

## **‘Continuity and Change in the Baltic Sea Region: looking at the impact of enlargement on Baltic foreign policy’<sup>1</sup>**

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Since the Baltic States regained independence in 1991, their foreign policy has been geared towards the West. As in the rest of Eastern Europe, EU and NATO memberships had increasingly become the daily mantra of Baltic political elites. Staging a unified front, the three republics closely cooperated in developing joint military structures, a regional free-trade area, and common infrastructure projects. While according to some analysts this veneer of common front was wearing thin in the late 1990s due to intensifying EU and NATO accession negotiations, the Baltic States coordinated their negotiation positions and maintained close working relations at the ministerial, parliamentary, and presidential levels. The Western attitudes of the Baltic States as a regional entity, which persisted throughout the Cold War, remained intact during the post-Soviet era, despite occasional attempts by Estonia to re-position itself as a Scandinavian country. It is also the assumption of the authors of this paper that the three countries share sufficient historical, cultural, and geopolitical commonalities justifying the use of the word “Baltic” to designate three unique nation states on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. While the paper analyses each country separately, the authors are always mindful of the broader regional context. For such small states cooperation with neighbours is not a privilege, but a necessity.

For the last three centuries, the Baltic region has been the battleground for the Europe’s powerful. Divided, conquered, and lost, this region rarely had a chance to decide its own destiny. This chance came again in the 1990s and the Baltics chose to pursue the policy of full and speedy integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. In 2004 this pursuit has been crowned with NATO and EU memberships. While these memberships clearly represent major milestones in Baltic foreign policies, their effects (or lack of them) is the primary focus of this work. Almost four years have passed since the three republics became the full members of the Euro-Atlantic community. While it is still hard to step back and evaluate even the short-term consequences of these shifts, this paper attempts to examine the first seedlings of this newly sown crop. It attempts to understand how do these memberships shape the behavior of the Baltic States? What are the patterns of continuity and change in the foreign policies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania? How do the national foreign policies compare among these three culturally distinct, but historically

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is derived from the book project, *Continuity and Change in the Baltic Sea Region: Comparing Foreign Policies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, forthcoming 2008).

closely related countries? How does the Euro-Atlantic membership affect the inter-Baltic and regional cooperation? How do the Baltic States manage the new role of regional policy makers, not just policy takers? These questions form the core of our project.

In addition to analyzing the post-2004 Baltic foreign policies, we also seek to contribute to theoretically driven debates about the formation, implementation, and change of national foreign policies. To be exact, we focus on the foreign policies of small states that are often neglected or sidelined in the minds of many “big-bang” minded analysts. More importantly, the internal dynamics of national foreign policies are often misunderstood – what applies to the US or Germany does not necessarily fit such small states as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. They have significantly smaller bureaucracies, closer cooperation among various political elites, and more intensive and direct participation of top political figures in daily foreign policy affairs. The distance between the domestic and foreign policy is much shorter in small states. One of the main reasons is the fundamentally regional focus of foreign policy, where domestic impacts are evident not only to decision makers, but also to an average voter. For the Baltics, such regional co-dependency is a mute point. It applies to almost every sector of the economy: energy, trade, environmental issues, transportation, tourism, etc. Obviously, it is also at the core of foreign policy.

