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The Baltic's response to Russia's Threat

**How Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania
reacted to the recent actions
of the russian federation**

This paper was drawn up by Ms. Ilaria La Torre, European Defence Researcher, under the supervision and guidance of the Head of the Permanent Secretariat.

This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states, but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. It was drafted by the Permanent Secretariat of Finabel.



SUMMARY

Introduction	3
The type of threat?	5
- Military threats	7
- Non-military threats	12
How have the Baltics responded so far?	15
- National Level	16
- NATO Level	19
- European Level	21
Conclusion	24
Bibliography	25
- Books and Academic Articles	25
- Primary Sources and News Articles	27

INTRODUCTION

Sharing a border with Russia has always been a major cause for concern for Baltic countries. However, the fear of a potential invasion from Moscow has strongly increased in the past decades, due to a multitude of factors: Russia's militarisation policies and the illegal annexation of Crimea. This paper aims to assess the key threats to the Baltic states coming from Russia. It will also look at the way the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have reacted – both autonomously and supported by the international organisations they are part of –, and the necessary issues that must be addressed in the future.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had to develop their autonomous concepts of security and defence. The Baltic states needed to create a new security policy: neutrality, trilateral alliance, or joining the West were three possible options (Szymański). Of these choices, joining the Western organisations seemed to be the best option. It provided a guarantee against the state the Baltic states feared most: post-Soviet Russia. In the mid-1990s, Russian resurgence and revisionism was a frightening reality, and Russia's wish to influence Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania began already on the first day of the brand-new Federation (Maliukevičius). The Baltic countries feared most of all the possibility of a Russian invasion. This fear was rooted in the 50 year-long previous occupation and the presence of large Russian minorities in the Baltic territories (Szymański). Indeed, Russia had developed a specific policy towards the Russophone minorities abroad – defined in the Compatriots Act of 1995 and in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 –, which stated that Moscow has clear responsibilities towards these minorities. Even if this can be seen as motivated concern for its former citizens, many Western scholars underline that the Kremlin mostly uses the

Russophone minorities as political instruments against the West (Nielsen and Paabo).

Post-Soviet Russia had one key objective: maintaining its international profile. Indeed, the country wished to keep the legacy of the USSR intact, just as the USSR had sought to maintain the legacy of Tsar Russia. On the one hand, what modern Russia wanted was, to create a buffer zone between its territory and the West, and, at the same time, to keep a strong leverage-hold on the post-Soviet territory, the Baltics included. In order to do that, Moscow created a strategy which involved military and non-military instruments (Maliukevičius).

To face Russia's strategy, the Baltics had to respond rapidly after becoming autonomous states. The states had to first create a capable and effective Armed Forces from scratch: to do so, they enforced a two-pillar scheme, based on conscription, with a large reservists list and, and on a voluntary territorial defence force (Szymański). The second step was guaranteeing high-level co-operation among the three countries: BALTBAT, BALTRON, BALTNET, BALTDEFCOL were created in the mid-1990s to do exactly this. The areas dealt with start from foreign deployment, to airspace defence, and military education. The final step was approaching the Western world, in particular the two following organisations, which could ensure stability and wealth for the Baltic states: the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU). Consequently, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined NATO's Partnership for Peace programme (1994) and signed Association Agreements with the EU (1995), in order to prepare future membership to the two organisations.

For many in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 2004 was perceived as "*the end of history*"

(Lawrence and Jermalavi). Indeed, in this year the three countries had become part of the world's strongest economic block – the EU – and had joined the world's most important security community – NATO. Baltic leaders were convinced that after joining these organisations, a prosperous future would arise for their countries. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty guaranteed, that legally an attack on one of the Baltic states, would cause the intervention of the Allies and, at the same time, the European Community's economic support would grant new life to the weak and Russian- dependent Baltic economy.

Focusing on the military aspect, the *rapprochement* to the West implied increased cooperation in the acquisition of military equipment, and in the sharing of best practices, deployment, and the training of troops. This had a substantial political consequence, as it affected the so far shared path for Baltic states, who then started to develop more specific national strategies. As underlined by Anžāns and Veebel, two different models

soon appeared in Estonia and Latvia. In Estonia, probably due to the geographic position of the country, being farthest from the Allies, a total defence approach was adopted, focused on the necessity to protect the territory (Szymański). The population was required to support a high degree of involvement in defence and security, and conscription was maintained and reinforced. A voluntary paramilitary armed branch, the Defence League, supported the traditional forces. Despite involvement in NATO, the country devoted considerable attention to its autonomous capabilities of defending its territories. In Latvia, where the population feared Russia less as a potential attacker, the security and defence approach was more general, and global, and involved the civilian population less directly. Conscription was abolished, with the creation of a solely professional army, and the expenditure on security and defence decreased. In 2012, the spending reached its lowest point, amounting to only 0.88% of GDP (Figure 1). Moreover, the involvement in NATO strongly influenced Latvia's foreign policy and its

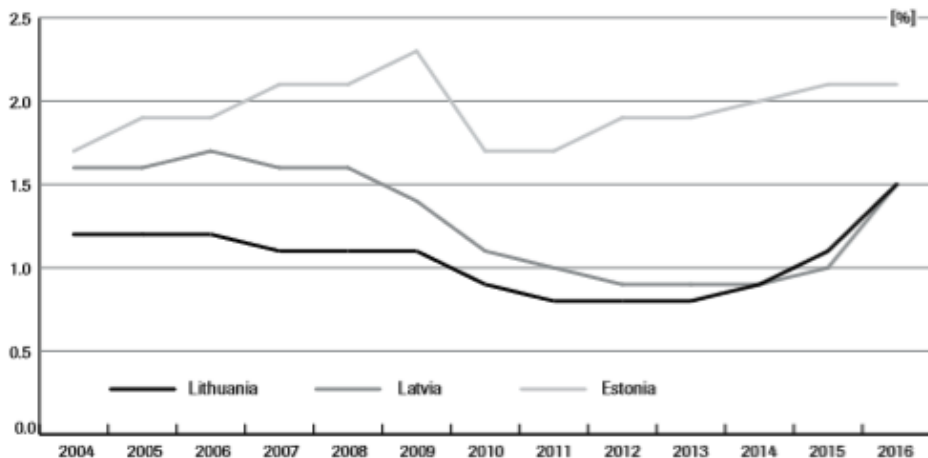


Figure 1: Defence expenditure in Baltic States 2004/16.

relations with Russia. Indeed, the post-Cold War NATO raison d'être, which included a wide-ranging concept of threats and considered Russia more as a partner than a rival, required normalization of relations with Moscow. To demonstrate good will to the Allies, Riga renounced, for example, its rights to the Russian-controlled Abrene District in 2007, for the sake of closer relations with the Kremlin (Andžāns and Veeber).

Lithuania on the other hand, chose a mixed scheme for its defence and security strategy: compulsory military service remained mandatory until 2008, which was then substituted by selective conscription which supported the professional military scheme (Szymański). In 2005 around 3,330 soldiers were called upon for basic compulsory military service. In 2013 there were only 634 soldiers (Andriškevičius). Undoubtedly, funding strongly influenced the organisation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The command of the AF strongly pushed for a bigger share of the budget allocated for the state's defence capabilities. As noted by Andriškevičius, in the first years of the new Republic of Lithuania, it was expected that the country would allocate a large share of its GDP – around 6% – for national defence and security. However, in 1995 only 3.7% of the GDP was assigned, and, even after joining NATO, the country maintained a low level of defence and security expenditure. In 2003, the share became even lower – 1.48% of GDP – while in 2013 only 0.77% of GDP was allocated. This strongly influenced the military capabilities of the country.

In general, the Baltic countries, in the first decades of their existence, relied strongly on the NATO Alliance for their defence, decreasing the expenditures they dedicated to this area, especially during the financial crisis. This is particularly true for Latvia and Lithuania. Estonia, for many reasons – such as its geographic position as we saw before – has al-

ways maintained higher spending for defence purposes. However, the situation for the three countries changed after Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea. This event altered the priorities for the Baltics, as they perceived an increased need for investment in their security and defence sectors, as well as the involvement of the NATO Allies. Pertinent questions are then, what is the nature of Russia's threat today for Baltic states? How will the Baltic countries decide to respond to this threat?

