JOINING NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION: 
THE ROLE OF BELIEFS IN ESTONIAN FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING 

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ........................................................................................................................... 3

1. **INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................................... 4

2. **METHODOLOGY** ..................................................................................................................... 7
   2.1. Method ...................................................................................................................................... 7
   2.2. Sources ..................................................................................................................................... 8

3. **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS** ..................................................................................... 8
   3.1. Rational choice models and cognitive models compared ....................................................... 8
       3.1.1. Rational choice models ................................................................................................ 9
       3.1.2. Psychological models .................................................................................................. 10

4. **BASIC CONCEPTS** .............................................................................................................. 14
   4.1. Beliefs ................................................................................................................................. 15
   4.2. Learning ............................................................................................................................. 17

5. **THE MODEL** ....................................................................................................................... 19

6. **ESTONIAN-NATO RELATIONS** ........................................................................................ 21
   6.1. Possible options for Estonia ............................................................................................... 21
   6.2. Estonia and NATO ........................................................................................................... 22

7. **ANALYSIS** ........................................................................................................................ 26
   7.3. Closer partnership with the West: 1998- ......................................................................... 43

8. **CONCLUSIONS** ................................................................................................................ 46

**LIST OF REFERENCES** ......................................................................................................... 47
ABSTRACT

The basic idea of the thesis is to examine the Estonian foreign policy elite’s beliefs in decision-making process towards the Estonia’s membership in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the paper it will be shown that the Estonian foreign policy elite tend to emphasize historical experience in making crucial foreign policy decisions. The theory used here suggests that foreign policy makers together with media use information stored in their “knowledge structures”, i.e. beliefs (e.g. history or world views) during foreign policy-making, and tend to ignore other alternative incoming (operative) information, i.e. current threats. Accordingly, it is concluded in the paper that Estonian foreign policy makers have “learned” lessons from history, which have helped them to evaluate any new situation. The following research question is posed in this paper: what are the beliefs the Estonian foreign policy elite bears in mind? When and how have these beliefs been used during the period of 1991-1998? In the analysis I want to address top-down information processing model, that a conceptually based information, i.e. commonly shared historical experience emphasizes the role of different kinds of beliefs in perceptions and further interpretations. The result of such kind of information processing is often misperception of other actors’ actions in international politics.
1. INTRODUCTION

On June 17, 1940, Estonia was occupied by the Soviet troops. The path to this event had been paved by installing Soviet military bases in Estonia after a Soviet-German non-aggression agreement was signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop on August 23, 1939, and a pact for the establishment of military bases was imposed on Estonia in September of the same year\(^1\). This event has always been in the memories of the Estonian people and it also showed clearly that a policy of neutrality failed totally, and now this mistake should not be repeated again.

Immediately after restoring the independence in the fall of 1991, the major concern was to secure Estonia against Russia’s instability and unpredictability. As Russia was expected to behave as it had been doing during all of its history, the Estonian foreign policy elite faced a problem: How to avoid repeating past mistakes? An Estonian colonel has put it straightforwardly:

“"The historical source of threat to our independence has been and will remain Russia with its special interest towards the Baltic region and its great-power politics"\(^2\)."

It was thus considered logical to seek membership in *Western* security structures. This situation gives history a major part in a pile of arguments for justifying Estonia’s desire to join the Western security organizations. Because Russia has always been “bad” against Estonia and Estonian people, a belief\(^3\) or common knowledge was created that now Estonia would have a moral right to seek a membership in NATO. Having history in the mind the external stimuli are interpreted in terms of this belief. Following the case of Estonia, one might say that this belief has actually become a

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3 K.J. Holsti defines beliefs as propositions that policy makers hold to be true, even if they cannot be verified. They are the foundation of national “myths” and ideologies, and efforts to question or examine them systematically are often met with hostility or even persecution. Some beliefs that are widespread in societies and expressed in the behavior of policy makers include those claiming that a particular nation, “way of life”, or ethnic group is superior to any other, that a particular political system or economic order is superior to others, that human progress and moral improvement are inevitable, that communism is inevitable, or that a particular country will always be a threat. See: K.J. Holsti “International Politics: A Framework for Analysis”, London: Prentice/Hall International, Inc., 1974, p. 363.
value\textsuperscript{4}, although analytically there is no big difference. Among beliefs, of course, scholars have identified several types of beliefs. Some of them can change easier, while others may not change at all. I will come back to the concept of beliefs later in the paper.

The next question to be answered in this paper is: How much do beliefs matter in foreign policy-making? There is, of course, a debate going on what is more important in foreign policy-making: is it, as I said, previous experience and beliefs, or are the systemic factors of world politics more important\textsuperscript{5}. In other words, do states behave according to the beliefs in the mind or according to the external threats? Several studies have shown the growing importance of the first, while the second, realist-rational paradigm has lost its importance according to the changes in the international system. At least the fact that decision-makers learn from history seems to be a common sense\textsuperscript{6}. A myriad of scholars in the field of social and political psychology have studied the impact of beliefs on foreign policy decision-making, suggesting that there is a causal relationship between beliefs, perceptions and decision-making\textsuperscript{7}. The purpose of this paper is not so much to find out causality between these three components, but rather to show, first, what kind of beliefs are more emphasized and under what circumstances they may be persistent or non-persistent during some time-span; second, what kind of impact beliefs may have on decisions made within the realm of foreign policy-making; and finally, has there any change taken place in beliefs of Estonian foreign policy elite.

Scholars have long recognized the importance of the initial stages of decision-making - the perception and interpretation of information (processing it). In order to say something about beliefs and their impact on foreign policy-making I will further in the paper show how it would be possible on the basis of the cognitive-rational

\textsuperscript{4} Holsti defines values as the result of upbringing, political socialization in various group contexts, indoctrination, and personal experience. They serve as standards against which our own actions and those of others are judged, and are thus the bases of many of our attitudes. Values point out the general direction toward which our actions should be directed (wealth, power, prestige, happiness, isolation) and for policy-makers they also serve as reasons and justifications for goals, decisions, and actions. See: K.J. Holsti (1974), p. 363.
\textsuperscript{5} For example, structural realists (e.g. Waltz) argue that systemic factors are key in understanding state’s foreign policy, history does not matter. See: Kenneth Waltz “Theory of International Politics”, New York, Random House, 1979.
\textsuperscript{6} Dan Reiter, “Crucible of Beliefs”, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 4
debate to extract the two basic models of information processing: top-down (theory-based, cognitive) and bottom-up (data-based). Generally speaking, when perceptions of the world are dominated by the characteristics of the informational inputs (events, data, i.e. changes in the environment) we call it bottom-up or data-driven processing. Top-down or conceptually driven processing emphasizes the role of stored knowledge in perceptions\(^8\), resistant to external influences (e.g. threats). Information processing is especially important tool for showing how policy-makers perceive or react to the external stimuli (e.g. Russian actions). The question is: How individual decision-makers interpret the information they receive as inputs? (history + threat). I suggest that individual’s information processing depends more on the informational inputs from within the system (some sort of \textit{shared} common knowledge about historical experience and the individuals’ own prior knowledge, i.e. beliefs), than on informational inputs from outside the system. The virtue of such an analysis is that foreign policy decision-makers, like other information processors, must interpret the events that concern them; that is they must build subjective understandings of world events. As I will further show, historical events concern Estonian foreign policy-makers well enough, resulting in belief creation and further institutionalization of the beliefs, giving some of them a top priority value. In order to understand better how both information-processing approaches work, I will present the cognitive-rational debate within the theoretical part of my paper. In the final part of my thesis I will try to show, using a lot of examples from the speeches, statements and newspaper articles of the Estonian foreign policy elite, how these beliefs may be operative and further used in foreign policy-making. The case to be analyzed is the integration into NATO.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Method

The empirical part of this thesis focuses on what is usually called verbal politics. It is suggested that words of politicians (or other decision-makers, or journalists) in some ways may be seen as the real contents of politics, and that they always are of great importance in the study of national security. The concept of beliefs in perceptions is central in this context. The methods used here include qualitative content analysis of speeches, articles, and interviews made with different foreign policy-makers, or so-called foreign policy elite. I consider also the journalists being a part of foreign policy elite and, for the sake of simplicity, I refer to them also as “foreign policy-makers”. Both primary (speeches, parliamentary stenography, and interviews) and secondary (newspaper articles, books, or journals) sources are used. The qualitative content analysis is selective, in the respect that only relevant articles will be analyzed. One of the shortcomings of this kind of analysis involves an interpretative element that could lead to epistemological problems.

According to Graber qualitative content analysis involves “the systematic, directed search of selected documents of presence or absence of a limited amount of presumably significant information. It differs from quantitative research by deemphasising the potentially equal importance of all content elements, focusing instead on preselected key elements”. Qualitative methods generally refer to a range of techniques including participant observation (overt and covert observation and involvement) and intense interviewing (in-depth individual and group interviews). Qualitative methods have ranged from the study of individuals and groups inside the political arena, to the political attitudes and behavior of people outside it. The aim of

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10 By foreign policymakers I mean the people who in their everyday life deal with foreign policy issues, e.g. the President, high-ranking politicians, MP-s, officials from different ministries, also opinionformers and opinionleaders from different media and press agencies.
11 Winnerstig 1996, p. 28
the current study is thus to explore foreign policy-makers’ subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences.

2.2. Sources

The analysis is largely based on the articles from the biggest daily newspaper in Estonia - Postimees, which counts for approximately 60 000 copies per day. The amount of readers is estimated about 250 000 people per day. Due to the lack of time I could not include other newspapers (only some of them have been included). In favor of Postimees I would say that it has also been the most consistent newspaper in Estonia, meaning that during the years 1991-1998 the newspaper has not changed its name and style, and even the reporters have remained the same. Analytically it is good that the paper has been holding the same line of analysis concerning Estonian foreign and security policy. It might be relevant to characterize it as a nationally oriented, moderately critical paper. The time-span (roughly put) for the analysis is 1991-1998. Other materials for the qualitative analysis were found mostly from the newspaper articles, different publications and books, and finally 9 interviews were performed for this study.

3. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1. Rational choice models and cognitive models compared

Foreign policy decisions have typically been explained by either the rational actor or cognitive psychology models. At the core of the debate are questions about the actual decision-making behavior of political leaders or foreign policy elite generally: whether they maximize or satisfy utility, “whether they are engaged in a holistic or non-holistic search, whether they are capable of making detailed calculations or are limited to simplifying heuristics”\(^{15}\). There are of course different

\(^{14}\) for example, in 01.08.98, the number of copies was 66 200 (per day).

models and approaches dealing with decision-making process, because of complexity of this process and the multiplicity of personal, political, institutional and cultural considerations that can shape decisions. Therefore, my aim is not to oppose these two models to each other, but rather show that they complement each other.

