Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy
Strategies of Small States

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1. Introduction

I grew up in the United States, representing my own small country of origin, Hungary, frequently in casual conversations and at school events already as a child. I noticed that what I said and how I acted could influence foreigners’ perceptions of my country, and at a later age I also saw this at a larger scale, with companies, politicians, celebrities and their actions influencing a country’s image knowingly or unknowingly.

This brought me to wonder what a country can actively do to build awareness of its attributes abroad and create a positive image of itself in the world. For my Communication and Media Bachelor thesis, I researched the effect that the social media presence of Hungarians living abroad, and Hungary’s foreign representations have on its image in the world.

As a student in an International Relations Master’s program now, I am curious to know more about the methods and costs of image-building and I realize that small countries struggle at times with the costs of building their image abroad. Just looking at the annual US$240 million budget of the Fulbright program of the United States (Fulbright Association, 2019), which is a good example of building the country’s image abroad, shows that not all small countries can afford such lavish policies. In comparison, Hungary’s Stipendium Hungaricum program had an annual budget of US$19 million in 2017, which is less than 8% of the US’s annual Fulbright budget and still a number that is already high compared to the small country’s standards (Bucsky, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to gather useful public diplomacy and country image improvement tools and practices from small countries who have are actively working towards defining and spreading their national brand. Since small states may have a disadvantage in this respect (budget constraints, fewer economic relations, less influence, etc.), gathering do’s and don’ts that have already been tried out in practice is an effective strategy for small states who also want to do more to promote their country in this area. I would also like to find out if there are any areas where small states have an advantage in country image building compared to larger ones.

In past decades, the use of force or military power were the most effective ways of achieving a nation’s goals, if cost is ignored. Recently, the use of soft power has gained popularity and respect. Small states, if we use the definition by Nikolett Garai, Júlia Koncz-Kiss and Máté Szalai, are usually below their region’s average in size, population
and economic output (Garai, Koncz-Kiss, & Szalai, 2017). Thus, these small states must resort to more cost-efficient statecraft to reach their goals.

To determine which of the examined practices are the most effective, I chose to use an evaluating system. This study uses Simon Anholt’s criteria for successful image building policies. The grading system created with it will be described in more detail in the chapter titled ‘Making ‘effectiveness’ measurable’.

My research question for this thesis is the following: What effective public diplomacy methods can small states use to be equally heard and noticed in the world?

By being heard, I mean that the image they have of themselves, or the information they would like to convey to the world is made available and easily accessible, and by noticed, I mean the image that others have of them in the world is mentioned abroad and perhaps even recognized or praised.

First, I define the fundamental concepts used in the study and explain the method I used. Then comes a look at two cases, gathering information about their strategies and evaluating their effectiveness. Finally, I will conclude my findings, evaluate the thesis and whether its objectives were met, determine what could have been done differently, and what can be done in the future to continue research on the topic.

2. Understanding public diplomacy

2.1. Defining key concepts

First, I began by gathering the most widely accepted definitions of the technical terms used most often in the field of public diplomacy.

Soft power, as defined by Joseph S. Nye, its creator, is “the power that societies have to attract others to support the policies pursued by their governments” (Nye, 2004). It is the umbrella of all methods states can use to persuade others that are not coercive, hard power. Soft power has been receiving more praise in past decades. Simon Anholt wrote that “the benefits [of soft power] are measurable, tangible and considerably more cost-effective than coercion” (Anholt, Places, 2010, p. 44). But soft power has been criticized for being a normative concept that is unable to present direct outcomes. Even so, most scholars agree that Joseph Nye’s definition of soft power has largely influenced our understanding of public diplomacy (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017).
However, there is not one perfect definition for *public diplomacy*, but rather several accepted ones for it and its objectives. The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy describes it as a field where ‘theory’ followed practice in its studies. It writes that *public diplomacy* is

> “an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” *(Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013, p. 436)*.

Traditionalists often claim that *public diplomacy* is “a modern name for white propaganda” *(Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013, p. 439)*. Though some scholars believe that a newer wave of public diplomacy sets it apart from its traditional, propagandistic uses, they warn that it can still be misused today. Ian Hall wrote that “*Public diplomacy* is about changing minds. It can consist of simple propaganda, but it is arguably more successful if it aims at building lasting relationships of trust between a government and foreign audiences” *(Hall, 2012)*.

In line with ‘new-wave’ thinkers, Amit Dasgupta defines *public diplomacy* as a newer addition to traditional diplomacy. He says that in traditional diplomacy, only “professional diplomats, government and political representatives of other countries” can be participants, while public diplomacy is different in that it aims to “engage with those outside the government” *(Dasgupta, 2011)*.

At the same time, even newer forms of public diplomacy can be used to achieve more traditional dominance. As Miriyam Aouragh wrote, “*public diplomacy* is about gaining support for global and regional hegemony [and] it is far from value free” *(Aouragh, 2016)*.

‘*Public affairs*’ is often used as a closely related concept to *public diplomacy*. The former targets the domestic audience and mainly citizens eligible to vote, while the latter tries to address foreign audiences *(Dasgupta, 2011)*. Not all countries differentiate between the two.

‘*Nation-branding*’, a term originally coined in 1996 by Simon Anholt is – as he wrote – misunderstood by many to imply that nations, cities and places can be branded and sold using marketing strategies just like products and companies can. Anholt has said on many occasions since then that the term was misunderstood, that he regrets using it without
defining it clearly enough and that he believes places cannot be branded based on marketing principles. Though he still uses the term, he encourages the use of “image building” or “competitive identity” instead (Anholt, Places, 2010).

In his 2007 book, Anholt defined competitive identity (or CI) as “the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy and with trade, investment tourism and export promotion.” He wrote that “CI is a new model for enhanced national competitiveness in a global world” (Anholt, Competitive Identity, 2007, p. 23).

As Pawlusz and Polese reported, the idea of nation branding is highly contested among scholars, with critics such as Sue Jansen and Nadia Kanea. Regardless of its debated efficacy, most scholars agree that branding campaigns condense cultural values and national identity and help define the nation for its citizens (Pawłusz & Polese, 2017, p. 876).

Anholt’s definition of brand image is “reputation understood as an external, even cultural phenomenon which is not under the direct control of the ‘owner’ of the brand, but which nonetheless is a critical factor that underpins every transaction between the brand and its consumers”. He writes that brand equity is the notion that a country’s image, or brand must be “managed, measured, protected, leveraged and nurtured”. Brand purpose is a strategic vision created internally with cooperation of different members of the brand (Anholt, Places, 2010).

Anholt also created the Nation Brand Hexagon Concept, which examines six dimensions of national competence: exports, governance, culture, people, tourism and immigration, and investment. He then uses these six aspects to determine the Nation Brand Index, one of the most well-known regular image comparisons of a large number of the world’s countries (Anholt-GfK Roper, 2016).

Keith Dinnie pointed out the distinction between national brand, a company or brand available at a national level and nation-brand, which he wrote is “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences”. He called attention to how brands exist in consumers’ minds rather than being a totally controllable creation of the marketing function (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15).

Country of origin effect, as Anholt described, is the phenomenon when just by adding the “Made in …” label to a product, the positive values attributed by the customer to that
country transfer onto the product, such as Swiss precision, German engineering, French chic, Swedish design, etc. (Anholt, Competitive Identity, 2007, p. 9).

Similarly to what Simon Anholt described in his book Places, a Swedish journalist, Charlotte Boström explained on a podcast called ‘The Europeans’ that nation brand building is usually initiated by governments. First, they poll as great a foreign audience as possible about their perceptions of the country, then decide how that suits what they would like people abroad to think of it. Finally, they usually employ a brand team to help them launch actions that will achieve their goals (The Europeans, 2018).

Public diplomacy instruments can be categorized into two groups based on how long they’ve been used. Old public diplomacy instruments include movies, literature, gastronomy, and ones also used by propaganda, such as television broadcasts, advertisements, and state-sponsored media. State-funded cultural and educational exchanges are also old public diplomacy tools. New public diplomacy instruments are any type of social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Flickr, or YouTube - just to name a few - or new technology, such as Google Analytics or advertising that is able to filter its audience. Just because a public diplomacy tool is old, however, doesn’t mean it isn’t still used today, though its use may have changed somewhat over the years.

New public diplomacy (NPD), as defined by Vickers, “can be characterized as a blurring of traditional distinctions between international and domestic information activities, between public and traditional diplomacy, and between cultural diplomacy, marketing and news management” (Vickers, 2004), a definition Gilboa later criticized for not being precise enough when using the term “blurring of traditional distinctions” (Gilboa, Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy, 2008).

Papp-Váry wrote that recently, country image centers and country brand councils have been popping up left and right, aiming “to position the country, distinguish it from its competitors, create a uniform brand strategy, and, in a sense, coordinate the various messages about the country” (Papp-Váry, 2018).

The objective of public diplomacy can be specific, such as communicating how a natural disaster was handled by a government (either trying to dampen negative opinions or promoting their success), communicating a country’s standpoint in an international conflict, promoting the efforts its government is making to resolve it, making a country’s relationship with other countries more clear to the public, or even targeting the tourism
industry, communicating that a country is one of the best places to get a certain product (i.e. Belgium and chocolates, France and wine, etc.). It often has overlapping areas with the tourism industry. But many times, the objective of public diplomacy is, as Amit Dasgupta writes “to convey the message: why we do, what we do” (Dasgupta, 2011).

2.2. Making ‘effectiveness’ measurable

The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy calls evaluation the Achilles’ heel of public diplomacy, meaning that it is still a challenge for most states to measure their success in it (Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013).

But in an attempt to make the effectiveness of the examined strategies comparable, this study chooses a system of evaluation to judge public diplomacy measures.

Traditional foreign policy measures are often evaluated using David A. Baldwin’s method, which asks whether the policy’s declared objectives were attained, whether it was cost-effective, whether it incurred costs to the target, and how high the stakes were for the actor and the target. (Baldwin, 2000)

However, looking at these criteria in the case of public diplomacy measures isn’t always relevant. Contrary to armed conflicts (which are often the primary subject of Baldwin’s evaluation), when working to improve its image, a country (the actor) doesn’t only have one or two adversaries, it competes with every other country in the world (or at least countries with a same profile or countries located in the same region). Furthermore, it is much more difficult to assess costs to the actor and attained objectives in public diplomacy than in armed conflicts, since the former’s measures can sometimes have long-term effects that only present themselves in measurable ways decades later, if ever.

