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Impact of NATO Enlargement on Eastern Europe Security: Case Study of Ukraine War

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Abstract

In a situation where Russia attacked Ukraine in 2022, the role and the major dilemma of NATO is rediscovered. The blame is that while NATO had expanded its power towards the East European countries, it had provoked Russia to react to the threat of the NATO enlargement process. Within this background, this research's objective is to examine the impact of the NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe related to the case of the Ukraine war, within the lens of Eastern European citizens' perception of their security and NATO. The research aims to answer the role of NATO in securing the preservation of the conflicts and threats in Eastern Europe. To answer the questions, the data was gathered mainly through personal interviews with experts in the area, along with a public survey of European countries which added the perspective of the normal citizens. Through the research, it became clear that the enlargement of NATO had provoked Russia's security, and the attack on Ukraine was the result of the unstable security of Russia and the hegemonic power dynamics between the West and Russia. Despite the dilemma of NATO to protect Eastern European countries and not provoke Russia at the same time, citizens who are under threat and fear show a strong desire to join NATO. How NATO would proactively solve this security dilemma would be a key for the European security of the next few decades, in light of this Ukraine war and Russia's reactions.

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Introduction

The project aims to address the complex security dynamics in Eastern Europe, particularly in the context of NATO's enlargement strategy aimed at countering Russia's influence in the region. The overarching problem lies in understanding the effectiveness of NATO's enlargement policies in enhancing regional security, as well as their impact on public perception and trust in NATO. It is crucial to tackle this problem due to its significant implications for regional stability and international security. The ongoing tensions between NATO and Russia, exacerbated by events such as the Ukraine War, highlight the pressing need to assess the efficacy of NATO's enlargement strategy and its broader implications for European security. By examining public perceptions and trust in NATO, this research seeks to shed light on the underlying factors shaping regional security dynamics and inform future policy decisions. The existing literature provides insights into NATO's enlargement strategy and its historical context, as well as the evolving security landscape in Eastern Europe. However, there are notable gaps in understanding the nuanced effects of NATO's enlargement on regional security dynamics, particularly from the perspective of citizens and governments in Eastern European countries. Additionally, while there is some research on the Ukraine War and its implications for NATO's enlargement strategy, further analysis is needed to fully grasp the complex relationship between these factors.

In the context of ongoing geopolitical tensions and security challenges in Eastern Europe, this research will focus on the history of NATO, especially the policy of NATO enlargement to push back Russia in their region. On top of that, this study will discuss how this policy has affected the regional security of Eastern Europe, how the citizens and governments perceive the NATO enlargement policies, whether they are part of NATO or not. Within this background

context, the research will intertwine the case study of the Ukraine War, and examine the relationship between NATO enlargement and the Ukraine War. Furthermore, this study will examine the perception and the standpoint of citizens regarding the credibility and reliability of NATO, in a manner of regional security since there have been constant attacks and threats from Russia, including the recent full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The assessment of public opinion in the region will help judge whether NATO's enlargement benefits or undermines the security of Europe, especially those countries that are under the threat of Russia's sphere of influence and attacks. Since individual fear and unstableness are as important as the security of each nation and cooperative organizations such as NATO, this research will be a good assessment of whether NATO does its job to protect its citizens and member states, or otherwise foster the environment of fear for the Eastern European countries under the nominal excuse of enlargement against Russia. At the end of the research, the processes will guide NATO and the European society to find better solutions to protect the citizens from the danger of power conflicts and dynamics, especially the power race between Russia and Europe.

Research Methodology

For the main methodology, I used qualitative primary data, from the interviews with experts and professionals. I gathered the interviewees by searching their works and journals and contacting them through email. I especially contacted experts from the Geneva Security Center of Policy (GCSP) and the professors from IHEID (The Graduate Institute, Geneva) for face-to-face interviews. Throughout the process of recruitment, I have explained myself and my research agenda and background, to inform the potential interviewees about their roles in my research, so that the participation can be voluntary. During the process of interviewing, I kept the ethical consideration of not violating their basic rights of safety, integrity, and dignity. I also informed them how the gathered data would be used in my research, and how to ensure the confidentiality of their answers; every process was taken under mutual consent, without the forceful situations. Another primary data that I used is the public polls of the Eastern European countries, regarding the perception of NATO and regional security. I did not gather the data myself, but I used the data that was collected by other researchers and credible organizations, like the European parliaments and Eurobarometer. Additionally, secondary data such as academic journals was a huge support and backup to the primary data of interviews and public perceptions.