Robert Jervis argues that “explanatory power of different models must come from auxiliary assumptions about the identities of actors, their goals, and their beliefs”\(^\text{16}\). This is most obviously true for rationalism, which argues that behavior can be understood as the actor’s attempt to maximize some consistent utility function. But this claim says nothing about what the actors value and what behaviors they believe will produce maximum benefit. This is not only explainable by rational-realist assumption but necessitates also looking upon cognitive and motivational psychological approaches. Let me start with rational choice models.

3.1.1. Rational choice models

Traditional social science theory depicted decision-making as an essentially rational process. This assumed that policy-makers processed information in a relatively straightforward and honest manner in order to discover the best policy alternative. According to Richard N. Lebow, to do this, “they identified the alternatives, estimated the probability of success of each, and assessed their impact upon the values they sought to maximize. Policy-makers were thought of as receptive to new information. As they learned more about a particular problem they were expected to make more complex and sophisticated judgments about the implications of the various policy alternatives they considered”\(^\text{17}\).

Rational choice models treat initial preferences and expectations as exogenous and then model a decision based on the assumption that people maximize expected utility. They assume that people are “instrumentally rational”: “Given their existing preferences, people are expected to engage in an appropriate end-means

\(^{16}\) Robert Jervis “Realism in the Study of World Politics”, *International Organization* 52, 4, Autumn 1998, pp. 971-972

calculation”\textsuperscript{18}. Alex Mintz describes it as a process according to which “decision-makers attempt to think about the outcomes that could result from the available choices as well as the chances of those outcomes occurring, and then choose the alternative that seems in some rough way to offer the best potential”\textsuperscript{19}.

Analysts who work with more relaxed set of assumptions about rational choice have elaborated a concept of “procedural rationality”, or a set of norms which guide the process of choice. According to Lebow & Stein, “these norms dictate an active search for relevant information and options, estimates of the likelihood and value of the consequences of the principal options, revision of estimates in response to new information, and choice of the option that promises the highest expected utility. People are expected to think about outcomes in terms of their final welfare or total assets. Insofar as people conform to these relaxed norms of a rational process, new information can lead to a revision of preference orderings and choices”\textsuperscript{20}.

How to explain choice behavior? According to Jon Elster, “rational choice theory appeals to three distinct elements in the choice situation. The first element is the feasible set, i.e., the set of all courses of action, which (are rationally believed to) satisfy various logical, physical, and economic constraints. The second is (a set of rational beliefs about) the causal structure of the situation, which determines what course of action will lead to what outcomes. The third is a subjective ranking of the feasible alternatives, usually derived from a ranking of the outcomes to which they (are expected to) lead. To act rationally, then, simply means to choose the highest-ranked element in the feasible set”\textsuperscript{21}. Several questions raise here: if there is the uncertainty in the international relations, in terms of outcomes, how foreign policy-makers still know how to behave or act? Can they handle all the relevant information? Maybe psychological models can give us better answer.

3.1.2. Psychological models

\textsuperscript{19} Mintz 1997, p. 2
\textsuperscript{20} Lebow & Stein 1993, p. 96
\textsuperscript{21} Cf. Miles Kahler “Rationality in International Relations”, International Organization 52, 4, Autumn 1998, p. 923
In very many situations, we see something different from the rational process that I have just described. Evidence from the cognitive studies has shown that people just do not make decisions as prescribed by the classical model. Alex Mintz put it straightforwardly: “People seldom maximize utility, they frequently violate the invariance assumption while being sensitive to ‘framing’ effects, and they refrain from complex calculations because of cognitive limitations”\(^{22}\).

Within the political psychology discourse there are also several different schools of thought. In this paper I will describe 2 psychological approaches: cognitive and motivational (affective). We have to bear in mind that those cognitive functions and affective functions of both interpretation and policy decisions are closely interactive.

**Cognitive approach** emphasizes the ways in which human cognitive limitations distort decision-making by gross simplifications in problem representation and information processing\(^{23}\). A fundamental premise of cognitive models is that “people are cognitive misers: they are more responsive to information that supports their beliefs than to that which challenges them, they tend to deny or discount inconsistent information, they are slow to change their beliefs in response to new evidence, and when they do, they do so incrementally”\(^{24}\). People tend to assimilate incoming information to these beliefs (top-down information processing). E.g. Estonia’s NATO pursuit is affected by the bitter historical experience, which seems to hinder taking other security political alternatives on the agenda. Richard Ned Lebow illustrates why is it so: “There is a growing evidence that people process and interpret information according to a set of mental rules that bear little relationship to those of formal logic. This occurs partly also because international politics imposes heavy information-processing demands on policy-makers. Numerous experiments point to the conclusion that people try to keep their beliefs, feelings, actions, and cognitions mutually consistent”\(^{25}\).

Robert Jervis in his path breaking study suggested also that it is impossible to explain crucial foreign policy decisions without reference to policy-makers’ beliefs about the world and the motives of other actors in it. Jervis: “These beliefs organized

\(^{22}\) Mintz 1997, p. 2
\(^{23}\) Lebow 1981 (1990), p. 102
\(^{24}\) Lebow & Stein 1993, p. 110
\(^{25}\) Lebow 1981 (1990), p. 103
as ‘images’, shape the way in which policy-makers respond to external stimuli’²⁶. Jervis suggests that the primary source of images is stereotyped interpretations of dramatic historical events, especially wars and revolutions (in the case of Estonia: events in 1939-40). The major part of Jervis’ study is devoted to analyzing the ways in which images, once formed, affect foreign policy behavior. He makes here the distinction between “rational and irrational consistency”. Jervis notes that “the principle of consistency helps us to make sense of new information as it draws upon our accumulated experience, formulated as a set of expectations and beliefs”²⁷. It also provides continuity to people’s behavior. Here Jervis stresses that “the pursuit of consistency becomes irrational when it closes people’s minds to new information or different points of view. Once an expectation or belief has taken hold, new information is assimilated to it”²⁸. This means that policy-makers are more responsive to information that supports their existing beliefs than they are to information that challenges them (for example, in 1997 Russia offered security guarantees to Estonia, which was immediately rejected by Estonian foreign policy-makers). It usually happens that “when confronted with critical information, they [policy-makers] tend to misunderstand it, twist its meaning to make it consistent, explain it away, deny it, or simply ignore it. When policy-makers finally recognize the need to reformulate an image, they are likely to adopt the first one that provides a decent fit. Images change incrementally, there is a ‘masking effect’ of preexisting beliefs”²⁹. Lebow adds: “Since reliance on preexisting beliefs is both widespread and necessary for the processing of new information, the political psychology research program must assess when such reliance becomes irrational and distorts policy outcomes”. Khong and others argue that this reliance is not irrational per se, “but it becomes irrational only when perseverance and denial dominate openness and flexibility”³⁰. Kahler sees here a dilemma: “the rationality of reliance on existing schemas or cognitive maps for interpreting the world is dependent on the desirability of updating beliefs more or less frequently in the face of discrepant information”³¹.

²⁷ Jervis 1996, cf Lebow, p. 104
²⁸ ibid, p. 105
²⁹ ibid.
³¹ Kahler 1998, p. 927
In another book Jervis talks about cognitive (unmotivated) biases. He suggests that people’s thinking is heavily theory-driven\textsuperscript{32}: “decision-makers may overlook that evidence supporting their theory may also be consistent with other theories or express sheer coincidence”\textsuperscript{33}. Jervis suggests that people’s perceptions are strongly colored by their beliefs about how the world works and what patterns it is likely to present with (worldviews). The decision-maker who thinks that the other side is hostile will see ambiguous information as confirming this image, whereas the same information about a country thought to be friendly would be taken more benignly\textsuperscript{34}. On a more abstract level statesmen probably vary in their predisposition to perceive threat; some believe the world is generally one of the high conflict, and others think common interests are more likely to prevail\textsuperscript{35}.

In sum, there are several deviations from rational decision-making, which, according to Lebow, might be described as decision-making “pathologies”: “1) the overvaluation of past performance as against present reality, 2) overconfidence in policies to which decision-makers are committed [for example, overconfidence that NATO-policy would succeed], and 3) insensitivity to information critical of these policies”\textsuperscript{36}. Of course, there are several other theories dealing with these “pathologies” \textsuperscript{37}. Summing up, for me the psychological perspective on decision-making appears to be the most relevant by virtue of the insights it offers into the causes and effects of different beliefs and their impact on foreign policy decisions.

\textsuperscript{34} Also national self-images have been considered as having an important influence on policy. Theories of ethnocentrism, for example, are based on the premise that policy-makers tend to view their own motivation and behavior in a more favorable light than they do that of other actors. Most studies of self-images are just an elaboration of enemy image theories, where ethnocentric hostility is focused on a particular enemy. See: Ole R. Holsti 1962; Lebow 1981 (1990), p. 195
\textsuperscript{36} Lebow 1981 (1990), p. 112
\textsuperscript{37} for example, prospect theory. It points to deviations from expected utility theory, the conventional means of explaining choice under conditions of risk. Individuals systematically and frequently evaluate outcomes with respect to a reference point rather than using net losses or gains; individuals are risk-averse with respect to gains from that reference point and risk-acceptant with regard to losses; and preference ordering varies according to the framing of prospects (a clear violation of the criterion of invariance in rational choice) This reference (framing) dependence is the central analytic assumption of prospect theory. It violates the expected utility postulate of an individual utility function that is defined over levels of assets. People treat gains and losses differently: they overvalue losses relative to comparable gains (loss aversion). People tend to value what they have more than comparable things that they do not have, and the disutility of relinquishing a good is greater than the utility of acquiring it. See: Jack S. Levy “Prospect Theory and the Cognitive-Rational Debate”, in Geva & Mintz 1997, p. 33-35.
Another school of thought in political psychology emphasizes the importance of motivation as a source of perceptual distortion. They see human beings as having a strong need to maintain images of the self or the environment conducive to their emotional well being. Some historical psychological traumas may have relevance here. Janis and Mann start from the assumption that “decision-makers are emotional beings, not rational calculators, that they are beset by doubts and uncertainties, struggle with incongruous longings, antipathies, and loyalties, and are reluctant to make irrevocable choices”\(^{38}\). “They desire to avoid fear, shame, and guilt, that the aversion of psychological stress is the most important drive affecting cognition”\(^{39}\). Motivated errors can lead decision-makers to underestimate or overestimate threats. Jervis notes that “States will be motivated to perceive a threat as smaller or less troublesome than it actually is”\(^{40}\). It is hard to say how much historical “traumas” may have impact on Estonian foreign policy-makers’ motivation, but at least according to the words of an Estonian colonel, this may be the case:

> “The capitulation in 1939, further repressions and 50 years of totalitarian rule have left a profound psychological trauma to the Estonian people, which is reflected in: 1) the weakness of the mentality of being independent and free nation (patriotism, pride, desire to defend the country); 2) the complex of being undervalued: the lack of belief in its strength, including defense capabilities of the state; attempt to copy everything what comes from outside; 3) mental and physical underdevelopment: alcoholism, mental disabilities, egoistic individualism, high crime etc.”\(^{41}\)

The theory that shows how these two approaches are combined is still beyond our grasp.

