



BALTIC SUPPORT FOR GEORGIA: SOLIDARITY, NICHE, AND SECURITY POLICIES

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Abstract: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have proven to be staunch supporters of Georgia and its declared foreign policy goal – integration and eventual membership into the Euro-Atlantic area. In the context of Georgia’s achievements on its Europeanization path, having a constant support from the EU and NATO member states is significant for the country’s Euro-Atlantic future. This research paper examines the motivations behind the Baltic’s Georgian policies, their ardent backing of Georgia and its Europeanization efforts. The paper argues that the following three factors in combinations explain the Baltic support for Georgia: 1. shared historical experiences – solidarity policy; 2. a desire to increase their intra-EU visibility by finding the niches where they claim to have a unique expertise – niche policy; and 3. security considerations – security policy. In other words, the Baltic States’ position towards Georgia is linked both to their identity and strategic interests. While it provides a strong basis for cooperation, it is important for Georgia not to take this support for granted, but to further strengthen ties with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and to continue sharing their experience, expertise and practical knowledge when it comes to reforms, democratic advancements and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Keywords: Baltic states, Georgia, Europeanization, solidarity, niche, security, development cooperation

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of realizing Georgia's declared foreign policy goal of becoming integrated into the Euro-Atlantic area, support from EU and NATO member states is of particular importance. The three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – represent countries that clearly understand Georgia's aspirations and unique needs and have provided consistent support for Georgia's democratization and efforts at Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Baltics' strong support for Georgia and its declared Euro-Atlantic path is repeatedly confirmed not only by official statements but more importantly by their actions. While close respective bilateral partnerships between Georgia and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are apparent, explanation of the reasons behind this support are not only academically interesting but also useful for Georgia – as a state aspiring toward closer integration and eventual membership in the EU and NATO – in the process of constructing its foreign policy priorities and orientations. As the motivations behind the Baltic states' support for Georgia is not well researched, this paper aims to contribute to the deeper understanding of the Baltic states' respective policies and interests in supporting Georgia.

This paper has the following objectives: 1. to better understand Baltic perspectives on Georgia, including the country's role and place in the Baltic states' respective foreign policies; and 2. to analyze the motivations behind each state's ardent political and economic support for Georgia, particularly in its Euro-Atlantic integration processes. Thus, this paper briefly evaluates the Baltic states' Georgian policies and explains the motivations behind them. This paper is based on desk research and interviews with Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian experts.

The research paper argues that the Baltic states' active support for Georgia is determined by three interrelated factors: common historical experience (referred to here as *solidarity policy*); each country's desire to increase its own visibility inside the EU (referred to here as *niche policy*); and security considerations (referred to here as *security policy*). In conceptual terms, this argument implies that the Baltic states employ both value/identity-based (“historical memory”) and interest-based (“intra-EU visibility” and “small state threat-perception”²) approaches to foreign policy, meaning that Baltic support for Georgia is grounded both in notions of identity and calculations of strategic interest.

²The terms “historical memory”, “intra-EU visibility” and “small state threat-perception” are used by Vahur Made in his article while explaining Estonia's foreign policy motivations for the Eastern Partnership, see (Made, 2011)

REVIEWING THE BALTIC STATES' SUPPORT FOR GEORGIA

Georgia is viewed as a strategically important partner by all three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). Bilateral partnerships between Georgia and each Baltic state have been particularly strengthened since the Rose Revolution in 2003. Since then, Georgia has actively expressed its desire to implement reforms to consolidate the country's democracy and become a constituent part of the Euro-Atlantic space – accordingly, relations with Georgia represent a key priority in each country's respective foreign policy.

Due to historical linkages and shared experiences and challenges – existential concerns (i.e. fighting for and seeking survival (for Baltic perspective see Mälksoo, 2006)); the burden of the Soviet legacy; the desire not to be labeled “post-Soviet”; current tense relations with Russia; and Western-oriented foreign policies since regaining independence in the early 1990s – the Baltic states feel kinship with Georgia. In particular, the Baltic states understand Georgia's needs and aspirations and emphasize the importance of close and friendly relations with the country.

