



**Màster en Relacions Internacionals Seguretat i Desenvolupament (MURISD)**

# **Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Facing Russian Irredentist Discourse Towards the Post-Soviet Space (2014-2018)**

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Treballs de màster i postgrau. Màster en Relacions Internacionals, Seguretat i Desenvolupament (MURISD). Curs 2019-2020

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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**Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Facing Russian  
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(2014-2018)**

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Joan Ruiz Gegúndez

Vilnius 10 July 2019



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## **RESUM**

Fent-se valer de les eines analítiques en matèria de política exterior, posades a l'abast pel realisme neoclàssic (NCR), el present treball s'endinsa en la percepció d'amenaça externa per part de les elits polítiques letones envers al discurs irredemptista rus materialitzat l'any 2014, tot generant un seguit de canvis estructurals en matèria d'acció exterior i duent a terme una estratègia que troba la seva lògica tant en els condicionants estructurals i la naturalesa del sistema com i, fonamentalment, en la pròpia cultura estratègica del país.

## **PARAULES CLAU**

Realisme neoclàssic; cultura estratègica; Letònia; anàlisi de la política exterior; política exterior de Letònia; espai post-soviètic; països bàltics; OTAN; UE.

## **ABSTRACT**

Making use of the analytical tools of foreign policy that the Neoclassical Realist (NCR) framework makes available, this work explores the external threat perceived by the Latvian political elites towards the Russian irredentist discourse which materialised in 2014, generating a series of structural changes in its foreign action and carrying out a strategy that finds its logic both in the structural conditions and the nature of the system and, fundamentally, in the country's own strategic culture.

## **KEY WORDS**

Neoclassical Realism; Latvia; foreign policy analysis; Latvian foreign policy; post-Soviet space; Baltic Countries; OTAN; EU.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

СССР (*USSR*) – Союз Советских Социалистических Республик (*Soviet Union*)

БДБ (*CIS*) - Содружество Независимых Государств (*Commonwealth of Independent States*)

CFSP - European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy

CSDP - European Union Common Security and Defence Policy

EDA - European Defence Agency

EFP - Enhanced Forward Presence

EU - European Union

HNS - Host Nation Support

КГБ (*KGB*) - Комитет Государственной Безопасности (*Committee for State Security*)

JKP - Jaunā konservatīvā partija (*New Conservative Party*)

LKS - Latvijas Krievu savienība (*Latvian Russian Union - Русский союз Латвии*)

MS - European Union member States

NA - Nacionālā apvienība “Visu Latvijai!” – “Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK” (*National Alliance “All For Latvia!” – “For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK*)

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NATO StratCom COE - NATO Centre of Excellence for Strategic Communication

NBS (*LNAF*) - Nacionālie Bruņotie Spēki (*Latvian National Armed Forces*)

NCR - Neoclassical Realism

NRF - NATO Response Force

RAP - Readiness Action Plan

SAB - Satversmes aizsardzības birojs (*Latvian Constitutional Protection Bureau*)

SDPS - Sociāldemokrātiskā partija (*Social Democratic Party “Harmony”*)

VJTF - Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

ZZS (*UGF*) - Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība (*Union of Greens and Farmers*)

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to study Latvian foreign and security policy regarding the Russian irredentist discourse towards the post-Soviet space for the period 2014-2018. There are essentially two objectives. First and more broadly, we want to determine whether the model of analysis of foreign policy offered by Neoclassical Realism (NCR) is useful and adequate to explain the particularities of the Latvian case and if it contributes any added value to the answers provided by structural realism. Secondly, and more specifically, we seek to analyse how a small State perceives the threat of a rising power, such as Russia, and how it responds, seeing the dynamics of regional power distribution in the post-Soviet space. Implicitly, the aim is to address various questions, although the development of this article revolves around the second question. These questions stem from the use of deductive methods of reasoning. The initial question is as follows: Is Russia's annexation of Crimea perceived as an external threat and, at the same time, is it modulated to become the central axis of the development of Latvian foreign policy? Secondly, based on what Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016) propose, the question would have the following logic: what strategy do State X take to confront State Y that infringes a threat Z and why? Therefore, in this case, our question would be formulated as follows: what strategy does Latvia use in response to the threat posed by the annexation of Crimea by Russia and why? This is the key question.

Regarding the justification of the object of study, we must assess the applicability of the theory to the particularities of the context. From a theoretical and meta-theoretical perspective, the validity of the NCR approach is to be subjected to academic scrutiny. One of the main criticisms attributed to studies that take the NCR as a theoretical basis for analysing foreign policy is their bias in the object of study. This means that they are focused on the study of great powers, mainly the United States, and that, therefore, it is not useful for medium or small States. Consequently, it is interesting and pertinent to develop a country's analysis of the characteristics of Latvia. On the other hand, the case of Latvia presents a series of peculiarities that make this case a very relevant topic. In this sense, diverse dimensions intervene, such as the historical dimension (the Russian and Soviet occupation of the Baltics) or the ethnic dimension (almost 30% of the population is Russophone as a result of the historical legacy). In this sense, the central hypothesis around which this work is based becomes the following consideration: In terms of foreign

policy, Latvia undertakes a strategy of relying on its membership of the European Union and NATO, a concept rooted in the country's strategic culture since the restoration of sovereignty, as a means to achieve its fundamental objective of guaranteeing national sovereignty and deploying relatively recent nation-state building without external threats, in the wake of Russia's perceived threat and its actions in Eastern Ukraine and the Crimea (2014).

It is also equally important to be clear about the research methods necessary to carry out our study. On the one hand, we will apply NCR and its analysis guidelines to develop our research. This model gives us the independent variables, which are the distribution of relative power; the distribution of capacities; the clarity of the system and the permissiveness of the system, the dependent variable: the behaviour of the State (the foreign policy selection it has made) and the intervening variables that we must incorporate, but as a result of the length and time limitations of this thesis, only strategic culture will be selected, in which facts and ideas play a key role. Various approaches such as constructivist realism have developed this aspect. We will mainly use qualitative methods, corresponding to the documentary analysis of primary sources (coming from the government) and secondary sources (extracted from the existing literature). Quantitative methods will also be used to examine databases corresponding to statistical elements on perceptions, demographic trends and dynamics of the population.

Ultimately, the paper will be organised as follows. First, we will analyse the limits and theoretical virtues of NCR to explain the behaviour of a State and, subsequently, we will analyse the current debate and the main criticisms that the model receives. Next, the methodology that will be used will be detailed, based on the mixed logic that we have mentioned. We will continue with a contextual analysis of Latvia within the Baltic space, discerning the historical relations with Russia, the ethnic composition of the country, as well as the agreements that it has signed with other international actors. We will also address the Russian irredentist discourse, understood as a starting point for the configuration of Latvian foreign policy. Finally, we will conduct the central analysis, where we will identify the external threat perceived by Latvia, and the relationship between the dependent, independent and intervening variables in the configuration of the country's foreign policy, translated into the State's behaviour process. Finally, the results are presented, and the aim is to answer the research questions initially established, while validating the starting hypothesis.



## **PART I. NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AS A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS**

### **Chapter One. The Added Value of a Neoclassical Realism Scheme for Analysing State Behaviour in the International System and its Criticism**

#### **1. Neoclassical Realism: Key Aspects from Foreign Policy Theory**

##### **1.1. Origin, Definition(s) and Evolution of Neoclassical Realism**

According to Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016), “Neoclassical Realism” was coined by Gideon Rose in his article review titled “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy” published in 1998 as an issue in *World Politics Journal*, in which she analyses four specific books written by Wohlforth (1993), Brown (1995), Schweller (1998) and Zakaria (1998). For Rose (1998), through these works, Neoclassical Realism (NCR) is constituted as a new school<sup>1</sup> of mid-range foreign policy theories (Rose, 1998 and Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016). As a result of the failure of the explanations related to foreign policy in a positivist moment<sup>2</sup>, the will to develop mid-range theories returned.

NCR is defined as a theory of international politics or as a fourth school of mid-range foreign policy theories (Rose, 1998), but it could also be understood as a realist subschool within the realist approach of international relations (Wohlforth, 2016) or as a research programme of international politics or a body of theories (Ripsman, et al., 2016). From this point of view, NCR appeared as a reaction to some critics against neorealism, but also, as a new framework for explaining foreign policy outcomes that neorealism could not explain (Rose, 1998; Ripsman, et al., 2016 and Wohlforth, 2016).

##### **1.2. Exploring the Limits and Virtues of Pre-Existing Theoretical Approaches**

Rose (1998) pointed out that this fourth school: “explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought” (Rose, 1998: 146). This is what sets NCR apart from the other realist approaches, because it seeks answers on a domestic level and unpacks the *black box*. Although it is the international system that shapes States’ behaviour, by introducing the domestic level

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<sup>1</sup> Rose (1998), exposes four main schools on theories of international politics or theories of foreign policy, which are the following: *Innenpolitik theories*, offensive realism, defensive realism and neoclassical realism.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the failure of rationalism to, mainly, explain or predict the end of the Cold War and the rise of social-constructivism during the nineties (Ibáñez, 2016).

in our analysis, we can take into account the variables and processes that can affect how States react to the system stimuli (Ripsman, et al., 2016).

The main difference concerning other realist perspectives is that NCR not only analyses the international system level, but it also examines: “how systemic pressures are translated through unit-level intervening variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and domestic state structure [...] In the neoclassical realist world leaders can be constrained by both international and domestic politics” (Rose, 1998: 152).