### 4. Basic Concepts

The understanding of the whole process of using beliefs and history by Estonian foreign policy-makers necessitates looking closer at the basic concepts used in the

\(^{38}\) Cf Lebow 1981 (1990) p. 107


\(^{40}\) Jervis 1985, p. 25-26
current study. Most relevant concepts appear to be the concept of beliefs, in order to find out what kind of beliefs we could differentiate for the current analysis; and the concept of learning, in order to show how the beliefs can be used in practice.

4.1. Beliefs

The mainstream study on beliefs has been released by Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane. Goldstein & Keohane identify three types of beliefs:

1) worldviews (conceptions of possibility). Worldviews are the cultural-symbolic modes of thought and discourse. Worldviews express people’s conceptions of their identities, evoking deep emotions and loyalties. Accordingly, idea or belief in independence and democratic Europe may be the case in Estonia. And NATO is seen the important promoter of peace and democracy in the World.

2) principled beliefs. They consist of “normative ideas that specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and just form unjust”. E.g. that “slavery is wrong”, that human beings have the “right of free speech”. Principled beliefs mediate between worldviews and particular policy conclusions; they translate fundamental doctrines into guidance for foreign policy action. In the case of Estonia they probably help to define Russia within the broader worldview about democracy and peace in the World generally, referring to the historical experience and moral justice. Changes in principled beliefs, as well changes in worldviews (if they change at all), have a profound impact on political action.

3) causal beliefs. They are beliefs about cause-effect relationships, originating from shared consensus of recognized elites, whether they be politicians or scientists at elite institutions. Such causal beliefs provide guides for individuals on how to achieve their goals. The belief that joining NATO would guide Estonia to a democratic and peaceful world may be one such belief, the belief that NATO is the best organization for guaranteeing Estonia’s security. Causal beliefs deal with strategies for the accomplishment of goals and are valued because of shared principled beliefs, and understandable only within the context of broader worldviews. This would imply that NATO is important for Estonia because of shared bad historical experience, and

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41 Laaneots 1996, p. 21
42 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 8
43 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 9
44 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 10
understandable within the worldview of democracy and independence (“survival”). Changes in the conceptualization of cause-effect relationships take place more frequently and more quickly than do changes in either worldviews or principled beliefs. It suggests that there may be some other ways to achieve the ultimate goal of Estonian foreign policy - integration into the democratic and peaceful West (e.g. joining the European Union). The main idea here is that “Insofar as ideas put blinders on people, reducing the number of conceivable alternatives, they serve as invisible switchmen, not only by turning action onto certain tracks rather than others, but also by obscuring the other tracks from the agent’s view”45. It means that some sort of neutrality is excluded from Estonia’s foreign and security policy discourse.

Goldstein & Keohane also provide us for the way how ideas influence policy outcomes. There are three causal pathways through which ideas are hold the potential of influencing policy outcomes:

1) “ideas serve as road maps”46. Once an idea or belief is selected, this pathway limits choice because it logically excludes other interpretations of reality or does not suggest any further exploration. According to Goldstein & Keohane, “ideas serve the purpose of guiding behavior under conditions of uncertainty by stipulating causal patterns or by providing compelling ethical or moral motivations for action”.

2) “ideas contribute to outcomes in the absence of a unique equilibrium. They may serve as focal points that define cooperative solutions or act as coalitional glue to facilitate the cohesion of particular groups - which may even prevent agreement on a wider basis”47 (e.g. there is no public debate on NATO issues in Estonia).

3) “ideas embedded in institutions specify policy in the absence of innovation. Once ideas become embedded in rules and norms - that is, once they become institutionalized - they constrain public policy”48. Goldstein & Keohane suggest that on all these three paths, ideas matter: “policy would have been different in the absence of the idea in question”49. The authors suggest also that “Ideas serve the purpose of guiding behavior under conditions of uncertainty by stipulating causal patterns or by providing compelling ethical or moral motivations for action. Causal ideas respond directly to uncertainty by reducing it, whereas principled ideas enable

45 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 12
46 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 12
47 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 12
48 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 13
49 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 13
people to behave decisively despite causal uncertainty. Principled ideas can shift the focus of attention to moral issues and away from purely instrumental ones focused on material interests and power. Political elites may choose courses of action on the basis of shared cultural, normative, religious, ethnic, or causal beliefs (focal point). Other policies may be ignored.

Peter Haas argues that in every organization (or country) there are some sort of “epistemic communities”, which are constituted by knowledge-based experts who share both cause-effect conceptions and sets of normative and principled beliefs. This helps to keep beliefs consistent over time, despite the possible changes in cause-effect conceptions (causal beliefs). This reasoning suggests also that policy-makers or even organizations (e.g. states) have learned from history. Haas describes the situation as follows: “On the organizational level the collective interpretation of history is often an explicit goal of organizations; events are invested with meaning and then developed into organizational stories or paradigms. The tendency in organizations is to sustain conventional interpretations of these myths, such that they are resistant to change even in the face of disconfirming evidence.”

4.2. Learning

It is assumed here that top decision-makers as well as bureaucracy learn “lessons” from the past (how to deal with the “hereditary enemy”, for instance). According to Hans Mouritzen: “They [decision-makers] repeat behavior defined as ‘successes’ or shun behavior defined as ‘failures’. Present behavior depends not only on present conditions, but also on the way incoming information is interpreted in terms of ‘theories’ inherited from the past. Applying a ‘theory’ requires historical analogy: a current situation is said to be somehow ‘similar’ to a historical situation. One is tempted to use an old, successful remedy the next time one faces a seemingly ‘corresponding’ situation.” Dan Reiter in his book “Crucible of Beliefs” wrote also “learning means the application of information derived from past experiences to

50 Goldstein & Keohane 1993, p. 16-17
facilitate understanding of a particular policy question”\textsuperscript{54}. According to Reiter, the basic learning argument is as follows: “A small power is either allied or neutral in a world war and has either a successful or a failed experience during the war. From this experience, the small power draws the lesson that alliance is best or that neutrality is best and chooses alliance or neutrality in the peacetime years following the war based on this lesson”\textsuperscript{55}.

Steven Weber suggests that states have a “critical learning period” in their history: “Learning occurs when decision-makers respond with a fundamental restructuring of belief systems and a redefinition of self-interest - in short, a shift in the first tier of cognitive structure (strategic foreign policy model). A new strategic model gets selected from a menu of available choices. The critical learning period comes to an end when the new model is institutionalized in the state’s decision-making system. These institutions then constrain further change: they permit and sometimes even foster adaptation, but tenaciously protect the first tier of cognitive structure. It will not change again until the state confronts another critical learning period, if it ever does”\textsuperscript{56}.

The more specific way in which beliefs can be used in foreign policy-making is schemas or analogies (some sort of knowledge structures). Analogical reasoning is the process through which analogies are made operative. The psychology of analogical reasoning begins with the idea that human beings are creatures with limited cognitive capacities. As a result, a means by which they cope with the enormous amount of information they encounter is the reliance on “knowledge structures” such as analogies or schemas\textsuperscript{57}. These knowledge structures “help” them order, interpret and simplify, in a word, to make sense of their environment. Matching each new instance with instances stored in memory is then a major way human beings comprehend with their world\textsuperscript{58}. According to Yuen Foong Khong, once the analogy or schema is accessed, “it 1) allows the perceiver to go beyond the information given, 2) processes information ‘top-down’, and 3) can lead to the phenomenon of perseverance”\textsuperscript{59}. Social psychologists say that new events tend to be assimilated into preexisting

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Reiter 1996, p. 19-20
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Reiter 1996, p. 3
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Khong 1992, p. 13
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Khong 1992, p.14
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Khong 1992, p.14
\end{itemize}
structures in the mind, because of the limited cognitive capacities of human beings. Cognitive psychology thus describes people as “cognitive misers”, “satisfiers”, or people with “bounded rationality”, human beings are assumed to have limited computational capacities. Khong concludes here that “human beings have to rely on some sort of simplifying mechanism to cope and to process - to code, store, and recall - the massive amount of information they encounter in their daily lives”\(^{60}\).

5. THE MODEL

The main idea of this study is to look at the reasoning process of Estonian foreign policy-makers toward NATO and Russia. Proponents of rational or bottom-up thinking would say that joining NATO was a rational decision, because ends and means were calculated and the best option chosen in the belief that this option would lead to a greater security, and consequently greater utility (even despite the risk of short-term loss in gains according to prospect theory). Cognitive theorists, on the other hand, refer to the complexity of incoming information. The best way to handle with it is to ignore some of information, in order to make decision-making simpler for themselves. In order to do that, history may be very helpful. To take this a step further, my suggestion is that the policy-makers relied on historical events in 1939-40 as well as on the worldview of “democratic and peaceful West/Europe” in justifying NATO membership.

My proposition could be expressed in more concrete terms: the Estonian foreign policy-makers are strongly influenced by historical “bad” experiences with Russia/Soviet Union. The question is if they also have strong rational argumentation behind the decision to join NATO? Causal beliefs can be a part of this kind of argumentation. Looking at the results of my qualitative inquiry, it could be possible to show in the light of rational-cognitive debate, what kind of beliefs we can identify in the content of the texts posed by foreign policy decision-makers, including the opinion formers from the media. As I noted in the theoretical part of my paper, I will use the model proposed by Goldstein & Keohane for evaluating different types of beliefs (or ideas) within the broader top-down and bottom-up information processing

\(^{60}\) Khong 1992, p.25
procedures. Interesting is to see whether there has been any change in beliefs since 1991 up to 1998. The model looks like as follows:

Historical experience (1939-40) \(\rightarrow\) top-down information processing (theory-driven)

Current threat perception \(\rightarrow\) bottom-up information processing (data-driven)

Decision to join NATO

The findings show that historical experience and the threat perception are closely linked to each other. The idea of top-down information processing suggests that the historical lessons give foreign policy-makers some sort of “theory”, which helps them dealing with the current situation (perceiving it). Seeing the similar situation, they have already something in their mind. It facilitates assessing current situation and making decisions. Data from the current situation is assimilated into that theory, necessary for confirming the validity of a historical event. But how are perceptions organized into a meaningful guide for behavior? This is done by the belief system. According to Ole R. Holsti, the belief system is composed of a number of “images” of the past, present and the future, and includes all the accumulated, organized knowledge about itself and the world\(^{61}\). In addition, the belief system has the function of the establishment of goals and the ordering of preferences\(^{62}\).

