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The Impact of Global Events on Reform Strategies within International Organizations - A historical institutionalist perspective on Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly of the United Nations

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The Impact of Global Events on Reform Strategies within International Organizations

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A historical institutionalist perspective on Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly of the United Nations



Master Thesis
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Abstract

States in the international system create international organizations to find solutions to collective action problems. To remain relevant, these organizations oftentimes need to adapt to newly arising challenges and issues. This need for institutional rearrangement and adaptation is most prominent during short periods of times, often referred to as critical junctures. The subsequent academic thesis will contrast the two critical junctures of the UN's 75th Anniversary and the war in Ukraine, and their respective impact on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. This will yield insights into how the momentum generated by such critical junctures can better be harnessed to advance reform processes in international organizations.

The United Nations is the foremost international organization, and the General Assembly its most universal organ. Its 193 members come together to discuss a plethora of topics and to find solutions to the most pressing concerns of the 21st century. In 2020, amidst the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations celebrated its 75th Anniversary and adopting a set of commitments aimed at accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs outlined therein. In 2021 Secretary General Antonio Guterres proposed concrete steps to fulfill these commitments in his report *Our Common Agenda*.

Especially, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the General Assembly has been increasingly vocal on issues related to international peace and security, originally the primary responsibility of the Security Council. The UNGA's 11th Emergency Special Session on the war has resulted in numerous resolutions deploring the aggression, calling on Russia to remove its troops from Ukraine's sovereign territory, but also rejecting Russia from the UN's Human Rights Council and establishing the groundwork for an international registry of damages. Does this increasing activity constitute a broader shift in the UNGA's self-perception, the interpretation of its mandate and of its working methods?

Keywords

United Nations; General Assembly; Revitalization; Critical Junctures; UN75; Our Common Agenda; war in Ukraine; institutional change; international organizations

List of Abbreviations

ACT Group	Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group
AHWG	Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ES	Exogenous Shock
ESS	Emergency Special Session
EU	European Union
G20	Group of Twenty
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IOs	International Organizations
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North-Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCA	Our Common Agenda
OPGA	Office of the President of the General Assembly
PGA	President of the General Assembly
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
TFP	Temporal Focal Point
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
US	United States

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I. Introduction and Research Topic

This thesis will explore the impact of major international events, such as pandemics or military conflicts, but also seminal anniversaries and celebrations on reform processes in international organizations (IOs). The insights from the historical institutionalism field, more specifically the theories of critical junctures oftentimes leading to increased impetus for institutional change, will be applied to the setting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and its currently ongoing reform process. This reform process, termed “the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly” (hereafter: Revitalization process), will be juxtaposed with the critical junctures of the UN’s 75th Anniversary and the follow-up report by the UN Secretary General (UNSG) titled *Our Common Agenda* (OCA), and the ongoing war in Ukraine. The former two together constitute an example of Temporal Focal Points (TFP), while the latter constitutes an Exogenous Shock. By analyzing the debates, the statements made in national capacities therein, and the eventually adopted resolutions on the Revitalization process, this thesis will illustrate the differing impact of TFPs and Exogenous Shocks on reform processes in international organizations.

a. Research Puzzle and Research Question

The underlying puzzle of this academic thesis can be subdivided into two considerations. Firstly, given that the Revitalization process has been on the UNGA’s agenda since 1991 (UN General Assembly, 2023e), why has there been arguably little progress made? According to critics, the Revitalization process has yet to produce reliable mechanisms to ensure the implementation of General Assembly resolutions, an issue which greatly inhibits its efficiency and effectiveness (Swart, 2008, p. 21f; Al-Nasser, 2014, p. 55; Gordanić, 2021, p. 64). In addition to that, the question might be raised whether there have been any turning points at which the Revitalization process gained momentum. At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the UNGA quickly adopted measures to maintain business, including decision procedures in cases when in-person meetings were not possible (UN General Assembly, 2020c). Meetings were quickly moved to virtual platforms and resolutions were adopted. While resolution A/RES/74/303 was a technical roll-over of the previous resolution (UN General Assembly, 2020a), A/RES/75/325 outlined ambitious commitments and concrete deliverables of the previous sessions, among others, the

establishment of a biennial format of the Revitalization process (UN General Assembly, 2021b).

The second consideration deals with the UNGA's standing within the wider United Nations framework. Regardless of the aforementioned developments, the General Assembly is argued to be increasingly marginalized within the United Nations framework, especially vis-à-vis the Security Council (UNSC) (Gordanić, 2021, p. 62). Despite being the most representative organ of the United Nations with its 193 member states (United Nations, 2024c) and numerous accredited organizations (United Nations, 2024b), the General Assembly and efforts to reform this universal body do not receive as much attention, as the reform of the Security Council for instance. This seems hardly justifiable given the UNGA's increasing activity, especially regarding the still ongoing war in Ukraine. While the Security Council failed to prevent the outbreak of the war in February 2022 (United Nations, 2022c), the General Assembly managed to adopt a plethora of resolutions condemning the Russian aggression (UN General Assembly, 2022c) and highlighting the humanitarian consequences of this war (UN General Assembly, 2022d). In this regard, the question might be asked, whether the war in Ukraine constitutes a turning point in the UNGA's "marginalization" to the Security Council (Gordanić, 2021, p. 62). Given the General Assembly's quick response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the adoption of ambitious goals and concrete deliverables in resolution 75/325 and its clear response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, it seems as if there has been a turning point in the General Assembly's activities. This potential turning point can best be described by the historical institutionalist concept of critical junctures. These "relatively short" time periods (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 348) have the potential to initiate institutional change in international organizations (Manulak, 2022, p. 5). They do so by highlighting "preexisting deficiencies in global regulatory structures" and open pathways for the "search for alternative [institutional] arrangements" (Manulak, 2022, p. 7). The Covid-19 pandemic shifted the work of the United Nations to the virtual realm, while the war in Ukraine might have shifted the debate from one organ to another. Both of these events originate outside of the United Nations framework. Another event of international relevance, however originating from within the UN, was the United Nations 75th Anniversary in 2020 and the following publication of the UNSG's report *Our Common Agenda* (OCA) in 2021. Did this event have a similar impact on the work of the United Nations, more precisely on the work

of the General Assembly? Did it have a different impact than outside events of global significance?

These different considerations, puzzles and questions are summed up in the following research question, which will guide this academic work.

How are global events instrumental to the advancement of reform processes in International Organizations?

Answering this question will yield insights into how the momentum created by events of international significance can be harnessed more effectively and reform processes in IOs accelerated.

b. Relevance

A research question should fill a gap in the academic literature (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994, p. 15). There is extensive debate on the processes and mechanisms that drive institutional genesis, change and decline. In recent years, the international community has been increasingly faced with crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the consequences of climate change, as well as regional wars and their global repercussions. These issues require collaborative solutions. Given that states oftentimes have conflicting agendas, they create institutions to solve these collective action problems (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999, p. 726). These institutions will have to adapt to the very dynamic nature of current issues. Historical institutionalism offers far-reaching insights into the means with which institutions can continuously reinvent themselves to remain relevant. This school of thought offers insights into the long-term processes of institutional change (Pierson, 2011), the different change actors in institutions (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009), as well as moments of institutional change (Manulak, 2022) and the resulting options for change agents to adapt to shifts in the environment (Jupille, Mattli and Snidal, 2013). Understanding the impact of global crises on IOs and institutional change therein will enhance their responsiveness to major crises and long-term challenges of the 21st century.

The second contribution of an academic research question should be to the solution of a significant real-world problem (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994, p. 15). During the 2023 SDG Summit held on September 18th and 19th, that year, the UNSG Antonio Guterres pointed to the fact that only 15% of Sustainable Development Goals were on track to timely implementation (United Nations, 2023). Given this disheartening figure, concrete and timely action is necessary. The Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (UN General Assembly, 2020b) and *Our Common Agenda* (United Nations, 2021b) were aimed at delivering tangible impetus on these efforts. Both documents, as well as the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development outline targets related to functioning institutions that could effectively deliver on the SDGs. Nevertheless, the implementation of SDG 16 on, among others, building “effective, accountable and inclusive institutions on all levels” (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024b), has been stagnating (Ursu, 2023). In this regard, efforts need to be made to strengthen international institutions, making them fit for purpose to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals as promised in the 2030 Agenda.

The international institution, this research project is focusing on is the General Assembly of the United Nations. As the most representative organ of the UN, the UNGA provides an excellent case for how institutions can effectively react to the challenges of the 21st century. Given the UNSC’s current deadlock, the UNGA has acted increasingly vocal and convened an emergency special session on the situation in Ukraine, therewith overcoming the Russian veto (United Nations, 2022c). So far, this emergency special session has led to the establishment of a register of damage caused by the Russian aggression (Council of Europe, 2023), as well as numerous resolutions condemning the violence (UN General Assembly, 2022c, 2022d). Additionally, the UNGA has committed to convene whenever a veto is cast in the UNSC (UN General Assembly, 2022b), and has engaged more actively in the selection of the UNSG (UN General Assembly, 2023d).

While the UNGA might offer the necessary resources and political will to solve these challenges, its working methods, its position within the UN, and its overburdened agenda needs to be adapted to the rapidly changing environment. However, there is limited debate about institutional reform of the General Assembly. Most debates on UN reform focuses primarily on the UNSC’s reconfiguration (Lehmann, 2013; Binder and Heupel, 2015) and adjustments of the veto procedure (United Nations, 2022a). In contrast, the Revitalization

of the work of the General Assembly, which has only recently received attention, is merely covered as a sidenote to the wider UN reform agenda or in relation to its position vis-à-vis other UN organs (Barber, 2022), mostly its marginalization to the UNSC (Gordanić, 2021).

II. Literature Review

The following section will, firstly, provide a comprehensive overview over the theoretical debate on institutional change in international organizations. Secondly, the reform proposals and agendas within the United Nations will be explored. These include the reform proposals by different UN Secretary Generals, as well as the reform processes within the two main organs, namely the Security Council and the General Assembly, the latter of which is the main focus of this thesis. Subsequently, the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, the UNGA's reform process, will be outlined in more detail, followed by a close examination of the UN's 75th Anniversary and the UNSG's report *Our Common Agenda*, and the deliberations of the war in Ukraine within the UN.

a. Institutional Change – The Theoretical Debate

How and why institutions are created, and how they adapt to changes in the international environment is highly debated. In an environment characterized by strategic considerations, institutions inform boundedly rational actors about the intentions of others, offering more predictable and effective solutions to collective action problems. Actors create institutions to attain “gains from cooperation” (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 945). Sociological institutionalism emphasizes cultural considerations. Institutions “influence behavior by providing the cognitive scripts, categories and models [...] indispensable for action” (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 948). Historical institutionalism explores the mechanisms and actors involved in institutional change over time. Similarly to rational choice institutionalists, they also envision institutions as providing actors with “greater or lesser degrees of certainty about the [...] behavior of other actors” (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 939). Additionally, they agree that institutions mold actors' worldviews by providing them with “cognitive templates for interpretation and action” (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 939). Institutions themselves might incentivize change. While they feature power-distributional factors, compliance with its rules is another factor allowing for institutional change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009, p. 4). Institutions might offer more or less leeway with rule interpretation

(Mahoney and Thelen, 2009, p. 10), and include more or less numerous and powerful veto actors (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009, p. 19). Depending on these institutional features, different types of change agents might contribute to different types of institutional change, ranging from exploitation of enforcement gaps in existing institutional arrangements, to the complete displacement of institutions (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009, p. 24). Along a decision-tree, actors make use of already existing institutions and select among the plethora of different institutions. Depending on their given needs and preferences, they might also adapt existing institutions to their respective needs or create entirely new ones (Jupille, Mattli and Snidal, 2013, p. 5). Throughout time, these institutional settings might evolve to offer more potential for change. Critical junctures interrupt historical continuity through exogenous shocks, i.e. military conflicts or economic crises (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 942; Jupille, Mattli and Snidal, 2013, p. 211). In addition to these exogenous shocks, Temporal Focal Points, “prominent temporal landmarks, such as anniversaries”, play a vital role for the initiation of institutional change (Manulak, 2022, p. 5). During these short periods of time, change agents can select from a plethora of options, all of which have an impact on future outcomes (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 348).

