

Foreign and security policy in times of uncertainty: the case of NATO eastern flank states

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This workshop seeks contributions on foreign and security policies of NATO eastern flank states (NEFS) and their potential synergy. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine ended the period of stability and peace in the region. For the countries of NEFS (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) this means a new reality in which their leaders have to make strategic decisions about future geopolitical trajectories. Furthermore, the recent steps taken by Finland (already in the alliance) and Sweden regarding NATO membership after decades of neutrality show that the Russian invasion had a great impact on the leadership of these states, increasing their sense of insecurity.

Nevertheless, a complete reorientation of foreign policy is not an easy task, even in such external circumstances and internal factors quickly come to the fore, influencing states' foreign policy, even in times of international crises, as the example of Poland shows. Crises can be seen as 'critical junctures' which create possibilities for change and for questioning existing policy paradigms and institutional practices (Birkland 2006; Kuipers 2006). They can be considered as a 'window of opportunity' to adopt new strategic choices in foreign policy because urgency, threat perception, and uncertainty change the existing methods of interaction (Ansell et al. 2014). In times of crises, the leadership's interpretation of the situation shapes their foreign policy-making processes and decisions (see Hermann and Kaarbo 2020).

The workshop strives to examine how the new (uncertain) regional and geopolitical situation is understood by the leadership of NEFS. More broadly, it aims to analyse challenges in building regional synergy, focusing on the formation of foreign policies in these countries, because the specificity of their internal systems (see Holmes and Krastev 2018) suggests that processes of shaping foreign and security policy also have their peculiarities. We welcome papers exploring various aspects of change and continuity and potential foreign policy paths of NEFS (including Finland and Sweden) in the face of the threat from Russia and the growing uncertainty in the regional and international environment. Apart from the empirical dimension, we are also looking for work addressing methodological and theoretical gaps in the scholarship on synergy of regional foreign and security policies as well as changes in foreign policy in times of crisis.

Paper proposals can include but are not limited to the following topics:

- Foreign and security policy of NATO eastern flank states
- Foreign policy of external actors towards NATO's eastern flank
- Synergy of foreign and security policies of NATO eastern flank states
- Foreign policy-making processes in times of crisis and uncertainty
- Domestic consensus and contestation in the light of external threats
- Internal factors determining crisis foreign policy decision-making processes
- Political, economic, and ideational foundations of foreign and security policy
- The impact of growing regional uncertainty on continuity and change in foreign policy