

## East of the “Iron Curtain”: Why Did Post-Communist Countries Join NATO?

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### Abstract

Why did East and Central European countries decide to join NATO after the Warsaw Pact dissolved? This article analyzes NATO expansion from the perspective of the Central and East European applicants for NATO membership. Contrary to the expectations of neo-realist scholars support for NATO membership was costly to build, particularly in Central and East European countries where the perception of threat from Russia was low. The historical evidence I examine indicates that in the early 1990s it was not apparent what post-Cold War security arrangement would best suit the needs of the former Warsaw Pact allies. For the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the Balkan countries, which had not experienced or been threatened by Soviet invasion, NATO membership was neither a clear choice nor the only security option they could pursue. NATO's adaptation and expansion challenges neo-realist expectations and supports arguments advanced by neo-liberal institutionalists and constructivists.

**Keywords:** NATO enlargement; Eastern Europe; post-communism

“To admit countries into NATO would be tantamount to pledging that the United States would fight in their defense. Are we really willing to do this? Why would we? How many of us are willing to die – or to have our children die – in an East European war?” (Robert Jervis)<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

Despite the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) did not cease to exist. Why did post-communist countries decide to join the alliance<sup>2</sup> after its *raison d'être* – an imminent Soviet military threat - vanished? Alliance dissolution was a conceivable outcome: NATO could have shared the destiny of the Warsaw Pact and disappeared (Bertram, 1997).<sup>3</sup> Its adaptation, through eastward expansion, has presented scholars with a puzzle for two reasons. First, between 1991 and 1999, there were divisions among the member states which could have caused NATO's demise (Kaufman, 2002). Two of these divisive issues were NATO enlargement and involvement in Balkan ethnic strife (Sloan, 1995).<sup>4</sup> Second, instead of dissolving, the alliance expanded to include former communist countries that were members of the defunct Warsaw Pact – NATO's military adversary during the Cold War.

I argue that contrary to the expectations of scholars such as Robert Jervis, Charles Kupchan, and Andrew Kydd political support for NATO membership was costly to build in post-communist Europe. The historical evidence I examine indicates that between 1990 and 1992 it was not apparent what post Cold War security arrangement would best suit the needs of the former Warsaw Pact allies. For the Balkan countries, which had not experienced or been threatened by Soviet invasion, NATO membership was neither a clear choice nor the only security option.

In many Central and East European countries, former communists were reincarnated as social democrats and staged a political comeback by forming their own cabinets and dominating the legislative process. NATO expansion east of the “Iron Curtain” refutes neo-realists' expectations about post-Cold War security developments in Europe. I provide a

<sup>1</sup> Robert Jervis. “Legacies of the Cold War” *The Brown Journal of Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1995) p. 25

<sup>2</sup> I follow Haftendorn, Keohane, and Wallander's typology and treat NATO as an alliance - a “highly institutionalized security coalition directed against a specific threat.” The authors present their typology of security institutions in the edited volume *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions Over Time and Space*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. pp. 26-28

<sup>3</sup> Bertram argues that the adaptation of NATO as a Euro-Atlantic security network was not the only collective security option national leaders could pursue after the end of the Cold War.

<sup>4</sup> Sloan argues that NATO's involvement in the Bosnian conflict “has raised the question of whether NATO remains relevant to the security challenges of the post-Cold War world.” (p. 226)

domestic level explanation which sheds light on the strategic and ideological concerns of post-communist countries in the area of foreign policy. Post-communist countries applied for NATO membership because 1) ex-communist governments lost parliamentary and governmental control or 2) ex-communists changed their foreign policy position in order to attract electoral support from their constituents. Had the ex-communist governments stayed in power and refused to change their foreign policy positions, expansion of NATO would either not have occurred or would have stopped with the admission of Poland.

## 2. Neo-Realists vs. Neo-liberal Institutionalists on Alliance Expansion

NATO expansion has animated the debate between neo-realists and neo-liberal institutionalists. Neo-realists anticipated NATO's demise. Mearsheimer, for example, argued that with the decline of the Soviet threat, international security organizations<sup>5</sup> such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact would decay.<sup>6</sup> In the neo-realist framework, Mearsheimer argues that alliances are simply "temporary marriages of convenience" (p. 11). If the security threat that an alliance is supposed to counter wanes or disappears, the alliance should naturally dissolve. Neo-liberal institutionalists argued otherwise. In the words of Wallander, Haftendorn and Keohane, "the end of the cold war has supported institutionalist hypotheses: not only have quite a few security institutions persisted, some (such as NATO) have even acquired new functions" (p. 5)

