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# **DIVIDING AND UNITING NEWS FRAMES: FRAMING RUSSIA-RELATED BORDER ISSUES IN THE ESTONIAN, LATVIAN, FINNISH, US PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA AND CHINESE STATE MEDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The research reveals frames of Russia-related border issues in the public service media of Estonia, Latvia, Finland, the US, and the state media of China, which had or have territorial disputes/conflicts with Russia. The focus of the research conducted from 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2021 (N=115 of articles on the subject) is on border issues: border treaties and territorial disputes, border security, cross-border cooperation. By using the framing analysis, I have detected similar and specific frames, dividing and uniting Russia with its neighbors and defined the frame-setters (agents). The results show that historical and present tensions regarding the border issues dividing Russia and neighboring countries may cause setting negative, dividing news frames. There is also a significant share of positive similar and specific frames on border issues acting as uniting constructs. The frame-setters include officials, politicians and other speakers of neighboring countries, rather than journalists and Russia's speakers.*

Keywords: frames ▪ Russia ▪ border ▪ news ▪ public service media

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Brief historical background and current relations**

Possessing the biggest territory in the world the Russian Federation borders many countries in Europe and Asia and has different historical and current relations with them in joint border issues including territorial disputes or conflicts and cross-border cooperation. The study covers certain, not all, Russian neighbors, such as Estonia, Latvia, Finland, the US, and China, that have various historical and current relations with Russia, and all of them had or have territorial disputes/conflicts with the big

neighbor, that might, according to the author's assumption, cause differences in the construction of the reality by news frames.

The territorial dispute between Russia and **Estonia** is related to a different understanding of the border line after the restoration of independence of Estonia in 1991. Estonia wished to sign the border treaty according to the Treaty of Tartu concluded in 1920 after Estonian Liberation War, but Russia considered the temporary control line as the border, which would result in the loss of some Estonian territories (most of Petserimaa and some areas behind the Narva River) in favor of Russian Federation (Piirimäe, 2021). In November 1995 Estonia renounced any intention to reclaim the above-mentioned territories (Day *et al.*, 2004; Piirimäe, 2021). The first version of the border treaty between Estonia and Russia was signed in 2005 (Gromilova, 2016). Estonian Parliament decided to add to the ratification act a declaration with the reference to the Treaty of Tartu, and Russia withdrew its signature (Piirimäe, 2021). The latest border treaty was signed by both sides in 2014 and the Estonian Parliament concluded the first reading of it in 2015 (Gromilova, 2016). The treaty is still not ratified by the Russian side.

Also, there is still a territorial problem around Saatse boot, a boot-shaped area of the Russian territory of 115 hectares that extends through the Väraska-Saatse road between the two Estonian villages in Setomaa (Gromilova, 2016). This part of the border is considered by Russia as potentially conflictogenic (Kharybin, 2017).

The dispute over the border between Russia and **Latvia** is connected to the Latvian-Soviet Peace Treaty (1920) signed after the Latvian War for Independence (Levinsson, 2006). This dispute has affected the Abrene (Pytalovsky) district that belonged to Latvia according to the above-named treaty (Levinsson, 2006). However, Latvia officially renounced any territorial claims in 2007 when the Border Treaty was signed and ratified by both sides (Lannin, 2007).

**Finland** used to be the Grand Duchy of Finland as a part of Russia from 1809 until 1917 with wide autonomy and declared independence in 1917 (Meinander & Geddes, 2011). During three wars between Soviet Russia/USSR and Finland, Soviet-Finnish war (1918–20), the Winter War (1939–40) and the Continuation War (1941–44) the border has changed many times (*ibid.*). Now some former Finnish territories belong to the Russian Federation (Kharybin, 2017). Despite this Finland has been considered as the most friendly and cooperating Western world's country by the USSR after WWII until the collapse of the Soviet Union and by the Russian Federation beyond the communist period (Gordon Dickinson, 2003).

Russian Federation has a border with the **US** State of Alaska in the Bering Strait. The Russian Empire sold the Alaskan territory to the US in 1867 (Kaczynski, 2007). However, marine border line was not regulated, and in 1990 the countries signed the USA/USSR Maritime Boundary Agreement<sup>1</sup> which is still not ratified (Kharybin, 2017). The Agreement is under fire in Russia and Alaska as not profitable (Kaczynski,

1 [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/US\\_Russia\\_1990.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/US_Russia_1990.pdf)

2007). Due to the non-ratified agreement this dispute will likely continue (Kharybin, 2017), especially considering the background of the very complicated relations between countries which changed from being allies in WWI and WWII to the Cold War during the soviet period and even the Hybrid War in 2022 (Wigglesworth *et al.*, 2022).