Ripsman, et al. (2016) attempt to develop a comprehensive NCR research programme of international politics (NCR type III) that is capable of offering more explanatory power than the vast amount of alternatives including *Innenpolitik* approaches, constructivism, realism and neorealism/structural realism. They also consider that we cannot completely separate the international sphere from crisis decision-making, foreign policy and great strategy spheres due to domestic variables, which are relevant for explaining these second spheres, and consequently, have some relevance in terms of causality for the international level (Ripsman et al., 2016).

The limits presented by realist alternatives are found in an area termed *systemic determinism* by Ripsman, et al. (2016) who, as an example, show how only in strange circumstances States are provided with clear information about the opportunities and constraints they face by the international system. As a result, there is a large debate about the nature of these opportunities and constraints at the domestic level. It is precisely this *systemic determinism* that evades and rejects the opening of the *black box*.

In contrast, *Innenpolitik* approaches are placed within *domestic determinism* due to the assumption that States make political choices mainly, or exclusively, based on political reasons at the domestic level<sup>3</sup> (Ripsman, et al., 2016). According to Rose (1998), by assuming pure level-unit explanations, *Innenpolitik* theories cannot explain or have difficulties explaining why States with similar domestic systems frequently carry out dissimilar actions and choices in foreign policy. Also, liberal approaches do not take into account the key role developed by the foreign policy executive, which is positioned at the intersection between the domestic politics arena and the international politics arena while they are in charge of making foreign and security policy (Ripsman, et al., 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> As Rose (1998) sets out, there are several internal reasons such as socioeconomic structure, political and economic ideology and national character.

It is the agent-structure combination that produces outcomes in the long term. Foreign policy and international politics are typically conducted by international pressures that are translated into the domestic sphere, in which the course of the events is dictated by its own (Rose, 1998 and Ripsman, et al., 2016). Only in extreme cases can one sphere dominate the other; otherwise, they generally determine more than dominate. In this sense, that idea of NCR is reproduced by Wohlforth (2016) when he says: “[NCR] seeks to rectify this imbalance between the general and the particular” (Wohlforth, 2016: 39).

Constructivism, in the form of liberal theories, due to not taking into account and even rejecting the importance of the relative distribution of material power, is limited when explaining many questions of international politics (Ripsman, et al., 2016). The root of constructivist theoretical development lies in placing its study centre, in order to understand the behaviour of States, in the fields of norms and ideas, interests and identities. One of its main exponents, Wendt, proposed a sociological and social-psychological analysis in which identities and interests are given endogenously by the process and not by the structure (Wendt, 1992). Consequently, interests may change for transnational, individual, internal and/or systemic factors.

In the wake of Rose (1998) we can determine a fundamental change regarding the classic realists and the neorealists; NCR starts from the premise that perceptions play a key role in understanding how actors interpret stimuli from the system. From this point of view, we can intertwine a link towards a more constructivist approach to neoclassical realism, since they focus specifically on perceptions of relative material capacities.

## **2. Neoclassical Realism Weaknesses: A Critique**

### **2.1. The Criticism Gathered and Responded by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016)**

In their book, Ripsman, et al. (2016), include a section which contains the main critiques that NCR has received, from its rise in the nineties to the time their work was published in 2016. They divide these objections into six main axes, in which they respond to these critical scholars:

- a) Neoclassical realist scholars incorporate unit-level variables in an ad hoc manner.

Both realist and liberal scholars, such as Walt or Moravcsik respectively, have criticised the fact that NCR incorporates domestic variables in an ad hoc manner. This means that they use some concrete variables depending on the case study and the structural realist

baseline chosen as the theoretical framework, because these factors will have a more influential effect than others. For instance, for Legro and Moravcsik (1999), this means that those works which claim to belong to the realist tradition are a failing realist core (Ripsman, et al., 2016). In addition, Vasquez (1997) criticises that this additionally ad hoc inclusiveness of variables is only an attempt to save a flawed core theory, and it shows the degenerative nature of the entire realist research paradigm. Also, Walt (2002), cited by Ripsman, et al. (2016) argues that it results in avoiding generality and predictive power in an attempt to pursue descriptive accuracy and policy relevance.

Ripsman, et al. (2016) address these charges by arguing that analysts have to be able to explore and identify the relevant variables depending on the context and the circumstances of the case studies and the realist baseline chosen.

Also, they organise and suggest four broad categories of intervening variables<sup>4</sup> which could have an effect on maximising or diminishing the relation between dependent and independent variables (Ripsman, et al., 2016). In addition, they: “further specified the circumstances under which of each of the four categories of intervening variables would likely have a discernible effect on the dependent variables” (Ripsman, et al., 2016: 177). By also offering two methods to identify these variables: deductive and inductive, it is hard to select unit-level variables in an ad hoc manner using these methods (Ripsman, et al., 2016).

b) NCR does not provide a coherent theory.

These authors argue that NCR, described in terms of Rose, Schweller or themselves, constitutes a research program. NCR analysis starts from a set of common assumptions that play a uniting role between heterogeneous theories and theorists, which could generate competing hypotheses and predictions. Moreover, scholars such as Wohlforth (2016) argue that a theory, and implicitly theoretical subschools of realism, must be applied thinking of the closeness to: “[realist] core assumptions, scope conditions<sup>5</sup> and expected outcomes as well as to the real-world foreign policy scenarios to which they are applied” (Wohlforth, 2016: 49). Implicitly, it means that there are contexts in which realist theories could not offer a clear and accurate analysis of foreign policy. We must

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<sup>4</sup> Strategic culture, leader images, state-society relations and domestic institutional arrangements.

<sup>5</sup> Distinctions between core assumptions, scope conditions and theories are already made by Wohlforth (2016).

know the details of a given foreign policy issue in order to determine if it is suitable for the analytical parameters of a given theory (Wohlforth, 2016).

c) It prioritises descriptive precision over parsimony and explanatory power.

Taking into account Occam's razor principle, Ripsman, et al. (2016) respond that if the addition of slightly more complexity provides us with greater explanatory power, then it is worthwhile, since it is misleading to view a simpler theory as more parsimonious.

d) It repudiates structural realism core assumptions and the broader *Realpolitik* tradition.

In order to refute this argument, they mention three main assumptions that link NCR with structural realist principles: "specially, they assume: (1) that the international system is anarchic and, consequently, that States must rely on themselves to ensure their survival; (2) that survival is the most important national interest in an anarchic realm; and (3) that anarchy makes cooperation difficult, as it leads States to prefer relative over absolute gains" (Ripsman, et al., 2016: 177). For these reasons, they argue that: "neoclassical realism is a direct descendent of structural realism and it is consistent with the underlying principles of realism" (Ripsman, et al., 2016: 180).

e) NCR is incapable of producing generalizable theories.

Walt (2003) cited by Ripsman, et al. (2016) criticises the fact that NCR is more focused on 'descriptive accuracy' than generalizability. In their defence, it is claimed that the success of NCR will precisely depend on its ability to make generalizable theories about an important political phenomenon (Ripsman, et al., 2016).

f) It is only focused on great powers and has a United States-centric bias and therefore is of little use for explaining the vast majority of State behaviours.

They recognise that many neoclassical realist scholars have studied cases related to the United States and former great powers due to the link with a long tradition in realist thought. In their opinion, it is not only an explanatory theory of great power politics, but it could also be applicable to explanations of the strategic behaviour of small and medium powers in international politics.

## **2.2.Narizny (2017): Critiques of Neoclassical Realism and ‘Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics’<sup>6</sup>**

Narizny (2017) has made the most recent critique against NCR in his paper *On Systemic Paradigms and Domestic Politics: A Critique of the Newest Realism*. He sets out from a fundamental premise: Neoclassical Realism lacks internal coherence since these authors accept the incorporation of domestic elements in their analysis<sup>7</sup>, because it would only suffice to incorporate them into classical realism without having to resort to NCR. In this sense, the fact that Rose (1998) justifies NCR’s existence with the aim of overcoming the explanatory limitations presented by structural realism shows a contradiction in itself: this sub-paradigm does not add value because it does not fill any gap in the paradigms field and, consequently, it is superfluous.

Second, the lack of theoretical consensus among the academics gathered in the NCR framework for analysis. It also reveals the heterogeneity of theorists and points of view that converge in NCR, generating this little consensus on certain theoretical aspects of the sub-paradigm. In addition, he criticises the fact that many scholars have used the approach of Rose (1998) as an umbrella for justifying or legitimising their academic purposes, which he believes are often incompatible. This mixture generates a theoretical inconsistency regarding the establishment of fundamental premises shared within the sub-paradigm, leading NCR to be flawed at a theoretical level and inconsistent in its methodology for case studies.

He also states that being halfway between realism and liberalism, it becomes an unsatisfactory middle ground, as it is not effective in facilitating the production of knowledge. By going beyond the limits of its theory, it loses the consistent logic of its core assumptions. Ultimately, he sarcastically comments that if all neoclassical realistic works were published, the level of variation in State behaviour that is explained by domestic politics would expand. That is to say that these works encompass a wide range of perspectives on social behaviour and that, according to Narizny (2017), it seems that everything is valid within this sub-paradigm.

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<sup>6</sup> In reference to the work published by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell in 2016, titled ‘*Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*’.

<sup>7</sup> These critiques of NCR related to the incorporated domestic intervening variables are called a “laundry list” by Ripsman, et al., (2016).

Regarding the work of Ripsman, et al. (2016), Narizny (2017) uses the term 'paradigmatic imperialism' to refer to the strategy they use to encompass points of view that are originated in opposition to their own. Consider that these scholars appropriate the central findings of liberalism and constructivism, giving the following examples: a) theory of democratic peace, b) economic interdependence, c) regulatory socialization and d) strategic culture. With this, he classifies NCR as a kind of theory of everything, since it seeks to explain everything, excluding practically nothing, because of what he thinks they do about realism something trivial. He considers that it is a common symptom of a lack of attention to the paradigmatic or theoretical limits of his own approach.