Here are some of the key concepts that I used to contain my methodology and the research outlines:

NATO Enlargement: The process by which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expands its membership to include new member states, typically in Eastern Europe, intending to enhance collective defense and security against potential threats, particularly from Russia.

Regional Security: Refers to the collective efforts and strategies aimed at maintaining peace, stability, and cooperation within a specific geographic region, such as Eastern Europe. It involves addressing various political, economic, and military challenges to ensure the well-being and safety of member states and their citizens.

Public Perception: The subjective views, attitudes, and beliefs held by individuals and communities regarding NATO's enlargement policies, its role in regional security, and its credibility as a security alliance. It encompasses how the public perceives NATO's actions, intentions, and effectiveness in addressing security threats in Eastern Europe.

Literature Review

NATO's policy of enlargement played a significant role in the Ukraine crisis as well as the relationship between the West and Russia (Wolff, 2015, p. 1103). The fall of the Soviet Union and communism brought various revolts in Eastern Europe, such as Romania, Lithuania, and Yugoslavia, causing Russia to push Europe to make a 'no enlargement' pledge in 1990. Despite this pledge, NATO kept interfering and expanding its influence towards Russia and its post-satellite countries for the proper transition to democracy and stability of their security. Under this motivation and reasons, NATO established the Founding Act of 1997 for eastward expansion, incorporating the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999 (Wolff, 2015, p. 1105-1107). Even though after the 9/11 attacks, Russia seemed to accept the enlargement policy of NATO by viewing it as the defense mechanism against global terrorism, when NATO had promised the acceptance of Georgia and Ukraine as members of NATO, Russia attacked Georgia and Ukraine. Overall, NATO's enlargement highly destabilized the security of Russia, and annexing Crimea to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO seemed rational from the perspective of Russia (Wolff, 2015, p. 1109-1112).

One of the biggest examples from the past of how Russia protected itself from NATO enlargement and Western aggression is the invasion of Georgia in 2008. The acceleration of Georgia's path to NATO membership through the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest had provoked a preventive aggression from Russia. As there was a sufficiently large power shift between allies while Georgia was getting significant military and defensive support from NATO, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War was inevitable, which destabilized NATO-Russia relations overall (Benson and Smith, 2022, p. 1021).

While NATO expanded its influence, it also developed cooperation with Ukraine which was mutually beneficial. The relationship between Ukraine and NATO has been ongoing since Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991. Since then, Ukraine has joined the Partnership for Peace program in 1994, and the Charter on the Distinct Partnership in 1997 (NATO, 2023). The start of process of Ukraine joining NATO started in 2008 when NATO leaders had promised Ukraine entry into NATO during the Bucharest Summit of 2008. While continuing to have cooperative activities, NATO and Ukraine have concluded the NATO-Ukraine Council in 2023 for equal relationship between members and Ukraine as well as to have increased integration in NATO (NATO, 2023).

From the perspective of Russia, the invasion of Ukraine was for the protection of the security of Russia and the prevention of NATO enlargement. If the main goal of Putin is to reclaim Russia's place of importance in international affairs and have a larger sphere of influence, Ukraine maintaining good relationships with NATO, which wants democracy in Ukraine, becomes a major threat to Russia. Democratic expansion of NATO means hostility to Russia as a non-democratic country (Doris and Graham, 2022, p. 75-81). Therefore, Putin appealed to the West that Ukraine's democracy should be self-determined; in Putin's perspective, both the US and Europe are convincing Ukraine that liberal ideas are better than Russia's rhetoric, as well as the "Western military activism involving NATO has proven that democracy expansion was merely a pretense for ... more threatening forms of Western aggression" (Doris and Graham, 2022, p. 83).

