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ARTICLE

Estonia and Portugal in Europe: escaping peripherality, capitalizing on marginality

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ABSTRACT

Estonia and Portugal are small states located at opposite geographical fringes of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This article analyses how their NATO and EU memberships matter in escaping the anathema of periphery. We argue that the two countries can be comparable with each other because they share an experience of post-authoritarian democratization, a liminal geographic location with the ensuing geopolitical and security challenges. Our analysis is premised upon two correlative concepts of small states and marginality, whose meanings vary from geopolitical reasoning to constructivist accounts that put the emphasis on the relative notion of size as a product of self-perception. However, both approaches share at least one common point: 'by joining international organizations, small states increase their capacity to be influential', which is a central point in Noel Parker's conceptualization of the phenomenon of marginality. Arguably, small states can positively use their non-central location by aspiring to belong to political and security core(s) through policies of institutional inclusion, and by influencing and reshaping the core(s). Building on these arguments, we look at peripheral positions as negative and marginality as positive for dynamics/strategies of belonging.

KEYWORDS
Estonia; Portugal; marginality; Europe

1. Introduction

The current academic scholarship is replete with analysis of ways and means of EU policies of fostering institutional, societal, legal, economic and other changes in its member states. Much less had been written about how individual member states, particularly small and non-centrally located, can – directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally – contribute to transforming the European polity. And, concomitantly, can they assist in a better self-understanding of what Europe should be in future?

Estonia and Portugal are two small states located at opposite geographical fringes of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Both countries are not only two geographic margins of Europe, but also two relatively small states. Both factors – location and size – are deeply embedded in a modernist and traditionalist dichotomies where 'small' connotes 'weak', while 'big' implies 'strong' (Panke 2012; Kassab 2018). For different reasons and in their own specific historical contexts, Portugal and Estonia have had troubled borders with a big neighbour and have been cut from Europe in a way that boosted their aspirations to join Western institutions. Currently, Tallinn, from northeast, and Lisbon, from southwest, share strong political and security commitment towards these organizations.

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Of course, the two countries drastically differ from each other in at least two respects. First, Portugal used to be an empire and historical colonizer, while Estonia was an object of imperial domination and occupation. Second, given the Russia factor, security situation in Estonia is much more troublesome than that of Portugal which faces no existential security threat comparable to any of the Baltic states. However, both countries are keenly interested in being parts of an international system where issues of size and peripheral location would not be able to negatively affect their roles and status.

This article analyses how Estonia's and Portugal's NATO and EU memberships matter in escaping the anathema of periphery. We argue that the two countries can be comparable with each other because they share an experience of post-authoritarian democratization, a liminal geographic location with the ensuing geopolitical and security challenges.

The interest to this topic is both political and academic. From a policy perspective, we presume that the current post-liberal momentum in international politics (Ikenberry 2018; Nye 2019) creates new opportunities for relatively small countries to reposition themselves on a global scale either through taking advantage of the existing demands for leadership in specific policy fields, or creating new platforms to allow them to take a lead in promoting particular policies. Small and non-centrally-located states not simply 'have a broader sense of community because they are more based on it, they need more solidarity and integration, and they have a broader sense of the law because it protects them more than bigger states with more power' (Szalai 2017, 355). By iterative inroads into new spheres of common interest, margins may be able to set certain practices that other actors would find appealing and advantageous. We shall see below how these conceptual departures can be translated into policy analysis of Estonia's and Portugal's policies in European and Euro-Atlantic contexts.

Academically, our analysis is premised upon two correlative concepts of small states and marginality, whose meanings vary from geopolitical reasoning to constructivist accounts that put the emphasis on the relative notion of size as a product of self-perception (Hey 2003; Long 2017). However, both approaches share at least one common point: 'by joining international organizations, small states increase their capacity to be influential' (Lamoreaux and Galbreath 2008, 11), which is a central point in Noel Parker's conceptualization of the phenomenon of marginality. Arguably, small states can positively use their non-central location by aspiring to belong to political and security core(s) through policies of institutional inclusion, and by influencing and reshaping the core(s).

Building on these arguments, we look at peripheral positions as negative and marginality as positive for dynamics/strategies of belonging. We raise, thus, three interconnected research questions. *First*, we would like to find out what are the factors that might enhance the prospects of Estonia's and Portugal's peripheralization within the EU and NATO. *Second*, we wish to look at how these countries overcome the negativities of their peripheral location through developing normatively inclusive policies and thus contributing to pan-European and trans-Atlantic relations. *Third*, we seek to know how each of these countries reconceptualises and transforms Europe. After the explanation of our conceptual underpinnings, the paper delves subsequently into the issues of peripherality, inclusion and re-signification. Our empirical base consists of official documents and statements, think tank literature and semi-structured interviews, conducted in Brussels and Tallinn with officials and policy experts in 2017–2019.

2. Conceptualizing peripherality beyond 'smallness'

There are plenty of academic literatures about EU's policies towards its margins, yet much less is known about how margins influence and politically construct the EU. This issue is particularly relevant given the current crisis of Europe's normative core and the diminishing ability of Brussels to exert its power of "disciplining and punishing", to put it in a Foucauldian way. In the course of the current transformation of the international order from liberal to post-liberal, the very definition

of core and margins becomes much less certain and more blurred. This is especially so in Europe where the very idea of 'core' is predominantly discussed beyond geographic context and relates more to commitments to foster the EU project of integration and solidarity, rather than with territorial location or size.

