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UNEASY NEIGHBOURS

**Russia and the Baltic States in the Context of
NATO and EU Enlargements**

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UNEASY NEIGHBOURS:

**Russia and the Baltic States in the Context of
NATO and EU Enlargements**

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The framework

In 2002 Russian foreign policy faced two major events in the Baltic Sea region. NATO prepared and made the decision to invite seven Central and East European states, including the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to become members of the organisation. In this year the European Union also finished membership negotiations with the Baltic states (and others) so that the agreements could to be ratified in 2003, and the actual accessions take place in May 2004.

Baltic NATO membership will mean that Russia will have a long border on NATO states close to its very heartland, and its Kaliningrad region will be enclosed. The three former Soviet republics will thus join a military organisation which in Soviet times was considered the main threat. For the first time the Baltic countries will be secured against Russian occupation and will assume international military obligations. More importantly, EU membership will irrevocably de-couple the Baltic states from Russia and integrate *all* sectors of their societies into the strongest economic-political community in Europe. Still, Russia accepted these developments. This is all the more remarkable, since the Baltic states for fifty years were fully, though reluctantly, absorbed by the Soviet Union. After they became independent in 1991, Russia had tense relations and numerous conflicts with them, and it strongly opposed their inclusion into NATO in different ways.

Therefore the aim of this study is to analyse how and why this tremendous change has come about and to give some clues about its likely effects on the situation around the Baltic Sea. It will examine the development of Russian-Baltic relations since 1991, especially the last few years. Most attention is devoted to the Russian side in the relationship, and some external factors will be scrutinised. The focus is placed on the two main issues, namely the NATO and EU enlargement. In a *pro et contra* fashion, the evidence of and reasons for Russian opposition and acceptance, respectively, are presented.

The paper deals primarily with the actions and views of the official representatives of the states. In the Russian case, this means the president with his staff, the government and other officials who, according to the constitution are appointed by the president. But also actors such as State Duma members, economic actors, think-tanks, newspapers and public opinion receive some attention, since they may influence the foreign policy decision-makers, particularly in periods preceding elections.

Russian resistance to Baltic NATO membership

Russian motives

After gaining independence, the first security policy priority of the Baltic states was to join Western structures, particularly NATO. In January 1994, even before NATO had declared itself open for an eastern enlargement, Lithuania was first officially to apply for membership, arguing that it could pave the way for its two neighbours. The three countries quickly became observers in the West European Union, joined NATO's parliamentary assembly, NATO's Partnership for Peace programme, and took part in and organised exercises with NATO and neighbouring states in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic countries were not included in the NATO enlargement decision in 1997, but they were soon accepted as official candidates for the next round of enlargement and started energetically to fulfil the conditions of NATO's Membership Action Plan laid down in 1999.¹

Russian leaders had several motives to resist this development. To start with, many still considered Russia a great power on the strength of its size, its seat in the UN Security Council, its nuclear arsenal, etc. According to the foreign policy doctrines enunciated in 1996 and 2000, Russia strives for a multipolar world,

¹ See Peter Schmidt, *Die nächste Runde der NATO-Erweiterung. Ziele, Kandidaten, Bedingungen*, SWP-Studie, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik 2001.

which is not dominated by one power centre (read: the United States) and in which Russia plays an important role.² Watching the small Baltic republics, which until recently had been parts of the Soviet Union, join NATO hurt Russian pride and prestige. Russian nationalists and communists even hoped to reincorporate the Baltic states or parts of them.

Even if Russia did not include Baltic states in the 'near abroad' category, in which the other post-Soviet states were placed, they were not considered as foreign as for example Finland or even Poland either. They were often called 'newly independent states', which Russia allegedly had helped to freedom in 1991, when the Soviet Union fell apart. Russian officials defended the incorporation of the Baltic republics into the Soviet Union in 1940 as legally correct, since the parliaments had voted for it, and refused to accept the term 'occupation' used by the Balts, even though they had earlier denounced the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.³ Further, Russia claimed to be a peaceful democratic state, which does not pose a threat to any country, and therefore found it hard to understand the Baltic fears and suspicions.

Obviously, the main reason for resisting Baltic NATO membership was that this was viewed as a security threat to Russia, which implied that NATO itself was deemed as a threat. A major concern, particularly for the Russian military and nationalists, was that NATO would come close to vital parts of Russia.⁴ The Russian media monitored the Baltic military build-up or 'arms race' and NATO contacts with great suspicion, fearing that NATO would take over formerly Soviet bases or

² Yeltsin's messages to the Federal Assembly, *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (NG) 14 June 1996, *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (RG), 7 March 1997, RG, 11 July 2000.

³ Vladimir Elagin, "A difficult road from Tallinn to Moscow", *International Affairs* (IA) vol. 47, No 3, p. 159; Mikhail Demurin, "The prospects of Russian-Latvian relations", IA, vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 77 f; *Krasnaia zvezda* (KZ) 1 July 2000.

⁴ Shustov, Vladimir (1998) "Russia and Security Problems in the Baltics", IA vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 40 f.

had already done so.⁵ The Communist Party leader Gennadii Ziuganov in 1997 asserted that the placing of tactical NATO air forces in Poland and later in the Baltics would render the European part of Russia practically defenceless.⁶ *Krasnaia zvezda*, the official military newspaper, in 2000 concluded that the Baltic states were practically subordinated to Washington, referring to the fact that some Baltic presidents, ministers and top officers had lived and worked in America.⁷ Lately the Russian press has criticised the construction of a new radar station near the Russian border in Latvia, as well as Estonian offers to NATO of establishing air bases in the country.⁸

Special concern was shown for the Kaliningrad region and its communications with the rest of Russia, because the region would be encircled by NATO, if not only Poland but also Lithuania joined the alliance. Kaliningrad city remains the headquarters of the Russian Baltic Sea Fleet, and Baltiisk is its most salient naval base. Russian leaders, who visited the region, often emphasised its military importance. Baltic calls for demilitarising the region and Western economic “expansion” in the region tended to be interpreted as designs on Russia’s territorial integrity.⁹

Russian proposals

Already at the all-European conference in Budapest in December 1994, President Boris Yeltsin called NATO a product of the Cold War and criticised the enlargement plans for creating a new divide in Europe and sowing distrust. He wished

⁵ NG, 30 December 1997, 16 June 1998; 1 March 2001, 28 February 2002; RG, 24 May 2000; *Sovetskaiia Rossiia*, 18 April 2002; KZ, 12 March 2002.

⁶ *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie* (NVO), No. 30, 1997.

⁷ KZ, 26 April 2000.

⁸ NG, 28 February 2002, KZ, 19 January 2002; *SPB Vedomosti*, 30 October 2001.

⁹ NG, 26 July, 26 October 1996; F. N. Gromov, “Znachenie Kaliningradskogo osobogo regiona dlia oboronosposobnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii” /The importance of the Kaliningrad Special Region for the defence ability of the Russian Federation/, *Voennaia Mysl*, 1995, No. 4, pp. 9-13; NG, 11 August 2000.

NATO to be dissolved just like the Warsaw Pact or be transformed into a political organisation, since no threat existed. Instead of enlarging NATO, Russia also proposed strengthening the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe), where Russia is a member and has a veto right.

The Baltic states were recommended to stay neutral, and non-allied Sweden and Finland were mentioned as models for them.¹⁰ In addition Russia offered them non-aggression pacts or unilateral security guarantees. When these proposals were flatly rejected Russia instead proposed security guarantees together with NATO. Thus in 1997 on the eve of NATO's Madrid summit, Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov declared that Russia had no intention to threaten or occupy the Baltic states and that they had a right to security guarantees "with or without Russia, quite as they prefer". In July 1997 Primakov could even tolerate security guarantees only from the West¹¹ - that is as long as they did not amount to Baltic NATO membership.

Regional alternatives were also proposed. The old Soviet idea of a nuclear-free zone in the Baltic area, this time stretching to the Black Sea and guaranteed by both NATO and Russia, was dusted off. Yeltsin also advanced the idea of a regional security zone for the three states together with Sweden and Finland.¹² But the latter rejected the idea, unable as they were to extend guarantees and provide security for the Baltic states.¹³

Russia further favoured co-operation in the framework of the Council of Baltic Sea states (CBSS). When it assumed chairmanship in the Council in 2001, Russia wanted not only to strengthen the economic component of co-operation in

¹⁰ *BBC Monitoring Service, Summary of World Broadcasts* (abbreviated BBC) Russia, 6 December 1994.

¹¹ *Dagens Nyheter* (DN), 25 May, 23 March 1997, BBC, Russia, 15 July 1997.

¹² NG, 23 April 1996, 28 Oct. 1997; Shustov (1998), 42 f.

¹³ More on this in Tuomas Forsberg/ Tapani Vaahtoranta (2001) "Inside the EU, Outside NATO: Paradoxes of Finland's and Sweden's Post-Neutrality", *European Security* vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 76 ff.

the region but also to make the Council a primary coordinator, to focus on Kaliningrad, and to initiate dialogue in new fields, especially between military authorities.¹⁴

On top of this Russia suggested several confidence-building measures, such as a "hot line" between Kaliningrad and the Baltic states, advance information on military exercises, and a common air surveillance system in the whole Baltic Sea area.¹⁵

Russia's main alternative to NATO enlargement for the Baltic states, however, was EU membership, as will be shown below. Russia could even accept that the EU developed a common foreign and defence identity and set up a crisis prevention force.

Russian means of pressure

In order to prevent Baltic NATO membership and underpin its own alternative proposals, Russia staged a concerted political campaign with an array of arguments and means of pressure. A common argument, which was often used in connection with the presidential and Duma elections in 1995-96, held that NATO expansion would undermine the position of Western-oriented politicians and encourage nationalists and communists in Russia.¹⁶ This meant that the Yeltsin administration did not resist the latter forces but adapted to them.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Baltinfo*, Official Newsletter of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, no. 40, Sept. 2001, pp.1-3.

