

The American University Honors Program

The Baltic Experience in Post-Cold War European Integration

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University Honors in International Studies, SIS
Spring 2011

Introduction

When the Berlin Wall came tumbling down in 1989, followed shortly afterwards by the fall of Communist governments across Eastern Europe and culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Union itself, Europeans on both sides of the Iron Curtain began looking for ways to heal the divisions that had developed over more than four decades of forced separation. Ultimately, the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) became two of the primary mechanisms for the reintegration of the newly democratic Eastern states. Between 1999 and 2007, nine states formerly part of the Eastern bloc – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia – joined first NATO and then the EU.

The accession story for each of these countries is of course unique. The stories vary according to the countries' differing stages of development before the end of the Cold War, the different visions and abilities of their leaders, the different amounts of support they received from Western nations, and many other factors. Accession to NATO and the European Union is also composed of two separate processes, each presenting its own challenges and its own rewards for membership. While some basic requirements are uniform across the board for would-be members of each organization, accession treaties are negotiated individually for each country, thus allowing for considerable variation in the process. Even the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the two halves of the former Czechoslovakia, had such differences that the Czech Republic was admitted to NATO in 1999, while Slovakia did not enter until the next round of enlargement in 2004.

Despite these differences, these countries had much in common with each other. In the first instance, all were within the geographical region of East and Central Europe and had been dominated by the Soviet system since the end of the World War II. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, each began a transition from the political and economic system of Communism to democratic states with market-based economies. Once they had freed themselves from the constraints of Communism, each state made rejoining the Western community of nations one of its foremost priorities.

One specific difference, however, sets Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania apart from the other states listed above. While Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania all existed as independent states throughout the Cold War – albeit in name only to a large extent – the three Baltic Republics were forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in August 1940. Until regaining their independence in the early 1990s, the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics were as much an integral part of the Soviet Union as was the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. Although the United States and its Western European Allies refused to recognize the *de jure* legality of this annexation, it was nonetheless a *de facto* reality for half a century.

This peculiarity of the Baltic situation led to particular aspects of the countries in question that could have had an impact on the accession processes to NATO and the European Union. Did the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union make them any more or less viable candidates for accession to the Western institutions? Were their economies different from their other East European counterparts? Were their political institutions prepared for governance at the same level?

Despite the relevance of the above questions, in the study of international relations it is quite often perceptions that matter nearly as much as facts do. To that end, it may be useful to focus on the varying perceptions in the different groups at hand, particularly among the leadership of the different countries. Did the Baltic countries have a different view of NATO and the European Union than did the other former Communist countries? Different motivations to join, or concerns? Did Western European and American leaders distinguish between the Baltic countries and the other Eastern European nations, be it intellectually or in their actual treatment? Finally, how were Soviet, and later Russian, beliefs about and feelings toward Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, different from their beliefs about their satellite states, and how did that affect their actions and positions regarding these different states after the dissolution of the Communist “Empire”?

The existing literature on Eastern European accession to NATO and the EU does not explore this issue in any great depth. Most analyses in this field tend to fall into one of two different traps: trying to interpret the transformation in the region as a whole without breaking down country-specific differences, or getting so bogged down in the specific circumstances of a single country that few conclusions are drawn on a more general basis. By contrast, this essay will attempt to assess whether the former Soviet Socialist Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had a markedly different experience in their efforts to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union than did their Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, and Slovak counterparts, and, if so, how and why. Specific attention will be paid to the role of perceptions as this process unfolded.

Before delving into the subject at hand, a very brief historical overview of Eastern Europe will be presented to highlight events relevant to the question posed above. The views of the interested parties will then be analyzed, first on NATO enlargement and subsequently on East European accession to the EU, taking note specifically of differences in perception of the formerly Soviet and non-Soviet states respectively. The accession process for each organization will then be looked at specifically, broken down by the two categories of applicant countries. The last section will draw conclusions based on the evidence gathered in earlier portions of the paper.

The countries chosen to be examined in this study are the three Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, as distinct from the other states under consideration: Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia (later divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia). While East Germany and Slovenia also joined both NATO and the EU during roughly the same time period, they were considered inappropriate for the type of comparative analysis being conducted here. East Germany did not enter these institutions as its own state, but rather was incorporated into them when reunified with West Germany, while Slovenia is distinct in that it was a member of the former Yugoslavia.

The conclusions of this paper will be based as much as possible on evidence gleaned from original documents, such as transcripts of official conversations, internal government memos, and first-hand accounts. Other primary documents will also be utilized, such as political statements and other public statements. Due to the relatively short time since the accessions have taken place – less than a decade in most cases – there will inevitably be gaps in the

documents, so anecdotal evidence and other such second-hand accounts will serve to supplement the main sources.

Historical Overview

Before World War I

Prior to World War I, the Baltic States had little history of independence. Although the etymology of the modern-day names of Estonia and Latvia can be traced back to tribal times, these tiny nations were subject to the rule of their larger and more powerful neighbors, ultimately existing as dominions of the Swedish Empire in the 18th Century. Lithuania had a little bit more of a history of independence: until 1569 the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was an independent state that covered most of its modern-day namesake. At that point it joined with Poland to form the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, of which it was a constituent and legally equal member. Despite this fact, the Poles dominated the Lithuanians culturally and linguistically, especially at the levels of the ruling elite.

In the early 18th Century, Swedish Estonia and Swedish Livonia, covering most of the modern-day Estonia and Latvia, were ceded by the Swedish Empire to the Russian Empire as a result of the Great Northern War, marking both the beginning of Russia's role as a Great Power and its dominion over the Baltic regions. Although an integral part of the empire and subject to Russian fiscal and monetary laws, these regions preserved some of their autonomy, in particular regarding religious freedom – under Sweden these areas had been predominately Protestant, subject to the Augsburg Confessional – and some other local administrative rights. With the division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, Lithuania too became part of the

Russian Empire subject to the Tsars, though it never had the same level of autonomy that the other Baltic areas enjoyed.