The fact that NATO not only survived but is also expanding by accepting Central and East European countries in its ranks has attracted scholarly attention in recent years. Exploring the reasons for NATO's staying power and expansion will improve our understanding of the adaptation mechanisms of security alliances. Moreover, few scholars have taken interest in the foreign policy formulation processes of the aspiring NATO members, all of which are now democracies. The focus of this article is two-fold. First, I discuss the larger issue of alliance expansion by examining two theoretical strands – liberal institutionalism and neo-realism. I evaluate the use of the two theoretical strands in explaining NATO adaptation and expansion from the perspective of the prospective members. Second, I analyze the decisions of Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania to apply for membership in the alliance. I was prompted to study the Bulgarian foreign policy process because public and political support for NATO membership in Bulgaria was consistently low between 1990 and 1995 and rose between 1997 and 2001.<sup>7</sup> Pro-NATO politicians engaged in a Sisyphean effort to popularize the idea of NATO membership. The case of Poland exemplifies the role of systemic factors, such as the perception of threat, in a country's decision to join a security alliance. The case of Romania illustrates how electoral incentives lead to changes in incumbents' foreign policy position.

I discuss the issue of Bulgarian and Romanian admission to NATO and enlargement because acceptance of Balkan countries in the alliance brought to light political concerns among foreign policy makers in the United States and the other NATO members. Policymakers were worried that by admitting the Balkan countries, the alliance would inherit these countries' inter-ethnic conflicts. The controversies surrounding expansion could have destabilized the alliance but they did not (Kaufman 2002). Moreover, there was a perception among international relations scholars that the decision of former communist countries to join NATO would be welcome as manna from heaven by constituents without creating internal divisions in Central and East European societies. Charles Kupchan, for example, notes that "the countries of central and eastern Europe are looking ardently west, hoping to find a home inside NATO's eastern boundary" (p. 112). Robert Jervis contends that "Russia and the other countries of Eastern and Central Europe desire nothing more than inclusion in the Western world – socially, economically, and politically" (p. 26). Andrew Kydd states that "the least puzzling part of NATO enlargement is the desire of the East European states to join the alliance" (p. 804). Understanding the rationale of Central and East European countries for joining NATO is important in light of Kenneth Waltz's balance of

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<sup>5</sup> John Mearsheimer follows John Ruggie in drawing a distinction between institutions and organizations. In Mearsheimer's language NATO is an organization because it has its own personnel, budget, and buildings. The institutionalist literature, however, sometimes refers to NATO both as a security organization and an institution. See John Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter, 1994-1995): pp. 9-10

<sup>6</sup> John Mearsheimer. "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War" *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 6-7 Mearsheimer asserts the high likelihood of NATO's decay in his rejoinder to criticism leveled at "The False Promise of International Institutions." He argues that international organizations of NATO's caliber cannot effectively deal with security threats because the international system encourages states to behave as short-term rather than long-term power maximizers. See "A Realist Reply" in *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995): pp. 82-93.

<sup>7</sup> Bulgaria was one of the few Central and East European countries where support for NATO membership was extremely low until very recently. In 1995 Bulgarian public opinion was divided on the issue of NATO membership. The pro-membership group had slight advantage in the public opinion polls – approximately 5%. As of 2003, public support for NATO membership in Bulgaria was 65%, lower than support in the other second-wave applicant countries.

power theory (Waltz, 1979). NATO enlargement challenges Waltz's predictions that small states will engage in power-balancing by allying with the weaker power, in this case Russia. The small Central and East European states have favored the bandwagon of the Atlantic Alliance rather than Russian patronage. Thus, the post-Cold War international security outcome we have witnessed through NATO expansion is consistent with Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat argument, which predicts bandwagoning (Walt, 1998). There is little convincing evidence, however, indicating that post-communist countries saw Russia as a source of security threat in the 1990s. Thus, Walt's theoretical proposition is consistent with the outcome but not the cause of expansion.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War it was not clear what international security arrangements would best suit the interests of former communist countries. It is important, in this regard, to note that all of the former communist countries signed bilateral cooperation agreements with the Soviet Union (or Russia) between 1990 and 1992. Contrary to Kupchan's and Jervis's conjecture, in the early 1990s it was far from obvious that Central and East European countries would seek association or membership in NATO. Some ex-communist governments faced significant obstacles in creating consensus in favor of NATO membership. In at least one of the countries – Bulgaria - foreign policy makers had to fight an uphill battle to build legislative support for NATO membership.