After having assessed the evolution of the security and defence policies of the Baltic states, the next chapter presents the key threats coming from Russia towards Estonia, Latvia, and, Lithuania. Chapter two will give an insight to the response of the Baltic states, taken singularly, as well as to the collective action of NATO and the EU, especially following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. In the concluding section, a final glimpse of the real nature of the threats will open up some suggestions on what needs to be improved and how.

THE TYPE OF THREAT?

Ulman defines a threat to national security as: *"an action or sequence of events that threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to private, nongovernmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state"* (Ulman, 1983 in Jakniunaite). The threat posed by Russia to Baltic security is multi-faceted, long-term, and sharply different from traditional threats. More recently, there has been growing awareness of the seriousness of these threats, since the annexation of Crimea effectively ended the debates on the strategy of Russia vis-à-vis its Western neigh-

hours, making the aggressive intentions of the Kremlin clear. This is demonstrated by the December 2015 Russian Security Strategy, which elaborated that Moscow considers the United States and NATO openly as potential opponents. This is on top of Russia's Military Doctrine of December 2014, which viewed NATO's self-appointed role as global leader, as violating the rules of international law, especially due to its approach on the Russian Western borders.

Threats to national security have never remained consistent over time, as new actors and methods continually arise and develop. According to Valery Gerasimov – the current Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia – “the very ‘rules of war’ have changed.” For example, a war can begin without ever having been declared, with spontaneous military actions, without massive physical clashes. This gives priority to short-term precision actions, and attacks to infrastructures and information facilities. Figure two shows the main changes between traditional and renewed military actions (Figure 2).

In brief, the Gerasimov doctrine tells us to consider warfare in a broader manner (Monaghan), no longer separating between conventional and non-conventional instruments. In the words of the General, “the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness” (VPK).

Many scholars group the new methods of conducting a conflict under the notion of hybrid warfare. On the 6th of April 2016, The European Commission defined hybrid strategy as a “mixture of coercive and subversive activities, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare.” Even if hybrid warfare was somehow already present in the past, e.g., during the Cold War, its relevance vis-à-vis traditional conflict makes it much more relevant today (Takacs).

Traditional Military Methods	New Military Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declaration of War at the beginning of a conflict • Frontal clashes between large units • Defeat of manpower, firepower, with the objective of gaining territorial control • Combination of land, air, and maritime operations • Strict hierarchic system within the AF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Declaration of War • Non-contact clashes between interspecific fighting groups • Use of armed civilians • Annihilation of the enemy's military and economic power through specific strikes on key infrastructure • Combination of land, air, maritime, and cyber operations • Use of non-traditional and unconventional methods • AF organised in a unified informational sphere

Figure 2: Changes in the Character of Armed Conflict According to Gerasimov.
Credits to De Gruyten Open

In Russia, the notion of hybrid warfare is not the same as in the West. Indeed, this word – transliterated literally in Russian as ‘gibridnaya voina’ (гибридная война) –, is only used by Russian commentators while debunking Western theories of Russian hybrid action in the West. Generally speaking, Russians prefer avoiding labelling these actions under different terms. Moscow considers unconventional tools as the principal means to neutralise Western military superiority: likely this is the reason that in Russia hybrid is considered merely on par with traditional strategies since separating them means belittling the capacity of Moscow to fight back the West (Monaghan).

Russia’s challenge vis-à-vis the West consists of a hybrid approach which encompasses instruments of hard and soft power. When speaking of Russia, Drent et al., suggest that the word ‘soft force’- which translates into Russian as ‘myagkaya sila’ (мягкая сила) – should be used to substitute the terms ‘soft power’, as it is to be a different type of use of force. The concept of soft force is described by Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept (2013), more as a destabilisation tool, than a diplomatic one (Drent, Hendriks, and Zandee). This means that Russia considers it – as it is stated in the Russian Foreign Policy Concepts of 2013 and 2016 – as a way “*to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion.*”

In the eyes of the Baltic countries, during the past decade, Russia has developed a robust strategy to threaten their territories, using hard and soft power, and putting into place threats towards diverse sectors of the countries’ security. Generally speaking, five sectors of security policy are often identified in this regard, using Buzan’s sectoral approach: military, economic, political, societal, and environmental (Stone). The following sections are

devoted to the analysis of these main threats, looking at Russian behaviour towards the Baltics. While the next paragraph will concentrate on military threats, the following paragraph will provide an overview of the most critical non-military threats.

Military threats

Military threats are probably the most visible and direct threats the Baltic countries perceive since the fall of the USSR. For post-Soviet countries, the relations with Russia have been firmly rooted in past Russian domination, both during the Soviet and Tsar Regime periods. Consequently, the image of Russia is still as a potential aggressor. Since the restoration of independence, the possibility of military intervention of Russian forces in Baltic territories was considered as highly improbable (Jakniunaite). Yet, the guarantee from NATO membership assured regional stability for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, making the possibility of intervention practically impossible. Nevertheless, the Georgian-Russian conflict of 2008 slightly increased the fears of Baltic countries (Jakniunaite). The conflict showed the capabilities of Russia, and the failure of the West to respond firmly. However, as reported by Jakniunaite, during the conflict in Georgia, Russian officers also understood the inadequacy of Russian equipment and facilities (Lucas in Jakniunaite). Indeed, most of the technologies and the weaponry used were the ones developed in Soviet times. Consequently, in the following years, the Russian Armed Forces underwent profound internal transformations, supported by an increase in military spending.

In 2008, through the New Look reform plan, Moscow tried to improve the Armed Forces and give them modern, and thus more efficient, equipment. The purpose of the reform was to turn the Soviet-style mass-mobilised

army structure into a purely professional one: Soviet-type specialised divisions – such as tank and motorised infantry – had to become all-arms brigades, “formed on the basis of deployment and warfighting criteria – light, medium, heavy – rather than equipment-driven” (Drent, Hendriks, and Zandee). The budget devoted to defence and military purposes by the Kremlin gives an overview of Moscow’s wish to improve the efficiency of the Armed Forces. As Figure 3 shows, how the defence budget during 2006-2015, has more than doubled. The most significant effort put in place by the Kremlin was launched in 2011 by President Putin: The State Armaments Programme 2011-2020, or GPV 2020, which consists of a \$500 billion rearmament agenda. The plan’s goal was to substitute 70% of Soviet equipment by 2020 to give Russia advanced weapons befitting of a resurgent power (Johnston and Popescu).

Despite an overall increase in the share of the GDP devoted to military expenditure from 2008 with a stiff peak during and after the Crimea crisis, after 2016 a profound fall in defence expenses can be noticed. Indeed, the lower oil prices and international sanctions which followed the intervention in Crimea interfered with the growth in expenditure, as they fuelled the economic recession of 2014. This is demonstrated by the fact that in January 2015 the Minister of Finance Anton Siluanov announced a 10% cut across all government expenditure, defence included (Drent, Hendriks, and Zandee). However, the Russian administration has tried to maintain the ambitious level of military spending. As noticed by Persson, “[t]his reflects the leadership’s commitment to the modernization of the Armed Forces and more assertive security policy since 2012 when Vladimir Putin became Russia’s president for the third time.” (Drent, Hendriks, and Zandee)

Russia's Official Defense Spending 2006-2017 (billions of 2017 dollars)