When World War I broke out, most of the other future satellite states of the Soviet Union were also part of various empires. Hungary was of course half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which also included what would later be Czechoslovakia and part of Poland, the rest of which was divided between the Prussian and Russian Empires. Bulgaria meanwhile was subject to Ottoman rule for much of its history before becoming an independent state towards the end of the 19th Century; Romania's path was similar to that of Bulgaria, although it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until it won its own independence and formed a parliamentary monarchy in 1881.

The World Wars

During World War I, the German Empire managed to occupy much of what is now Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and vast areas of the region was completely devastated by the fighting. Nationalist sentiment had been building in the Baltic areas for some time, and, following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the fledgling nations capitalized on the chaos in Russia proper to declare their independence at various points in 1918. After a few years of fighting, the Baltic States were established in the early 1920s as autonomous states in their own right with their own constitutions, born like so many other European states out of the rubble of the First World War.

With the dismemberment of the defeated Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary too became an independent state in the interwar period. The new nation of Czechoslovakia was also carved

out of the remains of the same empire. Poland too was “reconstituted” as its own nation, one of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points that was incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles. Despite their positions on opposite sides of the fighting, Bulgaria and Romania managed to retain their pre-war independence. In summary, all of the states under consideration here existed independently in the interwar period.

The notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Hitler’s Germany in 1939 divided much of Eastern and Central Europe between the two signatories. Poland was split between the two, while parts of Romania were demanded by – and ceded to – the Soviets. The three Baltic Republics were pressured by the Soviet Union to agree to mutual assistance pacts with the latter before being completely annexed and incorporated into the USSR in 1940, again as per the Pact. Bessarabia was taken from Romania under this pact as well, ceded to the Soviets, while the rest of Romania remained independent during the war – though it was eventually pressured to join the Axis Powers, despite a desire for neutrality. Czechoslovakia had of course been one of the first to be dismembered in this war, as part of its territory was ceded to Nazi Germany at the Munich Conference of 1938. Germany invaded what was left in 1939, dividing it into a protectorate and a puppet state, while a portion of what is now Slovakia was annexed by Hungary. Bulgaria and Hungary remained independent states throughout most of the war as members of the Axis Powers.

To sum up what has been covered so far, the future non-Soviet members of the Warsaw Pact had a stronger history of independence before World War I than did the Baltic States, although all of the states under consideration existed in their own right between the two World Wars. During World War II, these same states were either conquered early on or joined the war

on the side of the Axis Powers, some voluntarily but some under coercion. The other common World War II experience of these countries was the devastation seen throughout all their lands. It is well known that the Nazi plan identified Slavs as a sub-human group and as such they received far harsher treatment than other conquered lands to the West. Similarly, the Soviets were predictably cruel to those living in their newly acquired lands. In just the first year of Soviet occupation from June 1940 to June 1941, it is estimated that at least 59,000 Estonians, 34,000 Latvians, and 30,000 Lithuanians were executed, conscripted, or deported.¹ Central and Eastern Europe also suffered greatly through the invasions and reinvasions, such as when Germany invaded the Soviet Union by way of the Baltics, and the Red Army took the same path back in retaliation.

The Cold War

When World War II finally came to an end, a line was clearly and firmly drawn down the middle of the European Continent, with the victorious Allies splitting it between them. Clearly, all of the states under discussion in this paper fell squarely within the Soviet zone of influence, and in due course Soviet-style communist regimes were in place at the head of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, nominally independent states nonetheless receiving instructions from Moscow. Stalin's actions in this sense very much mirrored the czarist strategies of earlier times – the establishment of weak, Soviet-dominated (and thus

¹ Dunsdorfs, Edgars. *The Baltic Dilemma*. Speller & Sons, New York. 1975.

Russian-dominated) states in Central and Eastern Europe created something of a buffer zone between the Soviet Union itself and the West, whom Stalin already distrusted.²

While these Central and Eastern European countries were dominated by the Soviets, they did retain some form of sovereignty throughout the duration of the Cold War. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, by contrast, lost even the appearance of independence when they were incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940. Instead of a quasi-independent Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia, there existed only the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, subsumed by the Russian-dominated USSR.

Despite this reality on the ground, most Western Allies never accepted the annexation of the Baltic Republics as legal under international law. Although they did not take any direct actions to interfere with Soviet control, several countries maintained that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania continued to exist *de jure* and even continued to have diplomatic relations with the governments in exile claiming to represent them; Baltic diplomatic and consular representations in the United States, Australia, and Switzerland were able to continue functioning from 1940 until independence was regained in 1991.

In contrast, the United States and its Allies generally did not dispute the legality of the Communist governments in the sovereign states of Central and Eastern Europe, preferring instead to focus on the oppressive nature of these regimes in their propaganda. In fact, while some Westerners undoubtedly felt sympathy for their Eastern brethren's plight, the vast majority of West Europeans and their governments were focused on the immediate necessity of rebuilding

² Judt, Tony. *Post War*. Penguin Books, New York. 2005.

from the devastation of the latest world war. Once that reconstruction was well under way and life had regained some sense of normality, free Europeans with living memories of the horrors of war wanted nothing more than to hold on to the stability and material comforts they had built for themselves in the war's aftermath, not destabilize the Continent now that there was some sense of normality.³ Attempts to destabilize Eastern regimes would have destabilized the Continent as a whole and brought uncertainty into the lives of these now largely content Europeans. Thus, although the rhetoric and symbolic political maneuvering of the West may have differed slightly between the Baltic Republics and other Central and Eastern European countries, their actions – or lack thereof – were largely the same across the board.

In fact, despite the support given to claims of the legitimacy of Baltic independence throughout this period, the Western Allies actually toned down their public support for the Popular Front movements in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia just as they were finally gaining momentum towards secession. By that point, key Western leaders like Mitterrand and Thatcher had realized that their primary interest in the domestic affairs of the Soviet Union should actually be stability as well, namely the continuation of Gorbachev's rule, despite the strong pressure the powerful Baltic-American lobby managed to place on Washington.⁴ Already under attack from Soviet hard-liners for his reformist policies, Gorbachev would be further attacked by such for failure to quell the unrest in the Balts. Rightly fearful of these hard-liners taking matters into their own hands, the West took Gorbachev at his word that force would not be used and left it at that.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Readman, Kristina Spohr. "International reactions to Soviet disintegration: the case of the Baltic states". *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A reappraisal*. Edited by Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti. Routledge, New York. 2008.

