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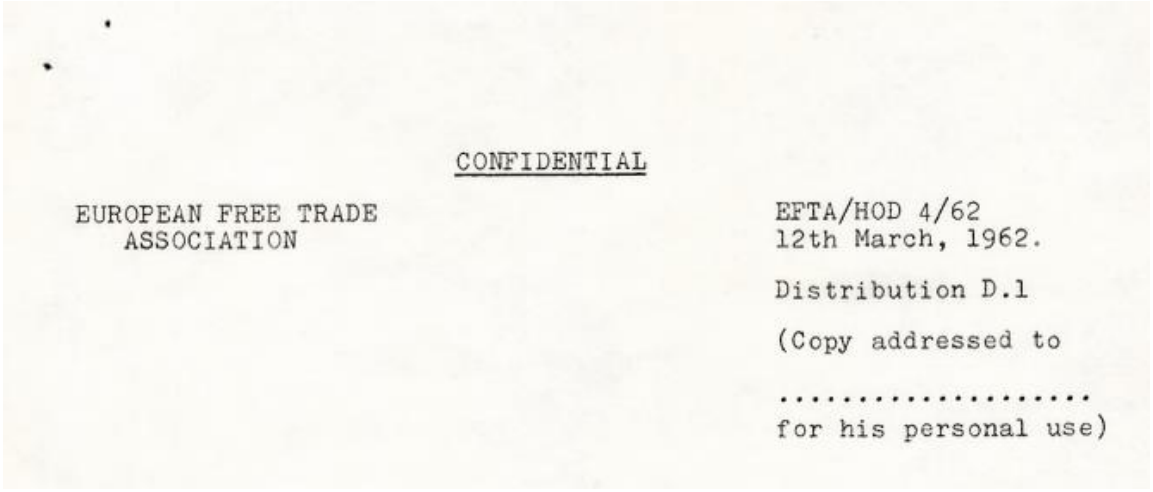

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A Tale of Two Countries

Analysing Swedish and Danish Diplomatic Actions within the European Free Trade Association 1960–1962

Naod Habtemichael

Abstract

This thesis examines how national identity influenced Swedish and Danish diplomatic strategies within the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) from 1960 to 1962, and how these strategies were portrayed in national newspapers. By applying a theoretical framework focused on interpreting diplomatic intentions, alongside a narrative analysis of news articles, the study scrutinises EFTA documents and contemporary press coverage to explore the interaction between diplomatic actions and public narratives. The findings reveal distinct approaches. Sweden was fixed to its neutrality doctrine and was solely focused on dismantling trade barriers. Denmark, on the other hand, pursued a more pragmatic strategy – defending domestic sectors such as agriculture, maintaining alignment with influential European powers and left the door open for deeper political integration. Newspaper articles in both countries sought to shape public understanding by reflecting as well as questioning official diplomatic narratives. While Swedish press coverage critically judged the constraints of neutrality, Danish newspapers predominantly presented EFTA as a temporary platform for further integration. By showcasing how diplomacy and the printed press co-produced national identities through narratives of neutrality and rationality, the thesis contributes to the scholarly understanding of small-state diplomacy and the interplay between national identity and foreign policy in an early phase of European integration.

Key words: EFTA, European integration, Cold War, Diplomacy, 1900s
Words: 17 353

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1 Introduction

Economic forces are in fact political forces. Economics can be treated neither as a minor accessory of history, nor as an independent science in the light of which history can be interpreted.

E.H. Carr (1939)[1]

1.1 A Divergence in European Economic Integration

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times", Charles Dickens famously wrote about a historical era of political change in Europe. The same could be said of Europe in the late 1950s, as the continent faced renewed efforts to build unity in the wake of the Second World War. Following, several initiatives aimed at integrating European nations took shape. Many countries found themselves at a crossroads, whereas different organisations with differing political objectives were established. At the time, the political climate was characterised by bipolar tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. This rivalry shaped military alliances as well as economic cooperation and integration efforts in Europe. Positioned between the two superpowers, European governments aimed to achieve lasting peace while also ensuring economic growth and stability. The foundation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 under the Treaty of Rome was the most significant step in this direction. The new community represented an ambition toward deeper economic and political integration among its founding members, which consisted of France, Italy, West Germany and the *Benelux* countries. For non-EEC countries, however, the speedy pace of integration raised new challenges. Exclusion threatened to weaken

[1] Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1946), 116.

economic competitiveness – particularly for export-dependent Nordic economies like Sweden and Denmark.[2] At the same time, these countries dealt with high aspirations for economic integration alongside the complex security dilemmas posed by the Cold War. In this context, the creation of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960 emerged not only as an economic alternative but as a diplomatic platform for countries that were either unwilling or unable to commit to the EEC's political ambitions. Sweden, for example, promoted EFTA as a means of boosting foreign trade without compromising its neutral foreign policy. The government emphasised the organisation's potential to improve access to European markets – an argument that resonated across the Nordic region. Denmark, too, saw EFTA as an important forum for economic engagement, though with a more politically strategic outlook.[3] In contrast, other founding members, like the United Kingdom, initially approached EFTA more cautiously.[4]

Yet, for Sweden and Denmark, EFTA represented more than an economic opportunity – it offered an important platform through which smaller states could articulate and secure their political autonomy in the face of a trajectory that pointed to deeper European integration. Reflecting on E.H. Carr's assertion that economic forces are inherently political, this thesis argues that the early EFTA negotiations consisted of considerably more than technical discussions on trade. Rather, they were politically charged processes, shaped by national identities, strategic interests and broader geopolitical considerations. Yet these dimensions were often downplayed in public, where economic diplomacy was typically framed as neutral, technical or even apolitical. This disconnect forms the core of this thesis: if trade negotiations were politically significant, how was this reflected in their public representation? By analysing previously confidential diplomatic records alongside contemporary press coverage, this thesis pursues a twofold aim: first, to investigate how diplomatic strategies within

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[2] Stephen Wall, *Reluctant European. Britain and the European Union from 1945 to Brexit*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 52.
[3] 'Lange Ej Optimistisk Om Snar Handelsfred [Lange Not Optimistic about Improved Trade Conditions]', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29 January 1960.
[4] 'Nordiskt Ekonomiskt Samarbete. Rapport Från Nordiska Ekonomiska Samarbetsutskottet SOU 1958:31 [Nordic Economic Cooperation. Report from the Nordic Economic Cooperation Committee]' (Stockholm: Handelsdepartementet [Department for Trade], September 1958), SOU 1958:31.

EFTA were articulated behind closed doors. Second, to examine in what ways these strategies were affected by notions of national identity. Understanding these discrepancies remains highly relevant today – not least because current debates over trade barriers and the reemergence of tariffs reflect many of the tensions explored in this thesis.[5] These developments strengthen both the aim of the study and the argument about the inseparability of economic and political forces. Therefore, this thesis not only contributes to historical scholarship but also offers insights into contemporary diplomatic practices and the media's role in narrating foreign policy.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis examines how the diplomatic engagements of Swedish and Danish representatives within EFTA were portrayed in national newspapers and whether these portrayals aligned with or diverged from the diplomatic actions conducted in official meetings. By comparing internal EFTA records with Swedish and Danish press coverage, the study aims to uncover discrepancies between confidential negotiations and their public representation. Particular attention is given to how national identity – whether expressed through ideas of neutrality, pragmatism or broader notions of "Scandinavian exceptionalism" (which is defined in 2.1.2) – shaped and legitimised diplomatic strategies in the media.
Consequently, the research questions guiding this thesis are:

- *How were the roles and actions of Swedish and Danish diplomats in EFTA represented in national newspapers, and in what ways did these representations align or diverge from the underlying diplomatic strategies?*
- *In what ways did conceptions of national identity shape Swedish and Danish diplomatic strategies within EFTA and how were these strategies framed in the national press?*

[5] Andy Bounds, 'EU Faces Trade War on Many Fronts', *Financial Times*, 29 April 2025, https://www.ft.com/content/0de62e71-add6-4a4b-b419-7d3e6b3c7b4e (Accessed 2 May 2025).

2 Literature Review

The following review explores two interconnected dimensions that form the analytical framework of the thesis. The first section concerns the diplomatic strategies of Sweden and Denmark within EFTA, focusing on how economic and political motivations shaped their strategic behaviour in the association. The second examines the interaction between diplomacy, national identity and public narratives, analysing how foreign policy was reflected through print media.

2.1 EFTA's Role as a Diplomatic Forum

2.1.1 Economic and Strategic Motivations for Engagement

For decades, scholars have debated whether the birth of the EEC weakened the sense of national sovereignty among the six founding states – or if the creation of the Community, on the contrary, served as a means for states to safeguard their interests within a broader framework. Rhenisch, for example, argues that the formation of the Community was not intended to diminish the role of national governments but rather to reinforce and stabilise their position as central actors in European integration.[6] While such an argument acknowledges the continued dominance of national governments, it risks oversimplifying the impact of regional integration in two important ways. First, it downplays the extent to which economic interdependence – one of the Treaty of Rome's key principles – shaped the integration process. Second, it underestimates how the mechanisms

[6] Thomas Rhenisch, 'Political and Economic Foundations of the European Economic Community', in *Interdependence versus Integration. Denmark, Scandinavia and Western Europe, 1945–1960*, ed. Thorsten Borring Olesen, 193 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1995), 147.

of interdependence gradually led to a shift in decision-making power – from national governments to intergovernmental bargaining and supranational institutions. These aspects laid the groundwork for an upcoming phase of European integration, in political as well as economic terms.

In this context, the creation of EFTA in 1960 was an alternative path for European countries that either could not, or did not want to, commit to the EEC's political ambitions. Early works on the history of European integration have predominantly viewed the EEC as the primary institutional driver, seeing EFTA as a pragmatic yet secondary trade initiative rather than a diplomatic platform in its own right. An example of scholarly literature aligned with such a notion is Corbet's chapter in *Europe's Free Trade Area Experiment*, in which he emphasises the perspective of EFTA as a reactive economic agreement, existing in the shadow of the EEC.[7] The association consisting of the Seven, according to Corbet, was shaped more by external constraints than by its own internal diplomatic agency. More recent scholarship has re-evaluated EFTA's role, challenging earlier interpretations that portrayed it primarily as an economic safety net for non-EEC-countries. Rye's *Integration from the Outside* is an example of this gradual shift. She acknowledges that EFTA was not merely a passive economic entity. Instead, she asserts, it actively influenced trade relations with non-EEC countries through negotiations, agreements and other policy actions among its member states.[8]

However, reviewing the existing literature in this field reveals a persistent gap: most historical analyses still prioritise economic explanations while undervaluing the diplomatic agency and strategic motives of smaller states like Sweden and Denmark. These strategic motives could include safeguarding political autonomy, leveraging EFTA as a bargaining platform *vis-à-vis* the EEC, managing domestic sectoral pressures and positioning themselves favourably within the Western bloc without compromising national principles. Furthermore, what remains underexplored is how these motives were shaped by national

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[7] Hugh Corbet, 'Role of the Free Trade Area', in *Europe's Free Trade Area Experiment. EFTA and Economic Integration*, ed. Hugh Corbet and David Robertson, First edition (Oxford: Published for the Graduate School of Contemporary European Studies, University of Reading, and the Trade Policy Research Centre, London, by Pergamon Press, 1970), 15–27.
[8] Lise Rye, 'Integration From The Outside. The EC and EFTA from 1960 to the 1995 Enlargement', in *European Enlargement across Rounds and Beyond Borders*, 2024, 8.

identity and communicated through both diplomatic practices and public narratives. The main research problem this thesis addresses is therefore that smaller states roles in the wake of early European integration often are portrayed as structurally determined, rather than as the outcome of calculated strategies. Thus, by bringing together internal diplomatic records and contemporary press coverage, this study aims to seek answers to how Sweden and Denmark negotiated their positions within EFTA as well as constructed narratives to anchor these choices domestically. In doing so, the thesis shifts focus from institutional determinism to a more nuanced understanding of small-state agency during a formative period of European politics.

2.1.2 Strategic Engagement Within the Association

The role of EFTA extended beyond mere economic collaboration. Besides issues such as long-term objectives regarding lower tariffs, the association also became a significant platform for smaller member states to engage in strategic diplomacy. For instance, Sørensen highlights the strategic choices behind Sweden and Denmark's decision to remain outside the EEC, arguing that their stance was aimed at preserving both economic competitiveness and political autonomy.[9] This act of juggling these two objectives shows the importance the two countries placed on avoiding supranational constraints – and their broader diplomatic considerations concerning sovereignty and national interests.[10]

Similarly, Laursen and Olesen assert that Denmark's engagement within EFTA was strategically motivated by an effort to balance its Nordic identity against aspirations towards deeper European integration.[11] The diplomatic strategy, the authors argue, was in that sense intertwined with broader political and cultural

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[9] Vibeke Sørensen, 'Nordic Cooperation – A Social Democratic Alternative to Europe?', in *Interdependence versus Integration. Denmark, Scandinavia and Western Europe, 1945–1960*, ed. Thorsten Borring Olesen, 193 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1995), 196.