In the eyes of Western policy makers and international relations scholars, the decisions of Central and Eastern European countries to join NATO should have been uncontroversial, attracting little political opposition. In the minds of the Western architects of NATO enlargement, the positive net benefits of membership should have been obvious to constituents and political leaders in Central and Eastern Europe. Scholars have overlooked the vacillation, indifference, and opposition to NATO membership in post-communist Europe. The impressionistic accounts of the internal ratification processes inside ex-communist countries are based on superficial and easily available evidence – mostly speeches made by these countries' presidents. Many of these presidents – Lech Wałęsa (Poland), Vaclav Havel (Czech Republic), and Zhelyu Zhelev (Bulgaria) - were political dissidents during the Communist era and their statements did not necessarily represent the sentiments of most of their countries' legislators or voters.<sup>8</sup> There have been few serious attempts to examine the ratification inside these countries' legislatures (Mattox & Rachwald, 2001). In this paper, I present evidence which demonstrates that NATO membership was not the only possible way of filling in the security vacuum which emerged with the demise of the Warsaw Pact.

### 3. NATO's Persistence After the Cold War

Robert McCalla (1996) has addressed the question of NATO's persistence after the end of the Cold War. He argues that even though neo-realist theories explain alliance formation, they do not provide a good insight into alliance adaptation and expansion. International institutionalist theories, he contends, conceive of NATO as "part of a broad multilevel and multi-issue relationship among member states" and are thus good at explaining NATO's persistence (p. 445). Neo-realist theory offers little insight into NATO's adaptation and prospects for survival. In a neo-realist vein, Gibler (1999) has argued that NATO expansion will magnify the risk of conflict in Europe, particularly in case Russia becomes marginalized and forced to observe NATO's expansion as an outsider. Gibler's skepticism has been corroborated only recently after Russia annexed Crimea and clearly demonstrated territorial ambitions toward other parts of Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

Sandler (1999) uses a cooperative game theoretic framework to explain alliance formation and expansion. Alliances survive, he argues, because they provide members with gains from mutual defense. The amount of these gains depends on the spatial and locational attributes of the allies. The goal of Sandler's model was to predict which countries are likely to enter NATO after the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary. The model, however, did not offer an accurate prediction about the direction of NATO's expansion. Sandler argued that the Baltic countries and Romania were unlikely entrants because their inclusion would not make a sufficient contribution to mutual defense. Contrary to his expectations, however, the Baltic countries and Romania were indeed invited to begin accession talks in late November 2002. Other

<sup>8</sup> See Jonathan Eyal's article "NATO's Enlargement: Anatomy of a Decision," *International Affairs*. (1997) Vol. 73, No. 4: 695-719. Eyal makes references to the "persistent demands of the east Europeans to join the alliance" (p. 703).

<sup>9</sup> *Russian efforts to be taken as a serious international actor crystallized in a 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security with NATO. This document explicitly stated that Russia and NATO are not adversaries and will cooperate toward the achievement of a common goal of European security. Russia had become a desirable partner because it had reduced its military forces significantly, withdrawn from the Baltic countries and Central Europe, and made a commitment to reduce its conventional and nuclear weapons. To become a partner to a military alliance, Russia had to relinquish some of its military capacity. The good neighbor foreign policy espoused by President Putin led to the NATO-Russia Council, an outgrowth of the Founding Act. The Council was created in an atmosphere of a palpable security challenge after the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001. The full text of the Founding Act can be accessed at NATO's official website at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25468.htm).*

Balkan countries such as Albania, Bulgaria, and Macedonia were not included in his set of predictions. Sandler's model relied on a definition of NATO as a mutual defense alliance. Such conceptualization omits an important mission of the alliance, namely its leadership's attempt to further the democratization process in Central and Eastern Europe. The precursor to NATO expansion – the Partnership for Peace Initiative (PFP)<sup>10</sup> – included “ensuring democratic control of defence forces” as one of its fundamental goals in Central and Eastern Europe (Borawski, 1995, p. 234).

Even a cursory reading of NATO documents on enlargement will demonstrate a commitment to the development of a web of Euro-Atlantic structures for economic and security cooperation. The leaders of the former communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe, with the exception of the former Yugoslavia, all expressed interest in membership in NATO and the European Union (EU). Former German Defence Minister Volker R  he spoke on behalf of many European politicians when he announced that there was “no reason in principle for denying future members of the European Union membership of NATO” (R  he, cited in Borawski, 1995, p. 237). NATO expansion, therefore, should be viewed as a trivial development in European security and Euro-Atlanticism.<sup>11</sup> In his speeches, President Clinton emphasized that the inclusion of *democratic* (my emphasis) East and Central European countries would be the fundamental goal of NATO in the 1990s and into the new century (Clinton, cited in Borawski, 1995, p. 241). Zbigniew Brzezinski also pointed out that a “commitment to democracy and shared values” should be the primary concerns of candidates for NATO membership (Brzezinski, cited in Borawski, 1995, p. 243). Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott articulated that the primary reason for expansion to Central and Eastern Europe was to “strengthen democratization and legal institutions, ensure civilian control of their armed forces, liberalize their economies, and respect for human rights, including those of national minorities” (Talbott, cited in McGuire, 1998, p. 24).