The Soviets, for their part, viewed Central and Eastern Europe as rightfully within their zone of influence, paid for dearly in the blood of the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War. After all, no less than Winston Churchill had shared with Stalin the notorious “percentages agreement” in October 1944, deciding on a bit of paper the fate of Central and Eastern Europe. Indeed, Stalin took the idea of a zone of influence quite seriously and held up his part of the bargain insofar as he felt the Western Allies did. An indicative note from Molotov written in February 1945 reads “How governments are being organized in Belgium, France, Greece, etc., we do not know. We have not been asked, although we do not say that we like one or another of these governments. We have not interfered, because it is the Anglo-American zone of military action.”⁵

The Baltic Republics were similarly won by the blood of the Red Army, and thus of key symbolic significance to Russian nationalists. More than that, however, they represented the route which had now been used twice to launch invasions into Russia proper from the European Continent, first by Napoleon and then Hitler, extremely destructive if ultimately unsuccessful. The collaboration in of local people with both of these invading forces made the idea of a tight Soviet grip on this region all the more imperative in minds of many, especially when coupled with the fact that any land invasion from the West would probably have had to be launched from West Germany, through Poland, and on through the Baltics.

Despite these initial geostrategic reasons for the annexation of the Baltic Republics, as time went on the simple fact of their existence as an integral part of the Soviet Union became the reason for them to remain so. By the time Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia began to declare their

⁵ Judt., p. 121.

independences in 1991, they had been a declared part of the Soviet Union for half of a century.

Many ethnic Russians had moved there either voluntarily or as part of the massive movements of peoples by the Soviets throughout their time in power (by 1980, ethnic Latvians represented only 54% of the population, ethnic Estonians 64%, and ethnic Lithuanians 80% of their respective countries⁶), and “Sovietization” had occurred in practically every aspect of Baltic daily life. The *de jure* non-recognition of this fact by the Western Allies did nothing to change the reality that the Baltic republics were as fully incorporated into the Soviet Union as any other Soviet Socialist Republic.

Of course, this incorporation refers only to political realities. In terms of culture, language, and traditional history, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians maintained in large measure their own distinct identities throughout their existence within the Soviet Union. As mentioned above, ethnic Russians had moved in relatively large numbers into the relatively prosperous (by Soviet standards) Baltic Republics, especially in the cities. Coupled with the preferential treatment given to the Russian language within the Soviet Union as a whole, Baltic natives found themselves faced not only with forced “Sovietization” but also with “Russification”. This kind of demographic change is almost always met with resentment by the native population, and so it was in the Baltic Republics.

This was the case in all of the Soviet Socialist Republics though, so why were the Balts different from the Caucasus or Central Asia? For one, as has been mentioned before, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania did have a precedent for independence, brief as it may have been. Economic factors were also at play, however. Located on the extreme Western edge of the

⁶ Ibid.

Union, the Baltic Republics had more exposure to the outside world than other Republics. The Estonians especially had a strong cultural and historic bond to Scandinavians, even able to watch Finnish television and see how much better off their Northern cousins were. Meanwhile, the Lithuanians had similarly deep ties to Poles. Although Poland was poor compared to Scandinavia, it was still a visible improvement from the Soviet Union itself. Yet the Baltic Republics were also aware that they were perhaps the most economically well-off region of the USSR,⁷ perhaps giving them the impression that their economies would be more viable and healthy if not tied down with the rest of the Union.

This made the self-perceptions of the Baltic peoples distinct from the self-perceptions of the Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Poles. While these latter groups were surely politically controlled by the Soviets as well, they were not faced with such a cultural and linguistic invasion. Communist regimes outside of the Soviet Union used the native language because that was the language spoken by the ruling elite who, though following the Soviet lead, were usually local to the area they were governing. Local populations were also allowed to continue to control their own culture, as long as it was in line with the Soviet-sanctioned Party line. This allowed the satellite states to retain some sense of national identity, often even employed by the local Communist regime to try to direct popular sentiment in a favorable way.

⁷ Ibid.

1989 and into the Future

Beginning in 1989, the Communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe began to be replaced, one after another, with largely democratic governments actually chosen by the people whom they were to represent. In the case of the non-Soviet members of the Warsaw Pact, these revolutions happened by and large without bloodshed. Made possible by Gorbachev's own reform efforts of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, the Communist regimes began to make small efforts towards reforms, though not quickly enough to meet the demands of the people. Following the first multicandidate elections in the Soviet Union in March 1989, Eastern European regimes began to believe that they too would be allowed to reform. On June 4, 1989, Poland held the first multiparty elections of the Central and East European Communist countries, in which the candidates of the Solidarity movement defeat the Party candidates in every single seat.

Here is where one can begin to see that Gorbachev is taking the right of the self-determination very seriously. Gorbachev never considers using force to counteract the results of this election, and in fact counsels the Polish Communist Party that they should peacefully respect the results. Indeed it seems that such advice was unnecessary. In a transcript of a meeting of the Polish Party leaders the day after the election, the discussion is focused on how to mitigate the repercussions of this defeat through tactics that would not be out of place in an advanced democracy: message control, reinventing the Party for the next election, and finding a way to connect to the populace.⁸ Bringing up the example of the unrest then prevalent in China, Cde. W. Baka even suggests taking pains in a public statement to emphasize that they "had taken into

⁸ Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok. *Masterpieces of History*. "Document No. 61: Transcript of CC PUWP Secretariat Meeting, June 5, 1989"

account the unfavorable result. We are consistent, we have no other alternative. Warn against attempts at destabilization, pointing to the situation in China.”⁹ Clearly, the Polish Communist Party did not want to tempt Moscow to use force against their people, which was never a real option anyway.

