

ENABLING NATO ENLARGEMENT: CHANGING CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE BALTIC STATES

Maria Mälksoo

University of Cambridge

Abstract. The current paper is a critical constructivist account of the changing Western perceptions of the Baltic states in the context of the debate over NATO enlargement. The article shows how the initial perception of the Baltic states as falling within the former Soviet Union's sphere of legitimate interest, and therefore outside the area of potential NATO enlargement, changed in response to an American-led reconstruction of NATO's role from that of a defensive alliance to the framework of a democratic security community.

Keywords: NATO enlargement, Baltic states, critical constructivism, geopolitical identity construction, international relations

1. Introduction

Baltic membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was considered a 'mission impossible' throughout most of the post-Cold War debate over enlargement. Indeed, the question of the admission of the Baltic states has been the ultimate contentious issue in NATO enlargement discourse: Russia has opposed it most vehemently, the major European allies have supported it least enthusiastically and the Americans have had highly dissenting opinions on the matter. Only a few years before the Prague Summit in November 2002 where the three Baltic states were finally invited to begin the accession talks with the Alliance, the 'Baltic question' in NATO was still highly controversial and keenly debated. At the end of the day, Estonia's, Latvia's and Lithuania's jump over the 'barbed wire called the former Soviet Union' hanging in the consciousness of the traditional inhabitants of the transatlantic security community seems to have been rather abrupt and, therefore, begs for systemic study.

Why was the issue of Baltic membership in NATO commonly regarded as the most difficult piece of the puzzle throughout the enlargement debate? What constituted the shift from treating the Baltics as 'second tier' candidates in the

NATO enlargement debate to speaking of them as 'normal' aspirant countries? To answer these questions, I will examine how the image of the Baltic states in the 'mental map' of the NATO allies has fundamentally changed over the last decade in order to enable their ultimate admission to the transatlantic security community.¹

Thus, the premises of the study lie in the critical constructivist approach. The notion of the 'mental map' touches the crux of the problem. Milan Kundera (1984) once asked rhetorically, why Vienna is Western Europe when Prague 100 miles west from Vienna is Eastern Europe? Using that as an example we could ask – why Copenhagen is Northern Europe while Tallinn 600 km north is Eastern or Central Europe and Helsinki 80 km north of Tallinn is West or North?² Mental maps can be of considerably greater importance in determining a state's geopolitical identity than the actual geographical position of the country. In other words, the way a state is perceived by other states determines largely its position in the world. Belonging to a political community is neither a geographical nor an historical inevitability – the political communities themselves are essentially 'imagined' (Anderson 1991) and their memberships socially constructed.³ In the context of this study, the point made here is simply that the similarities and dissimilarities of the traditional and aspiring members of the transatlantic security community (as institutionalised in the body of NATO) are processed politically by the builders of post-Cold War NATO. They decide which similarities shall and shall not be politically relevant. In fact, similarities do not exist as politically relevant givens before they are being communicated as politically relevant (Neumann 1992:64).

Hence, the Baltic states are considered here above all as an object of an array of intellectual operations practiced upon them by the West.⁴ It is not, of course, that foreign policy actors or theorists sat down and consciously chose a particular construction or script that would best represent the Baltic case in NATO.⁵ Rather, these categories preceded any consciously formulated opinion, or were constitutive of it (Fierke 1998:48). Indeed, governmental elites choose specific policies,

¹ The analysis relies on a large archive of primary and secondary documents, including official NATO, U.S., European and the Baltic states governments' policy statements, speeches, articles, interviews, newspaper reports, discussions and academic analyses. Given space limitations, it has only been possible to refer directly to a small number of those documents in order to illustrate the empirical base of the specific discourses. In addition, I conducted thirteen interviews between March and May 2003 with diplomats and politicians who have been closely involved in shaping the Baltic dimension in NATO enlargement discourse. The relative importance of the interviews is mostly illustrative since they were conducted in order to check against the results of the author's previous research, and not to be used as main primary source material.

² Sven Sakkov has made this point.

³ Of course, to refer to something as socially constructed is not at all the same as to say that it does not exist. It is the discursive constitution of the Euro-Atlantic security community and its members *in spe* (*resp.* the Baltic states) that I refer to as 'construction', and it does not mean that either NATO or the Baltics have been made up but their meaning has been moulded in discourse (Weldes et al. 1999:12).

⁴ By 'the West', I mean the transatlantic community bonding the United States and its European allies.

⁵ The term 'script' refers to a set of representations, a collection of descriptions, scenarios and attributes that are deemed relevant and appropriate to defining a place in foreign policy (Ó Tuathail 1992:156).

strategies, and concrete interests because they (or their justifications) are consistent with more general, deeper, collectively held ideas or discourses (Moravcsik 2001:177).

Critical constructivism is therefore a highly relevant approach to the current study since it denaturalises dominant constructions, offers guidelines for the transformation of common sense, and facilitates the imagining of alternative life-worlds (Weldes et al. 1999:13). For a constructivist, the building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material, embracing normative dimensions together with instrumental ones and expressing not only individual but also collective intentionality (Ruggie 1998:33). Moreover, the meaning and significance of ideational factors are not independent of time and place. Norman Fairclough's method of critical discourse analysis (1992, 1993, 1995) has a strong orientation to changing discursive practices and their place within wider processes of social and cultural change. Therefore, it is particularly well suited to analyse the changing constructions of the Baltic states in NATO enlargement discourse.