Estonia has been enjoying the independence already 8 years and there has been already 9\(^{th}\) government since regaining the independence. The next chapter aims at giving the answers to the questions posed in previous chapters, primary to find out what kind of beliefs have been used by Estonian foreign policy-makers during these years in the integration process into the democratic and peaceful West (NATO being a symbol and tool for achieving it).

\(^{61}\) Ole R. Holsti 1962, p. 544
\(^{62}\) Ole R. Holsti 1962, p. 544.
6. ESTONIAN-NATO RELATIONS

6.1. Possible options for Estonia

What were the options Estonia could choose among? Pertti Joenniemi outlines several possible options for Estonia after regaining independence in 1991:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EAST</th>
<th>WEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>In-between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance grouping</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea cooperation</td>
<td>Baltic Union</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baltic/Nordic bloc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baltic Sea cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EC/EU</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US security guarantees</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NACC</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Broadly speaking, it might be said that there has been some movement over time from left to right according to this table. The Estonian foreign policy-makers faced several options: 1) Nordic-Baltic relations, 2) relations of the Baltic states within the Baltic Sea Council, 3) Baltic states and the New Hansa concept, 4) Baltic-EC/EU relations, 5) Baltic-US relations, 6) Baltic relations with Russia and CIS, 7) the Baltic states as a gateway between the East and the West, 8) the Baltic states as neutrals, 9) inter-Baltic cooperation. These preferences were voiced out even before Estonia regained independence. Of course, they were not so much alternatives to each other. According to the small state theory, a small state, located near a great power can choose only between alliance with its more powerful neighbor, alliance with latter’s chief rival, or some kind of neutrality. In other words, these options were: 1) declaring Estonia as a neutral state; 2) founding the security of Estonia on security cooperation with Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); 3)

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further development of cooperation with NATO and the EU aiming at membership\textsuperscript{65}. The first two options were completely ruled out during the years 1991-1993. Since 1994 actual cooperation started with NATO (PfP), which eventually meant choosing alliance with the West.

Why do states want to join an alliance? According to Mouritzen, “the primary purpose of joining an alliance is to modify an unfavorable environment polarity. Typically, the incentives and power projection ability of a threatening unipole is sought reduced through the offering of incentives to a conflicting pole, so that it may improve its power projection ability in the area. In this way, the alliance candidate hopes to replace unpleasant environment unipolarity by bipolarity or perhaps even by a pleasant unipolarity under the wings of the protective pole”\textsuperscript{66}. Or according to Nicholson, states want to join alliances because they are rational and self-interested and, thus, want to get something out of it\textsuperscript{67}. In the case of Estonia, this “something” was security, hence survival. But why NATO was chosen, especially in the face of Russian threat? What were the arguments behind that? One possible answer to this question will be given in the next two chapters.

6.2. Estonia and NATO

The contacts of Estonia with NATO started already in 1991, when Estonia joined NACC (North Atlantic Cooperation Council). NACC activities concentrated on several areas like peacekeeping, disarmament, defense planning, civil control of the defense forces, scientific cooperation and defense expenditures. The next step was Partnership for Peace program (PfP), which Estonia joined in February 1994, aiming primarily at joint peacekeeping missions with NATO countries. In the beginning of 1995 Estonia joined PfP’s planning and review process (PARP), which aimed at equalizing the defense expenditures of the member states according to the NATO demands and procedures. Estonia was given a clear task to raise the interoperability of its defense forces. Since 1996 Estonia and NATO have had even bilateral talks about

\textsuperscript{66} Mouritzen 1998, p. 7
possible NATO enlargement. In May 1997, at the meeting of NACC foreign ministers a new institution was created - EAPC (Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council), which replaced NACC. The aim was to extend PfP activities.

The strategy of becoming a NATO member has been institutionalized on the governmental and parliamentary levels. How did this come about? Here it is helpful to look at the legal acts concerning NATO, also how NATO-issue is dealt in the party programs. In the document “The Main Directions of the Activities of the Government for the Year 1997” the Estonian government declares that the main goal of Government’s foreign policy is as fast as possible and effective integration into the EU and NATO. At the same time Estonia wants the best possible relations with Russia, while not harming the sovereignty of Estonia. Border agreement is regarded as the most important issue here. Estonia continues its “policy of positive engagement” towards Russia, where the main aim is to regulate bilateral economic relations on the basis of internationally recognized norms and traditions.

In another document, called “The Main Goals of the Government for the Years 1997-1998”, Estonia’s foreign policy strategy is expressed in more concrete terms: Estonia has to strengthen its own ability to defend itself while integrating into the Western defense organizations. In order to guarantee the interoperability Estonia will develop cooperation in the first hand with NATO’s military and political structures. Estonia will continue active participation in the Partnership of Peace Program (PfP) and is ready to join new NATO initiatives. Important is the continuous use of Estonian defense forces within the NATO Stabilization Force mission (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and performing an international military exercise (the Baltic Challenge ’97) on the territory of Estonian Republic. Estonia will be ready to participate in the Combined Joint Task Forces missions and its planning and preparation. It shows clearly that other options were now ultimately left aside, the process of joining NATO got its permanent place in the agenda of every new government.

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68 this policy was said to be initiated in 1994 and would have involved, among other qualities, mutual respect for sovereignty, mutual respect for national security interests, mutual refrain from verbal and other confrontation, mutual respect for international norms of behavior, most importantly in the area of human rights (- T.R.). See: Jüri Luik “Quo Vadis, Estonian Foreign Policy?”, speech on September 11-12 in Annual Ambassadorsorial Conference, 1994.


Estonia has not yet officially presented its wish to NATO on the highest-presidential-level (Lithuania did this on the 4th of January, 1994). The most important legal act concerning joining NATO on the parliamentary level is so-called “The Fundamentals of Estonian Defense policy”71, adopted by Riigikogu at 7.05.1996. 65 MP’s voted for, 3 abstained, nobody was against. In this document it is said that Estonia’s defense will be developed on the two important and mutually inclusive components: 1) the self-defense, based on the state’s own defense structures; 2) international defense cooperation, which aims at joint defense activity together with defense organizations oriented towards guaranteeing European security. It is also stated that: “Estonia’s point of departure is the well known principle that security of all states cannot be separated from each other and that one state cannot create its security at the expense of another”. Estonia posits its view that only such a state, who have clearly declared its desire to defend itself and who has the considerably strong defense capability, can enhance international peace and security. The aim of Estonia is thus to become a full member of NATO and the WEU. Cooperation with these defense organizations is the main political and practical possibility to strengthen Estonia’s security and defense. Estonia is said to be further ready to cooperate with the Baltic Sea countries in the political and defense areas in order to guarantee the security of this region. It is also important for Estonia to have bi- and multilateral military-political relations and cooperation with all democratic states. In creating defense policy Estonia follows the line of thought that the main sources of threat to a state’s security are aggressive claims of the great powers and the political-military instability. Institutionalized on the governmental and parliamentary levels, the policy of joining NATO was profoundly embedded into a day-to-day decision-making process. At the same time, joining NATO was seen one of the best ideas also in the programs of almost every political party (except maybe Center Party and Russians’ parties).

The party programs, concerning parties’ views on foreign policy are also important in showing how do major political parties develop the beliefs (ideas about independence or democracy, and the ways for achieving these goals):

The Coalition Party:

71 Eesti kaitsepoliitika põhialused, Riigi Teataja I 1996, 33, 684
The main task of Estonian foreign policy is the consolidation of our independence and prevention of potential aggression by political and diplomatic means. During its existence as a state Estonia has been in a similar situation with the other Baltic states, therefore we have to proceed from common interests of the Baltic states and seek possibilities for more profound cooperation. Estonia is a European country and therefore tight cooperation with the Nordic countries and deepening of cooperation with the structural units of the European Union proves natural. Estonia must participate with maximum possible activity in the organisations of NATO, WEU and EU to obtain maximum guarantees for defence.”

The Center Party (former People’s Center Party)-1997:

“The aim of foreign policy should be strengthening the independence of Estonian Republic. The essence of foreign policy is to join the international politico-economic and military unions on the basis of clear-cut agreements, which respect the interests of Estonian state and people. The people should have a chance to decide the membership in these unions on the referendum.”

Estonian Country People’s Party:

“The aim of Estonian foreign policy should be the one and only: to strengthen the independence and security of Estonia. Estonian foreign policy course must not harm peace and balance in any region. Very important is to improve relations with Russia (...) Estonia must be ready to participate in the NATO structures.”

The Moderates:

“The priorities of Estonian foreign policy are joining the EU and NATO (...) We support joining NATO, in order to get diplomatic, economical and military support during the peacetime and the crisis situation (...) Estonia, together with other democratic states, have a responsibility for the international security.”

The Fatherland Union:

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73 Keskerakond, Programmilisi hoiakuid, http://www.keskerakond.ee
“The main guarantee for Estonian foreign political security is belonging to the sphere of influence of NATO, and becoming a full member of NATO as a most effective security political organization in Europe (...) We want to base our relations with Russia on equality, good neighborliness and unconditional respect of both countries’ sovereignty as it is postulated in the Tartu Peace Treaty from 1920 (...) We consider important to create a normal relationship with Russia”\textsuperscript{76}. 

The Reform Party:

“We consider important a foreign policy which is clearly based on national interests, and will be carried out in direct relations with other states and cooperation organizations. In the main questions in our foreign policy, there should be a consensus found among Estonian political forces, in order to guarantee carrying on of the uniform foreign policy line”\textsuperscript{77}.

Estonian Pensioners’ and Families’ Party:

“[the Party] regards the priority of Estonian foreign policy the strengthening of Estonian independence, creating security guarantees within the EU and NATO”\textsuperscript{78}.

