



Thinking Geopolitically: NATO's Balancing Behavior Through Montenegro's Accession



Master's Thesis

By

Melike Kaptan

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Student Name: Melike Kaptan

Student Number: s1891405

First Supervisor: Dr. Marinko Bobic

Second Supervisor: Dr. Peter van Ham

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Abstract

On December 2nd, 2015, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) officials extended an invitation to Montenegro in order to initiate official talks with the government regarding its membership to the Alliance as its 29th member. While numerous proponents and opponents of the newest wave of eastern enlargement had analyzed the motivation behind NATO's foreign policies from different perspectives, a common ground was still present in their assessment: NATO's concerns about Montenegro lie mainly on the provisions of Article 10, since Montenegro does not possess the necessary material capabilities to provide a substantial contribution to the Alliance. In other words, NATO was using Montenegro as a political pawn to demonstrate to Russia the robustness of the Open Door Policy and the solidarity of the Alliance. Although Montenegro's accession to NATO can be considered, to some extent, as a response to Russia's involvement in the Ukraine war and its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, I propose that Montenegro's geopolitical importance was significant for NATO, and that NATO was acceding Montenegro as the result of a balancing act against a perceived Russian threat. In this thesis, in order to analyze this phenomenon, the Congruence Method of analysis was utilized on a single revelatory case; Montenegro. The Congruence Method allowed the utilization of two existing theories; the Balance of Threat Theory and the Classical Geopolitics, in a complementary manner. The results showed that in addition to the threat against the Euro-Atlantic integrity caused by the Ukraine war, Russia was also creating another perceived threat with its repetitive requests to establish a naval base in Montenegro. The thesis reveals that due to the uncertainties of the Syrian war, Russia was in search of an additional naval base in the Mediterranean Sea which led its strategic interests to the coasts of Montenegro, the only country in the Adriatic region which is not a NATO member. Consequently, the research concluded that NATO was balancing against a potential threat from Russia which stemmed from the geopolitical importance of Montenegro.

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Abbreviations

ANP	Annual National Program
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DF	Democratic Front
EU	European Union
FH	Freedom House
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ID	Intensified Dialogues
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
IPCP	Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program
IPP	Individual Partnership Program
ISAF	International Assistance Force in Afghanistan
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MONSTAT	Statistical Office of Montenegro
MTEP	Military Training and Exercise Program
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCC	Operational Capabilities Concept
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PFP	Partnership for Peace
PMF	Political-Military Framework
RIAC	Russian International Affairs Council
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement

1. Introduction

On December 2nd, 2015, the Foreign Ministers of the NATO Alliance invited Montenegro to initiate accession talks to adhere the nation as its 29th member (NATO News, 2015). Consequently, NATO had begun its fourth wave of eastward enlargement since the end of the Cold War. In other words, while NATO had been mainly focusing on the Western European countries during the Cold War era - excluding Turkey and Greece which joined the Alliance in 1952 - in the period starting from 1999, these policies became more Central and Eastern Europe oriented. In 1996, former US President Clinton announced that to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Alliance, NATO would run an enlargement campaign towards the former Soviet Bloc to eliminate the emergence of any possible "gray zone of insecurity" in Europe (Mitchell, 1996). Hence, after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact; NATO enlargement proceeded initially with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004; Albania and Croatia in 2009; and lastly Montenegro in 2017.

From the very first wave of the eastward enlargement, NATO faced adverse reactions from Russia (Shiffrinson, 2017: 109). It was apparent that Russia perceived NATO's actions as a threat. The Russian government declared that "the Russian strategy [...] is to undermine NATO effectiveness" and that "[w]e want to have NATO as weak as possible because we are not part of it" (Gordon, 1999). This derogatory rhetoric may suggest that Russia felt betrayed by NATO's insistence on approaching the former Yugoslav countries due to an alleged "promise" that NATO had made during the German unification talks in the 1990s. This "promise" was a mutual understanding between NATO and Russia in the sense that if Russia allowed and supported the unification of Germany then NATO, more specifically the United States, would never move beyond Germany or approach the communist States for membership (Kramer, 2009: 39). However, the chronology of the expansion of NATO clearly demonstrates that this is precisely what NATO did, starting from the former Warsaw countries and then moving beyond, towards the former Yugoslav States which added to the historical tensions between NATO and Russia (Wolff, 2015: 1105). Thus, despite the fear of provoking Russian aggression (Ibid: 1109) and

consequently leaving the overall security of Europe in a potentially precarious position, NATO is still displaying its persistence by moving forward under its prominent Open Door Policy.

NATO based this particular strategy on Article 10¹ of the Washington Treaty (NATO Official Website, 2017) which states that “NATO’s door remains open to any European country in a position to undertake the commitments and obligations of membership, and contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area” (Ibid). In other words, the provisions of Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949) enable the Member States to invite any state within the European continent to become a member without the involvement or the interference of any third party. From a critical perspective, the introduction of this policy and its legal framework that was adopted unanimously by the Member States can be considered as a clear demonstration of NATO's interest in expanding its territory within Europe, regardless of the reactions from "the third parties."

The third-party interference here refers mainly to Russia and its criticism over the NATO enlargement, particularly the accession of Montenegro. Russia most certainly tried to interfere, obstruct and stall NATO's invitation to Montenegro in 2015, through mobilizing pro-Russian protestors from the Democratic Front, a pro-Western government opposition party (Recknagel, 2015). Although Moscow denied its involvement in the uprising of the demonstrators, the Serbian Orthodox Church made a statement during a protest on how they “grieve over Montenegro's separation from Mother Russia” (Boskovic, 2015). Russia, on the other hand, continued its negative rhetoric towards the Montenegrin government’s willingness to join and threatened Montenegro to cease the joint projects with the state if the membership process were to become consolidated (Emmott & Siebold, 215). This would be a potentially hard blow to Montenegrin economy considering that Russia was operating the majority of Montenegro's foreign-owned companies and real estate businesses (Tomovic, 2016). Furthermore, according to the Russian International Affairs Council’s (RIAC) announcement, between 2001 and 2010, Russia had invested over 500 million dollars in Montenegro and that by 2012, 32% of the enterprises in

¹ 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, 34 UNTS 243, Article 10: “The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession”.

Montenegro owned by Russia (Pivovarenko, 2014). However, Russia did not limit its opposition campaign against NATO's invitation to Montenegro only to supporting protesters and recurring to economic threats. Right after the announcement of the invitation, the Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov, warned NATO that "Moscow has always said at various levels that the continuing expansion of NATO, the NATO military infrastructure eastward, of course, cannot help but lead to a response from the east, that is, from Russia, in terms of ensuring security and maintaining a parity of interests" (Russia Beyond, 2015). However, he did not specify what kind of response NATO should expect from Moscow.

It is a well-known fact that Russia had always perceived NATO's enlargement as a threat and NATO's continuation to do so had added fuel to the existing NATO-Russian tensions. The NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, tried to ease Russia's concerns by stating that Montenegro's accession to NATO was not a threat to Russia but an attempt to integrate the Western Balkans further into Europe (Buckley et al., 2015). The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, emphasized the importance of NATO's Open Door Policy by stating that Montenegro's accession is a step towards a Europe "that is whole, free and at peace" (Ibid). However, this campaign was still qualified as an "irresponsible policy" by Russia, and NATO's approach to Montenegro was defined as "a mistake, even a provocation" by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov (Teffer, 2015). The fact that Russia saw NATO's enlargement as a "reckless expansion of its geopolitical space, artificial division of states into 'us' and 'them'" (Buckley et al., 2015) speaks volumes about how isolated the country was feeling from Europe. However, as the Former NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said "[w]e also need to be realistic in recognizing that NATO will continue its Open Door policy -- not because of any intention to 'encircle' or marginalize Russia, but because respect for territorial integrity and the right of each sovereign state to freely decide security policy and alignments are fundamental if Europe is to be truly 'whole and free'" (NATO Speeches, 2009). From these statements, it is evident that this small Western Balkan country's pro-western trajectory had enlarged the rift between NATO and Russia, and once again brought a clear picture as to how they perceive one another.

In the view of these altercations between NATO and Russia, a rhetorical question comes to mind; is Montenegro solely a political pawn being manipulated between these two rivals, or is this

nation bringing something to the table for NATO? From the Montenegrin perspective, the country never wavered from its path towards NATO membership and demonstrated a level of commitment towards this since obtaining its sovereignty. It joined the Partnership of Peace (PfP) Program in 2006, and joined the Membership Action Plan (MAP) in 2009, all of which were the expected steps to be taken to obtain NATO membership (NATO Archive, 2017). Montenegro's progress; however, still does not explain to what extent the smallest former Yugoslav country (Darmanovic, 2007: 152) can provide a contribution to the Alliance with an average population of 600.000 and approximately 2.000 soldiers (Farkas, 2015). Robert E. Hunter, the former US Ambassador to NATO, explains NATO membership invitation to Montenegro as a "test case" of NATO's Open Door Policy as a response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea to its borders (Hunter, 2015). In fact, Mr. Hunter was resonating the views of several critiques at the time of this invitation, which coincided and with the war in Ukraine (Kaminski, 2015; Roberts, 2015; Lomonosov, 2016). Moreover, considering that "the Ukrainian crisis has created the deepest rift between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War" (Wolff, 2015: 1103), NATO's enlargement endeavors and its candidates were perceived as a geopolitical scheme of NATO to influence the Eastern European countries to create a line for containing Russia (French, 2014). However, pointing to Ukraine as the only reason for adhering Montenegro into NATO does not seem to do justice to Montenegro's potential contributions and years of arduous work to join the Alliance. More importantly, it does not take into account the geopolitical factors of Montenegro, particularly its location on the Adriatic Sea, which gives the state strategic importance within the context of geopolitics.

The concept of geopolitics here is considered mainly as a tool for foreign policy-making which combines the geographical position of a state, the strategies, and the strengths that come from it (Wolff, 2015: 1104). Furthermore, although NATO has been promoting the implementation of its Open Door Policy via Article 10 to adhere Eastern European states to its Alliance, the invitation to accede Montenegro hints both to its geopolitical attributes and NATO's balancing role behavior against Russia. Thus, to further analyze the phenomenon here described, the author of this thesis conducts an in-depth analysis on Montenegro and sets out to answer the following research question: *What is Montenegro's geopolitical importance in the NATO-Russia dispute, and how does it affect NATO's balancing behavior?*

This research question will allow the researcher to find out what is the role of Montenegro's geopolitical importance in the NATO-Russian dispute, and whether this importance has any effect on NATO's balancing behavior. In this light, the significance of the research is twofold; both on an academic level and a societal one.

On an academic level, the study will be conducted within the context of Montenegro's trajectory towards NATO; more specifically, the period when NATO extended an invitation to Montenegro in 2015 to initiate the official talks for a fully-fledged membership. While the NATO enlargement issue has been theoretically and empirically analyzed quite extensively through the years using approaches such as neoliberal institutionalism, constructivism, and neorealism, the newest member has yet to be addressed to any degree in the relevant literature. In fact, there is a striking absence in the relevant literature on Montenegro, and the limited number of studies on this case is almost exclusively framed within the emergence of the Russian threat derived from the Ukraine war. This research; however, is purposed to provide a satisfactory addition to this void in the literature and to present a unique theoretical approach to understanding the phenomenon.

Instead of to applying the common practice of testing a number of relevant theories to determine which one explains the phenomenon the best, this study will utilize a complementary approach to signify that theories do not have to be rivals, and that they can be used to support one another to provide a complete analytical framework and to bring forth a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in hand. In order to prove this point, the Balance of Threat Theory and Classical Geopolitics will be utilized. Both of these theories have somewhat been a victim of oversight when it comes to explaining NATO's balancing behavior in the face of a perceived threat, and more importantly, these theories have never been used in a complementary manner before. Hence, the complementary approach of the Balance of Threat Theory and Classical Geopolitics, combined with in-depth analysis on Montenegro, the reader will obtain a more comprehensive insight into the geopolitical importance of the sea, Montenegro's role in the NATO-Russian dispute and NATO's balancing behavior against a perceived threat. The readers will obtain further insight into the extent of the Open Door Policy of NATO applied to Montenegro and whether it has any links to the geopolitical importance of the country. Furthermore, due to the limited literature and resources concerning Montenegro's path to NATO

accession, the research will utilize an extensive media coverage which, although not the primary objective of the thesis, will also present the overall views and perceptions of analysts, critiques and Montenegrin people regarding the issue of Montenegro's NATO accession.

In conclusion, considering that the analysis of this thesis will bring together relatively neglected theories, an interesting methodology, and a recent case selection to answer the research question as presented above, the approach of this study can motivate and encourage further analysis on similar cases. The importance of geopolitics, as one of the leading elements in this study, has a considerable influence in today's international world order which can be in the interest of decision-makers, policy-makers, and academics to produce new policies under broader considerations.

1.1. The Structure of the Thesis

This research consists of nine chapters. Chapter 2 provides an extensive review on NATO's need for enlargement, how it adds to the tensions between NATO and Russia, and Montenegro's role in these tensions on its way to NATO membership. Chapter 3 presents the origins, predictions, and mechanisms of the Balance of Threat Theory and Classical Geopolitics. Variables, case selection, data collection and detailed explanation of methodology are defined in Chapter 4. The analysis, which begins with Chapter 5, has two sub-sections. The first section only presents and illustrates descriptive data of the geopolitical factors, and the second section analysis all the relevant data on the geopolitical importance of Montenegro, and its importance for NATO. Chapter 6 introduces empirical evidence on NATO's perceived threat using discourses from State officials and analyses how Montenegro's geopolitical importance impacts NATO's balancing behavior against a threat. Chapter 7, as the final chapter of analysis, explains to what extent Montenegro fulfills the prerequisites of the Open Door Policy. Lastly, chapters 8 and 9 provide an overall discussion on the results of the analysis, define the limitations of research and offer recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

The literature review in this chapter is purposed to provide a more detailed outline of the critical points as introduced in the previous section. Thus, to provide a more organized structure, this section initially states the existing, ongoing debates and arguments concerning NATO's eastward enlargement, the tensions between NATO and Russia, and the views on Montenegro's alignment with NATO. Briefly, this chapter explains that while proponents of enlargement suggest that NATO needs to expand to survive and bring stability to Europe, opponents are more critical about whether frustrating Russia is worth the costs of enlargement.

