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The Baltic states and new security challenges in flux

Edited by
Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik
and Tomasz Stępniewski



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Lublin 2023

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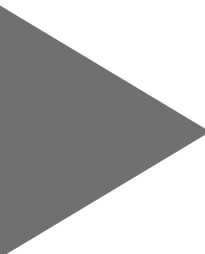
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Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik
Tomasz Stępniewski

Introduction – The Baltic states and new security challenges in flux

The Baltic states have been the focus of security concerns for many years. With its complex geopolitical environment, multiple actors with varying interests, and a history of conflict, the region faces significant security challenges, especially from Russia. These challenges include hybrid threats, military build-ups, environmental degradation, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Baltics, together with Poland, were often labelled “alarmists” by their European Union partners when they flagged concerns about Russia in previous years. As a result, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, they have reconceptualized their national policies and sought to adapt to new security challenges. The Baltic states have shown strong leadership by receiving Ukrainian refugees, banning Russian propaganda in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, or resigning from importing gas from Russia. In addition, the new security situation has forced them to take steps in the field of defence,

cooperation with allies, and within international institutions. While a military attack against the Baltic states is rather unlikely because Russia's military capabilities are engaged in Ukraine now, in the mid-to-long term, Russia's belligerence and foreign policy ambitions would significantly increase the security risks for the Baltic states. Russia considers the Baltic states to be the most vulnerable part of NATO, which would make them the focus of military pressure under a NATO-Russia conflict.

The Baltic states' situation should be seen in a wider regional perspective, however. The Russia-Ukraine war has fundamentally changed the security dynamics for Finland and Sweden, bringing them significantly closer to NATO accession (Finland is now a member). Particularly for Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, the presence of both these countries in NATO will contribute to stability and strengthen security in the Baltic Sea region. In any case, given the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea Region to Europe, including the Baltic states, and the wider international community, ensuring its security is a crucial priority. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has created conditions for Russia to revise the balance of power in Eastern Europe and even the international order established after the Cold War.

In this Policy Paper, we will examine the key security issues facing the Baltic states and explore potential solutions to address these challenges. Ultimately, our goal is to provide a comprehensive assessment of the security situation in the Baltic states and offer insights into how they can be strengthened in the years to come. Firstly, Zdzisław Śliwa and Louis Wierenga provide an overview of the Baltic countries' security perception considering Russia's continued aggression

towards Ukraine as well as the evolution of the threat assessments and actions taken to improve security. They highlight the role of NATO as well as the national security concept based on comprehensive perception and an entire government approach. Secondly, Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik explains the relevance of civic aspects of defence, arguing that there are domestic complexities relating to social attitudes towards state defence which determine the Baltic vulnerabilities not only regarding traditional aspects of security threats but also hybrid ones. Finally, Sigita Struberga analyses a case study of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia. She concludes that while the general evaluation of Russian culture and media in the country is assessed as visually decreasing, the Russian language is still needed for parts of the Baltic societies. As a result, it might be used for spreading disinformation as new risks and challenges may appear and create a breeding ground for dissatisfaction among these societies.

This special series of IEŚ Policy Papers is the result of a collaboration between the Institute of Central Europe in Lublin, the Baltic Defense College in Tartu, the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, the University of Tartu, and the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation. We would like to thank the authors for providing their input and analysis on the Baltic states and the changing security situation in Central and Eastern Europe. We hope that these IEŚ Policy Papers will be well received by their readers.

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, Tomasz Stępniewski
Lublin, April 2023



Zdzisław Śliwa
Louis Wierenga

Facing an unknown future - The Baltic countries' destiny

Summary:

- Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have a long and problematic relationship with the Russian Federation. They were solemnly reminded of “the ghosts of the past” when the Russian Federation launched its high-intensity, kinetic aggression in Ukraine, continuing its violation of territory on 24 February 2022. These events came as no surprise to the three Baltic nations, who had been warning other countries of such a possibility for many years. Although much weaker, Russian capabilities and intentions are not to be misjudged; over time Russian instruments of power will be restored to be employed to aggressively engage neighbours and the West again.
- Historical memory plays an important role in the perception of the Baltic states' understanding of contemporary Russian aggression asking to take decisive

steps to ensure security and territorial integrity. The perception further evolved after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, seeing it as a growing threat against any bordering nations, especially those that belonged to the Russian area of influence in the past.

- All three nations are dedicated to supporting the enhanced NATO deployments on their territory, relying on the political will of the sending nations, mainly involved in enhanced Forward Presence, and the development of proper infrastructure to host such forces permanently, which requires investment as part of the Host Nation Support.
- Although there are differences among the three Baltic nations related to the concepts of the Territorial Defence Forces (TDF), all nations are investing in them. TDFs are seen as an important capability, based on threat assessment and the obligations of NATO's Article 3, which includes shaping a patriotic spirit and enhancing societal resilience.
- There is a change, visible in Latvia and Estonia, related to Russian-speaking populations as among them the perception of Russia is evolving; however, it will take at least one generation to observe a significant mental shift. Younger generations are more assimilated within Estonia and Latvia, compared to the older generations living with memories of the past.
- Russian intelligence services and propaganda have been active in all the Baltic countries and will continue hybrid operations to preserve influence over target groups.

Introduction

Historically, Russia has been seen as an existential threat to the three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as it is directly linked with their geographical location. The worries have been strengthened by the imperialistic ambitions of Moscow throughout the centuries, and the constant drive to subordinate other nations and seize new territories including the desire to expand the buffer zone. The 24 February 2022 proved to be an important day, which awakened the “ghost from the past”, reminding nations that the Kremlin’s aggressive desire to rebuild the former empire was not forgotten. It was especially remarkable in Tallinn, as it was the same day the country was celebrating the 104th anniversary of the establishment of Estonian independence, therefore, the attack against sovereign Ukraine was a reminder of its history. Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, during her speech, said “Russia’s military action against Ukraine shows how high the price of freedom is”¹. This was connected with the casualties during the Estonian War of Independence and the fact that already in 1940, sovereignty was lost again to Soviet Russia followed by russification and deportations to Siberia. Latvia and Lithuania faced a similar fate, and those nations recognized that their unity and the transatlantic Alliance are critical to be able to face imperialistic Russia based on an assumption that it will not stop its aggressive behaviour if successful. The Baltic countries and Poland face a grim reality that the

¹ *Speech by Prime Minister Kaja Kallas at the laying of wreaths at the War of Independence Victory Column, 24 February 2022, Republic of Estonia, Government, Tallinn, 24 February 2022, <https://www.valitsus.ee/en/news/speech-prime-minister-kaja-kallas-laying-wreaths-war-independence-victory-column-24-february> [18.01.2023].*

possibility of being the next target cannot be ruled out. In this context, the words of Lennart Meri, former President of Estonia, are particularly valid; during his speech at a Matthiae-Supper in Hamburg in 1994, he stated ironically, “in 1940, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had joined the Soviet Union ‘voluntarily’” as seen by Russian politicians even up to the date. According to him, with the West’s “appeasement” policy, “one unwittingly becomes an accomplice of imperialist forces in Russia who believe that they can solve their country’s immense problems by outward expansion and by threatening their neighbours”². He highlighted that the message to the Russian Federation’s leadership should be “clear that another imperialist expansion will not stand a chance”. It is important to highlight that the leaders of Baltic countries and Poland have often been very cautious and suspicious about Moscow’s intentions, expressing warnings regarding Russian revisionist policy. The threat was directly voiced by Lech Kaczyński, former President of Poland, during a visit to Tbilisi in 2008 with the presidents of Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. He said, “We know very well: today – Georgia, tomorrow – Ukraine, the day after tomorrow – the Baltic countries and then, perhaps, the time will come for my country – Poland”³. Those words were quoted by President Volodymyr Zelensky during his address to the Polish Sejm. That assessment of

² Address by H.E. Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia, at a Matthiae-Supper in Hamburg on February 25, 1994, Archive of the Office of the President of the Republic, Hamburg, 25 February 1994, <https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=9401> [18.01.2023].

³ Visit of the President of the Republic of Poland to Georgia, Prezydent.pl, 12 August 2008, <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/aktualnosci/rok-2008/wizyta-prezydenta-rp-w-gruzji,26753,archive> [18.01.2023].

Russia has been demonstrated to be correct as proved by its aggression against Ukraine, trying to forcefully change the European borders. The Baltic nations have recognized this and decided to act comprehensively to enhance national capabilities to preserve sovereignty by cooperating nationally, regionally, and within international organizations with a focus on NATO and the EU. An aggressive narrative by Russian politicians, propagandists, and media within strategic communication, along with constant violation of airspace and maritime borders of those three nations, as well as a continuous hybrid war, waged over many years, demonstrates a profound lack of respect for sovereignty and international law. Moreover, the “compatriots” policy is another domain causing challenges, especially for Estonia and Latvia, which aims to “provide comprehensive protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad”⁴. Such a policy was used to justify the attack against Ukraine and could be used to justify aggression against other Baltic countries. The so-called “Primakov doctrine” has been brought back to life, assuming that “Russia should insist on its primacy in the post-Soviet space and lead integration in that region”⁵ dominating other countries; such “integration” took place in Georgia and now is being “practised” in Ukraine, the flagship example being Belarus. It could be assumed that Clausewitz’s statement about war as a continuation of

⁴ *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, Approved by Dmitry A. Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, on 12 July 2008*, p. 2, https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf [21.01.2023].

⁵ E. Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 June 2019, p. 1.

policy has been implemented by Russia. Russian “successes” in Georgia, Syria, and Crimea caused the Kremlin leaders to use war based on the incorrect assessment that it will not be opposed by Ukraine and the international community.

The chapter is based on available unclassified official documents published by the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian authorities, especially those related to the security domain, offering insights into the threat perception and actions taken by the three nations which reflect specific concerns of Russian military and non-military actions and the way it conducts the war. The first part will focus on the revision of the threat assessment and its evolution in the Baltic nations, allowing their suspicions and worries to synthesize. The next part will present a similar approach focusing on political and military decisions and actions undertaken nationally and regionally but also within international organizations, specifically NATO and the European Union. The important role of territorial defence forces in support of resilience and defence capabilities will be discussed as a contribution to societal awareness being built up as a deterrence factor. The conclusions summarize major findings reflecting the complexity of the security situation and the challenges the Baltic countries are facing.