In addition to these largely structural conditions, we also touch upon the underlying logics of actor behaviour. As described in the theoretical chapter of the paper, the ideational versus instrumental reasoning lies at the heart of the “grand debates” in the discipline of international relations. It is not surprising that the Baltic States exhibit decision-making patterns driven by both ideational and instrumental logics. To conduct a more interesting and methodologically appropriate inquiry, we sought to determine which factors came to dominate particular foreign policy areas. We argue that national security and cultural-ethnic issues are to a large extent driven by such ideational variables as historical memory and national identity. On the other hand, economic issues largely confirm with the instrumental framework of policy making: the cost-benefit analysis of national interests informs the majority of strategies and decisions. Once these two logics begin to interact, as it often happens, ideational factors seem to trump instrumental calculations. The cost-benefit logic dominates issues grounded within the “safety limits,” but as the economic interests breach the cultural-historical framework, they become truncated by ideational perceptions. Therefore, the Baltic States are often willing to suffer substantial economic losses rather than compromise their identity or re-evaluate historical lessons. Among the most obvious examples are the removal of the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn, the privatization of Venspils Nafta and reselling of Mazeikiu Nafta. At the same, we argue that since May of 2004 Baltic foreign policy gradually entered the post-existential stage. While it is still framed by the historical memories of the 20th century, the new directions emerge in the post-enlargement environment. Economic security and growth have increasingly become the forefront issues. This is the most obvious shift in the Baltic foreign policies. However, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are constantly vigilant not to fall back into Russia’s embrace. This enduring awareness and caution is the lesson

from the past. It continues to frame Baltic foreign policies. To paraphrase the famous saying of Pauline R. Kezer, continuity gives the Baltic foreign policies their roots; change gives them branches.

### **Instrumental vs. Ideational Factors**

We argue that both instrumental and ideational factors matter in foreign policy decision making. By instrumental factors, we mean what empiricists refer to as observable phenomenon that can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively. For example, instrumental factors include troop movements, economic embargoes, and voting in international organizations. By ideational factors, we mean those determinants that are not easily observable but nonetheless have a significant impact on foreign policy decision-making. Such ideational factors would include the impact of history, identity and rhetoric. Like structure and agency, like exogenous and endogenous factors, we argue that instrumental and ideational factors of foreign policy are inextricably linked and foreign policy cannot be explained without recognizing its many determinants.

Perhaps the most important instrumental factor of foreign policy in many studies is power. Power is determined by what a state has and how that state projects power. In the study of international relations, power and state size have been closely linked. Great empires are ordinarily large empires. Weak states are ordinarily small states. An entire subset of the international relations literature has been created around small states in international politics. Stephen Walt argues that the self-help international system allows states to do two things: balance or bandwagon (Walt 1985). Accordingly, for small states there is only the choice for bandwaggoning since they do not have the material resources to project large amounts of power. This realist perception of international relations allocates the role to small states as followers and never leaders. However, Robert Keohane argues that this stress on power underestimates the influence of small states on international relations (Keohane, 1969). As Keohane states, a concentration on power in the international system does not explain why 'small states have risen to prominence if not to power' (Keohane, 1969, 291).

How can we define small states? Robert Rothstein defines small states as '...a state which recognises that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so...' (Rothstein, 1968) (Rothstein 1968). At first glance, this definition tells us little about small states since nearly all states are interdependent with other actors in the international system. Functionalism (and its 'neo' variant) illustrates how states have continued to shed routine functions to international institutions (Haas 1958; 1970). Whether large or small, states are interdependent with other actors in the international system. Yet, Rothstein goes further in saying that perception matters. Agents within the state must see their size as their primary weakness as do foreign actors. Thus, even size has its instrumental and ideational factors. We can look at population, geography, gross domestic product (GDP) and military capacity as indicators of size, but this tells us little about prominence or power.

In his discussion of small states in the EU, Baldur Thorhallsson moves beyond the traditional indicators of size (Thorhallsson 2006). Thorhallsson's conceptual framework incorporates the notion of internal and external capacities to illustrate state size. Internal capacity is determined by domestic resources and the ability of the government's ability to act domestically. External capacity refers to a state's ability to impact the international system, through influence and agenda-setting. For Thorhallsson, internal and external capacities are heavily interlinked. As a result, he introduces two concepts that tie the internal and external together. They are 'action competence' and 'vulnerability'. Action competence 'concerns states' ability to formulate and implement policies, domestically, and their ability to exert influence, internationally' (Thorhallsson 2006: 14). Vulnerability 'refers to states' domestic and international weakness and possible subjugation in a wide context' according to the traditional indicators of size (Thorhallsson 2006). Action competence and vulnerability shed light on how, as Keohane says, small states have risen to prominence if not to power.