2.1. NATO's Eastward Enlargement

As mentioned in the introduction, the enlargement process of NATO had changed drastically with the Central and Eastern European revolutions in the final years of the 1980s, when the post-Soviet countries started to declare their independence and obtain statehood and to "return to Europe" in the sense of joining NATO and the EU (Simon, 2001: 121). NATO was obviously aware that with its recently introduced Partnership for Peace Program in 1994, the overall rhetoric of cooperation with the former adversaries and the ongoing German reunification talks, further enlargement would be necessary for the future. Former US President Bill Clinton addressed the debates over the NATO enlargement policy in the NATO Summit of 1994 by stating that "the question is no longer whether NATO will take on a new member, but when and how" (Brown, 1994: 34).

A significant number of academics and theorists brought a different explanation to understand and predict the survival of NATO and its enlargement policy. John Lewis Gaddis (1998) argued that NATO was initially, during the Cold War, acting under basic principles, such as balancing power, never underestimating the common enemies, and treating them accordingly. However, these principles were violated during Clinton's administration when NATO started "enlarging the enlargement process" (Gaddis, 1998: 150). Following Gaddis' argument, Dan Reiter (2001) also explained NATO's drastic decision on eastward enlargement as a means of deterrence for the

future aggression with Russia and the promotion of democracy, and the prevention of possible conflicts among the members (p. 41). Their viewpoints have great merit within the neorealist school of thought which asserts that if the Alliance can overcome their common threat, or if the threat itself is not as grandeur as it used to be, then there will be no need for states to commit to the Alliance (Kydd, 2001: 804). Adding to this school of thought, Mearsheimer (1994) introduced similar views within a Structural Realism perspective which, in his opinion, explains the State's behavior better than many other theories. Since peace and constant cooperation without collaboration is impossible, States are prone to seek opportunities and take advantage of them when they find one to improve their relative position and power (Mearsheimer, 1994). Hence, sustainability of Alliances is not possible in a self-help world where everyone is competing with one another to maximize their power (Ibid: 11). However, the NATO Alliance and its ongoing enlargement process indicate that the members of NATO still perceive Russia as a sufficient threat to motivate the Alliance to pursue its existence (Rauchhaus, 2000: 191), and even in a self-help world order, unity is strength against a common threat.

Petar Kurečić (2008), on the other hand, argues that for the existence and sustainability of the NATO alliance, opposing the realist predictions on NATO's survival, the post-Cold War presented a new era where the NATO had "transform[ed] itself in accordance with new challenges, and conditions" by enlarging towards the Balkan region (p. 27). However, it is observable that through such transformation, NATO also had to revise the conditions of eligibility for its potential candidates. While "qualifications of the aspirants for NATO membership" (Larrabee, 2010: 49) for Western states were much higher before 1999, such aspirations have become much lesser for the post-Soviet applicants, after 1999 (Ibid). The reason for such transformation is NATO's Open Door policy, which ultimately enabled the militarily and materially weaker states to become eligible for membership (Art, 2016: 341). Through the adoption of the Open Door Policy, NATO had clearly displayed a change of structure; from a greater military capability with its limited number of members to broader borders with questionable functionality (Ibid).

From a Neoliberal Institutional perspective, such conditions offered an opportunity for the Member States who understood that they could gain more through cooperation and interaction, and consequently prolong the existence of the Alliance even after the *raison d'être* no longer

existed (Hellmann & Wolf, 1993: 3). The former US National Security Council, and a NATO official, Damon Wilson, stated, in an interview with the *New Atlanticist* that NATO's enlargement should also be considered as a demonstration of its self-confidence to the rest of the world (Kumar Sen, 2015). He explains that "it is quite important for the Alliance itself because you don't enlarge if you don't have a sense of confidence in your institution" (Ibid). Although Mr. Wilson's assertions were expressed within the lines of Montenegro's accession to NATO, he still hints to the fact that Montenegro is an "important statement to Russia that we will not be intimidated by bullying" (Ibid).

While this section explains NATO's need for enlargement in order to survive against the Russian threat, the commonly used theories do not incorporate the geopolitical considerations of NATO's enlargement behavior. Was NATO's enlargement towards Montenegro merely a response to "bullying"? Or, was Montenegro more important to NATO than merely functioning as a political pawn? This research will go beyond the existing review and analyze the geographic strength of Montenegro both for NATO and for Russia, to fully understand Montenegro's role in NATO's latest wave of enlargement.

2.2. Tensions between NATO and Russia

The mutual distrust between NATO and Russia is a well-known phenomenon among most of the relevant academia. As mentioned in the introduction, Russia believes that NATO had somewhat double-crossed it and not only persuaded Russia to support German reunification but also pursued the enlargement with the post-Soviet nations. The more skeptical academics view this enlargement as a cause for further aggression which can very easily lead to less cooperation and more disputes between the West and Russia (Kydd, 2001: 802). Andrej Krickovic (2016), in his research on the institutional binding, analyzes that Russia perceives NATO's enlargement as a primary threat, not because for the fear that NATO would initiate military action against Russia, but because of the potential influence that NATO may have on Russia's political and economic mobility in Europe. Under this sense of isolation and marginalization from the Western countries, Russia had shown serious interest in joining NATO in 1992, 1996 and 2002, only to be turned down by Brussels, which demonstrated that Russia cannot and will not become a party to

NATO's geographical enlargement (Pouliot, 2010: 171). NATO allies, Germany and France in particular, were seriously opposed to Russia's membership of NATO for a number of reasons. The first one is that including such a dominant power as Russia would destroy the transatlantic alliance (Ibid). The second reason was that NATO would be sharing borders with Asian countries, and thirdly the Russian dispute with these Asian countries, particularly with China, would reflect heavily on the Alliance (Duong, 2002).

In addition to this sense of isolation, NATO's persistence in enlarging towards Russian borders through Georgia and Ukraine sparked aggressive reactions from Kiev. The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, defined this as "a colossal geopolitical shift" that would go against Russia's national interests (The New York Times, 2006). Andrew T. Wolff (2015) asserts that the value-driven enlargement policy of NATO has limitations since it does not account for how Russia perceives this enlargement from a geopolitical view (p. 1120). He further analyzes that geopolitical enlargement towards the Balkans would be too costly for NATO and that it should focus on more stable regions; such as the Scandinavian countries (Ibid). However, even though Wolff recognizes the importance of geopolitical enlargement which would allow NATO to "identify areas of critical strategic importance in Europe" (Ibid), he overlooks how NATO's geopolitical enlargement policy can change if a strategic area is under a potential external threat.

As mentioned earlier, the annexation of Crimea, along with the Ukrainian crisis, triggered a sense of urgency in NATO. This was a demonstration of how vulnerable states in Europe could be if they were not committed to at least one of the two most prominent international organizations; the EU or NATO. The fact that Russia could pursue such aggressive actions directed at NATO and the EU was a wake-up call for the US, and this became a topic of priority during the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014 (NATO Press Release, 2014). The participants of the North Atlantic Council issued a declaration in Wales which explicitly acknowledged that NATO considered Russia's aggressive behavior as a significant threat (Ibid). This threat, which caused a multi-dimensional disturbance not only in Europe but also in the Middle East and North of Africa (Ibid), was referring to the Russian military actions both in Ukraine and in Syria. In light of this acknowledgement, since other aspirant countries; such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, were not quite ready for full NATO membership, Bosnia because of its lack of progress in implementing necessary political reforms for its military properties and Macedonia

for its ongoing dispute with Greece over the country's name (Nič, 2015), NATO selected Montenegro as the most eligible and realistic nation to pursue. However, while the tensions are evident between NATO and Russia, the overall debate does not provide explicit information on how Montenegro's trajectory towards NATO membership plays a role in these tensions.

2.3. The Case of Montenegro

Montenegro was invited to initiate the accession talks in December 2015 and received the formal invitation to join NATO in May 2016. This latest result of the Open Door policy was taken as an act of defiance in the face of Russian opposition, which was also declared by the Members of NATO Congress during the Warsaw Summit in 2016 (Belkin, 2016). As previously indicated in the introduction, the logic behind the invitation to Montenegro to join NATO has links to the annexation of Crimea to Russia which challenged "the fundamental principles of the European order" (European Council on Foreign Affairs, 2014).

The consideration of NATO's enlargement agenda through Montenegro created a division of scholarly opinions. Critical thinkers of NATO's eastward enlargement, particularly in relation to Montenegro, question how a small country like Montenegro can bring a substantial contribution to the collective defense organization, especially after its potential membership has received so much opposition from Russia (Herszebhorn, 2017; Gramer, 2015; Saideman, 2015; Farkas, 2015). Furthermore, these skeptics also bring forth their concerns about the unanimity within the NATO Alliance itself. Member States like Germany and France displayed a level of reluctance towards NATO's enlargement and presented their concerns about Montenegro's readiness to become a member. These concerns lie mainly within the lines of the domestic turmoil caused by the Montenegrins' perception on NATO, the rule of law, and the ongoing corruption within the state (Hunter, 2015; Nič, 2015). Proponents of Montenegro's accession to the NATO Alliance, on the other hand, are rather more optimistic about the country's preparedness for fully-fledged membership. Damon Wilson (Kumar Sen, 2015), as introduced earlier, stated that Montenegro implemented important reforms on its path towards the EU and NATO membership and displayed great initiative related to other problems in its governmental system (Kumar Sen, 2015). The former NATO Secretary General, Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, in an interview also stated

that although the Member States of the Alliance should respect the Russian drawn “red lines” that consist of Georgia and Ukraine, this cannot be said for Montenegro, since Montenegro is the least complicated case among the candidates (Tavberidze, 2018). Thus, proponents demonstrate more enthusiasm about NATO’s enlargement agenda bringing stability to the Western Balkan region which they consider as a demonstration of NATO’s unity against the ongoing instabilities within Europe (Roberts, 2015; Lomonosov, 2016).

In addition to these schools of thought, statements about the ultimate goal of NATO's latest wave of enlargement add a different view on Montenegro's readiness for membership. A senior NATO official, who wanted to remain anonymous, stated about the diplomats within NATO that “[t]hey want to show NATO isn't afraid of enlargement and will lock the Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic strategy and won't leave them in limbo” (Kaminski, 2015). Another geographical view on NATO's enlargement came from the senior member of the Democratization Policy Council, Bodo Weber, who analyzes Montenegro's accession as a strategic move of the US administration “to close off geopolitical space for Russian meddling, contain Putin's imagination he can return Russia to global power” (Abramowitz, 2017). However, he does not explain what “the meddling” is in this context. Thus, the research in this thesis also aims to identify whether there was an already existing Russian meddling or a potential one during the period in which NATO invited Montenegro in 2015.

In conclusion, although all three sections in this chapter provide an overview of the hostility between NATO, Russia and Montenegro’s role in that political climate, there are still other important aspects to consider for NATO’s accession of Montenegro, such as the geopolitical one. Because of the recentness of the phenomenon, academic studies on Montenegro are quite scarce and limited. As an example, while Srđan Orlandić’s (2016) article stands out regarding the subject of NATO's enlargement and Montenegro's geopolitical importance. His study, like the others, links the phenomenon to the threat that Russia represents for Europe instigated by the Ukraine war. However, while Orlandić understands Montenegro’s geopolitical importance as a political pawn caused by the annexation of Crimea, this research further proposes to investigate whether Montenegro became a cause of tension between NATO and Russia because of its geopolitical importance.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Theories

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical understanding of the Balance of Threat Theory and the Classical Geopolitics. The importance of choosing the Balance of Threat Theory in this research is twofold: Firstly, this theory can explain the behavior of an Alliance in the face of a perceived threat better than the Balance of Power Theory, or the other sub-theories; such as Neoliberalism, and Neorealism. Secondly, the theory's mechanisms are more closely linked to the geographic features of a perceived threat. This is particularly important since the research purposes to utilize a complementary approach for theoretical synthesis with the Balance of Threat and the Classical Geopolitics. Geopolitics, on the other hand, provides a deeper understanding of how the geographic position of a state can affect the foreign policies of a country, or in this case, NATO's balancing behavior.

3.1.1 The Balance of Threat Theory

The Balance of Threat Theory was initially developed and introduced by Stephan M. Walt (1987) in his book *Origins of Alliances*, which was primarily influenced by Waltz's (1979) Balance of Power theory. However, instead of refuting it, Walt proposed to reformulate the theory by presenting another perspective (Keohane, 1988: 171). Waltz's theory predicts that States tend to join the weaker side in order to balance their power against the bigger power (Waltz, 1979: 127). However, since this theory cannot fully explain the behavior of alliance formation and alliance behavior in the face of a perceived threat, Walt's theory is more suitable for this research.

The Balance of Threat Theory has its starting point from the Realism paradigm and recognizes that States exist in an anarchic world (Walt, 1996: 18). Consequently, security has become the most crucial issue for the state and the process in which a country adopts foreign policies is highly influenced by how the leaders of that state perceive the external environment (Ibid). On that point, the main prediction of the Balance of Threat Theory is that States tend to join the stronger or the less threatening side when there is a perceived threat (Kydd, 2001).

From the Alliance perspective, Stephan Walt (1988: 275) asks the question "[w]hen will states form alliances, and what determines their choice of allies?" He explains that States seek security in the face of a threat rather than power (Ibid). Alliances enlarge to accept other States into their protection to increase their security and deter the perceived threat (Kydd, 2001: 804). One of the components of the concept of Threat is "aggregated power" which argues that if a State has greater material capabilities; such as industry and weaponry than that State can pose a greater threat (Walt, 1996: 19). Thus, aggregated power is an essential element for the States' perception of power (Wivel, 2008: 296). Another component is the "perception of intent" which is the uncertainty of how another State will use its aggregated power (Ibid). The level of threat also relies on the "offense defense balance" which means that States feel less secure when they can easily fight with one another and when it is easy to acquire the necessary means for doing so (Walt, 1996: 19). This refers to the lack of deterrence that can stop one State from trying to harm another. Finally, "the geographic proximity" (Walt, 1987: 151) is another component which considers that the closer the proximity, the greater the threat (Wivel, 2008: 297). In other words, States are more concerned about the perceived threats that are geographically closer to themselves, than about the ones that are far away. Based on these components, the threat does not necessarily mean a direct military action or any aggressive behavior from the external power, since the threat is defined by how that State perceives it.