The evolution of the threat perception

The perception of national security among the Baltic countries evolved after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, seeing it as a real threat against any bordering nation, especially those that belonged to the Russian area of influence in the past. Therefore, since regaining independence in 1991, the security policy of the Baltic states has been focused on

Russia as an existential threat. It caused the rather obvious decision to close ranks with the US-led Alliance as the key pillar of the collective defence of all members, creating a meaningful deterrence factor. Naturally, the Russian threat is not the only security threat, but it is the focus of the national and military intelligence services⁶. Such awareness is of course not only linked with them, as there is an understanding of the threat against other nations as “Russia views its neighbouring countries – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia – as an area of exclusive influence with natural and indisputable dominance”⁷.

The suspicions toward Russia within the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service (EFIS) 2021 report recognized that “it is important to keep an eye on Russia’s neighbouring region, where the Kremlin’s policy is aimed at establishing itself as the dominant force”⁸ as it could directly impact national security. The report specifically recognized priority regions: Ukraine and Belarus. Next, it emphasized the requirement to continuously build up armed forces “to increase readiness for a full-scale confrontation with NATO” paralleled by attacking the unity of NATO and specifically transatlantic relations. Finally, the role of comprehensive psychological and information warfare, espionage, and cyber-attacks using special services (FSB, SVR, and GRU)

⁶ It should be noted, for example, that China is mentioned by the Valsts drošības dienests (VDD), as are polarization, extremism, and radicalism. The latter is deemed as a mild threat. The threat from China is forecasted to increase over time but is not seen to be nearly as serious a risk as the Russian Federation.

⁷ Constitution Protection Bureau (SAB), *2021 Annual Report*, Riga 2021, p. 19.

⁸ Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2021. Security report*, Tallinn 2021, p. 6, <https://valisluureamet.ee/doc/raport/2021-en.pdf> [1.02.2023].

within covert influence operations was recognized with a differing range of aims and desired end states. The EFIS Report 2022 paid more attention to Russia within three chapters followed by a chapter concerning China, including an overview of its relationship with Russia. The report described the sequence of preparation for war within large-scale exercises, activities of the intelligence service, and cyber espionage to shape the environment. The reason was recognized as follows: “Ukraine is the linchpin that keeps Russian imperial ambition together”⁹. As the report was presented just before the aggression, it provided a very interesting overview of Russian forces’ capabilities recognizing their concentration on the Ukrainian border as an “immediate threat to Ukraine and an ultimatum to the West” being ready to “launch a large-scale military offensive against Ukraine if the Russian leadership so decides”¹⁰ by the second half of February 2022. This assessment was very correct, it included a solid overview of military capabilities and the scale of strategic exercises, but the capabilities proved to be overestimated. The annual review of the Estonian Internal Security Service highlighted the importance of the invasion day, 24 February, the anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, which “did not mark the beginning of Putin’s aggressive foreign policy but only its continuation with military means”¹¹. Estonian historian and statesman Jüri

⁹ Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2022. Security report*, Tallinn, 31 January 2022, Chapter 1 and p. 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹ Estonian Internal Security Service, *The Annual Review of the 20/21/22*, Tallinn, 12 April 2022, p. 5, https://kapo.ee/sites/default/files/content_page_attachments/Annual%20Review_2021-22.pdf [21.01.2023].

Uluots explains the Kremlin's aggressive behaviour with an interesting and relevant quote: "Due to the primordial nature of its socio-political ideology, the nation of Greater Russia cannot help but continue to invade the living space of other nations, attack them, harm them, and conquer them. At the same time, new reasons and theories for the attacks are found again and again"¹². It could be assumed that this is very valid in the current security environment as the reasons are not changing, and the military instrument of power is a major one after other tools are not achieving the desired end state.

Latvian security services have recognized the growing activities of Russian intelligence during the past years in support of political aims sensing and shaping the environment. The range of interests has been very wide, focusing on NATO and EU members examining foreign security policy, military capabilities, domestic policy, and the economy of foreign countries but also technologies for their benefit. Of course, Latvia was among such focused interests. An important factor in this has been the Latvian Russian-speaking population, constituting some 25% (est. 463,587 persons) who exhibit sympathy towards Russia, great empire sentiment, and a danger of nesting agents of influence to be used when necessary. The Latvian State Security Services (Valsts drošības dienests, henceforth, VDD) are acutely aware of the threat posed by the Russian Federation's intelligence services. The VDDs annual report provides a concrete link between the current threat posed to the Latvian state and the historical policies of Russia. Latvian authorities realize

¹² Ibid., p. 3.

that the threat is both external and internal. The possibility of Russia violating the territory of any of its neighbours, no matter how far-fetched, is not underestimated by any of the Baltic states. The VDD pays close attention to domestic activities conducted within Latvia by pro-Kremlin agents. The Latvian State has taken legal measures against glorifying the illegal actions taken by the Russian armed forces; the VDD initiated criminal proceedings for war crimes committed by Russian forces, and in February 2023, the VDD completed a year-long investigation into a pro-Kremlin blogger on account of glorifying crimes committed by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine and efforts to create hatred and alienation in Latvian society. It comes as no surprise that one of the top priorities of the VDD is to identify and apprehend individuals who engage in espionage against the Latvian state. Three unrelated criminal cases were launched in 2021 against Latvian nationals who were accused of spying on behalf of the GRU, one of whom has already been found guilty. Arguably the highest profile case of espionage focuses on a former member of the Saeima, Janis Adamsons, who was arrested and is awaiting trial for passing Latvian military, defence, political, and security information to the FSB¹³.

The Russian Federation presents a clear and increasing risk to Latvia in the domain of the information space. China also poses somewhat of a threat to the security of the Latvian information space, the VDD did mention that China is increasing its presence in the Latvian information space

¹³ *In the criminal case of Saeima deputy Adamsons, accused of spying, the judge will be changed*, Baltic News Network, 17 August 2022, <https://bnn-news.com/in-the-criminal-case-of-saeima-deputy-adamsons-accused-of-spying-the-judge-will-be-changed-237256> [9.02.2023].

to pursue its foreign policy objectives and that this is largely centred around NATO and the EU. Given the centrality of NATO in Latvia's security architecture, this is likely to increase, though even now China remains less of a threat than Russia; however, the risk is that China's objectives often overlap with those of Russia. Another country featured prominently as a challenge to the security of Latvia's information space is Belarus, coupled with Lukashenko's use of hybrid warfare to weaponize migrants along the borders of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The instrumental use of migrants has had a negative impact on the national security of Latvia because there was a lack of appropriate response, due to tensions in the region. Despite the security risks presented by Belarus, the Russian Federation presents a more dire and pressing threat to the national security of Latvia. The primary means of influence which the Kremlin utilizes against Latvian society is aimed at Russian speakers, but these messages do make their way into the Latvian information space as well.

In the most recent National Threat Assessment from the Defence and Intelligence Services of Lithuania, Russia, Belarus, and China are named as security threats. Due to Lithuanian foreign policy engagement with Taiwan and the PRC's reaction to this, security risks are potentially higher for Lithuania compared to their Baltic neighbours. While the focus is on the security threats faced by each of the Baltic nations from Russia, it should be noted that Lithuania also perceives security risks from China most definitively. Latvian security services recently noted Chinese intelligence as a security risk, one which will increase, focusing on searching for classified and open sources of information

about the West in general and focusing specifically on NATO and the EU. The Lithuanian State Security Department and Security Service view China as aggressive and a direct threat to Lithuanian economic, cyber, and information security. Russia and its playbook, naturally, posed a significant risk to the security of Lithuania. The security services illustrate this by the spillover effect that Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine will have on the neighbourhood, including the Baltic Sea Region. Aggression towards NATO member states is positioned as only likely as a result of unintended incidents. The Lithuanian report credits the Alliance and Baltic national defence capabilities as a credible deterrent. Like Latvia, Lithuania recognizes the threat posed by Russian intelligence services. Of particular interest in the case of Lithuania is espionage conducted on Russian opposition activists, who have come to Lithuania to escape the regime.

Political and military decisiveness

Russia as a military threat was highlighted by the leadership of the three Baltic states putting an accent on its offensive character founded by imperialist goals. The perception of Russia was specifically highlighted when the Baltics recognized it as a terrorist state. Already in May 2022, the Lithuanian Seimas unanimously passed a resolution declaring Russia's war against Ukraine as genocide and correctly noted that Russian forces committed war crimes and massacres of the civilian population of Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, Borodyanka, and Hostomel. The resolution stated that "The Russian Federation, whose military forces deliberately and systematically target civilians, is a state that supports and

perpetrates terrorism”¹⁴. Latvia made similar statements in August 2022, when the Saeima named actions against civilians as “targeted genocide” and recognized Russia as a “state sponsor of terrorism”, calling upon other nations to “adopt the same view”¹⁵. Estonia, in April 2022, published the Statement of the *Riigikogu* (Parliament of Estonia) “On the war crimes and genocide of the Russian Federation in Ukraine”¹⁶ and lastly, the *Riigikogu* adopted a statement declaring Russia “a terrorist regime and the Russian Federation a country that supports terrorism, whose actions we must confront together”¹⁷. All the nations present similar perceptions of Russian aggression, and they all support the territorial integrity of Ukraine. They strongly condemn the Russian Federation’s revisionist foreign policy expressed by the violent attack on an independent state, including voicing the requirement to initiate investigations by the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court to judge Russia’s crimes. Their political decisiveness was presented by constant support for the EU sanctions, even though they affect national economies, and it was

¹⁴ *Lithuania recognises war in Ukraine as genocide, Russia as terrorist state*, Baltic News Service, 10 May 2022, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1691202/lithuania-recognises-war-in-ukraine-as-genocide-russia-as-terrorist-state> [18.01.2023].

¹⁵ *Latvian brands Russia a “state sponsor of terrorism”*, Baltic News Service, 11 August 2022, <https://news.err.ee/1608681955/latvian-brands-russia-a-state-sponsor-of-terrorism> [18.01.2023].

¹⁶ *Riigikogu, Statement of the Riigikogu “On the war crimes and genocide of the Russian Federation in Ukraine”* 584 AE, Tallinn, 18 April 2022, https://www.riigikogu.ee/tegevus/eelnoud/eelnou/f374fe59-cofd-472e-a5f1-88466babff36/Riigikogu%20avaldus%20%20Venemaa%20F%C3%B6deratsiooni%20s%C3%B5jakuritegudest%20ja%20genotsiidist%20Ukrainas_ [19.01.2023].

