



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

A comparative analysis on the evolution of framing in Dutch media with regards to Albania's European Union (EU) enlargement process.

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Citation

Gruda, F. (2023). *A comparative analysis on the evolution of framing in Dutch media with regards to Albania's European Union (EU) enlargement process.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3642648>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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MA Thesis: International Relations: European Union Studies

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Date: August 20th, 2023

Word Count: 13729 (Without Appendix)

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my supervisor, Drs. M. Cornelissen, who made this research possible. Her insights and direction were crucial for me in establishing my research and exhibiting the ways on how to conduct it. I would also like to thank Dr. M. David for providing essential feedback that has helped improve this research profoundly.

The beginning and completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the love, understanding, patience, care, and compassion from my soulmate and Fiancé Arantza, my mother Sapka, my brother Valon, and my sister Vlora. There are no words to express the debt of gratitude I owe to all of you. Thank you for absolutely everything. I love you all very much.

To my father, Nexhmedin, we started on this path together and even though you are no longer here physically, your love, discipline, encouragement, and spirit, have kept me going. Thank you always. Gjithmon je ne kujtime. Te dua pa fund!

Last but not least, I would like to give my sincerest thank you to GOD. Without you, I would not even be alive, and without your constant guidance and love, I would be lost. Thank you for always providing the light.

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the evolution of Dutch media framing concerning Albania's European Union (EU) integration process. To better understand the complex dynamics impacting perceptions of Albania's EU integration, examining the media mood, framing tendencies, and the general thematic focus in Dutch news coverage is imperative. This will be guided by the theoretical framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism Theory (LIT). The research focuses on one central question: How does the media framing of Albania in Dutch media correlate with the Dutch government's decision-making on Albania's accession process between 2018 and 2022?

The findings highlight how the media can influence public opinion and policy dialogue through links between media framing and Albania's integration milestones. The findings indicate that there is a strong correlation between the portrayal of Albania in the Dutch media and the decision-making of the Dutch government on Albania's accession to the EU. The fluctuating emphasis of media framing, which reflects external influences and geopolitical dynamics, is consistent with the fundamental ideas of LIT, which hold that domestic actors must adjust to global conditions. This study emphasizes the connections among media narratives, public opinion, and policy concerns. It stresses the significance of acknowledging the media's role in promoting an informed and positive public debate on EU integration.

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List of Acronyms/ Abbreviations

Agence France Presse (AFP)

Department of Justice (DOJ)

European Commission (EC)

European Council (EUCO)

European Parliament (EP)

European Union (EU)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

Intergovernmental Conference (IGC)

Liberal Intergovernmentalism Theory (LIT)

Member of European Parliament (MEP)

Member of Parliament (MP)

Member State/ s (MS)

National Bureau of Investigation (NBI)

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK)

Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA)

Stabilisation and Association Council (SA Council)

Tweede Kamer, House of Representatives, (Lower House of Dutch Parliament)

Union (European Union)

US Department of State (DOS)

World War 1 (WW1)

World War 2 (WW2)

(Chapter 1): Introduction

Albania is a country located in southeast Europe, bordering Greece to the south, Montenegro to the north, North Macedonia to the east, and Kosovo to the northeast. It has a population of approximately 2.8 million people and a size of 28,748 km², or roughly the same size as Belgium (Instat, 2022). Southeast Europe is often called the Western Balkan region, comprising Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The Western Balkans have had an arduous history filled with conflict and instability, and Albania's case is no different. After gaining its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, the country went through many radical changes (Dervishi, 2006). First, Albania was invaded by Greek and Serbian forces in World War 1 (WW1), then during World War 2 (WW2), and it was under Italian occupation, then by the Nazi occupation until Albanian partisans brought its liberation on November 29, 1944 (Prifti, 1978). This liberation, however, was marred by a brutal communist regime under the leadership of Enver Hoxha from 1944 until he died in 1985 (Elsie, 2013).

This communist regime under Hoxha had Albania so isolated that it was often referred to as the "North Korea of Europe" because of how strict the regime was towards its people and the slow progress that it was making (Eder, 2014). Hoxha died on April 11, 1985, and the transition to free and democratic elections would not occur until the spring of 1991 (Elsie, 2013). The transition took a while to come to Albania, possibly because of how strict the regime was with releasing outside information to its citizens. Some Albanians were not even aware that the Berlin Wall had fallen in 1989. (Elsie, 2013). After 1991, Albania was still very unstable regarding democratization, and the transition to a democracy and a market economy was more challenging than initially envisioned. This transition period was slow because changes that had been promised for reform and democracy were not being implemented, and the Democratic Party of Albania was found to have manipulated the 1996 general elections (OSCE, 1996).

To make matters worse, a nationwide pyramid scheme collapsed in 1997. It almost caused the country to go into civil war since hundreds of thousands of Albanian citizens had participated in the scheme and lost their life savings (Jarvis, 2000). Also, the war in neighbouring Kosovo in 1999 caused an influx of refugees into Albania, further exacerbating the fragile political and economic system in place.

Albania and the rest of the six countries in the Western Balkans are surrounded by European Union (EU) Member States (MS). They have all made EU membership their top foreign

policy objective. The EU, for its part, had realized the region's geostrategic importance, and in 2003, through the Thessaloniki Summit, expressed "unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries" (EC Press, 2003).

By declaring this support, the EU sent a clear message to the Western Balkan countries that the enlargement process and the doors towards enlargement would remain open for them so long as the rules and guidelines set forth by the Copenhagen criteria would be met (EURLex, 2023). The Copenhagen criteria were established in 1993 and comprise the following: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU; and the capacity to adhere to the EU's standards and laws fully, which are also known as the 'acquis' (EURLex, 2023).

However, not everyone is a proponent of further EU expansion. Hesitations and opposition to further EU enlargement have come from EU citizens and MS. More specifically, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands had been quite hesitant to support Albania's further EU integration process. In 2019, France and the Netherlands used their vetoes to delay the opening of accession talks (Emmott et al., 2019). Thus, it is vital to investigate the motives behind these decisions and what may have influenced them. This research focuses specifically on the Netherlands.

An influential EU MS, the Netherlands, is in a unique position because it has historically supported the enlargement process as a way to maintain European peace, stability, and prosperity. However, it has also felt "enlargement fatigue" due to worries about the social, economic, and political repercussions (Archick, 2021). This sentiment has been prominent in Dutch public opinion for the past few years, prompting concerns about the possible influence of media on these perspectives (Spöri et al., 2022). This emphasizes the significance of looking at how the media, as a significant source of information for citizens, may influence the creation of these attitudes (Saunders, 2016). Understanding the relationship between media framing and EU integration processes in this context is very important (Beshku, 2021). The EU's enlargement process has far-reaching effects on MS like the Netherlands as well as prospective candidate countries like Albania. Albania's path to EU membership exemplifies the difficulties and possibilities presented by the enlargement process. Albania faces challenges concerning corruption, governance, and the rule of law as it strives to fulfil and achieve EU norms and standards (Gemi & Triandafyllidou,

2021). The way Albania is portrayed in Dutch media can significantly affect how Dutch citizens and Dutch officials view Albania's progress regarding EU enlargement.

The speed and conclusion of this enlargement process are significantly influenced by public perceptions and attitudes (Benedikter, 2022). The media, which serves as the main source of information for the public through framing different issues or topics, can have a significant impact on how people think and how they argue issues of public policy (Kuypers, 2010). It is important to investigate how Dutch media frames Albania's path toward EU membership to understand the complex mechanisms through which media framing can influence public opinion and, ultimately, policy decisions, as emphasized by scholars such as Schuck & de Vreese (2006). Building on the importance of media framing, this thesis will attempt to answer the following question: How does the media framing of Albania in Dutch media correlate with the Dutch government's decision-making on Albania's accession process between 2018 and 2022?

The main research objectives are to examine the changing patterns of how Dutch media portrayed Albania's EU integration process over the designated period, to investigate whether the evolution of media framing influenced Dutch public perceptions and opinions about Albania's EU integration prospects, to explore how media framing developments may have influenced policy debates and decisions concerning Albania's EU integration within the Netherlands, and lastly, to determine whether shifts in Dutch media framing of Albania had any discernible impact on the speed, trajectory, or challenges of Albania's EU integration journey.

Going forward, the structure of this thesis has been set up to carefully study the interaction and evolution between the framing of the EU integration process for Albania by Dutch media. It starts with an introductory chapter that gives a historical background of Albania and the EU enlargement process. Then it establishes the scene by describing the study's significance, background, and research question. The second chapter will provide the theoretical framework for the research, which is based on Andrew Moravcsik's Liberal Intergovernmentalism Theory (LIT) and will provide an explanation as to why only some aspects of LIT were used for this research. The third chapter will provide a thorough analysis of the literature that covers the Dutch 'enlargement fatigue,' the perceived risks and benefits associated with enlargement, and the overall EU accession process, which will allow for the contextualization of the research. The fourth chapter will provide a historical overview of major external events, the accession policy process, and decisions that the EU undertook regarding Albania from 2018 until the end of 2022. The

historical overview chapter is only meant to serve as complementary data and to observe if there are any correlations with the main mode of research. The primary research method was through a Media Content Analysis, which will be discussed in the fifth chapter. In the subsequent chapter, the research results will be presented and discussed. Finally, the last chapter will conclude this research's findings, list limitations, and make suggestions for further research.

(Chapter 2): Theoretical Framework

In order to better understand the theoretical foundation of this research, the Liberal Intergovernmentalism Theory (LIT), developed by Professor Andrew Moravcsik in 1993, will be used (Moravcsik, 1998). Moravcsik states that there are three main theoretical assumptions that LIT entails, and they are: states are the main political actors with the EU as a place where they can bargain and negotiate to achieve their national goals (Moravcsik, 1998). Domestic factors like public opinion, political institutions, and interest groups also shape state preferences. This is known as domestic preference formation (Moravcsik, 1998). The third theory is the interactions between relative gains. When MS negotiate, they assess the potential benefits or losses, which affects their overall decision-making within the EU (Moravcsik, 1998). LIT can offer a lens through which to examine the complex dynamics of EU integration, providing insights into how domestic preferences and intergovernmental agreements influence the overall enlargement processes.

The foundation of LIT is the idea that governments operate rationally, motivated by their own national interests and preferences (Moravcsik, 1998). According to this argument, national governments' interaction in the reasonable pursuit of their economic and political interests is the primary cause of EU integration (Śliwiński, 2021). According to Moravcsik's theory, intergovernmental talks drive EU decision-making as states try to maximize their gains while limiting restrictions on their sovereignty (Hooghe et al., 2019). The ideas of "relative gains" and "preference formation" are essential to LIT. Relative gains encompass political, economic, or geopolitical advantages that countries seek to obtain through further integration (Moravcsik, 1998).