Many studies explore the evolution of the U.S. position on NATO enlargement. Borawski (1995), for example, examines how the U.S. and Russian positions on expansion changed over time and demonstrates that there was no consensus within the alliance on how to administer enlargement. There is a scarcity of scholarship examining the demand side of alliance expansion by analyzing the point of view of future NATO members.

#### 4. East or West? – Security Arrangements in Central and Eastern Europe

The Cold War created a security vacuum which the newly-elected democratic governments had to address in their foreign policy programs. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact did not signal an end to the ex-communist countries' association with the Soviet Union. The demise of the pact brought about the end of a security arrangement which could no longer serve the needs of its members due to a rapidly changing security environment. Formerly communist countries had three distinct options immediately after the end of the Cold War: provide for their own security, seek NATO membership or find an alternative arrangement which could include or exclude Russia. Between August 1990 and July 1992, most Central and East European countries had entered cooperation agreements with the Soviet Union (or Russia).<sup>12</sup> Regardless of which option each country would decide to embrace, one thing was certain – the countries' foreign policy ministers would have to establish peaceful relations with Russia. Peaceful relations would be imperative for Poland and East Germany because they had had Soviet military presence on their territory during the Cold War. The perception of threat from Russia was high among the Polish and Baltic people, who had experienced Soviet occupation and annexation, respectively. Asmus's (2002, p. 150) historical evidence demonstrates that the initial impulse for NATO's eastward expansion was to guarantee Poland's security by curbing Russian territorial interest. Western and Polish politicians needed assurance that Soviet troops had withdrawn permanently.

In a study of East European support for NATO membership, Kostadinova (2000) explores the relationship between support for NATO membership and distance from Russia in ten Central and East European countries. She establishes a statistically significant relationship between public support for NATO membership and geographic proximity to Russia, as well as support for membership and a history of Soviet invasion. Proximity to the source of a security threat is positively correlated with the perception of threat. The farther country is from the source of a security threat, the lower its incentive

<sup>10</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, skepticism regarding an active NATO role in European security was prevalent among U.S. policy-makers. The Washington consensus that emerged in the first half of the 1990s converged around the Partnership for Peace initiative. PFP allowed the new European democracies to participate in safeguarding European security, but it denied them the right to full membership. PFP was, in effect, a plan to placate the aspiring members and keep their aspirations at bay, at least in the short term.

<sup>11</sup> Many of NATO's primary documents such as the Partnership for Peace agreement and the Membership Action Plan (MAP) speak of Euro-Atlantic structures to refer to NATO and the EU since most of the former communist countries have applied for membership to both.

<sup>12</sup> The agreements were bilateral in nature. Some of the countries were unable to enter an agreement with the Soviet Union prior to its dissolution but did sign agreements with Russia.

to join an alliance ensuring protection from that source. Based on Kostadiniova's findings, Balkan countries and all Central European countries with the exception of East Germany and Poland should have had a fairly low security incentive to join NATO.

McGuire (1998) examines the historical patterns of Russian and Soviet regional domination. He does not find evidence supporting Walt's argument that states will balance against a regional security threat by allying with a regional hegemon. When Russia was engaged in a tug of war with the Ottoman Empire over the Balkans, "Russia's objective was not to acquire more territory, but to facilitate and hasten the emergence from Turkish rule of Christian states," (McGuire, 1998, p. 29). When Soviet troops occupied Germany, Stalin did not have a clear agenda in mind for the communist satellites. The *raison d'être* of the Warsaw Pact was "to establish a buffer between the USSR and the resurgent Germany," (McGuire, 1998, p. 30). By the middle of the 1980s, the Soviet Union had realized that Eastern Europe was an economic and political liability. Under Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviet Union Communist Party lost interest in sustaining the relationship of economic and political dependence it had developed with the peripheral communist states (McGuire, 1998, p. 31). The Soviet Union had gradually been losing influence over the communist bloc before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The perception of security threat within the Soviet Bloc was waning even before democratic transitions began in 1989.

Therefore, the perception of a security threat from Russia cannot explain the decision of non-occupied Central and East European countries to apply for membership. To fully comprehend the rationale for Eastern Europe's decision to apply for NATO membership, one ought to examine the foreign policy formulation processes of the applicants. A second image argument provides a better explanation of NATO expansion than a systemic neo-realist argument focusing on regional security threats.