This article puts forward the argument that the constructivist emphasis on geopolitical identities and mental maps provides an important point of departure for understanding NATO's eventual expansion to the Baltic region. A shift in the image of the Baltic states from post-Soviet republics to success stories of the former Eastern bloc enabled their ultimate admittance as full partners in the Euro-Atlantic security community. The initial perception of the Baltic states as falling within the former Soviet Union's sphere of legitimate interest, and therefore outside the area of potential NATO enlargement, changed in response to an American led reconstruction of NATO's role from that of a defensive alliance to the framework of a democratic security community. Western constructions of the Baltic states were transformed along with the self-perception and -projection of the Alliance in the post-Cold War security environment. At the end of the day, NATO not only needed a new *raison d'être*, a new mission to justify its continued existence in the post-Cold War world, but the mission had to be bold (i.e. embracing the countries from the former 'other' side).

The discussion about why and how Russia finally downgraded its opposition to enlargement or the analysis of the discursive constructions of the 'Baltic question' in NATO by the Russian foreign policy establishment, and their impact on the change in Western perceptions with regard to the inclusion of the Baltic states, remain out of the reach of this article.⁶

2. Facing the Eastern 'Other'

Traditional positivist international relations scholarship is usually confined to explaining causality, asking why one variable necessarily caused another, instead of contemplating on how certain acts become possible (Fierke 1998:5–6). Indeed,

⁶ For the development of Russian perspective on NATO's eastward enlargement, see Black 2000. About the Baltic question specifically, see Black 1999. See also Meek 1998.

the existing literature on NATO enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe has not sufficiently addressed issues raised by a context of dramatic change where the 'other' disappears or undergoes significant transformation. A spate of realist and institutionalist explanations of NATO's opening up to Central and Eastern European countries, *inter alia* the Baltic states, are inadequate to unfold the first and foremost reason and meaning of the very process: mental rearrangement of the map of Europe, an unprecedented overcoming of the conceptual division of Europe that dates from long before the Cold War. The question whether post-Communist countries were able to join Europe not only politically, but also socially and culturally, or would they really remain the open flank to non-Europe, has been fundamental in the NATO enlargement process. NATO enlargement to Eastern Europe has also tested the ability of Western Europe to overcome cultural and civilisational boundaries between 'us' and 'other' (Lauristin 1997:28). That is why, the post-Cold War NATO enlargement debate in general, and the Baltic dimension of it in particular, has, in the final analysis, been a battle of perceptions.

Geopolitical imaginations (such as 'Europe') generally require an 'other' and 'us' distinction. In the mind of the West, the Baltic states have historically been a part of the Eastern European 'other'. The use of the East as the 'dominant other' has been a general practice in European identity formation in the last five centuries (Neumann 1999). Indeed, in the West, Eastern Europe was considered alien and backward long before the image of the Iron Curtain created the perception of Eastern Europeans as "dull-grey people leading dull-grey lives in dull-grey apartment blocs" (Ilves 2001). Eastern Europe was 'invented' by Western Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century.⁷ The construction of Eastern Europe by the West was a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, creating the puzzling "Europe but not Europe" (Wolff 1994:7–13). Soviet rule in Central and Eastern Europe loaded the term 'East' with further negative connotations. While 'West' became, both unwittingly and knowingly, a synonym for advancement, culture, freedom and decency, 'East', on the other hand, came to be an equivalent for underdevelopment, callous authoritarianism and omnipresent nonsense (Havel 2001). According to Fierke and Wiener (2001:121–3), NATO and the EU developed a specific Western identity during the Cold War. This identity was embedded in the construction of shared democratic norms which, in essence, were the result of both social practices and the definition of the democratic Western political order, as different from the communist Eastern political order. The East became therefore an important reference point for the social construction of Western Europe.

The perception of Western superiority and Eastern inferiority did not, of course, constitute a good starting point for a new arrangement of the world after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Therefore, the end of the Cold War has called for a revision of the conceptual division of Europe and compelled the reconsidera-

⁷ 'Invented', since the disunion between Western Europe and Eastern Europe "was not a natural distinction, or even an innocent one, for it was produced as a work of cultural creation, of intellectual artifice, of ideological self-interest and self-promotion" (Wolff 1994:4).

tion of Europe as a whole. In essence, both ‘West’ and ‘East’ should gradually become morally neutral concepts again for as long as the word ‘East’ evokes a pejorative, and the word ‘West’ a commendatory connotation, it will be immensely difficult to build a new world order based on equality of the various regions (Havel 2001).

The enlargement processes of NATO and the EU to Central and Eastern European countries have reified the need for a more inclusive European identity. The issues of identity may be hidden from the usual day-to-day perspective in the enlargement discourses of these two organizations, but they actually go to the heart of their eastward enlargement processes. Indeed, the Euro-Atlantic ‘self’ has been greatly challenged by the expansion of hard and soft security umbrellas to the states that have historically been conceived of as an ‘other’. The end of the Iron Curtain has not promised any easy or immediate reconciliation of the continental moieties, in politics, economics, or culture (Wolff 1994:371).⁸ Hence, a major conceptual issue has been concerned with the task of defining what was actually understood by the term ‘Europe’, and specifically, where the boundaries of Europe would end in the East (Smith and Timmins 2000:12–13).