The components as mentioned above are crucial for the theory to be applied in any given case study. The uncertainty caused by an adversary's intentions can create the perception of a threat which can encourage an alliance/organization to add more members to balance it. The aggregate power influences the States when it analyzes its potential allies. Offense defense balance creates a sense of insecurity for States due to the lack of repercussion or international assistance if one country decides to harm another country. NATO, for example, found a way around this particular component with Article 5 of the Washington Treaty², which ensured the members' security

² 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, 34 UNTS 243, Article 5: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security."

through a principle of “one for all, all for one” mutual defense provision. Lastly, when the perceived threat is geographically close to the State in question, then the response to alleviate that threat should be expected to take place in a timelier manner.

The framework of the Balance of Threat Theory indicates that for the theory to work on a selected case, a perceived threat must be evident and that the threat should fit the components as mentioned above. Although this section has only provided the groundwork of what the concept of Balance of Threat Theory stands for, in the analysis, the researcher will present evidence of the existence of an external threat and explain how this threat links to the geographical importance of Montenegro within the NATO-Russia tensions.

3.1.2. The Classical Geopolitics

In order to evaluate the geopolitical importance of Montenegro in the analysis, it is important to understand the origins of the Classical Geopolitics and what the theory entails. To provide a brief background; although Classical Geopolitics has very close links with the mainstream Realism theories, after World War II, it became somewhat disentangled from the paradigm. The reason for that was the German scientists, who used geopolitics to justify their racist expansion ideology (Kristof, 1960: 19). This was also referred to as “imperial geopolitics” (ÓTuathail, 1998:16). Three pioneers of Classical Geopolitics; Nicholas Spykman (1994), Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890), and Halford John Mackinder (1904), who can also be considered Realists (Wu, 2017: 5), recognize the State’s search for power and its effects on the nation’s foreign policymaking (Sempa, 2002: 75-100). They share the Realist assumptions of the Hobbesian State of nature, States’ balancing behaviors, States as the units of analysis, and the international anarchy (Wu, 2017: 6; Parker, 2014: 15). To emphasize further on the importance of geography in politics, Nicholas Spykman (1944) categorizes “geography” as “the most fundamental factor in foreign policy because it is the most permanent” (p. 41). Furthermore, Geoffrey Sloan (1988) defines geopolitics as “a theory of spatial relationship and historical causation whose perspective is the international system as a whole” (p. 20), which simply ascertains how the geographic attributes of a state affect its behavior in foreign policies.

There are two main strands of thought in Classical Geopolitics. The first is the Organic State Theory, which will not be applied in this research, and the second one is Geostrategy. Very briefly, Organic State Theory, influenced by Darwinism, asserts that States are in a constant struggle for survival; hence, they must either grow or die (Owens, 2015: 469). Geostrategy, on the other hand, is concerned with State's behavior, its development, and progress within the State's geographical context (Ibid: 470). This behavior in strategy building within the geographical context has strong correlations between the maritime or continental features of the State (Ibid: 476). The geographical strength of a country, whether it is land-locked or coastal, defines the State's foreign policymaking, its strategy, and development; therefore it is more dynamic rather than static (Owens, 2015: 477). In other words, geopolitics, and the level of its importance are sensitive to the international affairs affecting the State, and a geopolitically important State can be open to the exploitations of adversary States (Ibid). Thus, it is up to the State to build strategies to turn its vulnerabilities and its geopolitical features into opportunities.

In this research, the geostrategic strand in the Classical Geopolitics is more relevant to understand Montenegro's geopolitical importance for two reasons. The first reason is that out of two strands of thought, only geostrategy examines the geopolitical position of the State and how it impacts the State's behavior. In the analysis, after reviewing the geopolitical importance of Montenegro, the researcher will look into how this importance created a strategic move for NATO within the framework of balancing a perceived threat. The second reason is that the analysis will apply the famous geostrategist Alfred Thayer Mahan's (1890) six factors, which are presented in his book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*; 1) geographical position, 2) physical conformation, 3) extent of territory, 4) number of population, 5) character of the people, and 6) character of the government (p. 28-81). Mahan's approach was selected by the researcher specifically for his particular interest in sea power and coastal States. However, since his studies are set in the context of the world order of the 17th and 18th centuries, he defined his six factors in more imperialistic and colonialist settings contexts, which is not the case in this research. Hence, these factors will still be utilized as defined in Mahan's book; however, the researcher will only take the main points of these definitions and disregard the parts which are not suitable for this case, or for this era.

3.2. Hypotheses

In light of the views presented in the literature review, and in the theoretical framework of the Balance of Threat Theory and Classical Geopolitics, three hypotheses have been formulated to analyze and answer the research question.

H1: Montenegro's geopolitical importance for NATO stemmed primarily from Montenegro's geographical position.

H2: Montenegro's geopolitical importance for NATO stemmed primarily from the desire to balance the threat from Russia.

H3: Montenegro's geopolitical importance for NATO stemmed primarily from Montenegro's fulfillment of the NATO accession prerequisites.

The first hypothesis primarily analyzes the importance of Montenegro's geographical position within the geopolitical framework. Thus, the falsification of the hypothesis can only be achieved if the geographical position of Montenegro is not significant enough for NATO.

The second hypothesis analyzes Montenegro's geopolitical importance and whether this importance had an impact on NATO's balancing behavior against the Russian threat. The falsification of the hypothesis, therefore, can only be achieved if Montenegro were not geopolitically important and if NATO were not acceding Montenegro in order to balance against Russia.

The third hypothesis refers to the three prerequisites of the NATO's Open Door Policy (NATO Official Website, 2017). These prerequisites allow NATO to evaluate a State as a candidate for entering its Alliance. The hypothesis asserts that Montenegro has to fulfill the prerequisites, in addition to its geopolitical importance, to make a contribution to the Alliance. Thus, if Montenegro fails to fulfill the prerequisites, it would mean that Montenegro is not contributing its geopolitical importance for NATO; and therefore, the hypothesis can be falsified.

4. Research Design

4.1. Variables

Although there are three hypotheses since the independent variable of the first hypothesis is one of the six factors of Classical Geopolitics, the overall analysis will be composed of three variables: one dependent and two independent.

The *dependent variable*; geopolitical importance, is conceptualized based on Alfred Thayer Mahan's (1890: 28-29) six factors;

a) Geographical position; this factor involves the location of the country, whether it is landlocked or has access to the sea and the geographic position of its neighbors.

b) Physical confirmation, as influenced by the Mahan's description (1890: 35), is whether the country has functioning harbors for military utilization.

c) The extent of territory indicates the size of the country and the length of its coastal area.

d) The number of population represents the overall demographic numbers, and how these numbers are distributed in the country.

e) The character of the people factor signifies the main ethnic and religious groups in the country and the overall cultural characteristics of the nation.

f) The character of the government, as Mahan explains (1890: 82) in a broader concept, is whether the administration is pursuing a peaceful conduct or an aggressive, war-oriented policy.

The first *independent variable*, the second hypothesis, is the balancing against a perceived threat. Although Walt's conceptualization of threat is more befitting to an aggressive confrontation, his components of what a threat entails are valid for operating the variable. Thus, the evidence retrieved from the media resources and foreign policy documents will analyze the element of threat based on four components as elaborated in the theoretical framework.

- a) The aggregated power of the threat looks into Russia's aggregated power.
- b) The perception of intent signifies the uncertainties of the outcome of the threat.
- c) Offense defense balance looks into Montenegro's ability to defend itself in the face of a threat.
- d) Geographic proximity looks into the proximity of the threat.

Lastly, in the second *independent variable* the prerequisites of NATO's Open Door Policy are based on the three conditions as introduced previously;

- a) Whether the aspirant country is European
- b) Whether the aspirant country is a Democracy
- c) Whether the aspirant country has the willingness and the necessary contribution to commit itself to NATO.

4.2. Case Selection

The study in this research will analyze a single case which “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009: 18). The in-depth analysis will be conducted on Montenegro which is selected purposefully since it is the latest addition to the NATO Alliance. NATO's enlargement activities had been inactive since its most recent wave of enlargement in 2009, and the invitation extended by NATO to initiate official talks to accede Montenegro as its 29th member in 2015 provided an opportunity to investigate Montenegro's role in the very tense environment between NATO and Russia during that period. This opportunity qualifies this case study as a “revelatory case” (Yin, 2003: 49). This descriptive single-case study can allow the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of a particular phenomenon that has yet to be investigated. A researcher can only recur to this study when a previously inaccessible phenomenon becomes accessible for observation (Ibid: 43).

The research in this thesis regarding the case of Montenegro is particularly focused on the period between 2006 and 2015. This is the period in which Montenegro became independent and became a member of the PfP in 2006, and the time when NATO extended an invitation to Montenegro to initiate the official talks for membership in December 2015. Understandably, the particular focus here is not Montenegro's domestic policy changes during the accession period to acquire full membership, but the role of its geopolitical importance in NATO-Russia tensions, and NATO's balancing behavior that eventually led the Alliance to invite Montenegro. Although single-case studies are usually too specific to be generalizable to a larger population, they also produce a more detailed, in-depth explanation to "the proximal causes of the behavior and circumstances" (Bromley, 1991: 86). This explanation is, in fact, one of the reasons why this particular research is a single-case analysis.

4.3. Data Collection

The analysis in this research requires extensive qualitative and quantitative data to study three main elements; the balancing behavior against a threat, the geopolitical importance of Montenegro, and the prerequisites of the Open Door Policy. The sources for the analysis will depend on the primary and secondary resources available

For the geopolitical analysis, geographical data will be obtained from the CIA World Fact Book (CIA.GOV, 2018), which offers comprehensive data on the extent of the Montenegrin landscape. The character of people, on the other hand, will be based on Professor Geert Hofstede's extensive study on the cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1984) which is comprised of six factors which explain the overall characteristic traits of a nation. Other relevant data on population, people's perceptions of NATO, and demographic indicators will be retrieved from the World Bank's Urban Population and Rural Population indicators (2018c & 2018d), Gallup's study (2017) on Eastern European countries perception of NATO, and the Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT, 2015), respectively. Necessary information to determine the character of the government can be found in the official reports from the European Commission on Montenegro (2006 & 2015) and European Union External Action (2013 & 2014). Since these reports contain brief historical background

information on Montenegro and how the nation became independent in 2006, data collected from these reports will demonstrate whether the government was pursuing aggressive or peaceful international policies.

The analysis of the threat of Russia requires a different approach. For this variable, the evidence of the threat will be acquired initially from media sources both in English and in Russian, and then the complementary information will be retrieved from speeches given by the governmental officials (The US Senator Speech, 2014; Shuster, 2017). Furthermore, in order to present the aggregated power of Russia, data from the Global Firepower (2018; Kosenkov, 2015) will be presented for the Military Strength Ranking.

Lastly, the Democracy of Montenegro, which is the second requisite of the Open Door Policy, will use the data from the Freedom House (2009; 2018a & 2018b), and the official reports from the European Commission (2008). For additional information on Montenegro's corruption levels and its path to democracy, the Transparency International (2018) and the Nations in Transit reports (Marovic, 2016) provide extensive data on Montenegro's process. The willingness and contribution, on the other hand, will mainly depend on primary sources from the World Bank database; such as the Annual GDP, and Worldwide Governance Indicators (2018a & 2018b). In the analysis of these prerequisites the willingness will be explained within the lines of Montenegro's commitment to the NATO membership process; thus, official NATO reports will indicate the necessary conditions for the membership process (NATO, 2016).

4.4. Method of Analysis

The methodology of this thesis will mainly revolve around a qualitative approach, and the quantitative data will be utilized for descriptive purposes to illustrate the various components of Montenegro. The main reason for the qualitative preference is the exploratory and descriptive nature of the research question and the selected case which cannot be analyzed through a fixed sequence of steps but rather through the "interconnection and interaction among the different design components" (Maxwell, 1996: 3). Thus, from this viewpoint, for the analysis section of this research, the Congruence Method (George & Bennett, 2005: 181) will be applied.

The Congruence analysis allows the utilization of a case study to collect empirical evidence to explain the relevance or the strength of a theoretical approach (Blatter & Haverland, 2012: 144). This specific method consists of two sub-types: a) a competing theories approach, and b) a complementary theories approach (Ibid). While the former presupposes that one theory is more powerful to explain the empirical information and the outcome of the phenomenon than the other theory, the latter implies that theories are not necessarily rivals or a source of uncertainty but rather a basis for a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon (Ibid: 145). This is the reason why the method of analysis will employ the complementary theories approach.

In order to explain Montenegro's geopolitical importance and NATO's balancing behavior, the analysis will initially consider the dependent variable; the geopolitical importance of Montenegro. The second step is to analyze the independent variables; the Balance of Threat and Open Door Policy prerequisites, respectively. The third step is the application of the selected theories to the hypotheses, which will demonstrate whether they can provide an explanation to the research question or not. Thus, if the results indicate that Montenegro was geopolitically important in the face of the NATO-Russia tensions and NATO invited Montenegro in 2015 to become an ally as a balance against a Russian threat, then the implementation of the complementary theories approach within the Congruence analysis method would be achieved.

Finally, considering that the Balance of Threat Theory and the Classical Geopolitics have never previously been used in a complementary manner to explain a phenomenon, the results of the analysis will provide unique results as well as motivation for further studies in theoretical syntheses in relevant fields.

5. Geopolitical Importance of Montenegro

The first chapter of analysis consists of two sub-sections. The first section is *solely* based on descriptive data and information based on Mahan's (1890) six factors. The second section, on the other hand, compiles all the data and explains the geopolitical importance of Montenegro for NATO. As described in the theoretical framework, the researcher will respect Mahan's definitions of these factors; however, these definitions will be applied in a broader sense to capture specifically the geographic features of Montenegro in a geopolitical context.

