UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES (CES)

THE RATIFICATION OF THE IC, A REFLECTION OF A (EUROPEAN) IDENTITY CRISIS?

Examining how the Istanbul Convention is linked to European identity in national political discourses

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Master's thesis:	30 credits
Programme:	Master's Programme in European Studies
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester year:	Spring 2026
Supervisor:	Monika de Silva

Abstract

The transformative approach of the Istanbul Convention (IC) raised both opposition and support within EU member countries. Opposition, (mostly within Central East European countries), perceived the Convention as threatening toward national culture and family traditions. Others, (mostly West and Nordic countries), supported the Convention and described it as progressive. Previous research has thoroughly analysed opposition and support in national political discourses. How the discourse of a European identity is intertwined within these national discourses, is however less known. The aim of this thesis is therefore to examine how and if the IC is linked to a European identity, by answering the research question; "*In what ways is the Istanbul Convention linked to European identity in national political discourses?"*.

Three country cases were included in the analysis, where Poland represent a CEE country, Germany a West European country, and Sweden a Nordic European country. I expected that the overlapping European identity in Germany and Poland would highlight a link between the IC and a European identity. While the established gender equality discourse and national identity in Sweden, would contribute to a discursive link between the IC and a national identity. With a frame analysis as method, national news articles from respective country were analysed. Unexpectedly, no discursive link between the IC and a European identity was found within Germany. Neither was a link between the IC, and a national identity discovered in Sweden. However, a link between the IC and a European identity was visible within Poland.

Master's thesis:	30 credits
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Supervisor:	Monika de Silva
Keyword:	Istanbul Convention, Gender equality, Violence against women, European identity
Word count:	14429

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1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has over time developed from a peacekeeping project into many branches; among others the EU is now also a supranational normative force. Throughout this development, political leaders have often had different opinions regarding how much power EU institutions should have and at what cost to national sovereignty. Despite disagreements over national sovereignty, leaders have consistently agreed on one thing – a shared European identity is central to EU's legitimacy.

One perspective of a European identity is gender equality, which has been a shared value between political leaders since the European Community. However, the meaning of gender has transformed over time, from focus on equal pay between men and women, to a holistic perspective on gender equality, which emphasises gender as a social construction. The broadened concept of gender equality has strengthened the EU as a normative force. At present time, EU institutions have an established mandate to both decide what the meaning of gender equality is and identify solutions to inequality (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021).

Since gender equality is a changing concept with different meaning depending on time and place, it's also a concept open for contestation. During the past decade, different EU member states have had different interpretations of the meaning of gender equality. Previous research has thoroughly examined how EU member states both support and oppose gender equality at an EU level. Some Central and East European Countries (CEE Countries) focus on gender equality from a binary perspective, where the focus of gender equality primarily is biological, the difference between men and women. Most of the West and Nordic countries support a "holistic meaning" of gender equality, which view gender as a social and cultural construction rather than connected to a binary construction. In this thesis, this latter definition, is referred to as the "holistic" or "deeper" perspective on gender equality, which aims to describe the broader and deeper definition of gender equality. Within the holistic definition, gender equality often involves changes of social structures, power dynamics and norms within societies. During the past decade, the meaning of gender equality has become more frequently questioned during EU assemblies in the EU Parliament, where mostly CEE countries oppose the terminology" gender" or "gender ideology (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 799). At the same time, "defenders" of gender equality have begun to view newer EU Countries (CEE-countries) as offenders of gender equality, and articulate that they need to "catch up" with European values (Ahrens et al., 2022, p. 810). These "defenders" sometimes link gender equality to a European identity, where gender equality is connected to democracy, progress and civilization.

In 2011, the Istanbul Convention (IC) was adopted by The Council of Europe. The Convention is unique from the perspective that it is one of the first international treaties tackling violence from a gender-equality perspective[1]. The IC also includes a definition of gender equality, which emphasises gender as a social construction, rather than focusing on gender equality from the perspective of biological sex. Since the IC is a decided legislative text, neither the EU nor individual member states with the intention of ratifying the Convention, could change the meaning of gender equality during ratification processes. During national ratification processes, the fixed definition triggered both opposition and support. Where progressive governments supported the holistic meaning of gender equality, while mostly conservative right-wing governments rejected it.

Previous research examines both opposition and support during these ratification processes of the IC, both at a national and an EU level. Different interpretations of gender equality and contextual factors that trigger either the opposition or those who support the convention is thoroughly examined by

[1] The Convention on Elimination on Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) from 1979 also include focus on gender equality and non-discrimination. However, the IC includes further focus on protecting and preventing individuals from discrimination by jurisdictional changes and education.

several academic researchers. In summary, during ratification processes within EU member countries, a variety of political discourses emerged, where some EU member countries are supportive of the IC, and some EU member countries oppose it. How the discourse of a European identity also is intertwined within these discourses, is however less known.

This master thesis aims to contribute to the current research field, by answering the research question "*In what ways is the Istanbul Convention linked to European identity in national political discourses?".* The aim is to compare *how* and *if* political discourses in the EU link the Istanbul Convention to a European identity and identify how these national discourses vary depending on the national context. This master thesis has a deductive approach, where the hypothesis is developed from previous research. Hypothetically, West Europe and CEE countries have a strong connection to a European identity, and therefore also link the ratification of the IC to a European identity (which can trigger both opposition and support). Nordic European countries on the other hand have in general a weaker connection to a European identity. Partly because they historically already have an established gender equality discourse at a national level and will therefore link the ratification of the IC to their national identity.

The hypotheses are tested by analysing and comparing the political discourse in three EU member states that have ratified the IC. Where Poland represents a CEE Country, Germany represents a West European country, and Sweden represents a Nordic country.

The thesis begins with explaining a background of the IC and its articles. Then, the literature review summarizes previous research that have analysed both opposition and support during ratification processes in several European countries. The following theory section ends with a hypothesis for respective country case. As method, a qualitative frame analysis is selected with the aim to identify and compare frames within each political discourse. Identified frames for respective country case are discussed, and the thesis concludes that there is a visible discursive link between the IC and a European identity in Poland. However, unexpectedly, no discursive link was found within Germany and Sweden. In the concluding parts, the result is analysed and related to broader questions: What is the meaning of gender equality for the EU today? How is the result related to the EU as a normative force?

Definition of a European identity

During historic time, decision makers have frequently been divided in two blocks, one intergovernmental and one federal, both debating how the EU integration process should take place. Both sides of the debate have consistently agreed on one thing – the importance of an EU identity, which should overlap the national identity (Hobolt & de Vires, 2016; Nelsen & Stubb, 2014). The EU has over historic time moved from a peace keeping project to a supranational normative force. Where Treaties such as the Treaty of Rome and the Treaty of Amsterdam have defined gender equality as a core EU value connected to EU integration (Lombardo & Meier, 2008, p. 97; Peto & Manners, 2006, p. 98; 100). This thesis defines "European identity" in relation to EU's role, not only as a political and economic power, but as a normative force where European values are integrated both within and outside the EU.

2. Background

The Istanbul Convention – tackling violence from a gender-equality perspective

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention (IC), is the first international treaty tackling violence from a comprehensive gender-equality perspective (Leye, D'Souza & Meurens, 2021, p. 1). Articles within the treaty comes from updated feminist knowledge and current international norms about violence against women (VAW) (Krizsán, et al. 2004, p. 2). The IC includes measures for integrated policies, and articles about prevention, protection and prosecution in relation to VAW. With the aim to tackle violence in a comprehensive way (Leye, D'Souza & Meurens, 2021, p. 2).