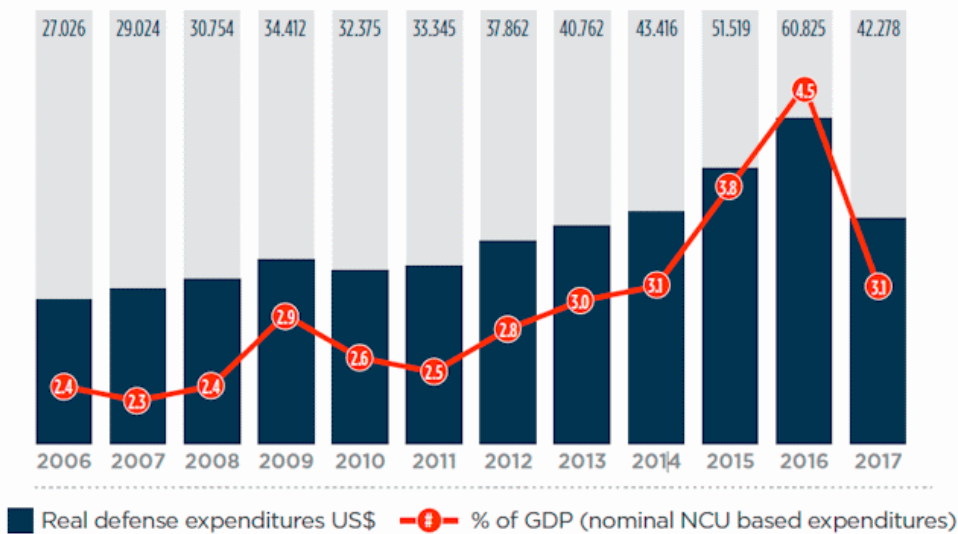


Figure 3: Russia's Official Defence Spending. Credits to GlobalSecurity.org

Reforms of conventional forces elaborated on the need for restructuring of the entire army. Firstly, the acquisition of new ground vehicles – such as the Armata Universal Combat Platform – improves crew survivability. According to NATO, Russia will buy by 2020, around 2,300 tanks and 30,000 armoured and unarmoured vehicles (Turner). New navy capabilities will modernise the defence fleet, the submarine force, and the amphibious ships. Moreover, new long-range destroyers will become part of the Russian Navy. The Airforce will be provided with new equipment, such as the T50 aircraft, over 4,000 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and 1,150 helicopters. Regarding air defence, the missiles systems S-400 and S-500, devoted respectively to short-medium and long-range air defence, will be improved (Turner).

Russia is also actively investing in the development of each component of its strategic nuclear triad: air, ground, and sea. NATO estimates that Russia currently deploys 7,700 nuclear warheads, including 1,735 installed strategic warheads and 2,000 tactical weapons. The modernisation of nuclear air forces includes the upgrade of bomber aircrafts – the Tu-95MS (Bear), Tu-160 (Blackjack) and Tu-160M2 – and the investment in a brand-new stealth bomber PAK-DA. Concerning the Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles, a strong emphasis is put on mobility – in particular, RS-24 Yars (SS-27 Mod 2), RS-26 Rubezh / Yars-M, Sarmat, and Barguzin missiles. The sea-based forces SS-BNs will be substituted with a new Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs).

The modernisation of the military has a direct impact on Kaliningrad Oblast. The Russian enclave has assisted, in the last decade, to a deep modernization of military equipment: in 2016, the last step was the deployment of the high-performing Iskander-M missiles, which now already supports the present S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile system and the

P-800 Oniks anti-ship cruise missile. As reported by the ECFR Commentary, Kaliningrad was supposed to be, in the eyes of many, “*Russia’s answer to Hong Kong*”: it has become a super-militarised bastion in the centre of Europe. The acceleration of the deployment of military capabilities along NATO’s borders has also impacted Kaliningrad Oblast: the air defence and coastal defence systems have been reinforced, e.g., with the implementation of the so-called ‘Anti-Access Area Denial’ (A2/AD) (Turner). This directly affects the security of the Baltic region, Lithuania in particular. Seen as a vulnerability for the enclave – as it depends on Vilnius for gas, electricity, and connections – Lithuania has now become a region which could be threatened by Kaliningrad Oblast, as unrestricted transit in the corridor of Suwalki would allow Russian troops to pass through Lithuanian land. This passage makes the country and the entire NATO alliance more vulnerable to the direct intervention of Russian forces in their territories (Jakniunaite). As stated by the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Linas Linkevičius, in an interview to *The Times*: “*the military build-up in Kaliningrad is a challenge for NATO.*” Consequently, the country decided to build up a 45 km long barrier along the border with the enclave, following its need for increased security. Even if it was officially built up for smuggling reasons, the security challenge posed by Russia with the militarisation of this area has without doubt influenced the fence construction. Apart from the modernisation of the military and the increase in spending for defence purposes, other factors also influence the current perception of threats for the Baltic countries.

Firstly, Russia often puts into place, along the borders and in Kaliningrad Oblast, a high number of provocations against NATO and the individual allies. These provocations involve air and land activities close to the borders, and sometimes include violations of sovereign territory. For example, Russian

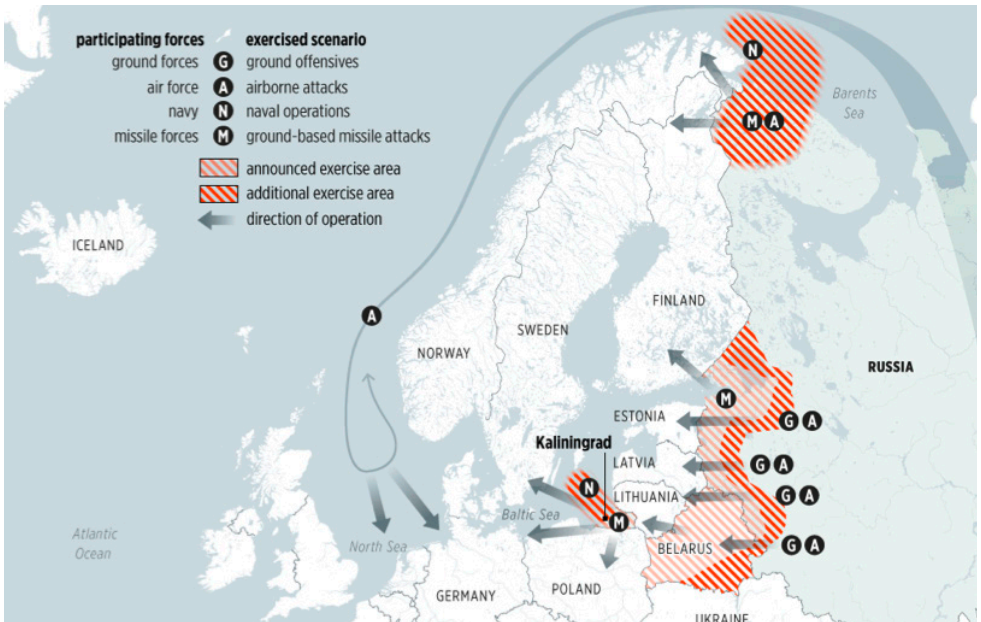


Figure 4: Zapad 2017 Wargame. Credits to info.BILD.de

air activity close to the European airspace increased by around 70% in 2015 (Turner). Another provocative action was the deployment of two additional divisions in Russian Western military districts, announced by the Defence Minister in 2016. Focusing on Baltic territories, one of the landmark cases of Russian border provocations happened in 2014, on the second day of the NATO summit in Wales. As reported by the BBC, “*The incident saw the abduction of an Estonian security official by ‘unidentified individuals from Russia’ on the border.*” A completely different type of provocations is what is often referred to as nuclear ‘saber-rattling’. This practice involves threatening the enemy to deploy nuclear-capable missiles and bombers against its infrastructures and key objectives (Turner).

Secondly, the Russian Federation is conducting various elaborate military exercises along

its territory. The Zapad and Ladoga exercises – which involves Russian and Belorussian Armed Forces in the Western and Northern borders – are the most worrying in the eyes of the Baltic countries. The last wargame practiced by Russia in the West was Ladoga 2018, held from the 26th to 29th of March, which did not receive wide media coverage, as it involved only fifty pilots – who practiced on their detection capacities and on the launch of missiles. This exercise was considered a small thing compared to the enormous exercise often piloted by Moscow – such as the Zapad and Vostok wargames. Nonetheless, the exercise involved roughly one hundred aircrafts, including the 4++-generation Su-35 interceptor, and the new nuclear-capable Su-34 bomber. As noted by Myers, the latest version of the Ladoga wargame was much more similar to the Soviet simulations, and this should garner the attention of the Baltic

countries (Myers). Another exercise that took place last year in Eastern Europe, was Zapad 2017 – meaning West 2017 –, which has been actively observed and analysed by Western public opinion and policymakers. As officially stated by the Belarusian Ministry of Defence, the wargame involved 7,200 Belarussian and 5,500 Russian troops, using 250 tanks, 200 artillery units, 40 helicopters/aircrafts, and 10 ships of the Baltic and North Fleet (Dyner). Nonetheless, according to Szymański, L. and Dyner, the possibility of a higher number of troops involved is probable. For the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Petr Pavel, the drills could have involved between 70.000 and 100.000 soldiers. As argued by the Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, Russia and Belarus have divided Zapad into multitude of small exercised – Ladoga included –, which are in reality all connected to one another and are actually a part of the same simulation (Szymański, L.).

