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The Liminal in European Union Enlargement - A Case Study of the Contested Jadar Lithium Mine Project in Serbia

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Dedicated to the memory of Roza
In celebration of her small bunny life.

Abstract:

As part of its broader strategy to break its reliance on Russian energy while simultaneously developing its own industrial capacity to fulfill its decarbonization goals, the European Union (EU) has been a vocal supporter of the controversial Jadar lithium mining project in Serbia. Recently, it has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Serbian government in spite of the project's cancellation as a response to intense bottom-up civic pressure. This policy has widely been interpreted in rationalist and realist terms as coercive or even colonial. However, this interpretation fails to answer the question of why or how come the EU has decided to do this in spite of its identity as an organization founded on liberal democratic values. This thesis, relying on a broader critical constructivist framework based on discourse analysis, combined with the ethnological concept of liminality applied to Serbia's EU accession process, analyzes key official documents including the EU's founding treaties, the Critical Raw Materials Act, the Stabilization and Association Treaty and the MoU with Serbia. It argues that the EU accession process can be seen as a political rite of passage, and that it is precisely this liminal discourse of EU accession that allows the EU to reconcile the contradictions inherent to its critical raw materials strategy.

Keywords:

European Union, Jadar, liminality, EU accession

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1. Introduction

The Jadar project is in a state of limbo — cancelled by the Government of Serbia in 2021 following widespread environmental protests, at the time of writing, the European Union (EU) has just included it on its list of strategic projects (European Commission 2025 C(2025) 3491 final), after a Memorandum of Understanding on the matter was signed between the two parties in 2024 (European Commission 2024a). The EU has thus once again partnered with the Serbian government on a project already rejected by its citizens, amid and in spite of the student-led civic protests that have lasted since November 2024. Though this state of affairs is undoubtedly strange, it renders the writing of a sober reflection on the entire matter from a political science perspective — which is the goal of the present thesis, unexpectedly timely. Therefore, this introductory section will start by providing some background information on the Jadar project, as well as the relationship between Serbia and the EU, before proceeding to formulate the research question and structure of the paper, in addition to a few notes on the significance and rationale for this research.

1.1. Background

In 2024, the European Union (EU) adopted the Critical Raw Materials Act (European Commission 2024b, (EU) 2024/1252) to respond to the growing demand for rare earth metals and other raw materials as part of its efforts to decarbonize its economy by 2030 (European Commission, n.d.-a). According to the Commission, the EU demand for lithium in particular is "expected to increase twelve-fold by 2030 and twenty-one-fold by 2050", and this increased demand for critical raw materials means that "EU efforts to meet its climate and digital objectives are at risk" (ibid.). In 2024, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Maroš Šefčovič, European Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security; Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency on behalf of the EU and Dubravka Đedović, Minister of Mining and Energy on behalf of Serbia, to establish a Strategic Partnership on Sustainable Raw Materials, Battery Value Chains and Electric Vehicles (European Commission 2024a), as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz looked on, having made a special visit to Serbia for the occasion.

This in a country that had just undergone a highly contentious parliamentary election characterized by well-documented and widespread manipulation by the ruling SNS party including misuse of public office for campaign purposes, outdated voter rolls, failure to prosecute criminal acts related to the election, failure to ensure equitable media treatment of election participants, voter intimidation and clientelism, and other abuses (ODIHR 2024, CRTA 2024). Furthermore, Serbia remains an EU membership candidate that has steadfastly refused to align its foreign and security policy with the EU, especially with regard to its relationship with Russia following the 2022 outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The question naturally arises of why the EU (and Germany in particular) decided to reward Serbia's government in this way, and at a moment in which its abuses, with a long history prior to the aforementioned elections, had become so blatant.

Serbia's journey towards European Union integration formally began at the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, where the EU confirmed the Western Balkans' European perspective and established the Stabilization and Association Process as the framework for accession. Following a complex transitional period after the fall of Slobodan Milošević, Serbia officially applied for EU membership in December 2009 and was granted candidate status in March 2012 (European Commission, n.d.-d). The dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina, initiated in 2011 and facilitated by the EU, was considered to be a breakthrough, and the subsequent 2013 Brussels Agreement was supposed to serve as a blueprint for normalizing relations between Serbia and Kosovo. By December 2015, Serbia had opened its first negotiation chapters, marking the beginning of substantive accession talks (ibid.) This represented a vote of confidence on the part of the EU in Serbia's government, led in various capacities by Aleksandar Vučić, who currently serves as Serbia's President.

Despite this initial momentum, Serbia's EU integration process has stalled as the result of a lack of 'political will' on both sides. The country has opened 22 out of 35 negotiation chapters, but only two have been provisionally closed as of 2025 (ibid.). In December 2021, Serbia reached a modest milestone by opening Cluster 4 on the Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity, the last negotiation cluster opened to date (ibid.). Per successive EU progress reports, the primary obstacles are in areas such as the rule of law, media freedom, and most significantly, the issue of Kosovo, with the EU insisting on a comprehensive normalization of relations before membership (European Parliament 2025, P10_TA(2025)0093). Serbia's balancing act between EU aspirations and its traditional ties with Russia, which has been in sharp focus since the beginning of the war

in Ukraine in 2022, has further complicated its accession path. The EU's adoption of a revised enlargement methodology in 2020, emphasizing fundamental reforms and a more credible accession process, has established a clearer roadmap, but the timeline for Serbia's potential membership remains uncertain amid the broader context of ‘enlargement fatigue’ within the EU and complex geopolitical dynamics in the Western Balkans. The metaphor of an endless EU ‘waiting room’, which Western Balkans countries find themselves stuck in as the result of their membership candidate status has become ubiquitous to the point of cliche, but, as will be demonstrated later on, it can serve as the starting point for an incisive analysis of the critical raw materials case.

Zooming in on the domestic political situation in Serbia, in October 2020, widespread ecological protests broke out in the town of Loznica against the proposed project to extract lithium and other critical minerals from a unique deposit in the Jadar region (Popović 2024). This was a response to the Government's fast-tracking of the project in spite of numerous environmental concerns (Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute 2023), which, according to environmental experts (Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute 2024), were not adequately addressed by Rio Tinto, the Anglo-Australian mining giant that had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Serbia to develop the project in 2017. The outrage was further exacerbated by the company's extremely poor reputation regarding environmental protection. Responding to intense bottom-up pressure from citizens, the Government of Serbia and the local authorities reluctantly cancelled the relevant permits for the lithium mining project in 2021 (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2021). However, in July 2024, the EU and the Government of Serbia signed the aforementioned Memorandum of Understanding after the Constitutional Court of Serbia had conveniently ruled the Government's decision to revoke Rio Tinto's licenses to develop the Jadar project unconstitutional just over a week prior. It is clear that the Jadar project has been brought back from hibernation owing to the strong interest of the EU, and especially Germany.

1.2. Research Question and Thesis Structure

From an International Relations (IR) perspective, this case is difficult to explain from both the traditional liberal and realist schools of thought. A liberal IR scholar may expect the EU as a

normative power (Diez and Pace 2011) to make a point of respecting the clearly stated wishes of a large majority of Serbian citizens, because being seen to act contrary to those wishes can damage its relationship with them, as indeed it has. On the other hand, focusing on the EU's realpolitik (Allen and Galóczi 2024, 94) and economic interests in "near-shoring" lithium for its batteries to argue that it has put aside its principles of respect for democracy, the rule of law, and environmental responsibility in order to obtain those interests fails to take into account the social construction and articulation thereof — what makes lithium a "critical" mineral, and what role Serbia plays in the EU's energy and climate ambitions.

Furthermore, a number of researchers and activists claim that the EU has come to regard Serbia as a political and ecological "sacrifice zone" (e.g. Šterić 2023, Momčilović 2023) rather than a serious membership candidate. This view assumes that the project, if implemented, could cause the ecological devastation of the Jadar region. The paradox with regard to the EU's stance on the project would then be that it would leave Serbia so ecologically devastated that it could never hope to catch up to EU environmental standards, and therefore never be eligible to be admitted into the EU. The public view that the EU has indeed taken a transactional approach of tolerating government abuses in exchange for critical raw materials has only increased in the wake of the ongoing unprecedented wave of student-led anti-corruption protests, which have thus far been merely diplomatically acknowledged, rather than embraced, by relevant EU institutions, and is reflected in public polling on support for EU accession. The Jadar project is a prism that refracts and focuses all of the various problems facing Serbia as the result of endemic corruption and authoritarianism, which is why it has elicited such staunch opposition from wide swaths of the Serbian public.

In this context, the EU's continued support for the Jadar project should be seen as part of a broader set of policies to promote what is commonly referred to as 'stabilitocracy[1]' (Bieber 2017) in the Western Balkans, essentially valuing the mere absence of war and unrest above democratic and economic development in the region. This approach has disappointed a large portion of the public that had previously been in favor of Serbia's EU accession, which was seen as a guarantee of freedom and prosperity. According to a recent survey, only 45% of Serbian citizens would support EU accession at a referendum, whereas the public perception of the EU is significantly net

[1]Or 'stabilocracy' more recently.

negative (-12) (Radio-televizija Srbije, 2024). Furthermore, there has been a resurgence of a conservative Eurosceptic view of the EU as a neocolonial, neoliberal globalist project, a trend throughout Europe and much of the world (Geva and Santos, 2021).

The Jadar project poses an interesting research question under these circumstances: Why did the EU sign a memorandum on critical raw materials with Serbia despite popular opposition to the project, coupled with democratic backsliding and disputed elections? The dissonance between the EU's normative emphasis on its values and its policy of supporting a highly controversial extractivist project in partnership with an increasingly authoritarian government makes the Jadar project a case worthy of detailed analysis. A comprehensive explanation of this case requires the development of a tailored approach based on ideas from the broad and diverse field of critical international relations. Considering the fact that the details of negotiations between the relevant parties are unknown to the public (and the Author), and that there is no way for an outside observer to directly intuit leaders' thought processes (i.e. what they 'really' think) (Hansen and Wæver 2002, 26), any academic research into the case will necessarily rely on a close reading of publicly available texts, including official documents and statements. Critical IR is well equipped to extract meaning from texts, though, in the post-structuralist vein, it does not claim that interpretations gleaned as the result of its analysis are carved in stone, singular and permanent. Referring back to the notion of the 'EU waiting room', and reiterating that the EU's behavior in this case cannot be accounted for by either major school of thought in IR, I claim that the reason for the EU's continued support for the project can be explained via the concept of liminality — a state in between well-established positions, which Serbia occupies with respect to its EU accession negotiations. It is this liminality that (on a surface level) bridges the dissonance between the EU's values and its interests with regard to this case.

I will develop this idea in three steps: first, I will provide an overview of the currently available literature on the Jadar project and distill certain common interpretations of the EU's role therein. I will also present a paradigmatic theoretical review to demonstrate that a comprehensive theoretical approach with a starting point in critical IR theory must be developed to answer the research question; before proceeding to develop that theoretical and methodological framework, primarily through the application of discourse analysis with reference to liminality on a corpus of texts relevant to the Jadar case.

1.3. Thesis Significance and Rationale

The Jadar project is undoubtedly a very important and fascinating case for closer theoretical study and understanding. According to both the Government and the EU advocates for the project, it has the potential to transform Serbia's economy, putting it on the path to catch up with EU countries in terms of economic development. On the other hand, if implemented contrary to the will of a majority of citizens, and in such a way as to result in environmental devastation, it would indeed fix the relationship between the EU and Serbia along exploitative, colonial terms. As will be demonstrated later on, there has as yet been no systematic effort to synthesize these two possibilities through theory.

Post-structuralist frameworks for analysis have the potential to fill the gaps left by existing explanations of the EU's behavior in the Jadar case, and this thesis seeks to contribute both to post-structuralism, and to the public debate on the Jadar project. In a practical sense, my thesis strives to respond to Torfing's (2005) call for discourse theorists to provide case studies of specific discourses, instead of focusing entirely on theoretical developments, as well as the call for discourse theory to move beyond what are considered 'soft' subjects, such as gender or ethnicity studies (ibid.).

Finally, in the course of research for this thesis, the promising niche of the study of liminality within IR proved particularly applicable to the context of a region said to be in a perpetual state of *transition*. Therefore, this thesis also seeks to contribute a few theoretical points in dialogue with the existing literature on liminality, as well as introduce the concept to the critical constructivist study of Serbia's relationship with the EU in terms of the accession negotiations, considering the fact that the most widespread theoretical approach to it so far has been based on peace- and statebuilding theories

2. Literature Review

This section will provide a comprehensive overview of the literature pertinent to the present research, to determine how it treats the political context under which the Jadar project operates. This political context can be conceptualized as an intersection between Europe's foreign, enlargement, and economic policies. The literature review will consist of two major sections: the first will present a review of the literature citing *exogenous* factors to explain the EU's policy on the Jadar project, based on a 'geoeconomic turn' in the EU's overall policy stance. This is the basis for all but one of the works available on the Jadar project. The second section will briefly discuss the mainstream rationalist approaches to studying European Foreign Policy (EFP) and enlargement in terms of the possibilities for *endogenous* explanations, before introducing constructivist approaches and elaborating on their analytical advantages in filling the remaining theoretical gaps in terms of the possibility of synthesizing exogenous and endogenous factors.

2.1. Exogenous Analyses of the EU's Policy on the Jadar Project

The starting point for an exogenous analysis of the EU's policy on the Jadar project is the *geoeconomic turn* in EU policy, as explained by Bauerle Danzman and Meunier (2024). They argue that, though the EU has resisted deploying the defensive and offensive geoeconomic tools which other major economies had already started introducing in the 2010s, it has rapidly developed and deployed such tools in recent years. They attribute this rapid reaction to the securitization of trade given the EU's dependencies on other major economies which can no longer be counted on to uphold the rules of free trade. Firstly, with regard to China, the concerns include its direct linkage of "economic strategy with broader foreign policy and security objectives" amidst a rising geopolitical rivalry (ibid., 1107), as well as the distortive nature of China's state subsidies as a threat to the EU's competitiveness. With regard to the United States, the concern is the introduction of unilateral and protectionist trade policy under the first Trump administration which has continued and intensified up to present day. Finally, both COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine engendered a sense of crisis that demanded a change in the EU economic doctrine (ibid.). Though the authors also cite internal politics, including the transfer of certain competencies to the

EU level, Brexit, and national elections, this section is underdeveloped, and lacks an account of the EU's internal dynamics. Under this framework, the Jadar project falls under the EU's defensive geoeconomic instruments, as part of the European Green Industrial Plan, which in turn contains the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) which regulates cooperation with Serbia on lithium extraction.

In the same vein, in terms of the impact of the EU enlargement process on the EU's policy on the Jadar project, it is easy to take the realist account of the relationship between the EU and Serbia for granted, due to its hegemonic status in the discussion. Cavoski offers a very succinct realist analysis of that relationship, arguing that "the motivation of the EU for enlargement in the Western Balkans is primarily instrumental with the primary aim to extend its writ into the Balkans and stabilize the region to ensure that there is no repeat of the war and instability of the 1990s" (Cavoski 2015, 266). Likewise, the Serbian side's interest in enlargement is also instrumental, aiming to strengthen its weak institutions and ensure greater economic welfare (ibid.). Therefore, she dismisses the applicability of constructivist theories based on "a clear alignment of values between the applicant state and member state[s]", because "it is highly questionable whether Serbia subscribes to the integrationist project or even fully adheres to the liberal-democratic value foundations of the EU" (ibid., 267). For realists, then, the approximation of an applicant country's governance models to those of the EU can be explained in terms of conditionality, herein progress on that front can ultimately be rewarded with EU membership (ibid., 267-268). Crucially, Cavoski argues that the EU has an inherent interest in "propagating its own rules, legal order and models of governance" (ibid.).

Zooming in on the Jadar project, at the time when this thesis was in the early stages of development in mid-2023, there was almost no literature on the Jadar project from a social science perspective, but there was a wealth of geological and environmental work that did not even try to answer any political or social questions. However, several relevant social science articles have been published on the Jadar project since, all of which fall within the broad framework of a geoeconomic turn in the EU's policy. It is of critical importance for this thesis to be in dialogue with them when developing the explanatory framework proposed above. In order to identify certain gaps in their argumentation, it is helpful to present the main claims of these works more-or-less one-by-one, serving in the first order to demonstrate the need for an approach that unifies exogenous and endogenous factors, which will ultimately be based on liminality and discourse.