The IC was adopted by The Council of Europe in 2011, with the aim to approach violence from two legislative agendas – addressing both gender discrimination and domestic violence. The Convention press on the necessity to work at a constitutional level with both formal equality (de jure equality) and substantial equality (de facto equality) (Article 4). All implemented measures of the IC include a gender-sensitive approach, where Article 3 defines gender as "the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men." (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 27-28). Article 15 establish that all parties of the convention must "take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, […] adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education, and in trainings for professionals" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 28).

Two steps of ratification

To adopt the IC, countries must go through two steps of ratification. As the first step the countries need to sign the Convention, secondly the countries need to ratify the Convention. Before ratification, countries must, (if necessary), adjust their legal policy frameworks according to the Convention (Leye, D'Souza & Meurens, 2021, p. 4).

As of May 2026, 38 countries and the European Union have signed the IC (European Disability Forum, 2026). In the European Union, 21 EU member states have ratified the Istanbul Convention: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden (Leye, D'Souza & Meurens, 2021, p. 4; Meurens, et al., 2020, p. 30).

3. Literature review

The transformative approach of the Istanbul Convention (IC) started debates both at a national level in EU member states, and at an EU level. While some member states appreciated the transformative approach of the Convention, other countries rejected it. Previous research has thoroughly examined both opposition and support for the IC within several European countries. Especially within opposition, political leaders opposing the Convention link the criticism to unjustified integration of international norms. Furthermore, Krizsán & Roggeband (2021) concludes that EU candidate countries probably supported the Convention with the aim to align with European values. This conclusion provides argument that there could be a link between ratifying the IC and aligning with European values and norms. How and if a link between the IC and a European identity exist within national political discourses, is however not thoroughly examined. One of the objectives of this thesis is therefore to contribute to previous research; by examining in what ways the Istanbul Convention is linked to European identity in national political discourses.

The ratification of the IC within the EU, national political discourses

Ratification processes in relation to definitions of gender equality

According to previous research, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (IC) within EU member states begun in a discourse where previous disagreements regarding the meaning and definition of gender equality often were resolved by "de-gendering" policy documents. For example, during negotiations at an EU level, different member countries must agree on how to define gender equality within policy documents. When EU member countries have had disagreement about the definition, the meaning of gender equality has often been changed, with the aim to agree on a shared definition within final policy documents. During negotiation processes, previous research describes it as policy documents has been "de-gendered", where the definition has been limited, or changed to fit other established goals (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Leye, D'Souza & Meurens, 2021; de Silva & Tepliakova, 2024). At present time, different countries, institutional levels and policy actors labels the concept of gender equality in different ways (Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2009, p. 1-2). This has had consequences when previous violence against women (VAW) policies has been decided. Where policy documents, (especially policies and instruments tackling domestic violence), frequently have ended up "de-gendered" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 25; Leye, D'Souza & Meurens, 2021, p. 1; Bosak & Vajda, 2019, p 78). The IC challenged this pattern by including an unchangeable definition of gender equality, and the meaning of gender equality could therefore not be compromised during negotiations. This fixed definition contributed to both opposition and support during ratification processes in EU member states (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021).

Actors opposing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention

Both de Silva (2025) and Krizsán & Roggeband (2021) identify that strong opposition toward the ratification of the IC mostly emerged in conservative right-wing EU countries (de Silva, 2025, p. 16; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 2). The opposing parties mainly included conservative right-wing politicians, church authorities, or right-wing think tanks (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 2; Bosak & Vajda, 2019, p. 78).

Previous research also describes how several country cases oppose specific terminologies from the IC. For example, the Hungarian parliament opposed the inclusion of the term "gender" in their national legal system, arguing that there was no similar or existing definition within their national jurisdiction. In Bulgaria, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Bulgarian legislation already emphasizes the connection between biological sex and gender-equality as a social construction. In Poland, both governmental representatives, church authorities and right-wing think-tanks opposed the term "gender" within the IC. They expressed strong concern that the terminology was foreign to the Polish culture and didn't exist in the Polish language (de Silva, 2025, p. 14-15).

Krizsán & Roggeband (2021) further nuances the opposition by explaining what articles triggered most concern at a national level. Criticism mainly concerns Article 3, which defines gender as "socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men,". Also, Article 12 – 16, requires countries to "promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men by means of education and other methods" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 2). According to Krizsán & Roggeband, (2021), opposing parties perceive these articles as threatening toward national sovereignty (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 34). Some opposition even linked the terminologies" gender" and "gender ideology" to "the ideology of neoliberal elites" (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 799).

The link between the IC and a European identity isn't directly examined within previous research. However, de Silva (2025) explains that opposition toward the IC frequently question the traditional top-down mechanisms of international norms. Furthermore, opposition often perceive the IC as threatening toward national sovereignty and traditional family traditions, questioning the implementation of international norms (de Silva, 2025, p. 16; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 2-3).

Support for the Istanbul Convention

Previous research also examines factors that contributed to a non-controversial ratification process within countries. Krizsán, et al (2024) establishes that non-controversial ratification happened in countries with strong public support for gender equality, high level of women's representation in national parliaments, and established women's organizations at a national level. In countries where support for women's movements and women's empowerment was strong, opponents had small chances to block the ratification process (Krizsán, et al. 2024, p. 7).

Nevertheless, not only mainstream governments ratified the IC without controversies. International influence seems to affect the ratification process within EU candidate countries. According to previous research, political and economic incentives to adopt international norms could be stronger compared to national opposition that reject the Convention. Krizsán et al. (2024), acknowledge that international influence, especially when it involves political pressure or conditions for financing, influenced national governments to ratify the IC. As a result, some governments ratified the IC even where national support for gender equality was weak. For example, several EU candidate countries showed strong political will to ratify the IC (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine). Previous research therefore concludes that willingness to align with European norms, match their political willingness to join the EU (Krizsán, et al. 2024, p. 22; 27).

Research gap

As previously stated, when the ratification of the IC begun in EU member states and at an EU level, different EU member states had different interpretations about the meaning of gender equality. In some cases, this resulted in an almost hostile discourse where opposing actors identified the definition as harmful to national traditions and culture (de Silva & Tepliakova, 2024, p. 11-12; Leye, D'Souza & Meurens, 2021, p. 1).

As we also have established; previous research thoroughly examines how the IC was perceived and debated at a national level in ratifying countries. Factors for both opposition and support are explained. Several scholars also relate the strong opposition to the fact that there was no shared definition about gender equality in the EU. The IC challenged this by including a fixed definition. For some EU member states, the framing of gender equality within the IC seem to align with either national or European values. These countries (mainly West and Nordic EU member states), commonly define gender equality from a holistic perspective, where gender equality is related to structural changes and changes of norms (Lombardo & Meier, 2008, p. 2). Other EU member states (mostly conservative governments) viewed the definition within the Convention as a change in EU terminology and wanted to remain focus on equal opportunities between women and men (Lombardo & Meier, 2008, p. 2). According to Krizsán, et al. (2024), EU candidate countries ratified the IC

without major controversies, which motivate that there could be linkages between the ratification of the IC and a willingness to apply to EU norms. Furthermore, Krizsán & Roggeband (2021) explain that opposition of the IC is related to criticising the implementation of international and European norms. The authors explain that CEE countries were more prone to adapt to international and EU standards after the end of the Cold war but have over historic time become more prone to criticise the meaning of gender equality and the enforcement of EU norms (p. 224).