While taking into consideration Georgia's aspirations and unique needs, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have provided consistent support for Georgia's democratization efforts and for its declared foreign policy goal: Euro-Atlantic integration, including eventual membership in both the EU and NATO. Moreover, as Diāna Potjomkina of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs notes on the example of Latvia, although economic ties³ are not well developed, “mutual understanding” (2015: p.127) between the Baltic states and Georgia is strong, something reflected in the frequency of official visits⁴ to Georgia by high-ranking officials from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (and vice versa) and in quantity of cooperation agreements in the fields of economy, security and defense (including military training), strategic communication, and culture. Non-state relations between the Baltic states and Georgia are also well-developed (including in spheres of tourism, education, and the civic sector).⁵

³In 2015, Georgia ranked 39th in terms of Lithuania's most important export market, and 46th – import market. In 2016, number 54 trade partner for Latvia and 66th export market and 41st import market for Estonia in 2014. Sources: http://www.versli Lietuva.lt/uploads/media/57beae67a67d0/2016.08.25_Gruzija_ang.pdf <https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/14308-aseradens-latvijai-un-gruzijai-ir-plasas-iespejas-ekonomisko-attiecibu-talakai-attistanai-un-padzilinasai> <http://www.postimees.ee/3384241/kruise-arutas-grusia-kolleegiga-toiduhutuse-vastavust-eli-nouetele>

⁴One of the recent examples from 2017 is the official visits of the President of the Republic of Latvia Raimonds Vejonis and Minister of Interior Rihard Kozlovskis in March, 2017; of the delegation of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia headed by the Minister of MFA Andrejs Pildegovičs in February, 2017; visit of the Estonian Foreign Minister Sven Mikser in April, 2017. Also, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili paid a visit to Estonia in May, 2017; Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius's visit on 10-13 June, 2017; President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili had an official visit to Lithuania in March, 2017, while Victor Dolidze - State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration had the official meetings in all three Baltic states in February, 2017.

⁵For instance, according to the information provided by Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Georgia, MFA of Estonia annually grants scholarships for Georgian students to study at the universities in Tartu and Tallinn; production of the Georgian-Estonian movie “Tangerines”

It is worth underlining that after regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the main foreign policy goal of each Baltic state was the accession to both the EU and NATO. (As Dovilė Jakniūnaitė (2009: pp.123-124), associate professor of Vilnius University, notes: this is to guarantee their security, “ensure survival” in Russia’s neighborhood and to “confirm and validate their status as the true” European (Western) states). Having successfully achieved both objectives by 2004, as well as completing the transformation to market economy and democracy (Kakachia & Skardžiūtė-Kereselidze, 2013: p.193), the Baltic states redefined their foreign policy strategies, paying particular attention to the then-newly developed European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)⁶(Kesa, 2012: p.98), with a specific focus on its eastern dimension – since 2009 – the Eastern Partnership (EaP), of which Georgia is a focal point.

As proponents of both deepening and widening the EU with the purpose of creating a larger, stronger, and more united Europe, the Baltic states have supported the development of the EU’s EaP⁷ initiative and striven to “keep it on the EU’s agenda” (Cigane, 2017:28). It is worth underlining that, as Katerina Kesa notes, “Lithuania was one of the very active and the initiators of a special policy for the EU’s Eastern neighborhood, preparing draft papers for what became ‘Eastern Partnership’ in 2009” (Kesa, 2012: p.105). When it comes to Georgia, in particular within the framework of EaP and Association Agreement (AA),⁸ the Baltic states strongly advocated for EU-Georgia talks on the conclusion of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in 2013 and have promoted visa liberalization for Georgia, among other states. Also, the Baltic states have praised progress made and reforms undertaken by Georgia and consider the country “a success story of the Eastern Partnership”⁹ initiative.

A special address made on March 28, 2017 by Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė is a noteworthy example of such support:

in 2013; in 2014, an Information-Educational Centre on Georgia was opened at the Academic Library of the Riga State University; Lithuanian Language Center is functioning in Georgia, while Georgian Language course has been delivered at the University of Vilnius since 2014.