We build our analysis on the presumption that political 'discourses are influential in part because they are produced in both the power centres and the power margins' (Kuus 2007, 8). This is of particular importance for situations in which policy actors with unequal status are involved, which usually makes us assume that it is the stronger ones that exert influence upon their weaker partners or interlocutors. Yet this logic should be readjusted to inter-subjective interactions in which the presumably weaker actors do have a potential to affect major power holders. As historical experiences of some borderlands – for example, the Baltic states – demonstrate, they might 'not simply adopt and learn, but also strategically appropriate Western narratives' (Kuus 2007, 113). Moreover, the very binary opposition might look simplistic, since 'the frontier is not merely an expansion or projection of the centre, but that centre and frontier are permanently connected and interdependent… (T)he frontier is in the centre, as much as the centre is in the frontier' (Ioris 2018, 100).

In this framework, the concept of marginality may be used as an analytical tool to uncover complexities of spatial relations in Europe. The interest to this concept rises from the more general debate on the crisis of territoriality and the concomitant competing narratives on – and practices of – reshuffling political spaces. As Noel Parker assumed, peripheries are usually treated as dependent territories destined to resign themselves to their secondary role in relations of domination imposed upon them. Yet margins might be discussed as subjects of their own, possessing not only peculiar identities but also abilities to re-signify their geographical remoteness from power centres, produce authentic cultural messages and thus contribute to the social construction of the logic of inclusion. Thus, non-central actors have meaningful cultural and symbolic resources to trigger concomitant political dynamics and might be reluctant to accept the core speaking for them; moreover, they may try to define the nature of the core itself (Parker 2008, 3–23).

To qualify for the role of the margin in Parker's vocabulary, a country ought to institutionally belong to one or more power poles, yet in the meantime have some explicit or implicit, complementary or alternative connections with other alliances or blocs. In the case of Portugal the two cores are the EU and the US; the belonging to the space of European integration and Euro-Atlantic security community might either complement (within the framework of the liberal international order), or diverge from each other (in the case of the growing disengagement of the US from European affairs). By the same token, Portugal itself is a centre of the Lusophone world, a global community of Portuguese-speaking countries, which necessitates strong engagements of Lisbon with its former colonies beyond the West. As for Estonia, the structure of its marginality is different: being a member of two poles – the EU and NATO, this country in the meantime is an object of the 'Russian world' projection (due to sizeable Russophone minority), and linguistically belongs to the Finno-Ugric 'world', which makes cultural connections with Russia indispensable. However, an intention to politically disengage itself from Moscow makes Estonia aspire for a Nordic (rather than Baltic) identity, which creates some ambiguity from the viewpoint of Tallinn's unconditional loyalty to the EU and NATO.

However, some authors discard substantial differences between foreign policies of major (for example, Russia) and smaller (for instance, Baltic states) actors when it comes to the understanding of sovereignty and respect for international norms (Lamoreaux 2014), which might ultimately invalidate the very distinction between centres and margins. Being in disagreement with this approach, we wish to reinforce the marginality argument and deploy it in a more contemporary context defined by the growing appeal of post-liberal conceptualizations of Europe, which requires a more complex conceptualization of the core – margins intersubjective relations not only as spatial but also as inherently normative. The addition of the normative dimension to the centrality – marginality contradistinction may have two effects. First, it helps to peer into the crux of today's debate on the

weakened appeal of the post-Cold War liberal consensus and, correspondingly, the diminishing space for EU's normative power. Second, the concept of normative centrality is instrumental in explicating foreign policies of Estonia and Portugal, two geographically peripheral countries, as normatively central in the sense of the official Lisbon's and Tallinn's adherence to the rules, principles and values constitutive for the EU political identity.

3. Two small peripheries: detachments, disconnections and insecurities

In this section, we compare Portugal's and Estonia's experiences of tackling the challenges of peripheralization and track their different trajectories of driving away from risks and menaces related to their peripheral position.

In the ***Portuguese case***, the dangers of peripherality come from experiences of this country's disconnection with the continent. The first defining fact in the formation of the Portuguese state (XII century) was its troubled relation with Spain, the only state with which it shares land borders. It was only in 1640 that Portugal gained independence vis-a-vis Castile. Against the backdrop of the threat of the Castilian crown, Portugal built what is considered the first global empire (Page 2017). Deprived of the possibility of terrestrial expansion in Europe, the country embraced its maritime dimension by looking at the Atlantic and other oceans. The conquest of Ceuta in 1415 by D. Henriques initiates the imperial era, which continued for about six centuries. The Carnation Revolution terminated the colonial cycle in 1974, which definitively ended with the return of Macao's sovereignty to China in 1999.

