

(Re)securitisation in Europe: the Baltic States and Russia

Sandra Fernandes and Daniel Correia
Universidade do Minho
sfernandes@eeg.uminho.pt
danielferreiracorreia@gmail.com

Abstract:

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia have entered a more difficult era with the 2004 enlargement and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The three Baltic states are new EU member states that share threat perceptions vis-à-vis Moscow. The article unpacks securitisation processes in the three Republics and how they have evolved after 2004 and 2014, as compared to the previous period of independence initialled in 1991. By exploring discourses, identity formation by strategies of othering and policy changes, we argue that re-securitisation is currently undergoing after a period of softer securitisation in the aftermath of EU accession.

Keywords: securitisation, othering, Baltic States, European Union, Russia

Introduction

Concerns about new wars in Europe have gained impetus since the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014. This state of play is particularly acute for the three Baltic Republics and Russia as they form a “regional security complex”, i.e a geographically coherent set of two or more states whose security perceptions are closely interlinked (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 415). Despite the accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures, “at the opening of the twenty-first century, the Baltics states are in the Russia-centred complex irrespective of how much they dislike this” (2003, p. 415). Even if they are part of the West for most purposes, “security-wise they are not” (2003, p. 413). With their cultural differences, the three states located on the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea belong to the same geopolitical space, have a recent shared history and, above all, similar security concerns informing their foreign policy priorities (Praks, 2015, p. 189; Miniotaite, 2003, pp. 211-13; Made, 2011, p. 185).

“Securitisation” vis-à-vis Russia has profoundly marked the process of independence of the three Baltic states. The reference to the occupation by Nazi and Soviet troops during the Second World War and from 1945 to 1991 has informed their path. The mutually exclusive views about whether the Baltic states are newly independent states or the continuation of the interwar Baltic republics is one of the major points of contention in the Baltic-Russian relations (Visek, 1997, p. 330). The existence of mutually irreconcilable narratives regarding their shared history during the conflict (Kattago, 2008, p. 432; Grigas, 2013, p. 127) is a core issue as Moscow rejects the fact that the former Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) occupied the Republics. Instead, the Kremlin values its role as a liberator from Nazi domination.

The article aims at analysing securitisation by the Baltic Republics after their accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004 and raises the question whether the phenomenon has changed as consequence of the Ukrainian crisis initialled in late 2013. It aims at identifying the intensity of securitisation as one may hypothesize that the EU [and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)] enlargements have decreased negative perceptions and improved security perceptions vis-à-vis the Kremlin.

We aim at exploring securitisation as both an evolutive phenomenon and a perennial dynamic affecting negatively Baltic-Russian relations. Although the analysis of “desecuritisation”¹ (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998, p. 29) falls out of the scope of this article, we put under perspective the evolution of threat perceptions and identity and their impact on policy change. Furthermore, we unpack three core dimensions that are interconnected in this particular process of securitisation: security, history and normative considerations.

Firstly, we explore the theoretical framing of “securitisation” as a form of “othering” in order to identify categories of analysis. Secondly, we analyse the main dimensions of securitisation from 2004 onwards, having as a comparison the 1991-2004 period. Thirdly, we give emphasis to the political changes that have occurred after 2014 in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

1. Securitisation: The Construction of Identities under Threat

Securitisation theory is premised on a constructivist notion of security, in the sense that “security is a quality actors inject into issues by securitising them” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998, p. 204). Therefore, the focus of the analyst is not to determine if a threat is “real” (Sheehan, 2005, p. 53), but rather to determine if something is successfully articulated as such.

A process of securitisation involves a referent object and a securitising agent, and it occurs when the latter portrays the former as being existentially threatened, thereby legiti-

¹ “Desecuritization” refers broadly to the return of normal politics after an emergency period.

mising the adoption of extraordinary measures aimed at ensuring its survival (Emmers, 2013, p. 133; Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998, p. 36). The rhetorical structure of securitisation or, in other words, the “internal” conditions of the speech act, must follow “a plot that includes an existential threat, a point of no return and a possible way out” (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998, p. 33). Therefore, the distinctiveness of security issues rests on the sense of urgency and absolute priority that is attached to them (Hough, 2008, p. 18; Mälksoo, 2006, p. 278).

In addition to presenting an issue as an imminent threat, a successful securitisation only takes place if a relevant audience also acknowledges the existence of an ostensible threat to a valued referent object. If that recognition does not take place, the discursive construction would merely constitute a securitising move (Mälksoo, 2015, p. 223; Emmers, 2013, p. 124; Brandão, 2015, p. 47). In other words, the securitisation model involves two stages: (1) presenting an imminent and existential threat to a valued referent object and (2) an acceptance by a relevant audience of the threat articulated by the securitising agent.

As pointed out by Buzan, Wæver and Wilde (1998, p. 36) and Roe (2008, p. 632), a security action is always taken on behalf of a collectivity. In light of that, it must be noted that securitisation processes tend to be dominated by powerful actors that occupy a privileged position within the state, particularly its authorised representatives (Emmers, 2013, p. 134). In fact, the greater the power and influence wielded by the securitising agent, the more likely is the securitising move to be successful. The state’s political elites, particularly in western liberal democracies, tend to predominate over other potential securitising actors by virtue of the legitimacy derived from having been chosen by the electorate (Emmers, 2013, p. 134).