¹⁵ DN, 13 Sept. 1997.

¹⁶ For a recent example, see NG, 1 March 2001 (Ambassador Oznoibishchev).

¹⁷ Generally on this problem, see Carolina Vendil, "Patriotic Foreign Policy – the Bandwagon No One Wants to Miss", in Ingmar Oldberg et al. (1999) *At A Loss – Russian Foreign Policy in the 1990s*, FOA-R—99-01091-180-SE, Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Establishment, pp. 135-178. According to a poll in 1993 among politicians and experts, the Baltic states (for several reasons) were seen as first among Russia's enemies. (Andris Spruds, "Perceptions and Interests in Russian-Baltic Relations", in Helmut Hubel (editor) *EU Enlargement and Beyond: The Baltic States and Russia*, Nordeuropäische Studien, No. 18, Berlin: Berlin Verlag 2002, p. 352, footnote.

Russian analysts also claimed that the Baltic states were hostile to Russia and would influence NATO accordingly, if they became members.¹⁸ Others pointed out that admitting the Baltic states would be an economic burden on NATO members.¹⁹ It was further maintained that Baltic membership in NATO was a risk to NATO itself, because if the states were attacked, they could only be defended with nuclear weapons.²⁰

When NATO was to take its enlargement decision in 1997, Yeltsin threatened to reconsider all relations with NATO and not to sign the Founding Act on Russia's relations with NATO (see below). After this Act had been signed, he warned of tearing it up, if the Baltic countries were to become members later. The threat to break or downgrade relations with NATO was henceforth constantly repeated.

Russia was of course relieved when the Baltic states were not admitted into NATO in 1997, and the anti-NATO campaign tapered off. Still, a Russian researcher has later claimed that the admission of Poland into NATO led to drastically impaired relations with that country, spy scandals etc., and even helped bring military and security people to power in Russia after Yeltsin (!). Another researcher held that Russian opposition to Polish, Czech and Hungarian NATO membership was actually an advance position so as to stop Baltic accession, which if it happened would result in a crisis worse than the one over Kosovo.²¹ A third view was that Baltic NATO membership could entail a much more serious crisis in Russian relations with the EU.²²

¹⁸ BBC, Russia, 21 May 2002.

¹⁹ NG, 14 June 1997, BBC, Russia, 31 May 1997.

²⁰ NG, 16 April 1997.

²¹ Igor Iurgens, leading figure in the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy, and Nadezhda Arbatova, respectively, in a roundtable at NG, 1 March 2001.

²² Arkady V. Moshes in *The Baltic Sea. A Region of Prosperity and Stability? Prospects and Limits of a Regional Policy in North-Eastern Europe*, 121st Bergedorf Round Table, Hamburg: Körber Foundation 2002, p. 47.

The Baltic striving for NATO membership has probably been one of the main reasons behind Russia's scanty and lopsided political exchange with the three states and the lack of comprehensive political agreements with them. Since independence no Russian president has so far paid an official visit to any of them, and visits by Russian prime and foreign ministers were few, mainly connected with international conferences. Only the Baltic presidents have occasionally visited Russia unofficially or officially, or they have met Yeltsin and Putin in third countries.²³ Nor did the inter-governmental commissions meet.²⁴ Another kind of political protest was the refusal of the Russian Duma in May 2001 to attend the NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Vilnius, the first in a non-member state, and President Putin's decision in June not to attend the NATO summit in Prague in November, lest it be seen as a sign of approving NATO enlargement to the Baltic states.²⁵

Another way for Russia to prevent NATO membership for Estonia and Latvia was to link it to the minority problems in these countries.²⁶ NATO had made the solution of ethnic and territorial conflicts with neighbours a condition for membership. Russian officials and mass media thus constantly claimed that the human rights of Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia were violated. A diplomat in 1996 pointed out that hundreds of thousands of people, one third of the populations, had not been granted citizenship, which barred them from political and other rights, and that the Russian language was being suppressed. The presidential policy guidelines on the Baltic states of 1997 demanded citizenship for all Russian-speaking residents of Estonia and Latvia, the streamlining of naturalisa-

²³ Thus Estonian President Meri went to Moscow privately in 1995, Latvia's Ulmanis went there to sign a troop agreement in 1994. In April 2002 the Russian Foreign Minister turned down an invitation to visit Estonia. (BBC, Estonia, 13 April 2002)

²⁴ *Kommersant*, 18 August 2000, BBC, Estonia, 30 April 2002.

²⁵ BBC, Russia, 26 May 2002.

²⁶ As will be shown below, this does not mean that the problems of the Russian-speaking minorities in these states are not real. The concern in Russia for their plight was both genuine and a manifestation of Russian nationalism.

tion procedures, citizenship on the basis of birth, and the right to family reunions.²⁷ Lithuania, which had granted citizenship to all residents in 1991, was held up as a model.

In 2001 a Foreign Ministry official rebuked NATO and EU representatives for lacking objectivity, when they insisted that the Hungarian ethnic minority receive education in their own language, but would not help the Russians in Estonia and Latvia to the same treatment.²⁸ Likewise, President Putin posed the question, why Europe recognised the demands of the Albanians, making up 20 per cent in Macedonia, for a corresponding representation in the power structures, such as the police force, and for having Albanian recognised as an official language, while this was denied with respect to the Baltic Russians, who had a larger share of the population.²⁹ Referring to “the mass violations of basic rights and freedoms” of Russian citizens and compatriots in Latvia, the State Duma in 2000 passed a law in two readings which forbade trade with that country.³⁰ Especially after September 2001, Russia criticised the Baltic states for allegedly supporting the Chechen terrorists by allowing them to have representatives there.³¹

Still another Russian method to undermine the Baltic states’ drive for NATO membership was to use the unsolved border questions. Estonia and Latvia had earlier demanded the restoration of the borders of the inter-war republics that Stalin had changed after the war. However, when they in late 1996 and early 1997, respectively, officially gave up these demands in order to qualify for NATO mem-

²⁷ ”The Baltic states: The situation is often discouraging” (Interview with Foreign Ministry official V Loshchinin) IA, vol. 42 (1996) no. 3, pp. 50 f; BBC, Russia, 13 February 1997.

²⁸ Demurin (2001), p. 76, NG, 1 March 2001.

²⁹ His figures were 28 % for Estonia, 36 % for Latvia. (BBC, Russia, 3 Sept. 2001)

³⁰ But in the end the law was suspended and replaced by a sharp statement calling for all measures, including economic sanctions, to make Latvia abide by international law, and recommending the president again to turn to the UN and other organisations. (Segodnia, 5, 6 April 2000)

³¹ NVO, 17-23 Dec. 1999; NG, 7 April 2001, Elagin (2001) p. 158.

bership, this became the very reason for Russia not to sign the already prepared border agreements.

With regard to Lithuania, which has made no official claims on Russian territory, Yeltsin did indeed sign a border agreement in 1997. However, the Russian Duma refused ratification, openly explaining that it would remove one of the last obstacles to its NATO membership, and linking it to free transit to Kaliningrad.³² Until this day the Duma has not ratified the treaty, though the Lithuanian Seimas did so in 1999. Worse, Russian nationalists including the former Kaliningrad Governor Leonid Gorbenko have questioned the transfer of Klaipeda (Memel) from former East Prussia to Lithuania in 1945.³³

Finally, the Russian proposals were sometimes also accompanied by military threats and pressure. Thus Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and extreme military analysts such as Anton Surikov threatened with partisan war or pre-emptive strike.³⁴ More seriously, high-ranking diplomats in 1995 threatened to increase troops at the borders, if the Baltic states joined NATO.³⁵ Military officers warned that if the neighbours were to join NATO, Russia would have to reinforce its positions in Kaliningrad, also with tactical nuclear weapons.³⁶ In late 1998 the Duma discussed a resolution that would link START-II ratification to an agreement not to extend NATO to former Soviet territory.³⁷ In 2002, *Krasnaia zvezda* criticised the Baltic refusal to sign the European disarmament treaty on conventional forces in Europe (CFE), which created a grey zone and a threat to Russia. This refusal could allegedly make Moscow break the force limitations on

³² RG, 4 Oct. 1997.

³³ "Governor Gorbenko claims Lithuanian territory", 30 April 1997 (nupi.no/cgi-win/Russland/krono).

³⁴ The *Baltic Times* (BT), 2-8 Oct. 1996, 2-8 Oct. 1997; *Zavtra*, No. 13, 1996.

³⁵ The *Baltic Observer* (BO), No. 35, 1995; Shustov (1998) p. 41.

³⁶ More on this in Oldberg (1998) "Kaliningrad: Problems and prospects", in Pertti Joenniemi/Jan Prawitz (eds.), *Kaliningrad: The European Amber Region*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 4 ff. See also KZ, 10 June 1997 and BBC, 18 June 1998, NG, 28 March 2001.