In summary, previous research field highlights connections between the ratification of the IC and applying to international and European norms. Krizsán & Roggeband (2021) thoroughly analyse why the IC triggered such intense debates at a national level and describe consequences from gender equality and democracy perspectives. The authors analyse Poland as a case, however not in relation to a West and Nordic country. Furthermore, how and if the IC is linked specifically to a European identity within national political discourse, is not as thoroughly examined. The selection of country cases within this thesis, as well as the focus on European identity within the research question, could contribute to previous research by analysing how and if the three country cases include a link to a European identity within national discourse. The result could increase the understanding about how different EU countries perceive the IC, in relation to applying to either a European and/or a national identity.

4. Theory

Conservative right-wing governments identified the Istanbul Convention (IC) as a threat toward national sovereignty and national tradition. Other countries, mostly mainstream governments in Nordic countries and West countries, supported the IC and ratified the Convention without controversies. With this background, three country cases are selected to test the hypothesises of this thesis, where Poland represents a CEE country, Germany a West European country, and Sweden a Nordic country.

In the following section I will provide a hypothesis for all three country cases of this thesis. In summary, I expect that a European identity will be stronger in the Polish and German case, and I therefore expect that linkages between the IC and European identity could be visible within national discourse of ratifying the IC. I expect that Sweden has a stronger national identity especially regarding gender equality, and I therefore expect that the IC will be linked to a national identity.

Poland

Poland, which represent a Central Eastern Europe (CEE) country, signed the IC in 2012, and ratified it in 2015 (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 60; Council of Europe, 2025).

Poland represents a relatively young democracy, which previously has shown strong willingness to meet international human right standards. However, over the past years, attacks on gender equality have increased at a national level (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 6). In Poland, contestation against the IC started before signing of the Convention. In the beginning of 2012, Prime Minister Donald Tusk aimed to sign the IC. However, concern about the Convention was raised by Minister of Justice Jarosław Gowin, who questioned the definition of "gender" within the IC. Other actors quickly joined the criticism, where mostly Catholic churches and conservative groups (including women's conservative groups) opposed the signing and ratification process (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 57-58). At the same time, supporters of the IC mobilised, and forwarded pressure on the Prime Minister to ratify the Convention. In the end, Donald Tusk signed the Convention in December 2012, following the supporters of the IC. According to Krizsán & Roggeband (2021), the fact that Donald Tusk was pro-European could have influenced him to take side with the supporters of the IC (p. 58, p. 124). Nevertheless, intense debates emerged after the parliament signed the Convention. For one example, Member of Parliament (MP) Beata Kempa urged to "stop the gender ideology" of the IC (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 58). In 2014, a think tank named "Ordo Iuris Institute" was established from the opposition and started to organize campaigns against the ratification of the IC (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 59).

At the same time, supporting organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO: s) continued to put pressure on the government and the Prime Minister to continue the ratification process (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 123-124). Major opposition from both church leaders, political representatives and think tanks emerged. Despite the intense opposition, the Polish Parliament ratified the IC in 2015, and the Convention entered into force the same year (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 60).

In November 2015, the populist right-wing Law and Justice Party won the parliamentary election, and several critics toward the IC received governmental posts. The new president, Andrzej Duda, almost immediately started to oppose the IC, expressing that the Convention was dangerous and a threat to Polish culture and family traditions. Elzbieta Rafalska, the Minister of Labour, confirmed that the new government discussed withdrawal from the Convention (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 59-61). Between the year of 2015-2020, the withdrawal of the Convention was an ongoing debate. However, the strong national opposition did not contribute to a withdrawal from the Convention (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 126).

The “war on gender” that emerged in Poland is representative for opposition that the IC triggered in conservative CEE countries. The Polish case therefore allows to draw broader conclusions from this thesis results.

The political discourse in Poland also reminds us of previous debates that have been held at an EU level. Where radical right organisations during negotiations (even before the IC existed) have described gender equality as a threat to national sovereignty and traditional family values. These groups prefer to frame gender equality from a binary perspective focused on biological sex (Ahrens et al., 2022, p. 805-806). Furthermore, the criticism toward “gender” at an EU level has often been embedded in Euroscepticism. Eurosceptics sometimes relate “gender” to criticism related to migration issues. They also reframe “gender” by placing it’s meaning in context connected to arguments about sovereignty or criticise international mechanisms of spreading norms by referring to the principle of subsidiarity (Ahrens et al., 2022, p. 809-810; Kantola & Lombardo, 2021, p. 576). For example, during negotiations regarding the ratification of the IC in the European Parliament (EP), opposing countries used the norm of subsidiarity to argue that the EU wasn’t legitimate to ratify the IC (Berthet, 2022, p. 689).

Since Poland is a net benefactor of EU funds, the support to remain in the European Union is most likely strong. Poland most likely perceives several more benefits of being part of the EU, from both economic, political and security perspectives. However, the implementation of European norms, seem to trigger opposition within national discourse. From previous research, there are elements within the national discourse where the ratification process of the IC is linked to either aligning or opposing European values. For example, Donald Tusk, is described as pro-European by Krizsán & Roggeband (2021), which probably effected his decision to sign the IC and align to European standards. Opposition on the other hand, refer to sovereignty arguments when criticising the ratification of the Convention, and to oppose the transformative approach of the IC.

In summary, I expect that the European identity in Poland is strong, where benefits from becoming an EU member country influence the political discourse. However, the IC triggered strong opposition within Poland, where the transformative approach of the Convention and the definition of gender equality was criticised within opposition. Furthermore, the implementation of international norms was questioned. Hypothetically, the opposing discourse in Poland could link the IC to aligning to a European identity, by questioning European norms and the origin of the IC. Furthermore, since opposition describe the definition of gender equality as foreign to the Polish culture, it could be possible that the IC is perceived to be part of a European identity. My hypothesis is therefore that the IC is linked to a European identity within national political discourse.

Sweden

Sweden signed the Istanbul Convention (IC) without major controversies in 2011 and ratified it in 2014 (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2024; Council of Europe, 2025 a)). In Nordic countries like Sweden, gender equality has been integrated within national policy documents since the 1990s, and gender equality norms has influenced the country for a long historic time (Elgström, 2000, p. 463; 472). Strong national support for gender quality probably contributed to a non-controversial ratification of the IC, as well as established women’s organizations within the country. Compared to Poland, the definition of gender equality within the IC, which includes measures to approach structural inequality, didn’t seem to have collided with national definitions of gender equality.

In comparison to other EU countries, Swedish culture (and other Nordic countries) is related to independence and neutrality, rather than viewing themselves as part of a European community. For example, Sweden still has its own currency and have so far voted against introducing the Euro. Also, the geographical position of Nordic countries, could contribute to a stronger Nordic or national identity. At the same time, Sweden shares many values that the EU represents, for example gender equality, human rights and democracy. From this perspective, there is a connection between European values and Swedish values.

Hypothetically, the fact that Sweden has a well-established gender equality discourse at a national level together with a strong national identity, I expect that the IC is linked to a national identity within political discourse, and not a European identity.

Germany

Germany signed the Istanbul Convention (IC) in 2011 and ratified it in 2017 without major controversies (Council of Europe, 2017). Germany has been part of European integration from the beginning and has had a long history of strong economic and social incentives to be part of the EU. Like Sweden, Germany shares values described as European core values, for example, gender equality, human rights and democracy. However, compared to Sweden, the European identity in Germany should be stronger. This could also be related to a geographical perspective, where Germany is more connected to the centre of Europe.