Despite the fact that **China** has been an ally of the USSR in WWII and considers the Russian Federation to be more than an ally (“MID KNR“, 2021), it has had territorial disputes both with USSR and Russia (Kharybin, 2017). “Territorial disputes with China concern the aquatic area of Amur River and, in particular, Damansky Island, while at a certain stage China put forward claims to about a million square meters of the Far East” (Kharybin, 2017: 91). The dispute has escalated into armed border conflict over Damansky (Zhengbao) Island in the Ussuri River in 1969 (Sidorov, 2014). The border was demarked based on the agreement in 1991 by which Russia ceded a part of the disputed territories. In 2011 China has put forward its claims to “17 hectares of Altai mountainous area”, creating a new territorial dispute (Volodin, 2012). Kharybin resumes that most likely, “over time, Russia will make concessions on this issue as well” (2017: 91).

Currently, in the beginning of 2022, Russia’s relations, especially, but not only, in international politics, with neighboring EU countries, such as Estonia, Latvia, Finland as well as the US, may be considered strained or even unfriendly by above-mentioned countries and by Russia because of the war conflict in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU (Wigglesworth *et al.*, 2022). To the contrary to the Western coalition China is “more than an ally” of Russia (“MID KNR“, 2021).

Regardless, Russia and the above-mentioned neighboring countries must cooperate in crucial border matters, e. g. in border security. Also, there are regular cross-border issues such as the crossing of the border by people from both sides and functioning or potential cross-border cooperation such as the transit of goods including energy transfers, regional development projects, cross-border cultural and environmental projects, etc. Significant Russian native speaker minorities also live in Estonia and Latvia, 33% and 37% of the total population respectively (Vihalemm & Juzefovits, 2020), including citizens of Russia, with the biggest share of Russian citizens in Estonia (“Kto kogo?”, 2022). Finland also has a growing Russian-speaking minority (Pikkarainen & Protassova, 2015). The small native Russian minority lives in the US state of Alaska bordering Russia (Kern, 2021), and Indigenous Alaskans have also relatives in the Chukotka in Russia on another side of the Bering Strait (Grove, 2021a). The significant and growing Chinese minority lives in the Far East of Russia (Kogan, 2019).

This study focuses on the detection and description of the frames of the Russia-related border issues on the public service media news portals of Estonia, Finland, Latvia, the US and the Chinese state media news portal. The research covers the period from 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2021 selected due the rising tensions between Russia and Western world countries in 2021, which led, after the start of the war

in Ukraine, to a hybrid war (Wigglesworth *et al.*, 2022), wherein Chinese position regarding the war in Ukraine and relations with Russia differs in many aspects (She-makov, 2022).

## 1.2. Borders that divide and unite

It is difficult to define the border unambiguously (Marsico, 2016), because it is multidimensional (O'Dowd, 2010), geographical and political, but also philosophical category and fundamental social phenomena (Kolossoff & Scott, 2013). Borders are political and social constructs that are established by human beings (Paasi, 2005). As a social representation (Kolossoff 2005), that is directly connected to how geographical and political borders influence the real life of people divided by them and how borders play their role in the social construction of reality tending to fix themselves to people's minds (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Border impacts both spaces and people, including mind-changing process (Haselsberger, 2014) taking a form of "fabricated truth" (Van Houtum, 2011:51).

Despite "the state borders are the most widely recognized and institutionalised dividers of world space" (O'Dowd, 2010: 1031), being the sources and areas of territorial disputes and conflicts (Kharybin, 2017), at the same time borders are considered as spaces of dialogue between people (Konrad, 2015). This inherent ambivalence of borders creates "a space for negotiation and dialogue, but also where misunderstanding and possible confusion may arise" (Español *et al.* 2018: 457). Hence, they simultaneously divide and unite (Marsico, 2013, 2016; Maduagwu, 2011; Español *et al.* 2018; Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Borders not only separate communities, but also regulate contact between them (Español *et al.* 2018), e. g. the border may be used for consolidating people (Maduagwu, 2011; Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Thus, the border issues may be framed as dividing countries and communities or as supporting dialogue and cooperation between them.

The discursive nature of borders is "especially important when they are disputed and provoke a conflict" (Kolossoff 2005: 624). "Often political discourse perpetuating negative stereotypes causes the lack of communication between the sides involved in such a conflict" (*ibid.*). Wherein the negative news frames (Schuck & de Vreese, 2009) may contribute to deepening perception of the border issues in a negative way.

Due to the above-mentioned multidimensionality border studies encompass a wide range of disciplines, social geography, political science, history, etc., and certainly media studies (Scott, 2020) that use the methods of studying the social construction of reality as framing analyses. In media studies, framing is a process of how the media construct a "meaningful, comprehensible reality for the audience, selecting and organizing ideas for the audiences to interpret" (Solopova & Kushneruk, 2021: 725). Thus, this study is focused on the analyses of the frames of Russia-related border issues in the neighboring countries' media.

The aim of the study is to use the research on the framing of Russia-related issues

in the neighboring countries' media to find out whether the relations in the border issues are framed as negative (dividing frames) or positive (uniting frames) in the context of complicated historical background, included territorial disputes and/or conflicts, and present international relations.