⁶The ENP was established in 2004. It was “set as a framework to govern the EU’s relations with 16 of the EU’s Eastern and Southern Neighbours in order to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration.” Source: European Union External Action Service. (2016) *European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)*. [Online] Available from: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en [Accessed 25 April 2017].

⁷The Eastern Partnership was launched at the Prague Summit in 2009 within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It is a joint initiative of the EU and 6 Eastern European partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The EaP, as Štefan Füle, former Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, explains it, “aims at bringing the EU’s eastern neighbors closer to the EU” (European Commission, 2012:2), through enhancing cooperation and fostering socio-economic and political reforms in neighboring countries. Source: Council of the European Union. (2009) *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit Prague, 7 May 2009*. Brussels, 8435/09(Presse78). Available from: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf [Accessed 25 April 2017].

⁸Signed in June 2014 and entered into force on July 1, 2016, AA is a comprehensive treaty that guides Georgia’s relations with the EU. It covers the following thematic areas: political dialogue and reform; cooperation in the field of foreign and security policy; cooperation on freedom, security and justice; trade and trade-related matters (covered by DCFTA); economic cooperation; and other cooperation policies (such as transport, energy cooperation, environment, among others). AA replaced previous Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1999). For the full text see Official Journal of the European Union (2014) https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/association_agreement.pdf

⁹Agenda.ge. (2017) *Georgian, Estonian FMs Discuss Upcoming Brussels EaP Summit*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30052> [Accessed 25 May 2017].

“Dear friends, today is a special day when Georgians start travelling to the EU visa-free. From now on our nations will be even closer [...]. Your commitment to freedom and democracy is an example for the region. Lithuania is your fatal friend and will always support Georgia. ჩვენ ვამაყობთ თქვენს წარმატებით (We are proud of your success).”¹⁰

It is worth mentioning that strengthening EU involvement in the EaP was a key priority of both the Lithuanian (January-June 2013) and Latvian (January-June 2015) rotating presidencies of the Council of the EU, as it will be for the upcoming Estonian (July-December 2017) presidency. The following quotation from Estonian Foreign Minister Sven Mikser is one illustration:

“Within the framework of the Estonian presidency, we will be working in order for the outcomes of the Eastern Partnership Summit to be ambitious and motivating for all the participants to further develop Eastern Partnership.”¹¹

In addition to political support, the Baltic states have assisted Georgia in the implementation of the AA and, more generally, have contributed financially to the country’s development through each country’s respective development cooperation policy, which has been implemented since EU accession (this will be further discussed below). The usage of development cooperation funds by each country can be considered a key tool for facilitating bilateral relations with Georgia.

In addition to development assistance, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian support is noticeable on security-related issues and events. First of all, they constantly reaffirm support for Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. For instance, shortly after the inception of 2008 August Russo-Georgian War, the Baltics together with Poland showed their strong support for Georgia by issuing a joint declaration¹² on the situation in Georgia, condemning Russia’s actions and jointly visiting Tbilisi to show solidarity with the country. Moreover, in their statements, officials from the Baltics acknowledge Georgia’s role in contributing to regional security and stability and its participation in NATO-led operations and missions.

¹⁰Grybauskaitė, D. (2017) *Prezidentės sveikinimas Gruzijos žmonėms su galimybe laisvai keliauti po Europą (President congratulated the people of Georgia with the introduction of visa free travel to the European Union)*. [Online Video Message]. 28 March 2017. Available from: <https://www.lrp.lt/en/press-centre/press-releases/lithuanian-and-georgian-presidents-meet-at-the-start-of-visa-free-travel-regime/27306> [Accessed 20 May 2017].

¹¹The Baltic Times. (2017) *Estonian Foreign Minister: EU must improve interconnections with Eastern Partnership nations*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.baltictimes.com/estonian-foreign-minister-eu-must-improve-interconnections-with-eastern-partnership-nations/> [Accessed 20 May 2017].

¹²See, *Joint Declaration on the situation in Georgia by the Presidents of the Baltic States and the Republic of Poland* (2008) [Online] Available from: http://www.parliament.ge/files/294_19825_680458_1.pdf

WHY DO THE BALTIC STATES SUPPORT GEORGIA?