³⁷ NG, 30 Dec. 1997, BT, 26 Febr.--4 March 1998, 17--30 Dec. 1998.

the northern flank.³⁸ The defence committee recommended the Duma not to ratify the amended CFE treaty until November 2002, when NATO was to take the enlargement decision, obviously as a pressure attempt.³⁹

The Kosovo crisis in 1999 strained the Russian-Baltic relations even more. The Baltic states supported NATO's attack on Yugoslavia in order to defend human rights and preclude a refugee disaster, while Russia defended the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and severed its official relations with NATO. Russia also opposed NATO's new military doctrine, because it did not exclude operations outside the North Atlantic area. In June Russia held its largest military exercise ('Zapad-99') for many years together with Belarus. The exercise assumed a NATO attack on Kaliningrad and trained the use of nuclear forces. In December 1999 Russia signed a new union treaty with Belarus, whose president was strongly anti-NATO, and military integration between the two countries intensified.⁴⁰ A Moscow institute director ominously warned that the Russian and Belarussian armies held a "steady finger on the soft throat" of the Baltic states and could easily convert them into an enclave, which NATO practically could not defend.⁴¹ According to US intelligence reports, Russia in June 2000 transferred tactical nuclear weapons to Kaliningrad, though this was strongly denied by Russian officials.⁴² Russia's war against separatism in Chechnya in 1994-96 and its resumption in 1999 of course also alarmed the Balts, who long had sympathised with the Chechens.

Thus Russia saw several reasons to oppose the Baltic plans of joining NATO, advanced a row of proposals to avert or restrict them, and backed them up with a

³⁸ KZ, 17 January 2002. Stephen Blank, *Rethinking the Nordic-Baltic Security Agenda: A Proposal*, Report G88, Sandhurst: Conflict Studies Research Centre, November 2000, p. 18.

³⁹ KZ, 17 May 2002.

⁴⁰ NG, 30 June 1999, Baltic Institute, Ballad, News archive, "Kaliningrad cornerstone in military plans with Belarus", 13 October 2000; Blank (2000), p. 3.

⁴¹ A. Bubenets at the obscure Research and Project Institute of Organisational Solutions, NG, 24 February 2001.

⁴² Washington Times, 15 February 2001.

wide range of military, political and economic measures and conditions. The fact that NATO did not include the Baltic states in the first wave of enlargement in 1997 could to some extent be seen as a result of that opposition.

Coming to terms with NATO enlargement

The above-presented picture of Russian resistance to the Baltic states becoming NATO members has, however, to be supplemented by an analysis of the evidence pointing in the other direction. As noted in the introduction, the Russian policy of opposition did not succeed and was gradually modified by concessions and search for compromises.

A major reason for this was the fact that a tough Russian policy could disturb the economic relations with the Western states. Russia could not afford a confrontation with them, because it had suffered a deep economic crisis throughout the 1990s and had become extremely dependent on trade with and investments from Europe. President Putin geared Russian foreign policy more emphatically than Yeltsin towards Russia's economic needs and development so as to catch up with Western states. He saw Russia as a European state and wanted political and economic integration with the West.

Moreover, Russia had to notice that NATO and the candidate states sought compromise and co-operation with Russia. Before taking the formal decision on enlargement in 1997, NATO launched the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Co-operation and Security with Russia, which instituted a Permanent Joint Council with regular meetings. In this Act NATO reassured Russia that it had "no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members". The organisation was then enlarged by only three new members: those farthest away from Russia. NATO military presence in Poland was restricted to a staff headquarters near the German border. During the Kosovo war NATO called for Russian support and afterwards it made concerted effort to mend fences with

Russia, particularly after Putin took over the presidency from Yeltsin at New Year 2000.

In the end, Russia warmed to these Western approaches. It signed the Founding Act, which opened the door to the 1997 NATO enlargement. Even if Russia opposed the NATO attack on Yugoslavia, it helped to mediate an agreement and then participated in the NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo - along with the Baltic states and Poland. In 2001 it supported the NATO peacekeeping operation in Macedonia, which - different from Kosovo - served to uphold the integrity of the state and to keep the Albanian insurgents at bay. NATO's increased preoccupation with the Balkans also seemed to detract its attention from the Baltic area. Russia accepted gradually to resume official relations and exchange with NATO, realising that it stood to lose from isolating itself.⁴³

Just like NATO, Russian leaders declared that they did not see any threat from the other side. Just like Yeltsin and his staff occasionally had done under Yeltsin, President Putin in early 2000 even talked about Russia joining NATO – if its national interests were safeguarded.⁴⁴ Even if this only was a hypothetical question, it at least undermined the policy of opposing Baltic membership. The Russian Duma, since 1999 dominated by parties loyal to the new president, finally ratified the START-II and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, thereby disposing of these means of pressure on the United States. Partly this can be seen as a way to make the USA abide by the ABM Treaty with Russia and desist from building a national missile defence (NMD).

When George W. Bush became US president and decided to develop an NMD nevertheless, some Russian observers hoped to extract an American 'no' to NATO enlargement in exchange of an approval of the NMD. But it was also noted

⁴³ V. Kozin (2000) "The Kremlin and NATO: Prospects for Interaction", IA, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 12 ff.

⁴⁴ NG, 7 March 2000. Curiously, NATO enlargement and possible Baltic accession were not even mentioned in the new Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 28 June 2000. (www.in.mid.ru)

that many European states in the meantime had become more positive to an enlargement encompassing the Baltic states.⁴⁵ As the United States in the course of 2001 seemed to opt for both an NMD and a big enlargement including the Baltic states, Russia gradually resigned to both. The enlargement was more and more seen by officials and observers alike as inevitable and as a matter of time.⁴⁶

Thus on a visit to Finland on 3 September 2001, President Vladimir Putin found the enlargement useless since nobody threatened anyone in Europe. But he stressed that Russia did not intend to use any levers against the Baltic states.⁴⁷ He declared that Russia respected their independence and would not start any 'hysterical campaign' against them, since this would only impair the situation.⁴⁸ Diplomats suggested damage limitation by demanding non-deployment of nuclear weapons and NATO troops in the Baltic states and a promise only to use force with the approval of the UN Security Council (where Russia has a veto right).⁴⁹ In fact the two former conditions seemed rather plausible as NATO had accepted them in the 1997 Founding Act.

The terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 and the American call for support in the war on terrorism offered Russia new options. The Duma, the Communists and the Russian military opposed or did not want to support the Americans, specifically the establishment of air bases in Central Asia.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ The Nordic, the new members and Germany were singled out. (NG Dipkurier, 1 Febr. 2001)

⁴⁶ The Council for Foreign and Defence Policy already in autumn 1999 deemed their entry 'most likely' (NG Stsenarii, No. 9, 13 Oct. 1999, p. 9).

⁴⁷ Except for insisting on all-European human rights for the Russian-speakers in the area.

⁴⁸ *Prezident Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (henceforth Prezident RF), Homepage of the presidential administration, 'Vystuplenie Prezidenta RF' /RF President's Speech/, 3 Sept. 2001 (www.president.kremlin.ru/events/291.html)

⁴⁹ Ambassador Demurin in NG, 1 March 2001.

⁵⁰ Rolf Peter/ Claudia Wagner, (2001) "Rußland und der „Kampf gegen den Terrorismus“", *Osteuropa*, vol. 51, no. 11-12, pp. 1251f.

Some observers even wanted to make Russian support conditional on concessions, such as giving up NATO incorporation of the Baltic states.⁵¹

Another approach was proposed by e.g. Dmitrii Trenin at the Moscow Carnegie Center, who recommended Russia to ally itself with NATO as closely as possible, so as to secure its influence and integrate itself into Europe. Russia should accept Baltic NATO membership, since Russia could not stop it. Moreover, it meant no growing threat to Russia, but rather improved political and economic relations as the Polish case showed, argued Trenin.⁵² Such thinking reflected well the policy that President Putin chose to conduct. He immediately expressed his support for the US-led antiterrorist coalition, offered intelligence cooperation and air routes across Russia. Officials explained that Russia had long experience in fighting terrorism in Central Asia and the Caucasus, specifically in Chechnya, and when the West took on that fight, it could only serve Russian interests and boost its prestige.⁵³

NATO also responded in kind by offering Russia a new joint council, where Russia would be one of twenty members with equal voting rights concerning certain issues such as the fight against terrorism, peacekeeping and non-proliferation of NBC weapons. Visiting Brussels in October, Putin praised the idea as one radically changing the mutual relations, and expressed extreme satisfaction with the relations with the USA.⁵⁴ In the autumn Putin decided to scrap the Russian bases in Cuba and Vietnam, which long had annoyed the Americans. As a result of 11 September 2001, Russia could also rejoice in NATO states muting their criticism of the Russian war in Chechnya. When the United States later decided to send

⁵¹ Among them diverse experts such as S. Rogov, V. Nikonov, A. Arbatov, A. Pushkov, A. Migranian (*Svobodnaia mysl*, December 2001; NEDB, 26 October 2001).

⁵² Dmitrii Trenin, "Antiterroristicheskaia operatsiia SshA i vybor Rossii" /The US antiterror operation and Russia's choice/, *Moskovskii Tsentri Karnegi*, press-reliz, 19 Sept. 2001, Trenin, "Osenii marafon" Vladimira Putina" /The autumn marathon of Vladimir Putin/, *Moskovskii Tsentri Karnegi*, briefing, 20 November 2001.

⁵³ Peter/Wagner (2001) pp. 1250ff, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), 26 March 2002.

⁵⁴ Prezident RF, 3 October 2001(www.president.kremlin.ru/events/453.html).

military personnel to Georgia in order to combat international terrorism, Putin even accepted that as being ‘no tragedy’ to Russian interests.

After visiting President Bush in November 2001, Putin said in a radio interview that even though NATO membership would not increase Baltic security, Russia acknowledged the role of NATO in the modern world and wished to expand co-operation with it. Pressed to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to enlargement he said: “I don’t object to it /.../ Of course I cannot tell people what to do.”⁵⁵ In another interview in February 2002, Putin cautioned about “some response reaction”, if the NATO infrastructure moved closer to its borders, but admitted that Russia might see the problems connected with enlargement differently, if the relations between Russian and NATO became productive and trustworthy and if mechanisms of taking joint measures in key questions were created.⁵⁶

Indeed, in May 2002 NATO and Russia signed an agreement creating the NATO-Russia Council, which was to devote itself to the fight against terrorism, to crisis regulation, non-proliferation, conventional arms control and confidence-building measures, anti-ballistic defence, sea rescue operations, military cooperation and civilian emergency planning. Putin commented that a new level and quality of mutual understanding had been reached.⁵⁷ Just before that event US President Bush visited Moscow and signed an agreement with Putin on further reductions of strategic offensive weapons until 2012, expressing a mutual wish for genuine partnership, based on cooperation and confidence.⁵⁸ The question of NATO enlargement was not mentioned.