b. Reform Proposals by Secretary Generals

The Secretary General of the United Nations is the head of the independent Secretariat of the United Nations and the highest-ranking official of this global organization. The incumbent has been present on the world stage, mediating in conflict situations, raising attention to urgent issues and representing the UN vis-à-vis its member states and accredited organizations. In addition to that, the different UNSGs have put forward numerous reform agendas, of which the following are to be highlighted: Firstly, Secretary General Trygve Lie (1946-1952) developed the rules and procedures through which the UNSG could intervene in the discussions of the Security Council (Global Policy Forum, 2021c). These procedures remain especially important in times of its continued deadlock, as illustrated by the still ongoing deadlock on the war in Ukraine. Secondly, Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld (1953-1961) set the precedent for the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops during the Suez Crisis (Global Policy Forum, 2021b). While this activity was criticized by some member states, it nevertheless strengthened the independence of the UNSG. After Hammarskjöld's death in 1961, Secretary General U Thant (1961-1971) established the UN Development Program and the UN Environmental

Program (Global Policy Forum, 2021d). Further sub-organizations and branches of the UN were established by Secretary General Kofi Annan (1997-2006). He initiated the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council during the World Summit 2005, to respond to increasing calls for consolidation among the plethora of organizations under the UN umbrella (Chetail, 2006). After UNSG Hammerskjöld's term, all incumbents drew on their "intellectual capacity and moral authority" to head the independent secretariat of the United Nations (Baumann, 2016, p. 468). Most UNSGs could only rely on a "residue of member states' goodwill during a honeymoon period" shortly after their election (Weiss and Carayannis, 2017, p. 310). As soon as reform agendas were interfering with national interests, however, the UNSG would lose support by parts of the UN membership (Global Policy Forum, 2021a). History has shown that the UNSG can propose and initiate institutional reform, can moderate the debate, and can draw on the resources of an independent secretariat. Nevertheless, it is the member states who have the final say in the implementation of reforms.

c. Reform of the Security Council

Under the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security (United Nations, 1945, art. 24). It is the only organ of the UN that is able to issue legally binding decisions (United Nations, 2024d). However, the UNSC's composition of ten rotating (E10) and five permanent members (P5) has long been criticized as a "deficit" of legitimacy (Binder and Heupel, 2015, p. 238). The P5, while not being elected by the wider international community, have exclusive veto powers. This allows permanent members to impose their will on the wider UN membership (Binder and Heupel, 2015, p. 241). In recent years, however, the UNSC has been deadlocked over Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. To maintain functionality and effectiveness, but also to increase legitimacy and representativeness, Liechtenstein proposed to convene the UNGA whenever a veto was cast in the UNSC. This proposal was adopted in April 2022 amid the "growing criticism of inaction by the Security Council on the war in Ukraine" (United Nations, 2022a). Other reform proposals aim at enlarging the Council by adding permanent or non-permanent members, or both (Auswärtiges Amt, 2022). Germany, together with Japan, India and Brazil form the Group of Four (G4), which supports each other's bid for permanent seats within the UNSC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 2022). Finally, the Accountability,

Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT Group) elaborated numerous proposals, e.g. a “Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes” (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, 2024), aimed at opening pathways for the wider UN membership to engage in UNSC affairs and streamline processes (Lehmann, 2013). In this regard, also its relationship with the UNGA has been reevaluated frequently, each accusing the other of encroaching on their respective territories (Swart, 2008, p. 24; Binder and Heupel, 2015, p. 241).

d. Reform of the General Assembly

The General Assembly of the United Nations is the “main policy-making organ” of the United Nations, comprising 193 member states, all of which have equal voting rights (United Nations, 2024a). While it is the most universal international organization, the UNGA has faced criticism over its inefficiency and overburdening agenda. Lack of cooperation and distrust, repetitive debates and duplicated resolutions, and no means to assess or enforce their implementation are limiting the UNGA’s effectiveness (Swart, 2008, p. 23). To position the UNGA as a “separate but equally important” institution vis-à-vis the UNSC (Swart, 2008, p. 22), member states, the UN Secretariat and outside experts are engaged in the process of Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. Since the UN’s inception in 1945, optimization and reform measures were discussed. However, the formal pathway for improving the UNGA, the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, was only included in its agenda in 1991 (UN General Assembly, 2023e). Subsequently, in 2005, an Ad-hoc Working Group on Revitalization of the General Assembly (AHWG) was established and has been reporting on the implementation the Revitalization’s four clusters, which will be outlined in more detail below. While there have been significant advances in some areas, especially the working methods remain a highly contentious issue (Gordanić, 2021, p. 62ff). In this regard, the implementation of UNGA resolutions by UN member states, in particular, greatly inhibits its efficiency and effectiveness (Swart, 2008, p. 21f; Al-Nasser, 2014, p. 55; Gordanić, 2021, p. 64).

Despite these challenges, the UNGA has increasingly engaged in activities and debates related to the promotion of international peace and security, formerly the exclusive domain of the Security Council (Binder and Heupel, 2015; Barber, 2022). Especially since the

Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the resulting deadlock within the UNSC, the UNGA increasingly employed the provisions of the United for Peace Resolution of 1950. These provisions state that “if the Security Council, because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility [...] the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately with a view to making appropriate recommendations” (UN General Assembly, 1950, p. 10). This increasing activity has further expanded the UNGA’s mandate. As confirmed by the ICJ in several instances (International Court of Justice, 1962, 2004), the UNGA’s practice “shapes the legal rules pertaining to its own competences” (Barber, 2022, p. 307). By engaging more actively in issues of international peace and security, the UNGA has further cemented its right to debate and issue recommendations on any topic discussed in the UNSC (United Nations, 1945, arts. 10, 11, 14). It also created an expectation among the member states that it will do so in the future (Barber, 2022, p. 335). The UNGA has therewith shifted the power balance between itself and the UNSC, and incrementally advanced the Revitalization provisions on “role and authority of the General Assembly”.

e. The Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly

As aforementioned, the reform process of the United Nations General Assembly, termed “The Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly”, was firstly included in the UNGA’s agenda in 1991. Subsequently, in 2005, an Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) was tasked with elaborating concrete steps with which to enhance the “effectiveness and efficiency” of the General Assembly (UN General Assembly, 2021b, 2023c). Since then, the AHWG has been reinstated during every UNGA session to continue the discussions on the four Clusters which the Revitalization process encompasses.

i. Content of the Revitalization process

The reform agenda proposed within the Revitalization process is divided into four main clusters aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN General Assembly, 2023d). The following four clusters are integral parts of the Revitalization process:

- Cluster I: The Role and Authority of the General Assembly
- Cluster II: Working Methods
- Cluster III: Selection and Appointment of the Secretary General and other Executive Heads
- Cluster IV: Strengthening the Institutional Memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly

Firstly, the provisions of Cluster I on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly focus on the broader standing of the General Assembly within the United Nations system, its relations to the other principal organs, namely the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the International Court of Justice, as well as the engagement with other stakeholders, such as civil society and youth. In addition, the annual reports of the principal organs to the General Assembly are also covered within this cluster, as is the UNGA's public relations engagement and the implementation of its resolutions.

Secondly, the working methods (Cluster II) refer to general administrative functions of the General Assembly, the conduct of general and thematic debates and the documentation thereof, as well as to the UNGA's overall agenda. Further, the report of the Secretary General to the UNGA, as well as the rules and procedures of the six Main Committees and the General Committee are covered in this cluster. This cluster was especially relevant at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting shift to a virtual format of discussions. This will be further outlined below.

Thirdly, Cluster III deals with the process of selecting the Secretary General of the United Nations, and the role of the General Assembly therein. The UNSG is selected by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. Cluster III of the Revitalization process aims to increase the transparency and inclusivity of this process by, among others, ensuring geographical representativeness and gender balance among the candidates, and allow for transparent and timely consultation between the wider membership and potential candidates (UN General Assembly, 2021b, p. 8ff).

Finally, strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly requires the OPGA to have access to the necessary resources and adequate staffing to handle the ever-increasing number of tasks it is being given by the 193 member

states of the General Assembly. In addition to that, the Fourth Cluster also outlines the competencies of the PGA, as the main representative of the General Assembly.

ii. Timeline

For the purpose of this thesis, the timeframe of the 74th until 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly will be considered. This translates into the years 2020 until 2024, starting with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in the beginning of 2020, the (Leimbach and Fillion, 2020) closure of the UN headquarters in New York and the resumption of sessions in virtual formats. In September 2020, the 74th session ended and the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations was celebrated with the UNGA passing its resolution A/RES/75/1 (UN General Assembly, 2020b). This resolution sets out various commitments for member states and emphasizes the continued and increasing importance of functional and inclusive multilateralism with a reformed United Nations at its helm. In this resolution member states also tasked the Secretary General with the elaboration of concrete proposals for the fulfillment of their commitments, which were subsequently delivered in the UNSG Report *Our Common Agenda* in September 2021 (United Nations, 2021b). In February 2022, the Russian Federation launched its full-scale invasion against its democratic neighbor Ukraine, which is still ongoing at the time of writing of this academic thesis (Politically Speaking, 2024). The 77th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations came to an end in September 2023. The timeframe between the 74th and 77th session was chosen because it begins with a fundamental, global watershed moment initiated by the Covid-19 pandemic, spans the seminal events of the UN's 75th anniversary and the follow-up report *Our Common Agenda*, as well as the war in Ukraine, and finally ends with the first biennial cycle of the Revitalization process, which will further be outlined below. The UNGA's 78th session can only partially be considered as it is currently ongoing at the time of drafting this thesis and will span until September this year.

The 74th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, starting in September 2019 and ending in September 2020 was characterized by the inception of the global Covid-19 pandemic, representing one of the biggest challenges to the UN's operations (UN General Assembly, 2021a, p. 3). In March 2020, the United Nations Headquarters in New York City was temporarily closed, and operations moved to a virtual format (Leimbach and Fillion, 2020). In addition, on March 27th, 2020, the General Assembly opted to use the

silence procedure as the standard way of adopting resolutions during the Covid-19 pandemic in cases where in-person plenary meetings were not possible (UN General Assembly, 2020c). These developments also impacted the work of the Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly, which convened their meetings in a virtual format. During the 74th Session, five meetings were held, namely one general debate and four thematic debates covering the four clusters of the Revitalization process (Permanent Mission of the Republic of Ghana to the United Nations and Permanent Mission of the Slovak Republic to the United Nations, 2020).

The year 2020 overlapped both the 74th and 75th session of the General Assembly and marked the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. This was, as aforementioned, celebrated with the Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, adopted in September 2020 (UN General Assembly, 2020b). In addition to that, the United Nations conducted a global listening exercise under the initiative UN75, during which citizens of all member states could describe their perspectives on current challenges, their hopes and fears for the future, and their perception and envisioned role for the UN in the global system (United Nations, 2021c). These insights contributed to the commitments made by member states in resolution 75/1. To strengthen multilateralism in line with this resolution, the Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization further continued its work throughout the 75th session, elaborating proposals for further strengthening the UNGA's role and authority, as well as its effectiveness and efficiency. The program of work for this session covered four thematic and one general sessions during which the four clusters of the Revitalization process were debated (UN General Assembly, 2021a, p. 2).

On September 10th, 2021, at the end of the 75th session, UNGA Resolution 75/325 on the Revitalization process was adopted (UN General Assembly, 2021b). This resolution was the first, comprehensive resolution after the technical rollover during the previous session due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It sets out the thematic foci for the upcoming 76th and 77th session, the former dealing primarily with Cluster I on the UNGA's role and authority and the Cluster II on its working methods. The latter would be focused on Cluster III and Cluster IV dealing with the selection and appointment of the UNSG and other executive heads, and the strengthening of the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, respectively. This marked the first time that the clusters of the Revitalization process were discussed in a biennial format. In this regard, resolution 75/325 stipulated that

the next resolution dealing with this process “shall be considered during the seventy-seventh session and biennially thereafter” (UN General Assembly, 2021b, p. 2). Also on September 10th, 2021, the Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres published his report *Our Common Agenda*. In it, he responded to member states’ call for workable solutions to “upgrade” the United Nations (UN General Assembly, 2020b, p. 4).

As outlined in the resolution, the Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly focused its deliberations during the 76th session primarily on Cluster I and II. The program of work consisted of one general debate, two thematic debates on, firstly, the role and authority of the general assembly, and secondly, its working methods, as well as an interactive dialogue between the UN Secretariat and the permanent missions of the member states (UN General Assembly, 2022a, p. 2). Given that the AHWG decided on a biennial format for its deliberations, in September 2022 no resolution was adopted by the General Assembly plenary on the Revitalization process. Tragically, the 76th session of the General Assembly also witnessed the Russian Federation, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, launching its full-scale invasion against its neighbor Ukraine.