Even when compared to the previous Zapad wargames, Zapad 2017 differed strongly from previous operations. The exercise simulated a conventional large-scale conflict, which saw NATO countries as potential enemies – as confirmed by the exercise maps presented by the Belarusian Ministry of Defence. Many studies conclude that Russia used Zapad 2017, as a tool to verify the experience gained in recent combat operations, in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine (Dyner). Moreover, Moscow wanted to make its non-equal relation with Belarus clear, for it is considered to be a dependent ally, and not a partner (Szymański, L.). However, the most significant result of the exercise was that the operations showed that despite NATO's presence in defending the Eastern flank, Russia could likely break the defence system of Baltic countries within a few hours (Dyner).

Finally, the last and maybe most important factor that urged Baltic states to increase their

security and defence, was Russia's invasion of Crimea. The invasion, together with the following illegal annexation represented "*the first example of a state seizing territory from another sovereign state in Europe since the end of the Second World War*" (Turner). Russia had already begun a restoration of such use of force in Georgia, with the so-called 'peacekeeping' forces, which invaded and occupied Georgia's sovereign territories to consolidate the control of the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Turner). Surprisingly, the reaction of the West after this action has been quite weak: even if Russia's intervention was considered disproportionate to the initial skirmish in the region, Western countries seemingly have not yet put in place truly effective measures to punish Russia's behaviour. The principal consequence of this weakness was that it emboldened Russia, allowing it to place pressure on the Ukraine some years later.

In the case of Crimea, the violation of the United Nations Charter and other international law commitments was clear. Therefore, these actions in Eastern Ukraine had a stronger impact on Europe and NATO as a whole. As stated by Jakniunaite, "*[t]hrough taking control of Crimea, instigating unrest in Eastern Ukraine and facilitating the creation of quasi-states, though never getting openly involved in direct actions, Russia expanded the limits of imagined possibilities*" (Jakniunaite). Consequently, after the events in Eastern Ukraine, the possibility of a Russian intervention in these territories began to be discussed seriously in the Baltic countries. What worries the Baltic countries the most, is the risk of an escalation of conflict somewhere else which could spill over in the Baltic space. Indeed, as Baltic officials recently stated, Russia's capabilities give the Kremlin a time-space advantage that Russia can easily exploit. As noted by Pezard et al., for example, one Latvian official "*assessed the warning time for a conventional attack to be only 48 to 72 hours, while a for-*

mer official – also from Latvia – hypothesized a scenario in which Russian airborne forces could seize Riga with virtually no warning” (Pezard et al.).

To conclude, considering the various military activities that Russia has put in place internally and in the Western neighbourhood, the threat towards Baltic countries is increasing. Even if Russian military action is considered as improbable, the West should be ready to respond to any threat coming from Moscow.

Non-military threats

Baltic states should not only prepare for military interventions or threats coming from the Russian Federation. Russia has experimented and reinforced less tangible, measurable, and direct types of menace, which can be grouped under the definition of non-conventional threats. These threats include political, societal, economic and environmental actions, carried with the use of the information and cyber domains, often using the supply chain and infrastructure as leverage means. Also, it is important to assess that, when talking about non-conventional threats, the various sectors do not operate in isolation from each other but are strongly linked (Stone). As underlined by Pezard et al., Europeans are more concerned about the risk of Russia employing hybrid warfare, than a conventional attack (Pezard et al.).

Political and societal threats are mostly aimed at the political stability and socio-cultural cohesion of countries, through various sets of instruments, such as propaganda, counter-information, and intimidation (Stone). As underlined by Jakniunaite, these menaces “are more complex and interact with the internal, domestic processes, and are multi-causal” (Jakniunaite). In the case of Baltic states, a Russian non-military strategy was present since

the birth of the Russian Federation, but it is during Putin’s presidencies that this has become much stronger, and thus more relevant. Putin talked openly of “*humanitarian dimension of Russian Foreign Policy*”, underlining the need for aiding those people who supported Moscow from abroad and, from the other to oppose the Western-imposed model in the post-Soviet space (Maliukevičius).

Russian socio-political action abroad, intensified from 2012 onwards, when Putin’s dominance of the Kremlin became stronger. Russia presents itself as a counter-balance to the West, which has propagated its model worldwide. Russia’s rising opposition to the Western model, has brought with it, the questioning of certain realities, and value systems. This in turn, leads to the unveiling of weaknesses, shining an unattractive light on Western domination (Pugačiauska). One of the instruments by which the Kremlin tries to influence the pro-Russian community is the media. For social media, the community is highly influenced through the spread of fake news.

The television also plays an essential role in the Baltics. Indeed, the audience share of Russian TV channels is quite high: 15,7% in Lithuania, 29% in Latvia, and 19% in Estonia. The Kremlin exploits this large share through the production of pro-Russian, anti-Western shows, movies, and documentaries (Jakniunaite). As reported by Pezard et al.: “*Estonians and non-Estonians live in different information spaces, often with contrasting content. [...] Most of the Russian-speaking population derives its information and views on history and current events from Russian television channels that are directly subordinate to the Kremlin and can be used as a mechanism of propaganda.*” The products of Russian media mainly address historical topics, portraying the Soviet times as a period of glory invoking nostalgia, and Lithuanian independence as an attitude

based on aggressive nationalistic – sometimes even fascist – values (Maliukevičius).

For example, in 2013, the Russian TV channel ‘Pervij Kanal’ (Первый канал) broadcasted the documentary ‘Chelovek i zakon’ (Человек и закон) concerning the events which took place in Vilnius in January 1991. It stated that the activists for Lithuanian independence, the group Sajūdis, started shooting at the crowd and not the OMON police (Maliukevičius). During, and after the invasion in Crimea, funding devoted to this type of action increased, concentrating on the popularising Russia’s orchestrated formats. For example, the Kremlin strongly influences the output of Russia Today (now RT) and pro-Russian NGOs abroad – mostly connected with Russkiy Mir Foundation (Фонд Русский мир), the Gorchakov Foundation (Фонд поддержки публичной дипломатии им. А.М. Горчакова), and the Historical Memory Foundation (Фонд Историческая память), as well as the visibility of pro-Russian perspectives on the social media (Kojala and Žukauskas, 2015; Veebel, 2015; Wake, 2015 in Jakniunaite).

Additionally, Russia currently threatens the national security of the Baltic states through economic leverage. Notably, one specific segment of an economic threat – that of energy – is often employed. Gas and oil exports, were first used as a political tool during the Cold War, to keep members of the Warsaw Pact reliant on the Soviet Union (Newnham). In post-Soviet times this has continued, even more so during the Putin era. The Kremlin strives to keep its neighbours in a state of energy dependence. In order to achieve this task, Russia actively invested in the construction and management of pipelines and energy

facilities during the past two decades (Newnham). Consequently, nowadays countries such as Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania depend on Gazprom for around 100% of their energy needs, as clarified by Figure 5 (Nielsen and Paabo).

