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The Everyday Construction of Regional Security: A Comparative Study of Small States' (in)Security in the Baltic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean

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Abstract

This paper puzzles with the routinised construction of security issues in a comparative outlook in the Baltic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. In observing

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the quest of small states in pursuing physical and ontological security, this paper sets out to assess the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical paradigms derived from the Baltic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. Specifically, small states in the Baltic Sea – including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Latvia, and Lithuania – and small states in the Eastern Mediterranean – including Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon – have two altered, yet comparable realities in their daily device, formulation, and practice of foreign, security, and defence policies. While the Baltic Sea small states often find themselves more unified in their approach towards security, the Eastern Mediterranean small states have a multitude of gaps and do not experience such an in-depth level of cooperation. In the case of the Baltic Sea, small states often have a common perceived threat: Russia. On the other hand, small states in the Eastern Mediterranean have different contestations and collaborations. For example, Cyprus mostly perceives Turkey as its primary security concern, while maintaining good relations with Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel, who by contrast do not exhibit the same level of hostility towards Turkey. Nonetheless, similarities persist. For instance, small states in either region may group together, collaborating on a daily basis over security and defence, while identifying common patterns for further improvement in their policy work. Drawing from the Baltic Sea paradigm, small states in the Eastern Mediterranean may learn and benefit in their everyday construction of their own regional security realities.

Keywords

Baltic Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, Ontological Security, Regional Security, Small States

Introduction

It is well-documented across the literature that modern approaches to security utilise physical or traditional and ontological features upon which state-actors rely on in maximising their safety. As such, being secure in both physical and ontological senses is the relief from fear of survival, as well as the state of being free from existential dread.[2] Literature on small states, in particular, shows that 'smallness' is mostly concerned with both concepts, due to small states being, by definition, limited in material capabilities, inter alia resources, personnel and defensive arsenal, territorial size and population, smaller bureaucratic and infrastructural setups,[3] while exhibiting strong interest in pushing for their own recognition as a serious player in the international political arena.[4] However, a largely unaddressed issue in this context of security seeking is how small states manage to group together and collaborate on a daily basis to secure those same interests, ensuring their survival, and sustaining their physical and ontological security by crafting policy that aligns with each other's interests against possible

[2] Bahar Rumelili, *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015). See also Nina Krickel-Choi, 'The Concept of Anxiety in Ontological Security Studies' (2022) *International Studies Review*, Vol. 24(3) viac013, DOI: 10.1093/isr/viac013, 6.

[3] Alyson J. K. Bailes, Jean-Marc Rickli and Baldur Thorhallsson, 'Small States, Survival and Strategy', in Clive Archer, Alyson J. K. Bailes, and Anders Wivel (eds), *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) 26-45. See also Ronald P. Barston *The Other Powers: Studies in the Foreign Policies of Small States* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979). See also Iver B. Neumann and Benjamin de Carvalho "Introduction: Small States and Status", in Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann (eds), *Small State Status Seeking* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[4] Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel, 'Small States: Concepts and Theories' in Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel (eds.) *Handbook on the Politics of Small States* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020).

and/or perceived threats. Not only is physical security alone inadequate in addressing the material needs and constraints of small states, but dismissing the importance of perceptions, norms, and how they project their self-image in the international scene to appear as legitimate political players can be lethal for these states.[5] Indeed, 'self-image projection' as a way of gaining confidence and security has been characterised as a 'soft power' tool that fills the gap for state-actors that cannot compete against larger states in material terms.[6] The exact practice of security policy in this way, which includes the promotion of the notion that small states are resilient and capable collaborators, nonetheless, may vary from region to region.

Given the fact that in most cases, state-actors cannot fully address external security issues in their region due to limited access in material resources,[7] regional security is, by definition, heavily dependent on inter-state cooperation at a multi-level and multilateral mode of cooperation. Not only that, but inter-state cooperation increases when 'smallness' is taken into consideration. This means that small state-actors face even bigger problems and limitations due to their smaller size, territory, population, and restricted availability of resources. While there is much to say about regional cooperation and how larger state-actors have

[5] Živilė Marija Vaicekauskaitė 'Security Strategies of Small States in a Changing World' (2017) *Journal of Baltic Security*, Vol. 3(2) 9.
[6] Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma' (2006) *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12(3) 352. See also David Clarke, Anna Cento Bull, and Marianna Deganutt, 'Soft Power and Dark Heritage: Multiple Potentialities' (2018) *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 23(6) 664, 670. See also Derek Bolton, 'Targeting Ontological Security: Information Warfare in the Modern Age' (2021) *Political Psychology*, Vol. 42(1) 132.
[7] Kei K. 'The US and East Asian Regional Security Architecture: Building a Regional Security Nexus on Hub-and-Spoke' (2011) *Asian Perspectives*, Vol. 35(1) 17. See also Ralf Emmers and Sarah Teo, 'Regional Security Strategies of Middle Powers in the Asia-Pacific' (2015) *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 15(2) 187.

utilised partnerships with small states to secure regional interests across the literature in more mainstream approaches,[8] these explanations do little to justify how small states specifically construct a regional security that prioritises their own interests first and foremost. What is characteristically missing from mainstream analysis is not the reasons small states choose to collaborate in constructing a regional security system against collective and perceived threats, but the means through which they achieve that, while relying on ontological tools that sustain and reaffirm their narrative across time and space. Utilising such 'ontological tools' means, first and foremost, that small states need to better understand their own ontological security needs. This includes the mechanisms through which small states ensure continuity, order, create resilient policies, and reflect that on a regional and international scale, by presenting themselves as reliable security partners.[9]

Using process tracing and archival methods, this paper examines the daily creation of regional security policy, needs, responses, and collaboration of small states across two different areas: the Baltic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. While small states in the Baltic Sea have a more unified approach in their everyday security dealings, such as identifying a common external threat, it seems there is a lack of unity and cohesion in the Eastern Mediterranean. Identifying the missing links through which small-state collaboration in the Eastern Mediterranean can

[8] Baldur Thorhallsson and Sverrir Steinsson (2017) "Small State Foreign Policy", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. See also Robert O. Keohane (1969) "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 23(2). See also Anders Wivel, Alyson JK Bailes, and Clive Archer (2014), "Setting the Scene: Small States and International Security," in Anders Wivel, Alyson JK Bailes, and Clive Archer (eds.) *Small States and International Security* (New York, NY: Routledge) 3-25.
[9] Brent J. Steele (2008), *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2008) 4, 26.

flourish is important, not least because regional cooperation is vital to retaining ontological security on a wider scale across the region, but primarily because models such as those seen in the Baltic Sea region can be exported in other regions as well. Moreover, despite their striking regional differences, these two regions also share similarities: small states in both regions have suffered under an external power in the past, thus sharing stories of past trauma in their struggle for independence and autonomy. Similarly, these same actors now present themselves as facing 'overarching existential threats',[10] as it is in the case of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean and Russia in the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and beyond.

