

# **Bachelor's thesis**

Belgium as a victim or a culprit?

A comparative analysis of framing the 2016 Brussels bombings in  
Flemish and Dutch newspapers



# **Radboud University**

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## **Abstract**

In this dissertation, a cross-national analysis of framing the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 Brussels bombings in Dutch and Flemish national newspapers is presented. The purpose of the study was to investigate how Dutch and Flemish newspapers framed the bombings and explain how the differences in framing may relate to the different cultural contexts. Analyzing a corpus of 104 articles of Dutch and Flemish quality newspapers, it was found that Flemish newspapers opted for a more personal approach, bringing a human face to the issue and presenting Belgium as a victim. On the other hand, Dutch news texts reported the events emphasizing on conflicts, economics, safety measures, and political and international relations. While these results contrast with Hofstede's (1984) scores of these two countries on the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance, they are in line with Hall's (1976) context theory. By presenting these results, this research provides more empirical evidence for framing terrorism in European news texts and highlights that, although the same language in Flanders and the Netherlands, they are still considered to be two highly different socio-cultural contexts.

## **Introduction**

In the past two decades, the world has faced terrorism, and more specifically, public bombings or attacks plenty of times. Here, terrorism can be defined as “the unlawful use or threat of violence especially against the state or the public as a politically motivated means of attack or coercion” (Merriam-Webster Learner’s Dictionary, 2019), and will, in this dissertation, relate to public bombings or attacks for political or religious reasons.

Ranging from the 9/11 attacks in the United States to explosions at the Atocha train station in Madrid in 2004 and the multiple shootings that terrified Paris on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, all have been extensively covered in the media. The way news stories are presented often portray institutional and socio-cultural ideologies (Rafiee, Sanders, & Spooren, 2018), which calls for the need to examine news from a critical point of view. Therefore, the present study will analyze how Dutch and Flemish newspapers frame the bombings that took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium, which was the largest terrorist attacks that ever occurred in Belgian history.

In the early morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016, a bomb exploded in the departure terminal of Brussels Airport. A few seconds later, a second bomb went off on the other side of the building, and a third one was left behind at the airport; it did not go off and was found by the Belgian police later that day. Then, just one hour after the bombings at Brussels Airport, another bomb blew up in a metro in the center of Brussels. During these terrorist attacks, 32 people were killed and more than 270 people were injured. The Belgian Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office later confirmed that the perpetrators were Syrian suicide bombers and that the Salafi jihadist militant group Islamic State had claimed the attacks in Brussels.

With another major terrorist attack happening in Europe, many articles were released by newspapers in the week of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016, covering what had occurred. Since many newspapers that range from several socio-cultural contexts reported the same event, it is likely that the bombings were framed differently per newspaper. A recurring topic in the articles was the blaming of the Belgian Security Services by political leaders from other countries, saying that the existing threat could have been handled better and the bombings could have been prevented if there had been better cooperation and an enhanced security system. This provides a suitable example for the current framing analysis since it allows to compare articles in Dutch and Flemish newspapers that cover the same topic.

Analyzing framing practices in newspapers from the Netherlands and Flanders is particularly interesting because these are two distinct socio-cultural contexts that share the

same language. Differences in Flemish and Dutch news texts can thus not be attributed to language, but possibly to other cultural aspects. By this cross-national analysis of frames in Dutch and Flemish newspapers, I hope to bring awareness to the intercultural differences between Flanders and the Netherlands and furthermore, to make the reader aware of the influence these could have on how a story is framed in the news.

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## **Theoretical framework**

### **Framing**

Most research about framing events in newspapers or other types of media either analyze which type of frame is employed in a certain context (e.g. De Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), or what the effects of the use of a certain frame are on readers' perceptions of a topic (e.g. Brantner, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011; De Vreese, Semetko, & Valkenburg, 1999). Here, framing is defined as the following: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, cause interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Though many definitions of framing exist, the above is especially useful in studying the framing of terrorism because it focuses on textual news messages and helps the reader to "identify main causes and responsible agents, make moral judgments, and, finally, to suggest policy responses to the event" (Papacharissi & De Fatima Oliveira, 2008, p. 54). In other words, the media may frame the messages and influence the receiver's perception of the event that took place. It is important to notice that this is not a static, but rather a dynamic process of frame-building and frame-setting. Here, the first concept, called frame-building, refers to the process in which the internal and the external factors of journalists or news organizations influence the construction of the frame and its characteristics (De Vreese, 2005). On the other hand, frame-setting is considered to be the phase in which the frame has an actual effect on the perception of the reader (De Vreese, 2005). This effect is formed by an interaction of the media on one side and the individual on the other (De Vreese, 2005). The current study particularly focuses on the frame-building process, determining which part of the bombings Dutch and Flemish newspapers concentrated on.

However, little clarity seems to exist about the most effective method of identifying frames. In qualitative studies, an inductive approach is often employed whereby frames are investigated through an in-depth reading of the text and identified without a predefined set of frames (e.g., Reese & Lewis, 2009). On the other hand, in more quantitative frame analysis studies, researchers often choose to use a deductive approach; defining and operationalizing the frames investigated in the study before the coding takes place (De Vreese, 2005). Neuman et al. (1992) identified a general set of frames that could be used in frame analysis studies: the human impact frame, the powerlessness frame, the economics frame, the moral values frame,

and the conflict frame. These frames could be used in framing studies of various issues, which makes them widely applicable. Later, a study by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) elaborated the set of frames of Neuman et al. (1992) and identified five types of frames: human interest frame, conflict frame, morality frame, attribution of responsibility frame, and economic consequences frame. This model is most frequently employed to distinguish frames that occur in news articles and is often applied with regard to framing in political issues or events.

### **Framing terrorism**

Mostly since the terrorist attacks in the United States on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, a great number of communication researchers have studied frames used by media to communicate news stories to the public. The majority of this research is focused on framing terrorism and war on terrorism in US media (e.g., Pande, 2010; Powell, 2011; Ryan, 2004), while fewer researchers examined the framing of terrorist attacks in European media. Nevertheless, researchers in the field of communication studies should start to do more research on framing after the 9/11 attacks, because, like other parts of culture, media changes throughout the years and might use a different reporting style now than they did twenty years ago. In addition, not only the United States but other countries around the globe as well have been shaken up by acts of terrorism such as bombings or armed attacks. The way media frame these events might vary per country or culture, which increases the necessity of frame analysis studies outside the United States and research with a larger cross-national focus.