As early as 2021, Ivanović *et al.*, a group of forestry experts working within the framework of cultural landscape management, conducted a survey among individual households within the Jadar region, aiming to capture the residents' views on the proposed lithium mining project and how they thought it may impact them and their livelihoods (Ivanović *et al.* 2003). A total of 66 individuals were surveyed from two settlements, Tršić and Korenita, corresponding to 7% and 4.6% of the total number of registered households respectively. The authors' use of open-ended questions is relevant for this thesis as a source of qualitative data on the residents' own interpretations of the political aspects of the project. Namely, respondents expressed distrust for Rio Tinto in particular due to its global reputation for implementing projects with poor environmental standards and felt excluded from the decision-making process, leading at least one respondent to conclude that "pressures of foreign influence on the country" were the only plausible explanation for their exclusion and the pace of the project's development (ibid., 10).

The first attempt to study the Jadar project from a political science perspective was published by the Belgrade Center for Security Policy (Šterić 2023). Though provocatively titled *A Driver of Green Transition or a Colonial Tailings Dump: Political Discourse on the Jadar Project*, the publication does not employ discourse analysis as part of its methodology, nor does it provide any definitive answer to the question it raises in its title. Rather, it comprehensively maps the events, narratives, and actors involved in the Jadar project based on media reporting and publicly available documents, aiming to serve as a resource for further inquiry. Having provided a general overview of the project's development from the very early stages up to the time of writing, the publication identifies five key actors: government representatives, environmental activists and green parties, pro-European opposition, right-wing national opposition, foreign actors, and Rio Tinto representatives.

For the present purposes, it is important to articulate the main lines of argumentation of each of these groups in support or in opposition to the project, since they all involve distinct interpretations of Serbia's relationship with the EU and the country's future more generally. This warrants the slightly lengthier summary that will follow. Starting with the groups supporting the project, the government's narrative has undergone many changes over time in response to the civic backlash against it, evolving from emphasizing the benefits to the local development of the Podrinje region, which has suffered from an alarming rate of depopulation, toward spinning a grand narrative about Serbia's historic chance to be a significant actor in the green transition, thus

ensuring its development and prosperity. As the civic protests intensified, the government was forced into a cycle of damage control, at various times promising that environmental regulations would be scrupulously followed, dismissing environmental concerns outright, and attacking and smearing opponents of the project as politically motivated and corrupt.

Since the publication of this work, the government has also attempted to shift the burden of guaranteeing the project's environmental sustainability to the EU, and Germany in particular, once it became clear that the government did not have the necessary credibility to do so (Danas, 2024). Rio Tinto was also forced to change its narrative by the increased opposition — its message initially was that the project would create thousands of well-paying jobs for residents and experts, before pivoting to defend its environmental efforts by claiming to be working with experts and university professors to make sure the project is sustainable. This message remained unconvincing to the public, prompting the company to pause the project, at least publicly, so as to carry out consultations with the residents. Rio Tinto has since remained quiet, but has been taking steps to continue developing the project behind the scenes, in spite of the government's revocation of all relevant permits (op.cit.).

The three distinct groups identified by the publication as opposing the project managed to find enough common ground to organize some of the largest civic protests to date. Though the environmental activists were themselves heterogeneous (Šterić identifies some three separate groups), their narrative was a cohesive one, namely the "securitisation of the ecological threat posed by the construction of the mine" (Šterić 2023, 15). In other words, they argued that the mine would pose an existential threat to the residents' health, way of life, and potentially even survival. There was also strong anti-colonial messaging aimed at the Western countries which supported the project most vocally. This is a point at which the views of the environmental activists and the right-wing opposition seem to converge, though the latter place greater emphasis on the traditional relationship of the residents to the soil. The pro-European opposition was placed in an awkward position, given the fact that the initial exploratory phase of the project was greenlit by the government led by the Democratic Party at the time, which in turn disintegrated into many of the parties that make up the pro-European opposition today, as well as their lack of expertise on environmental matters and reticence to oppose the EU. For those reasons, the pro-EU opposition focused on highlighting rule of law issues with the project, stopping short of outright rejecting any

path towards lithium mining in the future, provided that sufficient environmental standards are guaranteed by a non-SNS government (ibid.).

Most relevant for the present discussion, however, is the section on foreign actors, who are, according to Šterić, "undivided" in their support for the project (ibid., 22). He puts forward three main reasons for this support. Firstly, Serbia's geographical position in the EU's immediate neighbourhood and its political position as an EU membership candidate are both useful from the perspective of achieving "strategic autonomy" on critical raw materials, a goal stated in the EU's Critical Raw Materials Act. Secondly, the easy access to Serbia's lithium is of particular economic interest for the European automotive industry, especially that of Germany. Finally, though Šterić merely mentions the fact that Rio Tinto's is a British-Australian company[2], it is likely that the view among EU representatives is that the Jadar project would help balance China's already significant presence in Serbia's mining industry through the Zijin mining company. Šterić notes that the most vocal support for the project came from U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill, who argued that it represents an unprecedented economic and development opportunity for Serbia, considering lithium's importance in producing the batteries needed for a green transition. Other representatives were less publicly vocal in their support, arguing in favor of the project behind closed doors, especially those of the UK and Germany.[3] However, in spite of the publication's title, Šterić does not ultimately offer any interpretation or explanation for how the Jadar project has played out so far.

In contrast, Allen and Galgóczi, in their comprehensive analysis of the Jadar project (2024), which includes an extensive section of technical details about the ecological implications of mining lithium, conclude that "realpolitik" is likely to prevail, and that the mine in the Jadar valley will be opened in spite of "[...] grassroots democracy, civil society engagement and social and democratic progress within the country" (Allen and Galgóczi, 94) They also argue that Serbia's lithium deposits grant the country a significant degree of leverage over the EU, and could even serve to accelerate its EU accession, cutting the line in front of other countries that may have done more to politically align with the bloc. This *quid pro quo* arrangement, as the authors envisage it, would

[2] Though it should be pointed out that the Aluminium Corporation of China (Chinalco) now owns a significant stake in Rio Tinto (Onstad and Hornby 2008))

[3] Several meetings between delegations led by a representative of the German Federal Ministry for Economic and Energy Affairs and Serbian civil society actors in the environment and energy sector are known by the Author, through his professional affiliation, to have taken place in Belgrade over the past three years.

see Serbia ‘give’ the EU a lithium mine, and receive EU membership in return. Perhaps most importantly, these authors seem to have the parties’ motivations reversed — I would argue that it is the ruling coalition in Serbia that would like the mine to open, bringing with it even more opportunities for graft and patronage, and the EU would want Serbia as a full member state, and in due course, a member of the single market, ensuring the free flow of goods and services. Though it articulates a valuable outside perspective on the Jadar project, this article has a myopic view of the internal politics of Serbia, so its assumptions on the political consequences of implementing the project are not built on solid foundations.

Vivoda and Loginova (2025) apply a "minerals trilemma" framework, which juxtaposes the competing demands of security, cost, and sustainability, to analyze the Jadar lithium project in Serbia as a critical mineral extraction project. The authors argue that the Jadar project exemplifies the difficulties of rapidly scaling up critical mineral production to meet global demand, particularly within contested geopolitical environments. Their analysis traces the project's evolution from initial exploration through widespread protests and government policy reversals, ultimately concluding that governance challenges, geopolitical competition, and information warfare make it "exceedingly difficult to rapidly bring sufficient critical mineral supplies to market"(Vivoda and Loginova 2025, 2).

While their theoretical framework provides a useful analytical lens for understanding the complexities of critical mineral projects, their empirical analysis raises several methodological and conceptual concerns that limit the study's contribution to the literature. The authors' treatment of opposition to the Jadar project is particularly problematic in its emphasis on external manipulation rather than legitimate local concerns. Vivoda and Loginova repeatedly attribute protests to Russian “state-backed disinformation campaigns" (ibid., 12) and characterize academic criticism of the project as scientifically unfounded, yet they provide limited empirical evidence to support these claims. Furthermore, the authors also appear to take Rio Tinto's claims about environmental safeguards at face value without subjecting them to critical scrutiny. For example, they fail to engage with substantial criticism of Rio Tinto's environmental impact assessments that have been dismissed by independent experts as inadequate (RERI 2024). This oversight is particularly concerning given Rio Tinto's well-documented history of environmental and social failures, including the destruction of Juukan Gorge, which the authors mention only in passing.

Furthermore, the authors' analysis of governance challenges reveals internal contradictions in their argument. While they acknowledge Serbia's "pervasive lack of trust in political institutions" (Vivoda and Loginova 2025, 11), weak regulatory capacity, and history of inadequate environmental oversight of mining operations, they appear to view these primarily as obstacles to project implementation rather than legitimate reasons for public concern about environmental protection. The authors seem to suggest that better communication strategies could resolve public opposition, rather than addressing the underlying governance deficits that fuel public distrust. Most fundamentally, Vivoda and Loginova's analysis suffers from an uncritical embrace of the "green transition" discourse that takes increased mineral extraction as a given necessity for addressing climate change, failing to problematize the extractivist assumptions underlying current approaches to the energy transition.

On the other hand, Stuehlen and Anderl (2024) employ a bottom-up approach to the Jadar project, examining how grassroots resistance movements can illuminate broader transnational power structures, with the Jadar project as a case study. Their framing of the research puzzle is particularly interesting — why does Rio Tinto continue to be confident that the Jadar project will ultimately be implemented, in spite of the revocation of all licenses by the government in response to a powerful resistance movement? Through a "reconstructing rule from resistance" analytical framework, the authors identify three interconnected actors shaping the conflict. First, they argue that Rio Tinto operates beyond a mere corporate role, actively influencing policy and assuming quasi-governmental functions through aggressive land acquisition tactics and continued activities despite the apparent cancellation of the project. Second, the authors characterize the Serbian government as functioning both as subordinate to external pressures and complicit in enabling the mining project, with EU accession conditionality, particularly market liberalization requirements, constraining its sovereignty while creating opportunities for state capture by transnational interests. Third, Stuehlen and Anderl identify the European Union as playing a contradictory role, simultaneously promoting environmental protection and market openness for foreign direct investment. This contradiction creates an asymmetric relationship where economic demands implicitly override environmental concerns, particularly in peripheral candidate countries.

The authors conclude that Rio Tinto's confidence in the Jadar project stems from structural advantages embedded in the Europeanization process, arguing that the EU's contradictory framework of advocating for environmental reforms while pushing market liberalization creates

the ideal conditions for transnational corporations, describing this as "investment-friendly openness legitimized by an environmental agenda" (Stuehlen and Anderl 2024, 264) that enables corporations to expand their influence beyond market relations into governmental functions. However, they do not fully explain the asymmetric relationship between Serbia and the EU, nor how the EU, as a normative actor, reconciles the contradictions inherent to the project. This article comes closest to including an account of factors endogenous to the EU's structure, and rightly points out the contradiction between economic and environmental factors in its policy.

Perhaps the most biting in her criticism of the Jadar project is Vujičić (2024), who examines it through the theoretical lenses of "globonationalism" and "ethnoelitism," positioning it as a case study of contemporary neocolonialism. She argues that Serbia, as a country economically peripheral to the EU and not a NATO member, faces coercive pressures from the hegemonic powers to exploit its lithium resources for the demands of Europe's green transition. This represents modern neocolonialism wherein political manipulation and economic dependency mirror colonial governance patterns, with powerful states using sanctions and trade agreements to enforce compliance and foster dependency that undermines Serbia's autonomy.

Vujičić critiques what she terms the "illusion of sustainability" (Vujičić 2024, 734) arguing that narratives positioning lithium as a sustainable resource coupled with nationalist rhetoric are used to obscure economic exploitation, with the marginalization of local communities reinforcing neocolonial patterns where external interests exploit resources while neglecting cultural and social ramifications. Central to Vujičić's analysis is her concept of 'globonationalism', which she defines as an emerging identity framework that prioritizes class power and global elite membership over traditional forms of nationalism or ethnonationalism. This represents a fundamental shift where ruling elites in peripheral nations abandon protective nationalist stances in favor of alignment with global capitalist interests, seeking legitimacy and recognition on the international stage often at the expense of democratic principles and local community rights.

Vujičić argues that globonationalism creates a bifurcated world system where class dynamics become the primary determinant of power relations, followed by persistent racial and ethnic hierarchies, fundamentally reshaping political landscapes as national elites prioritize integration into global power structures over traditional sovereignty concerns. She concludes that the Jadar case represents a critical nexus of globonationalism, ethnoelitism, and neocolonialism,

calling for more equitable frameworks for resource extraction that acknowledge the intersections of environmental sustainability with social justice.

It is interesting to note that the present thesis is not the first to make the connection between Serbia's liminal position with regard to the EU and the Jadar project. Đukanović references the term as part of a discussion of Serbia's peripherality in relation to the EU as a center (Đukanović, 2024). For her, the Jadar project represents an imposition of a hegemonic neoliberal interpretation of the green transition, which she rightly points out is based on "relentless mining and extractivism" (ibid., 2), on a state and region considered to be peripheral, or liminal in the sense of constituting a borderland between Europe and the East. Referencing the work of Todorova on Balkanism, the Balkans is a region constructed as "a repository of negative characteristics" against which Europe constitutes itself (Todorova 2009, 188). Thus, Rio Tinto has positioned the Jadar project as an opportunity for Serbia to finally "catch up" to Europe, and potentially escape its "entrapment" in this liminal position. Though I agree with all of the arguments Đukanović presents, merely taking liminality as a fact imposed by the powerful center on a developing periphery as a means to glorify the center itself does not leave room for a discussion on the construction and functioning of that liminality, which this paper will present in the subsequent sections.

There are several throughlines that can be traced through the literature presented above that specifically deals with the Jadar case. The most salient similarity that reveals itself when one examines the above texts at a high degree of abstraction is that they were written with the intention to inform rather than examine. With the exception of the study by Ivanović *et al.* (2023) and the comparatively brief article by Đukanović (2024), the majority of the papers' length is devoted to reporting on what has actually taken place in Serbia regarding the project, the various actors and their narratives, coupled with a certain interpretation, whether through an anticolonial lens, a minerals trilemma, reconstructing rule from resistance, etc. Through the various interpretive frameworks, there is significant (though not universal) agreement that an unequal and coercive relationship is at play between foreign powers, particularly the EU, the government of Serbia, and Rio Tinto itself on one side, and Serbian citizens, themselves organized into certain interest groups, on the other. However, its nature is not explored beyond establishing a power dynamic reified by the EU accession process. Furthermore, all the authors seem to agree that the EU's economic and geostrategic interests have motivated it to support the project – the geoeconomic turn, yet none of

the authors (again, except Đukanović, op cit.) have questioned how and why those interests are constructed.

2.2. Endogenous Approaches to European Foreign Policy and Enlargement

European studies is a complex field of inquiry, as the EU is a *sui generis* political institution — more than an international organization, and less than a state. It is therefore not a trivial matter to determine the starting point for conceptualizing its foreign policy — how and why the EU acts on the international scene. In other words, it is not immediately clear whether foreign policy as practiced by the EU requires a separate theoretical framework that accounts for its supranational structure, or whether it can be treated in terms of long-standing IR theories wherein states are the actors in the international field. As Bergmann and Niemann point out, there is a lack of a coherent theoretical framework for studying European Foreign Policy (EFP), which instead consists of discrete empirical studies compiled on a case-by-case basis (Bergmann and Niemann 2013, 1). In a similar vein, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier argue that, though there is an abundance of literature on enlargement, much of it "consists of descriptive studies of individual policy areas and country cases" (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2006, 97). Furthermore, Bergmann and Niemann (op.cit. 15) point out that two broad approaches to explaining EFP are possible: an endogenous approach focusing on the "actors and processes" that relies on European integration theory, and exogenous approaches which rely on existing IR theories to explain policy outcomes. Likewise, in terms of enlargement, which Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier define as "a process of gradual and formal institutionalization of organizational rules and norms", two dimensions may be observed: vertical institutionalization (the *deepening* of EU integration) and horizontal institutionalization (the *widening* of EU integration) (op.cit. 97-98). The proper starting point for this study, therefore, is the influence of endogenous theories on EFP and the widening of EU integration.