Implicit in Thorhallsson's analysis is that there is something particularly unique about small states within the EU, if not NATO. The decision-making procedures for instance at the European Council, Political and Security Committee, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives illustrates a member-state's ability to have an impact on the agenda of the wider community. The EU is populated by small states and the Baltic States are some of the smallest. Baltic action competence and vulnerability have internal and external dimensions as indicated by Thorhallsson's conceptual framework. EU and NATO membership has raised the Baltic States to prominence though not to power. The forthcoming chapters will highlight how these memberships have had an impact on Baltic foreign policies.

Instrumental factors of foreign policy only tell us part of the story. We identify three interrelated ideational factors: history, identity and discourse. History's impact on foreign policy can be seen in two ways. History, more specifically historiography, is a tale of where a state has been. The international community consists of those who ruled and those who were ruled. A history of dominance, whether on top or on the bottom, has a lasting impact on individual conceptions of where the state sits in the international system. Secondly, we can see history in terms of trajectory. Not only does history tell us where we have been, but also gives us a remit of where we can go forward. Foreign policy sits between these two notions of history, looking back and looking forward. The best example of this is American history and US foreign policy. Richard De Zoysa illustrates how US foreign policy is predicated on the legacies of 'Manifest Destiny': a form of civilizing evangelism (De Zoysa 2005). Likewise, Bobo Lo has illustrated the force of history on Russian foreign policy equally predicated on a long-term identity crisis (Lo 2002).

But what of small, weaker states, that have not been the rulers but instead the ruled. Post-colonial states exude three foreign policy characteristics. Firstly, post-colonial foreign policy is directed at restoring the country to its previous

state prior to colonialism. Secondly, these states attempt to seek redress for the dominance from which they have suffered. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, post-colonial states seek to prevent a return to its colonial status through the means of foreign policy. We argue that you can see the Baltic States in the light of post-colonial states. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have experienced outsider influence, and in many cases political control, since the thirteenth century. This long-term experience of control by outside forces, whether German, Swedish or Czarist Russian, have had considerable impact on the Baltic States' notion of where they fit into the international system. However, as we shall see in chapter two, the Soviet occupation remains the most relevant period in the Baltic region and has the greatest impact on foreign policy in terms of restoration, redress and prevention.

Identity, and in particular national identity, is a part of history as well as a result of it. In turn, national identity determines how we see history (historiography). This view of history is in other words, a 'collective memory'. Illya Prizel states that 'since the memories of societies, much like those of individuals, are inconsistent and selective, the national identity is subject to what layer of a polity has the custodianship of the collective memory' (Prizel 1998: 14). National identity is a complex phenomenon and there is no need for us to problematise it here nor review approaches to it. What we do need to justify is national identity's impact on the foreign policy process. By and large, foreign policy has been discussed in terms of instrumental factors, but no scholar of Baltic foreign policy could discount the impact of national identity on foreign policy. In fact, the literature on foreign policy in the post-Soviet region pays a great deal of attention to the impact of national identity on foreign policy, against the grain of the larger body of work on foreign policy (see Misiunas 1994; Burant 1995; Prizel 1998; Tsygankov 2000; Kuzio 2003). This difference is partly recognition of the impact of nationalism and national identity in post-Soviet politics, but is also simply a matter of timing where the study of international relations in general began to be increasingly challenged by constructivist agendas.

The national identities in the Baltic States are in effect post-colonial identities as described earlier. All three states show a great deal of resentment towards their former colonizer, the Russian Federation, and are keen to restore, redress and prevent future Russian domination. We can see such a pattern in the pre-enlargement foreign policies in the Baltic States. Estonia and Latvia restored their inter-war regimes, constitution, citizens and all. All three states have repeatedly sought redress for the illegal occupation, in particular the cost in lives and resources. Finally, the Baltic States have sought to prevent not only Russian regional hegemony but Russian dominance of any type, by seeking entry into NATO and the EU.