Following the idea of relative gains, states integrate in order to acquire economic advantages and increase their political and geopolitical influence. Economic advantages can entail increased trade, more extensive market access, and economic growth (Moravcsik, 1998). Political gains can be where MS can increase their influence in the overall decision-making of the EU and shape policies to their own liking (Moravcsik, 1998). Geopolitical influence entails the enhancement of the EU's image on the global stage and improving defence and security capabilities (Moravcsik, 1998). It is equally important to note that when MS assess relative gains, they also are influenced by the potential losses, such as economic burdens of new members, national sovereignty loss, and a decrease in political influence (Moravcsik, 1998).

Preference formation, on the other hand, highlights how domestic pressures and interests influence governments' positions during intergovernmental negotiations (Hooghe et al., 2019). The core of LIT is this interaction between national preferences and intergovernmental agreements. These preferences come from various factors, including national economic worries, societal and cultural values, and public sentiment. Some domestic pressures which can shape preference formation are economic interest groups, which can include labour unions or business associations (Moravcsik, 1998). They can lobby governments to sway policies to their benefit. Political institutions, including the parliaments or political parties, can also shape preference formation by incentivizing decision-makers towards specific policies or limiting their abilities to do so (Moravcsik, 1998). This might include tabling resolutions or bills that can limit the decision-making by the government. Public opinion can also shape overall decision-making by influencing the priorities and agenda of decision-makers (Moravcsik, 1998). This can be done by means of political campaigns or media framing. Significantly, media framing plays a vital role in shaping the overall public discourse and, by extension, influencing decision-making. Media framing, which is guided by editorial choices and discussions within society, can hold the power to mould public perceptions and thereby impact government preferences (Crespy & Schramm, 2021). Media outlets can potentially direct public opinion by framing issues in specific ways, thereby indirectly influencing government decision-making with regard to the EU accession processes.

The connection between media framing and some of LIT's theories becomes apparent when examining how media narrative can influence both the relative gains and national preferences of MS. Media framing shapes the public's understanding by emphasizing certain aspects of a topic or issue, which downplaying other aspects, thereby influencing preferences (Crespy & Schramm, 2021). For example, a media narrative highlighting the geopolitical advantages of Albania's EU membership might increase the perceived relative gains and shift the national preference to be more favourable for its accession to the EU. On the other hand, media narratives that emphasize potential drawbacks, like increased organized crime due to Albania's accession, could shift the narrative to a negative one. This interplay takes center stage in the context of the Dutch government's decision-making on Albania's EU accession. The Dutch government evaluates the potential gains and losses associated with Albania's enlargement, and geopolitical advantages like enhanced security may be weighed against economic and financial implications or concerns with the rule of law.

The suggestion sheds light on how media framing may have influenced Dutch preferences and interests, which may have affected the country's posture during Albania's accession process (Hooghe et al., 2019). LIT also aids in comprehending how media narratives affect public opinion and ultimately have an impact on policy discussions, both of which are essential components of the EU enlargement process.

LIT has also drawn criticism for oversimplifying the role of non-state actors and disregarding the function of supranational institutions, even while it offers insightful analysis into the role of states in EU integration (Hooghe et al., 2019). Some contend that it might not fully take into account the complexity of EU decision-making and the dynamics of integration. Despite criticism that LIT may be oversimplified, it still enables a nuanced analysis of MS interests and preferences during the EU accession process. The emphasis on rational decision-making and the influence of domestic factors is suitable to uncover how Dutch media framing can impact the dynamics of EU enlargement, and this is why it was chosen for this research.

The connection between the Dutch media framing of Albania's EU accession and its repercussions may be examined through the lens of LIT's insights into state preferences, intergovernmental negotiations, and the function of domestic politics (Crespy & Schramm, 2021). This research question fits LIT's emphasis on state preferences and intergovernmental negotiations as it examines the development of Dutch media framing of Albania's entry into the EU and its impact (Crespy & Schramm, 2021). According to LIT, governments work toward integration to maximize their comparative advantages and advance national interests. The question in this context aims to determine how media framing correlates with the decision-making of the Dutch government with regard to Albania's EU accession.

The literature review will give an overview of existing literature regarding Albania's integration process, the EU accession process, Dutch "enlargement fatigue," and media influence on public opinion. LIT's emphasis on the logical pursuit of state objectives provides a lens to understand the reasoning behind these elements. For instance, LIT explains how concerns about sovereignty and local pressures may contribute to the Netherlands' potential "enlargement fatigue." (Archick, 2021). LIT can also advance knowledge of how media framing affects public opinion and form preferences (Crespy & Schramm, 2021). LIT is consistent with the body of literature on the impact of media on public perceptions and attitudes by recognizing the importance of domestic politics in preference formation. The theoretical framework also adds to the analysis of the Dutch

viewpoint on EU membership by revealing how media representations of Albania could support or contradict pre-existing Dutch beliefs.

The fundamental LIT tenets of state preferences, rational decision-making, and intergovernmental negotiations provide a strong foundation for comprehending how Dutch media framing influences and is influenced by the dynamics of EU integration (Hooghe et al., 2019). The idea of state preferences is at the core of LIT. This indicates that the Netherlands, as a member state, will base its strategy on its perceived national interests in the context of Albania's admission into the EU. These preferences can influence and be influenced by how the Dutch media frame Albania's achievements, difficulties, and compliance with EU norms. The LIT's focus on logical decision-making highlights the possibility that media narratives that support or contradict the Netherlands' interests and concerns could have an impact on the Dutch government's policy choices toward Albania's membership.

(Chapter 3): Literature Review

Dutch Enlargement Fatigue:

Within the context of EU membership, the idea of "enlargement fatigue" has become a prominent issue, resonating particularly powerfully with nations that have traditionally supported European integration, such as the Netherlands (Damjanovski et al., 2020). This idea has drawn more attention as the European Union has gradually added more member countries. This attention is due to the consequences of enlargement for both the current MS and their population. The Netherlands, which has been considered to be a cautious supporter of EU enlargement if the rules were followed, is now battling the challenges of enlargement fatigue (Rrustemi, 2019).

Damjanovski et al. (2020) define *enlargement fatigue* as weariness, cynicism, or anxiety toward the continuous process of EU expansion. This phenomenon can take many different forms, such as hesitation to support new candidates, doubts about the viability of integration, and worries about how admission will affect domestic policies and societal norms. The Dutch experience of enlargement fatigue indicates more general concerns about the union's ability to successfully absorb new members and preserve cohesion in the face of variety (Audenaerde, 2021). For the Netherlands, enlargement weariness has a variety of effects. This changed attitude can have an impact on policy choices involving greater integration as well as talks with prospective member states. Fatigued Dutch citizens' opinions on enlargement may affect the public debate and electoral outcomes. Additionally, the appearance of enlargement fatigue emphasizes the requirement for EU institutions and member states to address concerns and effectively promote the advantages of integration.

The Netherlands has traditionally been seen as a cautious proponent of European integration. Therefore, the rise of enlargement fatigue inside that country represents a significant change in its perspective toward further growth. This change has broad ramifications for both the country as a whole and each citizen (Saric, 2021). The Netherlands' shift from a nation that actively supported cautious EU enlargement to one that is struggling with enlargement weariness might have a substantial impact on a number of its engagement-related activities inside the EU. This shift in opinion may impact integration-related policy choices and prompt a more guarded approach to helping new candidate nations.

Dutch residents, whose opinions have historically been in line with the nation's pro-enlargement stance, may also see a change in their sentiments, according to von Hlatky et al.

(2023). The impact of enlargement fatigue on public opinion may have an effect on voters' decisions, spark discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of greater integration and affect how involved citizens are in the EU integration process. These changes in public opinion and policy may have an impact on how the EU admission negotiations proceed. The current enlargement fatigue may impact the Netherlands' role as a significant player in these negotiations, changing the pace and circumstances under which candidate nations want to join the EU (Reiners & Turhan, 2021).

According to Börzel et al., the Netherlands' evolving stance toward further EU expansion has been complicated by enlargement fatigue, which has been attributed to several causes (2017). First, due to the EU's quick enlargement, worries concerning integration capacity have surfaced, raising doubts about the union's capacity to successfully absorb new member states from various cultural and economic backgrounds (Börzel et al., 2017). Integration capacity refers to the ability of the EU to prepare non-members for membership and to preserve its performance and effectiveness after enlargement. These difficulties have increased concerns among nations that have historically supported enlargement, such as the Netherlands. The authors argue that the EU's integration capacity has been challenged by the enlargement of the EU to Central and Eastern Europe in 2004 (Börzel et al., 2017).

This perspective can help assess how the perceived integration capacity of Albania might shape its EU accession prospects. Also, it can help determine how the integration capacity of a particular MS, like the Netherlands, can impact its willingness and readiness to integrate new members. Additionally, concerns regarding the conformity of national institutions to EU norms have been raised in some candidate nations due to alleged weaknesses in the rule of law and widespread corruption. These worries dim the anticipated advantages of extending the expansion process, and the authors emphasize that the quality of institutions, the level of economic development, and the strength of civil society really matter to MS, like the Netherlands (Börzel et al., 2017).

According to Falkenhain et al. (2021), socioeconomic concerns are another motivating element, with Dutch citizens expressing concern that enlargement could lead to an inflow of employees from candidate countries, thus straining social services and labour markets. This anxiety results from the need to protect domestic interests throughout the integration process. In addition, there is substantial concern over a possible loss of national identity. Enlargement fatigue

is partially motivated by worries that the Netherlands' unique cultural identity may be lost as the EU diversifies and expands (Audenaerde, 2021).

According to Njoroge (2021), enlargement weariness is also a result of the economic costs involved with growth. The idea of shouldering financial obligations to help the growth of less developed countries might raise worries for wealthier member states like the Netherlands, especially while economic gaps continue. Finally, a communication breakdown is a major factor. A lack of understanding of the advantages of enlargement can cause confusion and apprehension, which can affect both Dutch citizens and policymakers. This emphasizes the significance of open and knowledgeable dialogues to avoid enlargement weariness.

The Netherlands has a distinctive viewpoint on the EU accession process as an EU Member State with a long history of steadfast commitment to European integration (Uvalić, 2023). The literature explores how the Netherlands views the activities of candidate nations to join the EU, illuminating the nation's motivations, worries, and changing attitudes toward new members.

The Netherlands' initial enthusiasm for the EU has been muted as it has grown due to practical concerns about the union's ability to absorb new members and the potential influence on domestic policies. The geopolitical ramifications of enlargement also have an impact on the Netherlands' perspective on EU membership. The literature demonstrates how the nation has come to understand the stabilizing influence the EU can have on its surrounding areas (Sakki et al., 2021). As a result, the Netherlands has generally supported Western Balkan nations seeking EU membership, seeing Southeastern Europe's security and collaboration as benefits of their integration. However, this support has always been conditioned with further progress in the candidate countries with regards to the rule of law, democratization, and other requirements.