It is clear from the preceding review of the work published on the Jadar project, however, that so far that the question of *why* or *how come* the EU supports the Jadar project has not been convincingly answered, as the analyses lack a sufficiently theoretically developed account of the structure of the relationship between the EU and Serbia, which is the object of this thesis. In other words, the *realist* and *exogenous* interpretations of the EU's position on the Jadar project attempt

to explain it as a response to the challenges coming from outside, and thus fail to account for the apparent dissonance between the EU's values and its interests. This section will discuss the various *endogenous* approaches to studying the foreign policy of the EU as well as EU enlargement, both of which are of key importance for understanding the its position on the Jadar project. It will first briefly present the mainstream, rationalist approaches to EU integration, and their implications for European Foreign Policy (EFP) and enlargement, highlighting possible insights for the Jadar case, before arguing that the weaknesses of these endogenous, rationalist approaches justify turning to a constructivist framework, which has the potential to account for both.

Generally speaking, there is an "absence of a plausible general theory of EU governance" (Peterson 2001, 289), but European studies encompass a broad field of work on the study of European integration — the question of how and why the European project has been successful (as well as the degree of its success), and its governance, i.e., how decisions are made, though the literature on governance is not nearly as robust as that on integration. In other words, explaining why and how sovereign states have chosen to delegate some of their powers to this first-of-its-kind institution in the making is far easier than theorizing on the organization as it actually exists and functions, including in the areas of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Enlargement Policy. The field of European studies is a fragmented one, populated by a swath of "middle-range theories" (ibid., 291), each of which specializes in explaining a certain phenomenon that constitutes the wider field, but no one theory can lay claim to being a 'theory of everything'.

As Bergmann and Niemann indicate, though these theories were not specifically designed to study EFP, certain general conclusions stemming from them apply to EFP as a *policy*. It is therefore worth briefly presenting the main theoretical strands of European integration theory and contextualizing them within EFP, following Bergmann and Niemann. The two most influential theoretical strands in European studies are neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, but other middle-range theories have also developed since, including multi-level governance and policy networks. These theories may ascribe varying degrees of importance to certain processes within European integration, but they all fundamentally share a rationalist ontology — their point of departure is the idea that states, as the primary agents of the process of European integration, have for various reasons made the rational choice to integrate in order to achieve certain goals.

The first of these rationalist theories was neofunctionalism, which sees integration as a process, as opposed to an outcome — one in which national and supranational elites push for

integration in order to further their rational interests. (Niemann, Lefkofridi, and Schmitter, 2018) However, the framework leaves room for these rational actors to learn and change their preferences over time. Once supranational institutions are created, they become rational actors in their own right, and also seek to increase their own power, thus providing impetus for further integration (ibid.). Another key aspect to neofunctionalism is the idea of spillover — once a certain sector is integrated at a supranational level, it drives further integration due to their interdependence (ibid.). The consequence for foreign policy is that member states "will find themselves compelled — regardless of their original intentions — to adopt common policies *vis-à-vis* non-participant third parties. Members will be forced to hammer out a collective external position (and in the process are likely to rely increasingly on the new central institutions to do it)" (Schmitter 1969, quoted in Bergmann and Niemann 2013, 6). Indeed, with regard to the Jadar project, a common external-facing policy has been adopted, and the EU Commission has been the main actor or even 'policy entrepreneur' (Bergmann and Niemann 2013, 6).

Liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) has proven to be a more robust theory of European integration, and is still referenced in contemporary work. Though it is not explicitly based on a realist view of international relations, LI recognizes that states are the primary actors in European politics functioning in a state of anarchy, as the EU is not an actor capable of imposing decisions on states (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2009), but rather an organization established by member states by way of an international treaty. The EU is a platform for states to negotiate and bargain in order to obtain their rational interests, and so the decision to cooperate is based on rational calculations of efficiency (ibid.). The insight of liberal intergovernmentalism when it comes to EFP is that, in the absence of an economic or welfare interest, member states "favor further integration when they do not have credible unilateral alternatives for action" (Bergmann and Niemann 2013, 8). In terms of the Jadar project, which may have strong implications for economic and welfare interests, in particular for Germany, LI would explain the adoption of a common EU policy precisely as the consequence of its perceived importance. Likewise, in terms of enlargement, LI emphasizes the "anticipated effect of enlargement on a state's welfare", and frames the enlargement policy in terms of relative bargaining power among states as well as possible "side payments" for unwilling states to go along (Schimmelfenig and Sedelmeier 2006, 102).

As Peterson (op.cit.) points out, neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism are fundamentally compatible theories, in that they are both theories of international relations — they approach the study of European integration from the point of view of independent states, and, more precisely, their elites, engaging in bargaining in order to obtain some national goals. Precisely because, according to Peterson, LI comes closest to being a comprehensive theory of intergovernmental negotiation at a supranational forum, it does not view the EU as a political entity in itself, and therefore does not account for the complex and unique structure of the EU's internal policy-making process. That is why two separate but complimentary theoretical strands have emerged, which do not explicitly question the foundations of liberal intergovernmentalism's rational choice institutionalism, but focus specifically on how decisions are being made in the EU as a political community whose integration is still ongoing. These are multi-level governance and policy networks.

Multi-level governance is primarily an attempt to make sense of the EU as an organization straddling the boundary between domestic and international politics (Bache & Flinders, 2004). For multi-level governance, decision-making in the EU takes place within policy networks whose members come from three levels of governance — subnational, national, and supranational. In other words, multilevel governance recognizes that decision-making at the EU level takes into account not only national preferences, but also the independent preferences of supranational non-state actors and interest groups as well as the interests of specific regions (ibid.). For EFP, this means that domestic foreign policy practices may change as the result of partcipation in EU foreign policy (Bergmann and Niemann 2013, 11). Furthermore, this participation also engenders a problem-solving attitude as well as regular communication and consultations on foreign policy (ibid.). Finally, it multi-level governance also takes into account the agency of non-govenrmental organizations in pressuring EU-level institutions to adopt or change policies (ibid.).

The concept of policy network analysis goes even further in focusing on the EU as a system in and of itself, an already existing institution (as opposed to an institution in the making) that functions as a policy coordination mechanism for its various levels of governance, as well as its various policy networks. Peterson (2001) notes that EU decision-making consists of a large number of policy sectors, each of which constitutes itself as an interest group battling for ‘turf’. In other words, various non-hierarchical policy networks, comprising staff employed directly by the EU, staff reporting to member states, various consultants, lobbyists on behalf of private companies,

etc. in seek to fence off policy fiefs from contact, and therefore, interference from other networks, even to the detriment of a wider effort at intersectoral coordination. Though the ultimate decision-making power still rests with high-ranking officials, these policy networks frequently narrow the policy choices significantly before they are presented for final decisions, However, as Peterson also points out, policy networks should arguably be viewed as a useful metaphor rather than a fully-formed theory, crucially lacking a workable theory of power. According to Bergmann and Niemann, policy network analysis can be used to supplement other theoretical perspectives, with its added value being in its ability to account for "the process of agenda-setting, decision making and implementation within CFSP" (Bergmann and Niemann 2013, 14).

Perhaps the most widespread approach to studying the EU today are the new institutionalisms — rational choice and historical institutionalism. Rational choice institutionalism is by far the most often used approach to studying the European Commission, since it is a principal-agent model, wherein the member states are the principal, and various European Commission bodies are the agents (Pollack, 2009). This line of inquiry seeks to answer two questions: why do principals delegate power to the agents, and what happens when the agent acts contrary to the principals' preferences (ibid.). Regarding the former, rational choice institutionalism concludes that delegation is the result of a rational choice to reduce 'transaction costs' of implementing certain policies, especially those that would be difficult to implement at the national level (ibid.). Regarding the latter, rational choice scholars have established that principals constrain the executive power of the Commission through 'comitology', various bodies designed to supervise the Commission's work, and provide different levels of constraint on its actions (ibid.). Historical institutionalism is often framed in opposition to neofunctionalism in that it rejects the notion that EU institutions were set up with a particular brief that they are expected to competently manage, but rather claims that institutions develop over time, and that institutional choices act as a palimpsest, with layers left over from previous administrations and contexts that are very difficult to change (ibid.). The key term introduced by historical institutionalism is that of path dependence, the idea that once a policy choice is made, it constrains decision-making in the future due to the difficulty of reversing a path already taken (ibid.).

In terms of the governance approaches, one insight from the study of policy networks could be that the wider EU has adopted its current stance on the Jadar project as the result of an entrepreneurial policy group managing to impose its estimation of the project by protecting its

policy 'turf' from more rule-of-law-focused groups. Likewise, multi-level governance could provide the insight that, in some cases, the particular interests of certain regions, in this case, that of Germany's State of Baden-Württemberg,[4] can be elevated into an EU interest, if presented in sufficiently urgent terms. It also leaves the door open to civil society influence, in terms of its opposition to the project. Finally, with reference to historical institutionalism, it may be the case that the EU initially miscalculated the degree of public opposition to the project, having seen it as an economic opportunity for both sides, but its inertia makes it difficult to change course now. Though European integraton theory has important *general* implications for EFP, these yield unsatisfying results with regard to the Jadar project, primarily due to their underlying rationalist ontology that emphasizes the study of policy bargaining. This translates into an inability to fully account for the EU's relationship with the rest of the world, including with regard to the enlargement process.

For the most part, the previously referenced work on the Jadar project, as well as the lay public discussion in Serbia, is also structured by a rationalist ontology, and sees it as an issue of geopolitics, either as an economic opportunity for both sides (e.g. Vivoda and Loginova, 2025) or an exploitative, neocolonial imposition of great powers' will (e.g. Vujičić, 2024) as part of a geoeconomic turn in EU policy. These are all aspects of physical (and economic) security, but there is also the matter of the EU's identity as a global environmental leader, an identity that differentiates it from the two remaining world powers, the United States and China. It is precisely the study of the role of identity that is missing from the above approaches to EFP, as well as the more specific accounts of the Jadar project. Identity bridges the gap between endogenous and exogenous factors, both of which alone are unsatisfying in terms of explaining the EU's policy on the Jadar project. For this, it is necessary to turn to *constructivist* theories.

2.3. Constructivist Approaches: Integrating Endogenous and Exogenous Factors

Having rejected the rationalist ontology of both the major schools of thought in EU studies and the general public debate in Serbia, while recognizing the need to discuss the Jadar case in

[4] Baden-Württemberg headquarters Mercedes-Benz, an auto-giant that has expressed great interest in producing batteries and other components for its electric cars in Serbia in a partnership with Stellantis (Nienaber et al. 2024), which already owns the former Zastava factory in Serbia.

terms of identity, and, therefore, *security*, it is time to establish an appropriate theoretical framework for analysis. This section will begin by introducing constructivism as an alternative ontological starting point, discussing the main ideas under both conventional or liberal constructivism, as well as critical constructivism. It is on the basis of critical constructivism that a theoretical and methodological 'toolbox' of concepts will be developed to aid in the subsequent analysis of the case.

'Social constructivism' was introduced by sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1991). Though the volume is a comprehensive and influential sociological account of the production of knowledge, the primary point referenced in security studies is that lived human reality is *constructed* on the basis of various types of social interactions, conventions and norms, rather than being given as objective fact. This notion was translated to IR by Alexander Wendt (1992), who framed it as a response to the debate that was ongoing at the time between neoliberals and neorealists on the precise nature of the anarchic international system. He points out that the 'self-help' system (Waltz, 2010) which states employ to manage that anarchy is not determined by it, but is socially constructed through interaction based on ideas and identities, coining the now famous phrase that "anarchy is what states make of it" (ibid.).

By demonstrating that even the most fundamental concepts such as power politics and anarchy are socially constructed rather than given, Wendt has opened the door for reexamining a range of topics in political science. Another influential early constructivist work in mainstream IR was *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (1996), a collection of essays edited by Peter J. Katzenstein, which examines key questions in security studies at the time, such as the proliferation of conventional, chemical, and nuclear weapons, the military doctrines of certain great powers, the United States' involvement with NATO, etc., from the point of view of culture and identity, sketching out a third approach to security studies, next to the traditional liberal and realist schools. Crucially, Katzenstein argues that "[...] state interests do not exist to be "discovered" by self-interested, rational actors. Interests are constructed through a process of social interaction." (Katzenstein 1996, 44)

Applying this logic to the EU as a supranational but state-like entity, unlike rationalist and principal-agent models, constructivist approaches to European studies emphasize that interests, and, therefore, policy priorities, are socially constructed, rather than carved in stone, and that the

choices made regarding those interests are also the result of "collectively shared systems of meanings" (Risse 2009, 145). It is often in this constructivist context that the notion of a 'logic of appropriateness' is used to explain how policy choices within the EU are constrained by socially constructed norms to 'do the right thing' due to a sense of social belonging (ibid.). In other words, choices are constrained by a recognition of shared *identity*, a key term absent from all of the other approaches to European studies. It is important to point out, however, that constructivism does not necessarily negate, but may complement rationalist approaches by noting that what is considered 'rational' in a certain context is socially constructed, rather than objective.

The field of constructivism is further subdivided in terms of the conceptualization of identity into conventional or liberal and critical constructivism. For conventional constructivists, such as Wendt and Katzenstein, identity is constructed as the result of a process of state socialization, which entails "explicit beliefs or implicit assumptions about what actions are possible, permissible, or advisable for state authorities to perform or to refrain from performing, or which constitute the category of sovereign political authority and its identity in interaction with other entities" (Alderson 2001, 422). In other words, through adherence to certain norms, institutions, ideas, etc. throughout interactions with other states, a state internalizes its position in the overall social structure, thus acquiring its identity. European identity, which remains a contested term even today, represents a collective identity wherein national identities still take precedence over the collective European identity (as evidenced by the lack of a federal Europe), but the European identity is inextricably intertwined with the national one[5]. Crucially, identification with Europe may take various forms based on national values, i.e. 'Europe' may mean different things to a German and a Frenchman (Risse 2009). However, as Risse argues, at the level of elites, "'Unity in diversity' as well as democracy, human rights, the rule of law and social market economy (as opposed to laissez-faire capitalism) are constructed as what is special about the EU" (ibid., 153).

As an example of how constructivist modes of thought can also be used to augment existing rationalist models, Schimmelfennig has reflected on continued EU enlargement as one of the blind spots of liberal intergovernmentalism, and has published a lot of work on the matter. Following a

[5] Various models have been proposed for the interaction between the two levels of identity, including an 'onion' model of nesting identities, a *cross-cutting* model, as well as a 'marble cake' model wherein the two are mixed together and inseparable (Risse 2009, 153).

liberal constructivist model, he observes that the "Big Bang" EU enlargement was based on a feeling of obligation towards "states that share the collective identity of an international community and adhere to its constitutive values and norms."[6] (Schimmelfennig 2001, 58-59) This explains continued EU enlargement starting with the admission of former Warsaw pact states following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in terms of the "entrapment" of existing member-states to follow through on their rhetorical commitment to any European country that shared "European values" at the time (ibid.), but can be applied to the current membership candidate countries, particularly Ukraine's membership candidate status after the Russian invasion. Another factor entrapping the EU in this rhetorical commitment is the simple fact of geography — a European project can hardly exclude countries located squarely on the European continent, though, crucially, that continent is itself a fine example of a socially constructed reality, considering the fact that its landmass is contiguous with Asia, with the Caucasus mountains representing an arbitrary (and often contested; Rumelili 2004, 2007) line of demarcation between the two.

However, in elaborating a mechanism of "rhetorical action" (Schimmelfennig 2001) to explain continued EU enlargement, Schimmelfennig is just one step removed from the concept of *speech acts*, which are foundational for the critical constructivist theory of securitization. More generally, the research agenda of liberal constructivism seems at times to be based on an attempt to integrate critical constructivist insights into a more mainstream academic discourse within political science, i.e., without using critical constructivist language. Another example of this notion would be the debate between liberal and critical constructivists on the functioning of identity in international relations.