According to the original securitisation model (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998), the success of the securitising move does not hinge on the implementation of extraordinary measures.² However, “resonance” has been considered a problematic category (Salter, 2011). As a matter of fact, if the above-mentioned category is taken as the fundamental criterion to determine whether the audience has validated the claim articulated by the securitiser, a fundamental question would inevitably arise: how can “resonance” be adequately assessed (Williams, 2011, p. 217)? Acknowledging that limitation, Salter (2011, p. 121) maintains that policy change is an inseparable part and the touchstone of every successful securitisation process:

There must be some public policy change, either in discourse, budget, or in actual policy: resonance is simply too unstable a category to really evaluate, and can lead

² “We do not push the demand so high as to say that an emergency measure has to be adopted, only that the existential threat has to be argued with enough resonance for a platform to be made which it is possible to legitimise emergency measures or other steps that would not have been possible had the discourse not taken the form of existential threats, points of no return, and necessity” (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998, p. 25).

to analysis by counter-factual (though no measure was taken, there might have been, would have been, could have been).

Consequently, a successful securitisation would, thus, be comprised of both discursive (speech act and a shared understanding between securitising agent and audience) and non-discursive (policy implementation) components (Emmers, 2013, p. 135; Floyd, 2010, pp. 52-54).

Our analysis will explore empirical evidences of both components of securitisation: on the one hand, we will locate the identification of threats in discourses; on the other hand, we will verify if policy changes have occurred accordingly. We define here “policy changes” as changes that have not been contested by a significative part of the “audience”. We base our choice on one of the most problematic aspects of the Copenhagen School’s securitisation framework that is “the under-theorised conceptualisation of the audience and its role in securitisation processes” (Léonard and Kaunert, 2011, p. 74). While it can be argued that the motives for not providing a rigid definition stem from the fact that every audience is case specific, it can also be contended that it is vital to establish the characteristics common to all audiences owing to the essential role they play in the securitisation framework (Vaughn, 2009, p. 273).

In that context, we use the definition provided by Balzacq (2011, pp. 8-9), according to which an “empowering audience” has two main characteristics: a direct relationship with the issue being discussed as a threat and the power to authorise the adoption of measures aimed at tackling that threat. As noted by Roe (2008), the audience can be divided into the general public, which provides “moral” support, and policy-makers – in particular parliaments – that can provide the “formal” support to implement exceptional measures (Roe, 2008). The main objective of the analyst is not to assess whether there is indeed a “real” threat to the very existence of a valued referent object, but rather to assess, not only if the securitising actor was successful in staging something as an existential threat, but also if that depiction has been accepted by a relevant audience and translated into relevant policy change.

As emphasised by Buzan, Wæver and Wilde (1998, p. 120), threats are premised on an inherent depiction of something as posing a threat to some “we”– and often thereby contributing to the construction or reproduction of “us”. In other words, securitisation is a form of “othering” (Jaeger, 2000), in the sense that it presupposes an unambiguous demarcation between what we aim to protect and the “other” that presents a threat to it. Therefore, “to speak security is to employ a discourse of danger inter-subjectively depicting that which is different from self as an existential threat – and therefore as other to self” (Jaeger, 2000). Williams (2003, pp. 519-520) also stresses that the ability to establish the limit of a given identity, to contrast it to what is not, “to cast this as a relationship of threat or even enmity” is indispensable to a successful securitisation.

However, practices of othering do not inevitably entail the articulation of difference as an existential threat. As noted by Hansen (2006, p. 5), “constructions of identity can take on different degrees of ‘Otherness,’ ranging from fundamental difference between Self

and Other to constructions of less than radical difference”. Mälksoo (2009, p. 66) makes a similar point, stressing that it is possible to differentiate “between shades of otherness in the scale between difference and outright threat to self’s identity”.

Central to all practices of “othering” is the notion of identities. The concept of national identity refers to relatively stable set of conceptualisations and expectations about the self (Ehin and Berg, 2008, p. 9). Some authors, particularly McSweeney (1996, p. 83), contend that the Copenhagen School reifies identities, treating them as mere “objective realities, out there to be discovered and analysed”. As stressed by Booth, the core of the disagreement between McSweeney (1996) and Buzan and Waever (1997) is the notion of identity: while the former sees it as a process, the latter, while not treating it as fixed, claim that they tend to become relatively constant and sedimented (Booth, 2005, p. 36). While it is accepted that identities are not fixed and, therefore, are subject to change, we concur with Buzan and Waever (1998, p. 205): “identities as other social constructions can petrify and become relatively constant elements to be reckoned with”. Once identities become sedimented, beliefs and institutions change only slowly (Theiler, 2003, p. 254).

Despite the debate regarding the notion of identity, there is still a lack of consensus on how to understand the relations between self and other (Berenskoetter, 2007, p. 657), namely whether (1) a spatial/external other is needed for the construction of identity and (2) if othering invariably leads to the construction of the other as an outright threat (Morozov and Rumelili, 2012, p. 29). Diez (2004, pp. 325-333) underlines that forms of “geopolitical” (or “traditional”) othering, in which identity, politics and geography are closely interlinked, have become more and more frequent since the 1990s, including in the EU, citing the othering of Islam and Turkey as prime examples.

In order to further illustrate the different forms of othering, Diez (2005, pp. 628-629) proposes the existence of four categories to demonstrate the existence of multiple strategies of constructing “self” and “other” in international politics: (1) representation of the other as an existential threat (securitisation); (2) representation of the other as inferior; (3) representation of the other as violating universal principles; (4) representation of the other as different.

Taking into consideration the existence of multiple forms of othering, we assess below the Baltic states’ security discourses and practices vis-à-vis Russia. In particular, we aim at evaluating if securitisation, understood as the intersubjective articulation of a threat and correspondent policy change, has been the most prevalent form of othering Russia in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania since their accession to the EU in 2004.