This pattern would soon be repeated elsewhere in the region. On September 11, 1989, Hungary announced that it would no longer prevent other East Europeans from traveling freely across its border to Austria, having already removed the electronic surveillance equipment and barbed wire fence over the course of the summer. In 1990, Hungary held its own elections, where its ruling party was also swept out of power, and also peacefully handed over the reins of government to the opposition. Czechoslovakia had already undergone its own Velvet Revolution in the course of just a few days in late 1989, electing Vaclav Havel to the presidency on December 28 of that year. In June 1990 Bulgaria also held elections, which the reformist wing of the former Communist Party won fairly, renamed as the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Romania is, of course, the clear exception to this peaceful transition in Eastern Europe, but it was clearly the exception which proved the rule.

At the time, many puzzled over why the Soviets, who for so long had so violently clung to their satellite states in such visible acts of oppression as the use of tanks to quell the Prague Spring uprising, as well as the constant unspoken threat that the Red Army would be called in if those states got too far out of line. There were many factors at work here, including Soviet preoccupations with the withdrawal from Afghanistan, internal unrest, and the fact that the satellite states had in many ways by this time become a drain on the rather limited economic and

⁹ Ibid.

political resources of the Soviet Union. With the advent of missiles that could reach the Soviet Union proper from NATO territory, even the security value of the Soviet “near abroad” had been decreasing for some time. Regardless of these more pragmatic reasons, it is apparent that Gorbachev’s avowed principles of nonviolence and the right of all peoples to self-determination were more than just words – they were a true commitment to ideals more commonly associated with advanced Western democracies than the policies of Soviet premiers. The fact that he not only withheld Soviet troops but also encouraged his allies to refrain from violence as well is testament to this fact.

Despite such commitment to liberal principles, Gorbachev did not feel that he could accord the same level of leniency when it came to the self-determination of those peoples that were within the Soviet Union itself, namely the Baltic Republics. The aforementioned internal unrest was centered around nationalist uprisings in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the first harbingers of the collapse of the Soviet Union that was to come. With Gorbachev’s *glasnost* policies had come the opening up of all the old wounds that the Baltic peoples had been harboring for years – Russian linguistic and cultural domination, atrocities committed during the World Wars and early stages of Communism, and above all the illegality of the Baltic Republics’ annexation by the Soviet Union.

Somewhat surprisingly, the transcript of the weekly meeting of the Soviet Politburo held on November 9, 1989, just hours before the breach of the Berlin Wall, makes no mention at all of the transformations that had been taking place in Eastern Europe. It is instead dedicated exclusively to a discussion of the problems being faced with the Baltic Soviet Socialist Republics. Unlike several of his colleagues who assert that there can be “no compromise” with

the Baltics,¹⁰ Gorbachev does at least seem to advocate some kind of accommodation, acknowledging that there are legitimate grievances that the Republics have brought to his attention, such as language and citizenship, though he does not seem to believe that these are sufficient reason to declare independence from the Union. Shortly after this assertion, however, he goes on to say “But we should show them: those who choose separation doom their people to a miserable existence [proziabanie]. And they should come to feel it.”¹¹ Already it is apparent that even Gorbachev is ready to take a firm stance against the claims of Baltic independence should it be necessary. He seems cautious still at this point, planning to offer the Balts a form of economic autonomy in the hopes of keeping some kind of hold on them, and seems to believe that this plan could work. Others in his Politburo already were predicting dire consequences, however, including the dissolution of the Union as a whole as a result of these independence movements in the Balts.¹²

The various independence movements in the Baltic Republics, known as the Popular Fronts, continued to press for freedom, despite some concessions from Moscow, and in referendums in each of the Republics an overwhelming majority of citizens voted for secession from the Soviet Union. Estonia managed to avoid violence for the most part, but Moscow tried to forcibly retain control of both Latvia and Lithuania. By the end of 1991, however, all three Baltic States had regained their independence and had set their eyes firmly on the dream of integration with Western Europe.

¹⁰ Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok. *Masterpieces of History*. “Document No. 99: Session of the CC CPSU Politburo, November 9, 1989.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Visions of NATO Enlargement

Non-Soviet Members of the Warsaw Pact

Despite the avowed desire of Gorbachev – and its unspoken echo by some Western leaders, notably French President François Mitterrand and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher – the Warsaw Treaty Organization was not destined to long outlive the transitions to democracy of its non-Soviet members. Gorbachev, like Mitterrand, had hoped that the continued existence of both the Warsaw Pact and its Western analogue NATO in the short term could lead to a mechanism for pan-European integration following the demilitarization of the two blocs. (Thatcher's position was distinct in that she simply wanted to maintain the stabilizing balance of power that had been in place on the Continent for decades.) However, the rapid withdrawal of the Soviet Union's newly-democratic "allies" culminating in the formal dissolution of the Pact in Prague in July 1991, showed just how hollow the Soviet-dominated alliance had been, and how little domestic support it had in the Central and Eastern European nations that were a party to the treaty.

In the immediate aftermath of their peaceful revolutions, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia (soon to split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, and Romania were not immediately concerned with joining a military alliance so soon after freeing themselves from the constraints of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was viewed by these countries with something between ambivalence and suspicion. There was suspicion because NATO was often believed to be dominated by the Americans, a somewhat justified accusation. Though the United States obviously never resorted to the coercive tactics utilized by the Soviets, its superpower status and accompanying military and political dominance created a

certain sense that the United States was in a “first among equals” position within the Western Alliance. Not quite sure that they wanted to leave one superpower-dominated bloc just to join another, the former members of the Warsaw Pact did not immediately pursue NATO membership.

The Eastern Europeans at this time were not so much pro-American as they were anti-Soviet. The Americans – or even NATO – had not “won” the Cold War in any traditional sense of winning, just as the Cold War was not a war in the traditional sense of the term. In fact, the United States had avoided doing anything that could have destabilized that comfortable stalemate, especially once Gorbachev came to power and the West realized that this was a man that they could reasonably work with. For this reason the Central and Eastern Europeans were not immediately banging down NATO’s door, pleading to be let into the North Atlantic security club.