Therefore, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea regions are comparable, particularly when it comes to regional security. Studying these regions via the ontological security lens can be beneficial in two ways: (a) it fills an important literature gap in Area and Regional Security Studies, particularly when it comes to the assertiveness of small states against larger regional threats, and (b) it provides useful insights that can be utilised for policymaking in the security realm. After utilising and understanding the Baltic Sea model, it might be easier to draw out important lessons that could help further enhance security and collaboration in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Process tracing is used to trace through historical patterns and events that have shaped each region respectively, in order to better interpret the narrative, by breaking down the intermediating factors between independent and dependent variables of analysis, and thereafter, understanding the enmeshed link between past memory and security-seeking within a regional context for small states (see Figure 1).

[10] Constantinos Adamides (2018) "The Challenges of Formulating National Security Strategies (NSS) in the Presence of Overarching Existential Threats," *Cyprus Review*, Vol. 30(1).

The first section of this paper sets out an ontological security conceptualisation of regional security. Even though the framework begins with the Giddensian approach, in that being ontologically secure implies a deeper 'sense of continuity and order in events,'[11] it highlights that the daily repetition and practice of security by small states as individual units is far from enough. In fact, small states need to practice a regional variation of ontological security. By reflecting on how collective security in the Eastern Mediterranean consists of daily cooperation and unity against regional threats, this would allow small states to reassess the region's security needs.

Thereafter, it examines the impact of collective memory and trauma as contributing factors that ultimately justify the resilient and united approach exhibited in the Baltic Sea small states, in contrast with the poor, divided security policy priorities in the Eastern Mediterranean small states. In the first case, the Baltic Sea region consists of Baltic and Nordic small states that face common security issues that are often tackled in unison, via extended regional cooperation.[12] For instance, a main source of this strong sense of solidarity that fosters this regional security bond are the mutual past experiences and sufferings encountered by the Baltic-Nordic group. Collective memory and trauma experienced by states form part of the ontological security approach: first, the historical impact and mutual experiences at the face of external security threats shape and prompt specific security policies and needs; secondly, linking individual states' ontological needs to region-wide ontological security needs; thirdly,

[11] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991) 243.
[12] Živilė Marija Vaicekauskaitė 'Security in the Nordic Baltic Region and Russia: Towards Enhanced Regional Defence Cooperation?' in Anne-Marie Brady and Baldur Thorhallsson (eds.) *Small States and the New Security Environment* (Cham: Springer, 2021).

revisiting regional security-crafting by utilising ontological security concepts. The third and fourth section apply this framework of ontological security using empirical examples in the Baltic Sea and Eastern Mediterranean respectively. The fifth and final section offers a reflective exercise whereby additional insights may be drawn for future work that builds on existing knowledge that further enhances this proposed model for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Although this paper predominantly rests on a theoretical contribution to regional security in the Baltic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, it also offers an alternative lens through which these cases could be observed. It fosters an attempt at integrating an ontological security perspective that tries to understand how and why small states, in their daily pursuit of physical and ontological security, may choose to construct specific narratives that benefit the region against a common external threat, and in turn, benefiting themselves. For this reason, understanding how cross-collaboration in the Baltic Sea region has helped craft such a model could be beneficial for the turbulent waters that is the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

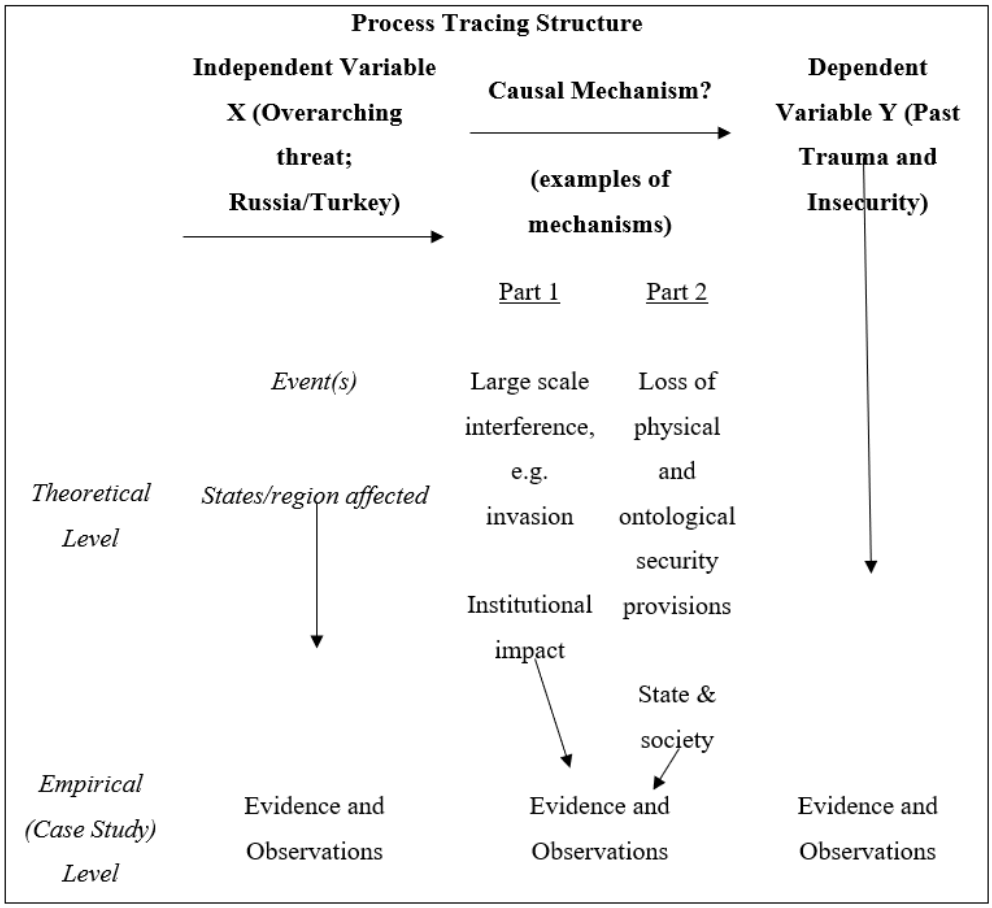

Figure 1 *Process-Tracing as an Example – Overarching Threats to Insecurity*

1. A Framework for Everyday Regional Security

The essence of being secure at state level is about planning, executing, as well as revising existing policy on matters pertaining to security. This trifecta of planning, executing, and revising by default implies that doing security is not a static process. Experiencing security continuously, from raising awareness over what should be framed as a security question and drafting it into policy, to actually implementing it throughout the state's apparatus all contribute to putting together a security mechanism or framework. Not only that, but daily observations of possible or perceived threats is part of this same process, where states set up their surveillance[13] to ensure continuity and the normalisation of daily state and societal processes. 'Doing' security then, is a collective process of the daily manifestation safety, a sense of continuity, and the normalisation of narratives. This approach towards 'doing' security can be summed up in the words of Jelena Subotić: 'at times of great crises and threats to multiple state securities (physical, social, as well as ontological), narratives are selectively activated to provide a cognitive bridge between policy change that resolves the physical security challenge.' And ontological security through 'autobiographical continuity'.[14] The narrative that is used for the construction of regional security can be understood in the same principle.