Perceptions of the other reveal something about the self. Indeed, the quality ascribed to the other is in actuality something that is within the self that comes to exist as other in terms of the discursive economy of identity/difference (Campbell 1992:239, Kowert 1998/99:29). Western Europe and Eastern Europe were also invented by the Enlightenment together, as complementary concepts, defining each other by opposition and adjacency (Wolff 1994:5). In this context, we could regard the fundamental uneasiness of the ‘good old Europeans’ towards enlarging NATO to Central and Eastern European countries not merely reverberating their sense of insecurity towards the historical ‘other’, but also the inherent difficulty in determining *what* the European identity proper actually means.⁹ Indeed, in discussing NATO enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, *inter alia* the Baltics, the Western allies have also been discussing themselves.

A dread of the enlargement to the East has been highly visible among many Western Europeans throughout the last decade. One could, indeed, detect a fear that people very different from ‘us Europeans’ were about to join, a fear of the unknown, a fear that the new members were going to change the current Euro-Atlantic structures into something alien (Ilves 2001). The doubt that Central and Eastern Europe was “the other Europe, not really the one”, was very real – although it was difficult to trace, “because people did not say it explicitly or put it in writing” (interview with Asmus).¹⁰

⁸ According to Jane O. Sharp (1996:148), Stalin’s Iron Curtain was replaced with “a curtain of indifference”. For Central Europe it seemed that the Western goal posts were constantly being pushed back or, as one Polish official suggested, “the West keeps bringing us nearer the soup, but giving us a shorter spoon”.

⁹ An illuminating study of the genealogy of the (lost) idea of Europe is provided by Elbe (2003).

¹⁰ Nevertheless, any discourse is a combination of explicit meanings – what is actually ‘said’ – and implicit meanings – what is left ‘unsaid’ but taken as given or presupposed (Fairclough 1995:106–7).

While it was possible to distinguish two faces of Central and Eastern Europe in the mind of the West after the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe – “one was Walesa, Havel, Solidarity, freedom-fighting dissident, David-versus-Goliath-hero; the other was nationalist, authoritarian, xenophobic, antisemitic, and antidemocratic” –, the Baltics were initially thought to represent the latter (interview with Asmus). Indeed, the West was not sure whether the Baltic states could really be democratic. In particular, their ultimately successful handling of the many issues related to the status of Russian minorities was not predetermined. Moreover, the possibility of Moscow engendering a more hard-line attitude on the part of the Russian immigrant communities in Estonia and Latvia provided new reasons for concern to the Western European sceptics. The major European allies (the United Kingdom, France and Germany) together with Southern Europeans, who have all been reluctant of Baltic membership in NATO throughout most of the past decade, shifted finally their opposition towards a more positive stance because of beginning to perceive the Baltic states as “more and more like us” (Asmus 2001).

Although vigorous Russian resistance was perceived as the key reason for seeing Baltic membership in NATO as a bridge too far for most of the post-Cold War debate over expansion, the allies also had initially doubts about whether the Baltic states were truly Western, part of the community which they represented. Indeed, in the mind of the Western Europe, the Baltics had more or less become part of the mental map of the former Soviet Union,¹¹ and therefore, the attitude of “Minsk-Pinsk, Omsk-Tomsk; Tallinn-Stalin, what’s the difference” was a prevailing one (Ilves 1998). Lennart Meri (1998), a former President of the Republic of Estonia, grasped truly something essential here noting deftly that the greatest obstacle to the Baltic states’ aspirations for NATO membership lay not in Moscow but rather in the West.

Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that the West did not have much knowledge about the Baltics after fifty years of separation.¹² Even today, an observation of Anatol Lieven (1993: xxxv) seems still to be valid, namely that:

...the Baltic states are so little known in the West. Writing on other areas of Eastern Europe, some cultural and historical background can be taken for granted; not so here. In particular, people in the West, and indeed Western

¹¹ Moreover, although the Western world never officially recognised the illegal Soviet annexation of the Baltic states from 1940–1991, their post-Second World War recognition of the western border of the Soviet Union indicated that the West had actually accepted the Baltic countries as being part of the Soviet Union.

¹² This phenomenon was symptomatic for the rest of Central and Eastern European countries as well. Madeleine Albright (1998) used to illustrate the perception of Central and Eastern Europe as a quaint, exotic mystery to the West by the following anecdote: “Jan Masaryk, the son of Czechoslovakia’s first president, used to tell a story about a U.S. Senator who asked him, “How’s your father; does he still play the violin?” To which Jan replied, “Sir, I fear you are making a small mistake. You are perhaps thinking of Paderewski and not Masaryk. Paderewski plays piano, not the violin, and was president not of Czechoslovakia, but of Poland. Of our presidents, Benes was the only one who played. But he played neither the violin nor the piano, but football. In all other respects, your information is correct.”

diplomacy, have a tendency to lump the Baltic states together and regard them as identical (...) they are in fact very different, and may experience very different fates in the years to come. In this sense at least, there is no 'Baltic Region'.