He also criticises the fact that often, NCR is capable of attributing the outcomes to the strategic interaction itself, ignoring the preferences of the actors, what Frieden (1999) cited by Narizny (2017) calls "sins of omission". The criticism is that, for the neoclassical realists, the preferences matter but are not taken seriously (Narizny, 2017).

It presents a lack of solid theoretical foundations to build a theory, because it does not specify or define the systemic pressures that will explain the State's behaviour; it is the academic who must select the realist baseline theory to identify them, and depending on this, the explanation of the behaviour will be different because each of these sets out from different expectations and treats the importance of domestic policy inferences from different sub-paradigmatic perspectives. This confronts Ripsman, et al. with a difficult dilemma, in which: a) if realist baseline theories are not relatively important, they should admit that the structure is unimportant and therefore, they are not realistic, b) if realist baseline theories are the key element to explain most of the variation in the behaviour of the State, what is important then is the baseline, not NCR, as an analytical tool. Therefore, he concludes that Neoclassical Realism should not be understood as a paradigm or sub-paradigm, since it is not a coherent school of thought.

Although Neoclassical Realism maintains its prioritisation on systemic pressures, it opens the door to giving more importance on an explanatory level to societal preferences, than to the main desire of the States: survival itself. According to the logic of Waltz (1959), this entails a rupture, whereas if the organising principle of the structure is anarchy, the States will only differ in terms of capacities, but the distribution of functions will be the same. He considers that we could say that it is a constructivist realism or another typology.

In short, Narizny (2017) agrees that decision-makers are subject to a series of cognitive biases and do not calculate the information perfectly. Conversely, realism affirms that the cognitive biases do not change the objectives of the States, they only make the persecution of these less efficient. Therefore, attempts by NCR to incorporate the domestic level into its analysis are inefficient, not only because they do not capture the set of explanatory factors of foreign policy at the domestic level, but also because the incorporation of these missing elements would contradict the core assumptions of realism. For example, the fact that the type of regime can be taken into account would contradict the idea that all States are functionally equal, a claim that NCR does not support. The type of regime can, in turn, adjust the capacity of the State to mobilise resources as well as the quantity and development of these.

## **Chapter Two. Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics: Operationalising the Theoretical Framework**

### **1. Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics as a Scheme**

The object of study, and consequently, the dependent variable of this paper, is the study of a State's external behaviour, particularly for the case of Latvia. That is, the outcome, the foreign policy of a State, given the external environment and the perception of an external threat. In our case, and as stated by Ripsman, et al. (2016) the selection of the dependent variable and its specification will depend on the studied time framework. Also, this allows us to distinguish between the type of Neoclassical Realism, that is, the evolutionary version we fall under. Our temporal delimitation takes place in the medium-long term (months-years), and focuses on the study of foreign policy, as well as its grand strategy adjustment in our time frame. This space is defined by the authors as the maximum scope of the NCR types I and II, but also as the basic framework for the development of their NCR Theory of International Politics.

There are two key elements that the authors consider in their work to distinguish the type III NCR from the rest: a) their willingness to overcome the study of anomalous cases that structural realism is unable to explain, as well as not only counting a wider range of foreign policies, and b) the temporal element: explain cases that go beyond foreign policy and the grand adjustment strategy and determine the international outcomes and the effects that these have on the international system, with the 'great powers' as a focus of



study. As described by the internal processes that NCR type I and II analyse, we cannot hold onto them. We go beyond a simple opening of the *black box* that studies, in a very generic way, the internal processes of perceptions, decision-making and policy implementation, to rely on structural realism, all without taking into account the importance of the domestic level to constrict and modulate the behaviour of the State at the external level, and that instead, type III does consider. Nor would we feel comfortable with NCR as A Theory of Foreign Policy (type II) in such a way that despite evolutionarily surpassing its predecessor, it only seeks to explain a wider range of foreign policies than type I, while also focusing on the study of 'great powers'.

As a result, we do not consider it coherent to distinguish between types II and III according to the temporal element and the study of the international outcomes as well as their effects on the international system. It is justified by the fact that what we do consider to be a fundamental criterion for the distinction is the degree of methodological depth in the analysis and the will to build a true mid-range theory. Only from this perspective can we understand that our work, methodologically, falls under this NCR as a Theory of International Politics, as long as we use its analytical scheme and not that of its respective predecessors. Also, despite not being able to address the international outcomes of such behaviour, we are aware of the possibility of doing such an analysis.

In addition, we also opted for this type III because it consists of going one step further and surpassing NCR types I and II, and its fundamental assumption which has been exposed above, starts from the idea that the selection of a specific foreign policy from a range of acceptable options to respond to a given international environment will depend on the domestic political sphere, which can affect both the perceptions that the foreign policy executive may have regarding the international environment and the decision-making procedures and the ability to implement those policies that have been selected as a result of the process (Ripsman, et al., 2016). In short, if we were to position our analysis, bypassing the temporal criteria that delimits I and II from III, we should position it much closer to Type III for the reasons stated above.

## **2. State External Behaviour as a Result of Systemic Constraints and Domestic Political Imperatives: Defining Independent and Intervening Variables**

Regarding the independent variables, located within the scope of the systemic stimuli, highlighted in yellow in Figure 1, we find three fundamental ones: a) distribution of

relative power or in other words, relative distribution of material power, b) clarity of the system and c) permissiveness of the system. In this section, we will not explore the content of each of these in detail, as they will be considered and treated in our analysis. What we must reference is the debate that the authors have about the structural system and the “structural modifiers”. They go beyond the three-level structure developed by Waltz (1979), although they assume: a) the ordering principle, that is: the existence of a hierarchical structure, b) the distribution of functions: the States do not functionally differ, because in this system of anarchic nature all units are equally States and, therefore, there is no functional differentiation and, c) the distribution of capacities: each of these parts in an anarchic system do not function differently, and have a different capacity distribution which possibly leads to different behaviours and dynamics<sup>8</sup>. Thus, they incorporate the term 'structural modifiers' defined by Snyder (1996), to deal with the factors that also determine what types of interaction levels are possible and desired, giving rise to a series of material variables such as geography, technological and military development rates or the offence-defence balance. In other words, these are not elements of the structure as defined by Waltz (1979) but instead make up the nucleus of interaction between the units of the system which can modify the effects of the systemic structure on both its ordering principle and the relative distribution of material capabilities.

In short, the NCR incorporates relevant systemic variables beyond the above: clarity of the system and permissiveness/restrictiveness of the system. This is what differentiates it from neorealism. The role of the structure and of the structural modifiers is to determine the parameters through which the States will choose their most favourable strategies as well as the results at the international level (Ripsman, et al., 2016).

Ultimately, as for the intervening variables, since the objective of the study is to analytically approach a process of foreign policy development focused on the medium-long term, we only select the 'strategic culture', represented in green in figure 1. Not only because it is the only variable that modulates and influences all aspects of State responses, and that is connected to the three domestic processes we analyse to shape the resulting foreign policy response (perception, decision-making and policy implementation) but also, per se, the strategic culture, meaning that it takes shape and is born from the rest of

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<sup>8</sup> Like Waltz (1979), Ripsman, et al. (2016) incorporate here the relative distribution of material capacities that determines the interaction between the units. It is here where they position the States and the amount of power they have.

the intervening variables: state-society relations, images of the leader and domestic political institutions. Likewise, it is interesting to analyse not only how it proceeds in the Latvian context, but also the link with this NCR in the field of ideas, beliefs, visions, norms and assumptions. In short, an NCR closer to constructivist postulates. Of course, it does not mean that strategic culture is the most important and determining intervening variable of study. This set of characteristics that includes the modulation and by extension, the constraint, of the processes of analysis, decision-making and implementation of policies on the domestic level.

Therefore, we do not select our variables in an *ad hoc* way, but we do it taking into account the specific context of study, the delimitation and specification of our research question and its theoretical and methodological approach, but also because of the length of the present work and its formal characteristics.

### **3. Defining Strategic Culture**

The approach we take in this study of strategic culture starts from a broader vision of everything it encompasses, contrary to that of other scholars such as Legro and Kier who examine it more specifically and distinguish it from organisational culture. Here we will include a conception that is nurtured by worldviews, beliefs, expectations and assumptions (Ripsman et al., 2016). Our categorisation of strategic culture starts from a series of attributes defined by Ripsman et al. (2016):

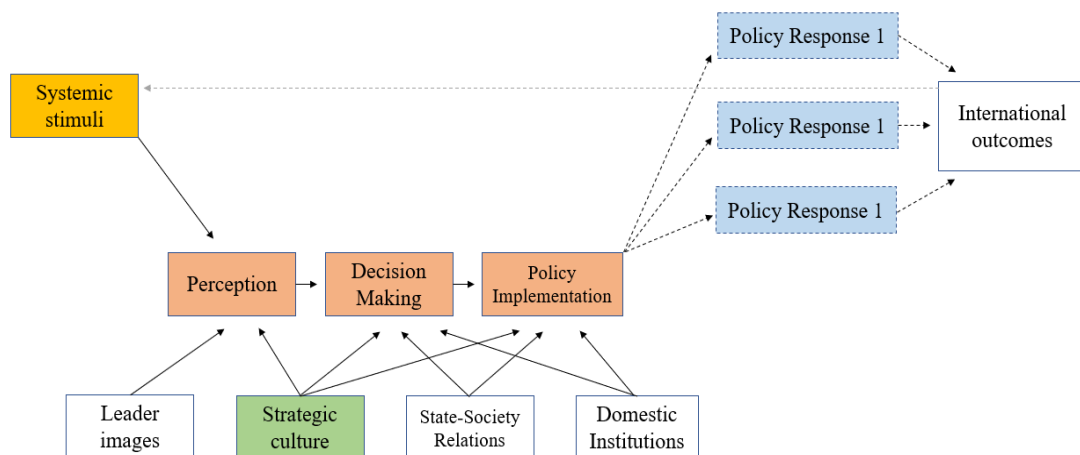
- a) The strategic culture of a country can modulate how a State faces, perceives and adapts to structural changes and systemic modifiers in terms of material capabilities.
- b) The strategic culture of a State modulates and feeds on the understanding of political leaders, the elites present in society and of society as a whole.
- c) This set of assumptions, ideas, perceptions and expectations takes root and constrains the behaviour and freedom of action of a State, determining what strategic options are acceptable, through the socialization and institutionalization of it.
- d) Ideology as a relevant element that can affect a State's attitudes towards international affairs in terms of awareness regarding the use of force.
- e) Within the previous point, we also emphasise the degree of nationalism, since a nationalist culture, ultimately, serves to promote personal sacrifices in favour of

the State and at the same time, helps to mobilise resources to support the State's national security policy.