[10] Toivo Miljan, *The Reluctant Europeans. The Attitudes of the Nordic Countries towards European Integration* (London: Hurst, 1977), 275.

[11] Johnny N. Laursen and Thorsten B. Olesen, 'A Nordic Alternative to Europe? The Interdependence of Denmark's Nordic and European Policies, 1945–1998', *Contemporary European History* 9, no. 1 (March 2000): 83, https://doi.org/10.1017/S096077730000103X.

considerations. Nevertheless, existing literature often overlooks how Danish diplomats operationalised these strategic considerations within EFTA negotiations, leaving unresolved questions about the interaction between diplomatic objectives and national identity.

In contrast, several scholars state that Sweden's strategic engagement within EFTA was distinctly shaped by its longstanding policy of neutrality. Karlsson, for instance, argues that although trade liberalisation broadly aligned with Sweden's neutrality, policymakers often interpreted neutrality differently when applying it practically to economic diplomacy.[12] This pragmatic construct created inherent tensions within Sweden's diplomatic strategy – which showcased itself by revealing uncertainty behind what appeared to be a coherent national policy.[13]

However, what appeared as a diplomatic drawback could also serve as a strategic advantage. In this case, it could be interpreted as Swedish diplomats adopted flexible positions by selectively emphasising either economic pragmatism or political neutrality, according to the intended audience or the diplomatic context. Furthermore, Karp asserts, Sweden's neutrality policy during the early Cold War, though clearly understood domestically, posed diplomatic challenges on the international stage. This was largely because it proved difficult to justify to external actors seeking clear alignment with either the Eastern or Western bloc.[14] Thus, the membership in EFTA offered Swedish diplomats a strategic room to leverage two different objectives: enabling diplomatic manoeuvring in international trade matters – as well as providing political space to maintain neutrality in the public sphere.

Another important aspect of both countries' strategic engagement during the Cold War is the concept of "Scandinavian exceptionalism" (which is further defined in 3.1.1). According to Lawler, the term refers to the distinctive self-perception among Scandinavian countries, which regard their engagement with European institutions through the lens of progressive and internationalist

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[12] Birgit Karlsson, 'Neutrality and Free Trade. Sweden and Trade Liberalisation, 1948–1958', *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 52, no. 2–3 (May 2004): 47, https://doi.org/10.1080/03585522.2004.10405251.
[13] Gunnar Hägglöf, *Minnen Inför Framtiden. 1961–1971* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1975), 131.
[14] Regina Cowen Karp, *Ontological Security-Seeking. National Identities under Stress*, Routledge Global Security Studies (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2025), 114.

values.[15] Denmark and Sweden belong to a set of countries, Lawler emphasises, that justified their ambivalent stance towards deeper European integration by invoking a national self-image grounded on superior democratic values. Such exceptionalism was not only necessarily rhetorical but also a normative framework – influencing the countries general foreign policy objectives, and in the long run, their diplomatic strategies. Therefore, addressing these issues – using concepts as "exceptionalism" – helps to better understand how these self-perceptions may have played a role in the diplomatic agency of small states and challenges the view of EFTA as primarily an economic project.

2.2 Diplomacy, Public Perception and Media Narratives

This section examines the interplay between diplomatic practice and public narratives in the early 1960s, focusing on how developments related to EFTA was understood and communicated in Sweden and Denmark. Building on the previous discussion of strategic motivations, it considers how diplomats responded to public expectations and contributed to a set of narratives revolving around European integration.

2.2.1 Rethinking the Role of Diplomats

The post-war diplomatic practices in Sweden and Denmark have been characterised as being largely shaped by a small, relatively homogeneous elite.[16] Traditional norms of diplomacy maintained a clear separation between political decision-making at the highest levels and the execution of foreign policy, with diplomats typically operating in anonymity. Gram-Skjoldager, for instance, highlights how Danish diplomats historically adhered to such a separation among

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[15] Peter Lawler, 'Scandinavian Exceptionalism and European Union', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 35, no. 4 (1997): 565–94, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00089.
[16] Nevra Biltekin, 'Servants of Diplomacy. The Making of Swedish Diplomats, 1905-1995' (Diss., Stockholm, Department of History, Stockholm University, 2016), 196.

the two branches.[17] However, in post-war Denmark, economic diplomats began to redefine the traditional diplomatic role by engaging more actively with domestic political considerations and public expectations, and thus, challenged the previously clear differentiation between the political and diplomatic spheres. "The multilateral economic diplomats", Gram-Skjoldager notes, "were among the first to break with the anonymity that had so far been one of the key features of the Danish diplomat."[18]

This shift, that simultaneously showcased itself in a number of European countries, indicates that diplomatic practices were increasingly influenced by domestic political agendas and interactions within the public. Despite this, existing literature has seldom critically examined how these changing diplomatic roles interacted with – or were affected by – public discourse. Looking into the relationship between elite-driven diplomacy and public perception is therefore central to understand how Swedish and Danish diplomats navigated the political landscapes of the early years of European economic integration.

An example of the interplay is found in the memoirs of the Swedish diplomat Ingemar Hägglöf, who recalls writing a column in *Svenska Dagbladet* in the late summer of 1956. In the column, Hägglöf argued that Sweden would risk economic isolation if it did not respond to Europe's shifting trade landscape.[19] His public involvement exemplifies how diplomats occasionally began to shape, and respond to, public perceptions in a period of critical policy choices. While Hägglöf's engagement demonstrate a case of a diplomat "breaking with anonymity", to paraphrase Gram-Skjoldager, and trying to influence public opinion, the scholarly literature rarely analyses whether such public engagements were indicative of a broader diplomatic strategy to actively influence public perceptions.[20]

During the 1950s, Swedish public opinion strongly favoured closer Nordic cooperation rather than joining the politically ambitious EEC.[21] Aligned with the

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[17] Karen Gram-Skjoldager, 'Bringing the Diplomat Back In: Elements of a New Historical Research Agenda', Working Paper, 1 March 2011, 13, https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/15952.
[18] Gram-Skjoldager, 17.
[19] Ingemar Hägglöf, *Drömmen Om Europa* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1987), 122.
[20] Gram-Skjoldager, 'Bringing the Diplomat Back In', 17.
[21] Bo Stråth, 'Nordic Industry and Nordic Economic Cooperation. The Nordic Industrial Federations and the Nordic Customs Union Negotiations 1947-1959' (Diss., Stockholm, Almqvist och Wiksell, 1978), 162f.

public sentiment, interest groups representing private enterprises in Sweden were also sceptical towards an EEC membership – dreading that a deeper political integration might conflict with their economic interests.[22] The alignment between public sentiment and economic interests came to frame the political environment within which Swedish diplomats operated.

In Denmark, by contrast, the public opinion toward European integration was marked by uncertainty. Worre notes that opinion polls in 1959 showed 62 per cent of Danish voters were undecided on the market issue, while the remaining electorate was evenly split between the different pathways that EFTA and EEC offered.[23] This came to be yet an example of how public opinion and societal attitudes – or the lack thereof – can both constrain and guide diplomatic decision-making. Danish politicians and diplomats thus operated without clear guidance from public opinion until the first British application for EEC membership in 1961, making Denmark follow suit.[24] The application also had consequences in the public sphere in Sweden. Former Swedish diplomat Mats Bergquist described the public debate after the United Kingdom's initial attempt to join the EEC as historically unmatched in the Swedish modern history – regarding both its intensity and longevity.[25]

This shift reflected a greater transition in foreign policy priorities, whereas economic issues increasingly shaped both national self-perceptions and, in extension, international negotiations. While the research in this field highlights the growing importance of economic diplomacy in the post-war era, the current academic literature has yet to fully explore how these dynamics played out within EFTA's institutional structures. To understand how economic diplomacy operated within EFTA, therefore, it is just as important to consider how these developments were communicated to the public and shaped through media narratives – which will be further discussed in the following section.

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[22] Stråth, 179.
[23] Torben Worre, 'Danish Public Opinion and the European Community', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 20, no. 3 (January 1995): 211, https://doi.org/10.1080/03468759508579305.
[24] Adam Rolewicz, 'Networks and Actors. Foreign Office Attitudes Towards European Integration 1957-73.' (PhD Dissertation, Kent, University of Kent, 2018), 112.
[25] Mats Bergquist, *Östen Undén, Tage Erlander Och Det Kalla Kriget*, 2023, 131.

2.2.2 Press Coverage and Narratives of European Integration

While the role of economic diplomacy has received growing scholarly attention, less focus has been placed on how the press engaged with and shaped these diplomatic efforts – particularly within the framework of EFTA. Newspapers significantly influenced public perceptions of diplomatic decisions, serving as gatekeepers and actively framing dominant narratives.[26]

In the Swedish context, scholarly discussions on European integration pointed out the country's commitment to its non-alignment and neutrality, which came to shape both the official rhetoric and media discourse.[27] Lödén, for instance, has argued that the Swedish government carefully cultivated a "narrative of detachment", making sure that European cooperation was framed in a way that did not contradict the country's strict foreign policy objectives.[28] As a result, it remains unclear to what extent this narrative had an impact on public opinion, or whether newspapers even challenged official rhetoric by government officials. Similarly, Phinnemore argues that Sweden, like other Nordic countries, traditionally favoured intergovernmental forms of cooperation over supranational integration, a preference potentially shaping Swedish media portrayals of EFTA as a safer alternative to the politically ambitious EEC.[29] Yet, this perspective might not capture the complexity within the Swedish press, specifically considering the variety of economic interests, editorial policies and journalistic practices that had an influence on how newspapers portrayed European integration. In contrast, Danish press narratives seem to have adapted a more pragmatic perspective. Scholars often highlight Denmark's stronger European orientation, shaped by its Western alliances and membership in NATO.

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[26] Erik Neveu, 'Media, Public Opinion, and Political Action', in *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies*, ed. John Downing (London: SAGE, 2004), 355.
[27] Aryo Makko, *Ambassadors of Realpolitik. Sweden, The CSCE and The Cold War*, First edition, Studies in Contemporary European History 20 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 37; Mikael af Malmborg, 'Den ståndaktiga nationalstaten. Sverige och den västeuropeiska integrationen 1945-1959' (Diss., Lund, Lund Univ. Press, 1994), 386; Thomas Pedersen, 'EC-EFTA Relations. An Historical Outline', in *The Wider Western Europe. Reshaping the EC/EFTA Relationship*, ed. Helen Wallace (London: Pinter Publishers for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), 86; Karlsson, 'Neutrality and Free Trade', 41.
[28] Hans Lödén, 'För Säkerhets Skull. Ideologi Och Säkerhet i Svensk Aktiv Utrikespolitik 1950-1975' (Diss., 1999), 27, https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/12866.
[29] David Phinnemore, 'The Nordic Countries, The European Community (EC) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) 1958–1984', in *The European Union and the Nordic Countries*, ed. Lee Miles (London New York: Routlege, 1996), 32.

This geopolitical position influenced public expectations and led the press to situate EFTA within broader debates about Nordic cooperation and international engagement.[30] While such studies offer insights into Denmark's later gradual realignment from EFTA towards the EEC, they rarely address how EFTA was framed in Danish newspapers at the time.[31] However, while the literature often describes Denmark as an "anxious" small state – concerned about exclusion and eager to remain flexible – few studies have examined how these concerns were reflected in the media.[32] Contemporary Danish coverage frequently portrayed EFTA as a temporary solution, leaving room for future alignment with the EEC rather than presenting the association as an endpoint.[33]

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined the formative role of narratives in shaping both public opinion and diplomatic behaviour. As Hampson and Narlikar argue, narratives are not just reflections of political preferences – they help form political identities.[34] From this point of view, press coverage may do more than explain policy. It also influenced how political communities (i.e., voters) in Denmark and Sweden perceived their countries future in Europe. While narratives can build public support, they can also limit debate by leaving little room for alternative views. Thus, narratives may have narrowed what was seen as politically achievable, rather than expanding the range of ideas about European integration. What remains underexplored, however, is how press narratives aligned with, diverged from, or helped shape the diplomatic strategies pursued by national governments – particularly during EFTA's early years. Therefore, by integrating diplomatic documents with contemporary media narratives, this thesis will provide new insights into how public narratives and diplomatic practices jointly shaped strategies and identities.

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[30] Anders Wivel, 'As Awkward as They Need to Be. Denmark's Pragmatic Activist Approach to Europe', in *Nordic States and European Integration. Awkward Partners in the North?*, ed. Malin Stegmann McCallion and Alex Brianson (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2017); Laursen and Olesen, 'A Nordic Alternative to Europe?'

[31] Morten Rasmussen, 'Joining the European Communities. Denmark's Road to EC-Membership 1961–1973' (PhD Dissertation, Florence, European University Institute, 2004), 31.

[32] Miljan, *The Reluctant Europeans*, 156–158.

[33] Morten Kelstrup, 'Denmark's Relation to the European Union. A History of Dualism and Pragmatism', in *Denmark and the European Union*, ed. Anders Wivel and Lee Miles (London: Routledge, 2014), 15.

