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## INTRODUCTION

The topic of integration of the three Baltic states into Euro-Atlantic structures is interesting primarily because today they are the only example of achieving full membership in the EU and NATO among the countries that were once part of the USSR. It is no secret that some other post-Soviet states have repeatedly stated their intentions to join these international structures. Thus, the experience of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia is in many ways unique and this fact alone deserves close attention of researchers.

Speaking about the relevance of the topic, we must not forget that in domestic science there are very few works on their development in the post-Soviet period. In most expert publications, the authors, guided by a "pragmatic" approach, tend to absolutize the importance of economic factors, refraining from analyzing political processes in the region. Therefore, the study of the development of the Baltic States in the post-Soviet period - the evolution of priorities and strategies for implementing their domestic and foreign policies - is now gaining not only purely scientific but also practical importance as an important element in forming an effective national security strategy.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the historical path taken by these three countries from post-Soviet states to members of two key international institutions of the Western community.

To achieve this goal in the study was to solve the following tasks:

1. Describe the internal conditions for the formation of a course for Euro-Atlantic integration.
2. To consider the regional context of the beginning of realization of a course on Euro-Atlantic integration.

3. Examine the development of EU-NATO relations with the Baltic States before they become candidates for accession.
4. To analyze the regional specifics of the preparation of the Baltic States for accession to the EU.
5. Identify the features of the Baltic countries' preparation for NATO membership.
6. To determine the impact of EU accession on the further development of the Baltic States and their participation in deepening European integration.
7. To find out the changes in the international situation in the region and the foreign policy of the Baltic States after joining the EU and NATO.

**The object of research** is the recent history of the Baltic States and the European Union.

**The subject of the study** is the history of the integration of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia into the European Union and NATO.

**Research methods.** The history of European integration of the Baltic States has been studied using general scientific, historical research methods, as well as methods borrowed from related sciences. In particular, the following methods were used: analysis and synthesis, structural analysis, comparative analysis, systems analysis, problem-historical, typological. The involvement of the whole complex of the above methods was conditioned by the needs of our research and the need to study a wide range of sources. All these methods allowed to solve the set tasks in full.

**The scientific novelty** of the obtained results lies in a comprehensive study of the problem of European integration of the former Soviet republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, taking into account current foreign economic and political needs. The historical course of European integration processes in the

Baltic States is studied; the set of preconditions of the European choice for the specified countries is defined, besides, for the purpose of outlining the most integral picture, the factors which have caused motivation from EU about integration of the former Soviet republics are investigated; the economic component of the European integration of the Baltic States is studied.

**The practical significance** of the study is determined by the possibility of using its materials in the media, NGOs working in the field of European integration as an important analytical material. The results of the work can become a part of generalizing works, educational and methodical manuals, handbooks on the problems of European integration both in Ukraine and abroad.

**Work structure.** The work consists of an introduction, two sections, conclusions, a list of sources used.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE BALTIC COUNTRIES ON THE WAY TO RECOGNIZING THEIR EURO-ATLANTIC CHOICE**

#### **1.1. Internal conditions for the formation of a course for Euro-Atlantic integration**

It is no exaggeration to say that the formation of a course for integration into key international institutions of the Western community began during the struggle of the people's fronts of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to restore the independence of their republics from the Soviet Union in 1990-1991. neighbors in their programs with the slogan "return to Europe." Of course, it was extremely difficult to talk about what forms this return could take, at a

time when the republics of the then Soviet Baltic States had not yet received international recognition as sovereign states. And yet it was then that the first steps in this direction were taken. Thus, in May 1989, MPs from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia gathered in Tallinn to develop a common regional platform aimed at jointly achieving sovereignty and independence, as well as establishing contacts with Western European countries and international organizations. This initiative was called the Baltic Assembly. Two months later, in July 1989, its delegates agreed to establish a regional organization, the Baltic Council, to implement these plans. The Council of the Baltic States, established in 1990, also dealt with issues of coordination in the field of foreign policy [4, p. 49].

Naturally, in the conditions when the Soviet Union still existed, the leadership of which did not recognize the withdrawal of the Baltic republics from its membership, the leading countries and international institutions of the West were in no hurry to establish ties with these republics and their regional structures. Therefore, their main achievement at this time was the establishment of direct links with neighboring countries of Northern Europe - Finland, Sweden, Denmark and their regional organizations, such as the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers. With the assistance of the foreign ministers of these countries, the Baltic Information Office was opened in Brussels on 17 November 1990. Until the official international recognition of the independence of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, it acted as its informal representative to NATO and the European Communities. The Supreme Councils of each of the three republics delegated their representatives there, who were accountable to their foreign ministers and, although de jure they did not have diplomatic status and privileges, they actually performed diplomatic functions. After the international recognition of the independence of the Baltic States in late August - early September 1991, the Bureau became their official diplomatic mission in Brussels [57, p. 15].

And in 1992, each of them opened its own office in this city to maintain ties with the EU and NATO. At the end of May 1991, with the support of the Danish mission to NATO, an Lithuanian delegation led by the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, V. Landsbergis, paid an informal visit to the organization's headquarters. Thus, the first contacts of the Baltic political elites with the EU and NATO were established before the official recognition of the independence of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

It is now necessary to explain why the Baltic States so quickly opted for Euro-Atlantic integration and then adhered to it so clearly and consistently. First, it should be noted that the pro-Western orientation in these countries has certain historical traditions. Even at the dawn of their national statehood during the First World War, prominent Baltic politicians and national figures, such as YOnas Schlupas, Stasys Shalkauskas, Oscar de Lubic-Milos, Jan Tinisson and Karel-Robert Pusta, advocated the orientation of the Baltic states and their regional states. associations to the Entente countries, justifying its expediency by the need to protect against the claims and pressure of such strong and expansionist neighbors as Russia and Germany [4, p. 47]. Then it was the support of Western countries at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 that allowed Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to achieve international recognition of their sovereignty and the withdrawal of foreign troops from their territory. Therefore, throughout the interwar period, they saw Britain and France as the main guarantors of their sovereignty and security. Important was the fact that Western countries condemned the conclusion of the Soviet-German Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, especially its secret protocol, on the division of spheres of influence in Eastern Europe and did not recognize as a result of these agreements the Baltic states joined the USSR in 1940. some of them even continued to have diplomatic missions in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the post-war period. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Baltic political elites of the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, who sought to emphasize the

continuity with the traditions of national statehood that existed in the interwar period, chose a pro-Western foreign policy course [10]. At the same time, as noted by Russian researchers V. Vorotnikov and A. Sitin, important was the fact that throughout the Soviet period in the history of the Baltic States, their population remained in touch with their compatriots who emigrated to the West. Even during the Cold War, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian intellectuals-emigrants in the USA, Great Britain and Sweden ideologically substantiated the Euro-Atlantic choice of their peoples [6, p. 101]. Later, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, some of them returned to their historical homeland and, according to R. H. Simonyan, along with representatives of the former economic nomenclature of the Soviet Baltic States, participated in the formation of a new political elite of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. having a certain influence on its domestic and foreign policy priorities [25, p. 35].

Secondly, Euro-Atlantic integration was seen as the only reliable guarantee of the security of the Baltic States. In this regard, the main argument was the thesis that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - small countries sandwiched between large and strong neighbors, who have repeatedly throughout history captured and annexed their territory, regardless of public opinion. . It is especially emphasized that the non-participation of the Baltic States in military alliances in the interwar period did not help them maintain their independence. Therefore, in order to avoid a recurrence in the future, they need to join international collective security structures that are not under the control of these neighbors and thus could create some counterbalance to their influence. "Dangerous neighbors", of course, primarily meant Russia, to which the public of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was responsible for destroying the sovereignty of these states in 1940, followed by mass repression, deportation and forced emigration of mostly national elites. However, as Professor AV Sharapov notes in his article, fears of excessive strengthening of Germany after the unification of Germany and the GDR and



the potential revival of its imperial ambitions also took place among the political elites of Central Europe and the Baltics [12, p. 368]. Therefore, Western international institutions, especially NATO, seemed to them a universal tool against the potential expansionism of both Russia and a united Germany, by military-political deterrence of the former and the reliable integration of the latter into the overall system of collective security.

Moreover, according to E. Dragomir, a researcher at the Finnish Center for Russian and Eastern European Studies at the University of Helsinki, security considerations have played an important role in motivating accession not only to NATO but also to the European Union. According to her, especially in the first years after the restoration of independence, the Baltic countries were dominated by emotional rather than rational assessments of Western international structures and the benefits of joining them [43, p. 296]. Thus, the EU was simply perceived as a community of peace, prosperity and a high standard of living, and accession to it as a guarantee of protection of the national economies of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia from external threats, especially from Russian pressure and risks of instability. and the conflict potential of the post-Soviet space.

With regard to the European Union, such motives were primarily expectations of economic assistance and subsidies from its structural funds. The fact is that the disparities in the development of different countries and regions of the EU and the resulting migration flows within the common labor market from depressed regions to more prosperous are considered one of the main threats to European integration. Therefore, through various structural funds and financial instruments of the EU, significant amounts are allocated from its budget to "pull" disadvantaged regions with lower living standards to the European average. Thus, the Baltic countries, which lagged far behind the European average in terms of economic development, in the event of accession to the EU could well count on serious subsidies from it. From the

point of view of the common man, the opening of the western borders and the possibility of free employment in the countries of Western Europe with a much higher level of wages and social guarantees than at home were also serious motives.

As far as NATO is concerned, there have also been rational considerations of economic benefit. Of course, joining the Alliance provided for a significant increase in its own defense spending - the allocation of its needs from the budget annually at least 2% of GDP. However, monitoring compliance with this requirement in NATO was (and remains) not very strict, and the ability to enlist the Alliance's assistance in logistics and training for its own armed forces far exceeded these costs. . In addition, participation in NATO's international structures and the deployment of NATO infrastructure in the Baltic States provided for the creation of new jobs, including for civilian personnel, which cannot be discounted in the economic difficulties of the transition period.

Summing up, it should be noted that during the 1990s, public opinion on EU and NATO accession remained extremely volatile and underwent serious fluctuations under the influence of a number of objective and subjective factors. At the same time, supporters of joining both organizations rarely constituted an absolute majority. However, due to the large share of the population, which has not decided on its position on this issue, opponents of accession in the Baltic States have always been much less than supporters. Potentially, these people could join the camp of both supporters and opponents of Euro-Atlantic integration. And this once again confirms that the key role in this process was played by the political elites of the Baltic States, and not public opinion.