But we must also add the characteristics described by Kitchen (2010):

- f) Separating ideas from beliefs allows us to distinguish between the different types involved in policy formulation: 1) scientific ideas, how the world works, the relationship between the international environment and things; for example, the idea of liberal peace, 2) intentional ideas, normative suggestions, as a kind of ethic or moral, which is understood to be the right thing to do in foreign policy, and 3) operational ideas, regarding which of the above can be pursued<sup>9</sup>; it is in this that different operational ideas on how to face threats from various sectors can compete<sup>10</sup> (Kitchen, 2010).
- g) Material capacities are fixed and intrinsic while ideas are variable and dependent, they intervene at the unit level through individuals, institutions and the culture of a State.

**Figure 1. Selected study processes and variables from NCR Theory of International Politics**



Source: Compiled by author, based on Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016)

<sup>9</sup> They can also be chosen, as the above, based on ethical criteria.

<sup>10</sup> For example, from the military, government, social areas, etc.

## **PART II. LATVIA IN THE BALTIC CONTEXT: THE SOVIET PAST, ETHNIC COMPOSITION, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY TREATIES AND RUSSIAN IRREDENTIST DISCOURSE**

### **Chapter Three. The Suspense of National Sovereignty: From the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939) to the Collapse of the Soviet Union (1991)**

We have to take into account that from 1795 to 1917, Latvia, as well as the rest of the Baltic States, was part of the Russian Empire. In this context, Latvians were already one of the minorities persecuted by Tsarist Russia (Montefiore, 2003). However, in 1918 it became a sovereign state after the fall of the empire due to the coming to power of the Bolsheviks. Through the analysis of O'Connor (2003) and Zake (2008), we can conclude that during the Tsarist administration of the Baltic territory period, there was not enough structured and widespread national Latvian consciousness. Although, in the provinces of Courland and southern Livland this consciousness began to be built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through some elite educated intellectuals influenced by German and Russian nationalist doctrines and Slavophilia (Zake, 2008), this was not the case for the isolated region of Latgale (O'Connor, 2003).

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed and came into force in 1939. The content of this was drawn up by the Soviet and German delegations, ultimately establishing an agreement to divide the territory between Germany and the Soviet Union into spheres of influence. The USSR came to cover, mainly, the eastern part of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (Montefiore, 2003 and Soroeta, 2011). 1940 brought the de facto occupation of the Baltic countries, with the deployment of Soviet military units over Baltic territory and the withdrawal of foreign diplomatic bodies from the territory (Yackemtchouk, 1991 cited by Soroeta, 2011). It also resulted in a number of people being murdered and/or deported: almost 60,000 Estonians, 34,250 Latvians<sup>11</sup> and 75,000 Lithuanians (Montefiore, 2003). Also, during the second wave of mass deportations that took place in 1949, also called '*coast wave*', more than 42,000 people were deported from Latvia to Siberia (Riekstiņš, 2003 cited by Brikmane 2018).

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<sup>11</sup> Zvidriņš (2011) pointed out that during the occupation, 1940-1941, more than 30,000 Latvian residents were deported, evacuated or murdered, while in 1949, more than 41,000 Latvian people were deported. In contrast, in official documents, it is reported that until Stalin's death, between 15,000-19,000 people were deported (Šneidere, 2004).

According to Saburova (1955), the main effects that are relevant for our study and can be verified from the Soviet occupation are the following: 1) suppression of all private institutions, 2) rigging of elections, manipulation of results and prohibition of opposition parties, 3) mass numbers of deportations<sup>12</sup> and deaths, 4) militarization of the coast, and 5) imprisonment and murder by members of the government and the army, of officials of all estates within the administration, businessmen, publishers, religious leaders, both Latvian and Russian-Latvian. But also, censorship of mass media, music, arts, culture, etc. (Urtāns, 2009).

It was not until 1991 when Latvia, alongside the other Baltic States, declared their restoration of independence<sup>13</sup> from the USSR, even calling for the nullity of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the illegality of the occupation of their territory and the suspension of their sovereignty (Soroeta, 2011). Finally, on September 6, 1991, the USSR recognised the sovereignty of the three Baltic republics and declared the occupation illegal.

## **Chapter Four. Latvia's Ethnic Composition**

### **1. Trends in Latvia's Ethnic Composition: From Independence and Soviet Occupation to the Restoration of Sovereignty**

Table 1 shows the differences in three crucial and different time periods: the period of independence and sovereignty (1918-1940), the Soviet Occupation (1940-1941 and 1944-1991) and the restoration of sovereignty (1991-present) according to the Latvians and the three main ethnic minorities of the country: Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian.

The key trend of interest is to observe how, during the Soviet occupation, the Latvian population reduced from 75.5% (1935) to only 52.0% (1989), while the Russian ethnicity increased its presence up to 34% in 1989, 23.4 percentage points more than in 1935. The ethnic composition of Latvia changed as a result of the policies pursued by the USSR in the form of deportations of the population, Russification and internal mobility by the USSR in general (Muižnieks 2010 and Council of Europe, 2016). The Russophone

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<sup>12</sup> Saburova (1955) explains that in 1941, an exhaustive review of the population was conducted, and passports of other Soviet republics located in Central Asia began to be issued. It was a strategy to deport and remove nationality from the ethnically Latvian and Russian-Latvian population, thus avoiding the possible threat of clandestine struggle for the recovery of sovereignty. Between 20,000 and 21,000 people were repressed by the Soviet regime in 1940-1941 (Šneidere, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> To be more precise, we must use the term "restoration of independence" (Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija, 2014) due to the illegality of the occupation and the restoration of the lost sovereignty in 1940.

population makes up the main ethnic minority of Latvia, ahead of the Belarusian and Ukrainian minority groups respectively, constituting approximately a quarter of the population in the country, being mainly concentrated in Riga and the other urban centres (Minority Rights Group International, 2018).

**Table 1. Evolution of the number of people of Latvian and Russian ethnicities according to holders of Latvian citizenship (1935-2018)**

	Independence	Soviet Occupation			Sovereignty	
	1935	1970	1979	1989	2000	2018
<b>Latvian</b>	75.5%	56.8%	53.7%	52.0%	57.7%	62.2%
<b>Russian</b>	10.6%	29.8%	32.8%	34.0%	29.6%	25.2%
<b>Belarusian</b>	1.4%	4.0%	4.5%	4.5%	4.1%	3.2%
<b>Ukrainian</b>	0.09%	2.3%	2.7%	3.5%	2.7%	2.2%
<b>Jews</b>	4.8%	1.6%	1.1%	0.9%	0.4%	0.2%
<b>Germans</b>	3.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%

Compiled by author, based on: RSAE of the Russian Federation (1970; 1979 and 1989); Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija (2011) and Centrālā statistikas pārvalde (2011 and 2019)

Second, we observe how precisely during the period of restoration of sovereignty, in 2018 the Latvian government made efforts to recover demographic values which defined the period of independence of Latvia (1918-1940), both for the Latvian ethnic population (62.2%) and for the decline of the Russian population (25.2%) respectively. Another curious fact is the increase in the presence of Belarusian and Ukrainian ethnic minorities during the Soviet occupation, with little presence before it, and the drastic decline of the Jewish and German population.

## **2. The Existence of Non-Citizens: Implications for the Political System and Social Cohesion**

The Latvian authorities, with the restoration of the existing legal body prior to the occupation and, especially with the Citizenship Law of 1919, proceeded, in accordance with the Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija (2014) to restore citizen status and the rights of those people who were already recognised as Latvian citizens as well as their direct descendants (Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2017a). But Soviet citizens who migrated to Latvia during the occupation and their descendants did not obtain Latvian nationality, but were considered “permanent residents in Latvia”, and received the status of “former citizens of the USSR without citizenship of the Republic of Latvia or of any other State”, that is, non-citizens. However, as of 2015, with the introduction of amendments to the citizenship

law (2013), citizenship is automatically granted to the children of stateless persons and non-citizens if they so request (Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija 2014). According to Minority Rights Group International (2018), for non-citizens, participation in public affairs, finding work in certain sectors of public administration and travelling through the EU is limited. However, the rights of ethnic minorities are protected in accordance with international legal standards (Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2018 and Council of Europe, 2019).