During the UNGA’s 77th session stretching from September 2022 until September the following year, the Ad-hoc Working Groups focused its deliberations on Cluster III and IV, namely the selection and appointment of the UN Secretary General and other executive heads, and the strengthening of the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, respectively. In this regard, two thematic debates on the two clusters and an interactive dialogue between the permanent missions and the UN Secretariat were held (UN General Assembly, 2023a, p. 2). The deliberations were reflected in General Assembly Resolution 77/335, the first biennially adopted resolution (UN General Assembly, 2023c).

Finally, the UNGA’s 78th session has been overshadowed by Hamas’s tragic attack on Israel on October 7th 2023, and the subsequent military response by Israel in the Gaza strip and elsewhere in the Palestinian Territories (Levite, 2024). With regard to the Revitalization process, the newly appointed Co-Chairs of the AHWG (President of the General Assembly, 2023), the Permanent Representatives of Romania and Saint Lucia plan to hold four meetings throughout the session. These are to be focused on Cluster I and II of the Revitalization process, as per the previously agreed biennial format (Permanent Mission

of Saint Lucia to the United Nations and Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations, 2024).

iii. Achievements so far

Since the establishment of the AHWG, the Revitalization process has made some advances in each of the aforementioned clusters. The regular exchange between the major organs and the Secretariat of the United Nations headed by the UNSG has been institutionalized. Regular meetings between the PGA and UNSG, as well as with the presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council are being held and the outcomes presented to the wider membership of the UNGA. Additional meetings are held with the chairs of the subsidiary bodies of the respective major organs of the UN (UN General Assembly, 2023d).

In 2021, the AHWG proposed to lead by example by limiting its agenda items. In its resolution 75/973, it proposed to focus primarily on the implementation of existing resolutions and to consider the following resolutions “during the seventy-seventh session and biennially thereafter” (UN General Assembly, 2021a, p. 7) This was confirmed by the UNGA in its resolution 75/325 (UN General Assembly, 2021b). As a result, the work of the AHWG in 2021 focused primarily on the provisions of Cluster I and II, namely the role and authority of the General Assembly and its working methods, respectively. This allowed for in-depth and focused discussion on these two topics (Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations and Misión Permanente de El Salvador ante la organización de las Naciones Unidas, 2022). In addition, the AHWG addressed the overburdening number of events on the sidelines of the general debate commencing in September each year. The member states elaborated a voluntary pledge on limiting side events to preserve the “primacy, significance and established practice of the general debate” (UN General Assembly, 2023c, p. 4). So far, this pledge has been signed by 31 member states and four UN system entities (UN General Assembly, 2024).

On matters related to Cluster III on the selection and appointment of the Secretary General and other executive heads, the AHWG achieved to institutionalize a “formal presentation of candidatures for the position [...] in a manner that allows sufficient time for interaction with Member States”, as well as starting the soliciting process “through a joint letter” by

the presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly (UN General Assembly, 2023d). Furthermore, the AHWG achieved the historic recognition “that there is yet to be a woman Secretary-General” (UN General Assembly, 2022a, p. 70), presenting a significant advancement from the simple “presentation of a significant number of women for the position of [...] Secretary-General” (UN General Assembly, 2021a, p. 88). Finally, in 2016, the AHWG presented the President of the General Assembly with the office’s own Oath of Office and a Code of ethics for the President of the General Assembly (UN General Assembly, 2016, p. 11f).

iv. Unresolved Issues

Regardless of these achievements, particularly to academic and think tank experts, the Revitalization process still appears to be lacking substantive achievements. As aforementioned, especially the UNGA’s relation to the Security Council seems to be fraught with distrust and inefficiencies. The General Assembly appears to be increasingly marginalized to the Security Council (Gordanić, 2021). This seems to be confirmed by the continuing request by the UNGA to the UNSC to provide the Assembly with substantive “special subject-oriented reports” (UN General Assembly, 2021a, p. 31). This request was first stated in 2006 and repeated annually thereafter (UN General Assembly, 2006). Since then, the “no special subject-oriented reports have been formally submitted to the General Assembly” (UN General Assembly, 2021a, p. 31). Similarly, the working methods, especially the drafting of resolutions in a “more concise, focused and action-oriented form” remains an issue (UN General Assembly, 2022a, p. 9). This is being echoed by academic circles (Swart, 2008, p. 21f; Al-Nasser, 2014, p. 55; Gordanić, 2021, p. 64) and within AHWG debates (Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN in New York, 2021; Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations, 2022; Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations, 2023). In this regard the difficulty of ensuring implementation of resolutions is one of the main inhibitors for effective UN reform, including the Revitalization of the General Assembly.

f. The UN's 75th Anniversary and Our Common Agenda and *Our Common Agenda*

In 2020, a year which was severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations celebrated its 75th Anniversary. At the same time, the UN engaged in a global listening exercise, engaging with more than a million people from 195 countries around the globe to collect perspectives and develop a better understanding of the peoples' fears and hopes for the future. The UN75 initiative engaged with the global population mostly through virtual means and took "stock of global concerns and [...] views from across the world on what sort of global cooperation is required" (United Nations, 2021c). This initiative highlighted areas in which citizens would support more active UN engagement and contributed to visualizing the UN's future role in the peoples' lives.

The responses established a number of key priorities in the short and long-term future, ranging from the access to basic services in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and "rising concern with employment opportunities, respect for human rights and reducing conflict" (United Nations, 2021c). Unsurprisingly, the foremost long-term concern was climate change and related environmental issues. Strikingly, 97% of participants identified international cooperation, with a more transparent United Nations at its helm, as the best possible option for solving these increasingly present challenges (United Nations, 2021c).

These preliminary findings of the global listening exercise under the UN75 initiative were forwarded to member states to be taken up in the consultations and negotiations of the Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (UN General Assembly, 2020b). In this declaration, the UN member states adopted twelve joint commitments in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, exacerbating conflicts and the acceleration of climate change. These commitments include putting people at the center and leave no one behind, protecting the planet from further environmental degradation, solving international conflicts, upgrading the United Nations and engaging more intensively with youth to provide for future generations (UN General Assembly, 2020b, p. 4). In addition, better preparedness for the prevention of future health crises and the collaboration with different relevant stakeholders, also to ensure sustainable finance, were agreed upon (UN General Assembly, 2020b, p. 4f). Finally, the member states tasked the

Secretary General to deliver concrete recommendations for the advancement of these commitments.

These recommendations were subsequently delivered by UNSG Antonio Guterres in his report *Our Common Agenda* published in September 2021. In his report, he illustrated the need to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and provided a series of recommendations for the doing so (United Nations, 2021b). The recommendations cover the twelve commitments outlined in the 75th Anniversary Declaration, and include among others:

- The creation of a renewed social contract anchored in human rights;
- A new agenda for peace;
- A commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 or sooner;
- A Global Digital Compact;
- The holding of a Biennial Summit between the Group of 20 (G20), ECOSOC, the UNSG and the heads of international financial institutions;
- The establishment of a United Nations Youth Office;
- The convening of a High-level Advisory Board on the improved governance of global public goods (United Nations, 2021a).

In addition to these recommendations, the report also advanced the proposal for the convening of a Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024, at which the member states of the United Nations are supposed to agree on a Pact for the Future (United Nations, 2021b, p. 7).

g. The War in Ukraine

On February 23rd, 2022 (EDT), the Russian Federation launched its full-scale invasion against its neighbor Ukraine. Both in Europe and beyond, states demanded the immediate secession of hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory. In addition, many states offered their support to the Ukrainian government and started the negotiations on different sanctions and on humanitarian and military aid deliveries. The unprovoked war raised the international awareness about the threat posed by the Russian Federation and as a result, Finland and Sweden joined the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2023 (NATO, 2024a) and 2024 (NATO, 2024b), respectively.

Within the United Nations, these developments were closely followed, both within the Security Council and the General Assembly. In addition, the impact of the war on issues such as food security (World Food Programme, 2022) and migration (IOM, 2024) were also part of the debate in different subsidiary organs of the UN. In New York, the tensions were raising, and several meetings were convened by the Security Council shortly before the invasion. Shortly after, the General Assembly also engaged in the debate (Politically Speaking, 2024). Prior to the invasion, the Security Council convened four sessions, firstly to raise concern and debate the military buildup on the Russian border to Ukraine on January 31st, 2022 (*Security Council on Ukraine | United Nations (31 Jan 2022)*, 2022). Secondly, since these alarming developments were not decreasing, on February 17th, the Security Council convened again. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, stated that “tensions in and around Ukraine are running higher than at any point since 2014” (Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, 2022). When on February 21st, the Russian Federation acknowledged the independence of the Eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, upon the request of Ukraine, the Security Council convened an emergency meeting (UN News, 2022). On February 23rd, both the Security Council (*Ukraine - Security Council, 8974th meeting*, 2022) and the General Assembly (United Nations, 2022b) convened to discuss the rapidly deteriorating situation and to debate whether and which measures could be taken. While the emergency session of the UNSC was still ongoing, Russia invaded the sovereign territory of Ukraine and started the war. Following these dramatic developments, the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution deploring “in the strongest terms, the Russian Federation’s aggression [against Ukraine] in violation of Article 2, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter” (United Nations, 2022c). Given this deadlock within the Council on this highly volatile situation, the UNSC decided on February 27th, 2022, to ask the United Nations General Assembly to convene an emergency special session on the situation in Ukraine (UN Security Council, 2022). Subsequently, the 11th emergency special session of the General Assembly was established under the Uniting for Peace framework and has been discussing the developments in Ukraine since.

In the months following the invasion, the 11th Emergency Special Session (ESS) negotiated various resolutions deploring the Russian aggression (UN General Assembly, 2022c) and raising attention to the humanitarian consequences of the war (UN General Assembly, 2022d). In addition, the General Assembly suspended Russia from the Human Rights Council (UN General Assembly, 2022e) and reaffirmed the principle of territorial integrity

in Ukraine (UN General Assembly, 2022f). Further, it recommended the establishment of an international register of damage (UN General Assembly, 2022g). One year after the invasion, the General Assembly again voiced its support for a “comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine” (UN General Assembly, 2023b) in the strongest terms. Finally, in order to ensure more accountability of the UNSC member states, and especially the P5, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 76/262 on April 26th, 2022. This resolution titled “Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council” allows the UNGA to convene “a formal meeting [...] within 10 working days of the casting of a veto” (UN General Assembly, 2022b, p. 1). This resolution further covers some provisions outlined in Cluster I of the Revitalization process, namely the annual report by the Security Council to the UNGA. In this regard, the General Assembly “invites the Security Council [...] to submit a special report on the use of the veto” (UN General Assembly, 2022b, p. 2), an invitation which, as aforementioned, has not been accepted by the Security Council yet.

h. Missing elements

As outlined above, the mechanisms behind institutional change in international organizations has been explored extensively and applied to certain institutional settings. Similarly, there is substantial debate on the different reform proposals and processes within the United Nations itself. Especially, the debate on the reform of the Security Council has been ongoing for several years. The General Assembly and its Revitalization process have only recently gained attention yet lack the substantive coverage of other UN organs and institutional change settings. Similarly, critical junctures and their impact on reform processes in international organizations is only marginally covered. Manulak, for instance, describes the impact of Temporal Focal Points, one form of critical junctures, on the UN’s environmental institutions (Manulak, 2022). As aforementioned, the war in Ukraine, potentially also another critical juncture, has been covered in academic debates on the relation between the UNGA and the UNSC. The formers increasing activity in response to the Russian aggression raised arguments about a potential redistribution of mandates away from the UNSC to the UNGA (Barber, 2022, p. 335). However, there remains a gap in the academic discourse linking the critical junctures directly to the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. This thesis aims to fill this gap.

III. Theory

a. Theoretical Framework

This academic work will draw on the historical institutionalist perspective on long-term institutional change in international organizations (IOs) and the mechanisms by which such change is advanced. More precisely, the concept of critical junctures will lead the argumentation in this work. Historical Institutionalism asserts that “history matters” (Pierson, 2011, p. 2), emphasizing that actions by certain actors can trigger path-dependent dynamics of change. International institutions oftentimes maintain certain balances or equilibria between actors, resulting in certain institutional arrangements. However, these periods of “stability [...] are punctuated occasionally by brief phases of institutional flux” (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 341). These brief moments of institutional change are commonly referred to as critical junctures, which have the potential to shift the balance and alter institutional arrangements. In these “relatively short” time periods, the choices made by actors within the existing institutional arrangements have a “substantially heightened probability” of affecting the redefined and repurposed institutional arrangements (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 348). In these brief moments, actors have at their disposal a wider range of options with which to respond to the new developments (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 348). These options can include to continue using available institutional arrangements, to reorient efforts towards alternatives, to adapt previously used institutions to the new context, or to establish entirely new arrangements (Jupille, Mattli and Snidal, 2013, p. 4). By choosing either of these options, actors define the further course and design of institutional arrangements (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 348). As aforementioned, examples of such critical junctures can be categorized in two ways: Firstly, exogenous shocks, i.e. military conflicts or economic crises, interrupt historical continuity and subsequently encourage debate about potential shortcomings of existing institutional arrangements (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 942; Jupille, Mattli and Snidal, 2013, p. 211). Secondly, Temporal Focal Points (TFPs) describe the relevance of “prominent temporal landmarks, such as anniversaries and focusing events” (Manulak, 2022, p. 5). These events, likewise, draw attention to the “preexisting deficiencies in global regulatory structures” and open pathways for the “search for alternative [institutional] arrangements” (Manulak, 2022, p. 7).

b. Hypothesis

As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, the research question seeks to explore the impact of global events on reform processes in international organizations. Translated into the theoretical framework outlined above, this research question can be phrased in the following terms:

How are critical junctures instrumental to the development and adaptation of existing institutional frameworks?