The most important conclusion is that there is little difference among Estonian political parties concerning foreign policy options, priorities or goals. Parties do not dedicate a lot of attention to the foreign policy at all, thereby creating the situation that joining NATO can be considered as a “depoliticized” issue, which, of course, would raise the question of implications for democracy. But this is the topic for another study.

7. \textbf{ANALYSIS}

The idea in this chapter is to give the readers several examples of above mentioned beliefs and some patterns of how might they have been used in justifying Estonia’s NATO membership. The aim is to find out what kind of beliefs individual decision-makers or opinion formers have had during the time period of 1991-1998,

\textsuperscript{76} Isamaaliit. Programm, http://www.isamaaliit.ee
\textsuperscript{77} Reformierakond. Programm, http://www.reform.ee
\textsuperscript{78} Eesti Perede ja Pensionäride Erakond. Programm, http://user.exit.de/eppe
and how the beliefs might have had influence on the decision to join NATO. At least referring to the concept of Goldstein and Keohane, beliefs serve as “roadmaps”, reducing uncertainty in foreign policy realm. I differentiate here three distinct periods\(^\text{79}\) of Estonian foreign and security policy when different beliefs were articulated: 1) re-establishment of independent statehood: 1991-1994 (since regaining independence until withdrawal of Russian troops); 2) state-building 1995-1997 (from PfP till Madrid Summit); 3) closer partnership with the West 1998. In each period I will examine what kind of principled beliefs, worldviews and causal beliefs existed and their possible impact on foreign policy decisions. The current analysis suggests also that there have been some changes (or challenging patterns) in beliefs during each of these periods.


This period begins with the restoration of the independence in fall 1991 and ends with the withdrawal of the Russian military troops from Estonia at the end of August 1994. The beliefs propelled around the immediate concern during that period: how to maintain the independence of the newly born Estonian Republic. Consequently, the “catchword” was security. Estonian leaders turned their faces to the West for the help. In 1991, just two months after regaining independence the speaker of the Estonian Parliament Ülo Nugis, returning from the session of the North Atlantic Assembly, stated:

“Our historical experience has proved that neutrality do not guarantee our security (…) We can guarantee our security through an alliance's collective security arrangement. At the present, only such an alliance is NATO”\(^\text{80}\).

Why history was so important in maintaining the independence? As early as in 1991, an Estonian historian, Mart Laar (now Prime Minister), answered this question quite explicitly:


“Without memory we cannot make it. At least in a democratizing society (...) Estonian people have not forgotten its past (...) Defending its history, the Estonian people actually defend themselves”\textsuperscript{81}.

History seems to have helped Estonia in coping with perceived Russian threat and keeping the eye on the survival. Consider, for example, the words of Foreign Minister Trivimi Velliste in 1993:

“I would begin with the rhetorical question: what is the aim of foreign policy? In order to make foreign policy, it is useful in every moment to keep in mind our main goal, where we want to reach, what is the most important. In order to do that it is useful to keep your eyes, or at least one eye, on history. [what has been historically foreign policy of tribes?] Mainly two things: guaranteeing the survival and well being (...) Estonia’s foreign policy is of course constrained by our geopolitical position. We have been always between the East and the West /…/which has determined our destiny (...) In other words, the main question in our foreign policy is Russia”\textsuperscript{82}.

The presence of the Russian troops in Estonia clearly contributed to the policymakers’ references to historical injustice and that was why Estonia should join NATO. In the memories of the Estonian people the things done by the Soviet occupational army had especially important place. Foreign troops were considered as a symbol of the continuation of the occupation. The arguments emphasized that Estonia principally could not collaborate with Russia and there was an urgent necessity to emancipate (even to escape) from Russia/Soviet Union as fast as possible. In the beginning of 1992, the new Prime Minister, Tiit Vähi, described the situation as follows:

“[Russia ignores the fact] that Estonia and other the Baltic States are sovereign states, to whom the WW II started when Russian troops came in and when Russian military bases were installed. Withdrawal of the last Russian soldier from the Estonian soil would mean a freedom for the people’s soul…The Baltic states are entitled in this situation to give their hopes on NATO. Of course, we have to keep in mind also a proverb, that if you help yourself, the God will help you, too”\textsuperscript{83}.

\textsuperscript{81} Mart Laar “Milleks vajame mälu?”, Postimees, 15.01.1991
\textsuperscript{82} Trivimi Velliste “Eesti välispoliitika: hetkeseis ja eelistused”, Postimees, 26.01.1993
Accordingly, the main feature of Estonian foreign policy was not so much fear, but retrieving historical justice, even in the face of the immediate threat from Russia and its military personnel in Estonia. Russia was considered revengeful and ill-tempered, a country that could not be trusted in any case. At the same time journalists and policy-makers perceived Russian threat as being very high:

“Looking at the recent developments in Russia, it is clear that the things are not going well for us... Even if there will be no coup or attempt of it, we cannot expect anything good from Russia in the near future. Russia’s pressure on the Baltic states (especially on Estonia) is strong... Diplomatic history has shown that making concessions to Russia would only lead to the bigger demands from Russia... It is crystal clear that Russia will not let the Baltic states to move away from its sphere of influence”84.

The first post-elections’ Foreign Minister Trivimi Velliste:

“But in Estonia, security goes far beyond the abstract, far beyond a future theoretical consideration, for us, it is an acutely tangible concern here and now. It is a fact -- foreign occupation troops remain on our soil. It is a fact -- the number of fully trained and demobilized troops from the former Soviet armed forces in our country -- some 10,000 or so -- is five times the size of our fledgling and poorly-equipped defense forces, not to mention that Russian fighter planes need but 17 minutes to reach Tallinn from take off in locations within the Leningrad oblast. In short, for us, security is an immediate concern (...) All of these references by theoreticians and high-ranking Russian leaders (Karaganov, Kostikov etc) alike have the combined effect of making Estonia feel rather insecure. It should also make Western democracies feel uneasy to hear serious discussion of geopolitical realities and spheres of influence, not to mention the use of force”85.

“The West apparently has not recognized the real threat coming from Zhirinovsky... The characteristic for our Easter neighbor’s style is that when we celebrate Midsummer holidays, they start heavy propaganda campaign against the “violation” of human rights in Estonia”86.

Paradoxically, this kind of immediate threat from Russia did not push Estonian foreign policy-makers stopping Estonia’s decision to join NATO. It was known fact

83 Tiit Vähi “Eesti Vabariigi rahvuslik julgeolek ja rahvusvaheline koostöö”, speech in a NATO workshop, Postimees, 11.06.1992
84 Indrek Kannik “Vene kaart Eesti poliitikas II”, Postimees, 06.08.1992
85 Speech by Trivimi Velliste, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia at the NUPI-CSIS Conference on Baltic and Nordic Security, Oslo, September 21, 1993
86 Trivimi Velliste (interviwed by Aivar Jarne) “Karl Vaino kabinetist Toompeale ja siis New Yorki”, Postimees, 10.01.1994
that Russia would never let NATO to expand to Russia’s “near abroad”. The following question arises: if the situation is threatening enough, why should policymakers stand “stubbornly” on their positions (to join NATO) and push this threat even further? The answer is simple: there was a belief that Estonia had been historically mistreated and that now the West should have a moral duty to help Estonia in case of Russia’s attack. There was seen almost causality between Russian threat and the West’s commitment: if Russian threat increases, the West’s commitment to defend Estonia also increases (the EU or NATO would admit Estonia as a member; US commitment etc.) But actually it appeared to be vice versa: when Russian threat increased, the West’s commitment respectively decreased. In this respect, was it reasonable to stand on “our” positions, if the West’s commitment was only believed to be high? The brilliant answer was given by Foreign Minister Trivimi Velliste in 1993:

“I think that Russia is in the eve of conflict (…) But the Baltic States are already on the other side. We have been accepted as the European democratic states and we cannot be used as a trade-off [between the West and Russia] (…) We are a part of a democratic Europe, and if someone wants to change it, when the West will support us”87.

But this support is not 100% clear even today. This situation seems to give a support to the assumption about the role of beliefs in perceptions of external threat and, hence, in decision-making. Referring to the cognitive-rational debate, I could say that at least during the formative years of Estonian Republic cognitive knowledge (the principled belief) about bad historical experience rather than rational cost-benefit calculation (or current threat estimation) pushes Estonia to join NATO. The security political information is processed top-down, preferring dispositional factors to situational ones. But if one takes into account situational factors (current threats), it could be suggested that Estonia should not set NATO membership that high on the foreign and security political agenda. According to the so-called small state theory, Estonia, being a small state should adapt to the changes in its immediate environment, meaning of being more flexible in their foreign and security policy decisions88. Some journalists (quite a few of them) pointed to the underlying causes of the problem from this perspective:

87 Aivar Jame “Trivimi Velliste: meil ei ole Mannerheimi ega Maginot’ liini”, interview with Trivimi Velliste, Postimees, 27.03.1993
“Estonian Republic is digging its own crave. We have to get the support from local Russians at any cost, but this not the strongest side of the Estonian policy (...) The claim for the Petseri and back-Narva areas by our uncompromising patriots from the Fatherland [political party], means that Estonia wants its own Sudetenland (...) Moscow can always say that Russian minority is discriminated in Estonia. Russia is gladly ready to protect its citizens [in Estonia]. At the same time Estonia believes that great powers support him. Let’s recall history now and answer the question: who will be a looser?\textsuperscript{89}.

As some Estonian foreign policy-makers mentioned above, the Russian geopolitical and military doctrines particularly were a basis for the perceived Russian threat. It is hard to say whether these doctrines could be regarded as a real threat, because Russian government usually denied its commitment to those doctrines. But according to the public statements, Estonian politicians perceived these doctrines enough threatening:

“It is clear that Russia is trying with the help of its citizens [in Estonia] to maintain the political and economic superiority over us. That’s why [Russia] has brought up so-called near abroad conception, that actually means Russia’s masked attempt to re-divide Europe according to the example of 1939\textsuperscript{89}.

A “creeping” threat was considered the so-called “Karaganov doctrine” from 1992. The doctrine meant that Russia should carry on more active post-imperial foreign policy, beginning with Estonia and Latvia (“near abroad” policy). In his speech on February 23, 1993 the Estonian president Lennart Meri explicitly condemned this doctrine saying that Russia’s reforms “step back in front of the new, aggressive and neocolonialism-oriented foreign policy concept”\textsuperscript{91}. Meri equalized Karaganov with Hitler and Goebbels. In another speech he compared it with Monroe doctrine, according to which, the Baltic States belong to Russia’s sphere of interest where Europe is not allowed to intervene.