While definitions of regional security are contested in the literature, common characteristics of related definitions focus on cooperation within a

[13] This refers to security and intelligence agencies, observatories, or other entities tasked by the executive of a government or regional organisation to monitor events of interest related to security. For European practices, see also Richard J. Aldrich and Daniela Richterova, 'Ambient Accountability: Intelligence Services in Europe and the Decline of State Secrecy' (2018) *West European Politics*, Vol. 41(4).
[14] Jelena Subotić, 'Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change' (2016) *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 12(4) 611, 616.

specified territory to address security issues. In that regard, regional security is perhaps best understood as a collective framework for state-actors in a distinct geographic area where foreign, security, and defence policies interact interchangeably and strategically, yet equally complement each other, while relying strongly on cooperation between state and non-state actors, including institutions and organisations. This means that a change in one of these state-actors within a security context, triggered by an event or policy change, may lead to an issue of concern for other state-actors in the region.[15] At the same time, regions as constructs retain both analytical and ontological standing when incorporating states into their construct, thereby placing them within a 'neighbourhood' security context: state security is primarily formulated around that same neighbourhood or regional sphere.[16]

For small state-specific cases, regional security becomes even more important. While traditionally limited in material capabilities and resources, these state-actors remain exposed and vulnerable to physical security breaches, among others. Upholding their ontological security across time and space, then, is a constant act that requires constant monitoring as part of a daily, repetitive process. Going beyond the Giddensian notion of ontological security as a 'sense of continuity and order in events,' constructs and dealings of regional security on a daily basis strive for consistency. In designing reliable and stable instruments of security, one must seek reaffirmation and mutual self-recognition by peers in order

[15] Aviad Rubin and Ehud Eiran 'Regional Maritime Security in the Eastern Mediterranean: Expectations and Reality' (2019) *International Affairs*, Vol. 95(5) 981.
[16] Barry Buzan and Ole Waever *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 27.

to retain harmony and build on an image that can appeal to others and, ultimately, to one's sense of identity simultaneously.

This means that not only should such an image be receptive to perceptions, norms, and ideas externally, but it should also co-exist with self-esteem in a reflective manner.[17] In turn, this reflectivism and reinterpretation of norms and ideas contributes to a normalised narrative that such images can fit in, thereby promoting external compliance, unity, and acceptance by other parties.[18] The more something is repeated and reflected upon, the easier it is for it to be incorporated into a daily routine that appears to be legitimate, and consequently, widely accepted.

Sustaining such a narrative is by no means easy, however. For one thing, security constructs that rely on an ontological approach require repetition and routinisation. Whether this is exerted through emotional appeals to a wider audience via speech acts, by focusing on themes related to memory and trauma, or emphasising the prospects of deep anxiety and social unrest at the face of a threat or a known/unknown adversary, statecraft (including policymaking and decision-making) over security matters requires to instigate policy that justifies any action or measure taken. When applied at a regional security level, ontological

[17] Jennifer Mitzen and Kyle Larson, 'Ontological Security and Foreign Policy', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.458. See also Mitzen, (no 3) 352. See also Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2008) 126-127.

[18] Michel Foucault, *O Nascimento da Biopolítica* (Coimbra: Edições 70, 2004) 75, cited in Renata B. Ferreira, 'Healing and Reconciliation in Contemporary Post-Conflict Scenarios: Securitisation Movement of War Trauma in Perspective' in Erica Resende and Dovile Burdyte (eds.) *Memory and Trauma in International Relations: Theories, Cases and Debates* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014) 98.

security is the consistent balance of such retained synergies, certainty, harmonies, and confidence that the 'Self' (in this case, a state or a group of allied states in a regional context) is indeed secure against the 'Other' (in this case, other states and actors in a regional context), maintaining a good sense of external and internal self-identity.[19]

2. Regional Security: Collective Trauma, Memory, and Cooperation

Regional security through an ontological sphere can be based upon the need to maintain material interests. This, inevitably, refers to the need to uphold physical security that is vital for the survival and continuity of the state in material terms. Nonetheless, states may sometimes go against their own material needs in order to satisfy their ontological security priorities. This is tied to the concepts of 'trauma' and 'collective memory'. Both concepts, when examined, can be held responsible for identity, and thereafter, regional security construction. At the same time, however, states cooperate with and compete against each other to prioritise their interests, whether these are translated in material or ontological terms. This section, therefore, addresses how ontological security concepts such as trauma and memory contribute towards regional security cooperation. The link between the variables is rather straightforward: utilising the process tracing model presented in Fig.1, the goal is to identify how trauma and the memory of past misfortunes

[19] Alexandria J. Innes and Brent J. Steele, 'Memory, Trauma and Ontological Security', in Erica Resende and Dovile Burdyte (eds.) Memory and Trauma in International Relations: Theories, Cases and Debates (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014) 17. See also Brigt Dale, Siri Veland, and Anne Merrild Hansen, 'Petroleum as a Challenge to Arctic Societies: Ontological Security and the Oil-Driven 'Push to the North'' (2019) *The Extractive Industries and Society*, Vol. 6(2) 369-370. See also Guangyi Pan and Alexander Korolev, 'The Struggle for Certainty: Ontological Security, the Rise of Nationalism, and Australia-China Tensions after COVID-19' (2021) *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 26(1) 118, 122.

triggered by a foreign entity, such as occupation, exploitation, and general societal anxiety and discomfort in small states has brought about insecurities. These insecurities may manifest in the form of overarching threats, thus bigger states like Russia and Turkey creating societal and state insecurities due to past hurtful experiences. This premise will serve as an analytical preamble towards examining each respective case study more in depth.

A. *Trauma and Collective Memory*

'Trauma' is a deeply embedded state of discomfort and agony into one's identity. It is the overarching negative notion of pain, suffering, and past shortcomings that have inflicted damage, as well as systematic and prolonged anxiety that cannot be easily dismissed. For instance, in the presence of an existential threat and in line with regional security, trauma is about recall past experiences linked to their identity that in turn shape memory. When referring to a group of entities or people who have experienced the same or similar events that have shaped their present state, we also refer to 'collective memory'. While traditional analysis of power politics would argue that the survivability of small states would rely on alliance-building with larger states, the persisting examples of history via trauma and memory would prompt small states to think twice before forming such a pact with others.[20]

In the case of conflict and war, the dichotomy of either continuing or stopping conflict is likely to be shaped by both positive and negative experiences. In the case of former empires, there is a tendency of states in regional context to

[20] See Innes and Steele (2014). See also Constantinos Adamides (2020) *Securitization and Desecuritization Processes in Protracted Conflicts: The Case of Cyprus* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan) 72.

worry over the repetition of events that once held them under the wing of a more powerful imperial entity or hegemon, as it is for certain Eastern European states who, having embarked on a process of 'decommunisation', worry about Russia from an emotionally linked approach due to the latter's legacy following the collapse of the Soviet Union.[21] In the aftermath of assessing collective experiences, then, small states may prompt for different cooperation models. This means that small states may use such models either to collectively stand together against common existential threats, or, depending on their interests, use an appropriate model that might limit cooperation with some state actors, yet enhance and deepen relations and security cooperation with others. As explored later, the latter typically applies in the case of the Eastern Mediterranean.