Western-oriented Russian commentators defended this policy against nationalist and communist critics by arguing that NATO now actually was rather weak,

⁵⁵ *RFE/RL Newslines* 5, No. 19, Part II, 19 Nov. 2001.

⁵⁶ Prezident RF (Interview in Wall Street Journal), 11 Febr. 2002 (www.president.kremlin.ru/events/453.html)

⁵⁷ Prezident RF, 28 May 2002 (www.president.kremlin.ru/summit9/s9_dek.html)

⁵⁸ Prezident RF, “Dogovor mezhdru RF i Ssha” /Agreement between RF and the USA/, 24 May 2002 (www.president.kremlin.ru/summit8/s8_doc1ru.html).

and that the enlargement would not make it stronger. Since Putin could not change reality, he had changed his view about it.⁵⁹ A Kremlin official explained that Russia had been more efficient than NATO in the first stage of the war against the Taliban and that NATO had to be given time to adapt to new challenges.⁶⁰ A newspaper even claimed that Russia had replaced Western Europe as the main US ally.⁶¹

When NATO took the final decision to admit the Baltic states as members on 22 November 2002, Putin – unlike most eastern NATO partners – did not attend. Still Russia had reason to cherish NATO's declaration that the decision was not aimed against Russia, as well as its confirmation of the Founding Act, which dictated restraint in locating forces and nuclear weapons in new member states. When President Bush immediately afterwards came to visit Putin outside St. Petersburg, Putin characterised the mutual relations as being on a very high level and developing forward. He again deemed the enlargement as unnecessary but hoped for a "positive development of relations with all members of NATO" and with the bloc as it reformed itself.⁶²

Even though Russia well before 11 September 2001 realised that it could not stop NATO enlargement to the Baltics, the cooperation with the United States and NATO against common threats did offer some compensation, and when the decision was taken, no serious countermeasures were announced. There were several similarities with the chain of events in 1997, but this time more and stronger common interests were at work.

⁵⁹ BBC, Russia, 21, 28 May 2002.

⁶⁰ *Financial Times* (FT), 18 March 2002.

⁶¹ BBC, Russia (G. Sysoev), 23 May 2002.

⁶² Prezident RF, "Press-konferentsiia Prezidenta", 22 Nov. 2002 (www.president.kremlin.ru/text/appears) retrieved 19 Nov 2002.

Normalising relations with the Baltic states

At the same time as Russia changed its view of NATO, it also had reasons to modify its tough policy against the Baltic states. The political elite gradually came to realise that resistance to their NATO membership and pressure tactics to achieve it could be counterproductive, refresh old fears and in fact reinforce the Baltic desire to join NATO. The liberal-minded Council for Foreign and Defence Policy (SVOP), consisting of both officials and researchers, rejected sanctions and threats and recommended an active rapprochement with the Baltic states already in 1995. In a 1997 report they expressed an understanding of why the Balts were sceptical about unilateral Russian security guarantees. Their recipe was a respectful direct dialogue with them, a differentiated approach, alternative security proposals, economic co-operation and the use of international organisations.⁶³

The Russian strategy of preventing the Baltic drift toward NATO by a campaign against the discrimination of the Baltic Russians had several flaws. It tended to harden the Baltic stance against them, whereas Russia was and is genuinely interested in the improvement of their situation. Russia actually strove for the Baltic Russians' integration into their societies, partly since it could not take care of any immigrants, but mainly because they themselves wanted to stay. The economic prospects were better in the Baltics. Russian economic measures against the Baltic states mostly hurt the Baltic Russians, who were active in trade with Russia. Besides, human rights are violated also in Russia, the wars in Chechnya being the worst example, and the new Russian citizenship law is tougher than the former by demanding language fluency and by its lack of residence rules.⁶⁴

⁶³ "Rossia i Pribaltika", NG, 28 October 1997. See also "Rossiia i Pribaltika-II", NG Stsenarii, No. 9, 13 Oct. 1999.

⁶⁴ *Moskovskie novosti*, 26 Febr. 2002; Jeremy Bransten, "Russia: Duma approves strict citizenship bill", RFE/RL, Features, 25 May 2002 (www.rferl.org/nca/features) Retrieved 31 May 2002.

Furthermore, the citizenship and language laws have gradually been liberalised in Estonia and Latvia since the mid-90s. The Estonian and Latvian leaders recognised the high numbers of non-citizens and the slow rate of naturalisation as problems, and their first priority was to fulfil the conditions for NATO and EU membership.

For all these reasons Russia scaled down its maximalist demands on behalf of the Baltic Russians, mainly restricting itself to supporting the recommendations of the European experts and institutions. Thus, President Putin in September 2001 promised that he would not make the situation of the Russian-speakers in the Baltic states into a problem that would impede the development of relations between the countries, since it would only harm the Baltic Russians. Instead he aimed at joint efforts with sensible Baltic politicians. Likewise, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told the Council of Europe that Russia wanted European standards of ethnic rights, “nothing more, nothing less”. He added the hope that Latvia’s and Estonia’s entry into the EU would promote their observance of human rights. This would improve the relations with Russia and favour the creation of a single humanitarian expanse across Europe.⁶⁵ The Baltic Russians could in fact become a link between Russia and these states and help to integrate Russia into Europe.

Finally, the Russian tactics of refusing to sign border agreements with the Baltic states since 1997 also proved counterproductive. Firstly, such agreements were in Russia’s own interest, since - as the Guidelines put it - illegal immigration, organised crime and the smuggling of weapons, drugs and strategic materials were a problem. Secondly, Russia had initially been ready to sign, and the sudden refusal, coupled with links to other questions (not to speak of raising new demands), hardly convinced the West that the Baltic governments were at fault.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ NG, 28 Oct. 1997, BBC, Russia, 3 Sept. 2001; 26 March 2002, 22 November 2002.

⁶⁶ BBC, Latvia, 20 Oct. 2001, 25 March 2002.

A major argument for Russia to accept NATO enlargement, which was advanced by the candidate states, was that it would make them feel secure and confident enough to intensify relations with Russia. Poland here is an instructive example. After years of tense relations and a crisis in early 2000 that was not only related to the NATO issue, President Alexander Kwasniewski took the initiative of resuming contacts with Russia, he visited Moscow and invited Putin to Warsaw. Poland greeted Russia's intensified rapprochement and cooperation with NATO after 11 September 2001, and its military officials pleaded for more military co-operation with Russia.⁶⁷

After some time Russia responded to the Polish overtures by repaying official visits, culminating in President Putin's trip to Warsaw in January 2002. On this occasion Putin declared that the relations were now free from political problems. He held that the countries had similar views concerning security in Europe, and called for co-operation against terrorism. Putin even apologised for Soviet behaviour during and after the war, which was received favourably by the Poles. Both parties were interested in improved trade relations.⁶⁸

The Baltic states acted in a similar way as Poland. The revised security doctrines did not talk about direct military threats from Russia and instead expressed concern about the instability and unpredictability in Russian politics, and social and ecological threats.⁶⁹ The states supported NATO's rapprochement with Russia, including the creation of the NATO-Russia Council with cooperation against terrorism and many other tasks on the agenda.⁷⁰ Also they told Russia that

⁶⁷ Kai-Olaf Lang, *Ein neues polnisch-russisches Verhältnis?*, SWP-Aktuell, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Jan. 2002, pp. 4-6.

⁶⁸ Prezydent RF, 16 Jan. 2002 (www.president.kremlin.ru/events/435.mtml), Lang (2002) pp.1-6.

⁶⁹ Spruds (2002), p. 353, Graeme P. Herd/ Mel Huang, *Baltic Security in 2000*, Report G95, Sandhurst: Conflict Studies Research Centre, May 2001, pp. 20, 31; NG, 20 April 2000.

⁷⁰ BBC, Estonia, 29 Nov. 2001, BBC, Latvia, 28 May 2002, BBC, Russia, 3 June 2002.

NATO nowadays primarily is a political organisation aiming at stability, and is not a threat to Russia.⁷¹

Lithuanian officials, like the Polish, promised that increased security through NATO membership would enable the country to develop co-operation with Russia in all fields to mutual benefit. The Lithuanians invited Russian observers to their exercises with NATO and called for confidence-building measures with Russia, and an agreement on this was reached.⁷² Lithuanian officials readily accepted the Russian denials about tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad.⁷³ Even though Lithuania wanted full NATO membership, it saw no need for deploying nuclear weapons or big foreign military units on its territory.⁷⁴ After Russia's financial breakdown in August 1998, Lithuania and Poland had sent humanitarian aid to Kaliningrad, including the naval base Baltiisk. Military transit from Russia to Kaliningrad was regulated in an agreement with Lithuania of 1993, which was prolonged every year, and NATO voiced no intentions to change it when Lithuania joined NATO. Lithuania was also cooperative with regard to the economic development in Kaliningrad.

Latvia on its part only agreed to military co-operation with Russia in the framework of the PfP and other international programmes. But the foreign minister stressed that after NATO accession, Latvia's relations with Russia had to be built from "positions of positive cooperation", and he talked about historically understandable complexes towards Russia in his country which had to be overcome.⁷⁵ Estonia indeed offered NATO bases in the country, but its Foreign Minister hoped that closer relations between NATO and Russia would help improve

⁷¹ RG, 27 Nov. 2001.