As a co-founder of NATO in 1949, the authoritarian regime of Salazar used the Euro-Atlantic security protection to fend off liberalization and decolonization (Teixeira 1999, 21–22). Yet before the turn towards Europeanization, Portugal developed mistrust towards continental Europe over centuries, having preferred to seal a maritime alliance with England. In the XIV century, Portugal secured help to defeat Spanish invasion. The Anglo–Portuguese Treaty of 1373 is considered the oldest diplomatic alliance still in force. This pact would in fact be replaced after the Second World War by an analogous agreement. The alliance with the US, both bilaterally and via NATO, is explained by Lisbon's recurrent bet to seek support westwards looking at a maritime power for security reassurance. With the bilateral defence treaty and membership in NATO, Lisbon kept its tradition of having a maritime ally and continued to 'turn its back' to Europe as an isolated country looking at itself as 'proudly alone' in its overseas colonial policy. World power status and expansion in Portuguese history was, thus, located outside of Europe, and the consolidation of its continental territory happened in centuries of fights against European powers and alliances with Atlantic maritime powers. Today, the importance of the transatlantic relationship persists despite the integration in the EU which, for the first time in its history, and only since 1986, has made the country overcome centuries of detachment.

Even after having achieved the goal of EU accession, 'out-of-Europe' disengagement remained present as the country balances this new orientation with other geopolitical priorities. The participation in multilateral organizations reflects its vision as a state with three key defining elements for its foreign policy: Atlanticism, Europeanism and Lusophonia. In this profound sense Portugal sees itself as a medium size country with global ambitions but limited resources (CEDN 2013),[1] which makes the EU, NATO and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) crucial for its foreign policy. Participation in multilateral forums has been a persistent commitment, confirmed by the Foreign Minister who assumed that 'our multilateral attitudes can be constituted as an autonomous and characteristic feature of Portuguese foreign policy' (Lusa 2018).

The year 1974 marked, thus, a U-turn in Portuguese position as it was the end of the Portuguese overseas empire and the return to borders of XVth century. In a world more open to new democratic states (Moreira 1984) a peripheral and weaker Lisbon understood the need to take advantage of international ties (Vines 2012, 371). After democratic stabilization, the regime aimed at managing partnerships to avoid overdependence and counteract exclusion from centres of

international decision-making through the reinforcement of relations with the US, and renewal of ties with the Portuguese-speaking world (Cravo 2012, 215).

Today, Portugal sees itself as a European and Atlantic country with a global vocation inherited from centuries of experience in its former borders. Portugal has transformed its imperial and colonial heritage into the 'Lusophone' dimension with CPLP that brings together nine member states spread over four continents.[2] The creation of a Lusophone community builds on the idea that the former colonies might take advantage of the common Portuguese language to promote cultural and economic cooperation. In CPLP framework Portugal looks for maximizing the potential of relations with regional powers (Palmeira 2018), above all Brazil and Angola (Sá 2015).

By the same token, the Portuguese foreign policy is bent on another understanding of centrality: the country sees itself as a geographic centre of the West as transatlantic community, and as a natural link in relations between the EU, North and South America and Southern Africa (CEDN 2013). The deep-rooted perception of Portugal's place in the trans-Atlantic relationship contributed to the consolidation of a foreign policy thinking that understands the centrality of reaching from Europe to the American continent and to the South of the Atlantic. This 'Western' position is thus, first and foremost, maritime and lusophone, yet European but not European in a 'continental' way. This perspective is well articulated by the Portuguese Ambassador to NATO, Luís de Almeida Sampaio, that summarizes it by saying: 'we were never part of the Holy Roman Empire, we were always, and we remain an Atlantic nation'.[3] However, despite Portugal's imperial heritage, Portugal never ceased to be part of Europe as its periphery or semi-periphery (Nunes and Gonçalves 2001, 13–31).

These circumstances explain the global vocation of Portugal that promotes a diplomacy at '360 degrees'. Portugal reinvented its relations with the Atlantic space where it possesses a strong legacy built over centuries. In this context, the prompt reconfirmation of the alliance with NATO immediately after the Carnation Revolution reflects the continuity of the Atlantic historical vector (Telo 2007). Loyalty to NATO was then complemented by a new momentum towards integration in the EU (Ferreira-Pereira 2014). Lisbon is still the most south-western border of Europe, and integration with the EU seems to have reconciled the perennial contradiction between the Atlantic and Europe (Teixeira 2011). If the West – understood now as the transatlantic community – is an evident and older paradigm for Portugal, the inclusion in the EU is predominantly perceived through socioeconomic lens. Portugal joined the EU as a poor southern country and a net beneficiary of the EU budget. Its full-fledged European history started with EU accession that was seen as the path to modernity and prosperity once the country entered a post-dictatorial era. However, when entering the EU in 1986, Portugal did not seek to adhere to a 'common European identity'. Instead, the country pursued the inclusion in an economic and financial space.

The commitment to European integration is enduring as the country has been resisting the winds of EU-skepticism and populism with Eurobarometers never putting under question the added value of the EU project for Portugal. However, Portuguese citizens are ambivalent pro-Europeans as they express feelings of being left behind in times of economics reversals (Sandra. and Estrada 2016). The North-South divide between richer and poorer member states explains the country's positioning: on the one hand, EU membership permitted the upgrading of the country as a developed one, yet on the other hand, Portugal remains one of the poorest countries of the EU and has failed with convergence goals (Carregueiro 2017). The financial bailout in 2011–2014 made Portugal acutely feel peripheral again in the EU as it was ostracized for failing to fulfil its commitments towards economic and financial stability, which endured severe austerity policies monitored from Brussels.