An important study that researched framing European terrorism analyzed the Norwegian case of the terrorist attacks in Oslo and the island of Utöya on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 2011. By comparing how the attacks were framed by two major Norwegian newspapers during the first two weeks after the attacks, it was found that media strongly de-politicized the attacks (Falkheimer & Olsson, 2015), and accordingly showed similar results as studies that examined framing of terrorism in the US (e.g., Powell, 2011). However, this study only focused on newspapers in Norway, while a cross-national approach might be even more interesting because events like bombings or shootings are often reported in a large number of countries and past research already showed different framings of events across socio-cultural contexts (e.g., Semetko, 1991).

Thus, with cultures becoming more and more entangled because of globalization, and terrorism as a global issue rather than a national issue, researchers more often compare the

way media frame terrorist attacks in different countries. Here, proximity is argued to be a factor that could influence the way a message is framed. Many times, large differences could be seen between the news reportage in the newspapers of countries where the event happened and newspapers in other countries. A research that studies the way terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom and Spain were represented in American and British newspapers suggested that coverage of political actors and people involved in the issue (e.g. victims) prevailed in American newspapers, while British newspapers emphasized more on the international players and factors involved (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008). Additionally, another study on framing bombings compared how the Chinese communist newspaper *People's Daily* and the American newspaper *New York Times* framed the Chinese embassy bombings. It showed a large influence of historic Cold War suspicions and conflicts between the two countries (Parsons & Xiaoge, 2001). Whereas the American newspaper spoke of an 'accidental bombing', an 'Anti-American hysteria' and 'apologies that were never accepted', the Chinese newspaper reported it as an 'intentional bombing', 'American disrespect' and 'genuine apologies were never given' (Parsons & Xiaoge, 2001). Both of the above studies show clear differences in how the bombings were framed by newspapers from the country in which the attack took place and by newspapers from other countries. Although other cultural factors, like the history of the countries, might also play a role in the construction of these events, these examples suggest an influence of proximity on framing practices.

These results strongly affirm the effect that cultural images can have on framing in the news. However, these conclusions could not be drawn when comparing how African versus American newspapers framed the 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, DC (Schaefer, 2004). It was expected that when an attack was "local", the newspaper would focus more on the "criminal disaster" side of the story, emphasizing "rescue efforts, victims and investigation of prosecution of the act and having more coverage of public reactions" (Schaefer, 2004, p. 96). On the other hand, when an attack was foreign from the newspaper's country-of-origin, media outlets would focus more on politics and international relations (Schaefer, 2004). Nonetheless, it was found that the degree to which the story emphasized on rescue efforts, victims, and public reactions did not depend on whether the attack was close-by or not (Schaefer, 2004), and it could be concluded that the circumstances of the event itself, like its nature and size, had a greater impact on the framing of the story than the locality. However, in this study conclusions were drawn based on two different types of terrorist attacks, which

might have enlarged the influence of the characteristics of the event on the way it was framed.

Therefore, in the current research, the Brussels bombings on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March are the only events being researched, which limits the extent to which the event itself has an effect on its framing and consequently increases the possibility of an influence of proximity.

## **Flanders and the Netherlands**

In comparing media coverage of the Brussels terrorist attacks in newspapers in Flanders and the Netherlands, similarities and differences between these two should be clarified first. Flanders is the northern federal state of Belgium and shares Dutch as an official language with the Netherlands. However, Belgium and the Netherlands are two separate countries and cultures, carrying different histories, values, beliefs, and political cultures. These cultural differences could influence the way events are framed in news texts in the two countries. For example, looking at Hofstede's (1984) scores of cultural dimensions, large differences are found between the two countries in terms of power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Most valuable in this research is the latter. Belgium scores very high on uncertainty avoidance (94), while the Netherlands does not (53). Uncertainty avoidance can be explained as the minimization of uncertainty in a culture by implementing strict laws and rules, with an emphasis on safety and security measures (Hofstede, 1984). Since Belgium scores higher on this dimension than the Netherlands, Flemish newspapers might focus more on these safety and security measures than Dutch newspapers. Moreover, Belgium has shown to have more of a high-context culture than the Netherlands, which may result in more indirect, implicit messages in Flemish newspapers and more direct, explicit messages in Dutch ones (Hall, 1976).

Research on framing within Flanders and the Netherlands is scarce. While a considerable amount of studies has been carried out on the agenda-setting and framing of political issues in Dutch and/or Belgian newspapers (e.g., Sevenans & Vliegthart, 2016; D'Haenens & De Lange, 2001), less research has been conducted on the framing of terrorism in these countries. A possible explanation for this could be that the Brussels bombings on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 were the first large terrorist attack in the past decades, and it was not possible to research framing terrorism in the Netherlands and Flanders.

While no research was carried out on terrorist attacks, in particular, it was compared how so-called 'Syria fighters' in Dutch and Flemish newspapers were framed (Berbers et al.,

2016). The study showed that the kind of frames that depicted the Syria fighters as a problem were used to a greater extent than the more positive frames. For example, the 'terrorist' frame, which "revolves around the radicalization of Muslims, national security, and preventing a possible terrorist attack in the Netherlands or Belgium" (Berbers et al., 2016, p. 806) was frequently used. From these findings, it could be concluded that Flemish and Dutch newspapers framed Muslims in a generally negative and problematized way (Berbers et al., 2016). This research demonstrates that, even before the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March bombings, Syria fighters were already framed as being connected to terrorism although no terrorist attack even happened in Belgium or the Netherlands. This might indicate that a negative bias already existed towards Syria fighters based on factors other than terrorism, like religion or history, which might have intensified after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March Brussels bombings.

Since the Netherlands and Flanders are geographically so close to each other, as well as being two distinct socio-cultural contexts, it would be interesting to know whether proximity does arouse a difference in framing news texts, and Flemish newspaper thus presented the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks distinctively. While proximity did not show a significant effect in a cross-national framing analysis of two terrorist attacks (Schaefer, 2004), it might play a role when the study focuses on the reportage of one event only. Following the line of thinking of Schaefer (2004), Flemish newspapers should emphasize more on the victims of the terrorist attacks and should give more examples of public reactions, while Dutch newspapers should highlight the political and international issues.

### **Present study**

By taking a cross-national comparative approach, the present study will analyze which frames were used in Flemish and Dutch newspapers when reporting the terrorist attacks on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 in Brussel. It will contribute to the field of framing research in different ways. Often, cross-national framing research of terrorism is focused on two countries which do not have the same language, or on how two or more different events were reported in media outlets. However, in these studies, the language of the newspaper or the type of terrorist attack could have an impact on the frames used. Comparing the framing of Flemish and Dutch newspapers on one event rules out these confounds of language or type of event. Furthermore,

this study aims to fill in the existing gap of cross-national framing research of terrorism in Western Europe.