⁷² NG, 4 Sept. 2001 (interview with the Lithuanian defence minister).

⁷³ Vremya MN, 22 Febr. 2001.

⁷⁴ Kommersant, 27 Dec. 2000 (interview with a foreign ministry official).

⁷⁵ BBC, Latvia, 10 April 2002, 15 May 2002.

Estonian-Russian relations, as well.⁷⁶ All the Baltic states promised to begin talks on adhering to the CFE Treaty.⁷⁷

As for Russia, it can be observed that despite the above-mentioned threats of countermeasures in case the Baltic states joined NATO, the Russian leadership since the mid-90s generally desisted from military pressure on the Baltic states. They assured them of peaceful intentions and rejected the use of force as a principle. On schedule Russia closed its last military base, the anti-missile radar station in Skrunda, Latvia, in August 1998.⁷⁸ During his visit to Stockholm in December 1997, Yeltsin declared that the troops in the north-west of Russia would be unilaterally reduced by 40 per cent, and this promise was also carried out in 1998.⁷⁹ In October 1999 the General Staff talked about decreasing Russian troops near the Baltic states in order to deprive them of a pretext for joining NATO.⁸⁰ True, these actions did not only reflect a less hostile attitude but were also a result of lacking military funding and the need of troops elsewhere.

According to Western estimates, the number of ground troops in Kaliningrad was reduced from about 103 000 men in 1993 to 12 700 in 2000, and the total was appreciated at 25 000.⁸¹ Head of the Baltic Fleet, Admiral Vladimir Yegorov in July 1999 made sure that Russia was not interested in strengthening its forces in Kaliningrad. After being elected governor, he pledged that the forces would be cut

⁷⁶ BBC, Estonia, 29 May 2002.

⁷⁷ BBC, Russia, 20 November 2002. The problem now is that the adapted CFE Treaty has not yet been ratified by some NATO states, since Russia has not as promised withdrawn its troops from Moldova and Georgia. For this Russia blames the governments of these states.

⁷⁸ BT, No. 123, 3-9 Sept. 1998.

⁷⁹ Segodnia, 22 Jan. 1999.

⁸⁰ *Baltic Institute*, Ballad – the independent forum for networking in the Baltic Sea region, News archive, "Russia to withdraw troops from Baltic borders?", 26 October 1999 (www.ballad.org) Retrieved 8 Febr. 2001.

⁸¹ International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1993-94, 2000-2001*, London: Oxford University Press 1993, 2001, p. 104 and 124, respectively; *Segodnia*, 14 March 2001.

from 25 000 to 16 500 in three years, even if the Baltic countries joined NATO.⁸² In September 2002 the Russian navy participated in a Partnership for Peace exercise in the Baltic and paid its first official visit to Klaipeda.⁸³

Though conditions were made as shown above, Russian officials often expressed a wish to improve relations with the Baltic states. With regard to NATO membership they recognised that the Baltic states were sovereign states, over which Russia had no veto power. Russia had accepted Lithuania's right to join whatever alliances in an agreement of July 1991. When it promoted integration with Belarus, no officials in Lithuania turned against that.⁸⁴

Among the Baltic states, Russia had the best political exchange with Lithuania, even though this was the state that seemed closest to NATO membership. Already in 1997 Yeltsin had received Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas in Moscow, and in 2001 Brazauskas' successor Adamkus was invited to Kaliningrad and Moscow.⁸⁵ As already noted Russia appreciated Lithuania for its relatively liberal minority policy.

Russia's tense relations with Estonia and Latvia also tended to improve in spite of NATO's approaching enlargement decision. In February 2001 Putin summoned Latvian President Vike-Freiberga to a meeting, albeit not in Russia but in Austria. The 2002 meeting of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in St. Petersburg provided an opportunity for the Russian Prime Minister to meet his Baltic counterparts, and practical cooperation was discussed.⁸⁶

In November 2002 Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matienko visited Tallinn and resumed the work of the intergovernmental commission, which had

⁸² Baltic Institute, News archive, "Yegorov not afraid of NATO", 7 March 2001 (www.ballad.org) Retrieved 8 March 2001; Interfax, 26 March 2002; *Handelsblatt*, 29 May 2002.

⁸³ BBC, Lithuania, 12 Sept. 2002.

⁸⁴ *Izvestiia*, 20 Febr. 2001 (interview with Lithuania's ambassador to Moscow).

⁸⁵ NG, 2 March 2001, KZ, 21 March 2001.

⁸⁶ BBC, Russia, 10 June 2002. This was the first such meeting in ten years for the Estonian prime minister.

been dormant for four years. She commented that concessions had been made by Estonia and agreed to discuss the abolition of double customs duties and the border agreement.⁸⁷ At a lower level, the city of Moscow developed its contacts with Tallinn and Riga, especially in the cultural sphere.⁸⁸

From this chapter one may conclude that even if Russia put up strong resistance against the Baltic states joining NATO and relented in achieving normal exchange with them, its general need of good relations with the West and the West's cooperative attitude toward Russia pushed it gradually towards acquiescence. Economic co-operation and a common fight with the West against 'terrorism' served Russian national interests better than attempts to defend old power positions in the Baltic area by pressure tactics. NATO and the EU thus exercised influence on both Russia and the Baltic states to come to terms. Russia had to accept Baltic NATO membership, which guaranteed these states security in case of Russian threats. The Baltic states had to endorse Russian participation in NATO decision-making on certain issues and to adapt to the Western understanding of the difficult problem of the Russian-speaking minorities.

EU Enlargement and Russian fears

Effects on trade relations

Russia's economic relations with the Baltic states have in recent years been increasingly affected by the latter's ambition to become members of the European Union. Already in 1994 the Baltic states concluded a free trade agreement with the EU. They intensified their efforts for EU membership when they were not included in the first wave of NATO enlargement in 1997, but the two processes were seen as complementary. Most West European states are members of both organisations. In 1998--99, first Estonia, then Latvia and Lithuania opened mem-

⁸⁷ BBC, Estonia, 7 November 2002. See also 18 April, 30 April 2002.

bership negotiations with the EU, and the countries began a veritable race in fulfilling the conditions laid down in the *acquis communautaire*. Their negotiations were completed in late 2002, and the accession will take place in May 2004. They also backed the EU's evolving Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the creation of a EU rapid reaction force and other key political decisions.⁸⁹ Step by step they adapted their legal systems to European standards, for instance with regard to human rights and minority issues, taxation and crime prevention.

EU accession also meant that the candidate states had to adopt the Schengen agreement, which meant eliminating border controls among the members and introducing stricter controls and visas for non-members. The aim was to hinder illegal immigration, which is a hot political issue in all European states. To this end the three countries signed readmission agreements with Western neighbours concerning refugees, so that the visa regimes with these states were abolished in the mid-1990s. Assisted by the EU, especially its Nordic members, they constructed EU-compatible border regimes and control systems on the Russian and Belarussian borders, which had only been administrative lines on the maps in Soviet times.⁹⁰

Other difficult problems pertained to the common EU agricultural policy. The Baltic states, especially Lithuania and Latvia, insisted on more EU support and quick access to the common market.⁹¹ Hard pressed by the EU, Lithuania in 2002 agreed to shut down the two nuclear reactors at Ignalina by 2005 and 2009, respectively, in return for compensation from the EU.⁹² In general, this adaptation process was by no means easy, and it generated growing resistance to the EU in

⁸⁸ BBC, Russia, 30 May, Estonia, 31 May 2002, RG, 20 April 2002, *Moskovskie novosti*, 26 Febr. 2002.

⁸⁹ Herd/Huang, p. 15 f, 33; Sven Arnswald/Mathias Jopp, *The Implications of Baltic States' EU Membership*, Berlin: Institut für europäische Politik 2001, pp. 45ff.

⁹⁰ Herd/Huang, p. 8.

⁹¹ Herd/Huang, p. 8, BBC, Latvia, 15 March, Lithuania, 16 April 2002.

⁹² RG, 30 Aug. 2001; BBC, 18, 23 April, 3 May 2002; Kommersant, 15 March 2002.

the three countries. Interestingly, the rural populations dominated by the titular nations were more negative to accession, whereas the urban Russians were more positive. This opposition caused political headaches for the governments, because the EU accession was to be confirmed by referendum.⁹³

As for Russia, its leadership gradually realised the potentially negative impact that the process of Baltic affiliation with the EU had or could have on its own interests.⁹⁴ Russia itself has no chance of becoming a member of the EU in the foreseeable future, so EU enlargement to the Baltic states will irrevocably separate them from Russia.⁹⁵ A Russian diplomat also showed irritation over Estonian statements that EU membership would enable the country to conduct inter-state dialogue with Russia from firmer positions and to force Russia to change its policy.⁹⁶ Researcher Arkady Moshes at the Institute of Europe in Moscow has indicated the risk that member countries having tense relations with Russia may influence the EU's Russian policy in a negative way.⁹⁷

Russian officials also expressed concern about Baltic reorientation of trade from Russia to the unified EU market, or more justifiably, a reinforcement of this trend. Russia might lose potential investments due to the increased attractiveness of the new members. Most importantly, Russia was concerned that the introduction of EU standards and regulations with regard to quality, environment, means

⁹³ Graeme P. Herd/ Joan Löfgren, "'Societal Security', the Baltic States and EU Integration", *Cooperation & Conflict*, 36 (2001) 3, pp. 288 f; NG, 20 April 2000. In 2000 polls on EU membership, 45 % of Estonians voiced support (32 % in 2001), 44 % of Latvians and 40 % of Lithuanians according to Lauri Lepik, "The Accession of the Baltic States to the European Union", in *First Baltic-German Dialogue*, 2--4 November 2001, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2001, pp. 21-23)

⁹⁴ Generally on this relationship, see chapters in Helmut Hubel (ed.) *EU Enlargement and Beyond: The Baltic States and Russia*, Nordeuropäische Studien, No. 18, Berlin Verlag, 2002; Heinz Timmermann, „Russlands Politik gegenüber der EU“, *Osteuropa*, 50 (2000) 7, 8; Marius Vahl, *Just Good Friends? The EU-Russian Strategic Partnership and the Northern Dimension*, CEPS Working Documents, No. 166, Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, March 2001.