Analysis

NATO Enlargement and Regional Security

The overarching strategy of NATO enlargement started after the Cold War when NATO changed its objectives and goals of the security policy. That has impacted the regional security dynamics in Eastern Europe while it counters the Russian influence and pursues its goals.

During the Cold War, NATO's objective and function was to contain the Soviet Union and deter it ideally without provoking it; the goal was to establish the military block system in Europe, developing common rules between the Western world and the Eastern world (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). NATO was a defensive alliance to stop the spread of communism and socialism (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). Its goal was to liberate people from the idea of communism as well as to support the nations to defend themselves from the yoke of communism (Fisher 1960, p. 150). Under this mission, NATO aided economically, technologically, and militarily to improve the instability and insecurity of freed countries (Fisher 1960, p. 150). Basically, "the 'old NATO' survived based on its threat-based assumptions of collective defense", against the common enemy of communism and the Soviet Union (Kay, 1997, p.1). This goal and objective of NATO changed after the Cold War: since their reason for existence had gone, NATO found its purpose and a rationale to expand it to include the Eastern European countries who were part of the Soviet Union or the neighboring countries of the Soviets (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). Based upon the fear and suspicion of Russia, Eastern European countries were eager to join NATO; in this sense, NATO enlargement is based upon the countries' demand, instead of NATO being the autonomous entity to enlarge (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024).

Yet, by using this fear of people and the high demand to join NATO, Europe wanted to develop an inclusive security system; through a charter of Paris in 1990, the goal of Europe as well as Russia was to have sovereign equality: to create indivisible security that one should not expand one's security at the expense of other states (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). However, since the goal of the United States after the Cold War was to develop a security strategy based on hegemony — and as they believed that it was the way to "mitigate the security competition and the international anarchy" — it had distorted the original goal of NATO but to recreate the block politics and transitioned to become a revisionist power; the new purpose of NATO had become the interventionism and expansionism (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). Under its hegemonic goal, the US had significantly increased its military presence and financial augmentation in Eastern and Central Europe for its security architecture and the protection of NATO's eastern borders (Koschut, 2021, p.148) This hegemonic goal of the US had affected the NATO alliance such as Poland, to be heavily dependent on the US in their stability (Böller and Werner, 2021, p.2). Also, due to this increased power dynamics at the border, NATO was shown as not a defensive alliance but rather aggressive to Russia (S.Chakravartti, personal communication, 18 April 2024). This trend had led to the worries that George Kennan also mentioned in 1998, how "the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies… [NATO expansion] was simply a light-hearted action by a Senate that has no real interest in foreign affairs" (Friedman 1998).

The biggest mistake made by NATO while expanding towards the Eastern European region is the failure of integration of Russia within the European system and society (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024)(S.Chakravartti, personal communication, 18 April 2024). When the Soviets had fallen, NATO only panicked about the disappearance of their

reasons to exist and cooperate, neither negotiating with the new leader Yeltsin nor helping

Gorbachev to restore the new form of government (Shevtsova, 2010, p.4) Despite all the efforts

and want from the Russian government to join and be part of NATO and make OSCE as the main

security organization for Europe, Russia was rejected by Western European Countries and the

US, with the suspicious perceptions from Eastern European countries (J. Goodarzi, personal

communication, 17 April 2024). From NATO's perspective, integration of Russia – who is the

successor of the Soviet Union – would be meaningless; this perspective led to the propaganda

that only NATO can protect Europe from Russia's sphere of influence (S.Chakravartti, personal

communication, 18 April 2024).

The reaction of Russia was solid. It was obvious and even rational that Russia saw NATO

as anti-Russian and the military alliance against Russia since NATO did not accept Russia

despite the end of the Cold War era (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). For

Russia, NATO is not a 'nice' defensive alliance, especially with the precedent of the

bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999, the violation of international law (anonymous, personal

communication, 18 April 2024). Even though the action of NATO was for humanitarian aid for

abused citizens, it was also a violation of the autonomy of Yugoslavia, giving room to question

NATO's legitimacy (Krieger, 2001, p.2). Despite the bad relationship with NATO, Russia put an

effort to be integrated into the West. First, Russia tried the negotiation method with the Bush

administration; when the Berlin wall came down and Germany was unified under the

non-communist government, Gorbachev asked Germany to stay a neutral country by not joining

NATO (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024)(Savranskaya and Blanton, 2010).