2. Securitising Russia after EU Accession: The Continuation of Existential Politics in Other Ways

The pre-enlargement foreign policies of the Baltic states had three major components: “restoration, redress and deterrence” (Galbreath, Lasas and Lamoreaux, 2008,

p. 59). More concretely, the main objectives of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were to restore their interwar republics, rectify to the extent possible the effects of their forced incorporation into the Soviet Union and preclude their inclusion in Russia's sphere of influence. After regaining their independence, the Baltics' decision to adopt an unambiguous pro-Western foreign policy and seek the full integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures, particularly the EU and the Atlantic Alliance, was only clearly expressed in the mid-1990s, after the idea of neutrality was discarded (Miniotaite, 2003, p. 214; Scerbinskis, 2005, p. 165).

According to Auers (2015, p. 198), even though the goal of Western integration was soon agreed upon, the three Baltic republics "maintained a façade of neutrality" until the last Russian troops left their countries in 1993 (Lithuania) and 1994 (Estonia and Latvia), "in order to avoid antagonising" the Kremlin. The Baltics' rejection of neutrality is intimately connected with their recent history, as their neutral stance in World War II did not avoid their occupations by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Meri, 1995).

The normalisation of the Baltic-Russian relations has been hindered by the tendency to frame historical narratives as security issues or, in other words, to secure certain historical remembrances through the complete rejection, delegitimisation or even criminalisation of alternative interpretations (Mälksoo, 2015, p. 222). The existence of "conflicting historical narratives" have a profound impact on relations because they "directly concern the foundational principles of each nation involved" (Fofanova and Morozov, 2009, pp. 15-16). As stressed by Ehin and Berg (2009, p. 9)

The national identity construction of the Baltic states and Russia, together with the historical narratives they are based on, are incompatible, and, indeed, antagonistic. The constituting narratives of self of the Baltic states and Russia include truth claims that are mutually exclusive. The differences are not in details but pertain to central elements of the respective narratives – the events of Second World War, the role of the Red Army, assessment of the Soviet regime and its collapse, the termination and restoration of Baltic independence.

According to Mälksoo (2006, p. 275), "the shift from existential politics to normal politics by the Baltic states is far from being accomplished". In that regard, the notion of "existential politics" can have two main dimensions: the quest for "physical" survival, which led to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania's pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration, but also for "meaningful" survival, or alternatively stated, to be recognised as a certain sort of being (Mälksoo, 2006, p. 278). In that context, after becoming EU and NATO members, the three Baltic republics have sought not only Western Europe's acknowledgment of their historical subjectivity, but also to "enlarge the mnemonic vision of the united Europe" by seeking to incorporate their wartime experiences into a common European historical

consciousness (Mälksoo, 2009, p. 84). The premise of the Baltic historical narrative regarding World War II is that there is no fundamental distinction between the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany and the ones perpetrated by the Soviet Union. By drawing a comparison between both regimes' crimes, the Baltic historical narrative "clearly challenges the paradigm of the singularity of the Holocaust against which Europe has been defined so far" (Onken, 2009, p. 38).

In 1991, following more than four decades under Moscow's control, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have proclaimed their independence on the basis of legal continuity (Onken, 2009, p. 40). In other words, the Baltic republics do not consider themselves as newly independent states, but rather as a continuation of the interwar republics that existed between 1918 and the beginning of the first Soviet occupation in June 1940 (Viktorova, 2007, pp. 46-47). As a corollary, rather than having seceded from the USSR, the Baltic republics regained their independence following 50 years of foreign occupation (Zalimas, 1999, p. 7). Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius base their argumentation on the *ex injuria jus non oritur* principle, which postulates that illegal acts under international law cannot have legal consequences. Therefore, they were never legitimately part of the Soviet Union (Elsuwege, 2015; Annus, 2012, p. 26).

In addition to the de facto loss of independence, the Soviet occupations, in particular the longest one (1944-1991), were translated into territorial changes and markedly altered the demographic composition of Latvia and Estonia (Aalto, 2005, p. 260; Viktorova, 2007; Kasekamp, 2010, p. 140; Auers, 2015, pp. 29-30; Mole, 2012, pp. 128-138). Lithuania, on its side, regained territory after its incorporation into the Soviet Union, namely its historical capital, Vilnius, which was occupied and annexed by Poland in 1920 and 1922, respectively, as well as the coastal city of Klaipeda (also known as Memel) from Germany.

In addition to the above-mentioned territorial changes, the decades of Soviet occupation were marked by forced population transfers that led to significant changes in the ethnic composition of the Estonian and Latvian populations. The first massive deportation took already place in 1941 and its "main objective was to eliminate the nation's cultural, business, political, and military elite" (Altau, 2015). In the second massive deportation (March, 1949), also known as Operation "Coastal Surf", over 90,000 Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonian citizens were expelled from their countries (Strods and Kott, 2002).

Whereas the ethnic composition of the Baltic States was considerably homogeneous in 1945, the lasting Russian occupation of Estonia and Latvia changed the ethnic makeup of those countries. At the end of World War II, the percentage of indigenous population was high in Latvia (80%), and even higher in Estonia (94%) (Kasekamp, 2010, pp. 154-155). However, the massive influx of industrial workers from Russia led to a sharp decline in the number of ethnic Estonians and Latvians. By the year 1989, the percentage of titular Estonians and Latvians was only 62% and 52%, respectively (Kasekamp, 2010, pp. 154-155; Kattago, 2008, p. 432; Plakans, 2011, pp. 153-158). With regard to Lithuania, the percentage of ethnic Russians is significantly lower in comparison to the other two

Baltics³ (Galbreath, Lašas and Lamoreaux, 2008, p. 28). Unlike Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania's ethnic composition did not change drastically during the last decades, as ethnic Lithuanians made up 78% and 80% of the total population in 1945 and 1989, respectively (Kasekamp, 2010, p. 155).

