

# A systematic review on Post-Cold War Eastern European Patterns Led by Constructivism

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**Abstract.** This article will explain the reasons why the former European socialist countries chose to embrace the West after the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, and the post-Cold War Eastern European Patterns Led by constructivism. This will find a more plausible theory in the theory of international relations to explain what happened in a specific area in this specific historical period. Literature review is applied in this article to explore definitions of theories and specific policies and data across countries. This article uses some authoritative books on international relations, as well as materials from the World Trade Organization. Some of these materials are the most targeted data provided by the International Trade Organizations to indicate the policy tendency of former Yugoslav countries. In the article, the cases from different regions point out that constructivism is the most reasonable explanation for the former European socialist countries to embrace the West after the dramatic change in Eastern Europe. The article will provide some more specific policy trends in the history of the region for the situation in Eastern Europe that has gradually heated up in recent times. Under the influence of constructivism, the vast majority of former socialist countries in Eastern Europe invariably adopt pro-Western behaviors. There are many reasons for constructivism to become the mainstream theory of diplomacy in Eastern Europe, including the legacy of history and the influence of the "Iron Curtain".

**Keywords:** Constructivism, realism, liberalism, Cold War, Croatia, Baltic States, Central Europe, Balkans

## 1. Introduction

Although the authority of liberalism and realism as the two core theories in international relations was challenged by other theories in the period after the end of the Cold War, these two theories remained the mainstream in international relations. Liberal supporters believe that peace and harmony between countries can be implemented. However, when the International Alliance disintegrates in 1939, a new theory has explained the continuity of the war. This theory is later called realism. Realist believes that chaos and fear have dominated international relations. The theory of constructivism emerged in the mid-1990s, is a serious challenge of the theoretical paradigm of dominants and liberalism [1]. Constructivism is considered an intermediate standing theory. Constructivists emphasize the importance of values and common interests between individuals interacted on the global stage. Alexander Wendt described the relationship between agents (individuals) and structures (such as the state) as one in which structures not only constrain agents but also construct their identities and interests. His famous phrase 'anarchy is what states make of it' sums this up well. Another way to explain this, and to explain the core of constructivism, is that the essence of international relations exists in the interactions between people [1].

This article will try to explain why the former European socialist countries embraced the West after the upheaval in Eastern Europe, in order to provide readers with more information to understand the complicated European situation in recent times. To underscore this point, this article will provide a more in-depth explanation of the Baltic States, Central Europe, and the Balkans. Of the three regions, the Baltic has the smallest volume and was controlled for a long time since the time of Peter the Great

in 1721 [2]. Central Europe has closer ties with the West in terms of politics and economy. The ethnic and religious issues in the Balkans are the most complex. The first part teases out reasons and cases where realism is not the dominant factor. The second part lists reasons and cases why institutionalism under liberalism is not the dominant factor. The third part will argue and give examples of why constructivism dominated the upheaval in Eastern Europe. In this way, it will be possible to better understand the post-Cold War Eastern European landscape dominated by constructivism.

## **2. Realism**

Realism, a theory that claims to explain international political reality, emphasizes the nature of human egoism and the lack of political constraints imposed by central authority over the state. The realist point of view is that the highest goal of the state is survival, which explains that the behavior of the state is judged more according to the ethics of responsibility than the moral principle [3]. But realism cannot explain why the former European socialist countries embraced the West after the drastic changes in Eastern Europe.

### **2.1 Examples of three Baltic states**

The case of the three Baltic countries can be analyzed. The three Baltic states have long been under direct or indirect control by Russia (the Soviet Union). After the end of the Northern War in 1721, Russia won Estonia and Latvia from Sweden, which opened the prelude to the 200-year rule of the two countries. In addition, Lithuania also divided Poland for the third time in 1795. annexed by Russia. Following the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1918, the three Baltic states gained their independence, only to be annexed by the Soviet Union again in the 1940s and not regained their independence until the Soviet Union disintegrated at the end of the Cold War [2]. The three Baltic states refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) after the collapse of the Soviet Union and struggled to wean themselves off their political and economic dependence on Russia. After independence from the Soviet Union, the three countries began to move towards the process of joining North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and at the same time regarded Russia as a revisionist country that inherited the "aggressive nature" of the Soviet Union. Undoubtedly, what cannot be erased from the collective memory of the three countries is the "historical grievances and cultural differences" against Russia since the Tsarist Russia period, which has become the main reason for their "return to Europe" [4]. But choices made because of "historical grievances and cultural differences" are clearly inconsistent with the states' actions advocated by realism are judged according to the ethics of responsibility rather than by moral principles.

