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To the Executive Board of the 2019 Arenberg-Coimbra Group Prize

With the current application, I would kindly ask you to consider me as a candidate for the 2019 Arenberg-Coimbra Group Prize. I graduated from the Master's Programme of Baltic Sea Region Studies at the University of Tartu in June 2018 after having successfully defended my thesis "Nordic-Baltic Perceptions of Shared Security" (supervised by Eva Piirimäe, PhD). During the 2-year MA programme in Tartu, I had a great opportunity to spend a semester abroad through the Erasmus+ exchange programme, and I chose to do so at the University of Aarhus in Denmark. I studied in Aarhus from August 2017 to January 2018 and participated in their Master's programme in Political Science. The experience of studying in Aarhus was greatly beneficial for developing, conducting research for and writing my thesis, complemented my studies and skills overall, and has allowed me to successfully start a career in the field of my studies. In the following paragraphs, I will shortly present my experience of added academic value by the Erasmus+ exchange – firstly, I will give an overview of my thesis, and then highlight the influence the exchange semester in another Coimbra Group university had on my Master's thesis.

The focus point of my Master's thesis was the Nordic and Baltic countries' perceptions of shared security in the changed security environment after the year 2014. As the aggressive international behaviour, threatening statements and military strengthening of Russia have increased the security risks in the area since then, the security perceptions of the Nordic-Baltic countries and the security relations between them have become subjects of influence, and hence served as an interesting case study of security perceptions within a region. The research examined the Nordic-Baltic security environment from two perspectives: regarding the countries' affiliation to strategic aims of NATO as the key security actor in the region, and regarding the regional Nordic-Baltic cooperation. As two central research questions, the thesis proposed the following: 1) how do Nordic and Baltic countries relate to NATO's strategic aims and objectives?; and 2) what are Nordic and Baltic countries' regional

cooperation interests in the changed security environment? To answer these, the thesis placed the current security situation of Baltic and Nordic countries and NATO into the theory of regional security complexes, relying on the discourse of the Copenhagen School of international relations. The empirical analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis and was based on the strategic concept of NATO, adopted in 2010, and the most recent official national strategic documents on security and defence adopted in each of the seven countries of Nordic-Baltic area – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

As a result of the research, some central findings were laid out. The Nordic and Baltic countries' strategic aims in security and defence have a lot in common with NATO's strategic aims. By and large, majority of the aims of NATO are also represented in the Nordic-Baltic countries' security aims. The extent to which the countries' national aims concur with NATO's strategic aims does not differ significantly by country, neither does it depend on whether the country in question is a member state of NATO or merely a partner. What was noted from the analysis is that aims related to defence and deterrence appear most important and relevant for the countries. Additionally, the Baltic states seem to be more concerned about deterrence and nuclear balance than the Nordic countries, but also emphasise energy security and openness towards potential candidate states and partners. The Nordic countries direct their emphasis more towards crisis management and security threats with global range. These differences can be traced back to different past experiences, historical background, and different availability of resources. As for the second research question, the Baltic and Nordic countries' security cooperation interests were indicated to be high, and this tendency to be at least partly connected to the change of security environment in the region and intensification of threats from Russia. All seven countries' security strategies indicate aims and objectives regarding cooperation with the Nordic and the Baltic countries, six of them also in regard to Nordic-Baltic multilateral cooperation. The key collective efforts include joint military projects, trainings and exercises, energy and infrastructure security, and general enhancement of cooperation. Four countries directly refer to Russia's behaviour as a motivation behind enhancement of security cooperation between the states. Hence, although the countries' self-perception may rather follow identification with either the Nordic or Baltic group, the Nordic-Baltic countries are interested in working together towards

re-establishing stability in the area. The thesis also had two empirical assumptions: that member states of NATO have higher strategic intersections with NATO compared to partner states of NATO in the Nordic-Baltic area, and that military strengthening and aggressive behaviour of Russia makes the countries of the Nordic-Baltic area aim towards enhanced cooperative security efforts in the area. As a result of the empirical analysis, the first assumption did not find confirmation, while the second one was confirmed. To sum up, the Nordic-Baltic countries' security perceptions include both identifying with the greater Euro-Atlantic community as well as with the regional cooperative efforts. The countries are well eager to work together towards their common aims in security and defence on both levels, even despite not all belonging to a unifying security structure.

The MA thesis has contributed to filling a gap in literature by looking at how NATO's objectives have been integrated into the member and partner states' national defence policies, and by providing a case study of the Nordic-Baltic area within the regional security complex theory. On theoretical level, the thesis has confirmed that within a regional (sub)complex, strengthening of a common threat brings countries closer together in cooperation based on amity, but disproved that states which identify with the global power more closely are also more eager to relate to it strategically. Furthermore, the thesis has mapped the main security aims of the Nordic-Baltic countries, their cooperation interests and strategic relating to NATO on national level, providing better understanding of the dynamics of the region's defence environment and NATO's role in it as well as providing comparative knowledge on the Nordic-Baltic countries' security aims.

The process of writing the thesis was quite challenging due to several reasons, e.g. the research relying on a wide range of primary sources in five different languages and the topic being closely knit to recent developments in international relations, making it a subject of change and a complex case for analysis. However, the result was a success – my thesis was very well received by the defence committee, graded as very good and awarded to be the best MA thesis of my programme in 2018. In many aspects, these achievements were possible thanks to my exchange semester in Aarhus University. Firstly, studying in a another university was a highly developing experience in terms of academic abilities. While Aarhus University is well known as a high-level research university, I was able to work even more closely with

different research methods. Analyzing academic papers thoroughly not only in content but also in research design was taken very seriously in the department, which prepared me very well for designing my own research for the thesis and gave me necessary skills to develop a strong methodology for my research project. Moreover, I was able to take courses on some topics that were not comprehensively dealt with at my home university, but provided me with necessary knowledge for the thesis. The international and diverse community of the university also gave me an opportunity to discuss my thoughts with a wide range of people, both students and professors, with different views, experiences, expertise and advice – great surroundings for developing fruitful research ideas.

What is more, studying in Denmark and living in a Danish-speaking environment were extremely beneficial for my language skills. The primary sources of my thesis also included documents in Danish (as well as other Nordic languages), and hence speaking it well enough to be able to understand and analyse the text was essential. In Aarhus, I was able to both participate in a Danish language course as well as practice my skills with native speakers, read in Danish on a daily basis, etc. – all of which helped me develop my language skills enough to be able to work with the sources in Danish. Lastly, having a firsthand experience in getting to know the Danish state and society has helped me understand the central research puzzle of my thesis a lot better, and hence conduct a deeper analysis and provide more accurate results. In order to work with perceptions, it is important to be able to see the problematique through the eyes of all actors. Having lived in a Baltic state for the most of my life, gaining closer insight of a Nordic country was necessary to diversify my views on the region, and I believe it has helped me compose a well balanced analysis on the topic.

Based on the abovementioned aspects, I consider my exchange semester in Aarhus University a significant influential factor in the success of my Master's thesis, and I hope it also serves as proof of how beneficial the close cooperation between Coimbra Group universities can be for a student.

Yours truly,



Janeli Harjus