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**THE POSSIBLE RUSSIAN THREAT TOWARDS THE BALTIC
STATES AND NATO'S ROLE IN IT**

Bachelor's thesis

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I declare I have written the research paper independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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ABSTRACT

Relations between the Baltic states and the Russian Federation have changed after the Crimea, Ukraine annexation by Russia in 2014. After the events the Baltic states have felt threatened, as well as the organisations where the countries belong, NATO and the European Union. The concerns for potential threat arise from Russia's military activities in the Baltic Sea region and their increase in military expenditures. Another issue is that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not certain whether the Alliance's members would come to their defence if Article 5 were invoked. The thesis looks as well into the potential changes in the near future to ensure the Baltics' national defence.

Keywords: Russian Federation, the Baltic states, NATO, international relations, Ukraine crisis

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the thesis is to find out if there is a real threat towards the Baltic states from Russia. Furthermore, it analyses the concerns for the Baltic security and takes a look into the common national view on defence of the three countries. Achieving the goal of the research, the paper relies on the relevant war-games, articles, books and public documents written by policy makers and shapers. The thesis first states the problem of the topic and what has influenced it. As the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) plays a great role in the three states, it as well finds out its purpose in the area. The paper continues with the possible solutions and evaluation. It seeks answers to the questions: What are the potential threats to the Baltic states? How does NATO participate in the Baltics' national defence? What are Russia's objectives in the region? Other issues related to the topic are, for instance, Crimea occupation by Russia in 2014 and Russia supplying the Baltics with energy and electricity.

The Baltic states are among the nations supporting international sanctions against Russia following the Ukraine crisis. Nonetheless, Baltic countries are operating within the limits of the district's economic ties to Russia and the interests of bigger European Union nations who need to maintain cooperative relations with Moscow. These competing forces will make it hard for the Baltics to keep up a forceful position on Russia, constraining them to respond to the occasions as opposed to moving proactively in the standoff between Moscow and the West.

In the previous years, the security situation in the Euro-Atlantic region has deteriorated significantly. Russia has adopted a forceful hostile approach towards Western revisionism and has turned out to be an immediate and open threat to NATO. This is especially relevant to the eastern part of the Alliance, the Baltic states and Poland. NATO, however, is more advanced than Russia, both militarily and economically. Nevertheless, when it comes to the Baltic Sea region, the military capability is completely different, concerning the armed forces in the area and the advantages Russia has of geographic proximity and time factor.

The purpose of the thesis is to find out the most logical approach to accomplish and maintain a resistant security position in the Baltic Sea area and to analyse the possible ways to minimize the danger of Russia against the nations in the region. Furthermore, it focuses on the potential threats from Russia, as well as on the Baltic states` self-defence opportunities, NATO`s participation in the area and Russia`s military competence in order to find out the solutions to preserve freedom of the Baltic countries.

1. POTENTIAL THREATS TO THE BALTIC STATES

A threat against one nation, more specifically a military threat, is defined as a potential use of military force in resolving diplomatic or economic issues. It is an extreme way to solve the conflicts between two or more parties.

Russia has frightened the West more than one time with its military capacity. Starting with Ukraine, when Russia proved their military capacity to the West and turned their previous thoughts of its inefficiency around, in addition the “hybrid war” while integrating subversion and invasion with sending military units to pick up an early military benefits. Russia’s achievements with its actions made Western parties insecure, who started to plan an intricate answer. At that point, in Syria, Russia utilized military power abroad on its previous Soviet Union territories significantly since the end of the Cold War.

In spite of the fact that Russia's economic growth rate is decreasing and its military powers are progressively tied up in Ukraine and Syria, NATO leaders, governments, and observers are worried that Russian President Vladimir Putin's willingness to take risks has not stopped (The Economist, 2015). New concerns have emerged after the previous events, especially from the assumption that the Baltic states might be Russia's next potential military target. Russia has a lot of support in the Baltics, especially in Estonia and Latvia, which have large Russian-speaking minorities. Spying in Russia is on high level, as well as Russia’s media propaganda. As Russia controls the Baltics’ energy and electricity supply, it may use it against them.

Furthermore, recent events in Ukraine have raised the question, whether the same could happen in the Baltics. Relations between Russia and NATO strained after Crimea voted for integration of the region into the Russian Federation following a referendum on March 16, 2014. The West wrongly believed Moscow would be more receptive towards Ukraine extending relations with the European Union than towards the Baltics joining NATO (Coffey & Kochis, 2015). For Russia the Ukraine problem consisted in losing influence over an essential neighbour country, not in the conflict about some particular institutional system. Russia’s objectives in Ukraine were ensuring the rights of Russian-speakers to use the

Russian language, establishing a federal Ukraine with devolution of power to the country's regions, and ensuring Ukraine's continued "non-bloc" status. According to Moscow, it was appropriate that Russia should invade as they did not want Ukraine to join NATO. The expansion of NATO seemed unstoppable and because of that Russia needed to show its military capacity.

The Baltic states have been becoming more cautious after the Crimea occupation and the expansion of Russian military action in the Nordic and Baltic region. As a result Baltic states are taking measures to secure their own military capabilities. Therefore, considering the current security approaches and the military of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, all the countries have expanded their military spending, the quantity of troopers and individuals from volunteer Territorial Defence Forces, accelerating the modernization of programs, and – on account of Lithuania – the reintroduction of enrolment (O'Dwyer, 2015). In the following next years the Baltic states will concentrate on building up their own military abilities with the insurance of the nation's region. The degree to which these arrangements can be executed will depend mostly on the monetary and demographic circumstances of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

To sum up, Russian animosity towards Ukraine rose fears among the Eastern-European individuals from the NATO alliance together, particularly the Baltic states. At present, the Baltic states are the targeted nations in the point of Russia's danger and to a great extent rely on NATO for their security. The Baltic states realize that their military capacities won't hold up against Russia's animosity as the NATO reaction may arrive past the point of no return. NATO has after the Cold War faced the choice of whether to leave the area or leave the business and has settled for the previous, changing itself and its power structure to expeditionary missions far from NATO region, while European members took the chance to lessen their defence spending in more peaceful times. Furthermore, there are questions whether to strengthen both of the United States and NATO defence measures.

1.1 Issues between Russia and the Baltic states

In recent years north-eastern Europe has faced important security issues. Since the three Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania became the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union in 2004, they also brought along a remarkable defence increase in the region. But the overall sovereignty and peace concerns in

the region are serious issues that could damage European security and the state of the NATO alliance in north-eastern Europe.

There are several security concerns in the Baltic Region. Despite the largely friendly and open attitude of NATO toward Russia, the Russian regime adopted a distinctly and publicly anti-NATO position in the past couple of years. Furthermore, Russia considers NATO as a threat to its own national security (Galperovich, 2016). At the beginning of the year 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new defence strategy document, where he stated that “The build-up of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and vesting it with global functions implemented in violations of norms of international law, boosting military activity of the bloc’s countries, further expansion of the alliance, the approach of its military infrastructure to Russian borders create a threat to the national security. “ The statement is impelled from the rising military presence by the United States and NATO’s allies in the Baltics and Eastern Europe.