From the point of view of opening the research topic, the issues of transformation of political and economic institutions of the Baltic States in the course of forming the course for Euro-Atlantic integration and preparation for

accession to the EU and NATO are also of some interest. However, the issue of institutional transformations in post-socialist countries is extremely broad, has its own specifics, complex, multifaceted nature and, being the subject of research in a number of sciences (economics, sociology, political science and especially transitology), goes far beyond this study. Systematic analysis of these issues requires a separate study using other methods, approaches and sources. Therefore, in the framework of this work will be considered only some of its most significant aspects.

First of all, it should be noted that to establish a clear relationship between economic and political transformations in the Baltic States with the formation and implementation of their course for Euro-Atlantic integration is quite problematic. According to I. Kachanivsky, a researcher at the University of Ottawa in Canada, many experts now tend to believe that all market transformations in the economy and the formation of multiparty political systems in post-socialist countries are directly related to their desire to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. However, as Kachanivsky rightly points out, market transformations and the formation of multiparty systems have more or less affected all post-socialist transition countries, both those that later became members of the EU and NATO, and those that have not even applied for membership to date. accession to NATO and the EU [54, p. 3]. Therefore, it would be an exaggeration to say that all political and economic reforms in these countries were conditioned by the course of Euro-Atlantic integration.

## **1.2. The regional context of the beginning of the implementation of the course for Euro-Atlantic integration**

Throughout most of its history, the Baltic lands, as well as Poland, have been the object of political rivalry between two regional hegemonies, Russia and

Germany. Therefore, it seems quite logical that with the acquisition of independence, these countries tried to balance their influence with the help of a third force external to the region. In the interwar period as such a counterweight were chosen the countries of Western Europe, especially Britain and France. However, reliance on these states failed to guarantee Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia the preservation of sovereignty during and after World War II. Therefore, having restored independence in 1991, they chose as the main direction of their policy a clear focus on the United States as the main guarantor of their sovereignty [13, p. thirteen]. According to some European experts, the US focus on security is extremely beneficial to the small countries of the Baltic region, as it allows them to obtain security guarantees from the world superpower, without risking falling into the field of its total geopolitical control due to its geographical remoteness [47, p. 177].

The Atlantic aspirations of the region's post-communist countries were supported by northern European members of NATO, especially Denmark, which in the new international situation saw membership in the organization as an important strategic resource for strengthening its own influence in the region. Thus, the position of the North Atlantic Alliance in the Baltic region has steadily strengthened. And in the second half of the 1990s, few doubted that NATO would become a key element of the region's new security system.

The attitude of the northern states to European integration has also changed. The history of relations between the EEC and the Nordic countries is several decades old. Unlike the transition countries in the region, their level of economic and socio-political development was higher than the European average, and in terms of their economic indicators, they were significantly ahead of some members of this organization. Thus, the northern states fully met the criteria for accession to the EEC. However, until the early 1990s, only one of them (Denmark) was a member of this organization and participated in the signing of the Maastricht Treaty establishing the EU. This situation was

explained primarily by three reasons: the long-standing rivalry between the two integration groups in Europe (EEC and EFTA), the reluctance of Sweden and Finland to join Western alliances in a bipolar confrontation in Europe and the development of northern regionalism. Even in the first postwar decades, when the European integration project was born, plans for regional integration appeared in the northern countries. Thus, in 1948-1949, on the initiative of Sweden, negotiations were held on the establishment of the Scandinavian Defense Union. However, due to unfavorable domestic and foreign policy circumstances, they were not successful [56, p. 236]. After the accession of Denmark, Norway and Iceland to NATO and the declaration of neutrality of Finland and Sweden, the possibilities of cooperation between these countries in the military and foreign policy spheres practically vanished. However, in other areas the prospects for the development of regional cooperation still remain quite high. Thus, in 1952, the Northern Council was established, which became a forum for interparliamentary cooperation between the Nordic states. At its meetings the issues of social policy, unification of legislation, development of cultural contacts and environmental protection were discussed [60, p. 159]. In the same year, the northern countries entered into a passport union, and in 1954 formed a common labor market. The next step was the creation in 1971 of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which meant the entry of regional cooperation to the intergovernmental level.

Thus, at the beginning of the postwar period there was a high probability of forming an independent integration center in northern Europe. However, this was hampered by both the difficult international situation associated with the beginning of the bloc confrontation on the European continent, and the reluctance of some of the northern countries to cede at least part of their sovereignty. The latter factor determined the very nature of their cooperation. It has evolved through informal consultations and the establishment of interparliamentary and intergovernmental forums for the exchange of views (the

Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers). The states of the region avoided the formation of structures with supranational powers and the adoption of strict integration commitments. Their joint action in the international arena or in the unification of legislation was usually based on informal agreements rather than international agreements. Thus, despite significant achievements, the opportunities for northern cooperation were quite limited.

The reluctance of the Nordic countries to cede part of their sovereignty also affected their attitude to European integration. At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, they preferred to join the EFTA by joining the EEC. The reason for this choice was not only their traditionally close economic ties with the United Kingdom, but also the fact that cooperation in the EFTA was entirely limited to economic issues, while the EEC initially had political projects for future development. It is believed that the EFTA has become an alternative for those states that shared British skepticism about the deepening of European integration [44, p. 5]. However, in 1960, Denmark, followed by Great Britain, applied to join the EEC, and in 1961 their example was followed by Norway. However, this attempt was unsuccessful due to opposition from France, which vetoed further negotiations with the three countries. Their next attempt to join this organization in 1967 met the same fate. After being rejected for the second time, Denmark took the initiative in 1970 to create the Nordic Common Market (NORDEK). But Finland's refusal to participate in the project, as well as the changing international situation in Europe, put an end to these plans. Following the resignation of Charles de Gaulle as President of France, the country changed its mind on the admission of the EFTA States to the EEC. As a result, in 1973, Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark became members of the European Communities. At the same time, Norway applied for membership, but in a referendum held in that country, the majority of the population opposed the accession. Finland and

Sweden did not apply for membership at all during this period, considering membership in the EEC incompatible with their neutral status [44, p. 7]. Thus, until the enlargement of 1995, Denmark remained the only northern country in the EEC / EU and one of its two Baltic members (along with Germany). But even she showed a high level of Euroscepticism. By joining the EEC, Denmark became one of the most consistent opponents of the deepening of European integration, which manifested itself in the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, the situation began to change. The traditional policy of neutrality and non-participation in European integration, which was quite successful during the Cold War, giving the Nordic countries some room for maneuver, has become ineffective in the new environment, threatening to marginalize these states and turn them into European peripheries. By this time, the ideas of traditional northern regionalism had largely exhausted themselves and were replaced by the geopolitical concepts of the New North and the Baltic region. The main idea of both was to use the opportunities of the new geopolitical situation to join European integration, but not as a periphery, but as a new integration center. It was assumed that the northern countries will act as repeaters of European values and models of development in the transition countries of the Baltic region and thus increase their political weight in Europe [10, p. 399].

Thus, the main emphasis in the activities of the RDBM was initially placed on informal cooperation and exchange of views. The organization was deprived of the opportunity to regulate the processes of regional cooperation and the formation of its international legal framework. All this does not allow us to talk about the RDBM as an independent player in the international arena, capable of being an equal partner of the EU. Given the fact that in the 1990s most members of the RDBM were either already members of the European Union or considered accession to it as a priority of their foreign policy, much

more important than regional integration, it can be considered as a satellite organization. EU, often served as an instrument of its foreign policy [62, p. 7]. This probably explains the failure of the attempts of the Republic of Belarus to join the activities of the RDBM in the context of deteriorating relations with the European Union in the late 1990s - early 2000's.

Despite the fact that the European Commission has been represented in the RDBM since its inception, observers have characterized its participation in the organization until the beginning of the Northern Dimension program as "rather passive". This situation can be explained by two reasons. The first of them was that until the 4th enlargement of the European Union in 1995, its foreign policy was dominated by the Mediterranean vector. The intensification of the EU's Baltic policy provoked protests from its poorest southern members at the time, who feared competition for the distribution of financial assistance from the European budget by even poorer post-socialist countries in the Baltic region [11, p. 200]. The second reason was related to serious doubts about the future of RDBM in the first years of its existence, which were due to strong contradictions within this organization [45, p. 405]. The source of these contradictions was the serious controversy between Russia and the Baltic countries over the withdrawal of Russian troops from their territory and the granting of civil rights to the Russian-speaking population of the latter.

Thus, until the enlargement in 1995, the participation of the European Commission in the work of this organization was formal.

### **1.3. Development of EU-NATO relations with the Baltic States before they become candidates for accession**

The formation of the EU's eastern integration policy coincided with the formation of its policy towards the Baltic region. In fact, these two political vectors developed in parallel and often complemented each other. Thus, back



in October 1994, the EU in the message of the European Commission "Coordination of the European Union's approach to the Baltic region" for the first time recognized the importance of developing the Baltic vector of its policy. And after the accession of the Union of Sweden and Finland in December 1995, the discussion of European initiatives in the Baltic region took place mainly at the same summits, which discussed issues related to eastern enlargement.

The European Commission also came up with the idea of bringing the associated countries of the region closer. She supported plans to establish a free trade area and a customs union between the three Baltic states and Poland. European agreements, strategies for preparation for accession and the PHARE program were named as the main tools for the implementation of the tasks listed in the document [1, p. thirteen]. Thus, although the text of the Baltic Regional Initiative itself did not explicitly address the issue of enlargement, the implementation of its objectives and the implementation of the proposed measures were aimed primarily at helping the Baltic transition countries meet the accession criteria and prepare for EU membership.

Describing the main tools of the Baltic Regional Initiative, the following points should be noted. First, in 1997 the European Commission approved a new concept of the PHARE program, according to which it was reoriented from the needs of general development of the economies of the associated countries to the specific tasks of their preparation for EU accession [15, p. 93]. Secondly, in 1997, based on the conclusions of the European Commission on the situation in each of the candidate countries, a strategy for preparing the Baltic states for accession to the European Union began to be formed. Its main provisions were voiced by a member of the European Commission G. van den Broeke during a visit to Latvia and Lithuania in April 1997 [29, p. 12]. He cited structural reforms in the economy as the main task facing these countries on their path to EU accession. Particular emphasis was

placed on the structural restructuring of the banking sector and agriculture. Considerable attention was also paid to the problems of modernization of the transport system and the border control system. As for the European agreements with the Baltic states, they entered into force only three years after their signing - on February 1, 1998 [65, p. 126].