### **2.2 The example of Croatia**

Another example that makes realism unreasonable is Croatia in the Balkans. The complex relations between the Balkan countries have lasted for thousands of years, from the war between the First Bulgarian Empire and the Byzantine Empire, to the two Balkan Wars, to World War I and World War II, with complex religious, ethnic, and cultural conditions [5]. Croatia actively sought to join the European Union after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it became necessary to join the World Trade Organization as a prerequisite for joining the European Union. During its accession to the WTO a series of compromises on import tariffs made by Croatia in order to join the World Trade Organization [6]. Croatia's market openness has increased, but this will have an impact on the underdeveloped domestic industry. This behavior has led Croatia to expose its not comprehensive or strong industrial system to European countries such as Germany and France that have a complete and strong industrial system. Those products from Germany and France with better market competitiveness will inevitably eat into the living space of Croatian local products. Such behavior is inconsistent with the nature of self-interest as explained by liberalism. Based on the analysis of two cases, liberalism cannot explain why the former European socialist countries embraced the West after the drastic changes in Eastern Europe.

### 3. Liberal institutionalism

As the major challenger to realism, liberal institutionalism evolved in the mid-twentieth century [7]. Shortly after this, Robert Keohane created the doctrine of neoliberal institutionalism and formally challenged the hegemony of realist theory with Joseph Nye in 1977 [8]. Neoliberal institutionalism recognizes that states are the only important actors in international relations, that the interests of states are not irreconcilable, and that in an anarchic international system, states can cooperate with each other through international mechanisms [9-10].

#### 3.1 three Baltic states

As newly independent countries long under Russian rule, participation in international cooperation could bring unparalleled benefits in such a dangerously anarchic international society. According to neoliberal institutionalist theory, the escalation of military concepts and the high cost of war due to the renewal of weapons, it is an extremely difficult act for a small country like the three Baltic states to solidify its defense by developing its own military power [7,11]. In this case, therefore, joining an international or regional organization with military cooperation seems to be a more cost-effective option. Moreover, increases in inter-nation economic contacts left states increasingly dependent upon one another for the attainment of such national goals as growth, full employment, and price stability, this also provides more reasons for the three Baltic states to actively seek membership in NATO and the EU [7].

However, when the three countries joined NATO, their behavior began to contradict the neoliberal institutionalist perspective. During the Cold War, the fundamental purpose of NATO was to "guarantee the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations," and the Soviet Union (Russia) was the imaginary enemy of NATO under this concept [12-13]. However, due to the existence of closer economic ties with Russia and other issues, the three Baltic states began to adjust their policies toward Russia after joining NATO, appropriately drawing closer to Russia. [11]. The three Baltic states have agreed to the construction of a new Russian-German oil and gas pipeline, which they have attacked as an "evil pipeline," and they are also in contact with Russia about the Baltic rail project [14]. The behavior of the three Baltic states is inconsistent with the purposes of NATO, which clearly contradicts the claims about institutionalism and international cooperation. It also shows that neoliberal institutionalism is not the main doctrine that dominates the diplomatic direction of the three Baltic states after independence.

#### 3.2 Central Europe

The case of the five Central European countries seems to be seen as a strengthened version of the Baltic States: equally aspirational to the West, while more sharply mismatched with neoliberal institutionalism. Except for the GDR, the remaining four countries have joined the EU and NATO.

For example, Poland's annual military spending is already as high as 2.2% of GDP in 2020 and is expected to rise to 3 % of GDP in 2023. Such high spending is inconsistent with the neo-liberal institutionalist doctrine that "the cost of war is too high, and that cooperation will reduce costs and improve defense security" [7]. Moreover, Poland's economy is closer to Russia than to the three Baltic states and Russia: Russia is the third largest importer and exporter of Polish trade.