NATO membership, from the perspective of most Central and East European state leaders, carries both material and symbolic benefits. The material benefits include logistical and financial support for military reform in the future member states (Donnelly, 1997; Donnelly, 2000). The symbolic benefits are associated with the positive image Central and Eastern European countries are likely to develop among Western politicians and business investors. The political and economic risks in a country involved in Western multilateral institutions are much lower than in untrustworthy former communist countries. Katzenstein has articulated important symbolic benefits of alliance membership. NATO expansion eastward has stretched our Cold War conception of East/West by welcoming Central and Eastern Europe in Western civilization. As Lippman has argued, "the nucleus of this community [NATO] is "distinct and unmistakable" based on geography, religion, and history," (Lippman cited by Katzenstein and Hemmer, 2002).

Socialist and social democratic governments were not necessarily interested in pursuing association with Western political structures. The material benefits were simply not high enough to convince leaders who had previously advocated orientation toward the Soviet Union to alter their foreign policy goals. There were no symbolic benefits of membership in the eyes of ex-communist politicians whose ideological beliefs were not consistent with those of leaders in the capitalist world. There were two main avenues toward NATO membership for Central and East European states. The first avenue, followed by Bulgaria, implied debilitating the ex-communists by defeating them in legislative elections. The second avenue, followed by Romania, implied a change in the foreign policy orientation of the ex-communists. Both avenues illustrate the importance of domestic politics and a government's ideological preferences in the formulation of a country's foreign policy goals. Ex-communists had a natural affinity with ex-communist Russia. Right-wing pro-reformists wished to disassociate their countries from the socialist legacy and sought to establish a relationship with the democratic world through membership in Western multilateral institutions. Some ex-communists, such as the Romanian social democrats, responded to the electoral incentives provided by democratic institutions and managed to stay in power by changing their foreign policy agenda.

The domestic-level explanation I provide challenges systemic explanations of alliance adaptation and expansion. Walt's argument that states balance against threat is not sustained by the historical evidence marshaled by McGuire. The perception of threat from Russia in the 1990s was not strong enough to justify NATO expansion. I claim that NATO eastward expansion did not become possible until ex-communists were defeated in legislative elections or changed their foreign policy positions. This rationalist explanation, informed by institutionalist and constructivist theories, is more plausible than neo-realist balance-of-power or balance-of-threat theories. It explains both the reasons for East Europeans' desire to join NATO and the timing of their decision.

## 5. The Importance of Systemic Factors: The Case of Poland

Immediately after the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, Polish leaders hurriedly announced that Poland would be interested in developing closer ties with the Alliance but would not seek full membership in it. In 1991 President Walesa

declared that "Poland is not putting itself forward as a candidate for NATO membership," (Asmus, 2002, p. 15). Following this cold-shoulder attitude toward the Alliance, the right-wing Center Alliance created an Atlantic Club which actively began lobbying for NATO membership. Only a year later, President Wałęsa joined by Czech President Havel and Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall, publicly declared that they would pursue full-fledged membership in the alliance.

Why did Wałęsa openly endorse the idea given that 12 months earlier he had been cautious about membership? To complicate his efforts, the electoral victory of the left-wing coalition of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) led to a setback in Polish ambitions to join the treaty. NATO membership did not become fully rooted in Polish foreign policy until a pro-NATO lobby entrenched itself in the Sejm and the Senate in 1997 (Piotrowski and Rachwald, 2001). Thus, the success of the Atlantic idea was not ushered in until a critical legislative lobby formed in both legislative chambers. The policies, which were initiated by the Wałęsa Administration, were ensured continuation during the Presidency of Alexander Kwaśniewski. Polish diplomacy also led to a dramatic increase in public support for membership. Support grew gradually from 30 to 50 and later on 70 percent as evidenced by the Public Opinion Study Centre (CBOS) (Piotrowski and Rachwald, 2001). The case of Poland, and perhaps the Baltic Republics, illustrate the importance of security concerns originating in the inherently anarchical international system. Where the perception of threat is high, small powers will tend to bandwagon on the side of great powers, as Stephen Walt has contended.

## 6. Foreign Policy Making in Bulgaria

The discussion of Bulgarian foreign policy between 1995 and 2003 will demonstrate the following points.<sup>13</sup> First, the issue of Bulgarian membership in NATO was controversial, particularly when the communist successor Socialist Party was in power. Scholars' expectations that policy makers across Central and Eastern Europe will openly embrace the idea of expansion are belied by my findings about variations over time in public and political support for the Atlantic idea in Bulgaria. Second, the foreign policy position of Bulgarian Socialist Party changed dramatically when the party leaders saw an opportunity to improve their party's negative image among Western politicians. NATO membership was seen as a necessary condition for continued Western financial support. Third, the change in the socialists' foreign policy position and the electoral success of parties which had expressed support for NATO membership spearheaded a new era in Bulgarian foreign policy – the era of steadfast commitment to integration in the Atlantic Alliance.