Serious debates within the EU have unfolded over the timing and order of admission of candidate countries. Germany advocated that these countries be divided into groups and adopted in several stages. At the same time, the neighboring states of the Visegrad Group were to be adopted in the first place. There was also the opposite approach, called "non-discriminatory", or the concept of "big bang". According to him, all CEE candidate countries had to be admitted to the EU at the same time. At the Madrid Summit, the German proposal for gradual enlargement was rejected by other members of the European Union and the European Commission was instructed to prepare conclusions on the level of preparedness of each of the associated countries and their compliance with the admission criteria [16, p. 106]. These conclusions were prepared by July 1997 and became part of the Order 2000 program, approved at the Luxembourg summit in December of that year. Based on the assessments presented in these conclusions, it was decided at the summit to start accession negotiations with only six candidates: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus. At the venue of the summit, these states were named the Luxembourg Group. Thus, the associated countries were differentiated and a priority group of first-wave candidates was singled out, which was a partial return to the German project. Following the Luxembourg summit, the Baltic states were divided, with only one of them - Estonia - on the list of "first wave" candidates, while the prospects for Latvia and Lithuania remained uncertain. This has provoked strong criticism of this decision from their governments and complaints that accession to the EU by only one of the Baltic States will have a detrimental

effect on socio-economic ties. The Estonian leadership, being quite satisfied with the results of the summit, on the contrary, sought to distance itself from such criticism, and on occasion did not miss the opportunity to emphasize the significant differences between their country and its southern neighbors. The most radical statements of Estonian politicians have argued that in terms of mentality and ethno-confessional roots, it is much more correct to classify Estonia as a group of northern European rather than Baltic countries.

The transformations that took place at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s in the CEE countries prompted the North Atlantic Alliance to reconsider its former attitude towards the region. Already at the NATO summit in London in July 1990, a declaration was adopted in which the Alliance invited the Warsaw Pact (ATS) states to establish a partnership. This declaration initiated negotiations on the formula "four plus two" (four victorious countries in World War II plus two German states), which ended with the unification of Germany on October 3, 1990 [66, p. 8]. In fact, it was not the unification that took place, but the incorporation of the GDR into Germany, which was a member of NATO. Thus, a precedent was set when the territory of one of the main states of the Soviet bloc passed into the area of responsibility of the North Atlantic Alliance. For the pro-Western post-communist governments of the CEE countries, this event was of symbolic importance, as it suggested the possibility of equally rapid and easy integration into Western structures and other police states. As a result, as early as 1991, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia expressed a desire to join the Alliance. Therefore, there is every reason to believe that the unification of Germany itself has become a catalyst for the whole process of NATO enlargement to the east.

Estonia was the first of the Baltic states to declare its desire to join the Alliance. On October 20, 1991, at a meeting in Madrid, the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of the Republic, J. Nulis, informed NATO Secretary General M. Werner [3, p. 53]. However, for the next two years, the Baltic states did

not officially raise the issue of joining NATO, as Russian troops had not yet been withdrawn from their territory. However, all this time the Baltic States have remained determined to integrate into NATO.

This was evident in the decision to establish a national armed forces. Unlike the CEE countries, such as Poland, which chose to reform its old army, which it inherited from Poland and was equipped mainly with Soviet equipment, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia abandoned the use of Soviet military equipment and military personnel that appeared after the collapse. USSR on their territory, to build their own armed forces. Instead, they decided to create a new national armed force from scratch that would fully meet NATO standards. For this reason, Estonia almost refused military cooperation with Finland, which in the early 1990s invited it to share its own experience in defense construction. As is well known, Finland pursues a policy of non-participation in military alliances and its military doctrine is based on the principle of self-defense. Therefore, the Estonian government agreed to accept Finnish assistance only after receiving assurances from NATO military structures that it would not prevent the country's armed forces from complying with Alliance standards [2, p. 132]. The initiative to expand NATO to the east came primarily from the military and political circles of Germany, supported by part of the Clinton administration. According to the German military expert A. Kron, one of the main foreign policy priorities of the united Germany was the desire to change its status of NATO's eastern border and move the bloc's border further east by accepting Poland [55, p. 242]. However, there was no unity in Kohl's government on the issue of Alliance enlargement. Thus, Foreign Minister K. Kinkel was very wary of such a prospect.

The final decision to launch the Eastern Enlargement process was made at a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Bergen, Norway, in September 1996. Despite Russian protests in the person of Defense Minister I. Rodionov, who

was present at the meeting, it was announced that enlargement would take place. In order to minimize Moscow's negative reaction, it was decided to develop a project on rapprochement between NATO and Russia before the negotiations on the accession of specific candidates, which would allow it to be integrated into the European security system. The German government played a central role in this issue. Together with the US State Department, he developed a project of strategic partnership with Russia. As a result, in May 1997, the Fundamental Act on Russia-NATO Relations was signed, on the basis of which the Russia-NATO Council was established. Thus, according to its developers in Bonn and Washington, Russia should have received the right to vote on European security issues, but not the right to veto the decisions of the Alliance [72, p. 31].

In 1995-1997, there was a heated debate among NATO members as to which of the CEE countries should be invited to join the Alliance. Among the transition countries in the region, Poland was the undisputed favorite. Her candidacy was lobbied by Germany and the United States. In addition, Russia, which actively protested against the possible invitation to NATO of the Baltic countries, which it considers as part of the post-Soviet space, had much fewer objections to the invitation of Poland [24, p. 98]. Thus, a consensus was reached almost immediately on her candidacy. The main supporter of the invitation to the Alliance of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was Denmark. However, Danish politicians understood that at that time it was almost impossible. Therefore, the real goal of their lobbying can be considered the moral support of the Baltic States and the strengthening of Denmark's position in the region. In Germany, opinions on this issue are divided. For example, Foreign Minister K. Kinkel, who declared himself a "lawyer of the Baltic States", supported their invitation to the Alliance. However, the main initiator of eastern enlargement - Defense Minister F. Rue - was strongly opposed to this. He believed that granting NATO membership to at least one of the Baltic

countries would destroy the partnership between Germany and Russia [48, p. 16]. Therefore, he was more sympathetic to the candidacies of Slovenia and Romania. The latter candidacy was actively supported by France.

However, as noted by the former Latvian Ambassador to NATO I. Liegis, the last word in the selection of candidates for invitation to the Alliance remained with the United States [17, p. 10]. For the first time, the US government made clear its position on the possibility of admitting the Baltic States to the NATO Defense Ministers' Meeting in Bergen in 1996. W. Perry, in particular, said that these countries would definitely not be invited in the first round of enlargement. not ready [72, p. 30]. In July 1997, on the eve of the NATO Summit in Madrid, the US government announced that it would support only a limited enlargement of the Alliance, which would include only three Central European countries. NATO partners had to agree to the US decision, and only Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were invited to join the Alliance at the Madrid Summit in 1999.

Describing the US position on NATO membership in the Baltic States in the 1990s, it could be called wait-and-see rather negative, as evidenced by the statements of a number of American diplomats [19, p. 2; 7, c. 1]. Thus, at the Madrid Summit it was announced that NATO would continue its "open door" policy. In addition, the document adopted on it noted the efforts of the Baltic countries to strengthen the security of the region. And the 1998 Charter of Partnership between the United States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia explicitly stated that all its signatories were interested in the integration of the Baltic States into NATO. The statements made by American politicians after the signing of this document were even more encouraging for the Baltic countries. Thus, US President B. Clinton stated that his country is determined to create conditions for the Baltic States to join NATO one day [30, p. 8; 42, c. 34]. The Alliance's 50th anniversary Washington Summit, which officially included Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, reaffirmed its

commitment to an "open door" policy. After that, there was no doubt that the process of expansion to the east would continue. However, as in the preparations for the first round of this expansion, the candidates who will enter the next round have not yet been named. The summit only announced that the second round candidates would be determined no later than 2002.

## **SECTION 2**

### **THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING SPECIFIC CONDITIONS AND DEADLINES FOR ACCEPTANCE OF THE BALTIC STATES IN THE EU AND NATO**

#### **2.1. Regional specifics of the Baltic States' preparation for EU accession**

Since the mid-1990s, an important tool of the European Union's foreign policy has been comprehensive strategies for developing cooperation with neighboring regions, known as "measurement". The first such initiative was the Barcelona Process, often referred to as the "Southern" or Mediterranean dimension of the European Union. The EU's fourth enlargement has changed the Baltic region's place among its geopolitical priorities. The Baltic trend in its foreign policy began to compete with the Mediterranean. Thus, on the eve of enlargement, the first plans for the formation of a comprehensive EU strategy for the Baltic region appeared. The European Commission's communication of 25 October 1994 entitled "Coordinating the EU's approach to the Baltic region" stated that the main objective of its policy in this direction was to "develop a comprehensive context for the EU's regional approach to the Baltic region" [61]. The message stated that international cooperation in the Baltic region has great potential and importance for Europe

in the light of the forthcoming EU enlargement and the start of negotiations with the Baltic States on the conclusion of European agreements. The main priority in the political sphere was declared to be "strengthening security and ensuring stable political and economic development of the whole region" [70].

In the field of economics, the priority was the task of trade liberalization, primarily industrial products. Considerable attention was paid to the development of transport and energy infrastructure in the region, attracting investment, protecting the environment and combating organized crime. The document also spoke about the role of the EU as a coordinator of all structures interested in the development of regional cooperation in the Baltic States and the expediency of combining bilateral and multilateral approaches in its policy towards this region. However, the text of the document has repeatedly stressed that the European Union will not create additional development programs and allocate additional funds to implement the measures proposed in it to strengthen regional cooperation. Instead, it was proposed to strengthen the coordination of existing development programs and structural funds operating in the Baltic region. The next step in shaping an integrated approach to EU Baltic policy was the adoption of the Baltic Regional Initiative. It focused on the economic development of the region. Priority areas for international support in the areas of trade, investment, infrastructure, energy, nuclear safety, ecology and tourism were listed. In general, this program was a gradual development of the ideas and principles set out in previous EU documents on the Baltic region. The key principle of his Baltic policy remained to strengthen the coordination of existing structures in the region instead of creating new programs and allocating new resources. Regional cooperation projects that were eligible for financial support from the European Union were to fit into the overall funding strategies of the PHARE, TACIS and INTERREG programs. Given that these programs were originally



aimed at supporting different groups of states, with different specifics, it becomes clear that the possibilities of their interaction were very limited. Thus, the idea that with the adoption of the "Baltic Regional Initiative" in the EU there was a comprehensive strategy for the Baltic region, seems unfounded. It did not make fundamental changes in its Baltic policy and disappointed many supporters of intensifying the role of the European Union in the Baltics [59, p. 42]. Therefore, it can be concluded that the "Initiative" was mainly symbolic, marking the growing interest of the EU in the Baltic region and its desire to play a leading role in the development of regional cooperation here. The most important milestone in the development of a comprehensive EU strategy for the Baltic region was the Northern Dimension program. Although the geographical scope of this program was defined much wider than the borders of the Baltic region, it became the main territory of its implementation. A significant role in the implementation of the "Northern Dimension" was given to organizations in the Baltic region, such as the RDBM, the Organization of Subregional Cooperation of the Baltic States, the Helsinki Commission and others. In addition, all states covered by this program were members of the RDBM at the same time. Thus, by analogy with the "Southern" (Mediterranean) "Northern Dimension" can be called the Baltic.