However, when Bush insisted Germany join NATO, Gorbachev also insisted that there should be

no more NATO expansion afterward (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024).

After tolerating the first two waves of expansion of NATO, in 2007, Vladimir Putin made a statement that 'enough is enough' during the Munich Security Conference; if the expansion of NATO is continuous, Russia will push back also (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). Keeping that statement, Russia reacted in 2008 by attacking Georgia, when Georgia blatantly showed their willingness to join NATO, as well as NATO made a statement that the door is open for Georgia and Ukraine during the Bucharest summit in Romania (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). Russia's foreign policy was always reactive rather than proactive since they could not remain as the global power anymore (S.Chakravartti, personal communication, 18 April 2024).

Impact of the Ukraine War and Case Study Analysis

How do all of the NATO enlargement policies and the security dilemma relate to the specific case of the Ukraine War? How has the conflict influenced regional security dynamics, and how NATO has responded to this crisis? How does the Ukraine war reveal the existential characteristics of NATO enlargement?

As many scholars had expected, the NATO expansion into Ukraine had triggered a Russian intervention (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). The goal of Russia while invading Ukraine was to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO or indirectly, weaken Ukraine so Ukraine joining NATO would not be a threat to Russia (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). This whole idea is based on its historically grounded perspective of *derzhavnost,* the traditional concept of manifestation and the pursuit of Great power status (Merry, 2016, p. 28). This *derzhavnost* was manifested in both domestic and external public policy, denying the equal sovereignty of all nations, which was incompatible with

the international norms of sovereignty and the goal of Europe (Merry, 2016, p.29). Especially

towards Ukraine, viewed as a satellite country, Russia pursues the relationship of *suzerainty,*

exerting power to limit its external sovereignty and internal autonomy (Merry, 2016, p.30). Since

Ukraine was close to the border of Russia, it is important for Russia to not have NATO power

close to the Russian border (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). This

anxiousness of Russia was shown in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea; losing Crimea meant

Russia losing access to the Black Sea, but also meant the loss of historically strategic naval

military bases and the connection with the West (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April

2024). Russia's strategic rhetoric was that Crimea originally, historically belonged to Russia and

it was a historic mistake to transfer to Ukraine during the Soviet period; additionally, Russia also

had a justification to liberate Russians who lived in Ukraine who were under threat (Kofman et

al, 2017, p.14). Russia also emphasized that the primary goal of the US is an expansion of NATO

to contain Russia, as well as the US is even pressuring Europe to apply the sanctions against

them (Kofman et al, 2017, p.14). The relationship between the NATO enlargement, the

motivation of the US, and the aggressive actions of Russia had become clear. The Ukraine war

and its instability of security is a mixture of basic sovereignty and the hegemonic mindset of

Russia and another hegemonic-oriented actor of NATO.

The Ukraine War had shown the dilemma between the 2 principles that NATO

enlargement had created (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). The first main

principle is the right of every state to join security alliances freely if the states are willing to; this

is the main principle that every security organization including NATO and OSCE follows

(anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). That means, if Ukraine or Georgia wants

to, they have all rights to do so. However, this principle is in contradiction with the second main

principle, called the principle of indivisibility of security: "The security of each state of our region is inextricably linked with the security of every other state" (Brichambaut, 2010, p.1). This principle does not deny basic human security rights, but the principle indicates the nations using force to ensure their security should be ready to face the risk of their security caused by their actions for their security (Lanko and Yarovoy, 2023) It also means that the state cannot strengthen its security if by its action, it decreases the security of other states (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024); in this case, Ukraine joining NATO had decreased the security of Russia, eventually causing failure of security in Ukraine. This resonates with how NATO's purpose or reason to exist is to deal with the conflicts caused by its existence.