As pointed out by Newnham, energy is used, both as a reward to allies, and as a punishment to rivals and enemies, and these two strategies can be identified as “petro-carrots” and “petro-sticks”, following a carrot-and-stick model. An example of a “petro-stick” strategy, is Russia’s dispute with the Ukraine which lasted more than a decade. As for the event in 2014, Gazprom not only became the owner of Chornomornaftogaz, which was the Crimean subsidiary of the Ukrainian state-owned company Naftogaz, but Russian strongly increased the gas and oil prices for the Ukraine, cutting off the supply.¹ As reported by Deutsche Welle, more recent events have seen a small improvement in relations, at least when discussing energy disputes. Moscow and Kyiv, are supposed to cooperate in the construction of a new pipeline through Ukrainian territories – Nord Stream 2. As concluded by Nielsen and Paabo, generally speaking, the energy strategy alone is not one ultimately favoured by Moscow, as it inevitably endangers the state’s income, which is strongly dependent on this: it accounts for a total of 80% of the income. Yet, the Kremlin undoubtedly still uses energy supply as a political tool to place pressure on post-Soviet countries. This is exactly what occurred in relation to Kiev during the Crimean crisis. In contrast to the Ukrainian example however, the Baltic countries, are even more at risk of receiving political pressure, as unlike the Ukraine, they are not an essential route for the pipelines.

¹ To know more about this issue, check some articles on <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-cuts-gas-to-ukraine>, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-16/ukraine-faces-russian-gas-cutoff-as-payment-talks-fail>,

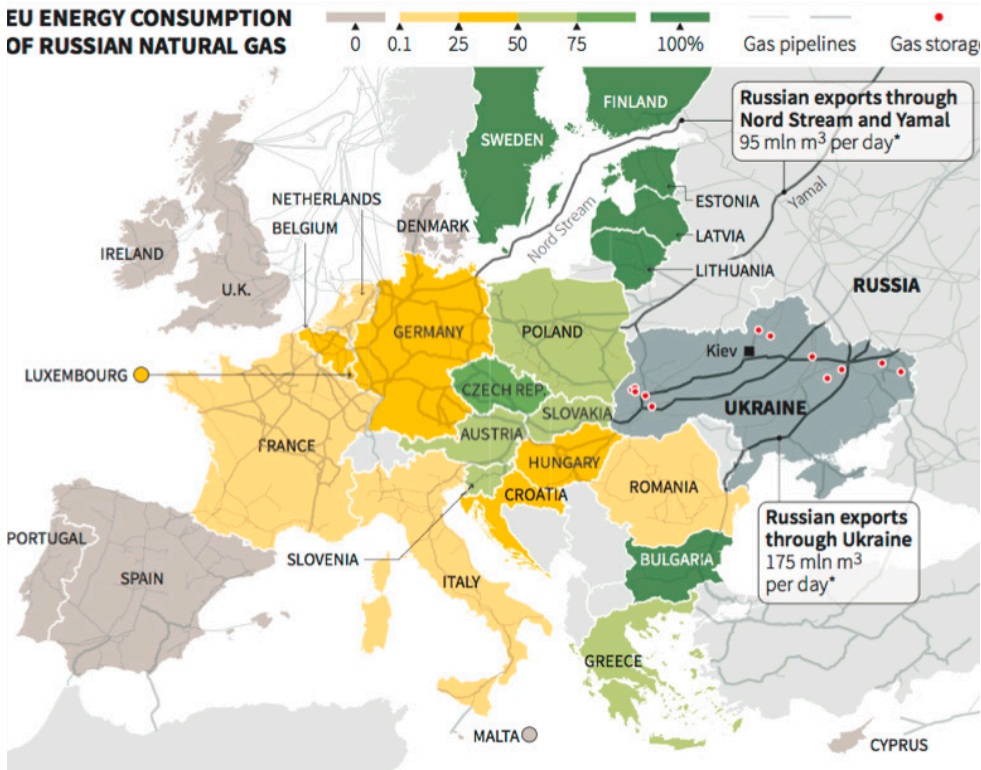


Figure 5: EU Energy Consumption of Russian Natural Gas. Credits to Bloomberg

Another type of non-military threat, which should receive particular attention, is that of cyber. Cyber is not included in the previous discussion – the five categories of threats –, as it should be considered to be a cross-cutting threat. Indeed, cyber-attacks are the means by which many fora – such as the social, political, economic, and cultural ones – can be weakened simultaneously. Cyberspace can provide robust destabilisation tools, through which malicious actors can undermine the functioning of essential infrastructure systems. Indeed, the provision of water, electricity, healthcare, finance, food, and transportation has become increasingly reliant on software, which manages their allocation and connects the systems

(Gandhi et al.). This dependence makes facilities more vulnerable to remote attacks, which can prepare, or support other military, and non-military actions, or that can be used as a retaliation measure. Russia considers cyber warfare in an unusually broad way, encompassing military defensive and offensive capabilities, cyber-attacks, information warfare, and hybrid warfare strategies (Turner).

In the last two decades, Russia has developed two broad Information Security Doctrines. Compared to the first one from 2000, the one signed by President Putin in 2016 embraces a broader concept of national interest when it comes to the information sphere – includ-

ing social, cultural, psychological, and even spiritual effects. As noted by Sean Lawson in an article for Forbes *“Actions carried out based on this broader understanding could provide a serious challenge to the West, one that it might not at first recognize or be equipped to counter.”*

The broad definition of cyber warfare includes, for example, the attacks of 2007 which took place in Estonia. Estonia faced a powerful cyber-attack which tried to undermine the functioning of the Government and the Parliament, through dismantlement of the apparatus of these bodies together with the Presidency, political parties, and some news agencies (Thomas). The attack came during a dispute between Russia and Estonia over the removal of a Soviet war memorial from Tallinn. Even though Russia never admitted its involvement, Estonia claims to have identified specific Russian addresses as the origins of the attacks (Thomas). Another case is the informational warfare which took place before the intervention of Russian troops in the Ukraine, which involved a massive propaganda operation, and a series of attacks conducted against Ukrainian and Western official websites, as well as upon infrastructure and media.

Notably, the attack against the Ukrainian electricity grid in December 2015, and the attack conducted against Kyiv’s international airport in January 2016 alarmed the West because it showed the high level in which Moscow mastered the ability to conduct cyber-attacks which could cause serious damage to key infrastructures (Turner). Taking this into account, Russia’s high investment directed to the development of offensive cyber capabilities is even more disturbing.

To conclude, non-military means are a worrying and evolving character of the way Russia can interfere in Baltic national stability. These threats should be first strictly identified, and then fought against with a strong and specif-

ic security and defence strategy, in order to maintain the internal stability of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

HOW HAVE THE BALTICS RESPONDED SO FAR?

After having assessed the threats to the Baltic states coming from the Russian Federation, the second part of this paper is devoted to the analysis of the instruments adopted by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to face these challenges, especially vis-à-vis the renewed threats of the past decade.

Since 2014, the international scenario which the Baltic countries are faced with has changed strongly. Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, was a clear sign that the status quo, which was enforced after the fall of the Berlin Wall, was less stable than expected. Indeed, most scholars considered Russia’s invasion in the region not only as a violation of international law, but also a demonstration of Russia’s wish to revise the post-Cold War structure of Europe. According to Takacs, the events in Crimea occurred, because the Ukraine was not able to put into force an effective deterrence strategy (Takacs).

Deterrence can be defined as the capacity to persuade a potential aggressor, that any action against the targeted country’s territory, would cause undesirable damages, and that these costs far outweigh any potential gain (Paulauskas in Takacs). Following this reasoning, the actions of Moscow were effective because Kyiv was not ready to face the threats which were put in place. Consequently, the Kremlin exploited the various vulnerabilities of the country, to support the separatist forces of Crimea, and this process resulted in the loss of the region for the Ukraine. Undeniably, Ukraine tried to deter the actions of Moscow, but in the end, it was not effective enough.

The potential gain for Russia, which was preventing the Ukraine from integrating into the European and NATO structures, was more significant than the potential losses which arose from the invasion in Crimea.