⁹⁵ NG, 6 Oct. 2000.

⁹⁶ Elagin (2001) p. 155.

⁹⁷ Moshes (2002) p. 311.

of transport, among others, in the new member states would amount to a *de facto* ban on some Russian exports and contribute to turning their trade westwards. Russian transit traffic might be affected, too. Russia was calculated to have lost USD 350 million a year after Sweden, Finland and Austria joined the EU in 1995.⁹⁸ According to a government paper, the Baltic states would on accession raise import tariffs by at least half, and be obliged to co-ordinate export quotas on eastern neighbours.⁹⁹

Another serious problem for Russia was the risk that the Baltic imposition of Schengen visas on non-members threatened to restrict Russian travel to and trade with the Baltic states. Thus in 2000-2001 Estonia and Latvia extended visa requirements to the border populations in Russia, who had been exempted before.¹⁰⁰

Problems for Kaliningrad

The visa problems were especially grave for the Kaliningrad region that will become a Russian enclave inside the EU, when Lithuania and Poland join. The region (unlike the rest of Russia) has enjoyed visa-free regimes with Lithuania and Poland since 1992. This led to a very intensive border trade, which according to some calculations engaged about a fourth of the working population.¹⁰¹ Kaliningrad city became completely dependent on importing foodstuff from abroad, a fact that spelled disaster, when the ruble crash occurred in 1998. About five million people were claimed to have crossed the borders annually around 2000. Thus there were protests in the region, when Poland introduced some limitations in 1998, and serious misgivings arose, when Poland and Lithuania decided to introduce visa

⁹⁸ Moshes (2002) pp. 310-313; Elagin (2001) p. 155, Natalia Smorodinskaya, *Kaliningrad Exclave: Prospects for Transformation into a Pilot Region*, Moscow: Institute of Economics, Russian Academy of Sciences 2001, p. 64 f.

⁹⁹ RG, 7 Febr. 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Elagin (2001) p.157, Demurin (2001) p. 78, RG, 20 Dec. 2001, RG, 18 April 2002.

¹⁰¹ Timmermann (2001) p. 16.

regimes for visits as of July 2003.

The inhabitants of the region travelled much more often to the neighbouring countries than to the rest of Russia. Lithuania and Latvia allowed visa-free train travel across their territories to and from Russia. Latvia introduced visas for Russian trains already in 2001 after some passengers had jumped off. Russia reacted by redirecting the trains to Belarus, thereby increasing the travelling time significantly. Lithuania decided to introduce transit visas as of January 2003.¹⁰²

Russia strongly opposed the introduction of visas for Kaliningrad. First it proposed a 'Baltic Schengen', which implied granting visa-freedom for Kaliningraders in *all* the Baltic states. In negotiations with the EU in 2001 the Russian Foreign Ministry demanded free transit through Poland, Lithuania and Latvia without visas on trains, buses and cars along agreed routes, and proposed free, one-year visas for Kaliningraders to visit these states. Other officials talked about erecting 'corridors', and transit in closed non-stop trains.¹⁰³ Since almost all traffic went through Lithuania, the most benevolent of the Baltic states, Russia focussed on the issue of transit across that state.¹⁰⁴

At meetings with the EU and the CBSS in mid-2002 Putin criticised the intended introduction of transit visas as a violation of Russia's territorial integrity and the Russians' human right to visit a part of their own country. He considered the solution to this vital question decisive and an absolute criterion for the relations with the EU. Instead of visas Putin suggested the adoption of the procedure used for transit through the GDR to West Berlin in the 1970s – without taking into account that the travellers then hardly wanted to defect into that transit country.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² SPB Vedomosti, 29 Oct. 2001; RG, 16 May 2002; Ingmar Oldberg (2001) *Kaliningrad: Russian exclave, European enclave*, FOI-R-0134--SE, Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, pp. 41 ff.

¹⁰³ BBC, Russia, 16, 17 May, 28 August 2002. RG, 24 May 2002; Oldberg (2001) 43 ff.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Putin's special Kaliningrad envoy Dmitry Rogozin in *Lietuvos Rytas*, 21 September 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Prezident RF, Vystupleniia, 9 May, 5 Oktober 2002; BBC, Russia, 29 May 2002, 10 June 2002.

The Russian Duma in June 2002 again made a ratification of the border treaty with Lithuania contingent on the solution of the transit problem. Instead of demanding visa exemption only for Kaliningrad residents, Putin in August 2002 called for visa-free travel between the EU and all of Russia.¹⁰⁶ Preserving the link between Russia and Kaliningrad was thus deemed more important than the special problems of the Kaliningraders.

Another problem with EU enlargement around Kaliningrad is that the region depends on receiving some 80 per cent of its energy (oil, gas and electricity) from Russia via Lithuania. As the Baltic states decided to switch their electricity grid from the ex-Soviet to the Polish and European systems, Kaliningrad faced the choice of either following suit, which meant dependence on foreign sources and higher costs, or the building of conversion stations or new transmission lines across neighbouring states. The government decided to build a new gas pipeline through Lithuania and a huge electricity power plant fed by it. However, *Gazprom*, though state-owned, resisted taking on the costs. They preferred exporting at world market prices to helping the Russian state subsidise Kaliningrad.¹⁰⁷

To solve the problems of enlargement, President Putin advocated trilateral negotiations between Russia, Lithuania and the EU. When visiting Poland, he suggested solving the problem before EU enlargement and creating a common working group to that end. These Russian suggestions sometimes sounded like conditions and pressure tactics, an impression which is confirmed by press comments to the effect that Russia could delay EU enlargement to the Baltic states.¹⁰⁸

The above problems of EU enlargement for Kaliningrad were aggravated by the fact that the region experienced worse economic, social and environmental

¹⁰⁶ BBC, Russia, 29 May, 11 June 2002; RFE/RL Newline, 28 August 2002., (www.rferl.org)

¹⁰⁷ Swiecicki, Jakub (2002) *Kaliningrad i kläm*, Världspolitikens dagsfrågor, nr. 10, Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, pp. 21 f; MN, 26 March 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Prezident RF, 16 Jan 2002; Oldberg (2001) p. 47.

conditions with concomitant problems of crime and diseases in comparison with Russia at large, not to speak of the neighbouring countries. The states around the Baltic feared that the problems in Kaliningrad might spill over on them.¹⁰⁹ In order to compensate for Kaliningrad's exclave location, Russia in 1991 had made it a Free, in 1996 a Special Economic Zone, which meant customs-free imports and exports to and from the region. However, as mentioned the region became heavily dependent on foodstuff imports from the neighbours and the zone was often used as a springboard to the rest of Russia. As the region in itself was small, lacked natural resources, and suffered from a worn-down infrastructure, unstable legal conditions and rampant corruption, Western investors preferred the neighbouring states.¹¹⁰

Russian benefits from Baltic EU membership

The above Russian apprehensions concerning Baltic EU membership must be weighed against the benefits that can be derived from it. Indeed, Russia had at least as many reasons to accept the enlargement of the EU as that of NATO. Firstly, also this enlargement was up to the parties concerned, and Russia could do little to prevent or halt it. Attempts to do so would only prove counter-productive, whereas acceptance could give some possibilities to influence the parties to heed Russian interests.

Secondly, Russia had for years recommended EU membership as an alternative to NATO membership for the Baltic states, since the EU was viewed as a European organisation mainly concerned with economic matters, as opposed to NATO which was seen as a military organisation dominated by the United States. Russian leaders had therefore no objections to the EU CSDP or to the creation of an EU crisis prevention force and even talked about a strategic partnership with

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion on the grey economy and the reliability of statistics, see e. g. Swiecicki (2002) s. 15-18.

the EU.¹¹¹

Thirdly, as already shown, Russia noted that the move towards EU (and NATO) membership induced Estonia and Latvia to amend citizenship and language legislation for the Russian-speaking inhabitants to conform with international standards. Russian criticism and pressure had failed to achieve this.

Fourthly, as Russia gave priority to economic development, the EU became its single most important trading partner, accounting for up to 40 per cent of Russian foreign trade. Two thirds of Russian exports, which rose quickly in 2001, consisted of oil and gas. By contrast, the EU was not as dependent on Russia, receiving only 16 per cent of its oil imports and 19 per cent of its gas imports from there.¹¹²

Thus, even if Russia itself did not aspire to EU membership, it strove to develop as close relations as possible, and this policy appeared to be popular among the population.¹¹³ Russia signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU in 1994, formulated a medium-term strategy for developing relations with it in 1999 in response to the EU Common Strategy on Russia, and contacts and co-operation on all levels intensified. A Joint Declaration with the EU in 2000 spoke in favour of boosting exchanges between the parties as well as between Russia and the candidate countries. A year later the EU and Russia created a common working group that aimed to develop a concept for a common European economic space within five years.¹¹⁴ In May 2002 the EU recognised Russia as a market economy, a decision which was designed to pave the way for

¹¹⁰ Smorodinskaya (2001) 61 ff.

¹¹¹ Dmitrii Danilov (2001) *The EU's Rapid Reaction Capabilities: A Russian Perspective*, IISS/CEPS Forum, 10 September 2001, Brussels: Centre for European Security Studies, (www.cusec.org/danilov) Retrieved 1 September 2002; KZ, 6, 9 Dec. 2000, NG, 24 May 2001; RG, 16 April 2002; Blank (2000), p. 16.

