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*EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION TOWARDS THE EAST*

(Re)securitisation in Europe: the Baltic States and Russia

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Abstract:

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia have entered a more difficult era with the 2004 enlargement and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The three Baltic states are new EU member states that share threat perceptions vis-à-vis Moscow. The article unpacks securitisation processes in the three Republics and how they have evolved after 2004 and 2014, as compared to the previous period of independence initialled in 1991. By exploring discourses, identity formation by strategies of othering and policy changes, we argue that re-securitisation is currently undergoing after a period of softer securitisation in the aftermath of EU accession.

Keywords: securitisation, othering, Baltic States, European Union, Russia

Introduction

Concerns about new wars in Europe have gained impetus since the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 2014. This state of play is particularly acute for the three Baltic Republics and Russia as they form a “regional security complex”, i.e a geographically coherent set of two or more states whose security perceptions are closely interlinked (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 415). Despite the accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures, “at the opening of the twenty-first century, the Baltics states are in the Russia-centred complex irrespective of how much they dislike this” (2003, p. 415). Even if they are part of the West for most purposes, “security-wise they are not” (2003, p. 413). With their cultural differences, the three states located on the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea belong to the same geopolitical space, have a recent shared history and, above all, similar security concerns informing their foreign policy priorities (Praks, 2015, p. 189; Miniotaite, 2003, pp. 211-13; Made, 2011, p. 185).

“Securitisation” vis-à-vis Russia has profoundly marked the process of independence of the three Baltic states. The reference to the occupation by Nazi and Soviet troops during the Second World War and from 1945 to 1991 has informed their path. The mutually exclusive views about whether the Baltic states are newly independent states or the continuation of the interwar Baltic republics is one of the major points of contention in the Baltic-Russian relations (Visek, 1997, p. 330). The existence of mutually irreconcilable narratives regarding their shared history during the conflict (Kattago, 2008, p. 432; Grigas, 2013, p. 127) is a core issue as Moscow rejects the fact that the former Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) occupied the Republics. Instead, the Kremlin values its role as a liberator from Nazi domination.

The article aims at analysing securitisation by the Baltic Republics after their accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004 and raises the question whether the phenomenon has changed as consequence of the Ukrainian crisis initialled in late 2013. It aims at identifying the intensity of securitisation as one may hypothesize that the EU [and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)] enlargements have decreased negative perceptions and improved security perceptions vis-à-vis the Kremlin.

We aim at exploring securitisation as both an evolutive phenomenon and a perennial dynamic affecting negatively Baltic-Russian relations. Although the analysis of “desecuritisation”¹ (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, 1998, p. 29) falls out of the scope of this article, we put under perspective the evolution of threat perceptions and identity and their impact on policy change. Furthermore, we unpack three core dimensions that are interconnected in this particular process of securitisation: security, history and normative considerations.

Firstly, we explore the theoretical framing of “securitisation” as a form of “othering” in order to identify categories of analysis. Secondly, we analyse the main dimensions of securitisation from 2004 onwards, having as a comparison the 1991-2004 period. Thirdly, we give emphasis to the political changes that have occurred after 2014 in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

1. Securitisation: The Construction of Identities under Threat

Securitisation theory is premised on a constructivist notion of security, in the sense that “security is a quality actors inject into issues by securitising them” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998, p. 204). Therefore, the focus of the analyst is not to determine if a threat is “real” (Sheehan, 2005, p. 53), but rather to determine if something is successfully articulated as such.

A process of securitisation involves a referent object and a securitising agent, and it occurs when the latter portrays the former as being existentially threatened, thereby legiti-

¹ “Desecuritization” refers broadly to the return of normal politics after an emergency period.