Not only does the principle of legal continuity constitute the bedrock of the Baltics' statehood, but it is also the background against which the current Baltic-Russian takes place. As Jaeger (2000) stresses, the Baltics' practices of inscribing the principle of historical continuity in state foundations can be defined as a kind of securitisation, "as they cast the entire state project as precarious if not firmly connected to the historic one". In other words, non-recognition of their legal continuity is perceived in the Baltic capitals as a threat to their very independence and statehood legitimacy.

The mutually exclusive views about whether the Baltic states are newly independent states or the continuation of the interwar Baltic republics is one of the major points of contention in the Baltic-Russian relations. In that regard, one of the most important corollaries of the principle of legal continuity was the citizenship laws adopted by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The Estonian and the Latvian citizenship laws, adopted in 1995 and in 1994, respectively, are based upon the principle of *jus sanguinis*. As a consequence, only the citizens of the interwar republics and their descendants were granted automatic citizenship. The other residents, who became stateless when the Soviet Union ceased to exist, were required to go through a naturalization process in order to become Estonian and Latvian citizens⁴ or, in alternative, adopt the citizenship of a third state (for example, Russia).

As Herd and Lofgren (2001, pp. 276-278) have noted, Estonia and Latvia have securitised the threat posed by their Russian-speaking "colonial" minorities⁵ to the "dominant position of the titular nation" and also to their very independence as sovereign states. The implicit aim of those laws was to assure that the first post-occupation legislative elections had "overwhelmingly ethnic Estonian and Latvian electorates" (Auers, 2015, p. 81). In order to consolidate their national identities after almost five decades under Soviet control, the Baltic republics, in particular Latvia and Estonia, needed to cement the Soviet/Russian "Other", which led to the exclusion of the Russian-speaking minority and Russian language and culture as far as possible (Mole, 2012, p. 83).

3 However, the Russian minority living in Lithuania is still significant, numbering 176,900 and thus representing 5,8% of the total population (Lithuania Statistics, 2013).

4 In Latvia, the percentage of non-citizens has dropped from 29% (approximately 730 000) in 1995 – when the naturalization process began – to 12% (257 377) in July 2015. Therefore, 84% of Latvia's residents are now citizens (Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). In Estonia, the share of persons of undetermined citizenship has drastically decreased from 32% in 1992 to 6.1% in January 2016. The majority of these residents chose naturalisation during the 1990s (Estonia.eu, 2016).

5 For a discussion about whether it is appropriate to speak about the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states as colonisation, see (Annus, 2012).

The integration into the Atlantic Alliance and the EU was also framed as a central component of the Baltics' broader "return" to Europe (Herd and Lofgren, 2001). As noted by Pavlovaite (2005, p. 199), the "return to Europe" rhetoric was not merely a way of asserting these countries' "Europeaness", as it has also served the purpose of distancing themselves from their significant "other", epitomized by Russia. "After regaining their independence, the Baltic states have been constructing their political identities in terms of the East/West opposition. They have been creating narratives of belonging to the West, with the East as their threatening other" (Miniotaite, 2003, p. 214).

As a consequence, only by joining the two organizations that symbolise the West can the Baltic republics avoid their past irreversibly (Lehti, 2005, p. 37). Owing to the civilizational affinity between these states and the West, the "return to Europe" is depicted as an essential step: "we acknowledge a certain civilization as our own, a certain political culture, certain intellectual and spiritual values and general principles" (Meri, 1998). Joining the Western institutions was perceived in the Baltic republics as a move that would confirm and solidify "their belonging to the Western civilization" and the final act of liberation from Moscow rule (Fofanova and Morozov, 2009, p. 24).

The perception of Russia as the most significant "other" and a potential threat to the Baltic states clearly attest that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been above all united "by a construction of a common danger from the East", which was one of the major rationales for the Baltics' pursuit of NATO and EU membership (Miniotaite, 2003, p. 213 and p. 220). As pointed out by Mälksoo (2006, p. 277), the Baltic republics' quest for NATO and EU membership, premised on the perceived danger posed by the "historically aggressive and unstable neighbouring Russia", has constituted "the politics of survival par excellence". Whereas Europe is associated with positive connotations, Russia is "othered", being described as unstable, aggressive and, implicitly, as inferior. In addition to that, the recurrent claims of the need to "protect" the Russian-speaking minority have fuelled the Baltic states (in this case, Latvia and Estonia) fears and strengthened the essentialist notion of embedding political loyalty in ethnicity, leading to the depiction of the Russian-speaking minority as a potential "fifth column" (Jaeger, 2000).

After having refused the Russian offer for security guarantees in 1997 (Mereckis and Morkvenas, 1998; Morozov, 2001, p. 221), the Baltics overtly ignored Russia's strong opposition to their NATO membership and signed the Baltic Charter with the United States. While the Baltics' accession to the Alliance was constructed as an existential quest in Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius, the Kremlin perceived it as a threat (Morozov, 2005). The Euro-Atlantic integration of these countries was fundamentally perceived and depicted as the ultimate test to the West's credibility and guarantee that the Yalta and Munich mistakes would not be repeated.