Geopolitical Factors
a) Geographic position
b) Physical conformation
c) Extent of territory
d) Number of population
e) Character of people
f) Character of the government

5.1. Descriptive data of the Geopolitical Factors

a) Geographical position

The geographical position of a coastal country provides a strategic advantage to the nation and to its allies since the nation can utilize its position as a base for military actions against potential enemies (Mahan, 1890: 30). Thus, the specificities of the physical location of Montenegro is first to be elaborated to illustrate the geographic features of the State.

The original name of the nation in Montenegrin language is Crna Gora, which means Black Mountain, and the administrative capital of the country is Podgorica, which is in the Southeast of Montenegro. The political map of Montenegro in Figure 1 illustrates that the Republic of Montenegro is in the Southern part of the European continent within the west-central part of the Balkan Peninsula. The continental borders of the country are shared with a number of former Yugoslav nations; Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Northwest, Serbia in the Northeast, Kosovo in

the East, and Albania in the Southeast. Montenegro also shares its South and Southwest borders with Croatia with a coastline to the Adriatic Sea which has a maritime border with Italy (Allcock et al., 2018).

b) Physical conformation

Mahan explains the physical conformation factor as the access to the seaboard of a country (1980: 35). If the country has no harbors on its seaboard, the geopolitical importance decreases since the nation cannot have naval sea power or maritime trade power (Ibid.)

The coastline of Montenegro is between Croatia and Albania on the Southeast side of the country. The coastal area is surrounded by the mountains of Orjen, Lovcen, and Rumija (Msp.gov.me, 2011). Montenegro possesses two essential ports on the coast of the Adriatic Sea; Bar and Kotor. Bar, which is the closest to the end of the Adriatic Sea and the beginning of the Mediterranean Sea, is the principal port of Montenegro (Ibid.). Kotor, on the other hand, is situated in an indented section of the coastline that is closer to Croatia, in the largest bay of the Adriatic Sea (Leadbeater, 2009).

Figure 1: Political Map of Montenegro (Source: mapsland.com)



c) Extent of territory

The extent of territory here includes not only the square kilometers of the country but also its coastline. Mahan emphasizes that the country's length of sea coasts, in proportion to the size of the State, should be taken under consideration, as well as the characteristics of its harbors (1890: 43).

In that context, data retrieved from the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) "The World Factbook" (CIA.gov, 2018) indicates that Montenegro has a territory of 13.812 square kilometers, 13.452 of which is land and 360 square kilometers of coastal waters. The total of Montenegro's Adriatic coastline is 293.5 kilometers. The report ranks Montenegro number 162 out of 254 countries in regard to the total of land and water areas and categorizes the geographic attributes of Montenegro as a "strategic location along the Adriatic coast" (Ibid.). Compared to the other European countries, Montenegro's extent of territory ranks number 38 out of 46, followed closely by Cyprus and Luxemburg (Statistics Times, 2014).

Despite the popularity of Kotor and Bar harbors as touristic destinations, Montenegro has three naval bases located in these two harbors; The Bar Naval Base and the "Pero Ćetković" base in Bar, and Pristan base in Herceg Novi which is a coastal town at the entrance of the Kotor Bay (Montenegrin Navy, 2018).

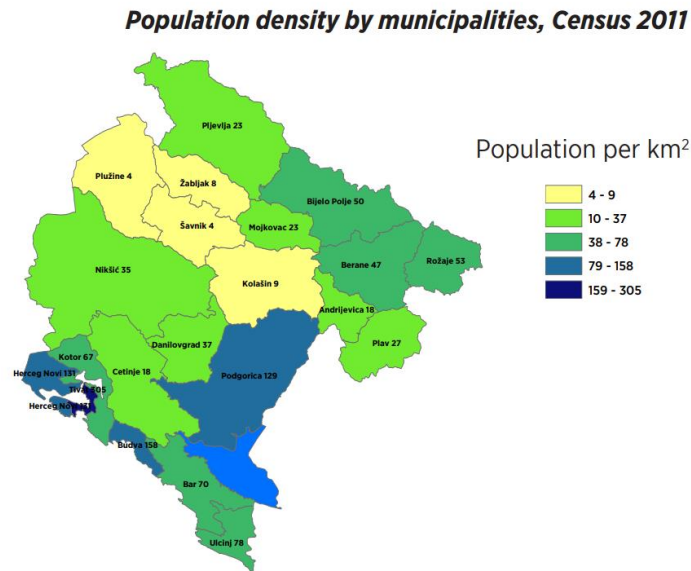
d) The number of population

Mahan (1890) explains that the demographic structure of a nation's population, particularly the distribution of it, is another important factor to be considered (1980: 44). The characteristics of the overall population in a country, in this context, can affect the government's defense and foreign affairs policies.

The demographic data retrieved from the Eurostat (2016) indicates that the Montenegrin population had increased from 614,624 in 2007 to 622,099 in 2015. On an international scale, in terms of population, Montenegro ranked number 36 out of 48 European countries, followed closely by Luxemburg, Malta, and Iceland (Statistics Times, 2015). Figure 2 illustrates that the population density is highest in the capital city of Podgorica and the coastal areas which include

the municipalities of Herceg Novi, Tivat, Kotor, Budva, Bar, and Ulcinj (Mijanovic & Barovic, 2015: 381).

Figure 2: Population Density by Municipalities (Source: MONSTAT, 2015)



e) The character of the people

Mahan (ibid) explains the factor of Character of People as the national character that examines personality traits of the overall population (1890: 50). National character, from this standpoint, has an impact on the strategic potentials of the nation’s preferences. Thus, data on this factor will first demonstrate the ethnic and religious varieties in Montenegro and the nation’s characteristic traits.

According to the data provided by the Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT), the majority of the population is divided between Montenegrins and Serbians, while the rest is composed of Albanians and Bosnians (MONSTAT, 2015: 8). The statistical data of 2011 relating to Montenegro’s national characteristics, as displayed in Figure 3 and Figure 4, indicate that the dominant ethnic groups in Montenegro are the Montenegrins and the Serbians, and that the main religion in the country is Eastern Orthodoxy. Although, Montenegro had both the Montenegrin Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the country, the Montenegrin Church had

such little support that it possessed almost no significant influence in the society (Vukomanović, 2008: 251). The Serbian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, had an immense support by the overall population which enabled the institution to have significant influence among people and the political establishments in Montenegro (Ibid). This significance will be further elaborated in the analysis section of this chapter.

Figure 3: The Ethnic Structure of Montenegro (Source: MONSTAT, 2015)

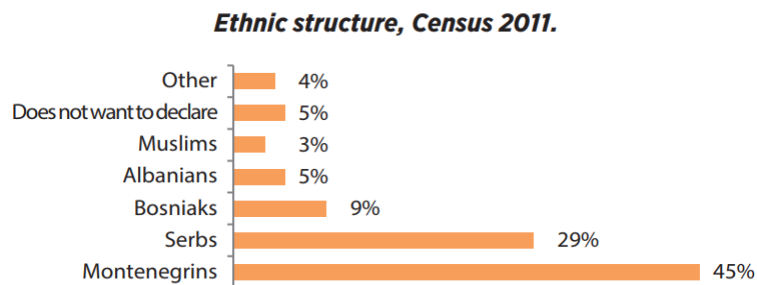
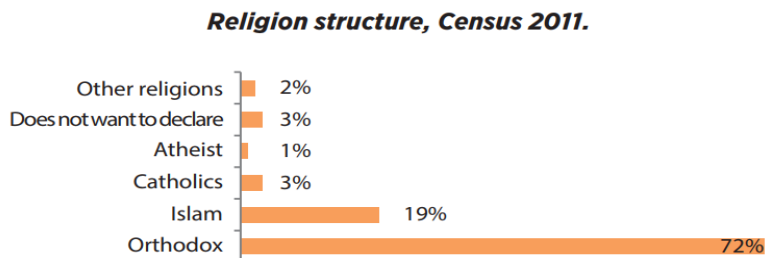


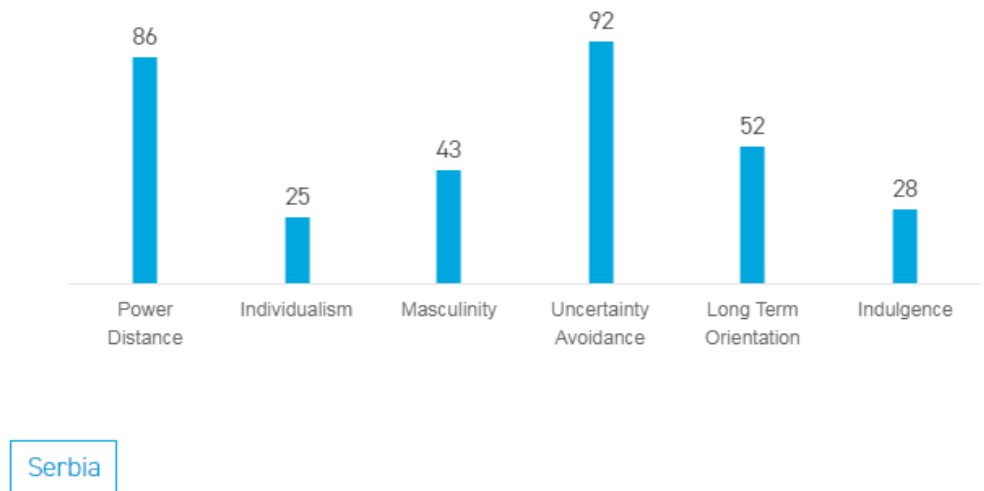
Figure 4: The Religious Structure of Montenegro (Source: MONSTAT, 2015)



In order to display the character of Montenegrin people, Professor Geert Hofstede’s (1984) six factors of national character are employed. The *power distance*, *individualism*, *masculinity* and *uncertainty avoidance* factors will be analyzed based on Hofstede's (1984: 85) empirical evidence on former Yugoslavia nations and the utilization of Serbia indexes as the proxy (see Bar Chart 1) since Hofstede’s studies do not include Montenegro. Serbia is selected as the proxy for the reasons that Montenegro gained its independence from Serbia only twelve years ago, and that Montenegro and Serbia share very similar linguistic, religious, historical and characteristic traits. The *long-term orientation* and *indulgence* factors, on the other hand, will only use the data on

Serbia as the proxy as presented in Bar Chart 1 since Hofstede's study (1984: 85) that provides empirical data on former Yugoslavia nations does not include numeric data on these two factors.

Bar Chart 1: Serbia's National Culture based on Hofstede Criteria (Source: Hofstede Insights, 2018)



The *Power Distance* of a country indicates the social acceptance of the power in the governmental institutions. Hofstede's research demonstrates that former Yugoslavia nations have a very high index (76 points) of power distance (Hofstede, 1984: 85). This means that people in these nations do not believe that power should be distributed evenly to the citizens. Krivokapic and Ceranic (2014), two Montenegrin academicians who based their study on Montenegrin cultural attributes, link this phenomenon to the authoritarianism in Montenegro (2014: 207). Authoritarianism here is valued as a trait of social psychology, rather than a mode of governance. This trait is associated with the dominance of higher-ranking officials, and there is an expectation of obedience from those of lower positions (Ibid). From that viewpoint, 74.5% of the Montenegrin population agrees that obedience to authority is one of the most important values and patriarchal culture is very dominant in Montenegro (Ibid).

Individualism, as opposed to collectivism, stands for the cultural preference of individuals taking care of themselves, while collectivism is a characteristic trait for tightly-knit societies where individuals expect their families or social environs to look after them (Hofstede, 1984: 83). The index of 1 point is fully collectivist while the index of 100 points is fully individualist. Hofstede's

study gives 27 index points for the former Yugoslavia (Ibid: 85), which also reflects Serbia's 25 index points. Both indexes point towards a very collectivist societal structure. Based on Krivokapic and Ceranic's (2014) empirical data as presented in their article, 67.8% of the Montenegrin society expects to be taken care of by the governmental institutions and 72.6% of the society comments that their biggest goal is to make their families proud rather than to pursue their own individual desires (Ibid).

Masculinity signifies the characteristic traits of competitiveness, achievement motivation, aggressiveness, result-oriented career performance, and control of emotions (Hofstede, 1984: 96-98). The masculinity index is between 1 and 100; 1 is fully feminine, and 100 is fully masculine. Hofstede index for the former Yugoslav states is 21 points, which is on the feminine side of the scale (Ibid: 85). Serbian index, on the other hand, is 43 points, which is still on the feminine side but very close to the center. Femininity, in this context, represents more emotional displays, a higher value for the quality of life, lower career ambitions, and more modest behavior (Ibid: 96-98). Thus, based on the data of former Yugoslavia and Serbia indexes, if Montenegro's index is tentatively ranked somewhere between 21 and 43 points, it can be assessed that Montenegrin culture prefers to establish good relations and friendship in its social environment.

Uncertainty Avoidance is defined as "the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity" (Ibid: 83). Hofstede's data indicates that former Yugoslav states' index is 92 points and Serbia's is 88 points which indicate a high level of avoidance of the uncertainty of the future. As in the masculinity index, if Montenegro's position is also placed somewhere between 88-92 index points, then it can be concluded that Montenegrin culture has a high resistance to change on a social and institutional level since they cannot predict the outcome of that change.

Long-term Orientation refers to the people's preferences "to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the past, present and future" (Hofstede Insights, 2018). A nation, which scores low, tends to honor its ancient norms and societal rules, while a nation, which scores high in this index, usually tends to make more effort in modernizing these cultural norms and values to keep abreast of the times (Ibid). The only available numeric data on this index is Serbia (see Bar Chart 1), which scores 52 points and thus, does not provide a clear preference that would apply to the Montenegrin society. This intermediate score; however,

represents that Serbia is somewhat torn between holding on to its old traditions and adopting more contemporary traits in its societal system.

Indulgence, on the other hand, refers to the socialization of the people and the degree of control that they have for pursuing their desires (Ibid). Serbia has a low indulgence index point for this dimension (28 points), which is consistent with the collectivist social construction of Serbia and former Yugoslav countries as indicated in the Individualist factor.

f) The character of the government

Mahan explains the character of a government on the basis of whether the government is seeking war or peace on an international level (Ibid: 82).