¹⁷ The full text available: *Riigikogu, Statement of the Riigikogu On condemning the annexation of the territory of Ukraine and declaring Russian regime a terrorist regime*, Tallinn, 18 October 2022, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Statement-of-the-Riigikogu-18.10.2022-eng.pdf> [19.01.2023].

a joint approach encouraging other nations to support them. Other aspects were sanctions against Russian citizens connected to or supporting the war along with the decision to transfer Russian oligarchs' frozen assets to Ukraine. Estonia already in January has initiated the development of the legal background for such steps. The Baltic nations are relatively small, but their joint voice matters and this is based on a clear understanding of the Russian threat and lack of trust in Moscow's peaceful coexistence in the future. It is a brave approach when directly bordering Russia along with strong attacks by the Russian leadership and propagandists already questioning the sovereignty of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as a historical mistake. Nevertheless, since 2014, the word "deterrence" has become more commonly applied in the political and military narrative along with "resilience" as an "integral part of NATO's deterrence and defence posture"¹⁸.

Such a threat is seen in a broader context as not only limited to Ukraine, Georgia, or Moldova as it is targeting other nations bordering Russia including NATO members. Recognition of such a hostile posture has caused those three sovereign nations to support Kyiv with military assistance including artillery, ammunition, and the provision of education and training for military personnel. It is supplemented by humanitarian support for ordinary people including food, medical supplies, and e.g., electricity generators, buses for public transportation, etc. The overall effort is rather significant as according to the World Economy Institute,

¹⁸ NATO Website, *Deterrence and defence*, 26 April 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/nato/hq/topics_133127.htm [26.01.2023].

Latvia allocates 0.92% of its GDP to bilateral cooperation with Ukraine, Estonia 0.85%, Poland – 0.49%, and Lithuania assign 0.43%¹⁹, placing them among the top nations delivering support to Ukraine in relation to their GDP. Lately, Estonia decided to provide 113 million euros worth of military support, including howitzers (155 and 122 mm), military vehicles, Javelin anti-tank missiles, personal protective equipment (helmets, etc.), and dry food packages. The overall support to date amounts to 370 million euros (soon to reach 1% of GDP)²⁰. An important donation was two field hospitals and medical supplies; the third is planned to be delivered soon. The last Latvian declaration includes Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems, two M-17 helicopters, machine guns with ammunition, and unmanned aerial vehicles. Moreover, it plans to train some 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers in 2023. It also provided medical treatment for some 130 Ukrainian soldiers in 2022 and will continue this type of health care. Lithuania's 125 million euros package will include L70 short-range zenith guns with ammunition and two M-8 helicopters. Next, 40 million euros will allow for the procurement of anti-drone systems plus optical and thermal vision equipment²¹. In 2022, Lithuania “granted €660m in aid to Ukraine, including €240m in military assistance” and

¹⁹ *Wsparcie dla Ukrainy w stosunku do PKB. Polska w ścisłej czołówce 2022*, Money.pl, 12 October 2022, <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wsparcie-dla-ukrainy-w-stosunku-do-pkb-polska-w-ścislej-czolowce-6822171297897280a.html> [26.01.2023].

²⁰ M. Przepióra, *Czołgi i artyleria dla Ukrainy. Wspólna deklaracja dziewięciu państw*, Interia.pl, 19 January 2023, <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/raporty/raport-ukraina-rosja/aktualnosci/news-czolgi-i-artyleria-dla-ukrainy-wspolna-deklaracja-dziewieciu-nld,6544850> [27.01.2023].

²¹ Ministry of Defence, *I. Mūrniece Kijivā tiekās ar Ukrainas aizsardzības ministru*, Riga, 18 January 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/zinas/i-murniece-kijiva-tiekas-ar-ukrainas-aizsardzibas-ministru> [25.01.2023].

“will continue providing support until victory”²². The donation of weapon systems is causing the Baltic countries investment in the procurement of further weapon systems not only to replace donations but also to expand combat power. The advantage is that many Soviet-based systems are replaced by NATO-comparable ones. Therefore, the weapon systems are fully compatible with the Alliance nations enabling cooperation within sustainment, maintenance, and logistics. There are also some bilateral procurement projects as Latvia and Estonia are together identifying possible manufacturers of medium-range air defence systems. For this purpose, Latvia will allocate 600 million euros between 2023 and 2025, which is a significant part of the military budget. The joint defence planning underpinned by joint procurement allows better cooperation on the battlefield and improved understanding and support for each other at all levels of war.

The Baltic states are supporting economic-military projects like Rail Baltica and Via Baltica, “understanding that the railroads and highways will speed up deployment of heavy equipment such as tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, or self-propelled howitzers”²³. The projects are coordinated with military experts to ensure they meet military specifications. Other important projects are the NATO “Military Schengen Zone” and European Union PESCO “Military

²² *Lithuania and Poland to continue providing military aid for Ukraine*, Army Technology, 12 January 2023, <https://www.army-technology.com/news/lithuania-poland-military-aid-ukraine/> [24.01.2023].

²³ N. Papatolios, *Lithuania Roots For Via Carpathia to Become Part of TEN-T Network*, Rail-Freight.com, 3 March 2021, <https://www.railfreight.com/railfreight/2021/03/03/lithuania-roots-for-via-carpathia-to-become-part-of-ten-t-network/?gdpr=accept> [26.01.2023].

Mobility”, which will connect Baltic countries with NATO partners in the West based on “Via Carpathia” (a north-south road system from Lithuania to Greece) and integration into the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T, 10 transportation projects system linking Europe north/south and east/west). Another important factor is the requirement to sustain troops deployed to the region, especially as the troops could potentially be cut off from supplies for a time due to Russian ability to temporarily close the so-called “Suwalki Corridor” using air and artillery assets located in Kaliningrad, on Belarusian territory, or with aviation based inside the country. Exercises such as “Defender Europe” are proving the importance of lines of communication to support Baltic countries and could also be seen as logistical deterrence by showing the ability of large-scale deployment and moving both personnel and troops to reinforce Europe and its Eastern Flank, which is of critical importance for the Baltic nations²⁴. This is one of the reasons for investing in Host Nation Support, to have capacities to host and accommodate incoming troops based on seaports and airports to receive them and the infrastructure to host units. An example is Lithuania, which has started the construction of new military bases (Rokantiskes, in the vicinity of Vilnius, in the western district of Silale, and Siauliai). Next, Estonia is extending the Nursipalu training ground to have more space for exercises, and Latvia is expanding the Ādaži military

²⁴ I. Ploom, Z. Šliwa, V. Veebel, *The NATO “Defender 2020” exercise in the Baltic States: Will measured escalation lead to credible deterrence or provoke an escalation?*, “Comparative Strategy” 2020, vol. 39, no. 4, p. 375, DOI: 10.1080/01495933.2020.1772626.

base and considering a new Selonia Military Training Area in Aizkraukle and in the vicinity of Jēkabpils.

Resilience is strongly linked with conscription, allowing the enhancement of manpower of nations and the creation of a reserve pool allowing mobilization of nations in a short time with properly trained soldiers. In Estonia, conscription has been preserved in support of regular combat units and the ranks of the Defence League, intensively trained, and the number of reservists increased along with the number of exercises. Although Lithuania decided to do away with conscription, it did reintroduce it in 2015, just after the annexation of Crimea, to properly recognize the growing threat. The system has been working as part of the universal defence; therefore, the reform of the system is currently ongoing to make it more effective. President Gitanas Nausėda highlighted that “We have to understand that in the current circumstances, it is very important for Lithuania to move toward the principle of universal defence and to rapidly increase the number and ranks of trained reservists”²⁵. The so-called universal defence is seen as necessary and adequate for the situation, although, it has some consequences as Defence Minister Arvydas Anusauskas proposed to shorten the basic compulsory military service to six months, and “offer more alternatives to it and increase the annual number of draftees to 5,000 starting in 2027, from the current 3,800”²⁶. After six months of service, personnel could serve voluntarily for three months while being paid a regular

²⁵ *President on proposed conscription reform: Lithuania must move toward universal defense*, Baltic News, Vilnius, 12 January 2023.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

salary. The Lithuanian Armed Forces currently have about 11,500 professional military personnel, almost 3,500 conscripts, and nearly 5,400 volunteers. The reforms, after endorsement by the Seimas, will be introduced between 2024 and 2027. Latvia is currently developing legislation allowing a reintroduction of conscription and the process will be completed in 2023. Therefore, all the nations will have a similar approach to conscription as the foundation for the creation of reliable, well-trained, and dedicated reserve soldiers. It will allow rapid mobilization and smooth creation of units enhancing deterrence and overall readiness of the defence system to support authorities during a crisis and to fight during a war.

All three nations would support the deployment of brigade-size units on their territory; nevertheless, it is connected with the political will of sending nations, mainly involved in enhanced Forward Presence, and the development of proper infrastructure to host such forces permanently, which requires investment as part of Host Nation Support. It will not happen immediately. Other projects have been linked with investments in territorial defence forces along with other initiatives such as the Baltic Combined Joint Staff Element (B-CJSE), the Headquarters Multinational Division North in Latvia, the NATO Air Policing mission, enhanced Forward Presence, and NATO Forces Integration Units, to support the regional security framework. The Baltic Defence Cooperation Framework agreed by Baltic Defence Ministers in 2012 supports cooperation as the threat assessment is similar. Lithuania is building its division-level headquarters; lately, the same decision was made in Estonia to have the same headquarters. The challenge will, of course,

be with the proper number of staff to man those headquarters which also requires the formation of properly educated and trained military cadres along with procurement of division-level capabilities. The subordination of existing national brigades and closer links with eFP units is just the first step but, in general, the decisions are valid to extend command and control within the NATO Force Structure.

The vital role of Territorial Defence Forces (TDF)

The voluntary Estonian Defence League (EDL) subordinated to the Estonian Chief of Defence in wartime counts some 17,000 members, and with the supporting associations reaches 28,000 personnel and also possesses reservists (60,000 troops)²⁷. Their training has been growing over the years, including “snap mobilizations” which are currently at some 85% of soldiers’ presence for exercises²⁸. The “National Defence Action Plan 2019 – 2022” confirmed EDL as a wartime actor including its build-up²⁹. According to the Estonian Defence Forces Commander (2021), the “state’s confidence is in its reservists, the majority of whom have their service weapons at home, with which they will be able to report immediately in case of danger” to face different possible scenarios. The new initiative is the organization of a national defence education program to increase society’s

²⁷ *Estonian Defence League*, 2019, <http://www.kaitseliit.ee/en/edl> [20.01.2023].

²⁸ P. Glińska, *WOT: zacieśniamy współpracę z Estonią*, Polska Zbrojna, 18 June 2018, <http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/25900?t=WOT-zacieśniamy-współprace-z-Estonia-> [21.01.2023].