Though it is true that the objective of public diplomacy is often to be better than other countries and win the attention of foreign publics, and the actor generally wants to be more well-known, desirable and appealing than other countries, investigating costs incurred to other countries by a public diplomacy measure would be nearly impossible, since a drop in tourism revenue or decreasing guest nights spent in a neighboring country doesn’t necessarily mean that the original actor’s policy was the cause.

Thus, I looked for a more suitable evaluation method for public diplomacy effectiveness, preferably created specifically for public diplomacy measures.
2.2.1. The Anholt Criteria

In his book ‘Places: Identity, Image and Reputation’, Simon Anholt - often described as “the leading authority on managing and measuring national identity and reputation” - set three fundamental criteria that must be met in order to have successful image-building: strategy, substance and symbolic actions (Anholt, Places, 2010).

Using his criteria, in this thesis, I analyze and determine whether the public diplomacy measures used by my two case studies can be considered effective.

Of the three criteria, according to Simon Anholt, strategy is made up of a country’s self-determined identity; its identity relative to other countries; its plans and goals in the future and how it plans to attain them. According to Anholt, a country that wishes to improve its image needs a successful strategy: they must know who they are, where they stand in the international arena (and according to others, as well as according to themselves), and they need to know their objectives and how they will complete them.

The second criteria, substance – as he says – is lasting change and continuous real attempts to improve, aiming to fulfill the goals set out in the strategy. He explains that as he sees it, a country must actually have something to show for itself in order for self-promotion and branding to work: economic, legal, political, social, cultural and educational policies that show reform and progress (Anholt, Places, 2010, p. 13).

Symbolic actions are a way of telling the story of that substantial change. They are newsworthy actions that help communicate the improvements being made. A symbolic action can be anything: a policy, an innovation, a structure, a piece of legislation, investments, or institutions, as long as they are exceptionally remarkable, noteworthy or newsworthy. What’s more, symbolic actions must also work as a symbol of the country’s strategy: a part of the nation’s story while also creating a newsworthy vessel to tell the story. He added that a single symbolic action, however, will rarely be enough. A string of actions is needed to build a lasting image. Furthermore, symbolic actions should never be ‘empty’ in the sense that their objective is just to be told, they must contain worthy substance, and they “should continue in an unbroken succession for many years” (Anholt, Places, 2010).

Anholt writes that it is only by fulfilling all three conditions over a long term that a country can improve its image in the minds of foreign audiences.
2.3. Small States

When looking for small states worthy of being case studies, I looked to Szalai’s fourfold definition of country size: relative, absolute, normative and perceptual (Szalai, 2019). I chose to use relative size. My reasoning was that absolute size isn’t always a good indicator of a given country’s opportunities to self-brand since it tells us nothing about a country’s available funds or its standing in the global community. Normative size, which tells us about the international norms regarding size and a country’s size in the eyes of other countries, could be a good fit but is very difficult to measure. Finally, perceptual size, the effect of actual size on the identity and internal social norms of a country could also have a great effect on the image a country portrays to the world but is also difficult to quantify and compare. Thus, relative size, the size of a country’s population, territory, military and GDP relative to the average in its region will be the definition I use to define small states.

2.4. Method

This thesis uses a model that evaluates selected case studies on a scale from 0 to 3 between an imagined perfect public diplomacy strategy at 3, with the three points being given for each of Simon Anholt’s criteria. The top grade is given for well-thought out strategy, measures that give substance and good symbolic actions, and the worst grade will be given for a public diplomacy strategy with no strategy, no substance and no symbolic actions. Each of the aspects for evaluation add 1 point to the score if the findings show that now only did the country or government put effort into that area, but that they were also successful in it. If only one of the two is fulfilled for a given criteria (i.e. they put effort into it, but it didn’t work, or they didn’t actively work for it, but were successful anyway), then 0.5 points are given.

Since – as I’ve already determined – it’s often difficult in the cases of public diplomacy measures to clearly see whether objectives were attained (either because they’re not publicly declared, or because they are so long term and disseminated, for example), success of the original objectives will not be a part of the grading scale. It will be taken into consideration when evaluating the countries if available, along with other aspects of the measure and variables such as costs for example, but not graded.

The scale, admittedly, will be based on subjective analysis by the author, but also backed by objective data and statistics.
3. Case Studies

I decided to look at two cases with more in-depth research and detail in order to find good and bad examples of public diplomacy and nation branding strategies: Israel’s Hasbara policy and Estonia’s nation branding strategy.

I first examine why the chosen states can be defined as small, then give a general overview of the country’s foreign policy history and the main public diplomacy strategies used to promote the country. This will be followed by an evaluation and comparison of the two countries’ policies. Finally, the policies will be examined to see if other small countries could benefit from implementing something similar.

Of course, the two countries were not chosen randomly. They are thus selective and do not represent all states since my choices were limited to small states whose public diplomacy strategies are more widely covered in published scientific journals and books with more information available about them. However, the basis for my decision was that both countries’ public diplomacy policies are relatively well-known; Estonia for its niche diplomacy and focus on technology, and Israel for its mistake of using decentralized public diplomacy. Both have been working on their competitive identities for long enough that we can see the consequences and examine the benefits.

I also found the choice of Israel and Estonia to be fitting for this thesis based on several articles analyzing public diplomacy strategies around the world. Israel’s Hasbara policy has numerous articles debating its success in scientific journals and news outlets alike, often evaluating it poorly. The fact that Israel has had a relatively large, well-funded and well-documented public policy campaign aimed at influencing its image abroad makes it an excellent choice for a case study and prompted me to analyze it in a way that could help Israel or other countries learn from its mistakes.

Estonia has established its country brand as an e-democracy and its ‘digitally-forward’ thinking is fairly well-known around the world. Other than the element that the state is truly making a great effort to be at the forefront of digital development at a governmental level, I was curious to find out more about the strategies developed to spread information and raise awareness of Estonia’s policies.

It has evolved from a lesser-known state under Soviet regime to a Western and Nordic country that serves as a tech-hub and fertile ground for start-ups and businesses, bringing e-democracy and self-driving cars to mind. Japan, Azerbaijan, Namibia and Finland have
all adopted various elements of e-governing (Goede, 2019), yet it can be argued that these countries have not yet been as successful in tying their images to e-governance as Estonia has.

It will be especially interesting to see the similarities and differences between the public diplomacy activity of the two case studies, since they are both small countries working to ‘set the record straight’ about themselves, with the main difference being that Estonia is not in a territorial dispute or military conflict with any of its neighbors, it has been peaceful since it regained independence and is simply presenting itself and trying to move on from being seen as a post-soviet state. Israel, however, has been trying to convince the world about its right to exist, its right to annex territories and its right to shape the demographic indicators of its state ever since it came into existence. It will be interesting to see how public diplomacy and nation branding has helped them achieve their goals. What might work for one might not be a good strategy for the other.

In the following subsections, I grouped my findings based on category, and not based on country, in an attempt to make it easier to see the common themes and/or differences between the two case studies. I first start by checking that the two countries are, in fact, small states according to the definition I chose. Then I move on to Anholt’s three criteria for successful national identity building.

3.1. Their smallness

3.1.1. Israel
To first determine whether Israel qualified as a small state, I gathered information about the 4 quantitative attributes used by Máté Szalai: territory, population, economy and military, in the country in question and in its immediate surroundings or region (Szalai, 2019).

To determine which countries to compare Israel with, I chose countries that are listed by Encyclopaedia Britannica as commonly understood to be part of the Middle East from the 20th century on: Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).
### Table 1: Assessment of Israel’s size in a regional comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (thousand)</th>
<th>Territory (km²)</th>
<th>Economy (GDP$)</th>
<th>Military capacities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Size of military (people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>8,712.40</td>
<td>21640</td>
<td>350850.54</td>
<td>184500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>80745.02</td>
<td>769630</td>
<td>851102.41</td>
<td>512000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Republic of Iran</td>
<td>81162.79</td>
<td>1628760</td>
<td>439513.51</td>
<td>563000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>1179.55</td>
<td>9240</td>
<td>21651.79</td>
<td>15750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Arab Republic</td>
<td>18269.87</td>
<td>183630</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>6082.36</td>
<td>10230</td>
<td>51844.49</td>
<td>80000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>9702.35</td>
<td>88780</td>
<td>40068.31</td>
<td>115500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>32938.21</td>
<td>2149090</td>
<td>638827.14</td>
<td>251500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>4136.53</td>
<td>17820</td>
<td>120126.28</td>
<td>22600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>1492.58</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>35307.13</td>
<td>19460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>2639.21</td>
<td>11610</td>
<td>167605.22</td>
<td>21500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>9400.15</td>
<td>83600</td>
<td>382575.09</td>
<td>63000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>4636.26</td>
<td>309500</td>
<td>76642.65</td>
<td>47000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Yemen</td>
<td>28250.42</td>
<td>527970</td>
<td></td>
<td>20000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>20667.6929</td>
<td>415205.071</td>
<td>264676.213</td>
<td>158807.8571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table of 2017 data above, gathered from the website of the World Bank and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (or SIPRI) Military expenditure Database\(^1\), shows the exact population, territory, GDP, military size and spending of countries in the Middle East. The regional average is calculated based on the information available in this spreadsheet, and anything under the average is automatically highlighted in red, all done using Excel functions to avoid human error.

This shows that Israel is below its region’s average in two indicators: population and territory. However, its military spending is leading in the region. (The World Bank, 2019) (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).

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\(^1\) Data used to create Table 1 from the World Bank (The World Bank, 2019) and the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).
This means that Israel is a two-dimensional relatively small state. That is not perfect case for a small state in the region, seeing as Cyprus, Lebanon, Jordan and Bahrain, for example are four-dimensional small states.

Though its GDP and military expenditures are higher than the regional average, I would argue that Israel behaves like a small state because of its territorial disputes and armed conflicts along its current boundaries. The instability that that causes and its (relatively) changing boundaries can also contribute to its behavior as a small state.

3.1.2. Estonia

Like the Israeli case study, I used the four-dimensional regional comparison of size for Estonia as well. The three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would be too small of a comparison, thus I decided to include the Nordic region in the comparison.