3. First script: the Baltics as 'Former Soviet Union'

Besides being 'Eastern', the Baltics embraced yet another quality of 'otherness' in the context of NATO enlargement for the Euro-Atlantic community because of their late membership in the Soviet Union. Indeed, in the early years of discussing NATO enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, a firm dividing line was drawn between the countries of the former Soviet Union and the military and political satellites of this entity (Ilves 2000).¹³ The Baltic states were treated as a 'second tier' of post-communist countries as most European allies perceived Baltic membership to be "a red line to cross with regard to Russia for very-very sensitive historical reasons" (interview with a diplomat in NATO who asked to remain anonymous). Indeed, almost every leading political or military representative in Russia declared that any Alliance's attempt to offer membership to one or more Baltic countries would lead to a critical reassessment of the existing cooperative structures. Therefore, most of the arguments put forward in NATO against Baltic membership condensed to a cost-benefit analysis – although the rationale was camouflaged by the rhetoric describing the three countries as 'not yet ready' for membership (Kamp 1998:175). Officially, the Baltic states were excluded from NATO's first post-Cold War enlargement round because their armed forces were unprepared for membership. Although it is true that the Baltics had to start building their militaries from scratch, this excuse also served as a convenient mask to hide the geopolitical realities of the time.

The majority of European countries suggested that the EU was a more logical candidate than NATO for embracing the Baltics all in all (Mattox 2001:107–24). In the eyes of the Baltics, however, EU membership could not be regarded as a compensation for not being included in the enlargement of the Alliance, and thus as a solution for their security problems.

Russian geopolitical favoritism, and the Western long-time appeasement with this "Cold War Maginot Line mentality" (Asmus 2002:125) managed to derail Baltic membership in NATO for the first post-Cold War enlargement round, and left it open for fierce debate almost up to the second. The principal 'yes' to NATO enlargement to all Central and Eastern European democratic states in spite of their history or geography was cancelled by heavy 'buts' vis-à-vis Baltic membership. A constructive relationship with Russia was perceived to be of supreme importance to the goals of NATO. This *Realpolitik*-based approach to NATO enlargement thus saw Baltic membership creating rather than solving geopolitical problems (Kay 2001:210). That is why the 'Russia first' view, namely that

¹³ As confirmed by all thirteen interviewees.

Russia's objections should be allowed to override the Baltic states' sovereign right to join the alliance of their choice, prevailed in the NATO enlargement discourse for such a long time (Socor 2001).

From the perspective of *Realpolitik*, Baltic membership in NATO did not seem achievable until a fundamental shift in Russian reactions and/or transformation of NATO itself. The alleged 'indefensibility' of the Baltics because of their size and location was an essential part of the *Realpolitik* argument against their incorporation into the Alliance (interview with Larsen). Columnist Thomas L. Friedman (1997) dismissed the possibility of NATO enlarging to encompass the Baltic states without diluting itself to a "mini-UN," because "there is no way the U.S. Army is going to guarantee the Estonia-Russia border". Anne McElvoy (1996), in her paraphrase of the historic *mourir pour Dantzig*-argument, maintained that the applications of the former Soviet Union states to become members of NATO would be put on ice, because the West knew that it would not go to war over a Russian invasion of Ukraine or the Baltics.¹⁴ After all, "exactly how much oil is under the Baltic states?" (Labbe 2001).

On the one hand, then, it was signalled early on that neither Estonia, Latvia nor Lithuania had a real chance to be part of the first enlargement package, with the U.S. Defence Secretary William Perry saying in September 1996 that, "in my judgement, they are not yet ready to take on the Article V responsibilities of NATO membership". At the same time, the Western press began to speculate that Baltic exclusion from NATO would be the price Moscow received for acquiescing to NATO enlargement (Asmus 2002:161, Jakobson 1996, Lieven 1996). Moreover, the Baltic states were gradually regarded as a test case for the credibility of NATO's promises with regard to further accessions (Kamp 1998:179).

In the final analysis, Russia's 'red line' rhetoric touched a very sensitive political nerve in the Alliance and ultimately tested the overall mindset and rationale of NATO enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. Enlarging NATO on geopolitical grounds would have confirmed Russian anxieties about NATO as an aggressive military bloc being drawn right up to its borders. Moreover, refusal to invite the Baltic states out of consideration for the feelings or the strategic thoughts of the Kremlin would have ultimately amounted to admitting that Russia's fears of NATO's expanding to the region were justified – that NATO really harboured aggressive or imperialist anti-Russian intentions (Havel 2001). Russia's prejudice on the balance of power calculations behind NATO enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe thus emphasised the significance of defining the enlargement in cooperative rather than in confrontational terms for NATO allies. In order to enlarge NATO without reviving Cold War tensions or recreating a divided Europe, the enlargement rationale had to be inclusive vis-à-vis Russia, not implicitly confrontational towards it. The only conceivable enlargement logic

¹⁴ Lumping Ukraine and the Baltics together under the label of 'former Soviet Union' was symptomatic in the early years of discussing NATO's eastward enlargement in the West. The fact that by any 'measurable' NATO criteria Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were in reality much closer to Visegrad states than to Ukraine, was disregarded for geopolitical convenience.

that, at the end of the day, *enabled* Baltic membership in NATO without creating major Russian response, could therefore be the institutionalist one envisioning a new partnership between NATO and Russia as a complementary imperative to enlarging the Euro-Atlantic security community to Central and Eastern European countries. The purpose of NATO's eastward enlargement was thus to be less defined in terms of defence than of providing an anchor of stability, and building a new Europe *together* with Russia, rather than *without* or *against* it.