**Table 2. Evolution of non-citizens in Latvia by percentages**

	1993	2000	2011	2018
Non-citizens	33.9%	24.0%	14.3%	11.1%

Compiled by author based on: Latvian Human Rights Committee (2008) and Centrālā statistikas pārvalde (2019)

Regarding the total number of non-citizens, table 2 shows a progressive decrease from 1993 to 2018, reducing the number of non-citizens by 22.8 percentage points. This is mostly due to membership of the European Union, which establishes as a previous step membership of the Council of Europe, an international organisation that promotes democracy and human rights and which demands signing and ratifying the *Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (Council of Europe, 2016).

Moreover, according to data from the Iekšlietu ministrijas (2016) cited by the Council of Europe (2016) from the *Third Report submitted by Latvia Pursuit to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, we can draw a relevant conclusion: for the age group 49 years or more, the number of people who were born outside is much higher than the number born in the Baltic country: 127,870 versus 38,511. This fact lies in the phenomenon of the Russification of Latvia during the Soviet period. In addition, this same age group comprises the largest number of non-citizens for 2016: 168,164, total figure.

From this point of view, the patterns of exclusion and separation in public life, the media and politics continue to be rooted and stable, denoting greater integration in the knowledge of the Latvian language, the path towards a unified educational system, but less integration as a result of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, the labour market and social policy (Muižnieks, 2010).



## **Chapter Five. Participation in International and Regional Organisations**

In this section, we will highlight the membership of two very specific supranational organisations: the European Union and NATO, but from a perspective that only considers these organisations as a fundamental mechanism of collective security for Latvia.

In 2004 Latvia became part of the European Union, considered to be the largest enlargement of member states of the entire existence of this supranational entity. Latvia is in three axes in terms of security within the EU, which are the following:

- a. The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (1958<sup>14</sup>) provides for joint action by the member states, collective prevention of a terrorist attack in any territory of the member states, and collective assistance to a member state that undergoes a natural or human-caused disaster (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 1958 and EUR-Lex, 2019).
- b. The Treaty of Lisbon (2007) in article 42, point 7, established a collective/mutual defence. It considers if a State is subject to an armed attack, the rest of the member states are obliged to assist and mobilise all the instruments at their disposal to the victim state, in accordance with article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007).
- c. The establishment of a Common European Defence and Security Policy defined by the corresponding provisions in the EU Treaty is an integral part of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This serves to establish the axes of a defence and security policy and frame it within a consensus and common logic among all member states, incorporating the main perceived threats.

Furthermore, NATO has become the central organisation for Latvia in terms of collective security. Latvia joined in 2004, when there was an expansion of larger member states. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) treaty becomes one of the fundamental axes of interest for the Baltic country. The content of this article sets in motion a collective security mechanism through which, in the event of an armed attack in one or several territories of the member states, the organisation as a whole will come to the defence of the victim state/states (North Atlantic Treaty, 2019).

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<sup>14</sup> Since 1 January 2009, it has been called the European Union; it was originally part of the European Economic Community.

# **PART III. FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF NCR ANALYSIS PARAMETERS IN THE CASE OF LATVIA**

## **Chapter Six. From Russia's Threat to Foreign Policy International Outcomes**

### **1. Drawing the External Threat: Russian Irredentist Discourse Towards the Post-Soviet Space**

In general terms, irredentism can be understood as: “a political campaign to unite a minority group that belongs to a country, with a neighbouring State that exempts the argument that this group identifies with its national identity, culture, history, ethnicity or religion” (Devia, García and Herrera, 2017: 81). In this sense, Russia's objective is to recover its international presence by reverting to the post-Cold War order (Souleimanov, Abrahamyan and Aliyev, 2017). To carry out this project, it seeks to defend its traditional areas of influence by using nostalgia of the Soviet past (Jurkonis, 2014 cited by Grigas 2014a), in order to establish a security buffer zone against what it perceives as a threat: the approach of NATO and the EU towards its borders through the accession of the post-Soviet space countries to these organisations, as demonstrated by their Military Doctrine of 2010 and their National Security Strategy updated in 2015 (Devia et al., 2017).

The instruments used cover two broad categories. The first refers to soft power, which based on a nationalist ideology, builds, modulates and disseminates national identity through the use of tools such as *passportization*, control of the media, social networks, the Christian Orthodox Church, the Russian language, sport events, supporting and organising NGOs<sup>15</sup> in the Baltic countries to stir and promote political and social tension in these countries, within their strategy to support Russophones abroad through a political program of compatriots (Muižnieks, 2010, AOWG, 2015; Simons, 2015 and González, 2010 cited by Devia et al., 2017, p.84). Also, some experts denoted the combination of economic pressure with information campaigns through mass media as an applied tool for Latvia (Directorate-General for External Policies, 2017). From this point of view,

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<sup>15</sup> Some academics such as Simons (2015), exposed two examples, Rusiiky Mir Foundation and Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Foundation, but also *Rossotrudnichestvo* (Kudors, 2018). Two tools supported by the Russian government with the aim of uniting the population through cultural and social programmes, student exchanges, etc., with a view to interacting with the communities of "Russian compatriots" abroad (AOWG, 2015 and Simons 2015). In other words, spreading Russian soft power abroad.

President Putin's speeches emphasise national and patriotic elements, especially with the use of the term '*russkii mir*' (Russian World<sup>16</sup>) which, with its intended ambiguity, aims to reach not only all ethnic Russians and Russian citizens who are residents in the post-Soviet space countries but also all Russian-speaking populations (Grigas, 2014a; Moser, 2014; Naydenova, 2016; Devia et al., 2017; Kozdra, 2018; Tipaldou and Casula, 2018 and Cheskin and Kachuyevski, 2019). Putin divides the ethnicity of the national identity into the creation of Russianness and the new Pan-Russian identity and introduces the combination of Soviet and pre-Soviet symbols to twin the different ethnic groups, nations and nationalities that make up this entire Soviet ex-socialist space (Tipaldou and Casula, 2018).

As said above, one of the most used strategies is *passportization*, through which Russian citizenship, passports and pensions are granted for Russian ethnic minorities with the aim of invoking the defence of their citizens in another territory as an excuse to intervene in this and ultimately control the foreign government and their population (Ferrero, 2016, cited by Devia, et al., 2017: 93). It is a soft power measure seeking to convert individuals of Russian origin, Russian speakers and people who were citizens of the USSR into Russian citizens. It has been carried out in places like Estonia, Lithuania, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Crimea, Lugansk and Donetsk, but this strategy has not been homogeneously applied in all these countries<sup>17</sup> (Nagashima, 2017). In other words, the strategy is adapted to the context. For instance, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Russian Federation invoked the UN principle of *R2P (Responsibility to Protect)* in order to intervene in these territories under the pretext of protecting its own citizens from the conflict (Souleimanov, Abrahamyan and Aliyev, 2017). For the case of Crimea, although more than 200,000 Russian passports were provided in this territory and in Eastern Ukraine, Russia decided not to claim for the defence of its citizens but undertook to protect both Russian speakers and ethnic Russians (Chochia and Hoffmann, 2018). In the Donbas region, the secessionist authorities issued these documents which ultimately were accepted and recognised by the Russian government (Chochia and Hoffmann,

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<sup>16</sup> The term 'Russkiy mir' also means peace (Moser, 2014: 141 and Kozdra, 2018), which has been very useful throughout history, but especially during the Cold War to suggest that the Russian message contains positive and peaceful content (Naydenova, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, in regions such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia, authorities like the Russian Ministry of Defence started to grant passports to the population in a mass way (Artman, 2013). Also, there was a non-proved fact which, according to Mühlfried (2010), consisted of preparing thousands of blank passports which were distributed by soldiers to the citizens of these regions.

2018). In this sense, this strategy finds its legitimacy in the Russian Concept of Foreign Policy of 2008, 2013 and 2016 (updated over the years but maintaining its essence) emphasising the fundamental objective of globally protecting the rights and interests of Russian citizens abroad (Ruiz, 2013 and Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации, 2016). For Nagashima (2017), passportization is a way for Russia to defend its influence on the post-Soviet space rather than pursuing aggressive purposes. Also, Russian rhetoric towards Latvia is based on the argument of denouncing: 1) serious human rights violations against Russophones, 2) the increase in neo-Nazi protests in Latvia and, 3) the fact that the number of non-citizen people disagrees with international standards (Wake, 2015).

Secondly, we have hard power, which involves the use of the armed forces beyond their own borders for purposes as diverse as annexing territories, as in the case of Crimea; contributing to the formation of new states related to the identity of Moscow, such as South Ossetia; sending covert commands to the Lugansk and Donetsk regions in Ukraine; and also strengthening external military enclaves like Kaliningrad<sup>18</sup> (Devia et al., 2017).

The combination of both strategies has given rise to what is known as the hybrid war, which according to Renz (2016), Rusnáková (2017) and Fabian (2019) is at the heart of the Gerasimov Doctrine, a set of speeches by the homonymous general published in the Russian Military-Industrial Kurier in 2013. The key element guiding the Gerasimov Doctrine is this awareness that non-military instruments, that is, information, political, economic<sup>19</sup>, cyber and humanitarian operations, among others, make up the central axis of the Russian intervention, and will ultimately guarantee the success of the operation (Renz, 2016, Rusnáková, 2017 and Fabian, 2019). In addition, Renz (2016) and Fabian (2019) pointed out that one of the pillars of this strategy is also the modernisation and progress of military capabilities, but these should only provide support for non-coercive measures. Therefore, non-military methods are key to achieving political and strategic objectives. It is worth noting Latvia's fear of a possible hybrid war, because by using unconventional methods, the legal responses to the attack are blurred; for example, the camouflage of the military in voluntary militias as well as the supply of resources and technological and military material to these (Mierzejewski-Voznyak, 2015). The Russian

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<sup>18</sup> We must reflect that in the case of Kaliningrad, military operations are legitimate due to the fact that it is Russian sovereign territory.