Influenced by post-structuralist or postmodern thinkers, primarily Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, critical constructivism goes beyond merely admitting that ideas and values play a role in political matters, but focuses on language as the means by which we construct reality, and conceptualizes political phenomena in terms of linguistic structures. Therefore, critical constructivists emphasize the role of difference in identity construction. The *critical* in critical constructivism, and critical theory more broadly, reflects the fact that post-structuralism does not seek to merely observe social phenomena in isolation, but as constituent parts of a structure

[6] Schimmelfennig enumerates roughly the same values and norms as above.

wherein certain elements are privileged over others. In other words, critical constructivism seeks to lay bare various power relations and their effects.

In summation, this literature review has demonstrated that neither exogenous nor endogenous approaches to explaining the EU's policy on the Jadar project can by themselves fully exhaust the subject matter due to their respective blind spots. The study of identity, almost by definition, bridges the gap between the inside and the outside of the Self, and this is the preserve of constructivism. Liberal constructivism, though constituting a significant step in the right direction, does not go far enough in investigating the nature of identity, and is perhaps overly concerned with maintaining a sense of academic respectability, to the detriment of its power to *critically* analyze social phenomena. Therefore, the theoretical and methodological framework will be based on concepts from critical constructivism.

3. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This section integrates the theoretical and methodological framework for the subsequent analysis. It will consist of three sub-sections: first, important concepts from critical constructivism will be explained, followed by the introduction of the concept of liminality as part of the broader ethnological concept of the rite of passage. Finally, a methodological framework integrating these ideas will be presented, along with the main parameters of the analysis section.

3.1. The Critical Constructivist Toolkit

As Hansen (2006) points out, post-structuralist critical constructivism rejects the positivist epistemology characteristic of the conventional realist, liberal and constructivist schools in favor of recognizing that, as in linguistic analysis, meanings in political matters are not fixed, but are constructed intersubjectively through interaction. That does not mean, however, that critical constructivism must also abstain from developing methods of inquiry into political matters thus constructed (Dunn and Neumann 2016)[7]. It is on this basis that a 'toolbox' can be constructed for analyzing the political aspects of the Jadar case through a post-structuralist lens.[8] Whereas the concepts of securitization and ontological security, along with the assumption of state personhood straddle the line between the two constructivisms, they are compatible, and, indeed, productive in combination with explicitly post-structuralist concepts such as *différance* and discourse. As the place of post-structuralism in IR is still contested, even so many years after its introduction to the field, the following section will briefly present these concepts in a logical chain of reasoning that seeks to remove all doubt as to the legitimacy of their use for understanding the Jadar case.

3.1.1. *Différance*

Responding to what he identified as the shortcomings of structuralism, Derrida introduced the notion of *différance* in his essay *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* (Derrida 2005) wherein he reflects on the pioneering structuralist work of Ferdinand de

[7] Even though both Foucault and Derrida were opposed to their ideas being used as 'concepts' or 'methods'.

[8] It is important to point out that this toolkit is 'custom-made' for the purpose of this analysis, but that the wider critical constructivist toolkit also includes gender and post-colonial approaches, which, while being equally important, are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Saussure. Structuralism proceeds from the linguistic observation that the means by which we refer to physical or intangible phenomena, whether these means are written words, symbols, uttered sounds, etc., which are collectively called *signs,* are arbitrarily linked to the phenomena they represent, e.g. there is no discernible reason why the written word *chair* should precisely point to the concept of a chair. Thus, every sign consists of a *signifier,* the means by which we refer to a concept, and a *signified*, the concept itself, whose relationship is contingent (Saussure 2007). Signs can thus only be distinguished negatively by reference to each other, i.e. a signifier can only be identified based on what it is *not.*

Building on this structuralist foundation, as part of his wider project of deconstruction, Derrida introduced *différance* as a portmanteau of the French words *différence* (difference) and *différer* (to defer). The former refers to the construction of binary opposite signs that constitute each other in a circular way, e.g. signs like *light* and *dark* cannot hold any meaning without reference to their opposite. In constructing those binary oppositions, one sign is always apparently privileged over the other, e.g. *man/woman, democracy/dictatorship,* etc. Furthermore, *différance* indicates that the interpretation of the meaning of one sign always points to a chain of other signs whose meanings must also be interpreted in the same way, *ad infinitum*. That is why, for Derrida, meaning is always *deferred* — in other words, one can never arrive at a definite meaning (ibid.). Hence the rejection of positivist epistemology in critical constructivism, which instead analyzes the construction of political identities through binary oppositions, where one identity is privileged, or in other words, assigned a positive value, and its inverse is evaluated negatively, in the context of a wider, infinite chain of signification.

3.1.2. Ontological Security and State Personhood

It has yet to be demonstrated how this linguistic notion can be "scaled up" to apply to political communities, most often states, which are the subject of analysis in IR. The development of ontological security studies, which straddles the line between conventional and critical IR, and is extensively used by both, proceeds from the idea of state personhood — that characteristics usually associated with individuals, most notably identity, anxieties, routines, etc. can be ‘scaled

up' to the level of collectivities such as states[9]. As Ejdus points out, this anthropomorphisation is "a practice that is widely shared by practitioners and theorists alike", especially when, e.g. "laypeople and statespersons [...] express but also act upon a belief that their country is for example proud, angry, humiliated or else" (Ejdus 2020, 11). State personhood is a logical consequence of the rejection of the rationalist ontology that underpins the classical realist and liberal schools of IR. If state actions cannot be fully explained as the result of rational choices, but can be influenced by social phenomena such as culture and even emotions, then it stands to reason that analytical frameworks for individual behavior may be (carefully) applied to states. It is on this basis that conventional constructivists theorize about state socialization in terms of norms, values, and identity, and critical constructivists apply psychoanalytic, as well as a range of other theoretical frameworks, to the study of state behavior in international relations.

Security is a *feeling*. This is the crucial insight lacking from realist and liberal schools of IR, and the primary strength of constructivism, particularly the critical variety. From there, it stands to reason that, if states are security-seeking actors, there may be a variety of ways in which threats, both *physical* (e.g. a rival's military capabilities), and *intangible* are constructed. Indeed, the field of ontological security studies demonstrates that states will often choose to face the former in order to escape the latter (Ejdus, 2020.) The concept of ontological security was initially introduced by social psychologist Ronald Laing, and expanded upon by sociologist Anthony Giddens to mark a sense of biographical continuity and coherence, as well as an inner security in one's self-identity (Ejdus 2020). This notion was translated to security studies by Alexander Wendt, who listed it among his four "basic interests and appetites" shared by all states, along with physical security, recognition, and development (Wendt 1994, 385). Since its introduction, ontological security has become a field of study in its own right.

It is sufficient for the purpose of this thesis to turn to Ejdus' contemporary definition of ontological security in IR, which he formulates following Giddens as "possession, on the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, of answers to four fundamental questions that all polities in some way need to address [...] existence; finitude; relations and auto-biography" (Ejdus 2020, 16). Practically, possessing ontological security implies the ability to 'tune out'[10] potential

[9] The notion of corporate personhood, for example, has become so commonplace as to result in the legal protection of certain rights usually reserved for individuals, such as the right to free speech, in several jurisdictions. That is to say nothing about even more common concepts such as "brand identity" and "corporate culture".

[10] Or 'bracket off', as Ejdus puts it.

existential *anxieties* that would result from the absence (or mere threat to) the four questions enumerated above in the conduct of the routines that constitute daily life (ibid.). However, with regard to international relations, an anarchic, 'self-service' system, it is often more productive to speak of the inverse — ontological *in*security. Ontological insecurity arises as a serious and threatening interruption to one's routinized way of being, as the result of some *critical situation*, and takes the form of anxiety, "a feeling of inner turmoil over the uncertainty of anticipated events" (Ejdus 2020, 9). Critical situations, in the case of states, are unforeseen events that make it impossible to ignore or tune out the aforementioned fundamental questions as part of a routine way of operating, requiring a public reckoning in search of answers given the altered context (ibid.).

3.1.3. Securitization

Following a constructivist logic, these critical situations are not merely given as such, they are also socially constructed. The process of imbuing events or developments with security implications is referred to as securitization, which has become a field of study in IR in its own right. First articulated by Ole Wæver, the concept of securitization was concisely explained in a very influential volume by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde entitled *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998). It describes securitization as a *speech act* taken by a securitizing actor, usually a political leader, institution or some other influential public figure, in order to present a certain issue as an *existential threat* to some *referent object*, seeking to justify the taking of extraordinary measures that may have been unthinkable in normal circumstances. The referent object depends on the sector in which the securitizing actor is operating. In the military sector, the referent object is usually the state, in the political sector, issues such as sovereignty or ideology can be referent objects, etc.

Securitizing moves, in other words, attempts to declare something a security matter, share a common syntax, along the lines of "if we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way)" (ibid., 24). That is not to say, however, that every securitizing move must result in success and the adoption of the proposed extraordinary measure; success depends on how the audience of the securitizing move receives it, which in turn is influenced by the satisfaction of certain *felicity conditions* that govern speech acts. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde classify these as internal —

following the security form, and constructing a point of no return along with a way out (the adoption of the policy); and external — the social capital of the securitizing actor and the nature of the threat that is the subject of the securitizing move (ibid., 33). Securitization is thus conceptualized as a *discursive* practice, since any securitizing move requires an appeal to a structure of shared meanings in order to be convincing to others (ibid., 25).

3.1.4. Discourse

The term *discourse* is widely used in lay public discussion today in a way that is almost interchangeable with the term *narrative*, and has been interpreted in various ways throughout its development in post-structuralist thought. Therefore, it will be very important for this analysis to arrive at some kind of applicable definition of discourse, even though, in line with the classic post-structuralist insight, such definitions can only be provisional. In seeking such a definition, it is useful to follow Torfing, who divides the evolution of discourse into three generations. The first generation started off with a purely linguistic understanding of discourse as a "textual unit that is larger than a sentence", before gradually coming to include both written and spoken language as the subject of analysis (Torfing 2005, 6). The first generation of discourse theorists thus focused on linguistic studies, including sociolinguistics, content analysis, conversation analysis, but also psycholinguistics through discourse psychology (ibid.). At this stage in the development of discourse, then, though it could be used to explore political topics as part of a linguistic study, it was not bound up with an appropriate account of ideology and power (ibid.).

It is the second generation, which includes Michel Foucault and Norman Fairchough, that broadens the term to include various types of social practice (ibid.). Though Fairclough is preceded in his work on discourse by Foucault, it is nevertheless useful to start from Fairclough's conception, as it represents a sort of theoretical step backwards towards a linguistic model of understanding discourse as such, more in line with the first generation. Thus, Fairclough developed his Critical Discourse Analysis with an explicit focus on "the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs, and in particular on discursive aspects of power relations and inequalities: on dialectical relations between discourse and power, and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements" (Fairclough 2013, 8). He defines discourse as any semiotic act (written, or spoken text, photography, non-verbal communication, etc.) interpreted as a social practice that serves to 'naturalize' certain socially constructed meanings into

ideologies (ibid., 92). Fairclough criticizes Foucault for his lack of textual analysis (ibid.), since, being a linguist by training, he is concerned with the immediate analysis of language use. Therefore, he conceptualizes discourse as a tool for the establishment and maintenance of power, which in turn is conceptualized as 'objective' or non-discursive (ibid.). However, Fairclough does not provide a clear link between discursive and non-discursive phenomena, thus reducing discourse analysis to a critical[11] methodology deployed under realist auspices (Torfing 2005).

This is a divergence from Foucault's original conception of discourse, which he develops in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969, an English language reprint from 2004 used herein), a volume dedicated precisely to the history of knowledge. The starting point for Foucault, therefore, is a study of how, why, and by whom are scientific disciplines (e.g. "pshycho-pathology, medicine, or political economy", ibid., 20) constructed, in other words, how knowledge is categorized into "unities", which he refers to as *discursive fields*. Yet, instead of focusing, as Fairclough does, on the linguistic study of semiotic units and the rules for their production, Foucault already indicates that the proper subject of study are the *rules of formation* that govern the production of discourses, in other words: "[...] we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes" (ibid., 21). As Torfing puts it, Foucault "is concerned neither with the truth nor the meaning of actual statements, but with their discursive conditions of possibility" (Torfing 2005, 7). To simplify somewhat, discourse therefore serves to limit what can be thought, said, or done within a specific context.

In Foucault's work, the relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive continues to be fuzzy, and his views on this matter seem to have shifted in his later writings (Dunn and Neumann 2016). In *Archaeology*, he is still influenced by Marxism, and therefore concedes that the rules of formation that govern discursive practice are conditioned by social relations, which are non-discursive (Torfing 2005, Dunn and Neumann 2016). However, in his later, genealogical work, he moves away from both Marxism and the structuralism of his earlier work, towards the analysis of 'power relations', wherein power is conceptualised discursively, precisely as the ability to limit what can be said or done and establish a structure of social superordination and

[11] Critical in terms of being concerned with the political effects of discourse and the possibility for emancipation.

subordination (ibid.). Though in this conception, the discursive and non-discursive (in this case, power) can still be distinguished, they are "mutually constitutive and we cannot have one without the other" (Torfing 2005, 8). In their book on discourse as a *methodology* for social research, which will be discussed further in the course of this section, Dunn and Neumann clarify that "Before Foucault, [discourse] simply meant speech, both in the sense of oral language communication and oratory delivered at an occasion. After Foucault, it means what makes such speech possible, in the sense of becoming meaningful." (Dunn and Neumann, 2016, 22).

Torfing's third generation of discourse theorists proceeded to "further [extend] the notion of discourse so that it now covers all social phenomena", which brings the discussion back around to Derrida's deconstruction. If one follows the concept of *différance* to its logical conclusion, one may arrive at the conclusion that, if the meanings of all signifiers are established in relation to their binary opposite, and are further enmeshed in an infinite chain of signification, so that a definite meaning is always further postponed, then the privileged signifier in any binary pair loses its privileged status, precisely due to its reliance on its opposite for its meaning (Derrida 1997). Derrida calls this *decentering*, indicating that the philosophical (as well as linguistic) search for a metaphysical *center* that can imbue utterances with some definite meaning should be abandoned in favor of what he refers to as "free play" (op.cit.), the *provisional* construction of various (pseudo)centers that partially fix meaning through discourses (Torfing 2005). In his other seminal work, *Of Grammatology* (1997), in addition to further developing his concept of *différance* while arguing against the privileging of spoken language over writing, Derrida famously states that "there is no outside-text[12]" (Derrida 1997, 158), in other words, that "the consequence of giving up the metaphysical idea of a transcendental centre that structures the entire structure while itself escaping structuration is that everything becomes discourse" (Torfing 2005, 8). More simply put, deconstruction allows researchers to interpret everything as text[13].

It is precisely this last insight that serves as the point of departure for what is arguably the most widely used approach to discourse analysis among post-structuralist theorists of international relations, that developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985, 2001 edition used herein). In contrast to many of the other theorists of

[12] Also famously mistranslated, and thereafter misinterpreted as "there is nothing outside the text".

[13] In fact, in the essay *Ulysses Gramophone* (1987), Derrida spends almost 60 pages analysing the single word "Yes" in the context of James Joyce's *Ulysses.*

discourse, but similarly to Fairclough[14], Laclau and Mouffe set for themselves the explicit goal to construct an account of discourse to be *used* in order to bring about a new strategy for the conduct of emancipatory politics by connecting discourse with the Gramscian rejection of economic determinism inherent to Marxist thought. That is why their account of discourse is the most structured and well-developed, synthesizing insights from all of the previous generations — which, in turn, may be why post-structuralist IR scholars seem to rely on it.

Laclau and Mouffe therefore introduce a clear (but nevertheless complex) terminological framework to further explain the structure of discourse:

> "[...] we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 105).