[34] Fen Osler Hampson and Amrita Narlikar, 'Narratives and Negotiations: Lessons for Theory and Practice', in *International Negotiation and Political Narratives. A Comparative Study*, ed. Fen Osler Hampson and Amrita Narlikar, Routledge Studies in Security and Conflict Management (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 292.

3 Methodology

This section outlines the methodological foundations of the thesis. It introduces the analytical approach and how this is operationalised through a systematic analysis of diplomatic transcripts and newspaper articles. The section also reflects on the source material, the selection of primary sources and its limitations.

3.1 Conceptual Foundations and Research Design

3.1.1 Definitions

The field of diplomatic history has expanded considerably in recent decades, broadening the definition of what constitutes a diplomat – from solely traditional state representatives to a wider scope encompassing different actors, values and social relations involved in diplomatic exchanges.[35] As a consequence, scholars have increasingly recognised the role of non-state actors in diplomacy, allowing, for example, the influence of business leaders who engage in economic diplomacy and international non-governmental organisations that mediate conflicts and influence state policies. While a broader understanding of diplomacy has enhanced the scope, this thesis adopts a traditional definition of a diplomat – focusing solely on state representatives who formally negotiate on behalf of their governments. Thus, in line with the definition provided by Van Dyke and Vercic, diplomacy and diplomats will in this context be interpreted as "the management or negotiation of relationships among governments using

[35] Stefan Eklöf Amirell, 'New Diplomatic History and the Study of the Global Nineteenth Century', *Global Nineteenth-Century Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 2022): 28.

international or intercultural communication".[36] In contrast, David Lindsey, in his book *Delegated Diplomacy*, defines diplomats more broadly as actors engaged in "diplomatic communication" or "diplomatic work".[37] While Lindsey's conceptualisation captures a wider scope beyond formal state representation, it is arguably too broad for the precise historical and analytical focus of this thesis. Therefore, using a definition as such risk compromising the precision required in this case.

Furthermore, another key term in this thesis is "national identity", which refers to a nation's collective understanding of its distinctive character, shared values and perceived role in the international sphere. It is essentially a constructed notion, that continue to be shaped and reshaped through discourse and historical narratives. Menéndez-Alarcón notes that the term itself remains vague and lacks a "consensually established content".[38] Thus, national identity emerges primarily as an "imagined" framework and can therefore be said to share common traits with Benedict Anderson's work on "imagined communities".[39]

Closely related to national identity, and central to this thesis, is the notion of "Scandinavian exceptionalism". Similar to the definition of national identity, this term is a contested concept lacking a clear scholarly consensus.[40] Wivel describes how Scandinavian countries have historically positioned themselves as principled actors in international politics, promoting ideals such as peace and humanitarianism.[41] This self-image gained particular prominence during the Cold War, when the Nordic states were widely perceived – and actively portrayed themselves – as morally superior to both competing superpower blocs.[42]

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[36] Mark A. Van Dyke and Dejan Verčič, 'Public Relations, Public Diplomacy, and Strategic Communication. An International Model of Conceptual Convergence', in *The Global Public Relations Handbook. Theory, Research and Practice*, ed. Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Verčič, Expanded and rev. ed (New York: Routledge, 2009), 824.
[37] David Lindsey, *Delegated Diplomacy. How Ambassadors Establish Trust in International Relations* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2023), 29.
[38] Antonio V. Menéndez-Alarcón, 'National Identities Confronting European Integration', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 8, no. 4 (1995): 544.
[39] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition. (London: Verso, 2016).
[40] Christopher S. Browning, 'Branding Nordicity. Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism', *Cooperation and Conflict* 42, no. 1 (1 March 2007): 30, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836707073475.
[41] Wivel, 'As Awkward as They Need to Be. Denmark's Pragmatic Activist Approach to Europe', 33.
[42] Ole Wæver, 'Nordic Nostalgia. Northern Europe after the Cold War', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 68, no. 1 (1992): 77–102, https://doi.org/10.2307/2620462; Browning, 'Branding Nordicity'.

Erlandsson further highlights how this Nordic, or Scandinavian, identity sometimes transcended even national policies of neutrality, which led to a sense of shared regional identity among Scandinavian diplomats and policymakers.[43] Its significance, then, lies less in the formal policy outcomes and more in its enduring influence on how these states perceived themselves – and, in turn, how they acted within the diplomatic sphere.

3.1.2 Theoretical Framework

Building the theoretical foundation for this thesis, I have chosen to adopt Quentin Skinner's interpretive concept as the primary analytical approach, with particular emphasis on his concepts of intentionality and illocutionary force.[44] Skinner argues for the necessity of contextualising historical statements firmly within the specific political discourses they were originally intended to influence. More concretely, the thesis will utilise Skinner's method by explicitly focusing on identifying and interpreting the intended political actions (or as he defines it: illocutionary acts) behind diplomatic statements. This approach enables an understanding of texts not merely as static records of past discussions, but as deliberate messages – crafted by diplomatic actors to achieve particular objectives within the given historical context. In this sense, the focus lies less on what a text says in abstract terms, and more on what it seeks to do in its political and temporal setting.[45]

"Many historians," Skinner argues, "make it a principal part of their business to investigate and explain the unfamiliar beliefs we encounter in past societies".[46] His remark is particularly relevant when analysing historical documents that arise within a real-life political context. Consequently, how Swedish and Danish diplomats for instance discussed trade policies, sovereignty

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[43] Susanna Erlandsson, 'Window of Opportunity. Dutch and Swedish Security Ideas and Strategies 1942-1948', Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Historica Upsaliensia 252 (PhD Dissertation, Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, 2015), 104.
[44] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Vol. 1 Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79.
[45] Skinner, 94.
[46] Skinner, 27.

or neutrality cannot be taken at face value. Instead, their arguments must be understood within the social norms and political constraints of their time.

This means assessing not only what was said but also which arguments were considered legitimate or conceivable within the political culture at EFTA's diplomatic forums during the association's initial years. Therefore, the justification for applying Skinner's methodology in this thesis rests on several arguments. Firstly, Skinner's emphasis on intentionality is of great deal in order to understand the underlying strategic choices made by diplomats in the formal settings that are being examined. The revelation of the different possible pathways – that highlight the diplomats' strategic aims – are likewise embedded in the primary sources.[47]

Secondly, by requiring attention to intentionality and historical contextualisation, the framework used by the Cambridge historian helps to avoid certain anachronistic pitfalls which, as a result, helps to ensure that interpretations remain historically grounded.[48] Moreover, Skinner's concept of illocutionary force is particularly valuable as it highlights how diplomatic language actively seeks to shape political outcomes, rather than only having a descriptive function.[49] Such historical thoroughness is of importance, both for the sake of the scholarly transparency as well as ensuring a high degree of validity in the upcoming analysis. Nevertheless, a notable limitation in this methodological approach is the inherent risk of overemphasising intentionality and thus a degree of coherence to diplomatic statements that may not have been present at the time. To address this, the analysis requires self-awareness – particularly in limiting the scope for speculative interpretation and remaining cautious when encountering ambiguities within the diplomatic setting.

Furthermore, it is of importance to address the inherent tension between interpreting diplomatic statements as deliberate political actions and acknowledging that diplomacy is also deeply shaped by social norms as well as

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[47] Skinner, 98f.
[48] Skinner, 85.
[49] Although originally developed for the study of political thought, Skinner's conceptual framework can be applied to other political sources, such as diplomatic records, when carefully adapted. The framework's analytical value lies in its treatment of documents as deliberate political acts.

historical and institutional practices. Not least since diplomats often operate within established conventions and sometimes without conscious strategic intent. While Skinner's method is well-suited for interpreting diplomatic texts due to its focus on rational intent, it is less effective for analysing media narratives, where such intentionality is often absent. Moreover, diplomatic language itself may be shaped by inherited practices and normative expectations that influence behaviour beyond what diplomats explicitly recognise. To address this, the second part of the theoretical framework adopts a narrative analysis approach. As Fulton argues, news is not simply a channel of information but is actively shaped through linguistic choices and framing.[50] Particularly useful is her claim that news narratives do more than convey facts – they construct social realities and subtly influence how events and actors are understood.[51] Narrative analysis, then, provides a tool for exploring how diplomatic actions and national identities were reproduced – and potentially reinterpreted – within mass media representations. At the same time, it is important to remain critically aware that such narratives are inherently selective and shaped by journalistic norms that may limit the complexity of diplomatic portrayal.

The division in terms of the theoretical framework – whereas the primary sources convey two different types of meanings and cannot be understood in isolation from their institutional and political contexts – therefore require two different set of approaches. This division is further justified by recent contributions in the field of media history. The editors of *Towards a History of Media Tactics* emphasise that media practices, including representations in newspapers, are "always deeply embedded in existing social, political, cultural, economic and discursive realities".[52] Therefore, while Skinner's approach remains important to interpreting diplomatic intentions, a narrative analysis addresses the specific contextualisation that is required to bear in mind when analysing representations in historical newspapers.

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[50] Helen Fulton, 'Print News as Narrative', in *Narrative and Media*, ed. Helen Fulton et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 243, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511811760.
[51] Fulton, 219.
[52] Marie Cronqvist, Fredrik Mohammadi Norén, and Emil Stjernholm, 'Introduction', in *Media Tactics in the Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Marie Cronqvist, Fredrik Mohammadi Norén, and Emil Stjernholm, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2024), 4.

3.1.3 Methods

The selected methodological approach supports the thesis's aim of understanding how Swedish and Danish national identities shaped diplomatic actions and media narratives. Using a qualitative analysis of diplomatic transcripts and contemporary newspapers allows for a greater understanding of how these identities were actively performed in diplomatic contexts and reframed in public media discourses.

An ambition of this study is ensuring a systematic analysis. To meet this, a close reading strategy is employed in the analysis section – reviewing both diplomatic transcripts and newspaper articles. The software *NVivo 15* allowed the analysis to be organised systematically and categorise emerging themes. Although the overall coding strategy was primarily inductive – in the sense of themes emerging organically while reading and identifying the primary sources – there were also certain predefined deductive categories directly linked to the two research questions. The decision to combine both inductive and deductive coding approaches was guided by two principal aims. First, given the interpretive nature of this study, it was important to allow themes to emerge from the materials. An inductive approach made it possible to stay open-minded to unexpected patterns within the sources that might otherwise have been overlooked. However, at the same time the research questions required a certain level of analytical structure from the start. To meet this need of a semi-structured framework, several predefined categories – such as "national identity", "rationality", "economic interests" and "Scandinavian exceptionalism" – were established in the beginning of the process.

Given both practical and analytical considerations, the scope of the study is clearly drawn, and the period in question spans from 1960 to 1962 – which marks EFTA's initial establishment and early years. This relatively brief timeframe provides a manageable number of primary sources given the scope of this thesis. While EFTA's other member states are inevitably mentioned, detailed analysis beyond the two selected countries falls outside the scope of this thesis.

3.2 Sources

The empirical basis consists of two types of primary sources and consists of EFTA's diplomatic documents – provided by the Historical Archives of the European Union – and newspaper articles from Denmark and Sweden's respective national libraries. To retrieve the archival sources referred in this thesis, research visits were conducted during the spring semester of 2025 at the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm (18–20 February), the Historical Archives of the European Union in Florence, Italy (25 February–1 March) and the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen (4–6 March). The research visit to the archives in Florence was made possible through a travel stipend generously granted by the Centre for European Studies at Lund University.

3.3.1 Diplomatic Transcripts within EFTA Meetings

The core diplomatic material analysed in this thesis is sourced from the Historical Archives of the European Union. This includes transcripts from all five Ministerial Council sessions held between 1960 and 1962, each typically comprising 10–15 pages. In addition, the study draws on the complete set of Heads of Delegations meetings (approximately 350 pages) and around 50 meetings of the Brussels Liaison Committee (approximately 200 pages), although many of the latter were excluded due to their highly technical nature.[53] The transcripts are semi-detailed in format, combining agendas and summaries with attributed statements that specify who spoke, what was said, and how others responded.

These records were selected not only for their relevance to the period under examination but also for their ability to provide insights into the positions and political considerations that were top of mind at – among others – Swedish and Danish diplomatic delegates. The choice to prioritise these sources rests on

[53] While the focus of this analysis is on material related to political strategy and national identity, the more technical discussions were still useful. They helped provide context for the positions different countries took and gave insight into which delegations shared similar interests or tended to align during negotiations.

their value in capturing *de facto* diplomatic exchanges, as opposed to retrospective summaries in form of relying on historical accounts in political memoirs or other secondary sources.

However, that does not by any means conclude that the selections were free of limitations. The archival material is extensive, but no way near exhaustive. The available transcripts often focus on formal interventions and lack detailed records of informal discussions and remarks, which scholarly material have underscored played an important role during the period in question.[54]. The documents also risk of reflecting the institutional language of the EFTA Secretariat, meaning that some traces in national positions may be filtered through standardised reporting conventions, or even the Secretariat's eagerness to act as an unofficial gatekeeper for future historians. Finally, for the sake of transparency, archival citations from the transcripts follows the referencing standards employed by the Historical Archives of the European Union. This practice facilitates verification of the forthcoming research findings.