\textsuperscript{89} Andrei Hvostov “Kuidas olla Venemaaga”, \textit{Postimees}, 25.10.1993
\textsuperscript{90} Vardo Rumessen “Miks läbirääkimised Venemaaga ei edene?”, \textit{Postimees}, 19.01.1994
\textsuperscript{91} Aivar Jarne “Vene doktriinid Eestit hirmutamas”, \textit{Postimees}, 29.04.1996
In sum, joining NATO had clearly irritated Russia, resulting in confrontation\(^{92}\) in the Estonian-Russian relations. The initial idea that Estonia should become a bridge between the West and the East \(á la\),

“by virtue of history and geography, Estonians have become specialists in the ebb and flow, the hem and haw of Russia’s political life”\(^{93}\),

has clearly lost its meaning. Estonia probably hoped to use the new emerging East-West conflict on its own behalf, somehow provoking NATO to admit Estonia as a new member:

“Of course, we can say that the Cold War is over and NATO is not against anybody, that there is no confrontation between NATO and Soviet Union, because there is no Soviet Union. But considering the thoughts and prejudices of Russians about NATO, it is too early to talk about some sort of general rapprochement…Probably we even hope that there will never be any rapprochement or at least not in the near future. That’s why Estonia and other Baltic states dream about joining NATO…We face a dilemma: to give up Tartu Peace Treaty [of 1920] and the borders stipulated in it or give up NATO; or is it better to get rid of Russian troops, get back our territory and hence create the situation where the attack against Estonia would be unthinkable, as it is in the case of Austria or Sweden?”\(^{94}\).

Here it is referred to the statement of the foreign minister who said that the main goal of Estonian foreign policy would be joining NATO and creating a situation where the attack against Estonia would be equally unthinkable as it is in the case of Austria or Sweden. An interesting speculation comes up here: Estonian foreign policy is doing everything for preventing this kind of rapprochement between Russia and NATO. It is even seen in the interest of Estonia to keep the tensions between Russia and the West high, otherwise the West would forget Estonia and its problems with Russia, and consequently the NATO-door would remain closed.

The confrontation with Russia appeared to be imminent at least in the formative years of the newly born Estonian Republic. Of course, not all the political forces in Estonia did seek confrontation with Russia. There were several different views on

\(^{92}\) by “confrontation” I mean the situation where none of the sides assent to other’s demands.

\(^{93}\) Remarks by Trivimi Velliste, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia at the NACC Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Brussels, 2 December 1993

\(^{94}\) Eero Medijainen “Eesti võimalustest - NATO või Tartu rahu”, Postimees, 23.02.94
how to cope with complexity of international relations with Russia. Consider, for example, the words of Hardo Aasmäe, the member of the opposing Center Party:

“Russophobia is the problem of our foreign policy. It is not the secret that the current governmental coalition came to power mostly at the peak of anti-Russian feelings and manipulated skillfully with them. Russia has not forgotten it and Moscow is upset now.”

The year 1992 was an election year in Estonia, when the first post-independent parliament - Riigikogu - was elected. Foreign policy was an important issue for a quite many political forces, and the views about where Estonia’s future should lay varied basically in two main directions. The situation is best described by the director of division in Ministry of Foreign Affairs Jüri Luik, in 1992:

“Two big political forces, the Fatherland and Popular Front have started election campaign. The voters face two distinct ways of Estonia’s development: to reach the developed Western countries (where we originally belong) or to maintain dependence from the Eastern neighbor (…) Fatherland has always emphasized that Russia should be treated as an equal sovereign state, not like vassal treats his landlord.”

The emergence of Fatherland political party and its clear commitment to turn Estonia’s face to the “democratic and peaceful West” would need a separate study. Fatherland’s idealistic (they admitted it by themselves) foreign policy in the light of Russian threat and overall uncertainty was the very brave one at that time when Russia declared its “near abroad” policy, Russian army was still in Estonia and there was a growing unrest from the part of Russians living in Estonia; moreover, the desired Western support was unclear etc.

Despite that odd situation, the confrontation with Russia was even pushed further: no rapprochement with or any concessions to Russia were foreseen. A statement by the chairman of Fatherland Mart Laar illustrates this situation:

“Looking at the current Estonian politics, it seems to me that some political forces do not realize in which situation we currently are. /…/we have to realize who is our neighbor (…) If you give a finger to [this kind of] neighbor, it certainly takes the entire hand; if you show

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96 Jüri Luik “Vene küsimus valimiste põhiküsimuseks”, Postimees, 14.08.1992
some kindness or some desire to make concessions, it considers it as a weakness and starts demanding new concessions (…) We do not have to be hostile towards our neighbor, but we have to stand on our positions”98.

At the same time, the West’s ambiguous statements about guaranteeing Estonia’s security (or commitment to), made Estonian journalists somehow paranoid and impatient, resulting in the feelings that the West had betrayed Estonia, and accusations that the West had been too kind against Russia, not taking into account historical injustice. Despite the pressure from both sides - West and East - there was a commonly shared principle among Estonian foreign policy-makers that no concessions to Russia should be made. But sudden agreement in July 26, 1994 between the Estonian president Lennart Meri and the Russian president Boris Yeltsin, who signed the agreement on withdrawal of Russian troops and maintaining the social guarantees for the retired Russian military officers, was a total shock for the most of the politicians and journalists. Reactions to this agreement were overwhelmingly negative. For example, Ants Erm, the chairman of National Progress Party, commented these agreements in the following way:

“It cannot be agreed that this [agreement on withdrawal and guarantees] was a useful compromise for Estonia, it was rather unconditional capitulation. Russia achieved all its demands, even more /…/ (…) We can humanly understand the behavior of President Päts in 1939 - he faced a clear and present danger of aggression -, but we cannot justify the behavior of President Meri and foreign minister Luik. Estonia’s position on the international arena was quite strong, no danger of aggression. But now the act has been done - without asking from the people nor the Parliament (…) Putting these agreements into force we will find ourselves under such a strong political influence of Russia that any kind of decolonization, desovietization, building of the national state and guaranteeing of national security must be forgotten - forever”99.

The journalists’ reactions were boosted even more far. The main blame was here put on the West. “A new Munich was in the air”, as the journalists made the argument:

“[the West is behaving like in 1938, in Munich, calling Estonia for the concessions to Russia] (…) If one makes concessions, he or she must get the same amount in return. One must not

98 Mart Laar “Finlandiseerumine-estoniseerumine”, Postimees, 21.08.1992
take the step back only because of wishing to finish quickly the negotiations (...) Russian troops will go out anyway. Any agreement on this is only useful for Russia, not for us."\(^{100}\)

“Soviet occupation in the Eastern Europe was not more than an annexation through the cynical verbal dialectics and the shortsighted self-deception by the great powers [let's look at the Yalta conference in 1945]. Something like this is going on now as well [Russia is creating the new empire, abroad becomes near abroad. But Russia needs some legal coverage to its actions, where the West is helpful].”\(^{101}\)

The politicians continued in the same way:

“These agreements [on the withdrawal of Russian army from Estonia and on the social guarantees for the retired military officers] were necessary for Russia, in order to legalize its army’s presence in Estonia, and necessary for the Western countries, in order to stop the post-WW II unlawfulness, but at the same time maintaining the image of Russia as a “winner” (...) It cannot be denied that making these agreements has increased Russia’s hope to include Estonia to the chain of “near abroad [countries]”. And as Russian diplomacy has always used the tactics that if there has been achieved a concession from the opposing side, the pressure to gain more would increase, these agreements therefore might increase the aggressiveness of Russia in relationships with Estonia.”\(^{102}\)

This event showed that usually strictly held beliefs could be challenged. The president’s and foreign minister’s “wild” action in Moscow shows that under some circumstances beliefs do not matter, or are not fully held consistent. After this occasion, during the following years, more challenges to the beliefs followed, especially due to the relaxed relations with Russia and changes in Russian own foreign political rhetoric.


During this period, the Estonia’s overall direction to the West got more relaxed status. Estonia participated actively in the NATO’s peacekeeping actions and

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\(^{99}\) Ants Erm, MP, Chairman of the National Progress Party “Eesti Rahvuslik Eduerakond 26.juuli lepingutest Venemaaga”, *Postimees*, 02.08.1994

\(^{100}\) Vahur Made “Et München ei korduks Baltikumis, *Postimees*, 05.04.1994

\(^{101}\) Endel Lippman “Moskva dialektiline mustkunst”, *Postimees*, 6.04.94

\(^{102}\) Mart Nutt (MP, Fatherland) “Jeltsini doktriin ja Eesti” *Postimees*, 05.08.1994
participated in military training. This situation gave the way for more practical arguments for joining NATO, especially economical ones. Generally speaking, soft security elements appeared in the Estonian foreign and security political rhetoric. Another distinct feature: joining NATO was institutionalized in a day-to-day policy-making, thus creating the comprehensive legal basis for joining NATO.

After the withdrawal of the Russian troops, the more relaxed relations between Estonia and Russia emerged. The changes among the arguments in favor of NATO membership also occurred. The immediate threat from Russia seemed to have disappeared and, first of all, the economic reasons got more importance. Even the rapprochement with Russia was considered more feasible. Consider the next analysis from Aap Neljas, the liberal MP:

“While Scandinavian countries want to join [NATO] because of economical reasons, then the CEE countries want to get the Western security umbrella. Estonia could use also economic motive, and the EU could promote our economy...Although it is economically necessary to improve the relations with Russia, the orientation to Russia would hardly maintain our competitive market economy in the long run. In addition, it is impossible to separate economic cooperation from the political demands, which are clearly non-acceptable for the majority of Estonians”\textsuperscript{103}.

Arvo Junti, vice chairman of the Riigikogu and the member of the board of Centre Party added:

“In the interest of Estonia are the bi- and multilateral relations in the North, in the West and in the East. Cooperative agreements (also military ones) only enhance our security guarantees...Security can be threatened also by the non-military means. It cannot be excluded that Russia will use some other means in order to put some pressure on the Baltics. Undoubtedly, one this kind of area is economy [inflow of Russian capital]”\textsuperscript{104}.