It was not the *laissez-faire*, free-market nature of the American economy that East Europeans yearned after, nor the relatively militarized culture. Eastern Europeans, while aware of the desperate need for reform in their economies, were accustomed to a certain amount of security that the model of the United States did not offer. It was not the “American Dream” that these countries were after, but instead the “European Dream”. However, with the new fiscal and monetary requirements placed on member states in the Maastricht Treaty, it became increasingly apparent that the Central and Eastern post-Communist states would not be able to join the European Union for some time.¹³ They were thus willing to accept NATO membership when it

¹³ Judt.

was offered as a second-best method of huge symbolic value when it came to being tied to and integrated with the West.

The Baltic States

The lack of open support for Baltic independence in the West when the opportunity for it finally came revealed the West's rhetorical support for the claims of illegality of the Soviet annexation for what they really were: "a legalistic rhetoric and passive continuation of an old Cold War policy."¹⁴ Despite this ambivalent Western attitude to their plight, the Baltic States were more aggressive in pursuing NATO membership than were other post-Communist states. Like Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland, the Baltic States first and foremost saw their future in Europe, and hoped to realize that goal primarily through accession to the European Union.

Unlike the non-Soviet members of the former Warsaw Pact, however, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania felt pressured to find some sort of security guarantee against the threat of future Russian aggression.¹⁵ This was of course a direct result of the Balts' different experience in separating from the Soviet bloc. Whereas Moscow had allowed its satellite states to go their own way without interference, it had used first economic coercion and later force to try to prevent the secession of its Baltic Soviet Socialist Republics. Thus NATO membership for the Baltic States held the double significance of being a means to further European economic

¹⁴ Readman, p. 223.

¹⁵ Eglitis, Daina Stukuls. "The Baltic States: Remember the Past, Building the Future". *Central & East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy*. Edited by Sharon L. Wolchik and Jane L. Curry. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Maryland. 2008.

integration, but also the promise of the security guarantee enshrined in Article V of the Atlantic Treaty.

Western European Allies

Those Europeans who had spent the Cold War on the Western side of the Iron Curtain did have something of a desire to integrate the Central and Eastern post-Communist nations into their free and secure club. If nothing else, the atrocities taking place in the former Yugoslavia were a dire warning of what could happen if post-Communist countries were not guided into a democratic future. Before opening their doors to the East, however, most EU member states felt that they should get their own house in order first. Conscious that the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty would delay expansion, European leaders discussed the idea of offering NATO membership as a type of “interim prize”¹⁶ to begin the process of tying the Central and Eastern Europeans firmly to the West without having to immediately admit them to the European Union.

In the sense of offering NATO membership to these Europeans-in-waiting, the countries were grouped into two waves of accession: Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were admitted as members of NATO in 1999, while Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia (along with Slovenia) had to wait until 2004. Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia were held back until this second round of enlargement mostly because they were deemed not yet politically, economically, socially, and militarily advanced enough for membership in the

¹⁶ Judt, p. 716.

Alliance, and this was mostly true of the reasons for holding back Latvia and Lithuania.¹⁷

Estonia, however, was initially treated as part of “a presumptive inner core of candidates”¹⁸, largely ready to be included in terms of the key indicators that the NATO member states were looking at. It seems then that Estonia was denied an offer of membership in the 1999 round of enlargement because of loud Russian concerns over NATO expansionism all the way to their doorstep, including the Baltic States and thus territory that had been part of the former Soviet Union itself.¹⁹

The United States

Like its European Allies, the United States was eager to help ensure the successful survival of the newly democratic states of Central and Eastern Europe. The Americans hoped that this would happen mostly through a European process, however, advocating early offers of European Union membership. The United States was acutely aware of the need for economic assistance to the fledgling nations, but was unwilling to provide such assistance itself. In fact, President George H. W. Bush did not have much confidence in the new East European leaders, most notably in Poland, where he met people with no governing experience and limited means to make up for it, and felt that giving them the economic assistance they had requested would be like pouring money down a rat-hole.

¹⁷ Simon, Jeffrey. “Security Issues: NATO and Beyond”. *Central & East European Politics: From Communism to Democracy*. Edited by Sharon L. Wolchik and Jane L. Curry. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Maryland. 2008.

¹⁸ Judt, p. 721.

¹⁹ Simon.

Nonetheless, the United States certainly wanted to bind the Central and Eastern European countries to the Western institutions, including NATO. Such a stabilizing role for NATO actually came at a quite opportune moment, as NATO was seeking a new institutional purpose following the collapse of its existential enemy. The facilitating role it played in bringing the post-Communist countries into the Western fold gave it a purpose once again, albeit a temporary one. In terms of the Baltic countries, the United States had similar concerns to the Europeans over the potential Russian reaction to NATO expanding to the point of bordering Russia, and this again may have played a role in delaying Estonian membership. The Balts were accepted into the Alliance in 2004 with the rest of the former Warsaw Pact, however, regardless of Russian objections.

Russia

For Russian leaders, the expansion of NATO to the East was a simple instance of the United States and its Allies kicking them while they were down. Gorbachev may have been believed to let German reunification occur within the context of NATO with nothing in return, but he had at least wrung an alleged promise from the West that NATO would not expand further. Indeed, in a February 9, 1990, meeting with Gorbachev, US Secretary of State James Baker twice gives indications that the United States and its European Allies will not seek to expand the Alliance. In the context of German unification, Baker states “NATO is the mechanism for securing the U.S. presence in Europe...We understand that not only for the Soviet Union but for other European countries as well it is important to have guarantees that if the United States keeps its presence in Germany within the framework of NATO, not an inch of

NATO's present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction. We believe that consultations and discussions within the framework of the 'two + four' mechanism should guarantee that Germany's unification will not lead to NATO's military organization spreading to the east."²⁰ In this excerpt, Baker seems to be indicating that the West European Allies are opposed to the enlargement of NATO further east than Germany, and moreover that the United States is prepared to accept and support this position.