There is still significant attrition between the NATO allies the Baltic states and the Russian Federation. For instance, there is an unresolved Estonian and Russian border issue which originates from Russia’s unilateral changing of the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty Line (Viktorova, 2006). Another case of the attrition is the recent cyber-attacks on Estonia in 2007 (The Economist, 2007). There are large Russian minorities’ matters in the Baltic states susceptible to an anti-Western propaganda spread by the Russian Federation. Another continuing problem is the energy security for the region supplied by Russia. Finally, in addition to the above-mentioned concerns, the three Baltic states are also facing the same terrorism threat as the rest of the NATO nations.

1.2 The influence of Ukraine crisis

The Ukraine crisis started in 2014 with the Russian Federation is playing a certain role in the problem. The Russian invasion in Crimea and the attempt to destabilize eastern Ukraine made the Baltic countries anxious and persuaded NATO to send some forces in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states to back up their security. The relations between NATO and Russia had a new stage after the Ukrainian crisis, also in NATO's view of Euro-Atlantic Security. The Alliance applied several measures to guarantee, especially in Eastern European countries, that NATO is prepared to defend them in the circumstances of common defence. In addition, NATO announced extra measures at the Wales Summit to adjust the Alliance to meet up with the new strategy of Russia, named hybrid warfare, and developing challenges

that will likely threaten the security of Alliance (NATO, 2014). These adaptation measures include a variety of arrangements, from improving the effectiveness of the NATO Response Force system to gaining critical capabilities.

The Ukrainian crisis, in addition to the Georgian crisis in 2008, is one of the most remarkable crises for NATO with Russia in the post-Cold War period. The reason Russia acts in the Euro-Atlantic region is primarily dependent on the frame of NATO as the main deterrence force. The Ukrainian crisis demonstrated as well that the standpoint of the Alliance during the Russia-Georgia war was not sufficient enough to frighten Russia. NATO's failure to frighten Russia from illegally occupying Crimea and secretly supporting separatists in Ukraine, despite all its political pressure on Moscow, pointed out that NATO did not or could not adjust itself to the new security challenges that were caused by Russia, based on the lessons learned after the Russia-Georgia war (Gressel, 2015).

Before Russia started its aggression towards Ukraine, including the invasion of Crimea, three Baltic states had felt a higher level of security because of their participation in NATO and the EU. The situation changed after that. The authorities of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania claimed that Russia had been seeking for an aggressive policy against them for a long time, using several tools of power. Baltics agree that Russia is now able to arrange sabotaging actions against them in various fields and that these could endanger both their internal stability and the regional solidarity. The Baltic states' response to the danger from Russia has showed that the possible cooperation between them is low (The Economist, 2015). During the difficulties several weaknesses have been revealed in fields of how these states function, which Moscow might be willing to use as its own interests.

To sum up, the next potential target for the Russian Federation might be the Baltics because of the similar reason as Ukraine was: being a part of the Soviet Union in the past, lying next to Russia and having a mentionable number of ethnic Russians living there. However, Ukraine had in addition to these problems social and economic problems and strategic ambitions.

2. BALTICS AND RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania share a large number of the same dangers and difficulties in the area. Due to that the countries deal with these issues in the same way. The three Baltic states do not have in general great defence capabilities because of their restricted assets. The foundation of their power structure comprises of light land forces, and they have practically no air and maritime force abilities. Estonia depends on a reserve that is based on the national military service, while Latvia and Lithuania generally move towards having small professional armed forces of maximum 5000 soldiers (Nikers, 2015). Due to the small number of forces, Baltics count on the third parties, on NATO and the United States.

The Baltic states, as NATO and EU members, have fully agreed on the security policies of those alliances. Definitely, the national security problems and priorities appear to be different from other NATO and European Union nations. If there appears one common Baltic opinion on the security threat, it is an agreement that Russia is an on-going threat and problem. Most of the security concerns of the three Baltic states involve Russia in one way or another. Analysing the reports it is clear that Russia might be a possible threat to the Baltic Region security in the future. The one possible outcome is that Russia would prefer to use its soft power, its propaganda, as well as its position as a major energy supplier to the area, and its diplomatic power to undermine the Baltic states and pull the Baltics back into the sphere of Russian influence (Persson, 2014).

2.1 Baltics issues related to the national security threats

2.1.1 Energy Security

Russia and Baltic energy relations are inherited from infrastructural interdependencies, which take roots from Soviet legacies. Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian reliance on Soviet oil and gas infrastructures has been of crucial importance also since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Every Baltic state depends on the energy sources from abroad (see Figure 1). For Lithuania, however, this is no longer the case anymore, as from 2014, Norwegian contract

supplies Lithuania with the energy from Klaipeda (International, 2016). Thus, Lithuania is no longer the weakest of being manipulated with its energy supplies by Russia, as it was before 2014 (Smith, 2004). Latvia is as well highly vulnerable and counts on Russia for the bigger part of its gas and oil. Estonia, however, is the least vulnerable in terms of energy, having some of its own supplies of coal (Krutaine & Sytas, 2014). Estonia also imports oil and gas through its ports and therefore is less dependent than Lithuania and Latvia, who receive oil and gas from pipelines.

Gas supplies as a proportion of total energy use

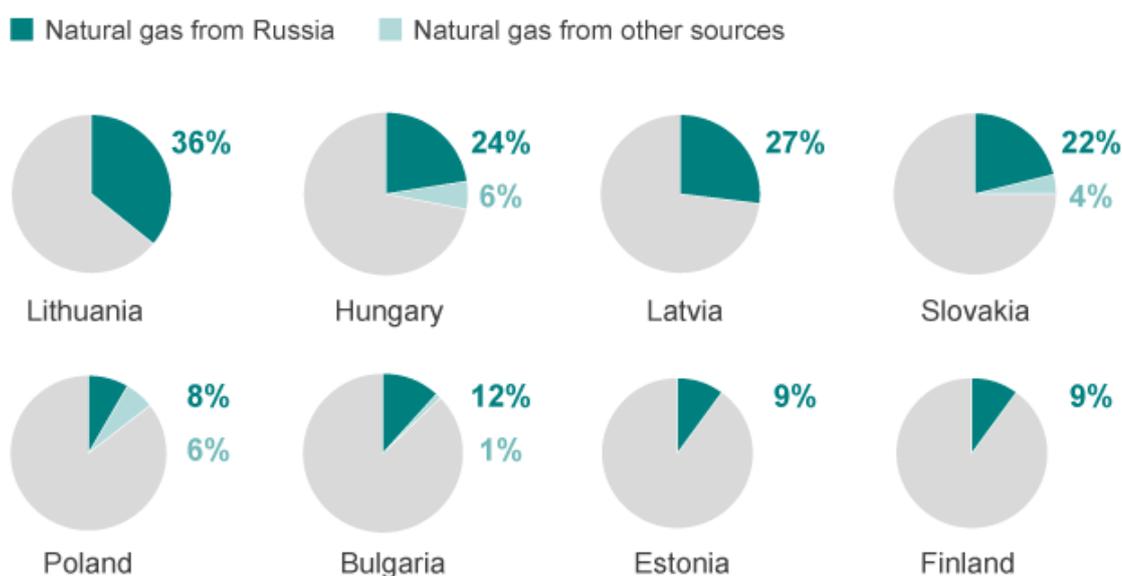


Figure 1. Russian gas supply
(Kirby, 2014)