In this regard, four components of the research question need to be further explained. Firstly, in this research, international organizations constitute the existing institutional framework, exemplified by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Secondly, critical junctures can be sub-divided into Temporal Focal Points and Exogenous Shocks, the former being represented by the UN's 75th Anniversary and the UNSG's follow-up report titled *Our Common Agenda*. The example used for the latter will be the currently still ongoing war in Ukraine. In February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of its democratic neighbor Ukraine. This event initiated intense debates in Europe and in the UN, both in the UNGA and the UNSC. Finally, actors engaged in the process of institutional rearrangement are defined as states in the multilateral environment, more precisely, the 193 member states of the UN General Assembly and the accredited groups of states represented therein.

Category	Definition	Example
Existing institutional arrangement	International Organization	United Nations General Assembly
Critical Juncture 1	Temporal Focal Point	UN's 75th Anniversary and Our Common Agenda
Critical Juncture 2	Exogenous Shock	War in Ukraine
Actors	States	UNGA member states and group of states

Fig. 1 - Categories

As outlined in the literature review, the General Assembly is currently engaged in the reform process titled “Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly”. It is this process that provides the optimal entry point for this academic research. Although the Revitalization process has been ongoing for several years, its progress has been arguably miniscule. This research therefore will test the following hypotheses:

1. Both the Temporal Focal Point and the Exogenous Shock had a noticeable impact on the Revitalization process.
2. The existing institutional arrangement has been adapted, following the TFP and the Exogenous Shock.

c. Central Argument

To further explore these hypotheses, this academic thesis will pose the following central arguments. It will be argued that, firstly, the Revitalization Process has made some advancements in the timeframe of this thesis, spanning the General Assembly’s 74th until 78th session. Secondly, some of these advancements are directly linked to the Temporal Focal Point, to the Exogenous Shock or to both at the same time. Thirdly, the advancements in the Revitalization process automatically imply adjustments to the existing institutional framework, the General Assembly of the United Nations. It will, therefore, be argued, that the UNGA itself evolved as a result of the impact of the Temporal Focal Point, the Exogenous Shock or both.

d. Definition of Variables

Following the argumentation above, the advancements throughout the timeframe of this thesis will be defined as the concrete deliverables achieved by the Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. These deliverables are firstly, developed throughout each session of the General Assembly in debates of the AHWG, the outcome of which are synthesized in the AHWG’s annual report. This report includes a summary of the working group’s activities throughout the session, a draft resolution outlining the concrete deliverables and decisions to be taken by the UNGA’s full membership, as well as finally an inventory chart listing all the provisions included in the four clusters of the Revitalization process, and their status of implementation. The concrete

deliverables are, therewith, the outcome of intensive deliberations in the AHWG and are subsequently outlined in the final resolutions adopted by the UNGA. Deliverables must have passed the deliberation stage, having been mentioned by national delegations and finally must be listed in the UNGA resolutions. Secondly, the impact of the Temporal Focal Point and the Exogenous Shock will be defined as the context in which the deliverables were mentioned throughout the sessions. National statements and UNGA resolutions covering the Revitalization process will be explored for, firstly, mentions of the deliverables, secondly, for mentions of deliverables in the context of the Temporal Focal Point, thirdly, in the context of the Exogenous Shock, and, finally, for the mentioning in the context of both critical junctures. Finally, the adaptation of the existing institutional arrangement will be defined as any development within the General Assembly's mandate and working methods, as a result of the Revitalization process.

e. Operationalization of Concepts

The aforementioned variables are summed up in the following figure. As argued, a deliverable of the Revitalization process must have passed the deliberations in the AHWG and must have been reflected in the national statements delivered throughout the different AHWG debates. Any deliverable will therefore already be stated in the final UNGA resolution, as well as in national statements. In the following step, this thesis will explore, whether the deliverable has been mentioned in the context of the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda* (X_1) or the war in Ukraine (X_2). Four scenarios can be developed in this manner:

1. The deliverable was mentioned in the context of the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda* ($X_1 = 1$ and $X_2 = 0$). The Deliverable was impacted by the UN's 75th Anniversary and *OCA* (Y_1).
2. The deliverable was mentioned in the context of the war in Ukraine ($X_1 = 0$ and $X_2 = 1$). The deliverable was impacted by the war in Ukraine (Y_2).
3. The deliverable was mentioned in the context of both the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*, as well as the war in Ukraine ($X_1 = 1$ and $X_2 = 1$). The Deliverable was impacted by both (Y_3).

4. The deliverable was mentioned without reference to either the UN's 75th Anniversary and OCA, or the war in Ukraine ($X_1 = 0$ and $X_2 = 0$). The Deliverable was impacted by neither (Y_4).

Revitalization Process		Critical Junctures		Outcome (Y)
Deliverable described in UNGA Resolutions	Reflected in national statements	Mentioned in context of UN75 and/or OCA (X_1)	Mentioned in context of war in Ukraine (X_2)	
Deliverable 1	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	No (0)	Impact by UN75 / OCA
Deliverable 2	Yes (1)	No (0)	Yes (1)	Impact by War in Ukraine
Deliverable 3	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Yes (1)	Impacted by both TPF /ES
Deliverable 4	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	Impacted by neither TPF/ES

Fig. 2 – Operationalization of Concepts

IV. Research Design / Methodology

a. Case Selection

This research design will draw on two cases, specifically chosen to represent both internal and external factors impacting institutional change in IOs. In this regard, seminal events which have attracted far-reaching international attention, and which have been debated in different formats on the diplomatic parkette will serve as examples. The United Nation's 75th Anniversary in 2020, during which member states outlined their desire to “upgrade” the UN (UN General Assembly, 2020b, p. 4), and the commissioned UNSG Report *Our Common Agenda*, published in 2021 (United Nations, 2021b), will illustrate the impact of UN-internal factors, which might impact the reform process of the Revitalization of the General Assembly. This will be contrasted with the ongoing war in Ukraine, which the Russian Federation, a permanent member of the Security Council initiated in February

2022. The repercussions of this war were palpable far beyond Europe and have further polarized the discussions in the multilateral forum of the United Nations. These two cases allow for comparability between the internally and externally generated reform momentum, as well as between the impact of the different events themselves.

b. Data sources

To analyze the impact of the war in Ukraine and the publication of *Our Common Agenda* on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, this thesis will draw on a variety of primary and secondary sources. The following data population will be taken into consideration: Firstly, the General Assembly itself offered valuable sources in the form of its resolutions on the Revitalization process, and other related topics. Secondly, the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly (AHWG) issued annual reports summarizing the discussions throughout the General Assembly sessions. Thirdly, the President of the General Assembly participated in some of these meetings, offering valuable contributions to the process. Fourthly, the Secretariat of the United Nations contributed insights into the Secretariat's work in support of the General Assembly and the Revitalization process. Fifthly, national statements, and statements made on behalf of groups of states and accredited organizations offer insights into the different goals and priorities. In addition, academic and think tank publications were taken into considerations.

c. Method of Analysis

By “back-tracking” the development of the different deliverables achieved in the Revitalization process, this thesis will determine whether the critical junctures had an impact on the reform process of the General Assembly. This two-step process will consist of, firstly, an analysis of the General Assembly resolutions adopted on the topic of Revitalization in the timeframe outlined above. In the second step, this research will then examine national statements given during the AHWG debates by a geographically diverse group of states. As aforementioned, the main focus of this examination will be to determine potential links between the deliverables and the critical junctures mentioned by the member states.



Fig. 3 – Back-tracking outcomes of the Revitalization process

This back-tracking exercise will begin with a comparison of the three resolutions on the Revitalization process adopted in this timeframe, namely A/RES/74/303 (UN General Assembly, 2020a), A/RES/75/325 (UN General Assembly, 2021b), and A/RES/77/335 (UN General Assembly, 2023c). Additionally, A/RES/73/341 adopted during the 73rd session before the Covid-19-related closure of the UN Headquarters in New York City will be considered (UN General Assembly, 2019). This will determine whether there have been any developments across the four clusters of the Revitalization process. Additionally, it will determine whether these resolutions link the deliverables to the two critical junctures.

The second step will then examine national statements made by a selection of states during the different formal and informal meetings of the AHWG. This will determine potential shifts in the perception of the Revitalization process, potentially also in response to the adoption of the UN's 75th Anniversary Declaration and *Our Common Agenda*, and the war in Ukraine. This analysis will **not** take the form of a content or discourse analysis. It will instead analyze whether any statements mention the concrete deliverables, and the two cases, either verbatim or in a paraphrased format, and the context of the reference. Statements made by the following delegations will be considered with primary attention given to the regional representativeness and perspectives from the permanent members of the Security Council: Firstly, Algeria made statements on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), bringing together 120 states, which are, as the name states, “not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc” (United Nations and UNESCWA, 2015). Secondly, Ecuador has been the most active representative from the South American continent in the AHWG debates. In addition to that, Ecuador is a member of the Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency (ACT) Group (United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, 2024) and hosted transition

workshops for incoming and outgoing Presidents of the General Assembly together with Finland and Malaysia (UNITAR, 2021, 2022, 2023). Thirdly, the European Union (EU) represents 27 states of high-income status, which are actively engaged in debates in the United Nations, including on all four clusters of the Revitalization process. Further, Singapore is a representative for the group of Small Island Developing States coming from Southeast Asia. And finally, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America represent permanent members of the UN Security Council, the former also being the aggressor in the ongoing war in Ukraine. Given that Ukraine itself only took the stage once during the AHWG debates, it will not be considered for this analysis.

d. Validity

This methodology covers the entire working cycle of UNGA resolutions on the Revitalization process. While this approach departs with the actual outcomes of the negotiations, it nevertheless passes all relevant stages. In addition to that, the utilization of different resources allows for in-depth triangulation, not only through the different forms of documents, the different stakeholders involved in the process, but also throughout each entire UNGA session. By choosing statements from a geographically diverse sample of states, selection biases towards a more Western European perspective can be mitigated, and the different perspectives of each member states on the Revitalization process and the General Assembly itself collected.

e. Limitations

Due to the brevity of this paper, determining wider shifts in the discourse in AHWG debates might be beyond the scope of this analysis. While individual statements by member states in the different formal and informal debates can be analyzed, they might not suffice to determine wider trends across the entire UN membership. Similarly, this research design does not allow for as deep an analysis of the development of individual proposals in the AHWG as, for instance, a formal process-tracing exercise could do. The two cases of the UN's 75th anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*, and the war in Ukraine can be analyzed for their impact on a selected group of deliverables of the Revitalization process. However, their impact on the entirety of provisions outlined in the four clusters cannot be determined. Finally, limitations also exist regarding the time horizon of this analysis. The timeframe of

the 74th until 78th session offers insights into some parts of the Revitalization process and its potential adaptation to internal and external influences. Given that the process has been ongoing for many years prior to the 74th session, the generalizability of these cases within this timeframe might, however, be limited.

IV. Analysis

a. Main Deliverables of the Revitalization process

A comparison of the relevant UNGA resolutions, namely the resolutions A/RES/74/303, A/RES/75/325, and A/RES/77/335 reveals significant developments in the Revitalization process. Resolution 74/303, adopted in September 2020, is a technical rollover repeating the provisions of A/RES/73/341 adopted in September 2019 (UN General Assembly, 2019, 2020a). A comparison with resolution 75/325 reveals striking advancements. Resolution 74/303 mainly covered the Covid-19 impact, including the temporary closure of the UN Headquarters in New York and the move to the virtual space. It encouraged member states to assess the implementation of previous resolutions and invites the UNSG to brief the membership on the pandemic's impact on the UN (UN General Assembly, 2020a, paras 3a, 4). It also tasks the President of the General Assembly to identify areas of overlap between the UNGA and the ECOSOC as they relate to the implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda (UN General Assembly, 2020a, para. 6).