¹¹² NZZ, 22 May, Handelsblatt and Wall Street Journal, 29 May 2002.

¹¹³ According to Moshes (2002) p. 312, 54 per cent of Russians in a poll of August 2000 wanted Russia to strive for EU membership.

¹¹⁴ More on this in Timmermann (2000), Hubel (2001), Vahl (2001).

its entry into the WTO. In return Russia promised to fulfil the remaining conditions such as liberalising its domestic energy market.¹¹⁵ The Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi even called on the EU to accept Russia as a member state.¹¹⁶

With regard to the Baltic states' entry into the EU, Russian officials also identified some economic advantages. On the strength of the EU Partnership Cooperation Agreement with Russia, Baltic import tariffs would be lowered, facilitating Russian export. The transit of goods through EU states would be free from customs and other fees, except for administration and transport.¹¹⁷ It was pointed out that Russian joint ventures and businesses already present in the Baltic states would gain access to the vast European market. Consequently, Russian investments in and trade with for example Lithuania has grown rapidly of late.¹¹⁸ The All-Russian Market Research Institute in Moscow concluded that the enlargement would have an aggregate positive effect on Russian foreign trade of 200-450 million USD a year.¹¹⁹

Concerning the difficult visa problem and Kaliningrad, Russia could not expect the EU to change the Schengen agreements, which had taken them much effort to attain, or that the Baltic states (and Poland) should keep their borders to the EU closed for the sake of Russia or its Kaliningrad region, or that they should postpone joining the EU. The talk of corridors evoked special fears in Poland because its experience with Hitler in 1939. Estonia rejected the idea of regional Baltic visas for Kaliningraders or unchecked transit.¹²⁰ Moreover, Russia itself imposed visa regimes on several CIS states in 2000, even though exceptions were

¹¹⁵ RG, NZZ, 30 May 2002.

¹¹⁶ (Der) *Tagesspiegel*, 27 May 2002.

¹¹⁷ Moshes (2002) p. 309 f; Oldberg (2001), p. 37 f.

¹¹⁸ RG, 5 March 2002.

¹¹⁹ Frumkin, Boris (2002) "The economic relationship between Russia and Europe: Current situation and emerging trends", in Fedorov, Yuri and Nygren, Bertil (eds.) *Russia and Europe: Putin's Foreign Policy*, Stockholm, Swedish National Defence College, Acta B23, p. 109 f.

¹²⁰ BBC, Estonia, 9 October 2002.

then negotiated, and Russian visas remained much more expensive and difficult to get than those of EU states and candidates.

Moreover, even if the imposition of visa-regimes meant new problems for Kaliningrad, Russia had to concede that the present situation at Kaliningrad's borders is very problematic with long queues, much corruption, smuggling and crime, according to frequent reports in the media.¹²¹

Russia could also observe that the EU gradually came to realise the specificity of the Kaliningrad problem and edged towards compromise. An official EU 'Communication' of January 2001 noted that all EU rules (Schengen) need not apply at once to the new members, and their special practices could be used. For example, visa exemptions could apply to border populations, or visas could be made multiple and long-term, cheap and available at consulates in Kaliningrad. Sweden resolved to open a consulate there in 2002. Also Lithuania and Poland wanted to enlarge their consular services in Kaliningrad, and Latvia prepared to open a consulate there, though Russia long made difficulties, probably in order to support its demand for visa exemption.¹²²

Moreover, EU officials and representatives of EU states pointed out that visa regimes could actually be made quite flexible and at least as efficient as the present border controls. The EU especially staked on improving the border infrastructures of the candidate states as well as of Kaliningrad. Finland was frequently used as a positive example. The number of Russian travellers to Finland in fact grew after that country joined the EU and the Schengen zone, and Finland became second only to Germany in issuing visas to Russian citizens.¹²³ Admittedly, this growth was also due to Russia's economic recovery.

¹²¹ See also Swiecicki (2002) pp. 24 f.

¹²² MN, 12 March 2002, RG, 30 April, 16 May 2002.

¹²³ Finnish ambassador René Nyberg in *The Baltic Sea*, p. 26. One million Russians visited Finland in 2000.

After arduous negotiations and Russian interventions with leading EU nations, Russia and the EU at a summit in Brussels in November 2002 reached a compromise on the visa issue, which both sides hailed as a success. They agreed on introducing, firstly, a so-called Facilitated Transit Document (FTD) – not a visa – for Russian citizens to be applied for at Lithuanian consulates, allowing multiple transit trips on all means of land transportation to and from Kaliningrad. Secondly, an FRTD for single return trips by train was instituted, which would be attainable on the basis of personal data submitted at the time of ticket purchase in Russia. This information would then be forwarded electrically, and the FRTD would be checked and issued at the border by the Lithuanian authorities. Lithuania pledged to accept Russian internal passports until 2005, and the EU would investigate the possibility of rapid trains. In exchange Russia vowed to sign a readmission agreement with Lithuania by 30 June 2003 and to start negotiations with the EU on the same issue, to permit the enlargement of the Lithuanian consulate and the opening of other consulates in Kaliningrad, and finally to speed up the issuance of international passports.¹²⁴ Before that decision was made the EU Commission had agreed to examine the preconditions for future visa exemption between the EU and Russia, while noting several problems, and this Putin accepted.¹²⁵ Thus a complicated problem, in which Russia had invested much prestige, was solved.

Concerning the problems of the effect of EU enlargement on economic conditions in Kaliningrad, the development since the 1990s indicates that Russia could not or had not been willing to sustain the region properly, and therefore Russia needed support from the EU. It called for EU investments and economic aid to Kaliningrad with reference to the impending enlargement, and most federal projects there counted on EU assistance. Indeed, the EU spent a lot of effort on the

¹²⁴ "Joint Statement on Transit between the Kaliningrad Region and the Rest of the Russian Federation", European Commission, Tenth EU-Russia Summit, 11 November 2002 (www.europa.eu.int/comm/external-relations), retrieved 13 November 2002.

¹²⁵ BBC, Russia, 11 November 2002.

social, economic and ecological problems of the region, mainly through its TACIS programme. At the November summit, the EU promised more assistance.¹²⁶ True, Russia complained that it and Kaliningrad received less EU assistance than the Baltic states. However, this could be justified by the fact that these countries were after all official EU candidates, and as such had made great progress in meeting membership conditions. The EU could not really be blamed for the structural and legislative problems in Kaliningrad. For these Russia of course bears the main responsibility.

Russia also had to acknowledge that Lithuania, in spite of its small size and restructuring problems, was demonstrably cooperative concerning Kaliningrad. Like Poland, it had provided the region with humanitarian aid after the August 1998 crisis and was interested in maintaining border trade. The two countries worked out a list of common projects to be implemented under the auspices of the EU Northern Dimension (the Nida initiative).¹²⁷ Lithuania agreed to let Russia build a new gas pipeline across its territory to Kaliningrad. Of course, this Lithuanian policy not only served to make its EU accession more palatable to Russia but also to win favours with the EU.¹²⁸

A final reason for Russia to accept the Baltic states joining the EU was that this did not harm but might in fact promote Russia's main recent ambition vis-à-vis the EU, namely to establish an energy partnership with Europe and become its main provider of oil and gas.¹²⁹ When visiting Germany, Russia's main customer, President Putin commented critically that EU states were not permitting more than 30 per cent of their power supplies to come from a non-member, adding that at Russia's borders gas was four times cheaper than in Western Europe. Hopes were expressed that Russia would meet 70 per cent of the EU's need of energy in

¹²⁶ Joint Statement on Transit. European Commission, 11 November 2002.

¹²⁷ RG, 17 Febr. 2000.

¹²⁸ Oldberg (2001) p. 41 ff.

¹²⁹ NG, 24 Jan. 2001; Oldberg (2001) p. 48.

2020.¹³⁰ Russia is already building pipelines from its fields in Siberia and northern Russia in the western direction, and those in southern Russia have been modernised. European oil companies have showed an increased interest in making investments in Russia, thanks to the country's legal and fiscal reforms and improving economic performance since 1999.¹³¹ At the November 2002 summit, the EU declared that there was no need for an upper limit for energy imports from any non-member state and that it was interested in long-term agreements on gas imports and in the construction of pipelines in Russia. The EU also accepted to investigate the possibility of linking the electricity grids.¹³²

In order to bring about such an energy partnership, Russia could rely upon existing pipelines and other means of transport in the Baltic states, though preferably at lower prices. Even when the Baltic states become EU members, they will remain dependent on Russian oil and gas, and a lot of investments have been spent on improving the infrastructure for Russian transit. The future closure of the Ignalina nuclear power station offers Russia the opportunity of taking over some electricity customers.¹³³ Lithuania was offered to buy gas from the new pipeline, and there were even Russian hopes of exporting electricity from the future power plant in Kaliningrad, e. g. to Sweden.

Thus, even if EU enlargement to the Baltic states might entail some economic losses and complications, political considerations and the hope of becoming a major energy partner for the EU appear to have helped Russia to accept the development. Attempting to halt or postpone the enlargement process would not have succeeded and probably crippled Russia's possibilities to influ-

¹³⁰ BBC, Russia, 10 April 2002; *Vremia Novosti*, 3 Oct. 2001, Tass, 21 November 2001.

¹³¹ FT, 25 April 2002.

¹³² "EU-Russia Energy Dialogue – Third Progress Report", European Commission, Tenth EU-Russia Summit, 11 Nov 2002 (www.europa.eu.int/comm/external-relations) Retrieved 13 November 2002; "The EU-Russia Energy Partnership", European Commission, 11 Nov 2002 (www.europa.eu.int/comm/energy_transport/en/lpi_en_3.html) Retrieved 13 November 2002.