3.3.2 Scrutinising Swedish and Danish Newspapers

To complement the diplomatic documents, the second part consists of a selection of Swedish and Danish newspaper articles published during the same period. The four Swedish newspapers examined were *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*. These were accessed via the database *Svenska Dagstidningar* during multiple research visits to the National Library in Stockholm. The Danish dailys – *Berlingske Tidende*, *Aktuelt*, *Børsen* and *Jyllands-Posten* – were retrieved via *Mediestream*, a digitised archive accessed at the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen.

The newspapers were selected due to their extensive coverage of international and economic affairs during the period in question. Although the selection is primarily national in scope, the decisive factor was strictly empirical. Each and every of these titles returned the highest number of relevant articles

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[54] Giles Scott-Smith, 'Opening Up Political Space. Informal Diplomacy, East-West Exchanges, and the Helsinki Process', in *Beyond the Divide. Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe*, ed. Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 38.

during the initial search process. Searches were conducted using a range of terms relevant to the research questions. For the Swedish material, the keywords included "EFTA", "EEG", "*Europeiska ekonomiska gemenskapen*", "*gemensam marknad*", "*De Sju*", "*De Sex*" and "*frihandel*". Danish searches similarly used terms such as "*EFTA*", "*europæiske fællesskab*", "*fællesmarked*", "*De Syv*", "*De Seks*" and "*frihandelsomraade*." In addition to the thematic keywords, searches were also made for individual political and diplomatic figures, such as Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Östen Undén and Denmark's Minister for Foreign Financial Affairs Jens Otto Krag, as well as other high-level diplomats appearing in EFTA meeting transcripts. Although none of the articles that were found using the search of names came to be used in the following section, the search results still came to use in the sense that they convened relevant examples of how influential actors were portrayed and how their associated policy positions were narrated at the time.

In total, approximately 20 articles from each country were collected and analysed. Articles were manually exported in PDF format and later imported into *NVivo 15*, where they were coded (according to the framework outlined in section 3.1.3). While the focus was primarily on news reporting, a limited number of editorials were also included – particularly in cases where the boundary between reportage and opinion was blurred, as was often the case in mid-20th-century printed press. The selection was guided by the articles' relevance to the analysis, especially in how they framed diplomatic developments for a domestic readership.

When interpreting the newspaper data, care was taken to avoid a reliance on keyword-matching alone. Instead, the articles were read in full to contextualise key arguments and identify recurring themes in a more overarching manner. This was particularly important given the historical nature of the languages and the subtle blending of information and opinion in the previously mentioned reporting style of the period. Furthermore, all Danish and Swedish newspaper texts were translated into English. To ensure accuracy, translations were cross-checked against official dictionaries whenever even minor uncertainties arose.

4 Analysis

The analysis is divided into three sections. The first two parts presents findings and examines diplomacy and media coverage separately – while the third section brings these perspectives together to synthesise the results. The final section also reflects on the broader conceptual implications of the interplay between diplomatic action and national identity in shaping public discourse. Before turning to the analysis, however, it is useful to revisit the questions guiding this study: How were the roles and actions of Swedish and Danish diplomats in EFTA represented in national newspapers, and to what extent did these representations align with – or diverge from – the diplomatic strategies pursued behind closed doors? Furthermore, in what ways did conceptions of national identity shape these strategies?

4.1 Diplomatic Actions Behind Closed Doors

4.1.1 Sweden's Agenda: Trade Without Political Entanglement

The internal forums of EFTA – particularly the Ministerial Council and the Heads of Delegations – served as important settings where national representatives could articulate and advance their strategic goals. These meetings were not limited to economic coordination but became important venues for shaping the association's direction in line with broader political priorities. Both Sweden and Denmark used these forums to bring domestic concerns into conversation with wider debates about EFTA's policy agenda, pursuing aims that reflected national interests as well as regional considerations.

During the association's first years, Swedish representatives distinguished themselves by being the most eager diplomats to speed up the dismantling process of trade barriers. This position becomes particularly clear when analysing the statements made by their delegates, who repeatedly pointed out the liberalisation of trade policies as the primary and, in their view, sole objective of EFTA. For instance, Swedish diplomatic representatives were consistently pushed to "abolish such [quantitative] restrictions at the same time as tariffs so as to make the Free Trade Area a reality".[55] Thus, Swedish diplomats not only prioritised the removal of tariffs but also sought the elimination of every significant trade barrier there was.[56]

Further evidence of this forward-leaning stance from Stockholm emerges from the discussions in the Consultative Committee. Their delegate, Mr. Josephsson, although acknowledging a certain degree of satisfaction with the rate of some tariff reductions made thitherto, warned that "any decision to reduce tariffs was severely compromised by certain countries lagging behind in implementing it or requesting and receiving exceptions".[57] He underscored that the uneven pace of phasing out trade barriers disturbed "the harmonious development of intra-EFTA trade and was to the detriment of the prestige of the Association".[58] This concern reflects a broader Swedish diplomatic objective: to ensure that EFTA could present itself as an internally coherent and credible economic bloc, and by doing so, being capable of negotiating with external actors (such as the EEC) on a strong footing.

By strengthening EFTA from within, particularly through advocating faster tariff harmonisation and a stricter adherence to principles characterised by *laissez-faire*, Swedish delegates sought to enhance EFTA's credibility as a self-

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[55] 'Heads of Delegations 47th Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 12 December 1961), 3, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 47/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[56] According to EC's glossary, the term quantitative restrictions is defined as 'Specific numerical limits on the quantity or value of goods that can be imported (or exported) during a specific period'. 'Access2Markets Glossary (DG Trade)', European Commission, accessed 28 March 2025, https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/glossary/quantitative-restrictions.
[57] 'Consultative Committee's 3rd Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 24 May 1962), 7, EFTA.H-02 EFTA/W 30/62, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[58] 'Consultative Committee's 3rd Meeting', 7.

sufficient framework for trade.[59] This strategy was further evident in the number of cases when higher-ranking representatives, such as Gunnar Lange, the Swedish Minister for Trade, made remarks to his ministerial colleagues in the Council about phasing out trade restrictions even earlier than they previously had agreed on.[60] Yet, as the records show, Lange's proposal found limited support beyond the British and Swiss ministers.[61]

The push for swift liberalisation reforms must also be understood in light of the country's broader diplomatic aspirations. While Swedish representatives sought to strengthen EFTA economically, they were simultaneously cautious to ensure that deeper economic cooperation did not eventually evolve into political integration, which would have conflicted with the country's longstanding policy of neutrality. It is to this second, equally important dimension of Swedish diplomacy – the persistent safeguarding of neutrality within EFTA's forums – that the analysis now turns.[62]

Sweden's neutrality doctrine provided a framework through which diplomats evaluated the scope for international cooperation – not as a reason to dismiss economic integration altogether, but as a way to keep it within boundaries that protected political independence. EFTA, in this light, was not seen as a threat to neutrality, but rather as a forum where economic collaboration could be managed without slipping into supranational commitments. What this reveals, however, is that Swedish diplomacy did not reject European integration outright. Instead, it sought to manage its potential depth by establishing clear political limits. In doing so, neutrality became more than just a defensive stance – it offered a perspective for legitimising Sweden's reluctance to go beyond the economic sphere.

Yet maintaining such a balance was more complicated in practice than in theory. As the previously classified records reveal, Swedish diplomats were

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[59] Sweden's push for liberal reforms in trade policies within EFTA might seem at odds with its expansive welfare state. But, as Andreas Bergh has argued, Sweden's model has throughout the years showcased how open markets and high social spending can be mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. See: Bergh, *Sweden and the Revival of the Capitalist Welfare State* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2014).
[60] 'Ministerial Council's 7th Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 2 March 1962), 3, EFTA-499 EFTA/C.SR 7/62, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[61] 'Ministerial Council's 7th Meeting', 3.
[62] Jakob Gustavsson, *The Politics of Foreign Policy Change. Explaining the Swedish Reorientation on EC Membership* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2016), 73–74.

attentive to how the association presented itself – particularly in its interactions with the EEC. During EFTA's initial years, it was actively pursuing an association agreement with the Six to create a fully integrated European market.

Within this context, Swedish representatives expressed concerns that openly highlighting a distinct bloc of neutral EFTA members – consisting of Sweden, Austria and Switzerland – might weaken the association's unity and complicate negotiations with external actors. Such a fragmentation, they feared in Stockholm, would not only weaken EFTA's coherence but could also threaten Sweden's broader strategic objectives by isolating the neutrals and drawing unwanted political attention. Thus, Sweden aspired to tread carefully by sticking with its neutrality without allowing it to, or at least crossing their fingers that it would not, obstruct the collective diplomatic front presented by EFTA.

Furthermore, Swedish diplomats repeatedly emphasised that any potential association with the EEC needed to remain strictly economic.[63] This insistence was tied explicitly to Sweden's position as a neutral state, a position which, as showed below, was sometimes misunderstood – and directly challenged – by Western allies:

"[…] it was felt that the three countries probably would also encounter special difficulties, linked with their foreign policy, as it was known that the position of the neutrals in Europe was not looked on with favour in-all quarters of the Six or of the United States' Government. Against that background the three countries had wished to examine the neutral aspects of their policy and the consequences they might have in the forthcoming negotiations and to see inhowfar, after decisions had been taken by other EFTA Governments, the three could co-ordinate their views and their approach to the Six."[64]

This passage illustrates how neutrality was viewed as both a core diplomatic principle and a potential weakness when political stakes were high. Neutral states were fully aware that their position often failed to gain traction – particularly among influential actors like the United States and the EEC.

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[63] 'Heads of Delegations 2nd Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 12 January 1961), 2, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 2/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[64] 'Heads of Delegations 36th Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 20 September 1961), 2, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 36/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.

The event also corresponds closely with Hans Mouritzen's concept of *handlefrihed* – the objective room for manoeuvre in foreign policy – which highlights the constraints smaller states face in navigating their external environments.[65] While superpowers such as the United States rarely experience limitations to their diplomatic manoeuvring, smaller states – like Sweden in this context – must constantly manage and reassess their limited *handlefrihed*, which is shaped by both external expectations and historical strategic choices. In this sense, Sweden's commitment to neutrality can be understood as a case of path dependency – where past decisions constrained the range of politically feasible options.

Such a sense of caution is also evident in Minister Lange's remarks.[66] Reporting on his recent visits to EEC capitals, he noted that there was growing recognition of the potential role neutral countries could play in Europe's future – though hesitancy remained about granting them full association.[67] Lange stressed that discussions among the three neutral members had been constructive and had produced a "high degree of agreement".[68] While their approaches to presentation might differ, the countries seemed to be united in their interpretation of neutrality in relation to the Treaty of Rome and were prepared to demonstrate this cohesion. Sweden and the two other neutrals had made every effort not to obstruct the integration process, Lange asserted, and were ready to begin eventual negotiations with the EEC without delay. This statement supports the view that neutrality was not always seen as an obstacle but was increasingly, at least tried to, be reframed as a flexible trait in the context of Western European diplomacy.

Another aspect on the matter is that Sweden's selected position, instead of pointing to a real shift in their neutrality principles, may have been tactical – by showing flexibility at a point when the political prospects for fully harmonising the two European markets were already growing more uncertain. By signalling some openness to reconsider their position, they likely aimed to present themselves as pragmatic partners ahead of the upcoming talks, without

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[65] Hans Mouritzen, 'Grænser for Handlefrihed. Skandinaviske Stater i Asymmetrisk Bilateralt Diplomati', *Internasjonal Politikk* 80, no. 1 (26 January 2022): 9, https://doi.org/10.23865/intpol.v80.3078.
[66] 'Ministerial Council's 18th Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 21 June 1962), 9, EFTA-499 EFTA/C.SR 18/62, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[67] 'Ministerial Council's 18th Meeting', 9.
[68] 'Ministerial Council's 18th Meeting', 9.

aspiring to make any real changes to their underlying commitment to neutrality. Although, in some cases, the strategic coordination by the Neutrals was showcased more explicitly:

> The Swedish Delegate said that officials of the three neutral countries [Sweden, Austria and Switzerland] had met in Geneva the previous week to discuss the wording of the letters of application for negotiations with the Six […] The Swedish letter referred to the traditional neutrality of Sweden and the pursuance of a neutrality policy.[69]

The calibration – between external economic engagement and internal political caution – can be interpreted as a rationally grounded strategy. First, it allowed Sweden to respond to Cold War pressures by pursuing economic integration without compromising its long-standing commitment to neutrality. Furthermore, by embedding economic objectives within a clearly articulated neutral identity, Swedish diplomats also used neutrality as a strategic resource to justify their position. Second, given Sweden's explicit eagerness to liberalise trade within EFTA, neutrality also functioned as a safeguard – protecting the country from political entanglements that deeper economic cooperation might otherwise result in, be it in a new form of organisation.

Put together, Sweden's insistent economic stance and neutrality represent additional dimensions of a coherent diplomatic strategy. This two-folded approach demonstrates how national identity – perhaps expressed through a certain foreign policy position – actively played a part in shaping Sweden's diplomatic objectives and actions within the association, which addresses the research question concerning the influence of national identity on diplomatic strategy.