²⁹ Ministry of Defence, *National Defence Action Plan 2019-2022*, Tallinn, updated, 22 February 2018, <http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/en/objectives-activities/defence-planning/national-defence-action-plan-2019-2022> [20.01.2023].

readiness and to promote a patriotic spirit³⁰. The EDL continues to play a significant role within the Estonian defence concept to defend the country and facilitate the deployment of Allied forces during crisis periods to fight together. In the case of occupation, the EDL has the potential to conduct robust resistance as it has in the past. The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia states, “An Estonian citizen has a duty to be loyal to the constitutional order and to defend the independence of Estonia. If no other means are available, every Estonian citizen has the right to initiate resistance against a forcible change of the constitutional order”³¹. The statement is very important in allowing action to be taken when the threat is assessed as real.

The Latvian National Guard (LNG) (Lat.: *Zemessardze*) is a service of the National Armed Forces designed to “involve the citizens of Latvia in the defence of state territory and society, and which participates in the planning and execution of the state defence tasks in accordance with the tasks determined in the Law”³². Moreover, the LNG’s role is to support the recruitment and implementation of educational programs in schools. The “State Defence Concept 2020” considers the LNG’s crucial role in territorial defence enhancing the links between society and the armed forces. It is important that well-educated commanders could make autonomous decisions as, according to Article 25 of the National Security Law, “unit commanders need to be

³⁰ *Estonia: national defense camps will be organised by the Defense League*, the Press release of the Estonian Defence Ministry, Baltic News Service, Tallinn, 26 April 2021.

³¹ Riigikogu, *Estonia’s Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 2015*, Tallinn 1992 (rev. 2015), Article 54.

³² Saeima, *The National Guard of the Republic of Latvia Law*, Riga, 26 May 2010, section 2.

adequately trained and ready to get engaged in state defence based on the State Defence Operational Plan without instructions from the top³³. It requires qualified and knowledgeable leaders, so professional soldiers man LNG leadership positions. LNG members may keep weapons at home based on carefully established procedures, personnel self-awareness, and individual proficiencies. The “State Defence Concept 2020” highlights the LNG’s role in defending territorial integrity, planning in the close future is for some 10,000 LNG troops by 2024 and 12,000 by 2027.

The Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Force (Lit. *Savanoriškoji Krašto apsaugos tarnyba*) is under the command of the Lithuanian Land Forces. They count approximately 6,000 soldiers; 5,000 volunteers (riflemen) and 800 active-duty officers and non-commissioned officers organized in six territorial units covering all of Lithuania, ready to act in occupied territory and behind enemy lines. The NDVF invests in pro-defence education in schools to strengthen the link to society and to increase patriotic spirit. This is part of patriotic education including military unit visits, observing exercises, and joining summer camps. The NDVF cooperates with a paramilitary organisation, the Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union (LRU) (Lit. *Lietuvos Šaulių Sąjunga*), a significant force estimated at 11,000 volunteers, who could join the armed forces or the NDVF and contribute to national defence or resistance in the case of occupation. The NDVF and LRU are not competing with each other as they both have a niche in national defence.

³³ Saeima, *The State Defence Concept*, Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, Riga, 24 September 2020, p. 9.

Although there are differences among the three Baltic nations related to the concepts of the TDF, all nations are investing in such components³⁴. Territorial defence forces are an important capability of all Baltic countries based on the assessment of security threats and regarding NATO's Article 3 obligations. Currently, they are enhancing regional cooperation recognizing that the three nations are constituting a joint area of operations. In this context, it is valuable that the NDVF has started cooperation with Polish Territorial Defence Forces (Pol. *Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej*, WOT), allowing cross-boundary engagement; the former WOT Commander General Kukuła highlighted "Poland has created it based on Lithuanian experiences"³⁵. The Baltic countries' TDFs underpinning the shaping of patriotic spirit among citizens is key in creating resilience and a spirit of resistance, supporting mobilization, and the creation of reserve capacity. The common characteristic is planned investments in TDF to enhance combat power, conduct joint exercises with regular armed forces, and the procurement of more sophisticated weapon systems, especially anti-tank and air defence capabilities to mitigate the Russian advantage presented by armour units and air force. A limitation is the voluntary character of TDFs, resulting in limited capability and readiness at basic levels³⁶, where they are not comparable

³⁴ Read also: Z. Śliwa, E. Allers, *The voluntary forces' role within the security systems of the Baltic countries: dissimilar but cohesive*, "Security. Theory and Practice" 2022, no. 1, pp. 174-186, DOI: 10.48269/2451-0718-btip-2022-1-025.

³⁵ B. Łapszewicz, *Obchody 28. rocznicy utworzenia Ochotniczych Sił Obrony Kraju*, "Kurier Wileński", 17 January 2019, <https://kurierwilenski.lt/2019/01/17/obchody-28-rocznicy-utworzenia-ochotniczych-sil-obrony-kraju/> [24.02.2023].

³⁶ P. Szymański, *The Baltic states' Territorial Defence Forces in the face of hybrid threats*, "Commentaries OSW" 2015, no. 165.

with professional soldiers. Patriotic and military education is vitally important for decision-making when facing an unknown future. Latvia serves as an example as the national defence program has been accredited for higher education institutions.

Conclusions

Historical memory in the Baltics is of great importance and is circulated from one generation to another. Several waves of russifications; deportations and ruthless treatment by Russia (as is happening now in Ukraine) have left the Baltic nations with few illusions about the quality and way of life under Russian rule. Due to the size of the population, the deportations carried out by the Soviets affected virtually all families, and these stories and scars are still visible. The fact is that the younger generation has become more accustomed to independence, and it is hard to imagine these nations as not free and democratic, so there is growing recognition of the real danger of losing it. As a result of history, and the current war, the years of Soviet occupation translate into a threat constituted by the Russian Federation in the perception of the majority of the three nations' societies. The danger is that the idea of "Russian World" integration was renewed during President Putin's term in office and is implemented using conventional war as a tool. Therefore, it is creating a real danger for Baltic nations, based on an assessment that Russia will not stop its ambitions and that it is not even connected with current leadership, but rather with Moscow's overall strategy and mentality. Russia is seen as the most significant and direct threat; therefore, it is only a matter of time before another nation will be targeted

by Moscow after rebuilding its military capabilities. This is well expressed by the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who stated “We shall boost our defences and make every effort to have a lasting presence of our Allies in Latvia. We shall provide Ukraine with all possible support – political, military, economic, legal, and moral. We shall work on further international isolation of Russia and Belarus through expanding our sanctions policy”³⁷. Mentioning Belarus in this context is rather important as this nation is a close Moscow ally, bordering the NATO Eastern Flank and Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland directly.

Membership in NATO and the EU is critical for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to preserve their security and is not only linked with the military domain as all those nations are under constant attack using non-military means and assets. Therefore, NATO is providing military capabilities which are supported by Baltic countries' national armed forces, and the European Union is ensuring stability in other fields. The Baltics have already created conditions for extending the size and capabilities of enhanced Forward Presence units and this process will be continued based on developing infrastructure within Host Nations Support. Another important factor is the strong support of these societies to boost investments into national security based on a comprehensive perception and a whole government approach. As an outcome, there is constant development of the respective nations' armed forces parallel to the procurement of weapon

³⁷ *Russia remains the most serious and direct threat to NATO – foreign minister*, LETA/The Baltic Times, Riga, 26 January 2023, https://www.baltictimes.com/russia_remains_the_most_serious_and_direct_threat_to_nato_-_foreign_minister/ [7.02.2023].

systems that are critical for effective combat operations based on experiences from the war in Ukraine. Specifically, there is a strong investment in territorial defence forces as seen in a growing number of volunteers, extensive programs of military exercises, and the provision of modern weapon systems. Joint regional defence planning and the pre-positioning of stocks and munitions will further extend the ability to defend countries and facilitate the deployment and employment of other NATO troops. The clear perception of the nature of the Russian threat has caused national security to be strongly supported by all civilian entities based on a developed legal framework allowing the training of troops during peacetime and using all the necessary instruments of power during crisis and wartime. There are no reasons to assume and trust that Russia will change its current military-led foreign policy, thereby causing an urgent need to enhance combat power as a deterrence factor reinforced by a resilient society. Next to nationally driven decisions, another factor is the clear perception that Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian security is interconnected because of their common history, geography, and geopolitical challenges enforcing direct cooperation and merging capabilities within all the instruments of power.

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Boosting civic aspects of defence in the Baltic states

Summary:

- The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has updated priorities and accelerated actions not only in the field of military security but also in a non-military dimension. As the approach to security issues has remained the same as it was before the war, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia actualised their strategies and policies to increase social resilience both in terms of external and internal threats.
- The Baltic authorities addressed at least four aspects of non-military defence activity: 1. strategic communication; 2. partnership of public and non-governmental sectors; 3. decentralization of responsibilities, and 4. national identity building and civic awareness.
- In their approach, the Baltic authorities emphasise the civilian aspects of security – involving the entire society in state defence. In order to increase the

willingness and ability of citizens to defend the countries, the Baltic states concentrate their policies on 1. historical issues, 2. media and information, and 3. culture and education.

- In terms of social attitude towards state defence, the data suggest there is a great willingness to defend one's own country, particularly in Estonia. While there is still division along ethnic lines, there is a positive trend of an increasing number of Russian speakers who see Russia as an enemy.

Introduction. "A whole-of-society approach"¹ to security and defence

The Russian-Ukrainian war has proved that the ability to counter contemporary threats is not based solely on military resources but also depends on the readiness of the entire society and state institutions to act. The aim of this paper is to analyse national defence systems in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – how do they ensure the basic needs of the population? how do they develop state management in times of crisis? as well as how military units are supported by the public. For small states in particular, closely aligning their defence approach with the specific challenges of their strategic environment enables greater effectiveness in resource apportionment which, in turn, more directly meets the defence interests of their people². While a holistic

¹ The term comes from: I. Berzina, *From "Total" to "Comprehensive" National Defence: the Development of the Concept in Europe*, "Journal on Baltic Security" 2020, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 1-9, DOI: 10.2478/jobs-2020-0006.

² T. Johanson, *Differing concepts of total defence in small states: comparing the cases of New Zealand and Poland*, "Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka" 2022, vol. 3, p. 208.

approach to national defence has been used in Finland and Sweden for several years³, since 1990, the Baltic states have started to prioritize it as well.