These three states have been for a long time dependent on Russian gas supplies and have had no access to the alternatives. Moreover, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's Gazprom gained shares in each of the gas companies of the three states. Since then, the three Baltic states have often considered a need to decrease a dependency on Gazprom's gas and stakes. Challenges emerged when the Baltic states joined the European Union. A number of competing LNG projects created a tough political competition between the states in Europe. A bilateral agreement with Norway salvaged Lithuania's LNG prospects. Consequently, Gazprom's move gave a ground for the two other Baltic states' option for the

full ownership unbundling as well. However, this still did not decrease Baltic reticence on Gazprom's dependence. In this context, development of the gas infrastructure linking the region to the rest of the European Union is a matter of urgency.

Nonetheless, each Baltic country is fully aware that the most vulnerable sector of their economy is the energy supply which is mainly coming from Russia; to keep the sources open, Baltics need to have good relations with Russia.

2.1.2 Ethnic minorities in the Baltics

As previously mentioned, Latvia and Estonia have significant Russian ethnic minorities (see Figure 2). The Russian minorities are not often welcomed to the Baltic's society. Moreover, those who are not speaking either of the Baltic's native language, depending on the state, where they are living, are seen as a minor threat from Russia, as they are not accepted like others (Person, 2015). The Russian regime sees the ethnic Russians as natural supporters of their interests and contributors of Russian ethnic political parties, politicians, and institutions in the Baltic states. Since the Baltic states gained independence, ethnic tensions originating from the Russian minority have caused a few violent conflicts between the ethnic Russian minorities and the Estonian and Latvian governments, for instance the Bronze Soldier case in Tallinn 2007 (Hernad, 2012).

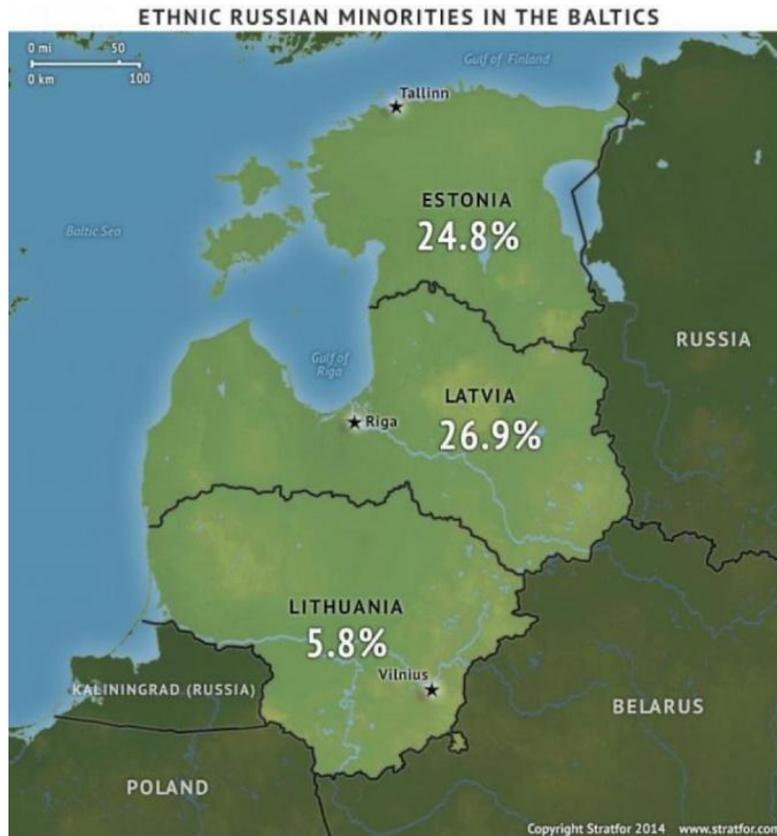


Figure 2. Ethnic Russian minorities in the Baltics

(Stratfor, 2014)

In the early-1990s, the tensions heightened due to the serious decrease of the economy as the economies of the Baltic states made the adaptation to capitalist market economies. Since then, history has played a big role in ethnic tensions as the Baltic governments, representing the public opinion of the majority, have been trying to forget and remove the communist-era memorials, which represent some of the ugliest moments of Estonian and Latvian history. For the Russian ethnic minority, however, the memories of the Red Army and its occupation of the Baltic states are a reminder of the glorious era of Soviet history. In 2007, the effort of the Estonian government to move an outstanding statue in memorial to the Red Army in Tallinn created a violent response from Russian ethnic groups (Hernad, 2012). As a consequence of the event one person died and several were injured, which shows that there exists a certain threat from the east.

2.2 Deeper look into the Baltic and Russian relations

2.2.1 Russia and Estonia

Economic ties between Estonia and Russia have become even closer: Russia has risen to the third position on the list of Estonia's trade partners, tourism continues to grow rapidly, however, the border treaty has not been ratified. A low-intensity argument continues at the diplomatic level: Russia still accuses Estonia of idealising Nazism and discriminating against the Russian-speaking minority in the nation of 1.3 million - allegations that Estonia dismisses (Reuters, 2014).

Russian-Estonian economic relations provide an excellent example of the general development progressing leaving aside the political barriers. Since the two states have not received by each other the most honoured nation status, the bilateral trade has to certain extent directed through third countries, the trade capacity has been growing despite an unofficial and politically motivated restriction imposed by Russia (Tüür, 2014). Restrictions on cross-border trade imposed by Estonia on the basis of an official policy have removed an excessive workload from border crossings and facilitated an explosive growth of tourism. Therefore it seems that transit through Estonia will decrease somewhat because Russia has been redirecting cargo traffic to its own ports. However, these losses will be compensated by other joint activities, including the development of industrial parks in Ida-Viru County with the participation of Russian capital.

Since there are no changes in the principle standpoints of Estonia and Russia in relation with each other, their mutual complaints will also stay the same. Russia cannot obviously stop blaming Estonia of having a wrong standpoint of history, an overwhelming gap concerning the Second World War and its consequences. Moscow's complaints concerning the alleged national minority problem are not going away either, because this statement is part of Russia's major diplomatic game in Europe. Estonia, in its turn, will continue pointing fingers at Russia's optional and questionable law implementation customs, leaving with zero solutions.

2.2.2 Russia and Latvia

Latvia is having the same issues as Estonia, the Russian minorities living there. Although there has been some criticism, expressed by the Russian side's representatives for the decrease in the importance of the Russian language in Latvia, nevertheless the overall tone

is much more moderate. The prediction regarding the Russian citizens' interest in the possibility to obtain residence permits by purchasing real estate and investing in Latvian banking sector, has fulfilled. The principle topics in Latvian foreign policy are related to the European Union and Latvia joining the euro-zone (Bukovskis, 2016).