The Netherlands' view on EU membership also considers trade and economic considerations. Increased market access and economic integration with candidate nations will benefit the nation, which is well known for its open and export-oriented economy (Sakki et al., 2021). In order to maintain fair competition and level playing fields inside the single market, the literature indicates that the Netherlands is keenly interested in seeing that candidate nations adhere to EU norms. The Netherlands has a complex stance on joining the EU, one that reflects a careful balancing act between its historical commitment to integration, worries about governance and the rule of law challenges, geopolitical objectives, and economic interests. This viewpoint affects the Netherlands' participation in the accession process and interactions with prospective EU members.

In terms of social transformation, the process of EU enlargement results in a complex interplay of perceived risks, opportunities, and uncertainties (Zweers et al., 2022). The literature thoroughly examines these dynamics, illuminating the numerous effects that result from candidate countries becoming full-fledged EU member states.

Risks & Opportunities of Enlargement:

A variety of alleged dangers connected to societal change during enlargement are highlighted in the literature. One of the main worries is the potential weakening of cultural diversity and national identity. There are concerns that as more member states join the EU, their unique cultural characteristics may be succeeded by a more generalized European identity (Olszewska, 2022). Additionally, there are worries about the emergence of socioeconomic inequalities since differences between existing members and newcomers may result in unequal economic growth and unequal standards of living.

The process of societal transformation during expansion is inherently uncertain. The literature emphasizes that although there are apparent potential advantages, the rate and kind of change might differ significantly between nations (Olszewska, 2022). Concerns regarding the social cohesiveness and stability of candidate and member states arise from how well local communities adjust to changing or new laws, economic trends, and cultural influences. Additionally, social change's effects on diverse societal groups, such as rural areas, disenfranchised groups, or ethnic minorities, present an element of unpredictability that needs to be carefully taken into account.

On the other hand, the expansion of the EU presents numerous chances for societal reform. The advantages of the single market are made available to candidate nations, fostering more commerce, investment, and economic development. As a result, there may be more job opportunities, higher living standards, and greater mobility for people in general (Stan & Erne, 2021). Additionally, being a member of the EU encourages greater collaboration and exchange among its members, providing chances for cross-cultural encounters and a broader outlook on world events. Socially, enlargement can promote the exchange of concepts, principles, and behaviours that lead to a more integrated and open European society.

In conclusion, the body of literature reviewed sheds light on critical factors influencing the "enlargement fatigue" phenomenon, particularly in the context of the Netherlands. The concerns

about integration capacity and the EU's ability to absorb new MS were dominant, especially in 2004, with the rapid enlargement of Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally, concerns over the conformity of national institutions to EU standards added doubt to the viability of integration and the potential impact of a weak rule of law and an increase in corruption. Socioeconomic factors also play a key role, where fears of the labour market being strained due to an inflow of employees from candidate countries have been observed. To add further, anxieties stemming from the loss of a national identity or culture and the economic burdens that can arise by supporting the less developed countries have added further to the enlargement fatigue.

A convincing link can be found by observing these factors within the framework of LIT. LIT suggests that EU MS decisions are a balance between national preferences and relative gains. The factors explained in the literature review resemble this balance. The concerns for integration capacity and conformity of institutions align with the concept of relative gains and losses. MS weighs the benefits of integration against potential losses. In a similar fashion, the influence of socioeconomic concerns, economic burdens, and the preservations of national identity and culture resonate with the concept of preference formation. These factors help to shape attitudes and national preferences towards further EU enlargement. Thus, the media framing analysis must consider these factors to comprehensively understand how they influence the framing of enlargement issues in Dutch media. The evolving Dutch perspective influences public discourse and overall government decision-making. As the Dutch government debates on Albania's accession process, the balance between national preferences and relative gains will be interconnected with public sentiment and media framing, resembling the dynamics outlined within the LIT framework.

(Chapter 4): Overview of Albania's Accession Policy Process & Major External Events Timeline

Panagiotou asserts that Albania's route to EU membership has been punctuated by notable turning points and enduring difficulties, reflecting the complexity of the admission process (2011). The literature on Albania's history highlights the country's goals, successes, and challenges in achieving European standards. The official filing of Albania's application for EU membership in April 2009, which signalled a crucial commitment to aligning its policies and institutions with EU principles, is one of the country's major integration milestones (Panagiotou, 2011). Albania's development was further recognized when the European Council granted its candidate status in June 2014 (Consilium, 2023). Following this accomplishment, accession negotiations were opened in March 2020, ushering in a new chapter of the nation's integration efforts (Consilium, 2023).

Nevertheless, Albania has faced several difficulties along the way. The Albanian government needs help with issues such as corruption, a weak judiciary, and the absence of the rule of law, and these have further complicated the country's admission process. The EU has consistently stressed the necessity for extensive reforms in sectors, including the legal, public, and electoral systems (Gabidzashvili, 2021). The necessity for Albania to step up its efforts to address security-related challenges has also been highlighted by worries about organized crime, human trafficking, and irregular migration. The story of Albania's integration emphasizes both social and economic progress (Gabidzashvili, 2021). In order to meet EU requirements, the literature emphasizes the importance of promoting sustainable economic growth, providing a favourable business environment, and maintaining social inclusion. The preparation of the Albanian population for the requirements of EU membership has been described as requiring a strong emphasis on education and workforce development.

Although there has been progress, the literature emphasizes that Albania's integration process is still ongoing (Gabidzashvili, 2021). The annual reports from the European Commission on Albania's development identify areas needing continued efforts to be fully in line with EU regulations. These areas mainly focus on the rule of law, a stronger judiciary, and improving the economic conditions for growth (Stanicek, 2022). The literature also stresses the significance of strong institutional adjustments and further political commitment to overcome the ongoing difficulties that have hindered the integration process.

Before beginning on the methodological process and the results of this research, this chapter will provide a brief overview of Albania's enlargement process into the EU and significant external events deemed necessary for this research. This table will serve to provide more context to the methodology chapter and potentially notice a correlation in the research findings.

April 17th, 2018	EC issued its first recommendation stating that Albania was ready to formally start accession negotiations with the EU (Consilium, 2023).
June 26th, 2018	EUCO, through Council conclusions, recommended opening up accession negotiations with Albania for June 2019, based on reforms in public administration, corruption, organized crime, judiciary reform, and property rights (Euco, 2018).
November 14th, 2018	EU and Albania held tenth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council (SA Council). The SAA serves as a framework for the relationship between the EU and Albania and, in essence, serves as the basis for Albania's accession process to the EU (DG Near, 2020).
November 29th, 2018	EP passed resolution 2018/2146 (INI), calling for accession negotiations to be opened with Albania as based on the EC's earlier recommendations (Europarl, 2018).
April 11th, 2019	The Tweede Kamer (Dutch Parliament), by #29911-239, passed a motion calling for the emergency brake procedure to be enacted against Albanian citizens due to an influx of organized crime (Tweede Kamer, 2019).
May, 2019	EC reiterated that Albania was ready to start accession negotiations, and the EUCO retook note of this recommendation (EC DG Near, 2023). However, EUCO did not vote for Albania to start negotiations in June 2019, as had been promised.
June 11th, 2019	The Tweede Kamer (Dutch Parliament), by #21501-02-2019, passed a new motion that called for not opening the accession negotiations with Albania (Tweede Kamer 2, 2019). 105 out of 150 Dutch parliamentarians voted against opening talks with Albania in 2019 (EWB, 2019).
October 17th, 2019	EUCO meeting conclusions were that the EUCO would "revert the issue of enlargement before the EU-Western Balkans summit in Zagreb, in May 2020 (EUCO Summit, 2019).
October 24th, 2019	EP passed resolution (2019/2883 (RSP)), expressing profound objections to the failure of not opening accession talks with Albania, primarily "due to the blocking of France, Denmark, and the Netherlands" (EP Resolution, 2019). An overwhelming majority of MEPs voted in favour of the resolution, with 412 votes for, 136 against, and 30 abstentions (EP Resolution, 2019).
January 31st, 2020	The official withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU) had taken place. It is worth mentioning that the UK was in negotiations to withdraw in 2019, however, postponements occurred and Theresa May resigned as the UK PM (BBC News, 2019).
March, 2020	The COVID-19 disease, first detected in December, 2019, now had spread substantially throughout the world.
March 24th, 2020	The ministers for European Affairs agreed politically to the opening of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia (EUCO, 2023).

March & April, 2021	Russia begins a major military build-up of troops alongside the border with Ukraine, followed by a second build up from October 2021, until the invasion. Estimates that over 175,000 Russian troops at Ukraine's border (Harris, 2021).
September 18th, 2021	The Trans Adriatic Pipeline, which runs from Azerbaijan and through Albania, into the EU markets via Italy, transported more than 5 billion cubic meters of gas to the EU (Hajiyeva, 2021).
2021	Nothing of significance with regards to Albania and the EU's enlargement process occurred in 2021, besides the annual progress report from the EP, which stated that Albania was moving at a slow pace (Stanicek, 2022).
July 19th, 2022	The first Intergovernmental Conference was held between the EU and Albania, signifying the start of a long process.
February 24th, 2022	Russia invaded Ukraine on the pretences of a "special military operation" and to "denazify" Ukraine (Astrov et al., 2022).

Table 1. Overview of Albania's EU Path

(Chapter 5): Methodology (Media Content Analysis)

Particularly in the context of EU integration, the impact of the media on public opinion has been extensively examined (Bradford, 2020). The body of work provides insightful understandings of the nuanced ways in which media narratives, framing, and coverage can profoundly affect how citizens see, feel about, and comprehend the European integration process.

The way that the media frames EU integration-related issues is crucial. The media has the power to influence how the public perceives and understands the complexity of integration through topic choice, vocabulary, and emphasis. According to the agenda-setting theory, the media's emphasis on specific issues might affect which ones become more prominent in the public conversation (Bradford, 2020). Media outlets have the power to choose which components of the EU integration process are publicized, potentially influencing public perception and priorities.

The literature emphasizes how the way the media portrays EU integration can have a significant impact on public sentiment. Citizens are more inclined to see integration favourably if the media frequently highlights its advantages (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). On the other hand, unfavourable coverage might lead to suspicion and dissent. Schuck & de Vreese assert that citizens often perceive the EU integration process as both a risk and an opportunity, depending on the influence or coverage by the media in relation to potential candidate countries (2006). According to their research, this duality is rooted in the uncertainty associated with social change and the potential benefits that EU membership can bring (2006). The contradiction between risk and opportunity reflects the complexities of the EU enlargement process, which can trigger different individual responses influenced by the media. Additionally, the media's function as a source of information might affect how well citizens comprehend the advantages, difficulties, and repercussions of integration (Li, 2022). Information that is biased or lacking might result in misperceptions and misconceptions.

Media bias can exacerbate social divisions over EU enlargement, whether genuine or perceived. Different narratives may be presented by media sources with different political viewpoints in order to reflect those viewpoints (Jost et al., 2022). As a result, citizens may be exposed to narrow ideas, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and preventing free speech. Media-fueled polarization can affect public discourse and the standard of democratic decision-making (Adriaansen et al., 2010). Policy preferences are also an area where the media can have an impact on public opinion. Media coverage of particular enlargement initiatives may affect public opinion

(Goldberg et al., 2022). The public's support or opposition to specific policies can be influenced by how the media portrays them as beneficial or harmful.