The Northern Dimension program covered almost all areas of cooperation in the region, except the military. In its documents the following directions were defined as spheres of activity [34, p. 1; 35, c. 8]:

- development of transport, energy and telecommunication infrastructure;
- environmental protection, nuclear safety and use of natural resources;
- cooperation in the field of education, science and human resources development;
- health care practice;

- development of trade, business and investment in the region;
- development of cross-border and interregional cooperation;
- fight against international crime;
- issues of justice and domestic policy.

It is clear that it was simply impossible to achieve serious results in the development of such a wide range of activities for a program that has neither a clear institutional framework nor its own financial resources. Therefore, gradually from this extensive list of tasks, certain areas are beginning to stand out, which are given more attention and which over time become the unspoken priorities of the "Northern Dimension".

Ecology has become one of the priority areas where the Northern Dimension program has achieved perhaps the greatest results. At a conference in Stavanger, Norway, in December 1998, it was emphasized that environmental issues were of common interest and should be based on multilateral cooperation. The main issues facing the region in this area were nuclear safety, hazardous waste management and water treatment. The most problematic regions in the field of environmental protection were usually called northwestern Russia (nuclear power facilities and radioactive waste storage facilities on the Kola Peninsula and near St. Petersburg) and Lithuania (Ignalina NPP) [22, p. 3].

Another important area of the Northern Dimension was the development of cross-border and interregional cooperation in northern Europe. The INTERREG IIC program adopted in 1997, in which all the states of the Baltic region took part, was of the greatest importance in this regard. It covered parts of Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Poland, Russia and Belarus, as well as all of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The program was focused on supporting territorial development and transnational cooperation. The creation

and development of a strategic alliance of cities of important economic importance in the region was declared its special goal [27, p. 146]. It should also be noted the Baltic Cooperation Program (SWEBALTCOP), which began in 1998. Its goal was to develop cross-border cooperation between the southern and eastern regions of Sweden with the Baltic countries, northern Poland and the regions of the Russian Federation accessing the Baltic Sea. The program focused on environmental and economic development, as well as the modernization of local and regional government systems.

Evaluation of the results of the Northern Dimension program is associated with serious difficulties. First of all, this is due to the fact that its purpose and objectives were formulated too abstractly: strengthening cooperation and coordination, developing positive interdependence, etc. In the absence of clear criteria for the tasks and a clearly defined goal to achieve their solution, what assessments of progress will be subjective. Based on the formulation of the tasks set before the program, it is safe to say that it was more focused on the process of cooperation than on its results. In this sense, the Northern Dimension program has in fact duplicated the functions of the RDBM, becoming another international forum for the EU's informal dialogue with the Baltic states.

We can agree with such researchers as H. Haucalla and M. Val, who pointed to the initial lack of a clear focus and specific content in this program. Their argument was based on the fact that the program extended to virtually all areas of regional cooperation, except military. And its policy documents gave the impression that they were all priorities of the Northern Dimension. As M. Val wrote in this regard, "when everything is a priority, in fact it indicates a lack of priorities" [71, p. 4]. However, in 2001, at the EU summit in Feira and the ministerial conference in Luxembourg, several priority areas were identified from the general list. These included: ecology (including nuclear safety), the fight against cross-border crime and the problem of Kaliningrad

[49, p. 70]. The second Action Plan of the Northern Dimension program paid special attention to the problems of minimizing the negative consequences for cooperation in the region after the accession of the Baltic States and Poland to the EU [69, p. 3].

It is also difficult to give an objective assessment of progress in the specific areas of implementation of the Northern Dimension listed in its Action Plans and other policy documents, but for a different reason. The multi-level approach and the blurred institutional structure, which the developers intended to free the program from bureaucracy and give it special flexibility, in practice turned into confusion and duplication of functions. According to the Russian researcher K. Voronov, each agency or structure of the EU that participated in the implementation of the "Northern Dimension" sought to record the success of the program at their own expense, and this led to their double counting [5, p. 83]. The program often includes projects whose implementation began under PHARE, TACIS, INTERREG or on a bilateral basis between the countries of the region long before its adoption. As a result, the success of the Northern Dimension program presented in the European Commission's annual reports has often been greatly overestimated.

In fact, according to vague statements about the formation of positive interdependence and strengthening comprehensive cooperation in the region, the European Union set two very specific tasks: preparing for EU accession of the Baltic States and Poland and ensuring stable energy supplies from northern Russia. Thus, K. Arker notes that the program "Northern Dimension" added little to the already adopted strategies for preparing candidate countries for accession to the Union and the Joint EU Strategy for Russia [36, p. 33]. In this regard, it seemed quite logical that the program should have ended after the enlargement in 2004, when most countries became members of the EU and, therefore, most of its problem area went into the sphere of domestic policy of the Union. Therefore, in the EU and

candidate countries, the debate on the transformation of the "Northern Dimension" after the expiration of the second Action Plan of the program in 2006. In 2002-2004, projects to transform the "Northern Dimension" into the East by connecting to it in addition to Russia and others eastern neighbors of the European Union [23].

However, contrary to forecasts, the EU continues to implement this program to this day. Its development since 2006 was discussed at the Fourth Ministerial Meeting on the Northern Dimension, held in November 2005. It was decided to establish a document that would define the general conceptual framework of the program and operate continuously, in contrast to the previously adopted three-year Action Plans. [50, p. 2]. The document adopted at the meeting stressed the need for a more realistic approach to defining the goals and objectives of the Northern Dimension, as well as reducing the scope of the program, based on the limited resources.

Therefore, there are two main directions in the EU's Baltic policy. The first of them was due to the enlargement strategy of the European Union. Its ultimate goal was the integration of most states in the region into the Union and the extension of the EU's Community law system to them. The second direction was based on the perception of the Baltic region as an object of EU foreign policy, as not all its states were candidates for accession to the Union. The embodiment of this direction was the model of regional "dimensions", first tested by the EU in the Mediterranean region. This duality of the EU's Baltic policy has eroded its goals and objectives. As a result, significant success was achieved only in the first direction.

## **2.2. Features of preparation of the Baltic countries for joining NATO**

Regional military cooperation programs have played an important role in developing the partnership between NATO and the Baltic transition countries. Their main participants were the three Baltic states seeking to join the Alliance, and the closest NATO member states (Germany, Denmark, Norway). Central to regional military cooperation projects was the Baltic Security Assistance Group (BALTSEA), founded in 1997. It has become a major contribution of the region to the NATO PfP program. Within its framework, a number of projects were implemented, such as the creation of a joint Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion (BALTBAT), a consolidated Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON), the Baltic Defense College (BALTDEFCOL), and others. The program was managed on two levels. The first of them was the development of specific projects and plans for their development. The main governing body here was the Committee of Defense Ministers of the three Baltic States. At the second level, general coordination and control of projects was carried out, as well as determining the amount of international assistance for their implementation. The main role here was played by the Steering Group, which included not only the Baltic States, but also Western countries interested in supporting this program. Two responsible states were also appointed to manage specific projects - one of the Baltic states and one of the western countries, among which the northern states and Germany were the most active [41].

The first joint project of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the field of military cooperation was BALTBAT. The decision to form it was made by the three Baltic countries in December 1993, ie before the official adoption of the PfP program [8, p. 119]. This formation was created mainly to participate in peacekeeping operations. To complete it, each of the three countries had to

send about 200 servicemen. The "Baltic Battalion Memorandum of Understanding" was also signed by other countries in the Baltic region: Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. Subsequently, these states provided significant assistance in the field of logistics and training of battalion personnel. Thus, in 1997, the Estonian contingent BALTBAT was trained on the basis of the Norwegian peacekeeping force in Lebanon. Later, the battalion gained practical experience in military operations. Since 1998, its units have participated in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina [14, p. 149].

Another project implemented under the BALTSEA program was the formation in 1997 of the consolidated Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON). Its headquarters were located in Estonia. The main task of the squadron was to clear the Baltic Sea. In addition, it could be used for rescue operations at sea. Another important function of BALTRON was to develop NATO military standards by the Baltic Navy.

In addition to projects implemented under the BALTSEA initiative, there are other examples of multilateral and bilateral military cooperation in the Baltic region. Germany, Denmark and Poland were very active in it. Thus, in 1997, on the basis of the German-Danish command LANDJUT, a multinational corps "Northeast" was formed, which included German, Danish and Polish divisions [55 p. 245]. The headquarters of this formation is located in Szczecin (Poland). After Poland became an official candidate for NATO membership, the Baltic states began to actively develop military and political cooperation with it. This is especially evident in the example of Lithuania, which sought to adopt the "Polish model" of NATO integration [50, p. 142]. Another important area of military cooperation in the region has been international assistance to the Baltic states in building national armed forces and strengthening their defense capabilities. The main areas here were the supply of military machinery and equipment, as well as training of military

personnel. Thus, the vast majority of the navies of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia consist of ships provided free of charge by Germany. Many of their officers studied in military institutions in Sweden, Finland and Denmark. A special mention should be made of the position of Denmark, which has in fact taken on the role of coordinator of Western programs to strengthen the security of the Baltic States. In June 1997, on its initiative, the Copenhagen Group was formed, which then regularly considered the needs of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the military sphere [33, p. 7].

The next important event in the development of relations between the Baltic States and NATO was the Madrid Summit of the Alliance in 1997, which named the candidates for the first round of enlargement. As none of the Baltic States was among them, this prompted the leadership of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to abandon the tactics of "forced integration" and reconsider their previous policies towards a more realistic assessment of the international situation, a more pragmatic and comprehensive approach to preparing their countries for accession. in the Alliance [21, p. 2].

First of all, these three states sought to prove that in the event of accession to the Alliance, they will not only become "consumers" of security, but will also be able to make a contribution to strengthening the bloc's defense capabilities. The main emphasis was on participation in NATO peacekeeping operations. Thus, in 1997, one of the units of BALTBAT was trained on the basis of the Norwegian peacekeeping contingent in Lebanon. In addition, military and civilian personnel from the Baltic States have participated in all NATO peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. As a rule, the Baltic peacekeepers served together with contingents from the northern countries. Of course, due to objective reasons, the practical significance of their participation in these operations was not great. However, it was designed to demonstrate to the members of the Alliance the loyalty of the Baltic States to its policy and their readiness to take an active part in its implementation [37, p. 57]. Thus,



Estonia sent about 900 peacekeepers to Bosnia and Kosovo. According to experts of the American Center for Strategic Studies, as a percentage of the country's population, this was the largest contribution among the states that sent their troops to these peacekeeping missions [67, p. 9].