According to Galbreath, Lasas and Lamoreaux (2008, p. 59), the Baltics' key challenge after ensuring their Euro-Atlantic integration has been to "overcome the post-soviet

tendencies of restoration, redress and deterrence and move towards the post-existential policies of consolidation, stability and expansion”. In other words, the three republics sought further integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, to increase regional stability in the Baltic sea and to foster their relations with the most Western-oriented post-Soviet countries, particularly with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

“Expansion” has been observable in the EU realm in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP).⁶ The support towards greater democratisation and towards Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the EaP states can be justified on security grounds. Owing to the Baltic republics’ threat perceptions vis-à-vis the Kremlin, the EaP is perceived by Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius as part of a containment strategy aimed at mitigating and challenging the Moscow’s influence in the shared neighbourhood of the EU and Russia (Made, 2011; Kesa, 2011, pp. 87-88). As noted by Auers (2015, p. 210), by helping to strengthen the democratic institutions of those countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have sought to “create geopolitical security buffers in the same way the Nordic countries did for the Baltic states” during the 1990s.

The moral responsibility to support the former Soviet republics might be illustrated by the former Lithuanian head of state:

Lithuania is eager to provide practical advice and support for your reforms. In fact, we have a lot to share, as we went through similar reforms just few years ago and now we know its “nuts and bolts”. (...) Europe has neither moral nor historical right to deny the nations in the Black Sea Region the possibility to share the same transatlantic institutions. On the contrary, we have a responsibility to bring these nations back to Europe (Adamkus, 2005).

Whereas threat perceptions regarding Moscow’s intentions and a sense of moral responsibility have indisputably played the major role in explaining the Baltic republics’ conduct, they have not only aim to contain Russia’s influence and counter what they perceive as its expansionist impulses in the EaP region (Jakniunaite, 2009, p. 125 and p. 128). Their active support towards the Eastern dimension of the ENP is also closely related to their intention of increasing their participation in the EU’s decision-making process (Made, 2011, p. 68; Lamoreaux and Galbreath, 2008). This aspect is an example of the “consolidation” dimension of their post-2004 foreign policy, as above-mentioned. One effective way of meeting that objective is through a strong focus on the Eastern dimension of the ENP because the post-Soviet countries “are quite harmless policy areas demanding little domestic, including

⁶ The ENP was launched in 2004 and includes Southern Mediterranean countries and six former Soviet Republics participating in the EU’s Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). The Eastern Partnership was created in 2009 in the context of the ENP to give new impetus to relations with these countries.

financial, input (...), but offering, at the same time, rather wide and risk-free opportunities to increase the image profile” within the EU (Made, 2011, p. 74).

In addition to prioritising the EaP, the Baltic states have stressed the need for a EU policy vis-à-vis Russia based on values and not merely on economic considerations.⁷ The Baltic republics’ reactions to the possible sale of four French Mistral-class amphibious assault ships illustrate this point. According to the then undersecretary for political affairs at the Estonian Foreign Ministry, the sale of those ships to Russia “would not add to the security of the region” and “the nations around the Baltic Sea in that case might have to see what they have to do to change their defense planning” (Tiido, 2010, quoted in Lobjakas, 2010). The former Minister of National Defence of Lithuania, Rasa Juknevičienė (2008-2012), pointed out that the sale was an “obvious mistake”, because “when a NATO and EU member sells offensive weaponry to a country whose democracy is not at a level that would make us feel calm” it sets a dangerous precedent (Juknevičienė, 2011, quoted in Iskauskas, 2011). Russia is thus subjected to practices of normative “othering”⁸ depicting Moscow as an undemocratic and potentially aggressive country.

Processes of normative othering were particularly prevalent during the “Bronze Soldier” crisis. The Estonian government’s decision to relocate on the night of 26-27 April the so-called “Bronze Soldier” (previously called “Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn”), a Soviet World War II memorial, from the centre of Tallinn to the Estonian Defence Forces Cemetery, provoked violent riots among the Russian minority and marked a new low in the relations between the two countries (Fernandes, 2013). The Kremlin has sought to expose the Baltic states (and also Poland) as an embodiment of “false Europe”, depicting them as being unworthy to be part of the West on normative grounds. During the “Bronze Soldier” crisis, Estonia’s conduct was depicted as being counter “to modern European civilisation, to the entire civilized world” (Kosachev, quoted in Pelnens, 2009, p. 60). As emphasised by Morozov (2005, p. 224):

By proclaiming their adherence to European values such as human rights and the anti-fascist legacy, Russian political actors attempted to single out the Baltics as the black sheep of the European family, thereby increasing their own legacy by assuming the right to speak on behalf of the true Europe.

During the “Bronze Soldier” episode, Tallinn also engaged in processes of normative othering. In that regard, the then Estonian head of state advised Moscow to “remain civilised”, and stressed that “it is customary in Europe that differences are solved by diplomats and politicians, not on the streets or by computer attacks. Those are ways of other

⁷ For an analysis of EU-Russia relations see Fernandes (2010).

⁸ See the strategies of othering presented in the first section.

countries, somewhere else, not in Europe” (Ilves, 2007, quoted in McLaughlin, 2007). The Estonian president thus sought to both widen and deepen the discursive border between “civilised” Europe, to which Estonia is part, and the “violent”, “unstable” and “barbaric” Russia, whose conduct and principles are not consistent with the European civilisation (Kaiser, 2016, p. 529).

Owing to what they perceive as the willingness of some EU members, in particular Germany and France, to prioritise commercial interests over a value-driven foreign policy towards Russia, the Baltic republics have been staunchly opposed to the dilution of NATO’s role in Europe, and simultaneously, they have been cautious towards the evolving European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) (Mälksoo, 2008, p. 39). As pointed out by the Latvian National Armed Forces’ Commander, “every initiative concerning security in Europe should be adding to NATO’s security capabilities”, and therefore “duplicating the alliance’s capacities would be unacceptable” (Graube, 2016, quoted in Latvian Information Agency, 2016).