The eight countries of the Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Poland and Russia, sometimes included in the wider Baltic region since they also have shorelines along the Baltic Sea, are not in this regional cooperation. I chose to include Poland in the regional comparison because of its proximity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (thousand)</th>
<th>Territory (km²)</th>
<th>Economy (GDP$)</th>
<th>Military capacities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Size of military (people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1,315.48</td>
<td>43470</td>
<td>25921.08</td>
<td>6400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>1940.74</td>
<td>62180</td>
<td>30264.45</td>
<td>5310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>2827.72</td>
<td>62642</td>
<td>47168.3</td>
<td>29650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5511.3</td>
<td>303910</td>
<td>251884.89</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>10067.74</td>
<td>407310</td>
<td>538040.46</td>
<td>30550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>5282.22</td>
<td>365123.01</td>
<td>398831.96</td>
<td>23950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5769.6</td>
<td>41990</td>
<td>324871.97</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>341.28</td>
<td>100250</td>
<td>23909.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>37975.84</td>
<td>306190</td>
<td>526465.84</td>
<td>173400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>7892.4356</td>
<td>138118.334</td>
<td>240817.582</td>
<td>34978.8889</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 Assessment of Estonia's size in a regional comparison*
The table above shows data of the region’s countries in the four dimensions also gathered from the World Data Bank and the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database\(^2\). The average is automatically calculated and numbers below the average are automatically highlighted in red, done using the same Microsoft Excel functions as for Israel’s calculations.

The numbers show that Estonia is a four-dimensional relatively small state in its region. This makes it a very strong case for examining its strategies as a small state. However, Estonia isn’t the only one in its region: Latvia, Lithuania and Iceland are also four-dimensional small states.

What’s more, Estonia is also one of the smallest countries in the world, and its population density is four times smaller than the European Union average. Its young existence as an independent country arguably also contributes to its smallness: it has had less time to establish itself in the international community.

3.2. Strategy

3.2.1. Israel

In this section, I have gathered all the measures, steps and phenomena that I found in some way contributed to or effected Israel’s strategic abilities of building its image.

To start off, it can both be argued that Israel has a disadvantage or an advantage because of its young statehood: it has had less time than other countries to develop an image of itself abroad, but at the same time had a fresh start and a blank canvas to fill with impressions of itself.

Historically, one of Israel’s biggest public diplomacy tools in the 20\(^{th}\) century was its Jewish diaspora and Pro-Israel and Zionist groups and lobbyists in the US, vocalizing and spreading support of Israel’s legitimacy as a state and of its government policies for decades. They still play an active role today.

As a more organized form of advocating, lobbying and designating key topics that they wanted the dialogue on Israel to be about, the government introduced Hasbara (‘to explain’ in Hebrew) to help the state give explanations and to shape the international discourse on its actions. Jon Dart summarized how it works: “Israel’s public diplomacy

\(^2\) Data used to create Table 2 from the World Bank (The World Bank, 2019) and the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).
efforts, (i.e. Hasbara) require an extensive communications strategy to coordinate its communication with the foreign media in Israel and overseas with multiple social networks and new media technologies fully utilized” (Dart, 2016) to create what the Israeli thinktank, Molad calls “one of the most sophisticated and effective public diplomacy apparatuses in the world” (dr. Shivi, 2012).

Through advocates, and through any channel possible, shifting the dialogue and framing coverage of events has been one of the strategies used by the country to maintain a more positive overall image compared to the amount of foreign criticism Israel’s governments receive and to continue to receive positive coverage of even their more questionable policies (Aouragh, 2016) (Dart, 2016).

A good example of that is something mentioned by several scholars: that criticism of government measures was and is often framed by several actors internationally as anti-Semitism and/or anti-Zionism and that Israel tends to discount international opinion and institutions (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018). Others also mention that negative coverage of the Israeli government’s actions has frequently been framed as anti-Zionist and made to look as if the very existence of the state is being questioned. I noticed this tendency to divert attention from foreign concerns to attacks on the statehood of Israel in Gilboa’s writing as well (Gilboa, 2006).

A more current example of this phenomenon is how the Republicans and veteran Democrats have reacted to a new wave of pro-Palestinian democrats in Congress, such as Representatives Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. These democrats are vocal supporters of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel, and unwavering supporters of Israel have often labeled them anti-Semite or anti-Zionist for their views. In a New York Times article, Jonathan Martin covered the creation of a group of senior democrats, the “Democratic Majority for Israel” to ‘remind elected officials about what they call the party’s shared values and interests with one of America’s strongest allies” (Martin, 2019).

Other than shifting the dialogue from any sort of criticism, according to Lowstedt and Madhoun, for decades, the Israeli government has been using public diplomacy not only to attempt to correct the world’s perception of Israel (which worsened partly because of its handling of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict), but also, more specifically, to dampen international criticism of the conflict itself. They write that one of Israel’s primary
Communication objectives has been to sway the world’s opinion of the decades-long struggle with the Palestinians (Lowstedt & Madhoun, 2003). Many, among them a filmmaker who wrote an article for the Guardian on the topic argue that the pro-Israel lobby influences journalists, resulting in biased coverage of the conflict (Pilger, 2002).

Also arguing along those lines, Aouragh wrote that Hasbara was first born in the form of a government office dedicated to improving Israel’s diplomacy. According to her, “Hasbara is best understood as the manufacturing of discontent with, or toward Palestinian self-determination, while simultaneously constituting consent for Israel’s dominance.” She mentions that Hasbara is sometimes compared to manipulation instead of propaganda (Aouragh, 2016).

Some writers, such as Edward Said say outright that it is more like propaganda. Said wrote that its effectiveness was unprecedented during the Al Aqsa Intifada, the second period of intensified violence between Israel and Palestine. According to Said,  

“Israel has already poured hundreds of millions of dollars into [...] lunches and free trips for influential journalists... bombarding congressmen and -women with invitations and visits; pamphlets and, most important, money for election campaigns; directing (or, as the case requires, harassing) photographers and writers into producing certain images and not others...training commentators to make frequent references to the Holocaust and Israel’s predicament today; many advertisements in the newspapers attacking Arabs and praising Israel...” (Said, 2001).

So, while some debate whether the main public diplomacy strategy, Hasbara has done enough, or whether it has achieved anything at all, many scholars agree that it is a powerful mechanism that has already shown its capabilities.

Lowstedt and Madhoun give an example of what Hasbara, and through it, supporters of Israel abroad were able to achieve, describing the most common biases and misinformation in the media. They explained that the American privately and publicly funded National Public Radio (NPR) reported 81% of Israeli deaths in the conflict but only 34% of Palestinian ones. What’s more, the Radio often failed to report on the deaths of Palestinian minors, civilians and women, while they reported more often on deaths in the same demographic groups if they were Israeli. The terms ‘retaliation’ and ‘retaliatory’
were used 79% of the time to describe Israeli acts of violence, while Palestinian violent acts were only described that way 9% of the time on three major private broadcasting networks, NBC, CBS and ABC (Lowstedt & Madhoun, 2003).

According to Said, this ‘propaganda’ is made possible by “a long-standing sense of Western guilt for anti-Semitism” (Said, 2001). Lowstedt and Madhoun added that mediums outside of Israel “have a harder time criticizing Israel for fear of being accused of ‘anti-Semitism’”. They also wrote that the International Press Institute had gathered over 240 cases of journalists who were obstructed, harassed, attacked or shot by Israelis during the first 2-3 years of the Al Aqsa Intifada, and even though Palestinians also obstructed press freedom, 82% of violations were committed by the Israelis (Lowstedt & Madhoun, 2003).

Even with this hard evidence, some find that the world is unfair and too anti-Israel. An Israeli scholar, Gilboa wrote that “media coverage of the PIW in the Muslim world and the West has been poisonous and anti-Semitic. With the exception of the US, much public opinion around the world sympathizes more with the Palestinians than with Israel” (Gilboa, 2006, p. 716).

Though I haven’t found a source confirming that the government also recognizes them, something that several scholars and journalists agree on is what Lupovici defines as the three main elements, or identity markers of Israel’s identity: a Jewish state, a security provider and a democracy (Lupovici, 2012, p. 822). In addition, Aouragh wrote that ever since the debut of a book titled ‘Start-up Nation, the Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle’, a new identity marker has appeared: a start-up nation, or a hub of technological advancements and entrepreneurship (Aouragh, 2016, p. 2) (Senor & Singer, 2009).

Based on my research I concluded that the biggest messages that, historically, Israelis have wanted to send to the world about themselves in addition to these identity markers are that they are in the right, that they deserve to be where they are, and that they haven’t done anything wrong in the Palestinian-Israeli War. I looked for steps the Israeli government took to implement that and the four Israeli identity markers identified by Lupovici and Aouragh.

Like many other nations, Israel followed the mainstream country branding practice in 2006, after a renewed effort to improve Israel’s public image abroad arose around 2003 and 2006.
The necessity appeared because public opinion polls showed that the country’s reputation had taken a huge hit yet again. First in 2003, the Eurobarometer poll showed that 59% of the 15 EU member states citizens found that Israel presents a threat to peace in the world, ranking the highest among all countries listed (European Commission, 2003). Then in 2006, the Anholt Nation Brands Index estimated Israel to be the worst brand overall in its Q3 Report, which Simon Anholt attributed to the 2006 Lebanon war and its perception abroad (Anholt, The Anholt Nation Brands Index, 2006).

He also explained that Israel achieved its lowest nation brand scores in the areas of governance, specifically regarding the question: ‘how strongly do you agree with the statement that this country behaves responsibly in the areas of international peace and security?’ – where Israel scored lowest of all 36 countries examined by the Nation Brand Index. Even the US, which has historically had a more positive image of Israel, ranked the country at 35th place out of 36 (Anholt, Places, 2010, p. 58).

In an attempt to kick the strategy into motion, in 2006, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni explained in an interview to Reuters that they had decided to launch a new rebranding campaign for Israel so that “When the word ‘Israel’ is said outside its borders” it would “invoke not fighting or soldiers, but a place that is desirable to visit and invest in, a place that preserves democratic ideals while struggling to exist” (Anholt, The Anholt Nation Brands Index, 2006).

This new wave of Israeli public diplomacy, or Hasbara is referred to by many scholars, like Miriyam Aouragh as ‘Hasbara 2.0’.

In 2008, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was made responsible for nation branding, and a British consulting firm, Saatchi and Saatchi was asked to create Israel’s brand strategy (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018) (Anholt, Places, 2010).