B. *Territoriality, Networks, and Cooperation*

Region-making is often a confusing process. Taking it from a simpler angle at the unitary level of analysis, in order for states to gain legitimacy and to safeguard their sovereignty and territorial integrity, they must also be recognised by the international community.[22] In that regard, states have to argue and build their case in presenting why they should belong as a member to the international community, including membership to international organisations, regional bodies, and institutions.[23] By contrast, this process of belonging and acceptance does not apply for regions in the same way. The European Union, for instance, as a bloc of 27 member-states does not have, in real terms, a fixed and recognised territory, simply because it is not a political union that abides by federalisation. Rather, the

[21] Ibid. See also Tanya Narozhna 'State-Society Complexes in Ontological Security-Seeking in IR' (202) *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 23(3) 572.
[22] Tristen Naylor *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilised Nations to the G20* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).
[23] Ibid.

EU enforces the concept of territoriality,[24] while its member-states constantly seek further protection of their borders by framing their own border disputes as EU border disputes.[25] This way, borders at bloc-level – that of the Union – can shift, which also allows for EU regionalism to expand on its European integration project. Borders for the EU as a bloc do not have to be exclusive, nor do they have to be drawn up on the map in a fixed position.[26]

Despite this approach towards EU borders, a comprehensive approach on the EU's side has attempted to foster a holistic framework of security cooperation that is adaptive to change and can complement the policy structure of its member-states. Such an approach is found in the nexus of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). While Frontex and CSDP in this current setting of case studies would mostly apply on those EU member-states covered by these policies, they both provide working frameworks for regional security engagement across members and non-members alike. In this regard, these frameworks have played a pivotal role in reproducing and redefining geopolitical narratives and imaginaries.[27]

[24] Katharina Koch, 'The role of Territoriality in the European Union Multi-Level Governmental Cooperation Framework of Finnish-Russian Cross-Border Cooperation' (2019) *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 26(2) 115-133.
[25] Ramona Coman 'Values and Power Conflicts in Framing Borders and Borderlands: The 2013 Reform of EU Schengen Governance' (2019) *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/08865655.2017.1402201.
[26] Jennifer Mitzen 'Feeling at Home in Europe: Migration, Ontological Security, and the Political Psychology of EU Bordering' (2018) *Political Psychology*, Vol. 39(6) 1380.
[27] Giuseppe Campesi 'Frontex and the Production of the Euro-Mediterranean Borderlands (2006–2016)' in Claudia Gualtieri (ed.) *Migration and the Contemporary Mediterranean. Shifting Cultures in Twenty-First-Century Italy and Beyond* (Pieterlen and Bern: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2018).

At the same time, regional cooperation depends on connections formed between state-entities. This forms deeper regional channels through which states reproduce common practices on policy inter alia security and the economy. Regionalising and constructing neural networks within existing regions produced unique identities through which no clear demarcation exists. Regionalisation, in this sense, opens up the possibility through which diffused emerging relations between states in a given geographic area may prompt a loose connection that forms a *de facto* territory, just like in the case of the Baltic States, the Middle East, or more specifically, in the Eastern Mediterranean.[28]

C. Horizontal and Vertical Cooperation

Another means through which regional security cooperation is constructed is by looking at 'horizontal' and 'vertical' modes of cooperation. Horizontal security cooperation and practices at a regional level are understood as middle-power cooperation level or balancing against bigger threats, usually state actors, by identifying both mutual ground for addressing security policy deficits, as well as political opportunities in the region.[29] While examples of literature like Lee's (2019) proposal focus on medium-sized powers, the same can be applied to small states. Under this type of cooperation, small states would seek common elements

[28] Lucas de Oliveira Paes 'Networked Territoriality: A Processual-Relational View on the Making (and Makings) of Regions in World Politics' (2022) *Review of International Studies*, 8. See also Ruth Hanau Santini, 'A New Regional Cold War in the Middle East and North Africa: Regional Security Complex Theory Revisited' (2017) *The International Spectator*, Vol. 52(4) 93-111.

[29] Peter K. Lee 'Middle Power Strategic Choices and Horizontal Security Cooperation: The 2009 Australia-South Korea Security Cooperation Agreement' (2019) *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 73(5) 451-452. See also Raphael Bossong, 'EU Cooperation on Terrorism Prevention and Violent Radicalization: Frustrated Ambitions or New Forms of Security Governance?' (2014) *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 27(1) 71, 73. See also James Thomson, *Conflict and Cooperation in Intelligence and Security Organisations: An Institutional Costs Approach* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

through which they can build their security cooperation against a common enemy. Ontological security approaches in this case are useful in explaining how trauma, collective memory, and identity at state-level can act as conductors to build this type of security cooperation.

On the other hand, vertical security cooperation and practices refers to the cooperation of states with bigger powers.[30] In this case, small states working together with bigger powers bilaterally and multilaterally within a regional security context would foster vertical cooperation. Nonetheless, such a framework does not apply to either regional case of small states as examined here. First of all, in order for this framework to be applicable, it has to be applied holistically, in other words, each and every state in a defined region should be cooperating with the same bigger state-entity. Secondly, in the presence of an overarching existential threat, it seems the vertical cooperation model works best. In the case of the Baltic Sea region, states abide mostly by the vertical practices of cooperation against Russia. In the case of the Eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey could be seen as a bigger power, it is perceived as an existential threat by states like the Republic of Cyprus, thus it is not a holistic model.

D. *Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation in the Region*

This model of cooperation primarily deals with enhancing relations between states over commonly identified priorities not only over foreign, security, and defence policies, but also over matters that are cultural and economic in nature. Within neighbouring countries, it is often easier to witness such relations to manifest, not only from state to state, but also across international organisations and institutions,

[30] See Lee (no 5) 450, 452.

where states maintaining good bilateral relations often promote each other in a wider regional or international context. This helps foster additional recognition and added value from other member-states, thus fostering multilateral cooperation between three or more states.[31] Moreover, through international organisations, small states are capable of projecting their self-image more effectively in their bid to appear as reliable partners, thereby enhancing security objectives in their status-seeking within regional blocs and international bodies.[32]

3. Baltic Sea Regional Approaches to Security

For the purposes of situating the reader within the regional composition, the reference to the 'Baltic Sea' covers those state entities and respected territories who fall within the basin, have direct access to it, or are in close proximity. These include Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Norway, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Certainly, this is a lengthy list, yet the interest lies in the small state-actors. While the three Baltic States share several characteristics and policy priorities, the Baltic Sea region itself is a different matter. In the small state context, it includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Latvia, and Lithuania. Their cross-collaboration has, at times, been dubbed as 'Nordic-Baltic' cooperation.[33] All states also retain some

[31] Michael Yahuda 'Chinese Dilemmas in Thinking about Regional Security Architecture' (2003) *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 16(2) 194. See also Jana Wrange and Rikard Bengtsson, 'Internal and External Perceptions of Small State Security: The Case of Estonia' (2019) *European Security*, Vol. 28(4).
[32] Baldur Thorhallsson 'Studying Small States: A Review' (2018) *Small States & Territories*, Vol. 1(1).
[33] Piret Kuusik and Kristi Raik, *The Nordic-Baltic Region in the EU 27: Time for New Strategic Cooperation* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2017). See also Ilze Rūse,

relationship with NATO, either in the form of official membership or as part of the Partnership for Peace programme that promotes bilateral relations between NATO and partners that are not full NATO members.