Understanding how the media construct, shape, and display information to influence public views and attitudes can be seen through the lens of framing theory, a pillar of media studies (Pareschi, 2023). Kuypers states, "Framing is a process whereby communicators, consciously or unconsciously, act to construct a point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be interpreted by others in a particular manner" (2010). In order to direct the audience's understanding, framing includes picking out particular features of a problem and highlighting them more so than others. This theory is especially pertinent to media content analysis because it allows for the exploration of the nuanced ways that media narratives may affect public perception. The framing of news stories affects how people understand their importance and repercussions. It alters the context in which information is delivered, affecting how the audience perceives an issue's causes, effects, and potential remedies. Researchers can identify biases, emphasize how the media shapes public perception, and determine how various frames might result in diverse interpretations of the same events by examining framing.

Scholars like Robert M. Entman and Stephen D. Reese have made significant contributions to the field of framing theory by underlining the significance of comprehending how media frames function (Entman, 2010). As mentioned previously, Jim A. Kuypers' research on the idea of "framing contests" is one crucial contribution (2010). Kuypers argues that framing focuses on how different stakeholders, such as politicians, companies, or issue advocates, use journalists and other news sources to convey their desired meanings of events and issues (2010). He goes on to state that frames can operate in four unique ways: they define the problem, or the issue being discussed, once the problem is defined, the causes for the problem are diagnosed, moral judgments for the problem are created, and finally, remedies are suggested (Kuypers, 2010).

Additionally, Stephen D. Reese's research explores how media frames collective memory to shape it (Nelson, 2019). Further, considering McGrath's work in the specific context of news content analysis is especially enlightening (1986). According to McGrath, in the examination of media framing, frames are more than just accounts of events; they also include interpretative packages that give those events meaning and significance (Santoire, 2022). Finding the fundamental components of a frame, comprehending how they are put together, and examining how they influence audience perceptions are all necessary for applying McGrath's framework.

The examples given in this previous section of scholars demonstrate that media and how it is framed can impact MS decisions in the further context of EU enlargement. This provides a solid foundation for the thesis, which is based on measuring media framing of Dutch media representation of Albania and its EU enlargement path.

An important but crucial theme for media framing and the influence it may have on policy decisions is the question of how it can be measured. Researchers can use different methods, such as representative surveys, interviews, or official documents that pertain to that theme (De Vreese et al., 2017). However, as De Vreese points out, these "linkage studies" that combine media content analysis with survey data often come with many challenges (2017). Additionally, one of the methods that stand out and is quite feasible considering the time constraints of this research is measuring media coverage (Kalfeli et al., 2022). Measuring media coverage requires scholars to count how many times a particular issue or topic is mentioned in different media sources. If the issue or topic receives continued attention in the media, the hypothesis is that this attention can then influence the public on that particular topic (Kalfeli et al., 2022). This is also dependent on how it is framed (Kuypers, 2010).

Framing theory can be used by researchers who are looking at news information to analyze how media narratives depict Albania's EU enlargement process. Researchers can determine the dominant frames through which the enlargement process is depicted by looking at the chosen events, the language used, and the emphasis on news items (Kalfeli et al., 2022). A few examples of these frames are "progress, which links to positive" "challenge, which links to negative," and "stagnation, which links to neutral." Researchers can identify how these frames change over time by using a systematic media content analysis, which may reveal trends, changes, or patterns in how the media portrays Albania's enlargement process (Kuypers, 2010). This study hopes to show how media framing shapes public views and could influence policy debates in the Netherlands.

Research Design:

Due to its effectiveness in methodically analyzing media coverage and its capacity to shape public opinion, a media content analysis was chosen as the approach for this research in order to reach a conclusive answer to the research question. This methodology was deemed suitable since it enabled a thorough examination of how the Dutch news media framed Albania's EU enlargement process. The justification for choosing media content analysis was that it could reveal hidden themes, frameworks, and patterns in media content. This methodology offered a structured

framework to evaluate how media narratives changed over time because the study's main objective was to investigate the interaction between Dutch media and Albania's EU enlargement process. It was feasible to capture the subtleties of how Albania's depiction in the media influenced public attitudes and policy considerations by methodically evaluating the substance of news stories from well-known Dutch newspapers. This method had the benefit of tracing changes in media framing patterns across a number of years, enabling a more in-depth comprehension of how attitudes evolved (Kalfeli et al., 2022).

The study explores possible changes in framing, trends, consistency, and variations in media narratives by comparing media coverage from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2022. This made it easier to spot possible turning points, see how policies might be affected, and understand how the media influenced public dialogue and policy choices. The general criteria set for this research were done for the following reasons: The demarcation of the period was chosen because the European Commission first gave Albania the green light for accession negotiations in April 2018, and the Council agreed to respond positively and open accession negotiations in June 2019 (EC DG Near, 2023). Therefore, it is logical to include the period leading up to the EC's approval for the start of accession negotiations as the beginning of the research period. The reason why the research is limited to December 31, 2022, was chosen on purpose so that the research could be feasible within the short time limit within the context of this thesis. The demarcation of five years has provided ample time so that data can be collected to show possible evolutions of Dutch media framing regarding Albania's EU integration.

The methods chosen for this research are mixed, meaning that it includes both quantitative and qualitative results. All of the data sampling for the research was obtained from the online database named Nexis Uni. This online platform is an international news database that gathers a wide range of news articles and publications. Access was provided to Nexis Uni through the Leiden University database catalogue. While there are other online news databases available such as Factiva and Google News, Nexis Uni was able to provide the selected news mediums for this research, while Factiva no longer had the news mediums on their database, as told by their IT department. Searching on Google News or manually gathering each article from the separate mediums would have taken too much time and was not feasible. Thus, what also needs to be kept in mind is that the research findings must not be understood as covering all of the Dutch media sources on the topic of Albania within the allotted time frame. As well as gathering all the

quantitative data through Nexis Uni, the qualitative results that were deduced have formed a major part of the overall research. The quantitative data that has been gathered is crucial because it allows for the observation of potential patterns, which will further help conceptualize the evolution of Dutch media. The literature review chapter has described a detailed theoretical framework on which this research will be based. The contextual framework, as laid out by the previous scholars, is very important in order to reach a comprehensive deduction for this study. The data gathered, and the results also allow for the potential use in future research.

As mentioned previously, the January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2022, timeframe has created the baseline for the entire data set retrieved from Nexis Uni. To determine what elements are crucial in observing media framing, this study has decided to include Kuypers's method of framing research (Kuypers, 2010). Specifically, Kuypers' method of measuring media attention and framing will be applied to the results of this research.

Data Collection:

In order to fully capture the way Dutch media framed Albania's EU enlargement process, four prominent Dutch newspapers—Telegraaf, Algemeen Dagblad, Volkskrant, and NRC—were chosen for the data collection portion of this study. The selection of these newspapers was made because they are the top four most widely read newspapers in the Netherlands (Feedspot, 2023). An added advantage is that these newspapers represent different political and sociological positions. Algemeen Dagblad offers a mix of regional and national coverage based out of Rotterdam, Netherlands (AD.nl, 2023). It is known for its factual reporting and not being biased toward any political leanings (Check, 2023). Volkskrant is praised for its in-depth reporting and was formerly a centre-left-leaning Catholic news publisher. However, now it is viewed as being slightly to the right of the political spectrum (Bias, 2023). NRC is acknowledged for its high-calibre journalism and for leaning toward the left-centre political spectrum (Huitsing, 2023). Telegraaf is renowned for its large readership, considered to be mostly factual, and is considered to be leaning toward the right on the political spectrum (Huitsing, 2023). These choices ensure a comprehensive depiction of Dutch media's coverage of the issue, gathering various viewpoints and strengthening the analysis.

As mentioned previously, all of the articles gathered in this study have been gathered by using the Nexis Uni database. All of the articles were in the Dutch language and, due to language

barriers, had to be translated into English. The Dutch news articles were translated into English using Google Translate to make analysis easier and to ensure consistency in understanding and interpretation. Every article had been fully translated in order to understand the full context. Although Google Translate is quite accurate, the limitations of translation errors must also be mentioned for the sake of transparency. This technique made it possible to gather all available news items while also analyzing media framing trends and sentiment shifts over time with precision and consistency.

In order to retrieve pertinent articles, particular keywords were used during the data retrieval procedure. The keywords "Albanië or Albania" and "uitbreiding or enlargement" were utilized to extract news articles relating to Albania's EU enlargement process. Ensuring that only publications exclusively about Albania are included, "Albanië or Albania" eliminates any potential for relevance ambiguity. The search term "uitbreiding or enlargement" is useful for finding publications that examine the broader idea of EU enlargement and put Albania's integration within the greater European perspective. The goal of this keyword selection technique is to compile a comprehensive dataset that includes both coverage of Albania specifically and the more general discussion about EU enlargement that may affect how people view Albania's integration process.

The data collection process attempts to provide a well-rounded and inclusive dataset that accurately reflects the way Dutch media frames Albania's EU inclusion by using these particular keywords throughout the chosen articles. By using this strategy, the analysis is ensured to be based on a wide range of articles, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how media narratives have changed over time and their possible influence on Dutch perceptions of Albania's progress toward EU membership.

Data Analysis:

The study's data analysis phase involves a methodical selection of articles for each year from 2018 to 2022 in order to track changes in how the Dutch media have framed Albania's EU integration process over time. The predetermined keywords "Albanië" and "Albania" as well as "enlargement/uitbreiding" were applied to articles in the selected Dutch newspapers, Telegraaf, Algemeen Dagblad, Volkskrant, and NRC. The articles were collected for each year, and the pertinent information was noted to produce a structured dataset. The central theme mentioned in the articles (such as economic considerations, the rule of law, enlargement fatigue/ Euroscepticism,

geopolitical considerations, or other issues) as well as the date, name of the newspaper, author, and general tone or context of the articles were all included in this dataset.

A spreadsheet was created to ensure data collection and analysis was made easier and kept for potential future research or for referencing. The spreadsheet's columns corresponded to the information mentioned above, and each row represented an article, allowing for a structured data organization. The graph also provided a visual picture of the evolution of media sentiment over time, highlighting any potential trends or changes in framing. This approach of data collection not only gave a thorough overview of media coverage across several dimensions and guaranteed accuracy and consistency in tracking stories. With the aid of this structured methodology, the study was able to thoroughly examine the way Dutch media presented Albania's EU enlargement process from 2018 to 2022, identifying any potential trends, modifications, and connections between media narratives and the trajectory of integration.