Germany has previously been part of strengthening gender equality policies at an EU level. As an example, Germany has a strong political connection to the European Parliament (EP), and a large number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) (European Parliament, 2026). When looking at previous negotiations in the EP, "defenders" of gender equality policies are mostly West European MEP: s (Ahrens et al., 2022, p. 809-810). These MEP: s sometimes promote human rights and gender equality issues from the perspective of being part of a European identity. For example, supporters of gender equality within the EP often highlight gender equality as a European identity issue, where gender equality and LGBTQ rights are connected to progress and civilization. These MEP: s has previously highlighted women's and LGBTQ rights as core European values, and a "marker for countries modernization" (Ahrens et al., 2022, p. 809). For example, the Greens/EFA group within the EP, has gender equality as a core value within the political group ideology (Kantola & Lombardo, 2023, p. 304). The Greens/EFA have previously excluded MEPs who wants to join the group, since they didn't share the political perspective regarding gender equality and LGBTQ rights. The political party from Germany "Die Grüne" has previously had a majority within this group, and the group leader has in several cases been from Germany (Ahrens, & Kantola, 2022, p. 34-35; The Greens/EFA, 2026).

During negotiations in the EP, the political discourse which support gender equality has previously established a narrative of "us" versus "them". Opposition toward gender equality has primarily been identified as an external issue concerning third countries. However, over the past decade, these "defenders" of gender equality have also started to look closer at newer EU Countries (CEE-countries) as offenders of gender equality, and articulate that they need to "catch up" with European values (Ahrens et al., 2022, p. 810). The increased polarization in the EP has contributed to conflicts between political groups, where West and Nordic countries promote gender equality and LGBTQ rights as part of a European identity. While other countries (mostly CEE Countries) describe the holistic or deeper definition of gender equality as foreign and a threat to national sovereignty and traditional culture (Ahrens et al., 2022, p. 810).

How is this then relevant in a German context? Hypothetically, the overlapping European influence and identity in Germany will highlight a link between the IC and a European identity. Compared to the Polish case, the political discourse in Germany would most likely be positive to the normative force of the EU. Since MEPs from West European countries (where Germany has the largest number of MEP: s in the Parliament) previously have defended gender equality at an EU level, it could be possible that the political discourse at a national level in Germany connect the ratification of the IC to aligning to a European identity.

5. Analytical framework, methods and material

In the following chapter, the thesis analytical framework, material and method is presented. First, the material including news articles from each country is described together with time frame. Then, the method, frame analysis, is described in relation to the material and the aim to answer the research question "*In what ways is the Istanbul Convention linked to European identity in national political discourses?".* Finally, the screening process of the material is described, and expected frames, which are developed from each hypothesis, are presented.

Method of data

Material

A political discourse is shaped by a variety of actors interacting within communication and could involve communication through both text and speech. "Discourse" in this master thesis comes from Lombardo et al., (2009), definition, where discourse is defined as the result of "all the multiple activities of people and groups engaged in the framing process" (p. 13). In the case of the Istanbul Convention (IC), this included politicians, civil society, church authorities, women's organisations and think tanks. The result of all activity during their communication was considered an established discourse (Lombardo, et al., 2009, p. 14).

In this thesis, the political discourse was carefully traced by looking at national news articles from several newspapers. To broaden the variety of articles, the search word "Istanbul convention" (in respective language) is searched at Google News. It allowed a selection of both longer analytical news articles, as well as shorter news texts. Furthermore, two newspapers were selected in respective country where the search word "Istanbul convention" (in respective language) was used to find relevant articles. To include a variation of articles, one newspaper from each country is right-winged politically, and one is left-winged. The newspapers were also selected due to them being cost free and not closed behind a paywall. However, all newspapers have been selected because they have a large digital geographic scope and are considered legitimate news sources at a national level. The aim of including several newspapers, both from a broader search at Google News, and selected newspapers, was that interests from specific actors which could affect the discourse would become neutralized (Lombardo et al., 2009, p. 10; p. 12).

A limitation related to the material from the German and Swedish country case was identified during the screening process. Within these countries, the ratification process happened without strong opposition or protests. This probably affected the content of the news articles, and a majority of the articles were focused on providing information about the IC or providing information about the ratification process in other countries. However, I found discourses including several actors within each national discourse, representing politicians, experts, Women´s organisations and NGO: s. Therefore, the material was enough regarding the scope of this master thesis and allowed me to identify discursive frames to answer my research question.

Selected newspapers in respective country case:

Germany: "Bild" (conservative/right) and "Die Tageszeitung" (centre-left/liberal).

Poland: "Fakt" (centre/populistic) and "Gazeta Wyborcza" (centre-left/liberal)

Sweden: "Aftonbladet" (left) and Svenska Dagbladet (conservative/liberal conservative)

When searching for "Istanbul-Konvention", Bild included 52 articles, and Die Tageszeitung included 284 articles. At Google News, 67 articles were included in the search.

When searching for “Konwencja stambulska”, Fakt included 48 articles and Gazeta Wyborcza included 298 articles. Google News included 35 articles.

When searching “Istabulkonventionen”, Aftonbladet included 56 articles, and Svenska Dagbladet included 36 articles. Google news included 81 articles.

In total 957 news articles were screened and analysed.

Articles were written in Polish, German and Swedish. I can read both Swedish and German articles without translation. The Polish articles have however been translated with “Lara by translated”[2], an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-translating tool. Even though AI has developed a lot during the past years and makes it possible to translate texts between languages, sentences and words can still become distorted or incorrect. This shouldn’t be a problem regarding analysing my results, since the aim of the framing process was to draw conclusions from several articles which form a discourse. In other words, the aim was to receive an understanding of the bigger picture from respective country discourse, rather than drawing conclusions from single quotes or words. Therefore, to use AI when translating articles from Polish national news should not have affected the process to identify frames within the political discourse. However, when quotes or statements from separate parties were included in this thesis with the aim of making conclusions more tangible, the section of the article was translated several times, and all quotes were controlled by a person who’s first language is polish. Furthermore, all quotes that are included in this thesis, are also included in the bibliography in the original language.

Timeframe

The timeframe was limited from when each country ratified the IC to present time. The timeframe was partly selected with the aim to collect sufficient and varied material. However, the timeframe also enabled the analysis of the ratification process and aftermath within each country. This was particularly important concerning the Polish case, where intense debates emerged after the Convention was signed and ratified.

Method of analysis

Frame analysis

As method, a qualitative frame analyse was selected to identify frames within each political discourse. Frame analysis is commonly used as method in research analysing political discourses and gender equality. According to Goffman’s theory (1974), frames can be helpful to analyse social events within society, with the aim to better understand different interpretations of the same scenario or situation. According to his theory, people approach an event or scenario by asking themself, “what is going on here?”. After asking themselves this, they establish a framework that could be the answer to this question (Goffman, 1974, p. 8-10). In relation to the ratification of the IC, people or parties within the discourse would look at the event of the ratification and then create their own interpretation of what is going on. From the discourse, it’s then possible to identify frames that explain how a broader audience perceive the ratification of the IC (Entman, 1992, p. 51-52).

Previous research has already identified both opposing and supporting frames within political discourse and analysed several elements within these frames (e.g. Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). However, if a link to European identity is intertwined within the discourse, is not known. To analyse in what ways the Istanbul Convention is linked to European identity in national political discourses, I simply asked one question to the material – “is there a link between the Istanbul Convention and a European identity?”.

[2] Lara Översätt – Världens mest tillförlitliga AI-översättare

Country cases

To answer the thesis research question: "*In what ways is the Istanbul Convention linked to European identity in national political discourses"* Three EU country cases are selected:

- Poland (represents a CEE Country)
- Sweden (represents a Nordic country)
- Germany (represents a West country)

All three countries have both ratified and signed the IC. These chosen countries give me the opportunity to analyse and compare a Nordic EU country, a West EU country and a CEE country. Previous research has already concluded that the ratification of the IC unfolded very differently within these countries. Germany and Sweden ratified the IC without major conflicts, while the ratification in Poland has been described as a "war on gender".