The impact of history and national identity on foreign policy can be seen in a state's discourse. We follow that discourse is a representation of ideas. Thus, ideas of the 'nation', the state, one's neighbours, etc, will manifest itself in foreign policy discourse. In their work on ideas and beliefs in foreign policy-making, Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane argue that ideas are important factors influencing foreign policy (Goldstein and Keohane 1993). They

challenge the rationalist accounts of foreign policy that prioritise interests over ideas. While they do not challenge the rationalist account of political behaviour, Goldstein and Keohane do attempt to situate ideas and beliefs into the rationalist decision-making process. The role ideas play in foreign policy is in many cases quite clear, especially in times of crisis and conflict. However, the role that ideas play is harder to determine in the minutiae of everyday foreign policy-making. How do ideas shape foreign policy? Goldstein and Keohane argue that '...action taken by human beings depend on the substantive quality of available ideas, since such ideas help to clarify principles and conceptions of causal relationships, and to coordinate individual behaviour' (Goldstein and Keohane 1993: 5). Furthermore, once these ideas have been institutionalised, they continue to shape political behaviour until new innovative ideas are created.

Goldstein and Keohane identify three ways in which ideas influence policy. Firstly, ideas can act as road maps towards certain preferences. How do policy-makers arrive at preferences and thus selective interests? Identifying ideas can determine why policy-makers may choose one strategy over another. Secondly, ideas can provide a basis for making-decisions when there is a lack of information and/or obvious strategy to choose. For example, ideas and belief systems may influence whether a state chooses one ally over another, or one trading partner over another. Finally, ideas can become institutionalised and thus be reiterated across time. Goldstein and Keohane imply that this institutionalisation of ideas is one of the reasons why many discount ideas and beliefs as causal factors in political behaviour. In other words, once ideas have been incorporated into institutional design and operation, they become outside the scope of causality. All three ways in which ideas influence foreign policy illustrate the importance of ideational factors in foreign policy.

The relationship between ideas and discourse is rather straightforward. We can identify the role of ideas in foreign policy by analysing the foreign policy discourse in the Baltic States. The words used to describe a state's role in the international system is indicative of the ideas that shape foreign policy preferences. In the Baltic cases, this illustrates why Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were predisposed to seeking security guarantees from the Western European security organizations rather than remaining a part of the post-Soviet security architecture, like Ukraine and Georgia. Maria Mälksoo illustrates that the perception of Europe in the Baltic States remains unsettled: whether to be European or to act like it (Mälksoo 2006). She argues that foreign policy discourse in the Baltic States still locates the three countries on the edge of Europe, neither in nor out. We take these ideational factors to see whether or not enlargement has changed foreign policy narratives in the Baltic States.

The instrument-ideational axis offers us two sides to explaining foreign policy in the Baltic region. The Baltic States are keenly aware of their vulnerability vis-à-vis Russia, especially at a time where Moscow continues to be increasing its pressure on the 'West' in general and the Baltic States specifically through energy, war games and air space violations. The

ideational factors are equally important but could easily be obfuscated by the instrumental factors. The Baltic governments have sought to restore, redress and prevent in the post-Soviet/colonial era. History, national identity and discourse represent 'road maps', focal points and institutions that determine foreign policy preferences. With these factors in mind, the instrumental-ideational axis presents us with three points on which to build in the forthcoming chapters.

- a) Instrumental and ideational factors of foreign policy are mutually constituted and are equally important in the Baltic cases.
- b) Dual enlargement allows us to see how much has changed in the Baltic region by considering whether instrumental and ideational factors have changed or continued as they were.
- c) While the Soviet/colonial period of history has directed foreign policy since the first mention of NATO membership in 1992, we seek to discover whether or not the Baltic States remain in a post-Soviet/colonial geo-political mindset.

While the structure-agency axis tells us about what or who is determining foreign policy and the exogenous-endogenous axis tells us about where foreign policy is determined, the instrumental-ideational axis gets at the heart of Baltic foreign policy as seen from Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius.