Characteristic to this period was the expression of more worldviews by Estonian foreign policy-makers in justifying NATO membership, especially in the light of Russia’s war in Chechnya. Consider several statements, for example, the Minister of Defense Andrus Öövel:

\textsuperscript{103}Aap Neljas “Poliitikast Tallinnas ja Brüsselis”, \textit{Postimees}, 13.05.1994

\textsuperscript{104}Arvo Junti “Julgeolekut ei ohusta mitte ainult sõjaline sekkumine”, \textit{Postimees}, 13.09.1995
“The enlargement of NATO is not expansionistic, it will be carried out only on the basis of free wish of the CEE new democracies who are thirsty for the stability and security”…The aim of Estonia is to build up democratic society, based on the same values as European democracies have. The development of economy and the growth of the society’s welfare presume stability. Stability will be guaranteed by state’s security. One way to guarantee and raise security is to join NATO…”105.

In 1991-1994, there was the immediate concern about “survival”, that according to the negative historical experience, Estonia must escape from Russia’s sphere of influence as soon as possible and therefore join NATO. In 1995-1997 it was realized that NATO itself was not in a hurry to accept the Baltic States as the new members. As Russian threat was not so much convincing argument in favor of NATO membership, more the economical questions and the argument that “Estonia shares Western values” got importance. But security “hard-liners” still adhered to the arguments prevailed during the formative years:

“Estonia’s integration into the West has 2 main directions: joining the EU and NATO. If at least one of them fails, our self-existence and security will be challenged. The situation will be even worse when we ourselves start hesitating over the usefulness of this and this step taken. But so it is [he refers to Arvo Junti’s idea of the new Warsaw Pact]…The only and real guarantee for Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian security comes from NATO. No any military block formed on the basis of former Soviet republics or Nordic countries cannot do that…The aim of Estonia must be joining NATO. Our leaders have to confirm it before and after the meal. Even minor hesitations in the NATO and the EU directions will be considered as our loss”106.

The situation was alarming indeed for the hard-liners: the top foreign policy-makers seemed to loose the consistency in their line of thought. Consider next analysis:

“If in the middle of the last year [1995] president Meri and the Government emphasized how necessary it was to join NATO, then in the end of the year they changed their minds. In the first place Western countries insisted Estonia that Estonia should better concentrate on the negotiations with the EU, because the enlargement of NATO will take place in a very far future, if at all. The second, among Vähi government, there was decided not to put so much pressure on NATO, realizing that it could rather harm our aspirations. Finland and Sweden put also pressure

105 Andrus Öövel “Eesti on oma tee valinud!”, Postimees, 05.10.1995
106 Aivar Jarne “Ei tohi loobuda NATO-st”, Postimees, 28.08.1995
on Estonia…But after the events in Chechnya and Pervomajsk, both Brussels and Tallinn changed their mind. NATO countries apparently realized that Russian threats should be taken seriously, and that Russia would not mind to intervene in the Baltics as well.107

Another a bit ironical comment on these “fluctuations”:

“At last, there is a clarity in our foreign policy. After foreign minister’s speech in Riigikogu [5.12.96] it is clear that the main priority of our foreign policy is to join the EU. In the name of that, Estonia is ready to sign border treaty with Russia, without mentioning Tartu Peace Treaty…Last year president Lennart Meri announced that the main priority is to join NATO. This year he explained that the most important thing is the relations with Russia.”108

As I mentioned before, the years of 1995-1997 were very good examples of drawing a clear line between “democratic and peaceful” West and “unstable and aggressive East”, i.e. Russia, thus emphasizing worldviews. This was the period when Russia was engaged in a war in its southern province Chechnya. Estonian policy-makers and journalists unanimously condemned this aggression. A relatively large group of parliamentarians even signed a joint letter about the recognition of Chechnya’s independence, which, by some commentators was considered as a misperception in Estonian foreign policy-making (hoping again too much of the West’s support or commitment). The only recently adopted ideas of democracy and other Western “values” hindered any policy-makers’ interest in why Russia actually attacked Chechnya, or whether Chechens were criminals or not. It suggests again that information was clearly processed top-down, meaning that Estonian foreign policy-makers had already something in their mind when facing a new situation. Estonia made it clear that it belongs certainly to the West and shares Western values, condemning decisively Russian actions in Chechnya. Russia with its actions showed that it did not share the same values as Western world did. The respective feelings were reflected in a journalist’s comment:

“Russia’s genocide in Chechnya shows clearly that democracy, human rights, freedom, self-determination of nations and considering others’ views and interests are not the things which can be talked about with Moscow. Violence is used now in Russia for resolving the problems as it’s been done during all its history. There is no reason to believe that something might

107 Aivar Jarne “NATO paotab ukse”, Postimees, 30.01.1996
change in this tradition (…) There is the murdering of a nation going on, the most open and harsh suppression of all kinds of democratic principles (…)\textsuperscript{109}.

The bitter truth was that, while condemning Russia’s actions, the West somehow understood the situation, regarding it as the Russia’s own business. The West’s rapprochement with the situation was a shock for many people in Estonia who had believed in the West’s commitment to democratic values. On the other hand Chechnya events showed what could happen to a small state which belongs to the Russia’s sphere of influence. Threat to the “survival” seemed to have come back. On the other hand, the West’s behavior towards the Chechnya’s conflict showed again the breakdown of the West’s image of “a protector of democracy and liberalism”, where the Estonian foreign policy-makers’ expectations were not met. As I showed above, this situation resulted in foreign policy-makers’ misperception of the West’s commitment in defending the independence of small states. The perception was - let’s recall the words of Trivimi Velliste in 1993 – as follows: “Estonia belongs already to the other side”, i.e. to the West.

Chechnya’s events strengthened the first tier of cognitive structure (strategy, worldviews)\textsuperscript{110}, i.e. the desire to belong to the democratic and peaceful West, and the idea that Estonia shares all these values. Foreign minister Toomas Hendrik Ilves can be regarded as the most prominent employer of worldviews (and respective causal beliefs) among Estonian foreign policy-makers. Consider several statements:

“Why does Estonia want to join NATO? The answer is twofold. First, NATO has always proclaimed that it is a defence Alliance based on common democratic values. Estonia shares those democratic values. Thus it is entirely natural that we should want to co-operate with NATO in guaranteeing those values. Second, NATO is in the process of re-creating itself as an entirely new NATO within a new Europe. Estonia does not want to join the NATO of the Cold War. In both location and spirit Estonia is a part of the new Europe and we feel entitled to be constructively involved in the formation of the new European defence arrangement”\textsuperscript{111}.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[109] Vahur Made “Mida 9.mail pühitseda?”, Postimees, 15.03.1995
\item[110] See: Weber 1991
\end{footnotes}
“These values, of self-determination, democracy, free-markets, the rights of the individual and the rule of law, shone as a beacon to the captive nations of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union”\textsuperscript{112}.

Or more precisely:

“At numerous meetings with European leaders, the same questions have been asked of us: who are you? how do you define yourselves? Our answer has been: as Europeans, as one of the Nordic peoples (...) Estonia must relate to Russia as a normal Western state, free and confident of its independence and not as a former colony or oblast burdened by complexes and doubts - assuming the later role would but ferment uncertainty and doubts not only in the east but also in the west and at home in Estonia (...) First, the backbone of NATO is formed from the common values - peace, freedom, democracy and welfare -which Estonia values above all and which the European Union has made its watchword. NATO was created to jointly defend these common values. Estonia shares these values and therefore sees its future as a full member of NATO, not only as a consumer but also as a producer of security (...) We believe that all of Europe deserves a lasting and secure peace, and that precisely NATO, in its proven efficiency, relinquishing its cold war role and concentrating on the basic functions mentioned above, can guarantee such a lasting peace. Hence Estonia too must move towards NATO and cooperate with it as closely as possible”\textsuperscript{113}.

Another challenging event with regard to beliefs may be an event from 1997 when Russia offered security guarantees for the Baltic States. In October 24, 1997, Russian president Boris Yeltsin proposed security guarantees for the Baltic States. In this document it is said that Russia acknowledges the principles of international behavior, the principles of OSCE, equality, sovereignty and promises to preserve the independence, sovereignty and the borders of the Baltic States. Russia denies any kind of force measures against the Baltic States, Russia is ready to cooperate with all states interested, and strengthen the security in Europe and the Baltic Sea region. Russia’s proposals in the political-military field include: creating the regime of confidence on the border; annual reports from the both sides about military plans on the confidence building areas; visits of the military objects; joint air surveillance over the Baltic airspace; joint activities of the naval forces; exchanging the information concerning

\textsuperscript{112} “Estonia and NATO Enlargement”, Remarks by Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, at Columbia University, New York, March 31, 1997

\textsuperscript{113} Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, to the Riigikogu, 5 December 1996
military doctrines of both states, in order to secure that these conceptions will be understood the same way on the both sides; military-technical cooperation. In the economic sphere Russia offered the joint energy system; creating regional infrastructure; improving trade on the border areas etc. In its official statement from 3.11.1997 Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explicitly rejected these guarantees, stating that:

“Unilateral security guarantees do not correspond to the spirit of the new Europe; this kind of guarantees and regional security agreements have never been and are not also now on the agenda of Estonian foreign policy”.

But Russia’s efforts were acknowledged, stating that Russia should be more active in the international organizations. By Estonian policy-makers, Russian security guarantees were considered as a some sort of Russia’s provocation in the light of the positive events towards Estonia’s integration into the European economic and security organizations at the same year - NATO Summit in Madrid (July 8) and the decision of the European Commission to start membership negotiations with the 5 Central and Eastern European states, including Estonia (July 16). Accepting Russia’s security guarantees would have apparently undermined the main goals of Estonian foreign policy - membership in NATO and the European Union. Of course, journalists appeared to be notoriously critical against Russia’s offer. The journalist of Postimees, Vahur Made, pointed to the several historical analogies in this respect:

“Already in 1922, communist Russia offered to Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Poland some sort of security agreement /.../. In 1925 Russia asked the same countries to sign mutual non-aggression pacts, though signed only in 1932. /.../Russia needed those agreements in order to hinder the Russia’s border countries’ signing their own alliance and approaching to other European superpowers (...) [The next analogy comes] from 1939, when Estonia accepted Russian military bases to be installed (...) Everything that the Baltic states can do now is to avoid that some stupid [Baltic] leader absent-mindedly might be too kind against some sort of security guarantees or bases (...) It is ultimately clear that the Baltic states cannot accept Russian offer. The state who offers us these things, is not simply trustful. Neither Russian democracy, nor economy is so stable that other states can build their security structures on that”

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114 “Venemaa ettepanekud Balti riikidele”, Postimees, 4.11.1997
115 Vahur Made, “Venemaa julgeolekugarantiid kordavad ajalugu”, Postimees, 01.11.1997
Another newspaper article describes the situation as follows:

“Another newspaper article describes the situation as follows:

“The need to reject these guarantees does not raise any suspicion for anyone who thinks that
Estonia should belong to Europe. It cannot be useful for Estonia, if Estonia, differently from
other European states, remains outside from NATO and is a kind of wonder animal, who will
be treated according to special regulations (...) In connection to the security guarantees the
Estonians inevitably recall the year 1939, when a friendship agreement with Russia led to the
occupation of Estonia. If Russia really tried to improve relationships with the Baltic states and
not just doing propaganda, it reminds a story about a man who, in his friend’s wedding, started
to bless the friend’s ex-wife”.