Screening process and expected frames

The screening process is inspired by Krizsán & Roggeband (2021) methodology of screening and categorizing frames related to the IC within national political discourse. The methodology is however adjusted to suit the material, timeframe and aim of this thesis.

Similar to Krizsán & Roggeband (2021), when collecting and translating the material, I divided articles in two files, where one file included opposing arguments about the ratification of the Convention, and the other file included supporting arguments. Then, I divided articles depending on when in time they were published, and what parties/actors were participating within the discourse. For example, women's organizations, religious leaders and political leaders were clustered in separate files. The aim was to structure the overlook of the discourse and receive an overview of time periods and actors participating in the national discourse. Parallel events (for example a national election, an EU election, or the implementation of other gender equality polices) could have affected the discourse. Separate events should however not affect the possibility to answer my research question and identify if the Istanbul Convention is linked to European identity in national political discourses, which is the aim to examine within this thesis. Therefore, the materials were clustered depending on when they were published, with the aim to analyse frames in relation to happenings within the discourse. However, the time aspect and how separate events at a national or an EU level affected the discourse was not analysed in more detail.

After the categorization of the material all articles that weren't immediately related to my research question were excluded. For example, more generalized or informative articles only describing events outside my country cases. About 430 articles remained and I started to formulate expected frames.

In relation to this thesis research question, several expected frames were formulated from the hypothesises developed in the theory section. In the Swedish case, I expected to identify a frame which **link the ratification of the IC to a national identity,** for example by viewing the IC as a measure to strengthen national gender equality processes and national values. In the Polish case, I expected to find a frame where **the ratification of the IC is linked to a European identity by opposing the implementation of European values.** For example, by highlighting Eurosceptic arguments or viewing the IC as a threat toward national sovereignty. In the German case, I expected to identify a **frame which link the IC to European identity by supporting European values**. For example, by highlighting the ratification of the IC as a measure to strengthen European values and norms, in relation to democracy and human rights.

Then, to systematically analyse the material, I performed a content analysis, where I colour coded the material according to my expected frames. Where each frame received a specific colour. This allowed me to systematically read each article and keep focus on frames emerging relevant to my research question. It also allowed to go back, and compare frames within the material, and between countries.

The chart below summarizes frames related to my research question. Frames discovered by previous research is not included in the chart but was included in the coding process.

Chart 1: Expected frames within each country case		
Supporting frames linked to a national identity	**Opposing frames linked to a European identity**	**Supporting frames linked to a European identity**
Expected frame Nordic country (Sweden)	***Expected frame, CEE country (Poland)***	***Expected frame, West European Country (Germany)***
Frame: The ratification of the IC is linked to a national identity Parties view gender equality as a measure to strengthen national values, related to democracy and progress The LGBTQ perspective is linked to national values, and identified as part of the solution to inequality	**Frame: The ratification of the IC is linked to a European identity by opposing the implementation of European values** Parties question the EU legitimacy to ratify the IC, and describe the Convention as a threat toward national sovereignty, family traditions or culture "Gender" is embedded within Eurosceptic arguments. Parties criticize traditional top-down mechanisms for spreading European norms The LGBTQ perspective is linked to European values. However, not identified as a solution to inequality, rather as a threat toward national culture and family traditions	**Frame: The ratification of the IC is linked to European identity by supporting European values** The gender transformative approach of the IC is described as a measure to meet European values. The discourse view ratification of the IC as a measure to strengthening European values The discourse is "blaming" opposing actors or countries to be "behind", and connect this to European values and a European identity The LGBTQ perspective is linked to European values and a European identity, and is identified as part of a solution to inequality

6. Results

In the following chapter, the result from each country is summarized. First Poland is presented, then Sweden and finally Germany. In summary, a discursive link between the Istanbul Convention (IC) and a European identity was identified in Poland. In Germany, there were unexpectedly no link between the IC and a European identity. In Sweden, there was unexpectedly not a visible link between the IC and a national identity. Therefore, the hypothesis for Poland was as expected, however not in the case of Germany and Sweden.

Poland

In Poland, the IC has been the subject of debates, involving both politicians, women organizations, think thanks and religious leaders. Four frames emerge within the material. Two very distinct frames which were expected from previous research, where one frame criticises the IC and one frame defend the IC – however, without a link to an EU identity. Two less distinct frames also emerge, where one frame support the IC in relation to stepping closer to European values. Then the last frame which criticise the IC, referring to it as western extreme gender ideology, which is described as foreign to Polish values and traditions.

1 Frame: The IC is a threat toward national values and family traditions

In summary, this frame consists of strong criticism toward the IC, both from the perspective of showing resistance toward the transformative gender ideology of the Convention, as well as arguments why the Polish jurisdiction already fulfil the aim to end Violence Against Women (VAW). This frame was expected, since it has been thoroughly analysed by previous research. The discourse mostly includes arguments from right wing politicians, which frame the transformative approach of the IC as a threat toward Polish culture and family traditions (Biuro Komunikacji i Promocji, 2020). For example, the former Polish Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro expressed strong criticism toward the gender ideology within the IC and viewed the transformative approach as a threat to national values and family traditions. He further stated that the Convention created "*Disorganisation of the social order*" (pb//am, 2023, **Quote 1**[3]). He was supported by Mateusz Morawiecki, the Prime Minister of Poland (from 2017 to 2023). Whose political party, Law and Justice (PiS), was in a coalition with Ziobro's Solidary Poland at the time. Both Ziobro and Morawiecki argued that the IC could be unconstitutional and emphasized that the Polish legal system already goes further than required by the Convention (pb//am, 2023).

With the purpose to question the legitimacy of the IC, a citizens' legislative initiative was developed which was called "Yes to Family, no to Gender", an alternative Convention that both politicians and the Polish Episcopate supported (Ciobanu, 2020). This alternative Convention had an aim to stop VAW, however, including strong opposition to the socio-cultural definition of "gender". During a meeting in Sejm where "Yes to Family, no to Gender" were discussed, the conservative politician Marek Jurek (Right of the Republic/Prawica Rzeczypospolitej) expressed that the criticism of the IC was related to protecting Poland from gender ideology. At the same meeting, Violetta Porowska (PiS), argued that the Polish legislation was already sufficient to combat VAW (Rojek-Socha, 2021).

2 Frame: The IC is defended and criticism toward the IC is questioned

As an opposition to the strong criticism toward the IC, women's organisations, left politicians and experts mobilized within a frame that aim to oppose the violent criticism of the IC. This frame was also expected and has been summarized and analysed by previous research. The political discourse within this frame defends the ratification of the IC and answer to criticism from critics. The discourse does however not include a link between a European identity and the IC.

[3] All original quotes are included within Appendix 1

For example, during the meeting in Sejm where the initiative "Yes to Family, no to Gender" were debated, the ratification of the IC was also defended. For example, Monika Rosa, a member of parliament, Sejm, expressed that the initiative "Yes to Family, no to Gender" was filled with lies, discrimination, homophobia and inequality. Another left politician, Wanda Nowicka, expressed that "Yes to Family, no to Gender" was an initiative by extremists from Ordo Iuris (Rojek-Socha, 2021).

Furthermore, Adam Bodnar, who was Ombudsman at the time of ratification, expressed that the Polish jurisdiction is not sufficient to address VAW, and argued that the IC could fill existing loopholes (pb//am, 2023). Similar arguments on how the IC could improve the Polish jurisdiction was expressed by Professor. Małgorzata Fuszara, a Polish academic, sociologist, lawyer, and activist, known for her work in gender studies. She responded to the criticism by defending the gender ideology within the Convention (Ambroziak, 2020).

Within this frame, the IC is supported by both politicians, women organizations and experts. However, no link to a European identity is visible.

