU's member states or even on countries that have applied for membership" (Albons, 2002, own transl.). In a motion to the Parliament in 2004, it can be read that the government finds it "difficult to imagine that Sweden would remain neutral in the event of an armed attack on another EU country. It is equally difficult to imagine that other EU countries would not act in the same way" (Sveriges Riksdag, 2004, own transl.). Eight days before the Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Sweden's government once again emphasised mutual defence in the context of the EU but also with non-EU members such as Iceland and Norway by stating that "Sweden will not remain passive if another EU member state or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). Sweden is in favour, although "cautious", regarding the abolishment of the unanimity rule for votes within the CFSP framework. (Koenig, 2020, p. 3). Sweden's willingness to give up its veto over

foreign policy shows that the country is indifferent towards possible foreign policy decisions that contradict their neutrality.

There are three main implications of the comparison between the two countries' behaviour in the European Union. Firstly, both countries' foreign policy has been fundamentally "Europeanised", which softens their political neutrality. Secondly, and for this study more interesting, both countries divert in their approach towards mutual defence within the framework of the European Union: Austria has emphasised the voluntary nature of mutual defence whereas Sweden has consistently reminded of the existence of the mutual defence clause, its readiness to assist and its expectations to be assisted. Sweden's desire to strengthen the EU's mutual defence can, therefore, be seen as having been the path towards entering an actual mutual defence organisation, the military alliance NATO. Third, both countries differ in their opinion towards giving up their veto power over foreign policy: Whereas Sweden is willing to do so, Austria is sceptical.

Relationship status with Russia: it's complicated

Austria's Constitutional Law and its commitment to neutrality was a condition for the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Austria (Senn, 2023, p. 23). It states that it is in Austria's "own free will" that the country is committing to permanent neutrality (*Bundesverfassungsgesetz vom 26. Oktober 1955 über die Neutralität Österreichs*, 1955). Due to the signing of the Constitutional Law, Austrian politicians have been very careful in maintaining non-hostile ties to the Soviet Union: The British Ambassador to Austria, Malcolm Henderson claims that former Chancellor of Austria Bruno Kreisky has been "accused of being too anxious not to upset the Russians by committing Austria to un-neutral courses" (Gehler & Kaiser, 1997, p. 91). Moreover, Austria closely cooperated economically with the Soviet Union, becoming the first "Western" country to sign a gas supply contract with the Soviet Union in 1968 (OMV, 2018). The tradition of non-hostile relations with Russia continued to follow the same path ever since Vladimir Putin became Prime and later President of the country, as Austria has always seen itself as the bridge builder between Western European states and Russia (Cede & Mangott, 2023, pp. 564-570). In the context of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik demanded withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and stated that "if Russian military action lead to further escalation, this could have repercussions for relations between Russia and the EU" ("Plassnik Russland", 2008, own transl.). It is noteworthy, however, that Plassnik highlighted Russian

relations with the EU, and not with Austria. While Austria's Federal Chancellery criticised Russia's annexation of Crimea, Putin visited Vienna three months after the annexation ("Pragmatismus", 2014). Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said that Sweden, in that situation, would not host Russia's president ("Pragmatismus", 2014). Austria's bridge-builder role was again confirmed by Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl at a state visit in Moscow in April 2018: According to Kneissl Austria's relationship to Russia "bears the character of a mature partnership based on trust [...]. There are no serious problems between the countries" (Grieß, 2018, own transl.). In the same year, Kneissl invited Putin to her wedding (Posaner, 2018). Putin visited Vienna in June 2018 for the sixth time and Austrian president Alexander Van der Bellen claimed that there is "no fundamental crisis of trust [towards Russia]" ("Putin Wien", 2018, own transl.). In April 2022, Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer visited Moscow, becoming the first leader of an EU country to meet Putin in person after the invasion of Ukraine (Dallison & Liechtenstein, 2022).