### **Baltic Foreign Policy in Transition**

Baltic foreign policy objectives following independence from the Soviet Union have been the same across the three states: security and integration. The Baltic States' primary security concern was partly strategic and partly constructed from memory. Real security concerns were determined by Russia's unwillingness/inability to remove military forces from Estonia and Latvia until August 1994 (although 1991 for Lithuania). Matched with this was constant rhetoric on the part of the Russian government, declaring everything from discrimination to 'ethnic cleansing' in Estonia and Latvia (*Izvestia*, 9 February 1994). Time did not ease relations. In 1998, the Russian Federated Council passed a non-binding resolution that called on the government to freeze all trade between the Russian Federation and Latvia (*Nevazisimaya Gazeta*, 21 March 1998). Security has been at least preliminarily guaranteed by membership of NATO and the EU. Regional integration in terms of the European security architecture as well as the political, civil and economic contexts was also suited by the enlargement process and fundamentally by enlargement itself.

Baltic post-enlargement foreign policies illustrate the shift away from explicit traditional security concerns by emphasizing 'soft security' and a further deepening of European integration. For instance, the Estonian Government's European Union Policy for 2004-2006, lists environmental, health and societal security as primary foreign policy tasks. The Latvian Foreign Policy Directive Project 2005-2010 calls for focus on regional security, illegal migration and organised crime, as well as increased economic relations within the EU common market. The Lithuanian Parliament's Resolution on Directions in Foreign Policy calls for the government to 'continue expanding the zone of security and stability in the region'. All three states make a point of

concentrating on the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy. Partly as a response to geopolitical gamesmanship in the western post-Soviet region as well as EU requirements that member-states allocate at least .4 percent of Gross Domestic Product for development policies.

Have the Baltic States developed 'normal' foreign policies since enlargement? Looking at the shift in foreign policy objectives across the three states, one might come to this initial conclusion. Galbreath (2006) finds in relation to Latvian post-enlargement foreign policy, that the Latvian government has used its position within the EU and NATO as part of a policy of 'aggrandisement'. Switching largely from the subject of European emulation, policy documents and guidelines illustrate a move to 'punch above their weight'. The new issue-areas are the global market, the war on terror, and the concentration on transition politics in Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. However, while policy documents from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania illustrate a shift in focus from the 'self' to the 'other', Maria Mälksoo (2006: 278-79) argues that 'despite certain relief in their immediate security concerns after the dual enlargement, the shift by the Baltic States from existential politics to normal politics is far from being accomplished.' Mälksoo illustrates how Baltic politicians have maintained a discourse of 'Europe but not Europe', asking the question "is the 'modern narrative' more about 'being European or, indeed 'behaving like one'?" (2006: 282).

The difference between the Galbreath and Mälksoo analyses illustrates the different processes involved in foreign policy and implementation. On one hand, the Baltic States have a role to play as member-states of the European Union which requires that they look less at the self and more at the group as well as abroad. On the other hand, as Mälksoo illustrates well, there still remains a tension in the political discourse in defining the 'self'. This tension is a result of the geopolitical circumstances in the Baltic sub-region. What it means to be 'Baltic' remains relative to those who use the term. At least one Estonian politician has said that his state was not 'Baltic' but 'Nordic'. Furthermore, the Baltic States are outposts for both the EU and NATO, bordering on states that are undemocratic and (to some degree) 'kleptocratic'. Yet, there has been a change in foreign policy objectives even if the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian identity crisis is not over. And CFSP and ESDP have given the Baltic States both new opportunities with which to build and new challenges with which to contend.

### **Living with Enlargement in the Baltic Region**

Baltic foreign policy objectives in Brussels are focused on the Eastern neighbourhood, relations with the Russian Federation, and enhancing the EU's capabilities as an international actor. As Riina Kionka, Personal Representative of the SG/HR on Human Rights in the area of CFSP and Head of Human Rights Unit in the EU Council Secretariat, stated in an interview, the Baltic States had a big shock waiting for them when they became members of the EU.<sup>2</sup> Going from accession state to member state

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<sup>2</sup> Dr Kionka was Undersecretary for EU Affairs in the Estonian ministry for foreign affairs from August 2004 to July 2005. Interview in Brussels, January 2007.

overnight added an entirely new dimension to Baltic States' foreign policies. As we shall see, the three issue areas illustrate this transition.