Coding Scheme:

According to the classification scheme employed in this study, the articles were divided into categories based on the date, newspaper, author, general tone or context (negative/positive/neutral), and the principal theme of each article. This methodical technique guarantees that the data is structured and organized for this in-depth research. The date that each item was published is indicated in order to track patterns and changes in attention and framing over time. The title of the newspaper is noted in order to examine possible framing discrepancies among various media sources. Authorship is tracked to spot any recurrent voices influencing the story. To expand the relevance of the results, articles that matched the search terms have been defined by the context or tone in how they are mentioned. For the purpose of this research, the terms tone and context are defined as 'contextual factors,' and they are separated into three categories: Positive, Negative, or Neutral. How the decisions were made on whether an article could be deemed positive, negative, or neutral depended on the context of each article. For example, articles about Albania's integration process as a potential security advantage for the EU, or potential economic growth, were deemed positive. Articles that mentioned the high crime rate in the Netherlands due to Albanian citizens or articles quoting Dutch officials on blocking Albania's EU path were deemed to be negative. Articles categorized as neutral were ones that mentioned Albania as the secondary topic of the articles. For example, certain articles discussed

COVID-19 or the Eurovision Contest, and they were not positive or negative leaning towards Albania. The categorization was done as objectively as possible, however, keeping in mind that errors may have been made.

Finally, the term theme has been defined as 'thematic factors,' and they have been separated into five categories: Rule of Law, Economic Considerations, Geopolitical Considerations, Enlargement Fatigue/ Euroscepticism, or Other Issues. Topics or issues mentioned in the articles that are significant to the broader five categories have been assigned within them and will be listed here: Rule of Law: entails topics or issues such as crime, corruption, a weak judiciary, and democratic backsliding. Economic Considerations: entails topics or issues such as Covid-19 funding, economic hardships, and business closures due to Covid-19. Geopolitical considerations: entails topics or issues such as EU enlargement, EU energy security, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and Chinese foreign policy risks in the Western Balkans. Enlargement Fatigue mainly entails Brexit in 2018 and 2019 and the potential of Nexit and Frexit (Tasente & Rus, 2019). Other Issues: entails topics and issues such as Covid-19 heavily in 2020 and Albania's hosting of a UEFA tournament with a Dutch club (UEFA, 2022).

The reasoning behind consolidating similar issues or topics within the five thematic factors is to contextualize the themes of the articles further and to make it easier to observe correlations, if there are any. This approach is aligned with LIT and resonates with the overarching themes and the literature that has been reviewed. The reason for choosing these categories for both the contextual factors and the thematic factors is because they are pertinent for the contextualization of the overall research. By adding the thematic and contextual factors to the research, this study provides context and is considered to be a part of a reasonable thematic investigation. There are also drawbacks and risks to mixing quantitative and qualitative data, as they can produce conflicting results or lead to inconclusive answers to the research question. It must be mentioned that there is still a risk of producing an inconclusive answer within these results. The following section will display the results that have been found by using the explained research methods. This approach firmly connects the chosen categories to the reasons for enlargement fatigue, the principles of relative gains and losses, and preference formation expressed within the framework of LIT.

(Chapter 6): Results & Discussion

To provide a clear overview of the research conducted, this chapter will follow a detailed structure. First, this chapter shows the number of articles that were found in the Nexis Uni database from January 1st, 2018, until December 31st, 2022. This is in order to provide a general overview of the quantity of articles that mentioned Albanië or Albania and Uitbreiding or Enlargement in Dutch media and establish a baseline for the research. Then the articles have been divided by contextual factors such as Positive, Negative, and Neutral, per year. Finally, the collected articles have been divided by thematic factors of Rule of Law, Economic Considerations, Geopolitical Considerations, Enlargement Fatigue/ Euroscepticism, or Other issues. It is important to analyze the contextual and thematic factors because they may be able to establish a correlation between the media coverage and the EU policy developments more clearly.

Number of Mentions of Albanië and Uitbreiding in Dutch Media:

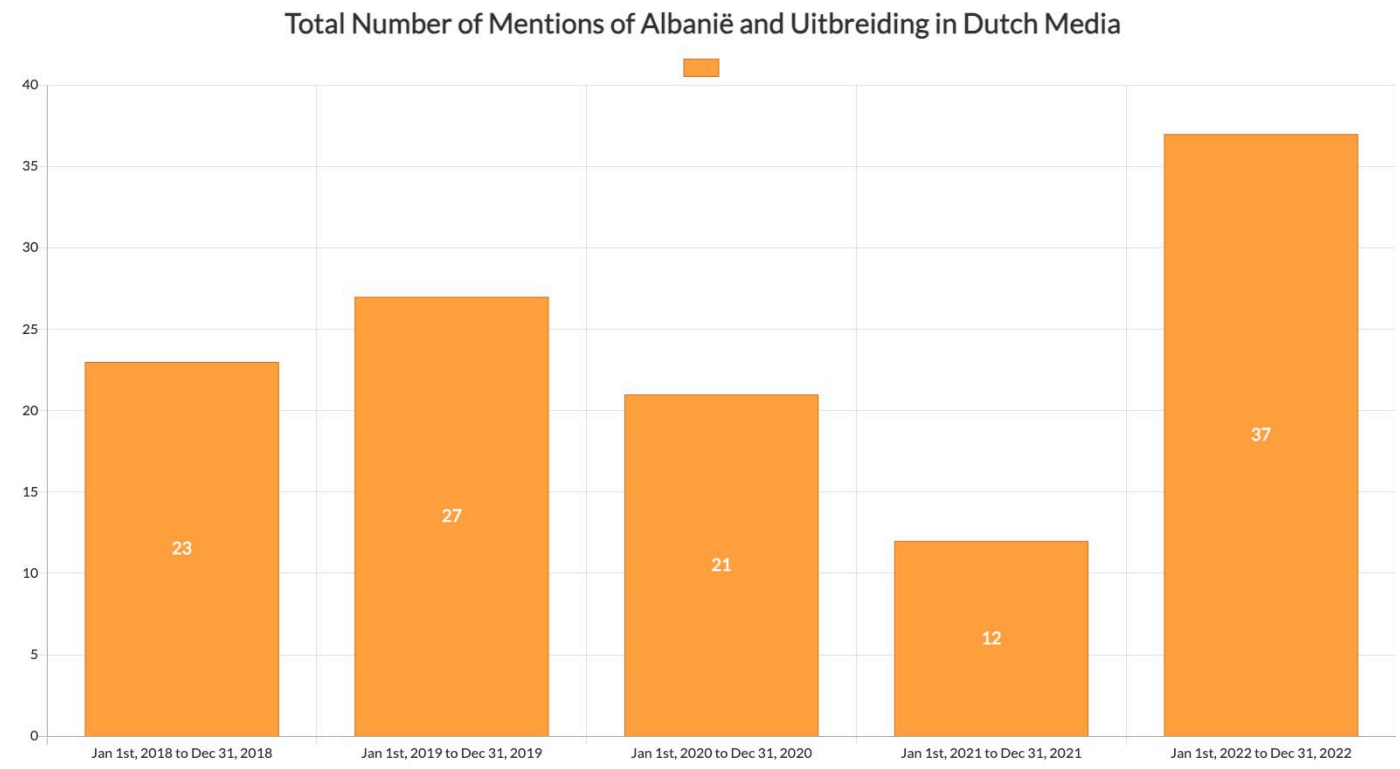


Figure 1. Total Amount of Mentions Per Year.

The first step in categorising the data sample from Nexis Uni was to tally the number of articles per year within the Jan 1st, 2018, until Dec 31st, 2022, timeline. This has been able to

provide a baseline for the overall results of this study and see if the attention has increased. The results of the number of mentions can be observed in Figure 1. From January 1st, 2018, until the end of 2018, 23 total articles were found that mentioned Albanië and Uitbreiding. In 2019, there was a slight increase to 27 articles. Then in 2020, the number decreased to 21 total articles. The decrease continued in 2021, with only 12 total articles found in the database. Finally, in 2022, the number of articles increased substantially to 37 articles. The findings presented in Figure 1 have been able to demonstrate that the year with the highest number of articles was 2022, and the year with the lowest number of articles was 2021. To note, all of the Articles in the data sample have mentioned both Albanië (Albania) and Uitbreiding (enlargement) together. This is to state that the analysis specifically concerns Albania’s enlargement into the EU.

Contextual Factors: Positive, Negative, or Neutral Tone

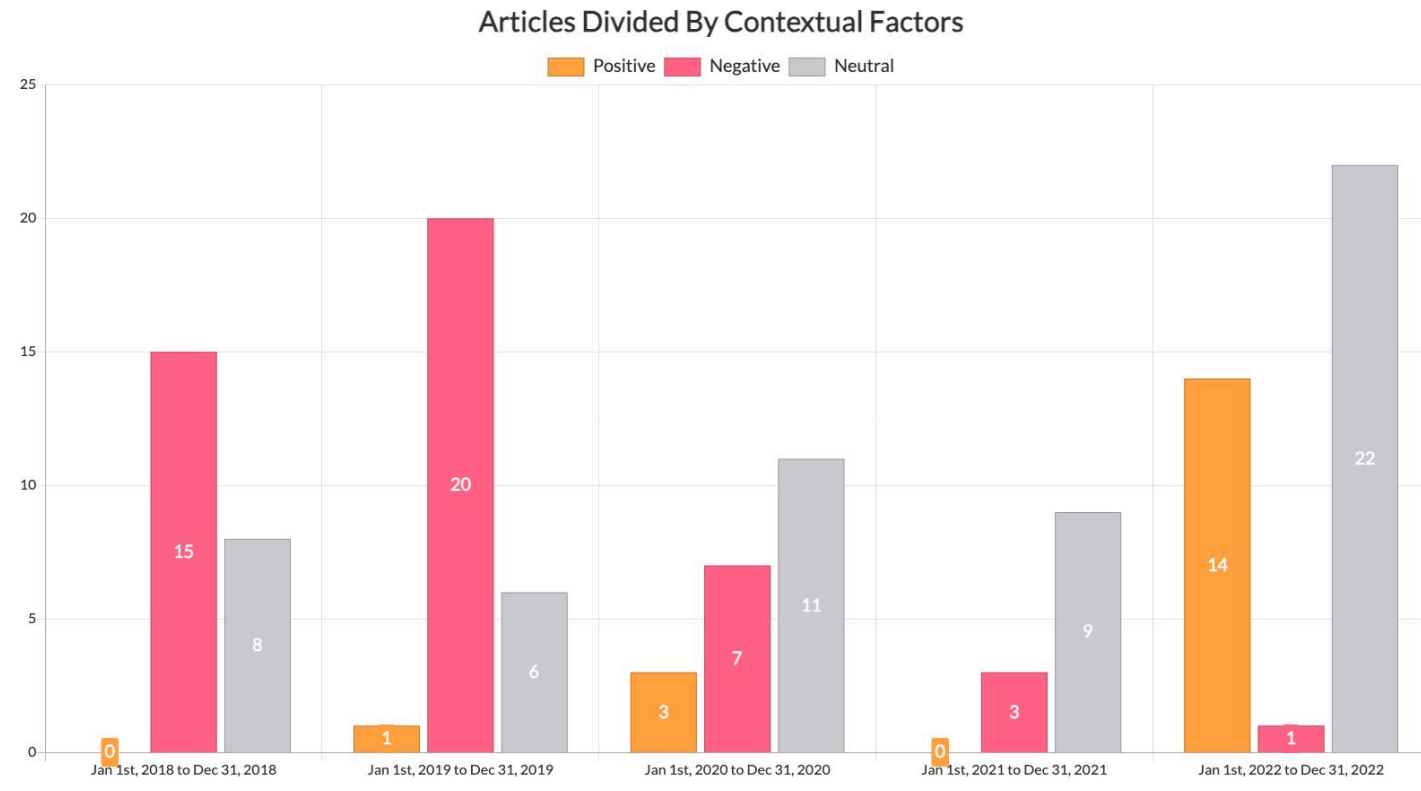


Figure 2. Articles Divided by Contextual Factors for Each Year from 2018 until 2022.