While, in general, in a military attack or crisis situation, state administration institutions are unable to provide protection to all citizens in the country, residents must take part of the responsibility for themselves. This involves a comprehensive (also called total) defence system⁴, based on the assumption that, apart from developing military capabilities, it is necessary to promote the readiness of citizens to defend the country, to create conditions to overcome crisis situations and to ensure the continuity of the state institutions. In practice, the role of the state is to create and coordinate planning systems, to strengthen partnerships between state institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and citizens, and to promote patriotic values and responsibility among society.

In Estonia, security risks other than military such as economic pressure were only mentioned in the National Security Concept of 2001. Similarly, the term *psychological defence* appeared for the first time in the Estonian Military Defence Strategy in 2002⁵. At that time, securitisation of

³ V. Valtonen, M. Branders, *Tracing the Finnish Comprehensive Security Model*, [in:] S. Larsson, M. Rhinard (eds.), *Nordic Societal Security: Convergence and Divergence*, London 2021, pp. 91-108; R. Czarny, K. Kubiak, *Total Defence in a consumer society: a real possibility or wishful thinking? The case study of Sweden*, "Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka" 2022, vol. 3, pp. 63-74.

⁴ T. Johanson, op. cit., pp. 199-210; P. Szymański, *New ideas for total defence: Comprehensive security in Finland and Estonia*, OSW Report, Warsaw 2020.

⁵ I. Juurvee, *Estonia's approach to societal security*, [in:] M. Aatola et al. (eds.), *Societal Security in the Baltic Sea Region*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga 2018, pp. 100-117; T. Jermalavičius, M. Parmak, *Towards a resilient society, or why Estonia does not need psychological defence*, International Centre for Defence Studies, 2012.

non-military issues had taken place in a top-down manner. Then, mass riots in Tallinn took place in April 2007; a lack of integration of the Russian-speaking population into Estonian society brought social cohesion into the public discourse. The Estonian documents underline the integrity of government communication, which is also essential for maintaining efficient psychological defence. The aim of strategic communication is to protect the mentality and values of Estonia's society against hostile information operations, which involves planning the state's political, economic, and defence-related statements and actions, preparing comprehensive information and transmitting it to the population. It is based on deep dialogue, informing society, raising awareness about information-related activities aimed at harming Estonia's constitutional order, strengthening efforts to prevent the effects with cognitive methods, and neutralising information attacks involving manipulation and false information. Finally, the development of cooperation within civil society as well as private-public partnerships is stressed.

For Lithuania and Latvia, the need for a shift towards comprehensive defence emerged in particular after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, when the complexity of security threats was recognized and the non-military capabilities of the states were strengthened. Lithuania re-established conscription in 2015, partially for the fear of Russian behaviour in Ukraine but also because of the need to fill the depleted ranks of professional units and at least initially due

to an inability to attract sufficient numbers of volunteers⁶. In 2016, the Latvian National Defence Concept mentioned Russia and its hybrid warfare as the main threats to Latvia's security for the first time⁷. Additionally, the National Civil Protection Plan, approved in 2020 in Latvia, established the competence and action of disaster management entities in the implementation of disaster management measures – prevention, preparedness, response, and mitigation measures relating to national and regional disasters or disaster threats as well as providing support to the national protection system and determining the functioning of the civil protection system in cases where there has been a military invasion or a war has begun.

All Baltic states have significant numbers of volunteer-based units. The Lithuanian Riflemen's Union is a state-supported volunteer paramilitary public organisation. In case of a military conflict, the riflemen would fight alongside the regular armed forces as well as provide assistance in maintaining public order, protecting key infrastructure, collecting intelligence, and performing other tasks. Similarly, the purpose of the National Guard consisting of volunteers in Latvia is to involve citizens in the protection of the country's territory and society and to participate in the planning and execution of national defence tasks in accordance with the tasks entrusted to it. The National Guard

⁶ L. Dyčka, T. Rökk, Z. Śliwa, *Defence strategies of the smaller NATO states – a comparative study*, "Vojenské rozhledy" 2020, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 23-45, DOI: 10.3849/2336-2995.29.2020.04.023-045.

⁷ J. Bērziņš, *Latvia: From Total Defense to Comprehensive Defense*, "PRISM" 2023, vol. 10, no. 2; idem, *Latvia's comprehensive defence approach*, "Bezpiecība. Teorija i Praktika" 2022, vol. 3, pp. 223-235.

is seen as “crucial in defending territorial integrity” by the State Defence Concept 2020. In Estonia, in turn, there is a territorial formation called *Kaitseliit*, or the National Defence League, which operates as a volunteer organisation under the auspices of the Estonian Ministry of National Defence⁸. In terms of public – non-governmental dialogue, none of the Baltic states uses NGOs directly, but they emphasize the influence of different defence-related studies by the think tanks. There is the International Centre for Defence and Security Studies in Estonia, the Latvian Institute of International Affairs and Centre for Geopolitical Studies Riga in Latvia, and the Eastern Europe Studies Centre in Lithuania, which are rather think tanks on international relations but also deal with security and defence issues. Other examples include civic activists volunteering to work in the information technology, media, academic, education, and business sectors such as the Lithuanian “elves” or mainstream media initiatives – a fact-checking platform such as *Debunkeu*⁹. Finally, it should be mentioned that all Baltic states underline the necessity of youth military education to underpin comprehensive defence systems, enhance the patriotic spirit and civic awareness, boost the society’s cohesion, and invest in leadership skills and physical training. In order to increase patriotism and attachment to the state, educational materials are published such as schoolbooks for children and teachers on national security and defence issues, methods of violent and non-violent resistance, methods of personal

⁸ E. Allers, Z. Śliwa, *The voluntary forces’ role within the security systems of the Baltic countries: dissimilar but cohesive*, “Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka” 2022, vol. 3, pp. 173-186.

⁹ D. Bankauskaite, D. Šlekys, *Lithuania’s Total Defense Review*, “PRISM” 2023, vol. 10, no. 2.

protection, and others¹⁰. It was only in 2018 that members of the Latvian Parliament made a decision to include defence education in the curriculum set out in the nationwide secondary education standard as a compulsory subject from 2024. In addition, the Youth Guard in Latvia is to organise and ensure the process of training young people in national defence, educate them in national defence, and promote patriotism, civic awareness, fellowship, courage, physical fitness, and discipline¹¹. In Lithuania, civic education and education on national security are not included in the compulsory school curriculum, so it depends on the willingness of teachers and their skills and attitude toward the subject. There is also a lack of coordination of teaching initiatives and programs and assessments of their effectiveness¹². In Estonia, national defence education takes place in roughly 150 schools.

In general, at least four aspects of civic defence have been involved. Firstly, the aim is to build public trust in the state administration through strategic communication. This means monitoring the media space, coordinating and planning communication activities as well as disclosing disinformation. Secondly, cooperation between the public and non-governmental sectors is to increase the state's ability to manage in crisis situations. Local associations and churches can play this role by supporting social resilience. Thirdly,

¹⁰ A. Petrauskaitė, *Nonviolent civil resistance against military force: The experience of Lithuania in 1991*, "Security and Defence Quarterly" 2021, vol. 34, issue 2, pp. 38-52, DOI: 10.35467/sdq/136317.

¹¹ I. Urych, G. Matysiak, *Preparing youth for defence: Socialisation, education, and training of young people in Europe for national security*, "Security and Defence Quarterly" 2022, vol. 38, issue 2, p. 115, DOI: 10.35467/sdq/149891.

¹² D. Bankauskaitė, D. Šlekys, op. cit.

the dispersion and decentralization of responsibility mean the division of management responsibilities between the relevant ministries in terms of their activities and the delegation of their performance to local governments. Fourthly, strengthening social resilience takes place through shaping a responsible attitude towards the country and nation, developing a sense of belonging and national identity, improving critical thinking and civic awareness, and the ability to act in conditions of increased physical and mental stress.

Civic approach toward defence under Russia's aggression against Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has updated priorities and accelerated actions in the field of security. As the approach to a total defence system has remained the same, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia actualised their strategies and policies to increase social resilience both in terms of external and internal threats. Since February 2022, support for military and non-military measures to strengthen the capabilities of the state and society has grown among the Baltic communities. In addition, the experience of the Russian-Ukrainian war has indicated the need to supplement comprehensive national defence with activities, e.g., in the field of neutralizing waste, providing electricity, or building shelters. On 17 May 2022, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania approved the strategy for preparing citizens for civil resistance. Such preparations rest on three components: civil resilience, the will to resist, and practical skills in both armed and civil resistance. The Strategy foresees highlighted public education and information on the topics of contemporary threats, national security, and options

for contributing to national defence. Moreover, it enhances civic and patriotic education for the youth, improves pedagogical training, advances civil involvement in public activities and cherishing of historical memory¹³ (a plan for its implementation has not been approved yet). Furthermore, in November 2022, a new version of the Law on Riflemen's Union in Lithuania was approved, which indicates that Riflemen's Union is to perform second-line functions, protect facilities, fight against sabotage groups, and ensure territorial protection in municipalities. At the beginning of 2023, the renewed National Security Concept of Estonia was signed as the international security environment deteriorated. While the basic principles of the Estonian security policy are based on the same assessment, the Concept points out that it is necessary to develop civil protection mechanisms, increase the cohesion of society and the resilience of the state, economic security, vital services, internal security, as well as international activities. Furthermore, several practical attempts were made to boost civil protection such as new public shelters for members of the public who find themselves out in the open in any town or city at the point at which danger warnings are issued as well as warning sirens being already installed in Estonia¹⁴. They may be necessary in the event of a military threat, but also in the event of other threats such as extreme weather conditions, major fires,

¹³ Ministry of National Defence of Republic of Lithuania, *Seimas approves civil resistance readiness strategy*, 17 May 2022, <https://kam.lt/en/seimas-approves-civil-resistance-readiness-strategy/> [18.04.2023].

¹⁴ *Estonian Rescue Board unveils nationwide public shelters online map*, ERR.EE, 21 January 2023, <https://news.err.ee/1608862433/estonian-rescue-board-unveils-nationwide-public-shelters-online-map> [18.04.2023].

chemical attacks, mass riots, etc. Currently, the Baltic states are considering other civil defence systems such as a mobile app to warn residents of approaching missiles, indicate places to take shelter, and also work in case of power outages.

However, there was a fear that the Russia-Ukraine war would deepen social division in the Baltic states. Due to the large Russian-speaking minority, the effectiveness of the government's actions would result from national unity and social cohesion in the countries as well as citizens' trust in the government. This would hinder the dialogue between the authorities and society. Especially in Latvia, the greatest security concerns were related to the low trust towards political parties and the lack of strategic communication of the government towards its population, including the possibility to disseminate accurate information to the whole public and the ability of local authorities to counteract hybrid threats. As a result, the Baltic authorities addressed three main societal security issues to strengthen social cohesion and respond to Russia's hybrid threats, in the field of 1. historical policy, 2. media and information, and 3. culture and education.