I propose the following research questions:

*Research question.* How do dominant frames encountered in Flemish and Dutch press coverage of the terrorist attacks on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 in Brussels differ?

- *Sub-question 1.* How do Dutch and Flemish national newspapers frame Brussels bombings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March?

- *Sub-question 2.* How do the differences relate to the different socio-cultural contexts?

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## Method

### Materials

To answer the proposed research questions, a corpus of 104 news texts was collected and analyzed, from which 52 articles were selected from two Dutch and the other 52 news texts were derived from two Flemish newspapers. For all news articles, the entire text was analyzed except for its title. For the Netherlands, the left-leaning quality newspaper *De Volkskrant*, and the center-to-right-leaning quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* were used (Bakker & Scholten, 2014). For the Flemish sample, news texts were retrieved from the left-leaning quality newspaper *De Morgen*, and the more right-leaning quality newspaper *De Standaard* (“De Standaard versus De Morgen”, n.d., para. 1). These were chosen because they belong to the national quality newspapers with the highest circulation of Flanders and the Netherlands. The use of both left- and more right-leaning news outlets allowed for a better representation of the entire population of all Dutch and Flemish newspapers. The online database NexisUni was used to collect the Dutch corpus, while the news stories from the Flemish newspapers were retrieved employing a similar online database named GoPress Academic. The articles were collected by searching for the keyword: attack Brussels (*aanslag Brussel*). Since in the case of a terrorist attack the amount of coverage is generally highest immediately after the event, the collection of data was limited to one week after the event, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March of 2016 until the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. 30 articles per newspaper were randomly selected from the NexisUni and GoPress Academic databases. All the articles were checked to see if they covered the Brussels bombings as the main topic. Those which covered other topics were excluded from the corpus. The maximum number of excluded articles was four per newspaper. To ensure an equal number of news texts per group, four articles were deleted from each corpus, which resulted in a corpus of 26 articles per newspaper, and 104 articles in total.

### Model of analysis

In order to identify frames in the corpus, the model of analysis by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) was used. This model includes a series of 20 questions and five frames: the human interest frame, the conflict frame, the morality frame, the attribution of responsibility frame,

and the economic consequences frame. Each frame was measured by three to five questions, to which the coder had to answer with *yes* (1) or *no* (0).

In the first place, the conflict frame can be defined as the one that “emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). The human interest frame brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Moreover, the economic consequences frame “reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region, or country” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). Lastly, while the morality frame “puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96), the responsibility frame “presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96).

For the purpose and the topic of this study, the framework by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) needed to be developed. Therefore, in this study, the safety frame was established as a representative of the Flemish and Dutch scores on Hofstede’s (1984) cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance. Based on these scores, it is expected that Flemish newspapers might emphasize on safety and security measures while this will be less likely in Dutch news articles. We define the safety frame as following: a frame that emphasizes the safety and security measures that were or should be implemented by an institution, region, country, or continent. This frame contained three questions to which the coder needed to answer *yes* (1) or a *no* (0). The three questions were: “Is there a mention of safety or security measures that should be taken as a response to terrorism?”, “Is there a mention of safety or security measures that will be taken as a response to terrorism?”, and “Is there a mention of safety or security measures that were already taken to prevent or as a response to terrorism?”. Moreover, the last question of the human interest frame, asking about visual information in an article, was deleted since this research only focused on text (see Appendix A for the entire model of analysis).

## **Procedure**

From all news texts, the lead paragraph and the body were coded using a deductive approach. The first and second coder, both native speakers of Dutch, analyzed all the Dutch and Flemish

articles based on the proposed model of analysis based on Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). After concluding the quantitative analyses, an example article of the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* and of the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* were analyzed qualitatively as well. These were not chosen based on the type of newspaper, but rather by the topic they covered and the extent to which they were representative of the results of the quantitative analysis. A general view on the corpus quickly showed that a large number of articles concerned the topic of the inadequacy of the Belgian Security Services. Since this was found to be a recurring topic in all news articles, it was considered an appropriate representative of the corpus. Therefore, every news text that discussed this topic was selected. Then, two articles that showed large differences in the frames of our previous quantitative analyses were chosen to analyze employing a qualitative approach. During this qualitative example analysis, no specific framework was used, but the articles were examined more generally to go beyond the frames established by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). Both the content and the language of the news texts were investigated, with a special focus on pronouns and text structure.

### **Statistical treatment**

Following the method used by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the mean score was calculated for each frame, using SPSS Statistics. Then, per frame, an independent samples t-test was conducted with “country” (Flanders vs. the Netherlands) as independent variable and the mean score of each frame as dependent variable. Cronbach’s alpha was measured for each frame. The reliability of five out of six frames, comprising three to five items, was acceptable or good, ranging from  $\alpha = .70$  to  $\alpha = .83$ . However, the reliability of ‘safety frame’, comprising three items, was moderate:  $\alpha = .62$ . Nevertheless, since the scale of the ‘safety frame’ only consisted of three items, the rather low Cronbach’s alpha was still accepted. Inter-coder reliability was measured using Cohen’s Kappa. The interrater reliability of the variable ‘total frame’ was acceptable:  $\kappa = .78$ ,  $p < .001$  (with the lowest agreement of 70% for the items ‘human interest adjectives and ‘morality message, and the highest agreement of 100% for ‘responsibility alleviate’, ‘responsibility group responsible’, ‘conflict disagreement’, ‘economic gains or losses’, ‘economic expenses’, ‘economic consequences’ and ‘safety were’) (see Appendix B for interrater agreement per item).

## Results

### Quantitative analyses

To answer the first research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted per type of frame. Table 1 below shows the means and standard deviations for the extent to which a frame occurred in Dutch and Flemish newspapers.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the extent to which a frame is present per country (0 = not present, 1 = present)

	the Netherlands <i>n</i> = 52 <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Flanders <i>n</i> = 52 <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Responsibility frame	.55 (.35)	.16 (.22)
Human interest frame	.29 (.33)	.52 (.37)
Conflict frame	.65 (.36)	.13 (.27)
Economic frame	.09 (.24)	.02 (.08)
Safety frame	.44 (.39)	.19 (.25)
Morality frame	.36 (.39)	.26 (.31)

Significant results between the two countries were found for five out of the six frames that were identified.

First, an independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the Netherlands and Flanders regarding the use of the responsibility frame ( $t(85.10) = 6.76, p < .001$ ). The Netherlands ( $M = 0.55, SD = 0.35$ ) was shown to make more use of the responsibility frame than Flanders ( $M = 0.15, SD = 0.22$ ).