Russia's aggressive behaviour in the Eastern flank has increased the fears of the Baltic states. While in the previous decade the possibility of a conventional invasion in their territories by Moscow was low, in 2014 it seemed highly probable. Consequently, enhancing deterrence practices soon became a pressing necessity for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Contrary to the Ukraine, the Baltics could count on two types of deterrence – direct and extended deterrence. This meant that discouragement measures were put in practice not only by the country whose territory was at risk – direct deterrence – but also by its allies – extended deterrence (Andžāns and Veeber). In the case of the Baltic region, pre-emptive actions were also operated by NATO, which wanted to demonstrate robust political solidarity against their potential aggressor, Russia. The European Union played a key role, too, by setting up economic sanctions against Russia in response to its illegal annexation of Crimea. Therefore, when discussing the response of the Baltic states to Russian assertiveness in the East, three levels that should be considered: national, NATO, and the EU.

National Level

At the national level, the Baltic countries sharply increased their spending in the military sector. In the past three years, investment grew mostly in the area of land forces – mechanisation, artillery, anti-tank, air-defence – and territorial defence (TDF). Notably, in Latvia and Estonia, TDF has been integrated with manoeuvrable forces; on the other hand, in Lithuania, TDF is included in the land forces (Szymański).

The Baltic countries responded to Moscow's aggressiveness with a fast modernisation of their Armed Forces. For example, in 2014 – as a direct response to what was happening in Crimea – Lithuania bought the Polish GROM man-portable air-defence systems in 2014 (€37.6 million from non-budget funding) and in 2015, Latvia acquired three medium-range TPS-77 Multi-Role Radars (MRR), to complement the already deployed three AN/TPS77 radars. In general, the Baltic countries have purchased second-hand and cheaper armament and military equipment, as part of more extensive negotiations. As pointed out by Szymański, some changes also occurred in the structure, training, and organisation of the Armed Forces of the three countries. For example, war-gaming practices focus mostly on urban warfare, and place protection of critical infrastructure and public administration buildings, as a top priority (Szymański). Each of the three countries developed specific features to counter Russia's assertiveness in the East, trying to fill the gap in their defence and security strategies.

As noted before, Estonia was a country that perceived itself to be more geographically removed from its allies, and therefore it has always relied more on its own local population in its security strategy. Thus, Tallinn has devoted finances for defence spending for a considerable amount of time. Of the Baltic countries, it is the one with the highest investment in defence budget, even before Russia's invasion in Crimea. Indeed, already in 2014, Estonia allocated 2% of its GDP on defence expenditure. After the invasion, new features were developed, e.g., the introduction of the “*two plus two rule*” which adds to the essential 2% of GDP, additional funds for support, and a defence investment fund from the general budget pool.

As the National Defence Development Plan of 2017-2026 underlines, cyber defence is a

ESTONIA

Equipment	Quantity	Delivery
Javelin anti-tank missiles (new)	80 launchers	2015/16
CV90 infantry fighting vehicles (used)	44	2016/19
Mistral 3 air defence and Milan 2 anti-tank missiles (new)	n/a	2015/20
K9 Thunder self-propelled howitzers (used)	12	Since 2021

Figure 6: Most Important Armament Programmes in Estonia. Credits to OSW Studies.

factor of utmost importance for the Baltic country, which relies on a strongly digitalised public administration system. Consequently, Tallinn wishes to establish a separate cyber defence command before 2021. Emphasis is also placed on the relevance of the readiness of the battalions, which should be mechanised in a stronger manner – CV90 infantry fighting vehicles – and better armed. The 1st Infantry Brigade will be equipped with self-propelled artillery, becoming a mechanized force ready for engagement and the 2nd Infantry Brigade will have increased combat capabilities, thanks to an additional artillery battalion equipped with 122mm howitzers. Finally, the Development Plan underlines the need for strengthening military intelligence and surveillance capability with the aim of also enhancing early warning capacities.

Looking at Latvia, the country invested less in its military sector before 2014, compared to the other two countries. According to data from NATO, Latvian defence spending in 2012, and 2013, was around 0.9% of its GDP, due to the heavy cutbacks in personnel and funding following the financial crisis. After Crimea, the country openly addressed Russia as a potential aggressor in its Defence Concept and Priorities. The government's 2016 defence priorities, stressed the need for reaching an investment of up to 1.7% of GDP

by 2017 and 2% of GDP by 2018, to ensure the capability to strengthen the defence and security structures of the country.

As elaborated by Szymański, the modernisation programme for 2016–2028 sees three main priorities – early warning and command, combat readiness, and host nation support. Due to the proximity of the airborne forces in Pskov, Riga invested on the acquisition of radars – AN/MPQ-64F1 Sentinel and TPS-77 radars –, and motorisation of the First Battalion with CVR[T] armoured vehicles. Moreover, to enhance the readiness of its AFs, the land forces have been moved from Riga – strengthening the militarisation of the Eastern region of the country. For example, from 2018, the base of Latgale now hosts a regular army unit. Latvia is not following the same steps as Estonia regarding compulsory military service, as the country's plan to reinforce the AFs does not involve reinstatement of compulsory conscription due to financial shortages, a lack of military instructors, insufficient infrastructure, and the ambiguity of a part of the population regarding Russian assertiveness (Szymański).

This notwithstanding, its renewed defence strategy pushes for voluntary involvement in the training of the National Guard. The involvement of the civil sector is demonstrat-

LATVIA

Equipment	Quantity	Delivery
CVR(T) armoured vehicles (used)	123	2016-20
AN/MPQ-64F1 Sentinel radars (new)	4	2016
RBS70 Mk2 missiles (new)	n/a	2015/17
TPS-77 radars (new)	3	since 2017
M109 self-propelled howitzers (used)	47	since 2017

Figure 7: Most Important Armament Programmes of Latvia. Credits to OSW Studies.

ed, for example, by the invitation from the government directed to large firms, in order to show greater flexibility in allowing their employees to participate in these trainings – as reported by the LRT. Finally, the country has also developed a Cyber Security Strategy (2014-2018) to strengthen Latvian awareness and responsiveness to threats in the cyber domain.

In Lithuania, as analysed in the first chapter, a mixed structure of professional and selective conscription for the army was set up in the past two decades. After the Crimean crisis, Lithuania put in place a strong strategy to overcome its military shortcomings. The country has effectively increased its defence budget, which enlarged the percentage of GDP from 0.8% in 2013 to 2,06% in 2018. The White Paper on Lithuanian Defence Policy of 2017 includes three priorities – modernisation of the AFs, rapid reaction, and a prepared reserve. For the first priority, the White Paper demands the restructuring of the AFs and a significant investment in equipment and infrastructure. Dealing with the internal organisation of the Army, Vilnius set up a structure of two brigades at peacetime, and three at wartime, including a trained reserve.

Moreover, the White Paper proposes a new mobilisation system which should provide financial incentives to professional services to increase their participation in the AFs. Since the country could be potentially attacked through Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus, or the Pskov Oblast via Latgale in Latvia, Lithuania is supporting the spread of defence capabilities in critical areas, e.g., through the formation of two additional brigades in Klaipeda and Vilnius. Turning to investments, air defence has been reinforced through the acquisition of the Norwegian air defence system, NASAMS, together with the mechanisation of the infantry with 88 Boxer infantry fighting vehicles, and the increase of their efficiency through self-propelled PZH2000 Howitzers. Regarding the cyber domain, setting up the National Cyber Security Centre and later the Cyber Security Council – to ensure cooperation between public and private sectors – Vilnius is prioritising the implementation of measures to increase the resilience of critical infrastructures and public administration institutions against cyber threats.

In relation to the rapid reaction component, it has already been partially strengthened since 2014, giving this section the support of Air and Special Forces, as well as logistics

LITHUANIA

Equipment	Quantity	Delivery
Javelin anti-tank missiles (new)	n/a	2015/17
PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzers (used)	21	2016/19
UNIMOG trucks (new)	340	2016/21
Boxer infantry fighting vehicles (new)	88	2017/21
NASAMS air defence system	2 batteries	By 2020
M577 support vehicles (used)	168	2016/17

Figure 8: The Most Important Armament Programmes of Lithuania. Credits to OSW Studies.

backing. To ensure the speed of their deployment, Lithuania amended its laws to give the Presidency the power to authorise the deployment of the AFs directly, without needing parliamentary approval (Szymański). Despite the steps already taken, the White Paper underlines the need for improving the Rapid Reaction Component, due to its small size – it is currently only composed of 2,500 troops – and the ongoing barriers for its deployment. Finally, the third priority for a prepared reserve has been addressed strongly so far. Already in 2015, selective conscription was reinstated in the country so as to enhance the participation of the citizens in the security of the country. The White Paper stresses how, through an increase in voluntary military service, Vilnius wants to fix the deficit problem of many units, with those who are sincerely motivated in fighting for their country.