### *The Eastern Neighbourhood*

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have each expressed support for increased engagement with the countries of the western post-Soviet area, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and to a lesser extent, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In relation to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, the Baltic States have expressed support for not only further integration but also further enlargement of the EU and NATO. While increased engagement and even integration is practical, further enlargement is not. The EU is in a phase of enlargement fatigue. It does not help that the Ukrainian government is split between pro-Western nationalists and pro-Russianists, Georgia is in constant tension with Russia and has the two breakaway regions of South Ossetia (monitored by the OSCE) and Abkhazia (monitored by the UN), and Moldova with the breakaway region of Transdniestra. To put the icing on the cake, the Baltic States have been strong supporters of Turkey's efforts to accede to the EU, in return for the earlier Turkish support of Baltic membership in NATO.

As Galbreath and Lamoreaux (2007) argue, the Baltic States are in the position to be bastions, beacons or bridges to the western post-Soviet states. Bastion means that the edge of the EU separates the 'European' space from the 'other', much like the role of the Mediterranean in the south. Beacon means that having gone through de-Sovietization, democratization, and marketization, the Baltic States can provide a successful example of post-Soviet transition that will increase engagement and further integration with these states by the EU. Finally, bridge refers to the Baltic States role as facilitators of further enlargement. Nevertheless, as small states, the position of bastion, beacon or bridge is dictated less by the Baltic governments and more by the domestic politics in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, the resolution of the 'frozen conflicts' (which includes the participation and positive step of the Russians), and the big member-states at the EU.

Interviews of senior officials in the Baltic capitals and the delegations in Brussels illustrate the nature of Baltic efforts to shape the agenda at the EU level in relation to the western post-Soviet area.<sup>3</sup> As highlighted by an official in the Latvian ministry of foreign affairs (MFA), simply being in the region makes a difference, as in the case where the Latvian embassy in Minsk was used by the Austrian EU presidency in 2006 to engage with Belarusian authorities. The Baltic States have also sent officials into the field of EU sponsored missions, such as to Moldova and Georgia. For instance, in Moldova in 2006, the Latvian government had an estimated 60 personnel working on the customs and border operations.<sup>4</sup> In May 2006, the Latvians had a joint meeting with the Ukrainian government on the challenges of European integration.<sup>5</sup> Recently, former Latvian minister for social integration

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<sup>3</sup> Interview data is based on several rounds of interviews in April 2005 and April 2006 in the Baltic States, as well as interviews with the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian delegations to the Council of the European Union in Brussels in January 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Information based on an interview with an official in the Latvian MFA in Riga, April 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Information based on an interview with an official in the Latvian MFA in Riga, April 2006.

Nils Muiznieks was made the EU's 'Group of experts' to Georgia. In comparing interview responses from officials in Latvia and Lithuania, we can see a difference in the rationale for supporting the Eastern neighbourhood. Latvian officials responded that Latvia had a strategic objective to help bring the Eastern neighbourhood closer, if not into, the 'European' space. On the other hand, Lithuanian officials often stated that Lithuania had a moral obligation or imperative to 'help' these countries.

In Brussels, moves to assist engagement and integration in the Eastern neighbourhood are limited by the Baltic States' status as small states. As a larger state for instance, Poland has significant pulling power in its support for pressure on Belarus and support for Ukraine. Baltic officials in Brussels illustrated a learning process following entry into the European Union on how to affect the EU agenda. According to a Lithuanian official, in order to get attention to your own initiative, a state had to take an active part in 'horse-trading' over unrelated issues. All three Baltic delegations expressed the steep learning curve for the new member states once they become full members. Some EU member states are easier to engage than others. Officials from the Estonian and Lithuanian delegations expressed satisfaction with states like the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and the Nordic member states. However, they also stated that other states like France and to a lesser extent Spain and Portugal were more difficult to encourage support for EU initiatives in the Eastern neighbourhood. One such example was the French and Portuguese veto over establishing an ESDP mission to Moldova. The Baltic governments have been able to play a part in influencing the EU agenda, especially in areas related to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Pointing to smaller states in the Union such as Denmark, Luxembourg and Belgium, Baltic officials argued that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania also have the potential to make a geo-political impact through the EU. Incidentally, the Baltic impact at the OSCE is weaker than the EU concerning support for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. During interviews of delegations to the OSCE in Vienna, many officials expressed surprise of any Baltic focus on these states.<sup>6</sup>