A second independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the Netherlands and Flanders with regard to the use of the human interest frame ( $t(102) = -3.32,$

$p = .001$ ). The Netherlands ( $M = 0.29$ ,  $SD = 0.33$ ) was shown to make less use of the human interest frame than Flanders ( $M = 0.52$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ).

Moreover, an independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the Netherlands and Flanders with regard to the use of the conflict frame ( $t(95.12) = 8.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The Netherlands ( $M = 0.65$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ) was shown to make more use of the conflict frame than Flanders ( $M = 0.13$ ,  $SD = 0.27$ ).

Additionally, an independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the Netherlands and Flanders with regard to the use of the economic frame ( $t(61.87) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .048$ ). The Netherlands ( $M = 0.09$ ,  $SD = 0.24$ ) was shown to make more use of the economic frame than Flanders ( $M = 0.02$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ).

Lastly, an independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the Netherlands and Flanders with regard to the use of the safety frame ( $t(87.13) = 3.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The Netherlands ( $M = 0.44$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) was shown to make more use of the safety frame than Flanders ( $M = 0.19$ ,  $SD = 0.25$ ).

However, an independent samples t-test showed no significant differences between the Netherlands and Flanders with regard to the use of a morality frame ( $t(97.35) = 1.57$ ,  $p = .121$ ).

### Qualitative analyses

In order to provide more qualitative insights into how Dutch and Flemish news texts were framed, one Dutch and one Flemish article concerning the terrorist attacks in Brussels were analyzed qualitatively. Both the first article, retrieved from the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* (see Appendix C and D), and the second article, taken from the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* (see Appendix E and F), discussed the blame that was given to the Belgian Security Services by other countries in Europe and further away.

Firstly, the two articles differ in the pronouns they use. The first point that should be highlighted is that the Dutch newspaper used third-person plural “they” throughout the whole text, while the Flemish text makes a clear distinction between “we” when talking about Belgium and “they” when addressing other European entities. By focusing on this difference between “us” and “them”, the writer of the article creates, from one point of view, a feeling of unity of all the Belgians, but, on the other hand, a kind of distance between Belgium and the rest of Europe. The critique on Belgium is framed in such a way as if Belgium is a victim of the “bullying” and is literally attacked by all other world leaders, which becomes clear in the

following example that shows a part of the article from the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard*. In both the first and the second part of the sentence, the author clearly refers to “our tears” [1] and “our country” [2].

Example 1

“Onze tranen zijn nog niet gedroogd en slachtoffers vechten nog voor hun leven [1], maar sommige internationale media schieten al met scherp op ons land, constateert Marc Hooghe [2] (Hooghe, March 25, 2016).”<sup>1</sup>

In the Dutch news text, all countries are referred to using third-person pronouns, even when addressing the Netherlands. As a result, the Dutch article seems to be more distant and less emotionally entangled in the issue than the Flemish article.

Example 2

“Ook premier Rutte verklaarde toen zonder aarzeling dat Nederland in oorlog was met IS [1] (Van Straaten, March 24, 2016).”<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the observed distance is also visible in the content of the two articles, although they cover the same topic. The two news texts point responsibility to different actors, which explains our results with regard to the responsibility frame in the quantitative analysis. While *NRC Handelsblad* shows some shortcomings of the EU, it also strongly highlights the ineffectiveness of the Belgian legislation system, *De Standaard* focuses on the inadequacy of Belgium not only being the country's fault but rather being an international problem. The Dutch article hereby takes a more global, distant approach. However, it seems that the author of the article in *De Standaard* tries to defend ‘his country’. These distinctions are clearly visible in the following examples, with Example 3 being part of an article in the Flemish newspaper and Example 4 belonging to the Dutch news text. In the text taken from

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<sup>1</sup> “Our tears have not dried yet and victims are still fighting for their lives, but some international media are already shooting at our country, Marc Hooghe observes. (Hooghe, March 25, 2016).”

<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister Rutte as well then declared without hesitation that the Netherlands was at war with IS (Van Straaten, March 24, 2016).

*De Standaard*, it can especially be seen in the first sentence that they strongly blame other European countries for being a “failed state” [1], taking away responsibility from Belgium. However, in the first sentence of Example 4 [1] from *NRC Handelsblad*, the author states that Belgium is the one that needs to enhance the effectiveness of its Security Services.

Example 3

“Als België een failed state is, dan zijn Frankrijk, Groot-Brittannië, Spanje en de Verenigde Staten dat ook [1]. Geen enkel land is nog in staat zijn burgers in alle mogelijke omstandigheden tegen terroristisch geweld te beschermen [2]. Het doet pijn die waarheid onder ogen te zien en dan is het veel gemakkelijker de schuld af te schuiven op klungelende Belgen [3] (Hooghe, March 25, 2016).”<sup>3</sup>

Example 4

“Maar veel Europese leiders zullen achter de schermen ook België zelf manen eens slagvaardiger te worden [1]. Ondanks alle beroering over de aanslagen in Parijs door in Brussel gevestigde terroristen van november 2015 zijn nieuwe voorstellen voor wetgeving, die het mogelijk maken van terreurverdachten langer dan één dag in voorarrest te houden, nog altijd niet goedgekeurd [2] (Van Straaten, March 24, 2016).”<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, differences in text structure can be found. While the Dutch newspaper article consists, above all, of several quotes from world leaders or other governmental individuals, the writer of the Flemish news text indubitably gives his opinion and addresses the issue from his own viewpoint. This results in a more personal, and maybe, a less objective approach. The quotes utilized in the Dutch news texts also utter a higher explicitness and directness, while

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<sup>3</sup> If Belgium is already a failed state, then France, Great Britain, Spain and the United States are too. No country is able to protect its citizens against terrorist violence in all possible circumstances. It hurts to face that truth and then it is much easier to blame struggling Belgians .(Hooghe, March 25, 2016).”

<sup>4</sup> “But many European leaders will also remind Belgium itself to become more effective behind the scenes. Despite all the turmoil about the Paris attacks by Brussels-based terrorists of November 2015, new legislative proposals that allow terror suspects to be detained for more than one day are still not approved. (Van Straaten, March 24, 2016).”

the presence of opinionated language in the Flemish article results in a more implicit and indirect text. In Example 5, the *NRC Handelsblad* article quotes the speech of the Greek Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos. Only in the first sentence [1], the author of the article explains about the topic, while the other sentences only quote the Greek commissioner [1 to 4].