In 2009, the Prime Minister’s office opened its Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs (MPDDA) and a national ‘Hasbara’ coordination headquarters. The Ministry was still responsible for classic public diplomacy and nation branding, and the new office would focus on citizen diplomacy. It would work to train and help volunteering Israeli citizens to have the necessary information and communication skills to spread the country’s good name using peer-to-peer diplomacy (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018).
Already from that it’s clear that there was more than one institution responsible for Israel’s public diplomacy. This was only complicated by how, as Hadari and Turgeman wrote, “the Israeli Foreign Ministry has suffered an ongoing process of marginalization.” They explained that the Foreign Ministry’s spheres of authority and importance were increasingly undermined by other institutions, particularly institutions of the defense sector (Hadari & Turgeman, 2018).

This had reached a level where the spokesperson and representatives of the IDF, the Israeli Defense Forces were “likely to be seen as representing the State of Israel rather than just the Army”, as seen in media coverage on October 31st, 2010, when IDF forces attacked a Turkish ship. The Israeli government struggled to activate their chain of advocacy and failed to react to harsh criticism worldwide, and it was the IDF spokesperson who was seen as their official channel of communication. A member of the Prime Minister’s Office even said that “In states of emergency the most powerful and capable body should be put into service, and in practice, the IDF spokesperson’s unit is still the strongest link in the chain of advocacy actors in Israel” (Hadari & Turgeman, 2018, p. 493).

In 2010, Israel also launched the public diplomacy campaign ‘Presenting Israel’ aimed at Israeli tourists traveling abroad, to encourage them to be active citizen diplomats and to communicate in ways that show people they meet that Israel is modern, sophisticated and peace-loving. The Minister of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs explained that the country wanted to “bring back the human dimension of Israeli faces […] by creating and encouraging direct communication, without governmental mediation” to help them fight other countries’ attempts to “dehumanize, delegitimize and demonize them” (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018) (Gilboa, 2006).

The campaign included three video clips made by the Government Advertising Agency in English, French and Spanish. The videos were aimed at the domestic audience and used humor to address citizens and ask them whether they were “tired of seeing how they are represented in the world?”. The ad then instructed viewers interested to visit the Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs Website to learn how they also can participate in the ‘right advocacy’ and ‘explaining Israel’ (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018, p. 18).

The videos attempted to be humorous by exaggerating the style and reporting of various foreign shows when reporting about events or people in Israel (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi,
When viewers visited the government website mentioned in the ad, they were met with controversial statements in the “Myth vs. Reality” page, such as “it is a myth that the UNSC Resolution 242 requires Israel to return to the 1967 borders since its demand for withdrawal from the occupied territories never specified where the border should be.” Or that “it is a myth that millions of Palestinian refugees are not allowed to return to Israel” because “their numbers are lower and many of them were not even native to the land originally”. The Ministry also wrote that it is a myth that “there’s no peace because of the settlements” because the conflict does not originate “in the size of the state but in its very existence” (Ministry of Public Diplomacy & Diaspora Affairs, 2012) (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018).

This campaign met criticism domestically and internationally, partly for ignoring the connection between bad public image and Israel’s foreign policies and conflicts, partly for the controversial statements made to volunteers via the website, and also for making journalists and presenters look uninformed and gullible (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018).

As Aouragh explained, similarly to the “Presenting Israel” campaign, multilingual hasbara volunteers around the world such as flight attendants of Israel’s airline company, El Al, were also encouraged to talk about their country during small talk when traveling abroad, paying special attention to mention Israel’s scientific and cultural successes (Aouragh, 2016, pp. 13-14). Dart explained that these volunteers often follow a strict ‘Official Hasbara Handbook’ during these conversations. Online, volunteers at times even harass or troll anyone criticizing Israeli government policies or siding with Palestinians (Dart, 2016, p. 1406). The guides created for these volunteers often prescribe the exact phrases and sentences to be used to disarm arguments against Israel, or to win listeners/readers over with counterarguments.

A good example of these ready-made arguments is how the UN’s ‘right of return’, a part of freedom of movement, and in other words, a citizen’s right to stay in their country or to return there after leaving it, is often misconstrued by pro-Israel voices to make it seem as though it’s an unreasonable Palestinian demand that is slowing peace talks down (Aouragh, 2016).

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3 The ads included a BBC-like English reporter walking in the desert with a camel, saying that camels are all that Israelis and their military use; a French newscaster reporting on violence and gunfire while parade and celebration footage plays in the background, a Spanish reporter presenting barbecues as the primitive and only way of cooking Israelis have. (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018)
3.2.2. Estonia

Ojars Kalnins, the former head of the Latvian Institute said in an interview with Papp-Váry that Baltic states had three main stages to their country branding since the early 1990s. He described the three stages as “we are here” – the introduction to Europe and the world, “we are normal” – we’re just like everyone else, and “we are special” – here are our unique qualities (Papp-Váry, 2005).

To begin Estonia’s nation brand building – which many argue was triggered because of the impending Eurovision Song Contest to be organized by the country – the Estonian investment promotion agency, Enterprise Estonia announced a tender to brand the country. A British consulting company, Interbrand won the tender. Their main objective was to “help Estonia overcome the ‘accident of history’ that had placed the country in the East, rather than the West in the minds of its interlocutors” (Papp-Váry, 2018, p. 96) (Jansen, 2008).

But, as Papp-Váry writes, Interbrand didn’t only have the task of branding Estonia for the Eurovision Song Contest. The project launched in 2001-2002 was also expected to promote the Republic of Estonia in the world. Some of the project’s objectives were to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI), to appeal as a tourist destination to larger markets, not just Sweden and Finland, while also setting out to broaden its European market for exports. It also aimed to promote Estonia’s EU and NATO accession (Papp-Váry, 2018) (Dinnie, 2008, p. 230).

Similarly to Israel, though for different reasons, Estonia was also in the lucky position of having a ‘clean slate’, meaning that it had the chance to make a first impression, since the name ‘Estonia’ was at the time unfamiliar to millions of European businesspeople and tourists. He added that without “brand recognition”, the 1.4 million-strong Estonia wouldn’t have been able to reach such a wide audience to then attempt to leave a positive impression (Dinnie, 2008, p. 231).

The project first started with a rigorous 6-month brand-development process to understand what people think of Estonia, and to then set what they wanted the country to be seen as in the future. During this phase, researchers held numerous interviews with opinion-leaders, politicians, entrepreneurs, journalists, Estonian and non-Estonian businesspeople, tourists, investors, importers, artists, designers, marketing professionals and researchers and organized public panels and conferences on Estonia’s national image.
From all that, the Brand Estonia strategy and the brand’s core messages were developed. Figure 4 shown below summarizes the result of the project (Dinnie, 2008).

Interbrand concluded that the essence of all of these interviews, and the slogan they would use was “positively transforming”, and also came up with 5 narratives, each telling a story about what Estonian people are like (Aronczyk, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estonia narratives</th>
<th>Target audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A fresh perspective</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A radical, reforming and transforming attitude</td>
<td>Export</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Nordic temperament and environment</td>
<td>Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A resourceful self-starter by nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A European society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 Estonia's Brand Model according to Keith Dinnie (Dinnie, 2008, p. 233)

The first narrative, “A fresh perspective” aimed to point out the “surprising” elements of Estonia’s culture and landscape. Keywords attached to it were “inexpensive”, “no establishment”, and “unbureaucratic”, among others. The second narrative, “a radical, reforming and transforming attitude” wanted to emphasize the Estonians’ entrepreneurial potential, comparing it with Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, claiming that Estonia “offers one of the freest market economies in Europe.” The third narrative, “A Nordic Temperament and Environment”, expressed that Estonians identified more with Nordic “innate tendencies toward honesty, transparency, soft-spokenness and reserve”. The fourth narrative was “a resourceful self-starter by nature”, focusing on Estonians’ education, skills and motivation, with keywords such as “pragmatic”, “EU front runner” and “survivors”. The last narrative, “A European society”, emphasizing the preservation of the Estonian language and folk culture, with keywords like “stable”, “safe” and “peaceful” (Aronczyk, 2013, pp. 141-143).

Unfortunately, due to criticism and a change of government in 2002, cooperation with Interbrand ended soon after (Papp-Váry, 2018).
But this first phase of the nation-branding strategy, dubbed “Positively Transforming” continued. Pawłusz and Polese wrote that later, before Estonia’s accession to the EU in 2004, a campaign was launched that aimed to introduce Estonia to the world with the slogan “Welcome to Estonia”. A following campaign, in 2008, was titled “Estonia: Positively Surprising”. But the main marketing campaign for Brand Estonia stayed the same throughout the phases: “Introduce Estonia” (Pawłusz & Polese, 2017, p. 877).

One of the slogans used in the campaigns was “Estonia: the best kept secret in Scandinavia”, clearly positioning the country to the West and alluding to how its break with Scandinavia was only temporary and caused by the Soviet Union.

Like Israel, Estonia also has a guide for its citizens who wish to participate in spreading brand Estonia. The country brand platform, brand.estonia.ee collects visual guides such as font, design and colors, talking points and key words expressing the essence of Estonia, statistics that help people prove that they don’t just claim to have a clean environment and to be a digital society – they actually are, and even wordplays on Estonia that can be used as a way to draw attention. The difference from Israel’s guidebooks is, however, as Papp-Váry writes, that it aims to be a guide for anyone who wishes to participate and doesn’t force the tools or their use (Papp-Váry, 2018, pp. 105-109).

3.3. Substance

For the second criterium, I looked for measures that supported the identity chosen by the state and their objectives. For both cases, this often meant that the countries made changes that supported technological innovation. I also listed examples that showed when the substance, or the measures made, didn’t support the country’s strategy.

3.3.1. Israel

To understand Israel’s hasbara, I researched its history and measures and policies made by the government that can be seen as ‘living the image’ or, in other words, policies that aligned with what it wishes to portray or had an effect on how the world sees Israel.

David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948 and it was then recognized by US President Harry Truman that same day as a new nation (Office of the Historian, 2019).

Israel maintained a positive image and reputation abroad from 1948 to 1967 and during constructive negotiations in the Arab-Israeli conflict, such as the Israeli-Egyptian Peace
Process and the Oslo negotiations. During the Gulf War in 1991, Israel didn’t retaliate following Iraqi missile attacks, which brought about sympathy towards it in the international community (Gilboa, 2006).