The following research questions were asked for the framing analyses:

*RQ1: Which uniting and dividing frames are used for framing Russia-related border issues?*

*RQ2: Which dividing and uniting frames are similar on more than one news portal, and which are specific for the defined news portal?*

*RQ3: Which frames are dominant?*

*RQ4: Who are frame-setters, agents of the detected frames?*

## 2. DATA AND METHOD

According to the classical widespread definition of framing by Entman “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993: 52; emphasis in original). In the frame certain aspects of an event are selected, connected and presented in a narrative to the audience to promote a particular interpretation; several characteristics of an event remain hidden or may be removed from the construction (Entman, 2010; Kremez & Kõuts-Klemm, 2021).

As mentioned above, by framing the media construct a “meaningful, comprehensible reality for the audience, selecting and organize ideas for the audiences to interpret” (Solopova & Kushneruk, 2021: 725). According to Saleem the media frames provide “moral judgment, causal interpretation and remedy/solution for media-focused problems” (2021: 134). However, the frame-building process is “influenced by the complex and dynamic interplay among politicians, journalists, news organizations and social factors” (Liu, 2022: 3). The researcher should distinguish the framing through media and framing by media or journalistic framing (van Gorp, 2007), because media frames may be created, besides the journalists, by audiences and strategic agents (actors), e. g. political parties and other organizations (Kokurina & Kho-retskaya, 2018), where strategic agents aim to influence journalists (Boyle & Mower, 2018). The media outlet and journalist personally may play two different roles: the frame-sender being a conduit for the source of the frame or the frame-setter as an agent who selects a frame himself or herself (Brüggemann, 2014). The news media in the frame-sender role may reflect the viewpoints of those who hold dominant positions in society, such as politicians, diplomats, powerful organizations, and business

elites (Matthews, 2020; Tirosh, 2021). Thus, the framing is connected to news slant and bias and ultimately to political power (Entman, 2010). That is why it is crucial to define the information sources, the speakers of the news with the aim to detect the frame-setter, the agent of the frame in the framing analyses.

Based on the above, the framing analyses may be applied to researching the effects of news coverage of social and political issues that include different interpretations of these issues by competing sides (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Detecting the elements of the frames as thematic and stylistically colored vocabulary, stylistic techniques based on a pragmatically motivated deviation from the linguistic norm and its stylistically neutral version (Kokurina & Khoretskaya, 2018: 61), clickbait headlines (Blom & Hansen, 2015), emotionally-charged words (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), tropes and figures (Franzosi & Vicari, 2017), etc. help to determine the “tone” of media coverage of an event or issue (Saleem, 2021). Some news frames emphasize positive or negative aspects of an issue carrying an inherent valence as positive or negative frames (Schuck & de Vreese, 2009) and can influence the support of the audience, its preferences related the framed issues (Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003; Busby *et al.*, 2018), e. g. joint border issues.

The choice of most media outlets (except for Chinese state media) for the research is based on the public service media (PSM) specifics as the observance of a principle “to be public, of all, for all” (Paulino *et al.*, 2016: 71). Strong PSM strengthens the association between news use and political knowledge, supporting political learning (Park *et al.* 2020), and performs educational, social, and cultural functions (Goyanes, 2021), especially in Europe where it plays the “leading role as a reliable source of information, provider of quality entertainment, and educator” (Jöesaar & Kõuts-Klemm, 2020: 97). PSM is considered to be an important foundation of democratic societies (Jacobs *et al.* 2016) developing and defending democracy (Lowe & Maijanen, 2019). Lowe & Maijanen also emphasize as PSM values serving domestic cultural institutions and maintaining and developing the national identity (*ibid.*).

However, the “public” may be designated as relating or belonging to the government that has “certainly inspired many debates questioning the autonomy of the public service media in relation to official information” (Paulino *et al.*, 2016: 72). Despite PSM tend to develop a higher degree of professionalism and independence from political control in countries with a strong democratic tradition (Sehl, 2020) they are under pressure from different inner and outer factors such as problems with funding (Campos-Freire *et al.*, 2020; Hagey, 2010; Lowe & Berg, 2013), opposition from privately held media (Sjøvaag *et al.* 2018: 1), populist parties and the manipulations of the governments (Campos-Freire *et al.*, 2020: 671).

The more complicated situation is in China where in 2010s the public broadcasting policy was focused on the ‘basic cultural right’ of access to broadcast media and on the social equalization of access to broadcast networks in cities and countryside (Chin, 2012). Other values, such as “high-quality programming, independence and impartiality, are still marginalized” (*ibid.*). Rohrhofer argues that Chinese media is

first and foremost dependent on the political framework within which it operates (2015). Thus, the Chinese state-controlled media is no doubt public broadcasting, but not yet public service media in Western understanding.

Hence, the influence of the PSM and public broadcasting state media (in the case of China) on the audiences cannot be overestimated, that is why I chose precisely the PSM outlets of Russia's neighboring countries and the Chinese state media channel for the analyses of framing of the border issues.