A. *Background*

The Baltic Sea region has experienced similar patterns of trauma and collective memory due to their past membership to the former Soviet Union. This trauma is also shaped by ongoing events, still connected to memory. The past and present actions of Russia, as well as future potential dangers emerging from the uneven relationship Russia has had with the Baltic Sea region are all noteworthy. What is particularly interesting, nonetheless, is how the Baltic states had not always experienced the same level of insecurity towards the Russian Empire. In the case of Estonia and Latvia, the greatest foreign influences were rooted in both the Russian Empire and Germany. In fact, prior to the Sweden's loss to the Russian Empire, Estonia and territories of present-day Latvia[34] were Swedish dominions controlled by a German social elite.[35] Similarly, Lithuania had fraught relations with Poland, stemming from nationalist sentiments and rivalry during the interwar period.[36] With the prevalence of the Russian Empire in North-Eastern Europe, these territories were subject to the Empire's sphere of influence, either through direct conquest or submission following military defeat, as in the case of Sweden,

'Nordic-Baltic Interaction in European Union Negotiations: Taking Advantage of Institutionalized Cooperation' (2014) *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 45(2).

[34] These territories were formerly known as 'Livonia'.

[35] Ralph Tuchtenhagen 'The Best (and the Worst) of Several Worlds: The Shifting Historiographical Concept of Northeastern Europe' (2003) *European Review of History: Revue europeenne d'histoire*, Vol. 10 (2) 365, 370.

[36] Stephen R. Burant and Voytek Zubek, 'Eastern Europe's Old Memories and New Realities: Resurrecting the Polish–Lithuanian Union' (1993) *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 7(2).

which lost Estonia and Livonia. In the aftermath of the October Revolution in Russia and the collapse of the former Russian Empire, Estonia and Latvia proclaimed their independence in 1917. Lithuania, on the other hand, was signed off as an independent state with right to territorial integrity and sovereignty following the end of the First World War in 1918. All three Baltic states were annexed by the Soviet Union and organised into Soviet Republics in 1940.[37]

On the other hand, on the side of the Nordic states, Finland as an autonomous Grand Duchy while formerly under Sweden achieved independence from the Russian Empire in 1917, with the end of the October Revolution. While Finland managed to hold on to its independence, it fought two wars against the Soviets, leaving the state financially exhausted, despite the Red Army suffering considerable losses.[38] Meanwhile, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden all retained their independence, noting the alarming rate at which the Soviet Union was exercising pressure on the region. Taking the Finnish case into consideration, the remaining Nordic states followed a policy of neutrality, while considering an enhanced Scandinavian regional security apparatus.[39] Although the latter was never properly materialised, the common perception that persisted among the four Nordic states saw enhanced collaboration throughout the rest of the century.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly independent regions formed their own nation-state, breaking off the Soviet-style republic/oblast

[37]Epp Annus 'The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics' (2012) *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol 43(1) 23. See also Taras Kuzio 'History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space', (2002) *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 30(2) 248, 250. See also Marharyta Fabrykant 'National Identity in the Contemporary Baltics: Comparative Quantitative Analysis' (2018) *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 49(3).
[38] Carl Van Dyke *The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 1939-40* (London: Routledge, 2013).
[39] Christine Ingebritsen 'Redefining National Security: Scandinavia Comes out of the Cold' (1997) *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 20(3).

system. Lithuania was the first Baltic state to proclaim its independence, followed suit by the others. While the Nordic states all technically remained neutral during the Cold War, their scepticism towards the USSR was transferred to Russia.[40] Both the Baltic states as well as the Nordic states see the Russian Federation as the continuation of the legacy of the Soviet Union. Not only that, but the Russian Federation retains strong past narratives embedded into law. In fact, Putin himself has famously stated that 'when they talk about the Soviet Union, they talk about us', something Russia further capitalises upon to preserve the myth and unity that binds together past narratives and present political decisions that address security.[41]

It should be noted that the shifting rule and conquest in the region of the Baltic Sea first replaced the Swedish-German status quo with that of a Russian Empire domination. Subsequently, the Soviet occupation of Baltic Sea territories and the influence the Soviet Union exerted in the wider region during the Cold War guaranteed a continuation of the collective memory and trauma these states have experienced and remember in the present. This, therefore, has contributed to a unitary regional ontological security-seeking in the Baltics and the Nordics – a narrative of past collective trauma that has been experienced by the states in this region.

B. *Cooperation and Contestation*

[40] Rikard Bengtsson, 'Nordic Security and Defence Cooperation: Differentiated Integration in Uncertain Times' (2020) *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 8(4). See also Olav Fagelund Knudsen *Stability and Security in the Baltic Sea Region: Russian, Nordic and European Aspects* (London: Routledge, 2013). See also Clive Archer 'Still Nordic After all These Years: Nordic Security in the Post-Cold War Period' (2005) *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36(3).
[41] See Kuzio (no 2) 250. See also Maria Mälksoo 'Militant Memocracy in International Relations: Mnemonical Status Anxiety and Memory Laws in Eastern Europe' (2021) *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 47(4) 498.

Baltic Sea region states tend to use a bilateral, multilateral, and horizontal levels of cooperation in defence and security. All small states in the region also retain good relations with the EU and NATO, either as full members or via enhanced bilateral relations. Horizontally speaking, these states also view Russia as a potential aggressor, particularly following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022. Not only that, but years of previously built tensions in the Black Sea region and the annexation of Crimea, these states sought to redefine their security apparatus and to note the potential hostility coming from the Russian Federation.[42] The Nordic-Baltic state security nexus incorporates an understanding of Russia as both a revisionist, as well as a mnemonical-positionalist entity that is interested in status-seeking by shifting the hierarchical distribution of power.[43] Similarly, with the invasion still freshly evident and the lessons of the past, Sweden and Finland, in a move that has been branded 'historic', had decided to begin NATO accession talks, whereas Denmark, equally dubbed as historic, took it to a popular vote, with the wider public ruling that Denmark should integrate itself into the European CSDP, a framework from which it had previously opted out from.[44] NATO accession for both Sweden and Finland