The General Assembly adopted the next resolution in the regular format in September 2021, on the same day the UNSG's report *Our Common Agenda* was released. Resolution 75/325 also refers to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it also outlines significant advances in the Revitalization process. Firstly, it stipulates that "the next resolution shall be considered during the seventy-seventh session and biennially thereafter" (UN General Assembly, 2021b, para. 5). This has significant impact on the AHWG's program of work during the following sessions. With the adoption of this resolution, the AHWG is no longer mandated to discuss all for clusters of the Revitalization process within one session but is allowed to set concrete foci for discussions in a biennial format. In this regard, Cluster I and II are the focus of the 76th session, while Cluster III and IV are being debated in the 77th session (UN General Assembly, 2021b, para. 4a). In doing so, the General Assembly sets the "primary focus on [the resolution's] implementation" (UN General Assembly,

2021b, para. 4b). Point 25 confirms this focus and calls for “more time for dialogue as well as the review of the implementation of the resolutions” (UN General Assembly, 2021b, para. 25).

A second major deliverable outlined in Resolution 75/325 is described under point 50 (UN General Assembly, 2021b, para. 50). The General Assembly therewith decides to amend rule 1 of its rules and procedures, affectively changing the starting date of its regular session and its general debate. This provides the PGA with “more time [...] to prepare” (UN General Assembly, 2021b, para. 50). The General Assembly moved the starting date of the regular session to the “Tuesday on the second week in September” and the opening of the general debate to the “Tuesday of the fourth week in September” (UN General Assembly, 2021b, para. 50).

Finally, UNGA resolution 75/325 also offers a historic recognition of the fact that in the 75 years of the UN’s existence, there has not been a single female Secretary General. Point 68 of the resolution “invites Member States to bear this in mind in the future, when nominating candidates” (UN General Assembly, 2021b, p. 68). Although in the present resolution this recognition is only afforded one rather short paragraph, it nevertheless presents a significant push toward the realization of Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 on “achiev[ing] gender equality and empower[ing] all women and girls” (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024a). A female Secretary General would also constitute the fulfillment of this SDG, “especially the fifth target ‘Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life’” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, sec. 02:30:44 – 02:30:56).

The General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/77/335 in September 2023, reporting on the developments across the four clusters after the first round of biennial discussions (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 4). As previously stated, during the 76th session the AHWG mainly focused on Cluster I and II (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 4a). The 77th session then dealt with Cluster III and IV (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 4a). In resolution 77/335, the UNGA “welcomes the efficiencies of the biennial format and [resulting] innovations in the working methods” (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 5).

In addition to the biennial format, this resolution pushes for “concerted efforts [...] to streamline the agenda” (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 34). This will provide the UNGA “more time for [...] substantive and interactive dialogues” ensuring better implementation of its resolutions (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 33).

Resolution 77/335 puts significant emphasis on the role and authority of the General Assembly of the United Nations. In the previous resolution focused primarily on “reinforcing synergies, coherence and complementarity between the agendas” of the General Assembly and the other principal organs (UN General Assembly, 2021b, para. 12). Resolution 77/335, on the other hand, focuses mainly on the UNGA’s relations to the Security Council. In this regard, the UNGA, firstly, emphasizes the continued relevance of the UNSC’s annual report. To ensure that the UNSC considers member states’ opinions, the UNGA calls for resuming the “practice of preparing a summary of the recommendations expressed by delegations” on the report (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 26). By referencing resolution 76/262, the General Assembly also calls for the submission of special reports, “including in connection with the casting of a veto” (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 28). These developments strengthen the UNGA’s oversight function and theoretically allow for greater accountability of the Security Council to the UN’s wider membership.

In the biennial cycle of the 76th and 77th session, the AHWG developed further proposals to strengthen the General Assembly, especially regarding its relations to the other main organs. In resolution 77/335, the UNGA asserts its “functions, powers and role [...] in matters related to the maintenance of international peace and security” (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 27). Previous resolutions simply pointed to “the role and authority of the General Assembly and the strict respect of the Charter-based prerogatives and division of work among the [UN’s] principal organs” (UN General Assembly, 2019, para. 7, 2021b, para. 9). An explicit reference to the UNGA’s deliberative and decision-making power in this field points to a shifting self-perception of the UNGA, especially vis-à-vis the Security Council, which holds the “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security” (United Nations, 1945, art. 24). This is in line with previous advisory opinions by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which confirmed that matters in this field can be discussed simultaneously by both organs (International Court of Justice, 2004).

The General Assembly further cemented its position vis-à-vis the other main organs by highlights the importance of the President of the General Assembly. It specified the office's role in the "strategic guidance and the overall success of the work of the Assembly" (UN General Assembly, 2023c, para. 79). Previous resolutions only referred to the "important role of the President of the General Assembly within the United Nations Organization, as well as in the overall success of the work of the Assembly" (UN General Assembly, 2019, para. 51, 2021b, para. 70). Resolution 77/335 affords the PGA greater responsibility and a mandate to set the overall strategic direction of the General Assembly. The specification and strengthening of the PGA's mandate, as the chief representative and strategic lead of the General Assembly, also enhances the office's and by extension the UNGA's standing vis-à-vis the other main organs of the United Nations.

Finally, the deliberations of the Ad-Hoc Working Group during the biennial cycle of the 76th and 77th session resulted in the adoption of a "voluntary pledge to limit side events" held simultaneously to the UNGA's annual general debate (UN General Assembly, 2023c, app. II). The member states of the General Assembly recognized the overburdened agenda of the annual High-Level Week and, with this pledge, reaffirmed the "urgent need to preserve the primacy, significance and established practice of the general debate" (UN General Assembly, 2023c, app. II). So far, 31 member states and four United Nations system entities have signed the pledge (UN General Assembly, 2024).

In summary, the resolutions adopted throughout the timeframe between the 74th and 77th session produced deliverables across all four clusters of the Revitalization process. These range from more efficient and result-oriented working methods (biennial format of the Revitalization process and the changing start date of the general debate and regular session), to an official recognition of the lack of female representation at the helm of the UN. In addition, the UNGA's role and authority in matters of international peace and security was asserted. It aimed at increasing the UNS's accountability to the Assembly through a repeated call for more detailed annual reports, including on the use of the veto. Further, the PGA's mandate was strengthened to include strategic guidance of the Assembly's work. Finally, a voluntary pledge to limit side-events was adopted. These deliverables are outlined in the subsequent table:

Deliverable	Resolution	Cluster	Content
1	A/RES/75/325	II	Biennialization of the Revitalization process
2	A/RES/75/325	II	Adaptation of Rule 1 of the Rules and Procedures (changing start dates of regular session and general debate)
3	A/RES/75/325	III	Recognition, that there is yet to be a female UNSG
4	A/RES/77/335	I	UNGA role and authority in the maintenance of international and security
5	A/RES/77/335	I	More detailed UNSC report (incl. special reports on the use of the veto; institutionalization of the summary of recommendations by member states on the UNSC report)
6	A/RES/77/335	II	Voluntary pledge to limit the number of side events on the margins of the general debate
7	A/RES/77/335	IV	PGA mandate for strategic guidance of the UNGA's work

Fig 4. – Main Deliverables outlined in the UNGA Resolutions on the Revitalization process

b. National Statements on Deliverables

The subsequent section will examine statements given by Algeria, Ecuador, the European Union (EU), Singapore, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and finally, the Russian Federation. Special attention will be given to references to the seven deliverables discovered in the previous section, to the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*, and to the war in Ukraine. This examination will potentially reveal the impact of critical junctures on the deliverables.

i. Algeria

Algeria spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the AHWG debates on a regular basis in the timeframe from the 74th until 78th session. The NAM represents 120 states from across the globe, mainly developing countries, which have an interest in the

functionality of the General Assembly, given that they do not have a veto mandate in the Security Council. The active involvement in debates on all four clusters indicates this interest and high sensitivity for the implications of a revitalized General Assembly.

In the debates on Cluster I on the role and authority of the General Assembly, the position of the Non-Aligned Movement has not been shifting noticeable. Already during the thematic debate on February 25th, 2021, before the publication of *Our Common Agenda* and the inception of the war in Ukraine, Algeria has been highlighting the centrality of the General Assembly and pointed to its role and authority in the maintenance of international peace and security (*Thematic debate on the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on public diplomacy and global communications - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 2021, sec. 58:30-58:33). It accused the Security Council of continued encroachment on the prerogatives of the General Assembly (*Thematic debate on the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on public diplomacy and global communications - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 2021, sec. 59:18-59:29) and emphasized that actions by the UNSC are limited by the provisions of Article 24 of the UN Charter (*Thematic debate on the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on public diplomacy and global communications - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 2021, sec. 59:47-59:48). Further, Algeria on behalf of the NAM called for the provision of more analytical annual reports by the Security Council, which are yet to include special subject reports 2021 (*Thematic debate on the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on public diplomacy and global communications - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 2021, sec. 01:03:35-01:03:47). Additionally, the NAM called for the convening of informal meetings with the UN wider membership to discuss and provide input on the UNSC reports (*Thematic debate on the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on public diplomacy and global communications - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 2021, sec. 01:03:57-01:04:04). In April 2022, two months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, these speaking points were repeated, almost verbatim. Again, the NAM criticized the UNSC's continued encroachment on mandates of the General Assembly (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 01:20:38-01:20:51) and its failure to

deliver more substantive and special subject reports (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 01:23:34-01:23:54). It highlighted the role and authority of the General Assembly in matters pertaining to international peace and security (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 01:19:58-01:20:06). In line with the biennial format of the thematic debates on Cluster I, the NAM reiterated their concerns and points March 28, 2024, and remained critical of the UNSC's actions vis-à-vis the General Assembly (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 78th session, 2024, sec. 34:15-34:33).

Algeria highlighted the need to preserve the primacy of the general debate as part of the UNGA's working methods under Cluster II. For this purpose, the number of side-events needed to be rationalized to ensure high attendance of the general debate (*(Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 75th session, 2021, sec. 5:30-5:52). At the same time, the NAM emphasized that all topics which are of interest to the developing world needed to be discussed during the general debate and none could be lost to inconsiderate rationalization (*(Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 75th session, 2021, sec. 04:42-04:58). In April 2022, Algeria, therefore, proposed the development of non-binding principles for the organization of side-events, which resembles Deliverable No. 6 outlining a voluntary pledge to limit the number of side-events (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 01:24:57-01:25:04).

The historic recognition that there is yet to be a female Secretary General of the United Nations was not mentioned by the NAM in any of the debates related to Cluster III of the Revitalization process. Merely gender balance and geographical representativeness were highlighted (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, sec. 01:45:45-01:45:50). The main arguments advanced by the Non-Aligned Movement were a need for more transparency and improved coordination with the Security Council throughout the UNSG selection process. The Movement called upon the Security Council to propose more than one candidate to the General Assembly for selection

(Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads, 2023, sec. 01:43:14-01:43:27).

Finally, the NAM highlighted the increasing relevance of the President of the General Assembly, especially in ensuring business continuity throughout the Covid-19 pandemic (*(Part I) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021, sec. 01:03:36-01:03:58*). The main arguments, however, revolved around equipping the office with the necessary budgetary and staffing resources. A specification of the PGA's mandate to be more involved in the UNGA's strategic agenda setting was not mentioned. While, of course, increasing the OPGA's resource contributions from the regular budget of the UN (*(Part I) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021, sec. 01:04:27-01:04:35*), the establishment of additional permanent staff positions (*(Part I) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly, 2023, sec. 01:59:43-01:59:55*) and the issuing of a compendium of best practices for the transition from one PGA to the next (*(Part I) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly, 2023, sec. 02:01:25-02:01:27*) certainly strengthen the office, this does not have the same implications as providing the office with a mandate to strategically guide the work of the UNGA.