Since NATO is a collective security alliance, the public perception of external security threats will most likely influence attitudes toward NATO membership. Kostadinova (2000) finds a statistically significant inverse relationship between public support for NATO membership and support for ex-communist parties. Her statistical result hinges on the assumption that ex-communist parties oppose NATO membership. Based on the historical evidence I have collected about the foreign policy process in Bulgaria, this assumption is upheld in the Bulgarian case.<sup>14</sup> The Bulgarian Foreign Minister and his team of ministerial advisors, the Council of Ministers, and the standing committee on Foreign Policy, National Defense, and Security are the three political and legislative bodies participating in the foreign policy making and implementation process. Since the meetings of the standing committee on Foreign Policy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are held behind closed doors, I treat the foreign policy positions voiced by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs as an articulation of the decisions reached by the three bodies. The evidence I present has been collected from primary sources – Foreign Ministers' speeches and Ministry of Foreign Affairs press releases – which present the foreign policy positions of the Bulgarian executive. The constitutional structure of the Bulgarian government does not formally assign the President a significant role in foreign policy making. As I will demonstrate, however, two of Bulgaria's former presidents – Georgi Purvanov and his predecessor Peter Stoyanov – did play an important informal role in advancing the pro-membership cause.

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<sup>13</sup> My focus is on the period between 1995 and 2003. Bulgaria had six foreign ministers between 1989 and 1995. They all made a contribution to the development of Bulgaria's foreign policy. Here I only focus on the foreign ministers whose activities and viewpoints have been widely documented in the Bulgarian and world press. These include Georgi Pirinski, Nadezhda Mihailova, and Solomon Passy.

<sup>14</sup> In the next section I will demonstrate that this assumption is not necessarily true in the case of Romania. Romania's communist successor party embraced the idea of NATO membership much earlier than the Bulgarian Socialist Party. The political and legislative debate on NATO enlargement in Central Europe and Romania was less acerbic, and thus coalition building in favor of membership less costly.

The main communist successor party – the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)<sup>15</sup> – was been in control of most Bulgarian governments between 1989 and 2009. The initial foreign policy course was determined by the BSP which won the plurality of the seats in the Grand National Assembly elections of 1990 and the National Assembly elections of 1994. Foreign Minister Georgi Pirinski<sup>16</sup> (1996-1997) and Georgi Purvanov, chairman of the BSP executive council, outlined a foreign policy agenda with three loosely defined goals – “European integration, regional stability, and regional cooperation and development” (Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, 2003). The document announcing the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not even broach the issue of NATO membership. At the time Purvanov had limited the foreign policy agenda of the Bulgarian Socialist Party to pursuing integration in the European Union and ensuring regional stability through careful diplomacy with the neighboring countries. While the BSP leaders diplomatically tiptoed around the issue of NATO membership, another prominent politician – the Chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament Sendov – nearly jeopardized his political career by expressing his anti-NATO views. In 1996, in a conversation with the Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Sendov expressed the position that Bulgaria should not become a NATO member. Members of the pro-NATO Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and Movement for Rights and Freedoms were enraged that Sendov had expressed his opinion on behalf of the entire Bulgarian nation. Having questioned the constitutionality of Sendov’s views and actions, the pro-Western opposition politicians called for his resignation (Melone, 1998).

In the middle of its term of office, the government of Zhan Videnov experienced a crisis of legitimacy instigated by the large export of domestically produced grain. Even though the socialist government withstood three votes of no confidence during its term of office, the deep schisms within its executive structures produced tensions inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Prime Minister Videnov and Foreign Affairs Minister Pirinski were engaged in a power squabble over the organization and leadership of BSP and Mr. Pirinski’s aspiration to run in the Presidential elections. Disaffected with the discord within BSP, Pirinski resigned from his post as foreign minister. The divisive issue of NATO membership was temporarily shelved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

While the BSP-led government was in shambles, President Peter Stoyanov seized the opportunity to radically alter the course of Bulgarian foreign policy by endorsing the NATO initiative. President Stoyanov appointed a caretaker government led by Sofia’s mayor – Stefan Sofianski – a pro-NATO politician. The President insisted on rapid ratification by Sofianski’s interim government. The decision to announce Bulgaria’s intention to apply for NATO membership was hasty indeed. It took the government approximately four hours behind closed doors to resurrect the forlorn NATO dream of the pro-reform Union of Democratic Forces. “Timing of the decision was of critical importance,” argues the ex-president (Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, 2002). One of Bulgaria’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs – Solomon Passy – was the founder of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria, an interest group advocating and pushing for NATO membership. The Club grew gradually to include members and supporters of all walks of life in spite of its original marginality. Founded in 1990, it was the first pro-NATO non-governmental lobby group that emerged even prior to the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact. In a parliamentary speech Foreign Minister Solomon Passy stated that the Atlantic idea was subjected to scrutiny and numerous legislative votes for 13 years.