Later in the same conversation, Baker asks Gorbachev a question, without requiring an immediate answer. Baker asks, "Supposing unification takes place, what would you prefer: a united Germany outside of NATO, absolutely independent and without American troops; or a united Germany keeping its connections with NATO, but with the guarantee that NATO's jurisprudence or troops will not spread east of the present boundary?"²¹ Although it is now known that the United States was committed to keeping German unification within the context of NATO, Baker appears to be offering Gorbachev a choice of which situation he would prefer. Baker even uses the word "guarantee", implying that this could almost become an agreement between the two superpowers and not just an informal understanding. Indeed, when Gorbachev replies "It goes without saying that a broadening of the NATO zone is not acceptable," Baker says "We agree with that."²²

Despite the fact that this supposed guarantee was not clarified by Gorbachev at a later date, let alone put into a written document, the Soviet and later Russian leadership took it as a promise from the Americans and their Allies that the developments in Central and Eastern

²⁰ Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok. *Masterpieces of History*. "Document No. 199: Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker, February 9, 1990."

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Europe in the early 1990s would not be taken advantage of, and specifically that NATO would not expand to cover more territory – perhaps that NATO troops would never even be stationed in the former East Germany. As it was never formalized, the West maintains now that no such guarantee was ever made, and it is certainly not difficult to argue that Baker was asking rather hypothetical questions in an effort to gain a better sense of the potential Soviet reaction to different scenarios.

This confusion surely did nothing but make Russia even more hostile to NATO enlargement at every stage. Beginning with Gorbachev and continuing through Yeltsin and even Putin, Soviet/Russian leaders have always been uncomfortable with the idea of a US-dominated, Western Alliance that has seemed to be inching ever-closer to Russia itself. Stripped of most of its “near abroad”, Russia would soon be left without the buffer zone it felt so critical to its security needs throughout the Cold War and even today. Although conscious of the fact that any attack from the West would be highly unlikely to be launched primarily with ground troops coming across Central and Eastern Europe, Napoleon and Hitler’s invasions are still imprinted to a certain extent on the Russian national psyche.

While Russia was opposed to general NATO enlargement on principle, the issue of expansion to include the Baltic States was even more emotional. As already explained, the just recently independent Baltic States had been an integral part of the Soviet Union since World War II. Many of the ethnic Russians who had moved to the Baltic Republics still live there, many without a clearly defined citizenship in either country and facing what amounts in many cases to legalized ethnic discrimination. Add to this the fact that there would now be NATO

members sharing a border with Russia, the successor state to its enemy, and it is no wonder that the Russians opposed these expansions so strenuously.

Visions of EU “Widening”

Non-Soviet Members of the Warsaw Pact

Despite the forced division of the European continent for much of the 20th Century, Eastern European national identity was still strongly tied to the idea of being just as rightfully part of Europe as any West European country. Indeed, before the world wars and Communist takeover, Prague and Budapest had been thriving metropolises at the very heart of Europe, and their intelligentsia longed to return to their previous standing on the Continent. Hence one of Vaclav Havel’s Civic Forum’s Manifesto’s key principles was a “Return to Europe” from the Soviet-enforced isolation from the rest of the European Continent. Despite the decades of economic dependence upon and dominance by the Soviet Union, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe nonetheless continued to yearn to return to their rightful place within Europe, and by extension the European Union.

There were more than ideological and cultural factors at work, of course. In addition to the political freedom obviously offered in the West that had been absent from the East, the Western Europeans were by far better off economically than their Eastern neighbors. As mentioned above, the newly democratic Central and Eastern European countries were (usually) drawn more to the European model of social capitalism than the more *laissez-faire*, American-style economic model. Many Eastern Europeans had the chance to experience such differences first-hand; Hungarians, for instance, had the right to travel abroad even before the fall

of Communism. Others often had the ability to listen to Western radio broadcasts or watch their television programs.

Attracted to the prosperity of Western Europe like moths to a candle, Eastern Europe held fast to the belief that if they could gain membership to the European Union, they, too, would have the opportunity to live like that. They believed that they would be able to hang on to the relative security and stability of the Communist regimes, yet improve their standard of living to eventually be on an equal footing with the West. This desire for an increased level of economic development is what drove the East European governments to ask early and often for an invitation to the exclusive EU club.

The Baltic States

The Baltic States' reasons for wishing to join the European Union were practically identical to those of the other Central and Eastern European nations. After decades of carrying out Communist economic policies centrally directed from Moscow, the economies of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, although not in quite such bad shape as the rest of the Soviet Union, were significantly poorer than even the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact members. An additional factor was the small size of the Baltic Republics. Without integration into a larger economic system, the viability of the Baltic economies was quite questionable. Indeed, they would more than likely have been subsumed once more into the Russian sphere of influence due to economic dependency if accession to the European Union had not been an option.

The EU Member States

Like with the case of the potential expansion of NATO, the European Union had an interest in first and foremost ensuring the stability of this ring of newly democratic post-Communist states on its eastern periphery, a need once again all the more urgent because of the conflict in the Balkans. The wisdom of using EU membership as a way to stabilize these states was far from universally accepted, however. First of all, despite an interest in what was going on at their borders, the European Union as an institution had other priorities. The Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, had prioritized the “deepening” of EU institutions before their “widening”, as had been favored by many, most notably French President François Mitterrand. This deepening or strengthening of EU institutions was perhaps most visible in the project of European Monetary Union (EMU), with the euro now planned to be introduced by the end of the decade.

It was also clear to those already within the European Union that the barriers to entry for new member states were at an all time high by this point. With each new treaty and each new level of integration, the member states had bound themselves closer and closer together, to the mutual benefit of those included states. However, since new member states were expected to incorporate the EU’s *acquis communautaire* of regulations into their countries’ own laws before entry, the process of negotiating such entry became ever more difficult as time went on. This did not of course impede the accession of Finland, Sweden, and Austria, completed in 1995. With economies already very compatible with the majority of European Union practices, these three countries were mostly waiting out the Cold War before they felt they could give up their staunchly neutral stances and join the EU, given their relative proximity to the Soviet Union.

The other would-be members, however, were just beginning to emerge from decades of Communist mismanagement. They had no tradition of market-based economies. They had very weak political and legal institutions, as well as no history in upholding the human rights and rule of law principles that are so central to the European identity.