In cases of the elections of the European Parliament and Latvian Parliament, the problem of residence permits will be brought up again. National Alliance indicates that the already misshaped state demographic circumstance is still aggravated. Furthermore, the real estate prices are raised disproportionately. The influence of Russian mass media and Russia's policy toward the compatriots in Latvia will also become topical with the approach of the elections. The Harmony Centre will be positioning itself as political force that can resolve issues of Latvian non-citizens (Baltic Worlds, 2013). Their activities will be backed up by the Russian media that will complete so called Russian speakers' rights issues. Along with the previously mentioned, liberalization of the gas market in Latvia will also affect the relations between Latvia and Russia.

The full introduction of the EU third energy package is hampered by the understanding between Latvijas Gaze (LG) and Latvian Government, conceiving the imposing exclusive rights for Latvijas Gaze till 2017 (Kudors, 2014). LG's 34 percentage share is owned by Gazprom; in this manner Latvijas Gaze and Itera Latvia are effectively contradicting the liberalizing of the economic sector in Latvia. Latvian Ministry of Economics is developing a law to make a basis for the integration of the other natural gas suppliers to Latvian market; however, Gazprom is getting prepared for a juridical and political fight in order to achieve the delay of this decision.

To sum up, Russia will try to persuade the Latvian foreign policy makers through diplomatic channels to be not "overactive" in the setting plans for the implementation of EU Eastern Partnership. However, Russia will not achieve any serious results with centre-right Latvian govern coalition in charge.

2.2.3 Russia and Lithuania

The last several years of Lithuanian – Russian relations have been under the constant silent pressure: few open clashes, but plenty of silent collisions and indirect tension. Energy projects, gas prices and the negotiations with Gazprom have been on the agenda for the whole year. The new Lithuanian government promised to renegotiate the conditions of gas import, but has not managed to produce any favourable results. The politics of history re-emerged

from time to time with growing passions. The most prominent event was the prohibition of the PBK TV channel in Lithuania after it showed the documentary about the January 13, 1991 events which was considered propagandistic misrepresentation of the recent history (Jakniunaite, 2014).

The positive economic relations towards the second part of the year appeared in September 2013 that Lithuania and Russia became included in border dispute and “milk war” (The Moscow Times, 2013). Which brought along the custom check-ups in the lines at the borders, and later Russia banned dairy imports from Lithuania. Inquisitively, the increased custom check-ups were strongly criticized not only in Lithuania or the EU, as well as the big wave of critique came also from inside, from Kaliningrad oblast. It can be even estimated that the area suffered most as they could not timely receive numerous exports goods and their production facilities suffered enormous misfortunes.

When just before the summit Ukraine rejected to sign the agreement, the scepticism towards Russia aggravated. Behind Ukraine’s changing its mind Russia was considered as a main culprit. And at the end of the year it became almost impossible to find a beneficial view towards Russia’s foreign policy in the Lithuanian public discussions.

None of the Lithuanian political forces is prepared to invest in improving relations with Russia although they are discussing Russia’s impact on important domestic projects, for instance, the new nuclear power plant or the LNG terminal (Pavilionis, 2015). This, however, can barely change the official relations between Lithuania and Russia and they will keep working in a cool mode.

The implementation of the EU’s Third EU energy package accelerated in 2014 and that means more intense pressure on Gazprom to separate its supply and transit business in Lithuania, as elsewhere. Naturally, this will develop in the context of the EU-Russian relations, but will have direct consequences for bilateral relations as well by increasing tensions.

Quarrels about interpretations of the events of 1940s or January 1991 are already a constant feature of the Lithuanian – Russian relations (Jakniunaite, 2014). The particular events are of course unpredictable, but one can say for sure that one or two cases that will weaken one of the sides will inevitably occur. These events will just emphasize the incompatible and contradictory views on history that both sides hold.

To sum up, there are a few differences and similarities of having the potential threat from Russia between the Baltic countries. For instance, Estonia and Latvia both have a remarkably high percentage of ethnic Russians living there, while Lithuania does not. It could pose a problem because the propaganda from the Russian Federation could influence the Russian minorities living abroad. This, however, is happening in Lithuania as well, although for different reasons. As Lithuania was for many years dependent on the energy supply from Russia, they are still looking for potential economic investments in Lithuania. As the energy discussion is still going on, the Russian media tries to influence their people in Lithuania through campaigns or any other way. The same goes on in Latvia, as they are dependent on Russia's energy supply to some extent. Estonia, however, is the least influenced in energy matters, because of having its own resources of coal.

The Kaliningrad region, which is situated next to the Baltic Sea, has long held strategic value. After Lithuania became a member of the European Union in 2004, Kaliningrad became an enclave inside the union, making the settlement of its status even more critical for EU-Russia relations than it had been previously. The European Union recognized Russia's concerns about a possible negative impact of the enlargement on the transit of people and goods between Kaliningrad and the rest of Russia. Due to the fact that the transportation between Russia and Kaliningrad passes through Lithuania, the main fear exists in the possible provocations on transit routes, both railways, or gas pipeline, or electricity transit routes. They can be considered as actions that are organized in order to have some type of pretext from Moscow's side, for Russia's side, to begin some aggressive actions. Therefore, there exist concerns whether Russia has placed its Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad. If the missiles were stationed in Kaliningrad many European cities would be in their range.

3. NATO PARTICIPATION IN THE BALTICS

The NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe initially happened without the risk that any threats would appear to NATO at first. In the 1990s the Baltic states, similarly to the rest of Europe back then, built up their military reserve based on the national military service, as well as supplemented by regional volunteer protection powers (Gressel, 2015). They co-worked with numerous nations regarding the acquisitions of armament and military equipment, while preparing the military units and their performance according to NATO norms. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania succeeded in 2004 by joining both the European Union and NATO (International Business Publications, 2015).

According to the NATO's Article 5 of Washington Treaty an attack on one NATO member would be considered an attack on all members (NATO, 2016). In the previous occasions, before the illegal Crimea invasion by Russian forces, NATO did not concentrate on the Baltic Sea territory as a potential military region, however NATO started to pay attention when episodes began to happen that influenced its partners, for example, the Russian cyber-attack on Estonia in 2007 (NATO, 2012). While the region is remarkably small for the worldwide superpower to completely concentrate on, it never totally abandons it either. Since the invasion of Crimea, NATO has started to concentrate on simple and effective exercises in the Baltic Sea district to develop their security, including submarine control and rescue practices open to all NATO allies, and also examining mine transfer and treatment of dangerous chemicals in the ocean. Clearly, the Baltic states want to be seen as making a useful contribution to the alliance and getting visibility in NATO and the European Union on issues of broad concern. Within the European Union, the three Baltic states want to be seen as modern, competent, and cooperative, which is why the three states try to avoid direct confrontation with Russia.