Moreover, in addition to its clear agendas, Sweden's efforts to keep the member states of EFTA united, and not least relevant, were closely tied to its broader diplomatic strategy. Strengthening the association internally was not just about ensuring better trade conditions but also about safeguarding Sweden's room for

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[69] 'Heads of Delegations 48th Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 14 December 1961), 2, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 48/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.

manoeuvre in a European landscape where neutrality was becoming harder to defend. Swedish diplomats were well aware that partners like Denmark and the United Kingdom were likely to join the EEC sooner or later, and a weakened EFTA would leave Sweden exposed both economically and politically. Keeping the association relevant was therefore part of the same strategic interest that shaped Sweden's overall approach. That is pursuing economic engagement without being drawn into commitments that could compromise its foreign policy objectives. Thus, understanding this emphasis is important for interpreting Sweden's diplomatic actions at large during the early years of the association – and for identifying how strategic caution and identity concerns often went hand in hand.

4.1.2 Denmark's Diplomatic Objective: Protect Domestic Interests

Looking at the other country in focus of this thesis, Denmark's diplomatic engagement within EFTA's reflected a different set of priorities. While Sweden's approach was anchored in the doctrine of neutrality and political principles related to such a policy, Denmark's focus was much more tied to domestic economic vulnerabilities and pragmatic political alignments. Two strategic aims are particularly visible from the diplomatic records: first, the protection of Denmark's agricultural sector and second, maintaining a close alignment with the United Kingdom – as both countries navigated in the course of European integration slightly separately from the rest of member states of EFTA.

Throughout the meetings among Heads of Delegations and within Ministerial Council, Danish representatives consistently emphasised the need to protect sensitive sectors, particularly agriculture, from the full effects of a swift liberalisation.[70] Their explicit arguments often referred to the pressures arising from competition with EEC members – particularly Germany – and the risk that domestic public support for European integration would weaken if agricultural

[70] Examples of such consideration for specific sectors include: 'Brussels Liaisons Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 30 November 1961), 2, EFTA-312 EFTA/BR 2/61, Historical Archives of the European Union; 'Ministerial Council's 18th Meeting', 7; 'Heads of Delegations 21st Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 23 March 1961), 3, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 21/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.

interests were not effectively protected. Such concerns were not theoretical but also acknowledged in the diplomatic discussions themselves. As one Danish delegate admitted following a disappointing Ministerial meeting: "it was not an easy matter to persuade public opinion that […] Denmark should go beyond its commitments under the Stockholm Convention with regard to the abolition of quantitative restrictions".[71] This hesitation was even more understandable given that Danish agricultural exports were already stagnating at the time.

Put in its context, next to surrounding statements, it suggests that Danish diplomacy within EFTA was shaped, first and foremost, by concerns about maintaining domestic political support – and by the fear that exposing critical sectors to harsher competition could provoke a political backlash that might undermine the country's broader European strategy.

Denmark's cautious approach to trade liberalisation – especially compared to its northern neighbour – might at first glance be interpreted as diplomatic foot-dragging. One could critically argue that leading Danish politicians and diplomats may have used domestic public sentiments as a convenient excuse to delay reforms. However, such a reading finds no support in the available transcripts. Neither is it consistent with the broader pattern of Danish diplomatic actions. On the contrary, the Danes acknowledged the fundamental changes that were taking place in Europe's economic and political structures. Such an awareness is particularly clear in the statements made by Denmark's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jens Otto Krag, at a meeting within the Consultative Committee in 1962.[72] Krag underlined that international economic integration was not a passing phase but a permanent structural shift that would characterise a new European era – one grounded in interdependency. As he put it:

> International economic integration was a phenomenon of the post-war years, and in reality it was the first step towards the abandonment of the nation as the basic economic unit. […] There might be delays and setbacks, but the trend towards unifying the Western European countries in one single market could not be broken.[73]

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[71] 'Heads of Delegations 47th Meeting', 2.
[72] 'Consultative Committee's 3rd Meeting', 2–4.
[73] 'Consultative Committee's 3rd Meeting', 3.

The Danish minister made it clear that the country's diplomatic actions, and long-term objectives, was not driven by isolationism, but by an adjustment to a new phase that could not be ignored. Krag also recognised that EFTA alone would not be sufficient in order to provide an expansive economic future for Denmark. Given its unusual share of agricultural exports, a greater access to European markets was therefore necessary. His acknowledgement also explains why Denmark placed so much weight on aligning its future closely with Britain. At one of the meetings among the liaisons in Brussels, Krag repeatedly stressed the importance of coordinating Danish positions on certain agricultural issues with the British.[74] He particularly emphasised the significance of bacon, noting that British consumers alone accounted for 90 per cent of Denmark's total bacon exports.[75]

Nevertheless, Denmark's determination – from the outset of EFTA – to both support European cooperation and shield vulnerable sectors from premature competition did not emerge unexpectedly. The approach was consistent with its broader alignment with Britain's stance, particularly regarding to ease the pace of tariff reductions within the association. It also became especially clear in internal discussions, where Danish representatives stated that if the United Kingdom moved towards EEC accession, Denmark would aim to follow suit.[76] This was explicit in the context of a Danish delegate who emphasised their "major interest […] to participate in one way or another in the discussions within the Six on the establishment of a common agricultural policy".[77] Thus, the association of the Seven functioned less as an endpoint in itself and more as a provisional platform from which Denmark expected to move towards a broader European integration.

Strengthening the ties with influential EEC members was therefore an important element of Denmark's broader strategy. In 1960, for example, Denmark concluded a trade agreement with West Germany – which can be seen

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[74] 'Brussels Liaisons Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 20 June 1962), 2, EFTA-312 EFTA/BR 33/62, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[75] 'Brussels Liaisons Meeting', 2–3.
[76] 'Heads of Delegations 25th Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 30 May 1961), 6, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 25/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[77] 'Heads of Delegations 25th Meeting', 3.

as a move that signalled political intent within the shifting European landscape. As the transcripts note: "Both countries subscribed in the agreement to the principle of the maintenance of traditional trade", it was stated, "not only between themselves but also between the two groups of which they are members".[78] Although Danish officials admitted that the agreement was mainly valuable for "political and presentational reasons" rather than for its immediate economic effects, it still served an important relational function.[79] As the months went by, the newly forged bond between Copenhagen and Bonn also appeared to bear fruit. Within a year, the Danish Prime Minister was invited to a bilateral meeting with Chancellor Adenauer.[80] This sit-down between the two highest-ranking politicians marked the first of its kind – but, thanks to Denmark's efforts to maintain strong relations, the records suggest it was far from the last.

Therefore, it seemed to work out for the smallest of the Scandinavian countries. Denmark succeeded in strengthening its ties with the West Germany as well as maintaining close coordination with British – all while remaining a pragmatic member of the initial EFTA group. In many ways, it managed to have the cake and eat it too – protecting vulnerable sectors at home while keeping its options open abroad. However, this deeper diplomatic engagement with powerful European actors also led to a growing awareness of the potential costs of being left outside the EEC. German representatives warned that, if a closer cooperation within the Six picked up momentum, "the possibility of association between the Six and the Seven would be considerably diminished" – especially as the common agricultural policy took shape.[81] They also pointed out that German agricultural imports from Denmark were already stagnating, while imports from EEC countries continued to grow – a trend likely to worsen if Denmark remained outside the Community.[82] Danish officials took these warnings seriously, calculating that exclusion could cost Denmark up to "20 per cent of her total

[78] 'Heads of Delegations 1st Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 19 October 1960), 3, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 1/60, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[79] 'Heads of Delegations 1st Meeting', 3.
[80] 'Heads of Delegations 25th Meeting', 3.
[81] 'Heads of Delegations 6th Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 25 January 1961), 1, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 6/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[82] 'Heads of Delegations 6th Meeting', 1.

exports over a few years which she would not be able to place in other markets."[83] In this light, Denmark's protective stance within EFTA and its eagerness to maintain good relations with key EEC members appear as measures to protect national interests. This approach shows that Danish diplomatic behaviour within EFTA cannot be reduced to short-term domestic pressures. Instead, it should be likened to a diplomatic action of being bold enough not to not rush matters – not necessarily out of reluctance to integrate, but as an effort to defend what they regarded as national interests. The strategy, like Sweden's, can therefore be seen as one being shaped by national identity – but in Denmark's case, that identity was less fixed in a certain doctrine and more in a practical understanding of a small-state's vulnerabilities, which ultimately was demonstrated by slowing down the reform pace in a quickly changing European order.[84]

Altogether, Denmark's strategy within EFTA demonstrates how national identity – understood here less in ideological terms and more through a pragmatic view of a combination of vulnerability and rationality. This perspective shaped Denmark's diplomatic actions behind closed doors, as the country used the association primarily to safeguard its economic interests while leaving the door open to future European integration. In doing so, the approach stood in clear contrast to Sweden's and sheds light on how domestic political concerns and ideas about national identity helped shape small-state diplomacy within EFTA.

At the same time, Denmark's diplomatic strategy remained closely tied to the United Kingdom's position within EFTA.[85] Copenhagen consistently supported London's calls for a gradual liberalisation and paid close attention to how EFTA's public messaging might influence future talks with the EEC. Furthermore, the diplomatic records also show a preference for carefully worded statements – announcements that avoided provoking the Six or overstating EFTA's long-term prospects.[86] By aligning with the United Kingdom, while engaging constructively within the association, Denmark managed to stay flexible. With these strategies outlined, the analysis now turns to how Swedish

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[83] 'Heads of Delegations 22nd Meeting' (European Free Trade Association, 16 May 1961), 4, EFTA-390 EFTA/HOD 22/61, Historical Archives of the European Union.
[84] 'Consultative Committee's 3rd Meeting', 2–3.
[85] 'Heads of Delegations 47th Meeting', 4.
[86] 'Heads of Delegations 47th Meeting', 4–8.

and Danish diplomacy was portrayed to domestic audiences. Examining national press coverage sheds light on whether – and how – official agendas were reinterpreted in the public sphere.

4.2 Reporting Diplomacy in the Printed Press

This section analyses how the processes surrounding EFTA as well as the involved diplomats were portrayed in a selection of Swedish and Danish newspaper articles. By examining recurring media narratives and representations of diplomatic roles and actions, this part addresses and answers the first research question.

4.2.1 Recurring Narratives in the Swedish Press

Analysing Swedish newspaper coverage from EFTA's early years provides valuable insights into how the country's position within the evolving process of European integration was conveyed to the domestic public. Therefore, this perspective is important partly for addressing the predominant question of this thesis – especially the relationship between diplomatic actions and their media portrayals. And partly because the press did not only report on Sweden's actions in EFTA. It also played a role in shaping the narrative, both by reflecting the government's cautious stance and by showcasing a limited understanding of what European engagement could – or even should entail.

A central theme emerging from the Swedish press is the presentation of EFTA as an economic arrangement rather than a political project that neither the leading politicians, nor the public in general, were ideologically invested in. A recurrent feature in the Swedish press was therefore the portrayal of EFTA as a practical solution – nothing more, nothing less. While articles often described the association in pragmatic terms, readers of Swedish press were rarely exposed to any meaningful connection between EFTA's aims and the government's broader political vision for Sweden's future role in Europe.

A column in *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, for example, argued that Sweden should pursue an association agreement with the EEC rather than full membership, framing EFTA as merely the existing – and limited – basis for European engagement.[87] In a similar tone, another article went further, describing EFTA as a solution adopted "in the absence of anything better, and in anticipation of something better", while urging the Swedish government to think through its broader ambitions for European cooperation.[88] These statements suggest a scepticism toward EFTA's long-term viability as well as the lack of strategic direction in Swedish policy. But rather than proposing an alternative, such commentary exposed an uncertainty – not necessarily about Sweden's current path, but about where it was heading in the longer run. Thus, while the government emphasised its detachment from political integration, the press came to reveal the limitations of this position by pointing to the absence of a forward-looking vision for Sweden's role in Europe.

Moreover, this framing closely reflected the Swedish government's internal strategy of cultivating a "narrative of detachment" – seeking economic cooperation while deliberately avoiding political commitments that could compromise its neutrality.[89] Hence, EFTA was widely accepted – and considered important for economic growth – but was never presented as a building block for something greater.[90] This absence of a long-term vision becomes even more apparent when examining how statements by leading politicians were reported in the press. Mainly due to what politicians chose to bring forward, and how their views were reported in the press, suggests what message they wanted to prioritise in order to attempting to shape public understanding. For example, an article covering Minister for Foreign Affairs, Östen Undén, and his remarks in the summer of 1961 illustrates this clearly. While he expressed clear scepticism toward a full Swedish membership in the EEC, he insisted that "not many Swedish politicians would seriously consider full membership in the *Rome*

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[87] 'Sverige Och Romavtalet [Sweden and the Treaty of Rome]', *Göteborgs Handels- Och Sjöfartstidning*, 14 July 1961, 4, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.
[88] 'Spricker EFTA? [Is EFTA Falling Apart?]', *Arbetet*, 1 July 1961, 7, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.
[89] Lödén, 'För Säkerhets Skull. Ideologi Och Säkerhet i Svensk Aktiv Utrikespolitik 1950-1975', 27.
[90] 'Sverige Och Romavtalet [Sweden and the Treaty of Rome]', 4.