The first indicator to look at to determine whether Montenegro is seeking aggressive foreign policies or peaceful conduct is to examine the way the nation obtained its independence from Serbia. The country declared its independence on 3 June 2006 after holding a referendum on 21 May 2006 within the framework of the Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (EU Commission, 2006: 5). In accordance with the provisions of the Charter, which determined the 55% threshold to validate the outcome, 55.5% of the voters supported independence, and 44.5% voted against it (Ibid.). This allowed Montenegro to secede from Serbia legally. The fact that Montenegro obtained statehood on substantial legal grounds rather than initiating armed conflicts and/or a civil war is an important fact to consider when observing the government's mode of conduct.

Secondly, immediately after obtaining statehood, which is established as a parliamentary republic, Montenegro initiated its political trajectory towards the EU and NATO memberships (Braun, 2016: 1). This allowed Montenegro to shape its new administration and governance structure in accordance with the EU standards. Examples of such standards are the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) signed between the EU and Montenegro in 2007, Montenegro's official application for EU membership in 2008, the adoption of a new electoral legislation in 2014, and the initiation of accession negotiations in 2015 (European Commission - Press Releases, 2015). Furthermore, in respect to NATO, the same year Montenegro gained its

independence in 2006, the country became a party to the NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (PfP) which is an individual commitment to initiate bilateral relations and cooperation with NATO.

Thirdly, within the scope of international relations with its neighboring countries, Montenegro had proved itself to be a constructive element in contributing towards the stabilization of the Western Balkan countries. Since its independence, Montenegro has managed to considerably reduce the border disputes with its neighbors Kosovo and Croatia (Dukanovic, 2016: 33). On the issue of promoting cooperation on a regional level with its neighbors, Montenegro proposed the Western Balkan Six initiative in 2013 which would gather the leaders of the region (Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia). Members of this union purposed to support one another in their endeavors of European integration with the framework of the Stabilization and Association process (European Union External Action, 2013). Montenegro has also taken part in a number of reconciliatory agreements; RECOM and Igman Initiative, and managed to maintain overall good relations with its neighboring states (Ibid, 2014). From these perspectives, it is clear that Montenegro had not been pursuing aggressive or offensive foreign policies but instead, prioritizing and committing itself to securing the EU and NATO memberships for its future.

5.2. Analysis of Geopolitical Importance of Montenegro for NATO

In its broadest terms, Classical Geopolitics defines "Geopolitics" as the geography and its effects on foreign policy, which propounds that if geographical attributes are significant enough, then they can have an impact on the foreign-policy making. From that viewpoint, and from NATO's perspective, can it be asserted that Montenegro's geopolitical features are important for the Alliance? The answer to this question needs the analysis of the data that was presented in this chapter.

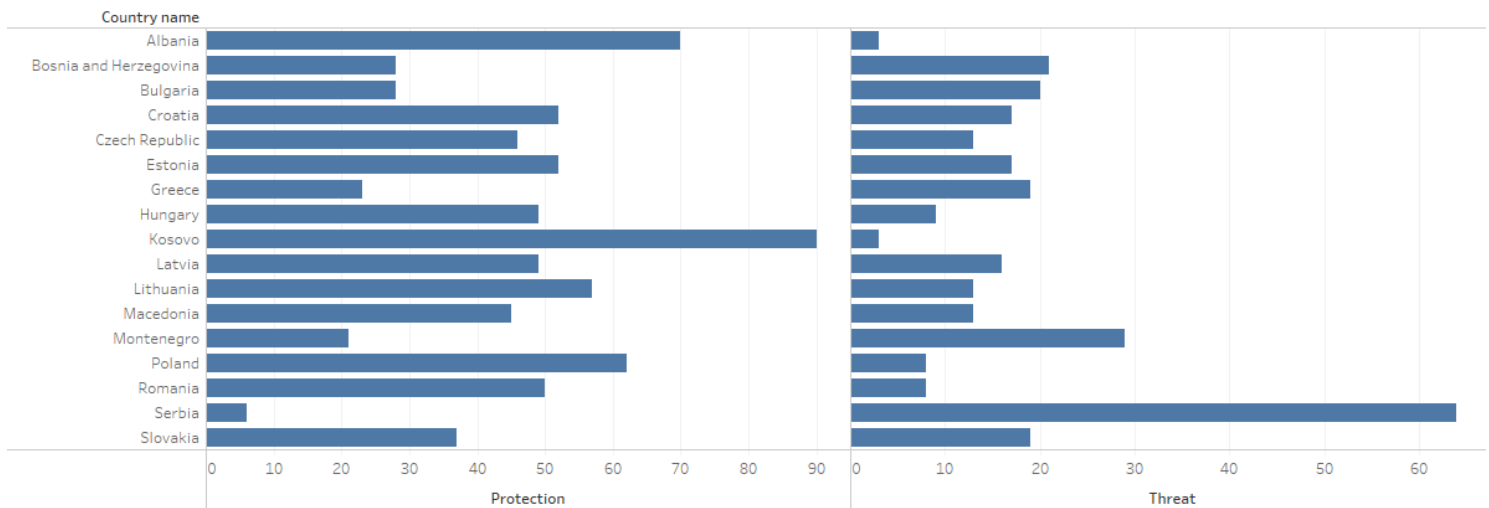
As demonstrated in the previous section, the factors of Montenegrin population and the extent of its territory are not of considerable significance due to their diminutiveness. Although Montenegro has the smallest population in the Balkans, it would be the second smallest state in the NATO Alliance, Iceland being the first.

The geographic position of Montenegro, on the other hand, presents very important political and strategic benefits for NATO. Firstly, a closer look at the Western Balkan map shows that Montenegro is the only nation on the Adriatic coastline which does not belong to an international organization to promote and ensure its economic, political, democratic or national security. All the other nations between the period of 2006 and 2015 were either a member of NATO or the EU. Secondly, the Northern and Eastern borders of Montenegro were surrounded by non-EU and non-NATO members; Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, all of which are the lowest ranking Balkan states in regards to peacefulness according to the Global Peace Index Report (2015). The report of 2015 indicates explicitly that Macedonia and Kosovo were the lowest ranking countries in the Balkan region regarding stability; Kosovo was ranking 69 and Macedonia 71 (Ibid: 10). From a geographic perspective, Montenegro's position provides an immense opportunity for NATO to take full control of the Adriatic Sea region, with the inclusion of the Otranto Straits which is the door to the Mediterranean Sea, and further benefits to stabilize the non-NATO members that neighbor its allies.

Furthermore, Montenegro's lack of membership to security communities means that its naval bases in Kotor and Bar, which are among the largest in the Adriatic Sea that played crucial roles during the Republic of Yugoslavia period (Magas, 2003: 76), are open to exploitation by other States. Thus, through acceding Montenegro, NATO would provide a possibility to utilize these harbors, as needed, for its operations and deployment for its future endeavors, and also close the doors against any attempt for potential exploitation and utilization by other external actors/countries. The character of the Montenegrin population presents an interesting aspect to look into regarding their ethnic character and their perception of NATO. As indicated earlier, 75% of the overall population was divided between Serbians and Montenegrins, and the majority of the population supported the Serbian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, some parts of the Serbian Church were demonstrating a profound allegiance towards Serbia and Russia to a point where they even consider the independence of Montenegro since 2006 as a temporary project (Buckley et al., 2015). The strong influence of Serbian Orthodox Church and the dominance of two ethnic groups in one small country presented a division and a difference of perception regarding NATO within the political establishments and the parliament. While Montenegrins who mainly supported the pro-Western Democratic Party of Socialists were rooting for the country's trajectory towards NATO and EU memberships, Serbians were demonstrating a more

pro-Russian front that could potentially damage this trajectory (Recknagel, 2015). According to a more recent poll data retrieved from the International Republican Institute (2017), 54% of the Montenegrin population thinks that Montenegro is heading in the wrong direction (towards the West). Furthermore, 41% strongly and 10% were somewhat opposed to Montenegro's NATO membership. Lastly, Gallup (2017) interview data from 1000 Montenegrins in 2016 indicates in Bar Chart 1 that, while 21% of the respondents perceive NATO as "protection," 29% perceives the Alliance as a "threat."

Bar Char 2: Eastern European Countries' Views of NATO in 2016 (Source: Gallup.com, 2017)



In retrospect, this negative perception is linked to two aspects; the remembrance of pain from the NATO bombings of the Former Yugoslavia in 1999 during the Kosovo War, and the previously displayed Montenegro's culture character based on Hofstede criteria. Thus, while "*uncertainty avoidance*" and "*indulgence*" explain Montenegrins reluctance to become a NATO member due to its uncertain security, political and economic implications for the future of the country, the historically pejorative views of NATO certainly contributed to this opposition. Interestingly, the fact that the Montenegrin government still pursued with its path towards NATO membership in spite of the public opposition indicates both the significance and the insignificance of the *Character of the People* factor. It is significant because it is a demonstration that the government made a crucial but unpopular decision about the future of the country's prosperity. The impact of this decision on Montenegro's democracy is illustrated in chapter 7. The insignificance, on the

other hand, is most observable since regardless of its people's opinion, the government became a NATO member in 2017.

In conclusion, while all six factors are defined and analyzed, only two of them demonstrate significance in relation to Montenegro's role in the process towards NATO membership; the geographic position of Montenegro and the anti-war characteristics of its government. However, a small country like Montenegro's anti-war preferences does not provide significant benefits either for the EU or NATO. Hence, it can be asserted that the geographical position of Montenegro which allows access to the Adriatic Sea and fortification of stability in Balkans are much more beneficial for the Alliance, and that the peace-oriented foreign policy tendency of the government is a complementary feature for Montenegro's geographic importance for NATO. This leaves the importance of Montenegro's geographical position as the primary factor that renders Montenegro geopolitically significant.

Table 1: Summary of Data for the Geopolitical Factors

Geopolitical factors	Important features
1 Geographical position	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to the Adriatic Sea
	<input type="checkbox"/> The only country in the Adriatic region without the EU or NATO membership
2 Physical confirmation	<input type="checkbox"/> Two important naval ports; Kotor and Bar
	<input type="checkbox"/> Three naval bases
3 Extent of territory	<input type="checkbox"/> Land: 13.452 square kilometers
	<input type="checkbox"/> Coast line: 293.5 kilometers
	<input type="checkbox"/> The smallest country in the Balkans
4 Number of population	<input type="checkbox"/> Population (2015): 622,099
5 Character of the people	<input type="checkbox"/> Two main ethnic groups: Montenegrin & Serbian
	<input type="checkbox"/> Dominant Serbian Orthodox Church
	<input type="checkbox"/> High level of uncertainty avoidance
	<input type="checkbox"/> High level of respect to the government
6 Character of the government	<input type="checkbox"/> Mode of conduct: Peace oriented

6. Balancing Against the Threat Russia from a Geopolitical Perspective

As elaborated in the theoretical framework, for the Balance of Threat Theory to work, there must be a perceived threat that creates a balancing action against that threat.

The Balance of Threat Factors
a) Aggregated power
b) Perception of intent
c) Offense defense balance
d) Geographic proximity

Throughout the research, the author scanned hundreds of media sources, journal articles, and foreign policy papers to understand Montenegro's geopolitical importance and how it influenced NATO to officially invite Montenegro to initiate accession talks in 2015. As presented in the literature review, the majority of the sources pointed towards the consequences of Russia's aggressive foreign policies on Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In other words, Russia's growing military presence in Europe manifested a perception of threat both for NATO and EU integrity, and NATO acted on that perception by initiating the official process of Montenegro's accession in 2015 to promote Article 10 of the Washington Treaty and to show Russia that NATO will not be intimidated by the Russian rhetoric against Montenegro-NATO relations and its military actions. However, this research asserts that there is more to this story than the use of Montenegro as a pawn between the Russia and NATO tensions and that while accepting that Russia created a military threat to Europe with the war in Ukraine, there was also a more immediate perception of threat that involved Montenegro directly. Furthermore, based on the retrieved data from a variety of media sources, this involvement of Montenegro had close links to the country's access to the Mediterranean Sea, through the Adriatic Sea, and the Russian involvement in the Syrian war. Thus, before getting engrossed in the analysis of NATO's balancing behavior, it is essential to understand the relationship between Russia and Syria within a geopolitical context.

The Russian-Syrian relations became very close when the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visited the Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in 2005 (Katz, 2006: 55). Since then, Syria has been one of Russia's most consistent partners in the Eastern Arabic peninsula. There are a number of reasons for this; both leaders oppose the general concept of American hegemony and the US intervention in Iraq (Ibid), Syria was relatively more independent from the Western world (Kreutz, 2010), and more importantly, Syria was providing Russia with a direct access to the Mediterranean Sea through the Tartus naval base. Why is this access so crucial for Russia? On a climatic level, during the winter months, the northern seas freeze and make it quite challenging for Russian vessels to navigate through the ice. On a logistic level, in order for Russia to reach Southern European countries, Africa and the Middle East, Russia has two options; either use the Turkish straits via the Black Sea, which provide a short-cut through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle straits that lead directly to the Mediterranean Sea, or make a long detour from the Arctic to North Atlantic Ocean and enter the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar. However, this long detour means more expenditure for Russia in order to cover longer distances, oil and man-hours. Lastly, on a political level, maintaining its military presence in the Mediterranean Sea, particularly in Tartus, which at this point is *mare nostrum* for Russia, balances its zero-sum game with Western countries (Ghilès, 2013).