Therefore, there is a certain paradox in Portugal's centrality: its transatlantic maritime dimension and connection with the Portuguese-speaking countries coexist with its peripheral position in Europe. For Portugal, Europe without a strong transatlantic community is a worst-case scenario as its policies have been based on the concomitant belonging to both due to the country's historical and economic peripherality. The perceived 'continentalization' of Europe – including the distancing

of the UK (*Brexit*) and the centrality of the German-French leadership (Santos 2017) – is a serious issue for Lisbon. As centrality operates through the Atlantic, any distancing of Europe from this axis is seen as a threat for Portugal because it would reinforce its secondary role in Europe.

For ***Estonia***, the dangers of peripherality are two-fold. First, they come from Russia's policies of portraying Estonia – along with two other Baltic states – as peripheral countries that always try to punch above their weight and thus create troubles for both Russia and the EU. This type of discourse is mainly aimed at Russia-speaking community within Estonia that finds itself under the overwhelming influence of Kremlin's propaganda, and a broad variety of Eurosceptic groups in EU member states that constitute a basis of Putin's 'understanders', mostly from the right-wing flanks.

Second, in the security field, Estonia faced sceptical voices originated from the West itself who questioned its full-fledged belonging to Western security or normative order. Security-wise, a notorious statement came from Newt Gingrich who in July 2016 questioned U.S. commitments to protect Tallinn in case of Russian attack, misrepresenting Estonia as 'the suburbs of St Petersburg.' (Oreskes 2016). Estonia does have arguments to counter this type of narrative: 'Nine Estonian soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan. Kabul is about 2700 miles from the Estonian capital, Tallinn. The first soldier in an independent Estonian army to be killed in combat since 1920 was Andres Nuiamäe. He was killed in Baghdad in 2004. Baghdad is about 2000 miles from Tallinn' (Stuttaford 2016).

Other experiences of peripherality date back to the reactualized remembrances of the Cold War containing a certain degree of animadversion towards its closest regional neighbours: 'In the aftermath of World War II, all the Nordic countries had more or less recognised the Baltics as part of the Soviet Union. Sweden, which had traditionally favoured an ethical foreign policy, was the country that had been most in the wrong during the golden age of the Soviet Union. At the Kremlin's behest, it had not only given up all the gold secured by the Baltic countries but also extradited the Baltic citizens who had served in the German army … In November 1989, the Swedish foreign minister Sten Andersson claimed while visiting Tallinn that Estonia was not occupied and that 'only a few radicals are pursuing independence' (Palk 2016). To this one may add a very cautious policy of Swedish government towards Estonian request for purchasing weaponry for newly established Estonian-armed forces: Sweden declined to foster military cooperation with Tallinn until the Russian brigade leaves Estonia (Rodeo 2018).

Estonia's engagements with the Baltic region were also not unproblematic. Estonia prefers to formulate its identity in Nordic rather than in Baltic terms (Lehti 1999, 36–37). In the meantime, Estonians themselves were not automatically supportive of foreign policies of their neighbours whose experiences they otherwise wished to imitate: for example, the initial attitudes to the Finnish Northern Dimension project in the Estonian media and political circles were largely suspicious and wary (Raik 1999, 157–159).

One more illustration of Estonia's tensions with EU normative mainstream is EU constant pressure over the official Tallinn on minority integration issues. During the 1990s the Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the EU and NATO tried to influence Estonia's policies in language and citizenship issues. 'The government's concessions were not always enough for Western concerns… and the 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the publication of numerous political and scholarly criticisms' (Hogan-Brun and Wright 2013, 250) of Tallinn's position.

Another example would be divergent security perceptions in Estonia and some of core European countries when it comes to assessing Russia's intentions and ambitions (Raik 2016). 'Most Western nations clung to that hope even in the 2000s, as Russia moved towards an authoritarian regime. The Baltic states, who vocally pointed this out, were labelled Russophobic' (Raik 2018). However, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas vindicated the validity of Estonian security perception of Russia as a revisionist power eager to forcefully change post-Cold War borders in a wider Europe.

The major conclusion Estonia has drawn from experiences of its location at Europe's fringes is that it 'should not position itself on the front line' (Reinsalu et al. 2015) and 'must belong to the notional centre of the Western allies' (Mihkelson 2016). In the Estonian interpretation, small countries are more vulnerable to security threats, which explains why 'a transatlantic alliance based on common values and European integration is a choice made by smallest European states' (Raik 2018). Small states are more inclined to come up with sobering assessments of international relations, 'since today's world is more insecure for a sensitive small nation than ever before. Delusion is dangerous for small states. They sense more keenly than large ones that our world has shrunk into a global village where distances, the protecting Alps and even oceans no longer separate anyone' (The President 2016).

4. Inclusion, belonging, and solidarity

This section argues that belonging to Europe for both countries is a matter of enacting mechanisms of connection/liaison, and avoiding/neutralizing (potential) effects of alienation and distancing from Europe's core.

Almost two decades after the Portuguese revolution, the third wave of democratization (Huntington 1993) continued when ***Estonia*** – along with other former countries of the USSR – became independent. The idea of coming back to Europe from which Estonia was forcefully cut off during the Soviet rule became the major driver behind de-communization, de-Sovietization and de-Russification.