3 Frame: The ratification of the IC is linked to a European identity, by opposing the implementation of European values

This frame criticises the transformative gender ideology of the IC, however from the perspective of criticising the origin of the Convention. Questioning it from the perspective of including opinions that could be harmful to Polish culture and traditions (Mierzyńska, 2020). The gender ideology within the Convention is described as an ideology from "West European countries", which seem to have little to do with Poland's culture and family traditions. For example, the Deputy Minister of Justice, Marcin Romanowski, condemned the IC and described it as Neo-Marxist propaganda. He further stated that "*…we are not interested in the opinion of foreign countries. For us, the foundation is a sovereign nation-state*" (Mierzyńska, 2020, **Quote 2**). Furthermore, Krzysztof Bosak, a conservative politician active within Ordo Iuris, described the IC in a similar way. He expressed that the IC is a document drafted by the Western European left, and stated that *"Western societies should learn from Poles about culture and respect in the treatment of women, and not implement documents prepared by the Western European left into our legal system and subject us to the dictates of successive international bodies"* (Mierzyńska, 2020, **Quote 3**).

Within this discourse, the need for further cooperation between Central East European (CEE) Countries is expressed, with the aim to implement values which are described as separate to West European values. For example, Morawiecki asked The Ministry of Foreign Affairs to cooperate with other CEE countries to develop alternative strategies to stop VAW, however without including gender ideological articles. Morawiecki further explained that the initiative to work closer with other CEE countries was a measure to stop the gender ideology that some countries tried to integrate within Poland (Ciobanu, 2020). However, he didn't particularly mention European countries. Lidia Sankowska-Grabczuk, who worked as a spokesperson for right-wing conservative initiatives in Poland at the time linked the criticism toward the IC to pressure from the EU. She explained that the aim of closer collaboration with CEE countries would be to create a Central European alliance with other countries that, despite enormous pressure from the EU, had not ratified the Istanbul Convention. She expressed that *"For us, it would be a great geopolitical opportunity: to create a Central European alliance among those countries that, despite enormous pressure from the EU, have not ratified the Istanbul Convention. We could be pioneers in creating a strong voice of "yes" for the family and "no" to gender"* (Ciobanu, 2020, **Quote 4**).

Within this discourse, the IC is linked to negative pressure from (mostly West) European countries. Compared to the first frame which also criticises the gender ideology of the IC, this frame criticises the origin of the IC. It views the normative force of the IC as pressure from the EU or other West European countries, which is expressed as harmful for polish culture and traditions. Compared to the first frame, the discourse is more aggressive when criticizing the IC. Not only viewing the IC as in

conflict with Polish jurisdiction but also questions the origin of the Convention, and norms within the Convention are described as threatening toward national values and tradition.

4 Frame: The ratification of the IC is linked to a European identity, by defending the IC in relation to stepping closer to European values

This frame is not distinct since only a few actors participated within the discourse. Possibly, it is more of an element within a supporting frame. Nevertheless, these actors defended the IC from the perspective of stepping away from shared European values. This frame was discovered inductively, meaning that I didn't expect to find it and it was not related to any of my hypotheses.

Sylwia Marta Gregorczyk-Abram, a Polish lawyer and social activist argued that the IC is an important tool to combat VAW in Poland. Furthermore, she expressed that withdrawing from the Convention would be even worse than not ratifying it, since it would be a withdrawal from the EU's standards for the protection of human rights. She expressed that "*Withdrawing from the convention would be even worse than not ratifying it. It will be a clear departure from European standards for the protection of human rights. All of this will deepen Poland's identity crisis, in which we have been stuck for several years, for example due to non-compliance with the rule of law. It may turn out that the withdrawal from the convention is only a training ground—a testing ground before future attempts to isolate Poland"* (Gregorczyk-Abram, 2023, **Quote 5**).

Similar links between the IC and stepping away from EU standards were made by lawyer Barbara Giertych. She wrote a Facebook post which was later shared in several news forums, where she defends the IC from critics. She expresses that *"The Istanbul Convention is a beautiful example of the implementation of European values inspired by the great Judeo-Christian tradition and the views of the great Greek philosophers. I am curious to know which of the elements of these important human rights contained in the Convention is currently bothering those in power"* (Tomaszewicz, 2020**, Quote 6**). She further stated that*" "For many months there has been an ongoing attack by certain circles on European values expressed in the so-called Istanbul Convention (the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women). After studying the content of this convention, I believe that it is a faithful implementation of the ancient European tradition of introducing natural law into legislation* (Tomaszewicz, 2020, **Quote 7**).

In summary, this frame perceives a withdrawal from the Convention as stepping away from European standards and values. Connecting it to an ongoing identity crisis in Poland. It is therefore a visible link between the IC and European identity within the discourse.

Sweden

1 Frame: The IC Is related to national processes

Compared to Poland, the political discourse in Sweden has been much more supportive about the ratification of the IC. It is also noticeable that national women's organisations are well established within the national discourse. In Poland, the discourse was almost overwhelmed by criticism, and women´s organizations had to use most of their space to defend the Convention. In Sweden, women's organisations have been more focused on forwarding demands on the government to implement the articles of the Convention. Linking the articles of the IC as a measure to strengthening VAW-related processes at a national level. For example, experts and representatives from women's organisations forwarded strong criticism toward the Swedish government, regarding not fulfilling several articles focus on digital violence, economic violence, and how the treatment of women who have experienced violence in general could be improved (Massi Fritz, 2014; TT, 2022; Rindborg Holmgren, 2023).

Several women's organizations also forwarded demands on the government related to violence against elderly women within home care, where national cases were highlighted together with proposed changes to develop the national work (Samadi et al., 2025).

Within the discourse, examples of measures to strengthen the national jurisdiction were presented (Börjesson, 2024; Annebäck, 2024; Frank, 2024). This frame perceives the IC to be a tool to fulfil national goals, related to ending VAW. The IC is framed as an important tool to improve the national legislation and systematic work with VAW. The discourse is completely focused on the IC in relation to national processes and improvements at a national level, never mentioning the origin of the Convention or viewing values within the Convention as foreign. On the contrary, Swedish women's organisations and experts seem to view the articles within the Convention as directly related to the national jurisdiction and national processes focused on VAW. This frame was very informative about the Convention, and less focused on aligning with national values, which I expected. Therefore, a link to national processes were identified, however, no link to a national identity. The expected frame was not identified, since there was no discursive **link between the ratification of the IC and a national identity.** Neither was the IC linked to a European identity.

2 Frame: Swedish politicians' perception of the IC and the EU, no link between the IC and a national identity

In 2019 there was European Parliament elections, and within this time, Swedish EU politicians and experts highlighted the IC in relation to improvements at an EU level (TT, 2019; Post, 2019; Björk & Drougge, 2014) However, **a link between the IC and a national identity is not visible** within the discourse.

For example, politicians from the Swedish political party "Feminist Initiative", debated the IC in relation to the EU encouraging member states to implement a sexual consent law, inspired by the Swedish model (TT, 2019). When discussing the IC, Alice Bah Kunke, a politician from The Swedish Greens, expressed that their political party wanted to implement a Metoo- jurisdiction within all EU member states (TT, 2019; Johansson, 2019). Furthermore, the importance of the LGBTQ-perspective within the Convention is raised by several politicians. For example, Malin Björk, an EU politician from the Swedish Left Party, raised the importance of ratifying the IC in all EU member states to improve LGBTQ-rights, and urged the implementation of articles at an EU level (Björk, 2018).