This case illustrates exactly how the defining of the situation is largely
influenced by the overall worldview that Russia is not on “our side”, i.e. on the
democratic and Western side, and by the principled belief in historical injustice and in
recurrence of analogies. That is why Russia cannot be trusted in any case. And the
worldview that Estonia belongs to the democratic Europe was held consistent,
although this “democratic West” behaved not always according to the expectations of
the Estonian foreign policy-makers.

Although perceived Russian threat had diminished, NATO was still important
organization for promoting democracy and stability against unforeseeable future
threats. The causality nexus between NATO and democracy or stability got important
place in every foreign political speech, statements, address, etc. Consider the next
statement:

“Still, we are often asked the question, "why do you still want to join NATO?" The answer is
simple. We are convinced that NATO is the international organization which can project
stability, a stability necessary to all countries of the continent”.

This is clearly the causal belief aiming at to create a causal link between NATO
membership and peace, stability and democracy. At the same time Russia’s
membership in NATO was considered as something misnomer or undesired (although
NATO-Russian cooperation was going on). Aap Neljas, the member of Foreign

117 Remarks by Jüri Luik, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia at the NACC
Ministerial Meeting, 2 December 1994, Brussels
Policy Committee of Riigikogu suspected even some sort of NATO-Russian “deal” in this context:

“The last year’s events have shown that Russia has not achieved to break down NATO enlargement, but it will be even more feasible that Russia will manage to make a deal with NATO concerning the extent and principles of NATO enlargement”\(^\text{118}\).

With the compunction in the heart, the conclusion to the situation was expressed like this:

“Anyway, Russia has achieved more in dealing with NATO than the Baltic states [Russia-NATO Charter]”\(^\text{119}\).

The fear of the West’s betrayal appeared even bigger than actual threat from Russia itself, which might suggest also the importance of the motivated (affective) biases in relations with Russia.

The next years showed that a decisive, Western-oriented, choice made during the formative years turned to be right, especially in the light of the positive events in July 1997 towards Estonia’s integration into the European economic and security organizations at the same year - NATO Summit in Madrid, July 8 (the Baltic States were not accepted in the first round of the NATO enlargement, but were considered as the possible future candidates) and the decision of the European Commission to start membership negotiations with the 5 Central and Eastern European states, including Estonia (July 16).

**7.3. Closer partnership with the West: 1998-**

The next years (1998-1999) showed again that some fundamental beliefs could be easily challenged in case of the absence of a unique equilibrium among the beliefs. Although the idea of joining NATO was institutionalized and embedded into day-to-day decision-making process, there was an emerging belief that democracy, peace and stability could be also guaranteed by joining the EU in the first place. The causal

\(^{118}\) Aap Neljas “Eesti enne NATO laienemist”, *Postimees*, 20.03.1997

\(^{119}\) Aivar Jarne “Ettevaatust, NATO!”, *Postimees*, 22.01.1997
nexus NATO = democracy, stability and peace was replaced with the following one: the EU = democracy, stability, peace, welfare. But the foreign policy-makers considered NATO membership still as the best option for guaranteeing Estonia’s security. As the eventual EU membership was seen more feasible than NATO membership, foreign policy elite even allowed themselves to start discussions over the costs of joining NATO. The two distinct camps appeared: those who thought that the costs of joining NATO and military build-up would be economically and socially too pressing, and those who said that NATO would provide the cheapest way for guaranteeing Estonia’s security. On the parliamentary level this debate rallied around the figure how much should military expenditures constitute from the GDP. The proponents of the bigger military build-up supported the expenditures consisting of 2% of the GDP, the opponents considered it too high and proposed to allocate more money to the culture and social life. One of the “2%” proponents, Aap Neljas, MP, Reform Party explained the need to raise military expenditures in a following way:

“[Why the proponents of common European defense do not want to quit NATO?] The reason for this is simple: NATO guarantees reliable defense for the members with the low military costs. NATO security service is regarded as reliable, because of the power of the only superpower now - the USA. The NATO’s service is expensive but cheaper and more reliable than doing it alone. That’s why the alternative WEU-based security schemes have not achieved support…That’s why it is logical that states, living in the unstable political environment, want to get this NATO security service, despite the initial expenses which might come along. And whatever senseless someone may consider raising military expenditures in Estonia right now, it is hard to argue against that the economical development needs stable political environment”

The next statement comes from the Postimees’ journalist Aivar Jarne:

“The speech of foreign minister Raul Mälk gave us the signal that NATO’s time is back…[But at the same time] the share of military expenditures is not increasing or not staying the same, but even decreasing - from 1,18 % of GDP to 1,14 %. [and there is a lack of interest in dealing with foreign policy among MP’s]”

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120 the idea that NATO is nevertheless the best option is also supported by personal interviews with several Estonian foreign policy-makers. Interviews were carried out in 14.-16.04.1999 in Tallinn, Estonia. See Appendix for the list of the interviewed.
121 Aap Neljas “NATO ja Euroopa Liidu maine”, Postimees, 21.07.1998
122 Aivar Jarne “NATO lipsunõel särab taas”, Postimees, 28.11.1998
The year 1998 also showed the re-emergence of the debate over essence of the Estonian foreign policy-making itself, at least on the parliamentary level. By many people, the foreign policy-making generally, was considered undemocratic, that the Parliament was not being consulted at all (this concern was expressed by some members of both the opposition and the governmental coalition). They referred to the two recent events: rejecting Russian security guarantees on November 1997 and signing the US-Baltic Charter in January 1998. Concerning foreign policy decision-making, Toomas Alatalu, MP, offered a solution to the problem by creating a Council of Foreign Policy, where the leaders of both Government and Parliament could make decisions in the foreign policy realm. Another MP, Olav Anton, said that Estonian foreign policy “looks now like an improvisation”, that Estonia would need some sort of foreign policy concept. The necessity for a comprehensive foreign policy concept was expressed by some scholars already in 1991-92, but this effort was explicitly refuted by the incumbent foreign decision-makers a la “Estonia do not need any kind of foreign policy concept, because Estonia’s foreign policy goals are clear: accession to the EU and NATO”. These ambiguous claims were firmly rejected by the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also now. Signing US-Baltic Charter was interesting in the sense that it broke down the one of the “taboos” in Estonian foreign policy, namely – no signing of any kind of unilateral security political agreements, aiming at security guarantees. Russian guarantees were successfully rejected just a couple of months ago. The causality now could be articulated like this: “USA = democracy, peace and stability”.

Recent events in world politics (Kosovo, March 1999) have given a space for some modifications in beliefs among the Estonian foreign policy elite. Humanitarian and human rights issues were also included on the agenda of Estonian foreign and security policy. An official from the political department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that, “Semi-officially, a threat now to Estonia is instability in the world”, but rejected the Estonia’s concern about the agenda in Kosovo. Former politician (now journalist) Aap Neljas identified also new threats to Estonia: namely, nuclear

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123 foreign policy discussion in Riigikogu, 16.02.1998
124 Ibid.
125 See for example: Peeter Vares “Millist välispoliitika kontseptsiooni vajaks Eesti”, Rahva Hääl, 05.01.1993
126 the interview with Mr. Sander Soone, Director of Division, Political Department, MFA of Estonia, 15.04.1999, Tallinn
power plants around Estonia and national identity. In some respect the loss of Estonia’s national identity could be seen even more threatening for the “survival” than some sort of Russian threat. The fact is that the enlargements of both the EU and NATO are now being carried out, and Estonia has got its permanent place on the agenda of these organizations.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This study suggested the importance of beliefs in foreign policy-making and in coping with uncertainty. And there was a tendency to process information top-down, i.e. the members of the foreign policy elite had some prior knowledge or “theory” in their mind in dealing with the uncertainty in the international environment. The prevailing worldview was the idea of democratic and peaceful West, and the principled belief that Estonia should join NATO because of historical injustice. A membership in NATO as a course of action for achieving desired foreign policy goals represented a causal belief. These beliefs, I might say, “fluctuated” to some extent during the time period of 1991-1998. During the formative years 1991-1994 NATO was considered as a sole provider of security and stability in the world and therefore Estonia were to join NATO, aiming at sustained survival of the state. Consider two additional examples from Estonia foreign policy officials:

“Often we hear the phrase that NATO is an outdated instrument of the Cold War. I do not agree. All along, NATO has been rather an instrument for protecting the democratic way of life. For this very reason, eventual accession to NATO is a strategic goal of my Government”.

“NATO has been the guarantor of peace and stability in the post-World War II world. By now, it is clear that NATO must remain in that role in the post-Cold War world as well. We Estonians believe with a great deal of certainty that NATO is, and will in the near future stay, the primary guarantor of security in Europe.”

127 Interview with Aap Neljas, 14.04.1999, Tallinn
128 Remarks by Jüri Luik, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia at the NACC Ministerial Meeting, 2 December 1994, Brussels
129 Address by Mr. Indrek Tarand, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, in the Finnish Parliament, 4 May 1994, Helsinki
In 1995-1997, the economical and worldview arguments appeared, leading up to some changes in foreign policy since 1997: e.g. stronger orientation towards the EU. But while Russia’s threat was considered smaller and smaller, it was still important to join NATO. The study also showed that beliefs have constrained choosing other options in foreign policy-making. The bad historical experience with Russia and the idea of democratic and peaceful Europe contributed to the putting the NATO option on the top of the agenda of Estonian foreign and security policy. At the same time, there is a growing belief among Estonian foreign policy-makers that Russia does not play any important role in the world politics, especially in the light of what happened in Kosovo in 1999. Therefore some new threats to Estonia’s security were identified: instability in the world, humanitarian catastrophes and the problems with identity.

Presenting alternatives, or finding the “third” way in Estonian foreign policy, is not considered relevant activity anymore. During the formative years, there were different ideas expressed, but principled beliefs about “bad” historical experience with Russia within the worldviews of democratic and peaceful West, gave raise to the causal beliefs during the next years up to now, expressing the role of NATO as one of the most important instrument in achieving the desired goal - to survive as an independent nation-state in the family of peaceful and democratic European states.

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