In addition, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia sought to form national armed forces fully compatible with the bloc's standards, which was to facilitate their further integration into its military structures. To this end, regular consultations with NATO military construction experts were held. The training of Baltic army officers was also mainly carried out in NATO countries. Much attention was paid to the practical development of NATO standards during joint military exercises. Lithuania has done the most in terms of conducting ground exercises. Since the mid-1990s, the Amber Valley and Winter Valley annual exercises have been held on its territory, with the participation of military experts and military units from NATO and other Baltic states. In 1998, a large-scale exercise called the Baltic Challenge took place on its territory, in which, in addition to the armed forces of the Baltic States, 2,000 US servicemen took part. As for naval exercises, the championship belonged to Latvia, which since 1996 has conducted a number of joint exercises with Germany, the United States and Sweden [15, p. 92].

Following the Washington Summit, a new phase in the Alliance's relations with the Baltic States has begun. The summit's decision to continue the "open door" policy after the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary launched preparations for a new round of NATO's eastern enlargement. And the fact that the states that will enter the next round of enlargement was not named, contributed to the intensification of rivalry between the candidate countries. At the same summit, a Membership Preparation Action Plan (MAP) was adopted, which became an additional tool for preparing candidates for membership in the Alliance. The purpose of this program was to help these countries meet NATO standards and better prepare for accession, based on

their characteristics and needs, each of which had to be set out in annual individual plans [68].

The Baltic states objectively had the weakest chances of joining, as Russia strongly objected to their membership in NATO. According to some military experts, ensuring effective defense of the territory of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the event of a potential conflict with Russia would be an extremely difficult task for NATO from a geostrategic point of view. In this context, the Baltic States have developed their own strategies for integration into the Alliance, which were designed to prove to its leadership that they are the best prepared to join all candidates and that their adoption will strengthen not only their own security but also NATO security in general [ 18, c. 7]. An important element of these strategies is the development of regional military cooperation. It included a number of programs and projects in which to some extent participated almost all the states of the Baltic region, except Russia. In addition to the regional projects already discussed above, two more should be mentioned - BALTDEFCOL and BALTNET. One of the main tasks facing Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in NATO integration was to train personnel to create an armed force fully compatible with Alliance standards. In this regard, the most significant project for the three countries can be considered the establishment of the Higher Baltic Defense College (BALDEFCOL) in Tartu (Estonia). Since 1999, the institution has been training senior officers from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, as well as civil servants, to work in their Ministries of Defense and General Staffs. The college has received international recognition, and along with representatives of the defense structures of the Baltic States, it has been training specialists from other CEE countries since 2002, as well as from Georgia [40].

But perhaps the most significant for NATO was the project of forming a single system of airspace surveillance and data exchange - BALTNET - by the Baltic States. The decision to create it was made in 1996, but the practical

implementation of the project was delayed due to the need to purchase modern radars and other expensive equipment. As a result, the system became operational only in 2000. After the accession of the Baltic States to NATO and the integration of BALTNET with the bloc's surveillance systems, the Alliance was able to monitor and control not only the airspace of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, but also neighboring Russia and Belarus. According to military experts, the range of some radars reaches 1000 km [10, p. 390].

Polish-Lithuanian cooperation has also developed significantly. Since September 1999, a Lithuanian unit has participated in a NATO military operation in Kosovo as part of a Polish battalion. And within the framework of the bilateral military partnership agreement for 2001-2003, a joint Lithuanian-Polish mechanized battalion (LITPOLBAT) was formed [58, p. 34].

Although such a large military partnership in the region created the preconditions for the formation of a regional system of collective defense, they were never implemented due to the persistent rejection by the Baltic States and Poland of any forms of regionalization in the security sector that would hinder their integration into wider Western defense structures. Thus, the representative of the Estonian Foreign Ministry G. Tiido stated in 2000 at a regional conference in Stockholm that the security of the region can be achieved only by its inclusion in the European security system, which is based on NATO, and therefore "there can be no question of a separate Baltic security system" [70, p. 19]. Thus, the possibilities of regional military cooperation were significantly limited. In fact, its main task was to develop a military partnership between the Baltic transition states and the NATO bloc and to prepare them for integration into the Alliance's military structures.

The next direction of the Baltic countries' integration strategies is to bring national legislation in line with its introductory requirements. Thus, the Lithuanian Seimas had to amend Article 137 of the constitution, which

prohibited the deployment of foreign troops and military facilities in the country. In addition, for the states "participating in Euro-Atlantic integration", in January 2002, preferences were introduced in the field of military transit through Lithuanian territory [72, p. 7]. NATO's requirement to establish civilian control over the armed forces has also been enshrined in law. The most difficult to implement for the Baltic countries was the Alliance's requirement to review state budgets and allocate at least 2% of GDP to defense needs. On the eve of the Prague NATO Summit, Lithuania came closest to fulfilling this indicator [62, p. 7].

Diplomatic work on lobbying for the inclusion of the Baltic States in the next round of enlargement was also an important area. There are two main approaches: joint lobbying, aimed at the simultaneous admission of all three republics to NATO, and the desire of each to prove that it is the most prepared candidate and that its admission will be the least problematic for the Alliance. An example of joint lobbying is the Vilnius Group, which involved almost all candidate countries and a number of Western politicians. The aim of this initiative, launched in the spring of 2000, was to persuade the Alliance to start accession negotiations in November 2002 with as many candidates as possible [28, p. 6]. In addition, joint defense ministers of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia visited the United States and Germany in the spring of 2002 to reassure NATO leaders that joining the Baltic States would strengthen the Alliance's security and create no major international problems. An example of individual lobbying is the active propaganda work of the Lithuanian leadership with US congressmen and diplomats from NATO countries. At the same time we can agree with the expert of the Ministry of National Defense of Lithuania K. Paulauskas that in this matter rivalry between the Baltic States almost always prevailed over joint action [63, p. 22]. Thus, at the turn of the 1990s and 2000s, comprehensive strategies for NATO integration were being developed in the Baltic States, involving virtually all state institutions. For the same

purpose, separate structures are being set up in the governments and diplomatic missions of the Baltic states to prepare for accession to the Alliance, often endowed with considerable powers. In addition, there is a rare consensus among the political forces of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia on this issue. Whether right-wing, left-wing or centrist in power, no government has questioned NATO integration. The perseverance with which the Baltic states sought membership in this organization allows us to conclude that this task was a priority in the system of their foreign policy priorities in the 1990s. There was uncertainty as to whether a new security system in the region would be formed under the auspices of the North Atlantic Alliance or outside it. There are three main alternatives:

- the formation of a belt of neutral states in the region and, thus, its transformation into a buffer zone between the military-political structures of the West and the post-Soviet space;
- creation of an independent Baltic regional system of collective security;
- ensuring the security of the region through its integration into the existing security structures of the EU.

The only consistent supporter of the implementation of the first of these scenarios was Russia. It seemed extremely important to Moscow to prevent its former allies under the Warsaw Pact and, even more so, the former Soviet republics from joining NATO by any means. However, after the rapid loss of positions in the Baltic in the early 1990s, its ability to influence the situation was extremely limited. Therefore, the idea of neutralizing the Baltic region is becoming widespread in the Russian leadership. It was to be based on cross-security guarantees to the states located here by the West and Russia in exchange for their refusal to participate in any military blocs outside the region. At the same time, Russia's proposals did not rule out the possibility of forming regional security structures, as well as the participation of countries

in the region in the process of European integration. As the main argument in favor of neutralizing the region, Moscow cited the possibility of avoiding a direct clash between NATO and Russia and thus reduce the risk of a new large-scale conflict in Europe [31].

However, Russia's proposals have not found support abroad. We can agree with the Deputy Director of the Center for Political Studies in Russia PIR YE Fedorov, who pointed out three reasons for the inadmissibility of this plan for the Baltic states themselves and for the West. First, in this case, the special military-political status of the Baltic States and their difference in this respect from most European states would be recorded, which, of course, went against their main political course of "return to Europe." Second, the security guarantees they would receive from the West and Russia in the event of a declaration of neutrality were in practice much weaker than those that the collective defense system within NATO could provide. Finally, the demand for a neutral buffer zone between Russia and NATO meant for many Western politicians that, despite the end of the Cold War, Moscow considered it likely that a new military confrontation would begin in Europe in the long run. The West's position on this issue was described by the British military expert D. Austin. He noted that from the point of view of security, the neutralization and demilitarization of the Baltic region is not of interest to the West or to the states of the region. It will only increase the vulnerability of the small Baltic countries and bring unilateral strategic advantages to Russia, which will be able to deploy armed forces in the immediate vicinity of these states, which in conditions of internal instability in Russia itself can pose a serious threat to their security [38, p. 7].

As for the plans to create a regional security organization, we can mention the project put forward by the Clinton administration in the mid-1990s.

According to it, it was planned that the regional defense system would provide allied obligations only for the war in the absence of peacetime

coordinating bodies and joint command. Its competence was to include issues of ensuring the peaceful development of the region, filling the "vacuum of power" created after the collapse of the USSR, and joint reflection of the countries of the region of possible aggression without the involvement of military assistance from outside. In fact, this project was a political concession to Russia. Although, according to military experts, this option was quite profitable for the United States itself. Its implementation would allow Washington to create a strong counterweight to a possible resumption of Russian influence in the Baltics, as no one doubted that the regional bloc would generally pursue a pro-Western orientation. At the same time, Moscow's demand that the region's non-participation in NATO's military structure be formally complied with. In addition, this option would allow the United States to shift the main burden of responsibility (including financial) for the security of the weak Baltic states to the northern countries, which were given the role of locomotive of the new regional security system. Thus, in March 1996, analysts at the American RAND Center suggested that Sweden, as the leading state in Northern Europe, alone or jointly with other countries, take responsibility for the security of the Baltic States. Former British Foreign Secretary D. Heard also expressed support for the idea of creating a Baltic regional security system, which would include Sweden, Finland and the three Baltic states.

Thus, in the mid-1990s, this idea received support in Western political circles. However, Sweden and Finland have unequivocally refused to participate in this project. The Swedish government, in particular, justified its refusal by the fact that the costs associated with the country's military and political guarantees to the Baltic States will significantly exceed the benefits that can give it the status of a regional superpower [32, p. 81].