In other words, moments are individual signs that are enmeshed in a web of meaning, which is constructed in terms of the differences between them, that net being discourse. On the other hand, there is what Laclau and Mouffe call the field of discursivity, which, to simplify somewhat, includes all signs that have yet to be enmeshed in a particular discourse[15] — these are elements. As ever, discourses are constituted in part by what they exclude. Therefore, discourse functions by articulating elements into moments, establishing what Laclau and Mouffe call closure, the fixation of meaning. Yet, this process is never fully complete, and can therefore be revised.

This is the point where discourse and Gramscian hegemony meet. Laclau and Mouffe take on board Gramsci's rejection of the Marxist economic determinism, who argues instead that both the economic 'base' and the ideological 'superstructure' should be studied, since it is in the ideological realm that power is exercised through the imposition of meaning, which Gramsci calls *hegemony* (Torfing 2005 10-11). From there, Gramsci reverses the Marxist privileging of economic relations over the field of the political, arguing that it is the political that constructs the economic (ibid.). However, Gramsci maintains the Marxist insistence that society is divided into classes, and that only classes may ultimately exercise hegemony (ibid.). Laclau and Mouffe

[14] Torfing remarks that, though their ontological starting points are opposite, "[...] when it comes to the actual analysis of social and political discourse, the differences between Fairclough and Laclau and Mouffe are small" (Torfing 2005, 9).

[15] But may carry meanings acquired in the course of enmeshment in other discourses.

explicitly dispense with Gramsci's "essentialism" in terms of his clinging on to the notion of classes as objectively given categories, and instead combine the classical Marxist categories of base and superstructure into a set of discursive processes. Therefore, for Laclau and Mouffe, discourse is *material*; discourses structure material reality. For example, the discourse of race has led to the construction of a segregated infrastructure system in the United States, in accordance with the legal doctrine of *separate but equal*, parts of which still persist today. That is not to say, however, that Laclau and Mouffe deny the objective existence of physical objects, their insight is merely that our interaction with physical objects is predicated on assigning them meaning, which is mediated by discourse.

3.2. Incorporating the Liminal

The term *liminal* comes from the Latin *liminus,* meaning threshold — the marker that separates the outside from the inside, while at the same time connecting them. To describe something as liminal, therefore, is to use a *spatial metaphor* in a social context. Liminality as part of social science was first articulated by ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* (1960), wherein he argues that rite of passage rituals can be divided into three phases: *separation, transition,* and *incorporation* (Van Gennep 1960). This fundamental scheme was theoretically refined by anthropologist Victor Turner in his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1995), focusing on and expanding the transitional or *liminal* phase of the rite of passage ritual; it is this expanded version that has been taken up in theoretical arguments from a variety of disciplines within social science (Thomassen 2018).

However, liminality can only be understood within the context of the rite of passage ritual as a whole. Thus, the *separation* phase refers to the casting out of an initiand, who is made to leave behind their previous life, including social roles, practices and routines (Van Gennep 1960, Turner 1995). The liminal stage, famously described by Turner as a position "betwixt and between" (Turner 1995) an initiand's old and new lives, involves "[questioning] most radically their own sensory apparatus, just as they challenge social order by setting themselves apart from any normally accepted social rules [...] they become nameless, timeless and socially 'unstructured', existing in a floating state of being, even as they acquire [...] the necessary knowledge and experience [to] eventually re-enter society and take up their new roles" (Thomassen 2018, 92). The

final stage, then, is incorporation, wherein initiands "re-enter society and take up their new roles" (ibid.).

As this section will demonstrate, the concept of liminality can be translated into the field of IR at three different, but mutually compatible levels. First, the liminal as understood through and within discourse analysis, with a starting point in discussions on the nature of Self-Other distinctions; second, the liminal as a challenge to the ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent to both rationalist and constructivist IR and a springboard for emancipatory thought; and finally, the rite of passage itself as a *metaphor*, highlighting the *processual* nature of liminality.

The entry point for the concept of liminality into IR can be traced to the debate between liberal and critical constructivists on the role of difference in the formation of state identity (Rumelili 2004). As previously discussed, liberal constructivists, following the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism, construct state identity on the basis of interaction with other states in accordance with certain norms and routines, whereas critical constructivists construct state identity discursively, based on difference. This sets up a theoretical misunderstanding between liberal and critical constructivists around the nature of the process of *othering*. As Rumelili notes, liberal constructivists misattribute a behavioral dimension to othering; in other words, liberal constructivists misunderstand the process of identity formation based on difference as being predicated solely on othering as something states *do* to other states.

On the contrary, Rumelili claims that "[...] the constitution of identities in relation to difference does not necessitate a behavioral relationship between self (the bearer of identity) and other (the bearer of difference) that is characterized by mutual exclusion and the perception and representation of the other as a threat to one's identity" (Rumelili 2004, 29). While criticising him for imputing behavioral dimension to othering, here Rumelili nevertheless takes as a starting point[16] Wæver's observation that "despite the wish of various post-structuralists and critical theorists to catch the EU and the West 'Othering' various neighbors – Islamic Middle East, Russia, or the Balkans – the dominant trend in European security rhetoric is that the Other is Europe's own past (fragmentation), and those further away from the center are not defined as anti-Europe, only less Europe" (Wæver 1998, 100).

[16] As does Hansen (2006) when she identifies the possibility of 'less-than-radical Others'.

Further developing this notion, Rumelili uses the EU's interactions with Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC), Morocco, and Turkey in the context of their membership aspirations, each of which illustrates the discursive construction of a European Self based on certain dimensions of difference.[17] In the case of Central and Eastern European countries, the difference is that of superior/inferior, wherein the EU is the superior and the CEEC is the inferior. However, since the CEEC have accepted this position through the institution of EU membership candidacy, and are therefore willing to 'learn' how to become like the 'developed' Western European countries, this relationship of difference does not result in othering. Indeed, it helps strengthen the EU's identity as "inclusive and universalist", precisely because membership candidacy recognizes that democratic governance and market economies can be acquired. In the case of Morocco's bid for membership, the EU's answer was unequivocal: Morocco is not geographically located on the European continent, and was therefore ineligible. There are other identity incongruencies between the two, in terms of rule of law and human rights, but "these deficiencies are in some sense considered normal, and Morocco is subjected to lower standards" (ibid.). Finally, Turkey's position with regard to Europe is described as *liminal* insofar as the EU "has kept a fluctuating social distance towards Turkey" (ibid., 44) due to Turkey's difference in terms of inherent characteristics, such as geography and culture, as well as acquired characteristics, such as its level of economic development, human rights and the rule of law. Like in the case of the CEEC, however, these can also serve to strengthen EU identity (ibid.).

However, this understanding of the liminal position as *fluctuating* or *ambivalent* demonstrates that the concept was not yet sufficiently developed in this context, especially because it once again implies a certain behavioral component. In re-tracing her arguments on the EU's *hybrid* mode of differentiation, which is based on both inclusive and exclusive discursive dimensions, Rumelili expands on liminality by referencing Turner, noting that "[...] liminals appear as threatening to those concerned with the maintenance of structure, because, as entities that fall in-between, they challenge the categories and hierarchies embedded in that structure" (Turner 1995, referenced in Rumelili 2007, 69).

It is here that the crucial point regarding the compatibility between discourse analysis and liminality is to be found: in terms of discourse theory, the liminal should be defined as that which

[17] Cf. Schimmelfenig 2001

eludes the fixation of meaning. The liminal cannot be integrated into discourse, and is therefore *unintelligible*, rendering it uncomfortable and threatening. Using Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) terminology, the liminal belongs to the *field of discursivity*. It is on this basis that I object to the identification of the liminal with *fluctuation, ambivalence, fluidity* and *hybridity*[18] — these are schemata that describe the process of attempting to fix meaning, rather than the uncategorizable liminal itself.

There are also non-discursive approaches to the use of liminality in IR, heralding an "emancipatory research agenda" which "goes against the grain of many traditional models of thought within IR theory" (ibid., 317-318). In constructing what can be described as a sort of manifesto for liminality in IR, Mälksoo (2012, 2018) argues that, rather than being a tool imported from political anthropology which researchers merely make reference to in the course of their usual analysis (as e.g. Rumelili has done), liminality holds the potential to bring about a methodological revolution in IR by challenging the field's "fetish of structure" (Mälksoo 2012, 321). Whereas the traditional realist and liberal schools of IR have tried to define "universal laws of international politics, liminality seeks to capture the particular, contingent, and idiosyncratic" (ibid., 321-322). Liminal IR would therefore reject the "evolutionary Westernization" inherent to other transitional approaches that rely on modernization theory (Mälksoo 2018, 146), and instead posit a *cyclical* understanding of international politics, along with a *relational* conception of power (Malksoo 2012). She concedes that the application of liminality in IR has been "modest" (ibid.), and seems to imply that this is because its implications for the field create a sort of ontological insecurity for researchers, a "fundamental uneasiness [...] as it disrupts, by definition, essentializations and foundational claims" (ibid., 318).

Mälksoo takes a direct approach to scaling up the concept of liminality from ethnographic observations of tribal communities to the analysis of state interactions by claiming that liminality is a "fundamental feature of the human condition", and as political communities are made up of individual subjects, there is no obstacle to its use in IR (ibid.). Furthermore, one implication of the use of liminality as a methodology is the rejection of the traditional notion of a *level of analysis* in IR as a "static crystalization" of pre-set categories (ibid.). Mälksoo does, however, acknowledge the limitations of scaling up in this way, since liminal political phenomena "lack a clear time span,

[18] Though *ambiguous* and *contradictory* seem appropriate as descriptors of a liminal Subject within this way of thinking, as they point back to the binary opposition inherent to (post)structuralism, and, therefore, discourse.

obvious entrance and exit points" (ibid.) as well as an authoritative "elder" (Malksoo 2018, 147) " [...] to guide the members of the society through the liminal ordeal" (Malksoo 2012, 326).

In a practical sense, Mälksoo (2018) argues in favor of the potential of liminality for IR analysis through a case study on Russia in terms of its relationship with transitional justice, general "permanent" liminal atmosphere throughout the post-Soviet era, and its relationship to war as a liminal experience. She notes that, when it comes to transitional justice, which she identifies as a kind of passage rite, a linear temporal conception is widespread, which posits "a clear distinction between 'now' and 'then'" (ibid., 149), with transitional justice serving as the passage from violence and repression towards peace and democracy (Nagy 2008, quoted in Mälksoo 2018, 149), but points out that, in practice, states do not take a linear approach to transitional justice. She therefore cautions against a conceptualization of *permanent* (Thomassen 2018) liminality applied to protracted processes of social transition, arguing that such an approach may serve to reproduce the very relation of superiority between the 'developed' and 'democratic' and the liminal, which her conception of liminal IR seeks to disrupt, since "the standards of liminal subjectivity in international politics tend to be determined by someone other [...] than those actually subjected to the very standards" (Mälksoo 2018, 152). Furthermore, she argues that such protracted liminality serves to heighten ontological insecurity, which leads states to "compensate for this uneasiness on the international plane" (ibid., 151), as she points out that Russia has done.

There are, at this point, several more theoretical points I would like to elaborate, before moving on to the section on methodology and the analysis of the Jadar case. Though I agree with Mälksoo that the application of liminality to IR is a promising, yet underdeveloped field of work, it is my view that she overstates its capacity to revolutionize the entire methodological model of the discipline. Indeed, in her case study (Mälksoo 2018) on the potential of liminality as applied to Russia, she falls back on other well-established concepts from the broader field of IR, including ontological security and its vocabulary, as well as transitional justice. Furthermore, in terms of protracted or *permanent* liminality, I agree in principle that declaring a society to be *permanently liminal* can be tantamount to othering it. However, this hands too much power to the 'established' who look on, and understates the importance of the internal processes taking place within the society undergoing transition. Here it should be recalled that, though liminality is thrust upon the liminal subject through separation, there is nevertheless an understanding that the end point of the

process is *reincorporation*, a return to the community. In other words, liminality can be said to be permanent insofar as the path out of liminality is *contingent* and mediated by *agency*.

Finally, where Mälksoo and Rumelili see liminality as a way to shift agency from "the established" towards the "ambiguously positioned" (Rumelili 2012, 497), continued liminality can also be the result of a cynical bargain between the 'elder' and the liminal subject. Ultimately, as I will demonstrate in the analysis section, for liminars, identity remains ambiguous despite attempts to fix it as closer to or more distant from the Self, as the ambiguity is ultimately "constructive" — it enables certain processes as part of the political rite of passage ritual. There are other examples from international politics where ambiguity as such has enabled certain results that would otherwise be impossible. One need look no further than two policies pursued by the United States: Strategic Ambiguity with regard to the defense of Taiwan from a potential invasion from the Chinese mainland, which can be said to enable Taiwan's continued independence, and the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy introduced by the Clinton administration, which enabled the military service of LGBTIQ+ individuals. These are not *processes*, however. Therefore, one definition of the *liminal* for the purpose of IR analysis without reference to discourse could be that *liminality is ambiguity as a process*[19].

3.3. Methodological Framework

The accusation that post-structuralist discourse theorists deny the existence of objective reality is a common one (Torfing 2005, 18), and it brings the discussion back to the critical constructivist toolkit. Its elaboration has demonstrated, not only how discourse transcends the traditional materialist vs idealist divide, but also how that very materiality allows us to 'read' various social and material phenomena as discourse, and how, ultimately, the discipline of discourse analysis has rightly found its place in international relations theory. Another criticism has been that post-structuralists are allergic to the empirical analysis inherent to the seeking of scientific knowledge (Hansen 2006). Therefore, this section will discuss how post-structuralist discourse analysis can be, and, indeed, *has* been used by IR theorists, in conjunction with other constructivist insights, both conventional and critical, working off certain well-established

[19] Here it is important to note the etymology of the English word *process* from the Latin *procedere*, meaning to advance, to move forward — another spatial metaphor. An arguably more poetic definition could then be that *liminality is the movement through ambiguity.*

frameworks from traditional, rationalist IR, to produce concrete case-studies, including the study of the EU. Based primarilly on those precedents, this section will finally lay out the main parameters for the subsequent analysis.

Lene Hansen's *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (2006) is a work that stands out in its clarity and the patience with which Hansen demonstrates the usefulness of discourse in analyzing foreign policy. As suggested earlier, post-structuralist critical constructivism focuses on "the constitutive significance of representations of identity for formulating and debating foreign policies", because the construction of a foreign policy requires the construction of a subject that can act on the international stage (Hansen 2006, 4). For Hansen, identity is *discursive, political, relational,* and *social* (ibid., 5). It is discursive because it is not given as such, and is the subject of constant contestation and evolution; political, because issues of identity require the formulation of a policy response; relational because, as Hansen puts it "identity is always given through reference to something it is not", in other words because the national, or in the case of the EU, supra-national Self must necessarily be constructed discursively — in a negative relation to various Others; finally, it is social because even individual identity is "constituted within and through a collective terrain" (ibid., 6).

In elaborating a methodology for using discourse analysis for the study of foreign policies, Hansen notes that, in contrast to the traditional rationalist schools of IR, post-structuralism, operating under a discursive epistemology, sees the relationship between identity and policy as non-causal; in other words, it is impossible to directly demonstrate that a certain identity will inevitably *cause* a certain policy to be accepted (ibid.). Thus, it is also impossible to directly determine whether a certain policy can best be understood in discursive or materialist terms, especially because, as already demonstrated, discourse *is* material (ibid.). As also remarked in the section on securitization, the success of a securitizing move — a discursive practice, is *contingent*, requiring the fulfillment of certain felicity conditions. It is therefore perhaps most accurate to say that matters of identity *enable* rather than *cause* the adoption of policies (Dunn and Naumann 2016), and *vice versa*. Hansen refers to this as *combinability*, assuming that the "goal of foreign policy is to create a stable link between representations of identity and the proposed policy" (ibid., 16). Since discourses are, by definition, not fixed, an internal coherence must continuously be re-established between identity and policy, either by changing policy so as to be in line with identity, or changing identity to be in line with policy (ibid.).