For the data collection I chose the news portals of the next media outlets that have been available without registration or fee in 2021:

- Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR) – Estonian Public Broadcasting, a news portal in Estonian<sup>2</sup> <https://www.err.ee>. According to Kantar Emor research Estonian residents trust ERR news portal the most (Kantar Emor, 2020), which, in addition to publishing news, broadcasts live on all Estonian Public Broadcasting TV channels, wherein the main TV channel ETV had the biggest TV audience in Estonia (Kantar Emor, 2022).
- Latvijas Sabiedriskais Medijs (LSM) – Public Broadcasting of Latvia, a news portal in Russian <https://rus.lsm.lv>. Portal LSM.lv has one of the largest audiences in Latvia, holding 5-6th place in the ranking of the most visited Latvian websites (“Aprīli liela”, 2022). Because the share of Russian-speaking residents in the population of Latvia is 37% (Vihalemm & Juzefovits, 2020), it can be concluded that a significant proportion of the portal's audience is made up of readers of the Russian-language version.
- Yleisradio Oy (YLE) – Finnish Broadcasting Company, a news portal in Russian <https://yle.fi/novosti>. Media channels and programs of YLE are most viewed/listened in Finland<sup>3</sup>. As the results of the preliminary search have shown, the Finnish version of YLE news portal, with certainly bigger audience than Russian in Finland (due the predominance of native Finns in the population<sup>4</sup>), covers the same topics in a similar amount as Russian. Since my Finnish language skills were not sufficient for frame detection I selected the Russian version for the analyses, which could also show framing trends in YLE.
- Alaska Public Media – the media of the State of Alaska, which has a border with Russia, a non-profit US organization with member television and radio stations that are part of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR) and other public broadcasting networks, news portal in English, <https://www.alaskapublic.org>. As a preliminary search of suitable US news portals has shown, US broadcasters with more wide cover, as Fox News, CNN, etc., do not cover USA and Russia border issues, and as a result I selected local

2 I selected the language versions according to my language skills that are sufficiently good for analyzing the frames.

3 Finnpanel: [https://www.finnpanel.fi/en/tulokset/tv\\_reportlist.php](https://www.finnpanel.fi/en/tulokset/tv_reportlist.php)

4 Statistics Finland: [https://www.stat.fi/tup/julkaisut/tiedostot/julkaisuluettelo/yyti\\_ff\\_202000\\_2020\\_23214\\_net.pdf](https://www.stat.fi/tup/julkaisut/tiedostot/julkaisuluettelo/yyti_ff_202000_2020_23214_net.pdf)



PSM of the Russia-neighboring US state that is more focused on border issues. The Alaska Public Media network reaches 97% of the state of Alaska (Gloria, 2019).

- China Global Television Network (CGTN) - international division of the state-owned China Central Television (CCTV), a news portal in Russian <https://russian.cgtn.com>. Broadcasting is aimed at foreign Russian-speaking news consumers, official information on the size of the Russian-speaking audience is not published in Russian or English, but the audience of the CGTN in Russian in Twitter is 88 700 followers as of September 2022<sup>5</sup>.

As a first step, I used search engines of the news portals to find articles related to Russia and the respective country using keywords in the language of the respective news portal in the form of “Russia [the name of a neighboring country]”, for example “Russia Latvia”. The number of articles found using the search engines is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Search results and numbers of manually selected articles on the Russia-related border issues

Media outlet	ERR (Estonia)	LSM (Latvia)	YLE (Finland)	Alaska Public Media (US)	CGTN (China)
Number of the articles found by search engines	770	45	171	9	35
Number of articles on the Russia-related border issues	55	6	40	7	7

As a second step, I got acquainted with each found article and carefully manually selected the articles corresponding to such Russia-related border issues as border treaties and territorial disputes, border security, cross-border cooperation (border crossing issues, transit, culture, environment, regional joint projects). The number of selected articles on the subject is presented in Table 1 above.

For the analyses of the selected articles, I used the manual inductive approach to framing analyses where the frames derive from the research material during the analysis (Vreese, 2005). This approach allows refraining from analyzing news stories with prior defined news frames in the researcher’s mind (*ibid.*).

Using the qualitative analysis from the previous study I focused on the semantic frames in the news headlines, sub-headlines, and body texts, including emotional and evaluative words, etc. (Kremez & Kõuts-Klemm, 2021). I systematized all the data, entering it into a table that includes all the necessary parameters for analysis regarding each news portal: title of the article, translated title if needed, author, date of publication, link to the article, frames(s), information sources max 4. While

<sup>5</sup> CGTN na russkom: <https://twitter.com/cgtnrussian>

analyzing each frame, I considered it as a whole (in the context) (Jensen, 2020), taking into account all the agents, activities, highlighted problems and proposed solutions involved (Kremez & Kõuts-Klemm, 2021).