The third option for ensuring regional security outside NATO involved the countries of the region joining the European Security and Defense Policy

(ESDP) during EU integration. This option had a number of advantages over others. First of all, he did not contradict the general political course of the region's transition states towards full-scale integration into Europe. In addition, integration into the European collective security system helped to overcome the limited resources of the region in the defense sphere and at the same time not aggravate relations with any of the major powers, as both Russia and the United States were loyal to the development of ESDP and CEE transition [27, p. 148].

However, despite all these advantages, the ESDP has not become an alternative to NATO membership for most of the Baltic States. In this regard, there are two main reasons why they preferred NATO to the EU over security. First of all, it is the incompleteness of the formation of the military-political component of European integration. The pace of political integration within the European Union lags far behind economic integration. Discussions on the formation of a common security and defense policy began only in the 1990s and were accompanied by serious disagreements over the key question of whether the EU needed its own military structures independent of NATO command. Many EU members have ruled out this possibility, opposing EU duplication of NATO functions. As a result, a compromise decision on the ESDP was adopted at the Cologne summit in 1999. Although it has become part of EU policy, its functions have been limited to small-scale anti-crisis and humanitarian operations in close cooperation with NATO. Thus, by the early 2000s, the military-political component of European integration was still in the process of forming and forming an independent EU collective security system capable of competing with that established in the North Atlantic Alliance, which seemed unlikely.

Speaking about the attitude of the Baltic States to the ESDP, the position of the Nordic countries, which joined the number of the most consistent opponents of its strengthening, should be especially noted. All of them sought



to preserve the guarantees of their territorial security outside the European Union [46, p. 219]. Denmark, for example, ratified the Maastricht Treaty only after being granted the right not to participate in a number of areas of European integration, including the CFSP (Danish "reservations"). It was extremely important for Sweden and Finland that EU membership did not conflict with their status as states that do not participate in military alliances. Therefore, one of the main conditions for their accession to the EU was the non-interference of this organization in the issue of military security.

In addition, all Nordic countries have advocated maintaining the American presence in Europe and NATO's leading role in European security. Like other small EU states, they believed that American influence should counterbalance the growing political dominance of France and Germany in Europe. Even the governments of Sweden and Finland, which are not members of NATO, have said that further development of transatlantic ties will help strengthen the security of their countries. Finally, all three states prefer the development of the ESDP through the formation of civilian anti-crisis forces (police forces, rescue services, etc.) rather than a system of collective defense based on the creation of common units and a single command [46]. However, there are significant differences in the positions of Denmark, Sweden and Finland. They are related to the attitude to the development of the political component of European integration in general and the vision of future relations between the EU and NATO. Thus, Denmark, as a member of both these organizations, in accordance with the "reservations" to the Maastricht Treaty does not participate in the development and implementation of the CFSP and ESDP. Therefore, in matters of military-political cooperation, it clearly prefers NATO. Membership in this organization is seen as an important strategic resource of the country, which increases its weight in European politics. Therefore, the Danish leadership is seriously concerned about the possibility of weakening the Alliance as a result of further strengthening of the ESDP

and a more independent role of the EU in the political arena. Sweden and Finland have taken a more neutral position in this regard, advocating both a further strengthening of the ESDP and a deepening of transatlantic ties. The Nordic countries fear that the creation of supranational security structures in the EU will lead to its federalization. Of the three states, only Finland finds such a variant of European integration acceptable [46, p. 220].

As for the Baltic States, they, not being full members of the European Union at the time, could not influence the development of the ESDP. However, lagging behind the economic criteria for admission from other candidates from CEE, they sought to fill this gap through political loyalty [34, p. 57]. Wanting to demonstrate the seriousness of their intentions to integrate into the Western community and play an active role as future members of the EU, these countries were ready to participate in all areas of European integration, including the ESDP. At the same time, they saw participation in it only as an additional factor in ensuring their security, and not as an alternative to joining NATO. The incomplete formation of the ESDP and sharp differences within the EU on key issues of its development, as well as the skeptical attitude of all its northern European members to strengthen this direction of European integration have prevented the formation of a new security system in the Baltic region under EU auspices.

### **2.3. The impact of EU accession on the further development of the Baltic States and their participation in deepening European integration**

The accession of the Baltic States to the European Union was of great importance in terms of changing their international legal status and the nature of relations with European integration institutions. However, the main trends of economic and political development of these states in the first years of

membership have not changed much compared to the early 2000s, as the processes of adaptation to EU norms and standards, as well as integration into its common economic space began long before accession. . After Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia became full members of the EU, in the field of European integration they still faced the task of fulfilling additional conditions for joining the Schengen area and joining the euro area. However, they have been able to use the resources of previously unavailable EU funds and other financial instruments and to some extent to influence decisions on the further development of European integration. Therefore, this section should consider the main characteristics of the economic development of the Baltic States in their new capacity as EU members, their position on the development and deepening of the main directions of European integration, as well as their participation in EU governing bodies, including presidency of the EU Council.

The first four years after the accession of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the EU were a period of active economic growth and improving the living standards of their populations. EU subsidies, the inflow of foreign investment and the removal of barriers to foreign trade have contributed to economic development. According to R. H. Simonyan, during this period the Baltic countries were valued by many as citadels of economic growth and a standard of successful socio-economic reforms, as states that received maximum dividends from integration into Western political and economic structures. By analogy with Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have even been called "Baltic Tigers". They have become developed countries not only among the countries of the post-Soviet space and the CEE region, but also among the European Union. Their GDP growth rates were several times higher than the EU average and could only be compared with the GDP growth rates of Slovakia, which took the leading position in the European Union in this indicator. From 2000 to 2007, the GDP of the Baltic

States grew 2.5-3 times. At the same time, if we look not at the growth rate, but at the real value of GDP, it turns out that in 2007 it only slightly exceeded half of the EU average (Latvia - 55.7%, Lithuania - 59.3%, Estonia - 68.8%). In 2000, similar figures were 36.7, 39.3 and 45.0%, respectively. This situation allowed the Baltic States to enjoy the support of the Cohesion Fund and other EU structural funds. In 2004-2006, Latvia received 1.2 billion euros from them, Lithuania - 1.7 billion euros, Estonia - 800 million euros [25, p. 37]. Still, it would be wrong to say that economic growth came only from EU subsidies. The structural changes that have taken place in the Baltic economies in the run-up to accession to the European Union have led to the leading role in their economy being played by the services sector. After joining the EU, it provided up to 60-70% of their GDP and served as the main source of its growth. According to Eurostat, Latvia ranked 4th in the EU in 2006 in wholesale (after Greece, Germany and the UK) and in real estate, renting and leasing (after Denmark, the UK and Germany). In addition, Latvia and Lithuania ranked 3rd and 4th, respectively, after Germany and the United Kingdom in the field of transport and logistics services. A significant contribution was also made by the construction industry, whose share in the economy of the Baltic States increased almost one and a half times, especially in Lithuania. At the same time, construction volumes increased almost 7 times in Latvia, 3-3.5 times in Lithuania, and 2.5-3 times in Estonia. In general, turnover in the services sector has increased on average three times.

Even industry and agriculture, whose share in the GDP of the Baltic States has fallen 3-4 times since independence, have shown significant growth in recent years. Compared to 2000, the volume of industrial output increased in Latvia by 39.1%, Lithuania - by 83.9%, Estonia - by 87.9%. Over the same years, value added in agriculture increased significantly at producer prices: in Latvia from 182 to 343 million euros, in Lithuania from 394 to 521 million euros, and in Estonia from 137 to 254 million euros. At the same time, the

total number of agricultural producers decreased significantly (especially in Estonia - by almost a third). And the physical volume of agricultural production has not reached the level of the Soviet years [26, p. 45].

However, rapid economic growth, which came mainly from the service sector, soon led to "overheating" of the economy. Structural changes in the economies of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which took place in the process of their reorientation to the EU markets and laid the preconditions for a further economic crisis. Back in December 2006, the authoritative British magazine *The Economist* published an article naming the main threats to the economic development of the Baltic States. First of all, mentioned: "bubble" in the real estate market, a significant deficit in current account balances (17.9% of GDP in Latvia, 14.1% of GDP in Lithuania and 12.5% of GDP in Estonia), as well as a sharp increase wages in construction, trade and tourism in the general labor shortage of the labor market, which arose due to the outflow of the most qualified personnel to other EU countries.

The first adverse signal was rising inflation. Contrary to initial expectations, it did not allow the Baltic countries to join the eurozone in 2008. The cause of inflation was primarily the oversaturation of the economy with speculative money from EU countries, especially from Sweden. In addition, EU accession has boosted consumer prices. The main catalyst for inflation was rising energy prices - for liquid fuel and gas, it averaged 10-20%, which led to higher payments for housing and utilities. The third factor that contributed to inflation was rising prices for medicines and medical services. This was especially true for Latvia, where medicines went up by an average of 20% and doctors' services by 60%.

According to sociologist RH Simonyan, after joining the EU in the Baltic countries came the era of cheap and easily accessible borrowed funds. The rapid growth of wages and the availability of consumer credit have contributed to changes in people's consumer psychology - from "convinced

accumulators" they "evolved into wasteful" who are accustomed to living inconsistently with their wealth [26]. Only for the last three pre-crisis years (2005-2007) the growth of the average salary here was from 30 to 40%. If we take the whole period from the early 2000s, the incomes of the population of the Baltic countries increased by 3-3.5 times.

However, it is important to emphasize that this increase in income was not the result of a corresponding increase in productivity, but mainly due to external borrowing. Thus, by the beginning of 2006, the accumulated volume of foreign direct investment in Estonia amounted to 97.2% of GDP, in Lithuania and Latvia - 33.6 and 33.1%, respectively. In 2007, it was also the most significant in Estonia - 12.664 billion dollars. US dollars, or 77.2% of GDP, in Latvia - 7.532 billion dollars. (37.5% of GDP), Lithuania - 10.939 billion dollars. (36.7% of GDP) [26, p. 40]. During the economic boom, the Baltic states rapidly increased their external debts. By the end of 2008, Latvia's debt amounted to 44 billion dollars. USA, ie it was almost 9 times larger than the country's gold and foreign exchange reserves (\$ 5 billion), Lithuania - 35.5 billion dollars, which is more than 4 times the reserves (more than 8 billion dollars). Estonia's reserves amounted to only 1/8 of the country's external debt, which reached 29.5 billion dollars. [26, p. 40].