However, after Israel’s many victories in its conflicts and wars, the two Palestinian Intifadas from 1987 to 1993 and 2000 to 2005 brought with them the decline of Israel’s international reputation. As Gilboa wrote, Israel’s reputation dramatically worsened especially after the second Intifada - also called the Palestinian-Israeli War (PIW) – that started in 2000 (Gilboa, 2006). Other measures that brought international criticism upon the country include the two wars in Lebanon from 1982 to 1985 and in 2006, the occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967, the isolation of the Gaza Strip, building the ‘Peace Wall’ and continuous construction of illegal settlements on the ‘West Bank’ (Dart, 2016).

More recently, however, Israel’s economy has changed for the better, especially its IT sector. According to the Global Innovation Index, Israel is 11th out of the 126 countries ranked in 2018 (Global Innovation Index, 2018). The UNESCO Science Report published in 2015 (UNESCO, 2015) wrote that the medium- and high-tech sectors are the main growth engine of Israel’s industry and contribute to 46% of Israel’s exports. According to the report, that sector is dominated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) and high-tech services (UNESCO, 2015, p. 409). They wrote that despite some drop in R&D spending in 2010, Israel maintained its place as world leader for R&D intensity in 2015.

Ongoing state funding programs managed by the Israeli Ministry of Economy in 2015 included the Research and Development Fund, Magnet Tracks, Tnufa and the Incubator Program with new programs like the Cyber – Kidma program, Cleantech and Biotechnology programs (UNESCO, 2015, p. 420).

Nexten.io ranked Tel Aviv as the 4th most attractive city for developers in 2018, after Seattle, Boston and San Francisco, with New York following closely behind, taking into consideration gross and net salaries, cost of living and rent prices (Nexten.io, 2018). They also reported that Israel has over 300 multinational R&D centers, though Tel Aviv was only 13th in the ranking by number of startups. According to Daxx.com, the website of a developer outsourcing company, in a rank of average software developer salaries in the world, Israel was 5th in February of 2019 (Daxx Team, 2019).
The Global Startup Ecosystem Report of 2018 wrote that Jerusalem is also a tech-hub, and it “thrives on close collaboration between leading academic institutions and the innovation community”, specifying that Jerusalem’s sub-sector strengths lie in health and life sciences, AI, big data and analytics (Startup Genome, 2018, p. 174).

The United States Government website on investment climates in different countries reports that the process needed to register a business in Israel is fairly straightforward, with 4 main steps and an average of 12 days to complete the registration, costing about US$1000 depending on the attorney and legal fees (U.S. Department of State, 2018) (Ministry of Economy And Industry, State of Israel, 2019).

But the economic and social changes listed here mostly only affect the ‘start-up nation’ identity marker, since there haven’t been as significant strides in bettering Israel’s democracy, its Jewish statehood, or its role as a security provider.

3.3.2. Estonia

In this subsection, I gathered examples of substance that show that Estonia was actively working to “live” the image, by introducing policies or programs aimed to improve the nation along its pre-set identity markers.

An essential foundation for Estonia’s major nation branding project was that the country had consciously been heading on a path to computerization since it regained its independence in 1991. Papp-Váry explained that in an attempt to help Estonia stand on its feet after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Western countries donated computers. In 1996, the government launched the “Tiger Leap” project, aiming to concentrate on and prioritize the development of the IT infrastructure and to provide all public schools with computers (Kimmo, Pappel, & Draheim, 2018).

Another important building block was in 1997, when Estonia set out to build up its e-governance system. According to Papp-Váry, it was easier for the Estonians to build up banking systems and public administration without having an old, paper-based system to replace. Starting fresh in 1991 meant that they could use the newest technology to create the most state-of-the-art systems. The government’s objective was not only to develop technologically, but also to create a citizen-friendly, service-providing state (Papp-Váry, 2018).
In a very short period of time, by 1998, Estonia connected all public schools to the internet and ensured IT education was available. Schools were kept open after school hours so everyone who wanted to could use the internet, and the objective was to make it easily accessible and used by as many as possible (Goede, 2019).

Estonians dared to dream big. Already in the early 2000s, a tech-enthusiast called Veljo Haamer envisioned internet access as a right for everyone. Thanks to his efforts, Estonia soon had wireless internet access points covering almost all of the country, and many of them were free (Basu, 2008) (Boyd, 2004). Also in 2000, Estonia launched the e-Tax system, and in 2001, the government’s X-Road data platform. In this system, data is not stored centrally, in one place, which would put it at a greater risk. Data is stored locally at banks, medical offices, universities – in altogether more than 360 databases that are all linked (Goede, 2019). When data is needed somewhere, it is transported to the authorized viewer through an encrypted channel. Citizens own all data recorded of them, and what’s more, the system records and reports whenever anyone views their data (Heller, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, Aronczyk wrote that Estonia was often called the “model pupil” of EU candidates for membership in 2002 because of its quick introduction of political, technological and monetary reform (Aronczyk, 2013).

Where other countries would have paused to give time to citizens to get used to all the new technology, Estonia kept going. They launched the Digital IDs, ‘ID-Kaart’ in 2002. They are since compulsory for every citizen above the age of 15. It is an identity card, an address card, an EU passport, a health insurance card, a tax card, ID for bank transactions, digital signature, a ticket or pass in Tallinn and Tartu, a parking ticket, and access to government systems all in one (Heller, 2017).

With this ID card, the online voting system was instated in 2005, called ‘i-Voting’ (e-estonia, 2019). Before 2005, only 5000 people had used their card at all, but more than 9 thousand citizens cast their ballot via i-vote at the 2005 elections. By 2014, a third of votes were cast online (Heller, 2017). In 2017, 31.7% of voters voted online, and tendency showed that once someone tries online voting, they don’t go back to traditional offline voting (Goede, 2019).

Among the services offered is also the 3-5-minute tax filing system online, and the e-healthcare system, where citizens and their physicians can manage and view their medical history, including test results, x-rays, previous prescriptions, etc. (Papp-Váry, 2018). By
2019, the system has expanded to offer over 2000 different e-services, with 500 different organizations who have integrated their systems into X-Road (Goede, 2019).

Estonia next faced a completely new challenge. In April 2007, the country was attacked by a rogue computer network called botnet. It attacked all the essential electronic infrastructure of the country; all major banks, telephone companies, media outlets and name servers, threatening the national security of the entire nation. Several newspaper sites were down because of automated comments being spammed continuously and ping attacks that were launched at websites by the thousands each second, and ATM machines were also affected. Computers around the world were hacked to launch DDoS or distributed denial of service attacks together (Davis, 2007).

Instead of letting the attackers get the best of them, Estonia stepped up their game. In response, the country started using Blockchain technology to encrypt data stored in government repositories. Estonia also became host to NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence, a think tank and training facility (e-estonia, n.d.).

In addition, to reinforce their defenses against such attacks, Estonia started plans to create the world’s first Data Embassy in Luxembourg at the data center in Betzdorf, ensuring that in the case of attacks or data loss, everything (including archives, correspondence, documents, manuscripts, photographs, films, recordings and data on computers) can be recalled from backup servers. The European Commission and NATO also use the same data center (Tambur, 2017) (Mercier & Bauldry, 2018).

But, like every developed country, Estonia faced demographic issues as well. As a solution to the diminishing population and decreasing birth rate, Estonia announced its e-residency program in 2014. It allows foreign citizens who wish to start businesses in Estonia (usually motivated by its favorable taxes and legislation) to apply for Estonian residency without ever visiting the country, online. Anyone who fills out the necessary forms then has to pick up their credentials at the nearest foreign representation of Estonia. With this possibility, Estonia hopes to increase its population by more than 600% in the next decade, attracting anyone looking to invest in Estonia, start businesses there, or use it as a portal to the European Union. It is important to note however that E-residency does not grant the right to live in Estonia, enter the country, or use the ID card as a travel document (Goede, 2019).
Estonia announced the introduction of the first digital currency of a country, to be called ‘estcoin’, in August 2017. According to Papp-Váry, the timing of this and several other technological advancement announcements was important because Estonia paided great attention to announce them while they were performing their EU Council Presidency (Papp-Váry, 2018), making them excellent symbolic actions.

By today, 99% of all government services are available online in Estonia today, and the only reason that isn’t 100% is because the government wants citizens to marry, divorce and buy and sell property in person (Tham, 2018).

For the comfort of their citizens, the ‘Once Only’ policy the government adheres to means that no matter the service Estonians are using, they should only ever have to enter a given piece of information once. The country has also become known for its lowest business-tax rates in the EU, for being a welcoming soil for start-ups and for its legislation that promotes innovation such as the testing of autonomous vehicles (Heller, 2017).

Estonia uses all of these measures as substance to back up the image they are trying to portray, E-Estonia. There is a saying that good wine needs no bush, which means that if a product is good, then it doesn’t need to be advertised. Estonia is certainly working to ensure that their product is good, but they also promote it. Government agencies and programs actively work to promote their services to investors, students, entrepreneurs and other even other governments who may profit from using similar systems (Kimmo, Pappel, & Draheim, 2018).

3.4. Symbolic actions

3.4.1. Israel

In this section, I looked for symbolic actions that were newsworthy and ensured that Israel was talked about in the world in a light that it had aimed for.

Newsworthy actions about Israel that have gained most traction have often been about its conflict with Palestine, about the United States recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and its recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli-controlled territory (Reuters, 2019). The objectively ‘good’ symbolic actions, such as the use of Israeli technology being used to provide drinking water to Sierra Leone children to name an example (Deane, 2019), didn’t receive as much coverage.
The country’s recently re-elected President, Benjamin Netanyahu appeared in the news before the elections, because Israel’s Attorney General has signaled his wish to indict him on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust, for having received high value benefits and expensive gifts, for attempting to sway news coverage of in favor of himself (BBC News, 2019). Though the allegations didn’t cost Netanyahu the election, it was not a positive *symbolic action* for the country’s image.

3.4.2. Estonia

To start their introduction to the world, the first appearance of public diplomacy in Estonia was when the government established the agency Enterprise Estonia in 2000 to promote Estonia for foreign investors. However, Estonia’s since infamous story of nation branding truly began in 2001, when its delegate to the Eurovision Song Contest won the competition, and thus Estonia automatically became the next in line to organize the competition the following year. Aronczyk wrote that hosting Eurovision in 2002 was the perfect way to announce its presence to everyone (Aronczyk, 2013).