In this regard, neither the 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*, nor the war in Ukraine seemed to have significantly impacted the positions of the Non-Aligned Movement in the debates on the Revitalization process. While the importance of a reinvigorated multilateralism, a phrasing used in *Our Common Agenda* (United Nations, 2021b, p. 3) was used in April 2022 (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly, 2022, p. 01:19:11-01:19:13*), shortly after its publication, this cannot be interpreted as having a direct impact on one or more deliverables outlined above.

ii. Ecuador

Within the debates on Cluster I on the role and authority of the General Assembly, Ecuador's position seems to evolve. During the debate on April 12, 2022, after the publication of both *Our Common Agenda* and the start of the war in Ukraine, Ecuador merely pointed to the role and authority of the UNGA as the most democratic and representative organ of the UN (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, p. 01:49:25-01:49:29). Two years later, in March 2024, however, Ecuador argued that the UNSC's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security could not be interpreted as meaning exclusive responsibility (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 78th session, 2024, sec. 02:05:33-02:05:47). Further, the reference made during this statement to the Uniting for Peace provisions (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 78th session, 2024, p. 02:06:12-02:06:17) indicate that for Ecuador the General Assembly does have a role and authority in the maintenance of international peace and security, alongside the Security Council. Ecuador also mentioned the need for a more analytical annual UNSC report (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 78th session, 2024, sec. 02:04:44-02:04:54). In March 2024, Ecuador went one step further and, by referencing UNGA resolution 76/262 (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 78th session, 2024, p. 02:06:31-02:06:39), called for the provision of special reports on the use of the veto. This latter point clearly indicates that Ecuador took note of the resolutions adopted during the 11th General Assembly Emergency Special Session on the situation in Ukraine. However, it seems unlikely that this reference is the result of the war in Ukraine which has by that time already been ongoing for more than two years.

Ecuador proposed changing the starting date of the UNGA's annual high-level week during the session on March 11th, 2021, on Cluster IV, to give the incoming PGA more time to prepare (*(Part 1) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 75th session, 2021, sec. 01:25:40 – 01:25:59). This proposal was subsequently taken up in resolution 75/325 with the adaption of Rule 1 of the UNGA's

Rules and Procedures. Any limitation of the side-events or even a voluntary pledge to limit their number was not mentioned by Ecuador.

Ecuador engaged in the discussions on Cluster III regarding the selection and appointment of the UN Secretary General and other executive heads. During these debates, it seconded the calls for more regional representativeness and gender balance among the leading offices of the UN (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, p. 02:15:13-02:15:28). Reference to the absence of a female UNSG was not made, however.

Finally, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in cooperation with the permanent missions of Ecuador, Finland and Malaysia hosted three transition workshops for the incoming Presidents of the General Assembly, in 2021 (UNITAR, 2021), 2022 (UNITAR, 2022), and 2023 (UNITAR, 2023). These workshops are aimed at facilitating a smooth annual transition from one PGA to the next. Ecuador referred to these workshops and called for their institutionalization to further strengthen the OPGA (*General Assembly: 103rd plenary meeting, 75th session*, 2021, sec. 11:06-11:30). Similar to the statements made by Algeria, this does not constitute a remodeling of the PGA's mandate towards more strategic guidance but it acknowledges the continued and growing relevance of the office, its need for additional budgetary and staffing resources, and a political willingness to support the office.

Ecuador mentioned *Our Common Agenda* to highlight the need for modernization of the UN to counter current challenges on the international stage (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - General debate*, 2022, sec. 02:14:16 – 02:14:30). While this places the Revitalization process within the wider reform of the United Nations, this statement does not allow to discern whether *Our Common Agenda* had any direct impact on the deliverables outlined above. The war in Ukraine was not explicitly mentioned. While Ecuador made a reference to the provisions of UNGA Resolution 76/262 (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session*, 2024, p. 02:06:31-02:06:39), which was adopted during the 11th Emergency Special Session on Ukraine, it is more likely that this comment is related to other thematic discussions on which vetoes were cast more recently (Dag

Hammarström Library, 2024). Similarly, Ecuador calling into question the coherent application of Art. 27 of the UN Charter (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session, 2024, sec. 02:07:50-02:07:57*), urging conflict parties to “abstain from voting” in the Security Council (United Nations, 1945, art. 27), is more likely linked to recent veto casts than to the situation in Ukraine. The national position and deliberations behind this statement are beyond the scope of this thesis.

iii. European Union

The European Union has been among the most vocal stakeholders throughout the negotiations on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. Firstly, in the deliberations of Cluster I on the role and authority of the General Assembly, the EU focused primarily on the UNGA’s role vis-à-vis the Security Council and called for more analytical and substantive annual reports. Referencing the veto initiative outlined in resolution 76/262, it also encouraged the UNSC to deliver special subject reports on the issuing of a veto (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session, 2024, p. 56:24-57:11*). Secondly, while the EU views the General Assembly as the “main policy-making organ” (*Thematic debate on the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on public diplomacy and global communications - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 2021, p. 01:07:57-01:08:00*), it merely views the UNGA’s mandate “in line with the Charter” of the UN and does not explicitly attribute it with a role and authority in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The EU explicitly mentioned both the primacy of the general debate (General, 27.07.21) and the biennial format of the Revitalization process (*(Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021, p. 11:50-11:58*) during the AHWG debates. For the former, the EU supported the development of guidelines for side events. As aforementioned, this idea was the precursor to the eventually adopted voluntary pledge to limit the number of side events (UN General Assembly, 2023c). The EU was among the states proposing the latter, in addition to a first list of other agenda items to be discussed in the biennial format, as a “concrete deliverable” for the upcoming resolution in the 75th session (*(Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc*

Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021, p. 11:42-11:44).

Additionally, the EU presented itself as a fierce proponent for a more inclusive UNSG selection process. It called for the presentation of more than one candidate by the Security Council to the General Assembly. These candidates were to be geographically representative and adhere to the principle of gender equality (*(Part 1) Thematic debate on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session., 2021, sec. 44:57-45:15*). The European Union also welcomed the renewed attention given to the fact that there is yet to be a female Secretary General, as stipulated in resolution (UN General Assembly, 2021b).

Finally, throughout the debates on strengthening the institutional memory of the OPGA the EU argued, that the Office should be strengthened given the UNGA's and by extension the OPGA's increasing visibility. This has been the case "over the past year [2022] in particular" (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly, 2023, p. 02:08:26-02:08:28*), an implicit reference to the activities of the UNGA in response to the war in Ukraine and the subsequent convening of the 11th Emergency Special Session. In addition to that, the EU acknowledged the vital role of the PGA in "steering the work" of the General Assembly (*(Part 1) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021, p. 01:10:16-01:10:17*), clearly arguing that the mandate of the PGA extends beyond mere administrative tasks, such as scheduling meetings. This can be seen as one of the first steps towards providing the PGA with the mandate outlined in resolution 77/335, in which the PGA offers "strategic guidance" to the General Assembly's work (UN General Assembly, 2023c).

The European Union throughout the different debates of the Ad-Hoc Working Group makes both implicit and explicit reference to the UN's 75th Anniversary and to *Our Common Agenda*. The UN's 75th Anniversary was seen as an opportunity to show the global population that "multilateralism works" (*1st meeting, Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly - General debate, 2021, sec. 57:10-*

57:12). The EU argued that engagement of civil society, youth, academia and private sector in the Revitalization process would firstly, confirm this point, and secondly, would contribute to a more inclusive and networked multilateralism as outlined in *Our Common Agenda* (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, p. 01:13:04-01:13:20). In addition, any efforts to rationalize and streamline the agendas of the different UN organs shall be oriented along the provisions of the UN 75th anniversary declaration, while *Our Common Agenda* presents further guidance for creating coherence in the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, the 2030 Agenda shall function as a “roadmap” also for the Revitalization process itself ((*Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 75th session, 2021, p. 10:06-10:07).

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Union has been vocal on the topic on numerous occasions, stating that the “trusted and constructive spirit [in the negotiations of the AHWG] was shuttered by the Russian attack on Ukraine” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - General debate*, 2022, p. 29:59-30:10). In addition, the war has fundamentally impacted the implementation of the SDGs, making a successful Revitalization process even more urgent (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, p. 01:09:13-01:09:24). The increasing visibility and the citizen-friendly communication of the General Assembly and its work is also key in delivering the SDGs, preventing the spread of misinformation during the Covid-19 pandemic but also regarding Russia’s “horrific and indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population and infrastructure in Ukraine” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, p. 01:11:57-01:12:07).

iv. Singapore

With regard to the provisions of Cluster I on the role and authority of the General Assembly, Singapore highlighted that the “Security Council acts on behalf of the General Assembly” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 78th session, 2024, p. 02:00:09-02:00:11). It was therefore obliged to provide more analytical and detailed annual reports to the Assembly. Singapore stressed that these annual reports

should also feature a section on the implementation of the provisions of UNGA Resolution 76/262, adopted in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine and providing the General Assembly with a standing mandate to discuss any instance in which a veto was cast in the Security Council (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 78th session, 2024, p. 02:00:35-02:01:04).

Singapore supported the biennial format of the Revitalization process ((*Part 2*) *General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 75th session, 2021, p. 42:53-42:55). In addition, it proposed the adoption of “completely voluntary guidelines for limiting side-events” to ensure the primacy of the general debate ((*Part 2*) *General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 75th session, 2021, p. 42:32-42:35). Singapore, therewith, was among the foremost proponents of the eventually adopted voluntary pledge to limit the number of side-events, outlined in UNGA resolution 77/335 (UN General Assembly, 2023c).

Singapore also engaged actively in the debates on the selection and appointment of the Secretary General and other executive heads. It asserted the General Assembly’s “clear role in the selection process” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, sec. 02:36:08-02:36:12) and stressed the need for more transparency, especially with regard to the selection of a candidate by the Security Council (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, sec. 02:37:10-02:37:16). In addition to that, Singapore called for sufficient time for the nomination of candidates and for the exchange with the wider UN membership. Gender balance and geographical balance were also mentioned as criteria for the selection process (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, p. 02:37:20-02:37:24). However, the historical recognition that there is yet to be a female Secretary General, as outlined in UNGA Resolution 75/325, was not mentioned explicitly.

For Singapore, the President of the General Assembly does not merely constitute a support staff for the organization of UNGA meetings, but rather functions as the “speaker of the world parliament” (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, sec. 02:20:37-02:20:42). Singapore points to the necessity of giving this office “the importance, not only in terms of protocol, but also in terms of budgetary, administrative nature” (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, p. 02:20:51-02:21:58), and further highlights that the PGA is “integral to the effective and efficient functioning of the United Nations as a whole” (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, p. 02:21:05-02:21:11). These statements align with the PGA’s eventually adapted mandate to offer strategic guidance to the UNGA’s work (UN General Assembly, 2023c).

With regard to the UN’s 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*, Singapore only makes reference to the optimism transpiring from the former, renewing the member states’ “collective commitment to multilateralism” and giving new impetus to the deliberations to make the UN “fit for purpose” (*General Assembly: Joint briefing by the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, 76th session*, 2022, p. 02:18:21-02:18:28). The Revitalization of the General Assembly remains a critical component of this endeavor (*General Assembly: Joint briefing by the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, 76th session*, 2022, sec. 02:18:28-02:18:30). Finally, the war in Ukraine is not explicitly mentioned by Singapore during any of the deliberations of the Ad-Hoc Working Group. As aforementioned, the reference made to UNGA Resolution 76/262, providing the UNGA with a standing mandate to discuss any instances of a veto being cast in the Security Council, is more likely related to recent veto casts in the Security Council than to the war in Ukraine.

v. United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, pointed to the clearly distinctive roles of the Council and the General Assembly. At the same time, it also acknowledged the increasing activity of the General Assembly, particularly with the recently adopted veto initiative. With resolution 76/262, as well as with the convening of its 11th Emergency Special Session, the General Assembly has taken on a central role in addressing the Russian aggression against its neighbor Ukraine (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 02:22:14-02:22:21). By highlighting these points, the UK attributes the General Assembly with a role and authority in the maintenance of international peace and security, while at the same time directly linking this role and authority to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Furthermore, on the subject of the UNSC's annual report to the UNGA, the UK engaged in informal consultation with the President of the General Assembly to deliberate on the content of this report.

On the working methods of the General Assembly, the UK highlighted the primacy of the general debate but did not explicitly refer to the voluntary pledge to limit side events (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 02:24:00-02:24:03). On the other hand, it supported the introduction of a biennial format of the deliberations on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 02:23:26-02:23:40), a proposition eventually adopted in UNGA Resolution (UN General Assembly, 2021b).

For the United Kingdom, transparency and inclusivity of the selection process of the UNSG and other executive heads remained of paramount importance (*(Part 1) Thematic debate on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session.*, 2021, sec. 01:41:20-01:41:28). In this regard, the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, in the process, the provision of a vision statement and close interaction with the wider UN membership, as well as geographical representativeness, gender balance and accessibility for persons with disabilities were

mentioned. The UK also voiced its “desire for a female UNSG” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, sec. 02:28:10-02:28:15).