### 3. FINDINGS

All the analyzed news portals published articles regarding the Russia-related border issues, but in different numbers and not all the articles included frames (see Table 2), at the same time, some articles include more than one frame.

Table 2. Number of the articles on the Russia-related issues VS number of the frames in these

Media outlets	ERR (Estonia)	LSM (Latvia)	YLE (Finland)	Alaska Public Media (US)	CGTN (China)
Number of articles on the Russia-related border issues	55	6	40	7	7
Number of frames	34	4	24	5	7

Below I present detected dividing and uniting frames, similar for at least two news portals and specific according to historical and present relations between the respective country and Russia. I also try to define the frame-setter (the agent of the frame) based on detected information sources, including speakers.

#### 3.1. Similar dividing and uniting frames and their setters

One of the aims of the study is to detect commonalities in the news framing of border issues regarding Russia and each above-mentioned country. The frame analyses revealed similar dividing and uniting frames presented in the news of more than one news portal described above. Similar frames are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Similar frames and the frequency of them occurring on the news portals of Russia’s neighboring countries. Dividing frames are in red, uniting ones are in green.

Media outlet	ERR (Estonia)	LSM (Latvia)	YLE (Finland)	Alaska PM (US)	CGTN (China)
Russia is a provocateur	5	1			
Stability and success in cross-border regional projects	3	1			3
Cooperating Russia	3		1		4
Russian tourists are highly valuable	2		9		
Cooperating with Russia in saving the common environmental resources	1			1	

Only one similar dividing frame “Russia is a provocateur” was detected on more than one news portal: in ERR (Estonia) and LSM (Latvia), wherein it was presented in 5 articles in ERR as dominant and in 1 article in LSM. Russia is constructed as a provocateur with whom it is extremely hard to cooperate, as a provocateur against Estonia, Latvia and/or the EU/Western countries, e. g. in the emotionally charged comment in ERR news:

*Marko Mihkelson, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, called the detention of Lätte [Estonian consul in Saint-Petersburg] a **provocation**. "Unfortunately, this **provocative** step by Russia confirms **the deep slump** in not only Estonian-Russian, but also Russian-Western relations," he commented. (Nael, 2021) (emphasis added)*

The speakers, frame-setters (agents of the frame) in the example above are Estonian officials, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This frame was used also regarding other steps of Russia, e. g. by using the metaphor of Russia as a conductor of an orchestra by ERR journalist as frame-setter (the article’s genre is indicated as “Opinion”):

***Russia's orchestrated** mass migration flow on and around the Belarus-Poland-Belarus-Lithuania border has been able to take precedence over coronavirus stories. (Mõttus, 2021) (emphasis added)*

In the LSM frame the speaker, the agent of the frame “Russia is a provocateur” is the Latvian side represented by the Minister of Defense:

*“Now the situation on the external borders of Latvia is relatively calm, but we need to be prepared for a possible increase in illegal migration and related **provocations** at the border (...)” said Minister [of Defense] Pabriks. (emphasis added) (“Armiya pomozhet”, 2021)*

The setters of that dividing frame transmitted by journalists are mostly Estonian and Latvian officials which emphasize the official position of both countries towards Russia’s steps.

In contrast to dividing frames several similar uniting frames in the news on studied news portals are detected.

Two similar uniting frames are detected in the news of three news portals. The frame “Stability and success in cross-border regional projects” on ERR (3), LSM (1) and CGTN (3, dominant) news portals constructs the cross-border cooperation between respective country and Russia as successful and stable, e. g. in ERR news:

(...) Mihkelson cited cross-border joint projects with Russia funded under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of the European Union, which he said has created **significant stability and transparency** in south-eastern Estonia and the Narva region. "All such infrastructure projects are **crucial and will create predictable stability**, as any instability could threaten us," he said. (emphasis added) (Ots, 2021)

The agent is above-mentioned influential Estonian politician Marko Mihkelson, a researcher of Baltic-Russian relations (e. g. Mihkelson, 2003, 2002). Thus, his positive framing of the cross-border projects is highly valuable in the Estonian public sphere. The other agents in this frame in Estonian PSM are mostly Estonian officials.

The same frame "Stability and success in cross-border regional projects" is detected in the Latvian article of LSM connected to the Latvian-Russian cross-border cooperation program 2014–2020:

*Well, of course, **I wait with impatience** when the Latvian-Russian border opens for tourism. Because the project partners - in Pytalovo, Ostrov, Palkino, Pskov **also did not waste time**, equipping their part of the "green" route.* (Odiņa, 2021)

The agent is the author of the article LSM journalist Tatjana Odiņa, who took part in the action and speaks using emotionally charged first person words and cites Latvian speakers in the field of tourism.