Estonia’s national song festival symbolizes to many the continuity and culture of Estonia, since singing reminds many of the ‘Singing Revolution’ of the 1980s and civic mobilization against the Soviet regime. In a survey by the Estonian Song and Dance Celebration Foundation, 96% of people asked said that the festival is an important national event. Pawluszy and Polese argued that the notion of Estonia as a ‘singing nation’ brings citizens together to rally behind a more cohesive national image that is accepting of all kinds of Estonians (Pawluszy & Polese, 2017).

Estonia’s airport in Tallinn was also made part of the brand campaign, where Enterprise Estonia first only added Estonian folk patterns and tree branch elements to furniture at one gate. When Estonians loved it, management decided to remodel the whole airport, envisioning a small, cozy and welcoming space (Pawluszy & Polese, 2017).

As mentioned previously, during Estonia’s EU Presidency in 2017 (EU2017.EE, 2017), the country’s leadership payed special attention to make announcements for new policies and programs encouraging technological and other advancements so that it would receive more attention while they were in the center stage. This was the period when they announced that they would be creating an ‘ultimate backup’ in Luxembourg (Teffer, 2017), held a digital summit (Herszenhorn & Plucinska, 2017), announced that they would launch the first government-backed cryptocurrency (Sundararajan, 2017) and held
the world’s largest cyber defense exercise (NATO, 2017). Of course, these are only a few examples, but this was a very good strategy to ensure that symbolic actions they took received as much news coverage as possible.

3.5. Evaluation

In this chapter, I examined the information gathered into categories based on Simon Anholt’s three criteria for successful public diplomacy and determined whether they were effective.

3.5.1. Strategy

Israel

Regarding the first criteria, strategy, I examined Israel’s self-image and compared it to what I learned about its image as perceived abroad. Anholt says that successful strategy can be seen when country has more or less of a consensus on who they are, what their goals are, and understand their standing in the world compared to that.

Even without questioning the validity of the identity markers described by Lipovici and Aouragh: Jewish, democratic, security provider and start-up nation, or whether they are more or less unanimously agreed on among Israelis, Adler-Nissen and Tsinovoi pointed out that there are some incompatibility issues between them. For example, to a citizen, looking to their country as a security provider usually means that the government and/or the army protects the country inside its borders and from outside. However, as they argued, in Israel’s case, the borders are often unclear because of the inclusion of Jews around the world and the frequent exclusion of non-Jews in Israel. Furthermore, being a Jewish state may not be completely compatible with being a democratic state, since its democracy can be questioned abroad due to the Arab minority’s situation and often lesser rights and Israel’s policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Adler-Nissen & Tsinovoi, 2018, p. 15).

Israel’s democratic identity marker is continuously questioned even today, since Benjamin Netanyahu promised during his election campaign in 2019 that if he was elected, he would annex the West Bank. In the New York Times podcast, The Daily, the host Michael Barbaro pointed out that U.S. President Donald Trump’s support of, or lacking denouncement of Netanyahu’s unilateral decisions to annex territory only encourages the Israeli Prime Minister to continue, and ensures him that there won’t be
international repercussions if he makes the step (Israel’s Election, Through the Eyes of a Young Palestinian, 2019).

Furthermore, Israel’s identity marker of being a Jewish state could also soon be questioned, since the OECD’s 2018 economic survey of Israel forecasted that by 2060, Israeli-Arabs and Haredim will make up half of the country’s population (OECD, 2018). At that point, Israel may have to rethink its self-definition.

Through my research I’ve concluded that despite Israeli citizens and the government having a good idea of who they are and where they stand, their impression of others’ opinion of them is often distorted, or they could even be distorting it deliberately. I heard an example of that in a podcast episode by The Strong Women’s Club with Joanna Landau, the founder of Vibe Israel, a not-for-profit organization that works to change the international discourse on Israel. In it, Landau automatically categorizes criticism and negative feedback of Israel as “anti-Israel” (The Strong Women’s Club Podcast, 2016). Others, like a researcher mentioned previously, Eytan Gilboa also frame criticism as an attack on the country’s being as a state (Gilboa, Public Diplomacy: the missing component in Israel's foreign policy, 2006).

Additionally, though most of the world’s countries recognize Israel de jure, many vocal Israelis concentrate rather on those who don’t, and the fact that Jerusalem is not recognized as its capital. Though the Israeli argument that the UN has made many resolutions unfavorable to them (such as placing the whole city of Jerusalem under international control on December 13th, 1949, to name one) is well-founded, it is my impression that the writers making the argument usually don’t go on to look at the reasons behind a policy not being taken well internationally, as seen in Samuelson’s 2016 Time article “Why Jerusalem Isn't Recognized as Israel's Capital” (Samuelson, 2016).

These examples lead me to believe that the unfortunate situation Israel is in - that the legitimacy of its statehood is still questioned by some countries to this day - may cloud the country’s ability to recognize fair criticism and thus opt for improvement.

This is a common theme ascertained by several academic journal articles on Israel’s image abroad. The institutions of Hasbara admittedly aim to shift conversations towards the positive aspects of the country instead of improving or correcting what there is to say about it, and many not-for-profit organizations also work to shift the conversation. Such attempts to change the dialogue often wish to guide conversations to non-politicized
topics such as education, family life, geography, tourism, business, and other areas of life in Israel, as mentioned previously.

The funding of and the number of people actively working on Israel’s Hasbara policy is greater than even that of some large countries. But even so, volunteers, the diaspora and pro-Israel lobbyists have not been enough to maintain a positive image.

Different scholars see the problem very differently. According to some, such as Gilboa, not enough money and attention is turned to public diplomacy. Others, such as Hadari and Turgeman, claim that there is a lot of funding and attention poured into public diplomacy in Israel, but the institutional limitations are hindering its success (Gilboa, 2006) (Hadari & Turgeman, 2018).

They write that the bureaucratic politics model explains best what has happened is Israel: public diplomacy responsibilities are scattered among several institutions without adequate coordination and cooperation, and when a new institution is created to be solely responsible and in charge of coordination, the original institutions often don’t want to give up their tasks, and competition emerges among branches of the government (Hadari & Turgeman, 2018).

Hadari and Turgeman also explained that the high turnover of ministers and government officials hinders the government in “implementing public policy systematically and consistently”. They wrote that there is a cultural acceptance of improvisation and planning only for the short-term and that because of that, the “inability to implement long-term plans derives both from bureaucratic inefficiency and governmental instability” (Hadari & Turgeman, 2018).

The Molad thinktank also called attention to the so-called “hasbara problem”, that some academics (such as the Israeli researcher and professor, Eytan Gilboa, who I found during my research fit into this category) chalk up Israel’s declining international image to faulty hasbara, when in reality – the think-tank claims – this is just an easy excuse, and that the issue lies with failing Israeli defense and foreign policy (dr. Shivi, 2012).

Simon Anholt, who represents the standpoint that the basis for good public diplomacy is good policies, would probably agree with the Molad thinktank. Referring to Israel’s image regarding non-political areas of life, he argued that “the political aspects of the country’s image appeared to be contaminating perceptions of other areas of national
interest, which, in theory, should be entirely unrelated.” (Anholt, Places, 2010, p. 60), which could explain why simply shifting the discussion on Israel to more positive or neutral topics such as culture, tourism, gastronomy, education, etc. would not necessarily solve the country’s image issues.

Anholt also wrote that “countries are judged by what they do, not by what they say” and that sometimes small, but good policies go unnoticed for countries with a bad standing image. He recommended a systemic, sustained change of political, social, economic and cultural direction (Anholt, Places, 2010).

Thus, based on Anholt’s first criteria for successful public diplomacy, strategy, I propose that Israel may need to reassess its self-image and how it thinks other countries and citizens around the world perceive it, and create a strategy that corrects criticized parts of that image instead of trying to divert attention away from them.

Estonia

An important part of creating brand ‘Estonia’ is cooperation with citizens and making sure that they also agree and want to stand behind the image that the government wishes to promote. Papp-Váry wrote that Estonia is skillfully balancing its domestic promotion of the country brand without it turning to propaganda similar to that of the Communist era (Papp-Váry, 2018).

He described the government’s digital country brand platform, brand.estonia.ee as “an excellent example of how to build a country brand involving local citizens facilitating uniform communications” (Papp-Váry, 2018, p. 105).

Moilanen and Rainisto argued that the early campaign was confusing. In their book titled “How to Brand Nations, Cities and Destinations”, they wrote that the sudden change from the original “Positively Transforming” slogan to “Welcome to Estonia” in 2002 caused confusion. They added that building the brand strategy cost €660,000 altogether and the launch operations for the Eurovision Song Contest cost €200,000 (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009, p. 66).

To create a good strategy, Anholt wrote that a country’s leadership must either organize or hire a company to carry out surveys to tackle the hardest part of finding the essence of a country, reconciling “the needs and desires of a wide range of different national actors into a more or less single direction, and find a strategic goal that is both inspiring and
feasible” (Anholt, Places, 2010, p. 13). Estonia was able to create a strategy for itself by consulting many different groups of society and condensing their findings.

I also looked for ranking data about brand Estonia. In Futurebrand’s Country Brand Index report of 2009, Estonia ranked 90th of the 110 countries measures, stepping up to 89th in 2010 (Futurebrand, 2010, p. 45).

In the same report in 2014-15, Estonia ranked 47th in its regional comparison in Europe and also 47th in its overall comparison of 75 countries. The report concluded that Estonia was below the threshold of scoring for both ‘Status’ and ‘Experience’ countries in 2014-15, meaning that it did not yet qualify as a ‘country brand’ according to their definition (Futurebrand, 2014, p. 36).

Brand Finance wrote in 2017 in their nation brand ranking that Estonia ranked #8 among ‘Best Performing Nation Brands’, reporting that it rose from 90th place in 2016 to 87th in 2017 and valuing Estonia’s Nation Brand at 28 billion USD (Brand Finance, 2017, pp. 16-17). In 2018, Estonia sank to #10 in the ‘Best Performing Nation Brands’ category, but moved up to 83rd place, with its nation brand valued at 35 billion USD (Brand Finance, 2018, pp. 14-15).

This shows that Estonia’s nation brand has improved greatly, though it still has room for improvement.