Example 5

Tegelijk confronteerde de Griekse Eurocommissaris Dimitris Avramopoulos (Migratie en Binnenlandse Zaken) de lidstaten van de EU met een pijnlijk gebrek aan daadkracht na de aanslagen van vorig jaar in Frankrijk [1]. “We kunnen niet blijven leren op de harde manier” [2], zei hij tegen website Politico [3]. “Zoals de aanslagen in Brussel aantonen hebben we absoluut meer coördinatie en het delen van inlichtingen nodig” [4] (Van Straaten, March 24, 2016).”<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, *De Standaard* addresses the same issue by only presenting the opinion of the author, who highlights the inadequacy of the European Security Service. No additional information or opinions from other actors is given, which decreases the plausibility and objectivity of what is declared.

Example 6

“Het Europese veiligheidsbeleid zit vol met dat soort lacunes en gaten in de informatiedoorstroming [1]. Die fouten kunnen door een goed georganiseerd netwerk genadeloos worden uitgebuit [2] (Hooghe, March 25, 2016).”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Greek Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos (Migration and Home Affairs) confronted EU Member States with a painful lack of decisiveness following last year's attacks in France. "We can't keep learning the hard way," he told the Politico website. "As the Brussels attacks show, we definitely need more coordination and intelligence sharing" (Van Straaten, March 24, 2016).”

<sup>6</sup> “European Security Service is full of gaps and gaps in the flow of information. These mistakes can be exploited mercilessly by a well-organized network (Hooghe, March 25, 2016).”

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## **Conclusion and discussion**

In this research, I aimed at investigating how Dutch and Flemish newspapers framed the terrorist attacks on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 in Brussels, and interpret how these contrasts might relate to the different socio-cultural contexts of Flanders and the Netherlands.

Consequently, it could be concluded how Flemish and Dutch newspapers frame who was responsible for the bombings, make moral judgments with regard to its victims and mistakes of the government and how they suggested policy responses to the event (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008).

It was found that Flemish and Dutch news texts diverged in the dominant frames encountered. Whereas the responsibility frame, the conflict frame, the economic consequences frame, and the safety frame were employed more commonly in Dutch newspapers, the human interest frame was found more in Flemish news outlets. Here, it can be concluded that Flemish news articles focused more on the human side of the story, while the Dutch ones take a more serious, political, and distant approach. The same results were also reflected in the qualitative analyses. This is in line with Schaefer's (2004) hypothesis of framing terrorism in African versus U.S. newspapers, which expected there to be a greater focus on "rescue efforts, victims and investigation of prosecution of the act, and having more coverage of public reactions" (Schaefer, 2004, p. 96) when the attack happened in the country of the newspaper, and an emphasis on political and international facets when this was not the case. As could also be observed in the examples, the Flemish newspapers clearly concentrated on Belgium, as a unity, being a victim of something terrible. However, the Dutch news articles seemed to take a more critical approach, inspecting the political and economic shortcomings of the Belgian and European government and what consequences this event has for the European Union.

The finding that Dutch news outlets mention the safety and security measures to prevent, or as a response to, terrorism more often than the Flemish news texts contrasts with the expectation based on Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance. It was predicted that Flemish newspapers would employ the safety and security frame to a greater extent since Belgium scores considerably higher on the uncertainty avoidance dimension than the Netherlands. However, the opposite was true. A possible explanation could be due to the emotional tone of the Flemish articles and the more critical approach of the Dutch ones. Flemish writers might have been affected more emotionally by the terrorist

attacks than their northern neighbors, which possibly resulted in a greater focus on emotions than on governmental practices like safety and security measures.

Moreover, it was expected based on Hall's (1976) context theory that Dutch news texts would be more explicit and direct, whereas Flemish newspapers would formulate their sentences more implicitly and indirectly. In the two example articles, this difference was shown by many direct quotes in the Dutch article and the use of more emotional and opinionated language in the Flemish one. Dutch news texts thus employ a more direct, explicit approach when reporting, while Flemish articles adopt a more indirect, implicit method. Although the findings of this study are not in line with Hofstede's (1984) scores, they are with Hall's (1976). A possible explanation might be that Hofstede (1984) drew conclusions about culture, based on his sample of employees of the company IBM, which makes them only representative in a business environment. Moreover, the study of Hofstede (1984) is quite outdated, and culture might have changed ever since. Taking these critical points into account, it could still be concluded that the framing of a news article is related to the culture in which it is written.

In future research, a larger corpus could be collected to get a more extensive view on the issue. This could be realized by adding more types of newspapers, or by enlarging the time frame from which the articles are taken. Another possibility is to analyze all articles present in a particular time frame. Additionally, the model of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) could be amplified more to ensure a less restricted view when coding the articles, and to maybe link the frames more to the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1984) or Hall's (1976) context theory.

However, like any research, this one had some limitations too. First, only news texts that were published in the first week after the attacks were analyzed. Moreover, as mentioned above, solely four newspapers were examined and chosen only because of their popularity. Although these belong to the Dutch and Flemish newspapers with the highest circulation rate, they might not totally represent all other newspapers in the two countries. Another limitation lies in the choice of analyzing only Flemish newspapers, rather than Belgian newspapers in general. Since Flemish is only one part of Belgium, results cannot be generalized to the entire country. A final limitation of this research is the lack of extensive qualitative research. Only one Dutch and one Flemish article were discussed, which did not allow to conduct a systematic analysis in a qualitative way.

The current research contributes to theory about the framing of terrorism in news texts. It fills in the gap of cross-national framing research of terrorism in Western Europe and shows that the concept of framing could even be applied to two countries that are extremely close to each other, and that do not differ too much in an economic or governmental way. Moreover, since Flanders and the Netherlands share the same language, this research shows that framing does not have to be related to language, but rather to other cultural factors. Even though the same language is spoken in these two countries, differences could still be found in how messages were framed. Thus, this research has provided additional evidence for the assumptions that media play a crucial role in the construction of events, which might influence the perception the reader has of these. Especially in the case of events like terrorist attacks, it is of high relevance that citizens of a country know who caused the event, how the government handled it and, more specifically, which measures were taken to prevent or as a response to terrorism.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Model of Analysis, based on Semetko and Valkenburg (2000)**

##### Attribution of responsibility frame

1. Does the story suggest that some level of gov't has the ability to alleviate the problem?
2. Does the story suggest that some level of gov't is responsible for the issue/problem?
3. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?
4. Does the story suggest that an in. (or group of people in society) is resp. for the issue/problem?
5. Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?

##### Human interest frame

1. Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?
2. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?
3. Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?
4. Does the story go into private or personal lives of the actors?

##### Conflict frame

1. Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?
2. Does one party-individual-group-country reproach another?
3. Does the story refer to two sides of the problem or issue?