The same frame uses in the CGTN news by Konstantin Kosachev, Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council of Russia:

*Russia and China are starting joint preparations for the Forum of Regions. **It is important to actively use the potential of interregional cooperation**, according to the Federation Council.* (emphasis added) ("Rossiya i Kitai", 2021)

Chinese speakers only, as technical specialists, are cited in the next sample with the same frame, hence, the agent is the Chinese side, but the frame-setter is CGTN journalist:

*The launch of the gas pipeline **gave a new impetus** to cooperation between Moscow and Beijing in the energy sector. **Let me remind you that...** (...).* (emphasis added) ("Po vostochnoi", 2021)

The next similar frame "Cooperating Russia" detected on the ERR (3), YLE (1) and CGTN (4, dominant) news portals constructs Russia as a potential cooperation partner in many areas, e. g. in ERR news the agent is a businessman Tiit Vähi, former prime minister of Estonia in 90s, whose business is strongly connected to Russia (Fefilov, 2022), using a metaphoric argument:

"(...) *Why are we **annoying the Russian bear? Better let's cooperate,**" Vähi told at the Economic Conference of the Center Party. (emphasis added) ("Tiit Vähi", 2021)*

In Finnish news of YLE speaker Ville Skinnari, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development of Finland, considered Russia as a cooperating partner in many areas seeing "big opportunities" in cooperation with it (Mikkonen, 2021).

The same frame is dominant in Chinese CGTN news, e. g.:

*Nikolai Kharitonov, (...), noted: "I think that **no pandemic will destroy our economic relations, between Russia and China.** (...)" (emphasis added) ("Posol KNR", 2021)*

Russian officials are cited in the text: Nikolai Kharitonov, Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Regional Policy and Problems of the North and the Far East and Alexey Chekunkov, Head of the Ministry for the Development of the Far East. China is also presented as an agent by speakers: Zhang Hanhui, Chinese Ambassador and Zhou Liqun, President of the Russian-Chinese General Chamber of Commerce. Therefore, the Russian and Chinese sides both have an agency. The article also includes another uniting frame "Stability and success in cross-border regional projects" described above.

Both parties may be considered as agents in another CGTN article with the frame "Cooperating Russia" regarding the opening of the Russian center in China as a metaphoric bridge:

*Meng Qingsheng, Deputy Head of the Committee for Management of the China-SCO Cooperation Area, said: "(...) We will promote this center as a new platform, **a new bridge for cooperation between China and Russia.**" (emphasis added) ("Rossiiskii tsentr", 2021)*

The similar uniting frame "Russian tourists are highly valuable" is met both in ERR (2) and YLE (9, dominant), e. g. in YLE starting from headlines emphasizing the value of the tourists:

*South Karelia **called for** the Russians vaccinated with Sputnik to be allowed into Finland ("V Yuzhnoi Karelii", 2021)*

*Trade with Russia is gradually recovering, **tourism is waiting** for the opening of borders (emphasis added) (Zidan, 2021)*

The agents of the frame are Finnish regional or government authorities or professional associations, e. g. Jukka Kopra, Chairman of the Regional Government of

South Karelia, Jaana Rekolainen, Director General of the Finnish-Russian Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Russian tourists are also highly valuable for the border regions of Estonia as Ida-Virumaa County, e. g. in a metaphoric headline:

*The head of the spa regarding Russian tourists: **it was like God's blessing** (emphasis added) (Nikolajev, 2021)*

The agents are CEOs and sales managers of Estonian spas in the Ida-Virumaa County, who had to save their business during the pandemic.

The last similar uniting frame “Cooperating Russia in saving of the common environmental resources” is detected in ERR (1) and Alaska Public Media (1), e. g. in ERR article:

*Harry Liiv: The **cooperation has saved Lake Peipus** from phosphorus and nitrogen deaths (emphasis added)*

The author of the article, the agent is Estonian official Harry Liiv, Deputy Secretary General of the Estonian Ministry of the Environment.

In the American article with the same frame journalist interviewed several speakers from the US, and the general message is that the scientific work in the borderlands connected to saving common environmental resources unites people despite the tensions between governments:

*While the governments of both countries have had a sometimes-tense relationship in recent years, [Paul] Conn [NOAA Fisheries] says he was impressed with the scientific community's good-natured approach.*

*“You hear about Russia and us, and this antagonistic relationship, but when you actually get to the people it's just amazing the amount of love they have for their science,” Conn said. (Early, 2021)*

Thus, the agent of the frame is the US in the roles of journalist and interviewed researchers.

### 3.2. Specific for each news portal dominant and other dividing and uniting frames and their setters

The Estonian PSM online portal **ERR** is the leader in the number of articles on border issues and in the number of frames. The topic of the ratification of the Estonian-Russian border treaty specific for Estonia-Russia relations described in the Introduction was covered in 10 articles in the ERR news by using the dividing frame “No interest

from the Russian side” blaming Russia in the absence of interest in the ratifying of the border treaty, giving it the dividing role of non-cooperating party. The frame-setters are Estonian influential politicians, e. g.:

*"Can the border treaty be [ratified] if the other party does not want to do so? At present, Russia has not shown that it wants to conclude a border treaty. (...)"*  
(Mälberg, 2021)

The speaker is Marina Kaljurand, the former Estonian Ambassador to Moscow and former Foreign Minister. Russia is framed as a non-active in the border treaty issues, and Estonia, on the contrary, as an active agent.