After the general introduction and brief presentation of the Baltic states' respective attitudes toward Georgia, it is worth discussing the motivations behind each state's strong support for the country and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. From the desk research and interviews the following three interrelated rationales become particularly apparent:

SOLIDARITY POLICY

The first explanatory factor is *solidarity policy* – the moral obligation to help, support, and share transition and integration experience, practical knowledge, and expertise with another country to aid it along the “Western Path” and undertake similar reforms. As Georgia is a country with which they share common values and circumstances: shared history (the Soviet legacy, including “rebelling against Soviet rule” (Interview with Šukytė, 2017)), similar historical experiences, social-political development paths; shared aspirations and fraught current relations with Russia, in this case, Baltic support for Georgia can be considered to be an value/identity-based policy driven by historical memory.

Andres Kasekamp, Professor of Baltic Politics at the University of Tartu, explains the Estonian perspective: “Estonians feel duty and imperative to support another country that has been on the same path as we had” (Interview with Kasekamp, 2017), referring to the period when the Baltic states received assistance from the Nordic countries in the process of Europeanization. The following statements by former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves (in June 2015) and Lithuania's Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius (in August 2016), respectively, exemplify this line of reasoning.

“We knew that certain countries were against us when we went down this path and tried achieving our European goals, but we focused on our friends and Georgia should share the good feelings that countries have towards you. This is quite a long process.”¹³ (Ilves)

“Lithuania's example of seeking NATO membership shows that one cannot give up on its dream, its goals. [...] We have come a long way and we are ready to help Georgia to do the same.”¹⁴ (Linkevičius)

¹³Agenda.ge. (2015) *Estonia's President: Georgia should fight for its European future*. [Online] Available from: <http://agenda.ge/news/36338/eng> [Accessed 25 April 2017].

¹⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania. (2016) Linas Linkevičius: solidarity of values motivates us to support Georgia on its path towards European integration. [Online] Available from: <https://www.urm.lt/default/en/news/linas-linkevicius-solidarity-of-values-motivates-us-to-support-georgia-on-its-path-towards-european-integration> [Accessed 15 April 2017].

An example of the solidarity policy in action was the founding in 2005 of a “new group of friends of Georgia” including Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. The group aimed “to assist Georgia’s internal reforms and its efforts to qualify for eventually joining NATO and the EU, as well as to support international steps to provide security for Georgia.”¹⁵

As for individual policies exemplary of the solidarity policy, according to the website of E-Governance Academy, Estonia is launching and implementing the EU-funded Twinning Project “Support to Strengthening of e-Governance in Georgia II” through the Estonian e-Governance Academy. The project is aimed at strengthening the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, increasing the knowledge and expertise of the DEA’s staff, and promoting and advancing “e-government and information security in line with the European Union standards.”¹⁶ Moreover, granting scholarships on an annual basis to Georgian public servants to study at the Estonian School of Diplomacy and for representatives of Georgia to study at the Baltic Defense College of Tartu¹⁷ is another example of this policy. As for Lithuania, since 2010 the Georgian-Lithuanian Commission on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration has held meetings and consultations on a regular basis “to discuss bilateral relations, European and Euro-Atlantic integration agenda, as well as positions on issues of regional and global importance and cooperation within international organizations.”¹⁸ These projects demonstrate the Baltic states’ commitment and willingness to continue sharing their advancements and reform experiences with Georgia and to provide the country with relevant and necessary expertise and assistance to accelerate its progress in the relevant fields.

It is important to note that Georgia also views the Baltics as role models for reform, democratic transformation, and integration with the EU and NATO. This is confirmed by the official discourse and statements of high ranking officials of Georgia.¹⁹ Kornely Kakachia and Renata Skardžiūtė-Kereselidze of the Georgian Institute of Politics clarify the Georgian position:

¹⁵Socor, V. (2005) New Group of Georgia’s Friends Founded, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, [Online] 2 (26). Available from: <https://jamestown.org/program/new-group-of-georgias-friends-founded/> [Accessed 10 May 2017].

