Lithuania and NATO Enlargement

By Doc. dr. Gražina Mniotaite*

The French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hubert Vedrine, divides the world into five categories of states: a "hyper power"; powers with "world-wide influence" (France, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, China, Japan and India); "mere powers" (e.g. Egypt, Spain, Italy and Poland); "powerless states" or "mere states" (Belgium, Sweden, Portugal, etc.) and "pseudo-states" (much of Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe). According to this classification - a paradigmatically realist one - the Baltic States unquestionably belong to the group of "pseudo states" as they "have no means of influencing the situation around them". Considered from this point of view, they can only be of some interest in the context of the strategic calculations relevant to the Russian relations with the West.

Evidently, if we want to treat the Baltic case as a serious subject of analysis we need a different, more refined theoretical perspective. In will in my article try to answer the question - How can NATO best integrate the Baltic States in the Alliance in the period following the invitation and after accession - and what must the three states do? I will attempt to identify Lithuania’s security problems from within, analysing them as a case of international socialization, as entering into the NATO security community can be seen as that.

According to Karl W. Deutsch, security communities arise out of a process of regional integration characterized by the development of transaction flows, shared understanding and transnational values. What Deutch called a "we feeling" or shared identity also characterizes a security community. Lithuania belongs to the Northeast European region. The region is composed of ten states; with four of them being NATO members, three aspirants for membership and four members of the EU plus Russia with the Kaliningrad enclave. The region is a kind of historical laboratory where new principles of international relations are being formed and put to the test. What kind of

security community could be formed in the region?

The history of the region gives us two models of initiating a security community; Hans Mouritzen defines them as the Nordic method (Bottom Up) and the EU method (Top Down). “Bottom up means that mutual sympathies and trans-national ties develop spontaneously over a long time at the popular level”\(^2\). The beginning of the Nordic security community goes back to the 19\(^{th}\) century, the security community emerged about 1905; whereas the institutions were not created until the post World War II period. The top down method starts with security visions from above, a common project and common institutions. It is the case of the Euro-Atlantic Security community. An important precondition for the emergence of the security community is a strong civil society.

Lithuania as well as the other Baltic States represents the second case of entering the security community. It is a state with a socialist past and with an intention of “returning to Europe”. In such circumstances we can talk about top down method of forming the security community. However, in contrast to the western members of the security community, Lithuania started out with no close regional ties with other states and no independent civil society. In addition, long-standing civilizational and cultural ties, historical myths, symbols and images (the Battle of Zalgiris (Grünwald), the crusader as an ancient enemy, the myths surrounding the Dukedom of Vytautas, etc.) constituting the historical component of national identity, push in the opposite direction. The attitudes towards the West are far from uniform.

Thus integration of Lithuania into NATO is not only a problem of military interoperability, but also the problem of interoperability of norms and values. Or in other words it is a problem of international socialization. According to John G. Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan socialization is “the process through which national leaders internalize the norms and value operations espoused by the hegemon and, as a consequence, become socialized into the community formed by the hegemon and other nations accepting its leadership position”\(^3\). The goal of the socialization is to achieve argumentative consensus with the other members of the community and not to push through one’s own worldview and moral values.

From this point of view NATO and EU can be defined as constitutive institutions that contribute to shaping actors’ identities, values and interests by imposing definitions of member characteristics and purposes upon the governments of member states. At an institutional level, a successful internalisation of an applicant state is indicated by the integration of the fundamental community norms into the state constitution and their translation into (stable) domestic laws. Thus, the enlargement process can be analysed as a process of teaching and learning community values and norms.

The NATO enlargement is a deliberative project, based on certain normative principles, with stated ways of its implementation and supervision of the whole process.

The main normative documents defining the Alliance’s principles for accessing
new members are the Partnership for Peace Framework Document (1994) and the Study on NATO Enlargement (1995). They are based on a broad concept of security, “embracing political and economic, as well as defence components”. The Study also specifies some problematic areas which should be of particular concern for those seeking membership of the Alliance: “States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims or internal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance”. An important condition is also applicant states’ military capability to contribute to NATO’s collective defence.