Access to warm waters has always been a historical quest for Russia. To explain it in a brief historical context, Russia had tried to obtain free access to the warmer waters in order to establish easy trade routes with the Eastern Mediterranean and Southern European nations for centuries (Chuma, 2016). When the Black Sea was an Ottoman lake during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Sultans closed the Black Sea and the straits to foreign warships and vessels (Hurewitz, 1962: 607). This strategy changed in 1774 with the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty, which provided Russia the passage it was seeking for its commercial ships (Ibid). When the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923, the traffic of the commercial and naval vessels was regulated by the Treaty of Lausanne; however, in 1936 the complete control of the straits was given to the Turkish government with the Montreux Agreement (Ibid). Joseph Stalin strongly opposed to the agreement by stating that "it was impossible to accept a situation in which Turkey had a hand on Russia's throat" (Ibid: 605) and he demanded modifications on the agreement so that Russia could move its military vessels and warships freely through the straits (Ibid). In conclusion, these modifications did not occur, and Turkey was given the authority to control the straits, closing

them if necessary and militarizing them for security. Full Turkish autonomy on the straits meant that Russia lost its unhindered access to the Mediterranean Sea and its most cost-friendly maritime trade route. Hence, the Russian naval base of Tartus, which is Russia's only naval base outside of Russian territory, became a direct way of ensuring its military presence in the Mediterranean region. Access to the warmer waters was what Russia had been trying to achieve for the previous two hundred years. Furthermore, according to Sibjen de Jong (Johnson, 2015), from The Hague Center for Strategic Studies, Russia did not care whether President Assad stayed in power or not, so long as the geopolitical interests of Russia were preserved. These interests included the continuation of Russia's military presence in the East of Mediterranean region.

The recent initial actions of Russian naval deployment to the Mediterranean coasts in the relatively small Tartus base started in 2012 in connection with the civil war in Syria (Nikolsky, 2014). The continuation of the crisis and lack of imminent threat from the Western or NATO intervention, the number of Russian warships in Syria started to increase (Ibid). However, the Tartus naval base was smaller in size and did not have sufficient space to accommodate the increasing number of Russian ships. These considerations, in addition to the uncertainties of whether the Syrian President al-Assad would regain the control over his country, provide a logical reason why Russia started to look for other possible locations for establishing an additional naval base. For obvious reasons, these locations could not be a NATO or an EU country, or a pro-Western state. Israel should also be discarded due to its close political relations with the US. Thus, Russia approached Egypt in 2013 to establish a new naval base; however, the project failed to materialize after the Obama administration's ultimatum and threat to cut off financial assistance to Egypt (Staff, 2013). This left Montenegro as the most plausible option, owing to its Soviet-links and its small economy.

Due to the uncertainties of the outcome of the Syrian civil war and the future of the Russian Tartus, in 2013, Russia evacuated Tartus, the only Russian base outside of its country (Weir, 2013). Although the Russian government did not provide a sufficient explanation to the media agencies for the reasoning behind the evacuation of the Tartus base, the ongoing political and military tensions in the region suggest that plausible reasons for this action could be protecting the Russian soldiers, civilians and technicians from the anti-Syrian government oppositions, and the promotion of the upcoming Geneva talks on stabilization of Syria (Ibid). In the same year, the

Russian government began to request the use of Montenegro's Bar Harbor as a Russian naval base in exchange for billions of dollars' worth of investment (Balkan.eu.com, 2013; Petrovskaya, 2015). In order to maintain its military presence in the Mediterranean Sea, Montenegro was the most plausible alternative for Russia. Montenegro was not a member of the EU or NATO, and as indicated in the previous sections, Montenegro had a high-level of economic dependency on Russian investments, and a minimal amount of military capabilities with a limited budget for rapid development. Although the Montenegrin government refused to allow access to Russia's military presence in Montenegro, favoring its positive progress towards NATO membership, the vulnerability of Montenegro and its openness to external influences, particularly the Russian impact on the nation's economy and politics, created a perception of threat for the US.

The threat, here, is analyzable through four factors that were introduced in the theoretical framework. Within the context of *aggregated power*, irrefutably Russia is one of the most significant forces in the international world order. It possesses the world's most extensive nuclear inventory (Kile & Kristensen, 2017), and holds the second rank within the scope of military power with a minimal difference to the US (Global Firepower, 2018). According to Global Power Index (2018), which comprises 55 different factors from the quantity of military personnel and arsenal to weapon diversity, the US' index in 2018 is 0.0818, while Russia's index is 0.0841. These rankings were also quite similar in 2013 and 2014 reports (Kosenkov, 2015). Thus, considering that the greater the power of the country, the greater the threat it poses, Russia's military capabilities and its requests to install these capabilities in Montenegro could justifiably be treated as a threat to Euro-Atlantic integrity.

The second aspect to look into is *the perception of intent*, as in uncertainty of Russia's motives when they requested the use of the Bar Naval Base. Information on how Russia exactly planned to utilize the Bar Naval Base is lacking; however, even the mere existence of Russian warships in the Adriatic Sea, on top of the Russian extant political capital in the nation would certainly contribute to the perception of threat. Furthermore, considering Russia's military involvement in the Syrian war since 2010 and the eruption of the Ukraine war in 2014 along with the Russia's annexation of Crimea, NATO simply could not risk Montenegro turning into a similar case to Sevastopol in Crimea or Tartus in Syria in the middle of a region surrounded by NATO allies. A Russian military base on the coasts of the Adriatic Sea would both potentially compromise

European security and the Euro-Atlantic integration. In addition, although there is no reputable media source or literature to prove this idea, the LNG (liquefied natural gas) stations, owned by American, Italian and Qatar companies (Leick, 2005), on the offshores of Montenegro and the Northern part of the Adriatic Sea could also be perceived as an attractive bait for Russia. When it comes to LNG stations and their pipelines, the Adriatic Sea can play an important potential role for the Balkan countries, since there are a number of ongoing LNG development projects that may potentially significantly reduce the Balkan's energy dependency on Russia (Milatovic & Sanfey, 2015). These then are the reasons why uncertainty related to the ulterior motives of the opponent is a component in the perception of threat. Thus, acceding Montenegro to NATO and decreasing the Russian influence in the region were the most strategic solutions against the ambiguous policies of Russia, concerning Montenegro.

The third factor is *the offence defense balance*, within the context of the Balance of Threat Theory, which creates a sense of insecurity for the less powerful party. Here, the less powerful party is the Montenegrin government, which had been trying to create a political balance between NATO and Russia in order not to risk its path to the NATO membership or Russia's considerable investment in the country (Jankovic, 2014). NATO did not have any legal standing to deter Russia from its military investments in Montenegro other than starting the formal accession process as soon as possible and using the membership itself as deterrence. Russia, on the other hand, was pursuing a soft power policy in Montenegro by politically influencing the Serbians and propagating anti-NATO actions to inhibit the integration process of Montenegro, which was weakening the Montenegrin government in the face of divided aspirations (Dempsey, 2014).

The fourth component of the threat, *geographic proximity*, is the most befitting one within the geopolitical context. The fact that Russia was seeking to establish new naval bases in the Mediterranean Sea both relates to the geographic proximity of Russia to the Eastern NATO countries and Montenegro, and to Montenegro's proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. Montenegro is in a very strategic geographic location, which would allow maritime access to the Balkan nations and the Otranto Strait and provide two critical harbors both for touristic and military purposes. The possession of this strategically important location was of interest both for NATO and Russia. From the NATO perspective, obtaining full control of the Adriatic Sea would not only stop Russia from any future attempts to establish a naval presence in Europe but also would

prevent Russia from gaining power in the Western Balkan regions. From Russia's perspective, losing Montenegro to the "enemies" would close the Otranto doors to Russia forever.

It was interesting to discover that Russia was pursuing such maritime policies at around the same time as the war in Syria and Ukraine was taking place. But, it was even more interesting that, as laid out in the literature review, all the analysis on reasoning and justifying NATO's invitation of Montenegro as the 29th member to the Alliance in 2015 was almost exclusively related to NATO's promotion of the Open Door Policy and its links to the Ukraine war. This raises the question of whether Russia's requests to establish a naval base on the Adriatic coast of Bar would indeed create a perception of threat in the eyes of NATO. It could have been an accurate assumption, considering the fact that Montenegro rejected Russia's billion dollar investment project in Bar. However, as the Montenegrin Prime Minister Dusko Markovic, elected in 2016, stated in a Q&A session, a nation like Montenegro, which has no significant military contribution to make for the organization, can offer strategic leverage to NATO against its opponents (Shuster, 2017). He further explained that since the Bar Harbor is very important for the NATO opponents, meaning Russia, due to the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Montenegro could provide a win for NATO in its power game with Russia (Ibid). An interesting aspect of the Prime Minister's acknowledgment of the Russian attempts in the Bar Harbor is the timing. The fact that Russia made its first request in 2013 and that the Q&A with the Prime Minister happened in 2017 suggests that Russia had been more assertive in its requests than it was reflected in the media sources. This strengthens the seriousness of the threat posed by Russia against NATO directly through Montenegro.

Furthermore, how this threat element was perceived by NATO, particularly by the US is most observable from the speech given by the US Senator Christopher Murphy, Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs (The US Senator Speech, 2014). In his speech, he urges the US government to increase its involvement in the Balkan countries since "Russia is sitting on the doorstep, ready to take our place" (Ibid). While the Senator praises Montenegro's willingness to become a full member of NATO, he also states that "Russia sees this glaring NATO gap on the Adriatic, and hasn't given up trying to step in and fill the role as Montenegro's protector. Russia would like nothing more than to have a proxy in the middle of NATO's Balkan arm" (Ibid). Moreover, on the issue of Russia's offer to establish a military base

in Montenegro in exchange for billions of dollars, the Senator also touched upon the issue of Montenegro's fragile and dependent economy on Russia. Considering that Montenegro was also recovering from the after-effects of the Euro crisis during that time, an investment of that scale would have been hard to repeatedly turn away from. We have to understand that, although we know now that the Montenegrin government indeed did not accept the Russian offer and instead pursued with its path towards NATO membership, that between the years of 2013 and 2014 when there was no official invitation from NATO or no assurances of a full membership, Montenegro could have accepted the offer and allowed Russia access to the Adriatic Sea. Finally, in the light of the perceived threat of Russia, the Senator urged NATO to invite Montenegro into the Alliance to inhibit Russia's further political and economic involvement in the process;

“[W]e shouldn't fear upsetting Russia over a NATO invitation to Montenegro. []. NATO should offer membership to Montenegro as soon as possible. Russia is trying to muddy the waters as quickly as possible inside Montenegro, and we shouldn't just assume that Montenegro will continue to spurn Russia's security offers if NATO continues to spurn Montenegro. The reasons to keep Montenegro out of the alliance just don't hold water any longer. Yes, the country has a long way to go when it comes to the rule of law and freedom of the press. But this is an incredibly young nation, and modern democracy takes time. And it's worth asking the question whether they'll get there faster as part of NATO's umbrella or Putin's.” US Senator Christopher Murphy (The US Senator Speech, 2014)

The different discourses from the US and Montenegro demonstrate how Montenegro's geographic position could have an influence on the NATO's foreign policies, and how the Russian "meddling" could create a threat from the NATO perception. Although the full contents of the statements are not presented here, their numerous expressions reflect all four components of the threat as defined in the Balance of Threat Theory. While the Senator's speech particularly includes the aggregated power and perception of intent components, the Montenegrin Prime Minister was more concerned with the offense defense balance and the geographic proximity of Russia. Russia's constant investment in media and real-estate to preserve its influence in Montenegro is referred to as *aggravated power*. Thus, as quoted from numerous Russian officials in the literature review, Russia had threatened Montenegro, on more than one occasion, to cut

foreign direct investments in the country if the nation followed through with the NATO membership. Consequently, if Russia followed through on its threat, it was capable of crippling Montenegro's already fragile economy. The uncertainty, on the other hand, was noted by Senator Murphy who commented that: "Disturbingly, it is hard for Montenegro to turn a blind eye to Russian money and influence" (The US Senator Speech, 2014). Prime Minister Markovic, on the other hand, was more concerned about the geographic proximity of Russia and its presence in Syria and Europe, and Montenegro's lack of capabilities to defend itself (Shuster, 2017).

7. NATO's Open Door Policy Prerequisites and Its Analysis on Montenegro

This chapter of the research focuses on NATO's previously elaborated Open Door Policy prerequisites and the implementation of these requirements on Montenegro. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze to what extent Montenegro fulfills the conditions that eventually allowed NATO to extend the official invitation in December 2015 to the Montenegrin government.

Open Door Policy Prerequisites
a) Geographic location
b) Democracy
c) Willingness and Contribution

a) Geographic location

The first prerequisite of the NATO's Open Door Policy is the geographic location of the aspirant State. Thus, in order for a state to apply for NATO membership, the state has to be on the European continent. From that viewpoint, as indicated earlier in the analysis of Montenegro's geopolitical features, Montenegro is a Western Balkan state which is within the borders of the European continent.

b) Democracy

The second prerequisite of the Open Door Policy specifies that the aspirant state for the NATO alliance has to adhere to democratic values. Considering that one of the primary goals of NATO enlargement is to promote stability and prosperity in Europe, the aspirant state is also expected to share similar democratic values with the Alliance (NATO Enlargement Fact Sheet, 2016). Democracy is defined as a functioning "democratic political system" (Ibid) which can be analyzed through the data retrieved from Freedom House (FH) reports on Montenegro (Freedom House, 2018a). The particular reason for selecting this institution is because of its specific

analysis of a government's implementation of political rights and its respect for civil liberties, both of which are befitting in the analysis of a "democratic political system."

The Freedom in the World reports from 2006 to 2015 demonstrate, in Table 2, that between the years 2006 and 2008, the first three years after obtaining statehood, Montenegro was rated *Partly Free*. Starting from 2009, Montenegro managed to increase its ratings to *Free*, which lasted until 2014. More recently, in 2015, we can see that the ratings drop to *Partly Free* again, and despite its drop in rank, Montenegro received its official invitation from NATO to initiate the talks for full membership to the Alliance in that same year.