Hansen's broader understanding of discourse is informed by Foucault, Derrida, and most significantly, Laclau and Mouffe, along the lines described in the section on critical constructivism. However, she introduces two key terms for the analysis of the discursive construction of identity — the processes of *linking* and *differentiation*. These are based on the post-structuralist understanding of the construction of binary opposites that produces a privileged sign and its opposite complement. Linking refers to the development of a series of signs that are positively linked together. Though Hansen does not explicitly say as much, this network of signs is structured with a main sign and a series of other signs that describe it, or assign properties to it. In somewhat more concrete terms, linking can be seen as the process of discursively assigning certain characteristics to a certain identity. Differentiation, then, is the process of establishing a negative relationship between two series or networks of signs, wherein each sign from one network is negatively connected to its opposite from the other network. It is important to point out that these processes must necessarily take place *simultaneously*. Identity is thus formed both in positive terms (what I am), and in negative terms (what I am not), and this corresponds to the distinction between the *Self* and the *Other*, which underpins much of the post-structuralist work on identity in the context of foreign policy. Foreshadowing the next section, Hansen even provides an example relevant to the present case — the formation of a European identity linked to the signifiers *civilized, controlled, rational* and *developed*, as differentiated from the Balkans, linked to the corresponding signifiers *barbarian, violent, irrational,* and *underdeveloped* (ibid.). She uses this as a point of departure in her own practical discursive analysis of the war in Bosnia in the second half of her book.

There is, however, a theoretical deficiency that can be read in the above account of identity in comparison to how identity is conceptualized within ontological security studies. As it is difficult to define identity non-tautologically (Ejdus 2020), a working definition based on discourse theory could be that identity is a stable discourse about oneself. Yet this is assuming that others play no role in my construction of my own identity. Competing discourses about my identity can *destabilize* (Hansen 2006) my own, leading to *ontological insecurity*. There is theoretical debate within the field of ontological security studies on whether internal or external (social) factors should be given more weight when studying disturbances to ontological security (Ejdus 2020), but the role of *routines* developed in interaction with others are recognized. This is the nexus between discourse analysis and ontological security studies, and should serve to demonstrate

that the two, though they have different theoretical points of departure, are nonetheless not incompatible, as ontological security studies provides a more concrete account of how efforts to alleviate ontological *anxiety* result in policy choices, what Hansen refers to as *combinability*.

Another crucial insight for this study is that the Self may be differentiated against multiple Others[20], who may occupy different positions in the discursive structure (Hansen 2006). Therefore, identity constructions based on conceptions of Self and Other need not be binary in order to be operative; in other words, there is a spectrum of less-than-radical Others that can be the subject of foreign policy (ibid., 36). The discursive process of constructing an Other is therefore referred to as *othering*, and can practically be divided based on the type of signifiers used for the process of differentiation into spatial, temporal, ethical, etc. forms of othering. Here Hansen quotes Wæver, who points out that, in terms of its mode of differentiation, the European Union (EU) does not conceptualize the Other as any particular national or ideological identity — the Other is Europe's own fragmented past (Wæver 1998).

Hansen also provides prospective discourse analysts with a schema that includes four key dimensions for successful research design. First, a decision must be made on which Self to study. In her case study, Hansen studied "the West", in terms of NATO member states; for the present case, it is clear that the Self is the European Union. Next, one needs to consider the corpus of texts wherein to locate representations of the Self. Here, Hansen relies on Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, wherein she argues that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 1982, quoted in Hansen 2006, 50). Hansen therefore identifies three intertextual models: Model 1 includes official foreign policy discourses in terms of policy documents; political leaders' speeches and interviews, etc.; Model 2 includes discourses produced by political opposition representatives, the media, and corporations; Model 3 expands the scope to include policy representations in "'high' as well as 'popular' culture" (ibid.). The present analysis firmly relies on Model 1, based on high-level policy documents adopted by the EU. Third is the timeframe. Since discourses change over time, this is a crucial point, as will be discussed further on in this section. Hansen chose the 1990s as the timeframe for her analysis, whereas in this case, the discussion of identity will require reflecting on texts from the time of the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 up to the present day, and the discussion of the Jadar

[20] There may also be multiple 'Selves'depending on the discursive context (Hansen 2006).

project in particular will reference the Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and the Republic of Serbia (European Commission 2024a). Finally, an analyst must decide on the number of events to study; Hansen focused solely on the war in Bosnia, whereas this study can be said to investigate the interaction between three events: Serbia's EU accession process, the EU's geopolitical (or geoeconomic) crisis, and the EU's decision to support the Jadar project.

To round off the discussion on how to apply discourse analysis as a methodology for analyzing foreign policies, Dunn and Neumann's (2016) strategies for conducting discourse analysis should be briefly introduced, including immediate textual analysis. It is useful at this point to start from Dunn and Neumann's definition of discourses as "systems of meaning-production that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable actors to make sense of the world and to act within it" (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 21). Therefore, they start by dividing strategies for discourse analysis following Mutlu and Satler, into *plastic, elastic,* and *genealogical* (Mutlu and Satler 2013, quoted in Dunn and Neuman 2016, 104). The *plastic* approach seeks to identify the "organizing principle" within a certain discourse intertextually — by tracing the interactions of meanings across different texts; the *elastic* approach "focuses on the changes and transformations within a discourse over time"; and the genealogical approach identifies "ruptures and breaks within a given discourse" as well as what is *not* articulated discursively, thus "[exposing] marginalized voices or subjugated knowledges" (ibid.). Dunn and Neuman caution against cleaving too closely to this categorization, as any research project may require reflecting on one or more aspects of a given discourse (ibid.).

In terms of direct textual analysis, Dunn and Neumann offer four methods: *presupposition*, *predicate analysis*, *subject positioning*, and *metaphorical analysis* (Dunn and Neumann 2016). Analyzing presupposition entails identifying elements of knowledge that are presented as given, in other words, *presuppositions* that are not elaborated on within a certain discourse, and problematizing them, thus highlighting the role of discourse in the production of meaning (ibid., 110). Predicate analysis (ibid., 111) is the most overtly linguistic of these strategies, as it entails analyzing which verbs, adverbs, and adjectives are placed in relation with certain nouns and how — this corresponds to the process of linking as elaborated by Hansen (2006). Analyzing subject positioning involves "interpreting the ways in which text(s) work to create a knowable reality by linking subjects and objects to one another in particular ways" (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 112). Finally, seeing as though "[m]etaphores are a textual mechanism used for the transference of

meaning, connecting the unfamiliar with the familiar" (Rorty 1989, quoted in Dunn and Neumann 2016, 114), their use as part of certain discourses may be studied, or metaphors may be used as part of a methodology to understand discourses, as Cohn has done in her study of gender and national security (Cohn 1993, quoted in Dunn and Neumann 2016, 114), and as this thesis will also do for the present study in the analysis section.

Dunn and Neumann also offer strategies at the level of discourse. Thus, the strategy of inventorying representations involves noting the hegemonic representation of a certain aspect of reality within a discourse, in addition to various possible competing representations, and highlighting the differences between them (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 116-117). This is accomplished by keeping an eye out for representations that seem to repeat between various texts, which develop into a *map* of discourses over time. In mapping discourses, a researcher "[recognizes] relations in the constitution of a discourse" (ibid., 118). Dunn and Neumann suggest that discourses that contain only one representation can be considered *closed,* and thus politically hegemonic; on the other hand, discourses containing several representations, none of which are "dominating" can be said to be *open* (ibid.). These dimensions point to the relative internal stability of a given discourse. Finally, investigating the layering of discourses means identifying those representations within them that have endured over time, or, in other words, those that have been especially influential or 'sticky' (ibid., 122).

It should be clear from the above that, while the approaches to international relations elaborated as part of the critical constructivist 'toolkit' each represent a field of study in their own right, there is nothing to prevent a researcher from integrating them into a common framework for analysis. Quite the contrary, reaching across disciplinary lines has the potential to produce interesting analyses that would perhaps not be possible merely by reference to one pre-elaborated framework. For the present analysis, discourse analysis provides the theoretical scaffolding, whereas securitization theory and ontological security studies help elaborate the structure of certain discourses.

As explained in the section on liminality, the discursive analysis of utterances related to the Jadar project that will follow will use liminality at three levels. First, the liminal identity as that which cannot be integrated into discourse, and is thus incomprehensible and threatening; second, in terms of ambiguity as a *process,* and finally, as a *metaphor* wherein the EU accession

process can be likened to a rite of passage ritual, with the EU serving as the 'elder' and Serbia as the liminar[21].

Having constructed a solid theoretical foundation based on gaps identified in the existing literature, its application to the case in question is a relatively simple matter. One way to reformulate the research question posed by this thesis is to ask the question of what impact Serbia's EU candidacy has had on the EU's policy on the Jadar project. Here, three elements can be isolated that make up the question. First is the fact of Serbia's EU membership candidacy, which has been ongoing since 2012, but a 'European perspective' had been promised to Serbia by the EU as early as 2003 at the Summit in Thessaloniki. Second, there is the matter of the EU's own wider energy and industrial policy, of which the Jadar project is but one small part. Finally, it is the interaction of these two pre-existing elements against the backdrop of the fact that a new type of mineral rich in lithium was discovered by Rio Tinto in the Jadar valley that produces what I have thus far referred to as 'the Jadar case'.

Therefore, the analysis section will be organized in terms of sub-sections corresponding to each of these elements, with each sub-section providing an analysis of the related discourses. As Dunn and Neumann point out, "a few texts written by a few individuals seem to be important" in the course of conducting discourse analysis (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 91). These texts are "crossroads or anchor points", which Dunn and Neumann call *canonical texts* or *monuments*, and Laclau and Mouffe refer to them as *nodal points* (ibid., 93). That is why the analysis section will focus on distilling discourses from a narrow field of texts selected based on their relative importance and the clarity with which the relevant discourses are articulated therein. Following Hansen (2006), texts from intertextual Model 1, consisting of high-level EU policy documents and agreements will be used to map the discursive field this thesis is interested in studying.

[21] In spite of cautioning against scaling up ethnographic concepts as metaphors for researching state interactions, in a more recent work, Mälksoo conceptualizes deterrence as a performative strategic practice with *ritual* features (Mälksoo 2021).

4. Analysis

4.1. The EU Accession Process as a Rite of Passage

In order to articulate how the EU relates to Serbia as a membership candidate country, at least a brief outline of how it discursively constructs its own identity must be provided. As demonstrated in the previous section, following the logic of discourse analysis, the process of identity formation takes place through two simultaneous discursive processes, those of *linking* and *differentiation* (Hansen 2006). This section will demonstrate how the process of linking takes place with regard to European identity by referencing its founding documents as *monuments*. Though differentiation can (and does) take place in relation to many different Others, this analysis will focus on differentiation with regard to the *Balkans*, which has been elaborated by Hansen (2006) and Todorova (2009). Finally, the metaphor of the EU accession process as a *rite of passage* will be elaborated based primarily on an analysis of the Declaration from the Thessaloniki Summit (2003) and the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and Serbia (2008).

4.1.1. Linking EU Identity

As touched upon in previous sections, the notion that the EU is a normative power, i.e., one whose actions are guided by its stated values, is not controversial. As will be further demonstrated, those values ostensibly form the basis for an European identity. The focus of this section is to link together a chain of signification that leads to the discursive construction of an EU *self*-identity, emphasizing that both linking and differentiation are necessary and simultaneous processes for identity construction.

Though there are many aspects to what may be called European identity, it should be clear that this thesis is interested specifically in (re)constructing a European *political* identity, wherein the EU exercises hegemony in defining *Europeanness.*[22] This being the case, it is not difficult to establish the basis for an EU identity, as its coordinates are plainly stated in its founding documents, and reproduced and referenced throughout all subsequent documents containing

[22] It should be noted that, though e.g. Switzerland and Norway are non-members, but unambiguously considered European, there has always been significant pressure to join. The reasons for not joining are mostly economic, as opposed to issues of identity, with neither country contesting the EU's interpretation of a European identity, which serves to reinforce that hegemony, rather than undermine it.

political articulations. To borrow another linguistic term, the approach here is *synchronic*, concerned with the current[23] discourse on EU identity, rather than its historical development. That is why this analysis relies on the consolidated versions of the foundational EU treaties, notwithstanding their historical development in terms of named treaties (Lisbon, Nice, Maastricht, etc.), of which there are two: the *Treaty on European Union* (TEU), and the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (TFEU). It is the former that contains political articulations crucial for the construction of an EU identity, and it will therefore be the starting point for this analysis.

Here it is worth reproducing three paragraphs from the very beginning of the Preamble to the TEU:

> [...] DRAWING INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law,
> RECALLING the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent and the need to create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe,
> CONFIRMING their attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law [...]

Firstly, attention must be drawn to how the first quoted paragraph establishes the political identity of *Europe* (based on both *cultural* and *religious* identities), constructing it as *universal*, based on reference to *humanist* values. It is reasonable to conclude that the TEU counts *inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person*, *freedom*, *democracy*, *equality* and *the rule of law* among those humanist values, and thus links them to the EU's political identity in a way that seems natural. Interestingly, the second paragraph calls for *ending the division of the European continent*, thus establishing that the goal of the EU is precisely to institutionalize a European identity, which in itself constitutes an admission that the very humanist values which have ostensibly arisen from *the inheritance of Europe* shared by the signatories had not in the past been sufficient to overcome division. The third paragraph restates the common values held by the signatories, and takes care to *confirm* the EU's attachment to them. This mantra-like reconfirmation of attachment to values

[23] Current as in *valid, in force*.

is a regular feature of this and other EU political documents, and points to the importance of the discourse of EU identity being based on values.

In fact, Article 2 of the TEU explicitly states that "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights [...]", thus operationalizing the language from the first quoted paragraph of the Preamble above. Article 3 does the same with the second paragraph above, stating that "The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values, and the well-being of its peoples". Furthermore, in Article 5, the TEU restates the EU's commitment to its values in external relations, even going so far as to expand them slightly:

> In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.

The tension between *values* and *interests* should be emphasized, yet it is not acknowledged anywhere in the TEU. Article 21 restates the EU's commitment to its values in the conduct of its foreign policy twice, and adds the goal of "[improving] the quality of the environment and the sustainable management of global natural resources [...]. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that the EU's identity is strongly based on its commitment to its values, and that the discourse linking the EU with those values is *closed*, i.e., not open to interpretation. However, the discursive interplay between *values* and *interests* is open, insofar as the TEU states in Article 22 that "On the basis of the principles and objectives set out in Article 21, the European Council shall identify the strategic interests and objectives of the Union", leaving space for discursive, *political* negotiation.

Finally, Article 49 sets out the explicit criteria for membership in the EU. This article has been referenced by, e.g. Rumelili (2007, 2012) as the key discursive articulation in the construction of an EU identity, and states that "Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union". As Rumelili pointed out, this sets up two membership criteria, those of geography and identity,

wherein the former is exclusive and based on immutable characteristics, and the latter is inclusive and aspirational (ibid.).

The identity coordinates not explicitly stated, but implied (presupposed) by the TEU, are equally, if not more important than the ones enumerated. The reference to *humanist inheritance* also means that the EU's commitment to *rationalism* and *secularism* in its governance can be read. This can also be read more explicitly in Article 3, wherein, *inter alia*, the EU commits to promoting "scientific and technological advance". The Preamble's connection of universality to the context of the "inheritance of Europe" can be read as an implied reference to *civilization*, a high degree of social and political development that should serve as a standard for all societies. Admittedly, there are no explicit references in the TEU to the EU identifying as a space of *prosperity*, but this assumption can be read rather clearly in other documents, such as the *Growth Plan for the Western Balkans*, which establishes the urgent need for "socio-economic convergence" between the Western Balkans countries and the EU (European Commission 2023, COM/2023/691 final, 1).

Though a loose sense of European identity predates the creation of the EU, as can be read in the Preamble; the TEU, and by extension, the EU itself, serves to fix its meaning. The strength of the discourse on the founding values of the EU is such that a willful violation of those values would constitute an existential threat to the very identity the EU was established to construct. Without its values, the EU as an organization would be no more than a secretariat administering a free trade agreement, and trade agreements do not typically foster identity construction. That is precisely why Wæver claims that the 'Other' in the construction of an EU identity is not any particular country or nation, but Europe's own "fragmented past" (Wæver 1998, 100).