<sup>19</sup> Russia has also used economic power to make gas more expensive or stop its supply and commercial blockades, again also to Ukraine (Devia, et al., 2017).

approach to Latvia focused on explaining and justifying the annexation of Crimea and the use of hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine, suggesting that there was solid evidence that the Kremlin pursued the same strategy for the Baltics as used in Ukraine in terms of information campaigns, although the significant difference for 2014 was the increase in hostility in this traditional rhetoric and military manoeuvres near the Baltics (Wake, 2015). This led to a change in the perception of the Russian information campaigns.

## **2. The Perception of the Baltic Countries as Regards Discourse and Its Materialisation**

While Jakniūnaitė (2016) points out the Baltic countries' own perception of insecurity and vulnerability regarding the events in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, Grigas (2014a) considers that in these countries there was great concern about the fact that if Crimea was a strategic place for Russia as an exit to the Black Sea and consequently to the Mediterranean, the Baltics were likewise seen as an exit to ice-free northern ports. Russia and the crisis of Ukraine became the main perceived threat since the sovereignty restoration (Grigas, 2014a; Mierzejewski-Voznyak, 2015; Vilson, 2015 and Jakniūnaitė, 2016). Also, President Vējonis, in 2015, accused Russia of being an aggressor (Brūge, 2016).

According to Jakniūnaitė (2016), in 2014 the situation became qualitatively different regarding the Georgian conflict in 2008 due to four facts that intensified the threat: 1) Russian military reform began to show its effects, 2) they carried out elaborate and extensive military exercises, including simulating the occupation of the Baltic countries, operations ZAPAD 2009 and 2013<sup>20</sup>, 3) increasing provocations that incurred a violation of territorial sovereignty, specifically of the airspace with war planes and maritime borders, and 4) the progressive militarisation of Kaliningrad.

It is worth mentioning the objective differences compared to Crimea, which are: 1) there are no Russian military installations in the Baltic countries, 2) there is not the same historical, cultural, social and spiritual connection and link as that between Russia and Crimea, and to a lesser extent that of Ukraine, 3) the residents of Crimea increased their

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<sup>20</sup> The perception of the Ministry of Defence of Latvia regarding these exercises was reflected in a statement which considered them to take an aggressive stance towards NATO and the Baltic region, with the intention of provoking a military assault in these countries, at the same time as an attempt to increase the Russian military presence in the region in terms of land, sea and air (Rublovskis, 2014 and Mierzejewski-Voznyak, 2015).

standard of living by being part of Russia while the same would not be the case for inhabitants of the Baltics, who belong to the EU, 4) the fact that the Baltic countries belong to western organisations benefits their populations, including Russophones (AOWG, 2015).

The Russian threat lies more in attempts to divide Baltic societies than in annexing its territory (AOWG, 2015). For Grigas (2014b), the Baltic States have a large number of factors that could justify Russian intervention with its citizens abroad policy protection and which starts from two large blocks:

- 1) The concentration of Russian-speaking populations near the borders with Russia in all Baltic countries, and specifically those residing in Eastern Latvia, especially in Latgale, where they represent more than 55% of the population<sup>21</sup>. However, we must consider the success of these Russian minorities in local politics, the low number of people who hold Russian citizenship and the apparent integration into Latvian society. It is important to add the fact that, according to Grigas (2014b), the centre of public opinion and marketing SKDS carried out a survey (2014) in which 36% of Latvian Russian speakers surveyed considered Russia's interference with Ukraine as unjustifiable, while 44% supported it.
- 2) There are a large number of organisations, associations, think-thanks, communities, foundations and centres, among others, aimed at ethnic Baltic Russian minorities.

Another relevant fact is that, before 2014, there was a divergence in security's referent object perception between elites and society, while since that year there has been a convergence: the priority in terms of security is the defence of the territory and by extension, of national sovereignty (Jakniūnaitė, 2016).

Latvian rulers were mindful of monitoring the country's vulnerabilities to Russian pressure (Vilson, 2015: 1) the largest Russian minority of the three Baltics, 2) high energy dependence (Kerikmäe, Chochia and Atallah, 2018), 3) high economic dependence on trafficking routes, which has led them to undertake a more moderate path to balance their interests, strong civil society and popular support in Ukraine. That is why in bilateral and multilateral relations, Ukraine was a less prominent topic, probably by not being openly

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<sup>21</sup> The number of Russian-speaking people is higher than that of ethnic Russians because they also include Belarusians, Ukrainians and Poles who have adopted Russian as their primary language. In Latvia they represented 34% of the population in 2014 and are potential targets of the Kremlin (Grigas, 2014b).

mentioned (Vilson, 2015) or by adopting a more moderate stance to conduct Latvia's foreign policy (Berzim, 2015: 28 cited by Vilson, 2015).

### **3. External Stimuli: Geographical Conditions, Technological Development, Structure and System**

Regarding external stimuli, and beyond the structural modifiers and the relative distribution of power, we will focus on issues related to the clarity of the system and the permissiveness/restriction offered by the strategic environments for the context under study. A key structural modifier for our study will also be mentioned: geography.

Geography becomes relevant insofar as it can more specifically affect the security environment in which a State operates in terms of physical distance, the existence of topographic barriers and strategic depth (Ripsman, et al., 2016). In this regard, it should be noted that Russia and Latvia share a border of some 283.6 kilometres, of which 143.9 are on land, 133.6 along rivers and 6.1 around lakes (Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrijā, 2018). Therefore, being a non-existing geographical distance and topographic barriers between Russia and Latvia, together with the question of the ethnic composition of the regions located in this territory, it heightens the perception of threat and insecurity. In addition, it must be considered that the border regions of Latvia with Russia are very low areas that have attributes that make it difficult to control the territory, as they are often swampy and filled with lakes (Deni, 2018).

Regarding the clarity of the system, according to Ripsman et al. (2016), it is composed of three main elements: a) the degree of discernibility of threats and opportunities, b) if the system provides information on the threats and opportunities, time, horizons and, c) the extent to which the optimal policy options stand out or not. To determine these three issues, we are afforded a series of characteristics or attributes that an actor has in inflicting a threat on another: a) revisionism or hostility expressed by affecting/damaging the territorial integrity of a State or its basic interests, b) the military and economic capacity to inflict damage to the State, which, in turn, depends on geography and technology, and c) a sense of imminence (Ripsman, et al., 2016). Russia was able to demonstrate these three attributes in their entirety in the conflict that took place in 2014 in Crimea. Moreover, as the authors themselves point out, we must understand the lack of clarity as an inherent characteristic of the anarchic nature of the international system and it is a product of both the agency and the structure, the result of the intervening variables united

line, which can affect the perception of States (*ibid*). The less clarity there is, the greater the margin for leaders, States and parties to carry out unique solutions based on their closest interests, preferences and strategic culture (*ibid.*). It is therefore, from this framework of little clarity in the international system, that we will analyse the strategic culture as a key intervening variable to understand the decisions made in this context of uncertainty.

Lastly, the permissiveness or restriction of strategic environments. From this point of view and, following the analysis developed in the previous sections, we can determine that in this case, in terms of imminence and magnitude, the threat was perceived as very imminent and dangerous, thus assuming, according to Ripsman, et al. (2016), that when this perception occurs, it results in a more restrictive strategic environment for the State, which implies a relatively less complex environment than the permissive environment because there are fewer viable alternatives to address them.

#### **4. Cultural Strategy as the Key Intervening Variable: Getting Inside the ‘Black Box’**

The scenario in which Latvia would move, part of the reality described by Kitchen (2010), in which the States ideas are highly institutionalized or culturally rooted and play a key role in the political process, since these shape the national identity or strategic culture are highly likely to be shared between ruling elites and foreign policy institutions. Therefore, in this scenario, the other ideas and actions that are not in line with the strategic culture of the country, are filtered. We must clarify that this reality is the scenario shared by the Latvian majority that adheres to the reality of the Latvian nation-state, and not by the country's Russian-speaking minority.

Latvia's concept of national security is rooted in a centrist state approach and a narrow vision of security<sup>22</sup> due to Latvia's historical experience, and its efforts at the start of the restoration of sovereignty to quickly establish security and defence structures (Ozoliņa, 1996). Latvia historically considered that the most probable threats to its own security would come from the efforts of other countries to destabilise the country and not so much from the military (*ibidem*, 1996).

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<sup>22</sup> Narrow in the sense that they only focus on the security of the sovereignty of the State and not that of the individual.



In short, we are interested in analysing the questions set out below, as they are elements that explain the strategic culture present in Latvia: a) the legacy of the historical past: the series of invasions suffered, the constant fear of Russian irredentism and the inheritance of an artificial ethnic composition, b) demographic policies linked to identity: non-citizens and the need to protect a relatively recent sovereignty and the process of building an unfinished nation-state, c) building a pro-western identity: Euroscepticism and EU activists d) The consolidation of an ethnic-Latvian conservative wing in the political system.

From this perspective, in the second part related to the analysis of Latvia in the Baltic context and, specifically chapters three and four, we have addressed the issues that encompass the legacy of the historical past and also, of the ethnic composition inherited from the Soviet occupation, as well as the policy of access to citizenship and the existence of non-citizens. Therefore, we only mention these points here as they modulate and build Latvian strategic culture. This element of historical experience is the fundamental feature of the configuration of Latvian strategic culture (Ozoliņa, 1996).