The line-metaphor, therefore, underlined fundamental questions about the meaning of security and NATO's identity as a security organization in the post-Cold War world. Historically, expanding a military alliance has essentially meant creating an *alignment* – that is, drawing a line, and so far, Russian concerns could be regarded fair (Kurth 2001:5–6). Indeed, while NATO's central task as a defensive alliance has traditionally been one of protecting the sovereignty of individual states, its security practice has subsequently involved the drawing of clear boundaries, specifying who was protected by the American security guarantee and who remained outside of it (Fierke and Wiener 2001:122). Hence, Russia's insistence on the 'red line' around the Baltics as regards to the limits of post-Cold War NATO illuminated a substantial dilemma of NATO enlargement, namely, how to enlarge a military alliance without drawing clear boundaries between those 'inside' and 'outside' the alliance. The Baltic membership question emphasized the difficult art of enlarging NATO without either confronting Russia as a major geopolitical factor in the region or appeasing it. As such, it became the litmus test of the Alliance's post-Cold War enlargement logic.

4. Second script: the Baltics as litmus test

After the Madrid Summit of 1997, it was gradually becoming clear that despite their smallness, the Baltics' impact on relations between Russia and NATO, and Russian and American politics in particular, was disproportionately significant. Moreover, the 'Baltic issue' encompassed the only moral component left in NATO enlargement process (interview with Jürgenson). The moral factor, however, was a very important incentive for the United States, the main promoter of the Alliance's eastward enlargement throughout the decade. As healing the wounds of the Cold War and erasing the injustices of Yalta became a major theme of NATO enlargement, leaving the Baltic states out was getting increasingly difficult. At the end of the day, the Baltics were seen as prime examples of the "noble victim," small states which had suffered, yet endured, and regained their freedom by peaceful means (Dalsjö 2001). In order to maintain its identity as victor in the Cold War, the United States, as well as NATO, had to act with some semblance of consistency with the normative ideals which they represented (Fierke and Wiener 2001:136).¹⁵

¹⁵ Of course, the U.S. reasons for bolstering the Baltic case for NATO were far from selfless, and therefore the moral rationale for enlarging NATO to the region has always been intertwined with strategic calculations (see i.e., Clinton 1998, McCain 2001, Talbott 1998). Furthermore, the fact

Thus, Baltic membership became *the issue* of the further debate over enlargement, indeed, a matter of principle for NATO. Having repeatedly said that states should be able to join their own alliances, that Russia would not have a veto, and that security in Europe is indivisible, NATO eventually faced the Baltic issue as a touchstone of its credibility in upholding all these principles (Bildt 1993, 1994, Pflüger 2001).

The initial underdog among the other Central and Eastern European applicants for NATO membership was therefore paradoxically becoming the ultimate litmus test of the Alliance's post-Cold War enlargement project (Holbrooke 1998, Talbott 2000). The construction of the Baltics as 'former Soviet Union' which implicitly emphasized the geopolitical straightjacket *disabling* their membership in NATO was gradually giving way to their projection as a test for the credibility of the Alliance's eastward enlargement rationale.

The invitation to begin accession talks with the EU in 1998 became the embodiment of the 'Baltic success story' of Europe's post-communist transition. While the 'former Soviet Union' label was disregarded by the EU, it was increasingly difficult for NATO, whose enlargement criteria was not that different from the EU's, to retain this implicit dividing line between the Baltics and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe (interview with Sillaste-Elling). The Baltic states that were still perceived as "a possible point of future tension" in the mid-1990s by the West had ultimately pursued "the right policies," performed well and met Western standards of democratic development and military reform (Asmus 1999).

The address of the President of Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, in Bratislava in May 2001 and the U.S. President George W. Bush's speech in Warsaw in June 2001 changed the dynamics of the enlargement debate irreversibly for the Baltic inclusion in the next enlargement round, and even the September 11 attacks could not sway the new momentum, vice versa (interview with Ederma, Gordon 2001–02).

Russia also softened its opposition towards further enlargement of the Alliance since NATO was perceived as less contentious when both Washington and Moscow saw each other as partners in dealing with a more pressing threat of Islamic fundamentalism (Huang 2003:79). The fact that Russia oriented itself clearly towards a cooperation model with the West greatly helped the Baltics to leave the 'special zone' as regards to their candidacy in NATO (interview with Luik). Furthermore, NATO's first post-Cold War enlargement round had convinced the allies that the actual military threat from Russia was insignificant. After all, World War III or Cold War II that the pessimistic realists had predicted, did not happen. Quite the opposite, Poland's relations with Russia, for instance, have improved after being admitted to the Alliance. In this context, NATO began to consider Russian concerns on the further enlargement of the Alliance as "a question of perception rather than fact" (Robertson 2001).

that the Baltics were strongly Atlanticist in their orientation and, as such, potentially very good partners for the U.S., did not go unnoticed either (see Asmus 1999). The Baltic region also provided for Washington an important laboratory for promoting closer regional cooperation between the East and the West (Perry et al. 2000).