At the onset, belonging to Europe was understood in Estonia in Huntingtonian terms, as civilizational delineation from Russia (exemplified by the EU membership) and its subsequent securitization (hence NATO membership) (Boston et al. 2018). This choice was of political nature and represented a decision when alternative options were available, from imitative (hypothetically, Estonia could model itself along the Austrian or Finnish modes of neutrality) to innovative (a whole bunch of post-modernist ideas of borderlands as meeting spaces that blur binary geopolitical distinctions).

In practically implementing this choice, Estonia develops its security profile in Europe in close partnership with NATO as the core security guarantor for this country, especially in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea. Against the backdrop of the growing militarization of the Baltic Sea region – in contrast to the spirit of normative region-building and de-securitization of the 1990s – Estonia is among the strongest proponents of solidarity within both NATO and the EU as a protective measure against possible unfriendly incursions by Russia.

Paradoxically, it is the geographic location as a 'border state' for both EU and NATO that substantiates Estonia's bid for centrality: 'Estonia is the skin of Western Europe, and an innocuous-looking scratch may lead to the entire organism of Western Europe becoming fatally infected … Estonia has always seen itself as a part of Western Europe, owing to which the eastern border of Estonia is the *de facto* eastern border of Western Europe' (The President 2016).

Estonia's inclusion into the European normative order operates through the acceptance of EU's 'normative power', and enacting mechanisms of solidarity (DW (Russian) 2017) that might have its price to pay, including reluctant consent with the least popular policies of the EU, such as refugee quotas (Veebel 2015, 28–52). '(W)e would be the most vulnerable if NATO and the EU were dissolved. Unfortunately, today this scenario cannot be altogether excluded. Hence, maintaining and reinforcing the unity of the Western allies should be one of the central axes of our security policy' (Mihkelson 2016). In the words of the former Foreign Minister Marina Kaljurand, 'we are a single organism… It makes helping others easy and self-evident, not a burden that we ought to bear. We contribute to resolving the refugee crisis because we want to; we will not stand on the sidelines and watch others suffer' (Kaljurand 2015). In pursuance of this policy, Estonia 'casts a wide net across government agencies, knocking on any available door to enhance its alliance with the U.S. (Hanna 2017).

'Big defeats have struck us when we were alone. Never again alone – this is the most central issue in ensuring our security in the long term' (Mihkelson 2015), an Estonian foreign policy analyst suggests. In this context, Estonia had all reasons to celebrate the results of the NATO summit in Wales in 2014 that has agreed on Tallinn's requests to 'perpetuate the presence of allied forces in Estonia, reinforce allied presence, and improve the response time of NATO forces' (Rock'n'Roll 2014).

The 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197–214) to Europe presupposes a harsh criticism of 'misguided and dangerous opinion that NATO's "hasty" expansion to the east is one of the reasons for the deteriorating relationship with Russia' (Mihkelson 2016). Estonia defends its policies through engaging in polemics with those in Europe who publicly doubt whether British or American soldiers should die for the freedom of Baltic states. The logic of solidarity extends to Ukraine as well, which leads some Estonian experts to regret about 'the lack of a clear, united will to take a step forward with Ukraine and sign the Association Agreement' (EU Soft 2014) with Kyiv in 2013. After 2014 Estonian government associated itself politically with Ukraine, a victim of Russia's power projection (Kaljurand 2017). The policy of isolating Russia was exacerbated by Talllinn's refusal to accept an invitation by the Russian Defense Ministry to resume contacts in military sphere (Sarapik 2016). In December 2016 the Estonian parliament adopted a law amendment to prohibit some high-ranking Russian officials from entering Estonia (TBT Staff 2018).

Inclusion in Europe is a much harder task for Estonian Russophone community that culturally and linguistically gravitates towards Russia, yet even in the conditions of 'increasing minority distrust to European institutions' in Europe itself, Russian-speaking groups in Baltic states still keep commitments to Europeanization and expose a 'critical trust' in EU institutions (Cianetti and Nakai 2017, 276).

In the ***Portuguese case***, belonging to EU and NATO also go hand in hand, but they do not represent the same rationales of inclusion as compared to Estonia. From 1949 onwards, Portugal saw the security guarantee of the Alliance through the historical prism of protection against continental Europe and regime survival. When joining the EU in 1986, Lisbon aspired to belong to the core of modernity, including democracy and economic prosperity. As a consequence, advancements in EU's security policies have, in Lisbon's view, to be coordinated with NATO.[4]

Portugal's centrality in NATO is reinforced by the strategic location of the Azores islands in mid-way between Lisbon and New York, which had been key for the Allies during World War II and the Cold War. The islands are even seen as a reason why the dictatorial colonizer joined NATO (and the UN) at first hand and why the regime could last. The regime gained a sort of US cover against the waves of liberalization that emerged from inside in a peaceful coup supported by the population in 1974. Although Washington has revised its European projection of forces since 2013, the Lajes military base is still rented by the US and new projects are emerging to mitigate economic losses for Portugal, including an international research centre.

The rationality of belonging to NATO is resilient as membership provides a place for Portugal in Europe that the EU is not expected to secure. Having the status of territorial periphery and feelings of being a 'poor relative' in the EU family, Portugal takes full advantage of maintaining a central role in the European security agenda through NATO. Lisbon's support for the US, against a majority of NATO and EU member states (namely France and Germany), in invading Iraq in 2003 was paradigmatic of the priority of keeping a central place in the alliance. Likewise, the support to the US anti-missile shield in Central Europe, against Russian disproval, is an example of the importance of NATO. In the NATO Lisbon summit of 2010, Portuguese government proposed to extend the shield to south-west Europe. The country is actively participating in NATO air policing of the Baltic region and was even in lead of the mission from May to August 2018 (NATO Allied Air Command 2018).