Next, we must emphasise identity politics. This is directly related to the previous points and constitutes the cornerstone of the development of the protection of a relatively recent recovered sovereignty (29 years) and the process of nation-state construction. It is therefore necessary to consider the fact that, regarding the construction of national identity, there are two underlying logics. On the one hand, it is a society immersed in a process of rebuilding national identity after its devastation during the period of Soviet occupation, which explains the support and loyalty of the population to the model of the nation state (Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2018). On the other hand, as the Baltic countries have been independent since the inter-war period, they experienced parliamentarism and democracy, two elements that, in addition to national sovereignty, were acquired values that modulate and shape the idea of national cohesion in the struggles for independence (*ibidem*, 2018). Also, the legislation and policies of citizen integration and naturalization processes were especially strict since the construction of the nation-state model is based on this multi-ethnic reality inherited from a past of subtraction subject to imperialism, as we have previously mentioned. As a result of perceiving the minority as a political threat (Ozoliņa, 1996 and Minority Rights Group International, 2018), a nationalist trend resulting from identity is reinforced, based on the experiences of occupation and repression suffered during the Russian and Soviet

occupation and the recent wounds of past injustices not yet reconciled (Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2018). Sasse, 2010, cited by Kuczynski-Zonik (2017b), states that as a result, the naturalization process for obtaining Latvian citizenship obeys two primary objectives: 1) restoring pre-employment ethnic demographic percentages and 2) consolidating society in the creation and development of a nation-state.

From this point of view, and related to the European identity, scepticism, both in Latvia and in the rest of the Baltic countries, is not a systemic institutional process but is sporadic in nature and refers to specific issues and personalities, taking into account that, since 2011, the level of opposition in the EU by Latvians has gradually decreased as a consequence of events of a geopolitical nature (Austers, 2017). The origins of Latvian Euroscepticism date back to the 1990s and are associated with the reluctance of nationalist parties to European intervention in internal affairs and the complexity of the nature of the accession negotiations process, while the Russian-speaking population was more in favour of human rights actions by the Council of Europe and the OSCE (Apals, 2017). At present this has been reversed, in the sense that Russophones perceived it as a factor that would move them away from Russia and the EU would recognise Latvia as a consolidated European democracy that would not adapt language and citizenship laws for the country's Russian-speaking community (*ibidem*, 2017). Austers (2017) states that this Latvian Euroscepticism, Baltic in its extension, is not grounded in radical opposition, but in a criticism of its negative aspects, while also reflecting a deep-seated frustration with national political institutions and not so much in European institutions. Criticism by Latvian intellectual Euroscepticism in the EU is rooted and has become heightened in the wake of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, questioning austerity measures, Euro adoption, migration flows, multiculturalism, security and defence (Apals, 2017 and Austers, 2017). Also, Reire (2016), emphasises that the poor establishment of a Euro-Atlantic identity lies in factors such as: 1) the State-society gap, 2) feeling of alienation from society, 3) the experience of the occupation, especially and, for four decades, Russia's attempt to bring down the international image of Latvia as a State through the fragmentation of history, distorting it through the politicisation of history and comprehensive propaganda, 4) cases of corruption and 5) economic crises.

However, the level of disaffection towards EU membership has declined in recent years due to the economic recovery, tensions with Russia, the holding of the title of EU

presidency and the introduction of the Euro (Austers and Ņikišins, 2017). Since regaining independence, Latvian foreign policy has focused on this Euro-Atlantic axis (Reire, 2016). Following the accession to the EU, the logic of the ruling elites was to lean on the EU to generate more distance and avoid its influence and threat towards Russia (Grostiņš, 2017). It should be noted that the Latvian political elite already correctly identified greater security in the 1990s, advocating for greater integration in European institutional structures, although the process of adopting the Euro did not obtain overwhelming support (Lieģis, 2015). It is also important to emphasise that the Eurocritical movement within Latvia did not obtain representation in Parliament 2014, with little electoral support in the previous years and no good results in the 2014 general elections and 2017 local elections (Apals, 2017 and Grostiņš, 2017). Also, and due to the popularity of Eurocritical arguments, the main traditional parties in government such as *Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība* (ZZS) and the *Nacionālā apvienība* (NA) often sought to incorporate Eurocritical elements regarding negative effects of the EU in electoral campaigns. But everything remained in discourse and no steps were taken in this direction, and in addition, they supported the decisions of Brussels voting in their favour and advocating active participation in the EU (Apals, 2017 and Grostiņš, 2017).

The EU has never been perceived as the predominant source of security for the Baltics. Nevertheless, after the events in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, the favourable perception of the EU as a source of stability increased (more than 10 percentage points compared to the 2008-2013 period in terms of public appreciation of the EU, according to the 2015 Eurobarometer (Apals, 2017). From this security perspective, it is clear that as a result of the events of 2014 (Crimea and Eastern Ukraine), they reinforced a more positive perception of the EU as a source of stability, but at the same time, its lack of conventional common army and its poor position of providing security to MS the next decade, would not be enough to reassure Latvian citizens (*ibidem*, 2017). The EU and NATO have been understood from the outset as the fundamental multilateral organisations in security (Poikāns and Zeltiņš, 2015).

Muižnieks (2010), Higashijima and Nakai (2016) and Struberga and Kjakste (2017), affirm that the Latvian State, and especially the majority of political parties, continue to focus their discourse on a specific ethnolinguistic group, Latvian, making minorities perceive their political participation as ineffective, as well as the fact that, especially in the 2008 crisis, the government stopped focusing on the development of a true integration

policy, which has left the field open to Russia to approach the search for these Russian-speaking minorities to win them over. Russian-speaking NGOs and the Russian-speaking population in general perceive politics as a zero-sum game, understanding it as a competition for material resources when they have no interest in participating in setting the agenda, policy-making or implementation and evaluation processes due to their low trust in institutions (Struberga and Kjakste, 2017).

As regards the political system, since the restoration, ethnic Latvians have dominated parties in government (Åslund and Dombrovskis, 2011). Generally, we can find two trends. On the one hand, the existence of Russia's support for pro-Russian political parties<sup>23</sup>, asserting their influence in electoral processes and the media (Lamoreaux, 2014 cited by Kerikmäe, Chochia and Atallah, 2018). On the other hand, parties are built around specific personalities from which a strong leader emerges (Kerikmäe, et al., 2018 and Nikisins, Rozenvalds and Zepa, 2015). Likewise, the fact that the thresholds to access the party system remain low and allow the entry of new parties of a populist trend that generate a perception of threat to the existing ones, the latter use these same populist tools to confront them (Auers, 2018). Still, the centre-right has governed and dominated politics, forming 3- or 4-party coalitions (Åslund and Dombrovskis, 2011). Since the restoration of independence, parties in coalitions of conservative, liberal and agrarian-conservative signs have defended the identity of the Latvian people and the Latvian nation-state.

The predominant themes in Latvian MOFA press releases denote that the events in Ukraine were the most predominant and frequent topic on the country's foreign policy agenda during the crisis, constituting 21.6% of all of these (Vilson, 2015).

Latvian strategic culture is based on the pursuit of its most vital interests: the survival of the State and the construction of the Latvian nation-state. Therefore, despite the unstructured Western-European identity, the configuration of the strategic culture has put this objective (interest) of defending the survival of its own sovereignty first.

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to highlight the Russian political influence in Latvia, which is represented by the "Harmony" party created in 2005, with a markedly pro-Russian identity that has had contacts with and been financed by the Kremlin, while establishing agreements with the "United Russia" party (AOWG, 2015). This party controls the consistory of Riga, the country's capital, from where it has promoted links with the city of Moscow and Russia. It was the most voted party in the 2014 elections, obtaining 209,887 votes and 24 seats (losing 7 seats compared to previous electoral elections), while the United Russia party obtained 1.58% of the votes and no seats, with a participation of 58.85% (Centrālā Vēlēšanu Komisija, 2014). However, these parties were not part of the governing coalition.

## **5. Outputs at International Level: Foreign Policy as a Public Policy**

When facing a threat and giving a course of action, the States, starting from an analysis of the threat and the context, select the means to do so, considering factors such as: 1) available means, 2) which can be the most efficient, 3) how the use of these can be justified, 4) ability to mobilise resources and, 5) range of possibilities from standards derived from soft power to military coercion resulting from hard power (Kitchen, 2010).

It must be understood that the Russian threat does not imply a change in the nature of the threats that this State faces, but rather an intensification of it. Russian influence and actions towards Latvia have been a historical threat (Ozoliņa, 1996). Already in 2012, the Latvian Parliament approved a set of documents for the development of the defence system in the medium-long term, constituting a New Concept of Defence of the State of the Republic of Latvia, based on the pursuit of two fundamental objectives, and planned through 2014 with the approval of the National Defence Financing Law (increased spending for this past year): 1) reach 2% of the GDP destined for defence by 2020 (Rostoks, 2017), 2) in the long term, a development plan of the LNAF (Latvian National Armed Forces) by 2024, with the aim of increasing the number and the quality of these as well as that of their available resources (Rublovskis, 2014; Beitāne, 2015 and Oztulis and Ozoliņa, 2017).

The pragmatic logic that has characterised Latvian and Russian relations since the recovery of sovereignty in economic terms, especially for access to Russian natural gas, must be considered (Kudors, 2016). The pragmatism strategy towards Russia, especially in economic terms, was modified and rethought, focusing on it in terms of security, defence and regional cooperation, as well as the need to strengthen the EU CFSP to ensure coherence and functionality as regards Russia (Beitāne, 2015). Two main strategic axes were also highlighted: 1) the preparation for holding the title of presidency of the Council of the EU (2015), 2) the crisis in Ukraine as well as the alleged accession to the OECD (Poikāns, J and Zeltiņš, A., 2015 and Mierzejewski-Voznyak, 2015). Therefore, since 2014, a historical and intensified approach has been shown towards the EU and NATO in security and away from Russian influence.