Sweden considered itself neutral during the entire time of the Cold War (Devine, 2011). Therefore, Sweden maintained non-hostile ties to the Soviet Union, despite identifying the country as the only potential aggressor (Neutralitetspolitikkommissionen, 1994, p. 301). Sweden's security policy, therefore, was designed on the basis of potential Soviet aggression (Neutralitetspolitikkommissionen, 1994). Specifically, the situation in the Baltic Sea was a main determinant in both country's relations (Andrén, 1986, pp. 432-436). In 1982, the Swedish Ministry of Defence appointed a Commission to investigate Russian submarine violations of Swedish territory (Ubåtsskyddskommissionen, 1983, p. 3). In the report, the Commission emphasises the "unacceptability of these violations in terms of Swedish security and defence policy and Sweden's policy of neutrality" and that these violations continued despite Swedish protests (Ubåtsskyddskommissionen, 1983, p. 79-81). The Commission concluded that in the years 1962-1982, the Soviet Union possibly violated Swedish territorial waters in 143 instances (Ubåtsskyddskommissionen, 1983, p. 87). Relations with Russia were negatively affected by Sweden's criticism on human rights abuses during the Second Chechen War (Försvarsdepartementet, 2007, p. 120). Similarly, tension arose when Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, compared Russia's justification of the War with Georgia in 2008 with Adolf Hitler's justifications ("Bildt Georgia", 2008). In 2014, Sweden criticised Russia for human rights abuses, specifically "against LGBT people" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014). In the same year, the annexation of Crimea took place and the Swedish Ministry of Defence reported that "[t]he policies pursued by Russia [...] are unpredictable and

destabilising” and that “the threat of military attack [by Russia] can never be ruled out” (Försvarsdepartementet, 2014, p. 19, own transl.). Violations and approximations of Swedish airspace continued after the demise of the Soviet Union, which led Foreign Minister Peter Hultqvist to summon the Russian ambassador and to call Russia’s behaviour “unacceptable” and “unprofessional” (Adams, 2016; "Sweden Summons Russian Ambassador", 2017; Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters, 2022). In 2017, Sweden reintroduced military conscriptions, deployed troops to the Baltic Sea Island of Gotland, and raised the military budget due to the tensions with Russia ("Sweden Military Budget", 2017).

Both Austria and Sweden maintained a non-hostile relationship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. However, while Swedish-Soviet relations were characterised by mistrust and tensions in the Baltic Sea, Austria established itself as a bridge-builder between West and East. These characteristics of both relations continued after the demise of the Soviet Union. Sweden’s tensions with Russia in the Baltic Sea as well as Austria’s (attempts of) bridge-building still shape the foreign policies of the countries today. Eventually, these characteristics of the relationship with Russia arguably influenced both countries’ decision on whether to abandon or maintain neutrality.

On the path towards NATO?

Austria’s Constitutional Law from 1955 prohibits the country from joining any military alliance (*Bundesverfassungsgesetz vom 26. Oktober 1955 über die Neutralität Österreichs*, 1955). Neutrality was also respected during the Cold War, as Austrian politicians did not want to displease Soviet leaders by approximation to NATO: Julius Raab, Chancellor of Austria, for example, advocated for good relations with the Soviet Union and warned politicians not to “pinch the Russian Bear” by criticising Soviet leaders (Ströbitzer, 2012, own transl.). Despite economic cooperation with the United States and the West within the framework of the Marshall Plan, this did not spill over into military cooperation (U.S. Mission Austria, 2022). In 1958, Austria secretly allowed the US to use its airspace, but only in “high altitude and in such weather conditions that would not allow for the planes to be seen” (Blasi, 2008, p. 312, own transl.), which highlights the good relations with the US. Nonetheless, when the amount of planes got too high, Austrian politicians displayed their discontent, which gratified the Soviet leadership (Blasi, 2008, p. 314). Since 1995, Austria has been a member state of NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) program (Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung, 2006). However countries like Russia and Belarus are also in the same framework (NATO,

2020), which renders participation in PfP itself as an argument for proximity to NATO invalid. In 2001, a parliamentary resolution longed for “consistent further development of Austria's relations with NATO within the framework of a tailored dialogue” (Parlament Österreich, 2001, p. 3, own transl.). Despite the bounded cooperation with NATO, in 2008, Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger clarified that NATO membership is currently not a prospect (“Spindelegger Sicherheitsdoktrin”, 2008). Similarly, Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz advocates for NATO cooperation, but he does not see Austrian NATO membership as an option (Mayer, 2017). When Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Austrian Chancellor Nehammer stressed once again that the country will not join NATO (“Nehammer NATO”, 2022).