The argument of Western solidarity has been advanced by small members, including Estonia, to beef up NATO presence in the Baltic States since the annexation of Crimea. Portugal has supported this argument, but not due to a commonality of views on the Russian threat. The position was rather instrumental: Lisbon looks for presence on all fronts to get reciprocity in other agendas. It is

a kind of 'diffuse solidarity' to achieve transversal credibility. Public opinion in Portugal is more sensitive to threats coming from the South as compared to the East, and Lisbon would like to see these challenges tackled by NATO (migrations, terrorism, fragile states), but there is a perception that members such as the Baltics have a predominant focus on Russia. In the NATO context, this divergent focus, as well as the marked differences about threat perceptions, make solidarity a univectoral asset to be provided mainly to countries under Russian threat, leaving limited space to practical solidarity that Portugal would like to enact, and to see enacted by others, with the objective of broadening the scope of action of the Alliance, in particular, to face the challenges emanating from the South, and thus producing security in a truly 360º approach.[5]

The example of the negotiations of EU sanctions against Russia is also illustrative of the Portuguese diffuse utilization of solidarity. Although Lisbon was not in favour of a hard position against Moscow, Portugal promoted a version of sanctions in accordance with international law. In face of what the country perceived as disproportionate positions from the Baltic member states, Lisbon supported the list of targeted persons as far as solid proof could be produced in front of the European Court of Justice.[6]

In the economic realm, Lisbon was eager to manage the financial bailout by the EU institutions to get reassurances in the belonging to the EU core. The ruling elite assumed the country's responsibility for its economic dire strait and was eager to detach itself from the Greek crisis and to appear as a trustable partner deserving EU solidarity. From 2011 to 2014, the centre-right government promoted the idea of national sacrifices in the light of the EU's importance for structural development, taking Athens as a counter-example of peripheralization (Portas 2012; Passos Coelho 2012). Ultimately, Portugal found a more balanced position when a group of 30 well-known individuals published a manifesto calling for solidarity with Greece and lambasted Portuguese and Europeans attitudes toward Greece (Lusa 2012). Ultimately, the 2018 appointment of the Minister of Finance as president of the Eurogroup and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the European Stability Mechanism confirmed the reposition towards the core.

The issue of solidarity has, thus, also been instrumental in Portuguese discourses of inclusion in both the EU and NATO. However, the issue is less politicized and securitized as compared to the Estonian's views on European normative power and the Ukrainian crisis. Although solidarity helps the country to confirm its belonging to the normative cores, Lisbon also sees solidarity in a more instrumental way to achieve inclusion in multiple political forums by gaining leverage and participating in negotiations.

5. Redefining and resignifying europe

In this section, we venture to see how both countries contribute to the debate on the future of Europe and help rethinking the very idea of European integration.

There are at least two policy areas where ***Estonia***, ascertaining its functional centrality as a locomotive of important changes, simultaneously reshapes Europe and infuses in it new meanings. One area embraces Estonian digital policies, and the second one deals with innovations in cybersecurity.

First, Estonia heavily invests in its technological advancement as a playground for 'successful cooperation between the public and private sector in order to develop an e-lifestyle and guarantee the secure use of cyberspace' (Pernik 2015). Estonia was home to Skype before it sold for $8.5 billion and has the most start-ups per capita in Europe. It has become a model for advanced nations trying to learn from e-Estonia. Yet more important are those areas – such as e-residency – where technological progress fosters societal changes beyond national borders. Foreign citizens can become electronic residents of Estonia, and access the wide range of e-services on offer. E-residency holders can open bank accounts, and operate a business in Estonia at a distance.[7] Over 17,000 foreigners, including Germany's Chancellor and Japan's Prime Minister, have become e-residents, creating approximately 1,000 new businesses (Blue Ocean Team 2018). Moreover, the

European Commission recognized digital signature as corresponding to EU technical standards (Pau 2016). EU's Digital Economy and Society Index 2017 (European Commission 2017) rates Estonia as first in providing online public services and globally in the 9th position.

In the same vein, in 2017 Tallinn opened a 'digital', or 'data Embassy' in Luxemburg where Estonian government can host all its electronic data (Digital Luxembourg 2017). Estonian state can continue operating outside its borders in case of a war or a natural disaster. The 'embassy' safeguards what Estonian society depends on – its online data related infrastructure, laws, patients' health records, etc. (Pommereau 2017).

A second field in which Estonian agency is influential for the entire Europe is cybersecurity. Estonia's bid for centrality in cyber-security has an impact on the whole Europe: 'Estonia is a donor in terms of cyber security, sharing its knowledge about an open information society, e-governance, e-democracy, cyber security and ICT solutions' (Pernik 2015). Based on these facts, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Estonian President (2006–2016), concluded: 'In this Hobbesian world of the internet, Estonians are more secure and enjoy greater freedom, because we have taken care to offer our citizens security where it matters and let them be free where there is no need to force a fake security' (Ilves 2017).