4.1.2. Differentiation — Constructing the 'Balkans' as Other

Serbia is located, both geographically and discursively, in the *Balkans*. More recently, non-EU Balkan countries have been grouped under the term *Western Balkans*, which is used extensively by the EU in its official documents, e.g. the Declaration from the Thessaloniki Summit (2003, C/03/163), the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans (2023, COM/2023/691 final), A credible enlargement perspective for an enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans (COM(2018) 65 final), etc. As both Todorova (1997, 2009 edition used herein) and Hansen (2006) have shown in their work, the Balkans serve as a source of differentiation for the wider West, including the EU.

Influenced by Said's work on *Orientalism*, Todorova conducts a diachronic analysis of the discourse of *Balkanism*, the construction of the Balkans as "'the other' within" from the perspective of Europe, with an explicit agenda of drawing attention to the stigmatization and ghettoization of the Balkans (Todorova 2009, 188). Relying on texts ranging from travel writing to diplomatic notes, Todorova shows how the term *Balkans* and especially *balkanization* "[...] became a pejorative, triggered by the events accompanying the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of small, weak, economically backward and dependent nation-states, striving to modernize" (ibid., 194).

The discourse on the Balkans from the European point of view has both *spatial* and *temporal* dimensions. Spatially, the Balkans "have always evoked the image of a bridge or a crossroads" (ibid., 15) between East and West. Balkanism differs from Orientalism in that it references an actual geographical area, not just a vaguely defined *East*, and is populated by white, mostly Christian inhabitants, with no history of colonization (ibid.). Temporally, however, "[as] in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' and 'West' has been constructed" (ibid., 188). Those characteristics include being "[...] aggressive, intolerant, barbarian, semi-developed, semi-civilized, semi-oriental" (ibid., 194). Todorova also quotes George Kennan, who goes so far as to claim that the problems facing the Balkans originate in their "distant tribal past", in addition to centuries of Ottoman rule (ibid., 187). Importantly, Todorova argues that, with the Balkans being located geographically in Europe, with white, mostly Christian inhabitants, the stigmatization of the Balkans serves as a convenient way to vent European frustrations without being open to "charges of racism, colonialism, eurocentrism, and Christian intolerance against Islam" (ibid., 188).

In the Afterword to the 2009 updated edition of *Imagining the Balkans*, Todorova only briefly reflects on the NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia that took place in 1999, two years after the original volume was published. However, Hansen begins her case study of the discourses around the war in Bosnia by extending Todorova's reading into the 1990s. Hansen's main argument in this regard is that the construction of the Balkans in roughly the way Todorova describes was used to "[create] a discursive space unencumbered by any responsibility toward the Bosnian war" (Hansen 2006, 97). In other words, the discursive formation that differentiates the 'European' or 'Western' from the 'Balkan' directly manifested into a policy of non-intervention,

and all of its material consequences. That discursive formation can be constructed as follows based on a juxtaposition of signs linked to each side: Europe (democratic, developed, peaceful, rational, tolerant, civilized)[24] — Balkans (autocratic, semi-developed, violent, passionate, intolerant, tribal).

It should be pointed out that Todorova and Hansen both analyze articulations from the 1990s at the latest, and the discursive field they describe has certainly undergone modifications since that time. I would argue that the above differentiation still holds, and that it can be observed in the interactions between the EU and the Western Balkans, especially considering the fact that certain documents that regulate the relationship (e.g. the Declaration from the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003) were written roughly at that time and remain relevant today. However, the beginning of the EU accession process has noticeably decreased the level of stigmatization of the Balkans, likely due to the accession of countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. In his relatively more recent analysis of the European integration of the Western Balkans, Belloni concludes that:

> The predominant European perspective of the Balkans has been described as a form of Orientalism, part of a dichotomy between the rational and enlightened West and the feminine, passional and irrational Orient. For some commentators, the Western Balkans continues to be constructed as an 'Other' towards which European identity is constantly redefined. While this description captures a lasting attitude with deep historical roots, today the Balkans are better understood as a transitional concept, something not yet Europe, or not quite European, but on its way to European integration. (Belloni 2009, 330)

4.1.3. The Rite of Passage

Though many of the arguments made in the previous two sections could be considered self-evident, it was important to go through the exercise of mapping the discursive field of European identity in terms of the signs linked to it, the signs linked to the Balkans, and the differentiation between those sets of signs, as it now enables the framing of the argument on the EU accession process as a rite of passage in discursive terms. The previous section focused on the perceived differences between European and Balkan identities, but it should be reiterated that, per Hansen (2006), the overall relationship between the two is not that of *radical* difference. As Rumelili (2004, 2007) notes, there are both inclusive and exclusive aspects to the formation of European identity. Based on the analysis of the TEU above, it is evident that, for the Balkans, there are three

[24] If this were to be formalized even further, it could be pointed out that *EU* is linked to *European*, which is in turn linked to the signs in the parenthesis.

dimensions that are inclusive: the claim to the universality of European values, the criterion of geographical location as a pre-requisite for membership, as well as the deliberately vague reference to the "cultural, religious, and humanist inheritance of Europe" — which can be read as a shorthand for white Christianity[25]. Once again following Rumelili (ibid.), the Western Balkans, and Serbia in particular, is linked to a set of inclusive signs which are fixed, or, in other words, cannot be acquired. On the other hand, it is linked to a set of exclusive signs which can be changed.

It is the incongruence between the possession of fixed inclusive signs, and the absence of acquirable exclusive signs that creates the *liminality* of the Balkans in relation to the EU. As pointed out in the previous chapter, liminality can be defined as the inability to integrate a matter into a stable discourse, rendering it unintelligible. Furthermore, I have also defined liminality from the perspective of the liminar as *ambiguity as a process* or a *movement through ambiguity*. Therefore, the metaphor of the rite of passage can be used to define the EU accession process as a rite of passage whose goal is to de-link candidate countries from exclusive signs and replace them with signs linked to European identity, thus fixing the meaning of a Balkan identity, and alleviating the discomfort stemming from the liminal position[26].

The rite of passage metaphor is particularly apt in this context, because all three phases can be observed in the political development of Serbia since the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s up to present day. Firstly, it is hard to argue against the notion that Serbia underwent *separation* during the 1990s, being cast out of the international community through an unprecedented sanctions regime in response to its abuses in Kosovo, and in repudiation of its authoritarian government at the time. While the sanctions were eventually lifted, this should not be construed as a *reincorporation*, as Serbia then moved into a period defined by the seeking of transitional justice and economic stabilization, with the EU essentially promising help with the latter in exchange for the former. The *EU perspective* for Serbia was thus constructed as the only way for Serbia to be reincorporated into the international community, which is predicated on the successful navigation of a liminal EU accession process.

This is borne out in two key documents defining the relationship between Serbia and the EU: the Declaration from the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, and the Stabilization and Association

[25] Though a large number of non-white and non-Christian *individuals* are equal citizens of the EU, one cannot help but notice that there are no member states with a non-white and non-Christian *identity*.

[26] I would argue that it is this discomfort that engenders what Todorova (2009) describes as the venting of European frustrations with regard to the Balkans.

Agreement between the EU and Serbia (SAA) from 2011. It should be kept in mind that these documents firmly belong to a diplomatic discourse, which means that many of the explicit assumptions hitherto discussed can only be read 'between the lines'. The first point of the Declaration from the Thessaloniki Summit is particularly illustrative:

> [...] We all share the values of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human and minority rights, solidarity and a market economy, fully aware that they constitute the very foundations of the European Union. Respect of international law, inviolability of international borders, peaceful resolution of conflicts and regional co-operation are principles of the highest importance, to which we are all committed. We vigorously condemn extremism, terrorism and violence, be it ethnically, politically or criminally motivated.

Though the explicit language frames the above as though an agreement on the enumerated values precedes the Declaration, and is taken as granted by it, it should rather be read as a condition — so long as the potential candidate countries agree to embody these values, the "European perspective" confirmed in the next point of the Declaration is available. Point 2 also frames EU integration as a "challenge ahead" for the potential candidates. Point 4 further strengthens the argument for conceptualizing the accession process as a rite of passage, stating: "[...] The process and the prospects it offers serve as the anchor for reform in the Western Balkans". The need for reform implies deficiency, and the only way to remedy it is by undergoing the accession process.

This point also serves as evidence on the role of the EU as an elder with respect to the rite of passage, as it specifies that "[p]rogress of each country towards the EU will depend on its own merits", as judged by the European Commission. The Declaration goes on to define these merits, of which three are politically most important. First, Point 5 sees the potential candidate countries "pledge full and unequivocal co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia", which can plainly be read as a condition. Recalling once more Wæver's definition of the EU mode of differentiation, this point also explicitly states that "[f]ragmentation and divisions along ethnic lines are incompatible with the European perspective." Second, Point 6 states that "[o]rganised crime and corruption is a real obstacle to democratic stability, the rule of law, economic development and development of civil society in the region and is a source of grave concern to the EU. Combating it constitutes a major priority." Finally, in terms of economic development, Point 8 states that "[e]conomic prosperity is essential to long term stability and democracy in the region. Persistent efforts and structural reforms are required to establish

functioning market economies and to achieve sustainable development and to ensure employment". In fact, it is most often in this economic sense that the region has been spoken of in terms of *transition* away from a socialist or state-directed economy towards a market economy, which is constructed as superior, leading to "economic prosperity".

In many respects, the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and Serbia is more explicit in framing Serbia's outside status and the deficiencies that need to be remedied in order to merit reincorporation. Thus, the Preamble unambiguously states the "[...] European Union's readiness to integrate Serbia to the fullest possible extent into the political and economic mainstream of Europe", pointing to its outside, or *separated* status. This is repeated in Article 10 on the Political Dialogue, which aims to promote "full integration of Serbia into the community of democratic nations and gradual rapprochement with the European Union".

Article 1 defines the aims of the Agreement, *inter alia* as supporting "the efforts of Serbia to strengthen democracy and the rule of law; [...] [contributing] to political, economic and institutional *stability* in Serbia, as well as to the stabilisation of the region; [...] [and supporting] the efforts of Serbia to complete the transition into a *functioning* market economy". I have italicized the words *stability* and *functioning* to draw attention to the assumption that, absent the SAA, Serbia and the region would be politically *unstable* and economically *dysfunctional*. In Article 4, the SAA also restates the importance of full cooperation with the ICTY, the commitment to human and minority rights in Article 4, and "good neighbourly relations" in Article 6, recalling the Thessaloniki line on "fragmentation and divisions". Finally, in Article 8, the SAA institutionalizes the EU's role as the elder in the accession rite of passage through the Stabilization and Association Council, which is tasked with "reviewing" the degree to which Serbia has fulfilled its obligations stemming from the SAA.

It is important to point out that, though it has been established that the EU accession process follows the logic and structure of a rite of passage, and, as demonstrated in the previous section, the discourse of Balkanism frames the region as semi-civilized and tribal, I do not mean to imply that this how EU officials 'really' think about the Balkans and Serbia — there is, of course, no way to know this (see Hansen and Wæver 2002, 26). Reframing the matter discursively, a successful *metaphor* is predicated on the neat mapping of one discursive formation or *structure* onto another, and it is useful insofar as it enables a comparison between the *moments* enmeshed in

each structure. Therefore, the rite of passage metaphor is useful in understanding the EU's behavior towards Serbia, including with regard to the Jadar project, as will be demonstrated later on.

4.2. The Securitization of Energy Policy in the EU

The application of a security discourse to energy policy within the EU, which has been ongoing for over a decade, has seen mixed results in achieving its goal of centralizing energy policy within the EU (Judge and Maltby 2017), with securitizing moves often producing the opposite of the intended effect (ibid.). In other words, when faced with a securitizing move, member states and their publics would find it even more important to be in control of their energy provision, rather than delegate it to the EU. Furthermore, it is difficult to satisfy the classic securitizing formula of "if we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way)" (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998); in other words, it is difficult to frame energy policy in terms of existential threat (ibid.). That is why, following Corry, Judge and Maltby suggest the application of a "riskification" framework to understanding the EU energy security discourse (Judge and Maltby 2017, 4). Simplifying somewhat, riskification is the construction of a *potential* threat that may not be *existential* but should still be guarded against by undertaking proactive measures to promote *resilience* (ibid.).

Two counterarguments can be offered to this. Firstly, times have changed. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent serious disruption in gas supplies to the EU have given rise to a successful securitizing move on the part of the European Commission. This is corroborated by the study on the geoeconomic turn in EU policy described in the literature review (Bauerle Danzman and Meunier 2024). Through its REPowerEU Plan (COM/2022/230 final), the Commission proposed a mechanism for voluntary pooling of gas demand from member states (enacted in 2023), a policy priority that had thus far proven elusive. Likewise, it has also proposed raising the EU's renewable energy target to 45% by 2030, adopted as part of the revised Renewable Energy Directive (EU 2023/2413), adopted a Critical Raw Materials Act (EU 2024/1252), proposed a Green Industrial Plan (COM/2023/62) to increase production of renewable energy infrastructure, and established a Roadmap towards ending Russian energy imports (COM/2025/440 final 2). The latter contains a very explicit security framing in its introduction: "[t]he dependency on Russian energy imports leads to serious security and economic risks for the

Union and its Member States, as Russia has continuously used existing energy supply as a weapon to threaten the stability and prosperity of the Union".

That is why riskification misidentifies the referent object in this case. Following a constructivist logic, it is not merely the physical threat of a lack of heating or transportation that can be existentially threatened, it is also our *routines* and *self-narratives*, which in turn constitute a feeling of ontological security. Here it is easy to make the connection to our line of inquiry, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a source of existential insecurity for the European Union (and other polities), both physical, in terms of the possibility of war or even nuclear confrontation with Russia — both of which are still rather distant prospects; and ontological, in terms of a shattered routine of Europe as a peace project committed to a rules-based international order, and the threat to European self-identity as a prosperous region of the world (Mitzen 2020), given the danger of hugely increased energy costs for the competitiveness of the EU's industrial production. The EU's REPowerEU Plan, of which the Critical Raw Materials Act is of primary concern for this study, can therefore be seen as one part of an attempt to re-establish ontological security, which happens to involve Serbia as a nearby source of abundant lithium for the urgently needed electrification of European energy production and storage, as well as its automotive industry.

Going back to the debate between rationalist and constructivist ontologies, if ontological security can be said to explain why states act in seemingly irrational ways, here the opposite is true — the EU is acting in a seemingly rational way. To put it differently, it should come as no surprise that the EU's behavior in the Jadar case has been so widely interpreted in realist, rationalist terms, since being seen to behave in such a way signals the seriousness with which EU officials have taken this critical situation, and therefore serves to alleviate the anxiety generated by it. However, this sets up a contradiction, since alleviating the anxiety originating from this critical geoeconomic situation (ibid., 15) comes at the cost of opening up to another attack on the EU's ontological security in the form of being forced to abdicate its identity as both the global leader in the fight against climate change, and that of a community based on democracy and human rights. The former could conceivably be sacrificed, and arguably has been, given that few still seem to remember the European Green Deal, but without the latter, the EU reverts back to being merely a trading block.[27]

[27] It should be noted that the EU has still not had to seriously contend with this contradiction because the Jadar mine, along with all of its potential political and environmental harms, has not yet opened.