Additionally, the Ukraine War and all the security shifts had revealed the relationships between the US and Europe through the frame of NATO and military alliances; and how vulnerable Europe is without the help of the US (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). First, the main objectives of Europe and the US are different: the goal of Europe is to create collective security and hegemony through NATO, and have equal status with the US, while the US pursued unipolar hegemony (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). However, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine revealed how Europe was heavily dependent on the US through the security system of NATO, and how the connections between Europe and Russia, China, India, and other countries are discontinuous (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024).

Public Perception and Trust in NATO

While NATO is impacting the regional security of Eastern Europe and Ukraine, what are the perceptions and attitudes of citizens and governments towards NATO? How do they perceive

the credibility, reliability, and fulfillment of its role in protecting member states and ensuring regional stability and security? When the security of the region also means the security of the citizens and individuals, it is essential to seize the overall opinion of citizens of how NATO is doing its job to protect the citizens from Eastern Europe. What do people think about NATO doing its job to secure regional peace and security?

First, most of the Eastern European public viewed NATO and its expansion as favorable to their security, that NATO can be an umbrella and protection against war and conflicts with Russia (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). Despite how NATO had felt pressured to accept new members and respond to the demands of East European countries for memberships, more countries from Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – were 'desperate to join Alliance and receive security guarantees under Article 5 that they feel they need to withstand future Russian threats' (Hyde-Price, 1998, p.5). In 1997, according to the public opinion survey that was taken by Eurobarometer, around 30% of those Baltic countries were in favor of NATO membership, while only 14% of the population were against NATO membership (Siharulidze, 2001, p.15). Especially in Lithuania, 26% of the citizens agreed that NATO is the best way to guarantee their country's security and stability, while another 26% also included the EU along with NATO as the best way for security; similar results were also shown in Estonia and Latvia, showing a higher number of 29% and 30% (Siharulidze, 2001, p.18). These results show how citizens in Baltic countries want to join security organizations to protect their countries' security.

However, since the disappearance of substantial Soviet Union, 'article 5 security guarantees are no longer as vital as they were during the Cold War'; the fundamentality of NATO in those countries had changed as an institution that pursued a transatlantic partnership with

America and provided multilateral and regional security guarantees (Hyde-Price, 1998, p.13).

Regarding this change, what's important for the reassurance of security is the military presence

in the region; for example, American troops are present in South Korea not to counterattack the

North, but to create justification for American intervention when North attacks American bases

in South Korea (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). Therefore, most of the

Eastern European countries viewed NATO and its enlargement as favorable to their security

insurance (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024), since joining NATO means

concrete military power.

NATO's existence is highly dependent on the fear and the threat that the peace might

break out, which means, they are dependent on the continued fear of the people (G. Diesen,

personal communication, 4 April 2024). It is the same situation for the Eastern European

countries, that "they have a great incentive to exaggerate the threat from Russia to ensure that the

security guarantees will not diminish" (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). The

security concern of Eastern Europe is very legitimate since their view of security is different

from Western European security; when we consider how Poland lost their countries 3 times in

the last 200 years, and how threats like Germany or Russia were always there, it is easier to

understand their anxiety and desire for security umbrella (S.Chakravartti, personal

communication, 18 April 2024). Therefore, despite the lack of imminent threat from Russia,

countries like the Czech Republic of Slovakia had joined NATO, targeting the West's integration

with economic and democratic space. (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024).

On the other hand, it brought the inner division process to some of the Eastern European

states. Countries like Georgia and Armenia during 1999 had shown diversified opinions against

NATO enlargement (Siharulidze, 2001, p.27). 62% and 44% of Georgia and Armenia citizens

had answered that NATO is no longer needed for maintaining the security of Europe, while only

16% and 19% of the citizens had answered that NATO is still necessary (Siharulidze, 2001,

p.28). Especially for Ukrainians, NATO wanted them to join the new polls and to support NATO

expansionism; but through the polls from 1991 to 2014, only 17-24% of Ukrainians sought to

join NATO, and 30-40% of the population saw NATO as an expansionist and the power of

threats (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024)(Ray and Esipova 2014). This

perception was accelerated after NATO's military involvement in Kosovo. 45% of the Armenian

citizens believed that NATO should not have become involved militarily in Kosovo (Siharulidze,