[42] See Bengtsson (no 4).
[43] Claudia Major and Alicia von Voss, *Nordic-Baltic Security, Germany and NATO: The Baltic Sea Region is a Test Case for European Security* (SWP Comment 13/2016) (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, 2016) available at https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-46600-3. See also Mälksoo (no 4) 495-496.
[44] Steven Erlanger and Michael D. Shear, 'NATO Formally Invites Finland and Sweden to Join the Alliance' (2022) *New York Times*, available at https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/29/world/europe/nato-sweden-finland.html. See also EEAS Press Team, 'Denmark: Statement by the High Representative on the Outcome of the Referendum on the Opt-Out in Defence Matters' (2022) *European Union External Action*, available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/denmark-statement-high-representative-outcome-referendum-opt-out-defence-matters_en

has been viewed rather favourably, with only two NATO member-states – Hungary and Turkey initially delaying the ratification of the accession.[45]

Due to their close collaboration and similar experiences, the Baltics have also followed similar cooperation patterns on border security. Characteristically, all three Baltic states have enhanced security at times of crisis. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic is a clear example of how the Baltic Sea region as a whole devised similar security policies to monitor and enhance border security. Practices ranged from lockdowns, to extended network surveillance and close cooperation.[46] At the same time, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has also pushed through agreements on security cooperation between Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, not only due to the need to protect and shelter fleeing Ukrainians from the war, but also due to the growing discomfort that prompts these countries to think they need to take pre-emptive measures to safeguard their states and societies from possible Russian hostilities.[47]

[45] See Krisztina Than 'Hungary: Finland and Sweden 'Can Count on Us' in NATO Bid' (2022) available at https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-finland-sweden-can-count-us-nato-bid-2022-11-09/

[46] Erin Webb, Juliane Winkelmann, Giada Scarpetti, Daiga Behmane, Triin Habicht, Kristiina Kahur, Kaija Kasekamp, Kristina Köhler, Laura Miščikienė, Janis Misinsc, Marge Reinap, Agnė Slapšinskaitė-Dackevičienė, Andres Võrk, and Marina Karanikolos, 'Lessons Learned from the Baltic Countries' Response to the First Wave of COVID-19' (2022) *Health Policy*, Vol. 126(5). See also Virkkunen Joni, 'Disease Control and Border Lockdown at the EU's Internal Borders During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Finland' (2020) *Baltic Region*, Vol. 12(4). See also Charles Heller, 'De-Confining Borders: Towards a Politics of Freedom of Movement in the Time of the Pandemic' (2021) *Mobilities*, Vol. 16(1).

[47] Lukas Milevski, 'Two Less Obvious Lessons for Baltic Defense from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine' (2022) *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, available at https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/06/two-less-obvious-lessons-for-baltic-defense-from-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/. See also Michele E. Commercio, 'How NATO Guarantees the Security of the Baltic States, (2022) *London School of Economics and Political Science EUROPP – European Politics and Policy Blog*, available at

Overall, the Baltics do not have any noteworthy contestation amongst themselves and neither do the Nordics. Their overall consensual approach to regional politics and security and open communication has brought enhanced cooperation and united them against overarching threats such as Russia. For one thing, Russia has access to the Baltic Sea via the route of the Gulf of Finland and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Oblast, situated between Lithuania and Poland. Having quit from the Baltic Sea States Council in May 2022, Russia was further condemned again by the Council shortly after.[48] Not only that, but due to the invasion of Ukraine, relations with Russia have become even more volatile and fragile. Russia has been launching attacks in the cyber realm against other states in the region since the 2007 cyberattacks on Estonia, the first recorded case in the Baltics where a state-actor launched such an assault.[49]

Topped with past experiences of Soviet and Russian threats, these examples pose a regional security challenge for these small states. Some noteworthy examples were already mentioned in the previous section, emphasising that the present-day narrative on where most threats for the Nordic-Baltic region come from is focused on Russia. At the same time, the Baltic Sea is of great geopolitical significance for Russia, not only due to historical ties going back to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, but also for strategic reasons. Access to the Black and Baltic Seas has always been both an economic and military priority, not least due to the regional trade routes, but also due to the

https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2022/03/07/how-nato-guarantees-the-security-of-the-baltic-states/

[48] Andreas Illmer, 'Baltic Sea countries rally together against Russia' (2022) *DW*, available at https://www.dw.com/en/baltic-sea-countries-rally-together-against-russia/a-61935095

[49] Russell Buchan, 'Cyber Attacks: Unlawful Uses of Force or Prohibited Interventions?' (2012) *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, Vol. 17(2).

presence of military and naval bases. The Kaliningrad Oblast enclave and the annexed region of Crimea are good examples of this ambition, that has brought contestations with both Ukraine and Lithuania.[50] Similarly, the Kremlin has been using information warfare throughout the Cold War, something also exhibited today in the form of hybrid warfare, in a bid to destabilise the Baltic and the Nordic states. In targeting what was deemed as a 'buffer' zone of Nordic and Baltic states, propaganda was considered by the Kremlin powerful tool during the Cold War to keep the West at bay – a policy that has continued even after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[51]

4. Eastern Mediterranean Regional Approaches to Security

The Eastern Mediterranean region comprises of state-territories within or in close proximity to the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea but are not necessarily covered by or have access to the sea itself. States as such include Greece (via the Dodecanese islands), Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine,[52] Israel, and Jordan. The construction of an Eastern Mediterranean-specific region for nation-states has been in the making for a few years. In a bid of contestation

[50] Kalev Stoicescu, 'The Russian Threat to Security in the Baltic Sea Region' (2015) *RKK ICDS – International Centre for Defence and Security (Briefing Paper)* 2-3.
[51] Rod Thornton and Manos Karagiannis, 'The Russian Threat to the Baltic States: The Problems of Shaping Local Defense Mechanisms' (2016) *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 29(3) 347, 355. See also Katri Pynnöniemi 'The Asymmetric Approach in Russian Security Strategy: Implications for the Nordic Countries' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 31(1) 157, 160.
[52] While the State of Palestine is another case that would be worth examining, its territorial integrity and sovereignty are contested due to the ongoing conflict with the State of Israel. In this context, it is an 'outlier' as compared to mainstream definitions of what constitutes a nation-state. Even though it is recognised by 139 states with whom it enjoys bilateral relations, this paper retains a limited scope that could be expanded in work that incorporates Palestine in other analysis in the future.

between hegemonic entities aspiring to establish their own empire or to extend their own sphere of influence, the Eastern Mediterranean became a tumultuous region that was shaped and reshaped through hegemonic clashes and transitional power dynamics between empires and competing spheres of influence.[53] This contestation had a profound impact on the formation of new nation-states. Not only are the small states that are included in this equation less in numbers as compared to the Baltic Sea region – including Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon – but by contrast, it appears as if they have different priorities. For instance, while Cyprus retains good bilateral relations with the rest, the same does not apply from country to country.