In essence, the Baltic membership in NATO was enabled by the shift to the institutionalist rationale in NATO enlargement discourse. The initially prevailing *Realpolitik*-based opposition to the Baltics' inclusion in the Alliance, mostly maintained in Europe, was 'won over' by the United States' idealistic aim to build a 'new Europe', undo historic injustice and erase old dividing lines.¹⁶ By the beginning of the millennium, NATO had pursued its enlargement discourse to the stage where it would have been seriously discrediting for the Alliance not to include the Baltic states. Having said repeatedly that no European democracy could be excluded from the enlargement process because of its history or geography, NATO's failure to include the Baltic states in the Prague Summit of 2002 would have severely reduced its credibility, damaged the transatlantic relationship, and harmed U.S. prestige around the world (Kay 1998:112). At the end of the day, NATO became entangled in its own words, and the eventual 'inevitability' of expansion was driven by the necessity to save the face of the Alliance.

5. Conclusion

This article set out to explore the puzzle of the shift in the Western representation of the Baltic membership question in the post-Cold War NATO enlargement discourse. As the evidence suggests, the constructions of the Baltic states by Western political elites in NATO enlargement discourse have undergone considerable change over the last decade. The projection of the Baltics as 'former Soviet Union' was a prevailing script until Estonia was invited to begin the accession talks with another core organization of the West – the European Union – in 1998. Subsequently, the Baltics were increasingly perceived as a 'success story' of the post-Communist transition to democracy. Furthermore, Baltic membership became a litmus test of the Alliance's eastward enlargement strategy, thus enabling their eventual inclusion in the grand project of the mental rearrangement of the map of Europe.

The principal conclusion of this study is that NATO's eastward enlargement has not simply been a means to extend membership to Central and Eastern European countries. The Baltic membership issue in particular has underlined how the transformation of the 'other' has been a prerequisite for the post-Cold War enlargement of the Alliance. Indeed, in order to accommodate the Eastern 'other', the Western way of thinking about Central and Eastern Europe, *inter alia* the Baltic states, had to change (interview with Kannike).

¹⁶ However, there is an important nuance to this conclusion here: besides *Realpolitik*-based opposition to the Baltic membership, there was also a realist geopolitical pro-enlargement stance that the liberal institutionalists of the Clinton administration benefited from – although the two pro-enlargement groups made truly strange ideological bedfellows (Kupchan 2001:131). Hence, to say that the institutionalist approach 'won', does not mean that rationalist motives for enlargement (such as enhancing NATO's influence in the East or creating a security regime in the name of stability) were disregarded.

The Western perception of the 'Baltic question' in NATO has been greatly framed by Moscow's vehement opposition to Baltic membership in the Alliance. Indeed, Russia's rigid stance vis-à-vis the Baltics' admittance to NATO has highlighted a number of themes that eventually became ritual in NATO enlargement discourse: that the enlargement of NATO was not aimed at the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe; that in parallel with the extension of its membership, NATO should offer a new partnership to Russia, and the latter should be actively involved in building a new European security architecture (Baranovsky 2001).

To expand eastward and, at the same time, to signal to Russia that it was not posing a threat, NATO had to rethink the nature of its commitment to collective defence. Therefore, the Baltics' demands for enlargement had to be handled in such a way that would neither weaken the Alliance nor upset Russia. Moreover, sustaining the momentum of expansion became essential to the continuing relevance of NATO. Of course, the question remained whether the Alliance could possibly keep Russia undisturbed, meet the security expectations of the Balts, and maintain its own relevance concurrently (Fierke 1998:186). The 'Baltic case' became to represent incarnations of several post-Cold War dilemmas including the questions of what are the limits of the West; how does Russia respond to the international changes; and could the 'new' Europe be extended to include parts of the former Soviet Union? (Hansen and Heurlin 1998: viii).

A hegemonic *Realpolitik*-discourse on Baltic NATO membership was dislocated when new developments and events (e.g. NATO's new missions, the new NATO-Russia relationship, the implications of September 11) could not be integrated, domesticated or represented by the existing discourse any longer. The ultimate inclusion of the Baltic states into the Alliance highlights the victory of one NATO enlargement logic over the other, namely the success of the institutionalist enlargement strategy over the one based on realist balance of power calculations. After all, the intrinsic bone of contention of NATO enlargement debate was not simply the fact of expansion *per se*, but rather the question of *how* NATO should be enlarged.

As the enlargement process proceeded, NATO began to emphasize the political over the military nature of expansion, and the Article Five guarantee to collective defence was receding into the background of the enlargement debate. While in the post-Cold War context, NATO would have become obsolete by maintaining the primacy of its deterrent function, enlargement was presented as a way to heal the divisions accepted at Yalta and promote a more equal dialogue between former Cold War adversaries instead of as a collective defence guarantee (Fierke 1998: 187–8). Hence, NATO redefined its role from that of the West's protector to that of Europe's anchor of stability in order to persevere its *raison d'être* after the Soviet Union's collapse. In this context, the Baltics could not ultimately be excluded from the Alliance's grand post-Cold War enlargement project.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Tarak Barkawi for his comments on an earlier draft of this article. Thanks are also due to the two anonymous reviewers of this paper for their valuable suggestions. I am grateful to the British Council and AS Tallinna Vesi for their generous scholarship. This article draws on my M. Phil. thesis written at the Centre of International Studies, University of Cambridge.