¹⁶E-Governance Academy. (no date) *Strengthening e-Governance in Georgia II*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.ega.ee/project/support-to-strengthening-of-e-governance-in-georgia-ii/> [Accessed 25 May 2017].

¹⁷Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. (no date) *Relations between Georgia and the Republic of Estonia*. [Online] [Accessed 20 May 2017].

¹⁸Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. (no date) *Relations between Georgia and the Republic of Lithuania*. [Online] [Accessed 20 May 2017].

¹⁹Statements of Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and President Giorgi Margvelashvili can be the examples. Kvirikashvili: “I would like to once again emphasize that Estonia serves as a role model for Georgia. I would like to offer our most heartfelt gratitude for being our friend and partner all over these years and being supportive of our efforts, including our NATO integration agenda.” (15 May, 2017) Source: Georgia Today. (2017) *PM Kvirikashvili: Estonia Serves as Role Model for Georgia*. [Online] Available from: <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/6545/PM-Kvirikashvili%3A-Estonia-Serves-as-Role-Model-for-Georgia;>

Margvelashvili: “Lithuania is an important and impressive role model to be followed.” (January, 2015).

Source: Government of the Republic of Lithuania. (2015) *Prime Minister in Tbilisi: we are committed to help Georgia on its path of democracy*. [Online] Available from: <https://lrvt.lt/en/news/prime-minister-intbilisi-we-are-committed-to-help-georgia-on-its-path-of-democracy>

“From the Georgian perspective, the Baltic model of development is a clear success story in the history of EU integration and represents a positive example for Eastern Partnership countries that are still on their way to the EU” (2013: p.196).

NICHE POLICY

A second interlinked factor that explains the Baltic states’ interests and active support for Georgia is related to the desire of the relatively new and small EU member states to increase their respective profiles inside the EU (this is defined here as an interest-based policy). Each state attempts to do so by acting as “reform-related knowledge-providers in the former Soviet space” (Made, 2012: p.87) – more precisely, in the EaP – while having a good understanding of the problematic nature of the transition and the social-political organization of post-communist countries (Bruge, & Bukovskis, 2009: p.88). Hence, Georgia, and the EaP more generally, represents an area of relative advantage for the Baltic states. Since 2004, after the Baltic states’ accession to EU and a change in their status, “the newly-created ENP was an ideal vehicle for them to demonstrate the ‘added-value’ of their membership since many in the old member states were asking what the new members could possibly ‘contribute’” –as is explained by Andrespok and Kasekamp (2012: p.118). Put simply, strong political support for Georgia as an Eastern Partnership country is a *niche policy* of the Baltics within the EU (Interviews with Potjomkina and Kasekamp, 2017). For instance, in 2011 the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Estonian School of Diplomacy established the Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership (ECEP), a training center and think-tank working on EaP issues, in order to aid implementation of the EU’s Eastern Partnership policy goals and strengthen EaP state institutions and civil society organizations.²⁰ It is worth underlining, however, that Estonia’s decision – under its Council of the EU presidency – to held the next EaP summit in November 2017 in Brussels (not in its capital of Tallinn) is an indication that Estonia attempts not only to present the EaP as “a purely Baltic special interest issue” but in order to garner more support and attention from the Western and Southern EU member states for the policy (Interview with Kasekamp, 2017).

When it comes to sharing know-how with Georgia, specific activities include cooperation on the implementation of projects as well sending civil servants and experts in the areas of: e-governance and cyber security (Estonia is sending cyber defense experts); military (experts from Lithuania are carrying out military training exercises and evaluating military studies²¹); migration, border management, and police (Latvian experts’ visits to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia); good governance; and civil society development, among other things.

²⁰Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership. (no date) *About Us*. [Online] Available from: <https://ecep.eu/en/center/> [Accessed 25 May 2017].

²¹Agenda.ge. (2016) *Lithuanian experts share military expertise with Georgia*. [Online] Available from: <http://agenda.ge/news/56359/eng> [Accessed 20 May 2017].