##### Economic consequences frame

1. Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?
2. Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?
3. Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

##### Morality frame

1. Does the story contain any moral message?

2. Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?
3. Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

#### Safety frame

1. Is there a mention of safety measures that should be taken as a response to terrorism?
2. Is there a mention of safety measures that will be taken as a response to terrorism?
3. Is there a mention of safety measures that were already taken to prevent or as a response to terrorism?

**Appendix B**

**Interrater reliability per item of the model of analysis**

Table B1. Interrater reliability per item of the model of analysis

	% Agreement	Cohen's Kappa	p-value	Strength of Agreement
Responsibility alleviate	100	1.00	.002	Almost perfect
Responsibility responsible	90	.78	.011	Substantial
Responsibility solution	90	.78	.011	Substantial
Responsibility group responsible	100	1.00	.002	Almost perfect
Responsibility action	90	.78	.011	Substantial
Human interest human example	90	.80	.010	Substantial
Human interest adjectives	70	.44	.091	Substantial
Human interest affect	80	.60	.038	Moderate
Human interest personal life	80	.62	.035	Substantial
Conflict disagreement	100	1.00	.002	Almost perfect
Conflict reproach	80	.62	.035	Substantial
Conflict two sides	80	.60	.058	Moderate
Economic gains or losses	100	1.00	.001	Almost perfect
Economic expenses	100	1.00	.001	Almost perfect

Economic consequences	100	1.00	.002	Almost perfect
Morality message	70	.40	.197	Fair
Morality religion	80	.55	.053	Moderate
Morality social prescriptions	90	.78	.011	Substantial
Safety should	80	.60	.038	Moderate
Safety will	90	.80	.010	Substantial
Safety were	100	1.00	.001	Almost perfect

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## Appendix C

### Newspaper article: NRC Handelsblad in Dutch

#### Hoe reageert de wereld op Brussel?

24/03/2017 – Floris van Straaten

Het begint een leeg ritueel te worden, nu Europa steeds vaker het slachtoffer wordt van grote terroristische aanslagen. Ook na Brussel betuigden wereldleiders, voorop natuurlijk de Europese, weer plechtig hun solidariteit met België. Maar afgezien van troostende woorden hadden ze België vooralsnog weinig concreets te bieden.

Dit in tegenstelling tot de aanslagen van Parijs. Toen gingen er direct stemmen op - om te beginnen in Frankrijk zelf - om de militaire acties tegen Islamitische Staat fors op te voeren. Ook premier Rutte verklaarde toen zonder aarzeling dat Nederland in oorlog was met IS. En inderdaad gingen kort daarna naast de VS en Frankrijk onder meer de Britten en de Nederlanders meebombarderen op IS-doelen in Syrië.

Ditmaal bleven zulke martiale geluiden achterwege. Alsof de Europese landen beseften dat door de verwoestende bombardementen op IS-doelen in Syrië en Irak de beweging weliswaar is verzwakt maar ook de kans op terreuraanslagen in Europa lijkt toegenomen. En welke leider neemt graag bewust het risico op een aanslag in zijn hoofdstad?

Een van de weinigen die na 'Brussel' nog van een oorlog spraken was de Franse premier Manuel Valls: „We zijn in oorlog”, zei hij. „De afgelopen maanden zijn we in Europa blootgesteld aan oorlogshandelingen.”

Tegelijk confronteerde de Griekse Eurocommissaris Dimitris Avramopoulos (Migratie en Binnenlandse Zaken) de lidstaten van de EU met een pijnlijk gebrek aan daadkracht na de aanslagen van vorig jaar in Frankrijk. „We kunnen niet blijven leren op de harde manier”, zei hij tegen website Politico. „Zoals de aanslagen in Brussel aantonen hebben we absoluut meer coördinatie en het delen van inlichtingen nodig.” Als de lidstaten de EU- afspraken hierover van vorig jaar hadden uitgevoerd, hadden de aanslagen in Brussel wellicht kunnen worden voorkomen, opperde hij. De ministers van Binnenlandse Zaken en Justitie riep hij op tot spoedberaad om de samenwerking te beklinken.

Maar veel Europese leiders zullen achter de schermen ook België zelf manen eens slagvaardiger te worden. Ondanks alle beroering over de aanslagen in Parijs door in Brussel gevestigde terroristen van november 2015 zijn nieuwe voorstellen voor wetgeving, die het mogelijk maken terreurverdachten langer dan één dag in voorarrest te houden, nog altijd niet goedgekeurd. Huiszoeken mogen op grond van archaïsche wetten nog altijd niet 's nachts plaatsvinden.

De aanslagen waren ook koren op de molen van campagnevoerders in de VS en Groot-Brittannië. De Republikeinse presidentskandidaat Donald Trump herhaalde nog maar eens zijn omstreden uitspraak dat wat hem betreft moslims tot nader order geweerd moeten worden uit de VS. „Op dit moment kunnen we deze mensen niet toestaan dit land in te komen, het spijt me.”

UKIP-leider Nigel Farage, fel voorstander van een Brits vertrek uit de EU, greep de aanslagen aan om de EU verdacht te maken. Hij zei dat die aantonen dat de Schengenzone zonder interne grensbewaking gevaarlijk is omdat terroristen ongehinderd kunnen reizen. Instemmend retweette hij een bericht van een rechtse columnist: Brussel, feitelijk de hoofdstad van Europa, is ook de jihadistische hoofdstad van Europa.”

Ook anderen, zoals de Tsjechische president Milos Zeman, zagen in de aanslagen het bewijs dat ze beter geen vluchtelingen kunnen opnemen omdat zich onder hen terroristen kunnen schuilhouden.

Veel Europese leiders zullen achter de schermen België manen eens slagvaardiger te worden.

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## Appendix D

### Newspaper article NRC Handelsblad in English

#### **How does the world react to Brussels?**

24/03/2017 – Floris van Straaten

It is becoming an empty ritual, now that Europe is more often becoming the victim of major terrorist attacks. Even after Brussels, world leaders, first and foremost the European ones, solemnly expressed their solidarity with Belgium. But apart from comforting words, they had little concrete to offer Belgium for the time being.

This is in contrast to the Paris attacks. Then, voices were immediately raised - starting in France itself - to significantly increase the military actions against the Islamic State. Prime Minister Rutte as well then declared without hesitation that the Netherlands was at war with IS. And indeed, shortly thereafter, in addition to the US and France, the British and the Dutch, among other things, started bombing IS targets in Syria.

This time, there were no such martial sounds. As if the European countries realized that the devastating bombing of IS targets in Syria and Iraq, while weakening the movement, also seems to increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks in Europe. And which leader likes to consciously take the risk of an attack in his capital?