Now let us consider briefly how Lithuania’s Euro-Atlantic integration shapes state practices by establishing, articulating, and transmitting norms that define what constitutes acceptable and legitimate state behaviour. In the article I will examine only one issue – “external territorial disputes”, or – good neighbourly relations. Lithuania has signed border agreements with all neighboring states. However, the sea border agreement with Latvia, signed not until 1999, is not yet ratified by Latvia. The border agreement with Russia, signed in 1997, is not ratified by the Duma.

The detailed analysis of the Baltic States’ border disputes leads to the conclusion that integration processes and the requirements for membership in NATO and EU usually prompt positive changes. One can easily discern the connection between NATO summits and the Baltic States’ attempts at solving their border disputes. The 1994 NATO Brussels Summit encouraged the revision of Lithuanian-Polish relations. The 1997 NATO Madrid Summit was a stimulus to Estonia and Latvia to drop their demands of including the treaties of 1920 in their border agreements with Russia. The 1999 NATO Washington Summit was a stimulus for Lithuania and Latvia to sign the sea border agreement. The conclusion is equally valid in relation to the ethnic disputes in Latvia and Estonia.

The delay to ratify the border agreement by Russia is a more complicated case. It is namely Lithuania’s quest for NATO membership and the related problem of the Kaliningrad region (transit, visas) that ultimately stands in the way of the ratification. However in the 10 years of independence there have been considerable changes in the treatment of the Kaliningrad problem in Lithuania - from the view of it as a direct threat to Lithuania’s security to the view that it is a common problem of the Baltic Sea region, to the solution of which Lithuania might contribute a great deal.

However, this conclusion is too optimistic and definitely is simplifying the process of enlargement and the security community building. Top down method of building the security community has its problematic points. One of them is that there exists a gap between the political elite and the population. We have total support of the NATO enlargement by the political elite and a hesitating attitude to the issue by the population.

On one hand, on the 23rd of May 2001 eleven parliamentary parties in Lithuania
concluded agreement on the defence policy for 2001-2004. According to the agreement, “Lithuania can secure long-term and stable security only by being a part of the NATO collective defence system”. The parties have agreed on the essential directions and priorities as to the development of the National Defence System and have committed themselves to maintain defence spending at the level of 2% of the Gross Domestic Product.

On the other hand, as public opinion surveys show, popular attitudes towards membership in NATO are far from settled. A public opinion survey on security issues conducted in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in March 1998 showed that Lithuania’s population was mostly supportive of the state’s efforts to join NATO: 55% of Lithuania’s, 47% of Latvia’s and 54% of Estonia’s population fully supported or rather supported these efforts.

In 1999 with an upsurge of anti-Western propaganda in Lithuania (related to the Kosovo events) and with actions against the increase of public spending on defence, popular support for Lithuania’s integration with NATO decreased. E.g. in Lithuania, according to the survey by “Vilmorus” in May 1999, those “against NATO” outnumbered for the first time those “for NATO” (32% and 31%, accordingly). Popular attitudes towards NATO became again more favourable after the Kosovo issue was closed. An influential, if not the dominant, factor in the Baltic States was Russia’s mass media interpretation of the Kosovo events presenting NATO’s involvement as a violation of international law and an encroachment on Yugoslavia’s sovereignty. This shows that a substantial part of the Baltic States’ population consider NATO primarily as a defence alliance ensuring member states’ sovereignty rather than collective European security.

In September 1999 the Lithuanian government initiated a programme on informing the population about the Lithuania’s integration into NATO. The programme is included in the Membership Action Plan. Perhaps because of the programme in January 2000 a survey by “Baltijos tyrimai” showed that Lithuania’s efforts to join NATO were fully approved by 38,6% of the respondents, totally disapproved by 14,3%, rather disapproved than approved by 30,7%, and 16,3% of the respondents had no opinion on the issue. The public opinion polls conducted in August and December 2000 indicated the rise of support for Lithuania’s membership of NATO from 42% to 49%, the number of opponents decreased from 25,7% to 22,3%.

According to a later survey by “Baltijos tyrimai” (January 2001), membership in NATO was approved by 46% and disapproved by 35% of the respondents. It should be noted that after the terrorist assaults of the 11th of September the percentage of those favourable to Lithuania’s membership of NATO increased sharply. Now two thirds, or 63,1%, of the population are favourable to membership in NATO, compared with 46% in early 2001.