These activities serve the purpose of modernizing Georgia's public administration, improving the country's administrative and institutional capacity, and fostering cooperation with the EU.

Development cooperation

Development cooperation projects provide additional relevant examples of how the Baltics attempt to *both* share their reform experiences and invest in the EaP and its constituent countries as one of their key niches within the EU. From the initial stages, Georgia – together with other EaP countries (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus) – has been a leading beneficiary of bilateral aid from the Baltic states. This showcases Baltic support for Georgia's readiness to successfully fulfill all the requirements of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Before reviewing the bilateral development cooperation policies, it should be underlined that all three Baltic states consider promoting and strengthening the democratic state structures and systems and other aspects of good governance (such as strengthening the rule of law, justice, and civil society), “as one of their best transition experiences to share through development cooperation” (Andrespok & Kasekamp, 2012: p.123) with Georgia.

The Estonian Case

Georgia has participated in Estonia's development cooperation policy since 2006. According to the information provided by the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during the Development Plan for Estonian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid 2006-2010, Estonia supported Georgia with €2.83 million, and €3.76 million (excluding humanitarian aid) in 2011-2015. €2.85 million is allocated for the period 2016-2018.²² The latest Estonian bilateral development cooperation country strategy for Georgia for 2016-2018 highlights support in the following areas: governance and democratic development (35% development cooperation funding); education, including vocational education (30%); entrepreneurship (25%); and micro-financing (10%).²³ Thus, as Crandall and Varov from Tallinn University note, “Estonia's development aid strategy is [...] structured to reflect its experiences and knowledge transfer, not provide an impact purely by monetary means” (2016: p.419).

²²Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia. (no date) *Estonian Development Cooperation Country Strategy Paper Georgia 2016-2018*. Pp. 11-17. [Online] Available from: http://vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/development-cooperation/gruusia_maastrateegia_2016_2018_eng.pdf [Accessed 10 April 2017].

²³Ibid., p.12.

The Latvian Case

Georgia was included in the list of recipient countries of Latvia's development cooperation aid in 2005, targeting the country's economic and social development. During the period 2005-2008, roughly 28 projects utilizing €397 333.11²⁴ were implemented.²⁵ Despite the fact that Latvian development aid has decreased because of the global financial crisis (from which Latvia was hit hard) it had no reflection on the allocated funds to Georgia. In the period of 2010-2016, Latvia's assistance to Georgia, through development cooperation aid, amounted more than €1.18 million.²⁶ In general, the following thematic areas considered to be a priority for Latvian development aid to Georgia: upgrading the quality of education, contributing to peace and security, good governance, civil society development, and economic development in addition to the areas of domestic resource mobilization and migration. It is worth mentioning that in 2008, following the August War, according to the MFA of Latvia, the country expanded the "Development Co-operation Policy plan for 2008" for Georgia in order to provide "support towards the post-conflict reconstruction in Georgia and towards the liquidation of the consequences of war", which included a project for supporting Gori University (providing new computer equipment, tuition for students, and in-service training for teachers).²⁷

The Lithuanian Case

Georgia has been involved in Lithuania's bilateral development aid program since 2005. In 2005-2016, Lithuanian financial support to Georgia amounted to €1.78 million allocated to 169 funded projects.²⁸ Lithuania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Program, allocates funds in the following areas: regional development (48 projects, the majority of the total); civil society, strengthening of democracy, and promotion of women's social and economic activities (45 projects); administrative and institutional capability-building (37 projects); economic and social

²⁴Before 2009-LVL 86 837.31 (approximately €123 559) plus additional €10 000 for "Providing textbooks for pupils of Kaspi and Kareli districts after the 2008 August War, implemented by Embassy of Latvia in Georgia and the organization "World Vision Georgia"; (€4212); LVL 1= EUR 1.42288. MFA of Latvia. (no date) Available from:

<http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/development-co-operation/latvia-s-contribution-to-development-assistance>

²⁵Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (no date) *Development co-operation projects and priority countries-Georgia*.

[Online] Available from: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/development-co-operation/latvia-s-contribution-to-development-assistance> [Accessed 6 June 2017].