A. *Background*

The Eastern Mediterranean is a politically fragmented region shaped by continuous conflict over resource-based, territorial, and identity-related matters.[54] The region has been equally viewed as exceptional or separate from the rest of the Middle East by other powers, such as European countries in the 19th-20th centuries, but even more so recently by NATO and the EU.[55] The collapse of hegemonic order of empires, following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the split to different states and territories initially left a newly formed yet initially weak Turkish state in the early 20th century.[56] Besides that, territories in the area were initially contested, becoming, first, mandates by Western powers who either

[53] Spyridon N. Litsas 'War, Peace and Stability in the Era of Multipolarity: What Lies at the End of the Systemic Rainbow?' in in Spyridon N. Litsas and Aristotle Tziampiris (eds.) *The Eastern Mediterranean in Transition: Multipolarity, Politics and Power* (London: Routledge, 2016) 10, 14.
[54] James Stocker 'No EEZ Solution: The Politics of Oil and Gas in the Eastern Mediterranean' (2012) *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 66(4) 579.
[55] See Buzan and Waever (2013) 192, 215.
[56] See Kuzio (no 2) 244.

retained the mandate or fully incorporated them into their respective empire as colonies. This de facto style of governance was effective during the transitional period from mandate to independence and was equally applied under the premise and assumption that independence would later on be guaranteed. For one thing, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire brought forth memory-fused conflict and ethnic tensions among groups who sought their right to self-determination. In the case of the Palestinian Mandate under British rule, the areas under administration included Palestine and the Transjordan, before breaking off into today's Kingdom of Jordan, the State of Israel, and the State of Palestine and its territories.[57] In the aftermath of the Second World War, the lack of clarity and mixed promises to different parties during the period of the mandate were contributing factors for the emergence of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

France, on the other hand, who de facto administered the Mandate of Syria and Lebanon after the Ottomans, exercised considerable influence over the region, yet had no fixed control within the context of a mandate. Moreover, France helped in the carving of an informal National Pact based on loosely defined religious minorities that split up concentrations of such minorities, favouring Christians, in present-day Lebanon.[58] Post-independence in 1943, this led to a consociational form of governance that split power between sectarian groups and elites.[59] The sectarian tension led to a bloody civil war in 1975-1990, whose sectarian remnants to this day leave the state semi-paralysed, with a fragile economy that is unable to sustain a government in the long run. The wars experienced with neighbouring

[57] Yitzhak Gil-Har, 'Boundaries Delimitation: Palestine and Trans-Jordan' (2000) *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36(1).
[58] Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd, 2002).
[59] Ibid.

Syria and Israel, as well as due to the events of the civil war also gave rise to Hezbollah, which has formed a transnational network of operations that enables it to have say over regional security and to exert influence over hostilities with Israel.[60]

In the case of Cyprus, who was handed over to the British by the Ottomans before the dissolution of the latter's empire, erupted in violence shortly after its independence. Following violent and sporadic intercommunal clashes, a military putsch by the Greek fascist junta and a military invasion and occupation by Turkey,[61] the right to self-determination has de facto split the island into two, with the Republic of Cyprus being the only internationally recognised state-entity, whereas the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' often characterised as a breakaway regime that is only recognised by the Republic of Turkey. Despite some efforts to resolve the conflict, various plans were rejected by either side of the 'divide', with the most recent examples of the famous 'Annan Plan', named after the former UN Secretary-General's direct involvement in 2004,[62] and the collapse of peace talks in Crans Montana in 2017.

[60] Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz, 'The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict' (2007) *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 12(3). See also Patrick A. Palmieri, Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Sandro Galea, Robert J. Johnson, and Stevan E. Hobfoll, 'The Psychological Impact of the Israel-Hezbollah War on Jews and Arabs in Israel: The Impact of Risk and Resilience Factors' (2008) *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 67(8).
[61] Following the attempt by the first president of the Republic of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, to change the constitution without the Turkish-Cypriot consent in 1963, the latter withdrew from government and intercommunal violence broke out, leading to major violence and escalations until 1974, when the military putsch and the invasion took place weeks apart. See Joseph S. Joseph, *Cyprus: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics – From Independence to the Threshold of the European Union* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999) 43-45, 47. See also Buzan and Waever (2003) 368, 369.
[62] John McGary and Neophytos Loizides, 'Power-Sharing in a Re-United Cyprus: Centripetal Coalitions VS Proportional Sequential Coalitions' (2016) *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, Vol. 13(1) 855.

In the wake of the decolonisation movement, Turkey had still managed to preserve a strong foothold in the region.. In the northern parts of Cyprus and Syria, Turkey retains sizeable occupation forces. For this reason, present-day Turkey is largely seen as a revisionist entity that seeks to challenge and re-shape the status quo.[63] Its subtle positionality in the region that appears to be interested in challenging the hierarchical distribution of power as seen in Turkish public narratives masks its true nature of revisionism and the intention of prevailing as a growing power in the area and beyond.[64]

B. *Cooperation and Contestation*

The Eastern Mediterranean as a region has been identified as a separate subregional system by practitioners, given the history and the ongoing geopolitical implications. Nonetheless, despite disparities, there is equally a great level of cohesion between countries, which is unique in nature given the equally measurable differences.[65] Disparities as such have included, at times, religious, ethnic, territorial, and economic grievances.[66] For example, the oil and gas disputes in recent years have often prevented unity over settling territorial matters, such as delimitation in Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).[67]

[63] Jonathan M. DiCicco and Victor M. Sanchez, 'Revisionism in International Relations' (2021) *Oxford Encyclopedia of International Studies*, available at https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.607
[64] Nikos Christofis, Bahar Baser, and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, 'The View from Next Door: Greek-Turkish Relations After the Coup Attempt in Turkey' (2019) *The International Spectator*, Vol. 54(2). See also Zenonas Tziarras, *Turkish Foreign Policy: The Lausanne Syndrome in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2022).
[65] Aristotle Tziampiris 'The New Eastern Mediterranean as a Regional Subsystem', in Spyridon N. Litsas and Aristotle Tziampiris (eds.) *The New Eastern Mediterranean: Theory, Politics and States in a Volatile Era* (Cham: Springer, 2019) 23.
[66] Ibid.
[67] See Stocker (2012).

In light of these disparities, small states in the Eastern Mediterranean have, at times, used bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation with one another, as well as networked regionalisation at times, when addressing regional security needs. For instance, the Euro-Mediterranean network, the discussions on fostering common energy security cooperation, as well as engaging in military, policing, and other tactical exercises further enhances the security dialogue in the region. Such an attempt was formulated via the discussions on an EastMed pipeline for energy security and cooperation in the region.[68] Nonetheless, an even more striking difference as compared to the Baltic Sea region is that cooperation takes place among some states and not holistically. Unlike the Baltic Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean group of states have been unable to hold a vertical approach to regional security cooperation. Simply put, not everyone agrees with a unifying narrative that is used against a potentially overarching threat.