Address:

Maria Mälksoo
K. A. Hermannini 12–9
10121 Tallinn
Estonia
Tel.: +372 6010 528
E-mail: Maria.Malksoo@kmin.ee

References

- Albright, Madeleine K. (1998) *Remarks before the New Atlantic Initiative conference*. Washington, D.C., 9 February.
- Anderson, Benedict (1991) *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Asmus, Ronald D. (1999) "Northern Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship". *Address at the 4th annual conference on Baltic Sea regional security and cooperation*. Stockholm, 4 November.
- Asmus, Ronald D. (2001) *Remarks in the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC) Webcast*, 1 November.
- Asmus, Ronald D. (2002) *Opening NATO's door: how the alliance remade itself for a New Era*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Baranovsky, Vladimir (2001) "NATO Enlargement: Russia's Attitudes". *An intervention prepared for the IISS/CEPS European Security Forum*. Brussels, 9 July.
- Bildt, Carl (1993) "Watch Russia's 'Baltic Near Abroad'". *International Herald Tribune*, 27 July.
- Bildt, Carl (1994) "The Baltic Litmus Test". *Foreign Affairs* 73, 72–85.
- Black, Joseph L. (1999) "Russia and NATO expansion Eastward: red-lining the Baltic states". *International Journal* 54, 249–266.
- Black, Joseph L. (2000) *Russia faces NATO expansion: bearing gifts or bearing arms?* Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bush, George W. (2001) *Address to faculty and students*. Warsaw University, 15 June.
- Campbell, David (1992) *Writing security: United States foreign policy and the politics of identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Clinton, William J. (1998) "The state of the union". Washington, D.C., 27 January.
- Dalsjö, Robert (2001) "The U.S. and Baltic NATO enlargement". *Intervention for the panel on Baltic Defence and Security, 4th Suomenlinna Seminar*. Helsinki, 6 June.
- Elbe, Stefan (2003) *Europe – a Nietzschean perspective*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, Norman (1992) *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, Norman (1993) "Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: the universities". *Discourse & Society* 4, 133–168.
- Fairclough, Norman (1995) *Media discourse*. London, New York: Edward Arnold.
- Fierke, Karin M. (1998) *Changing games, changing strategies: critical investigations in security*. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press.

- Fierke, Karin M., Antje Wiener (2001) "Constructing institutional interests: EU and NATO enlargement". In *The social construction of Europe*. Thomas Christiansen, Knud Erik Jørgensen, Antje Wiener, eds. 121–139. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Friedman, Thomas L. (1996) "Bye-bye NATO". *The Washington Post*, 14 April, A17.
- Gordon, Philip H. (2001-02) "NATO after 11 September". *Survival* 43, 89–106.
- Hansen, Birthe, Bertel Heurlin, eds. (1998) *The Baltic states in world politics*. Richmond: Curzon.
- Havel, Vaclav (2001) *Address at the conference "Europe's new democracies: leadership and responsibility"*. Bratislava, 11 May.
- Holbrooke, Richard (1998) *Speech in the Robert C. Frasure memorial lecture*. Tallinn, 1 April.
- Huang, Mel (2003) "Climbing down from the summit: Estonia's road towards NATO". In *The Estonian foreign policy yearbook 2003*, 76–90. Andres Kasekamp, ed. Tallinn: Varrak, The Estonian Foreign Policy Institute.
- Ilves, Toomas Hendrik (1998) "Eesti välispoliitika minevik, olevik ja tulevik" [Estonian foreign policy: past, present and future]. *Lecture at the University of Tartu*. Tartu, 30 April.
- Ilves, Toomas Hendrik (2000) "The Estonian perspective on EU and NATO enlargement". In *German and American policies towards the Baltic states. The perspectives of EU and NATO enlargement*, 81–87. Sven Arnsward and Marcus Wenig, eds. (Schriften des Zentrum für Europäische Integrationforschung.) Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Ilves, Toomas Hendrik (2001) "Constructing a New Europe". *Lecture at Humboldt University*. Berlin, 5 February.
- Jakobson, Max (1996) "Envisioning a possible deal with Russia on NATO expansion". *International Herald Tribune*, 23 February.
- Kamp, Karl-Heinz (1998) "NATO entrapped: debating the next enlargement round". *Survival* 40, 170–86.
- Kay, Sean (1998) *NATO and the future of European security*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Kay, Sean (2001) "NATO's open door: geostrategic priorities and the impact of the European Union". *Security Dialogue* 32, 201–215.
- Kowert, Paul A. (1998/99) "National identity inside and out." *Security Studies* 8, 2/3, 1–34.
- Kundera, Milan (1984) "The tragedy of Central Europe". *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April.
- Kupchan, Charles A. (2001) "The origins and future of NATO enlargement." In *Explaining NATO enlargement*, 127–148. Robert W. Rauchhaus, ed. London, Portland, OR: Frank Cass.
- Kurth, James (2001) "The next NATO: building an American commonwealth of nations". *The National Interest*, 5–16.
- Labbe, J.R. (Jill) (2001) "Just how many NATO members are necessary?" *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 27 June.
- Lauristin, Marju (1997) "Contexts of transition". In *Return to the Western world: cultural and political perspectives on the Estonian post-communist transition*, 25–40. Marju Lauristin et al., eds. Tartu: Tartu University Press.
- Lieven, Anatol (1993) *The Baltic revolution. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the path to independence*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Lieven, Anatol (1996) "Baltic iceberg ahead: NATO beware". *The World Today* 52, 175–79.
- Mattox, Gale A. (2001) "NATO enlargement: a step in the process of alliance reform". In *Explaining NATO enlargement*, 107–124. Robert W. Rauchhaus, ed. London, Portland, OR: Frank Cass.
- McCain, John (2001) "From tragedy to destiny: Estonia's place in the New Atlantic Order". *The Robert C. Frasure Memorial Lecture*. Tallinn, 24 August.
- McElvoy, Anne (1996) "Should we die for Hungary?" *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 October.
- Meek, James (1998) "Yeltsin tells NATO to keep out of Baltics". *The Guardian*, 15 May.
- Meri, Lennart (1998) *Remarks of the President of the Republic of Estonia at European Affairs Society*. Oxford: Oxford University, 27 February.
- Moravcsik, Andrew (2001) "Constructivism and European integration: a critique". In *The social construction of Europe*, 176–188. Thomas Christiansen, Knud Erik Jørgensen, Antje Wiener, eds. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