### *EU-Russian Relations*

Baltic relations with the Russian Federation have been significantly affected by history and current events. Historically, the Baltic States were granted independence from the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century only to formally lose their sovereignty in 1944 to the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as stated earlier, the primary objective of the post-Soviet era was to ensure independence of the Baltic States. The Baltic governments did this by integrating into the security networks of NATO and the EU. Although members since 2004, as Mälksoo illustrates, the issue of security and Russian bellicosity still remains important in the Baltic psyche. Events since the post-Cold War period over the inter-related issues of Russian-speaking minorities, Russian troop withdrawals, and the loss of territory as well as un-ratified border agreements, has done little to help the Baltic States get past their history of Soviet occupation (see Budryte 2005; Galbreath 2005).

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<sup>6</sup> Interviews at the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, April/May 2006.

<sup>7</sup> On foreign policy in the inter-war Baltic republics, see Ilmjarv (2004).

The Baltic States have used their position in the EU to influence the EU-Russian relationship. Firstly, as we see above, the Baltic governments are keen to use the EU as a geo-political heavyweight to counter the influence of Russia in its own 'near abroad'. Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius know that increased pressure, engagement and integration with the West weaken Russia's influence in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Belarus. Secondly, the EU gives the Baltic States an institutional vantage point lacking before 2004. In particular, the Russian government has used the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe as ways to apply pressure to the Baltic States in general and Estonia and Latvia specifically. While the Baltic States are members of all of these organizations, the key is that Russia is not part of the EU. With the move for a common foreign policy within the EU, Baltic interests can be projected onto the EU agenda, as seen in the EU-Russia summits in 2003 and 2006 where criticism of the Baltic States by the Russian government was not allowed as part of the discussion. Finally, and more optimistically, the EU-Russian relationship may be positively affected by the Baltic States. The Baltic States are stable and secure states through which to move goods between the EU and Russia. For instance, the Latvian foreign ministry has consistently concentrated on promoting transport through the region as a foreign policy priority.

Objectives are one thing, but outcomes are quite another. To what degree have the Baltic States been able to shape the EU-Russian relationship. Seemingly, very little. An official in the Latvian MFA stated that EU membership had not changed the relationship between Latvia and Russia. Another official stated that in the first year of membership, the Russian foreign ministry was trying to see whether or not the Baltic States would be considered by other EU states as full and equal members. The problem with the EU-Russian relationship as far as the Baltic States are concerned is that practical interests of individual states may override the geo-political concerns of the Baltic governments. For example, the Western European heavy reliance on Russian natural gas or the prospect of a pipeline under the North Sea from Russia to Germany could undermine EU solidarity. However, this has as yet not happened. In fact, Poland has illustrated how one state can stall an EU-Russian agreement as it did over the Russian import ban of Polish meat.<sup>8</sup>

#### *EU as an International Actor*

To some degree, the EU's role as an international actor overlaps with the Eastern neighbourhood initiative. At the same time, the EU's ability to engage with far flung regions of the world marks one of the greatest challenges for Baltic foreign policy. Through ESDP, the EU has had a peacekeeping and state-building force in the FYR Macedonia and has since taken over NATO's Stabilization force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2005. The EU also has had Police Training missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM) and FYR Macedonia (Proxima). In fact, a Latvian female police officer participated in the Proxima mission. As stated earlier, the Baltic governments,

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<sup>8</sup> *Guardian*, 'Putin's power struggle' 29 November 2007.

as well as many other EU member states, tried to generate an ESDP force for Moldova, which was blocked by France and Portugal. The 'frozen conflict' in Moldova has been one of the longest lasting conflict zones in Europe, although for the most part peaceful.<sup>9</sup> In the end, supporters of the ESDP mission had to settle with a European Commission field mission of essentially rapporteurs. In Georgia, the European Commission has a delegation and has recently established an 'EU group of experts' of which former Latvian social integration minister, Nils Muižnieks, has taken part.