The member states also had more than a hint of protectionism among their reasons for delaying as long as practical the accession negotiations with the East European candidate countries. The Schengen Agreement, one of the final steps towards the elimination of all internal borders of the European Union, had now been incorporated into the EU agreements. This meant that the right to travel and work freely across the union would be extended to all citizens of any newly admitted member states. Greatly exaggerated fears of a massive wave of unskilled labor immigrating from East to West thus weighed heavily on the member states' hesitation to invite the Central and Eastern European countries to join them. A more legitimate concern relating to the free movement of peoples across the Continent was also brought forth, which was the issue of the porous borders of many of the candidate states, particularly in the Baltic States.

The addition of such member states would also pose a financial burden to the richer, more established members of the European Union. Germany was already discovering just how expensive the integration of Eastern Germany was proving to be in terms of helping to build the infrastructure and institutions necessary for a functioning European social market economy. The West Europeans would not be directly financing the transition, however. The true expense would be found in the "subsidies, regional assistance, infrastructure grants and other transfers that would surely break the EU budget" if they were paid out to the new members at the same

level they were paid in the West.²³ One study from 1994 even suggested that the structural funds that would have to be doled out to Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria (the six countries seeking entry at the time) would exceed thirty billion Deutschmarks each year.²⁴

The European Union, however, held by its policy that any European country – as defined by the European Commission – had the right to apply for membership. Thus Hungary and Poland applied for admittance in 1994, followed in 1995 by Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Bulgaria, and finally by the Czech Republic (and Slovenia) in 1996.²⁵

Addressing these applications was successfully put off by focusing EU efforts on completing the preparations for the euro and the integration of East Germany, as well as efforts to mitigate the Yugoslav conflict. By the time the Treaty of Amsterdam was signed in 1997, however, the European Union was running out of reasons to put off accession negotiations and was forced to finally really begin the effort to finally heal the divisions wrought by the Iron Curtain and move towards a truly European integration.

Russia

Russia's objections to the expansion of the European Union were not nearly of the same caliber as their objections to the enlargement of NATO. Whereas the expansion of NATO was viewed by Russia as a direct threat to its own security, EU expansion was merely irritating from the perspective of a nation who still felt it should be consulted as a great power when decisions were taken regarding its so-called near abroad, especially since the increase in the region's

²³ Judt, p. 718.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Judt, p. 720.

increased economic interdependence with Western Europe consequently decreased Russia's relative influence there. The expansion of the EU also further isolated Russia from the rest of the Continent, increasing the divide and the potential for conflict in later years. Unlike with NATO, however, the Russians did not seem to have any particular objections to the Baltic States joining the European Union apart from wanting to ensure their interests in the issue of EU enlargement as a whole.

Accession

NATO Criteria

The only formal accession criteria for NATO membership is contained in Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This article states, "The Parties may by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty."²⁶ Thus there are only two clear-cut requirements laid out in the treaty itself: that a candidate state must be European, and that their membership must be agreed upon by unanimity, the principle under which all NATO decisions are taken.

The last requirement that the applicant state be "in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area" is of course vaguer. In practice, the "principles of this Treaty" has generally been taken by the Allies to mean the principles as stated in the preamble of the North Atlantic Treaty: "The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their

²⁶ *The North Atlantic Treaty*. Washington, April 4, 1949. Article IV.
<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm>.

desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area. They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security.”²⁷ Inherent in these principles is thus the understanding that members of the North Atlantic Alliance should be functioning democracies – a rule that had been bent due to exigent circumstances during the Cold War, but which was now most definitely a firm requirement. There was also a generally unspoken requirement that NATO members should have market-based economies. Finally, for expansion of NATO to make sense, it was generally believed that the new members should represent a net gain of security for the Alliance; that is, all members of the Alliance should be more secure after the enlargement than before. While this was not an official stance, and in any case would have been incredibly difficult to quantify, the pros and cons of each new member were certainly weighed by individual nations deciding whether or not to support an expansion, as well as in Alliance discussions of the matter. Specific markers of readiness included the fair treatment of ethnic minorities, good relations with neighboring countries – most importantly no territorial disputes – and democratic oversight of the military.

1999: NATO Round 1: Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary

While the Central and Eastern European countries, including the Baltic States, all emerged from Communism at roughly the same time, they were not all equal in terms of their

²⁷ *The North Atlantic Treaty*. Washington, April 4, 1949. Preamble.
<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm>.

development or readiness to be integrated with the West. For this reason, NATO enlargement to the East European countries actually took place in two waves, the first occurring in 1995 and bringing the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland into the Alliance. As mentioned before, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were invited to join the Alliance earlier than other East European countries because they were considered at this point to have made the transition to “successful produces of political, economic, social and military security.”²⁸ This means that, in the eyes of the Allies at the time, they had fulfilled the requirement that they be net security additions to the Alliance, rather than detractors.

2004: NATO Round 2: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia (and Slovenia)

When the 1999 enlargement occurred, NATO made clear that “no European democratic country...would be excluded from consideration” in the next expansion.²⁹ To this end, NATO created the Membership Action Plan (MAP) mechanism to help applicants prepare themselves to be the net produces of security and be valuable additions overall to the Alliance. MAP was extended at this time to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The countries in question began to worry, however, that they would be stuck in this indefinite MAP status forever, a step up from their previous status as members of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) but still not full members of NATO. To more urgently lobby for their inclusion, these nine countries, together with Croatia, formed the so-called Vilnius group in May 2000. As well as lobbying to place pressure on the NATO members to speed up the accession process, the

²⁸ Simon, p. 154.

²⁹ Ibid.

Vilnius group was aimed at practical cooperation, especially the exchange of information and best practices as the aspirant members struggled to fulfill the criteria for accession. In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia were formally incorporated into NATO at the Istanbul summit.