One of the few who still spoke of a war after 'Brussels' was French Prime Minister Manuel Valls: "We are at war," he said. "In recent months we have been exposed to acts of war in Europe."

At the same time, Greek Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos (Migration and Home Affairs) confronted EU Member States with a painful lack of decisiveness following last year's attacks in France. "We can't keep learning the hard way," he told the Politico website. "As the Brussels attacks show, we definitely need more coordination and intelligence sharing." If the Member States had implemented the EU agreements on this subject last year, the Brussels attacks might have been preventable, he suggested. He called on the Ministers of the Interior and Justice for urgent consultations to improve cooperation.

But many European leaders will also remind Belgium itself to become more effective behind

the scenes. Despite all the turmoil about the Paris attacks by Brussels-based terrorists of November 2015, new legislative proposals that allow terror suspects to be detained for more than one day are still not approved. Due to archaic laws, house searches are still not allowed to take place at night.

The attacks were also grist to the mill of campaigners in the US and Great Britain. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump reiterated his controversial statement that Muslims should be banned from the US until further notice. "We cannot allow these people to enter this country right now, I am sorry."

UKIP leader Nigel Farage, fiercely in favor of a British departure from the EU, seized the attacks to make the EU suspicious. He said that they demonstrate that the Schengen area without internal border surveillance is dangerous because terrorists can travel unhindered. He agreed with approval from a right-wing columnist: Brussels, in fact the capital of Europe, is also the jihadist capital of Europe. "

Others, such as the Czech president Milos Zeman, saw in the attacks the evidence that it is better not to accept refugees because terrorists can hide behind them.

Many European leaders will ask Belgium behind the scenes to become more effective.

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## Appendix E

### Newspaper article: De Standaard in Dutch

#### Zwakke staat, sluwe vijanden

25/03/2016 – Marc Hooghe

*Onze tranen zijn nog niet gedroogd en slachtoffers vechten nog voor hun leven, maar sommige internationale media schieten al met scherp op ons land, constateert Marc Hooghe. Het kaduke Belgische systeem zou mee verantwoordelijk zijn voor de aanslagen in Brussel. Maar geen enkel land is nog in staat zijn burgers in alle omstandigheden tegen terroristisch geweld te beschermen.*

Zaventem is zowat de enige luchthaven ter wereld waar ik ooit jobstudenten aan het werk heb gezien bij de veiligheidscontrole. Wij vinden dat normaal: de vaste medewerkers moeten toch ook vakantiedagen kunnen opnemen? In een land als de Verenigde Staten zou zo iets ondenkbaar zijn: daar wordt veiligheid bijzonder ernstig genomen. Met stijgende verbazing en groeiende ergernis kijkt men in het buitenland naar de wat nonchalante manier waarop wij de dingen aanpakken (DS 24 maart). Het gaat er daarbij niet eens om wat het effectiefst is. De ijverige jobstudent controleert allicht even goed als de nors kijkende agent in uniform. Alleen lijkt het allemaal veel minder ernstig. En misschien is dat ook de manier waarop wij het liefst de zaken beredderen, onder onszelf. Maar in een eengemaakt Europa zijn we niet langer onder onszelf.

In november hebben we al een eerste rondje België-bashing meegemaakt, toen vooral de Franse veiligheidsdiensten probeerden alle schuld voor de aanslagen in Parijs op de Belgische politiediensten af te wentelen. Na de aanslagen van dinsdag is dat nog acuter geworden. Vanuit landen met een strakke veiligheidscultuur, zoals de Verenigde Staten of Israël, klonk het verwijt dat we hier in België de zaken te veel op hun beloop laten, en daar nu voor worden afgestraft. Wat verwacht je anders in een failed state, waar ze 'liever chocolade eten' dan investeren in extra veiligheidsdiensten, zoals de Israëlische minister van Veiligheid zich liet ontglippen?

Failed state? Dat soort verwijten is natuurlijk ongepast, nu we nog volop bezig zijn met de rouw en met de zorg om de slachtoffers. Het is ook gemakkelijk om als er iets fout gaat de

schuld meteen door te schuiven naar een politiek systeem dat al een verzwakt en wat slordig imago heeft. Maar helaas is er geen enkel politieksysteem ter wereld dat een waterdichte bescherming kan bieden tegen terrorisme. Ondanks hun stoere taal zijn de Amerikaanse politiediensten er niet in geslaagd de bomaanslag op de marathon van Boston of de aanslag in San Bernardino te voorkomen. Ook Londen, Parijs en Madrid hebben al te maken gehad met terroristisch geweld op onschuldige burgers. Als België al een failed state is, dan zijn Frankrijk, Groot-Brittannië, Spanje en de Verenigde Staten dat ook. Geen enkel land is nog in staat zijn burgers in alle mogelijke omstandigheden tegen terroristisch geweld te beschermen. Het doet pijn die waarheid onder ogen te zien en dan is het veel gemakkelijker de schuld af te schuiven op klungelende Belgen.

### Politieke folklore

De term failed state is dan misschien overdreven, we worden wel nog eens met de neus op de feiten geduwd dat we een zwakke en verdeelde staat zijn. We hebben een heel complex systeem uitgebouwd van machtsdeling en federalisme, maar de schaduwzijde daarvan is misschien dat niemand zich nog echt verantwoordelijk voelt. Het is bijzonder beschamend om de burgemeesters van de verschillende gemeenten in Brussel bezig te horen, als ze proberen elkaar de zwarte piet door te spelen. Het complexe federale systeem vormt een permanente uitnodiging om de eigen handen in onschuld te wassen en te suggereren dat het de schuld is van iemand anders, of van een vorige regering, of wat dan ook. Het is een systeem waarmee we in België hebben leren leven, en het behoort tot de politieke folklore.

Die nonchalance wordt in toenemende mate onmogelijk, omdat elke zwakheid in het systeem meedogenloos wordt afgestraft. Als een terroristisch netwerk doorheeft dat je in Molenbeek gemakkelijker onder de radar blijft dan in de banlieues van Parijs, dan is de keuze snel gemaakt. In een paar uur tijd sta je vanuit Brussel overal waar je wil toeslaan, dus waarom zou je onze hoofdstad niet als uitvalsbasis nemen? In een Europa waar hetzelfde netwerk de ene dag toeslaat in Parijs en de volgende keer in Brussel, is er niet veel plaats meer voor dat soort nonchalance.