NATO Level

Historically speaking, since its foundation, NATO's main goal has been the collective defence of its members, especially vis-à-vis the

threats coming from the Socialist block. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO sought a new *raison d'être*, taking into account the changed post-Cold War international environment. Indeed, the unique threat posed by the Warsaw Pact gave place to diverse and multi-directional risks, such as inter-ethnic conflicts, state instability, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and international terrorism, which needed the development of new range of policies and activities. The possibility of traditional military intervention in the territories of a NATO member were considered to be very unlikely. Yet as mentioned before, this changed slightly after Russia's actions in Georgia and Eastern Ukraine.

Baltic countries have demanded an extensive involvement of NATO in their territories since the moment they joined the Alliance. In short, joining NATO was considered by them to be the most robust deterrence strategy against Russia. What counted for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was mostly Article 5 – the collective defence commitment – and its statement that an attack on the Baltics would mean an attack on all the members of the Al-

liance. During the history of the organisation, Article 5 was invoked only after 9/11, for the terrorist attacks in the United States. This meant that the ‘collective defence’ definition was also extended from the traditional definition of an armed attack.

After the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the notion of extended deterrence became essential for the Baltic countries, as it was clear that the involvement of NATO and its “*robust political solidarity*” – as stated also by many NATO PA reports – was a key factor in strengthening the credibility and capability of the deterrence against Russia (Takacs). NATO set up a doctrine focused solely on this issue. NATO understood that the current times are “*a pivotal moment in Euro-Atlantic security*” and changed the vision of Europe as ultimately free and at peace (Drent, Hendriks, and Zandee).

NATO’s 2010 Strategic concept underlined three priorities for the Alliance, namely collective defence, partnership, and cooperative security and crisis management. These priorities became even more urgent to face the new threats coming from Russia, who turned from a partner country to a potential opponent and adversary. Consequently, the Wales Summit of 2014 set up a range of short- and long-term measures to face the new threats from the East. As a direct short-term measure, NATO decided to address the issue of Russia’s intervention in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, putting in place, as a counter-measure, a freezing of the diplomatic dialogue between NATO and the Kremlin. All cooperation arenas and lower-level political dialogues with Russia were suspended, even if it was stressed that “*the Alliance (...) poses no threat to Russia*” (Turner).

In the long term, NATO developed a complete strategy to fight against the new hybrid

threat coming from Russia, enforcing a credible deterrence strategy through a commitment to its conventional and nuclear forces. Even before putting in place new measures, the deterrence capability of the organisation stood on solid bases. Indeed, in the cases of both conventional and nuclear forces, the multipolar character of NATO assures a solid response to any action from an adversary. Firstly, decisions are not made by a supranational authority but by the members of the Alliance. The presence of multiple centres for decision-making makes various members able to respond to a potential aggressor both autonomously, and within the mechanism of the Alliance, making the response to an action wider and stronger. Moreover, the multiplicity of the Alliance increases the survivability of the forces, as troops and equipment are not concentrated spatially and can, therefore, resist a potential attack to a better degree (Turner). NATO also decided to put in place additional measures to reinforce its deterrence capabilities.

Focusing on conventional forces, the Wales Summit enforced a Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which included a series of actions to improve the capacity of the Alliance to protect its territories and citizens. First, some assurance measures were necessary, aimed at the reinforcement of the Eastern borders. These actions included the immediate deployment of land, air, and maritime forces in NATO members bordering Russia, with the objective of reassuring the population and deterring any possible aggression. For example, NATO enlarged the missions to patrol the airspace and the seaside in the Baltic territories and enhanced the exercises and ground troops stationed in the Eastern flank. Furthermore, the Allies wished to develop a series of adaptation measures to intensify the presence in the Eastern flank, as well as the speed of response in the case of an attack (Drent, Hendriks, and Zandee).

Some of these measures are already in place, such as the investment on the NATO Response Force (NRF) which increased the troops to up to 40,000 units and the creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) composed of 5,000 ground troops which could be deployed in only 48 hours, supported by the specialists of the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) (Pezard et al.). Finally, during the Warsaw Summit in 2016, the Allies agreed to enhance NATO's military presence in the Eastern flank, setting four battalions in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The battalions will be led by four framework nations – Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, on a rotational basis, but they will effectively constitute a continuous presence (Pezard et al.).

Turning to the nuclear deterrent, this is considered by both the Strategic Concept of 2010 and 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR) as the “*supreme guarantee of Allies' security*” (Turner). Nonetheless, a strong focus on nuclear weapons reduction appears, especially in the DDPR. Currently, a wide variety of nuclear systems are in place, such as short-range weapons at the battlefield level, long-range weapons based in Europe, which are able to strike targets behind the front line, and strategic weapons, mostly in the hands of the U.S. The United States' strategic triad – land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), nuclear-armed bomber aircraft, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles – is considered to be the cornerstone of their deterrence capabilities. The functioning of many systems in Europe is linked to a ‘dual-key’ arrangement in which the U.S. retains custody of the warheads and cooperates with an Ally who provides the delivery system. France and the United Kingdom retain an independent nuclear force which contributes to the Alliance deterrence capabilities. At the Warsaw Summit and the Munich Security Conference in 2016 nuclear weapons were reaffirmed as

the ultimate guarantee of the Allies' security: “*We keep them safe, secure and effective. For deterrence and to preserve the peace. Not for coercion or intimidation*” (Turner). Moreover, the Warsaw Summit declared Initial Operational Capability of the NATO ballistic missile defence system. NATO command and control will be in charge of making specific U.S. ships located in Spain, a radar system in Turkey and the interceptor site in Romania.

Apart from deterrence, NATO is playing an essential role concerning the capacity of its members to enhance their resilience vis-à-vis all types of armed attacks. Developing a functioning civil preparedness is central to NATO as a critical aspect for the Alliance's collective defence. NATO can support its Allies in assessing and, upon request, enhancing their civil preparedness, helping them to enforce the NATO Baseline Requirements for National Resilience, which focus on the continuity of government and essential services, security of critical civilian infrastructure, and to support the military forces with non-military means. Moreover, as the Allies recognise cyberspace as an operational domain, they wish to enhance cybersecurity as a means to reinforce the resilience of civilian structures.

European Level

The deterioration of the security environment in Europe has stressed the necessity for the EU to boost its Common Security and Defence Policy. Indeed, the instability of the Southern border, coupled with the increasing threats coming from the East has urged the Union to develop renewed external action initiatives. Additionally, the European Union wishes to revive its international posture, following the request of the United States in asking its European Allies to take on more responsibility on the issues of security and defence. The stance of the European Union in international affairs

is critical, taking into account the existence of non-NATO EU-members such as Sweden and Finland, which, in the challenging environment of today require a higher degree of assistance for their territorial defence.

Within the EU, in legal terms, there are explicit clauses regarding the mutual assistance and support among the Member States. The mutual defence clause of Article 42.7 of the Treaty on the European Union stresses “the obligation (for the Member States) of aid and assistance by all the means in their power”, with the requirement for mobilising “*all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the Member States*” to assist any MS in need (Drent, Hendriks, and Zandee). Even if we cannot talk of the common external action of the European Union, it is clear that cooperation of the country in the issues of the Common Security and Defence Policy is considered essential for each MS, who wishes to act more strongly vis-à-vis certain countries and partners. Before 2014, EU-Russian relations centred around the concepts of ‘strategic partnership’ and ‘interdependence.’ As noted by Popescu, Russia’s actions in Crimea have turned the situation into a condition of ‘selective engagement’ more than an overall partnership, with the concepts of resilience and defence reaching the top of the priority list for the European Union (Popescu).