Table 2: The Democratic Chronology of Montenegro (Source: Freedom House, 2018)

Year	Freedom Rating*	Civil Liberties**	Political Rights***
2006	3.0	3	3
2007	3.0	3	3
2008	3.0	3	3
2009	2.5	2	3
2010	2.5	2	3
2011	2.5	2	3
2012	2.5	2	3
2013	2.5	2	3
2014	2.5	2	3
2015	3.0	3	3

* 1=Best, 7=Worst

** 1=Best, 7=Worst

*** 1=Best, 7=Worst

1.0 to 2.5 = Free,

3.0 to 5.0 = Partly Free

5.5 to 7.0 = Not Free

The compilation of Freedom House reports between 2006 and 2008 explain that one of the reasons for the *Partly Free* rating during this period was because of the problems related to

widespread corruption on a governmental level, which mainly involved Milo Djukanovic, the long-term leader of Montenegro who assumed the position of Prime Minister in 2008 after the presidential elections. The second prominent reason was the judicial system and how it was dependent on the political authorities and raised the questions of impartiality of the prosecutors and judges in the system (Freedom House, 2009). Montenegro's Progress Report of the EU (European Commission, 2008: 11) also shared similar concerns since Montenegro had failed to adopt and to implement specific laws within the predetermined deadlines. The same report also presented observations on political influence in the prosecution system since the Prosecutorial Council members are elected by the Montenegrin Parliament (Ibid).

In 2009, Montenegro scored high enough to be ranked as *Free* due to the increase in its respect for Civil Liberties (see Table 2) and the progress in combating corruption in the public sector; however, the overall perception of corruption in the public sector remained high (see Table 3). This perception of corruption has been one of the main disconcerting issues relating to Montenegro. Montenegro's anti-corruption report of 2014 (Shukla, 2014) states that although Montenegro had adopted a number of policies and laws to combat this issue, the implementation of them, particularly in the public sector had been considerably weak. The most challenging areas where the political corruption was most observable were reported to be in the election processes, political party funding, and the abuse of state power (Ibid). These findings are aligned with the data from the World Bank. According to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, Montenegro's control of corruption had increased from 40% in 2006 to 54% in 2015 (World Bank, 2018b).

In 2015, Montenegro's freedom index dropped from *Free* to *Partly Free* (see Table 2), in spite of the government's efforts towards taking constructive steps on the nation's path towards EU and NATO membership. Although this regression would be expected as a result of the increasing corruption scores in the government (see Table 3), data from Freedom House shows that the decline is actually originated from the Civil Liberties indicator (see Table 2). Since 2013 Freedom House has been analyzing Civil Liberties and Political Rights by applying certain factors (Freedom House, 2016), and the ratings for these categories indicate that the main reason for this drop is due to the -1 decrease from the Association and Organization Rights factor under the Civil Liberties indicator. This caused the overall score of Civil Liberties to go down from a

scale of 2 to 3 (see Table 2). While peaceful association scored 10 in 2013 and 2014, for 2015 the score went down to 9 (Ibid).

Table 3: The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) - Montenegro (Source: Transparency International, 2018)		
Year	CPI Score*	World Rank/ 176 countries
2007	3.3	84
2008	3.4	85
2009	3.9	69
2010	3.7	69
2011	4	66
2012	4.1	75
2013	4.4	67
2014	4.2	76
2015	4.4	61
* 0.0= Highly corrupt, 10.0= Highly Clean		

This decline also correlates with the eruption of protests against the Montenegrin government in 2015. These protests, organized by the Serbian-dominant pro-Russian opposition called the Democratic Front, were primarily aiming at the Former Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic’s foreign policies and overall governance and demanding his resignation (Komnencic, 2015). During the protests, the Former Prime Minister blamed the Democratic Front for trying to sabotage Montenegro’s accession to NATO and trying to stall NATO’s invitation process with these demonstrations (Marovic, 2016: 2). Police forces, on the other hand, were accused of abusing their power and using excessive force against the protesters with tear gas and brute force which had extensive coverage in the national and international media channels. Hence, due to the reaction of the government against the protests and demonstrations, the Association and Organization Rights score decreased and caused Montenegro to fall back to the *Partly Free* zone.

These indications are also supported by the data presented in Table 4 on Montenegro's democratic transition score. The data on 2016, which reflects the observations on 2015, points out an increase in Local Democratic Governance from 3.25 to 3.50. This increase means that local institutions; municipalities and governmental bodies, are too dependent on the authority of the central government. Likewise, the fragile financial situation of Montenegro (World Bank, 2018a) combined with the continuous violations of the rule of law, also contributed to the weakening of Local Democratic Governance in the country (Marovic, 2016). Thus, Local Democratic Governance, along with the unchanged scale of National Democratic Governance and slightly deteriorated Independence of the Media tipped the scale of Montenegro's governance towards authoritarianism (see Figure 5).

NATO's Open Door Policy requires that the aspirant country must be a democracy, and although the reaction of the Montenegrin government against the protesters from the opposition parties caused the ranking of Montenegro's democracy decline to a more precarious position, we cannot assert that Montenegro is not a democracy. On the contrary, it should be considered that Montenegro is an electoral Democracy, with a mixed parliamentary and presidential system, and has been dealing with a high level of corruption, political division, a strong governmental authority, and pervasive violations of the rule of law, certain liberties and freedom of media (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Democratic Progress of Montenegro in 2014 (Source: Marovic, 2015)

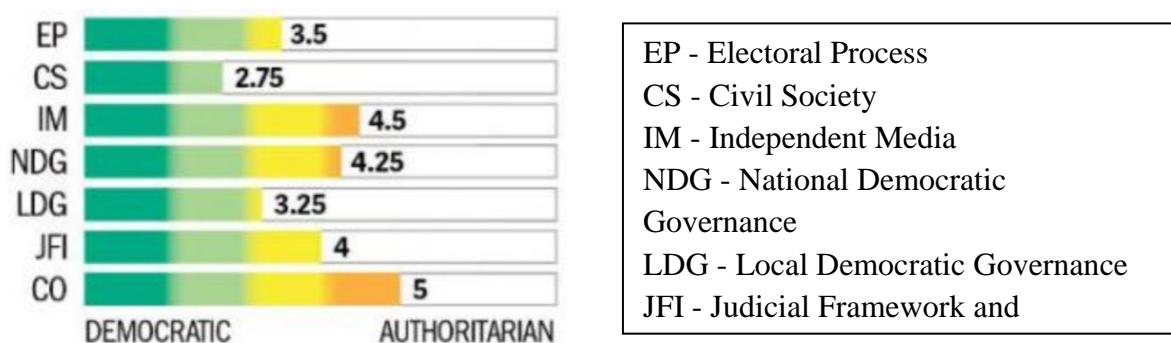


Table 4: Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores (Montenegro)

(Source: Marovic, 2015)

NIT Edition	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Electoral Process	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.50	3.50
Civil Society	3.00	3.00	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75
Independent Media	3.25	3.50	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.50
National Democratic Governance	4.50	4.50	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25
Local Democratic Governance	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.50
Judicial Framework and Independence	4.25	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Corruption	5.25	5.50	5.25	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Democracy Score*	3.89	3.93	3.79	3.79	3.79	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.86	3.89	3.93

*The democracy scores: 1= Highest level of democratic progress,

7= Lowest level of democratic progress

c) Willingness and contribution

The third and the last prerequisite of the Open Door Policy requires the applicant government's willingness to join the NATO operations and bring forth a contribution to the collective defense organization. Thus, the analysis of this prerequisite contains how Montenegro demonstrated its willingness to the NATO Alliance, which includes the pre-accession requirements that Montenegro fulfilled and the NATO operations that Montenegro participated in. The second part looks into the military capabilities of Montenegro to demonstrate to what extent the country can bring a contribution to the Alliance.

In order for a nation to accede to NATO, the government initially has to take institutionalized steps that demonstrate its commitment to the organization. After a State proves itself to be worthy of full-fledged membership, NATO extends an invitation to the country to initiate official talks of accession. The rest of the process is followed by NATO's monitoring the aspirant government's implementation of the administrative and military reforms and eventually signing the Accession Protocol with the candidate (NATO Foreign Ministers, 2015).

It has become a common practice since the 1990s that aspirant countries participate in NATO's PfP program, engage in the cooperation mechanisms that come along with PfP, and then sign the custom-made Membership Action Plan which evidently provides access to a full-fledged membership to NATO. The PfP program is a bilateral understanding between the individual aspirant countries and NATO (NATO PfP, 2017). The program allows Euro-Atlantic partners to build a cooperative relationship with NATO that enables them to develop their defense system and infrastructure, including military training and collaboration on scientific and environmental issues under NATO standards so that the aspirant country can eventually become a NATO member (Ibid). After initiating the first dialogues with NATO through PfP, the aspirant nation selects one of the bilateral cooperation documents which gives the framework of the objectives and goals of cooperation. These documents are the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program (IPCP), The Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), or the Annual National Program (ANP) (NATO, 2016). Briefly, the IPCP is the most standard document which is entirely modular and adaptable. It is based on the interests and objectives of the aspirant country and NATO (Ibid). The IPAP requires a more in-depth cooperation between the candidate and NATO on a political level. By constantly interacting with the NATO team, the government pursues on democracy and

security through domestic and institutional reforms (Ibid). Lastly, the ANP is the most demanding document of the three, which consists of a very comprehensive set of reforms on democracy, security and defense (Ibid).

While the first step consisted of selecting a tool that sets the tone of cooperation with NATO and develops the governmental institutions of the aspirant country, the second step is more about actively involving NATO operations. NATO offers a number of tools for the candidates to help them develop the defense capabilities that would make them eligible for participating in NATO operations. Some of these tools include the Planning and Review Process (PARP), the Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC), Military Training and Exercise Program (MTEP), and the Political-Military Framework (PMF) (Ibid). Very briefly, PARP develops capabilities of military forces and makes them available for NATO training and operations. The OCC is a more rigorous program used for training land, maritime and air military personnel and ensures its readiness for NATO deployment. MTEP is a five-year plan for training with NATO. Lastly, the PMF is the set of guidelines and political consultations to be followed when the country decides to participate in a NATO-led operation (Ibid).

It is essential to understand that through all these programs and tools, NATO provides a wide range of opportunities and flexibility for the aspirant countries to prioritize their areas of cooperation, their activities and their goals. When a country becomes a participant to the PfP program, NATO presents around 24 different areas of cooperation and more than 1.400 individual activities that the country can choose from and develop its custom-made trajectory (Pond, 2004). When the country selects its activities, they present them to the NATO members in a Presentation Document, and a two-year IPP is drawn up, which identifies the aspirant nation's goals and objectives (Ibid). The IPAP is a step forward from the IPP for further integration on a security/defense level. When countries commit themselves to this advanced tool, they ensure their opportunity for the Membership Action Plan (MAP). The MAP is the primary tool to become a member of NATO. It is a tailor-made partnership activity program for consultation, assistance, and support for the aspirant country. PARP, on the other hand, is a primary tool for interoperability which identifies the capability requirements and the country's contribution to the NATO-led operations (Ibid).

Montenegro's tailor-made trajectory started in 2006 with its participation in the PfP Program in the Riga Summit and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (Vuckovic et al., 2016: 603). From the moment when Montenegro gained its independence and statehood in 2006 to NATO's invitation in 2015, the Montenegrin government had shown a significant commitment to the Euro-Atlantic integration. The country had resolved the majority of the ongoing disputes with its neighboring countries and promoted a significant amount of regional stability which rendered the nation as a "champion" of implementing reforms and meeting NATO's requirements (Lilyanova, 2016).

In 2008, during the Bucharest Summit, NATO officials started the Intensified Dialogues (ID) process with Montenegro while also initiating Montenegro's participation in the IPAP (NATO News, 2008). The Montenegrin government identified its key areas of cooperation as defense and security sector reforms, civil emergency planning and security-related scientific collaboration (Lilyanova, 2016). In record time, Montenegro managed to finish its IPAP in 2009 and ID in 2010 and due to its favorable progress, Montenegro was invited to join the MAP in 2009, and the first cycle of MAP implementation started in 2010. This cycle allowed Montenegro to present the key challenges that were needed to be addressed by NATO (NATO Archive, 2017). The IPP, changed into IPCP in 2012, and the PARP, was integrated into the framework of the MAP (Vuckovic et al., 2016: 604).

In 2009, Montenegro also joined the Adriatic Charter for NATO, an association which was initially formed by the former aspirant countries Albania, Macedonia and Croatia, under the leadership and assistance of the US in 2003 to help the candidate countries on their path to NATO membership. The Adriatic Charter was a means of ensuring the continuation of the NATO's Open Door Policy and the integration of Euro-Atlantic countries under the democratic principles of NATO, which was only possible with the involvement of the US (Grdesic, 2004: 116).

Between the years of 2009 and 2015, Montenegro worked on its MAP to implement the remaining programs and mechanisms in its administrative and defense/security systems. The progress of cooperation with NATO was presented through the ANP reports (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, 2018). The fifth and last report of ANP presented four issues that the Montenegrin government indicated as areas of improvement: the rule of law, security, defense,

and public support of Montenegro's membership of NATO. As it has been presented in the previous chapter that the views of Montenegrins on this particular issue is quite divided. However, the government's will and ambition to commit the accession process remained intact which is observable with the government's introduction of the Parliament Resolution in 2015 on Montenegro's support and commitment to the integration to NATO (CdM, 2015).

While the Montenegrin government's willingness to become a part of NATO is apparent, the contribution it is bringing forward to the Alliance is another aspect to look into. Starting with the financial aspect of Montenegro's contribution, Table 5 indicates that the military and defense expenditure of Montenegro had been in a constant decline. Thus, considering that NATO had established 2% of its annual GDP to be spent on defense and security for its members, Montenegro is far below that percentile with 1.3% expenditure in 2015, which is also lower than the average of the European percentile of expenditure which is around 1.6% (Pryce, 2015). Given the average of its 4 billion-dollar GDP and 57 million-dollar defense expenditure with a population count of 600.000 citizens, the country's financial contribution to the Alliance had been quite limited.

Another aspect to consider when analyzing Montenegro's contribution to NATO is the military capacity of the country. Although the Armed Forces Personnel indicator in Table 5 accounts for a total of 12.050 troops in 2015, the actual numbers are a bit more different. The World Bank data includes the paramilitary forces in training in the cumulative armed forces, which accounts for approximately 10.100 soldiers in 2015 (Sovic, 2015). The number of active military personnel, on the other hand, was only 2.080; 1.500 in the army, 350 in the navy, and 230 in the air (Ibid).