Sweden has been neutral since 1814 and the country followed its policy of neutrality during the Cold War (Devine, 2011). However, after the Cold War ended, doubts emerged about whether Sweden’s partnerships with Western countries violated their neutrality, which led to the creation of the “Neutralitetspolitikkommisionen” (Neutrality Policy Commission) (Bjereld & Möller, 2016, p. 441). The Commission concluded that the Soviet Union was perceived as the only possible aggressor and that American documents revealed that the US would have been “fully committed to assist Sweden” (Neutralitetspolitikkommisionen, 1994, pp. 304, own transl.). General trust towards NATO and the US specifically, was common throughout the entire report. NATO considers Sweden as one of its closest partners and the cooperation has existed for “several decades” (NATO, 2023a). Sweden regularly conducts military exercises together with NATO forces, including Steadfast Jazz in 2013, Exercise Aurora in 2017, Trident Juncture in 2018, and Northern Wind in 2019 (NATO, 2013; SHAPE, n.d.; “Sweden war games”, 2017; Woody, 2018). The strategy of rapprochement with NATO, frequently termed as the Hultqvist doctrine, can be observed through the amount of joint exercises as well as the amount of bilateral defence agreements signed since 2014, namely 15 (“15 bilaterala försvarsavtal”, 2022). At the 2014 NATO Wales summit, which took place in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII) was launched and NATO granted “enhanced opportunity partnership” (EOP) to Sweden (NATO, 2023b). Status of EOP brings the military alliance and Sweden closer by committing to share information and enhancing access to interoperability exercises (NATO, 2023b). The annual Statement of foreign policy in 2015 states that Sweden will long for a closer cooperation with NATO (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015).

Finally in May, 2022 Sweden, alongside Finland, officially applied for NATO membership (Embassy of Sweden, 2022).

Cold War great power politics affected the relationship that Austria and Sweden had towards NATO. While both Austria and Sweden favoured NATO partnership over partnership with the Soviet bloc, Sweden secretly maintained very strong ties to NATO during the Cold War. Both countries joined the PfP initiative in 1995. However, Sweden also became enhanced opportunity partner in 2014. Since then, Sweden regularly conducted military exercises with NATO countries, while the number of Austria's joint exercises is minimal. In addition Sweden, unlike Austria signed over a dozen bilateral defence agreements. Sweden's close cooperation with NATO prior to the War in Ukraine, therefore, is the single strongest determinant of the country's path towards NATO membership.

Discussion

The analysis above provided an overview of the development of the neutrality policy of Sweden and Austria, both traditionally neutral EU member states. It revealed that Sweden softened its neutrality throughout the years to a much higher extent than Austria did. Sweden, therefore, has been already on the path of abandoning its neutrality for many years. Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership is not the beginning of the divergence of the paths (regarding neutrality) of both countries.

This softening of neutrality could be observed through five indicators. First, Sweden softened the meaning of neutrality through political discourse more than Austria did. Second, the Swedish public's opinion on neutrality, as opposed to the opinion by the Austrian public, was dependent on whether there were instances of Russian aggression in Europe. In Sweden, in the years 2015 and 2022, the number of NATO supporters was higher than that of NATO opponents. Therefore the norm of neutrality is stronger in Austria. Third, Sweden emphasised its readiness and expectations of mutual defence in the framework of the EU, whereas Austria emphasised the voluntary nature of mutual defence. In addition, Sweden is willing to give up its veto power over their foreign policy within the CFSP framework, whereas Austria is sceptical. Fourth, Swedish relations with Russia were characterised by mistrust and instances of hostility, whereas Austria's relationship with Russia was based on pragmatism and Austria's bridgebuilder-role between the West and Russia. Fifth, and most importantly, Sweden pursued a policy of rapprochement to NATO: the country's partnership with NATO

encompasses many more areas of cooperation than Austria's partnership. Sweden, to a higher extent than Austria, frequently conducted large-scale military exercises with NATO forces. In addition, Sweden signed over a dozen bilateral defence agreements.

Comparing these indicators of neutrality in the specific geopolitical context, this thesis has found ample evidence that Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership, as well as Austria's decision to stay a formally neutral country is a product of path dependent policies. This finding does not disregard that geopolitical threat assessment after the War in Ukraine was the final push for Sweden to apply for NATO membership. The main argument of the thesis is that Sweden has already been on the path of NATO membership, which eased the country's choice to become part of the alliance. Therefore, this thesis' main argument is not competing with realist arguments of geopolitical threat assessment. Rather, it should be regarded as a complementary argument.