3.1 NATO Enlargement and Russia in 2004

Even more than the Polish case, the three Baltic republics integration issue was highly sensitive to NATO and West's relationship with Russia. Thus, the case for integration into the institutions of the West in the early post-Cold War was made cautiously and more slowly than

those made for Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. After much debate inside the Clinton interagency process, integration of the Baltics into NATO was left for a future round of enlargement. That said, Clinton was firm in not allowing Russia a veto over future Baltic integration (Hampton, 2015). Also, the Clinton administration reassured the Baltic republics of the United States' earnest intentions regarding integrating them into the West through the successful completion of United States-Baltic Charter signing on January 16, 1998.

More than the second round of enlargement in 1999, the 2004 iteration problematized NATO-Russian relations. Not only did NATO now extend to Russian borders, the new Baltic republic members brought with them threat perceptions that included first and foremost concern about a revanchist Russia. Having just won their independence from Russia in 1991, which included some actual combat, the republics have been the most sensitive in the Alliance to potential Russian aggression and as 2014 has shown, with good reason. Putin's behaviour has confirmed inside NATO the Baltic states' and Poland's fears of "worst case scenarios", and their desire to refocus the Alliance on Article 5 and territorial defence (Ondrejcsák, 2014).

Aside from NATO absorbing the security concerns of the Baltic members with enlargement, the institution also incorporated their nationalities problems. The politicized issue of Russian minorities living inside the Westernizing Baltic republics is a live security concern, especially in Latvia and Estonia, where Russian minorities measure about 25 and 27 percentage of the populations respectively (Stratfor, 2014). In Lithuania, the Russian minority stands at about 6 percentage of the population. This problem has become much more dramatic since threatening Russian irredentist rhetoric increased throughout 2014, explicitly targeting Baltic republics on a number of occasions.

3.2 NATO and Baltics today

NATO-Russia tensions have manifested themselves in many ways in recent years. 2014 was an especially tense year, when the two sides hardened their positions following Russia's annexation of Crimea, continued interventionism in Ukraine, and military action concerning further irredentist claims in former Soviet and historic Russian spheres of influence. Especially troublesome for NATO has been the repeated rhetoric issued by Putin's regime threatening intervention in the Baltic republics to save Russian minorities that are allegedly being mistreated: "We will not tolerate the creeping offensive against the Russian language that we are seeing in the Baltics." (Hampton, 2015) As observed in a Financial

Times article, “Nowhere is Russia’s growing swagger triggering more concerns than in the Baltic states, which have a history of Soviet occupation, heated political arguments with Russia and sizeable Russian populations.”

The re-emerging outlines of a new Cold War in 2014 were reflected in the remarks of the Secretary General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, delivered in May: “We must adapt to the fact that Russia now considers us its adversary” (Reuters, 2014). A military doctrine signed by Putin in December 2014 confirmed Rasmussen’s sentiment. The new document, revised from the 2010 Russian defence mission document, explicitly identifies NATO as Russia’s main adversary, and defends Russia’s right to use conventional and nuclear weapons in the case of attack or perceived aggression.

Russian irredentist and revisionist claims were expressed through a number of provocative behaviours in recent years that rattled NATO member-states like the three Baltic republics, and affiliated non-member states like Finland and Sweden. Russia has greatly increased surveillance in the Baltic region holding dual citizenship and of Allied soldiers and airmen working in the region. A very clear example of defiant Russian policy intended to pivot attention in the West to Moscow’s re-emerging power and unsatisfied claims was the “burst of activity” of Russian military forces near or over NATO soil, especially in the Baltic Sea region (Gotkowska, 2014).

The Russian navy has harassed neutral Sweden and Finland as their cooperation with NATO increased. Throughout 2014, an unprecedented number of air space violations and incidents have required NATO Baltic Air Policing to scramble jets in response. Most significantly, there has been a dramatic increase in Russian military exercises in the area (Michta, 2014). Russia’s behaviour has led in both countries to a growing national debate about and appetite for NATO membership, surely a negative effect given Moscow’s intention of pre-empting that outcome. Even more common have been the multiple cases of Russian planes violating NATO member or affiliate airspace, buzzing NATO aircraft, and flying sorties in or near airspace over NATO member-states, behaviour reminiscent of the Cold War. The Baltic Sea region has been a favourite target of the provocative and often dangerous displays of Russian airpower. These displays include Russia patrols or sorties involving surveillance aircraft, fighters, long-range bombers, and even long-range nuclear bombers on exercises (Gotkowska, 2014). Typically in these incursions, Russian pilots do not use on

board transponders or shut off communication access, bringing them very close on occasion to civilian aircraft unaware of their presence.

3.3 Participation of the United States

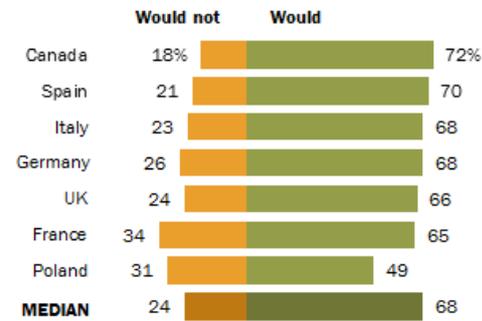
Since the Baltic states are so small, they do not play any significant role in the United States' policy. If the Baltics have any concerns about the United States, there is not much they can do about it. When it comes to Baltic Sea security and Sweden's and Finland's participation in this regard, the Americans are dedicated, engaged, and seemingly ready to put their effort into the problem. In the meantime, the lack of strategy on the European scale implies that it would be too much to expect the Americans to come up with an effective strategic plan for the Baltic Sea region (Hampton, 2015). In spite of the present threat level, it would be continually required to remind the United States the importance of their contribution in the region.

NATO has understood that the Baltic Sea region must be seen as one separate military range. The fast reinforcement of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by the United States after Crimea was appreciated by the Baltic states (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016). There was a general feeling among the nations that this time, if necessary, they would be protected by the NATO's allies more than during World War II when they had not been effective and competent enough to even join the allies.

To improve the cooperation with the allies, various exercises are carried out with the United States' troops, who have been sent to the Baltics for training. The American rotational military units in the Baltic states will be there as long as they are needed; however inside NATO there is a developing acknowledgment that guaranteed measures are not proportional to adequate in the long term prevention measures (Coffey, Heritage, 2013). As more time goes by from the Cold War, many Americans start to forget the importance of NATO and the relationship between its allies. Nonetheless, when a survey was carried out (see Figure 3), most of the NATO member states who participated answered that the United States will most likely defend other allies against Russia. Only in Poland less than 50% answered that the United States would come to an ally's aid.

NATO Countries Believe U.S. Will Come to Defense of Allies

If Russia got into a serious military conflict with one of its neighboring countries that is a NATO ally, do you think the U.S. would or would not use military force to defend that country?