- Neumann, Iver B. (1992) "From a Nordic region to what?". In *The Baltic Sea area: a region in the making*, 62–73. Sverre Jervell, Mare Kukk, Pertti Joenniemi, eds. Oslo: Europa-programmet, Karlskrona: The Baltic Institute.
- Neumann, Iver B. (1999) *Uses of the other: "The East" in European identity formation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Ó Tuathail, Gearóid (1992) "Foreign policy and the hyperreal: the reagan administration and the scripting of 'South Africa'". In *Writing worlds: discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape*, 155–175. Trevor J. Barnes, James S. Duncan, eds. London, New York: Routledge.
- Perry, William C. (1996) *Remarks at the conference "The future of defence cooperation around the Baltic Sea"*. Copenhagen, 24 September.
- Perry, Charles M., Michael J. Sweeney, Andrew C. Winner (2000) *Strategic dynamics in the Nordic-Baltic region: implications for U.S. policy*. Virginia: Brassey's.
- Pflüger, Friedbert (2001) "Who's afraid of round two?". *The Washington Times*, 19 March.
- Robertson, George (2001) "NATO remains open to new members". NATO Secretary General to Interfax, 14 February.
- Ruggie, John G. (1998) *Constructing the world polity: essays on international institutionalization*. New York: Routledge.
- Sharp, Jane M. O. (1996) "Reassuring Central Europe". In *About turn, forward March with Europe: new directions for defence and security policy*, 141–161. Jane M. O. Sharp, ed. IPPR: Rovers Oram Press.
- Smith, Martin A., Graham Timmins (2000) *Building a bigger Europe: EU and NATO enlargement in comparative perspective*. Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate.
- Socor, Vladimir (2001) "Baltic nonalignment is neither desired nor practicable to the Finland station – a road to nowhere". *Jamestown Foundation Monitor*, 11 April.
- Talbott, Strobe (1998) "The U.S. and the Baltic region". *Address at the U.S.-Baltic Partnership Commission*. Riga, 8 July.
- Talbott, Strobe (2000) "A Baltic home-coming". *Robert C. Frasure Memorial Lecture*. Tallinn, 24 January.
- Weldes, Jutta, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, Raymond Duvall (1999) "Introduction: constructing insecurity". In *Cultures of insecurity: states, communities and the production of danger*, 1–33. Jutta Weldes et al., eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wolff, Larry (1994) *Inventing Eastern Europe: the map of civilization on the mind of the enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Interviews by the author

- Asmus, Ronald D. (2003) Washington, D.C.: German Marshall Fund, 6 March.
- Diplomatic representative of a NATO member state who asked not to be identified (2003) Brussels: NATO Headquarters, 16 May.
- Ederma, Vello (2003) Washington, D.C., 6 March.
- Ilves, Toomas H. (2003) Abja, Estonia, 3 May.
- Jürgenson, Sven (2003) Washington, D.C.: The Embassy of Estonia, 6 March.
- Kannike, Sulev (2003) Brussels: NATO Headquarters, 16 May.
- Klava, Ilgvars (2003) Brussels: Latvian Mission to NATO, NATO Headquarters, 16 May.
- Larsen, Leif (2003) Brussels: Norwegian Delegation to NATO, NATO Headquarters, 15 May.
- Lithuanian diplomatic representative who asked not to be identified (2003) Brussels: Lithuanian Mission to NATO, NATO Headquarters, 15 May.
- Luik, Jüri (2003) Tallinn: Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 May.
- Sillaste-Elling, Kyllike (2003) Tallinn: The Bureau of the Prime Minister of Estonia, 8 May.
- Soone, Sander (2003) Tallinn: Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 May.
- Tiido, Harri (2003) Tallinn: Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 May.