In order to limit the provocations related to Victory Day celebrations on May 9, the governments of the Baltic states decided to ban the use of war symbols and to restrict the organization of mass events close to Soviet Army monuments. Then, they insisted on removing monuments from public places. Due to greater social acceptance resulting from solidarity with Ukraine, those decisions did not provoke any violent reactions from members of national minorities as well as cyber-attacks provoked by Russia did not evoke much chaos. Moreover, the authorities of the Baltic

states attempted to transform the meaning of the dates and places thus far identified with the Soviet Army. For example, the Latvian Saeima established May 9 as the Day of Remembrance of Victims of the War in Ukraine. Similarly, in 2022, a group of Lithuanian parliamentarians proposed commemorating May 9 in Lithuania with a day of remembrance of the victims of genocide in Ukraine¹⁵. Secondly, the Baltic states have taken actions in the media sphere to increase the awareness of information threats and resistance to manipulation among Russian-speaking citizens in these countries. The state authorities have banned the retransmission of several Russian TV stations. Currently, the Baltic public media offer quite wide and rich content including radio programs, segments of TV channels, and news portals, although not as attractive as those financed by Russia, which means that it is not so easy to protect these societies against Russian disinformation. At the same time, the states are trying to create an open, mature, independent information environment accessible to Russian-speaking citizens as well. Contrary to Latvia and Estonia, where different views on Ukraine and Russia are still visible among representatives of different ethnic groups, Lithuanian society basically shares the same view on Russia's aggression, which is due to a lower percentage of national minorities and a relatively high degree of national minorities' integration into Lithuanian society. Thirdly, work began on a reform of the education system, limiting classes in Russian in order to strengthen the state language. In Latvia, it will no longer

¹⁵ A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *May 9: The Baltic states oppose the symbols of aggression*, "IEŚ Commentaries" 2022, no. 597.

be possible to learn Russian as a second language in schools and similar limitations would be introduced in Lithuania as well. Furthermore, the transition to Estonian-language schooling by Russian-language schools was accelerated by the Estonian government¹⁶. Additionally, seeking to prevent the Orthodox Church from foreign (Russia's) influence, to protect the freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion of the citizens, and to enhance the integrity of society, the authorities adopted several amendments to the laws that significantly changed the position of and limited the autonomy of the Church¹⁷.

Social attitude towards state defence

Since 2014, when the Russian-Ukrainian conflict also inflamed insecurity in the Baltic states, the highest level of willingness to defend one's country has been consistently recorded in Estonia, ahead of the respective levels in Latvia and Lithuania. Next, data from the nationally representative survey conducted in 2019 similarly suggested that the greatest willingness to defend one's own country in the

¹⁶ *Russian will no longer be taught as a second language in schools in four years – Education Ministry*, The Baltic Times, 21 November 2022, https://www.baltictimes.com/russian_will_no_longer_be_taught_as_second_language_in_schools_in_four_years_-_education_ministry/ [8.05.2023]; *Estonia's Russian schools to switch to Estonian-language schooling*, Estonian World, 13 December 2022, <https://estonianworld.com/knowledge/estonias-russian-schools-to-switch-to-estonian-language-schooling/> [8.05.2023]; *Lithuania wants to teach kids Polish instead of Russian – but doesn't have enough teachers*, LRT.LT, 14 February 2023, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1888776/lithuania-wants-to-teach-kids-polish-instead-of-russian-but-doesn-t-have-enough-teachers> [8.05.2023].

¹⁷ A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *The Orthodox Churches of the Moscow Patriarchate in the Baltic States' attitude towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine*, "IES Commentaries" 2022, no. 711.

Baltics is in Estonia, ahead of Latvia and Lithuania¹⁸. As the Russia-Ukraine war broke out, an opinion that this situation would threaten security in the Baltic states was shared by 77% of Estonians and Latvians and 86% of Lithuanians. At the same time, public trust in the military and NATO among the Balts has generally increased. In 2022, almost 90% of Lithuanians and 80% of Estonians claimed they trust the Allied forces, while only 60% of Latvians did so. This means that Baltic citizens see NATO membership and its presence in their countries as a positive thing. A similar variation was observed in the case of confidence in the national army – in Latvia, it was the lowest (72%), and higher indicators were seen in Estonia (78%) and Lithuania (82%) (the EU average is 70%)¹⁹.

Data also indicate the relevant degree of readiness of the inhabitants of the Baltic states to defend the country in a situation of military threat; however, the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war, in this case, is not unambiguous. Estonians express the greatest readiness to defend their country. In 2022, 81% of the Estonian population believed that armed resistance in case of an attack was definitely or rather necessary. This is 9% more than the previous year. Two-thirds of the population is definitely or rather willing to participate in defensive activities according to their capabilities and skills. This is also nearly 10% more than the previous year. A similar trend was observed in Lithuania, where a survey revealed that 61% of respondents said they

¹⁸ M. Andžāns, A. Sprūds, *Willingness to defend one's country and to resist in the Baltic states*, "Security and Defence Quarterly" 2020, vol. 30, issue 3, pp. 15-30, DOI: 10.35467/sdq/124712.

¹⁹ Standard Eurobarometer 97, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693> [18.04.2023].

would defend by peaceful means, which is a 10 pp increase from 51% in 2021. 53% of respondents said they would turn to armed resistance, and 8% of them would organize armed resistance²⁰. In turn, the war in Ukraine has led 41% of Latvia's population to consider their role in strengthening the protection of the country, not just in the armed forces. Statistics show that the war in Ukraine has impacted citizens' interest in joining the National Guard, and the number of applications for service is increasing rapidly²¹. However, the will to defend the country by military means among Latvian citizens has decreased from 40% in 2015 to only 32% in 2022²². These data revealed that it is either a result of Kremlin propaganda or social antipathy toward the political elite in Latvia.

There is still a division in terms of the willingness to defend a country according to ethnic lines. While armed resistance in the event of an attack is considered necessary by most Estonians and non-Estonians, the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 caused Estonians to definitely support armed resistance at twice the

²⁰ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Lithuania, *Public opinion poll points to increased trust in the Armed Forces and NATO Allies, improved critical assessment of information environment and will to resist*, 20 February 2023, <https://kam.lt/en/public-opinion-poll-points-to-increased-trust-in-the-armed-forces-and-nato-allies-improved-critical-assessment-of-information-environment-and-will-to-resist/> [18.04.2023].

²¹ *Survey: War makes Latvians consider their role in state defense*, LSM.LV, 25 April 2022, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/defense/survey-war-makes-latvians-consider-their-role-in-state-defense.a453858/> [18.04.2023].

²² *Pētījums atklāj Kremļa propagandas atskaņas Latvijas sabiedrībā – mazinās gatavība aizstāvēt dzimteni*, LSM.LV, 23 February 2023, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/petijums-atklaj-kremļa-propagandas-atskanas-latvijas-sabiedriba-mazinas-gataviba-aizstavet-dzimteni.a498073/> [18.04.2023].

rate of non-Estonians (69% and 32%, respectively)²³. The positive trend is that support for Russia in Ukraine in the Russian-speaking environment in the Baltic states has decreased. For example, the number of Latvian people who view Russia negatively has increased from 37% to 66% in 2022, while in 2021 Russia was positively valued by 48%, and 14% were not clear²⁴.

Conclusions

Following Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the Baltic states have taken action in various spheres to increase the awareness of society and resistance to hybrid threats. We can see the active response of the state authorities in the field of historical policy, media and information as well as culture and education. At the same time, high rates of social support for NATO and national armies in the Baltic states as well as a readiness to defend the state among citizens are a positive signal for the governments of these countries. There are still a lot of existential threats, risks, and challenges to societal security in the Baltic states. As it was after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, currently the difficulties of the integration policy still exist as a consequence of the domestic and foreign challenges shaped by Russia's influence in the region. The geopolitical situation as well as domestic complexities determine the Baltic

²³ Ministry of Defence of Republic of Estonia, *Public opinion on national defence 2022*, May 2022, https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/public_opinion_and_national_defence_2022_spring.pdf [18.04.2023].

²⁴ *Survey: Latvian public sees Russia in a more negative light than in 2021*, LSM.LV, 20 September 2022, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/survey-latvian-public-sees-russia-in-more-negative-light-than-in-2021.a474416/> [18.04.2022].

vulnerabilities not only to traditional aspects of security threats but also to hybrid ones.

In general, non-military security strategies in the Baltic states have positively influenced social harmonisation. Several attempts were made to create strong social, economic, and cultural ties between state institutions and societies by reinforcing strategic communication and building mutual trust and tolerance. While some regulations came into force relatively quickly, from the long-term perspective it will be more difficult to change social awareness and to shape common values in society. Some changes in the field of memory policy have been observed and the plans and ideas proposed by the governments are gradually receiving attention from representatives of the Russian-speaking minorities. Some of them distance themselves from the pro-Kremlin war narrative and increasingly accept the symbols, values, and national ideas of the Baltic states, which stimulates social integration in these states. At the same time, the Baltic authorities' proactive approach may provoke Russia into more aggressive actions against them, including propaganda and cyber-attacks. Additionally, crisis situations may be used by radical social movements and populist parties aiming at inducing political divisions, especially in the pre-election period.

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Sigita Struberga

The Russian-speaking community in Latvia: On whose side in times of war?

Summary:

- In Latvia, the gap between two linguistic communities – Latvians and Russian speakers – has existed for a long time. The formation of such a gap is related to different historical memories and traumatic experiences on both sides. The war in Ukraine has shed new light on this issue. Russia's brutal war in Ukraine has created new challenges in the integration process. They are connected not only with the support of part of the Russian-speaking community for the Kremlin, but other socially and politically dangerous trends also require special attention considering the sustainability of the country's integration processes, including the radicalization of certain groups in both linguistic communities.

- The crisis has also shown the problem of the complex relationship between the state and the Russian-speaking community. On the one hand, many significant parts of the community still need to establish an affiliation with Latvian statehood. However, on the other hand, the strategic communication and forms of interaction chosen by the Latvian state need to be more effective to change this.
- It is essential to analyse what the status quo is, what are the possibilities that such weakness of the state can be used for political destabilization by an external enemy, and what lessons need to be learned and homework done to promote integration and strengthening of the societal security. The article seeks to address some of these complex questions and invites further discussion.