In that regard, the Baltics have pursued a “NATO first” defence policy and stressed the major importance of their bilateral relationship with Washington, widely perceived as the ultimate guarantee of their security and the only effective way of deterring Moscow (Rublovskis, 2014, p. 175). In addition to the United States’ role, the security guarantees enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty are widely perceived as more reliable than the mutual defence clause introduced in 2009 under Article 42 (7) of the Treaty of the European Union. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have sought to gain diplomatic and political importance with their allies, in particular the United States, by actively participating in all major Atlantic Alliance’s “out-of-area” missions. For instance, in addition to serving in Afghanistan without caveats, a very rare occurrence among NATO allies, Estonian troops have been deployed to the Helmand province — “one of the most deadly areas in the country” – and suffered the second-highest number of deadly casualties per capita of all NATO members (Coffey, 2013).

3. More than words: military and non-military changes after 2014

The paper has underlined, above, that securitisation has been visible before 2014, particularly at the discourse level. This has contributed to both justify statehood and independence and to enhance the Baltics’ role as EU members, namely concerning its policies towards the post-soviet space. After EU accession in 2004, othering of Russia has been more focused on normative differentiation than on the need to justify and protect the existence of the three states. In that sense, securitisation has continued but in a less urgent way. In this section, we address how the process has evolved in front of the deterioration of relations with the Kremlin in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. According to Hyndle-Hussein (2015), whereas the Russian military intervention in Georgia

have diminished the Baltic republics' sense of security, the annexation of Crimea and the outburst of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine have greatly increased Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania's fears vis-à-vis Russia. We will unpack how changes have occurred by exploring major policy changes (implementation level) beyond discourses.

The sense of urgency provoked by the events in Ukraine has been particularly observable in Lithuania. In a speech at the United Nations, the head of state asked: "how much time do we have" in the face of a country that "seeks to rewrite history and redraw the borders of post-war Europe" (Grybauskaite, 2015). After decades of disinvestment, Lithuanian's defence budget has been markedly increased since 2014. In that year, Lithuania's defence budget was the second smallest among NATO countries, standing at only 0,8% (Dudzinska, 2014, p. 1; Hyndle-Hussein, 2015, p. 3). In 2015 and 2016 the defence budget amounted to 1.15 % of GDP and 1.48 % of GDP, respectively (Ministry of National Defence Republic of Lithuania, 2015). In 2017, the sum is expected to be further raised to 1.77% of GDP. The defence expenditures is expected to meet the 2% NATO guideline next year and it will be further on steadily increased (Lithuanian Ministry of Defence, 2017).

Vilnius has introduced changes both at the military level and in other domains. The normative aspect of othering is also visible in the new military strategy approved in 2016 as it emphasises that Moscow is "undermining the rule-based European security architecture", and therefore "the security environment of Lithuania has worsened and become less predictable in the long-term" (Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence, 2016). The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 has served as a "catalyst to implement practical decisions to strengthen military capabilities" in Lithuania (Kojara and Kersanskas, 2015, p. 183). Vilnius is the only NATO member that has reinstated military conscription in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The compulsory military service, which had been abolished in 2008, was firstly reinstated on a temporary basis (5 years) in 2015. However, on March 14, 2016, the State Defence Council unanimously approved permanent conscription (The Baltic Times, 2016a) and, in June, the Parliament adopted "amendments to the Law on Military Conscription" (Seimas, 2016). Both the Head of State and Chief of Defence of the Republic justified the decision by alluding to Russia's actions in Ukraine and its significant impact in the region geopolitical environment (Zukas, 2015, quoted in The Guardian, 2015; Grybauskaite, 2015, quoted in Deutsche Welle, 2015a).

In addition to conscription, Vilnius has also taken decisive steps to augment combat readiness with the aim of precluding a "fait accompli" similar to the one Russia has created in the Crimea peninsula. Lithuania has, thus, altered the armed forces structures and invested in modern military equipment. The Rapid Reaction Force, that is indispensable to respond to "non-conventional threats" (Grybauskaite, 2014, quoted in DELFI, 2014), and the 2500 military personnel training was justified on the grounds that the conflict in Ukraine demonstrates the "need to be able to deploy forces in hours, not weeks and months" (Tamosaitis, 2014, quoted in Lyman, 2014).

As regards military equipment, the most significant investment was the purchase of 88 Boxer Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFV) armed with 30mm gun and Spike-LR anti-tank missiles. The purchase amounts to €386 million and is the largest defence investment ever made by Vilnius (Malyasov, 2016). To fully assess the enormous dimension of the investment, one may note that Vilnius' total defence budget stood at €425 million and €575 million in 2015 and 2016, respectively (Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence, 2015a).

Lithuania's securitisation of Moscow has not been confined to policy changes in the defence and military spheres. The country has also addressed what it has perceived as the Kremlin's "information warfare". In April 2015, the Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania suspended RTR Planeta broadcast for three months for "inciting discord, war-mongering, spreading biased information" (Deutsche Welle, 2015b). More concretely, the channel was accused of "inciting hatred" and "showing contempt for Ukraine's territorial integrity" (Kropaite, 2015). Prior to the annexation of Crimea, Lithuania had already imposed temporary bans on the broadcasts from Gazprom-owned NTV Mir, in March 2014, and from the First Baltic Channel (PBK), in October 2013 (Auers, 2015, p. 226; Reuters, 2014). The suspension of NTV Mir and PBK can be considered as a form of securitising the country's historical narrative (existential politics), on the grounds that both channels were accused of "spreading lies about the events in Vilnius in January 1991" (Reuters, 2014).