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey, Q53.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 3. NATO Countries Believe U.S will come to Defence of Allies
(Pew Research Center , 2015)

4. RUSSIAN POINT OF VIEW ON THE SITUATION

In the previous decades, Russian attitude toward the Baltic states has changed considerably while remaining negative. Since the time when the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regained their freedom and autonomy after the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, they have firmly followed a Western-oriented system of integration with the two decisive Euro Atlantic institutions, NATO and the EU. Russia has, after 1991, tended to see this western move as a potential danger to its own interests. Nevertheless, for a couple of years at the end of the 1990s, the Russian government under Boris Yeltsin appeared to adjust to this process and to move towards normal relations with the three nations.

After Vladimir Putin took over Yeltsin's place as a Prime Minister in 1999, he initially seemed to remain consistent to the Baltic policy of the Yeltsin years. But since returning to more oppositional principles to the West by the middle of the 2000s, Putin's Russia has delivered threats and assaults against the Baltics. The turning points for the Baltic countries were Russian cyber-attacks against Estonia in 2007 and its war against Georgia in 2008. In Moscow, the effective and maintainable change of these nations to democracy and market economy has been taken as a threat to Russia's own dictator and corruptive model of process (Freudenstein, 2015). Russia has used economic, financial, diplomatic, and many other tools in an attempt to hold a level of control over the Baltic states' improvements, damage their sovereignty and autonomy, and to hold a gap amongst them and their partners in NATO and the European Union.

Russia's unprovoked attack against Ukraine in Crimea and the Donbas region in the spring 2014 shows a totally new quality of Russian hegemony, which has risen from the ashes. Russia has been testing the limits in the past years of how far it can go in undermining the Baltic states, starting from the propaganda and ending with the violations of the borders and airspace to other minor activities to direct assaults. Vladimir Putin's objective in undermining the Baltic states, as for now, is not necessarily territorial in essence. His purpose is not expanding Russia into the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania, or creating states that are sovereign but in Russia's sphere of influence like Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine. His main objective for the foreseeable future is to weaken and damage NATO and the European

Union. His means is demonstrating that the solidarity of these organizations is basically non-existent.

On the other hand, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are still irrevocably part of the West. They have steady democracies and market economies that have come out of the financial and economic crisis since 2008 outstandingly well (Freudenstein, 2015). They have responded to Russia's post-Soviet neo-imperial aspirations with firmness, while maintaining a willingness to cooperate. In all Baltic countries, there has been broad political support for this policy from most parts of the political spectrum. Baltic-Russian relations are considered as general East-West relations in Europe.

In the 2000s, the Baltics have reacted to Russian threats by bolstering their defences, including cyber defence. As a consequence of Russian aggression against Ukraine and other hostile moves in 2014, the Baltic states have pledged to substantially increase their defence budgets, stepped up their efforts for energy independence, and asked for permanent redeployments of NATO forces (Hampton, 2015). The latter has so far only partly happened after the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014 (Freudenstein, 2015).

4.1 Russia's intentions towards the Baltic states

From purely military viewpoint, Russia has achieved superiority in the Baltic Sea area. The Kremlin is not prone to launching a wide-scale war there to recover its previous possessions, yet a small military activity towards a Baltic state to test NATO's resolve to protect its members might be on the cards.

The West has believed quite long enough that the Kremlin would have neither the abilities nor the notion to put NATO on test (Gressel, 2015). The alliance did not see it important to support the shore in its Eastern side, even despite Russia's military development in the region. Up to this point, the value of the security umbrella provided by NATO participation was not addressed in Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia. Their low expenditures on national defence have proved that.

At the moment, after Russia's 2014 occupation of Crimea and its war against Ukraine, the Baltic states may seem weak and vulnerable. Russia's objective in Central Europe is most likely to bring previous Soviet coalition countries back into its sphere of influence. With the greater probability, Kremlin tries to threaten NATO and rearrange the post-Cold War order (The Economist, 2015).

Russia's expanded military exercises in the greater Baltic Sea area are intended to test the West's resistances. The quantity of NATO jet observances of Russian military planes testing the airspace over the Baltic states has expanded quadruple over the last couple of years. Non-NATO members in the Baltic area have likewise been tested by Russia (MacAskill, 2015).

A significant development in Russian armed forces has taken place in the region over the past couple of years. Russian forces have improved their combat abilities in trainings preparing for various conflict scenarios in the Baltic Sea region, including the annexation and embargo of the Baltic states.

With regard to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Russia has waged war in the political, economic and information areas. These exercises of Moscow in the Baltics have been strategically determined.

Weakening the Baltic states would dissolve the member nations' trust in the West's capacity to act in their protection. Russia wants to prove that admitting previous Soviet coalition nations into NATO was a mistake for all the interested parties, which ought to be prevented in the future (Gressel, 2015). Deference to Russia's military pressure would erode the post-Cold War security architecture of Europe. The probability of a wide-scale conventional attack by Russia against the Baltic countries remains low, since it seems to be clearly too dangerous. Russian President Vladimir Putin is not, spectators agree, against taking risks, but by no means is he reckless.

A constrained conventional assault situation, on the other hand, represents a more likely experiment for the Baltic states and for NATO. In such a situation, Russia's methodology would be to initiate a restricted military operation against a Baltic state, so adjusted that it could possibly be seen as below the entrance of Article 5 (NATO, 2016). For instance, it could be a fast regional snatch in Lithuania by a small Russian special force brigade unit, put through under the excuse of, say, ensuring a regional hallway to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad from a prepared terrorist threat.

Such a regional conflict could be hard for NATO to handle. If Brussels refrains from a military response – to avoid expanding it to a nuclear confrontation – NATO would suffer a blow. Its power of prevention would be highly hollowed as the cooperation would have shown that, at least when it comes to collective security, some alliances are more equal than others.

The member state has to act to contradict such gloomy scenarios. A permanent presence of NATO forces in the state threatened by Russia could have a game-changing effect, yet it has been difficult to achieve (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016). NATO actions should be aimed at achieving political unity and improving the common defence capability. Otherwise, it can be argued NATO is only pretending to defend the Baltics.

4.2 Russia's military competence

The main external military risk for Russia is the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the military infrastructures of NATO allies inching closer to the Russian borders, including through further enlargement of the Alliance. In short, NATO's power demonstrations with exercises in the border states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, close to the Russian Federation and its allies can be considered as threats. The conflicts can be treated as integrated use of military force together with political, economic, informational and other non-military measures for the purpose of creating disruption in the civil population.

The military policy of the Russian Federation is aimed at avoiding and preventing the military conflicts, through improving the military organization and operational doctrines of the Armed Forces, and increasing mobilization readiness to ensure the defence and security of the Russian Federation, as well as the interests of its allies (Russian MFA, 2013).

A fight for territory, in case of an open, armed, often prolonged conflict carried out between nations, states or parties is considered as military conflicts, which in turn dictates a focus on land forces and operations. Nevertheless, Russia has made great progress in the conduct of joint operations, and its capable airborne and aerospace forces, as well as its navy forces cannot be ignored. In fact, these components are crucial, particularly in the early phases of a conflict, before land forces become fully engaged in the conflicts.