While Cyprus is trying to build that narrative by pointing to its own territorial occupation by Turkey, this is further inhibited by an 'immature' foreign policy that places constant emphasis on Turkey and not as much as on other regional events and opportunities.[69] To this end, Cyprus has exhibited bilateral cooperation with all other small states mentioned in the region, while often

[68] Conflicting statements have been made regarding the feasibility of the project. See EURACTIV 'Washington Kills EastMed Pipeline Project for Good' (2022), available at https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/washington-kills-eastmed-pipeline-project-for-good/. See also DNV 'DNV Further Confirms Feasibility and Maturity of the EastMed Pipeline' (2022), available at https://www.dnv.com/news/dnv-further-confirms-feasibility-and-maturity-of-the-eastmed-pipeline-226712

[69] Petros Petrikkos, 'Stuck in the Middle: Constructing Maturity and Restoring Balance in RoC-EU Relations' in Zenonas Tziarras (ed.) *The Foreign Policy of the Republic of Cyprus: Local, Regional* and *International Dimensions* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

bringing in other players like Greece to form trilateral networks of cooperation.[70] When it comes to Cyprus, nonetheless, Turkey is seen as the ultimate overarching threat that poses an existential question. Specifically, most Turkish actions taking place at a regional level are interpreted as possible future onslaught against Cyprus, due to the violent memories that are embedded in the state and society.[71]

On the other hand, there have been notable differences among different states. For instance, Lebanon and Israel have crushed, in multiple occasions, over territory, energy, the Palestinian issue, and other deeply enmeshed existential issues. This includes the presence of Hezbollah in the border of Southern Lebanon and the frequent clashes with Israel. For Israel, Hezbollah and Iran are often seen as threats of primary concern, while threats from its Arab neighbours are slowly diminishing due to the normalisation of relations the State of Israel has begun to receive.[72] Even so, despite past grievances, Lebanon and Israel have reached a 'historic' agreement on their maritime borders, for the first time, yet tensions with Hezbollah still remain.[73] While the delimitation is promising for the creation of a regional energy security periphery, contestations with Iran and Hezbollah prevent the fruition of a fuller, more holistic security that extends beyond maritime border agreements. Moreover, in the case of Jordan and Lebanon, Turkey holds bilateral

[70] Revecca Pedi and Ilias Kouskouvelis, 'Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Small State Seeking for Status' in Spyridon N. Litsas and Aristotle Tziampiris (eds.) *The New Eastern Mediterranean: Theory, Politics and States in a Volatile Era* (Cham: Springer, 2019) 158.
[71] Constantinos Adamides, 'The Challenges of Formulating National Security Strategies (NSS) in the Presence of Overarching Existential Threats' (2018) *Cyprus Review*, Vol. 30(1) 78
[72] Lindsay J. Benstead, 'Civil Society, Insecurity and Arab Support for Normalization with Israel: Contextualizing the Abraham Accords' (2021) *Mediterranean Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2021.2008669.
[73] Al Jazeera, 'Lebanon, Israel reach 'historic agreement' on maritime borders' (2022) *Al Jazeera*, available at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/11/israel-lebanon-agree-on-draft-deal-on-maritime-borders

relations with the former two, especially over matters related to the refugee crisis,[74] to which Turkey has even been seen as a regional partner the EU could collaborate with.[75]

In the case of Israel, Turkey also has moved forward to restore relations, despite the turmoil experienced in recent years. Should the relations between the two states fully restore, this could prove problematic for Cypriot ontological security-seeking,[76] yet in material terms, it does not necessarily factor much of a difference. However, Turkish ontological security, on the other hand, is growing. The state's attempts to appear as a capable mediator in resolving conflict,[77] for instance, is detrimental to Cypriot ontological security. For formerly and recently occupied state-actors, nonetheless, such a mediation move by Turkey is recognised as an opportunistic act that tries to forego and ignore the fact that Turkey is performing a ritual paradox: an occupier, who has previously launched invasions and mass tactical operations on foreign grounds is now acting as a mediator who supposedly wants 'zero problems' with its neighbours to resolve a violent conflict triggered by a full-scale invasion. This 'official' approach that attempts to portray Turkey as a state that wishes no conflict with its neighbours is

[74] Dawn Chatty, 'The Syrian Humanitarian Disaster: Understanding Perceptions and Aspirations in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey' (2017) *Global Policy*, Vol. 8(1).
[75] Lisa Haferlach and Dilek Kurban, 'Lessons Learnt from the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement in Guiding EU Migration Partnerships with Origin and Transit Countries' (2017) *Global Policy*, Vol. 8(1).
[76] Simon Henderson, 'Israel Juggles Diplomacy with Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece, (2022) *Washington Institute*, available at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/israel-juggles-diplomacy-turkey-cyprus-and-greece
[77] This has been the case for the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when Turkey proposed to act as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine. See Paul Benjamin Osterlund, 'Turkey, a Mediator in Ukraine, Mends Its Own Ties with Neighbours' (2022) *Al Jazeera*, available at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/30/turkey-a-mediator-in-ukraine-mends-its-own-ties-with-neighbours

used to mask the true intentions of the ruling party and executive to further pursue a neo-Ottoman ambition. The ambition itself includes the restoration of past empire glory and orderly and religious values.[78] In their self-interested security maximalisation and material gain, those who fail to see the imminent threat and growing regional influence of Turkish actions in the region will have much to lose.

5. Reflecting on the Ontology of Regional Securities

The persistence of memory politics and the quest for ontological security for small states has grown in significance. In the absence of material resources and capabilities, such states pursue different security models according to their needs at both local and regional level. Security seeking is linked to past experiences in each state's recent history that still guides region and network-crafting vis-à-vis policymaking. While applying a practical understanding of ontological security is largely the same concept across time and space, its impact varies region by region. First of all, the Nordic-Baltic group has experienced very similar, direct, and long-lasting security issues from the perceived overarching security threat, in this case being the Russian Federation. Infallibly, this group recognises and agrees, as recent events in the invasion of Ukraine have revealed, that Russia is threat that needs to be contained. To that end, states in the area who had previously remained largely neutral are now moving towards strengthening their defence and security infrastructure.

Secondly, the small states in the Eastern Mediterranean have not reacted holistically, in a collective manner to Turkish positionality and revisionism.

[78] Ilias Kouskouvelis, 'The Problem with Turkey's "Zero Problems"' (2013) *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 20(1).

Despite the ongoing occupation by Turkey in the northern parts of Syria and Cyprus respectively, Jordan and Lebanon carry out business with Turkey as usual, whereas Israel has begun restoring relations with the latter. The absence of regional-collective trauma and the lack in identifying a single overarching threat inhibits vertical cooperation that would unite small states in a synergetic way to combat perceived overarching threats. At the same time, the narrative is different from state to state. While Turkey is perceived as an overarching threat in Cyprus, and despite the persisting examples of Turkish influence growing in the region, no other small state has such strong views. Not only that, but other states even engage in bilateral cooperation with Turkey.

Besides that, the fact that conflict among states persists, for instance, hostility between Israel and Lebanon, does little to encourage dialogue over matters of regional security cooperation, bringing in other challenges into the equation, including contestations over energy security. Even so, the Eastern Mediterranean states who enable Turkish revisionism in the region will also have much to lose. Failing to recognise the threat emanating from unchecked Turkish revisionism in the region is both a material and an ontological challenge to regional players. As such, the experiences the Baltic Sea region has had could prove beneficial to those seeking to understand how such possible future risks can be mitigated.

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