Latvia has also identified Russia as an aggressor country with a particular focus on its ability to conduct hybrid warfare.⁹ The defense minister claimed that owing to "Russia's unpredictable nature, current relations (...) are based on mistrust and suspicion" and a thaw in Russian-West relations must only occur once the Kremlin "obeys international law, stops threatening its neighbours with weapons and restores the status quo of Ukraine's territorial integrity" (Bergmanis 2016, quoted in Tomkiw, 2016). Former prime minister also accused Moscow of attempting to undermine Riga's security through "(a)ggressive propaganda, economic sanctions, the demonstration of military power, and the unprecedented concentration of troops close to the Baltic borders" (Straujuma, 2016, quoted in The Baltic Times, 2016). Russia's military build-up is perceived as a threat, because "(w) e have already seen in Georgia and Ukraine how such exercises can turn into aggression, occupation, and annexation" (Vejonis, 2016).

As a consequence, Riga has also undertaken military and other policy changes. Defense expenditures have arisen from 1,2% of GDP (2015) to 1,7% (2017) (Marrone, France and Fattibene, 2016, p. 13; Sargs, 2016). Concerning the military sphere, although it has not invested as much as its southern neighbour, Latvia has also sought to modernise its armed forces and adapt them to the challenges posed by Moscow's conduct in Ukraine.

⁹ We define "hybrid warfare" as "the use of military and non-military tools in an integrated campaign designed to achieve surprise, seize the initiative and gain psychological as well as physical advantages utilizing diplomatic means; sophisticated and rapid information, electronic and cyber operations; covert and occasionally overt military and intelligence action; and economic pressure" (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015). For a detailed discussion of the concept see Galeotti (2016).

In that regard, the most significant decision was the €48.1 million euros purchase of 123 surplus Combat Reconnaissance Armoured vehicles – which will be equipped with Spike fourth-generation anti-tank missile systems from the United Kingdom (UK Government, 2014). As noted by Turnbull (2014):

A hundred 1970s-era vehicles might not sound significant (...) but in relative terms it is. Latvia's army is one of the smallest in Europe, numbering around 1,500, and has historically lacked any serious armoured capabilities. The government's build-up of an armoured vehicle fleet, albeit small, is a sign of shifting priorities in Eastern Europe.

In other domains, changes have concerned “information warfare” and constitutional amendments. Defensive capabilities to counter Russia's “information warfare” include the establishment of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga, launched in 2014. After signing a Memory of Understanding with representatives from Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, the UK and Germany on the creation of the above-mentioned centre, the then Minister of Defence justified the decision with Russia's actions in Ukraine: “The conflict between Russia and Ukraine clearly shows how important an information campaign can be in gaining the upper hand in a military conflict” (Vejonis 2014, quoted in Atlantic Council, 2014).

Riga has also securitised Russia's narrative about the conflict in Ukraine, namely by shutting down the local website of Russia's channel Sputnik in March 2016. The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that the decision was justified on the grounds that the channel is a “propaganda tool” used by the Kremlin (Jansons, 2016, quoted in EURACTIV, 2016). The Latvia's Network Information Center (NIC), which carried out the suspension, explained the decision by noting that “continuing operations of the sputniknews.lv website was at odds with the March 17, 2014 EU regulation that stipulates sanctions against activities endangering the territorial integrity and independence of the Ukrainian state” (Public Broadcasting of Latvia, 2016a).

Shortly after ordering the suspension of Sputnik, the Latvia National Electronic Mass Media Council placed a six-month ban on the Rossiya RTR Russian TV channel (Public Broadcasting of Latvia, 2016b). The Russian channel was accused of inciting hatred or calling for war or military conflict, following contentious claims by the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and member of the Russian Parliament, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

The securitisation of Russia in Latvia has also been materialised in constitutional amendments. The main aim of the bills, submitted to the Latvian parliament by president Vejonis, was to expedite both government and military decision-making in case of conflict (Public Broadcasting of Latvia, 2015). The amendments to the National Security Law give greater flexibility to local commanders, stipulating that, should the country come under serious military threat, the Latvian Armed Forces are authorised to immediately launch self-defence

measures without having to wait for an order from the Commander-in-Chief. Amendments also include a new and broader definition of “wartime”, now described as being a consequence of any attack, be it conventional (military) or not, or any other actions aimed against the country’s independence, constitutional order or territorial integrity (Baltic News Network, 2016).

The National Armed Forces Law has also been amended to guarantee the swift and efficient cooperation and exchange of information between the Cabinet of Ministers and the National Armed Forces’ command during wartime. In order to achieve that objective, the amendment indicates that the Armed Forces commander shall, in the event of a war, participate in the meetings of the cabinet of ministers as an advisor.

Finally, the amendment to the Law on the Structure of the Cabinet of Ministers – whose aim is “to ensure decisive action in the event of a national threat” – will enable the Cabinet to make decisions in the event of a state of war or a state of exception if the Prime Minister and at least three other Members of the Cabinet attend the meeting (President of Latvia, 2016).

As far as Estonia is concerned, although sharp condemnation of Russia’s actions in Ukraine have been voiced, securitisation has happened in a more balanced way. While avoiding portraying the Russian neighbour as an eminent threat, Tallinn has insisted on a more positive discourse underlying capacities and resilience. That way, although former president Toomas Ilves was one of the first EU heads of state to draw a comparison between Moscow’s intervention in Ukraine and the crimes perpetrated by Nazi Germany, he also considered “silly” to even suggest that Russia could invade the bordering city of Narva (2014, quoted in Weymouth, 2014).