Conclusion

This thesis examined why the War in Ukraine led to a change in the neutrality policy of some EU member states but not others. Specifically, it analysed the reasons for which Sweden applied for NATO membership, whereas Austria insisted on staying a formally neutral country. In order to give an answer to this puzzle, the development of the neutrality policy of both countries has been studied through the lens of historical institutionalism in a qualitative comparative case study. The analysis showed that the answer to the puzzle lies in the historical evolution of the countries' neutrality policy. Despite both countries being formally neutral prior to the War in Ukraine, Sweden and Austria pursued very different paths regarding their neutrality policy. Sweden, historically, softened their neutrality to a much higher extent than Austria did.

This softening of neutrality can be seen through the following five indicators of neutrality within that specific context: Discourse around neutrality, norm of neutrality in the public, participation in the EU's CSDP, relations with Russia, and relations with NATO. These indicators show that Sweden has already been on the path towards abandoning neutrality and joining NATO. The War in Ukraine, therefore, is not a watershed moment in the neutrality policy of the country. Austria, on the other hand, while also having softened their neutrality throughout the years, has done so to a much lower extent than Sweden.

There are several limitations to this thesis, which are mainly related to the limitation of size and scope of the Bachelor project as well as data availability. Although primary sources have been used to analyse the political elite's opinion on neutrality, direct interviews would have strengthened the overall argumentation. Moreover, there are several limitations concerning some indicators. First, the section on discourse only analysed discourse coming from the governing political elite. A full-on discourse analysis, however, would have included speeches from opposition parties and civil society. Second, comparability of public opinion can be questioned as both polling institutes are national and used different data gathering methods. Third, only publicly available documents were analysed, whereas a precise analysis of the relations between Austria and Sweden on the one hand, and Russia, NATO and the EU on the other hand, would have included classified documents. While it might be argued that the thesis utilised more German-language sources than Swedish-language sources, thus possibly creating a source bias, it is important to note that numerous statements by the Swedish government are also often published in English. Despite these limitations, this thesis nonetheless provided an adequate examination of Sweden's and Austria's history of neutrality policy and its path dependence.

This thesis shows the importance of examining the history of past neutrality policies to understand a country's decision to either remain neutral or abandon neutrality. While generalising is not a goal of this paper, the analysis can be regarded as valuable input to extend the study to other (formerly) neutral countries such as Ireland, Switzerland, Malta and Finland. Moreover, there are important policy implications that can be extracted from the thesis: the non-binary nature of the concept of neutrality leaves room for steering a country on a certain path, giving politicians a high degree of responsibility over the future course of their country's neutrality policy. Politicians who commit themselves to neutrality, therefore, should be careful with deviating from the path, because it can lead to abandoning neutrality in the long term, as the example of Sweden showed.

Further research on neutrality policies and the responses to the War in Ukraine of European states would help generalise path dependence in the context of neutrality policies. The thesis welcomes conducting similar studies on Irish, Swiss and Maltese neutrality in order to determine whether these countries' neutrality status would continue after instances of aggression in their vicinity.

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Appendix – original texts and own translations