However, the Estonian government acknowledges that 'only a handful of our proposed initiatives have made it through the EU's decision-making process and are now in effect… What Europe needs now is strong political commitment to take the remaining decisions in key areas such as copyright, telecommunications, cyber security and the free flow of non-personal data' (Ansip 2017). Attempts to push Europe in a direction harmonious with Estonian interests at certain point leads to exceptionalization of Estonia: 'we have now an information autobahn with 4.2 billion people driving on it, but only the cars owned by Estonians have license plates' (Ansip 2017).

Estonia is a particularly pertinent example of a previously peripheralized state who 'came to influence the broader NATO agenda' (Studemeyer 2018, 3). In security policy, Estonia has been 'more Catholic than the Pope himself (arguing that – Authors) decisiveness and a demonstration of strength are the main features that have been lacking in the Western response' (Reinsalu et al. 2015). First, Ilves was one of the few European leaders who in 2014 directly called partners to admit the collapse of the decade-long collective agreements upon which security in Europe has been based (Security in 2014). On numerous occasions, he reiterated the dangers of realist geopolitics void of a strong normative foundation. In this vein, he claimed that the EU is a federation of democratic states and an embodiment of Kant's liberal thinking.

The reassertion of the basic liberal assumptions implies polemics with some opponents within the West. A major quilting point in this respect is Ukraine that, in Ilves' words, 'is not an East European issue. The scepticism in our region about authoritarian Russia can no longer be dismissed as the 'East Europeans suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome' (Security in 2014). This argument is pointed against those who diminish the importance of the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, and promote a 'business-as-usual' policy toward Moscow: 'we would not sell our principles … It is time for Europe to reconsider its pragmatist, often ethically dubious gas-fuelled relations with Moscow' (Ibid).

By promoting its vision of security across the Euro-Atlantic space, Estonian diplomacy assumes that Western reaction to Russia after the 2008 war with Georgia was not tough enough (BBC News 2017): 'When I see people saying "economic relations are too important for us, we should ease the sanctions against Russia," when we have had something we last saw with the *Anschluss* of Austria, then I ask: where are our values?' (Ilves 2016). In this vein, in the opinion of the former Estonian President Lennart Meri, 'the illusion that normalising relations with Russia can be achieved as easily as transactions in a notary public's office was created due to the naiveté of Western politicians' (The President 2016). A similar approach concerns lapses in European anti-terror policies: 'We cannot allow there to be countries in Europe that are warned about terrorism, even with concrete details of people, names and so on, and do nothing' (Ilves 2016).

By the same token, Estonian foreign policymakers remain sceptical about their neighbours' contribution to European defence: 'NATO members and non-members face different security

situations. This is something our unallied northern neighbours should consider. Russians are Finland's biggest minority (70,000) and thus the Russian Federation always has a *casus belli* handy … Latvia's 0.9 per cent and Lithuania's 0.8 per cent are not just an embarrassment, but alarming, potentially disastrous levels in light of the recent Russian aggression' (Is This 2014). Continuing this critical note, the former Estonian Ambassador to Sweden concluded: 'Sweden is not really a European country. No war has been waged on Swedish territory for 200 years…modern Swedes often do not understand the attitudes and policies of other states, supported by dramatic historical experience … Estonians have sharper vision and more sensitive judgement than several other European countries, Sweden included' (Joeruut 2015). The political repercussions of this narrative makes a strong case of Estonia's membership in both the EU and NATO, yet leads to questioning Estonia's eagerness to rebrand itself as a Nordic country.

Thus, for Estonia 'in the foreseeable future, the core of diplomacy must be dominated by security policy' (Mihkelson 2016), and Tallinn pushes NATO to be more pro-active in 'the prepositioning of military equipment in the Baltic states, securing air defence, assuring control over areas of operations, transforming the peacetime air policing mission into an air defence one when necessary, and achieving the permanent presence of the US Air Force and Navy' (Marmei 2017). And it claims to achieve results: 'Estonia's arguments were proved to be right and timely …NATO was changed by the serious effort of Estonia and other allies with a similar viewpoint.' (Rock'n'Roll).

Although ***Portugal*** has been contributing to the digital and cyber agenda of both the EU and NATO, it has not been as visible as other countries, notably Estonia. The country has knowledge to contribute, and therefore there is potential for Lisbon to invest in getting more visibility in Europe.[8] This might be explained by the detachment of the digital sphere in Portugal from security concerns, contrarily to Estonia that hosts the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) and has marketed the digital dimension as the core priority of its 2017 EU Presidency. A signal of Portuguese interest is the first participation of the country in the 2017 Lockshields exercise conducted by the CCDCOE and its application to become a member of the Center. Another example is the ongoing construction of a NATO training facility on strategic communications near Lisbon. Seen as a domain of security, for Portugal, the cyber dimension also entails the need for close cooperation between the EU and NATO.[9]

In the meantime, there are two paths through which Portugal influences the European core. On the one hand, Portugal balances its peripheral position with its historical global experience as a maritime country, central for the Atlantic geopolitics. This is translated into a distinctive policy of the sea that is able to build bridges with the rest of the world (Alves 2017).