Russia in matter of fact has the world's second most powerful military (see Figure 4.). Having about 70,000,000 available manpower with approximately 3,500 aircraft in service, 350 naval power and 15,400 tanks (Global Fire Power, 2016). Moreover, Russia has allocated 46.6 US dollars for defence budget, which almost the same as the NATO's expenditures as a whole in 2015, having a budget with 45.5 US dollars (see Figure 5.).

Top 11 World Powers

	↕ Tanks	↕ Total aircraft	↕ Total naval strength	↕ Defence budget
1. USA	8,800	13,400	437	\$581,000,000,000
2. Russia	15,400	3,500	352	\$46,600,000,000
3. China	9,200	3,900	673	\$155,600,000,000
4. India	6,500	2,000	200	\$40,000,000,000
5. United Kingdom	400	900	66	\$55,000,000,000
6. France	400	1,300	113	\$35,000,000,000
7. South Korea	2,400	1,500	166	\$33,200,000,000
8. Germany	400	700	81	\$36,300,000,000
9. Japan	700	1,600	131	\$40,300,000,000
10. Turkey	3,800	1,000	115	\$18,185,000,000
11. Israel	4,200	700	66	\$15,600,000,000

Figure 4. Top 11 World Powers
(Karpova, 2016)

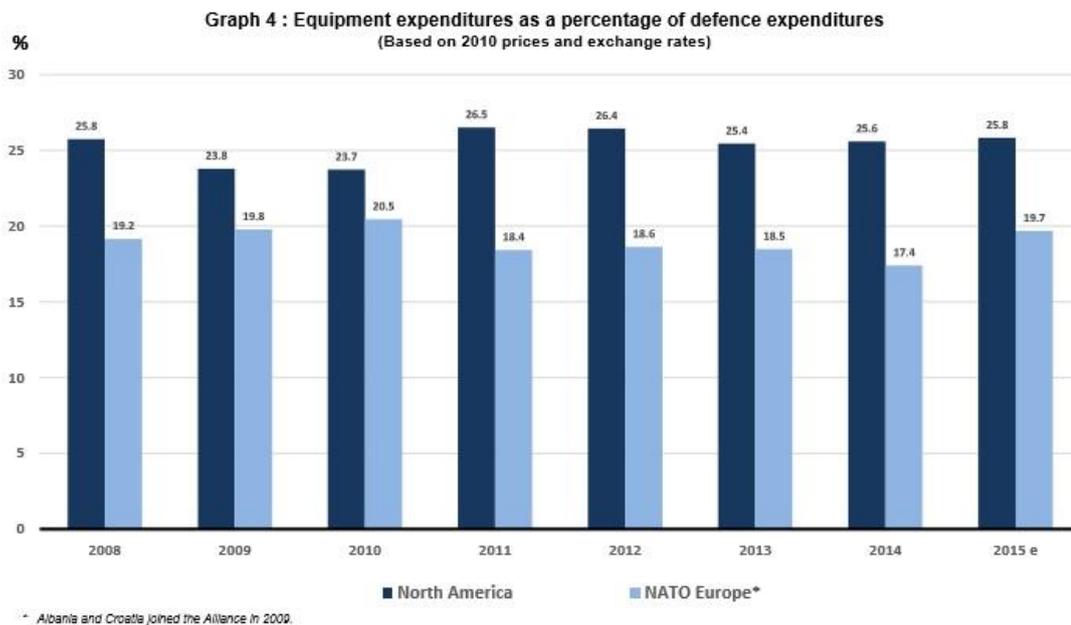


Figure 5. NATO expenditures on defence
(NATO, 2016)

It can be seen that the Russian expenditures on defence are considerably higher, compared with the NATO's alliance as a whole. The aim for the Russian Federation is to ensure the effective functioning of its military-industrial complex as a high-tech, multi-sector economic activity, able to meet the needs of the Armed Forces in terms of modern armament and other equipment, while at the same time sustaining the strategic presence of the Russian Federation in the world markets for high-tech products and services (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2015).

4.3 Russian propaganda

The Russian information campaign mounted against the Baltic states can also be considered as one of the serious threats to their national security. For a long time, the Baltics have had to deal with a Russian campaign through news, media and television that have put the Baltic governments in the worst light. Russia generously supports its ethnic groups and political parties in the three Baltic states, and Russian television, which puts ahead the propaganda picture of the Russian regime, is outstanding in all three Baltic states where it is seen by the Russian minorities (Kuokkanen, 2015). As people tend to believe everything that is said in the media they are starting to feel anxious about the countries and yearning for the Russian Federation without moving there. Due to that Russian propaganda causes more friction between the Baltics and the Russian Federation.

Without the Russian information campaign in the Baltics, the three Baltic governments would not be so worried about Russian investment in the area, and Russian organizations purchasing interests in Baltic organizations would not be seen at first as a compromise of their national security (Coffey & Kochis, 2015). The Baltics are, of course, unable to completely neutralize the influence that Russia exerts through certain groups that continue to support the Kremlin's policy in the public sphere. Clearly, Russians cannot learn that soft power is best employed and wins the best results when it is introduced as an attractive suggestion to the local populations and governments. Soft power that consists of lies, bullying, and coercion is not soft power at all.

Konstantin Kosachev, the head of a Russian agency Rossotrudnichestvo, has announced that Russia's soft power will be based on the ideological concept of Russian World including both Russia and its diasporas abroad. Kosachev has also indicated that it is necessary to improve one of the components of soft power- Russia's state branding in the

foreign countries (Kudors, 2014). It is sure that the numerous Russian non-governmental organizations in Latvia will be involved in creating a positive image of Russia by granting sponsorship to various projects related to culture and history. Moreover, the Russian side will probably continue making timely the theme of protection the compatriots' rights. Although granting the official status to the Russian language was already denied by the referendum of 2012, the calls to protect the Russian language in Latvia will be expressed also in the future.

5. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR BALTICS

5.1 The advantages and disadvantages of NATO development

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO concentrated on development, on global achievement for peace and on building associations with non-part countries, forming what was frequently named the new NATO. The consequence of the recently improved NATO is important to the Baltic Sea locale from all these of points of view.

5.1.1 NATO enlargement in the Eastern Europe

An easy assumption that the eastward expansion of NATO worries only the foreign policy elite in Moscow has been a characteristic of Western explanations of Russia's response to enlargement. This view, often supported by references to public opinion polls showing that Russians are more concerned about economic and social issues, is dangerously misleading.

The Alliance developed with twelve new individuals, including the Baltic states and Poland. This added to its quality as far as troops and capacities, by expelling the danger of security poorness in parts of Europe and extending the extent of the transoceanic security group. Then again, the new individuals, once part of the Eastern coalition, are presently the nations who see themselves as most open to respect to Russia, which constitutes a quandary for the Alliance. On the domain of new individuals there is no NATO structures built not that long ago, nor any perpetual troops or atomic weapons, as per the NATO-Russian Founding Act.