These contradictions can clearly be read in the Critical Raw Materials Act. The first point of the Preamble already references the importance of critical raw materials (defined as "non-energy, non-agricultural raw materials [...] considered to be critical due to their high economic importance and their exposure to high supply risk") for "defence and aerospace applications" in addition to "green and digital transitions" amid "rising geopolitical tensions and resource competition", while conceding that the demand for these minerals could "lead to negative environmental and social impacts". Point 5 introduces the term "Strategic Project" for the extraction of critical raw materials, and Point 22 clarifies that member states, as well as third countries, have the right to object to a project on their territory being classified as strategic, or more specifically, that a project in a third country may not be classified as strategic "against the will of its government". Point 26 establishes the urgency with which Strategic Projects should be treated under this Act, by being given "priority status at national level to ensure rapid administrative handling and urgent handling in all judicial and dispute resolution procedures relating to them". Furthermore, Strategic Projects should be declared to be in the public interest — another type of speech act, with the aim of legitimizing "adverse effect on the environment" if it is determined that the public interest "overrides those impacts". Point 35 clarifies that "[l]and use conflicts can create barriers to the deployment of critical raw material projects", and that spatial and zoning plans should therefore include provisions for them. Point 60 calls for the establishment of a scientific methodology for determining a project's "environmental footprint". However, this calculation should only be done if a separate analysis concludes that it could lead to "the procurement of critical raw materials with lower environmental footprint and would not disproportionately affect trade flows and economic costs". To put it rather bluntly, with regard to the environmental and social impacts of raw materials extraction, the EU would like to have its cake and eat it too.

4.3. The Jadar Case

It is at this point that the discussion can start to circle back to the Jadar project itself by reflecting on the question — what is it that makes it a *case*? In other words, what are the specific conditions of the Jadar project's existence that are analytically interesting in terms of their potential for generalizability? By way of an answer, it would be helpful to restate some of the arguments from the previous sections. First, the Jadar project is predicated on an untested technological

process, and the potential for ecological harm, coupled with the abysmal environmental records of both Rio Tinto and the Government of Serbia have prompted widespread civic protests against the project. On the other hand, the European Union bases its identity, *inter alia*, on a set of values which include democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. The EU also partially constructs its identity in contrast to its perception of the Balkans as autocratic, corrupt, intolerant, etc. However, these characteristics are changeable, and the EU accession process can be seen as a rite of passage whose purpose is for candidate countries to shed those negative characteristics and replace them with the values that positively form the EU identity. What makes Jadar a case, then, is the EU's disregard for the democratically articulated opposition to the project as well as the lack of credibility of partners with whom it has chosen to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on critical raw materials, in other words, its apparent willful abdication of its responsibility as the elder in the accession process.

The previous section has demonstrated that the EU's approach to critical raw materials has a fundamental contradiction at its core. One can think of that contradiction in terms of the clash between two logics — a logic of interest and a logic of values. The logic of interest is based on a securitized discourse in the context of the EU's decoupling from Russian energy supplies in the wake of its war against Ukraine, as well as the geoeconomic competition with China. Therefore, the logic of interest requires that the EU be seen as a decisive and purely rational actor, and has already produced certain policy outcomes that had hitherto been impossible. The logic of values, on the other hand, is ever-present, and it refers back to the way the EU explicitly frames its identity. It can clearly be read in the many equivocations contained in the otherwise drill-happy text of the Critical Raw Materials Act. However, it is important to point out that both logics can be linked back to the EU's identity, as has also been demonstrated. This clash opens up some further questions: can the EU really have its cake and eat it too, or will one logic ultimately win out over the other? If so, which logic will prevail?

The Jadar project constitutes a case precisely because it illustrates this contradiction, while also providing an example of how the above questions may be resolved. It would serve our argument well to map the two logics onto the Memorandum of Understanding Between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia on a Strategic Partnership on Sustainable Raw Materials, Battery Value Chains And Electric Vehicles (2024, hereinafter: the MoU). The Introduction provides the political context for the MoU, starting by emphasizing the "deep and

long-standing relationship as partners" between the EU and Serbia, before stating that this partnership is aimed at boosting Serbia's "economic, social and environmental convergence with the EU firmly based on the respect of European values and principles". Here one can immediately read the clash between the logic of interest and the logic of values: the text explicitly references the relationship between the EU and Serbia in the context of European values, while the MoU as a whole treats Serbia as a *third country*, in line with the Critical Raw Materials Act. The EU thus simultaneously embraces Serbia and distances itself from it.

Furthermore, at the very end of the first section on Objectives, the MoU references Serbia's EU accession in terms of the need for Serbia to "step up its alignment with the relevant EU Acquis" in the area of environmental protection. This constitutes an admission of Serbia's deficiency in this area, while simultaneously shifting the burden of ensuring the application of the appropriate EU standards onto it. The Partnership proposed by the MoU should also be "open, transparent and inclusive [...]", papering over the context in which the MoU was signed. Serbia's Supreme Court had just ruled the cancellation of RioTinto's permits to have been unconstitutional merely a week prior to the signing, in a process that was anything but open, transparent and inclusive; and a duly submitted civic initiative, a constitutional instrument of direct participation in Serbia, calling for a moratorium on lithium mining, was "lost" and ignored by the authorities (Đokić 2025).

Finally, the provisions on environmental, social and governance standards and practices state that "[b]oth sides will apply high sustainability standards" and that "[t]he Partnership aims to facilitate exchange and alignment of best practices in this area", with the ambition to comprehensively address "sustainable mining and challenges related to environmental, economic and social justice [...] across the battery value chain". This will be done by applying "guidelines and best practices [...] including the EU principles on sustainable raw materials" and cooperating to "improve the legal, regulatory and administrative framework [...] in line with the EU and Serbian policies and identifying areas of regulatory support that may be required". Once again, the MoU draws a line of equivalence between EU and Serbian environmental standards ("both sides", "facilitate exchange", "in line with the EU and Serbian policies"), while recognizing the deficiency of the Serbian framework by offering support.

Further adding to the volume of contradictions, as previously mentioned, for the purpose of the MoU, the EU is treating Serbia as a third country, an interaction which the Critical Raw Materials Act conceptualizes as *intergovernmental*. It is evident that, with regard to the Jadar

project, the Government of Serbia has acted precisely in accordance with the Act, including by declaring the project to be in the national interest, fast-tracking permits, and integrating the project into spatial plans. It has, however, been allowed to ignore the small print, what I have called *equivocations*, such as the need to conduct participatory processes, the need for appropriately compiled Environmental Impact Studies, etc — the intergovernmental approach requires the EU to take the government's word for it. Yet Serbia is also a membership candidate country, undergoing the accession process in which the EU has explicitly given itself the role of mentor or elder, and is eventually supposed to become an EU member state once it fully reforms by internalizing EU values, including the environmental standards that stem from them. Therefore, the Jadar project would likely be impossible to implement in a truly 'third' developing country, as it would raise the spectre of colonialism, extractivism, and exploitation, and endanger the EU's identity as a polity based on values[28, 29], since the EU has no robust mechanism to ensure the application of its environmental standards. It would also be impossible to implement inside the EU due to the need to take public opposition to the project seriously, as well as the additional scrutiny that would be required of the project itself. This should serve as an indictment of the EU's entire approach to critical raw materials, but that approach is precisely enabled by the particularities of this case.

It is here that the liminal discourse operates as a bridge between the two logics. Namely, given Serbia's liminal position with respect to the EU, and its irreducibility to a clear-cut Self or Other identity, the discourse contained in the analyzed texts attempts to fix the meaning[30] of Serbia's liminality as being *deficient, but improving*. The EU will offer Serbia its environmental framework, but Serbia is solely responsible for implementing it. This liminal maxim has so far been sufficient to reconcile the logic of interest with the logic of values in this case, because such a discursive framing of Serbia's liminality has had an enabling effect: the EU can move quickly to ensure a nearby lithium supply for its batteries, while the liminal accession process creates space to believe that the project will be implemented in accordance with its values. Liminality is also

[28] Here Todorova's (2009) observation should be recalled, that the Balkans have often served as a space where charges of racism, colonialism, eurocentrism, etc. can be brushed off.

[29] There are currently 6 strategic projects under CRMA in what could be called 'developing countries': the extraction of graphite in Ukraine, Madagascar, and Kazakhstan, rare Earth elements for magnets in Malawi and South Africa, and the processing of Cobalt in Zambia (European Commission n.d.-b). In contrast to EU-based strategic projects, the list of strategic projects offers no factsheets on these.

[30] See Laclau and Mouffe (2001): *foreclosure.*

reflected in the fact that the Jadar project is presented as a historic opportunity for Serbia's rapid development to catch up with the EU and ultimately be embraced by it as a member state. Therefore, as remarked in the section on the theoretical framework, this discourse does not *cause* but *enables* the EU's policy towards the Jadar project.[31] The stability of this discourse is highly questionable, however, as it inverts the power relation between the elder and the liminar[32] by forcing the EU into a Faustian bargain — the undue conferral of European legitimacy on Serbia's government[33]. The latter has cynically seized upon this inversion both as a base opportunity for satisfying clientelistic needs through the Jadar project, as well as a way to ensure the EU's passivity regarding the ongoing unprecedented wave of student-led civic protests across the country, in service only to its own continued survival, rather than any prospect of *reincorporation.* This, in turn, extends Serbia's liminality into a *permanent* one, calling into question the accession process, and thus, the entire discursive basis for the relationship between the EU and Serbia.

[31] See Hansen (2006): *combinability.*

[32] See Derrida (1997): *decentering*.

[33] Recall, for example, that the Critical Raw Materials Act only recognizes *state* objections to projects on its territory being classified as 'strategic'.

5. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it is worth observing that this paper can almost perfectly be divided in thirds. The first third started by establishing the reason for its existence. The Introduction thus provides background information on Serbia's EU accession process, the Jadar project, and the public reception of it. Based on these parameters, the research question was formulated — Why did the EU sign a memorandum on critical raw materials with Serbia despite popular opposition to the project, coupled with democratic backsliding and disputed elections? Thereafter, a literature review was conducted, including the overall geoeconomic turn in EU policy, and the literature on the Jadar project which follows this logic, and determined that no satisfactory answer has yet been offered, *inter alia*, because the reviewed literature had not been rooted in a systematic understanding of the EU, being based instead on exogenous factors. The primary approaches to EU studies were then reviewed in search of an *endogenous* explanation, but found that any interpretations that may be gleaned from their application were insufficient to fully answer the research question, given their common rationalist ontology and lack of concern with identity in political processes.

The second third moved towards constructivism as a more appropriate ontological starting point. The conventional or 'liberal' constructivist approaches to EU studies were reviewed first, but their conceptualization of state identity based on symbolic interactionism was found to be insufficiently precise, and in particular Schimmelfennig's "rhetorical action" was found to be similar to the better developed notion of speech act used in critical constructivist approaches. Therefore, an appropriate theoretical and methodological model for answering the research question was reached by assembling what I have termed the 'critical constructivist toolkit.' It introduced the foundational post-structuralist concept of *différance,* and demonstrated how post-structuralist analysis can be 'scaled up' to the state level by reference to the theory of ontological security, wherein states are treated as possessing personhood and identity, and the anxieties that accompany them. These anxieties are also *constructed* through the speech act of securitization, which legitimizes extraordinary measures, ostensibly to combat existential threats. Finally, securitization being a discursive process, the development and meaning of discourse analysis was expounded on, as were its application in IR, and its compatibility with the other theories that make up the toolkit. Finally, the concept of liminality was introduced as part of a rite of passage observed

in ethnological studies, and demonstrated its linkage to the other parts of our theoretical framework.

In the last third, that framework was applied to the Jadar case in several steps. First it was demonstrated how the EU constructs its identity through a process of linking and differentiation, treating each separately, though they take place simultaneously. The former was illustrated by applying discourse analysis to one of the EU's two founding documents, the Treaty on European Union, finding that the EU positively defines its identity by reference to both inclusive criteria such as the values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, and exclusive criteria such as geographical location and culture. The latter was illustrated by relying primarily on the work of Todorova on the concept of *Balkanism*, which demonstrates how the Balkans are linked to a set of negative signifiers (autocratic, semi-developed, intolerant, etc.) which are in turn contrasted to the signifiers the EU links to itself. However, the difference between the two is not radical, and, as I have argued, the EU accession process can be conceptualized as the liminal phase of a rite of passage whose goal is for candidate countries to shed the negative signifiers and obtain the positive signifiers linked to the EU's identity. The concepts of ontological security and securitization were then applied to an analysis of the EU's overall energy security strategy based on a close reading of the Critical Raw Materials Act, demonstrating a clear contradiction in its conception. The final section demonstrated how the Jadar case illustrates that contradiction between the logic of interest and the logic of values, and answered the research question by positing that the EU continues to support the Jadar project because Serbia's liminality allows the EU to bridge the two logics, avoiding an overt contradiction — for the time being.

In terms of limitations, it should be pointed out that, though the summarized version of the argumentation contained in this thesis belies its complexity, the presentation of the various theoretical arguments in the body of the text were necessarily simplified due to the space constraints of the format. Furthermore, this thesis relies on the textual analysis of public legal documents, but contains no material obtained specifically for the purpose of analysis, e.g. interviews with EU decision makers, opposition representatives or protestors (Hansen's Model 2). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge my own positionality with regard to the Jadar project. As already pointed out, in a proper constructivist vein, this thesis does not assume that the Jadar project would definitely cause significant environmental damage if implemented, it merely takes

note of the fact that an overwhelming section of Serbian society has decided that the project is not in the public interest, and I count myself among that section.

That leaves an examination of the predictive potential of this analysis. The previous section ended by pointing out that the discursive formation that allows the EU to continue to support the project is unstable, but it is unclear what will happen if that discourse thoroughly collapses. One way in which this could happen is that a new government wins democratic legitimacy in Serbia, and definitively ends the project based on popular opinion. This would satisfy the logic of values, but run contrary to the logic of interest. On the other hand, a new government could also choose to continue implementing the project, satisfying the logic of interest, but running afoul of the logic of values, pushing the public opinion in Serbia even further away from the EU. The final option, then, is the current *status quo* as described in the previous section. In other words, while this analysis cannot predict with certainty whether the Jadar project will be implemented, nor whether the EU will continue to support it, it does provide a framework for understanding certain political contingencies in the relationship between the EU and Serbia. In terms of policy implications, then, it seems as though the EU would stand to profit more in the long term by sticking to its values with regard to Serbia. That is because a more legitimate government with a better reputation in terms of the rule of law also stands a better chance of implementing the Jadar project in the future without serious environmental impacts – provided, of course, that this is technologically feasible.

I would also like to highlight certain theoretical developments that have arisen from this thesis, the most significant of which is the development of a methodology (and appropriate case) for applying the concept of liminality in conjunction with discourse analysis. I have thus conceptualized the liminal discursively as that which eludes the fixation of meaning, differentiating it from fluctuation, ambivalence, fluidity and hybridity. As evidenced by the Jadar case, the attempt to fix the meaning of the liminal nevertheless fails to reconcile contradictions. I have also insisted on the processual nature of liminality, further defining it as *ambiguity as a process* or *the movement through ambiguity*, whereas e.g. Rumelili and Mälksoo conceptualize it as a *state* or *position*. By applying this logic to the EU accession process, I have also argued that the EU precisely constitutes the 'elder' in the accession process as a rite of passage, and that such metaphoric use of the concept can help clarify certain political developments. Finally, where Mälksoo sees in liminality the potential for political emancipation as well as a methodological revolution in the conduct of IR research, I see the facilitating power of liminality as also enabling

the legitimization of harmful processes and practices which would otherwise not be possible, resulting in cynical bargains between the elder and the liminar which extend liminality into a permanent limbo.

I would like to end by offering two ideas for further research. One is a systematic application of the concept of liminality based on the model used herein to all of the current membership candidate countries, which could contribute to a better understanding of the accession process in its current phase, as opposed to the previous waves of enlargement. This would also serve to investigate whether the accession rite of passage has created what Turner calls *communitas* (Turner 1995), a sense of solidarity and understanding between the liminars based on their liminal status. The other refers back to the public perception of the EU's behavior with regard to the Jadar case in realist and rationalist terms, for which I propose the term 'folk realism'. This is a play on the term *folk etymology* used in linguistics to describe a popular mistaken impression of a word's meaning based on a misascribed etymology. By analogy, folk realism is the discourse within which lay discussions about foreign policy are conducted in Serbia and other countries of the region. It is characterized by reference to great power politics combined with conspiratorial thinking taken as self-evident precisely because, within that discourse, its truthfulness would serve the interests of great powers. As I have suggested with regard to the EU's handling of its energy crisis, such realism and rationalism have the effect of *appearing* as strong, decisive, and ultimately, *masculine* — all features that may well appeal to the lay population of the region in the conduct of armchair analysis.

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