Original Statement	Translated Statement	Language	Source
„Die Entscheidung, die wir heute treffen, bindet nicht nur uns, sondern auch unsere Kinder und Kindeskindern“	“[t]he decision we make today binds not only us, but also our children and our children's children”	German	Raab, 1955
“in steter Bereitschaft für Friede und Verständigung einzutreten“	“in constant readiness to stand up for peace and understanding”	German	Raab, 1955
“An Neutralität wird sich nichts ändern”	“nothing will change with regard to neutrality”	German	“Faymann Neutralität”, 2011
“Österreich ist militärisch neutral, aber das heißt nicht, Völkerrechtsbruch nicht zu erkennen“	“Austria is militarily neutral, but that does not mean not recognising breaches of international law”	German	Lahodynsky, 2014
“Österreich war [...] stets darauf aus, Brücken zu bauen und Gesprächskanäle zu beiden Seiten offenzuhalten.	“Austria, [...], was always eager to build bridges and keep channels of communication open to both sides”	German	Lahodynsky, 2014
"auf das Schärfste"; „nicht neutral gegenüber dem eklatanten Bruch des Völkerrechts und gegenüber Kriegsverbrechen“; "Neutralität ist nicht Gleichgültigkeit"	“strongly condemns”; “not neutral to the blatant breach of international law and war crimes”, “neutrality is not indifference”	German	“Van Der Bellen Neutralität”, 2023
“Den kan också bidra till fred och stabilitet i vår del av världen”	“can also contribute to peace and stability in our part of the world”	Swedish	Sveriges Riksdag, 1959, p. 6
"[...]Vi står uden for militære alliancer. Det er kernen i vor sikkerhedspolitik. Men nu, da vi ikke har Den Kolde Krig, og vi ikke har to supermagter over for hinanden, er neutralitet ikke længere et relevant begreb,"	“outside military alliances. That is the core of our security policy. But now that we don't have the Cold War and we don't have two superpowers facing each other, neutrality is no longer a relevant concept”	Danish	“Tiden Løbet”, 2000
“Die Neutralität ist identitätsstiftend für Österreich, das war so, und das wird so sein“	“Neutrality is identity-forming for Austria, it was so, and it will be so”	German	“Edtstadler”, 2023
“Neutralität sei derzeit nicht obsolet“; "Solidarität geht der Neutralität voraus"; „totes Recht“; "Ende der klassischen Neutralität“	“neutrality is not obsolete yet”, “solidarity over neutrality”, “dead law”, “end of the classical neutrality”	German	„Schüssel Hintergrund“, 2007
„Sverige inte kan förklara sig neutralt vid ett angrepp på något av EU:s medlemsländer eller på länder som sökt medlemskap“	“Sweden cannot declare itself neutral in the event of an attack on one of the EU's member states or even on countries that have applied for membership”	Swedish	Albons, 2002

<p>“Det är svårt att föreställa sig att Sverige skulle ställa sig neutralt i händelse av ett väpnat angrepp mot ett annat EU-land. Det är lika svårt att föreställa sig att övriga EU-länder inte skulle agera på samma sätt”</p>	<p>“difficult to imagine that Sweden would remain neutral in the event of an armed attack on another EU country. It is equally difficult to imagine that other EU countries would not act in the same way”</p>	<p>Swedish</p>	<p>Sveriges Riksdag, 2004</p>
<p>“”Sollte es durch russisches militärisches Vorgehen zu einer weiteren Eskalation kommen, könnte dies Auswirkungen auf die Beziehungen zwischen Russland und der Europäischen Union haben.”</p>	<p>“if Russian military action lead to further escalation, this could have repercussions for relations between Russia and the EU”</p>	<p>German</p>	<p>„Plassnik Russland“, 2008</p>
<p>„trägt den Charakter einer gereiften, vertrauensvollen Partnerschaft, [...]. Ernsthafte Probleme zwischen den Ländern gibt es nicht.“</p>	<p>“bears the character of a mature partnership based on trust [...]. There are no serious problems between the countries”</p>	<p>German</p>	<p>Grieß, 2018</p>
<p>"keine grundsätzliche Vertrauenskrise"</p>	<p>“no fundamental crisis of trust [towards Russia]”</p>	<p>German</p>	<p>„Putin Wien“, 2018</p>
<p>“Den av Ryssland förda politiken är dock oberäknelig och destabiliserande.” ; “[...]kan militära angreppshot likväl aldrig uteslutas.”</p>	<p>“[t]he policies pursued by Russia [...] are unpredictable and destabilising”; “the threat of military attack [by Russia] can never be ruled out”</p>	<p>Swedish</p>	<p>Försvarsdepartementet, 2014, p. 19</p>
<p>„den russischen Bären nicht [...] zu zwicken“</p>	<p>“pinch the Russian Bear”</p>	<p>German</p>	<p>Ströbitzer, 2012</p>
<p>“großer Höhe und möglichst unter solchen (Wetter-) Bedingungen stattfinden sollten, dass sie nicht bemerkt werden könnten”</p>	<p>“high altitude and in such weather conditions that would not allow for the planes to be seen”</p>	<p>German</p>	<p>Blasi, 2008, p. 312</p>
<p>“Konsequente Weiterentwicklung der Beziehungen Österreichs zur NATO im Rahmen eines maßgeschneiderten Dialogs.”</p>	<p>“consistent further development of Austria's relations with NATO within the framework of a tailored dialogue”</p>	<p>German</p>	<p>Parlament Österreich, 2001, p. 3</p>
<p>“helt inställt på att bistå Sverige”</p>	<p>“fully committed to assist Sweden”</p>	<p>Swedish</p>	<p>Neutralitetspolitikkommisionen, 1994, pp. 304</p>