Treaty in its current form".[91] At the same time, he kept the door open for an economic association to the Community, underlining that such agreements were a completely different matter. The statement implies that there was a governmental detachment from full integration but also hinted at the ambiguity in Sweden's position. While neutrality remained the cornerstone of their foreign policy, the shaping or influencing of Sweden's future engagement with Europe remained unclear.

Public commentaries also began to reflect frustrations with what they identified as a lack of political vision. An op-ed in *Svenska Dagbladet* warned about the serious situation Sweden faced after Britain and Denmark's applications to the EEC were met with great pleasure by the Six.[92] Given that an overwhelming share of Sweden's exports depended on European markets, the editorial questioned whether they should to pursue full membership or some form of association.[93] However, instead of advocating for either a new policy direction or ideological shift, the article proposed a temporary coalition government to manage the challenge. This both showed to what degree initiated political commentators valued the issue of European integration as well as dreading to miss out on an opportunity to strengthen Sweden's trade policies, and by doing so, support Sweden's economic outlook.

Around the same time, an even sharper tone of criticism emerged in the Swedish press. One article went so far as to describe the domestic debate on Europe as "alarmingly provincial".[94] Reflecting in this context, the journalist Goldmann observed that the progress in negotiations between the United Kingdom and the EEC was regarded in Stockholm as "regrettable".[95] He noted that the Swedish government appeared more focused on slowing down their process than on articulating a forward-looking vision for the country's role in the new course of European integration that was unfolding before them. Although

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[91] 'Hr Undén Och Blocken [Mr. Undén and the Formations]', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 7 August 1961, 4, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.
[92] 'Sverige Med Eller Utanför? [Is Sweden in or Out?]', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 15 August 1961, 4, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.
[93] 'Nordiskt Ekonomiskt Samarbete. Rapport Från Nordiska Ekonomiska Samarbetsutskottet SOU 1958:31 [Nordic Economic Cooperation. Report from the Nordic Economic Cooperation Committee]', 14.
[94] Kjell Goldmann, 'Sverige Och de Tio [Sweden and the Ten]', *Göteborgs Handels- Och Sjöfartstidning*, 17 June 1961, 11, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.
[95] Goldmann, 11.

the author acknowledged that the *Treaty of Rome* did not require military or foreign policy commitments, he brought forward the argument that Sweden's interpretation of neutrality was expanding in such a way that even economic coordination was seen as problematic. Non-alignment was being redefined, he wrote, and suggested that this rigid position was more about political hesitancy than due to an existent doctrine.

In contrast to Goldmann's criticism, another article framed Europe's division as an unavoidable outcome of political divergence rather than a failure of Swedish policy.[96] The piece recognised the mismatch between the ambitions of the EEC and the more limited goals of EFTA and suggested that a deeper political integration in Western Europe was simply not compatible with the position of neutral states like Sweden. Instead of criticising the government for an eventual lack of political will, the article had a more accepting approach of Sweden's cautious stance – implying that given France's resistance to broader cooperation as well as the geopolitical realities of the time, Sweden had little choice but to remain on the sidelines. This sort of framing came to terms with the idea that a policy of neutrality heavily constrained a country's strategic options.

Following the distinct perspectives, a more nuanced article met the subscribers of *Dagens Nyheter*, offering a broader view of Sweden's strategy. Instead of focusing on criticism, it called for adaptation to the changing European landscape. The article made the argument that EFTA had been created to coordinate efforts towards European unity, particularly by aligning tariff reductions with the Six, and thus, preparing for a possible future integration.[97] However, considering Britain's and Denmark's applications to the Six, it argued that EFTA's continued relevance was now in question. But rather than dwell on the past, the article urged politicians as well as policymakers to merely accept the consequences of contemporary developments and to pursue the solution based on the *Treaty of Rome* – one that had become the most realistic option. Interestingly, the author of the article to some extent reaffirmed Goldmann's argument and stated that the idea did not contradict Sweden's traditional position. Instead, it

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[96] 'Närmare Världen [Closer to the World]', *Arbetet*, 1 July 1961, 7, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.
[97] 'Europapolitiken Och Partierna [European Politics and the Parties]', *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 August 1961, 2, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.

was presented as a logical extension of the belief that Sweden belongs in a broader Western European community. This argument marked a shift suggested that while Sweden's earlier caution had been justified, it now risked being overtaken by reactions to quickly changing events – instead of taking a firm stance and being proactive. Therefore, the author offered a middle ground, to not abandon the concept of neutrality, but to re-evaluate what neutrality should mean.[98]

Ultimately, the Swedish newspaper articles examined here support the view that press coverage largely reflected the government's official stance – particularly its focus on economic cooperation without political integration. However, the press also revealed deeper uncertainties in Sweden's approach. EFTA was generally portrayed as a necessary arrangement, yet seldom positioned within a broader long-term European strategy. Although the neutrality doctrine remained largely unquestioned, several commentaries expressed growing unease about its expanding use – especially as it began to limit even economic engagement. This can therefore be seen as not a contest between different visions, but a broader sense of strategic indecision. In other words, Sweden's approach appeared to be more driven by the desire to preserve flexibility than by a clearly defined end goal.

In relation to the research questions, the Swedish case shows that national identity – primarily framed through neutrality – influenced both Sweden's diplomatic behaviour in EFTA and how it, in extension, was represented in the national press. Yet the newspapers also revealed the constraints of this identity in the face of changing dynamics in the field of European politics. Neutrality did indeed continue to serve as a source of legitimacy, but it also narrowed the scope of public debate and limited more forward-looking discussions. In this perspective, the press both reflected Sweden's cautious diplomacy and highlighted its limitations. This suggests that the doctrine rooted in non-alignment struggled to respond to a context increasingly shaped by political integration. This lack of long-term orientation, as seen in Swedish public

[98] 'Europapolitiken Och Partierna [European Politics and the Parties]', 2.

narrative, stands in contrast to the Danish case. There, as the analysis will dissect in the next section, the press was more keen to point to different concerns.

4.2.2 Danish Newspaper Coverage and Public Framing

Denmark's diplomatic records reveal a pragmatic strategy centred on vulnerable domestic sectors and preserving close alignment with Britain – a stance that was also clearly echoed in the country's press coverage. However, media coverage occasionally revealed both tensions and limitations inherent to small-state diplomacy. A recurring theme in Danish newspapers was the portrayal of EFTA as beneficial for the country's economic growth – at least for the time being. During the initial months of the association, articles described the association as a "revolution for Danish enterprises", consistently highlighting its role in lowering tariffs and laying the groundwork for potential future cooperation with the EEC.[99] Yet, EFTA was seldom presented as a viable long-term alternative to the Community.[100] Instead, press coverage framed it as a temporary arrangement – a solution to manage trade issues in a multilateral arena while Denmark positioned itself for further European integration. A narrative as such closely aligned with the government's internal diplomatic position, as reflected in statements from key political figures (as seen in 4.1.2). In this sense, EFTA was viewed as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Furthermore, Danish press coverage increasingly portrayed Denmark's urgent need to step out of Britain's shadow to actively define its own role in the context of negotiations of European integration. An article in *Jyllands-Posten* framed this not only as necessary, but also as a response to perceived diplomatic missteps by the United Kingdom – particularly following the breaking news regarding Britain's independent negotiations with the EEC. "There is hardly any doubt that the Danish government has been misled", the Danish PM Viggo

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[99] Tage Mortensen, 'Danmark Ind i En Ny Tid [Denmark Enters a New Era]', *Berlingske Tidende*, 26 June 1960, 7, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek; H. B-H, 'De Syv Rækker Haanden Frem Mod De Seks [The Seven Extend a Hand to the Six]', *Berlingske Tidende*, 13 May 1960, 2, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.

[100] 'Danmarks Udspil Til De Seks Præget Af Maadehold [Denmark's Proposal to the Six Marked by Moderation]', *Børsen*, 27 October 1961, 1, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.

Kampmann concluded.[101] Denmark had placed its trust in Britain to safeguard the interests of both countries if – or more likely when – the negotiations were supposed to initiate. Instead, as the article implies, Kampmann had been served a textbook definition of realism in the context of international relations. Thus, Denmark's reliance on British leadership seemed to have reached its limits, and it could no longer afford to have its interests shaped by promises that could not be upheld.

Some weeks later, another piece in the same newspaper reported that the Danish government no longer intended to "passively follow" Britain's flirt with the EEC, but instead would actively enter the discussions about forming a common market.[102] The article also described how Krag, Denmark's Minister for Foreign Affairs, viewed closer contact with the Six as both realistic and necessary, particularly under what was referred to as the "green plan" – which was a coordinated strategy among the Seven to approach the Six. Moreover, the article conveyed domestic pressure for Denmark to cooperate more closely with other small European states – such as Sweden.[103] This emphasis on diversification signalled a political reorientation that meant Denmark could no longer rely on Downing Street but had to pursue a more self-reliant role. In this sense, Danish identity in the integration process emerges only partly from alignment with powerful allies but mostly from a sharpened recognition of its own diplomatic responsibilities as a small state navigating a changing European order.

In addition to the economic and strategic framings of European integration, Danish commentaries also reflected cultural and ideological scepticism towards the European project. For instance, a column published in 1962 offered an insight to some of the views in the polemical debate regarding the forces shaping the Six and, in extension, how these cultural forces eventually would affect Denmark.[104] The author questioned whether the future of Europe would be shaped by a shared cultural optimism – symbolised by Mona Lisa – or

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[101] Michael Sinding, 'England Paa Vej Ind i Fællesmarkedet [England on the Path to Join the Common Market]', *Jyllands-Posten*, 1 March 1961, 1–2, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.
[102] Mich., 'Danmark Gaar Aktivt Ind i Markeds-Drøftelserne [Denmark Takes an Active Part in the Common Market Discussions]', *Jyllands-Posten*, 24 March 1961, 2, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.
[103] 2.
[104] Ole Bernt Henriksen, 'Vil Det Blive Mona Lisa, Der Smiler Til et Samlet Europa? [Will It Be the Mona Lisa Who Smiles at a United Europe?]', *Jyllands-Posten*, 16 February 1962, 6, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.

by "*kapitalister, militarister og katolikker*" (capitalists, militarists and Catholics) – whose world of ideas may lead to Europe's ruin. This notably controversial column suggests a concern about the ideological character of European integration, particularly from a perspective of a protestant nation in northern Europe. Furthermore, the article portrayed leading continental figures like Jean Monnet, Paul-Henri Spaak and Gerhard Schröder as representatives of a political culture foreign to Danish democratic and social norms.[105] And by presenting these symbolic contrasts, the author suggested that Denmark's reluctance to fully embrace the EEC was not only strategic or economic but also rooted in cultural identity and a particular set of values. Thus, the aim of the columnist may have been to challenge the assumption that integration was merely a matter of institutional adaptation or tariff alignment. Instead, the author chose to raise questions about what kind of Europe that Denmark was being asked to join, and whether that vision resonated with fellow countrymen. Although the column presents an ideologically charged view, it should not be read as representative of public sentiment. Rather, it illustrates how some voices in the Danish press used polemic question, perhaps to add depth, with the ambition to initiate a discussion revolving around cultural dimensions.

Beyond issues of culture and social norms, the public debate around Denmark's potential EEC membership was also tied to broader geopolitical and security concerns. An article in *Jyllands-Posten* framed Denmark's EEC application within the broader context of Cold War geopolitics, warning that Denmark's security could be at risk without a lasting European settlement.[106] It argued that the deepening integration within the EEC – mostly driven by France – was in time going to result in a new European dynamic that smaller states like Denmark could not ignore. The decision to apply for membership among the Six, the author argued, was driven not only by trade concerns but also by the need to remain anchored in a stable Western alliance, particularly as Britain's role appeared increasingly uncertain.

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[105] The Schröder referred to is Gerhard Schröder (1910–1989), who at the time served as West Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs. He should not be confused with the later Gerhard Schröder (born 1944), who was Chancellor of Germany from 1998 to 2005 and has since become something of a pariah due to his close ties to the Kremlin. That is, however, another story.

[106] Ole Bernt Henriksen, 'Danmarks Sikkerhed Kan Komme i Fare [Denmark's Security Could Be at Risk]', *Jyllands-Posten*, 30 May 1962, 1, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.

Nevertheless, the article's portrayal of an EEC accession as a needed geopolitical manoeuvre should be viewed with some caution. Unlike neutral Sweden, Denmark had been a founding member of NATO since 1949 and was already securely embedded in the Western defence alliance. Therefore, the claim that EEC membership was necessary to secure Denmark's place in the Western bloc can be seen as an overstatement of what was truly at stake. What the article shows, however, is how security arguments were used in the Danish press to frame integration as a means of preserving Denmark's relevance within the new Europe that was forming. The issue of national identity – understood as Western-aligned – was not used to justify a shift in direction, but to present a future within the EEC as a natural continuation of Denmark's existing alliances. In doing so, the author may have intended to present it as the logical next step in Denmark's already well-established foreign policy trajectory.