2001, p.30). 33.6% of Ukrainians also considered NATO's involvement in Kosovo to be an act of

aggression, while another 19.3% of Ukrainians considered it a war crime even (Siharulidze,

2001, p.36). NATO striking Yugoslavia contributed to how Ukrainians perceived NATO as the

aggressive military bloc around the 2000s, agreed by 46.2% of Ukrainian citizens (Siharulidze,

2001, p.36). During this process, NATO took the stance of ambiguity, telling Western Europe

that this expansionism was not targeting Russia directly while reassuring Eastern Europe that

NATO was protecting them from Russia; overall, these ambiguous actions of NATO brought

uncomfortableness and instability to the region, where they wanted the proper security

guarantees from Russia (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). This had become

the deterrent reassurance dilemma for NATO while diminishing the credibility of Eastern

European countries (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024).

All of these diversified opinions in Europe, rather positive or negative, changed after the

full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, regarding the NATO enlargement and

membership. Foremost, 82% of Estonia citizens showed positiveness in Estonia's NATO

membership, 2 percent higher than last year – their trust in NATO's military aid and its power of

prevention was 48% and 29% each (European Parliament, 2023, p.1). Especially in Ukraine, 89% of the citizens want their country to join NATO, 79% in the eastern region and 93% in the western region of Ukraine (European Parliament, 2023, p.2). However, in some countries like Poland, almost half of the respondents(47.7%) disagreed with Ukraine's NATO membership at this moment (European Parliament, 2023, p.2). Regardless of these various perceptions of NATO enlargement, more than half (64%) of the Europeans agreed with purchasing and supplying military equipment to Ukraine, as well 72% agreed with imposing economic sanctions against Russia (European Parliament, 2023, p.1). These results showed how some countries do not welcome Ukraine to join NATO, but the provision of aid is necessary regardless of Ukraine's NATO membership. Yet, one thing is clear: if the country feels threatened and insecure, any country needs, and wants membership of NATO.

Policy Recommendations and Implications

Then, what could be the future direction that NATO's enlargement strategy should take, to solidify the security of NATO? What could be the next step for NATO in light of the current security challenges of the Ukraine war?

One of the most prominent ideas for how NATO should act in the future is that NATO should strengthen deterrence and defense against Russia. It is to eliminate the buffer zone and the 'gray zone' of instability around Russia, to promote security (Polyakova et al, 2023). The full implementation of conventional deterrence and defense against Russia should be the top priority of the Alliances, investing in military capabilities to counter Russia's military advantage such as long-range missile systems, air defense systems, and cyber technologies (Polyakova et al, 2023). NATO, as a collective security organization, should do its job to protect its member states by all

means manage crises, and promote cooperation, following Article 5 (S. Chakravartti, personal communication, 18 April 2024)(Deni, 2017, p.13). It also means to honor Ukraine's promise of NATO membership speedily and effectively to secure Ukraine (Polyakova et al, 2023). Also, since the damage has been done already with the example of Ukraine and Georgia, more NATO military power in Balkan states and other Eastern European countries would not have as big an impact as Ukraine joining NATO; even if Russia can attack Balkan states, the war is not something Russians want (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). While maintaining security in those countries, it is important to discuss thoroughly the arms control strategies, military risk reduction, and deployment of conventional weapons in Europe; it is important to address the arms control issue within West-Russia issue relations, not only focusing on the relationships with Ukraine and Russia (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024).