5.1.2 Achieving the peace

After the Cold War, NATO continuously turned out to be more active (Gressel, 2015). Through global foreign missions NATO tried its arranging, basic leadership, direct and control, military units and interoperability in genuine battle circumstances. On a strategic and operational level this unquestionably enhanced NATO military capacity to fight close along each other. Furthermore, contrasted with Russia, NATO is a way more advanced when it comes to standard forces. However, as the choices made things are being changed into military arranging, it has turned out to be progressively obvious that the re-organizing and experience of expeditionary strengths in peace missions has constrained worth for regional

barrier. Diverse arranging, abilities, power structure and more warriors are required. Availability necessities are tested by obstacles, for example, administrative green light to move military units quick over the territorial outskirts, and designated power to the military so it can act quickly. Extra issues incorporate how to interface ordinary with atomic strengths, and how to react to hybrid war. To wrap things up, the development of Russian hostile to get to the region dissent capacities, for instance, in Kaliningrad and Crimea have lately modified NATO's perspective on both lasting troops and relational word of overwhelming hardware in the Eastern part (Gressel, 2015).

5.1.3 Cooperation with third parties

NATO manufactured a wide system of associations with nations to direct peace operations, assist change and adjustment, and give the gathering to conferences to construct trust and meet regular difficulties together. In this case, Sweden and Finland are the perfect partners and as interoperable as most collusion individuals. In the previous year, collaboration between NATO, Sweden and Finland has grown considerably with an emphasis on the Baltic Sea area inside the Enhanced Opportunity Program (Coffey, Heritage, 2013). With respect to the estimation of associations, a fundamental inquiry ahead is whether there is a part for accomplices in aggregate barrier, and if yes, how to build up an idea of module, yet no assurances, that fits both the structure of the Alliance, and the national structures of accomplices, and serves the enthusiasm of both.

5.2 Prospects for the NATO's security arrangements in the Baltics

In the outcome of the Crimea, the Baltic states will develop the capability of their military keeping in mind the end goal to expand ability to protect their own regions, while looking for a reinforcing of aggregate defence inside NATO. In the meantime Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia will be not able surrender their support in the missions abroad. Their inclusion in operations abroad ensures their position inside the Alliance, and empowers them to develop their picture as solid partners, particularly in the relations with the USA. In perspective of the Ukrainian clash, the Baltic states will look for nearer military co-operation with the United States, which they see as their key partner and underwriter of security. The Baltic states will likewise look for more noteworthy military nearness of European NATO individuals (Rühle, 2014).

The principle target of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia at NATO's Warsaw summit will be to get assurances of the perpetual nearness of unified powers on their domain. At present,

the United States gives a diligent rotational nearness in the Baltic states as a component of the Atlantic Resolve operation. Germany and the United Kingdom have submitted themselves to conveying rotational powers in the Baltic states and Poland for more periods and all the time. At the same time, the European partners have been sending rotational strengths on a specially appointed premise, for maybe a couple month drills. Since there are no arrangements to set up any changeless NATO bases in the Baltic expresses, to guarantee a relentless nearness of powers bigger than the single organizations from the US arrangements. In addition, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are in cutting edge talks with the United States concerning the pre-situating of a few hundred things of US military gear (Coffey, Heritage, 2013). Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have pronounced that NATO Force Integration Units, tasked with coordinating Host Nation Support, will turn out to be completely operational in the primary portion of 2016. It is additionally essential for the Baltic states to guarantee that NATO proceeds to monetarily favour the advancement of their military bases and the fortifying of airspace observation, and keeps up the fortified BAP mission.

The feeling of risk from Russia will add to a venturing up of trilateral military co-operation between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, though just to a constrained degree. From one viewpoint, the Baltic states have been growing nearer cooperation in a few zones, for example, cyber security, information sharing and Host Nation Support work out. However, as it may be, the monetary deficiencies and different needs as indicated by which singular Baltic nations have been building up their military, and for some situation likewise their shared doubt, will confine the degree for cooperation between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The withdrawal of Estonia from the BALTRON joint mine countermeasures squadron in January 2015 is a valid example. Collaboration in planning the three states' military modernization projects and joint acquisitions of deadly implement and military hardware is missing, as showed by the tendering systems now in advancement. The Baltic states have been motorizing their infantries in co-operation with various Western accomplices, who offer diverse sorts of protected vehicles. They have likewise made separate acquisitions of man-compact air-safeguard frameworks and different sorts of hardware.

5.3 Baltics armed forces improvement

Indeed, even with impressively expanded defence uses, acquires of deadly implement and military hardware and the enrolment of new soldiers, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would not have the capacity to completely adjust for the negative changes in their security

surroundings. Accordingly, the endeavours to fortify the customary capability of the military of the three Baltic countries will be supplemented in the coming years by measures to enhance these nations' capacity to have unified backing and upgrade their observation and early cautioning abilities. In the meantime, the Baltic states will concentrate on anticipating unusual dangers. Subsequently, the significance of extraordinary strengths will increment, seeing that they are equipped for conveying a prompt reaction to emergency circumstances.

The elements of progress inside the Baltic states' military will to a great extent rely on upon the financial circumstance, which will thusly decide the measure of safeguard spending plans. Demographic patterns will likewise be an essential component, restricting the Baltic states' capacity to man their troops. A portion of the changes may turn out to be excessively eager, or their usage might be spread after some time, with respect additionally to the appointive cycle. In any case, the Russian animosity in Ukraine has added a support in protection interests in the Baltic states (Nikers, 2015). Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia at present have the political will to deliberately build up their military possibilities, and there is likewise rising open enthusiasm for state security issues. The progressions at present saw in the military of the Baltic states will be steady, in any event inside the time allotment of the coming decade.

CONCLUSION

Potential threats in the Baltics may occur due to the fact that Russia is growing economically and the fact that Russia is trying to weaken NATO. As the Baltic states seem to be an easy target by having a close connections with Russia, especially Estonia and Latvia, where the Russian minorities reach up to 25 percentages and, as well as, Lithuania where the transit roads between Kaliningrad and Russia go through. In addition to that, the three state's military posture alone, without NATO, is relatively vulnerable to Russia, therefore from its perspective the Baltic states are excellent place to show its power.

After the Russian invasion in Ukraine, NATO and the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania felt threatened. Despite of the fact that NATO responded rapidly both military and politically, it took a quite long time to realize that the next potential target may be the Baltics. Feeling the attrition from Russia, NATO is becoming more engaged in the Baltic states by guaranteeing and improving the countries' defence and military capability and sending rotational troops for trainings to improve the cooperation between the countries. The Baltic states, however, demonstrate a degree of willingness for NATO and transatlantic relations currently not found on either side of the Atlantic.

Russia has acknowledged that expanded NATO can be considered a threat. They have repeatedly criticized the eastward enlargement of the Alliance and the planned missile defence shield in Europe. Therefore, Russia aims to demonstrate NATO its power to show how vulnerable NATO actually is. In summary, Russia does not really aim for another occupation of the Baltic states, but rather a situation where Russia can dictate economic and energy policy and has the power to largely control foreign and security policy of the Baltic states.

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