2004: EU Enlargement

While NATO accession clearly has a few major stages that candidate states are expected to pass through and certain criteria that they are expected to meet, accession to the European Union is a much more legalistic and formally negotiated procedure. The European Union, after all, exists at its most basic level as an institution which creates common policies and regulations which its member states are expected to abide by. Thus, before any new state can be incorporated into the Union, it must first demonstrate its ability to function within the environment that has been created over time by the various Treaties of the European Union. Similar to the NATO criteria, the European Union expects candidate states to commit to the protection of human rights, the equal treatment of ethnic minorities, good neighbor relations, a stable democracy, the rule of law, and a functioning market economy. These qualifications for membership are together known as the Copenhagen criteria (named so because they were decided at a summit meeting in Copenhagen). The Copenhagen criteria also include the qualification that, like NATO, aspirant members may only be European. The geographical limits of Europe are rather ambiguous, however, and thus are considered to be at the political discretion of the European Commission and Council.

In addition to meeting these basic benchmarks, however, the bulk of the accession negotiations are focused on the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* by the candidate state. The *acquis communautaire* is the 97,000 pages³⁰ that contain the sum total of all European Union law. Since EU regulations must be implemented at the national level by each member state when they are enacted, they must also be transposed by new members at the time of their accession to ensure their compliance. This *acquis communautaire* is divided into so-called chapters that each deal with a different area of EU policy, and each chapter is subject to negotiations between the EU and the candidate country regarding how the law should be transposed to the national stage.

These negotiations are conducted on a bilateral basis between the EU and each individual member country. Thus, despite the fact that the “Big Bang” expansion in 2004 saw the addition of ten new member states at the same time, negotiations over the *acquis communautaire* were distinct affairs for state. In this enlargement, six of the eight countries under consideration here – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary – joined the European Union, along with Malta, Cyprus, and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania were deemed not ready and their accession was held off until another round of enlargement in 2007. Thus, there was clearly no delay on the timing of a country’s accession to the European Union just because it was a former member of the Soviet Union. Indeed, when negotiations were set into motion, the “presumptive inner core of candidates” that began their negotiations a year earlier than the rest included Estonia, as well as Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland,

³⁰ Judt, p. 722.

and Slovenia. Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Malta did not begin their negotiations until slightly later.³¹

Many of the concerns that Western Europe had were negotiated away over the course of the lengthy negotiations. For instance, East European farmers were forced to accept that they would not receive subsidies at the level of the West until 2013, a combination of an attempt not to overwhelm the EU budget and also to protect Western producers from Eastern competition. Similar limits were placed on the level of cohesion and structural funds, again to keep control of the budget. The established member states were able to extract such benefits for themselves because they essentially held all the cards in the new negotiations. While they recognized that a stable Eastern Europe would be in the security interests of the entire Continent and that there were potentially some economic benefits to be gained by expanding the European Union even further, the candidate states were openly begging for admission, which many of them saw as the only way to escape their Communist past and return to Europe.

Conclusions

The fifty-year long existence of the Iron Curtain divided the European Continent down the middle, in some ways freezing time in the East while the West pursued its own destiny. When the events of 1989 allowed the Central and Eastern European nations to reunite with their Western cousins, they were not all coming from the exact same starting place. As we have seen, the non-Soviet former members of the Warsaw Pact who retained at least nominal sovereignty throughout the Cold War had generally had a somewhat stronger history of national

³¹ Judt, p. 271.

independence before the world wars as well. Despite the bloody revolution in Romania, it was the exception that proved the rule of peaceful revolutions in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. By and large the Soviet Union under Gorbachev was willing to let them go their own ways without even so much a hint of protest. These countries, though extremely poor when compared to the Western European countries, were at least economically healthier than the Soviet Union itself.

The story of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is somewhat different. Although the Baltic States had a brief stint of independence following World War I, prior to that the record of sovereignty was more mixed. These nations forcibly incorporated as Soviet Socialist Republics in 1940 did not even have the semblance of national sovereignty and were an integral part of the Soviet Union. Because of this, Gorbachev was not willing to let them go without a fight, rightfully fearing that Baltic secession could lead to the dissolution of the entire Soviet Union. As such, the “rule” in the Balts was economic coercion, with later bloodshed avoided only in Estonia. Although wealthier than the rest of the Soviet Union, the three tiny Baltic States were still considerably poorer than their revolutionary fellows in other states.

As the Cold War faded into the history books, the destiny of Eastern Europe once again began to converge with that of the Western half of the Continent, and so too did these two distinct groups of Eastern European countries converge into the group of European “post-Communist” states. Despite this apparent convergence, the separate histories of these two groups did affect at least somewhat the process of their entrances into the two major Western institutions.

The Baltic States placed a greater premium on NATO membership than did the other states who were more inclined to view it as a second-best to early European Union membership. This was due to their more acute fears of Russian domination, stemming from a history of such aggression. Ironically, the very fact that the Baltic States were formerly part of the Soviet Union made the attainment of NATO membership more politically difficult due to strong Russian objections, and potentially even contributed to the delay of Estonian membership from the 1999 round to the 2004 round of enlargement.

As far as accession to the European Union, the Baltic States' former membership in the USSR did not seem to have any political implications for their negotiations. However, since the Baltic economies were farther behind than their neighbors, many of the adjustments were more painful in that region than in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. This does not seem to have had any long-term effect on their accession prospects, however, as all three Baltic States became members of the European Union in the Big Bang enlargement of 2004, while Bulgaria and Romania were not able to achieve membership until 2007. Their willingness to enact harsh austerity measures as demanded by Brussels has actually made them more viable candidates than some others for further integration once inside the EU. Estonia became the first former Soviet Republic to adopt the euro on January 1, 2011, something that has not yet been accomplished by Poland, the Czech Republic, or Hungary.

Overall, the distinct history of the Baltic States as former members of the Soviet Union definitely seems to have had some kind of effect on their trajectory of European integration since achieving independence. This distinct history continues to color various parts of their relationship with other European countries, most noticeably when policy towards Russia is being

discussed, be it in the context of NATO or the European Union. As European integration continues to progress, it will continue to be of interest as to how long these different histories remain relevant, and whether the Baltic States will continue to be somewhat distinct from other, non-Soviet members of the former Warsaw Pact.