Facing the new threats coming from the East, the EU has sought deeper cooperation with its natural strategic partner, NATO. In July 2016, the President of the European Council, the President of The European Commission, and the Secretary General of NATO signed a joint declaration to strengthen the EU-NATO strategic partnership, in order to better address the threats coming from a range of conventional and unconventional actors. As a follow-up, in December 2016 EU and NATO ministers endorsed a package of 42

measures addressing the need for cooperation in the field of countering hybrid threats, operational measures, cybersecurity, defence capabilities, industry and research, exercises and training, and security capacity-building (Andersson and Balsyte). A tangible example of this collaboration is the new parallel or joint EU-NATO crisis management exercises. Indeed, on the one hand, NATO participated in CYBRID – EU hybrid exercise in Estonia – and, on the other, EU representatives took part in NATO’s CMX and Cyber Coalition exercises.

Apart from cooperation with NATO, the EU has put in place a multitude of autonomous measures to respond to Russia’s invasion of Crimea. Firstly, they set up a series of retaliation measures, especially in the economic domain. In 2014, the consensus of the 28 MS on sanctions against Russia included a series of asset freezing and travel bans for specific individuals linked to Russia’s invasion, as well as targeted economic sanctions against Russia. The measures were prolonged in 2015, when the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk announced that “*the duration of economic sanctions will be clearly linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreement*” (Pezard et al.). On the 13th of September, the sanctions were prorogued until March 2019.

The EU has overall set up also a range of actions to face hybrid threats. The primary objective of the EU is to raise awareness and the resilience capacity of MS, though the protection of critical infrastructure, energy diversification, cybersecurity, health and pandemics, and financial service security. In addition to that, emphasis has been placed on solving the issues of fake news and foreign propaganda. The first example of policy put in place by Brussels was the establishment of the Hybrid Fusion Cell as a body of the EEAS to “*detect, deter and respond to hybrid*

threats”, as stated by the conference report on Hybrid issued by the Commission. However, the most substantial effort of the Foreign Affairs Council was finding an agreement on the creation of the European Defence Fund, which was done only in 2018. This instrument can be used to fund both conventional, and hybrid-related programmes, and is essential to increase the awareness and resilience capacity of the countries. Moreover, the EU has also understood the necessity for exploiting better strategic communication: as other actors often use this tool as a weapon, the EU needs more effective communication within and outside its borders to fight against malicious actors. The EU launched a communication programme in this regard, and created a Strategic Communications Team in April 2015. This team should address the issue of disinformation through explaining the vision behind EU policies in nontechnical and engaging terms rather than engage in counter-narratives. (Pezard et al.)

Turning to cyber threats, the European Commission created a ‘blueprint’ for advising action to other bodies and the Member States in case of large-scale cyber-attacks. Moreover, the development of a Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox could create the guidelines to address issues such as sanctions, international cooperation, dialogue, capacity building, joint investigations, etc. In 2017, the Commission has also proposed to build on the existing European Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA) and create an EU Cybersecurity Agency.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have shown the possibility of improving security capabilities actively through a massive budget investment in defence. This notwithstanding, it is clear that despite the increase of the defence budget, there is little the Baltic countries can do on their own in the case of a Russian invasion. The international organisations they are

part of are an essential factor that should not be forgotten. If NATO plays a leading role regarding military capability, and deterrence strategy, the EU has reached an inestimable stance regarding, on the one hand, the pressure put on the Russian Federation through economic means, and, on the other, the capacity-building for critical topics such as hybrid and cyber threats.

CONCLUSION

This paper elaborates on the significant threats to the Baltic countries coming from the Russian Federation and on the current strategies put in place to deter them, both on the national and supranational level. As noted before, when speaking of the Russian approach vis-à-vis to Western neighbours, there is not one type of threat that presides above all the others. Indeed, the various actions carried out by Moscow are considered to be all on the same level, and having the sole aim of destabilising the internal solidarity of the targeted country. Nonetheless, considering the evolution of the threats and the type of response of the Baltic states and their allies, some key points should remain a priority for combating the Russian threat effectively.

Firstly, regarding conventional military threats, the Baltic states should maintain a high level of expenditure for defence purposes, focusing this spending on areas that need restructuration and renovation. Troops should be distributed all along the borders to increase the responsiveness and the survivability of the forces. Moreover, the efficiency of the rapid reaction component should be improved, through guaranteeing their quick and effective deployment, following, for instance, the example of Lithuania – where the President retains the power to deploy these troops without having to wait for prior approval from the Parliament. Also, where the rapid reaction component already exists, it should be enlarged to guarantee the necessary strength to react to an armed attack at the Russian border.

Secondly, focusing on rapid response, NATO should address its NRF (NATO Response Force) and VJTF (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force), the two quick reaction components of NATO. On the one hand, the Allies should address the issue of cost-shar-

ing– as now they fall only on the creator of the component. On the other hand, the decision-making around the deployment of VJTF should be streamlined, as the need for authorisation from the Allied governments at the moment slows down the process. To maintain the essential character of the rapidity of deployment, the Allies should consider giving SACEUR the possibility to pre-authorise the deployment of the VJTF.

Thirdly, NATO should conduct more extensive and realistic war games, to understand the real capabilities, and the practical obstacles that its forces could face in the case of a conventional attack against its territory. This type of exercise alone can train the ability of the troops to react rapidly and effectively to a military threat coming from Moscow. It is evident that in these exercises the land component, the VJTF, and the NRF should play a key role and be given particular attention in order to increase their interoperability, responsiveness, and capacity to adapt.

Fourthly, turning to the strategic component, NATO should reaffirm its nuclear capability to increase its capacity to deter adversaries. This does not mean going against the steps that have been made so far to reduce nuclear weapons at a global level, but reviewing its nuclear policy to reaffirm the stance of NATO as a nuclear-based alliance. In a time when Russian officials do not hesitate to threaten the pre-emptive use of atomic weapons against the Alliance, it is important to ensure that the nuclear component remains the backbone of the Alliance.

Fifthly, an increasing level of attention should be placed on the cyber warfare which is currently increasing its relevance in many armed conflicts. Thus, the Baltic states should work closely with the EU and NATO to improve

their resilience capacities and ability to counter a cyber-attack. In this regard, the creation of an EU Cybersecurity Agency is the first step to aid the Member States in their fight against cyber threats. The cooperation with the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence can be a crucial factor for setting up some guidelines for the actions of the MS in responding to this type of attack. Moreover, as Estonia is a leading player regarding the use of digital tools, increased collaboration with Lithuania and Latvia could reinforce the common defence of the Baltic countries in the cyber domain, through sharing good practices and “lesson learned”.

Sixthly, hybrid warfare should be addressed firmly. The Baltic countries should develop long-term measures to increase their capacity to resist these types of attacks. For socio-political attacks, a strong counter information campaign should be set up, in order to fight against the propaganda coming from the Kremlin. Moreover, some measures to increase the participation of the emarginated Russophones groups in the social environment of the Baltics should be set up. The cooperation of the EU and its bodies is essential to ensure expertise and funding. Concerning energy threats, the dependency of the Baltic

countries from Russian gas and oil imports should be diminished, to reduce the possibility of Russia intimidating Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania through this leverage. At the EU level, the creation of the Hybrid Fusion Cell to monitor the awareness of the MS for these threats should be considered only to be the first step among many, for gaining full capability of the EU to counter, with the help of all Member States, any type of hybrid threat. The possibility for using the funding of the European Defence Fund for hybrid purposes should be enlarged, in order to include a broader range of hybrid threats, which everyday threatens the European Union.

To conclude, these are the main recommendation that arise from the analysis in the previous chapters. They are not supposed to provide extensive cover on all the topics, but rather to assess the most urgent steps that should be done, in order to create a safe environment in the Baltic states. In any case, the Baltic countries should maintain, together with their Allies, a high degree of focus and attention on Russia and its movements in the international arena. This is essential not only for the security of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, but also for the stability of Europe, and – consequently- of the entire world.

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In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



Tel: +32 (0)2 441 79 38 – GSM: +32 (0)483 712 193
E-mail: info@finabel.org

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