Estonia is shown as an active party also by journalists acting as agents, e. g. in the emotional metaphoric headline by ERR journalist:

*Toomas Sildam: Estonia reached out a hand, Russia did not accept it* (Sildam, 2021)

There are specific Estonian ERR dividing frames used less frequently such as “Russia is an occupier” of Estonian border areas according to the Treaty of Tartu, “Bureaucratic Russia”, “The high level of the coronavirus infection in Russia as a danger for Estonia”, “Russia restricts travel of its citizens” and “Russia could turn off electricity in Estonia”.

Russia is also framed positively as cooperating or open to dialogue in the uniting frames specific for ERR that are detected per 1 article only: “Ready for consultations on the border treaty” and “Russia is ready to cooperate within the OSCE”.

The dividing frames, especially the first specific dominant one regarding the unratified border treaty, prevail on the Estonian PSM news portal ERR in 2021. Therefore, the construction of the Russia-related border issues is rather negative and dividing. However, the above-mentioned uniting frames show that the cooperation between Estonia in Russia in cross-border regional projects may be considered as effective and even may have progress in other issues, such as cross-border tourism, OSCE, etc.

The agents in the Estonian PSM are Estonian authorities, politicians and other influential speakers rather than PSM journalists being frame-senders, besides the opinion articles representing journalist’s own views on the border issue, that appeal to the right for freedom of speech in the Estonian PSM. Hence, in most of the frames the agent is the Estonian side.

No dominant frames are detected on the Latvian **LSM** news portal, probably because of the limited number of frames (4, including two frames presented above) in the articles related to joint border issues.

The specific Latvian dividing frame “Russian coronavirus requirements are less stringent” presents Russia as a danger to Latvians travelling to Russia because of the high level of coronavirus there, see in the headline:

*Transportation **with health risks** – private traders offer trips to Russia. Through Estonia (emphasis added) (“Perevozki s riskom”, 2021)*

The agents are the Latvian media as Russian Broadcasting LTV7 (part of LSM) which is the main information source and Latvian authorities and transport companies.

The specific positive frame “Russian television offers more entertainment” than Latvian is connected to the ban of Russian TV outlets, and is constructed by the emotional comments of Latvian residents in border areas and transmitted by Latvian Radio, e. g.:

*“(...) I want good entertainment, I want a good concert, I want a good show, I want to talk to people. And, for example, Russian television offers me all this. We do not politicize! You must be able to critically evaluate. (...)” Elvira is sure. (“V prigranich'e nedovol'ny”, 2021)*

The agents of the frames on the LSM portal are Latvian authorities and other Latvian speakers competent in the field, not journalists.

No frames regarding territorial disputes were found in the Latvian PSM.

On the Finnish news portal **YLE**, the dominant uniting frames concern tourism. The frame “Russian tourists are highly valuable” similar for ERR and YLE is presented above. Another dominant uniting frame detected in 4 articles in YLE only “Russia makes tourism easier” frames Russia as a positive agent in the development of cross-border tourism between Finland and Russia, e. g. in headlines:

*Foreign tourists will be able to stay longer in Russia on a single or double entry visa (Fedorov, 2021a)*

*The Russian Foreign Ministry eased restrictions on entry and exit (Fedorov, 2021b)*

YLE journalists play the role of the frame-sender in case of these frames being a conduit for uniting frames set by Russian authorities presenting Russia as very cooperative regarding cross-border travel.

There are many other unique uniting frames detected in 1–2 YLE articles as “Russian schoolchildren learn Finnish in border regions”, “Russia is the most important supplier for the timber industry”, “Russian students are needed to work in Finland”, “Most Russians are positive about Finland”, “Transport connection with Russia is highly important”. In most of the above-named uniting frames agent is the Finnish party. Contrary to other analyzed news portals the Finnish uniting frames are focused on concrete fields of cooperation.

Only two specific dividing frames are detected in YLE: “Russia creates tension near the borders of Finland” in 2 articles and “Protectionism intensifies in Russia” in



1 article. The frame-setters/agents of the first frame are Finnish military authorities, e. g. the headline emphasizing the persistence of the Russian military threat:

*Military intelligence report: armed activity in Finland's neighboring territories continued despite the pandemic* (“Otchet voennoi”, 2021)

The agent of the frame “Protectionism intensifies in Russia” is Finland represented by speakers of Finnish business.

No frames regarding territorial disputes were found in the Finnish PSM.

The uniting frames prevail in the Finnish YLE in 2021. Here the agents are Finnish authorities, governmental and regional, and other influential and expert speakers in the connected fields, rather than YLE journalists holding as neutral a position as possible. Thus, in most of the frames the agent is the Finnish party. The construction of the Russia-related border issues in YLE is mostly positive and is related to successful Finnish-Russian cooperation in border issues from the period after WWII.