Moreover, Hungary, as a member of the EU, has repeatedly made resolutions that are contrary to the attitudes or interests of the EU community. On June 4, 2021, Hungary used its "veto power" to prevent the EU from issuing a statement on Hong Kong. This is the third time in two months that Hungary has used its veto power to block an EU statement on China. IN addition, at the beginning of April this year, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán also publicly expressed his opposition to the EU's boycott of Russian gas.

### 3.3 Balkan countries

The Balkan region has complex ethnic and religious problems. Because this region was also heavily influenced by the Soviet Union prior to the Eastern European upheaval, it has strong ties to Russia, as did the previous two regions. In order not to make each case very similar, we have chosen one of the farthest countries from Russia in this region - Croatia, as a case of the Balkans.

As early as after gaining independence, Croatia actively sought to join the WTO and achieved this goal in 2001. In the process, however, Croatia has made many concessions in order to achieve its goals as quickly as possible. We can see that Slovenia is demanding that Croatia assume debts of the government of the former Yugoslavia that do not correspond to its due quota, which clearly runs counter to what is said about institutionalism and international cooperation. Croatia needs to accept the calculation of the International Monetary Fund, and assumes 28.49% of the undistributed debt of the former Yugoslavia. Croatia accepted 28.49% of the legacy debt [15].

Moreover, Germany extended unilateral diplomatic recognition to Croatia and Slovenia in direct contravention of the preferences of its European Community partners in 1991. So, this action was regarded as a betrayal of international cooperation, as it did not comply with the values and norms that the European Community has always upheld. It seems to prove a false doctrine about the importance of international cooperation [16].

## 4. Constructivism

Constructivism in the theory of international relations advocates the application of a sociological perspective to world politics, focusing on the social normative structure rather than the economic and material structure existing in international relations, and emphasizing that concepts, norms and culture play an important role in the formation of national behaviors and interests, especially the constructive role [17]. Moreover, Alexander Winter proposed two concepts of constructivism: first, the social structure of human beings is shaped by the mainstream view of human society, rather than driven by material forces; second, Characters appearing on the social stage are influenced by their identity and interests, not by their natures [18].

Winter divides the orientation of state behavior in international relations into three parts: identity, benefit and behavior. Identity refers to the content of who or what an actor is. Benefit refers to the needs of actors. Benefit presupposes identity because the actor cannot know what he needs until he knows who he is. The rest of our analysis of Eastern Europe and constructivism will revolve around these three elements.

### 4.1 Three Baltic states

#### 4.1.1 Religious identity

Russia controlled the three Baltic states for more than 200 years but failed to bridge the religious divide between them. In the 12th and 13th centuries, the Livonia and Teutonic orders-controlled Estonia and Latvia. During the reformation in the 16th century, both countries converted to The Lutheran sect of Protestantism. In modern times, the people of the two countries mainly believe in Lutheranism and Catholicism [19-20]. Lithuania has long been united with Poland in history as a unified Polish-Lithuanian kingdom, deeply influenced by Poland, so its religion is mainly Catholic [21].

As the eastern neighbor of the Three Baltic states, Russia is an Orthodox State. The Baltic states therefore lack a sense of Russian religious identity. Catholicism and Lutheranism are the main faiths in many western countries. Because of their religious identity, the three Baltic states have a greater sense of identity as "Western countries" in this regard, which leads them to consider the benefits of their exposure to the West and influences their behavior, such as joining organizations (NATO), to actively engage with the West.

#### **4.1.2 Cultural (National) identity**

Western regimes ruled the three Baltic states from the very beginning of their national identity. Before Russia ruled the three Baltic states, the West was in control of the region. They have been in control of the Baltic Sea since before Russia formed a unified state. Until 1721, after the Northern War, Russia seized Estonia and Latvia from Sweden. IN addition to Lithuania, which was annexed by Russia in 1795. After a brief period of independence after World War I, they were annexed by the Soviet Union in the 1940s, only to regain their independence at the end of the Cold War when the Soviet Union collapsed [19-21].