The government of Ivan Kostov altered the foreign policy course of Bulgaria.<sup>17</sup> After an affirmative electoral victory, the United Democratic Forces<sup>18</sup> formed a new government and delegated the Foreign Ministry to Nadezhda Mihailova who had served on the parliamentary committee on Foreign Affairs. Foreign Minister Mihailova mapped out a new foreign policy course which reflected the preferences of the United Democratic Forces. NATO membership became the topmost priority of the new Bulgarian government along with the traditional goal of regional stability placed on the agenda by the outgoing socialist government. Mihailova served as Bulgaria’s spokeswoman at numerous summit meetings and international ministerial conventions. In 1997 she announced that “the Bulgarian government has been unequivocally mandated by the electorate to achieve Bulgaria’s membership of [sic] NATO,” (Mihailova, 2003). Some of the objectives

<sup>15</sup> The Bulgarian Communist Party which ruled the country between 1944 and 1989 changed its name to Bulgarian Socialist Party during the democratic transition. The party has maintained a social democratic platform throughout the 25 years since the transition to democracy in Bulgaria. Its foreign policy position, however, has changed steadily from close association with Russia to advocacy of integration in Euro-Atlantic structures.

<sup>16</sup> According to the early Spring 1996 Gallup polls, Foreign Minister Pirinski was the most popular Bulgarian politician with the highest approval ratings. His popularity was based on popular approval for the pragmatic policies he advocated. These policies included a cautious approach of non-engagement with NATO. See Albert Melone’s account in *Creating Parliamentary Government: The Transition to Democracy in Bulgaria*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998. p. 208

<sup>17</sup> The Union of Democratic Forces and its successor - the United Democratic Forces - controlled key political positions during the 36<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> National Assemblies. It was during the 38<sup>th</sup> Assembly that the United Democratic Forces managed to change the direction of Bulgarian foreign policy, this time with the support of the Socialists.

<sup>18</sup> The United Democratic Forces (UtdDF) is a party coalition which succeeded the Union of Democratic Forces in 1997.

the government hoped to achieve through NATO membership is attract foreign investment and demonstrate its commitment to democracy and market reform. Any delay or setback in the membership negotiation process would be detrimental to Bulgaria's image of an emerging market democracy (Mihailova, 2003). Based on the rhetoric of Bulgarian policy makers, it is clear that the incentives to join an expanding NATO were both material (attract foreign investment and bolster Balkan security) and symbolic (efface the negative image of the former communist regime).<sup>19</sup>

In 1999, Purvanov denounced Bulgaria's legislative support for cooperation with NATO's anti-Yugoslav campaign in Kosovo. The lack of public support for NATO's military action against the Serbian government provided Purvanov with the opportunity to publicly vent his disagreement with the foreign policy of Ivan Kostov's government.<sup>20</sup> He declared the government's actions "anticonstitutional" and gave the Kosovo campaign a rather unpalatable label, calling it an "illegal war."<sup>21</sup> Purvanov's foreign policy position did not change until 2000 when the BSP leader devised the new party platform and his presidential electoral strategy. Both BSP's platform and Purvanov's electoral strategy included application for membership in NATO and the European Union as a fundamental "strategic goal." The radical switch in the foreign policy position of the Socialist Party was induced by the crisis of legitimacy experienced by the BSP-dominated government of Zhan Videnov in 1995-1996. This switch helped the government of Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha by ensuring swift passage of all legislation related to Bulgaria's membership in the Atlantic Alliance.

Integration into Euro-Atlantic structures became a dominant factor in Bulgarian politics in the early 2000s. The very survival of Bulgaria's government at that time hinged on successful military and economic reforms, which were necessary for a swift accession to the European Union and NATO. A parliamentary vote of no confidence requested by the parliamentary group of the United Democratic Forces, led by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Mihailova, was tied to the sluggish reform of the Bulgarian energy sector. Several documents issued by the leadership of UtdDF vehemently criticized the government of Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha for refusing to apply a law on closing down several reactors of Bulgaria's nuclear power plant.<sup>22</sup>

In the next section I analyze Romania's foreign policy to accentuate differences in the foreign policy positions of communist successor parties in the Balkans. These differences help explain the distinct foreign policies adopted by the governments of former Warsaw Pact allies.