²⁶Data is provided by Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Latvia, Development Cooperation Policy Division (Personal Communication via e-mail, 30 May 2017).

²⁷Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (2008) *Cooperation with Georgia*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/development-co-operation/development-co-operation-projects-and-priority-countries/cooperation-with-georgia> [Accessed 30 May 2017].

²⁸Lithuanian Development Cooperation. (no date) *Bendradarbiavimas su Gruzija (Cooperation with Georgia)*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.orangeprojects.lt/lt/gruzija/bendradarbiavimas-su-gruzija> [Accessed 30 May, 2017]

development (18 projects).²⁹ In general, supporting Euro-Atlantic integration processes particularly represents a priority area for Lithuania within the development cooperation policy. When it comes to 2017, €102,000 is allocated for the implementation of seven projects, while in 2016 €150,607 was allocated for 12 projects. The largest share of 2017 funding will go to Strengthening Civil Society in the Environmental Field, while the largest share in 2016 went to regional development.³⁰

Table 1. Funds allocated to Georgia from the respective development cooperation policies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania for the period of 2012-2017, as well as total sums.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Sum
Estonia	€772 481	€751 703	€857 290	€951 809*	€950 000	€950 000	2006-2017 ³¹ €9.44 million
Latvia	95 457364 LVL (€135 824.76)	110 785.11 LVL (€157 633.91)	€153 209.67	€173 438.52	€171 601.34	—	2005-2008 ³² €397 333.11 2010-2016 ³³ €1 178 126.67
Lithuania	370 002 LT (€127 650)	300 248 LT (€103 600)	€60 735.50	€106 394	€150 607	€102 000	2005-2016 ³⁴ €1.78 million

*Excluding humanitarian aid

²⁹Ibid.,

³⁰Lithuanian Development Cooperation. (no date) *Projects*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.orangeprojects.lt/en/georgia/georgia-projects> [Accessed 30 May 2017].

³¹MFA of Estonia. (no date) *Estonian Development Cooperation Country Strategy Paper Georgia 2016-2018*. [Online] Available from: http://vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/development-cooperation/gruusia_maastrateegia_2016_2018_eng.pdf [Accessed 10 April 2017].

³²Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (2008) *Cooperation with Georgia*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/development-co-operation/development-co-operation-projects-and-priority-countries/cooperation-with-georgia> [Accessed 30 May 2017].

³³Data is provided by Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Latvia, Development Cooperation Policy Division (Personal Communication via e-mail, 30 May 2017).

³⁴Lithuanian Development Cooperation. (no date) *Projektai (Projects)*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.orangeprojects.lt/lt/gruzija/gruzijos-projektai> [Accessed 6 June 2017].

SECURITY POLICY

The third and last rationale for the Baltic states' close cooperation with and support for Georgia is related to security issues, especially the Russian factor. Despite the fact that accession to the EU and NATO provided the Baltics with a sense of security in the shadow of neighboring Russia, at first, the 2008 Russia-Georgian August war and later the war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and the annexation of Crimea have given rise to renewed feelings of insecurity. These events have demonstrated to the Baltics "the extent of Russian actions" (Jakniūnaitė, 2016: p.17). While it is considered highly unlikely, "the idea that Russia might somehow invade one of the Baltic states became an accepted and normal part of discussions" – Dovilė Jakniūnaitė notes (2016: p.17). This feeling has been particularly strengthened by the fact that Russia has been conducting military exercises (annual Zapad exercises) along the Baltic states' borders, which as Mark Kramer from Harvard University notes, can be considered as "a reminder of the exercises that preceded Russia's invasion of Georgia" (2013: p.4) (meaning, Kavkaz-2008 military exercises, in 15-31, July, 2008 in the north part of the Georgian border); as well as Russia's justification for its actions in Georgia (and in Ukraine in 2014) as protection of the rights of its citizens, a fact alarming for the Baltics as they also have ethnic Russian minorities in their countries – as it is explained by Kakachia and Skardžiūtė-Kereselidze (2013: p.201).