In the Baltic States, the crisis was accompanied by a sharp decline in GDP per capita, rising unemployment, deflation (falling consumer prices) and falling domestic demand due to lower wages and the de facto cessation of consumer lending. The desire of their population to reach the Western European level of consumption at an accelerated pace, which in the pre-crisis years was stimulated by cheap loans, led to an increase in mortgage and leasing debts. The real estate market has responded to the increase in demand and the availability of credit by a multiple increase in house prices. Banks with predominantly Scandinavian capital, which formed the backbone of the Baltic banking sector, provoked a sharp decline in lending rates and a credit boom in

the industry that lasted until the end of 2007. Beginning in the second half of 2008, the financial crisis virtually paralyzed their operations. Most loans issued by banks for the purchase of real estate and construction work were not repaid. Therefore, they had to learn such new functions as the management of confiscated objects. And since in the crisis in the real estate market to sell these objects was unprofitable, the cost of performing these functions has grown steadily. As a result, banks suffered serious losses and virtually stopped lending to businesses.

However, the crisis in the banking sector was not limited to lending. Banks also suffered losses from servicing deposits. First of all, it concerned long-term deposits. Before the crisis, high rates were set for them - 7-8% per annum and banks had to pay depositors, among whom were many large companies, including insurance, huge sums. At the same time, the population, having received a deposit guarantee of up to 50 thousand euros from the European Union, began to increase their savings. Unable to pay the former high interest rates, banks were forced to reduce interest rates almost tenfold in two years, from 5% in autumn 2008 to 0.6% in autumn 2010. But, paying even such a small deposit interest to depositors, Baltic banks worked to the detriment. To avoid the collapse of the financial and credit system, the Baltic states were forced to subsidize banks. The most striking example of such a policy was the purchase by the state of Latvia's largest bank - Parexbanka. The costs of this measure were so large for the country's budget that necessitated a twofold reduction in salaries of state employees [26, p. 40].

The most difficult situation is in Latvia, where a parliamentary crisis erupted in 2011, culminating in the dissolution of parliament on the initiative of President Valdis Zatlers, approved by the country's population in a national referendum. As a result of the snap elections, the coalition government was again headed by Valdis Dombrovskis, who had previously begun an anti-crisis policy of austerity. In Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė, a representative of

the center-left Social Democratic Party, won the 2009 presidential election. And following the 2012 parliamentary elections, the conservative government of Andrius Kubilius was replaced by a coalition of left-wing forces led by the same Social Democrats. And only in Estonia did the center-right government of Andrus Ansip stay in power all the years of crisis and post-crisis recovery - until the spring of 2014.

Another feature of the development of the domestic political situation in the Baltic States during the crisis, which experts note, was the "formation of alternative centers of political power" [52, p. 25] in Latvia and Estonia, which oppose the national governments of these states, as a result of the victory in the municipal elections in their capitals of parties focused on supporting Russian-speaking minorities and rapprochement with Russia. These are the Estonian Party of the Center, led by the mayor of Tallinn Edgar Savisaar, and the Latvian association "Center of Consent", whose leader Neil Ushakov in 2009 took the post of mayor of Riga. Both politicians have repeatedly visited Moscow, led by business delegations from their countries, and generally take a different position from the Latvian and Estonian governments on Russia's place in their foreign policy priorities, advocating for better political relations and deepening economic ties. Nevertheless, the Baltic states managed to avoid economic bankruptcy and destabilization of the political system. Their policies of fiscal stabilization and reduction of government spending soon began to bear fruit, and by 2011 the recession was replaced by economic growth, which continued in 2012 and 2013. According to a report released in May 2014 by the International Monetary Fund on the state of the Baltic economies, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania almost completely overcame the negative consequences of the crisis of 2008-2009 [39]. The desire to minimize external borrowing, along with the commitment of conservative fiscal policy will not exceed the threshold of 60% of GDP, provided by the convergence criteria of the EU Maastricht Treaty, set for countries wishing to switch to a



common European currency [20]. Estonia, the first to recover from the crisis, was able to join the eurozone in 2011. Latvia followed its example in 2014, and Lithuania - on January 1, 2015. Therefore, now Baltic politicians like to emphasize at every opportunity the correctness of the chosen course based on tough financial discipline, and its advantages over the course of the leadership of Greece, which, having at the time of the crisis much better starting position, managed to get bogged down in external debt and provoke a new crisis of European scale.

With regard to the positioning of the Baltic States in the EU's domestic policy and their attitude to the further development of European integration, the evolution of their positions on these issues should be considered in more detail. During the accession negotiations, they took a largely positive or neutral stance on deepening integration, including in the field of foreign policy and security, advocating close cooperation between the EU and NATO in these areas. However, already during the discussion of the Convention on the Future of Europe, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia began to lean in favor of maintaining the status quo and the priority of the old intergovernmental decision-making methods in the EU over supranational ones. There were two main reasons for that. First, they feared that the proposed draft European constitution would transform the EU into a superpower in which the sovereignty of small countries, such as the Baltic states, would simply dissolve. During this period, the Baltic Eurosceptics were particularly fond of drawing parallels between the European Union and the USSR, trying to evoke in the population negative images of the past and associations with Soviet bureaucracy and planning and directive management methods. Secondly, they were particularly concerned about the development of integration policies, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), which, in their view, could weaken the role of NATO and transatlantic relations. languages.

Thus, at the time of their accession, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were inclined to join the Eurosceptic camp led by the United Kingdom, which opposes strengthening the powers of European supranational structures, especially in the political and military spheres, where they can compete with NATO. But in the first months of their EU membership, they revised their previous approaches. The Baltic states soon realized that the European Commission was the main defender of the interests of small new EU members in the face of stronger partners. In this way, they have never supported initiatives aimed at weakening the powers of the European Commission. At the same time, there were differences in approaches to the adoption of the European Constitutional Treaty between the three countries: if Latvia and Estonia took a wait-and-see attitude, Lithuania became the first EU country to ratify the document in 2004.

The signing of the Nord Stream pipeline agreement in 2005, contrary to the interests of the Baltic states, also forced them to change their policy towards greater support for deepening European integration. They began to advocate the strengthening of the EU CFSP, especially in the Russian direction, and the formation of a common European energy policy. Finally, rapid economic growth and improved living standards in the first years after accession have helped to increase the EU's popularity and support European integration among the people of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the same time, according to A. Kasekamp, support for even such a direction of European integration as the ESDP has increased, which previously caused many concerns: referring to the statistics of Eurobarometer surveys, he cites data that in Lithuania by the end of 2006 it was 85% , in Estonia - 82%, and in Latvia - 76% [53, p. 12].

Therefore, starting from 2006-2007, the governments of the Baltic States began to pursue a policy aimed at comprehensive support for the development of European integration, not only in depth but also widely. All three countries

have consistently supported the idea of further enlargement of the EU and the admission of new members. They supported Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013 and called for membership in other republics of the former Yugoslavia. But they give special support to Turkey's candidacy and the addition of Ukraine's official EU candidate status. In the first case, according to A. Kasekampa, it is about "thanks to Turkey" for the support it provided to the candidacy of the Baltic countries in obtaining NATO membership [53, p. 12]. In the second - on the intensification of the foreign policy of the Baltic countries towards the new eastern neighbors of the EU. It should also be noted that the Baltic States are wary of the principle of multi-speed integration, fearing to be on the sidelines of Europe. Therefore, they supported the conclusion of the EU Lisbon Treaty without much debate.

If we talk about the specific priorities of individual states, it can be noted that for Lithuania the undisputed priority in the EU, as in NATO, is to ensure energy security by developing an appropriate strategy at the EU level, which limits the ability of oil and gas monopolies (especially Russian) to control energy distribution. networks of European countries, as well as through the use of European budget funds for construction work to connect the energy infrastructure of the Baltic States with the infrastructure of Central and Western Europe. For Estonia, the priority areas were the construction of the Rail Baltic railway, which should connect Tallinn and Warsaw, as well as the formation of a single digital market in the EU and the strengthening of cyber security in Europe [52, p. 29].

The participation of their representatives in the work of the EU governing bodies plays an important role in the interaction of the Baltic States with the European Union. As already mentioned, the Baltic States received equal representation with other members in the European Commission in 2004. Since then, several prominent politicians from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have held the posts of European Commissioners. Thus, in the first J. Barroso

Commission, which operated from November 2004 to February 2010, the post of Vice President and Commissioner for Administrative Reform, Audit and Anti-Corruption was taken by the representative of Estonia, Seim Kallas, who previously held the post of Foreign Minister, Minister of Finance and even the Prime Minister of this country. In the second Barroso Commission (February 2010 - November 2014), he also represented Estonia as the European Commissioner for Transport.

Thus, the representatives of the Baltic States in the European Commission were entrusted with very important areas of work. On the part of European structures, this can be seen, on the one hand, as a recognition of the high professional competence of Baltic politicians, and on the other - as a desire to demonstrate that there is no discrimination against small countries in the EU.

It should be emphasized that the regional initiative has become one of the main topics of the Latvian presidency of the Council of the EU, which fell on a rather difficult international situation and contradictions in the Russia-West line in the first half of 2015. At the same time Vilnius and Riga summits »Are considered turning points in the history of this program.

#### **2.4. Changes in the international situation in the region and the foreign policy of the Baltic States after joining the EU and NATO**

Since the Baltic countries joined the Euro-Atlantic structures, international researchers have been concerned mainly with two issues: first, how it will affect their relations with Russia and other eastern neighbors, and second, how it will affect the policies of their northern neighbors, Sweden and Finland, which, thanks to their long-standing commitment to a policy of strict neutrality, have become known in the press as "Euronetrals". Let's start with the second of these questions.

Accession to the Alliance of the Baltic States has intensified the internal political debate in Sweden and Finland on the advisability of continuing the previous policy of non-participation in military alliances. Following the 2004 enlargement, the two countries found themselves surrounded on three sides by NATO members: Norway and Denmark to the north and west, Germany and Poland to the south, and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the southeast. Thus, they have effectively lost their former geopolitical status as a border buffer zone between Russia and NATO. In these circumstances, the intensification of political forces advocating the accession of these states to the Alliance began.

It should be noted that the transformation of the foreign policy of Sweden and Finland began long before the enlargement of 2004. In 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet-Finnish Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which established "special relations" between the two countries. Finland in the alliances of the West. As a result, the following year, the country, following Sweden, applied to join the EU. In 1992, Sweden, and in 1995, Finland officially refused to further define its political status as complete neutrality [9, p. 104]. Instead, the wording of non-participation in military conflicts and maintaining neutrality only in wartime was adopted. In addition, both countries became members of NATO's PfP program in May 1994, and soon after joining the EU received observer status in the WEU.

Naturally, the transformation of the foreign policy of these two countries has not gone unnoticed by NATO leadership. The Alliance was particularly interested in Finland, due to the country's important strategic position. Finland is in fact the only country in the West that has a significant land border with Russia with a length of about 1,300 km. In addition, its accession to NATO, along with the accession of the Baltic states, would allow the Alliance to establish control over the exit from the Gulf of Finland and, if necessary, completely block the communications of the Russian Navy in the Baltic.