3.5.2. Substance

Israel

Regarding Anholt’s second criteria, substance, I looked at the positive measures that support development made by Israel since 2006.

It is clear that Israel has strived to support technological development, scientific research and start-ups, proving their claim of being a start-up nation. Yet, the gradual change of the country’s population, which questions their identity marker of being a Jewish state; the still existing inequalities between non-Jewish minorities and Jewish citizens that questions their identity marker of being a democracy, and their ongoing conflict with Palestine, which questions their identity marker of being a security provider weakens the other three identity markers of their self-defined image.

Further worsening the situation, negative news and criticism often receive more coverage and “outshine” the commendable policies. As a consequence, while the Israeli-Palestinian
conflict is ongoing, too much of the *substance* of Israel’s policies and measures impact the nation brand negatively, and Israel’s national image cannot be completely restored until the conflict is resolved.

However, recent data shows some improvement. According to Futurebrand, a company that has carried out the Country Brand Index survey every year for more than two decades now, in which they measure the perception of 118 countries in order to tell how likely people are to visit, recommend and do business with each country (Futurebrand, 2019), Israel was ranked 41st in 2009, 30th in 2010 among the countries measured (Futurebrand, 2010) (with it hardly ever appearing in the yearly reports before that) and 26th in its 2014-15 report (Futurebrand, 2014). That either means that perceptions of the countries that were previously ranked before it worsened, or that Israel’s international image improved. In the 2014-15 report, Futurebrand reported that respondents said that Israel was one of the countries “most likely to be moving forwards” in three years’ time, also noting that it has “a strong perception around ‘Business Potential’ and is seen to have momentum in innovation, energy and technology” (Futurebrand, 2014, p. 49). This shows that Israel’s Hasbara 2.0 policy has had some success more recently in communicating its role as ‘Start-up nation’.

It was also written in the 2014-15 report that not all countries qualify as brands in the minds of the average global citizen. They explained that some countries are more known as ‘Status countries’, recognized for their value system, their quality of life and their business potential, and countries can also be perceived as “Experience countries”, where visitors go for heritage & culture, tourism and for its high quality, unique products. Futurebrand concluded that Israel was just above the threshold for both, and thus qualified as a country brand according to this definition (Futurebrand, 2014, p. 36).

A different Nation Brand rating by Brand Finance reported in 2017 that Israel ranked 41st out of a hundred countries, coming up from 42nd a year earlier, valuing their nation brand at 224 billion USD (Brand Finance, 2017, p. 16). In 2018, Israel moved back down to 42nd place, but their brand value increased to 248 billion USD (Brand Finance, 2018, p. 14).

Estonia

Authors such as Jansen argue that Estonia’s improving image and increasing GDP is not thanks to its public diplomacy strategy. In her article titled “Neo-liberal nation branding
– Brand Estonia” she wrote that the causes of Estonia’s rise were the drastic changes it made to its economy and the ‘shock therapy’ for socialism applied by Prime Minister Mart Laar. Jansen wrote that “nations like Estonia are pressured to participate or face futures of economic and political marginality and cultural invisibility”, explaining that once everyone is nation branding, other countries are pressured to follow so they aren’t left out. She concluded that “there is no hard evidence that [the Estonian branding initiative] contributed to Estonia’s economic expansion” (Jansen, 2008, p. 130).

Jansen went further to say that place branding is a “successful mechanism for transferring public funds and authority into private hands” and has contributed to the advancement of market fundamentalism and that its “feel-good illusions” cover up that it is in fact a burden and harms the public sphere (Jansen, 2008, p. 132).

In contrast, Kimmo, Pappel and Draheim wrote that though the e-residency program hasn’t yet reached its goal of creating a borderless digital nation, “it can be seen as successful in promoting Estonian values in creating hassle-free public services and developing ICT in the country” (Kimmo, Pappel, & Draheim, 2018, p. 427).

All of the steps Estonia’s government has made towards e-Estonia can be regarded as substance and symbolic actions. Regarding substance, something Anholt writes should use the previously created strategy and build upon it with different policies and measures, I found that Estonia has touched upon all of its identity markers (unbureaucratic, radical reforming attitude, Nordic temperament, resourceful self-starter, a member of European society) with policies it has made in the past decades. This confirms that it’s not just citizens who are living this image, the government is also working to achieve it, and this shows a more congruent image of the country.

3.5.3. Symbolic actions

To see what kind of coverage symbolic actions made by these countries received, I wanted to seek out objective, empirical data in order to ensure that my own bias wouldn’t influence my evaluation of news coverage of the two countries.
To do so, I analyzed event data that I filtered and exported from the Global Database of events, Language and Tone (or GDELT for short) on the two countries from 2010 to 2015\(^4\).

Israel

To see whether verbal interactions covered by news articles were more often cooperation or confrontational, I narrowed my search to events covered by the media that were either verbal confrontation or verbal cooperation\(^5\) between any country and Israel, with Israel as the subject\(^6\). GDELT listed 51,272 matches for that timeframe (GDELT Project, 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of verbal confrontations</th>
<th>Number of all verbal interactions</th>
<th>Confrontations as a % of all verbal interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>7319</td>
<td>10.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>6254</td>
<td>15.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1057</td>
<td>8170</td>
<td>12.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>7993</td>
<td>9.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1646</td>
<td>10336</td>
<td>15.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>11200</td>
<td>16.38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Figure 4} The number of verbal confrontations as a percentage of all verbal interactions by governments towards Israel’s government, year-by-year from 2010 to 2015.

The table above shows that a relatively high percentage of all verbal interactions covered by the media between any country and Israel, Israel being the target, were confrontational, and this only increased as time progressed, with only a slight drop in 2013.

Next, I used the ‘AvgTone’ attribute that, according to GDELT’s website, averages the tone of all documents with one or more mention of a given event. The score ranges from -100 which is extremely negative to 100, which is extremely positive, with 0 being neutral, but usually only returns values around -20 and 20 (GDELT Project, 2015, p. 5).

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\(^4\) The event data was exported from GDELT’s ‘Event Record Exporter’ (GDELT Project, 2019). Since the GDELT Analysis service is only capable of listing 10,000 results at once, I had to limit my search somehow. I decided to filter for intergovernmental interactions aimed at the case studies’ governments, because that reflects other countries’ and governments perception of the case study at hand more than interactions initiated by them. Also, for a foreign citizen, interactions with a given country initiated by their government are important enough that they may even read about it, see it on television, and be influenced by it. I also decided to filter my search for verbal interactions, leaving the material interactions out, since I was looking for peaceful interactions.

\(^5\) GDELT based its four categories of interactions between actors (verbal cooperation, material cooperation, verbal conflict, material conflict) on the CAMEO event taxonomy (Schrodt, 2012, pp. 131-138) that specifies over 300 specific categorizations of events. They chose to give the option of filtering on the four large categories to simplify the search (GDELT Project, 2015, p. 4).
This figure created from the data that the GDELT database shows that coverage of events targeting Israel between 2010-2015 became slightly more critical and negative as time progressed. The graph shows a drop below 0, which is neutral coverage on average, from the beginning of 2015.

I tried to find an event that could have caused the negative coverage. The only reasonable one I found that was significant enough was that in December 2014, the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset voted to dissolve itself and have an early election because of a difficult coalition (Staff, 2014). Even a small uncertainty such as the period until March 17th, when the new elections were to be held could cause a greater wave of negative coverage of events. But I cannot be sure that that’s what caused the shift towards more negative tone coverage from 2015.

Though it is difficult to make conclusions from such a small slice of data (comparison to other, better standing countries in this timeframe would have also been useful to see), the verbal interactions and their average tone show that Israel has room to improve its nation brand, especially from 2015 on.
I analyzed the GDELT data on intergovernmental verbal interactions aimed at Estonia using the same method as with Israel, in order to see whether the changes in tone reflected my findings and understanding of the case.

When downloading the data on intergovernmental verbal interactions towards Estonia’s government, I saw that Estonia had much less results overall than my other case study. While Israel had 51,272 results for the five-year timespan, Estonia only had 1799.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of verbal confrontations</th>
<th>Number of all verbal interactions</th>
<th>Confrontations as a % of all verbal interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>1.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>7.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>4.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>2.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>8.52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6 The number of verbal confrontations as a percentage of all verbal interactions by governments towards Estonia’s government, year-by-year from 2010 to 2015.*

The table above shows that Estonia has much fewer coverage of verbal confrontations than my other case study, but also had much less coverage of government interactions overall. Still, the ratio of verbal confrontation to verbal cooperation was much lower than for Israel.

To better compare the two case studies’ verbal confrontation to verbal cooperation ratio, I also plotted the percentage of confrontative interactions towards both countries on the same graph.
The table above shows the difference much more clearly: governments interacting with Estonia’s government in non-material ways from 2010 to 2015 had a much lower percentage of confrontational interactions than governments interacting with the Israeli government during that same timeframe.

I also noticed the tendency of more coverage and more articles online as time progresses, which is true globally, not just for Israel and Estonia, especially since GDELT analyzes internet-based news coverage. Nonetheless, using a percentage meant that the number of articles overall didn’t distort the ratios I calculated.

But the number of articles isn’t as important as what they were saying in any case, so I also created a graph mapping the average tones of the coverage of verbal interactions by foreign governments targeting the Estonian government between 2010-2015.
The average tone of coverage on verbal interactions by governments towards the Estonian government, 2010-2015

The main trendline is somewhat similar to Israel's. A possible reason for that is that it isn’t negativity or criticism of Israel and Estonia that increased, but rather that media became more negative worldwide. Estonia’s box-and-whisker chart shows a smaller variety of coverage. Most of the articles stay within a narrower range from most negative to most positive, which means that there was greater consensus among journalists reporting on the events. There was a slight increase of outlying opinions and coverage starting in 2015. However, Estonia shows a slight dip in coverage tone around May 2013.

Similarly to Israel’s drop in tone, I tried to find news events from around that time that could have caused the change in tone towards the negative.

News coverage from May 2013 connected to Estonia include its performances at the Eurovision Song Contest, a request from the European Union for it to take action on complying with EU regulation on renewables (European Commission, 2013), the capture of Hsien Tsai Tsai, alleged weapons supplier to North Korea, in Tallinn, Estonia (U.S. Attorney's Office, 2013), so some news coverage with negative undertones but still, nothing major for Estonia, so I was unable to identify the cause with great certainty.