<i>Year</i>	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)
2018	0.0	65.2	34.8
2019	3.7	74.1	22.2
2020	14.3	33.3	52.4
2021	0.0	25.0	75.0
2022	37.8	2.7	59.5

Figure 3. Contextual Factors Divided by %

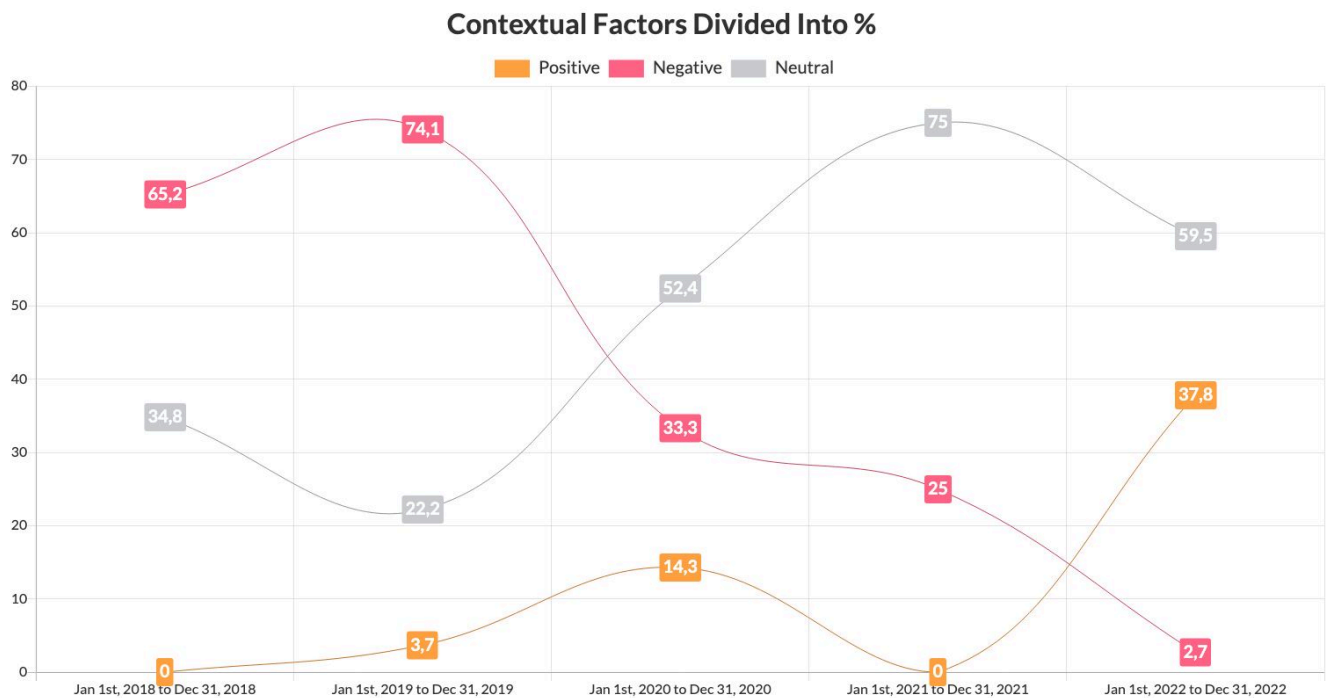


Figure 4. Contextual Factors Divided by % on Graph.

Discussion:

The offered results provide enlightening insights into the connection between the evolution of Dutch media framing and Albania's EU integration process. This section will provide a more detailed and comprehensive explanation of the research findings. In order to maintain organization and structure, the results for the contextual factors section will be discussed, followed by the thematic factors section.

Contextual Factors Discussion:

From the results in Figures 2, 3, and 4, the first observation that can be made is that in the year 2018, 65.2% of the articles pertaining to Albania and its EU enlargement process, were framed negatively. Then in 2019, the negatively framed articles increased to 74.1%. A clear observation can be made that the media framing of Albania from 2018 until 2019 was evolving negatively, and even the neutral articles decreased in this period. A deduction could be made that during 2019, the framing in Dutch media regarding Albania could have impacted official Dutch policy in a negative manner. As mentioned in chapter 4., Table 1. on April 11th, 2019, by motion #29911-239, the Tweede Kamer (Dutch Parliament), and through the submission of MP Mrs. Madeleine van Toorenburg, passed a motion calling for the emergency brake procedure to be enacted against Albanian citizens (Tweede Kamer, 2019). Mrs. van Toorenburg went on to assert that there is an Albanian Mafia presence in the Netherlands, and according to her, there are "6 times more Albanians in the Netherlands than officially registered (VisaGuide, 2019). This is a correlation that can be observed with the high percent of negative articles. The emergency brake procedure is regulated through EC regulation 1289/2013, which states that visa exemptions for third countries may be suspended in "emergency situations" by the EC (van Gerven Oei, 2019). The motion stated that "there has been a considerable increase in criminal activities by the Albanian mafia in the Netherlands" (Tweede Kamer, 2019). The motion passed and was sent to the Prime Minister, who passed it on to the EC. However, after evaluating the request, the EC found that Albania and its citizens were not breaching the Schengen Visa requirements and the request was rejected (VisaGuide, 2019).

Then on June 11th, 2019, by #21501-02-2019, a new motion was brought to the Tweede Kamer by MP Mr. Pieter Omtzigt that called for not opening the accession negotiations with Albania (Tweede Kamer 2, 2019). 105 out of 150 Dutch parliamentarians voted against opening talks with Albania in 2019 (EWB, 2019). This was even after the EC ruled that Albania was ready to begin the talks. At the time, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stef Blok, stated that opening negotiations with Albania "would be an untimely decision" (EWB, 2019). Therefore, this increase in negative framing for 2019 coincides with official Dutch policies towards Albania. But the shift to more negative in 2019 is also consistent with LIT's emphasis on the importance of domestic factors in determining policy outcomes. This change may be due to the media's more wary

presentation of growing domestic problems, such as the “Albanian Mafia” narrative alleged by the Dutch MP.

In 2020, it can be observed in Figure. 3 and 4 that the negative articles decreased substantially from 74.1% to 33.3%. This is a major shift in the framing of the news articles. Also 52.4% of the articles were framed as being neutral, and 14.3% were of a positive nature. This shows that there was an overall improvement of framing with regards to Albania. This improvement could also correlate with the fact that the ministers for European Affairs finally agreed politically to the opening of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia (EURO, 2023), as mentioned in chapter 4, Table 1. of this study. Another observation can be made that positive framing does not predate the March 2020 decision to open negotiations with Albania, as based on Figure 4., showing negative trends in 2019, and 2018. Conclusions can be drawn that the positive tone in articles started in 2020, and it could be assumed that Dutch media framing had an impact on the Dutch government to agree to these negotiations. The positive articles in 2020, mentioned how Albania had increased its ability to improve the rule of law, combat organized crime, and how improve its judiciary. This could be a cause for the framing to improve. However, in order to substantiate these conclusions, further research needs to be completed.

In 2021, the negative articles continued to decrease to only 25%, and at the same time, the neutral articles increased to 75%. The neutral articles in 2021, had topics ranging from COVID-19, the Eurovision song contest, and the UEFA Champions League finals. The positive articles also decreased to zero, and thus, an observation for 2021 is not able to be made. However, in 2022, 37.8% of the articles were categorized as being positive. This is a huge shift and the largest increase of positive articles in Dutch media within the five-year period that has been measured. The negative articles decreased substantially to only 2.7%, while the neutral ones decreased slightly to 59.5%. Overall, the most important and visible supposition that has been found in this part of the research, is that the framing of Albania in Dutch media evolved in a positive direction from 2018 until 2022. More specifically, a correlation can be made by observing Table.1 in Chapter. 4, that in 2022, the EU and Albania held their first Intergovernmental Conference (IGC). The Netherlands had to give its blessing for this to happen and so a link can be deduced.

Thematic Factors: Rule of Law, Economic Considerations, Geopolitical Considerations, Enlargement Fatigue/ Euroscepticism, or Other Issues

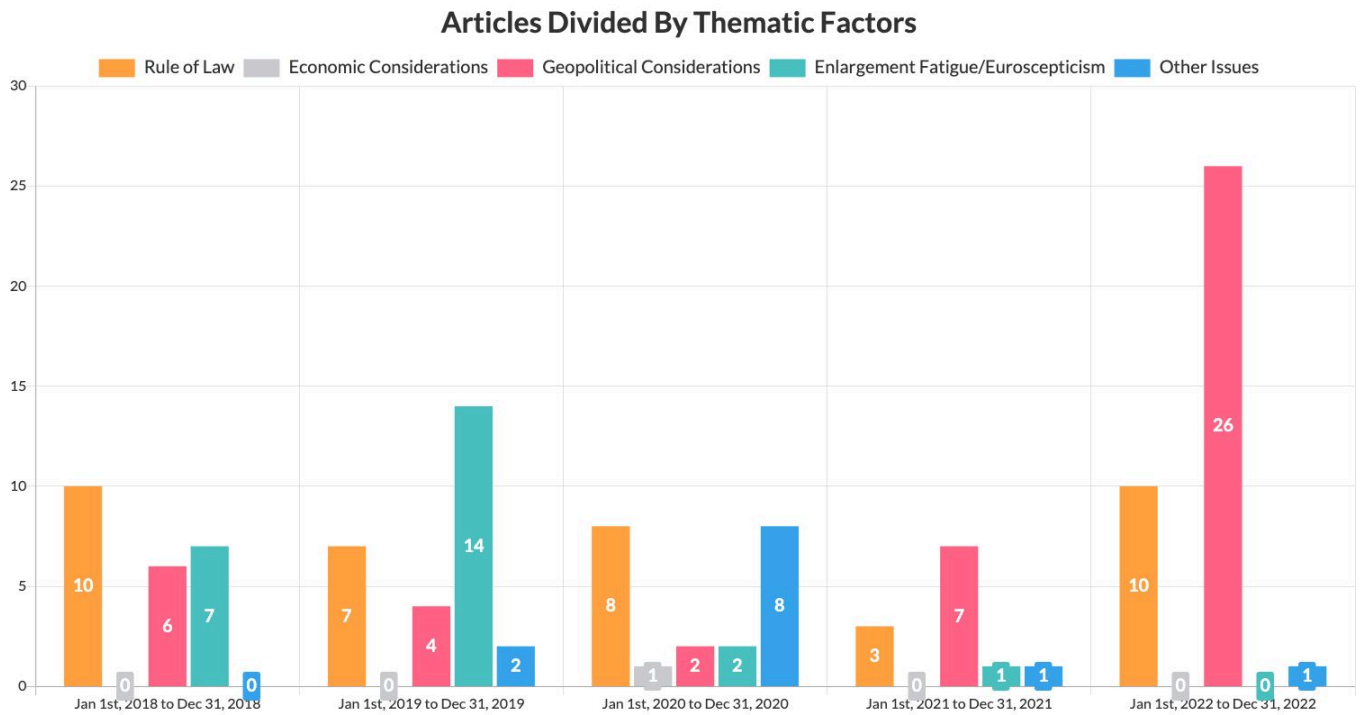


Figure 5. Articles Divided by Thematic Factors for Each Year from 2018 until 2022.