Thus, the Russian factor (including dependence on Russian energy sources, mainly gas; and sizeable/large Russian-speaking populations) heavily influences the Baltic states' domestic and foreign policy priorities and strategies (Kesa, 2012: p.98). Because they perceive Russia to be a threat to their own stability and that of their neighbors, the Baltic states have belonged to "the critical or anti-Russian camp in the EU" (Wilson, 2015: p.52) for some time and advocate for a firmer EU policy vis-à-vis Russia.

The Baltic states' support for Georgia in terms of security can be explained *first* by the fact that, as Nils Muižnieks writes on the example of Latvia, "examining Russian relations with Georgia can provide Latvia with crucial insight into Russian foreign policy tactics towards neighbouring countries, as well as leverage for understanding the evolution of the Russian polity" (2008: p.6). As Kasekamp explained during the interview "Georgia as a front line with Russia" can serve as the "canary in the coal mine" for the Baltic states, meaning that by tracking closely what is happening in Georgia, they might be able to understand Russia's intentions more generally (Interview with Kasekamp, 2017). Therefore, from this perspective, the Baltic states' support for Georgia can be identified as a pragmatic, interest-based policy driven by the "small states-threat perception" – as Vahur Made calls it (Made, 2011: p.68). It is in the interest of the Baltic states and their security to make sure that prosperity, stability, security, and democratization are achieved in Georgia, and that, as Dovilė Šukytė, a policy analyst at the Eastern Europe Studies Center explains, they have a like-minded and strong

ally and safer and democratic neighborhood (Interview with Šukytė, 2017), in general. And *second*, it can be also labeled an identity-based policy, driven by historical memory and perceptions. Meaning that by looking back at their own history and experiences, including that of fighting for sovereignty and for the ability to choose their own destiny, and their understanding what it means to have “independent foreign policies under the shadow of a big neighbor” (Kakachia & Skardžiūtė-Kereselidze, 2013: p.196), the Baltics perceive Georgia as of the “us” and try to assist in increasing the EU and NATO influence in order to lessen Russian influence in the country. Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations and quest for membership are also driven by a desire to obtain Western security guarantees against neighboring Russia, similar to the case of the Baltics (Mälksoo, 2006: p.277).

CONCLUSION

In sum, notwithstanding geographical distance and still-developing trade relations, Georgia represents a priority country for the Baltic states within the Euro-Atlantic space; each Baltic state allocates development cooperation funds and shares knowledge and expertise. Georgia is a country with which the Baltics enjoy common values, historical links, and shared experiences.

Since the early 2000s, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian support have increased. Having been successfully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic space, the three Baltic states have expressed willingness to act as knowledge providers for Georgia and to support the country (both politically and economically) on its path toward achieving deeper integration and eventual membership in the EU and NATO. Thus, the projects launched and implemented by the Baltic states have provided Georgia with assistance in implementing reforms derived from the EU-Georgia AA, targeting the country’s economic and social development, including supporting regional development, democratic structures, and good governance.

Lastly, having examined the Baltic states policies toward Georgia and the factors contributing to their strong support for the country, particularly on its Euro-Atlantic integration path, this paper argues that close partnership and assistance for Georgia is both a strategic objective (interest-based policy) and a moral obligation (value-based/identity-based policy) on the part of the Baltic states, and thus support can be explained by three interrelated factors: common historical experience – *solidarity policy*; each country’s desire to increase its respective visibility inside the EU – *niche policy*; and security considerations – *security policy*. All three motivations are interlinked and dovetail into the ultimate outcome – the Baltic states’ ardent support for Georgia.

As support for Georgia is deeply grounded in both their identity and strategic interests, it is probable that Baltic policies toward Georgia will not change in the near future. However, Georgia should not take this constant support for granted, as Baltic solidarity and assistance might be understood as conditional upon Georgia's readiness and willingness to advance and consolidate its democracy, achieve closer EU and NATO integration, and become a "true" European state—in particular, the Baltic states' *niche policies* involve promoting democratization and Europeanization. Therefore, it is important for Georgia to continue to perceive the Baltics as role models for reform, democratic transformation, and integration into the EU and NATO, and to further strengthen ties with the Baltic states.

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