Another direction– which is hard to achieve but should be achieved one day– is that NATO should take a neutral stance (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024) and give security guarantees to both Ukraine and Russia (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). During the Cold War, many European states kept a neutral stance, like Finland, Sweden, Austria, Yugoslavia, etc; these states became the buffer zone between the conflicts between Russia and Europe (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). What is needed is deterrence, but also reassurance, to promote peace between Europe and Russia (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). For example, when Norway joined NATO, it had a clear policy of not having foreign bases in Norway, as while Norway wanted the security of its region it also did not want to provoke Soviet aggression (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). The purpose of a security institution like NATO should be the reduction of security

competition; "because if one side increases security at the expense of the other, then (the other) will respond, and then you have both sides reducing their security" (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). Therefore, it is important to take both perspectives from both countries and guarantee both state's security, by connecting the two main principles of security, which are the principle right to join security organizations and the principle of indivisible security (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). Yet, it is true that when it comes to reality, it is hard to reduce military power and aggression to ensure security. The world and the security competition are geared towards the game of hegemony, which does not help reduce the security competition (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024).

One of the advice is to look back to the previous ideas of neutrality and for Ukraine to diversify its partnerships, such as having trade with Russia, the United States, Europe, and China, to not get too involved in any one state (G. Diesen personal communication, 4 April 2024). The solution for NATO is "to abandon its hegemonic ambitions and recognize that if it denies the security of Russia, then Russia will respond in a way which undermines our (European) security as well (G. Diesen, personal communication, 4 April 2024). It is not possible to keep expanding while maintaining sustainable peace. Therefore, the integration of Russia also into the sustainable, long-term peace and prosperity of Europe is essential (S.Chakravartti, personal communication, 18 April 2024). In that sense, Ukraine or Georgia joining NATO can be a huge threat to regional security, since Russia has a huge attachment to these countries (J. Goodarzi, personal communication, 17 April 2024). Ukraine joining NATO can create another crisis and regional conflicts as it was before in 2008 with Georgia. Since one of the guidelines for joining NATO is rather one's joining contributes to the security of NATO (United States Congress, 1997, p. 170), a sound decision-making process within alliances is the key.

Overall, communication is the key essential point (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). Going back to the Harmel doctrine for NATO, the objective of NATO is deterrence, but also détente, which means dialogue (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). While Europe and NATO are highly focused and spending budget on strengthening the security by deterrence policy, they lack the policy of détente with Russia; sustainable peace needs both deterrence and détente (anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2024). Restoration of the trust with Russia through thorough discussion and negotiation can be the next huge gap and assignments for NATO (S.Chakravartti, personal communication, 18 April 2024).

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this study sheds light on the intricate relationship between NATO enlargement, regional security dynamics, and public perceptions, particularly in the context of Eastern Europe and the Ukraine War. The evolution of NATO's objectives from containment during the Cold War to expansionism in the post-Soviet era has significantly impacted the security landscape in Eastern Europe, leading to tensions with Russia and regional instability. The Ukraine War serves as a poignant example of the complexities arising from NATO enlargement, highlighting the clash between the principles of state sovereignty and collective security. Russia's intervention in Ukraine underscores the inherent security dilemma posed by NATO expansion, as well as the geopolitical interests at play in the region.

It is clear that the NATO enlargement had provoked Russia to invade Ukraine; however, it is also evident that the Eastern European citizens want and need NATO to protect from Russia despite its existence itself is a threat to Russia and eventually creates instability in regional security. Public perception of NATO varies across Eastern European countries, with many viewing NATO membership favorably as a means of security assurance against potential Russian aggression. However, divergent opinions exist, reflecting underlying anxieties and historical grievances. The Ukraine War has further influenced public attitudes, with heightened support for NATO membership in Ukraine and calls for solidarity among European nations.

Strengthening deterrence measures against Russia is essential, but must be accompanied by efforts to engage in dialogue and build trust. Balancing the principles of state sovereignty and collective security requires a nuanced approach, with a focus on diplomacy, dialogue, and inclusivity. By addressing underlying tensions and fostering mutual understanding, NATO can

contribute to a more stable and secure future for Eastern Europe and beyond. While maintaining and developing strong deterrence structures and plans, the final goal, and the reason for the existence of NATO, should be the maintenance of neutrality in a world where the core substance of diplomacy is full of hegemonic competition and conflicts.

Abbreviation list

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

US: United States

EU: European Union

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

IHEID: Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement

SIT: School for International Training

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