Therefore, the leadership of the bloc has repeatedly stressed its desire to see Finland in the ranks of this organization. Thus, back in October 1992, at a meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, it was stated that "Finland meets all the requirements for members of the Alliance" [17, p. 8].

Following the enlargement of the Alliance in 2004, when Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia became its new members, political debates in Sweden and Finland intensified again. In Sweden, the main supporters of joining NATO were the right-wing parties, which succeeded in the next parliamentary elections in the country. In Finland, no political force openly supports joining the Alliance, but a number of parties, including the ruling Social Democratic Party, see NATO membership as a real alternative to the current political course. The largest percentage of supporters of joining the bloc is observed in the country's largest opposition party - the National Coalition Party (NCP), led by Yu. Kataynen (60%). The largest percentage of opponents of accession is in the Left Union (LSF) and the Union of Greens (about 80%), which, however, have very few seats in parliament. Diametrically opposed views on this issue are held by two ex-presidents of the country, who retain significant influence in its political life - M. Ahtisaari and M. Koivisto [9, p. 107].

According to Yu. Deryabin, in both Finland and Sweden, the debate over NATO membership usually intensifies during the election campaign and subsides again after it ends. As for the dynamics of public opinion on this issue, in the three years since the accession of NATO to the Baltic States, the percentage of opponents of joining the Alliance has been steadily declining (64% - in 2004, 57% - in 2005 and 55% - in 2007) [9, p. 108], although in general supporters of maintaining the current policy of military non-alignment are still the majority. Describing the arguments of supporters of joining the Alliance in Finland and Sweden, it can be noted that in general they are similar to the arguments expressed in countries that have already joined NATO. However, in contrast to the Baltic states, the "Russian threat" is

virtually non-existent among these arguments. However, a number of politicians and representatives of Finnish business believe that joining NATO should be seen as an integral part of the overall process of integration of the country into Western structures [9, p. 109]. This allows us to conclude that the solution of this issue in both countries is not related to the revision of their geopolitical guidelines and will depend mainly on the development of their domestic political situation.

It should also be noted that Finland's position will play a key role in determining the future status of the two non-aligned Nordic countries. Despite official statements by the country's leadership that it does not currently experience a "security deficit" and therefore has no reason to change its course, government and military circles are examining in detail the potential benefits and costs of joining NATO. As far as Sweden is concerned, it is likely to focus on and agree with Finland on this issue. If the latter joins NATO, Sweden will be surrounded on all sides by members of the Alliance. Maintaining the unattached status in such conditions will be quite problematic. Considering the internal transformations and the main directions of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia's interaction with NATO and the EU in the period after they become full members of these organizations, it seems appropriate and important to determine how these processes have changed their foreign policy. There are two main trends in this area. First, it is the intensification of relations with neighbors - the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe, which before joining the Euro-Atlantic structures did not pay much attention. If before the Baltic countries sought to distance themselves from their post-Soviet neighbors (as evidenced, for example, by their categorical rejection of the idea of forming the Baltic-Black Sea Union in the early 1990s [14]), now they seek to maximize their geopolitical position, to become the leading mediators in the relations between the Euro-Atlantic structures and the post-Soviet space - in any case, its western, eastern European part. In

justifying their special role in translating and upholding Western liberal-democratic values in the post-Soviet states, they emphasize the importance of passing on to these countries their unique experience of transformation from Soviet command-and-control systems to societies fully compliant with European standards of sustainable democracy and the free market.

Secondly, the Baltic politicians did not hide that they are seeking membership in the EU and NATO not only in order to strengthen the national security of their countries, but also to increase their weight in international politics. Of course, one can argue for a long time about how independent they are now in making their foreign policy decisions and how "their voices are heard" in Euro-Atlantic structures. But it should be agreed that in addressing specific foreign policy challenges, especially in relations with incomparably larger and stronger states, the use of the capabilities of the European Union and NATO can be a very important resource. In this regard, the desire of the Baltic States to transfer the solution of some of their foreign policy tasks to the level of the European Union has become a significant trend. For example, they lobbied for measures at the European level to diversify energy imports in order to reduce unilateral dependence on their supplies from Russia.

As for the Russian direction of foreign policy of the Baltic States, the above-mentioned trend in it is largely due to the very nature of relations between Russia and the EU. According to Estonian researcher KL Nielsen, in its European policy, Russia has always sought to make the most of the format of bilateral interstate relations with individual EU countries and to minimize interaction with its collective institutions. This approach, in his opinion, is explained by three factors: first, the old tradition of ignoring European supranational structures as insignificant and secondary compared to interstate relations, which has remained since Soviet times; secondly, by the fact that, thanks to its resource and military potential, Russia felt its superiority over every state in Europe, but not over the European Union as a whole. Finally,



this was facilitated by a complex, lengthy decision-making process in the EU, based on the harmonization of the positions of all member states and the achievement of an acceptable compromise. This procedure of internal coordination is extremely difficult to negotiate with external partners, as it requires a lot of time and leaves almost no room for maneuver and political bargaining - because any adjustment or counter-proposal requires a new agreement on the positions of all members. One way or another, Moscow preferred to negotiate not with the EU, but with its key member states - Germany, France, Italy, hoping that these countries would then extend the agreements reached to the relations of the entire European Union with Russia. Naturally, this did not suit other EU members, who considered themselves cramped into the framework, as they were in fact excluded from making decisions that would have to be implemented. . Therefore, medium and small countries of the European Union, which include the Baltic states, sought, on the contrary, to subordinate the regulation of relations with Russia to the collective institutions of the EU [14, p. 119]. In general, on the eve of the accession of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to NATO and the EU, two diametrically opposed views prevailed on how this would affect their relations with Russia. The first, which was followed by most authors, was based on negative predictions of their inevitable deterioration due to the Baltics' stubborn reluctance to take Russian interests into account in the region (for example, automatically granting citizenship to the entire Russian-speaking population or joining an adapted Treaty before joining NATO). about conventional forces in Europe, which was supposed to guarantee Russia the preservation of the former military balance in the region after the expansion of the bloc), as well as in connection with their desire to "strengthen anti-Russian sentiment" in Euro-Atlantic structures. On the other hand, the Baltic authors were mostly inclined to optimistic forecasts. According to them, with the accession of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the EU and NATO, relations would inevitably improve, as the very subject of Baltic-Russian differences,

caused by the former uncertainty of their geopolitical status, disappeared. Simply put, they hoped that Moscow would eventually accept the integration of the Baltic states into the Western community and begin to build relations with them on an equal and mutually beneficial basis, placing them in the broader context of its partnership with the West.

As already mentioned, the Baltic States are staunch supporters of further enlargement of the European Union. Based on this, they see one of the main tasks of their foreign policy at the present stage in supporting and promoting democratic and market reforms in the Eastern Partnership countries, so that in the future they can also join the European integration structures. In practical terms, this is reflected in various assistance programs for the formation of more effective and open systems of public administration, training of civilian and military officials, promotion of electronic technologies in the field of management and training of specialists in protection against cybercrime.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Summing up, I would like to emphasize once again the main features of the process of integration of the Baltic States into Euro-Atlantic structures. First of all, their course to join the EU and NATO had its historical preconditions and was due to a number of internal and external factors. The first of these is the consensus among Lithuanian political elites on the priority foreign policy goals of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which remained in power in the run-up to the elections, and the course of Euro-Atlantic integration remained unchanged. . Public opinion had little influence on this process. Numerous opinion polls show that supporters of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia's accession to the EU and NATO have not always been in the absolute majority. However, their percentage always exceeded the share of those who strongly opposed membership in these organizations. The majority of the population did not have a clear opinion on this issue until the early 2000s,

when the governments of the Baltic States began to conduct targeted advocacy campaigns in favor of joining the Euro-Atlantic structures. Thus, the integration of these countries into the EU and NATO is rightly considered an "elite project", to the implementation of which the general public was involved only on the eve of accession, when major decisions have already been made.

As for external factors, the reorientation of neighboring Finland and Sweden, which previously adhered to the policy of strict neutrality, to active participation in European integration should be noted first of all. After joining the EU (but not NATO), these countries began to provide significant support (both economic and diplomatic) to the Baltic States in their efforts to join both organizations. Sweden and Finland have in fact become the main lobbyists for the accession of the Baltic States to the European Union. Denmark and Norway played a similar role in joining NATO.

Contrary to popular belief, the initiative to join Euro-Atlantic structures did not belong to NATO and the EU itself, but to the Baltic states, or rather to their political elites. As the events of the first half of the 1990s show, both organizations were initially unprepared for such developments - they supported market reforms and democratic transformations in transition countries, but did not consider accepting them into the ranks in the foreseeable future. However, the persistence and activity of the CEE and Baltic countries in this matter prompted them in 1993-1994 to change their position and begin to form a strategy for their eastern expansion.

Following the almost simultaneous accession of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the EU and NATO in the spring of 2004, the Baltic States continued to integrate into their institutions, such as the Schengen area and the EU Monetary Union, NATO military structures. At the same time, they effectively curtailed regional cooperation projects, which were now carried out exclusively within NATO and the EU. Although the global financial and

economic crisis has hit the "overheated" economies of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia hard after joining the European Union, they have been able to successfully overcome its effects through austerity policies and thus switch to the euro in 2011-2015. However, the crisis has exacerbated the already high rates of emigration of able-bodied people to richer EU countries, which poses a serious threat to the further development and security of the Baltic States. Politically, after joining the EU and NATO, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia seek to act as mediators between the Western community and the CIS countries and active disseminators of Western values and development models in the post-Soviet space. In addition, they are actively involved in almost all NATO military operations and sometimes try to influence the EU's overall foreign policy towards Russia and the CIS.

Thus, the Baltic States have implemented a generally successful strategy for integration into the European Union, both in terms of the end result and in terms of protecting national interests. The process of European integration has contributed to positive internal transformations in various spheres of public life in the Baltic States. With the acquisition of full membership in the EU, the political weight of these states has increased, their international image has grown. Participation in regional associations helps to strengthen cooperation on energy, economic, environmental and information security.

The experience gained by the Baltic States on the path to European integration can be of great benefit both to Ukraine and to other countries that have declared their intention to join the EU. The main factor in the success of the implementation of the EU integration strategy is the transition from declaring intentions to become a full member of the Communities to concrete actions. Effective steps should be aimed primarily at reducing the role of the state in managing the economy, fighting corruption, the shadow economy. It is also important to use the experience of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the field of adaptation of legislation to EU norms, through the implementation of

programs developed in these countries.

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