Rather than portraying itself as a vulnerable country in the face of an ostensible threat posed by Russia’s revisionism, the Estonian political elite has instead opted for stressing the state’s military, social and economic resilience. Former defense minister stated that:

I would not say Estonia is nervous about the current situation in our neighbourhood, but we are concerned. Many things are working well for us, including the NATO Response Force and our response plans. Our professional Army, together with our reserve forces and our volunteer-based Defence League, are all working well. Combined, this gives us a substantial defence force. So our own forces, along with the commitment of allies, provide a credible deterrent. Naturally, we have historically very painful memories of being occupied by the Soviet Union, and that makes independence and sovereignty even more valuable for us. The security situation could always be better, but we are making the best of our situation. Our economy is growing, and Estonia is a safe and attractive place to invest in and conduct business. Our tax system is very favourable, and corruption levels are very low (Hanso 2016, quoted in Defence News, 2016).

Whereas Estonia’s defence expenditures did increase after the annexation of Crimea, they have not increased as significantly as in Latvia and Lithuania. However, Tallinn’s defence

investment was already high, as the country had already been one of the few NATO countries to spend 2% of GDP in defence since 2013 (Dudzinska, 2014). In spite of already meeting NATO's benchmark, Tallinn's defence budget have been steadily growing in the last two years, increasing from 2,07% in 2016 to 2,2% of GDP in 2017 (Business Insider, 2016).

Significant defense expenditures include the purchase of 80 third generation systems Javelins with the aim of reinforcing the army's anti-tank capabilities, in a deal worth 40 million euros (Palowski, 2016). Sven Mikser, former Minister of Defence (2014-2015) and Minister of Foreign Affairs since November 2016, stressed the procurement's urgency by noting that "due to the changed security circumstances, we decided to proceed with the procurement as soon as possible" (Mikser, 2014, quoted in Estonian Public Broadcasting, 2014b).

Despite the urgency attached to the moment of the purchase, the decision to buy the above-mentioned missile systems was made before Russia launched its intervention in Ukraine. In fact, boosting the armed forces' anti-tank capabilities had already been established as a key goal in the 2013-2022 National Defence Development Plan (Estonian Defence Forces, 2012). While it can be contended that the Russian annexation of Crimea may have added urgency to the upgrade of the Defence Forces' equipment, the need to do so had already been stressed.

Concerning the development of the Army's "armoured manoeuvre capability", Tallinn has taken significant decisions to increase battlefield mobility. Former Minister of Defence has indicated that Estonia has bought CV90 infantry fighting vehicles from the Netherlands, highlighting that it is "a large project with a total cost of €200 million (US \$218 million)" that will "have a serious deterrent impact on potential adversaries" (Hanso, 2016).

Like the other two Baltic republics, Estonia also considers that Moscow has been conducting disinformation campaigns aimed at destabilising the republic and tarnishing its international reputation. However, Tallinn response has drastically differed from Latvia and Lithuania's. Instead of securitising the Kremlin's official narrative by suspending Russian-language channels, the Estonian government has decided, for the first time since 1991, to create a new TV channel targeting the Russian-speaking minority. The Estonian Public Broadcasting Company (Eesti Rahvusringhääling, known as ERR) has, thus, decided to launch for the very first time a Russian language television channel (ETV+) on September 25, 2015 (Nielsen, 2015). The former Estonian head of state has emphasised that freedom of speech is one of Tallinn's core values and, therefore, banning TV channels should not be an option to be considered (Ilves, 2014, quoted in Milne, 2014).

4. Conclusion

The ongoing instability in Ukraine and the perceived engagement of Russia has brought significant changes in the three Baltic States. Negative perceptions had been already deeply informing the independence of the three Republics since 1991. Independence has been

based on the core understanding of national security as being guaranteed by a proper memory of history and a normative commitment to European values, as embodied by the EU (and NATO). The connection between security, history and values has marked these processes of securitisation where the significant other is Russia. The security perceptions of the three Baltic States heavily hinge, thus, on their historical past with Russia.

Taking the securitisation dynamics of the pre-enlargement period (1991-2004) as a comparison, the paper has used the categories of “securitisation” available in the literature with emphasis on both the discursive and implementation dimensions. Additionally, three strategies of “self” and “othering” (Diez, 2015) have been explored in the case of the securitisation of Russia by the Baltic States. The first one (the other as an existential threat) has informed massively the independence in 1991 because the legal continuity of the state is the basis of its security. It has been implemented in other changes such as the nationality laws. The second and third category (the other as inferior and as violating universal principles) have also operated in the formation of identity vis-à-vis Russia that is viewed as not belonging to Western normative framework.

Although NATO has assumed greater importance in the security and defense realm, as compared to the EU, securitisation has been pursued after EU accession in 2004. With a lesser focus on existential politics that relate directly to the integrity of the state as such and to the first strategy of othering, securitisation has been continued in other forms. The focus on the strategy of othering through values has been visible in the support to the EU policies directed to the countries of the post-Soviet space. After 2014, the three strategies of othering are visible, depicting Russia not only as a threat but also as “inferior” because it does not adhere to European values. Beyond discursive practices that fall into these dimensions of securitisation, the three Baltic states have introduced significant policy changes both at the military and non-military level.

With nuances among the three countries and in a softer manner (with less existential underpinnings), securitisation has, thus, clearly continued as member states of the EU. As a consequence of the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a new process of re-securitisation has emerged with the combination of different categories of othering materialised into significant policy changes meant to address the perceived Russian threat.

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