Ook nu zal er ongetwijfeld een pleidooi worden gehouden voor een sterkere Europese aanpak van het terrorisme. Helaas is Europa in hetzelfde bedje ziek als ons eigen land. In België is het soms al moeilijk om precies uit te maken wie verantwoordelijk is en wie welke informatie had moeten doorgeven aan wie. In Europa geldt hetzelfde mechanisme: de lidstaten pleiten

dan wel voor meer samenwerking, maar als het erop aankomt, is de eerste maatregel die wordt genomen het afsluiten van de grenzen. Wie nu naar Nederland wil rijden, mag een lange file voor de grensovergang verwachten. Lost dat iets op? Waarschijnlijk niet, maar de Nederlandse autoriteiten wekken zo de schijn dat ze hun burgers willen beschermen tegen het geklungel in België.

Wie is verantwoordelijk?

Natuurlijk is het niet altijd even gemakkelijk om over de grenzen heen te werken. Sinds de scheldpartij van november is er blijkbaar weer een goede samenwerking tussen de Belgische en de Franse opsporingsdiensten. Maar wat is het resultaat? Als men in Vorst de vingerafdrukken van Salah Abdeslam vindt, staat dat nieuws een paar uur later in een Franse krant. Op die manier wordt het buitengewoon moeilijk om het vertrouwen verder op te bouwen. Toch is dat de enige manier om de terroristische netwerken te bestrijden.

Als Turkije Ibrahim El Bakraoui in een vliegtuig naar Schiphol zet, dan weten de Belgische autoriteiten blijkbaar van niets. Het Europese veiligheidsbeleid zit vol met dat soort lacunes en gaten in de informatiedoorstroming. Die fouten kunnen door een goed georganiseerd netwerk genadeloos worden uitgebuit.

In België is het al bijzonder moeilijk om alle verantwoordelijke diensten op één lijn te krijgen, in een Europa, waar het wederzijdse wantrouwen steeds groter wordt, zal dat probleem zich des te scherper voordoen. Dan hebben we alleen nog de keus: ofwel alle grenzen hermetisch afsluiten, ofwel een sterk en coherent Europees veiligheidsbeleid uitbouwen.

Marc Hooghe

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## Appendix F

### Newspaper article: De Standaard in English

#### Weak state, cunning enemies

25/03/2016 – Marc Hooghe

Our tears have not dried yet and victims are still fighting for their lives, but some international media are already shooting at our country, Marc Hooghe observes. The broken Belgian system would also be responsible for the attacks in Brussels. But no country is able to protect its citizens against terrorist violence in all circumstances.

Zaventem is pretty much the only airport in the world where I have ever seen students working at security checks. We think that is normal: the permanent employees also need to get vacation days? In a country like the United States, such a thing would be unthinkable: security is taken very seriously there. With increasing surprise and growing annoyance, people abroad look at the somewhat nonchalant way in which we approach things (DS 24 March). It is not even about what is most effective. The diligent student probably checks the passengers as good as the surly-looking uniformed officer does. The only thing is that it all seems much less serious. And perhaps that is also the way in which we prefer to manage things, among ourselves. But in a unified Europe we are no longer among ourselves.

We already experienced a first round of Belgium bashing in November, when the French security forces in particular tried to pass on all the blame for the attacks in Paris on the Belgian police forces. After Tuesday's attacks, that has become even more acute. From countries with a strict safety culture, such as the United States or Israel, it was reproached that we are leaving things too much to the point here in Belgium, and are now being punished for that. What else do you expect in a failed state, where they 'prefer eating chocolate' rather than investing in extra security services, as the Israeli Security Minister let slip away?

Failed state? That kind of reproach is of course inappropriate, while we are still fully concerned with mourning and with concern for the victims. Also, when something goes wrong, it is easy to immediately blame a political system that already has a weakened and somewhat sloppy image. But unfortunately, there is no police system in the world that can offer full protection against terrorism. Despite their strong language, the US police have not succeeded in preventing the bombing of the Boston Marathon or the attack in San Bernardino.

London, Paris and Madrid have also been confronted with terrorist violence against innocent civilians. If Belgium is already a failed state, then France, Great Britain, Spain and the United States are too. No country is able to protect its citizens against terrorist violence in all possible circumstances. It hurts to face that truth and then it is much easier to blame struggling Belgians.

### Political folklore

The term failed state may be exaggerated, but we are once again pushed to the facts that we are a weak and divided state. We have developed a very complex system of power sharing and federalism, but the shadow side of that may be that nobody feels really responsible anymore. It is particularly embarrassing to hear the mayors of the various municipalities in Brussels trying to play the blackjack together. The complex federal system is a permanent invitation to wash one's own hands in innocence and to suggest that it is the fault of someone else, or of a previous government, or whatever. It is a system with which we have learned to live in Belgium, and it is part of political folklore.

This nonchalance is becoming increasingly impossible, because every weakness in the system is ruthlessly punished. If a terrorist network realizes that it is easier for you to stay under the radar in Molenbeek than in the Paris banlieues, then the choice is quickly made. In a few hours you will be anywhere from Brussels where you want to strike, so why not take our capital as your base? In a Europe where the same network strikes one day in Paris and the next time in Brussels, there is not much room for that kind of nonchalance.

Even now, there will undoubtedly be a plea for a stronger European approach to terrorism. Unfortunately, Europe is sick in the same bed as our own. In Belgium it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly who is responsible and who should have passed on which information to whom. The same mechanism applies in Europe: Member States argue for more cooperation, but when it comes down to it, the first measure to be taken is to close borders. Whoever wants to drive to the Netherlands now can expect a long traffic jam before the border crossing. Does that solve anything? Probably not, but the Dutch authorities create the appearance that they want to protect their citizens against the fumbling in Belgium.

### Who is responsible?

Of course, it is not always easy to work across borders. Apparently, since the shouting match

in November, there is again good cooperation between the Belgian and French investigation services. But what is the result? If you find the fingerprints of Salah Abdeslam in Vorst, that news will appear in a French newspaper a few hours later. In this way, it becomes extremely difficult to build on trust. Yet that is the only way to combat terrorist networks.

If Turkey puts Ibrahim El Bakraoui on a plane to Schiphol, the Belgian authorities apparently know nothing. European security policy is full of gaps and gaps in the flow of information. These mistakes can be exploited mercilessly by a well-organized network.

In Belgium, it is already extremely difficult to get all responsible services in line, in a Europe where mutual mistrust is increasing, that problem will be all the more acute. Then we only have the choice: either close all borders hermetically or develop a strong and coherent European security policy.

Marc Hooghe

## Appendix G

### Statement of own work

Print and sign this *Statement of own work* form and add it as the last appendix in the final version of the Bachelor's thesis that is submitted as a hard copy to the first supervisor.

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