Finally, similar points were raised regarding Cluster IV on the institutional memory of the OPGA. The UK argued that the practice of the UNSG producing a vision statement could also be implemented by the PGA (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, sec. 02:45:13-02:45:20). It further echoed calls for geographical representativeness and gender balance both for the President’s position and the office itself (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, sec. 02:45:57-02:46:03). The UK also envisioned the role of the PGA as going beyond mere administrative facilitation of the UNGA’s work program. According to it, the PGA played a role in the UNGA’s overall functioning (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, p. 02:44:49-02:44:51), in shaping its agenda and driving action (*(Part 1) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session*, 2021, sec. 01:47:15-01:47:19). These statements are in line with the provisions of resolution 77/335, giving the PGA strategic authority over the UNGA’s work program(UN General Assembly, 2023c).

The UN’s 75th Anniversary was perceived by the UK as an opportunity to make the UN fit for purpose (*General Assembly: 103rd plenary meeting, 75th session*, 2021, p. 06:45-06:53). The widespread support for a stronger and more prominent UN voiced during the UN75 global consultation, highlighted the need for quality in multilateralism and a streamlining of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in time (*(Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session*, 2021, sec. 01:02:12-01:02:20).

vi. United States

The United States, another permanent member of the Security Council, stressed the independent and complementary roles of the Security Council and the General Assembly (*Thematic debate on the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on public diplomacy and global communications - Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly*, 2021, sec. 24:19-24:25). The former, has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security (United Nations, 1945, art. 24). In this regard, the Council was the only organ of the UN that could issue legally binding resolutions (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session*, 2024, sec. 02:15:50-02:15:55). The US, however, also maintained that the latter was mandated to discuss any matter falling within the sphere of international peace and security, as stated in Article 11 of the United Nations Charter (United Nations, 1945, art. 11). In this regard, the UNGA fulfilled its strictly “recommendatory authority” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session*, 2024, sec. 02:15:46-02:15:49). Within the relationship between the two organs, the US highlighted its support for the provisions of the Uniting for Peace resolution, under which an emergency special session could be convened should the UNSC failed to adopt a resolution on a particularly urgent issue (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session*, 2024, sec. 02:16:00-02:16:17). In addition, the US mentioned the veto initiative outlined in UNGA Resolution 76/262 positively (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session*, 2024, sec. 02:16:23-02:16:28).

With regard to the General Assembly’s working methods, the United States argued that moving away from annual reporting and negotiation can often streamline processes with little cost to outcomes (*2nd meeting, Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly - General debate*, 2021, sec. 04:48-04:54). Further, the US voiced its support for initiatives aimed at limiting the number of side-events on the margins of the general debate (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session*, 2024, sec. 02:14:59-02:15:03). While this is not an explicit reference to the voluntary pledge to limit the number of side-events, it nevertheless represents openness to further pursue the matter.

Similar to the UK's position, the United States also emphasized the need for transparency and inclusivity in the selection process of the Secretary General ((*Part 1) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021*, sec. 01:47:27-01:47:29). The joint letter by the presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly initiating the selection process, was mentioned as a positive example in this regard ((*Part 1) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021*, sec. 01:46:01-01:46:12). The US further repeated the calls for a female UNSG (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads, 2023*, sec. 02:56:03-02:56:10). In contrast to other statements, however, the US cautioned against any proposed adjustments to the term of the Secretary General, and the call to the Security Council to present more than one candidate for the office (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads, 2023*, sec. 02:56:13-02:56:23).

For the United States, the mandate of the President of the General Assembly exclusively focuses on the facilitation of the UNGA's work, entailing mostly administrative and scheduling support for the member states ((*Part 1) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021*, sec. 01:49:13-01:49:16). This position stands in stark contrast to the eventually agreed extension of the PGA's mandate, providing the office with strategic guiding functions.

The United Nations' 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda* were only marginally mentioned by the United States throughout the deliberations of the AHWG. In this manner, *Our Common Agenda* guided the Revitalization process and presented "a vision for a more secure, inclusive and prosperous future" (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - General debate, 2022*, p. 01:51:40-01:51:47). By putting women and girls at the center of the UN's efforts, *OCA* highlighted the need for more female candidates being presented for the position of the Secretary General.

The war in Ukraine, on the other hand, was mentioned more prominently during the debates. The Revitalization process was instrumental to making the UN fit for purpose and enable it to counter "the most urgent challenges [including]the war in Ukraine" (*Ad Hoc*

Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - General debate, 2022, sec. 01:49:36-01:49:45). In this regard, the 11th Emergency Special Session on the situation in Ukraine was mentioned as a step in the right direction (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - General debate, 2022, sec. 01:49:54-01:50:10). The exceptional objection to the unprovoked, premeditated war expressed in UNGA Resolution ES-11/1 (UN General Assembly, 2022c) reflected the “central truth [that] the world wants an end to the tremendous human suffering in Ukraine” (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - General debate, 2022, sec. 01:50:49-01:50:56). By describing the UNGA’s activities in this manner, the United States showcases its ongoing support for the UNGA’s activities, including in the field of international peace and security.

vii. Russian Federation

The statements made by the Russian Federation throughout the AHWG debates stand in stark contrast to the previous national statements. Unlike the other permanent members of the Security Council, namely the UK and the US, Russia remained adamant in its assertion that the UNSC retains its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security ((Part 2) *Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly, 2023, p. 12:33-12:26). It maintained its position that the Revitalization process must not serve as an attempt to redistribute the different mandates of the main organs to the UNGA’s benefit, particularly not the mandates of the Security Council ((Part 2) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly, 2023, p. 12:15-12:23). The General Assembly, in this regard was strictly bound to its Charter-based prerogatives ((Part 2) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly, 2023, p. 12:47-12:49). Further, Russia accused the General Assembly and its membership of brining topics to the UNSC’s attention for the sole purpose of raising the topic’s political profile. This habit obstructed the functionality of the Security Council and resulted in the*

increasing use of the veto by the P5 (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session, 2024, sec. 01:27:14-01:27:30*). In the same vein, the Russian Federation compared some discussions in the General Assembly to noisy PR-campaigns aimed at demonizing one particular member state (*(Part 2) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly, 2023, sec. 13:09-13:13*). This led to insufficient deliberation, the result of which are “dubious political manifestos (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly, 2022, sec. 02:34:03-02:34:06*), rather than consensus-based resolutions. On a different note, Russia proposed cooperation between the UNSC and the UNGA in the field of peacebuilding and peacekeeping, areas of valuable engagement between the two organs (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly, 2022, sec. 02:34:20-02:34:28*).

With regard to the working methods, the Russian Federation generally supported the streamlining of the agendas of the UNGA’s main committees and the general committee (*(Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021, sec. 31:15-32:30*), as well as closer coordination with the ECOSOC to achieve the 2030 Agenda (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session, 2024, sec. 01:28:01-01:28:12*). In addition, Russia highlighted the primacy of the general debate on different occasions (*(Part 2) General Assembly: Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 75th session, 2021, sec. 31:35-31:45*) but did not explicitly mention the voluntary pledge to limit the number of side-events.

The Russian Federation did not support the introduction of any new ideas to the UNSG selection process under the third cluster and called upon the Secretariat of the UN to strictly adhere to its mandate (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads, 2023, sec. 03:01:15-03:01:22*). It further stated that the General Assembly selected the UNSG on the recommendation of the Security Council, highlighting the Council’s prerogative over proposing candidates (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the*

Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads, 2023, sec. 03:01:22-03:01:28). Finally, in stark contrast to other delegations, the Russian Federation stated that gender was “far from being the most important criteria” for candidates for the position of Secretary General (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads*, 2023, sec. 03:01:45-03:01:47).

Throughout the different sessions, the statements of the Russian Federation remained noticeably similar. Not once were references made to the UN’s 75th Anniversary or Our Common Agenda, only to the alignment of UNGA and ECOSOC agendas in the common pursuit in achieving the 2030 Agenda (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, 78th session*, 2024, sec. 01:28:01-01:28:12). Noticeably absent were also references made to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Despite the fact that the Security Council formally handed the discussion to the General Assembly (UN Security Council, 2022), by not mentioning the war at all, it seems as if Russia still does not accept the General Assembly’s authority to debate and issue resolutions on the matter.

V. Conclusion

This final section will be subdivided into three components. The first part will summarize the findings of the previous section. The second part will then refer back to the theory section and the research question, outlining the concrete impact of the TFP and ES on the Revitalization process, and providing a comprehensive answer to the research question initially posed. Finally, in the concluding remarks will cover remaining questions and further research possibilities.

a. Summary of Findings

This research design, firstly, explored the different UNGA resolutions on the Revitalization process throughout the timeframe between the 74th and 78th session. This analysis revealed a total of seven deliverables across all four clusters, which are the result of intensive consultations between the AHWG member states. The second step then contrasted the different deliverables with the UN’s 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*, and the

war in Ukraine. The analysis of national statements made by a geographically diverse sample revealed the following results (Fig. 5).

Firstly, none of the seven deliverables was explicitly mentioned in the context of either the UN's 75th Anniversary or *Our Common Agenda*. While each of the deliverables was mentioned at least twice in national statements of the selected group, none of these statements directly and explicitly linked the Temporal Focal Point to the deliverable.

Secondly, the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda* were mostly linked to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals outlined therein. In addition to that, both were mentioned primarily by the EU and the UK, forerunners in sustainable development and climate action. The 75th Anniversary and its global listening exercise under the UN75 Initiative were perceived as opportunities to showcase that “multilateralism works” (*1st meeting, Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly - General debate*, 2021, sec. 57:10-57:12). *Our Common Agenda* mainly incentivized the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thirdly, the war in Ukraine was mentioned more prominently, mostly by the transatlantic partnership between the EU and the US. In line with the above statements, the EU also blamed Russia for the stagnating SDG implementation. Efforts needed to be made to strengthen the UN and revitalize the General Assembly to counter the exacerbating spread of Russian misinformation on its war in Ukraine. The United States highlighted the need to make the General Assembly fit for purpose to counter the most “urgent challenge” (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - General debate*, 2022, sec. 01:49:36-01:49:45) of the war in Ukraine. This statement is in line with its engagement prior to the establishment of the 11th Emergency Special Session. On February 25, 2022, the United States, together with Albania, put forward a UNSC draft resolution aimed at halting the Russian aggression its neighbor. This resolution was subsequently vetoed by the Russian Federation and, as a result, the 11th Emergency Special Session was established. The United States further voiced its support for the 11th ESS, and the resulting veto initiative outlined in UNGA Resolution 76/262.

Most interestingly, however, the war in Ukraine was indeed directly mentioned in relation to two deliverables, namely No. 4 and 7. The General Assembly's role and authority in matters related to the maintenance of international peace and security was mentioned by United Kingdom. The UK pointed to the UNGA's central role in addressing the Russian aggression during its 11th Emergency Special Session (*Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Thematic Debate on the Role and Authority of the General Assembly*, 2022, sec. 02:22:14-02:22:21). In addition to that, it pointed to the UNGA's evolving role, directly mentioning the provisions of resolution 76/262 (UN General Assembly, 2022b).

Finally, Deliverable No. 7 provides the PGA with a mandate to strategically guide the UNGA's work (UN General Assembly, 2023c). The EU pointed to the increasing need to strengthen the PGA's office amid the growing visibility of the General Assembly "during the previous year [2022] in particular" (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, p. 02:08:13-02:08:14). The EU also highlighted the PGA's role in "steering" the UNGA's work in the same context (*(Part 1) Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG) - Strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the Assembly*, 2023, p. 02:08:13-02:08:14). Although this is only an indirect reference to the stronger mandate of the PGA, it nevertheless points to the office's increasing relevance during and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

	A/RES/75/325			A/RES/77/335				General Reference to UN 75 / OCA and War in Ukraine
Deliverables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Mentioned	EU	Ecuador or EU	EU	Algeria	Algeria	Algeria	EU	
	Russia	EU	Singapore	Ecuador	Ecuador	EU	Singapore	
	Singapore		UK	US	EU	Russia	UK	
	UK		US		Singapore	Singapore		
In relation to UN75 / OCA								<p>EU: OCA accelerate SDG implementation</p> <p>EU: prioritization according to UN75 and Agenda 2030</p> <p>EU: UN75 unique opportunity to illustrate UN's relevance</p> <p>EU: UN75 showed, multilateralism works</p> <p>UK focus on implementation</p> <p>UK: need for quality in multilateralism</p> <p>UK: UN75/OCA focus on SDGs</p> <p>UK: UN75 opportunity to make UN fit-for-purpose</p> <p>UK: UN75 indicated widespread support for stronger UN</p>
in relation to UKR				UK		EU		<p>EU: RUS impact on SDGs, Revitalization to counter RUS misinformation</p> <p>US: support for Uniting for Peace and Veto initiative</p> <p>US: make UNGA fit for purpose to counter most urgent challenge RUS-UKR, U4P, ESS</p>

Fig. 5 – Summary of Findings

b. Reference back to Theory (Critical Junctures)

A deliverable of the Revitalization process mentioned in the UNGA resolutions (Step 1 of the analysis) will have passed through the deliberations and must have been mentioned by some of the member states involved in the AHWG debates. The second part of the analysis then determined whether these deliverables were mentioned in the context of the TFP or the ES, both or neither. If it was mentioned in the context of the UN's 75th Anniversary and Our Common Agenda ($X_1 = 1$ and $X_2 = 0$), the deliverable was impacted by the Temporal Focal Point (Y_1). If it was mentioned in the context of the war in Ukraine ($X_1 = 0$ and $X_2 = 1$), the deliverable was impacted by the Exogenous Shock (Y_2). If it was mentioned in the context of both ($X_1 = 1$ and $X_2 = 1$), the deliverable was impacted by both the Temporal Focal Point and the Exogenous Shock (Y_3). Finally, if neither the TFP nor the ES were mentioned in relation to the deliverable ($X_1 = 0$ and $X_2 = 0$), it was impacted by neither (Y_4). In this manner the following results of the analysis can be stated:

- Only Deliverable No. 4 and No. 7 were impacted by the war in Ukraine (Y_2).
- For Deliverable No. 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 no impact by either TFP or ES could be detected (Y_4).
- The Temporal Focal Point did not have any direct impact on any of the Deliverables. Outcome Y_1 is not present.
- The scenario that both TFP and ES had an impact on the deliverable (Y_3) is not present either.