Following the events of 2014, structural changes took place in Latvian foreign policy, focusing on supporting the strengthening of NATO capacities in the Baltics and prioritising the national agenda for security affairs (Beitāne, 2015). Since the restoration

of independence, the Baltics have focused their foreign policy towards the West, with the aim of enjoying membership of the EU and NATO (Galbreath *et al.*, 2008 cited by Vilson, 2015). The fact that in 2015 Latvia held the presidency of the European Council, from where it preferred to enact policies related to Russia and Ukraine (Bērziņa, 2015: 28, cited by Vilson, 2015), and be supporters of a better integration and the one-voice metaphor in the EU, contradicts what the existing literature affirmed towards political disappointment and the low public support in the EU, contributing to a higher active engagement of Latvia in this organisation (Galbreath and Lamoureux, 2013: 120 cited by Vilson, 2015). Also, structural changes in Latvian foreign policy have followed their course for 2018, focusing on channelling action through the common understanding of the EU and NATO (Kudors, 2018).

Therefore, it seems that, from an external dimension, in the sense of action outside the Latvian territory, the government has advocated to carry out its policies regarding the situation of Ukraine and the threat of Russia from multilateral organisations such as the EU and NATO. Furthermore, the EU framework allows MS access to world politics and decision-making, while also promoting their national interests and foreign policy (Larsen, 2005, cited by Vilson, 2015 and Wake 2015), as well as joining NATO. Therefore, Latvia wanted to channel its course of action through both EU and NATO mechanisms. Latvia's national security is directly linked to the security of neighbouring countries, which is related to this interest in European political and economic integration (Ozoliņa, 2016).

Article 5 of NATO is still considered fundamental (Poikāns and Zeltiņš, 2015, Wake 2015 and Rostoks, 2017) as a sufficient measure of deterrence as Russia will not want an open confrontation with NATO that could lead to an escalation of the nuclear threat (AOWG, 2015 and Directorate-General for External Police, 2017). As Latvia, due to its own dimensions of the defence structure and the armed forces, remains one of NATO's weakest countries in military terms (Beitāne, 2015 and Bērziņa, 2015), it would not be able to face a Russian invasion, which generates a relationship of clear dependency on this North Atlantic organisation (AOWG, 2015). The responses in the framework of NATO are summarised in two summits (Directorate-General for External Policies, 2017): a) Wales Summit (2014): approves the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) consisting of the NATO Response Force (NRF) to equip it with more troops, (5,000), and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) (Lieģis, 2015; Oztulis and Ozoliņa, 2017; Rostoks, 2017 and Andžāns and Romanovs, 2018). It involves greater military activity in the

eastern part of the alliance; and b) Warsaw Summit (2016): establishes the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) to incorporate 4 multinational battle groups in the Baltics and Poland in a rotating manner, which contributed to reducing the anguish of these countries (Devi, 2018). The NATO Centre of Excellence for Strategic Communication was also located in Riga (Rublovskis, 2014; Vilson, 2015 and Wake, 2015).

In addition, the Baltic defence strategy, from a hard power perspective, rests on two fundamental pillars: 1) development of national defence capabilities, expressed in the armed forces, 2) defence support in NATO's defence system, especially to reinforce the national armed forces (Otzulis and Ozoliņa, 2017).

On the other hand, the EU summarised a compendium prepared from the disparity of positions between the MS on the response that had to be given, taking a dual approach: 1) strong position of deterrence towards Russia, 2) to maintain and encourage channels open to dialogue through diplomacy (Directorate-General for External Police, 2017). Likewise, there are elements of Europeanisation in Baltic foreign policies even concerning problems linked to national interests and to the security of the country, as access to the EU was presented as a formal return to Europe (Mäliksoo, 2006). At the same time, they saw access to the EU and NATO as an opportunity to stabilise relations with Russia in the framework of these multilateral organisations, using collective defence as a guarantee of national security (Vilson, 2015).

Action in terms of security within the EU is channelled through its own mechanisms, which are the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the European Defence Agency (EDA) (European Union External Action, 2020). In this sense, the elements of Europeanisation of the Baltic policies towards Ukraine have been (Vilson, 2015): 1) the participation in the formulation of policies through the procedures of the EU, as well as strong pressure to include their own preferences in the political agenda and results of the EU; participating in the EU's negotiation processes, but also endorsing the common European values and principles, 2) increasing the importance of the EU as a platform for interaction with Ukraine, while part of the EU policy towards this crisis was adopted and used in the formulation of Baltic foreign policies. Therefore, the EU's foreign policy coexisted with strong sanctions against Russia (Kerikmäe, Chochia and Atallah, 2018) in the economic, banking, defence, finance and high-tech sectors, freezing key assets of Russian decision-makers to EU MS, as well as the travel ban, although Russia remains the EU's third largest trading partner (Beitāne, 2015) and the economic and political

support for Ukraine (Brūge, 2016). In addition, the situation in Eastern Ukraine also led to changes in the EU's energy security policy, seeking the diversification of energy sources and advocating for the liberalisation of the energy market, among others (*ibidem*, 2015). It is this moderate stance of Latvian foreign policy that is channelled through the multilateral spaces of the EU and NATO (Kerikmäe, Chochia and Atallah, 2018), while the actions carried out within the country also take this stance as we will see later. Despite the Russia-EU interdependence in trade and energy terms, in 2014 there was a change in the EU's rhetoric and a debate was sparked around the restructuring of the great European strategy towards Russia (Beitāne, 2015).

We will not mention regional cooperation mechanisms as they have not played an active role in security matters, but rather, we will focus primarily on commercial and economic areas. However, it is necessary to mention the problems faced by these: 1) regional conflicts that undermine trust between the participating actors, 2) weakening by the Kremlin of the European integration planned by the EU in the area, 3) lack of motivation of parliamentarians to participate in inter-parliamentary assemblies due to their low visibility in their respective national electoral districts (Directorate-General for External Policies, 2017).

The measures applied by the government within the national territory revolve around different aspects. Firstly, the carrying out of a confidential study to assess the reality and attitudes of the Russian-speaking segment of its population, out of fear of the action of Russian NGOs working in the territory (Simons, 2015). The government was thus aware of the Russian aim to divide their society, using these NGOs, the policy of defence of the rights of compatriots and the attempt of pro-Russian political parties and media (Grigas, 2012 and Saari, 2014, cited by Simons, 2015). Furthermore, taking advantage of anti-Russian discourse in the country, the government temporarily suspended the broadcasting of a Russian state television channel for three months (Beitāne, 2015 and Bērziņa, 2015: 28, cited by Vilson, 2015). In 2016, *Satversmes aizsardzības birojs* (SAB) determined that the main threat in the medium-long term is played out in the information space, by facing Russian media tools and its soft power actions through these methods (Kudors, 2018). The Latvian government also tried to increase transmission in Russian on radio and Latvian television, as well as debate to provide alternative transmissions in Russian (Wake, 2015). The liberalisation of the gas market in pursuit of the liberalisation of supply sources was also promoted.



## CONCLUSIONS

The set of analytical elements contained in the Neoclassical Realism model and used in this study have allowed us to determine the threat that Latvia perceived in 2014 and how it has determined the structural direction of the country's foreign policy for the years analysed. Furthermore, by exploring Latvian strategic culture, we have been able to dissect the implicit logics that modulate and shape the formulation of foreign policy in the country. After having analysed the debate about the applicability of the NCR model, its attributes and the criticisms received, we have proceeded to explore how this would operate in our study as well as the historical relations between Latvia and Russia, going into detail about the Tsarist and Soviet occupation and the legacy of the ethnic composition that still shapes and determines the national character of the country. Subsequently, the debate revolved around the Russian irredentist discourse towards the post-Soviet space and how, with rhetoric and facts, Russia has been perceived as the most important threat in terms of security for Latvian sovereignty.

Lastly, giving feedback to our research questions posed at the beginning, and outlining the external threat perceived by Latvian political elites, that is, the Russian irredentist discourse, the illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, specifically in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, Latvian foreign policy took a new course based on structural changes. Consistent with our core research questions raised in this paper, we can determine that the NCR model has been useful and valuable in understanding the process of foreign policy formulation and subsequent implementation for the case of Latvia, a small-medium state. Likewise, this has provided us with added value with respect to what structural realism raises, since it has been essential to open the black box and address the strategic culture of the country to understand how this strategy has been carried out and why; that is, the nature of its justification, which is to understand the logic of the ideas prevailing among the political elites and their perception regarding relations with Russia, the result of legacy and historical experiences. It is in the strategic culture of the Latvian political elites that the chosen strategy is justified considering the structural constraints and the external threat. Faced with the threat of a possible hybrid war in the Baltics, Latvia decided to support and deepen its relationship with the multilateral organisations of which it is a member, that is, the EU and NATO.

In addition, the article has responded to the initial hypothesis: Latvia undertakes the strategy of asserting its membership in the European Union and NATO, rooted in the strategic culture of the country, as a means to strengthen and provide security in its task and fundamental objective of defending national sovereignty and developing the construction of the nation-state relatively recently, facing what was perceived as a threat in 2014. By means of these it proposes and promotes its position while fighting to place its preferences on the political agenda of both multilateral organisations, from where, in the last term, it operationalises and gives a joint response.

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