In general, I attribute the significantly more positive coverage of Estonian interactions than Israeli ones to the absence of an armed conflict, and to policies listed in the previous chapters that construct a basis that Estonia is able to build its image on. Since it is a forerunner in many of the fields, especially e-democracy and technology, many of its actions were also noteworthy and newsworthy, a condition of good symbolic actions. This
means that the country not only had solid substance and measures that they can be proud of for making life easier for their citizens, but they were also interesting, at times shocking and novel enough that the rest of the world found it interesting, and so news sources reported on it.

3.5.4. Grading
As mentioned above, based on my findings, I wanted to grade the three countries in the criteria that I used by Anholt to analyze them. If I found that a country performed outstandingly well in effort and results within a criterion, I awarded 1 full point for that category. If the country has shown some effort, but is still lacking in some areas, I awarded 0,5 points. If they have not only failed in that category but have also not shown any attempts, or their attempts at working on that area clearly failed, then they receive 0 points for that criterion.

Israel
Israel’s Hasbara receives 0.5 points for strategy, since it has at least attempted to strategize and assess the country’s values and image and its place in the global community, but it has not been completely successful and might benefit from turning towards a new strategy. Hasbara receives 0.5 points for substance, since it has struggled to come up with measures and policies that can be used to show foreign audiences its development in 3 out of the 4 identity markers which it has used to define itself (security provider, Jewish state, democratic state), but it has made strides in positioning itself as a technology hub. For symbolic actions, it receives 0 points, since it has failed to bring about newsworthy events that can be reported on and shared around the world – or has failed to attract more attention to them than to its more criticized actions.

Based on Simon Anholt’s three criteria for successful public diplomacy, Hasbara received 1 out of the maximum 3 points. I conclude that it was not an effective policy, since Israel needs to concentrate on “making the wine better” or changing the substance instead of using its strategy to shift dialogue, and it also needs more positive symbolic actions, or fewer negative ones at least.

Estonia
Looking at the three criteria for grading, Estonia’s public diplomacy receives 1 point for strategy, since it actively worked together with and surveyed several opinion leaders,
politicians, different groups and layers of society to understand the essence of Estonia and where it stands in relation to its neighbors and other countries in the world. Its frequent changes in mottos may have been criticized, but it was able to create a strategy for going forward and an image that was widely agreed upon by its citizens and helped it develop.

Estonia’s public diplomacy receives 1 point for substance, since it has been actively working for decades now to better the lives of its citizens and to make its government more efficient, something that can be universally applauded. Even with minor setbacks, such as cyber-attacks or security issues, it has managed to keep its reputation as a digitally-forward nation that works to correct issues that come up along the way.

Regarding symbolic issues, it also receives 1 point. It has managed to be the first in several initiatives involving technology (e.g. online voting in national elections, citizens’ data stored using blockchain technology, the opening of a data Embassy abroad, etc.), making each announcement newsworthy in and of itself. As a journalist, I can tell that people want to hear about e-voting and self-driving cars, and Estonia has managed to draw international attention to its steps in these areas. It has successfully stayed away from armed or other type conflicts, ensuring that coverage of its positive symbolic actions isn’t dwarfed by the negative news stories.

Based on Simon Anholt’s three criteria for successful public diplomacy, I conclude that Estonia’s public diplomacy from after its regime change to today has been successful and has succeeded in realizing what it set out to do: shifting perception of Estonia from an Eastern, under-developed country to a Scandinavian, Nordic, Western tech-savvy country that is inviting to start-ups, entrepreneurs and innovative companies.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the two case studies examined in this thesis can offer small countries some examples of what to do and what not to do if they wish to improve their country’s international reputation or image.

Following Simon Anholt’s three criteria is a good basis for creating a nation branding strategy. To create an effective strategy, a good first step can be surveying a wide selection of citizens, opinion leaders, members of the elite and other groups to find out what being a national means to them, and what their country represents to them. Estonia checked that box and it was a great benefit to them later on, since they knew what the
strengths of the country were and what they could be proud of, using that to build their policies, measures and image upon it.

In Israel’s case, this was not carried out in such a clear and direct manner. Experts in nation branding determined the ‘essence of brand Israel’ but the dialogue with different layers of society was missing. This could be an explanation for the incompatibilities mentioned previously between the main identity markers of the state of Israel: a security provider, Jewish, democratic, and start-up nation. Israel’s ongoing conflict with the Palestinians also means that the idea of where the country stands internationally, and within its region is more unstable, differing depending on which group we ask in Israel.

Simon Anholt also recommends that governments work together with different layers of society later on as well, once the strategy has been created and it is in the phase of implementation. There is no documented proof I could find of continuing dialogue with citizens during the implementation of the strategy in either country.

For creating good substance, the criteria recommend that the strategy created in the first step be executed in the form of new economic, legal, political, social, cultural and educational activities, such as innovations, structures, legislation, reforms and investments (Anholt, 2010, p. 13). Israel has brought numerous measures favorable to small businesses, reinforcing their self-identity as a start-up nation, as mentioned in ‘Evaluation of Israel’s Hasbara policy” chapter. But they haven’t been able to bring about such impressive changes effecting the other three identity markers of their self-definition as a state (security provider, Jewish state, democratic state). For this reason, I argue that Israel was unable to generate enough substance to back up the strategy it created for itself.

Estonia defined itself as a country that has fresh perspective, no establishment, is unbureaucratic and transparent, has a radical reforming and transforming attitude, a Nordic temperament, is a resourceful self-starter by nature and a member of the European society. I argued that Estonia was able to create substance to back its strategy, and thanks to the novelty of many of the policies it launched (especially in the field of e-democracy and e-governing), it was also able to make its policies newsworthy, creating good symbolic actions to promote its development.

Based on my research, I determined that Israel was unable to produce enough symbolic actions to promote their country’s policies and keep themselves topical. It was able to position itself as a tech-hub but didn’t generate enough newsworthy stories to promote
that identity marker, and the other points of its identity were muddied by its presence in an ongoing armed conflict.

Regarding my research question, ‘what effective public diplomacy methods can small states use to be equally heard and noticed in the world?’, I believe I was able to gather the tools and steps that even small countries can use to be unique, noteworthy and be noticed in the world, and to join the ranks of larger or more powerful countries in reputation.

I believe my thesis achieved the goals it set out to do: to find good and bad practices small states can look to as tried methods and to understand what makes an effective nation image building strategy.

I first gathered the key concepts from the field of public diplomacy and country image building. While carrying out my literature review, I also got acquainted with the different schools and opinions that researchers and academics working in this field have of successful public diplomacy measures. I was able to understand the theory behind the practice and identify how countries have applied it.

By examining and evaluating two small states and their public diplomacy and branding practices, I was able to find the steps that are needed for success (e.g. cooperation, dialogue with and surveying of many different groups of the society) and the measures that should be avoided (e.g. trying to shift the dialogue instead of working on the actual substance).

One of the successes of my thesis was that I was able to find and apply a set of criteria by which to evaluate the effectiveness of nation brand building practices, something which is often difficult to evaluate or measure using quantitative methods. The use of the Anholt criteria proved to be a good choice. By using it, I was able to identify the erroneous steps and the parts of the strategies that led to their success.

Using Máté Szalai’s definition of small states to determine and choose my case studies was also a good choice, since this way, the best practices recommended for small states in this thesis aren’t something that may be out of reach to them for budgetary or influential reasons. Large countries may have a larger annual budget to spend on image building (easier to survey domestically and internationally, easier to hire experts, etc.) and may have other pre-existing cultural or economic advantages (e.g. Hollywood, Swiss banking...
system, etc.) that are more connected with their country’s image than their policies, for instance. Making sure that the case studies in this thesis were small states helped ensure that other small states can realistically aspire to follow in their footsteps.

Of course, the absence of major qualitative analysis weakens the findings of the thesis. Though I did use some empirical data when determining smallness and to evaluate the two countries’ image through news reports of their international interactions, more objective statistical data would have been a stronger argument for my evaluation when I determined whether a measure was effective or not. However, this, as I mentioned in the thesis, is very difficult. Looking at statistics such as tourism revenue, number of guest nights spent in the country, GDP growth, etc., cannot directly be proven to have been caused by public diplomacy measures. To further counterbalance that, I also included data from different country brand reports.

The review of the tone of news articles on international interactions, or symbolic actions directed towards Israel and Estonia could have been more extensive, but the sheer number of results the GDELT database returned reassured me that it’s a good foundation for statistical analysis.

If my research hadn’t been conducted for a master thesis and if I perhaps even had funding, a further step could have been to carry out surveying around the world at the different phases of the two countries’ public diplomacy measures, in order to determine how they were progressing in reaching their goals year-by-year.

I could have asked foreign audiences specific questions pertaining to the identity markers and the image the countries had set out to portray, which would have given me more information about the effectiveness of the countries’ strategies than the standardized global country image index I used. Perhaps I could have even conducted surveying with different social groups in order to determine whether their perception of their country was compatible with what their leadership had decided on.

If I were to go on with my research in the future, I would find it interesting to continue applying these criteria to the nation brand building strategies of other small states, and to gather more guidelines for other small states just setting out on the path of image building. I would very much be interested in creating a ‘small-state friendly guidebook to nation branding’ of some sort that would attend to the specific needs of small states such as budget limitations or missing strategy and self-identification.
I would also be very interested in studying *substance* and *symbolic actions* more, to understand how a country can effectively generate them, and how to incite as much media coverage of them as possible.

Finally, I would be honored if I could one day work on creating or maintaining the nation brand building strategy of my own small state of origin, Hungary.
5. Abstract
This thesis set out to find positive and negative examples of policies made by small states that aim to promote the country’s image abroad. The author argued that these countries may have a disadvantage compared to countries with larger country brand budgets and existing influence. Using Simon Anholt’s three criteria for a policy that successfully builds a country’s competitive identity, strategy, substance and symbolic actions, the author analyzed two case studies, Israel and Estonia. With the criteria, she was able to identify good and bad practices small states can use. Readers can find an analysis of Israel’s long-standing Hasbara policy and Estonia’s country branding policies, evaluated according to Anholt’s criteria, and a conclusion about what small states can look to as an example in the two country’s practices, as well as what they may want to avoid.

6. References
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6.2. Secondary Sources


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