By the time Russia finally took control of the three Baltic states, Western culture had thoroughly influenced the region, while this cultural identification shifted further toward obscurantist nationalism. And this nationalism grew more and more intense along with the history of two annexations by Russia, and then translated into the identity of not being Russian (Soviet) but Estonian (Latvian, Lithuanian) oneself. Thus, we can see that when the Soviet Union faced the crisis of dissolution, the three Baltic states took the lead in waving the flag of independence [22]. It is this identification with Western culture identity and national identity that influenced much of the behavior of the Baltics from the Cold War to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

#### **4.2 Central Europe**

It is said that Central European countries have joined the EU and NATO, because they are not only close to the West, but even have the same identity of being "Western" countries.

First, GDR. This country was originally part of the German nation-state that was severed hard under the Yalta system. So, in 1990, after the successful negotiations between the western countries and the Soviet Union, Germany was reunified. and the GDR, as far as it was concerned, was naturally accepted as a part of the Western countries [23].

Although Hungary is dominated by Magyar people who are different from the West, Hungary has two identities to the West: religious identity, historical identity. In terms of religion, up to 66.2% of Hungarians are Catholic. And the historical identity is related to Hungary's neighboring country, Austria, which is seen as a Western country. Hungary and Austria were once part of the core of the Austro-Hungarian Empire [24].

The remaining Central European countries have all long maintained various identities with the West for various reasons, such as the Czech and Slovakia having been members of the Holy Roman Empire, and Poland having long defended the Western European world against Ottoman invasion. In general, the links between Central Europe and the West in its development are very much in line with Mr. Winter's constructivist view of "identity, interests and behavior".

#### **4.3 Balkan countries**

With the exception of Slovenia and Croatia (Catholic), which have a Western religious identity, the entire Balkan region has long been under the rule of Orthodox and Islamic civilizations. So, most Balkan countries lack a cultural, historical and national identity with the West. In fact, the Balkan countries show a sense of identity mainly in the form of a collective identity of "European identity" (excluding Russia) [25]. European identity refers to the transcendence of the existing national identities of European peoples on the basis of peace, equality and mutual respect, mainly involving European cultural identity, EU citizenship and EU diplomatic and defense identity [26].

Although this sense of identity is still only in the developmental stage, the common goal and the pressure originating from Russia are indeed exacerbating this trend. Russia has always had ideas about the Balkans and Eastern Europe in general, and after the events in Crimea in 2014 and the war with Ukraine this year, the Balkan countries' fears about Russia have increased further, which in turn has contributed to a "European identity"[27].

## 5. Conclusion

Realism is the dominant doctrine in the diplomacy of many countries today, but for the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, their many non-interest-oriented actions prove that realism is not what these countries uphold. Moreover, these former Eastern Europe socialist countries have to some extent embodied the neoliberal institutionalist theory in their active participation in organizations associated with the West. But in the process, both the actions that defy the organization's purpose and the close ties with Russia, the hypothetical enemy of the West, prove that neoliberal institutionalism cannot explain the moves of the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe to embrace the West after the end of the Cold War.

Unlike the two previous doctrines, constructivism can inform us about the reasons why the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe actively embraced the West very well. In the three Baltic states, religious and cultural identity is a major component, and the annexation from Russia has intensified the formation of national identity. For the five Central European countries, they had long been part of the West, except for a brief period of socialism. The Balkans may lack this long history of Western identity, but an acquired "European identity" is also developing. It is these identifications with different perspectives of Western identity that influence the interests and even the behavior of the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

Of course, there are exceptions among the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, such as Ukraine, which is pro-Western but not dominated by constructivism, and Serbia and Belarus, which remain somewhat distant from the West because of historical issues. But there is no doubt that under the influence of constructivism, the vast majority of the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe coincidentally adopted a pro-Western behavior. There are many reasons why constructivism became the dominant theory of diplomacy in Eastern Europe, ranging from historical legacies to the influence of the "iron curtain" that served as a confrontation between the two sides of the Cold War. Governments and international organizations need to pay more attention to the role of the doctrine while conducting diplomatic activities in Eastern Europe, tapping into the "sense of identity".

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