Mostly specific uniting frames are detected in the **Alaska Public Media**. One of them is focused on the Alaska region, the frame “Russians have a long history in Alaska” used in 2 publications:

*Russians have a long history in Alaska, with some Siberian migrant groups dating back as far as the early 1700s.* (Kern, 2021)

*Alaskans we’ve lost to COVID: Vladimir Khadjinov, Russian father of four* (Feidt, 2021)

In this frame the Alaskan Russians are shown as a respected native nation of the State of Alaska and the US. The agents of the cited publications are journalists of the news portal; therefore, it is an example of journalistic framing.

The unique uniting frame “Russia brings Russian and US people together” is related to the Bering Strait Festival planned for August 2022, “the seven-day event is a multi-year effort to bring together residents of the high north from both sides of the strait, some of whom are relatives, and to honor their shared culture” (Grove, 2021a). The journalist has interviewed the festival’s head, the US coordinator in Alaska, Mille Porsild, who highly appreciates the role of Russia connecting it to its chairmanship in the Arctic Council:

*“I mean this is a **really, really significant event**, and initiative to do this. I **really can’t emphasize that enough**. (...) It’s **really a result of the Arctic Council, and the fact that the Russians now have the chairmanship**, and they hold it until 2023.”* (emphasis added) (Grove, 2021a)

Thus, the frame-setter and agent of the frame is the US and the frame itself is completely uniting.

There is a unique dividing frame “Russia’s expansion in the Arctic” in the 1 article, considering Russian expansion a threat, detected in the interview with Norway’s ambassador to the US Anniken Krutnes:

*CG: Speaking of security issues and NATO, are there shared concerns between the two countries about Russia’s expansion in the Arctic?*

*AK: We see military buildup on the Russian side. And of course, we have to keep an eye on that. I would say that the Arctic region is still a peaceful and prosperous and predictable region. (Grove, 2021b)*

No frames regarding territorial disputes were detected in the US Alaska Public Media. In general, the framing of Russia is revealed as mostly positive, uniting. More often the agents are the US authorities and experts in connecting fields, but also journalists. The Russian officials are not presented as agents in the US outlet.

The construction of the Russia-related border issues on the **CGTN** news portal (the examples of frames are presented in 3.1 as similar and dominant) is absolutely positive, Russia is considered a very important strategic partner in all aspects of cross-border cooperation. No frames regarding territorial disputes were detected.

The agents are both Chinese and Russian authorities, governmental and regional, other influential and expert speakers in the connected fields, and journalists. Thus, the agents of the frames in the CGTN news are both China and Russia, and met-journalistic framing corresponds to the official statements of China.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the reviewed literature on border studies and framing, the borders are not only geographical and political, but they are also social constructs able to both divide and unite at the same time. Thus, the border issues may be framed both negatively and positively, dividing, or uniting countries and communities, and the framing analysis is a method for detecting the dividing and uniting constructions in the news.

An undertaken framing analysis revealed some patterns, including certain commonalities as similar dividing frame regarding Russian provocative behavior in border issues and several uniting frames regarding effective cross-border cooperation and valuable tourists from Russia, in the framing of Russia-related border issues in the news media of neighboring countries that has different historical and current relations with Russia. The historical background and current relations influence the framing of the Russia-related border issues, especially in the case of actual territorial disagreements as in Estonian-Russian relations, but it is not an insurmountable obstacle for setting several uniting frames.

The represented EU countries and the US, which PSM outlets are analyzed in the study, have had tensions in their political and economic relations with Russia in the past, including territorial disputes and conflicts, and in 2021, including sanctions and retaliatory sanctions, but all of them have cooperated with Russia in at least some border issues and this cooperation is framed as positive, therefore uniting. China is an exception considered Russia's strategic partner by officials and Chinese state media CGTN has framed Russia-related border issues very positively, without mentioning any disagreements between countries.

However, the study has some limitations, as the number of found articles on Russia-related border issues in Latvian and Chinese outlets was significantly lower than in Estonian and Finnish outlets, which may be due to the use of their Russian language versions with limited coverage.

In conclusion, the main generalization may be made – the tensions in the relations between countries as territorial disputes, political divisions, sanctions, different approaches to joint history, etc., dividing countries in the past and/or in the present, may lead to the setting of dividing constructs of reality – dividing frames regarding border issues by frame-setters (agents of frames), who are officials, politicians, other speakers of neighboring countries, rather than journalists or Russia's speakers. In this case the journalists are frame-senders being a conduit for the dividing frames created by the outer agents. At the same time, the significant share of frames on border issues, considering cross-border cooperation and tourism from Russia, are the uniting constructs. And again, this is more often not journalistic framing, because the agents are officials, politicians and other speakers of neighboring countries and sometimes Russia's speakers.

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