The Baltic role in Afghanistan is more pronounced than in the Balkans and Caucuses. All three states have soldiers serving in Afghanistan (as well as Iraq). Estonian troops are currently serving with the British in the southern Helmand province. Latvian troops are serving in Mazar-e Sharif near the Uzbek border as well as in Maymaneh in the east. However, Lithuania has the largest deployment in Afghanistan with around 120 soldiers and civilians leading a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in central Afghanistan. Recently, the European Council deemed ESDP funding could be used to support PRTs in Afghanistan. According to a senior Lithuanian official in Brussels, the prospect of ESDP support offers its own set of opportunities and challenges.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, EU funding for the Lithuanian PRT has the ability to make a significant impact on the reconstruction effort, rewarding this small Baltic state for taking a lead in security and reconstruction on a micro-level in Afghanistan. On the other hand, with increased funding comes increased responsibility and the need for an infrastructure that can benefit from this input. As mentioned before, in order to make an impact on the EU's agenda and policy implementation, the Baltic States require an epistemic infrastructure that can support these initiatives. According to the same senior official, Lithuania has the military and administrative capabilities of running the PRT, but increased funding requires non-governmental development organizations that are lacking in Lithuania. This absence is an illustration of how the transition of going from an importer to an exporter has its own significant challenges. One solution would be working through international non-governmental development organizations in order to recruit ESDP funding. At the same time, perhaps the Lithuanian government is loathe to bring in larger NGOs for the fear of losing administrative control over certain aspects of reconstruction. As of January 2007, the Lithuanian PRT has yet to receive ESDP financing.

Further afield, the EU has missions in the Middle East including the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS and EU BAM Rafah) and Iraq (Eujust Lex) as well as in Africa including the Congo (EUSEC DR Congo and EUPOL Kinshasa) and Sudan (Darfur, supports the AMIS II African Union force). These missions also pose a similar problem to that of Lithuania's PRT and ESDP funding and mark a major change in the types of expertise and knowledge needed in the foreign ministries. Senior officials for all three Baltic States stated that the government's found it hard to cope with moving from focusing exclusively on the geo-politics of the Baltic region to having to make

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<sup>9</sup> On the EU's previous policy towards Moldova, see Zagorski (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Interview at the Lithuanian delegation to the European Union in Brussels, January 2007.

decisions on places such as Africa or Asia. Again, in order to be successful at the EU, the Baltic States are faced with developing an epistemic infrastructure that can generate knowledgeable civil servants and issue-based campaigners. Since 2004, the Baltic governments have all established centres to further develop deeper knowledge in the European institutions as well as events and issues in far flung areas. Thus, there is a consensus among Baltic senior officials in Brussels that this development of domestic knowledge is the greatest challenge since joining the EU.

### **Conclusion**

The EU has been a way for the Baltic States to transition from importers to exporters, to make the asymmetric Baltic-Russian relationship more symmetric, and broaden Baltic horizons in other areas of the world. However, along with the opportunities, CFSP and ESDP have come with costs. One former Estonian senior official remarked that no state truly appreciates how the EU works until they hold the Presidency of the European Council. Unfortunately for Estonia, they have to wait until 2018, while Lithuania and Latvia must wait until 2013 and 2015, respectively. Nevertheless, the Baltic States have benefited greatly from their membership in the EU. While as Mälksoo's argument that perceptions of security and identity have not changed enough rings true, we can see that in terms of policy, there has been a clear change from the pre- to the post-enlargement phases. The goal of the Baltic governments is to continue to learn how to work through the labyrinth that is the EU and maximise their impact as small states.

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