<i>Year</i>	Rule of Law (%)	Economic Considerations (%)	Geopolitical Considerations (%)	Enlargement Fatigue/ Euroscepticism (%)	Other Topics (%)
2018	43.5	0.0	26.1	30.4	0.0
2019	25.9	0.0	14.8	51.9	7.4
2020	38.1	4.8	9.5	9.5	38.1
2021	25.0	0.0	58.4	8.3	8.3
2022	27.0	0.0	70.3	0.0	2.7

Figure 6. Thematic Factors Divided By %

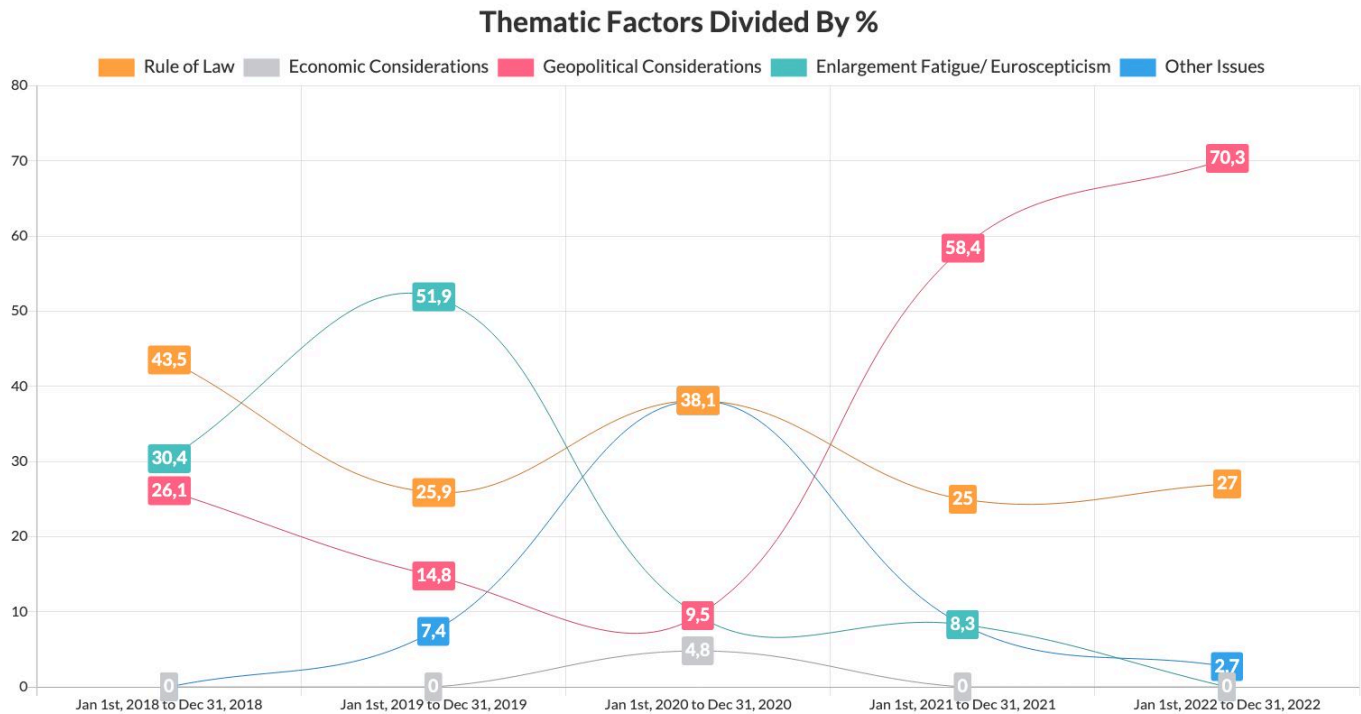


Figure 7. Thematic Factors Divided By % on Graph

Thematic Factors Discussion:

From the results in Figures 5, 6, and 7. the first observation that is made is that the rule of law is a very pertinent theme throughout the five-year period, with 43.5% of total articles in 2018, then 25.9% in 2019, followed by 38.1% in 2020, a slight decrease to 25% in 2021, and finally, 27% in 2022. This shows that although the rule of law theme decreased from 2018, it did maintain consistent throughout until the end of 2022. The rule of law, which includes topics such as corruption, crime, weak judiciary, and democratic backsliding is a very salient theme in the Netherlands and the analysis clearly shows that. The Netherlands official policy with regards towards further EU enlargement has always been of a cautious nature, making sure that the rule of law is followed before admitting new members. It can also be observed that the economic considerations, which includes issues like COVID-19 funding, and economic hardships, increased only in 2020, when COVID-19 was occurring, and was not a significant theme at all. This is a really striking result, since economic considerations are deemed quite important in LIT, however, they don't seem to be a strong factor in the media framing.

Another visible observation that can be made is with the enlargement fatigue/ Euroscepticism theme. The theme was of relatively high importance in 2018, with 30.4%. Then in 2019, it increased to 51.9% of the articles. This increase is due to the fact that the United Kingdom was in the process of leaving the EU in 2019, however it did not leave until 2020. Enlargement and BREXIT are linked in the media through the lens of enlargement fatigue/ Euroscepticism, and an emphasis is placed on the worries that the UK's departure may bring to the EU in terms of further enlargement. This can be further proven by observing the theme decreasing to 9.5% for 2020, 8.3% for 2021, and zero for 2022.

The most important deduction made in the thematic factors is with regards to geopolitical considerations. As mentioned previously, for the purpose of this study, geopolitical considerations entailed topics or issues that pertained to EU energy security, EU enlargement, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and Chinese foreign policy risks in the Western Balkans. A clear observation can be made that from 2018, until 2020, geopolitical considerations were decreasing as a major theme and went from 26.1% to only 9.5% in 2020. However, a very significant increase occurred in 2021, whereby it increased to 58.4% of the total articles. This clearly shows that salience for geopolitical considerations was increasing dramatically. This large increase is due to the EU's energy security and geopolitical worries that were evolving rapidly due to Russia's posturing before its invasion of Ukraine. It can be concluded based that topics such as the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) as an alternative energy source, and Russia's posturing of troops on the border with Ukraine were heavily mentioned in the articles, and thus a deduction can be made. Then in 2022, it increased even higher to 70.3%. This research hypothesises that this dramatic increase from 9.5% in 2020, is mainly due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the overall need for the EU to maintain its geopolitical security. This could also mean that EU enlargement has gained a new impetus from current MS such as the Netherlands. To substantiate this further, Albania and the EU held their first Intergovernmental Conference (ICC) on July 19th, 2022. This signifies the actual start of the negotiating process for Albania's EU membership.

Correlations can also be made between the contextual and thematic factors when comparing the results. For instance, it can be observed that more negative coverage coincided with enlargement fatigue/ Euroscepticism in 2019. Also in 2019, the negative coverage may have coincided with the rule of law since it was the highest level in 2019. Then the positive coverage coincided with geopolitical considerations in 2022.

(Chapter 7): Conclusion

With the help of the research question that this study has been based on, "How does the media framing of Albania in Dutch media correlate with the Dutch government's decision-making on Albania's accession process between 2018 and 2022?" this research has developed a better understanding of the relationship between Dutch media framing and the advancement of Albania's EU integration. This research was completed by measuring the evolution of Dutch media framing within the predetermined period from January 1st, 2018, until December 31st, 2022, and by observing the contextual and thematic factors within this period. This thesis has sought to identify correlations and trends contributing to the understanding of economic factors, preference formation, and the impact of geopolitical factors with regard to Albania's EU enlargement.

The results of the study lead to the following conclusion: the evolution of framing in Dutch media with regard to Albania and its enlargement process with the EU has evolved in a positive manner, based on the results from the contextual factors. In addition, the prevalence of articles about Albania increasing steadily in 2022, and the theme of geopolitical implications, which includes EU enlargement, further adds to the evolution of positive framing. The research results offer valuable insights that can both challenge and validate certain aspects of the literature within the context of LIT. For example, while LIT places emphasis on economic factors being significant in shaping state preferences and decision-making, the results from this analysis indicate that economic considerations were not a significant theme in the Dutch media coverage of Albania's enlargement process. This discrepancy highlights the complex factors that shape public opinion and media framing. However, it suggests that although economic considerations are crucial in policy decision-making, they may not be the focus of public discourse and media framing.

The emphasis on relative gains or losses is further in line with LIT's framework. This research observed a correlation between policy developments and media framing. The evolution of media framing from mainly negative and skeptical in 2018 and 2019 to more positive and supportive in 2020 and 2022 aligns with significant policy shifts. Most notably, the positive media framing in 2020 coincided with the agreement to formally open negotiations with Albania, as observed in Chapter 4. Table 1. This suggests that media framing can influence policy preferences by shaping public opinion and prompting governments to consider the broader societal sentiment for Albania's enlargement.

Another significant result is the increasing importance of geopolitical events. This is particularly visible in the heightened media framing of EU energy security and Russia's invasion and war in Ukraine. This is also consistent with LIT's emphasis on the role of external influences in shaping state preferences. The significant media coverage regarding geopolitical considerations in 2021, a year filled by Russia's heightened aggression, aligns with LIT's acknowledgment of global events and their impact on national policies.

With regards to preference formation in the context of Dutch media's framing of Albania's enlargement, it can be concluded that the process is influenced by a combination of domestic Dutch political considerations, EU-level political debates, and global geopolitical events. The Dutch media's framing of Albania and its enlargement in a positive light in 2022, alongside the milestone of the first EU-Albania Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), suggest that domestic political shifts and the conclusions of EU-level decision-making converge to impact framing.