## 7. The Atlantic Idea in Romania

It was much easier to build pro-NATO support in Romania than it was in Bulgaria. In the 1990s, Romania's political landscape was dominated by the pro-reformist pro-NATO Social Democrat Party (PSD).<sup>23</sup> Romanian politicians made their choice about which security arrangement to pursue as part of their foreign policy agenda. NATO membership was the security option parliamentary parties committed to in a 1996 appeal to the parliaments of NATO member states.

Romania's entire activity within Partnership for Peace, the North Atlantic Assembly [,] as well as its quest for NATO admission is based on the will of the people, backed by all parliamentary parties, [with the] view of becoming, as soon as possible, a full-fledged member of NATO structures... Romania understands [that it would] assume the rights, commitments, and obligations that are inherent to a NATO member. The Parliament of Romania conveys to the Parliament of [the member state] the assurances of its highest consideration and requests support for its endeavor as a free, independent, sovereign and democratic country, in compliance with article 10 of the Washington Treaty, in view of

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<sup>19</sup> Some constructivists see NATO as an "organization of an international community of values and norms;" primarily democracy, liberty, and the rule of law." This view is certainly consistent with the rhetoric of politicians who have tried to push for NATO expansion. Intangible symbolic benefits spurred and motivated the process of NATO expansion. For an elaboration of the constructivist perspective, see Frank Schimmelfennig, "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union. *International Organization* Vol. 55, No. 1: pp. 47-80.

<sup>20</sup> Ivan Kostov was one of the leaders of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) – the main coalition of pro-market reform opposition parties in Bulgaria. UDF leaders heralded the Bulgarian political transition.

<sup>21</sup> Most of the information about Georgi Purvanov has been gathered from a comprehensive biographical database compiled by Fundación CIDOB – Centro de Investigaciones Internacionales y Cooperación Internacional. The biographical database is available via the World Wide Web at <http://www.cidob.org/>

<sup>22</sup> "UtdDF's motives for a vote of no confidence are different from those of the Bulgarian Socialist Party," "Motives for requesting a Vote of No Confidence, November 22, 2002" and Official statement of Nadezhda Mihailova, President of the Union of Democratic Forces. All documents are available in Bulgarian in the online archives of the Union of Democratic Forces. <http://www.sds.bg/>

<sup>23</sup> The Social Democrat Party succeeded the Romanian Communist Party. Throughout its metamorphoses the PSD has distanced itself ideologically from the ex-communist party.

becoming a full-fledged NATO member.<sup>24</sup>

The Romanian governments and Ministry of Foreign Affairs “made EU and NATO membership a top priority and Romanian diplomats were working hard to make the case that their country was the “Poland of the South” in terms of strategic weight and regional importance,” (Asmus, 2002, p. 149). The Romanian Premier and former Foreign Affairs minister Adrian Năstase of PSD announced that the Romanian government would resign if Romania’s candidacy for NATO membership did not get approved. About 80% of the Romanians supported the country’s membership ambitions. Unlike their Romanian neighbors, many Bulgarians doubted that NATO membership would be as beneficial as some of the political advocates claimed it would be (Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, 2003). Having perceived the opportunity to retain parliamentary and governmental control, the Romanian social democrats openly embraced the idea of NATO membership and consistently pursued it since 1996 until Romania became a member in 2004.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper has explored the issue of NATO adaptation to the new European security configuration through eastward expansion. Three Central European countries are already NATO members. Six more East European countries have begun accession talks for membership. I have presented evidence, which demonstrates that NATO was not the only security option post-communist societies could have chosen. NATO eastward expansion occurred because of two events: some communist successor parties were debilitated and politically marginalized (Bulgaria), while others supported the Atlantic idea to retain parliamentary and governmental control (Romania). The inclusion of Poland in NATO was not a surprising development – Polish constituents and policy makers needed protection from any possible territorial ambitions Russia might wish to satisfy. Neo-realists were unable to predict NATO expansion. Institutionalist and constructivist theories can account for the high level of security cooperation we have witnessed through NATO expansion. Without understanding the domestic political processes of post-communist Europe, however, we cannot arrive at a satisfactory explanation of the demand for NATO membership. The second image explanation I advance in this paper challenges systemic explanations of the adaptation of security institutions.

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<sup>24</sup> Summary of appeal in Mariana Cernicova-Buca “Romania: the Quest for Membership” in *Enlarging NATO: The National Debates*, edited by Gale Mattox and Arthur Rachwald, 2001, p. 210.

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