On the other hand, the country brands itself in terms of its diplomatic capacity to develop multilateral relations and serve as an honest broker. Thus, Portugal organized the first EU-Africa summit during its 2007 presidency and, the same year, the Barroso Commission pushed for the EU Integrated Maritime Policy (Ferreira-Pereira 2008). Since 2006, the European Maritime Safety Agency is hosted in Lisbon resulting from a strategy that commenced in 1998 when Lisbon World Exposition – under the motto 'Oceans, a Heritage for the Future' – marked the five hundredth anniversary of Vasco da Gama's arrival in India (Cunha 2011).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that 'the more uncertain the world situation, the more we need multilateralism… (This is – Authors) the true principle of our foreign policy' (Santos Silva 2017, 43). In this vein, Portugal has explored the possibility of deepening the relationship with Spain through, for example, exemplary EU cross-border cooperation between the North of Portugal and Galicia, home to around 6 million people (Cancela 2010). The framework for these ties of friendship and a permanently pacified relationship has been possible due to Brussels' mediation.

Diplomatic skills of high-ranking Portuguese officials can also be considered as bringing Portugal closer to the core's agenda-setting. António Guterres was High Commissioner for Refugees and he is nowadays Secretary-General of the United Nations. António Vitorino has in 2018 been elected director general of the International Organization of Migration. Durão Barroso presided over a decade (2004–2014) in the European Commission in times of EU constitutional reforms. The country also won

a seat as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, bidding versus Germany and Canada in 2011.

The Portuguese defence of the independence of East Timor in 1999, a former colony, attests to the international influence that a small European state can have when it comes to a political use of the Lusophone geography and principles of multilateralism. In the words of former ambassador to Indonesia, 'the strategic articulation on all fronts – EU, UN, ASEAN, Indonesia, political responsibility, diplomats, NGOs, media and trust in the cause (East Timorese) – was essential and contributed to project Portugal' (Gomes 2008) on the global scene. Therefore, Portugal's contribution to the core is multilateral in a scale larger than Europe, which places Portugal in a group of frontrunners[10] and helps to recreate the Atlantic community in a broader sense to include the South, namely Africa, by promoting the CPLP and the Ibero-American community.

6. Conclusions

In concluding remarks, we come back to the three research questions we intended to discuss in this piece, and see how they can contribute to the current debate on small states' marginality. First, we have drawn a distinction between Portugal's and Estonia's geographic peripherality and their eagerness to make use of the resources of marginality – yet not in the sense of blackmailing the core, but rather by investing in a stronger EU and NATO solidarity and mutual protection. However, the loyalty to the original principles of the EU and NATO does not make their belonging to Europe's core unproblematic. This is particularly the case of Estonia where after parliamentary election of March 2019 the right-wing anti-EU EKRE (Conservative People's Party) became part of the government, which immediately provoked a heated discussion on the evident and well accentuated incompatibility of this party's nationalism and EU-skepticism with smooth and constructive relations between Tallinn and Brussels.

Second, we have concluded that both countries are conscious of the threats coming from their peripheral location, and seek to overcome these threats through investments into normative commitments that would allow them to remain at the normative core of the European project and trans-Atlantic security relations. In spite of obvious dissimilarities between the two countries when it comes to historical patterns of centrality and marginality, nowadays they face similar challenges within European and Euro-Atlantic spaces of belonging. Both Portugal as a former global empire and the centre of today's Lusophone world, with a maritime location, and Estonia as a victim of past imperial policies of its neighbours, currently develop similar policies to institutionally associate themselves with the Western core, especially in security domain.

Third, we have found out that the two countries differ from each other in discursively constructing Europe. Portugal puts much stronger emphasis on its financial performance within the Eurozone, rather than on shared political values. In the case of Estonia norms and principles as the basis for Western solidarity – above all vis-à-vis, Russia – often trump material considerations. In other words, Estonia defines the concept of Europe predominantly in normative and thus political terms, while Portugal does so with a strong emphasis on economic benefits and its bridging role to the rest of the Atlantic at large. This distinction is instrumental for explaining a stronger EU-centrism in Estonian foreign policy in comparison to Portugal whose diplomacy aims at striking a balance and finding points of conjunction between Atlantic, European, Lusophone and multilateral commitments. From a policy perspective, one may see that the two countries contribute to the political vitality of this region and enhance its ability to protect its edges from different security threats based on interdependence and solidarity. From a more academic viewpoint, one may argue that the cores are multivectorial and always changing according to the context, thus producing a specific synthesis of variable centralities in different times.

Notes

1. This view is articulated by the Portuguese diplomats, namely the Portuguese ambassador to NATO, Luís de Almeida Sampaio, interviewed in Brussels, in November 2017.

2. Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Tome and Principe and Timor-Leste.
3. Interview conducted in NATO Headquarters, Brussels, in November 2017.
4. Interview with the Portuguese ambassador in the Political and Security Committee, in Brussels, November 2017.
5. Interview with the Portuguese Ambassador to NATO, Luís de Almeida Sampaio, Brussels, November 2017.
6. Interview with a Portuguese diplomat in Moscow, in May 2018.
7. E-Residency is managed athttps://e-estonia.com.
8. Interviews with Portuguese officials and an Estonian official conducted in Brussels, in November 2017.
9. Interview conducted with the Portuguese ambassador in the Political and Security Committee, in Brussels, in November 2017.
10. Retrieved from the allocution of a Portuguese diplomat in Braga, May 2018.

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