Although the study offers insightful information, it is important to recognize its limits. As other information sources also affect perceptions and framing, the study's emphasis on Dutch media framing might not fully represent popular opinion. The intricacy of media discourse may also be oversimplified by the usage of terms. In order to provide a more thorough understanding of media influence, a future study might broaden the analysis to incorporate a wider variety of media sources and multiple languages. Additionally, analyzing how media framing affects real policy choices and public support could expand the comprehension of the media's function in the enlargement process.

Furthermore, because this study focuses primarily on a media content analysis, it might not accurately reflect the subtleties of public opinion. A more complete picture of the public's opinions and attitudes might be obtained by combining a media content analysis with surveys or interviews. In addition, a comparative analysis of media coverage across different EU MS could provide insights into variations in framing and preference formation.

In conclusion, this research contributes to understanding the interactions between media framing, policy preferences, and the LIT framework. The results highlight the relationship between media discourse, policy developments, and domestic and global factors. This thesis emphasizes the need for further investigation and study in this dynamic area of EU enlargement by demonstrating the importance of geopolitical considerations and the complexity of media framing.

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Appendix:

News Source from January 1st, 2018, until December 31st, 2018

#	Date of Article: D/M/Y	News Source:	Author:	Tone of Article: Negative/Positive/Neutral	Main Topic of Article:
1	09/01/2018	De Telegraaf	Ruud Mikkers	Neutral	Rule of Law
2	09/01/2018	De Telegraaf	H. Haak	Negative	Rule of Law
3	06/02/2018	De Telegraaf	Ruud Mikkers	Negative	Geopolitical Considerations
4	07/02/2018	De Volkskrant	Arie Elshout	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
5	07/02/2018	De Telegraaf	Ruud Mikkers	Negative	Geopolitical Considerations
6	08/02/2018	De Volkskrant	Hans Wansink	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
7	16/02/2018	NRC Handelsblad	Bastiaan Rijpkema	Negative	Rule of Law
8	26/02/2018	NRC Handelsblad	Roeland Termote	Negative	Rule of Law
9	17/04/2018	NRC Handelsblad	Tijn Sadée	Negative	Rule of Law
10	18/04/2018	De Volkskrant	Arie Elshout	Negative	Rule of Law
11	18/04/2018	De Volkskrant	N/A	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
12	20/04/2018	NRC Handelsblad	N/A	Neutral	Rule of Law
13	20/04/2018	De Telegraaf	N/A	Negative	Rule of Law
14	21/04/2018	De Telegraaf	Marjolein Zwemmer	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
15	05/05/2018	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	Hans Van Soest	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
16	07/05/2018	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	Hans Van Soest	Negative	Rule of Law
17	08/05/2018	De Telegraaf	Henk Mulder	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations

18	17/05/2018	De Volkskrant	Arie Elshout	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
19	18/05/2018	De Telegraaf	Ruud Mikkers	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
20	27/06/2018	De Volkskrant	Arie Elshout	Neutral	Rule of Law
21	09/10/2018	De Telegraaf	Niels Rigter	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
22	29/11/2018	De Volkskrant	Jenne Jan Holtland	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
23	22/12/2018	De Volkskrant	Marc Peepkorn	Neutral	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism

News Source from January 1st, 2019, until December 31st, 2019

#	Date of Article: D/M/Y	Newspaper:	Author:	Tone of Article: Negative/Positive/Neutral	Main Topic of Article:
1	18/05/2019	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	N/A	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
2	20/05/2019	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad.nl	Mark van Assen	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
3	29/05/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Casper Luckerhof	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
4	11/06/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Drie Onderzoekers	Neutral	Other Issues
5	15/06/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Caroline de Gruyter	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
6	17/06/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Arnout Brouwers	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
7	01/07/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Neutral	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism

8	06/09/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Mark Beunderman	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
9	07/10/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Arnout Brouwers	Negative	Rule of Law
10	16/10/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Clara van de Wiel	Negative	Rule of Law
11	16/10/2019	De Telegraaf	Ruud Mikkers	Negative	Rule of Law
12	18/10/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Arie Elshout	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
13	18/10/2019	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	Mark van Assen	Negative	Rule of Law
14	19/10/2019	De Volkskrant	Arie Elshout	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
15	19/10/2019	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	Hans van Soest	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
16	19/10/2019	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	N/A	Negative	Rule of Law
17	19/10/2019	De Telegraaf	N/A	Negative	Rule of Law
18	23/10/2019	De Volkskrant	N/A	Negative	Rule of Law
19	09/11/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Caroline de Gruyter	Negative	Geopolitical Considerations
20	12/11/2019	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	Sylvia van de Ven	Positive	Other Issues
21	12/11/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Tijn Sadée & Clara van de Wiel	Neutral	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
22	14/11/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Arnout Brouwers	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
23	15/11/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
24	16/11/2019	De Volkskrant	Marc Peepkorn	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
25	16/11/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Caroline de Gruyter	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations

26	19/11/2019	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
27	10/12/2019	NRC Handelsblad	Emilie van Outeren	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism

News Source from January 1st, 2020, until December 31st, 2020

#	Date of Article: D/M/Y	Newspaper:	Author:	Tone of Article: Negative/Positive/Neutral	Main Topic of Article:
1	28/01/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Neutral	Other Issues
2	31/01/2020	NRC Handelsblad	Michel Kerres	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
3	04/02/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Negative	Rule of Law
4	05/02/2020	De Volkskrant	Marc Peepkorn	Negative	Rule of Law
5	06/02/2020	De Telegraaf	Ruud Mikkers	Negative	Rule of Law
6	06/02/2020	NRC Handelsblad	Clara van de Wiel	Neutral	Rule of Law
7	07/02/2020	NRC Handelsblad	Luuk van Middelaar	Neutral	Other Issues
8	14/02/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Daan Kool	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
9	03/03/2020	AD/ Algemeen Dagblad	N/A	Positive	Rule of Law

10	13/03/2020	De Telegraaf	N/A	Neutral	Other Issues
11	16/03/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Anders Fogh Rasmussen	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
12	23/03/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Fatos Lubonja	Negative	Rule of Law
13	24/03/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Arnout Brouwers	Positive	Rule of Law
14	25/03/2020	NRC Handelsblad	N/A	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
15	26/03/2020	NRC.nl	Wouter van Loon	Negative	Rule of Law
16	01/04/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Arnout Brouwers	Neutral	Economic Considerations
17	08/05/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	Gijs Herderscheê	Neutral	Other Issues
18	01/11/2020	AD/Algemeen Dagblad	Casper van Oirschot	Neutral	Other Issues
19	02/11/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	N/A	Neutral	Other Issues
20	25/11/2020	AD/Algemeen Dagblad.nl	Maarten Wijffels	Neutral	Other Issues
21	10/12/2020	De Volkskrant.nl	N/A	Neutral	Other Issues

News Source from January 1st, 2021, until December 31st, 2021

#	Date of Article: D/M/Y	Newspaper:	Author:	Tone of Article: Negative/Positive/Neutral	Main Topic of Article:
1	14/01/2021	De Volkskrant.nl	N/A	Neutral	Other Issues
2	19/03/2021	De Volkskrant.nl	Julian Postulart	Negative	Enlargement Fatigue/ Eurocepticism
3	08/07/2021	De Volkskrant.nl	Nevanka Tromp-Vrkic en Dion van den Berg	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
4	09/07/2021	De Volkskrant	Matija Lujic	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
5	05/10/2021	NRC.nl	Mark Duursma	Negative	Rule of Law
6	05/10/2021	De Volkskrant.nl	Peter Giesen	Neutral	Rule of Law
7	06/10/2021	De Volkskrant.nl	Peter Giesen	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
8	06/10/2021	NRC Handelsblad	Mark Duursma	Negative	Geopolitical Considerations
9	06/10/2021	De Volkskrant	Peter Giesen	Neutral	Rule of Law
10	07/10/2021	De Volkskrant	Peter Giesen	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
11	17/12/2021	De Volkskrant.nl	Peter Giesen	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations

12	18/12/2021	De Volkskrant	Peter Giesen	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
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News Source from January 1st, 2022, until December 31st, 2022

#	Date of Article: D/M/Y	Newspaper:	Author:	Tone of Article: Negative/Positive/Neutral	Main Topic of Article:
1	21/01/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Olaf Tempelman	Neutral	Rule of Law
2	22/01/2022	De Volkskrant	N/A	Neutral	Rule of Law
3	26/01/2022	NRC.nl	Mark Duursma	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
4	27/01/2022	NRC Handelsblad	Mark Duursma	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
5	23/02/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Eline Huisman en Rosa van Gool	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
6	01/03/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
7	02/03/2022	De Volkskrant	Marc Peepkorn	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
8	09/03/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
9	10/03/2022	De Volkskrant	Marc Peepkorn	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
10	12/03/2022	NRC Handelsblad	Floor Rusman	Neutral	Other Issues

11	13/04/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Arnout Brouwers	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
12	30/05/2022	De Telegraaf.nl	Alexander Bakker	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
13	30/05/2022	De Telegraaf	N/A	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
14	09/06/2022	De Telegraaf	Alexander Bakker en Peter Winterman	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
15	09/06/2022	De Telegraaf.nl	Alexander Bakker	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
16	10/06/2022	NRC.nl	Mark Duursma en Stéphane Alonso	Neutral	Rule of Law
17	16/06/2022	De Volkskrant	Marc Peeperkorn	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
18	16/06/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peeperkorn	Neutral	Rule of Law
19	19/06/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Iñaki Oñorbe Genovesi	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
20	21/06/2022	NRC.nl	Emilie van Outeren	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
21	22/06/2022	NRC.nl	N/A	Neutral	Rule of Law
22	22/06/2022	NRC.nl	Stéphane Alonso	Negative	Geopolitical Considerations

23	23/06/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Marc Peepkorn	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
24	23/06/2022	AD/Algemeen Dagblad.nl	Frans Boogard	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
25	24/06/2022	De Volkskrant	Marc Peepkorn	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
26	24/06/2022	AD/Algemeen Dagblad	Hans Nijenhuis	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
27	25/06/2022	NRC.nl	N/A	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
28	04/07/2022	De Telegraaf.nl	Dutch Parliament Redaction	Positive	Rule of Law
29	05/07/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Arnout Brouwers	Neutral	Rule of Law
30	05/07/2022	De Telegraaf	N/A	Positive	Rule of Law
31	06/07/2022	NRC.nl	Aylin Bilic	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
32	06/07/2022	De Volkskrant	Arnout Brouwers	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
33	12/10/2022	AD/Algemeen Dagblad.nl	Frans Boogaard	Positive	Geopolitical Considerations
34	05/12/2022	AD/Algemeen Dagblad.nl	Hans Nijenhuis	Neutral	Rule of Law
35	06/12/2022	AD/Algemeen Dagblad	Hans Nijenhuis	Neutral	Rule of Law

36	13/12/2022	NRC.nl	Liam van de Ven	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations
37	13/12/2022	De Volkskrant.nl	Carlijn van Esch	Neutral	Geopolitical Considerations