At the same time, the press openly acknowledged the ambiguity that characterised Danish policymaking at large during this period. A journalist, for instance, pointed to a "*dobbelthed*" (duality) in the debate regarding Denmark's choice of direction – whereas he saw a tension between, one the one hand, clear economic interests and, on the other, a side with less clear political considerations, often intentionally left vague for strategic reasons.[107] His article also made clear that neither the Danish nor British public possessed a "realistic understanding" of the ongoing high-level negotiations with the EEC.[108] Instead of framing the issue as merely a communication problem, the article pointed to the deeper ambiguity of Denmark's approach to European integration. Furthermore, the author argued that the gap between diplomatic actions and public understanding was not just about how events were reported. In its place, it reflected a broader diplomatic echo chamber, where the press both showcased and repeated the same uncertainty. This made it even more important for the media to clarify where Denmark stood – and what the political leadership in fact aspired to achieve in terms of European integration.

While earlier articles highlighted the vagueness surrounding Denmark's overall European orientation, other articles made clear that the country's economic

[107] Henriksen, 1.
[108] Henriksen, 1.

priorities were anything but unclear. In particular, the Danish press seemed to have played an important role in detailing and, not least, framing the government's negotiating stance during the EEC application process. Reporting on Minister Krag's presentation in Brussels, articles in *Børsen*, for example, described Denmark's proposals as moderate and aimed securing a favourable outcome for the country's economic interests.[109]

Similarly, coverage by *Berlingske Tidende* further revealed that Danish demands – particularly concerning agriculture – had been taken seriously by EEC representatives, who were ready to begin negotiations ahead of the ministerial meeting in February.[110] Although both articles acknowledged the legal and technical difficulties of putting Denmark's agricultural system in line with the Community, they also highlighted how thoroughly these issues had been documented and taken seriously by Danish officials. In turn, this may have reinforced the impression that Denmark was not just reacting to external developments – especially in contrast to the earlier period when the political leadership had felt misled by its British counterparts. In contrast to earlier portrayals of strategic uncertainty, this coverage, at least to some extent, depicted Danish diplomacy as meticulous and competent. It also, between the lines, framed Danish national identity not through a set of ambitious political principles, but through its ability to defend economic sectors with bureaucratic competence. More importantly, these sectoral interests were treated as core elements of Denmark's gradual alignment within the new European landscape.

Press coverage often linked Danish national identity to the structure of its economy – especially the importance of agricultural exports – and to a political style based on practical concerns. An article summarised this view by expressing Denmark's ambition that all seven EFTA countries could join the Common Market together, since such a move would help "secure Danish exports, especially in the agricultural sector".[111] In this way, the press presented

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[109] 'Danmarks Udspil Til De Seks Præget Af Maadehold [Denmark's Proposal to the Six Marked by Moderation]', 7.
[110] HEI, 'De Seks' Reaktioner På de Danske Ønsker Foreløbig Positive [The Six's Reactions to the Danish Requests Are So Far Positive]', *Berlingske Tidende*, 30 January 1962, 10, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.
[111] Vagn Heiselberg, 'Håb Om at De Syv Samtidig Kan Blive Optaget i Fællesmarkedet [Hope That the Seven Can Be Admitted into the Common Market at the Same Time]', *Berlingske Tidende*, 29 July 1962, 14, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.

Denmark's interests not in abstract terms, but through concerns about trade and economic stability. Also, Denmark appeared neither detached nor visionary, but as a small state making deliberate adjustments to secure its place and sought after a deeper European integration.

Altogether, Danish press coverage during the two years in the scope of this thesis established a coherent public understanding of the government's diplomatic strategy, while also making visible the tensions and trade-offs it involved. It continuously supported the, in many ways, pragmatic path pursued by Danish officials but also revealed certain limitations. Some of these were Denmark's secondary position in alliances, the lack of a clearly communicated long-term vision and, lastly, the public's eventual difficulties in understanding the fundamentals of multilateral negotiations. However, through both its coverage and commentary, the press played a role in setting the terms of the domestic sentiments. But rather than simply reporting on policies and, what can be seen as dull meetings, it helped define how Denmark's interests were understood. Not least by framing European integration in terms of its sheer usefulness.

In answering the research questions, this section has underscored four important findings. Firstly, the Danish case reveals a certain alignment between diplomatic actions and media portrayal. Public discourse largely reflected the priorities of Denmark's sector-oriented diplomacy within the context of EFTA, particularly its emphasis on agricultural protection and maintaining flexibility.

Secondly, Danish newspapers explored the trade-offs and political considerations that defined small-state diplomacy. By doing this, the press helped frame integration not as an ideological project, but as a set of pragmatic adjustments rooted in national interest. Although press narratives were not always coherent, some tensions and critical commentaries seem to have broadened the debate.

Thirdly, the Danish press articulated national identity not through fixed principles but through recurring themes of economic dependency and what can be labelled as strategic realism. In contrast to the Swedish case – where neutrality served as the leading interpretive lens of understanding – Danish coverage portrayed integration as a complicated achievement of balancing between protecting economic interests while securing influence through alignment with larger powers, all within the constraints of geopolitical alliances.

4.3 Synthesising the Acts of Diplomacy and Press Narratives

Building on the previous analyses, this section offers a synthesis of Sweden's and Denmark's diplomatic strategies within EFTA. But instead of presenting a direct comparison, the aim here is to integrate the findings from both the diplomatic records and press coverage to explore the interplay between policy and public discourse. Thus, the focus lies on the second research question – how conceptions of national identity shaped Swedish and Danish diplomatic strategies within EFTA and how these strategies were framed in the national press.

4.3.1 Challenging the Notion of Scandinavian Exceptionalism

Although the two countries initially appeared aligned in their support for EFTA as an arena for economic cooperation, a closer look reveals that their diplomatic strategies and media narratives diverged in important – and telling – ways. These differences complicate the use of Scandinavian exceptionalism as an explanatory framework. The concept, often associated with the Scandinavian countries shared commitment to "internationalist progressivism", to use Lawler's term, assumes a coherent foreign policy stance.[112] Yet, as the previous sections of the analysis has demonstrated, the practice of diplomacy in both countries was shaped less by idealist principles than by context-dependent calculations.

At the same time, the near-complete absence of "exceptionalist" language in the EFTA diplomatic records does not, in itself, invalidate the concept at large. Scandinavian exceptionalism, as several scholars have noted, was less a blueprint for foreign policy and more of a narrative for domestic audiences.[113] The portrayal of the countries as morally distinct drew its credibility from internal features – such as public welfare institutions and high trust among its citizens –

[112] Lawler, 'Scandinavian Exceptionalism and European Union', 566.
[113] Browning, 'Branding Nordicity', 35–36.

features that had limited influence abroad – particularly when it came to how diplomacy *de facto* was conducted within EFTA.

In Sweden, Cold War neutrality was bound to a broader sense of national identity centred on egalitarianism. This was not about global idealism, but about placing social cohesion in centre – through instilling a shared sense of a political purpose. A context as such makes Östling's point, about how the small-state narrative "served to underpin and strengthen national traditions in post-war Sweden" particularly relevant.[114] The principles– notably neutrality and public welfare – were actively used in the public sphere to frame a cautious European stance seem not only rational, but authentically Swedish.

Public welfare, for instance, became part of a broader narrative that legitimised Sweden's cautious approach to European integration – reaffirming the idea of a distinct national path. As Gustavsson notes, joining the EEC was widely seen as a threat to both Sweden's neutrality and the continued development of the welfare state.[115] This connection between foreign policy and national identity may have helped sustain public support for a more reserved stance, even as the EEC's integration accelerated – with EFTA members eager to join. Neutrality thus functioned both as a diplomatic doctrine and a narrative of identity. It provided political continuity and projected a set of social democratic beliefs, which may have become evident since the party had been in power continually for almost three decades. Yet this national identity also introduced contradictions. As Swedish press commentary began to question whether neutrality could still accommodate the country's economic ambitions, it became clear that the doctrine had become more symbolic than strategic.[116] In this sense, what is often cited as a characteristic of Scandinavian exceptionalism – a value-driven foreign policy – appears less as a principle and more as a convenient narrative.

Denmark's trajectory during the EFTA years is an example of this shift. Rather than being guided by abstract ideals, Danish diplomacy in this regard

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[114] Johan Östling, 'The Rise and Fall of Small-State Realism. Sweden and the Second World War', in *Nordic Narratives of the Second World War. National Historiographies Revisited*, ed. Henrik Stenius, Mirja Österberg, and Johan Östling (Nordic Academic Press, 2011), 129.
[115] Gustavsson, *The Politics of Foreign Policy Change*, 40–41.
[116] Malmborg, 'Den ståndaktiga nationalstaten', 49.

focused heavily on alliance-building and sectoral pragmatism, with a strong emphasis on protecting key areas like agriculture (see 4.2.2). The combination of realism and selective symbolism was also reflected in the press. Editorials contributed to considerably more than reflect official positions – they played an active part in shaping public debate about Denmark's foreign policy objectives, particularly in relation to its evolving stance toward the EEC.

As highlighted in several contemporary articles, the Danish debate was centred less on values than on sectoral interests – with agriculture in focus. "The agricultural question will become one of the biggest issues in Danish politics", Minister Krag declared in *Aktuelt*, stressing that trade policy was not only an economic matter in terms of how quickly EFTA came to tear down trade barriers, but a politically charged issue with public importance.[117]

Moreover, Denmark's focus on agricultural protection went beyond economic concerns. Farming was tied closely to rural traditions and a cultural self-image that was prominent in public debate – especially in the media's sceptical coverage of the EEC and its perceived links to unfamiliar "southern European" norms.[118] In this sense, Danish farmers were seen as more than just economic actors – they also symbolised a way of life. Thus, defending domestic agriculture was about preserving more than just export revenues – it was also regarded as an important issue in order to maintain the "peasant roots of Danish modernity", as the historian Østergaard puts it.[119]

This perspective aligns with a broader pattern in Danish foreign policy, as Wivel observes:

> The role of the state is basically to defend the interests and values of the people, and the pursuit of less tangible goals must be embedded in this function. […] Also, this approach is reflected more generally in Denmark's pragmatic approach to international institutions such as NATO and the UN.[120]

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[117] 'Jordespørgsmålet vil blive et af de største spørgsmål i dansk politik.' 'Nye Veje Til Løsning Af Jordspørgsmålet [New Paths to Solving the Agricultural Question]', *Aktuelt*, 24 June 1962, 4, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.

[118] Henriksen, 'Vil Det Blive Mona Lisa, Der Smiler Til et Samlet Europa? [Will It Be the Mona Lisa Who Smiles at a United Europe?]', 6.

[119] Uffe Østergård, 'Peasants and Danes. The Danish National Identity and Political Culture', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (1992): 24.

[120] Wivel, 'As Awkward as They Need to Be. Denmark's Pragmatic Activist Approach to Europe', 25.

This sort of pragmatism indeed appears as a consistent thread in Denmark's engagement with multilateral institutions. The defence of agriculture within EFTA negotiations demonstrates how Denmark has historically navigated the tension between on the one hand preserving national identity and, on the other hand, rationality, since Denmark, according to minister Krag, sought after a place in the new, more economically oriented Europe that was taking shape.[121] Therefore, there was a need to carefully distinguish between areas where cooperation serves national interests and those where it might threaten the country's economic prospects.

In this light, the case for a deliberately articulated Scandinavian exceptionalism appears weak. The absence of value-based language in the EFTA records suggests that the association – where the diplomatic discussions revolved around compromises and adjustments in trade – was not a forum where identity-driven ideals found expression. Yet this does not necessarily diminish its relevance. Rather, it supports the view that Scandinavian exceptionalism may have been less prominent as a guiding principle of foreign policy, at least within this trade association, and distinguished more as a cultural narrative aimed at the domestic public. This interpretation further broadens the concept: foreign policy identity may rest on stated values but also on cultural expectations of social coherence. In this sense, Denmark's case reveals a more implicit form of Scandinavian exceptionalism – not expressed in proud ideals, but through how diplomacy was conducted and, in the end, publicly understood.

Finally, the previous analysis furthermore suggests that national identity influenced Sweden's and Denmark's EFTA strategies through underlying assumptions in each country's political culture rather than explicit appeals to Scandinavian exceptionalism. For Sweden, neutrality served two purposes – constraining diplomatic options while reassuring the public that social cohesion and non-alignment remained as core principles. Identity narratives, such as the "Third Way" approach identified by Makko, set outer boundaries for negotiators – defining what Sweden could not risk, such as neutrality and public welfare.[122] Meanwhile Denmark's endeavours were fixated on protecting agriculture

[121] 'Consultative Committee's 3rd Meeting', 3.
[122] Makko, *Ambassadors of Realpolitik*, 37.

products and to keep the door open to pursue a full membership in the EEC in the near future. Both nations approached EFTA primarily as a pragmatic means of managing constraints related to geopolitical issues and economic growth, rather than as a platform for ideological leadership. Finally, the press played an important role in both reporting on trade policy and European integration and shaping public understanding of foreign policy. In this sense, national identity functioned not as a fixed value set but as a flexible tool for managing geopolitical pressures and connecting decisions to anchor decisions to the domestic public.