Introduction

The Russian Federation has long used hybrid attacks, including information operations and manipulation of different societal groups, especially (but not exclusively) Russian-speaking communities in its neighbourhood and the Baltic states in particular. To strengthen its influence over the Russian-speaking minorities, especially in Latvia and Estonia, the Russian Federation has carried out permanent information operations through various channels, including traditional and social media, spreading rumours, using the entertainment industry, involving commercial and non-state actors in the promotion of state-crafted discourses, or specific narratives hostile to the target countries.

Russia's brutal war in Ukraine is testing the resilience of European societies in multiple ways. The governments are struggling with hard economic, political, and many other choices, including different forms of messaging and narratives to be sent not only to external but especially to internal audiences or particular groups of society to maintain internal stability and consensus. Latvia, in this case, is of particular interest considering the existing division in the perception of political realities between Latvians and Russian speakers. The emotionally charged atmosphere and tensions in Latvian society since 24 February have created grounds for disagreements even among the citizens, who until now were united in their views or preferred not to talk about such issues as emotional attachment to the Russian political regime or differences of opinion about Russia's war in Ukraine, knowing in advance that opinions might differ. For this reason, just after 24 February, the interest of the decision-makers and the broader public increased on what the representatives of the Russian-speaking community think, their value orientations, and their particular views regarding the Russian invasion. And indeed, it is an important issue not only in times of crisis. Thus, the paper aims to illustrate how the Russian speakers in Latvia have perceived the war in Ukraine and how the governmental strategies used for strategic communication with the Russian-speaking community influence its perceptions of reality.

The Russian-speaking community in Latvia

Some researchers state that with the increasing integration of Russian speakers into Latvian society and the European-level living standards they enjoy, Russia loses its support

in attempts to destabilize the country. Others still believe in the latent potential of destabilization, which might be used as soon as Russia makes a serious attempt to do so. However, in light of integration policies and generational change, fragmentation based on linguistic affiliation is gradually diminishing.

The discussion on the Russian-speaking community's place and role in Latvian society and its values and orientations started at the beginning of the 90s when Latvian statehood was re-established after the occupation period. Many Russian speakers found themselves without political participation based on receiving non-citizenship status in 1994. The formal limitations life and other activities aimed at strengthening Latvian as the state language accompanied it. Following the slow naturalization process, the introduction of a bilingual curriculum in schools with Russian language instruction and other significant steps taken by the government did not lead to a successful integration process for several reasons. On the one hand, the official normative and institutional approaches were mainly not followed by inclusive discourse towards the minority. The Latvian community, in turn, was traumatized by Soviet rule, which led to the group's isolation and continued fear of the nation's extinction and language. The concern was well-founded, considering the dominant position that the Russian language had before the collapse of the USSR¹ as well as the continued

¹ Latvia's post-World War II history shows how the population policies of the Soviet Union brought it to the situation that by 1989, the Latvian share of Latvia's population declined dramatically. According to the 1989 census, 52% of permanent inhabitants were Latvians, 34% – Russians, 4.5% – Belarusians, 3.5% – Ukrainians and 2.3% – Poles. The native language of their nationality was 89.9% of permanent residents;

influence of the Russian Federation and attempts to destabilize the situation in the country. Latvia's post-World War II history shows how the population policies of the Soviet Union brought it to the situation whereby in 1989, the Latvian share of Latvia's population declined dramatically. On the other hand, a part of the Russian-speaking minority, with their opinion leaders at the forefront, was unable or unwilling to change their vision of social and political realities according to the new circumstances. It meant seeing the world through a narrative that portrays the idea of their belonging to the Russian world with the Kremlin and its landlord at the centre.

Mass media are crucial in implementing the so-called "Compatriots policy" in Latvia. Research shows that most Russian speakers in Latvia have spent their lives absorbing Russian state TV and other Russian media channels. Since the nineties, Russia has developed the interpretation of a reality that the Russian-speaking community living in Latvia is not faring well and that the state discriminates against Russians based on their linguistic affiliation. Meanwhile, Russia is demonstrated as a wealthy state with a strong leader who takes good care of the Russian nation and cares about Russian compatriots living abroad.

The presence of Russian finances, business, and culture in Latvia is still broad and, up till 24 February 2022, was sustained through various channels. Since then, the Latvian state administration has taken several straightforward

1989. gada tautas skaitīšana Latvijā, [in:] *Nacionālā Enciklopēdija*, <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/63152-1989%C2%A0gada-tautas-skait%C4%AB%C5%A1ana-Latvij%C4%81> [18.04.2023].

and decisive steps to decrease Russia's presence. From implementing sanctions, a non-entry policy for Russian citizens, and examination of Latvian language proficiency for residents with Russian citizenship, up to removing several artefacts symbolizing imperialism from the public spaces. Meanwhile, a complete transition from bilingual schooling to learning in the Latvian language in all Latvian schools is approaching. Official economic, cultural, political, and other interactions are nearly zero. Russian media channels have been banned². The Russian opposition media channel "TV Rain" has lost its license due to the expressed support for the Russian army fighting in Ukraine and other violations of Latvia's legal regulations. Besides, public support for the war in Ukraine or Russian aggression can now lead to criminal prosecution. Thus, although Russia has successfully taken advantage of the fact that the Russian-speaking community in Latvia is not homogenous and that the integration policy has not been successful, now, many of the influences are diminished adequately.

The question of how Russia's war in Ukraine has affected the positions of this group and how much influence the Kremlin has on their worldview is currently seen as relevant. It is followed by asking whether Russia's brutal war and the prospective absorption of Ukraine into Russia's Federation has awakened Russian speakers. The answers vary based on different interpretations of the situation. At the same time, however, these opinions differ, and public opinion polls show increased public tension. It is believed that divisions

² On 6 June 2022, the National Council of Electronic Media banned all television channels registered in Russia from broadcasting on the territory of Latvia.

and certain even radicalization tendencies, which were not observed in Latvian society until now, continue to develop. For example, in March 2022, every third resident of Latvia, or 34%, believed that society had become more divided according to a public opinion survey conducted by the company SKDS³. According to “Latvijas Fakti,” the amount of those who agreed that Russia’s war in Ukraine increases the tension between Latvians and Russians was 56% in March 2022 and 60% in December 2022. The results in the Latvian and Russian groups are similar⁴. The further text will analyse the available data on the sentiments of the Russian-speaking community regarding the state, the community, Russia’s war in Ukraine, and other similar issues, focusing on mood changes in the period after 24 February 2022, as well as the possibility of destabilization based on these indicators.

Measurement of the sentiments of the Russian-speaking community

One of the most challenging steps for the government, dealing with malign external information manipulations and challenges related to alienation, marginalization of certain groups of society, and other socially and politically dangerous processes, is the measurement of these tendencies. This applies to the effects of malign activities and strengthening

³ A. Nulle, *Aptauja: latvieši saliedējas, 49% krieviski runājošo kara ietekmē izjūt sabiedrības šķelšanos*, “LV Portal”, 9 April 2022, <https://lvportals.lv/skaidrojumi/339856-aptauja-latvieši-saliedejas-49-krieviski-runajoso-kara-ietekme-izjut-sabiedrības-skelsanos-2022> [18.04.2023].

⁴ *Pētījums par sabiedrībā aktuāliem jautājumiem*, “Latvijas Fakti”, Portal of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, December 2022, <http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/node/4084> [18.04.2023].

resilience against it⁵. Public opinion polls show societal trends, and in combination with information space analysis, monitoring these results are often used as the basis for threat assessment. The measurements used are mainly quantitative, with limited space for in-depth questioning or interpretations and limited possibility for analysing external validity depending on the truthfulness of answers. Solutions might be found in continual studies with a mixed research design where opinion poll results are supplemented with such qualitative information-gathering methods as focus group interviews or in-depth interviews and observations. However, this type of research is instead an exception to the reality of the Baltic social research agenda.

Post-24 February opinion polls show ripples within the Russian-speaking community in Latvia regarding attitudes and beliefs about Russia's war in Ukraine and related issues. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, polling company SKDS and other state and non-state actors have been monitoring these moods more carefully than ever. According to SKDS, 80% of Latvian society and nearly 100% of Latvians supported Ukraine, 20% of Russian speakers supported Russia, and 47% provided a neutral answer in March 2022. At the end of April, support for Russia decreased to 13%. At the same time, support for Ukraine increased from 25% in March to 30% in April. 47% of Russian-speaking respondents said they do not support either side, while 10%

⁵ V. Keršanskas, *Detering Disinformation? Lessons from Lithuania's Countermeasures Since 2014*, Hybrid CoE Paper, 6 April 2021, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/publications/detering-disinformation-lessons-from-lithuanias-countermeasures-since-2014/> [18.04.2023].

indicated it is “hard to say”⁶. It is necessary to pay special attention to the more-than-half of those who are undecided or unwilling to answer, taking into account that similar manifestations of unwillingness to answer were also observed in previous years when Latvian Russian speakers were asked about their political orientations, for example, in exit-polls during the election.

Often, the positive tendency in attitudes toward support of Ukraine has been explained by the ban on Russian state TV channels. However, this issue must be viewed as more complex. According to an opinion poll by “Latvijas Fakti” in 2021, 59% of all inhabitants of Latvia and 94% of Russian speakers mainly used media in Russian. 83% of all respondents stated that it is essential for them to consume media in their native language. 79% of Russian speakers, in particular, agreed with this statement⁷. It is well known that many Russian-speaking residents of Latvia continue to consume the content of Russian propaganda media – either via the internet or illegal TV programming. No legal initiatives or prohibitions have been able to limit this in Latvia. According to research ordered by the National Electronic Media Council in August–September 2022, 60% of Latvian residents (95% among Russian speakers) would like to continue watching Russian channels. Media expert and former member of the Council Gunta Līdaka has commented by underlining that the “shadow audience” of Russian channels has increased

⁶ *Support for Russia in War Shrinks among Russian-speaking Latvian population*, LSM.LV, 3 May 2022, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/support-for-russia-in-war-shrinks-among-russian-speaking-latvian-population.a455042/> [18.04.2023].

⁷ *Pētījums par Latvijas iedzīvotāju medijpratību un mediju satūra lietošanas paradumiem*, “Latvijas Fakti”, 7 September 2023.

after the channel ban in Latvia. However, the audience of Latvian national channels has not increased or might even have decreased⁸.