In general, the response of the applicant states to the terrorist attacks against the United States of America is a litmus test that shows the level of their international socialization, an attitude to the
western security community values, norms and rules. Lithuania has by official letters expressed its strong support to the US policy.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania Antanas Valionis has in his letter addressed to Colin L. Powell, Secretary of State of the United States of America once assured the USA that Lithuania is ready to extend political, diplomatic and practical support for the USA in the fight against terrorism. The letter indicates that the Lithuanian Government has already granted permanent diplomatic clearance for the over flight of US aircrafts in the Lithuanian airspace. Currently the National Action Program on combating terrorism is being prepared as well as tri-lateral Baltic co-operation on developing joint measures in response to terrorist attacks against the USA is being intensified. As a partner and firm ally of the United States of America Lithuania is ready to take all the necessary means in addressing global challenges. Lithuania supports the NATO decision on possible application of the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty to the terrorist attacks against the USA.

By the results of a public opinion polls conducted by “Gallup International” in 30 states immediately in the aftermath of the terror acts in the USA on the 11th of September Lithuania was the most pro-American of all European states. More than 50% of the Lithuanian respondents believe that US foreign policy has a positive influence on Lithuania. The world population opinion average on this question is 31,78%. In Estonia it is 42%. However, less than the sixth of its population would welcome US military strikes against the states harbouring terrorists. Only 15% of the population agree that US government should launch a military attack against the states sheltering the organizers of the terrorist assaults in New York and Washington. This is close to the average percentage across the world, namely 14,73%. Thus we are, so to say, average Europeans.

Thus in trying to find an answer to the question “How can NATO best integrate the Baltic States in the Alliance in the period following the invitation and after accession – and what must the three states do?” I have stressed the problems related to the processes of international socialization or joining the western security community.

First of all, it should be noted that the expansion of the western security community is a process that involves and changes all its participants, not only the applicant countries.

As already noted, the Baltic States’ joining the western security community can be defined as a top-down case. Hans Mouritzen has aptly expressed its nature: “If you don’t follow our norms and rules, you will be deprived of future benefits, and/or the option of NATO (EU) membership will vanish”⁴. That is, the top down method is related to power projection.

The problematic point of the method is the rivalry between the applicant states that is inevitably generated. And this is sure an obstacle to the formation of a stable security community. Possibly this circumstance, not merely that of cultural differences, that explains why despite the grow-
ing co-operation between the Baltic States it does not transform into a shared identity, or “we feeling”. Latvia, trying to meet the norms and rules of NATO membership, will probably ratify the treaty by 2002, the year of NATO summit.

It is evident that in the process of integration with Euro-Atlantic structures Lithuania will have to deal with a number of very practical issues: Revoking the entrance-free regime with the Kaliningrad region of Russian Federation; reviewing Russia’s commercial and military transit to the region (most of it is through Lithuania; electricity supplies to the region are also mediated by Lithuania); protecting Lithuanian investments in the region constituting a major part of all investment there; and there is also the issue of the future facing the ethnic Lithuanian minority of 20,000 in the region.

The new international situation that has emerged in the aftermath of the events of the 11th of September gave a new impetus to NATO attempts at bringing Russia closer to the western security community. Russia can play an important role in fighting international terrorism. That stimulates more active attitude to Russia in Lithuania. The Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus in his address to the “Vilnius-10” Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2001 emphasized that Lithuania and the other Baltic States have a vision and a strategy of further developing their co-operation with Russia. This vision includes four points: First, “we are prepared to build on our successful cooperation with the neighbouring regions of Russia and make it a priority”. Second, “together with Russia we have a common interest in regional and economic growth and prosperity”. Third, “we are committed to promote cooperation between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic institutions even after NATO and the EU expands”, and finally, “Russia should come into peace with its history, and we are ready to help it in this uneasy process”.

However, both the rhetoric of some Lithuania’s politicians and the public opinion polls show that the role of NATO as a security guarantor is mainly associated with territorial defence and, in the case of Lithuania, defence against potential threats from Russia.

Thus, the rapprochement of the value attitudes of NATO states and the applicant states is to remain an urgent task for all members of the security community even after the acceptance of new NATO members.

I suppose that both for the member states and for the Baltic States it is important to stimulate public and research activities that help answer the following question: Under which conditions are the EU community norms, rules and values internalised in the domestic practices of the Baltic States and how they influence political and social change?