4.3.2 Representations and Interpretations

A notable distinction between the two countries diplomatic engagements within EFTA – one that suggests differing views of the political weight assigned to the association – was the level seniority of their highest diplomatic representatives. This was evident since Denmark continuously was represented by its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jens Otto Krag, rather than delegating the task to their Minister of Finance or, for instance, Minister for Trade. On certain occasions, Krag was also accompanied by Minister for Agriculture Hans Skytte – which highlighted how Danish diplomacy clearly linked international trade negotiations to the defence of domestic sectoral interests.[123]

By contrast, Sweden was only ever represented by its Minister for Trade, Gunnar Lange, which reflected a more narrowly focused approach – where EFTA was seen primarily as an economic matter handled by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, instead of being a part of broader foreign policy strategy shaped by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[124] Such deliberate choices reveal distinct strategic orientations: Denmark integrated EFTA into its broader foreign policy agenda, while Sweden confined it within the limits imposed by its neutrality doctrine. Sweden's cautious stance was further highlighted by a notable lack of high-level political engagement in European economic matters in general. As

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[123] 'Krag Og Skytte till Bonn i Handelskrigens Skygge [Krag and Skytte to Bonn in the Shadow of the Trade War]', *Berlingske Tidende*, 5 April 1960, 7, Mediestream, Det Konglige Bibliotek.
[124] The Swedish Ministry of Commerce and Industry was dismantled in 1982, with its responsibilities absorbed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Strategic shifts, it seems, are not always marked by bold declarations, but sometimes by bureaucratic reforms.

Bergquist points out, the country's long-serving PM, Tage Erlander, often showed limited interest in shaping Sweden's multilateral economic policy, not least by delegating these responsibilities to senior civil servants such as Dag Hammarskjöld.[125] The lack of political leadership, thus, led to a more bureaucratic style of diplomacy, emphasising traits as stability rather than considerable commitment. Moreover, by the time EFTA indeed was established, this had developed into a more of a technocratic approach that, as later media commentary suggested, appeared increasingly cautious.[126]

Yet, this institutional caution did not remain restricted within governmental corridors. It also shaped how Swedish diplomatic actions were interpreted and communicated in the public sphere. The press, at least to a certain degree, reflected the government's cautious stance – but not without question. While some newspapers remained aligned with official messaging, others used diplomatic developments as an entry point to revisit uncertainties about Sweden's stance in the fast-paced developments of European integration.
In the Danish context, the alignment between diplomatic strategies and media coverage can be partly explained by what Knudsen and Gram-Skjoldager describe as the emergence of *markedsdiplomater* – economically oriented diplomats who operated across the boundary between domestic interests and external trade negotiations.[127] These new trade-oriented diplomats helped improve coordination across different parts of Denmark's economic diplomacy – and, importantly for the readership, made it easier for the press to follow and report on the country's strategic aims. Consequently, the media often framed the image of Denmark as a pragmatic small state – one combining sectoral protectionism with a rational approach to multilateral engagements. Thus, Danish media consistently portrayed the country's role within EFTA (and potential future ties with the EEC) in ways that closely reflected official messaging: pragmatic, realistic and rational. This alignment was likely less a result of shared political views and more an outcome of organisational factors. The coherence

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[125] Bergquist, *Östen Undén, Tage Erlander Och Det Kalla Kriget*, 30.
[126] 'Efta Och Sverige [EFTA and Sweden]', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 30 July 1961, 4, Svenska Dagstidningar, Kungliga biblioteket.
[127] Ann-Christina L. Knudsen and Karen Gram-Skjoldager, 'Hvor gik statens repræsentanter hen, da de gik ud? Nye rolleforståelser hos diplomater og parlamentarikere efter 1945', *Temp - tidsskrift for historie* 1, no. 1 (6 January 2010): 85–87.

between Danish diplomats, ministries and interest groups can therefore be seen as contributing to a more public-oriented diplomatic strategy, making Denmark's foreign policy straightforward for the press to report on.

In contrast, the Swedish media landscape displayed greater fragmentation. As previously explored (see 4.2.1), newspaper coverage revealed a spectrum of perspectives ranging from strong alignment with governmental neutrality-based diplomacy to critical assessments of its long-term viability. But rather than reflecting incoherence, this variety suggests a more vivid public debate regarding Sweden's identity in Europe. Unlike Denmark, Sweden lacked formalised institutional mechanisms linking interest groups directly to foreign policy formation.[128] Seen in this light, the relationship between diplomatic actions and press representations was neither one of continuous alignment nor constant disagreement. It is better understood as a process of adjustments along the way – not unlike the diplomatic practices themselves. In Sweden, the press became an important arena for examining and testing the boundaries of cautious bureaucratic diplomacy. In Denmark, meanwhile, the press reinforced a more outward-looking diplomatic strategy while simultaneously highlighting potential vulnerabilities, particularly regarding its dependence on British alignment and uncertainties about future ties with the EEC.

Underlying these patterns, similar to what was showcased in the previous section, lies an often underexplored tension between identity and rationality. While foreign policy is typically framed as a domain of strategic calculation, especially in small-state contexts where choices are tightly constrained, it is also to high degree shaped by symbolic markers of national identity. In the Swedish case, neutrality functioned as both a rational doctrine – to preserve geopolitical independence – and an identity-forming narrative that signalled moral distinction and internal cohesion. Yet as the press discourse showed, these layers did not always go hand in hand. When rational economic interests suggested closer alignment with the EEC, the identity-narrated logic of neutrality introduced ambiguity. In Denmark, the alignment between sectoral interests and diplomatic

[128] Although the Social Democratic Party, which had governed almost continuously since the 1930s, maintained close ties with the labour union movement (LO), this access did not extend equally to other societal actors. Therefore, stakeholders such as Swedish enterprise associations or non-governmental organisations had more limited channels of influence.

messaging appeared more straightforward. But even here, rational arguments for protecting agriculture overlapped with cultural symbolism. As highlighted in contemporary press debates, concerns over foreign cultural elements reveal that what was presented as rational policy was often rooted in narratives of belonging.

Yet such framing rarely stands apart from internal narratives that give meaning to a nation's place in the world. As scholars have noted, certain states often cultivate a form of "small state nationalism" – rooted in moral authority – drawn as much from deliberate diplomatic actions as from realities of limited influence on the global stage.[129] This self-image made it easier to justify humanitarian diplomacy, most notably in forums such as the United Nations, but it also introduced implicit constraints. Diplomats were expected to uphold these ideals, even when external conditions demanded otherwise – producing a tension between strategic needs and domestic expectations.

Therefore, Swedish and Danish actions both exemplify how national identity did not always reflect diplomatic strategies – it actively shaped and sometimes limited them. This became particularly visible when media scrutiny intensified. Policies framed as pragmatic responses to changing circumstances still had to align with certain identity narratives to be perceived as legitimate. In Sweden, neutrality came under increasing media questioning, especially as economic integration with the EEC became harder to ignore. In Denmark, agricultural protection and close alignment with key Western partners expressed a different, but equally identity-driven, understanding of national interest. In both contexts, newspapers shaped the public space in which foreign policy was explained and sometimes questioned. EFTA diplomacy, in this light, was not only conducted behind closed doors – it was also made sense of in the public arena, where national interests and identity were continuously debated and redefined.

Finally, these findings, and furthermore synthesising and placing them in their rightful context, provides a more nuanced understanding of small-state diplomacy and media influence. Diplomatic strategies were significantly shaped

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[129] Poul Noer, 'Denmark and the Gaullist Vision . Government and Civil Society . Reactions to the Fifth Republic and Its European Policies, 1958-1969' (PhD Dissertation, Florence, European University Institute, 2006), 45.

by institutional structures, political cultures and media practices – showing that economic diplomacy within EFTA was never purely technical or apolitical.
The interaction between diplomats and journalists constructed an interpretative space, shaping how foreign policy was conceptualised and ultimately anchored among its respective citizens. These findings highlight the need to understand diplomacy and media not always as separate spheres, but as closely connected ones that constantly inform and react to one another.

In this light, the boundaries between political actions and public narratives appear less distinct. To return to E.H. Carr's observation, as presented in the beginning of this thesis: economic forces are in fact political forces.[130] Therefore, the case of actions conducted behind EFTA's closed doors shows that diplomacy, far from being an entirely technical or economic affair, was embedded in political narratives – shaped by national identities and the stories political leaders told about themselves and their country's place in Europe.

[130] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, 116.

5 Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how the actions of Swedish and Danish diplomats in EFTA were represented in national newspapers, and in what ways notions of national identity shaped diplomatic strategies.

Thus, in answering the first research question, the analysis reveals that representations of Swedish and Danish diplomacy in the printed press to a high degree reflected the priorities of their respective governments, but also revealed underlying tensions. In Sweden, press coverage remained broadly in line with the cautious stance of neutrality that shaped the country's diplomatic conduct. However, as shown in several articles, this alignment was not without question. Certain articles increasingly pointed to the limitations of such a stance, particularly in light of the EEC's increasing influence. In Denmark, press narratives tended to reflect the government's pragmatic approach, especially its efforts to defend agricultural interests and maintain flexibility *vis-à-vis* Britain and the EEC. Yet, even in this relatively coherent media landscape, signs of uncertainty, to a certain extent even critique, could be distinguished – particularly when Britain's reliability was called into doubt. The presence of a new kind of diplomats in Denmark, *markedsdiplomater* – centred around multilateral economic diplomacy – may have helped to ensure that Denmark's diplomatic strategies came across as clearer, by for instance liaising in between non-governmental organisations, the political leadership and the press. This suggests that the organisational efforts bore fruit and resulted in more cohesive media portrayals in Denmark. Thus, while media narratives in both countries broadly aligned with official strategy, they also served as a forum for reframing the legitimacy of those strategies.

In response to the second question, the findings indicates that national identity influenced diplomacy not through explicit doctrines, but through more subtle impacts. Sweden's neutrality operated both as a strategic framework and as a narrative of political stability and democratic restraint. Moreover, the

interpretive perspective applied in this thesis suggests that ideals of cohesion and continuity played both a role in the narrative as well as playing a part of institutional routines. Through a form of path dependency, the patterns constrained Sweden's diplomatic room for manoeuvre – even when economic rationality pointed toward closer integration with the EEC. In this way, national identity shaped strategy not through explicit declarations, but through underlying assumptions of political ideals. Danish diplomacy, meanwhile, drew on sectoral concerns and small-state pragmatism, which reflected a more adaptive and interest-based identity. In neither case was identity fixed. Instead, their stances evolved in response to geopolitical pressures and was invoked to justify differing levels of engagement within the association.

Thus, the thesis identifies an inherent tension between, on the one hand, the rationality as portrayed by the two countries diplomats and their actions to advance the association's trade policies. And on the other hand, serving as a contrast to rationality, is the issue of narratives of national identities. This tension underscores the complexity of diplomatic decision-making and highlights that economic diplomacy rarely can be reduced to strictly technocratic processes. Instead, as this thesis contributes to, the findings show that early EFTA negotiations were rooted within broader debates concerning Europe's political future as well as national, and occasionally even regional, identities.

These insights – based on previously unexplored primary sources – presents intriguing implications for the study of small-state diplomacy during the Cold War and early European integration. For instance, they arguably challenge prevailing assumptions about economic diplomacy and highlight the nuanced ways smaller states navigated their geopolitical positions through perspectives as strategic rationality and national identity.

Meanwhile, six decades after the period examined in this thesis, contemporary discussions around trade, national identities and European integration still revolve around similar tensions. This suggests that policymakers today could benefit from a better recognition of how historical diplomatic choices have resonated domestically. Therefore, by advancing this field of research, and identifying how narratives continue to shape and legitimise foreign policy, political actors can gain improved insights on the framing and anchoring of their policies – resulting in an improved strategic awareness.

Future research could further contribute to analysing EFTA underexplored documents by adopting approaches that investigate the diplomatic actions conducted by other members states, such as Norway and Austria. Such studies could clarify whether the interplay between identity and strategic diplomacy identified here was unique to Sweden and Denmark or representative of broader small-state practices within EFTA. Moreover, employing a quantitative textual analysis within a digital humanities framework presents yet another opportunity to expand and refine the research of EFTA's high-level transcripts. Such methodological innovation could enable a more comprehensive analysis.

Finally, applying a New Diplomatic History perspective – which considers how diplomatic practices are embedded within broader societal and cultural contexts – could also be of great benefit. The approach, which explores how diplomatic narratives were viewed and negotiated beyond elite forums, by for instance incorporating public sentiments from letters and personal diaries, has potential to enrich interpretations of diplomatic actions – and European integration at large – and how they resonated in everyday political culture. Such an approach would furthermore highlight how a country's diplomatic actions, far from being restrained to EFTA's high-level meetings in Geneva, could have been interpreted and understood in a variety of ways.

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