Despite these conditions, at the same time, it is possible to observe a gradual change in orientation, especially among young people, and the increase in support for Ukraine indicates this. At the same time, the leadership of the political party “Harmony”, which until relatively recently was accused of ties with the Kremlin, and the cooperation agreement it once signed with “United Russia”, which controls the Russian political space, has condemned Russian aggression. True, some believe this was one reason why the party received so little support in the elections and lost its long-held leadership positions. The support for this party fell to less than 5% from 20% in the 2018 election. The main competitor for the voices of Russian speakers was the political party “For Stability”. This political force has not only avoided showing condemnation of Russian aggression but instead opposes Latvia’s extensive support of Ukraine. “For Stability” also firmly rejects Latvia’s membership in the EU and NATO. This party got 6.8% of the votes in parliamentary elections. Another political force that declares itself as the defender of the rights of Russian speakers is “The Russian Union of Latvia,” with its precise pro-Kremlin positions. It took 3.6% of votes but no parliamentary seats. Dr Golubeva notes, “taken together, all three parties’ results yielded fewer votes than Harmony alone had gathered in 2018, but the

⁸ A. Timofejevs, “Aizvēra jūs, un paldies dievam.” *Vai Latvijā vajadzīgi mediji krievu valodā?*, Portal TVNet, 24 March 2023, <https://www.tvnet.lv/7738213/aizvera-jus-un-paldies-dievam-vai-latvija-vajadzigi-mediji-krievu-valoda> [18.04.2023].

trend is nonetheless clear – toward a more radical pro-Russian voice in Latvian politics”⁹. At the same time, it also depicts a strong trend – the increase in those who refuse to support the Kremlin and those who have maintained their previous positions, which may lead to further radicalization.

Thus, one might conclude that Russia’s brutal war in Ukraine has divided the Russian-speaking community into several groups – from those who share full solidarity with Ukraine and Ukrainians to those who stand for Russia’s imperial ambitions. The part of relevance is those who are confused and have lost their orientation. For many years, they have felt an affiliation with the Kremlin as the centre of their political worldview due to a sense of connection with the USSR, which has turned into support for Russia over time. However, the atrocities of Russian troops in Ukraine are not acceptable to them. There is also no clear feeling of belonging to this country; it has not replaced the previous sentiments.

Another essential aspect is belonging to the state and trust in governmental institutions. On the one hand, 80% of Russian speakers in Latvia state that they are patriots of Latvia¹⁰. On the other hand, previous research reveals that affiliation with the state is instead about the sense of belonging to the concrete territory and not the existing political regime¹¹. Trust in the state administration institutions and

⁹ M. Golubeva, *Latvia’s Russian Speakers Make Radical Electoral Choices*, Center for Foreign Policy Analysis, 7 October 2022, <https://cepa.org/article/latvias-russian-speakers-make-radical-electoral-choices/> [18.04.2023].

¹⁰ SKDS, *Cittautiešu aptauja par mediju patēriņa ieradumiem un citiem aktuālajiem jautājumiem*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/petijumi> [18.04.2023].

¹¹ See for example, Ž. Ozoliņa, I. Reinholde, S. Struberga (eds.), *Latvijas iedzīvotāju subjektīvā drošības uztvere: ietekme uz drošības politikas veidošanu*, Rīga 2021.

the statements of the state's highest officials is generally low in Latvian society. This is especially true of trust in political parties and high-ranking state officials. According to the January 2023 survey data of the company SKDS, 28% of the population in Latvia do not believe a single word of the country's highest officials, while 40% instead do not (68% of non-believers in total) when it comes to the country's financial stability and other similar issues. On the other hand, 2% fully believe, and 24% instead believe (26% of believers in total)¹².

According to the December 2022 opinion poll of the survey company "Latvijas Fakti", 50% of the respondents (-2% compared to March) trusted the information provided by the Latvian state institutions about the war in Ukraine, and 47% trusted the information provided by the Latvian media (the result did not change compared to March). Distrust of Latvian institutions and media was expressed by 22-23% of respondents. Among Russian speakers, trust indicators are traditionally lower than the average in society; in this group, the number of positive and critical evaluations on these issues was similar – around 35%¹³.

Latvian society as a whole is worried about its security and the near future. More than 2/3 of respondents fear the most in their lives that: they will suffer from an increase in energy prices or inflation, which will reduce purchasing power, and they will not be able to pay bills (72%); in case of illness, they will not receive high-quality medical services

¹² A. Kaktiņš, Post in Facebook official account, 14 February 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/arnis.kaktins> [18.04.2023].

¹³ *Pētījums par sabiedrībā aktuāliem jautājumiem...*

(72%); in case of illness, will not be able to pay for treatment (67%); in old age, will suffer from shortages (e.g., will not receive a pension large enough to survive) (66%)¹⁴.

All this leads to the conclusion that the Russian-speaking community of Latvia, which is generally apolitical with little interest in political participation, continues to be alienated from the Latvian state. It often sees the political regime as hostile¹⁵. At the same time, Russia's brutal war in Ukraine has created a significant existential crisis related to the pressure to reconsider one's sense of belonging, which until now has been centred on the connection with the Kremlin as the centre of the Russian world. It is instead a complicated process taking into account the fact that admitting Russia as an aggressor is a problematic psychological breakdown. Demand to express clear support for Ukraine and to actively demonstrate loyalty to the West and Western values is not seen by this group as natural. It is rather perceived as additional external and alien pressure.

Russian-speaking youth who have grown up since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the regaining of Latvian independence are much more likely to adopt Western-oriented views than their parent's generation who grew up under the Soviet system. It is necessary to realize that the older generation may not be able to adapt to the new situation entirely or that this process will take place slowly.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ž. Ozoliņa, I. Reinholde, S. Struberga (eds.), op. cit.

Lessons to be learned

Ethnic and linguistic or any other identities are not static – they might change and are changing more or less gradually every day. One such facilitator is transforming socio-political contexts. The Russian-speaking population of Latvia is no exception in this respect. At the same time, several factors have slowed down the integration process in Latvia. Interestingly, after 24 February 2022, some opinion leaders of the Russian-speaking community also acknowledged their responsibility in this aspect. Unfortunately, only sometimes is their opinion widely supported or recognized, and only a few of them see this co-responsibility. On the other hand, the Latvian nationalists have used the geopolitical context to promote radicalization tendencies in society, which cannot be evaluated as a favourable circumstance for the further rapid inclusion of the Russian-speaking community.

The Conception on the National Strategic Communication and Information Space from 2023 to 2027, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in January 2023, describes ways and means for how the Latvian government plans to organize strategic communication with its society. The Conception shows the choice to give up supporting local Russian language media, emphasizing the Latvian language as a uniting value of the nation. Although the goal is noble, it is unclear why emphasis is not placed on other values that would be more successful in uniting society. Such a refusal to provide more support for the creation of alternative content in the Russian language does not contribute to the formation of a discourse inclusive of all parts of society. Besides, the absence of diversified high-quality local media content in

Russian might push back the Russian-speaking audience to the Kremlin's controlled information space.

This example, and other similar ones, demonstrates that the Latvian government, choosing a strategy in which the national language is considered a factor promoting integration, on the one hand, undoubtedly strengthens the status of Latvian as the national language, however, on the other hand, refusing to provide broader support to local media that could provide information in Russian not only hinders such an essential process of integration of the Russian-speaking community but also creates additional conditions for the further use of Kremlin-controlled media among representatives of this community. Emphasizing language as almost the only proof of loyalty prevents the development of other critical inclusive narratives and puts additional obstacles in front of the process of forming a solid nation-state based on shared democratic values and faith in the country's successful future.

Such conditions, viewed in the context of security, are closely related to the resilience and societal security dimensions. Societal resilience is heavily interrelated with governance, the capacity of institutions, social order, and cohesion¹⁶. Building resilience is one of the biggest challenges for the state, which governmental and societal agencies face, especially in times of crisis. First, crisis developments are unpredictable and differ in scope and intensity, making it impossible to predict these developments or be entirely ready for them. Second, countries face challenges with

¹⁶ P. Dunnay, R. Rolloff, *Hybrid Threats and Strengthening Resilience on Europe's Eastern Flank*, "Security Insights" 2017, no. 16, p. 3.

resource allocation while dealing with limited state budgets. Third, achieving desirable results with short-term solutions to stabilize the situation is impossible. Thus, although Latvia shows flexibility and resilience in the communication system, which is the most crucial resource in the crisis management structure, there are several challenges regarding communication with the Russian speaking community.

The analysis demonstrates the importance of inclusion of all groups of society and the need to address them through channels familiar to members of these groups, thus building trust and understanding. It is the only way to render their resilience. When tensions rise during crises, there is a need to build communication based on the inclusion of society. Strong societal cohesion might be decisive for the country's well-being. The dialogue and choice of understandable language enable the government to find ways to improve interactions and change human behaviour, or even gradually change values and orientations.

Conclusion

The existing division in the perception of the geopolitical situation, vis-a-vis Russia and the West, and internal Latvian political realities between Latvian and Russian speakers, has been widely researched. This article does not create new knowledge, nor does it break existing conclusions. On the one hand, it shows divisions between the ways the titular nation and Russian speakers perceive Russia's war in Ukraine as well as other security aspects necessary for the state's security. On the other hand, it also demonstrates that ineffective and non-inclusive governmental communication strategies do not facilitate integration.

For a small nation like Latvia, it is vital to use all possible means to provide its own security and protect its identity, including guaranteeing the language's survival. The National Language Law and other legislative acts provide for this effectively. However, the contemporary complex geopolitical situations and internal societal issues require closely following internal societal divisions and adapting. Accordingly, the issue of building social cohesion should not be overlooked. Strengthening mutual trust contributes to building a sense of security and cohesion. The second important aspect is a need for policies founded on knowledge and the acknowledgement of such factors as specifics of societal groups. This requires the acquiescence of group-specific peculiarities and other crucial background information.

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The Baltic states have been the focus of security concerns for many years. With its complex geopolitical environment, multiple actors with varying interests, and a history of conflict, the region faces significant security challenges, especially from Russia. [...] As a result, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they have reconceptualized their national policies and sought to adapt to new security challenges. The Baltic states have shown strong leadership by receiving Ukrainian refugees, banning Russian propaganda in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, or resigning from importing gas from Russia. In addition, the new security situation has forced them to take steps in the field of defence, cooperation with allies, and within international institutions.

In this Policy Paper, we will examine the key security issues facing the Baltic states and explore potential solutions to address these challenges. Ultimately, our goal is to provide a comprehensive assessment of the security situation in the Baltic states and offer insights into how they can be strengthened in the years to come.

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