However, even with its small army, Montenegro had displayed a significant commitment to the NATO's overseas operations. Since 2010, Montenegro had been deploying soldiers to Afghanistan, first within the International Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) from 2010 to 2014, and then the with the Resolute Support Mission in 2015. However, the number of troops that the Montenegrin government could spare was quite minimal. For ISAF, while in the beginning, the Montenegrin government was deploying around 40 troops to Afghanistan, this number decreased to 25 troops by the end of 2014 (NATO and Afghanistan, 2017a). For the Resolute Support Mission in 2015, the government deployed 17 troops to the station (NATO and Afghanistan, 2017b).

Complete interoperability between the Montenegrin military capabilities with the other Member States was very unlikely under these circumstances. Although the government had been working towards implementing IPAP and other programs in its defense and security systems for years, the Montenegrin forces were still significantly reduced. The Montenegrin Air Force, as an example, was almost non-existent. Montenegro inherited the Golubovci airbase after separating from the Union of Serbia and Montenegro, which only possessed a few jets that were quite expensive to operate, and the military assets in the Montenegrin Navy were not any better than its Air Force (Pryce, 2015). According to the report, provided by the Montenegrin Ministry of Defense in 2013, Montenegro spent 15% of the country's GDP on renovation and modernization of the military assets, most of which were inherited from the former Yugoslav times (Ministry of Defense, 2013). Thus, along with its 2.080 active military personnel, it is safe to assert that the main reason for NATO's policy to invite Montenegro was not to bring a meaningful contribution to the collective defense organization.

In the light of the collected data, Montenegro fulfills the NATO's prerequisites of the Open Door Policy in a limited capacity, which consists of its geographic position, as in being a European country, and its willingness for commitment. The country's democracy had dropped to a more fragile State in the same year that NATO invited Montenegro, and the military contributions were unlikely to have increased the overall security of the NATO Member States or the Western Balkan region. Therefore, in the light of the presented data and the analysis, NATO's invitation to Montenegro in 2015 suggests that NATO's integration policy can be considered as a more strategic policy than an aggregation of material power.

Table 5: Collective Data of Montenegro's Military Contribution

	GDP (current US\$)*	Military expenditure (% of GDP)**	Defense Expenditure (Million US\$)***	Armed forces personnel (total)****
2006	\$2.696.020.574,583	2,312705735	n/a	16000
2007	\$3.668.857.103,750	1,749695109	n/a	15000
2008	\$4.545.674.527,611	1,872181256	n/a	15000
2009	\$4.159.330.369,547	1,843757578	n/a	13227
2010	\$4.139.192.052,980	1,814347747	74	13084
2011	\$4.538.198.498,749	1,748969303	80	12180
2012	\$4.087.724.527,817	1,656463855	68	12180
2013	\$4.464.260.488,582	1,452260994	65	12180
2014	\$4.587.928.884,171	1,472271497	69	12180
2015	\$4.052.913.385,827	1,37049762	57	12050
* Source: The World Bank Database (2018a)				
** Source: The World Bank Database (2018c)				
*** Source: NATO Press Release (2017)				
**** Source: The World Bank Database (2018d)				

8. Discussion

Throughout this research, the focal point has been the geopolitical importance of Montenegro, its role in the NATO and Russia tensions and how it may have influenced NATO's balancing behavior. The eruption of the war in Ukraine topped with Russia's annexation of Crimea created a blast of tensions between NATO and Russia, which left Montenegro with the obligation of making tough choices. Despite the Russian threats and political meddling, Montenegro never wavered from its path to a full NATO membership. More importantly, although the country could not bring any significant security contribution to the world's largest collective defense organization, it provided something more important than the military assets or personnel; a win for NATO against Russia in a very intense political climate.

In the analysis of geopolitics, out of six factors, Montenegro's geographic location seems to be the factor that most strongly supports the first hypothesis. Montenegro was the last country on the Adriatic region that was not a member of either the EU or NATO and was in a perfect situation to be utilized by both of these international organizations to consolidate the European integrity and the Balkan's stability. Another significant consequence of Montenegro's accession to NATO is that through this membership, pro-Russian Serbia would be surrounded by the Allies, and the overall Russian influence in the region would diminish considerably.

Furthermore, theoretically speaking, before its membership of NATO, Montenegro signified a potential base for the Russian fleets, warships, and commercial vessels. At the very least, Bar and Kotor harbors could have been utilized by Russia as a periodic stop for maintenance or as a way station for its other warships in the Mediterranean Sea. The NATO membership, in a way, restricted Russia to the Eastern Mediterranean part of the region with one naval base in Syria, whose future is uncertain. Bar and Kotor, on the other hand, can be renovated and be of service for the NATO allies. Thus, in the light of these considerations, the first hypothesis which asserted that Montenegro's geopolitical importance for NATO stemmed primarily from Montenegro's geographical position is supported.

The analysis also demonstrated that Montenegro's geopolitical importance that stemmed from its geographic position also caused an additional threat to the European security and the Western

Balkan integrity. It is an *open secret* that Russia was, and in a way, still considering the former Yugoslav countries as an outpost for its own political agendas, and Russia's exploitation of Montenegro in this context was not different. A Russian military presence on the coasts of the "NATO Sea" was a threat to the US' military hegemony in the Central and Eastern European countries. The Balance of Threat Theory, from this viewpoint, explains NATO's behavior to accede Montenegro when it did. Although NATO did not increase its relative power against Russia, the close geographic proximity of the threat and the ripeness of it in 2015 indicate significant evidence that NATO was balancing a potential Russian threat that stemmed from the geopolitical significance of Montenegro. In the analysis, the media coverage and the quotations from two government officials; one from the US and another from Montenegro, provided that Russia was *repeatedly* requesting the naval base in Montenegro. On the account of perception of intent, in what capacity Russia was intending to utilize the Bar Naval Base if the Montenegrin government provided access was a great uncertainty, which added to the overall perception of a threat. The perception of the threat here, by no means can be treated as an aggressive one. However, it played an important role in the competition between NATO and Russia, where the "winner" would either increase or establish its military presence in a geopolitically important location. From this viewpoint, the second hypothesis of this research, which was combining Montenegro's geopolitical importance for NATO and the balancing behavior of NATO against the Russian threat, is supported, based on the data from the analysis section and its results.

It has to be taken into consideration that today Montenegro is an official member of NATO and that Montenegro has taken a political and economic risk by spurning Russia to favor NATO. However, in 2015 and the years leading to NATO's official invitation, the overall political climate was not as clear as it is now. Numerous reasons existed to block Montenegro's membership, and although Montenegro had displayed a significant desire to become a member, willingness alone is not enough to secure NATO membership. Accession to this particular international organization requires the fulfillment of very stringent conditions to preserve the democratic norms and implementation of the rule of law. The preservation of these norms can be considered crucial for the survival of NATO and the unity of its allies. However, while NATO had been announcing that acceding Montenegro was a remarkable demonstration of Article 10 and the robustness of its Open Door Policy, Montenegro could only succeed in partially fulfilling its prerequisites. The country was European, and it was willing. However, when it comes to

democracy and contribution, Montenegro failed to display significant progress. As indicated in the analysis, Montenegro's civil liberties and political rights dropped from Free to Partly Free on the same year that NATO extended its official invitation to Montenegro, due to the restrictions on association and organizational rights, police brutality, and corruption. Although the analysis showed that public uprisings were caused by the pro-Russian Serbians in Montenegro in order to postpone and to sabotage the country's advancement into NATO membership, the government's mode of conduct was the most significant factor that dropped the nation's democracy indicators. Thus, considering Montenegro's democracy, and its minimal military contribution to the Alliance, the most substantial contribution that Montenegro could provide to NATO remains geopolitical importance. In light of the data and the analysis as presented in chapter 7, Montenegro could only partially fulfill the prerequisites of NATO's Open Door Policy. This enables the researcher to weakly support the third hypothesis; Montenegro's geopolitical importance for NATO stemmed primarily from Montenegro's fulfillment of the NATO accession prerequisites.

In conclusion, the data, the analysis, and the results allowed this research to take a unique perspective of theory application. As described in the method of analysis section instead of rivaling the existing theories to prove which one explains the phenomenon better, this research purposed to use two existing theories, but three rationales, in a complementary manner to demonstrate why Montenegro was important to NATO. Indeed, for this particular phenomenon, if the Balance of Threat Theory were to be removed, then the analysis would be mired down since various components of the theory would be missing from the research, and the Classical Geopolitics Theory would not be able to capture all the factors to provide a thorough explanation.

The complementary approach in the Congruence Method allowed for a more comprehensive research design to answer the research question. In-depth analysis of Montenegro with the application of the Classical Geopolitics and the Balance of Threat Theory not only allowed the researcher to characterize the particularities of one location but also, demonstrated closer ties with geostrategy. As explained in the theoretical framework, Classical Geopolitics stemmed from organic State theory and geostrategy, and this research utilized the factors listed by one of the pioneers of geostrategy, Alfred Thayer Mahan. From this perspective, it was fascinating to see how accurately the geopolitical importance of Montenegro influenced the strategic behavior of NATO, which arose from a perceived threat caused by Russia's persistent approach to the

Montenegrin government. Furthermore, although Walt's description of threat and its components were more befitting to an aggressive direct military threat, the four components were still quite useful to explain the various aspects of how a non-aggressive threat was perceived by NATO.

9. Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to conduct an in-depth analysis on Montenegro and its geopolitical features to observe to what extent these features played a role between NATO and Russian tensions. Furthermore, the research also purposed to find evidence of a Russian threat that was not only caused by Russia's annexation of Crimea but also another phenomenon that influenced NATO to extend an invitation to Montenegro in 2015. The reason for this assertion was that in spite of its limited military capabilities, small population, a fragile economy, half of the citizen's opposition, and the decrease in its democracy, Montenegro was still under the consideration as a suitable candidate for NATO. This led the researcher to ask whether there are other considerations for NATO's interest in Montenegro and found out that Montenegro's politically crucial geographic position was possibly the most important reason for NATO's acceptance of Montenegro. The primary results indicated that, indeed, the importance of Montenegro's geographic location is twofold for NATO. First, as a West Balkan State with close historical, political and economic ties with Russia, the accession of Montenegro to NATO was a direct message to Russia that NATO will not be deterred or vetoed by third parties. Second, for Russia, Montenegro was the most eligible and the last standing castle to establish military cooperation with its government, which would be most undesirable for NATO endeavors of bringing stability and integrity under the NATO umbrella.

The overall research itself also purposed to produce a comprehensive study on Montenegro, which was lacking considerable in the existing literature. In other words, this single case-specific approach with the utilization of two existing theories to explain one phenomenon does not produce a generalizable outcome; however, it brings clarity and completeness to understand the phenomenon from different perspectives. This is one of the reasons why, in the literature review, a large variety of quotations was used to reflect the opinions and the rhetoric of governmental

officials from Montenegro, Russia, and NATO. Another reason is to demonstrate how Montenegrin government managed to thrive on implementing necessary policies to secure its path to NATO under significant pressures from Russia.

One of the most intriguing parts of the research is the second section of analysis which is on the NATO's balancing behavior against the Russian threat. The very fact that how complementary geopolitics and the balancing theory are when it came to explaining Russia's requests to the Montenegrin government to establish a second naval base in the Mediterranean Sea and this phenomenon's recognition by several reputable sources solidify the validity of utilizing theories in a synthesized manner.

9.1. Limitations

The most challenging aspects of this research were the language restrictions and lack of accessible resources. Since the online search engines do not recognize the Montenegrin language, and the translation of official texts from the Montenegrin government was scarce, the majority of the research had to be dependent on the limited number of official reports, analyses, and data collected and written mainly by non-Montenegrin resources. The Montenegrin perspectives, on the other hand, were solely depending on the English texts written by the Montenegrins. Another struggle in this aspect was the limited data and resources on Montenegro, and although this was one of the reasons why Montenegro was so interesting for the researcher, lack of data on Montenegro still affected the comprehensiveness of the research.

Limitation of the research design is also an aspect worth mentioning. As stated earlier, a single-case study provides a limited basis for generalization. How can we generalize the complementary approach of the Balance of Threat Theory and the Classical Geopolitics which were utilized to give a thorough explanation of a Russian threat for NATO emerged because of the geopolitical importance of Montenegro? Evidently, this case-specific study cannot represent a larger population, but the method of analysis can open new doors for further research.

9.2. Implications for further research

Considering the results of this research, would it be possible to use the same method of analysis to provide a deeper, more comprehensive explanation for other phenomena as well? Frank Schimmelfennig (2003: 284), as an example, used Rational Institutional and Constructivist Theories to create a theoretical synthesis to present more empirical data and a more comprehensive explanation for the EU and NATO enlargement. From this perspective, what other theories can be used in a complementary manner to explain a phenomenon? Or, it is possible to use Classical Geopolitics as a unit of consideration to understand other accession processes of NATO? Iceland, for instance, a founding member of NATO and also a small island country which is situated in the intersection of the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, did not have a standing army to offer NATO's collective defense. Then, how else can we explain Iceland's NATO membership other than its most crucial geographic position which functions as a control port for Russia's warships? From this viewpoint, using the Congruence Method, with the Balance of Threat Theory and the Classical Geopolitics, the same research could be implemented analyzing the case of Iceland as well. The perception of threat would again be Russia and considering the timing, *the raison d'être* of NATO formation as well, and Geopolitics could explain the other members' considerations for accepting Iceland as a founding member, even though the country was lacking any sort of material and military contribution to the Alliance.

In consequence, through this single-case analysis, the researcher managed to produce a comprehensive study on the 29th and the newest addition to the NATO Alliance which was lacking significantly from the existing literature. Moreover, through the Congruence Method, which allows the theoretical synthesis of two different theories, the researcher managed to produce an original work, by complementing the Balance of Threat Theory with the Classical Geopolitics, which has never been implemented before. Finally, with the utilization of the Classical Geopolitics in a slightly modified manner, which was somewhat abandoned from the Realist paradigm and the overall field of International Relations in academia, the researcher managed to emphasize the importance and the robustness of the theory by implementing it on one of the most contemporary phenomena.

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