Revitalization Process		Critical Junctures		Outcome (Y)
Deliverable described in UNGA Resolutions	Reflected in national statements	Mentioned in relation to UN75 and/or OCA (X ₁)	Mentioned in relation to war in Ukraine (X ₂)	
Deliverable 1	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	Y ₄
Deliverable 2	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	Y ₄
Deliverable 3	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	Y ₄
Deliverable 4	Yes (1)	No (0)	Yes (1)	Y ₂
Deliverable 5	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	Y ₄
Deliverable 6	Yes (1)	No (0)	No (0)	Y ₄
Deliverable 7	Yes (1)	No (0)	Yes (1)	Y ₂

Fig. 6– Hypotheses confirmed / disconfirmed

i. Impact of Exogenous Shocks

The main insight derived from this analysis is the impact the war in Ukraine had on the UNGA's mandate. With the assertion of its role and authority in international peace and security, the General Assembly actively engages in issues that were formerly considered by some members of the UN as the exclusive domain of the Security Council. While Article 11 of the UN Charter provides the UNGA with recommendatory powers (United Nations, 1945, art. 11), some members of the Security Council referred to and are still referring to the provisions of the Article 12, which prevents UNGA consideration of issues that are simultaneously debated in the Security Council (United Nations, 1945, art. 12(1)). The war in Ukraine has drawn attention to ICJ advisory opinion finding the primary responsibility of the UNSC not to be of an exclusive nature (International Court of Justice, 2004). The UNSC's failure to prevent the outbreak of the war in Ukraine has highlighted the need for and expectation of UNGA action for the prevention of crises (Barber, 2022, p. 335).

Interestingly, this deliverable was mentioned explicitly by the United Kingdom, a permanent member of the Security Council. The UK, as aforementioned, has also actively contributed to increasing the transparency of the Security Council by providing participating in informal consultations with the PGA on the annual Security Council report. Whether this implies a shift in the UK's national position vis-à-vis the UN and a refocus of its priorities away from the Security Council towards the General Assembly is beyond the scope of this thesis. In addition, by strengthening the PGA's mandate, the UNGA highlights the need for adequate human and budgetary resources and allows the PGA to take a more prominent role in its deliberations. By expanding the office's mandate, the UNGA takes the first step in ensuring equality among the presidents of the major organs, especially between the presidents of the UNGA and the UNSC. This is in line with the UNGA's increasing activities in the field of international peace and security. By asserting its role in this area, and by strengthening its president's mandate, the General Assembly is no longer marginalized (Gordanić, 2021) by the Security Council, and has showcased its effectivity throughout the 11th Emergency Special Session.

The war in Ukraine has, therewith, forced member states to reevaluate whether the Security Council is the right forum to prevent crises and find sustainable solutions to ongoing conflicts. As outlined in the theory section of this thesis, during critical junctures actors have at their disposal a wider range of options with which to respond to the new developments, i.e. the war in Ukraine (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007, p. 348). In the case of the United Nations actors are synonymous with the UN's member states. These actors can choose options along the USCC model: "Use available institutions, select among alternative institutional forums, change existing institutional rules, or create brand-new institutions" (Jupille, Mattli and Snidal, 2013, p. 4). The preceding analysis has clearly illustrated that some actors, like the United States and the United Kingdom, have opted for alternative institutional forums, i.e. the General Assembly, for dealing with the exogenous shock of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. At the same time, other states, such as the European Union, Algeria and Singapore have highlighted the need to adapt existing institutional arrangements and rules, in this case, enshrine the UNGA's role and authority in international peace and security in a legal document (UN General Assembly, 2023c).

ii. Impact of Temporal Focal Points

As outlined above, the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda* did not have a perceivable direct impact on any deliverable. This, however, does not mean that this Temporal Focal Point did not have any impact at all on the overarching goal of the Revitalization Process. Temporal Focal Points draw attention to the “preexisting deficiencies in global regulatory structures” (Manulak, 2022, p. 7). Translated to this thesis, the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda* highlighted the UNGA's shortcomings in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals outlined therein. Following this line of argumentation, the Temporal Focal Point did not incentivize actors to choose alternative institutional arrangements, as did the exogenous shock. Rather, the TFP called for accelerated and reinforced action by the General Assembly, and by extension by the UN, to deliver on its previous commitments. As a result, the member states had to reevaluate their way of approaching these commitments and discovered the need to enhance the Revitalization process and make the UNGA fit for purpose.

In summary, the Exogenous Shock triggered a shift in the preferred institutional arrangement (away from the UNSC to the UNGA) for addressing arising challenges (the war in Ukraine), as well as an adaptation of previous arrangements (specification of the UNGA's mandate in international peace and security). The Temporal Focal Point, on the other hand, highlighted shortcomings in existing institutional arrangements (the UNGA) to deliver on previous commitments (2030 Agenda and SDGs), and focused attention on improving and adapting existing institutional arrangements for delivery of these commitments.

iii. Hypotheses

The two hypotheses guiding this research project were the following. Firstly, it was hypothesized that both critical junctures had a noticeable impact on the Revitalization process. Given that the Deliverables No. 4 and No. 7 were only mentioned in the context of the war in Ukraine, this hypothesis has been disconfirmed. A noticeable impact can only be confirmed for the Exogenous Shock, and not for the Temporal Focal Point. Secondly, it was hypothesized that the existing institutional arrangement has been adapted, following

the TFP and the ES. This hypothesis, on the other hand, has been confirmed. By strengthening the office of its president and asserting its authority in matters which were formerly the exclusive domain of the Security Council, the UNGA has adapted to the new challenges of the war in Ukraine. In addition to that, the General Assembly has opened new pathways for action, for itself, as well as for the wider UN membership. Which was illustrated by the 11th Emergency Special Session on the war in Ukraine and the adopted plethora of resolutions on the matter.

iv. Research Question

At the beginning of this thesis the following research question has been posed: “*How are global events instrumental to the advancement of reform processes in International Organizations?*”_The research design has revealed that, when defined as Exogenous Shocks, global events can trigger a reevaluation of existing institutional arrangements, shifting responsibilities and resources from existing institutional arrangements to others. Reform process, like the Revitalization process of the work of the General Assembly, are therewith reoriented towards filling a void left by existing institutional arrangement which are no longer sufficient to deal with newly arising challenges. In the present case, this entailed the readjustment of the IO’s mandate, for example. On the other hand, when defined as Temporal Focal Points, global events might trigger a stock-taking of previous commitments, their implementation and possibly readjustments of the course of action taken by the international organization. It does not necessarily trigger a complete reorientation towards alternative international organizations.

c. Concluding Remarks

This thesis sought to illuminate how global events are instrumental to the advancement of reform processes in international organizations. It departed from the theoretical concept of the critical junctures having an impact on institutional arrangements. This historical institutionalist perspective was subsequently applied to the setting of the United Nations General Assembly and its ongoing reform process, the Revitalization of its work. The concept of critical junctures was further specified into Temporal Focal Points and Exogenous Shocks, examples of which are the UN’s 75th Anniversary and the ongoing war in Ukraine, respectively. By firstly analyzing the resolutions adopted between the 74th and

78th session of the General Assembly, seven concrete deliverables of the Revitalization process were discovered. In the following step, national statements were examined for references to these deliverables, to the TFP and the ES, and to concrete links between the deliverables and the critical junctures. Interestingly, only two out of seven deliverables were explicitly mentioned in the context of the critical junctures. In this regard, the assertion of the UNGA's role and authority over issues related to the maintenance of international peace and security (Deliverable No. 4) and the redefined mandate of the PGA to strategically guide the work of the General Assembly (Deliverable No. 7) were mentioned in the context of the war in Ukraine. The UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda* were mentioned in the context of accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals outlined therein. None of the deliverables were, however, mentioned directly in this context. These findings illustrate that Exogenous Shocks can trigger a reevaluation of existing institutional arrangements, shifting responsibilities and resources from existing institutional arrangements to others. Reform processes, like the Revitalization process, are reoriented towards filling a void left by institutional arrangement which are no longer sufficient to deal with newly arising challenges. When defined as Temporal Focal Points, global events might trigger a stock-taking of previous commitments, their implementation and possibly readjustments of the course of action taken by the international organization. It does not necessarily trigger a complete reorientation towards alternative international organizations.

i. Remaining Questions

Given the narrow research design and scope of this thesis, the national statements mentioning the concrete deliverables, sometimes also in the context of the critical junctures, do not offer deeper insights into the underlying national considerations. While, for instance, Algeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement has been continuously advocating for a stronger engagement of the UNGA in matters related to international peace and security, the permanent members of the Security Council still seem to be weary of debating these matters in the General Assembly, where they do not hold the veto authority. Russia, for example, has continuously argued for the UNSC's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The United States, on the other hand, has applauded the efforts of the General Assembly in countering the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Does this signal a shift in national policy towards the General Assembly? If so,

does that shift extend beyond the Revitalization process? Further, it needs to be monitored whether the UNGA's role and authority in matters related to the maintenance of international peace and security signals wider developments in the UN's activities. Do member states opt to discuss matters in the General Assembly among 193 member states and accredited organizations, rather than in the Security Council where resolutions might not pass due to the veto of the P5, resulting in inaction and possibly a deterioration of crises? Does the decision to strengthen the office of the President of the General Assembly translate into a simultaneous strengthening of the General Assembly vis-à-vis the other main organs of the UN and in particular the UNSC across all areas of the UN's work?

ii. Future Research Agenda

The rather simple research design of this thesis derives its findings from only two steps, the analysis of UNGA resolutions and national statements given throughout AHWG debates. Further research projects could seek to substantiate these findings by developing a more detailed and in-depth process-tracing research design. This research design could include not only the immediate aftermath of the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*, and the war in Ukraine, but also the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced the AHWG to hold their deliberations in a virtual format at the beginning of the timeframe of this thesis. This might establish a narrative of different factors impacting the Revitalization process either by themselves or cumulatively.

In addition to that, this academic thesis only covered statements by a small selection of states engaged in the Revitalization process. While this selection is geographically diverse and represents some of the thematic and regional groupings in the General Assembly, it does not offer many insights into the perception of the Revitalization process by the wider UN membership. In the same way, the national statements delivered during the AHWG debates do not necessarily offer a full picture of the state's position on the Revitalization process and potential shifts in national policy in response to the war in Ukraine or the UN's 75th Anniversary and *Our Common Agenda*. Further research should therefore explore a bigger sample of states engaged in the AHWG debates and consult, if feasible, other documents informing national policy positions.

Finally, interviews might offer significant insights into the atmosphere during the AHWG debates, shifting dynamics resulting from the two critical junctures, and even national positions. In this manner, interviews could be conducted with the co-chairs of the AHWG, namely the permanent representatives of Australia, El Salvador and Slovakia, with representatives from the General Assembly Affairs Office, the Executive Office of the Secretary General of the United Nations and with the Office of the President of the General Assembly. Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York could also be approached for this purpose. Finally, experts working in think tanks and academia might also offer valuable contributions.

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