Within this frame, politicians link the IC to progress at an EU level, where Swedish examples are highlighted. However, the discourse does not link the IC to European values or a European identity. In general, the discourse is driven by providing facts and examples, rather than debating norms and values. Politicians seem to perceive the IC as synonymous with support for gender equality in general. However, it does not relate to either stepping forward or stepping away from either national or European values or a European identity, in similar ways that parties did in Poland. Furthermore, there were no signs of the expected frame, where **the ratification of the IC is linked to a national identity.**

Germany

In Germany, the IC is linked to national processes related to violence against women (VAW) which is similar to the Swedish case. However, the relation between the IC and national values also includes a global perspective. Where several articles that write about ratification of the IC in non-European countries and also highlight the importance of gender equality in Germany, which is related to increasing the level of gender equality in other countries.

Frame 1: The IC is linked to national improvements, however without a link between the IC and a European identity

In Germany, the ratification of the IC was linked to national jurisdictional changes, similar to the Swedish discourse. Compared to Sweden, the German discourse highlights the need for a national sexual consent law, with the aim to align to articles within the IC. This jurisdictional change raised both support and opposition, which contributed to discussions including both politicians, women´s organizations and experts. (Rath, 2015; Leimbach, 2015; Haque, 2021). For example, in 2015, legal spokespersons for all parliamentary groups expressed support for jurisdictional changes. However,

Minister of Justice at the time, Heiko Maas (SPD), didn't see any purpose to change existing jurisdiction, claiming that the current version fulfilled the articles of the IC (Oestreich, 2014). Debates about changing the national jurisdiction continued over time. A few years later, in the context of debating jurisdictional changes at an EU level, including a directive about a sexual consent law, Lisa Paus, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youths, encouraged a review of the national jurisdiction in Germany, and related it to applying to norms within the Istanbul Convention (Günther & Lührig, 2024). Furthermore, the chair of Justizministerkonferenz, (Jumikos), in 2025, Anna Gallina, expressed concern that Germany would become one of the last to implement a sexual consent law, and fall behind regarding women´s rights. Gallina made comparisons to Sweden, Spain and Netherlands, and highlighted that these countries already had implemented a sexual consent law aligned with articles of the IC (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2026). This is a small but visible link regarding aligning to European standards. It is however not very distinct, and no one express it more directly. Neither is the discourse related to defending or aligning to European values.

Debates about jurisdictional changes emerged in Germany. Compared to Poland and other CEE countries, the national discourse in Germany wasn't as hostile toward the IC itself. The discourse was more focused on fulfilling or not fulfilling certain articles of the Convention, and not about opposing the overall aim of the Convention. There were parties within the discourse that made comparisons with other European countries, expressing a need to not fall behind women´s rights standards. However, a visible discursive link between the IC and a European identity was not identified within national political discourse. The discourse is much more focused on improving national legislation and initiatives related to VAW. For example, increasing the number of shelters for victims of violence. For example, Katja Grieger, managing Director of the Federal Association of Women's Counseling Centers and Women's Emergency Hotlines explains that there isn't enough support for women who has experienced violence, and express a need for more centres with expert knowledge about VAW, with the aim to fulfil articles within the IC (Dimpfel, 2025).

In summary, even if the IC awoke some opposition related to the implementation of a new sexual consent law, there were no signs of the expected frame, which **link the IC to European identity by supporting European values.**

7. Discussion

This master thesis examines "*In what ways is the Istanbul Convention linked to European identity in national political discourses?".* In the section below, frames from each country case are discussed in relation to the research question. In summary, expected frames which include a link to a European identity was identified within the Polish case. In Sweden and Germany, no discursive role of a European or a national identity was identified within discussions about the Istanbul Convention (IC).

Poland, the ratification of the IC is linked to a European identity by opposing the implementation of European values

In the Polish case, there were frames that linked the IC to a European identity, mostly from the perspective of opposing the Convention. For example, several parties opposed the origin of the Convention, describing it as "implosion of foreign norms" and relating it to "West European values". Compared to the Swedish case and German case, the discourse was much more focused on aligning with European norms, where arguments about sovereignty was included in the opposition. The hypothesis within this thesis was therefore fulfilled. Compared to Sweden and Germany, Poland, in this case, rejects the EU as a normative force, and relate the ratification of the IC to "pressure from Brussel". Politicians urge to "stop the gender ideology" from Brussel and even tried to step closer to other CEE countries with the aim to create a coalition with countries that shared the same perspective on gender equality and violence against women (VAW). The IC is therefore clearly linked to a European identity within the national discourse which was the hypothesis of this thesis.

Furthermore, another frame appeared inductively and was not expected. Some parties criticised the potential withdrawal from the Convention by referring to stepping away from European values and standards. This frame was not expected but visualise that also support for the Convention link the IC to a European identity. This frame also focuses of the origin of the Convention, but from the perspective of supporting measures to further align to European standards.

Sweden, no discursive link between the IC and a national identity

From my hypothesis about the Swedish case, I expected to identify a link between **the ratification of the IC and a national identity.** This link was however not identified, neither was a link to a European identity visible. The discourse in Sweden was very focused on forwarding requests to the government about improving the national jurisdiction, as well as improving VAW-processes within the country. It is obvious that there are established women's organizations within the country, that perceived the IC as a measure to improve national processes. However, neither woman's organizations, political leaders or experts related the IC to national or European norms or values, neither was the origin of the Convention discussed. Instead of perceiving the IC as foreign norms, the Convention was translated to national improvements. However, compared to Poland, from a very concretized perspective (regarding improving jurisdiction or processes), and not in relation to aligning to norms or certain values. From the discourse it is obvious that gender equality is part of the national culture. Women's organizations mobilized within the discourse to put pressure on the government regarding the implementation of certain articles. The fact that Sweden has a strong independence within the gender equality discourse and a strong national identity is clear from this discourse. However, there was no existing **link between the IC to a national identity**, which I had expected. The result could be affected by limitations within the material. The IC didn't raise any major opposition in Sweden, and there seem to be a culture regarding discussing gender equality from a practical perspective, rather than debating progression in relation to norms and values.

Germany, no discursive link between the IC and a European identity

From my hypothesis, where I expected a strong European identity within the German case, I expected that there would emerge a frame which link the IC to a European identity. However, there were no visible link between the IC and a European identity within national political discourse. There were some minor elements within supporting frames, where only a few parties raised concern about falling

behind other European countries by not implementing certain articles within national jurisdiction. This was however a small part of the discourse. Instead, the frame which debated national improvements in relation to the IC was much more obvious. Where the implementation of a "sexual consent law" were debated from the perspective of national improvements. Both support and opposition for the new jurisdiction emerged, and, similar to debates that occurred in CEE countries, politicians raised arguments where they expressed that the national jurisdiction already fulfilled the article of the IC. However, compared to the Polish case, this argument didn't trigger further questioning of the origin or overall aim of the Convention.

In summary, unexpectedly, there are no **links between the IC and a European identity** visible in the German country case. Similar to the Swedish case, there could be reason for further research, since arguments about "not falling behind other EU countries" were raised within national discourse.

Summary

Even though some hypothesises were proven wrong, it is possible to answer this thesis research question; *In what ways is the Istanbul Convention linked to European identity in national political discourses?* The result from this thesis show that there exists a discursive link between the IC and a European identity within Poland, which was expected. The hypothesises was therefore proven right. In Sweden, no link between the IC and a European identity was visible within political discourse, which I had expected. For the German case, I expected that a strong European identity would make it possible to identify a link between the IC and a European identity. However, no link was identified, and part of the discourse in Germany rather perceived the IC from a global perspective and related the Convention to global progress. Even if the hypothesises related to Germany and Sweden were proven wrong, the result explain how different EU member countries perceive the ratification of the IC.