¹³³ NG-Dipkurier, 26 Oct. 2000; Handelsblatt, 12 Juni 2002.

ence and profit from the process. Russia and the EU found a compromise solution to the complicated visa problem around Kaliningrad, which had been seen as a test of the relationship. However, the developmental problems in that region, which threatened to destabilise the neighbouring countries, remained to be solved. Hence, Russia's overall interests with regard to Europe seemed to overshadow the losses it could incur from the inclusion of the Baltic countries into the EU.

Conclusions and prospects

The above analysis shows that Russian policy towards the Baltic states since 1991 has been quite contradictory and changeable. Not only did various nationalists oppose the official line, but also officials have contradicted each other or even themselves and changed views depending on the situation, the time and the audience. One is left with an impression of an ill-defined, short-term and reactive policy, subject to other concerns, domestic or international.

Nevertheless, over time certain patterns seem to emerge. Even if the political scene inside Russia has not been in the focus of this study, one can conclude that, predictably, Russian nationalists and military officers tended towards a tough, confrontational stance regarding the Balts, and Western-oriented liberals and economists towards a more cooperative line. The population and politicians in Kaliningrad were particularly interested in maintaining and improving the economic contacts with the neighbouring states.¹³⁴

Perhaps more unexpectedly, several Foreign Ministry officials appeared as hardliners, keen on exercising pressure on and hectoring the Baltic leaders. President Yeltsin appears generally to have avoided extreme statements, but he never visited any Baltic state after independence. By comparison President Putin seems to be more cooperative, having met the Baltic presidents on several occasions abroad. He took the initiative of signalling reluctant acceptance of Baltic NATO

membership and managed eventually to reach a compromise with the EU concerning the difficult Kaliningrad transit visa issue.

The record since the early 1990s further shows that Russia's relations with the Baltic states have been influenced by the international context and third parties rather than by these small states themselves. Several stages can be discerned. The early 1990s were characterised by Russian pressure and threats, using the presence of troops, the Russian-speaking inhabitants and the Baltic dependence on Russian energy as levers. The Baltic states strongly opposed Russian policy and called for support from the West. Estonia and Latvia raised border claims on Russia and did not yield concerning the Russian-speaking population. After the Russian troops were withdrawn in 1992-93 the Baltic countries became more cooperative in relation to Russia.

Before the NATO decision on eastern enlargement in 1997 the Baltic states made great efforts to meet membership conditions, which also meant that they shelved border claims on Russia and adjusted their minority policy to international standards. Russia replied with new pressure but also launched alternative security proposals, such as advocating EU membership. Russia was very relieved when the Baltic states were not admitted into NATO in the first wave. The Baltic states, however, did not give up their ambition and continued to integrate with NATO structures.

In 1998 the tension increased as Russia started a political campaign against Latvia, and in the following year Russia and the Baltic states took opposite views concerning NATO's military intervention against Yugoslavia.

However, in 2000 Russia under its new President Putin started to mend fences with NATO, and when NATO in 2001 seemed increasingly determined to admit the Baltic states, the Russian leadership grudgingly acquiesced in the fact. As the USA after 11 September 2001 declared war on international terrorism,

¹³⁴ Oldberg (2001) p. 59 ff.

Russia, keeping in mind its own problems in the south, supported the US-led intervention in Afghanistan and accepted a role in NATO decision-making in this and other questions. This could be seen as a compensation for Russia, boosting its prestige.

At the same time as the Baltic states finalised their accession negotiations with the EU, Russia intensified its economic cooperation with the EU. Even if the Baltic states drifted away from Russia, they were forced to cooperate with it in an international context. Their economic exchange with Russia decreased dramatically throughout the 1990s, but both sides were aware that an important interdependence remained.

Hence, Russian-Baltic relations have gradually moved from mutual estrangement and hostility towards a more respectful dialogue and accommodation. The Finnish economist Pekka Sutela has coined the fortunate concept of “Linen Divorce” to describe a process which is rough at first, but grows softer over time and is very resilient.¹³⁵ One can add that the divorced parties in this case have to cohabit and remain interdependent.

A key problem in Russian-Baltic relations since 1991 has been the disparity of power and a burdensome legacy of mutual suspicions, fears and conflicts. Russia is the largest state in Europe with about 147 million inhabitants, a successor to the former imperial Soviet power that occupied and incorporated the neighbouring states, which together only have about seven million inhabitants. Overestimating its power, Russia has often used pressure tactics and threats against the Baltic states. The small Baltic states have been wary of Russia’s intentions, sometimes overlooking its real limits of power and overstating the influence of Russian nationalists and communists.

¹³⁵ Pekka Sutela (2003) “*The Linen Divorce. Die baltischen Staaten und Russland*”, in Alexandrova, Olga/Götz, Roland/Halbach, Uwe (Hg.) *Russland und der postsowjetische Raum*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag (forthcoming).

Another conclusion from this study is that Russian policy towards the Baltic states has common features but is increasingly adapted to each country according to its specifics. The three countries are united in their common striving away from Russia towards NATO and EU membership, and their mutual ties grow, but they have specific identities and some divergent interests.

Comparing the states, Russian relations with Lithuania have on the whole been better than with the others, despite the fact that Lithuania was the leader among the Baltic nations in breaking up the Soviet Union and seeking NATO membership. Russia pulled out its troops first from Lithuania, signed a border treaty and has more political exchange with it. The explanation appears to be that Lithuania at an early stage had solved the citizenship question to Russian satisfaction, and that its moderate leftist governments proved cooperative with respect to Kaliningrad. Russia needed transit, and Lithuania also long remained relatively dependent on trade with Russia.

Russian relations with Latvia have on the whole been tenser than with the other neighbours. This may largely be attributed to the fact that Latvia has the largest Russian-speaking population and the strictest citizenship and language legislation. Initially, Latvia made border claims on Russia, too. Russian leaders tried to use the Latvian dependency on Russian oil transit as a means of pressure, on the other hand Russia was also dependent on and profited from this transit.

At times, the Russian relations with Estonia have been at least as bad as with Latvia, for instance in 1993, and for the same reasons. However, Estonia was most successful in switching its trade away from Russia and carrying out economic reforms, thus also offering good conditions for Russian business. Estonian nationality policy was a little softer than the Latvian one, and in 2002 definite signs of a thaw with Russia appeared.

In order to evaluate Russian relations with the Baltic states in a wider perspective, they should be compared with those in other ex-Soviet regions, such

as the Caucasian and Central Asian ones. It is then obvious that Russia has acted quite cautiously in the Baltic area. True, this region is strategically situated between Russia and its former main enemy NATO, but it has been quite stable by comparison. The Baltic states are democratic and develop rapidly unlike Russia's southern neighbours. There have been no wars among the former states over borders or resources, and no civil wars nor violent clashes between ethnic groups, as in the southern neighbour states. Russia nowadays sees separatism and Muslim fundamentalism in the south as the main threats to its security and has therefore intervened militarily there.

Looking finally to the future, Baltic EU and NATO membership may serve to help Russia overcome residual imperial proclivities towards these small neighbours and to establish peaceful ties with them. Many people in Russia retain personal, cultural and commercial ties in the Baltic states. As for the Baltic states, NATO and EU memberships will not only promote their economic development and European identity; they can also make them feel more secure from Russian pressure and allow them to develop those ties with Russia that are profitable to them. Many Balts know Russia well and speak Russian. The Russian-speaking populations are even more EU-centric (*Eurorussians*) than the titular nations, at the same time as many have old contacts in CIS states. The Baltic states can thus become some kind of a bridge between Europe and Russia and contribute to integrating Russia into Europe.

The Baltic countries also have strong interests in promoting European unity and progress. In the EU community they can contribute unique experiences of state building and democratisation, and they will automatically draw the attention of the other NATO and EU states to the problems of the Baltic Sea region. Even if the states will require structural support for several years, their needs will not be as big a burden as, for example, those of Poland. However, the fact that the Baltic states will have external EU borders on Russia and Belarus is likely to make them

more exposed to the influx of refugees and job-seekers from these and third countries. This will be a heavy responsibility for the Baltic states but also a reason to reach agreements with Russia on this issue.¹³⁶

Concerning the effects on third states, Baltic NATO accession will clearly increase the security of non-allied Sweden from any future Russian threats by creating a shield stretching all along the Baltic coast except the Kaliningrad region. Also Finland will probably gain security from the extension of NATO to the Gulf of Finland, unless Russia for some reason would increase its forces at the Finnish borders. In both Sweden and Finland the pressure to follow suit and join NATO is likely to grow, as NATO more and more transforms into an all-European, political organisation, where even Russia has a role. True, leftist and steadfast adherents of maintaining the policy of neutrality or non-alignment in Sweden could retort that it would be unnecessary to follow the Baltic examples, since the country would be safely embedded by NATO states like another Switzerland. EU enlargement to several states in Central and East Europe including the Baltic states may also marginally reinforce the pro-EU forces in Norway.

Finally, NATO and EU enlargement to the Baltic states may harbinger some changes in Belarus, a state which has a union with Russia. The Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has opposed NATO and its enlargement more strongly than Russia, and his relations with the EU are also bad. His regime remains authoritarian and repressive, and the economy is still state-planned in the old Soviet way. Belarus is therefore a growing burden on Russia to the extent that it aspires to be a Western-oriented market economy and democracy. Russia may therefore apply more pressure on Belarus to improve its relations and enter cooperation with NATO and the EU.

¹³⁶ Arnswald/Jopp (2001) pp. 60 ff.

In short, the Baltic states' accession to NATO and the EU will on the whole have beneficial effects both on the states involved and their neighbours, thus transforming the security landscape around the Baltic Sea.

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