From my results, it is obvious that these three country cases perceive the IC from different perspectives. Germany debates the IC from a perspective of improving national processes, however also by referring to global progress. Sweden is more focused on highlighting national improvement, or improvement within EU jurisdiction by implementing Swedish examples. The size of respective country could affect how these countries perceive themselves in relation to the IC and therefore explain why a relatively large country like Germany view their own gender equality level as related to global gender equality progress. Sweden is a smaller Nordic country, which could explain why the discourse rather highlights national improvement, and highlight how Swedish examples could improve EU legislation. Within national discourse in Germany, the implementation of a sexual consent law is related to not falling behind progress in comparison to other European countries. However, not linking the IC to a European identity in any other sense. In comparison to Poland, there are no signs that the definition of gender equality within the IC, conflicts with national values in either Germany or Sweden. Poland on the other hand, which previously has been prone to adapt to international norms and human right standards, view the values described within the IC as belonging to West European Countries. From the discourse, the national normative identity is described closer to other CEE countries compared to West European countries. Is this a questioning of the EU as a normative force? It could be, since opposition in Poland also relate the IC as "pressure from Brussels", and criticise the IC from sovereignty perspectives. Similar arguments were not visible in Germany or Sweden. Compared to Sweden and Germany, this discourse in Poland is much more related to the origin of the Convention and describe the IC as foreign opinions. Unexpectedly, also support for the IC in Poland link the withdrawal in relation to stepping away from European standards. This is further explained as a sign of an identity crisis in Poland. Possibly, this identity crisis is also visible in other CEE countries during ratification processes. Where benefits of becoming an EU country could be related to security and economic benefits, while the normative force of the EU is perceived as either threatening, or related to progress. Why is this discourse not visible in Germany and Sweden? Possibly because they have strong support for gender equality at a national level and established women's organisations, but also because their national gender equality discourse better aligns with the values within the IC. They are therefore more prone to both ratifying the Convention and relating it to national improvements.

In summary, a European identity has a discursive role within national discourses in Poland, which provide explanation to both opposition and support for the IC. The lacking link within Germany and Sweden, also provide explanation to the ratification process in countries that ratified the Convention without major controversy. The comparison between the three countries raises further questions, about the future for the EU as a normative force, and the current identity crisis not only within EU member countries, but also between countries within the EU.

8. Conclusion

This thesis examines how and if there is a discursive link between the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and a European identity, by answering the research question; *In what ways is the Istanbul Convention linked to European identity in national political discourses?*

Three country cases are examined, where Poland represent a a CEE Country, Germany a West European country, and Sweden a Nordic country. From previous research, a hypothesis for each country case was summarized. Where I expected to identify a discursive link to a European identity in Poland and Germany, including both opposition and support for the Convention. Since Sweden has a strong national identity regarding gender equality, I expected that there would be a discursive link between the IC and a national identity. Each hypothesis was tested by analysing the national political discourse, (reviewing national news articles), with frame analysis as method. From my results, a discursive link between the IC and a European identity was identified in Poland, and the hypothesis of this country case was therefore proven right. However, there were no discursive link between the IC and a European identity within Germany, which I had expected. Neither was a discursive link between the IC and a national identify identity identified in Sweden, which prove my hypothesis wrong. In Poland, the discourse was much more focused on the origin of the IC, and parties debated values and norms much more extensively in comparison to Germany and Sweden.

Values are the core of an identity, an identity that leaders for historic times have highlighted as necessary for the EU legitimacy. However, the result from this thesis raises questions regarding the possibility to establish a shared identity, when some EU countries view the IC as almost hostile integration of European norms, and others translate it to development and growth? Since the definition of gender equality has changed over time, it is not striking that different EU countries relate to the holistic or deeper definition described in the IC in different ways. However, a shared perception regarding the definition of gender equality, seems to be of importance when these norms are integrated from a European level to a national level in member countries. Newer EU member countries, including CEE countries like Poland, seem to experience an identity crisis when ratifying the Convention. An identity crisis described by previous research and which has been visible during negotiations in the European Parliament for quite some time. What does the differences in perception, both regarding definitions, but also how a European identity is perceived from a normative perspective, mean for the EU as a normative force in the future? Will it be weakened by the fact that member countries don't share the same perception regarding how European norms and values should be integrated within member countries? Or will the definition of gender equality, within Conventions like the IC, be integrated within countries like Poland in a way that challenge national opposition, and in the long run establish unity within the identity crisis described within the political discourse today?

How this identity crisis develops in the future, will affect the EU from the perspective of being a normative force. Furthermore, the current identity crisis within EU member countries, which also is reflected during negotiations at an EU level, challenge the EU from the perspective of deciding what the meaning of gender equality is today, as well as deciding solutions to gender inequality. Which will affect the population of the EU.

To strengthen the conclusions of this thesis, further research is suggested. The result and conclusions could be strengthened by looking at national discourses, however by including further material. By looking at recordings or notes from parliamentary negotiations about the IC, it would be possible to further analyse the national discourse within each country. Interviews with representatives from women's organisations or representatives from the national parliament could deepen the focus on values and norms linked to either a national or European identity. Furthermore, it would be interesting to include an EU candidate country within the analysis. These countries have a strong will to adapt to European norms, and it would be interesting to see if and how a link between the IC and a European identity is visible within national discourse, for example in comparison to a CEE country like Poland.

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Appendix 1, Original Quotes

Quote 1: "dezorganizacji porządku społecznego"

Quote 2: "…Opinia zagranicy nas nie interesuje. Dla nas podstawą jest suwerenne państwo narodowe"

Quote 3: "Społeczeństwa zachodnie powinny od Polaków uczyć się kultury i szacunku względem traktowania kobiet, a nie implementować dokumenty przygotowywane przez zachodnioeuropejską lewicę do naszego porządku prawnego i poddawać nas pod dyktat kolejnych ciał międzynarodowych"

Quote 4: "Dla nas byłaby to wielka geopolityczna szansa: stworzyć środkowoeuropejski sojusz wśród tych krajów, które pomimo ogromnej presji ze strony UE nie ratyfikowały konwencji stambulskiej. Moglibyśmy być pionierami w tworzeniu silnego głosu na »tak« dla rodziny i »nie« dla gender"

Quote 5: "Wypowiedzenie konwencji będzie jeszcze gorsze niż brak jej ratyfikacji. Będzie to jednoznaczne odwrócenie się od europejskich standardów ochrony praw człowieka. Wszystko to pogłębi kryzys tożsamościowy Polski, w którym tkwimy od kilku lat, chociażby z powodu nieprzestrzegania praworządności. Może się okazać, że wypowiedzenie konwencji to jedynie pole treningowe, poligon doświadczalny przed przyszłymi próbami izolowania Polski".

Quote 6: "Konwencja stambulska stanowi piękny przykład realizacji wartości europejskich inspirowanych wielką tradycją judeo-chrześcijańską oraz poglądami wielkich filozofów greckich. Jestem ciekawa, który z elementów tych ważnych praw człowieka zawartych w Konwencji przeszkadza obecnie rządzącym"

Quote 7: "Od wielu miesięcy trwa atak niektórych środowisk na wartości europejskie wyrażone w tzw. konwencji stambulskiej (konwencja o zapobieganiu i zwalczaniu przemocy wobec kobiet). Po przestudiowaniu treści tej konwencji uważam, że jest ona wierną realizacją starożytnej tradycji europejskiej wprowadzania prawa naturalnego do prawodawstwa"

Appendix 2, List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
EP	European Parliament
CEE Countries	Central and East European Countries
IC	Istanbul Convention
VAW	Violence Against Women
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO: s	Non-Governmental Organizations
LGBTQ	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer