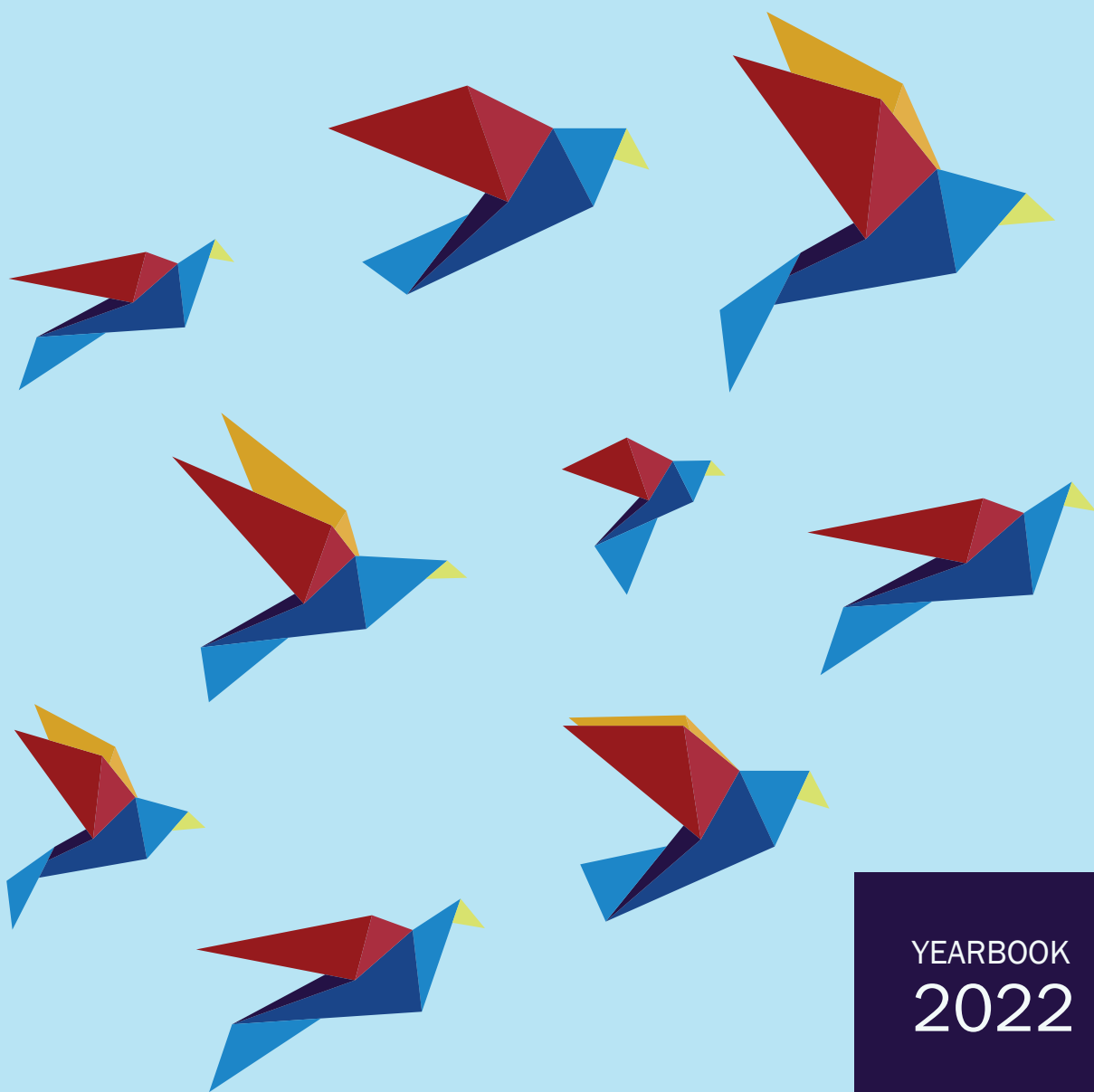
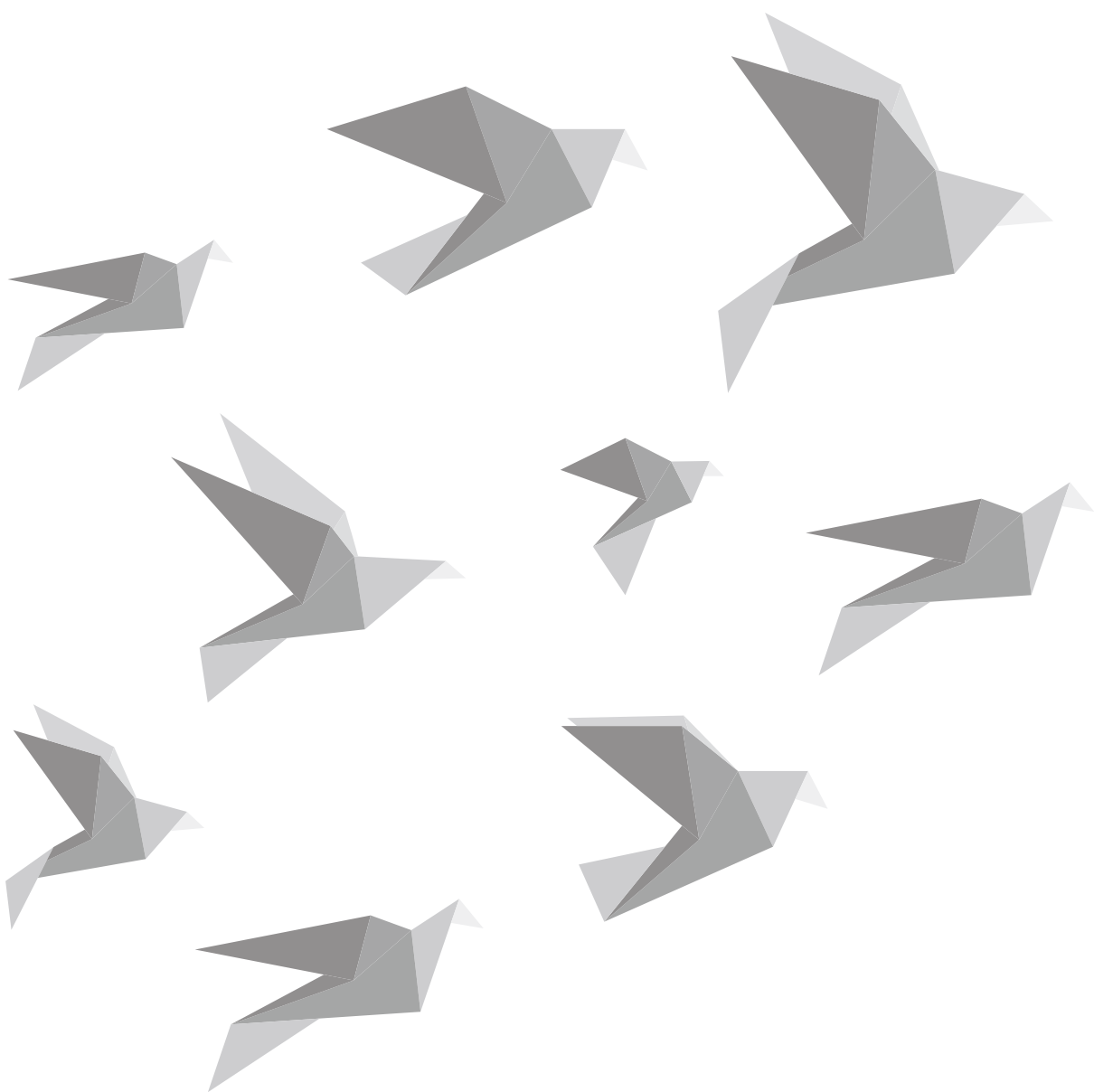
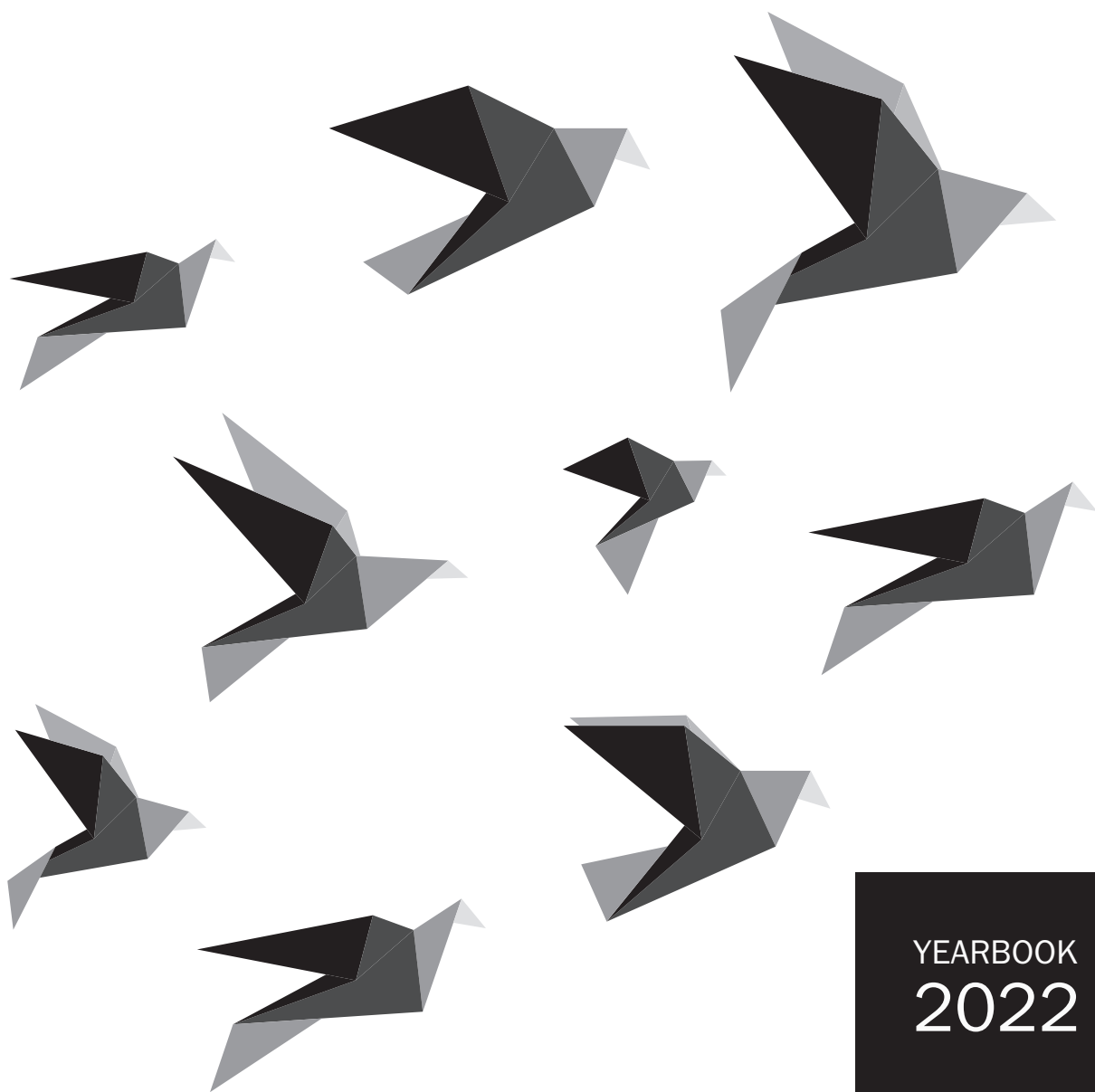

LATVIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY



YEARBOOK
2022



LATVIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY



YEARBOOK
2022

Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA)

Address: 21 Pils street, LV-1050, Riga, Republic of Latvia

www.liia.lv

www.rigasecurityforum.liia.lv | www.asia.liia.lv



LATVIAN INSTITUTE OF
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2022 aims to examine and evaluate various spheres of Latvia's foreign and security policy. It looks at what has been achieved in 2021 and draws up development scenarios for 2022, informing the public and offering recommendations to Latvian policymakers.

Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and The Parliament of the Republic of Latvia.



Ministry of
Foreign Affairs
Republic of Latvia



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS SAEIMA

In cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung



Editors: Sintija Broka, Andris Sprūds

Authors: Reinis Ābolģiņš, Māris Andžāns, Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Sintija Broka, Evija Djatkoviča, Natālija Knipše, Rihards Kols, Imants Lieģis, Aleksandra Palkova, Gunta Pastore, Elīna Pinto, Gunda Reire, Edgars Rinkēvičs, Toms Rostoks, Ēriks Kristiāns Selga, Andris Sprūds, Mārtiņš Vargulis, Elizabete Elīna Vizgunova-Vikmane.

Project coordinator: Sintija Broka

The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, any of the sponsors, or any governmental or other entity.

Translation from Latvian: Santa Pelše

English language editor: Talis Saule Archdeacon

Layout: Oskars Stalidzāns

Cover design: Mikus Kovalevskis

This book is published in collaboration with the Publishers "Hansa Print Riga"

ISBN 978-9934-567-77-3

UDK 327(474.3)

La 801

©Authors of the articles, 2022

© Translation: Santa Pelše, 2022

© Layout: Oskars Stalidzāns, 2022

© Cover design: Mikus Kovalevskis, 2022

© Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	
Andris Sprūds	7
ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS	
Edgars Rinkēvičs	9
A CALCULATED RISK IN A CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	
Rihards Kols	13
HOW WILL LATVIA HANDLE THE COCKTAIL OF THREATS, INATTENTION AND FRANCE IN 2022?	
Imants Lieģis	45
THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE RULE OF LAW IN LATVIA'S FOREIGN POLICY	
Gunda Reire	56
IN SEARCH OF STABILITY: LATVIA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2022	
Aleksandra Palkova	70
LATVIA AT THE CROSSROADS OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN 2022	
Mārtiņš Vargulis	83
DETERRENCE POLICY IN LATVIA 2021 AND 2022	
Toms Rostoks	94
LATVIA'S MILITARY DEFENSE AND CYBER DEFENSE: GROWTH CONTINUES, BUT ROOM FOR PROGRESS IS NOT DECREASING	
Māris Andžāns	108
THE YEAR OF BELARUS IN LATVIA AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: FROM A PROBLEMATIC NEIGHBOR TO A THREAT THAT IS THERE TO STAY ALSO IN 2022	
Evija Djatkoviča	125

THE CRISIS OF AFGHANISTAN: A TEST FOR THE EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN PARTNERSHIP Gunta Pastore	138
LATVIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN 2022: AN INVARIABLY RESERVED APPROACH IN CONDITIONS OF (IN)VARIABLE TURBULENCE Sintija Broka	150
NATO'S SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA: IMPLICATIONS FOR LATVIA Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova	161
THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE OF LATVIA'S INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS Natālija Knipše	168
TOWARDS A MORE GENDER-ATTUNED FOREIGN POLICY Elizabete Elīna Vizgunova-Vikmane	176
LATVIA AND ENERGY: WELL-CONNECTED, WITH POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF AVAILABLE CAPACITY Reinis Āboltiņš	188
THE DATA GOVERNANCE POLICY AS A TOOL FOR LATVIAN ECONOMIC AND SECURITY DIPLOMACY Ēriks Selga	200
INFORMAL AMBASSADORS: THE POTENTIAL OF DIASPORA PROFESSIONALS IN SCALING THE FOREIGN POLICY CAPACITY OF LATVIA Elīna Pinto	208
CONTRIBUTORS	227

FOREWORD

Andris Sprūds

Director of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs |
Professor at Rīga Stradiņš University

Similarly to previous years, Latvia's foreign and security policy environment in 2021 has experienced plenty of tension and challenges. The more saturated with events and activities a year is, the more significant the annual evaluation of foreign policy is as well. Therefore, within the framework of the annual *Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2022*, we, with the help of competent authors, continue to evaluate the events and decisions of 2021 and dare to outline the challenges and development scenarios for Latvia's foreign and security policy in 2022, while offering a number of actionable policy recommendations in different foreign and security policy areas.

In 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic continued to affect both interstate relations and daily life in society. The development and gradual availability of Covid-19 vaccines confirmed the capabilities and technological advancement of the world's scientists and let us feel optimistic about the possibility of leaving the pandemic behind. However, it is obvious the virus will continue to pose challenges in 2022 as well. Regardless of the pandemic, geopolitical tectonic plates experienced some dynamic shifts in 2021. In early 2021, the post of President of the United States was taken by Joe Biden, who committed to re-establishing the global presence of the United States, strengthening solidarity within the community of like-minded nations, and advancing the climate agenda. The transatlantic partnership was among Latvia's foreign policy priorities also in 2021, and it was one where we made a significant contribution through the hosting of NATO foreign ministers in Riga at the end of the last year, thus strengthening our position and contributing to the solidarity of the Alliance. At the same time, the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the interaction dynamics between member states within the European Union brought up questions about the coherence of the actions of allies. Interactions between the world's great powers – the United States, the European Union, China and Russia – also attracted the uninterrupted attention of Latvian foreign policy makers and analysts, as they continue to play an important role in Latvia's foreign policy. Violations

and hybrid attacks on the European Union/NATO border carried out by the Lukashenko regime continued, while tensions broke out on the Ukrainian-Russian border as well. In turn, relations with China are becoming increasingly complex. One can expect that these and other events and trends will continue to occupy the minds of foreign policy makers and researchers in 2022.

As with every year, Latvia's foreign policy is joined by relatively non-traditional security issues as well. This includes technology-driven opportunities and challenges, climate change processes and growing threats to democratic values and human rights. Digital technologies influence and alter the processes of international politics in countless ways. They offer new opportunities for authoritarian regimes while making it difficult for democracies to strike a balance between privacy, disinformation and the benefits provided by technologies. In the context of climate change, the recent COP26 conference on climate change has given the international community more and more homework, as it noted that the current level of progress is not enough, and these ongoing processes must be reflected in national domestic policy decisions.

The year 2022 will bring Latvia a number of opportunities, which will be constantly accompanied by new challenges in various areas of foreign and security policy. An informed society and its participation in promoting the country's international role are important preconditions for successful policy implementation. The Latvian Institute of International Affairs has once again put its trust in a team of talented and professional experts, inviting them to look at and evaluate various foreign and security policy areas and their progress in 2021, as well as to consider development scenarios for 2022, thus taking part in the process of informing the society and offering recommendations to Latvian policy makers.

The Latvian Institute of International Affairs sees partnership as an unwavering value, and this publication is the joint result of a successful partnership. This annual assessment would not have been possible without the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. We are grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its longstanding trust and productive cooperation. This cooperation promotes mutual understanding and dialogue between policy makers and implementers, think tanks, and the public. We also thank the Saeima, particularly the Foreign Affairs Committee, for their support in drawing attention to foreign policy issues and informing the public. We deeply appreciate our cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which has been an invaluable partner of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, making a significant contribution to the development of an informed discussion. Finally, the Latvian Institute of International Affairs is grateful to its followers and readers. It is an honor that you follow our activities and are interested in understanding the dynamics and challenges of international and regional events that affect the development of Latvia's foreign and security policy, as well as our challenges and opportunities on the global stage!

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Edgars Rinkēvičs

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

Dear readers,

In 2021, Latvia celebrated the 100th anniversary of its *de iure* international recognition and the 30th anniversary since the restoration of its national independence. Looking back and evaluating the long-term performance of Latvia's diplomacy, we can conclude that Latvia is successfully continuing its political, institutional and legal integration into the Euro-Atlantic area, has become a member of influential global organizations, and its national security guarantees have reached a high level. Latvia has established diplomatic relations with 190 countries and created an extensive network of diplomatic missions and honorary consulates. Representatives of Latvia hold important positions in various international organizations, and Latvia has presided over many international institutions. The participation of Latvian experts in civilian and peacekeeping missions around the world has become an integral part of its foreign policy. Latvia has become a recognized expert on the issues of strategic communication and the fight against disinformation; it contributes to the promotion of regional and global stability and development, as well as sharing its experience of reform with the Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries. Latvia is a responsible participant in the international system demonstrating a pragmatic and principled foreign policy. Its expertise is drawn on, and its opinion is listened to.

The achievements of Latvia's foreign policy provide for a good and solid basis for further national growth and strengthening of its international position. However, it must be taken into account that the international environment is becoming increasingly dynamic, fragmented, confrontational and unpredictable. This is largely determined by both the domineering and aggressive behaviour of individual countries ignoring or trying to impose their own interpretation of universally accepted international norms, the growing risks to the international law and democratic values in general, and the global destabilizing challenges, including hybrid and cyber threats, as well the international terrorism, illegal migration, climate change and the development of new technologies. The functioning

of international organizations and the international law-based global governance still show stagnation trends. This requires and will require additional focus and investment on the part of the Latvian diplomatic service and other public administration institutions involved in the international affairs, as well as from the non-governmental sector. Along with the traditional fundamental goal of Latvia's foreign policy – to ensure its national independence and security and promote prosperity – it is necessary to find sustainable solutions to current and future challenges in line with Latvia's interests. This must be enacted on the grounds of a world order based upon international law and a multilateral approach, an in a close cooperation with our Western allies and like-minded partners.

The year 2021 threw a spotlight on the above-mentioned problems and trends in international relations. We are also directly facing the hybrid attack carried out by the Lukashenko regime on the external border of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, where third-country nationals are being instrumentalised to create an artificial illegal migration flow accompanied by a massive disinformation campaign. The counteractions of the Baltic States and Poland – explanatory work in international organizations, achieving of full support and solidarity from the Allies, and the imposition of new economic sanctions on the part of the European Union against the Lukashenko regime – have brought stability to the situation, although the final solution has not yet been reached. The events at the external border of the European Union and NATO reaffirm once again the need to develop effective response solutions to hybrid threats. NATO's new Strategic Concept, the development of which was launched at the Meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Riga in late 2021, will have to provide a vision for responding to the challenges posed by Russia and China, as well as to offer solutions for a unified and coordinated response to hybrid attacks. From the Latvian perspective, the Concept must maintain the central role of NATO's collective defence and deterrence – NATO must be ready to respond to any threat and risk, thereby demonstrating that it still is the most successful Alliance in the world.

The transatlantic cooperation continues to play a central role in Latvia's foreign and security policy. The United States remains Latvia's strategic partner with whom it has a multi-level dialogue. The US presence in the Baltic region is an invaluable pillar of deterrence and defence, and the US assistance in the development of the defence sector in Latvia is a clear indication of the common understanding of challenges in the Baltic region. Latvia's priorities in the context of cooperation with the United States remain unchanged: strengthening of the US military presence in the region, promotion of cooperation in the digital and technology field, as well as a more active US involvement in the Three Seas Initiative. The close cooperation with Canada is an integral part of the transatlantic link. Latvia highly appreciates the participation of Canada as the framework nation in the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group in Latvia and would like for Canada to continue leading the NATO Battle Group even after the current mandate expires in 2023.

The European Union gradually continued to strengthen its global influence in 2021. This is confirmed by the efforts to offer a comprehensive response and to take the lead in

responding to strategic challenges; to prepare and implement new regional and bilateral cooperation strategies; to take a stronger and more principled stance in defending the common interests of the European Union, including by not refraining from the use of sanctions; and to develop its military and civilian capabilities. In order to drive this process forward, it will be important to find common grounds among the Member States on the development of the form and depth of the strategic autonomy of the European Union in various sectors, on the Strategic Compass and on the strengthening of the resilience of the European Union for its increased international role and influence. Latvia's priorities in the framework of the European Union remain the following: overcoming the consequences of Covid-19, the economic recovery, the further strengthening of the single market, the implementation of the European Green Deal to move towards a climate-neutral economy, further promotion of the digital transformation of the European Union and strengthening of values and the rule of law in the European Union. An important task will be to find synergies between the emerging Strategic Concept of NATO and the Strategic Compass of the European Union, where the European Union's defence and security capabilities must be complementary to NATO functions, avoiding duplication.

The promotion of stability and sustainable development in the neighbouring regions through the successful implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the development of cooperation with the region of Central Asia retains its significance in the focus of Latvia's foreign policy interests. Latvia advocates for a further deepening of the relations between the European Union and Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which should be provided with a long-term perspective for cooperation. Support should be granted to their gradual integration into the internal market of the European Union, and the expansion of sectoral cooperation, including in the field of security, should be carried out, thus acknowledging the achievements and promoting the further implementation of reforms. Latvia unequivocally supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and has been one of the first to support the establishment of the Crimea Platform Initiative, confirming its readiness to make a practical contribution to retaining the issue of the de-occupation of the Crimean Peninsula on the international agenda. Latvia continues its strong support for the democratic aspirations of Belarusian society, consistently opposes violations of international law and human rights by the Lukashenko regime, and will carry on to support Belarusian civil society in cooperation with Latvian non-governmental organizations.

As the destabilising activities by Russia increase, it poses an ongoing threat by using a variety of political, economic, military and hybrid methods to influence the situation not only in the neighbouring countries but also in Europe as a whole. Russia continues to demonstrate its approach of "spheres of influence" and ignores both the position of other subjects of international law and the universally accepted norms of international law. A clear example of this Russian position is the recurrent unprecedented concentration of Russian forces at the borders of Ukraine, causing serious tensions in the region. Those actions by Russia have received a strong and resounding response from the Allies,

warning that Russia will have to pay a “high price” for the possible military aggression against Ukraine, including severe economic sanctions. Overall, we must be prepared for Russia’s confrontational approach to continue. Therefore, both the European Union and NATO must consistently pursue their current policies towards Russia, and in the case of need, they must demonstrate the readiness to introduce even stronger economic retaliatory measures and to increase NATO’s presence in the Baltic region.

An important element of foreign policy will be the further development of relations with China. China’s ever-increasing economic and political influence, militarization and human rights abuses are forcing the European Union to view China as a cooperation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival at the same time. Latvia shapes its relations with China in close connection with the common policy of the European Union, which was reflected both in bilateral contacts and the position Latvia has expressed in the international organizations. In order to promote the unity of the European Union in its relations with China, Latvia advocates for the development of cooperation in the “27+1” format with the inclusion of all the European Union Member States, while balancing the participation in the “16+1” format activities in line with Latvia’s interests in the respective fields.

The strengthening of multilateral diplomacy based on international law is one of the main interests of Latvia’s foreign policy. Therefore, Latvia continues to prepare for running in the UN Security Council elections in 2025 for the position of a non-permanent member for the period of 2026–2027. An inter-institutional working group chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is defining the thematic priorities of the campaign. In turn, the process of preparing for running in the elections is led and coordinated by a new Ambassador-at-Large specifically appointed for this purpose. Membership in this institution will provide an opportunity for Latvia to demonstrate its ability to contribute to global processes, defend the international system based on the rule of law, and democratic values, as well as to strengthen its international reputation.

As international processes are becoming more complex and fragmented, there is a pressing objective need for an increasingly inclusive approach, with more and more governmental and non-governmental actors participating in the foreign policy developments. The significance of academic experts and think tanks contributing their ideas to the quest for sustainable and creative answers to current and potential international problems is also increasing. I am sure the collection, “Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2022”, prepared by the Latvian Institute of International Affairs will serve as a valuable assistance and source of inspiration for each of its readers, enabling them to enrich their understanding and knowledge of Latvia’s place in the regional and global foreign policy processes analysed in this year’s publication.

I wish you a pleasant reading!

Edgars Rinkēvičs

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

A CALCULATED RISK IN A CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Rihards Kols

Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Saeima

“...The future of Latvia [...] will again largely depend on us, as much as we will demand, want and be able to defend the beautiful future of Latvia. These are the main great tasks that the Latvian people and the Latvian government must perform without delay. Let everyone forget our small, everyday contradictions and differences, and let everyone who holds Latvia’s national independence close to heart, unite as one man, because the motherland demands it of us! [...] The future of Latvia lies in the hardened and the secure hands of the nation itself.”

Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics

Both in the early 1920s, when Latvia was recognized *de iure*, and today, Latvia’s ability to make decisions, achieve its goals, and hone the mastery of our diplomats in building relations with foreign countries is an existential and an ongoing mission. We must make the best use of what we have - we must find and hold on to the best allies, we must make agreements, and we must hold on to our values both on the world stage and at home. It is only by living and working independently that we as a nation, spiritually and politically, can come to a point of (self) awareness and confidence in our country and its continuity in the future. Not as the result of someone’s grace or help, but as the result of our strong and democratic development *per* our conviction – as a result of building our state.

Today, it no longer seems particularly appropriate to talk about how we live in times of extraordinary change. Therefore, I will take the risk of sounding a little dramatic in hopes of being unequivocally direct. Today’s status quo is a literally a “burning” planet, with regular and severe pandemic outbreaks and precarious progress towards the recovery of the global economy.

The pandemic is the leading cause of the world’s current economic problems. Covid-19 has driven global supply chains into chaos, plunged tens of millions of people into

unemployment and poverty, and pushed public debt to new highs. However, it is unlikely that a stable and globally fair recovery will be achieved, at least not until a uniformly high vaccination coverage is provided worldwide to halt the emergence of new Covid-19 mutations. So far, we have seen the emergence of five new variants, one of which, delta, caused a new wave of pandemics in many places, including Latvia and Europe, and this wave was much more severe than the previous one. At the time of preparing this article, the World Health Organization announced the discovery of a new variant and included it in the list of the most concerning Covid-19 variants. This list already has the globally dominant delta variant and the weakest alpha, beta and gamma variants.¹ Furthermore, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has warned that the new Covid-19 variant, the omicron variant, which causes coronavirus and was initially found in South Africa, poses a “high to very high” risk for Europe.

Long-term prosperity will also be affected by the success of meeting the targets of reducing carbon emissions and making substantial investments in the environment-friendly infrastructure to reflect today’s realities and societal needs, as well as by the adaptation of trade rules to reduce climate risks and natural disasters, and the acceleration of creating a circular economy.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly on 21 September 2021, Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized² that the world was, unfortunately, suffering from the “deficit of multilateral solutions”, which was hampering its ability to respond effectively to the world’s “multilateral challenges”.

The year 2021 was one of habit and adapted life, even if that life was a fragmented one. It was a year in which we lived with the pandemic instead of enduring it. Everything else in 2021 began its “take-off run” at the apparently usual speed.

It is even a paradox in a way. We have wanted to go back to the “normal world” for such a long time. And as soon as we began to get on with the reality of the “new normal” caused by the pandemic – namely, to get on with the crisis and to return to the usual pace in foreign policy – many of us were likely astonished by the speed with which more and more serious challenges presented themselves, one by one, during 2021. Challenges in transatlantic relations, China’s sanctions against the European Union, the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, and irregular migration as an instrument of hybrid war against the EU on the EU–Belarusian border... One might start to get the feeling that we are boarding a bus that no one knows how to drive, and that is driving straight into the next hole. This year, we saw how destructive reckless politics and rhetoric could be. We also saw how dangerous unfounded modesty and placations can be and how critical is the ability to agree, make decisions, and take action, i.e., to take calculated risks.

I would like to call upon you to remember these few concepts - recklessness, prudence and calculated risk – when looking at some of the 2021 “snapshots” of the wide field of foreign policy.

International politics has always been characterized by a certain degree of uncertainty and tension. Human nature and the systems we have jointly created are designed to express rage, anxiety and doubt in the loudest and most expansive way. These viruses have besotted democracies around the world. Societies are characterized by the same word: tension.

The conspiracies nurtured in the minds of anti-globalists and the most radical marginalized people, going hand-in-hand with political opportunism and even extremism, are gaining the support of a fraction of society and resonating with it. And that, in turn, causes dissonance in both domestic and foreign policy. With the help of the loudest critics of the multilateral system, international organizations are becoming increasingly paralyzed and unable to make decisions. This polarization seems to be starting to become institutionalized – in some places more strongly, in some places less – but the tendency for the political discourse to split and “group” at extreme opposite poles is already observable at the systemic level. It is a good breeding ground for conflict and confrontation, and the foreign policy chess game of the superpowers (or dice game, depending on how strategic each country’s foreign policy is) and the resulting clashes of views and values are leading us to crises of increasing complexity. In turn, their solutions demand of us the opposite, namely, the ability to cooperate, agree and act.

The feeling that characterizes our present is that we are in a daze. If in 2020 there was a unifying paradoxical sense of togetherness, which due to a shared experience temporarily served as a unifying force or at least allowed major conflicts to subside, then in 2021, we were brought back to the “old” ways, with the escalation of swelling conflicts and outbursts of smoldering disagreements, such as the already mentioned stress on transatlantic relations or hybrid threats through the use of irregular migration as a weapon against the EU’s external borders.

The challenges of the information age, which became almost explosive in the face of a crisis like the global pandemic, also created instability. The digital world exists in the “joint” and is a parallel reality at the same time, and the boundaries of the digital world are not the same as the national ones. Social networks are used to connect people and societies, while dividing them and challenging the meaning of a state by undermining confidence in the awareness of the existence of an interconnected reality and truth. Today, several parallel realities can exist in a single square meter. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to discuss a unified and universal perception and understanding of the world.

2021: THE STORM AFTER THE SILENCE

I believe most people have already forgotten the widespread hopes and beliefs that with the change of the master of the US White House, all confusion and disagreements would suddenly be resolved on their own. And it would be smart to forget. Geopolitical duels and challenges are what we are seeing today.

Thus, a few weeks after the inauguration of President Joe Biden, his Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, got himself into a public dispute with his Chinese colleagues during a bilateral meeting in Alaska. Moreover, the transatlantic relationship suffered another blow in the form of NordStream 2. The EU, for its part, imposed stricter sanctions on China, citing its policies and human rights abuses against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang as the reason, to which China responded with sanctions.

In June, disagreements between Russia and Britain in the Black Sea led some to draw parallels with the Crimean War of the 19th century. Joe Biden's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin did not particularly ease tensions in US-Russia relations.

When the first face-to-face meeting between Biden and the Chinese President Xi Jinping takes place, it is unlikely to be a particularly "cordial" one. The G7 is currently trying to make a justification for its existence. Other strong countries do not recognize the G7's authority on a global scale. However, the G7 and G20 can still set the rules of the game, for instance, in areas like the international tax policy, by heading initiatives on the minimum corporate tax and the digital tax that are currently being developed.

These events are often called "geopolitics", presenting them as new manifestations of old problems. So, Russia, for instance, continues the Soviet tradition of using energy exports to make other countries dependent on it, and NordStream 2 is the latest manifestation of this tradition. Antony Blinken calls it the "Russian geopolitical project to divide Europe",³ and in reality, there is now a severe energy crisis in Europe.

When President of the European Commission (EC) Ursula von der Leyen announced that she was going to chair the "geopolitical Commission",⁴ she aimed to highlight the difference between the new EC and a "political" Commission, emphasizing the goal of Europe to play a greater role on the international stage. Many Europeans believe that Europe needs a persuasive voice in the globalized world and tend to agree that even the big member states – France, Germany and Italy – might not be influential each on their own. However, the current conditions suggest that taking a geopolitical stance is sometimes a way to make up for one's weakness. We still cannot part with the consequences that accompanied the "old policy" and slowed down the discovery of solutions to global problems like the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance. The member states could not agree on a joint approach at its onset and began to operate in an "everyone on their own" paradigm, although it was clear that this crisis could only

be overcome by working together. As a result, an increasingly relevant debate arose, namely, the debate on European resilience and autonomy, which stirred up a rather existential reflection on the future of the EU as a project and the works that are in progress.

DISINFORMATION AS ROUTINE BACKGROUND NOISE

The revolution of the age of information is forcing us to rethink many issues, even the definitions of terms considered monolithic. One of these terms is “medium/ media”. In the broad sense, the term media includes both vehicles and technical tools like clocks, and entire systems like public administration or railway networks. Essentially, media are the environment we live in, the environment we have an attitude toward, and the environment that is able to influence us. They organize and structure our lives.

However, we usually use a narrower definition than this. In this case, we are talking about the mass media or mass communication media, which form an indispensable part of daily routines in society today. This is followed by a subdivision: “new” and “old” media. Everyday life in our society today is so closely linked to the media, the exchange and production of information, that the use of the term “information age” seems self-evident. Today, we are the media for ourselves. The media we use do not themselves know if they are the media, and the desire to take on the responsibility that the law stipulates for media is not too widespread. And all of that occurs on a global scale in a fully globalized information space without borders. We live in disarray that is only further complicated by the parallel technological revolution – the development of new technologies at an incomprehensible rate.

Today, we talk a lot about disinformation, fake news, manipulated news, photoshopped influencers, and moving away from reality. The term “fake news” already seems as old as the world. And this possibly only reaffirms how the speed of information changes the overall sense of time – because, as it turns out, the term “fake news” did not appear in the public domain until around 2016. It is true, though, that the previously seemingly innocent term “joke news” has become an actual lie. The very concept of “fake news” has reached a new level of quality: the global information space is experiencing the entrance of “deep fakes”, or fake videos created with the help of artificial intelligence.

The persuasive nature of this technology was demonstrated by the “fake Leonid Volkov” this spring,⁵ when some persons pretending to be Leonid Volkov, an associate of the Kremlin’s oppositionist, Alexei Navalny, approached Latvian parliamentarians, the media, and state institutions offering them telephone interviews or video meetings.

Officials from Amnesty International also met with the fake Volkov in a video call in February this year. The videos assembled from the recordings of the meetings were posted on a *YouTube* channel. They were further used as distorted and manipulated material on the Russian television channel *Russia-24*, thus discrediting the management and decisions of Amnesty International. Operations with a similar level of influence have been carried out against officials of Estonia, Lithuania, Germany, Denmark, Great Britain and other countries, where Russian representatives pretended to be Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the oppositionist of the Lukashenko regime in Belarus.

Both parliamentarians and non-governmental organizations in Europe and the United States, as well as our own *LTV News Service* (*LTV Ziņu dienests*), were “duped”. But unfortunately, I believe that nobody had really reckoned with or seriously considered such risks before they got into this situation, which makes us now consider not only the potential recurrence of such actions – or at least attempts at it – but also the fact that we can no longer entirely rely on our eyes.

“Deepfake” is a machine learning tool used to create fake videos featuring a public figure saying something they never said. It is the new generation of synthetic audio and video. Unfortunately, it will only get more effective, as testing the content and authenticity of deep-counterfeit technology requires special vigilance and knowledge while paying close attention to distinguish fake videos from real ones. They are hard to recognize. Artificial intelligence creates new opportunities to influence political processes. A new era of political disinformation has begun. As technologies evolve, deepfake is being developed with open-source software and is reviewed and improved daily. It won’t be long before it falls into the hands of lower-level hackers and makes its way into our bedrooms as well, from fraudulent calls, which are known to still be effective as people are cheated this way in Latvia every week, to real-time video calls from swindlers.

What can we do?

We can make the distribution process of deepfake videos more difficult and work with a wide variety of organizations to draw attention to this new threat. There is also the possibility to “train” our computers to recognize such synthetic videos. There are also tools being developed to enable journalists and organizations to identify fake videos. Artificial intelligence learns exceptionally quickly, but unfortunately, we don’t yet have the technology to independently recognize all fakes – for instance, this could be an algorithm that would intervene to correct a flaw as soon as fake videos are recognized as fake (the fake character blinks too rarely, for instance). The “implementation” of a two-step verification principle can make life more difficult for defrauders if someone needs to meet an unknown person in a video conference format.

Are social networks media, after all?

The most significant contribution concerning the “explosion” of the active spread of Covid-19 conspiracy myths came from social media algorithms favoring “everything is bad” news. The creators of conspiracy theories, although they are the minority, are aggressive. Facebook algorithms “believe” that angry, negative, and shocking posts are popular. They get an emotional reaction that results in sharing and involvement; thus, they are shown to as many people as possible. The social networking algorithms make use of the disposition of the human brain towards polarization.

At the moment, the large technology companies are, by their very nature and their level of influence, like quasi-governments, deciding what information millions of people will see or won't see. The problem is that, unlike national governments, whose main task is to keep their citizens safe and secure, the social networking giants are and will always be primarily interested in profits – either from advertising or audience engagement.

What's new in the disinformation about Latvia?

The disinformation about Latvia in the last year can be divided into two parts. First, some of the harmful disinformation has gained regularity; therefore, it is easily applicable to various Latvian domestic and foreign policy processes, regardless of their intensity. The other type of misinformation is repetitive but not regular. Within this aspect of the disinformation framework, the promoters of false information react to more specific events and processes in Latvia.

Within the framework of regular disinformation, the most common constructed stories/messages of the last year have been related to the alleged Russophobia in Latvia, in relation not only to the Russian-speaking population of the country itself but also to its presence in Latvia's relations with Russia. In the context of the representation of minorities, Latvia is seen by the pro-Kremlin media – and in communications aggressively targeted at local audiences, both in the media and even from the rostrum of the Saeima – as a radically different country that is unfriendly and discriminatory towards the Russian-speaking population. In terms of foreign policy, the disinformants blame Latvia for mutual diplomatic disagreements with Russia. Latvia is positioned as a neighboring country that is hostile to Russia, and as one which does not have an independent foreign policy. Russophobia is often cited as the reason for Latvia's allegedly unsuccessful economy and politics, emphasizing declining economic cooperation with Russia, especially in the transit sector. Against the background of this “news”, the supposedly “critical” role of Russia and Belarus in the Latvian economy is being especially emphasized and significantly overestimated.

This is nothing new, of course. Disinformants continue to mislead about Latvia's role in NATO and the EU. Over the past year, a special place in these stories has been allocated to undeserved and unjustified descriptions of Latvia as a “vassal” or, in the case of the EU, as a “second-speed member state”. Therefore, the disinformants emphasize that Latvia is supposedly forgotten and – for instance, as concerns the NATO membership – will not be protected from external threats.

There are also often stories highlighting alleged mass violations of human rights in Latvia. Interestingly, they are usually noticed and brought up when a decision has been made in Latvia to stop rebroadcasting a Kremlin-controlled television channel or when security services have launched inspections against pro-Kremlin journalists and social activists. In the middle of everything, in 2021, a member of the Saeima was detained on the grounds of being suspected of espionage in favor of Russia.

Looking at foreign policy issues: disinformants have actively criticized the interest and support of Latvian officials for the protests in Belarus in August 2020 and Latvia's position on the Russian State Duma elections, as well as on the issue of Alexei Navalny, an oppositionist to the Russian regime, by trying to portray Latvia as a “hysterical” country that allegedly interferes in the domestic politics of other countries.

The dramatic impact of the infodemic: from *fake news* activists to kangaroo courts and divided countries

The crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic is also a crisis of the digital information space. Conspiracy theories, lies and fabrications digitally drive wedges within nations and divide “spaces of truth” and families. Research shows that conspiracy theories thrive in times of crisis, as many people use them as a cognitive prism to understand the chaotic and complex developments around them, especially when there is a lack of official information, when that information does not reach them, or when they find it untrustworthy.

The role of this social group – the unreachable, the ignorant and the faithless – has always, without exception, been toxic. With their presence and messages, they increase public agitation, deepen the division of people into guilty, responsible and despicable groupings, as well as fuel and expand digital “kangaroo courts” and, in general, make it much more difficult to overcome a crisis at all levels. Although some social media platforms have set up information centers to educate their audiences about the pandemic or to limit disinformation, their effectiveness has been questionable, at least so far. However, combating disinformation becomes much more complicated if the disinformation is disseminated not only by individuals but also by influential media and socially and politically influential personalities.

National activism

States or their sponsored “activists” also deliberately spread misinformation to achieve a specific goal. We saw this in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic as well. In various phases of “developments”, the Kremlin-controlled channels provided a continuous and a context-specific flow of conspiracy theories, initially blaming the “global elites” for causing the pandemic and speculating that Covid-19 was, perhaps, a biological war of the West against Russia, then continuing with fatal scenes of the collapse of healthcare systems in Europe, the massive resistance of people against repressive governments, and finally internationally “torpedoing” all vaccines except the “Sputnik”.

The “digital tracing” and identification of fake news and their sources is ungrateful and never-ending work, but it is the only way we can stop these theories from spreading at the moment. One by one, the known players are being identified, and locally widespread fake news is being refuted. Although the fight against disinformation is sometimes like charging at windmills, resistance and the provision of alternative – true – explanations and messages are critical. Without them, trust in the state and its power, as well as confidence in legitimate and reliable media and sources of information, is undermined while cultivating suspicions, even fears, of everything that is “different”.

The pandemic is still an ongoing stress test for all levels of government. The foreign services had to be able to provide effective consular assistance, protect the image of their state during periods of crisis, and refute disinformation disseminated by the most confused members of their society or external agents of influence and doubt.

Is all fair in love, war, and cyber battles?

There are daily cyberattacks – or, more precisely, attempts at cyberattacks. Therefore, cyber security will form an essential part of the Strategic Compass, the geopolitical defense and foreign policy planning document, as cyberwarfare becomes a self-evident part of inter-state conflicts.

All is fair in the “information confrontation”. This line could briefly describe the dominant ideas about activities in the digital environment in Russia. The approach remains the same while the tools and methods constantly evolve. There has also been a lot of talk about Russia’s cyber activities: the devastating cyberattack NotPetya that was launched against Ukraine and Georgia, the hacking and leaking of information before the US and European elections, and so on. At the same time, the Russian government is seeking to control and close the country’s digital information space, including attempts to introduce a “sovereign internet” of Russia⁶.

Russia sees cyberspace as part of a more general “information confrontation”, where any means can be used to overpower other countries in the international system. Information warfare can be conducted by various means, including psychological operations, electronic warfare, and kinetic warfare agents. This means that one can carry out physical attacks on infrastructure in cyberspace as well as cognitive attacks, for instance, by spreading disinformation.

The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation describes the “information confrontation” as a clash of the national interests and ideas of one country with other countries’ national interests and views. And one can gain the upper hand in this struggle by attacking one’s opponent’s information infrastructure while simultaneously protecting one’s own. But, on the other hand, Putin’s regime sees the “information confrontation”⁷ as a geopolitical rivalry of great powers, where some are winners and others have to accept the role of losers.

Unlike Western countries, which talk about cyberspace and cybersecurity, Russian documents describe the information environment and information security, a broader definition which includes the uniformity of public opinions. In addition, Russia equates the borders of its information space with its territorial borders and watches for possible violations from foreign countries.

The threat of an “information confrontation” gives Russia an excuse to implement activities that do not constitute an open military confrontation, allowing it to remain unpredictable and achieve its strategic goals without causing an open conflict.

Is cyberspace in need of its own convention?

There is a significant problem with conventions and laws, whereby cyberspace still finds itself in a “grey area”. While most of the world’s information is transmitted and stored directly on the internet, the lack of an international convention setting out the “etiquette” for the acceptable boundaries of the use of information and cyber tools is incomprehensible. It allows cyberspace to continue to exist in the grey area without clear rules and regulations. If we do not set specific, precise rules, Russia and other countries will continue testing and probing the horizons of cyberspace with tactical attacks.

There is only a general principle establishing that states refrain from threatening or using force against any other state’s territorial integrity or political independence at the international level. Other states must be treated in a friendly manner. If someone is under attack, that someone has an inalienable right to self-defense.

Abusive state-sponsored cyber-activities related to espionage, extortion or the invasion of privacy may be classified as unfriendly and offensive, but they are not considered an act of war.

However, cyberattacks led by other governments can equal an act of war in their level of destruction, as they can result in human casualties and severe damage, and can harm to the country they target. In addition, cyberattacks that interfere with and manipulate other countries' electoral processes, depending on their effectiveness, can dangerously undermine the stability of democratic systems and public peace. But in many places, there is still a lack of the ability to identify and respond adequately to cyberattacks.

And yet, despite these extraordinary risks, there is still no international convention governing national "cyber behavior" in the way the Geneva Conventions cover the laws of war, or arms control conventions restrict the production of weapons of mass destruction and armaments.

From a practical point of view, the preparation and ratification of a new international and comprehensive agreement on cybercrime is likely to require intensive diplomatic efforts over many years, and a positive outcome is not guaranteed. To date, the most important international agreement aimed at deterring acts against computer systems, the confidentiality, integrity and availability of networks and electronic data, and the misuse of such systems is the Convention on Cybercrime of the Council of Europe, also known as the Budapest Convention, to which Latvia is a signatory. Its adoption back in 2001 proved that we were capable of working in that direction and agreeing on principles. Therefore, the prevailing skepticism about the ability to reach a global agreement on how to fight cybercrime is unfounded, even devastating. The dialogue on this type of international agreement should focus on practical cooperation in defining a collective position on the information or behavior in cyberspace that would be *de facto* detrimental to any country, regardless of political ideology, rather than being based on positions related to political struggles.

Only by working together will we provide an effective international strategy to combat cybercrime. Of course, this is a central issue for national security, and an international level agreement would not only improve our security situation but would also help ensure the stability and development of the global economy and the financial system.

In December 2020, the European Union launched its new Cybersecurity Strategy to strengthen Europe's technological and digital sovereignty. There are several reforms envisaged to strengthen EU rules on data processing and privacy, algorithms and their operation, the regulation of digital commerce and services, etc.

SECURITY AXIOMS

The greatest threat to any defense architecture can always be seen in a lack of will and internal fragmentation.

Last year's diplomatic frenzy between Paris and Washington was more than just a dispute over losing a lucrative submarine supply contract. France reacted particularly crossly, as it even recalled its ambassador to the United States for the first time in history. Paris points to the lack of transparency in the Biden administration and the lack of an honest dialogue, which has far-reaching consequences for the rest of the Alliance.

By excluding the vast majority of European allies from a crucial partnership with Australia, Washington has to some degree hinted, either consciously or unconsciously, at the role or value of Europe in its strategic competition with China. Through the AUKUS partnership, the Biden administration *de facto* decided to prioritize its own strategic interests over a close partner. It is an interesting coincidence, however, that the European Union released its first Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific a day after the announcement of the AUKUS. The document confirms the EU desire to “deepen its cooperation and ties with” Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

However, progress has been hampered by political divisions over the nature of the common goal. Many European countries have expressed concern that building a more autonomous Europe could ultimately weaken ties with NATO as well as between the European Union and the United States. Washington's ongoing vagueness has also fueled doubts about the overall concept of European strategic autonomy.

As we work on NATO's new Strategic Concept, we must understand that an ambitious worldview and slogans will be mere phrases unless we resolve the previous uncertainties. We experience difficulties trying to agree on more trivial issues within the Alliance with striking regularity. Is the document we will prepare a vision and a collection of wishes, or is it our vision on our future actions? Because if we sink into epigrams about political unity, we will once again sweep under the rug the issues we should talk about: the complicated, the impractical, the controversial, as well as the lack of mutual communication and trust between allies.

Conference on the Future of Europe

The European Union (EU) has sought to implement structural reforms since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. However, new integration measures are possible only under the intense pressure of a crisis, and changes in treaties have become taboo. The conference is expected to pave the way for the future of Europe and to generate new ideas for the development of the union through a hybrid format of inter-institutional

negotiations and citizen participation. However, the conference has been significantly delayed, and not only because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, it has also been controversially viewed by the EU member states.

To give an impetus to lasting reform, the conference must overcome four obstacles: the skepticism of many member states, the taboo of changes in treaties, inter-institutional competition, and the previous difficulties the EU has experienced in the context of the participation of citizens. The conference as a hybrid version of inter-institutional negotiations and communication with citizens was hardly possible due to national lockdowns and European travel restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 outbreak. However, the shortcomings of the conference's format go beyond its incompatibility with a global pandemic. Even if there were once again face-to-face meetings between national representatives, the question of how to overcome and reform the EU, even without the sense of urgency (anxiety) created by crises, will continue to be relevant.

What does the European “capacity” mean?

The EU is a great economic power. Therefore, its regulative power and its ability to operate both inside and outside its borders mainly depend on its influence in setting standards in the context of its free trade agreements and in setting requirements for the EU market that everyone who wants to operate in it needs to adapt to (for instance, the GDPR data protection regulation). Over recent years, the economic situation of the EU has allowed its public and private sectors to make significant investments to bridge the European digital divide, both in terms of infrastructure availability and skills. It was almost a prophetic step when looking back with today's eyes and experience.

Jean Monnet's prediction that Europe will be built in crises has already turned out to be accurate many times. Therefore, we can safely say that crucial crises should be an important driving force for reforms and innovations in EU policy-making. Therefore, Covid-19 could prove to be a major source of turmoil, a crisis raising political awareness of science and knowledge-based policy-making and analysis.

Political authorities – namely, decision-makers – crave certainty. That is why we can often hear complaints about the destabilizing effects of big surprises such as the pandemic. It seems as if they would expect to have a ready-made, precise, and workable response plan beforehand. In a way, this is somewhat reassuring, as their dissatisfaction shows that it is unlikely that any policy-maker will make easy decisions during a crisis. But, on the contrary, most governments want to avoid such situations because of uncertainties about future developments and poor choices. Covid-19 is currently the most visible example of this.

Following the principles of reverse logic, fewer surprises would mean more certainty in decision-making. Today, we often use knowledge of the past – *post factum*. This is also reflected in day-to-day policy-making practice, as national-level budget planning takes place within the framework of one year.

Many decision-makers are undoubtedly aware of the challenges of interpreting the past as a prologue to the future. The phrase well-known in the military field and referred to by Winston Churchill that “generals are always prepared to fight the last war” illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

Strategic conjectures

Increasingly, more players are openly and persuasively declaring themselves and their national interests in international politics. For instance, countries claiming the superpower status, such as China and Russia, are pursuing aggressive territorial policies. In times like these, our ability to act strategically and confidently at the international level is crucial. Any rules-based international order needs a forward-looking and effective policy-making process to prevent erosion. Whenever a binding international agreement is called into question or revoked, the threshold for uncoordinated unilateral actions is lowered while the likelihood of unexpected crises and conflicts increases. One way to tackle risks of uncertainty at the multilateral level is through strategic forecasting.

In ancient Greek mythology, Cassandra was a priestess of Apollo who was cursed to make true prophecies that no one, not even her father, King Priam, believed. Likewise, today’s policy-makers and decision-makers, like King Priam before them, desire to know the future, but accurate “prophecies” remain a challenge even today.

In this context, strategic forecasting aims to alert decision-makers early about possible events and developments for which action plans and crisis management versions need to be prepared ahead of time. Moreover, strategic forecasting can contribute when potential future crises and opportunities are identified at a point when there is still time to take measures to prepare for them. In this way, decision-makers are informed about their options to respond to potential crises.

It is possible to distinguish between forecasts and forecasting at the analytical level. The former is intended to anticipate specific events that could affect international politics. These include, for instance, sudden military escalations in strategically important countries or regions, as well as sudden turmoil in the financial system.

Predictions generated by the best forecasting “masters” – for instance, on issues such as the likelihood of the tense situation on the Ukrainian border being escalated by the Russian side into an open armed conflict in the next, let’s say, six months – in

combination with assessments of the situation from security and intelligence services, diplomatic know-how, and the outlook of relevant experts, would make discussions and debates about the implementation and enforcement of one policy or another, or how to respond to potential aggression in our neighborhood, become based on a much more objective and evidence-based evaluation. A similar practice can be applied in playing out scenarios and making forecasts about, for example, the possibility of Chinese aggression against Taiwan and the emergence of future waves and mutations of Covid-19. Of course, the accuracy of any predictions can be assessed in the light of real-world events.

NATO already has sufficient resources to serve as an early warning center and to develop strategic forecasting capabilities among allies and partners regarding geopolitical shifts caused by climate change or hotspots of political and social tension that could lead to crises and humanitarian disasters.

The more uncertain the world becomes, the world which is characterised by the increasing global connectivity, cross-sectoral interdependence and declining political engagement, the overall weakening of the international community or the multilateral system, the more crucial is, the more, and not the less, informed debate and open, frequent negotiations - until we can make decisions about the future geopolitical and regulatory aspects.

ENERGY AS A WEAPON

Russia's role in the current European gas crisis should serve as a wake-up call for us to finally begin reducing the threat posed by dependence on Russia and the priorities of its regime. Unfortunately, exposure to actual energy extortion has become a reality sooner than we would have "liked" it to. However, this does not change the EU's real vulnerability, as it currently imports 90% of its gas, much of it from Russia.

The construction of NordStream 2 has been completed. Still, the pipeline has not yet been formally approved due to the German court's decisions in the field of anti-trust, national security, and environmental protection. Moreover, most EU countries view NordStream 2 as a geopolitical weapon disguised as an economic project. Therefore, the decision to complete it was also a decision to give Moscow unprecedented leverage in the continent's energy markets, to further strengthen its control over European gas supplies, and to undermine rule-based principles in continental energy markets.

NordStream 2 has already caused a lot of harm on its own, as these pipelines export corruption along with gas. But we must at least reduce the damage and promote competition and transparency in the gas market through EU legislative instruments.

Those who hope that NordStream 2 will be permanently closed are most likely to be disappointed. Germany is particularly interested in Russian gas, as its need for it is ever-increasing. Germany firmly adheres to its decision to stop using coal. However, the expansion of renewable energy requires gas as a reserve in case of insufficient wind and solar power. So, once again, this case only confirms Europe's excessive dependence on Russian gas. This beltline is a strategic weapon in the hands of Moscow. And this can only be decreased by reducing the demand for Russian gas supplies.

Europe needs to get rid of this dependence. Otherwise, we will have to get used to Putin destabilizing Europe with new crises.

Other crises cause crises

The rise in electricity and natural gas prices has caused significant concerns both in Latvia and throughout Europe, and the European Commission must take action to curb the destructive activities of Gazprom. The EU needs to take its energy security more seriously, and this would be enhanced by diversifying energy sources and suppliers. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia must continue to reduce their dependence on Russian gas and electricity. This must be done jointly, as we are too interconnected to meet these challenges in an individual capacity.

As winter approaches, Ukraine is facing an energy crisis that can create political and economic instability and deepen the country's dependence on Russia.

On 1 November 2021, Ukrainian officials announced that Russia had suspended exports of thermal coal⁸ when stocks were five times lower than the government expected this year. However, the news was overshadowed by reports from the Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine (GTSOU) that Gazprom had reduced natural gas transit to about half of its contracted capacity in 2021.⁹

These separate energy news items are essentially two sides of the same coin in a high-profile game with bleak stakes: Russia is using this crisis to bring Ukraine back into its sphere of influence through direct energy dependence.

In recent weeks, the West has increasingly seen signs that could signal Russia's plans to use its full military potential. These include threatening military developments on Ukraine's border, the use of the energy market as a weapon against Moldova, as well as its support for the Belarusian hybrid war through the use of migrants lured by the Lukashenko regime's policy of free entry into Belarus as a hybrid weapon against the European Union.

The lack of clarity of Moscow's intentions and the Kremlin's reluctance to abide by international law and treaties exacerbates the situation. The escalation of the kinetic

conflict in Ukraine may not be on the list of priorities, but Russia has already carried out most of the steps for launching such a conflict if it chooses to do so.

The EU has finally begun to act in the face of increasingly apparent threats. However, the strong statements of solidarity with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia will mean little if no actual steps are taken to help protect the external borders of the European Union. We need a concerted European effort to deter Russian aggression in all its forms.

The fierce Russian campaign to undermine the Ukrainian government has combined traditional military aggression with hybrid warfare, such as cyberattacks on governmental websites, political disinformation and aggressive tactics in trade and energy markets.

More than 14,000 Ukrainians have been killed since Russia's 2014 military seizure of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.¹⁰ To this day, Russian forces, including Russian-led, enabled and supported separatists, continue to violate the ceasefire by killing and injuring Ukrainian soldiers and regularly preventing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe from carrying out its monitoring mission in and around the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

Although it is unclear whether Russia wants to occupy the whole of Ukraine, it is evident that the Kremlin is ready to use all its means to implement its "Red Lines" plan. The Kremlin has so far refused to define what these red lines are. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin has made it clear that the red lines will be drawn and responded to on an individual basis.¹¹ Namely, the lines will be drawn to be politically beneficial to the Kremlin's short-term interests.

Russia clearly disregards international law and its obligations, and it feels it has the right to roam through the Western countries arbitrarily and without consequences.

Along with its military efforts, Russia has continued its economic war against Ukraine by halting its coal exports and engaging in "political terrorism" by diverting gas supplies from Ukraine's pipelines.¹² In addition, Russia is now going against Ukraine in UK courts in an attempt to secure the repayment of a three-billion-dollar Eurobond loan which was accepted under pressure from the Kremlin.¹³ The Russian military, economic and cyber aggression has already cost the Ukrainian economy dearly several times – even notwithstanding the fact that the original agreement was signed by former President Viktor Yanukovych, a Kremlin ally who is now taking refuge under the wings of the Kremlin after the 2014 Maidan demonstrations. If our political – international – systems fail to protect Ukraine and others against Kremlin "lawfare",¹⁴ we can expect this type of tactic to be used more and more in the future.

This is classic Russian behavior: the use of various tools, leverages, threats, language, legal interpretations and disinformation to maintain what it considers to be a balance

of power between the West and Russia. EU leaders should already know this very well. Unfortunately, many of the same techniques are used with unfortunate regularity in Russia's relations with the EU and its member states. This ranges from disinformation campaigns in Spain and Italy and cyberattacks on Poland and Germany to widespread reports of Russian information activities in the context of vaccination against Covid-19.

Although high-level meetings, such as the EU-Ukraine highest level summit last month, may leave a positive "aftertaste", the results have often been toothless, unable or unwilling to provide tangible support to Ukraine against Russian aggression.

Some can loudly acknowledge the serious nature and potential of the threat posed by Russia. This is evidenced by the forthcoming arms supply deal between the United Kingdom and Ukraine to help modernize Ukraine's armed forces. And it is also a symbolically important step.

We have a reason to support Kyiv at this crucial time in history. Ukraine is a European nation that has consistently shown a desire for deeper integration into the Western area, and it is a country whose sovereignty and territorial integrity is being violated by the Kremlin every day. Suppose the combined diplomatic and economic power of the EU, the United States, and the United Kingdom are not enough to deter Russia from its current aggressive course. In that case, we can prepare for a long, cold winter.

THE VACUUM OF LEADERSHIP

How could the French presidential elections of 2022 affect the dynamics of European integration? First, it is worth remembering that France is the only nuclear state in the EU. It should also be borne in mind that the French government will hold the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU from 1 January 2022. While the French authorities are adamant about France separating elections from EU-level negotiations, one must be aware that any presidency always has a political background. France will go to the presidential ballot boxes in April during its EU presidency, thus raising concerns in Brussels of major political issues becoming hostages of French domestic political ambitions.

In general, the link between national elections and domestic politics, on the one hand, and European Union issues, on the other, is becoming increasingly close. Looking from the perspective of French domestic political struggles, the position of the French president has great significance in the context of the European Union. After all, the president and other European leaders take the most strategic decisions. This is all the more evident in the conditions of a crisis where the role of the Council of the EU has been particularly noticeable.

It would be very hasty to come forward with any predictions at this moment, given the current high level of political uncertainty (as it is difficult to predict the extent to which we will still be “in crisis” or in what “post-crisis phase” we will find ourselves during the most intense phase of the French presidential election campaign in early 2022) as well as the expected unpredictability of the electorate and the general crisis of democracy and democratism at both the national and international level.

At the time of writing this article, Germany had just reached a coalition agreement and begun to deal out positions. Therefore, it is too early to tell what political stances, including foreign and defense stances, and action plan this coalition will have.

And what about Europe? What about us?

We are waiting. Although European issues played no role in the election campaign in Germany, its next government will work on a complete list of topics to be addressed on the European level: the changes needed to meet climate goals, the foreign policy tasks, the crisis in Belarus and on the EU's borders with it, the war in Ukraine, the EU enlargement policy in the Western Balkans, the migration pact with Turkey, the joint position on competition, as well as issues regarding global businesses, security and human rights.

Yes, decades of crises have left Europe with an impressive list of tasks to be completed. And we have also been talking about the crisis in multilateralism for several years now, with the discussions including the topic of tensions and uncertainties about the future of NATO. So, I will refrain from calling it a real crisis, or even hinting that it could be one. But we can still talk about the situation and results created by different forces or non-forces.

THE STRATEGIC FOLDING OF STRATEGIES

The strategic autonomy of the European Union is still a widespread debate today, although there are different opinions about what it means. Latvia's position is clear. We would like strategic autonomy in areas where we need to strengthen our capabilities. However, when it comes to security and defense, these capabilities need to be maintained without looking at them as an alternative to NATO and without any undermining of transatlantic relations. Strategic autonomy has begun to resemble the “new Loch Ness monster” – everyone is talking about it, but no one has seen it, just as no one has agreed on a strategy either. Therefore, in these discussions Latvia should not discuss autonomy, which everyone perceives differently, but rather the EU strategies concerning Russia, China, and transatlantic relations.

When member states have agreed to develop the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, it has been based on *ad hoc* needs, which often leads to the disappearance of the principles and values that we have agreed upon. During the previous EP and EC term, we concluded that an EU global strategy does not exist, at least not in a form that would be appropriate for today. It is clear that we still avoid defining a strategic vision, leading to misunderstandings and a failure to move forward.

The EU has a habit of creating seemingly strategic and comprehensive concepts without defining their meaning or defining indicators to measure their effectiveness. Although the consensus on the need for strategic autonomy is strong and will undoubtedly impact policy development, more work is needed to identify inconsistencies and gaps in the concepts that have already been developed and to set measurable targets.

The European Union needs a new approach to security and defense in light of changes in the union's threats. The balance of geopolitical forces is changing globally, confrontations are emerging, and the EU needs to create a common strategic approach to these future challenges. The complexity of the environment of threats and the proliferation of hybrid threats and their evolving nature must be taken as the starting point in the emerging Strategic Compass of the EU.

The development of the Strategic Compass, launched in 2020, includes strategic conclusions, threat analysis, and strategic dialogue between the member states. It is structured around four interlinked thematic categories: crisis management, defense capabilities, resilience, and partnerships. Unlike the 2016 EU Global Strategy, in which EU institutions took the lead, this process is led by member states, and the institutions have a supporting and coordinating role.

The main challenge for the Strategic Compass seems to be, on the one hand, to provide clarity on the EU objectives (by defining goals, modalities, and tools) and, on the other hand, to ensure the support and involvement of the member states. The latter is essential for the follow-up of the process, the findings of which should ideally be reflected in national defense planning processes.

The process provides opportunities to improve the link between the EU defense initiatives and the dimension of the operations and capabilities of external crisis management, in order to consolidate the existing strategic partnerships and rethink new configurations, as well as to provide a concrete vision on the commitments made since 2016 to strengthen the EU's position as a defensive player. However, the Compass is at risk of remaining only "on paper" if it is not followed by the political will to implement it.

Everybody has to acknowledge the existing challenges and discuss them. From the geopolitical perspective, for instance, some of the key security players in the EU – namely, France, Germany and Poland – have different perceptions concerning strategic

autonomy, the strategic direction, and the level of threats to the EU. At the same time, the latest idea argues for a common EU threat perception and strategic culture. Meanwhile, Europe cannot afford to be a mere spectator in global affairs, allowing others to set the world order. The volatile security environment requires the EU to increase its capacity, resilience and readiness to act. The lack of unity, inactivity, delays, and poor coordination all cost a real and high price.

If the priorities of all the member states are not sufficiently balanced in the Strategic Compass, some states will not be interested in implementing it. This is something we know if we learn from past mistakes. It is worth remembering that decisions on security and defense policy are taken unanimously by the Council of the EU and are unlikely to change in the near future. Therefore, the Strategic Compass should have a “360-degree” approach and take into account the needs of all the member states in the context of crisis management, capacity building, partnerships, and resilience.

The political rhetoric also contrasts European autonomy and dependence too often. However, many global developments envisage a dynamic of interdependence that does not correspond to either of these two extremes. In climate policy, for instance, it is evident that the concept of autonomous EU sovereignty is questionable when action capabilities need to be interconnected at the global level to constitute any effect. Therefore, the need for the development of the EU Strategic Compass to be carried out in close coordination with NATO’s Strategic Concept in all of these areas should also be obvious. Furthermore, the member states of Central and Eastern Europe must be actively involved in developing the strategy, both at the administrative and the political level.

The promotion of European strategic autonomy (or any other current version of the name) can improve the dynamics of transatlantic relations in the new reality of today. After leaving Afghanistan and after AUKUS, we are seeing the onset of a strengthening of the common understanding towards more mature and fairer cooperation, a more equitable burden-sharing, and increased international security.

THE POLICY OF “ONE EUROPE”: EU RELATIONS WITH CHINA

Over the past decade, China has made significant steps in attracting and tying Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic States, to its cooperation and trade network. Through the diplomatic “caviar” approach, or simply with the sum of nominal currencies, Beijing has long promised substantial financial investments in the region. After introducing the so-called 17+1 platform, diplomatic contacts intensified, and everything ran smoothly most of the time.

However, concerns about China's activities have been raised in Brussels and elsewhere. Concerns have been voiced that point out that the Chinese Communist Party's leadership won't feel shy about using its (disproportionate) financial and technological influence to drive a wedge among the EU member states, if necessary. Still, time has passed, and it is rather apparent that progress is no longer taking place, at least on this side of the continent.

The perception of the People's Republic of China as a growing source of concern in the Baltic States is best traced through the annual reports of our security services. Traditionally, Russia has played a central role almost exclusively. However, China and the threats it poses have also won a place on some pages.

Admittedly, we are not unique in this respect, which inadvertently suggests that China's ruling forces could teach master classes on how to intimidate or repel potential partners. Moreover, the overly cross rhetoric and exaggerated reactions to even the slightest hints of human rights problems on its territory, and the publicity activities of the Chinese diplomatic service (and especially its embassies), could rather mislead an uninformed spectator as to which century's and which particular superpower's propaganda manifesto had fallen into their hands. And all of the above go hand-in-hand with ultimatums to correct errors that are inconsistent with the official narrative.

Tensions between the EU and China have significantly increased, even compared to the last year, when Europe surprised the world (and partly also itself) at the end of the year by signing the "comprehensive agreement on investment". However, immediately afterwards, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning China's extensive repressions against Uyghurs in Xinjiang and China's actions in Hong Kong. Shortly after, the EU imposed specific sanctions on certain Chinese nationals, to which China responded with sanctions against EU institutions and even members of the European Parliament. Developments were so swift that in March, the EU froze the agreement's ratification until these sanctions were lifted. China, of course, believes the EU should be the first to lift the sanctions.

On the rhetoric

The rhetoric, certainly, continued to escalate. In mid-July, the EU joined the White House, jointly condemning cyberattacks on Microsoft's servers¹⁵ made by Chinese-based hackers without pointing fingers at any specific country.

It must be acknowledged that there is still a lack of a shared understanding and vision on how the EU wants to shape its future relations with China: either it looks at China as a systemic competitor using unfair trade and investment practices, or as a trading partner with whom to at least talk, if not cooperate. This uncertainty has been floating in the air

for some time already. Since March 2019, the EU has publicly “identified” China as a partner, placing it in the category of economic competitors and systemic rivals.¹⁶ With the new administration coming to power, there have also been attempts by the United States to persuade the EU to join the US opposition against China.

On differences of opinion in the EU

In general, the opinions of EU member states on building cooperation with China in the future tend to vary. Skepticism and awareness of the specific threats and challenges of China’s presence and involvement have grown significantly in almost all member states in recent years. On the other hand, although public opinion is increasingly leaning against close ties with China, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, for instance, has been twice as vocal in positioning himself as China’s friend in the West. The exiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel has prioritized an unwillingness to undermine the export potential of the German industrial sector, thus choosing to ignore aspects of supply chain security. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, pays particular attention to the public rhetoric of those who do not yet know that the European Union, or more precisely, France (or *vice versa*) is a world power and that no orders from Washington or Beijing can influence anything - on the contrary, the EU can influence affect all of Asia if it wants to.

Whether the EU will be able to manage “strategic autonomy” in foreign policy in the context of cooperation with China is an open question. Another question is whether this relationship would allow the EU to adhere to its standards and values and gain adequate economic benefits.

A scenario for the future of EU–China relations

There are several potential scenarios for the future dynamics of EU-China relations, both in the direction of extreme escalation of conflicts and of unjustified optimistic harmony. The most likely scenario lies somewhere in the middle.

It has been evident since the end of 2020 that not all EU member states are happy with the provisional agreement between the EU and China that was “wrested” by Germany. Moreover, the general public perception of closer cooperation with China has also deteriorated. At the same time, the United States continues to maintain its agenda on Chinese issues, with its rhetoric gradually becoming more explicit, if not harsher, as exemplified by the recent US government warning of heightened risks when operating in Hong Kong.¹⁷ All these indications suggest there is no real way back to the most optimistic scenarios, including the agreement’s ratification. Moreover, the shift towards considering

China as a systemic rival and competitor has been going on for some time already. We also have to take into account the objective need for the EU to economically recover from the shocks of the pandemic while at the same time promoting the definition of climate-friendly growth as a priority. China is and will remain a key market for EU exports and the imports of critical raw materials. Over time, it will tighten the rules on corporate governance or regulatory actions to make it harder for Chinese companies to invest or take control over European companies or for European companies to cooperate with Chinese suppliers.

Such steps would be a rational response to the shortcomings highlighted by the pandemic, allowing the EU to impose stricter rules and guidelines on the (public) procurement of goods and put the necessary pressure on European companies to rethink their supply chain models and reduce their dependence on direct imports. To minimize the EU's external dependence to the lowest possible level, one cannot rule out the introduction of restrictions on imports or investment in certain areas.

What are we left with?

To sum up, tensions between China and the EU have gradually increased since signing the comprehensive agreement on investment in late 2020. As a result, the EU's position has become more confrontational, to which China responds by alternating between soft and "hard" diplomacy. Well, in truth, all of them are hard power methods, as per China's understanding and manifestations of its "soft power", they turn out to be nothing but the activities of poorly hidden hard power, namely, attempts to achieve economic, political and military dominance by coercive means.

It is important to emphasize that we are not talking about a policy of isolationism, either one's own or the isolation of others. Moreover, there is still the lack of a comprehensive and binding EU-level strategy with Beijing. In addition, the EU continues to see China as an ally in the fight against climate change, a partner we cannot afford to lose. Therefore, for the time being, the EU will remain in the middle, maintaining trade links with China and the US while striving for its strategic autonomy, for adherence to its standards in the area of human rights and in the social sphere, for the pursuit of value-based policies, as well as for the avoidance to harm its economic prospects.

How sustainable will such a "neutral" scenario be? Some risks could lead to a faster deterioration of EU-China relations. The domino effect would affect all areas, from trade and investment to implementing climate-neutral policies in the EU.

The hardest blow would be for Germany. Given China's importance in its exports and China's significant share of total foreign investment, Germany's reluctance to antagonize China is understandable. But, on the other hand, other member states are relatively

vulnerable to the blows presented by the relationship dynamics, given their own relatively high dependence on Chinese imports. And they would be the ones to bear a double burden. Therefore, these considerations should motivate the EU to stick to the course of slowly “drifting away”.

PAWNS ON THE EXTERNAL BORDERS OF EUROPE

The tensions on the border between Belarus and the European Union can be called a crisis involving migrants, but it is undoubtedly not a migration crisis. It is a hybrid war, and we must start to call it by that name.

A pause for statistics.

According to the data of the United Nations, 26.6 million people¹⁸ are currently considered refugees worldwide. In addition, another 84 million are regarded as internally displaced persons. Turkey has the largest number of refugees, amounting to 3.7 million persons, followed by Colombia, Uganda, Pakistan and Germany. In 2015 alone, 1.3 million people applied for asylum in the EU during the migration crisis.¹⁹

Let’s compare these figures with those faced by Poland, Latvia and Lithuania in 2021 due to Lukashenko’s hybrid attack on the external borders of the European Union. Since the beginning of the year, the Polish Border Guard has registered almost 32,000 attempts to cross the border illegally from Belarus, nearly all of them in the last three months. More than 17,000 cases were reported in October alone. By contrast, 120 border crossing attempts were recorded at the same border in 2020.²⁰ About 4,200 migrants from Belarus had illegally entered Lithuania²¹ by October. In Latvia, since 10 August, when Latvia declared a state of emergency on its border with Belarus, more than 2,000 people have been detained from crossing the border illegally up to November, while 62 persons have been admitted for humanitarian reasons. A total of 414 people were detained in 2021, most in the summer months.²²

The majority of migrants have been lured by the softened entry requirements for “tourists” from the Middle East and by the opening of new flights that have brought migrants from Iraq and elsewhere to Belarus. Minsk is deliberately encouraging migrants to come to Belarus, promising to help them get further into the European Union. Advertisements in travel agencies in Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere have even been used for this purpose. When the German *Tagesschau* newscast visited a travel agency in the Iraqi city of Erbil in autumn, an employee told reporters that about 20 people a day wanted to organize travels to Belarus for themselves and their extended families, resulting in 500–700 weekly “travel tickets”.²³

These are not millions. And, yes, these figures are so small that some have allowed themselves to put forward statements that the culprits in this escalating crisis are, in fact, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. According to this logic, the countries on the EU's eastern border are so overly concerned about a few thousand migrants entering their countries that they force them to spend cold nights on the Belarusian side of the border. So why can't they just open their borders, as Germany did in 2015? And yet Germany has never been able to open its borders because it is not located on the EU's external border.

Here is why: the crisis on the Belarusian border with its EU and NATO neighbors is not a migration crisis but a hybrid attack. Migrants are being used at the border by a hostile regime trying to harm NATO and the EU.

Following Belarusian aviation piracy to arrest the opposition journalist Roman Protasevich, the EU banned flights from EU airspace to Minsk and flights from Minsk; Lukashenko immediately sought revenge. But what can Lukashenko do when his capabilities are relatively small, given the collective capacity of NATO and the EU to withstand various attacks?

He can launch a hybrid attack.

Of course, soon after the Protasevich incident, Lukashenko threatened to "flood the EU with migrants and drugs". However, Lukashenko's actions were not directed against Iraqis, Syrians or Afghans. Instead, he aims to show that the governments of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland are unable to protect their borders.

Lukashenko wants to show that these governments, which are simply the easiest targets because they are Belarusian neighbors, fail to fulfil the primary tasks of any government, namely, to maintain order in their countries and protect their citizens from threats.

Suppose we could not control the situation on our borders. In that case, we could expect the citizens of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to quickly lose faith in the ability of their governments to protect their countries. If all three countries were to signal to their citizens, and thus to Belarus and the rest of the world, that they did not control their borders, it would be an open call for Belarus to attack these borders not only with more migrants but also through various other means, and for Russia, a Belarusian ally, to try similar tactics as well.

A solo or a choir?

In Poland, especially in the ruling circles, the initiative of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel to call Lukashenko was perceived less as a betrayal and more as a severe mistake. As the first Western leader to establish close contact with Lukashenko, Merkel

signaled, consciously or unconsciously, that Europe could start making concessions to his blackmail. By continuing this way, we would soon find ourselves not far from *de facto* legitimizing and “recognizing” a dictator and treating him as a partner. In addition, there is an impression that the great powers are acting in a coordinated manner. The crisis on the Lithuanian-Latvian-Polish border is taking place with the participation of Germany, the United States and Russia.

Indeed, Lukashenko used this case for his propaganda, primarily for “internal consumption”. Does this mean that Germany has declared the regime legitimate? No. Merkel’s conversation with him doesn’t change anything. Maybe she wanted to give him a chance to save political face with this dialogue ... In any case, so far, we have not seen any practical benefit from this conversation. On the contrary, a large group of migrants invaded the Polish border shortly afterwards. The Belarusian dictator is likely to increase the pressure on the EU to make it negotiate with him and lift or relax the sanctions.

Europeans are showing solidarity in the fight against Moscow and Minsk. The EU and NATO are organizing response measures while avoiding the traps of a military escalation. The most urgent task is to help release those trapped in the barbed wire fence, after which discussions on the revision of the European asylum mechanism must begin. Attempts at external destabilization cannot be prevented entirely. It is most likely that Europeans, not Russians, will be forced to put out the migration flame lit by Lukashenko. As for the dictator in Minsk, he is now wholly dependent on the Kremlin “having his back”.

THE RENAISSANCE OF BALTIC DIPLOMACY

Over the past 30 years, cooperation between the Baltic States has more than once been looked at with a certain hint of irony: not least because these talks most often end with the usual comparisons and emphasis of differences. Which, of course, befits all neighbors, wherever they may be. Paradoxically, the digital or hybrid diplomacy introduced by Covid-19 succeeded in establishing and creating, perhaps, one of the closest mutual “mini-alliances” within parliamentary diplomacy. This was accomplished by acting as a well-oiled mechanism and “winning over” more allies than would usually be expected while providing a consistent message and voice for their initiatives.

In society, as in politics and diplomacy, personal contacts are critical. The elusive level of feelings tells us how much or how little and how slowly or smoothly future cooperation and coordination will be. Although the Baltic Assembly has been operating effectively and focusing on the trilateral format for many years now, Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius had not established a formal, or even an informal, practice of meeting, discussing

developments, and coordinating foreign policy regularly on the level of the chairs of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committees to operate as a uniform, single player in our relations with the “outside” world. Differences in personalities, opportunities, capacities for understanding, and political views can play a decisive role.

The Covid-19 pandemic has, in many ways, harmed traditional diplomatic formats and forms. But the pandemic was also the unifying factor for the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Baltic parliaments – perhaps even the decisive one. As the usual practice of face-to-face visits and meetings, in the form of gathering together and communicating approximately once a year, was not available due to the constraints of the pandemic, it led to a shift to digital and mobile communications. The benefits were obvious. As if the parties had previously agreed to do so, they “threw out” courtesy and positioning phrases, hints and beating around the bush, and instead of that, they saw the opportunity to do more together. As soon as possible, at the end of April 2021, the chairs of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian parliaments went to Ukraine, namely, to Kyiv, and the front line in the east of Ukraine. Following that, they also went to Germany and France, as well as Moldova. It was the combination of forces and the ability to agree on shared priorities that most likely resulted in meetings with the highest-level representations in the framework of these visits. However, there is always the fact that there are those who benefit less and those who benefit more due to reaching a compromise and putting one party’s priorities at the forefront.

Digital diplomacy continued to develop daily, as did the ability to mobilize and engage colleagues from Germany, Poland, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Parliament, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Denmark and other countries to sign timely joint statements, as, for instance, in the case following the Washington-Berlin Agreement on NordStream 2 (the agreement stipulates that the United States will not impose sanctions against NordStream 2, while Germany promises to invest diplomatic efforts and financial resources to compensate Ukraine for the losses it will suffer in the context of this gas pipeline). In response to this step, the chairs of several European parliaments and the US Congressional Foreign Affairs Committee issued a joint statement expressing their opposition to the NordStream 2 gas pipeline project, reproaching the US and German decision on NordStream 2, which envisaged the completion of the gas pipeline. However, the gas pipeline is now complete. So now, at the end of 2021, several months after it began holding a powerful position, the story of NordStream 2 is not over, or rather it has not even really started.

The statement of the chairs of the Foreign Affairs Committees following the capture of the Ryanair flight in Belarusian airspace was also prompt and vocal on the global scale. In the statement by the chairs of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the US, German, Polish, Czech, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian and Irish parliaments, the seizure of the plane by the Belarusian regime was described as an illegal act of piracy against a civilian

aircraft. The statement released on the evening of the incident on Sunday highlighted that the plane had been hijacked by threatening violence as it was on the way from one EU/NATO capital to another. The leaders of the committees called for a response while temporarily prohibiting flights from and to Belarus as well as flights over this country. In addition, they requested the release of Roman Protasevich, the founder and editor-in-chief of the opposition media *Nexta*. The Saeima also later issued a statement on the illegal landing of flight FR4978 in the Belarusian capital Minsk, strongly condemning the Belarusian authorities for landing the plane with threats of violence and military involvement, thus endangering the safety of aviation and the lives of more than 123 passengers, including Latvian citizens, as well as crew members. Furthermore, the Saeima pointed out that such actions violate the norms of international law.

While in the case of Ryanair the issue was the need for the international community to ensure that civilian flights could operate safely and without restrictions, these examples in general have an illustrative purpose. For some member states of the European Union, the hijacking of a plane and the abduction of a journalist served as the cold shower they needed to shake them out of their over-complacency and the illusion that “it does not affect us”. To be able to agree on any meaningful action, we must first be able to agree on our attitude and understanding, whether it be sanctions against Belarus, addressing the migration crisis and the strengthening of the EU’s external borders, diplomatic relations, or the synergies between NATO and EU cooperation.

In November 2021, the chairs of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Baltic parliaments issued an open letter to Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, and Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary-General, stressing that Lukashenko has played an essential role in the creation of an artificial migration route and the cynical use of migrants in an attempt to destabilize Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and the EU as a whole, in order to achieve the lifting of sanctions imposed on his regime. The letter emphasized that the Belarusian regime was using people as a weapon to destabilize neighboring countries and the EU. Therefore, we have to respond systematically and coordinate to prevent a third party, be it a country or an organization, from using the EU migration and asylum system to put pressure on or blackmail the EU and its member states. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the EU’s resilience to hybrid attacks and develop regulation in line with today’s realities and challenges. The letter was signed by the chairs of the Foreign and European Affairs Committees of the Latvian and Estonian parliaments and the *Seimas* of Lithuania. The letter was also signed by the chairs of the Foreign Affairs or European Affairs Committees of the parliaments of the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, France, Poland, Germany, the United Kingdom and Ireland, as well as by the chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament (EP).

Why has the cooperation of the Baltic States proved so critical? Of course, in informal talks, the content of which is not destined to leave the negotiation room, the disagreements, misunderstandings and different opinions continued and will continue to exist. But phrases like “Baltic unity” have an empty connotation if they are formal and only exist on paper. Recognizing that a good compromise is one that no one is fully satisfied with, and being able to agree on priority goals, we have in a short time been able to prove and demonstrate how “small countries” can set great powers in motion, as well as influence and drive the course of events and decisions. Realizing that one is not a fighter, there is an opportunity to make good use of one’s voice and “weight” while continuing to hold on to one’s values and principles, as well as holding one’s allies close to them, not only in rhetoric but also in international politics. As we live in an age of populism, political opportunism and mass disinformation, democracies must be able to defend themselves, their people, and their interests. Moreover, they have to be able to remind their allies about this so that they are heard. We have been able to prove the role of the Baltic States as a regional player, which can give a positive impetus to the development of the bloc’s common policy.

CONCLUSIONS

If we look at history, even just the recent past, we can see that cycles of development and progress move “upwards” over time. At the global level, life is still improving. And none of this happens according to the laws of nature, not even according to social norms. It occurs in the course of purposeful work with a strategic vision and an achievable goal, with a willingness to look at problems honestly, to look at them without illusions and to get to work by unravelling them. Of course, this does not guarantee success. Therefore, we should always be aware that a calculated risk is the best option to pursue.

Prudence is important, as recklessness in decision-making is dangerous. However, it must not paralyze us by driving us towards indecisiveness. The state, security, autonomy, independence and other concepts and the values associated with them are not a result, but, rather, a process. And this process requires constant thinking, decision making, and moving forward. Exactly as the first Latvian Foreign Minister, Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics, once said.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Classification of Omicron (B.1.1.529): SARS-CoV-2 Variant of Concern," Pasaules Veselības organizācija, 26.11.2021, [https://www.who.int/news/item/26-11-2021-classification-of-omicron-\(b.1.1.529\)-sars-cov-2-variant-of-concern](https://www.who.int/news/item/26-11-2021-classification-of-omicron-(b.1.1.529)-sars-cov-2-variant-of-concern).
- ² "Inclusive, Networked Multilateralism Vital for Better World Governance, Says Secretary-General, at General Assembly's Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Meeting", United Nations, 21.09.2020, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20264.doc.htm>.
- ³ "Blinken says Nordstream 2 is Russian project that undermines Ukraine", Reuters, 23.06.2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/blinken-says-nordstream-2-is-russian-project-that-undermines-ukraine-2021-06-23/>.
- ⁴ "Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the European Parliament Plenary on the occasion of the presentation of her College of Commissioners and their programme", Eiropas Komisija, 27.11.2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/speech_19_6408.
- ⁵ Kols, R., "Par viltus Leonid Volkov", Rihards Kols, 28.11.2021, <https://rihards-kols.medium.com/par-viltus-leonidu-volkovu-23d3de09313a>.
- ⁶ "О Федеральном законе «О внесении изменений в Федеральный закон „О связи“ и Федеральный закон „Об информации, информационных технологиях и о защите информации“, Federācijas Padome. 22.04.2019, <http://council.gov.ru/activity/documents/104263/>.
- ⁷ "Russia's National Security Strategy 2021: the Era of "Information Confrontation", Institut Montaigne, 02.08.2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/russias-national-security-strategy-2021-era-information-confrontation>.
- ⁸ Hunder, M., "Russia to stop exporting thermal coal to Ukraine from Nov. 1", Kyiv Post, 30.10.2021, <https://www.kyivpost.com/business/russia-to-stop-exporting-thermal-coal-to-ukraine-from-nov-1.html>.
- ⁹ Sabadus, A., "Russian coal supply to Ukraine halts amid deepening energy crisis", Independent Commodity Intelligence Services, 01.11.2021, <https://www.icis.com/explore/resources/news/2021/11/01/10700745/russian-coal-supply-to-ukraine-halts-amid-deepening-energy-crisis/>.
- ¹⁰ "Kremlin Raises Rhetoric After US Cites 'Real Concerns' Over Russian Military Buildup Near Ukraine", Radio Free Europe, 21.11.2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-conflict-hysteria-peskov/31571947.html>.
- ¹¹ Kramer, A.E., "Putin Warns of a Russian 'Red Line' the West Will Regret Crossing", The New York Times, 21.04.2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/21/world/europe/russia-putin-ukraine-navalny.html>.
- ¹² Solonyna, Y., "Triple Threat? Russia Halts Coal Exports To Ukraine, Cancels Power Auction Amid Gas Crisis", Radio Free Europe, 04.11.2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-coal-electricity/31546121.html>.
- ¹³ Milhench, C., Zinets, N., "UK court says Ukraine-Russia \$3 billion Eurobond case should go to trial", Reuters, 14.09.2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-ukraine-eurobond-idUSKCN1LU23N>.
- ¹⁴ Lawfare: the use of laws, regulations or aspects of legal systems to gain a tactical or strategic advantage in the context of a conflict; law as a military weapon or weapon of war
- ¹⁵ "US, Europe condemn China for 'malicious' Microsoft cyberattack", Euractiv, 20.07.2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/us-europe-condemn-china-for-malicious-microsoft-cyberattack/>.
- ¹⁶ "Commission reviews relations with China, proposes 10 actions", Eiropas Komisija, 12.03.2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_1605.

- ¹⁷ “Issuance of a Hong Kong Business Advisory”, U.S. Department of State, 16.07.2021, <https://www.state.gov/issuance-of-a-hong-kong-business-advisory/>.
- ¹⁸ UNHCR Refugee Statistics, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.
- ¹⁹ “Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015”, Pew Research Center, 02.08.2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>.
- ²⁰ Roache, M., “In the Standoff Between Belarus and Europe, Migrants Are Being Used as Human Weapons”, TIME, 24.11.2021, <https://time.com/6119488/belarus-poland-border-dispute-humanitarian/>.
- ²¹ “Statistics on irregular migrants”, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://ls-osp-sdg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/9b0a008b1fff41a88c5efcc61a876be2>.
- ²² Amoliņš, G., “*Sākumā desmiti, tagad jau tūkstoši: kā attīstījās migrantu krīze pie Baltkrievijas robežas*”, LSM.lv, 11.11.2021, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/arzemes/sakuma-desmiti-tagad-jau-tukstosi-ka-attistijas-migrantu-krize-pie-baltkrievijas-robezas.a429840/>.
- ²³ “*Lockruf aus Belarus führt über die Türkei*”, Tagesschau, 09.11.2021, <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/report-muenchen/fluechtlingsroute-belarus-eu-101.html>.

HOW WILL LATVIA HANDLE THE COCKTAIL OF THREATS, INATTENTION AND FRANCE IN 2022?

Imants Lieģis

Senior Fellow at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs

The cocktail of international events that affected Latvia's security during 2021 has a mix of three ingredients. An apparent increase in threat perception has been the most toxic element. Concerns that attention is being focused away from the Baltic and European theatre have added to the mix. The "sweetener" has been France's boost in its endeavours to advance plans of European strategic autonomy and sovereignty. Will this mix leave a bitter taste as we move into 2022? Can Latvia do anything to make the cocktail more palatable?

THREATS

Of the milder threats during 2021, those posed by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic were handled with mixed results. The security of the Latvian state was challenged; ineffective crisis management in the health sector meant that there was a lack of vaccines at the year's start. A surplus by summer came hand-in-hand with an insufficient uptake of vaccinations within society, resulting in a flare-up of the disease in autumn. Concerns were aired about the slow reaction of the government and the threats to security posed by the impending crisis in the health sector. Liene Cipule, Head of the Emergency Medical Service warned that insufficiently strong governmental measures were "a question of the security of the state, when we are unable to guarantee the rights set out in the Constitution".¹ Internal differences between the four coalition partners hampered necessary decision-making in circumstances where only around 50% of the population had been fully vaccinated by mid-October. A state of emergency was therefore re-instated, first in the medical sector²

and then countrywide, for a three-month period beginning on 11 October.³ A month-long lockdown was imposed beginning on 21 October. The political repercussions of the handling of this crisis will be assessed at the ballot box in October 2022.

More tangible threats both to the region generally and to Latvia specifically emanated from Belarus. The internal crackdown by “President” Lukashenka was probably useful for his protégé, Putin. The latter could use this to warn his own population: “look what could happen to you if you test my tolerance for democracy”. Of course, Putin’s treatment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny is equal to the measures taken by his “friend” Lukashenka. Lukashenka’s behaviour moved from having a local to a global impact on 23 May 2021, when the Belarusian authorities scrambled a fighter jet to force the landing in Minsk of a civilian flight from Athens to Vilnius.

The incident was instigated by Lukashenka seemingly with the aim of removing from the Ryanair flight and subsequently arresting the Belarusian journalist and activist Roman Protasevich along with his Russian girlfriend. This resulted in EU sanctions being imposed, with a condemnation of Belarus’s actions being couched in terms of “state terrorism”. It also resulted in the immediate breakdown and suspension of Latvian-Belarusian diplomatic relations following Minister Rinkēvičs’s presence in central Riga at the flag-lowering ceremony of the Belarusian state flag and its replacement with the red-white Belarusian flag used by the Belarusian opposition. The flag was amongst those belonging to nations participating in the Ice Hockey World Championships taking place in Latvia during that time. Belarus that same day – 24 May – summoned Latvia’s ambassador in Minsk to the Foreign Ministry and gave him 24 hours’ notice to leave, with the remaining Latvian diplomats being given 48 hours’ notice for departure. Reciprocal measures were taken by the Latvian side. The complete breakdown of diplomatic relations with a neighbouring country can be viewed as a failure of diplomacy. Was Minister Rinkēvičs’s presence at the flag ceremony a necessary symbolic gesture, or was it a “publicity stunt” (as described to me by some diplomat colleagues) that unexpectedly backfired?

Not long afterwards, Belarus began using migrants as a weapon of hybrid war. With promises of entry into Europe, the Belarusian authorities started transporting people to the Lithuanian, Polish and Latvian borders. These migrants had been arriving on direct flights from Iraq (and elsewhere) to Minsk. As a result, following Lithuania’s lead, Latvia declared a territorial state of emergency for a three-month period beginning 11 August along and near to the Latvian–Belarusian border.⁴ Latvia, Lithuania and Poland all instituted enforced security measures to prevent the flow of migrants across their borders, which are also part of the EU’s and NATO’s external borders. The issue was brought onto both the EU and NATO agendas. Following Lithuania’s request, NATO sent its Counter Hybrid Support Team to the Lithuanian-Belarusian border in early September 2021, not long before the planned Russian-Belarusian military exercise

Zapad 2021. The team were not asked to visit Latvia, probably because Latvia did not anticipate an escalation of tensions. However, in the event of tensions escalating and military elements being introduced by Belarus, Latvia's foreign minister warned that they would be ready to invoke Article 4 of the Washington Treaty should the need arise. In a meeting with his Polish and Baltic counterparts in September, he said, "We retain the right [...] if the situation evolves with military elements, to request NATO countries to start article 4 negotiations".⁵

These hybrid war tactics by the Lukashenka regime were perceived with concern in light of the joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises Zapad 2021, where hybrid threats formed an integral part of the exercise. This exercise was also perceived as directly threatening towards Latvia (and our Baltic neighbours), as there were reports of some 200,000 troops participating,⁶ without the presence of invited observers under normal OSCE procedures. The exercise was no doubt used as a tool for further improving military interoperability between Russia and Belarus. Indeed, NATO's June 2021 Summit Communique referred to Russia's "military integration with Belarus".⁷

Other forms of hybrid threats remained on Latvia's radar during the year. Attempts at re-writing history, an ongoing tool used by the Putin regime, were mentioned in October when President Levits participated in the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism. He firmly rejected the use of "hybrid war, which includes attempts to 're-write' history in order to manipulate with public opinion".⁸

INATTENTION

"America is back" was the assurance given by recently inaugurated President Biden in his foreign policy speech at the State Department on 4 February 2021.⁹ Despite the chaos and challenges of four years of the Trump administration, US engagement in the security of NATO's Eastern Flank, including Latvia, had remained steady. President Biden did, however, state in his speech that he'd be stopping any planned troop withdrawals from Germany which his predecessor had announced. Such withdrawals could have had implications for Latvia's security.

As the year proceeded, an expected policy of more benign US re-engagement brought mixed results. The withdrawal of US troops as part of NATO's 20-year operation in Afghanistan was strategically acceptable, but a tactical disaster due to being chaotically managed. The spat over AUKUS (a submarine deal) and the announcement of a new Indo-Pacific security partnership between the US, UK and Australia also had repercussions within Euro-Atlantic relations which could continue into next year. The combination of these two events raised concerns and questions about the meaning of America being

“back”. Could America’s attention being drawn away from Europe negatively affect Latvia’s security? How much fuel was added to the fire of European strategic autonomy by America not paying sufficient attention to the concerns of its allies?

These events were probably also a reflection of US attention being primarily concerned with internal affairs, including the continuing struggle to manage the onslaught on democracy following the events of 6 January and the legacy of Trumpism. As far as foreign policy slips are concerned, the strength of America was shown to be its ability to quickly acknowledge mistakes made. This was the case with the outcome of the AUKUS affair. After the outrage expressed by France about a breach of trust, a joint statement by Presidents Biden and Macron following their telephone conversation referred to the fact that “The two leaders agreed that the situation would have benefited from open consultations among allies on matters of strategic interest to France and our European partners”.¹⁰ Another important part of the same statement, although it did not mention strategic autonomy, alluded to a stronger and more capable European defence being complementary to NATO. Although on the one hand France may have overreacted to the AUKUS issue by recalling its ambassador from Washington, on the other hand this re-focussed US attention to consulting with Europe on sensitive issues. From a Latvian perspective, this re-focussing was a positive outcome of a conflict in which Latvia had no particular “dog in the fight”.

Ongoing potential flare-ups of tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, and involving China, do not augur well. If Latvia abandoned pragmatism in its relations with Belarus, the same cannot entirely be said about dealing with China. This is especially true when looked at in comparison to the approach taken by neighbouring Lithuania, which not only quit the 17+1 arrangement between a number of Central and East European countries and China, but also provoked Chinese ire over Taiwan by, amongst other moves, agreeing to open a “Taiwanese” representative office in Lithuania. Together with other partners, Latvia downgraded its participation in the 17+1 leaders’ summit with President Xi in February 2021, but it did not follow Lithuania’s lead in quitting the 17+1 format. Interestingly, America paid attention to Lithuania’s approach. On 13 September the White House issued the following statement referring to Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida’s Šimonytė’s telephone conversation with National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan: “Mr. Sullivan reaffirmed strong U.S. support for Lithuania as it faces attempted coercion from the People’s Republic of China. He also underscored U.S. appreciation for Lithuania’s principled foreign policy in support of democracy and human rights, including in Belarus”.¹¹ Lithuania’s actions on China can be interpreted as being supportive of America whilst at the same time keeping Lithuania’s profile and concerns on Washington’s radar screen.

America’s focus on its big power strategic rivalry with China risks attention being deflected away from US commitments in Europe, especially if, as some have predicted,

a flare-up over Taiwan were to occur.¹² In addition, US concerns about China have also meant that NATO is paying more attention to China. The NATO leaders' summit in Brussels in June 2021 referred to engagement with China in order "to defend the security interests of The Alliance".¹³ In a wide-ranging interview in the *Financial Times*, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg underlined the importance of China to the Alliance by mentioning, amongst other things, that "when it comes to strengthening our collective defence that's also about how to address the rise of China".¹⁴

There were also indications during 2021 that Russia and China cooperated in testing the extent to which America could focus on parallel crises. After the Chinese and Russian foreign ministers met on 23 March 2021, there followed a large increase in Russian troops by the border with Ukraine, unseen since Russia's annexation of Crimea and military actions in eastern Ukraine in 2014. China in turn began carrying out highly publicised amphibious assault exercises and the highest frequency of air incursions into Taiwan's so-called air defence identification zone in nearly 25 years.¹⁵ In October 2021, a joint Chinese-Russian large scale naval drill, "Joint Sea 2021", took place in the Far East. These events were undoubtedly closely watched in Washington. They also probably led Secretary General Stoltenberg to state in the same *Financial Times* interview mentioned above that "China and Russia work closely together".

FRANCE

As already noted, French concerns about US commitments to ongoing engagement in Europe increased during 2021, thereby boosting ideas about European strategic autonomy. Hopes of President Biden bringing "back" the US after the traumas of Trumpism proved short-lived. Given the uncertainties about whether a Trump administration will return in 2024, France can seem justified in pushing for a greater defence and security role for Europe. Events surrounding the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and the circumstances in which the AUKUS agreement was signed prompted US-French rifts, which may have been smoothed over at the Macron-Biden meeting scheduled at the end of October. Such rifts negatively affect Latvia's interest in keeping a strong Euro-Atlantic link. There is a risk that these US-French rifts will continue to ferment during the next few years in the lead up to the 2024 US presidential elections. French presidential elections in the spring of 2022 could be another factor to take into account as President Macron seeks to gain a second term. Likewise, France, together with the rest of Europe, will be watching the mid-term US elections in 2022 for indications about a future return of Republican Trumpism with its subsequent implications for the Euro-Atlantic relationship.

France is also justified in pointing out that it is probably not a good thing that European countries still remain heavily reliant on the US for hard security. The prospects of proceeding with greater EU defence cooperation were boosted by elections in Germany, where it seems that the winners of the 2021 elections all appear keen, at least in words, on the idea of a European army.¹⁶ The formation of a new German coalition government, followed by the spring presidential elections in 2022, mean that the Franco–German “motor” within the EU will probably not hit full speed until the latter part of next year. In addition, France has continued to promote defence and security issues within the EU in the lead-in to its six-month presidency beginning on 1 January 2022. However, the message at times seems contradictory about whether European strategic autonomy should be within NATO or on its own. For example, speaking at a joint press conference in Paris with Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis on 28 September, President Macron stated that European strategic autonomy “is not an alternative to the United States alliance. It is not a substitute, but it is to take responsibility for the European pillar within NATO”. Yet he also claimed that “Europeans [...] need to react and show that we have the power and capacity to defend ourselves”.

There are three elements to the push for a higher profile for defence in the EU. Firstly, the EU Strategic Compass process, which aims to provide an updated framework for defence cooperation within the EU, will be completed during the French presidency. A step in this direction was made on 6 May, when 14 member states, including France and Germany, proposed setting up a joint European military “first entry force” of some 5,000 troops.¹⁷ Secondly, talk of an EU Defence Union seems to appear more frequently and was mentioned by EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her State of the Union Speech on 15 September when she said that “what we need is the European Defence Union”,¹⁸ even though this at present lacks the element of having a common budget. Thirdly, there will for the first time be an EU Summit on Defence during the French presidency.

Given that France is the only EU nuclear power and the only member state represented on the UN Security Council as a permanent member, it is logical that France leads the way on EU defence and security issues. Within the EU, it will be crucial that France encourages Germany to devote more political and military resources to defence and security questions. However, regarding Europe as a whole, the UK also needs to be on board. Whilst France seems to be on the way to mending soured post-AUKUS relations with the US, regrettably, post Brexit and post-AUKUS French–UK relations seem to remain fractious – not least because of lingering post-Brexit disputes over fisheries. As the two most serious European military powers, France and the United Kingdom need to resolve their differences and not allow festering problems to have a negative impact on strategic defence and security cooperation.

DEALING WITH THE COCKTAIL OF THREATS, INATTENTION AND FRANCE

Foreign policy is guided as much by events as by strategy. What lessons need to be drawn by Latvia from the events in 2021 to guide its foreign and security policy strategy in 2022?

Concerns about threats to Latvian and regional security during 2021 emanated from the ongoing unpredictable behaviour of the leaders of Russia and Belarus. The year 2022 will provide NATO with the opportunity to strengthen defence and deterrence measures for the region in the short- and long-term. In the short-term, it goes without saying that the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) of NATO troops in Latvia, led by Canada, must be maintained. No doubt Latvia will be seeking an extension of Canada's commitment in this regard. The NATO foreign ministers' meeting due to be held in Latvia on 30 November and 1 December will provide the platform for pushing this and other issues of concern to Latvia. Closely linked to the eFP is the need for Latvia to ensure the continuation of robust NATO reinforcement exercises, where military mobility continues to be a challenge. A recent decision by Latvia's Ministry of Defence to receive a floating bridge capability to improve military mobility, to support NATO exercises, and as a way to bolster Latvia's contribution to the eFP was a very positive development.¹⁹

In the lead-up to NATO adopting a new Strategic Concept at the planned leaders' summit in Spain next year, Latvia will need to ensure that credible territorial defence and deterrence remains at the core of NATO's business for the next decade. This approach should be based on the objective assessment that threats of all kinds from an aggressive, unpredictable and adept Putin-led Russia will remain undiminished. Latvia's focus on defence and deterrence issues will need to be closely linked to ensuring that the Alliance also adopts renewed, robust and credible plans to ensure the defence of member states' territory. Russia must be sent a strong message that the cost of any type of attack, cyber or otherwise, would far outweigh any benefit obtained by Russia. Clear guidelines on these issues must be at the core of the Strategic Concept 2022.

Given the propensity for increasing hybrid threats to appear within Latvia, its immediate neighbourhood and elsewhere in the Euro-Atlantic space, the new Strategic Concept will also need to address questions of hybrid threats. Latvia will need to continue to ensure the resilience of its society against such threats by building on the total territorial defence concept. New and emerging technologies will also be a critical part of NATO's next Strategic Concept. Latvia should not shy away from continuing to support the Latvian technology industry, which can offer niche contributions to partners in addressing the challenges and threats posed by emerging technologies.

Keeping the attention of Latvia's most crucial ally, America, will continue to be a vital challenge for 2022. A potential visit of President Biden to Latvia would clearly be a boost to this challenge. There is the prospect for securing such a visit. The NATO Summit in Madrid will take place on 29–30 June. President Biden will undoubtedly be there. Latvia will be hosting the next Three Seas Summit as well as the Business Forum in Riga in June 2022. The United States (together with Germany and the European Commission) have partner status in the Three Seas Initiative (3SI). By attending the Three Seas Summit, President Biden could be seen to keep a strategic focus on the south and north of Europe. Latvian officials at all levels will therefore need to pull out all the diplomatic stops to get President Biden to Riga during his planned visit to Europe next June. Given that the 3SI links 12 countries from the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas, Latvia will no doubt point out to its American partners that because of Russia, NATO's most sensitive regions are the Baltic and Black seas. The presence of President Biden in Riga would also provide a strong message about America's iron-clad commitment to uphold NATO's collective defence posture in Europe. His presence would also provide the opportunity to acknowledge that whilst China remains the main strategic challenge, it is Russia that continues to pose the biggest threats to Europe and Europe's Euro-Atlantic partners.

Should Latvia aim for a more "principled foreign policy in support of democracy and human rights" and in that way catch the attention of the US, just as Lithuania did in 2021 through its approach to Belarus and China? By doing so, Latvia could, for example, give greater support to Lithuania by following Lithuania's lead in leaving the 17+1 format with China, as the format is increasingly being perceived as a Chinese tactic to divide EU countries and dilute the EU 27+ China format. Latvia is unlikely to follow Lithuania's approach towards Taiwan. Such moves would need careful consideration. They could in parallel put in jeopardy Latvia's bid to get a seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2026. In practice, an approach of ongoing pragmatism will likely be chosen in preference to a "principled foreign policy".

How should Latvia deal with France during its EU presidency and the thorny questions surrounding EU defence? There are a number of possibilities for this, all of which work on the assumption that NATO, with the US, must remain as the guarantor of collective defence and deterrence in Europe. This therefore means, firstly, that Latvia should firmly reject any proposals for European collective defence. Regrettably, these are beginning to appear.²⁰ Secondly, Latvia should continue to espouse the approach taken by Prime Minister Kariņš as expressed in his interview with *Politico*. Namely, "The discussion of strategic autonomy is not a choice of either the EU and NATO or the EU alone, but it is an inclusive notion [...] NATO as the cornerstone of European security is and will remain in the future, the cornerstone of our security, but that is not in contradiction to having a stronger European Union".²¹ Thirdly, Latvia should express support for the idea that America should agree with its European allies that

strategic autonomy brings greater European strategic responsibility, and such an agreement should then be embedded in both NATO's new Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass.²² This window of opportunity would then allow an important alignment of this thorny question to be achieved by both organisations. Fourthly, Latvia should speak urgently to key members of the new German coalition government to offer ideas about European defence and security and the proposals coming out of France. In doing so, Latvia can stress the increasing role Germany needs to play in Baltic regional defence within the context of NATO, whilst also pointing to the relevance of the "Franco-German motor" in anticipation of President Macron's second term as president of France.

It is likely that 2022 will bring changes to Latvia's foreign policy team, given that parliamentary elections are scheduled for October 2022. Perhaps, after an unprecedented period of time (more than a decade) at the head of Latvia's Foreign Ministry, Edgars Rinkēvičs will consider moving to pastures new? He has been a solid, capable representative of Latvia. The country would benefit from his appointment to an international position. If, as seems likely, the current government survives until elections, Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš will also have set a record as being head of government for a full four-year term. He has made a very positive impression in the foreign policy arena, in particular at the European level, where his knowledge and excellent communication skills have earned respect from his counterparts, especially Chancellor Merkel and President Macron. His chances of gaining a second term as prime minister, if he even wants it, will no doubt be influenced by the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic and the state of Latvia's economy next year. Meanwhile, President Egils Levits will need to remain the anchor of stability as the internal politics of Latvia face the regular democratic challenge of parliamentary elections. As well as hosting the Three Seas Summit in Riga, his most important role for Latvia in 2022 will be at the NATO Madrid Summit. The cocktail of current threats, the risk of US inattention to Europe, and the ongoing French ambitions in Europe will all have an impact on the security of Latvia until the end of this decade.

ENDNOTES

¹ *Latvijas Avīze* print edition, 07.10.2021, p. 3.

² "Izsludina ārkārtas situāciju medicīnā Latvijā", Ministry of Health, 07.10.2021, <https://www.vm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/izsludina-arkartas-situaciju-medicina-latvija-0>.

³ "Rikojums par ārkārtējās situācijas izsludināšanu", Cabinet of Ministers, 09.10.2021, <https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/rikojums-par-arkartejas-situācijas-izsludinasanu-0>.

⁴ "Saeima atbalsta ārkārtējās situācijas izsludināšanu Latvijas-Baltkrievijas pierobežā", Latvijas Republikas Saeima, 12.08.2021, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/21724-budzeta-komisija-labajos-gados-uzkrato-naudu-valsts-taupis-ekonomikas-lejupslides-posmam-rss/29225-par-saeimas-sezu-norisi-un-mediju-iespejam-8-oktobri/29664-iznoma-telpas-edinasanas>

- pakalpojumu-sniegsanai-saeima/29348-par-saeimas-sezu-norisi-un-mediju-iespejam/30013-saeima-atbalsta-arkartejas-situacijas-izsludinasanu-latvijas-baltkrievijas-pierobeza.
- ⁵ Libietis, U., Ķezberis, U., Strazdiņa, I., “*Baltijas valstu un Polijas ministri Rīgā spriež par Baltkrievijas izraisītās migrantu krīzes risināšanu*”, 13.09.2021, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/arzemes/baltijas-valstu-un-polijas-ministri-riga-spriež-par-baltkrievijas-izraisitas-migrantu-krizes-risinasanu.a421082/>.
 - ⁶ Latvian official in discussions under “Chatham House” rules at Riga Dialogue, 2021, Riga, 01.10.2021.
 - ⁷ “Brussels Summit Communiqué”, NATO, 14.06.2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm?selectedLocale=en.
 - ⁸ “*Valsts prezidents: nedrīkst pielaut hibrīdkaru, kas ietver mēģinājumus “pārrakstīt” vēsturi, lai manipulētu ar sabiedrisko domu*”, President of Latvia, 13.10.2021, <https://www.president.lv/lv/jaunums/valsts-prezidents-nedrīkst-pielaut-hibridkaru-kas-ietver-meginajumus-parrakstist-vesturi-lai-manipuletu-ar-sabiedrisko-domu>.
 - ⁹ “Remarks by President Biden on America’s Place in the World”, The White House, 04.02.2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>.
 - ¹⁰ “Joint Statement on the Phone Call between President Biden and President Macron”, The White House, 22.09.2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/22/joint-statement-on-the-phone-call-between-president-biden-and-president-macron/>.
 - ¹¹ “Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan’s Call with Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė of Lithuania”, The White House, 13.09.2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/13/statement-by-nsc-spokesperson-emily-horne-on-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivans-call-with-prime-minister-ingrida-simonyte-of-lithuania/>.
 - ¹² Admiral John Aquilino told a confirmation hearing in March that work to shore up America’s ability to deter a Chinese attack on Taiwan is urgent, The Economist, 01.05.2021, <https://www.economist.com/weeklyedition/2021-05-01>.
 - ¹³ “Brussels Summit Communiqué”, NATO, 14.06.2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm?selectedLocale=en.
 - ¹⁴ Khalaf, R., Foy, H., “Transcript: ‘China is coming closer to us’ – Jens Stoltenberg, Nato’s secretary-general”, Financial Times, 18.10.2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/cf8c6d06-ff81-42d5-a81e-c56f2b3533c2>.
 - ¹⁵ Kendall-Taylor, A., Shullman, D.O., “China and Russia’s Dangerous Convergence: How to Counter an Emerging Partnership”, Foreign Affairs, 03.05.2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-05-03/china-and-russias-dangerous-convergence>.
 - ¹⁶ Rachman, G., “Europe still lacks a unifying vision”, Financial Times print edition 29.09.2021.
 - ¹⁷ Emmott, R., “EU seeks rapid response military force, two decades after first try”, Reuters, 05.05.2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-seeks-rapid-response-military-force-two-decades-after-first-try-2021-05-05/>.
 - ¹⁸ “State of the Union 2021”, European Commission, 15.09.2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/strategic-planning/state-union-addresses/state-union-2021_en.
 - ¹⁹ “General Dynamics to Supply M3 Amphibious Bridge and Ferry System to Latvian Land Forces”, MilitaryLeak, 23.10.2021, <https://t.co/eOmJXDemoS>.
 - ²⁰ Bouemar, V., “EU Collective Defence: What Does France Want?”, Clingendael Spectator, 29.09.2021, <https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/eu-collective-defence-what-does-france-want>.

- ²¹ Herszenhorn, D.M., Bayer, L., “For EU leaders, ‘strategic compass’ points in different directions”, Politico, 6.10.2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-strategic-compass-different-directions/>.
- ²² Binnendijk, H., Vershbow, A., “Needed: A transatlantic agreement on European strategic autonomy”, DefenseNews, 10.10.2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/10/10/needed-a-transatlantic-agreement-on-european-strategic-autonomy>.

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE RULE OF LAW IN LATVIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Gunda Reire

Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia |
Director of the Center for International Studies

The warning for the 21st century about the darkness that comes from destroying the rule of law and replacing the values of humanism with an ideology that justifies the unjustifiable can be read in detail in Timothy Snyder's relatively recent work "Black Earth" which explains the origins of the Holocaust, while ideologically going beyond the co-responsibility of the Nazi and Soviet regimes, the Holocaust and Eastern Europe. This warning also includes a solution – the protection of democratic values, our sovereignty and our own state, because a democratic state can also protect us from each other, preventing the emergence of extreme situations. Concerned observers tend to compare the 2020s with the situation in Europe 100 years ago – the 1920s. Therefore, a special attention must be paid to the causes and the environment of the tragedy. It is especially true in the case of Latvia as a small state that has suffered from both totalitarian regimes and is conceptually particularly sensitive to systemic risks.

The overarching goal of Latvia's foreign policy is to ensure the irreversibility of its independence and sovereignty, and the external security.¹ It is shaped by primarily seeing itself as a member of the Euro-Atlantic area – the European Union and NATO. Therefore, Latvia's foreign policy view is regionally and globally based on an understanding of the direct relationship between the stability and growth of the Euro-Atlantic area and Latvia's international position and influence. The core and the most important features of Latvia's foreign policy are determined by the synergy of three elements, within the framework of which each of them has an equal and complementary role. The first one is economic development. The second one is security. And the third – the rule of law or democratic values and norms. This article is devoted to the third element and to the international institutions that serve both

as the guardians and the tools for implementing values and norms in a democratic world.

Latvia's position in the international environment and the principles of Latvia's foreign policy can be clearly conceptualized in the context of a small state. On the one hand, such an approach is able to characterize Latvia's position and its available tools in the international environment. On the other hand, it also explains and provides answers on Latvia's choice of foreign policy strategy and the foreign policy steps taken by it, as well as provides a framework for understanding the future development directions. In the foreign policy of any small state, international organizations and the content and stability of the normative framework play an essential role. This conclusion follows from the theoretical conception of a small state, it has gained clear evidence in the practical politics, and Latvia is no exception in this regard.

THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF FOREIGN POLICY MAKING FOR A SMALL STATE

Although there is no clear consensus in the academic environment on the definition and parameters of the concept of a small state that would allow to precisely categorize such countries into a separate group, this fact should not be considered as an obstacle to conducting an evaluation. On the contrary – the international research comprises heated debates over the definition of the concept along with a detailed theoretical and practical analysis of the international activities of small states, as their different foreign policy profiles, geographies, economic development indicators and levels of influence share common features as well. In the theoretically-conceptual discussions, opinions are mainly divided on the threshold between micro states, small states, middle powers and great powers. The parameters inherent to Latvia do not fall close to any of these thresholds, and for the purposes of academic goals Latvia can be unambiguously defined as a small state.

In the traditional sense, the statistically quantifiable indicators of a small state cover the size of a territory, the size of a population, the size of an economy and the volume of military expenditure, thus forming a group of states that are not great powers and that are characterized by a common feature, namely, the lack of power and influence in a quantitative sense.² This approach can be further complemented by the limited capacity of political, economic and administrative systems inherent to small states.³ However, all of these are still quantitative, not qualitative features.

Today, the concept of small states is highly complex and dynamic, and in the theoretical context – conceptually extended far beyond the traditionally pessimistic frameworks

of extreme vulnerability, helplessness, insignificance and systemic irrelevance.⁴ The international challenges small states are facing in the 21st century can rarely be described as systemic. Rather, they relate to small states as weaker actors in the context of asymmetric relations⁵, to the geopolitical situation in the region and to challenges and opportunities that have their roots in a historical context and that have a specific tempo-spatial context⁶. Such an approach, for instance, is clearly illustrated by the relations between Latvia and Russia – since joining the European Union and NATO (institutional aspect), Latvia has been able to pursue its foreign policy goal of taking care of its security at the highest level. As a full participant in these and other international institutions, Latvia maintains a position of recognizing the significance of democratic values and the international law in general and in Latvia's situation in particular: already in 1995, the document "Main Directions of Latvian Foreign Policy until 2005"⁷ precisely stated that Latvia will maintain neighbourly relations with Russia on the basis of the norms of the international law and the observance of the international obligations (aspect of the rule of law). This line has also been accurately followed in all the future documents defining Latvia's foreign policy guidelines.⁸

The features of the international behaviour of small states after the collapse of bipolarity are mainly assessed by their ability to adapt to the international environment (rather than actively shaping it), and the membership in international organizations is emphasized as a key tool for international influence.⁹ Therefore, international institutions and multilateralism in the case of small states can be seen as the main platform for their influence and, to some extent, even as an institutional shelter in critical situations, able not only to add an additional dimension to the security situation of small states in the international system, but even to replace the state-protector relations.¹⁰ This approach is also clearly present in Latvia's foreign policy doctrine – strengthening multilateralism, or rule-based multilateral diplomacy, is one of the primary interests of Latvia's foreign policy,¹¹ and the overarching goal of Latvia's foreign policy – ensuring the irreversibility of Latvia's independence and promoting security – is pursued, among others, by facilitating an increasingly closer integration into international institutions, by promoting economic growth and by strengthening global and regional development, security, democracy, the rule of law, protection of human rights, and international law.¹²

The link between international institutions and the rule of law is an explicit one: in general, the international legal system brings together norms, processes and institutions, and the interplay of these elements creates the authority, legitimacy and effectiveness of the international law.¹³ Today, norms as one of the basic elements of international relations are materialized in international law, which in turn is the basis of normative multilateralism – multilateral co-operation. Therefore, the international law is put into practice and it influences the behaviour of countries not so much because of the threat of sanctions, but rather due to the commitment and actions of the participants in the system.¹⁴

LATVIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE RULE OF LAW

Multilateralism, membership in international organizations and the support for democratic values and the international rule of law have become an integral part of Latvia's foreign policy doctrine. This is emphasized not only with regard to Latvia's own international situation, but also with regard to, for instance, the aspirations of Eastern Partnership countries to join the European Union and NATO, Russia's aggressive foreign policy in general and its violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity in Ukraine in particular, the violations of human rights against its own people carried out by the Belorussian regime, as well as China's foreign policy strategy as a whole or the Rohingya situation in Myanmar.¹⁵

Democratic values are not just an academically theoretical concept – their real purpose is to form a part of public practice. Institutionally, in international relations, the European Union's values are enshrined in its treaties, and NATO is talking about transatlantic values as well. The values of the European Union are commonly shared by all the Member States. They are the rule of law, human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and human rights, and they are enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon¹⁶ and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹⁷. NATO speaks of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law in its Strategic Concept.¹⁸ In turn, the Council of Europe in the context of democratic values and the rule of law rests on three pillars: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.¹⁹ The practical aspect, however, is equally important: how these values are reflected in the international law, how norms are applied and implemented in practice and whether societies have accepted them as part of their lives.

It is not uncommon to hear deliberately ironic comments saying that Latvia's foreign policy strategy has been to "join everything", and indeed, one can admit that joining new international organizations has played a very prominent role in Latvian foreign policy until 2016 when it joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Immediately after regaining independence, in order to become involved in international processes and networks, the country became a member of the United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as the Council of Europe. It became also a member of the International Financial Institutions and the World Trade Organization, and it went through a lengthy integration process to join the European Union and NATO.²⁰

However, it is much more essential to see the purpose of membership behind the institutions, and in this respect, values do not have a poetic significance in Latvia's foreign policy. The belonging to the community of democratic values, the shelter of the international law and the partnership of the international organizations has a direct

impact on the national policy, foreign policy, security and sovereignty in general. An international system grounded in the rule of law and strong institutions where countries do not follow the path of isolationism grounding only on narrow national interests or domestic political ideological demand, corresponds to Latvia's foreign policy interests.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UPCOMING AGENDA – THE UN, NATO AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Along with the dynamic work in the European Union, the increased focus on the World Trade Organisation's capacity to self-reform and continue ensuring the order of international trade²¹, the integration of aspects of environment and climate, social inclusion, innovation and digitalisation into OECD work²², the preparation of candidacy for the observer status in the Arctic Council²³ and work in other international organizations, the coming year in Latvia's foreign policy will come with special tasks in the agendas concerning the UN, NATO and the Council of Europe. The work concerning the UN will require the most complex approach, the new NATO strategic concept will provide Latvia's security with a great significance, and, at the regional level, in the context of democracy and the rule of law Latvia must prepare for the presidency of the Council of Europe in the next two years.

The growing importance of the UN agenda

The United Nations has moved to the forefront of Latvia's foreign policy agenda, thus pointing to its globalization and the close link between international institutions and the strengthening of a stable environment based on international law and multilateralism. This process has been facilitated by Latvia's publicly announced candidacy for the post of the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2026–2027 and candidacies of Latvian representatives for UN offices, as well as the processes within the UN itself, initiated in 2021 by the Secretary-General António Guterres with the report "Our Common Agenda"²⁴ prepared in accordance with the mission set out in the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations²⁵ marking a bleak picture and pointing to the dual decision to make in the future, one between a breakdown and a breakthrough.

With regard to the candidacy of any country for membership in the UN Security Council, new economic contacts and the opportunity to influence the UN agenda are the potential benefits most often highlighted in the public debate. Democratic countries, however, rather view the post of the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council

as an opportunity to increase their international prestige and signal their support for multilateralism and UN values.²⁶ In order to achieve this goal, Latvia in the coming years must perform the following significant tasks: to create the profile and priorities of the Latvian campaign and to implement the campaign itself, so that two thirds of the UN General Assembly member states would actually vote for Latvia in the 2025 elections. It is already known that Latvia will participate in the contested elections, as Montenegro will also run for this position from the Group of Eastern European States.²⁷ Freedom of the media, security of journalists, resilience against disinformation, gender equality, as well as the digital future and the green economy in the context of fight against climate change are currently identified as key priorities for Latvia's work in the UN Security Council.²⁸ In order to be able to launch Latvia's public campaign on the way to the Security Council two years before the elections, namely, in 2023, the inter-institutional working group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to further develop the content of these topics over the next two years. The example of neighbouring countries, Lithuania and Estonia, shows that precise topical profiling, based on both the country's pre-existing image (Estonia's example) and its ability to adapt to a rapidly changing international environment (Estonia's and Lithuania's example), allows small countries to get heard and thus to make the most of the time spent in the Security Council.²⁹

In accordance with the concept of a small state emphasizing the narrow profile of activities resulting from limited financial and human resources, Latvia's foreign policy at the UN after regaining independence has been developed by a gradual and a purposeful specialization. Latvia running for positions in the UN bodies and nominating its representatives to elected institutions mainly cover several areas of expertise, and these are human rights, women's rights, freedom of the media and the field of communications. These areas consequently correspond to Latvia's intended priority areas for work in the UN Security Council. Latvia, for instance, has applied for membership in the UN Peacebuilding Commission in 2022,³⁰ and this work experience, if fully utilized, can help building the necessary expertise for work with the issues on the UN Security Council agenda. As an elected member participating in the Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication since 2015, Latvia partakes on a global level in the development of media literacy, freedom of expression and media, as well as the security of journalists within the framework of UNESCO which is an organization within the UN system.³¹ This area of expertise is reinforced by the work in the UN Committee on Information dealing with the issues of information and communication, in which Latvia was admitted in 2021.³² In 2021, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a historic resolution on "Global Media and Information Literacy Week",³³ in the development of which Latvia actively participated and which speaks about the fight against disinformation and the spread of misinformation. At present, Latvia has also been elected to the UN Commission on the Status of Women for the period of 2021–2025.³⁴ This Commission sets standards

in the field of gender equality and the promotion of women's rights, and in the coming years this membership will help Latvia to further strengthen the protection of women's rights in its expertise. The co-operation between the Baltic States at the UN has been carried out, with all the three Baltic States jointly nominating a Latvian candidate for the elections to the International Law Commission in November 2021, which occurred in a particularly competitive environment. Mārtiņš Paparinskis became the first representative of the Baltic states in the prestigious International Law Commission³⁵ for the term of 2023–2027. The International Law Commission is dealing with the development and codification of the international law. In this way, Latvia has confirmed a new level of readiness to make a practical contribution to strengthening the international law and multilateralism and to participate in the development and codification of the international law at a time when the question of responding to new global challenges is relevant at the UN level.

In addition to building a candidacy campaign and strengthening its expertise, Latvia must continue to maintain the idea of a fundamental reform process in the UN Security Council, the composition and methods of which are widely considered undemocratic and even archaic. Latvia's reform proposals can be viewed in two directions in order to activate the work of the Security Council and make its work more legitimate. Firstly, there is the need to increase the number of members of the institution in both the permanent and non-permanent categories in order to reflect the realities of the 21st century. Latvia sees a seat for Africa, Asia and Latin America in both the categories of permanent and non-permanent positions, while Eastern Europe should be allocated an additional non-permanent seat to provide a proportionality. Secondly, there is the need for a regulation that would oblige the countries of the *Big Five* to refrain from using their veto rights in the case of mass atrocity crimes.³⁶

NATO's new strategic vision

Latvia's membership in NATO is of paramount importance in maintaining the country's foreign security, and in this relationship, there is a clear link between strong institutions, support for democratic norms and values, and Euro-Atlantic security, which has further implications for economic stability and development as well. NATO's collective defence that rests upon the unity of the Alliance, the presence of Allied forces in Latvia and the credibility of the security guarantees of the Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, ensures deterrence in the event of an aggression against Latvia.³⁷

The Brussels Summit of 2021 which marked the end of NATO's 2030 Reflection Process was important for the overall security and stability of the transatlantic alliance. It is important that, in the light of changes in the security environment, existing threats, new challenges and the necessary adaptation of NATO, the members of the summit agreed to

review the existing NATO Strategic Concept until the next summit in Madrid in 2022. There have been seven strategic concepts in the history of the Alliance, each reflecting the geopolitical situation in the Euro-Atlantic space, demonstrating a new approach to the security challenges of its time and shaping future political and military developments while maintaining NATO's core objectives and tasks. The current Strategic Concept "Active Engagement, Modern Defence"³⁸ was adopted in 2010 and highlights three essential core tasks: collective defence, crisis management and co-operative security. The decision to create a new concept, firstly, points to significant changes in the security environment that require the Alliance to adapt. These changes include the issue of China as well: the Brussels Summit Communiqué sets out a detailed NATO's vision for China's geopolitical role in the context of transatlantic security for the first time.³⁹ Secondly, it also points to the task for Latvia in the coming year to participate in the process so that the new strategic concept would reflect Latvia's interests and vision regarding the transatlantic security.

The meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Riga at the end of 2021 made an important contribution to the Allied consultation process and the discussion on the revision of the NATO Strategic Concept. The NATO Foreign Ministers conveyed the message of deterring Russia from the use of military force against Ukraine, pointing to a wide range of options, including both economic and financial sanctions, as well as various political restrictions if that were to happen.⁴⁰ And the NATO Secretary General has confirmed the readiness of the Alliance to rapidly deploy more than 40,000 troops to Latvia in a short period of time if such a necessity arises.⁴¹ From Latvia's point of view, the new strategic concept, notwithstanding the growing importance of the China issue and the new type of threats, should retain the central role of NATO's defence and deterrence, complemented by crisis management and partnerships. Given China's influence on the security of the Alliance, it is important to define a common strategic approach among the Allies that eliminates the risk of an uncertain balancing between values and interests. It is in Latvia's interests to have a strategic concept that expresses a clear position for future relations with its neighbour Russia. The final document of the Brussels summit already emphasizes that there can be no return to "business as usual" until Russia demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities, and that NATO's forward presence in the Baltic States and Poland will continue.⁴² Other important topical areas regarding the NATO's new Strategic Concept, which are likely to be included in the document and will have a significant impact on Latvia, are the challenges posed to the society by the new technologies, thus highlighting the element of human security in collective defence, as well as the co-operation between NATO and the EU. In its foreign policy, Latvia has long emphasized that this co-operation must be coherent and complementary, avoiding duplication of functions. NATO is the guarantor of collective and territorial security in Europe, while the European Union has a special role to play in ensuring security and resilience in areas such as the economy, finance,

critical infrastructure, cybersecurity and the fight against disinformation. Likewise, the National Defence Concept stresses that Latvia ensures the collective defence only through NATO, and that the defence co-operation within the European Union must not overlap with NATO functions.⁴³

The forthcoming Latvian Presidency of the Council of Europe

Latvia's activities in the Council of Europe indicate the importance of international organizations in shaping the international order that is based on the international law and democratic values. Over the past three years, Latvia's name in the context of the Council of Europe has been heard in connection with the Russian issue and work in the field of money laundering prevention, as well as the minority education. From the point of view of Latvia, the restoration of the Russian delegation's voting rights at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly undermined the Council's authority and was in contradiction with the values and principles the organisation represents.⁴⁴ The Opinion of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe on the amendments to the legislation concerning the educational reform implemented in Latvia⁴⁵ reflects the historical context of Latvia, the fact of the Soviet occupation and the implementation of the policy of russification and segregation of education, as well as expresses the support for the Latvian educational reform and its goal of strengthening state language skills. In recent years, Latvia has prevented significant negative consequences for the business environment and national security interests in general, has eliminated the risks of entering the so-called "gray list" and has become the first member of the Council's of Europe Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (Moneyval) whose legislation complies with all the international FATF Recommendations.⁴⁶ In 2021, the third monitoring cycle on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Republic of Latvia came to an end, and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted recommendations for Latvia.⁴⁷ They commend Latvia's achievements in the field of social integration, as well as make recommendations for a more effective provision of minority rights.

Over the next two years, Latvia will face new challenge in order to fully prepare for its second presidency of the Council of Europe, which will take place on a rotating basis from mid-May to mid-November 2023. The Council of Europe, as the most important regional human rights organization, has historically played an important role in the process of restoring Latvia's national independence, in strengthening its independence and in the country's foreign policy in general. The primary task of the Latvian Presidency will be to promote the existing priorities and activities of the Council of Europe, to strengthen the organisation's political role and human rights standards in its member

states, to increase the organisation's visibility and influence, and to strengthen its reputation. The forthcoming tasks of the Latvian Presidency have already been generally outlined by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in her 2021 report on democracy⁴⁸, where she points out that democracy and the rule of law are in an unprecedented backslide, therefore the international community will have to work hard to reverse this trend, strengthen democracy and ensure an environment conducive to human rights and the rule of law. The presidency will also present an opportunity for Latvia to pursue its national interests in the form of priorities, which must encompass the organizational reform process aimed at respecting and strengthening the international law in Europe, including human rights, and the duty for countries to comply with their international obligations and the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. As regards sectoral policies, one can expect that Latvia will continue to keep issues such as the human rights situation in Russia, the freedom of expression and the security of journalists, as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and Georgia high on Council of Europe's agenda. In addition, it must be mentioned that already in 2021, the Council of Europe discussed the connection between the artificial intelligence and human rights, the need to develop a legal framework on this issue, as well as the far-reaching impact of new technologies on society (internet governance, media literacy, freedom of expression, human rights). Over the coming years, the issue of the impact of climate change on human rights will form a part of the agenda of the Council of Europe and, consequently, the Latvian Presidency will also be affected.

CONCLUSIONS

When assessing the importance of international institutions, democratic norms and values in Latvian foreign policy, one can see that there are two analytical platforms both emphasizing the essential and even the vital role of norms and values. These platforms refer to both the concept of conducting and shaping the foreign policy of a small state and the core elements of an effective functioning of the Euro-Atlantic area. The indispensable link between international institutions and the rule of law as a facet for establishing a predictable and effective international environment can be clearly seen in the existing foreign policy of Latvia, and it will certainly be present in the near and distant future as well.

The role of international organizations and the rule of law in the foreign policy of small states should not be underestimated, and the growing number and influence of international organizations in the 21st century also serves small states as multi-faceted platforms for international influence and visibility. Latvia's active participation in various international organizations confirms this while simultaneously pointing to the

strategy that has been chosen, namely, amidst the conditions of limited financial and human resources to specialize and use its actions to strengthen the international rule of law and the law-based international order. Latvia is focusing on an externally stable and internally unified Euro-Atlantic space, characterized by a growing economy, a high level of internal and external security, strong democracy and support for multilateralism, as the most favourable environment and framework for its foreign policy. Therefore, Latvia's foreign policy in the international institutions is designed to support and strengthen the existence and functioning of such an environment.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union", 2019, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2222/download>, p. 1.
- ² Wivel, A., Bailes, A.J.K., Archer, C., "Small states, survival and strategy", in *Small States and International Security. Europe and beyond*, Archer, C., Bailes, A. J. K., Wivel, A., (eds.), Routledge, 2016, p. 3–25.
- ³ Baldacchino, G., Wivel, A., "Small states: concepts and theories", in *Handbook on the Politics of Small States*, Baldacchino, G., Wivel, A., (eds.), Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020, p. 2–19.
- ⁴ Reire, G., "Small States in the United Nations Security Council: Legal and Conceptual Aspects v. Practical Perspective", submitted and in the publishing process in *Electronic Scientific Journal of Law Socrates*, 3 (21), 2021, <https://www.rsu.lv/socrates>.
- ⁵ Wivel, A., Bailes, A. J. K., Archer, C., "Small states, survival and strategy", in: *Small States and International Security. Europe and beyond*, Wivel, A., Bailes, A. J. K., Archer, C., (eds.), Routledge, 2016, p. 3–25; Baldacchino, G., Wivel, A., "Small states: concepts and theories", in *Handbook on the Politics of Small States*, Baldacchino, G., Wivel, A., (eds.), Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020, p. 2–19.
- ⁶ Wivel, A., Bailes, A.J.K., Archer, C., "Small states, survival and strategy", in: *Small States and International Security. Europe and beyond*, Wivel, A., Bailes, A. J. K., Archer, C., (eds.), Routledge, 2016, p. 3–25; Maass, M. M., "Small states: surviving, perishing and proliferating through history", in: *Small States and International Security. Europe and beyond*, Archer, C., Bailes, A. J. K., Wivel, A., (eds.), Routledge, 2016, p. 20–37.
- ⁷ "Latvijas ārpolitikas pamatvirzieni līdz 2005. gadam", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/latvijas-arpolitikas-pamatvirzieni-lidz-2005-gadam>.
- ⁸ See: "Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/arlietu-ministra-ikgadejais-zinojums/arhivs>.
- ⁹ Archer, C., Nugent, N., "Introduction: Small States and the European Union", in *Current Politics and Economics of Europe*, 11(1), 2002, p. 1–10; Baldacchino, G., Wivel, A., "Small states: concepts and theories", in *Handbook on the Politics of Small States*, Baldacchino, G., Wivel, A., (eds.), Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020, p. 2–19; Panke, D., "Small States in the European Union", Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010; Steinmetz, R., Wivel, A., "Introduction", in: *Small states in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities*, Steinmetz, R., Wivel, A., (eds.), Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010, p. 1–14; Wivel, A., Bailes, A. J. K., Archer, C., "Small states, survival and strategy", in *Small States and International Security. Europe and beyond*, Archer, C., Bailes, A.J.K., Wivel, A., (eds.), Routledge, 2014, p. 3–25.

- ¹⁰ Bailes, A. J. K., Thorhallsson, B., “Instrumentalizing the European Union in Small State Strategies”, in: *Journal of European Integration*, 35(2), 2013, p. 99–115; Wivel, A., Bailes, A. J. K., Archer, C., “Small states, survival and strategy”, in *Small States and International Security. Europe and beyond*, Archer, C., Bailes, A. J. K., Wivel, A., (eds.), Routledge, 2016, p. 3–25.
- ¹¹ “Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union, 2020”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2221/download>, p. 7.
- ¹² “Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union, 2019”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2222/download>, p. 1.
- ¹³ Weiss, T. G., Wilkinson R., (eds.), *International Organizations and Global Governance*, Routledge: 2013, 1st edition, Loc 2018, Kindle.
- ¹⁴ Reire, G., “Multilateralism and Inter-war Latvia”, in *The Centenary of Latvia’s Foreign Affairs. Global Thought and Latvia*, Bukovskis, K., Sprūds, A., Ščerbinskis, V., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2020, p. 35–36.
- ¹⁵ Latvia’s foreign policy positions are clearly reflected in the Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union, in the Speech by the Foreign Minister at the annual Foreign Policy Debate in the Latvian Parliament (Saeima), the President’s (Foreign Minister’s in 2018) addresses to the General Debates of the UN General Assembly in New York, and they also follow from the general legislative practice. On the European Union and NATO issues, it is worth paying attention to the summit declarations. Latvian foreign policy guidelines of earlier years can be read in the following documents: “*Latvijas ārpolitikas pamatvirzieni līdz 2005. gadam*” (Main Directions of Latvia’s Foreign Policy until 2005) and “*Latvijas ārpolitikas pamatnostādnes 2006.–2010. gadam*” (Latvian Foreign Policy Guidelines for 2006–2010).
- ¹⁶ Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, 2016/C 202/01, Official Journal of the European Union, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016ME/TXT&from=EN>.
- ¹⁷ Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, 2016/C 202/02, Official Journal of the European Union, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016P/TXT&from=EN>.
- ¹⁸ “Active Engagement, Modern Defence”, Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf.
- ¹⁹ “Values. Human rights, Democracy, Rule of Law”, Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/about-us/values>.
- ²⁰ Reire, G., “Multilateralism and Inter-war Latvia”, at *The Centenary of Latvia’s Foreign Affairs. Global Thought and Latvia*, Bukovskis, K., Sprūds, A., Ščerbinskis V., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2020, p. 43–44.
- ²¹ It is in Latvia’s long-term interests to maintain and strengthen a rules-based international trade environment, with the World Trade Organization acting as an important support and rulemaking forum. The organization is currently facing systemic challenges in all the three of its core functions: negotiations have long failed to modernize trade rules; the dispute settlement system is not fully operational and trade policy monitoring is ineffective.
- ²² The 2021 Meeting of the OECD Council at Ministerial Level adopted two key programming documents: the OECD’s 60th Anniversary Vision Statement providing guidance for the organisation’s work over the next decade, and the Global Relations Strategy. See: “Trust in global cooperation: The vision for the OECD for the next decade”, OECD, 2021, https://www.oecd.org/mcm/MCM_2021_Part_2_%5bC-MIN_2021_16-FINAL.en%5d.pdf.

- ²³ "Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union, 2020", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2221/download>, p. 15.
- ²⁴ "Our Common Agenda", United Nations, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>.
- ²⁵ "Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations", UNGA Doc A/RES/75/1, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/1>.
- ²⁶ Reire, G., "*Maza valsts un globālā pārvaldība: Latvijas 30 gadi ANO institūcijās*", in *Latvijas ārlietu simtgade. Daudzpusējā diplomātija un starptautiskās organizācijas*, Bukovskis, K., Sprūds, A., Ščerbinskis V., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2021.
- ²⁷ "Statement by H.E. Milo Djukanovic, Prime Minister of Montenegro, at the General Debate of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations, https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/68/ME_en.pdf.
- ²⁸ Interview with H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Opening of the Riga Conference, 46'14"–54'34", <https://www.rigaconference.lv/video/>.
- ²⁹ See: Reire, G., "Small States in the United Nations Security Council: Legal and Conceptual Aspects v. Practical Perspective", submitted and in the publishing process in *Electronic Scientific Journal of Law Socrates*, 3 (21), 2021, <https://www.rsu.lv/socrates>.
- ³⁰ "*Latvija un tās pārstāvji ANO*", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/latvija-un-tas-parstavji-ano>.
- ³¹ "*Latvija ievēlēja UNESCO Starptautiskās programmas komunikācijas attīstībai Starpvaldību padomē*", LV portāls, <https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/275110-latvija-ieveleta-unesco-starptautiskas-programmas-komunikacijas-attistibai-starpvaldibu-padome-2015>.
- ³² "*Latvija un tās pārstāvji ANO*", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/latvija-un-tas-parstavji-ano>.
- ³³ "Global Media and Information Literacy Week", A/RES/75/267, United Nations, 25.03.2021, <https://www.undocs.org/en/A/75/L.68>.
- ³⁴ "*Latvija un tās pārstāvji ANO*", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/latvija-un-tas-parstavji-ano>.
- ³⁵ "Election of the International Law Commission", International Law Commission, 2021, https://legal.un.org/ilc/elections/2021election_outcome.shtml#europe.
- ³⁶ Interview with H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Opening of the Riga Conference, 46'14"–54'34", <https://www.rigaconference.lv/video/>.
- ³⁷ "*Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija*," Likumi.lv, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/317591-par-valsts-aizsardzibas-koncepcijas-apstiprinasanu>.
- ³⁸ "Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf.
- ³⁹ "Brussels Summit Communiqué", Press Release (2021) 086, NATO, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm.
- ⁴⁰ LETA, "NATO ģenerālsēkretārs: Ja Krievija mēģinās uzbrukt Ukrainai, tai nāksies maksāt augstu cenu", 29.11.2021, <https://www.leta.lv/search/find/?patern=Stoltenbergs&mode=nonozare%2Cstem&item=EAC8A6D0-65A2-4F61-9058-130759619776>.
- ⁴¹ LETA, "*papildināta – NATO ģenerālsēkretārs: Nepieciešamības gadījumā uz Latviju īsā laikā varēs nosūtīt vairāk nekā 40 000 karavīru*", 29.11.2021, <https://www.leta.lv/search/find/?patern=Stoltenbergs&mode=nonozare%2Cstem&item=4B032AC7-31A5-4A9B-8FE0-F0842307C62D>.
- ⁴² "Brussels Summit Communiqué", Press Release (2021) 086, NATO, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm.

- ⁴³ “Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija”, Likumi.lv, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/317591-par-valsts-aizsardzibas-koncepcijas-apstiprinasanu>.
- ⁴⁴ “Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union, 2019”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2222/download>, p. 2.
- ⁴⁵ “Latvia. Opinion on the recent amendments to the legislation on education in minority languages”, CDL-AD(2020)012, Opinion No. 975/2020, Venice Commission, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2020\)012](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2020)012).
- ⁴⁶ Helmane, I., “*Latviju neiekļauj ‘pelēkajā sarakstā’*”, LV portāls, <https://lvportals.lv/norises/313462-latviju-neiekļauj-pelekaja-saraksta-2020>.
- ⁴⁷ CoE, Forth Report Submitted by Latvia. Pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities – received on 27 October, 2021ACFC/SR/IV(2021)002, <https://rm.coe.int/4th-sr-latvia-en/1680a46422>.
- ⁴⁸ CoE, State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. A democratic renewal for Europe, Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 2021, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/report-2021>.

IN SEARCH OF STABILITY: LATVIA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2022

Aleksandra Palkova

Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs |
Researcher at the Riga Stradiņš University

In many ways, 2021 has been a critical year for Latvia and the European Union - it has been the first year of recovery after the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, and multiplying global events and growing geopolitical tensions that have made the year no less significant at the international level as well. However, it has also served as a catalyst in the search for stability that has affected the lives of all member states and their societies in almost all facets of their economic, social, and cultural dimensions over the past year. Overall, 2021 was marked by many events – by the challenges that formed the very heart of the crisis, such as the race to acquire vaccines, the development of new strains of Covid-19, and economic recovery; by migration and security issues; and by some of the major fundamental changes that shape the world we live in today, forming the digital, environmental and geopolitical challenges that lay ahead, from Europe's borders to its transatlantic relations and its climate policy. The year 2021 was also a year of deep reflection on the future of the European Union in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

With each passing month after the crisis, the pace of change in the EU and its member states is only increasing, and 2022 is therefore expected to be filled with new challenges, both in the context of international events and in the work of the European Commission and the member states. At the European level, 2022 will begin with the six-month long French Presidency of the Council of the European Union starting in January, together with the Czech Republic and Sweden. This presidency will take place at a special time. The European Commission has defined 2022 as the “European Year of Youth”.¹ Therefore, the following year will bring novelties in several ways, including in the development of the European Green Deal, with the introduction of new technologies and the reduction

of harmful CO₂ emissions, the improvement of air and water quality, the introduction of new fertilizer regulations and the transition to a “circular” renewable economy, in the digital transformation, and in the post-pandemic economic recovery heading towards better social protections and better social standards for European citizens. In 2022, the Arctic region will have an increasingly important role as well. Moreover, the rule of law in the context of the Hungarian elections will require certain attention. The EU plans to commit itself to the development of trade and investments and to strengthening relations with its key partners in 2022, which confirms the return of the EU to stability and the continuation of its development according to plan, in which Latvia has an ambitious role to play as well.

SUCCESSFULLY OVERCOMING CRITICAL POINTS: AN OVERVIEW OF 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences

Towards the end of 2020, more and more teams of researchers announced the success of phase III clinical trials that involved thousands of people. This has allowed vaccine manufactures to apply for approval and has brought hope for the possible containment of the pandemic. However, the year 2021 began with the breaking news for the countries of the world that the number of vaccines is limited, thus leading to the onset of a competition for vaccines between countries. Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)² states that although EU member states are the ones primarily responsible for health care, the EU shall complement their national policies in this regard. The vaccine strategy has helped the European Union ensure 4.6 billion doses of the Covid-19 vaccine and reach the target of the full vaccination of 70% of adults by the end of the summer.³ Another important step that was accomplished in 2021 was the creation of the EU Digital Covid Certificate, with EU institutions agreeing on it in record time. This certificate is now used by millions of people. In the case of Latvia, the first doses were already received at the end of December 2020. And as of January, Latvia started its vaccination process firstly by vaccinating people in order of priority, and as of May by allowing people to apply for a vaccine in an open queue. The total number of vaccinated people in Latvia in December 2021 was 63.7%.⁴ However, willingness (or rather the lack thereof) to get vaccinated became one of the biggest challenges for Latvia. In the beginning, when there were not enough vaccines for everybody, it seemed that the whole of Latvian society was waiting for the vaccines to be delivered. But soon enough, the Latvian government realized that due to misinformation, a large percentage of the population did not plan to get vaccinated at all. Until the beginning of October 2021, Latvia did not appear green

on the vaccination maps when compared to other European Union countries. Society started to embrace a more active vaccination process only following the introduction of the latest state of emergency and lockdown.

The field of economics

The year 2021 was also crucial for the launch of the recovery plan commenced by the EU to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the coronavirus crisis. It was based on the temporary European Recovery Instrument for 2021–2023 amounting to 750 billion EUR, the NextGenerationEU instrument, and the budget for 2021–2027 of 1.1 trillion EUR.⁵ One must note that the NextGenerationEU, funded by the EU budget, is the largest and most innovative instrument the EU has ever proposed to revitalize its economy, not only in terms of financial support but also in terms of the mode of funding, as it accounts for almost five times the EU's annual budget. It provided financial support to member states in the form of both grants (390 billion EUR) and loans (360 billion EUR), and it is added to the EU's seven-year budget amounting to 1.1 trillion EUR, thus bringing the total financial "package" to 1.8 trillion EUR.⁶ Overall, the EU economy over the next seven-year financial period (2021–2027) will receive 60% more funding compared to the current period (2014–2020),⁷ making the EU Recovery Plan an extraordinary response to an unprecedented situation in the history of EU. In addition, NextGenerationEU has provided a new approach for the European Commission, as it established the "principle of budgetary balance" - the EC will be exceptionally authorized to borrow on behalf of member states on the capital markets, but only for measures to mitigate the effects of Covid-19.⁸ In order to secure the loan, the ceiling for financing EU budget expenditures set out in the Own Resources Decision was raised, which will serve as a guarantee for borrowing operations. In total, taking into account both NextGenerationEU and the long-term budget agreement that was reached with the European Parliament, at least 30%⁹ of expenditures had to be invested in the fight against climate change, and up to 10%¹⁰ of annual expenditures on biodiversity measures. Moreover, one must also point to the new Rule of Law Mechanism, which meant that funding from the EU budget was also linked to the compliance of member states with the EU's fundamental values (Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union) in order to protect the EU budget in the event of shortcomings. In the case of Latvia, the EC granted a pre-financing of 237 million EUR, which corresponds to 13% of what was set out in the Council Implementing Decision. There are currently four priorities. The first priority is ensuring the green transition, which envisions "an investment project of 295 million euros to restructure the Riga Metropolitan area transport system by creating a multimodal public transport network with a unified traffic timetable and fare and ticketing system, as well as investing in clean transport infrastructure, including railways trams, electric buses

and cycle lanes”.¹¹ The second priority is providing support to the digital transition, which will allocate “125 million euros to support companies introducing digital technologies such as e-commerce solutions, innovations and new products. And 95 million euros will be dedicated to the improvement of digital skills to improve both basic and advanced digital skills”.¹² And the third priority is reinforcing economic and social resilience, which will include “158 million euros for reforms and investment in modernizing healthcare, strengthening the resilience of the health sector and increasing the availability of integrated and high-quality healthcare services”.¹³

The field of climate

Although the Covid-19 crisis appears to have overshadowed many issues, the EU has still continued to actively develop new climate mechanisms. In 2021, a legally binding European Climate Law entered into force within the EU, setting a target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.¹⁴ A new program to combat climate change called “Fit for 55” was also set up.¹⁵ This program aims to reduce CO₂ emissions in the European Union by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.¹⁶ It envisions European businesses and homeowners increasingly using clean technologies, including renewable energy and electric vehicles. One of the key points of the reform is the introduction of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).¹⁷ This imposes taxes on goods imported into the EU based on their carbon footprint. In 2021, Latvia continued to position itself as an active actor in the field of the climate and promoted its informative report *Latvia’s Strategy for Achieving Climate Neutrality by 2050*, developed in 2019, which is closely related to the European Commission’s Green Deal.¹⁸ In this strategy, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (VARAM) summarized its vision of how Latvia should develop various sectors by 2050 within each respective division, namely, energy, transport, land management, consumption, and production. The strategy also envisions a horizontal integration of research and innovation in all sectors of the economy, as well as the development of comprehensive energy efficiency and solutions for municipalities and the urban environment.

Digitization

In 2021, the European Commission set out its vision for a people-centered, digitally empowered Europe by 2030 through the Digital Compass initiative.¹⁹ This initiative includes a proposal to create new rules for a secure internet and a common digital identity in Europe.²⁰ In the case of Latvia, the field of digitalization remains one of its priorities – this is also discussed in the medium-term policy planning document *Latvian Digital Transformation Guidelines for 2021–2027*,²¹ which sets out the policy on Latvia’s

digital transformation (the development of the information society), covering the period from 2021 to 2027, in which Latvia plans to actively follow the course set by the EU and implement its interests.

Issues of migration

Changes in the geopolitical situation have put migration issues back on the EC agenda with a new relevance. The European Commission has put forward a package of proposals to reform the EU's migration policy. The aim has been to achieve a fairer distribution of the burden of the influx of migrants across all the EU member states. At the end of 2021, the EC revised its migration policy and cancelled the Dublin system. Until now, one of the legal mechanisms governing the EU's response to forced migration to member states has been the so-called Dublin system, first approved in 1990. According to this system, the problem of refugees had to be addressed in most cases by the EU countries that were the on the border. However, from now on this will no longer be expected. An additional problem is migration on the Belarussian-Polish border, which presents a threat to Latvia's security as well. As pointed out by the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: "the migrant crisis on the border with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia caused by Belarus is only a part of a much larger hybrid war aimed at dividing the European Union (EU)".²² At the moment, the EC has proposed a package of temporary asylum and return measures to assist Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in addressing the emergency situation at the EU's external border with Belarus.²³ The proposal by the Commission, as the EU executive body, allows these three countries for the following six months to register migrants for asylum only in certain places, such as at certain border crossings. It also stipulates that asylum seekers could be held at the border for up to 16 weeks, thus removing their permanent right to be held in more appropriate centers within the country, and EU countries would have to ensure that the basic rules apply to them only after a decision on their cases has been taken.²⁴ It should be mentioned that already in August 2021, the Latvian Border Guard reported that the number of lodgings had run out.²⁵

EU relations with Russia and Belarus

EU relations with Russia and Belarus in 2021 remained strained. Moreover, the Council of the European Union extended sanctions against Russia for a year over the use of chemical weapons. The list of EU sanctions contains ten Russian individuals and one Russian research institute involved in the poisoning of Skripals and Alexei Navalny with "Novichok".²⁶ Overall, this is already the third decision by the Council of the European Union to extend sanctions against Russia over the use of chemical weapons. The restrictions were originally imposed in 2018 following the poisoning of Sergei and

Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, Great Britain. The British authorities believe the Skripals were poisoned with a substance called “Novichok”, developed by the USSR.²⁷ The Council of the European Union then cited the poisoning of Navalny with Novichok as another reason for extending sanctions. In a similar manner, the European Union has also introduced its fifth package of sanctions against Alexander Lukashenko’s regime in Belarus. The list includes 17 natural persons and 11 legal entities, the airline company “Belavia”, the OJSC “Grodno Azot” and the consortium “Belorusneft”. This set of sanctions has gained the support of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada.²⁸ In addition, restrictions were imposed on the Syrian airline “Cham Wings” for the transportation and smuggling of illegal migrants. In order to adopt sanctions on the instrumentalization of migrants, the European Union had to change its regime of sanctions against Belarus in November. The purpose of these sanctions is to freeze all their assets in the EU. European individuals and companies are prohibited from providing funds or resources to those on the list. In addition, the natural persons included in the list of sanctions are prohibited from entering EU countries. Following the approval of the EU’s fifth package of sanctions against Belarus, the list now includes 183 people and 26 organizations from this country.²⁹ Latvia, together with other countries, is advocating for a more active EU policy in this context and the need to adapt the Schengen Borders Code to situations where a hybrid attack is being directed towards the EU’s external borders.

WITH EACH NEXT STEP ONLY SAFER – INSIGHT 2022

The Covid-19 pandemic

In 2022, the European Union is planning to soften its “green list” and push for the idea of the “Health Union”. It was to expect that the first stage, from 10 January to the end of February 2022, would see the relaxation of the criteria for a country’s inclusion in the “green” list. For example, the limit is currently set at 75 newly notified Covid-19 cases per 100,000 population in 14 days, and the European Commission is proposing to raise this limit to 100.³⁰ And the EC wants to abolish this list entirely as of the second stage on 1 March 2022.³¹ The European Commission justifies this by the progress of vaccinations in the world and by the desire to move to a system that takes into account the status of travelers rather than their country of departure. The EC’s plan to expand the list of persons to be admitted to the Schengen Zone in 2022 was also discussed. Brussels officials would encourage the admission of those who have received a certificate of recovery from Covid-19 or have been vaccinated with a vaccine listed by the World Health Organization as of 10 January. The list also includes the Chinese vaccines *Sinovac* and *Sinopharm*, as well as the Indian vaccines *Covishield* and *Bharat Biotech*. The Russian vaccine *Sputnik V* has not yet received WHO endorsement. Both recovered travelers and travelers vaccinated

with vaccines not registered in the EU will have to present a negative PCR test conducted no earlier than 72 hours before entry into the EU.³² The certification system currently in place in the EU covers just a little more than 40 countries. It is in Latvia's primary interest that the certificate has a certain binding uniform validity period in all European Union member states. Similarly, it is also in Latvia's interests to ensure fair collective access to medical and healthcare resources which are not usually accumulated. The European Commission has already decided to set up a new European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), which will assess health threats and the necessary response capacities – vaccines, medicines, and diagnostic tests – by promoting their production, stockpiling, and rapid procurement and distribution procedures. It is important for Latvia that an agreement is reached in 2022 on the possibilities for member states to participate in the administration of this authority.

The field of economics

The EU budget for 2022 amounts to 167.7 billion EUR in commitments and 170 billion EUR in payments.³³ The 2022 budget will be complemented by the NextGenerationEU funds, which are designed to help boost Europe's economic recovery. Next year's budget will play an important role in the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and in increasing resilience to future crises.³⁴ To avoid large increases compared to 2021 and to ensure a realistic capacity to absorb funds, the budget proposes back-loading part of the financing of some budget lines to the second part of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) period.³⁵ The growth rate of the eurozone economy is facing new challenges, but it is returning to normalcy as a result of the overall recovery mechanisms. The growth rate in 2022 is expected to be 4.3%, which is less than the forecasted 4.5%. In 2023, the European Commission expects the eurozone economy to grow by 2.4%. Following the revision of inflation forecasts, inflation is projected to be 2.2% in 2022, which is an increase from the previously projected 1.4%. Inflation could turn out to be higher than projected if supply constraints remain more resilient and wage growth in excess of productivity is passed on to consumer prices. As the economy expands, the labor market is expected to recover to its pre-pandemic levels next year. These improved growth prospects point to a smaller deficit in 2022, with the eurozone deficit projected to be around 3.9% in 2022 and to decline further to 2.4% in 2023.³⁶ The total budget of the Ministry of Economics of Latvia for 2022 is estimated to amount to 203.1 million EUR.³⁷ At the same time, it is expected that 2022 will see the launch of support programs of the European Recovery Fund and the new programming period of EU Structural Funds³⁸ amounting to more than 1.6 billion EUR in four investment areas: the digitization of enterprises, the transition of the economy and promotion of productivity, reducing regional disparities, as well as mitigating climate change and increasing energy efficiency.³⁹ Therefore, the planned financing and Latvia's activities for 2022 will continue to stimulate the Latvian economy.

The issues of climate

The year 2022 will be a crucial year in the context of climate issues. The report on global warming by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as well as the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 26)⁴⁰ and the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15) in Kunming⁴¹ have made it clear that countries need to do more in the field of climate change and in their national efforts. Therefore, the EC's 2021 efforts will continue to have an impact in 2022, primarily through the "Fit for 55" program and the CBAM-imposed taxes on the imports of steel, cement, fertilizers and aluminum during the first three-year period starting in 2023.⁴² In order to continue to make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050, the EC in 2022 will pay close attention to Green Bonds, which will play an increasingly important role in the context of achieving the funding necessary for the more active decarbonization of countries (as a part of the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan). Similarly, the EC will also continue to implement the EU Action Plan on zero pollution, including in the fields of integrated water management (to address issues of surface and groundwater pollutants) and ambient air quality. Legislation in connection with the European Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) will also be reviewed in order to better protect the health of people and nature.⁴³ It is important for Latvia to ensure that economic development takes place without negative effects on the climate, but in areas where these effects cannot be mitigated, other compensatory solutions need to be found. Therefore, Latvia supports the European Commission's "Fit for 55" legal package, which envisages a reduction of at least 55% in greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union by 2030. The strengthening of energy efficiency, the protection of biodiversity, and the further development of the circular economy are important aims for Latvia. In EU discussions, Latvia will especially advocate the lowest possible national target for reducing greenhouse emissions. And in order to successfully reach it, Latvia will advocate for greater financial support to help society to successfully adapt to being a climate-neutral economy.

The Arctic region

It should be noted that the European Union is also presenting itself as an increasingly confident actor in the Arctic. This includes the fields of climate and the environment, development issues in the European Arctic, as well as international cooperation in the region and related issues. At the end of 2021, the EU issued a new policy communication aimed at positioning the EU's engagement in the Arctic in the context of the European Green Deal, defining the EC as the "Geopolitical Commission".⁴⁴ Latvia positions itself as an active actor in the Arctic region, as "the ongoing processes in the Arctic region also have a direct impact on the environment, economy and security of the Baltic Sea

region. Given the growing importance of the Arctic region, Latvia is preparing to apply for the role of an observer in the Arctic Council in 2022. Latvia's priority areas would be climate change prevention and adaptation, environmental and ecological research, as well as logistics and digitalization. We therefore want to use the preparatory process as a platform to deepen cooperation with the Nordic countries on issues such as climate change and regional development".⁴⁵ This therefore confirms the active role of Latvia as an actor in the chosen climate policy.

Digitization

The Covid-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst to accelerate the digitalization of Europe and the world. In 2022, the EC will continue its "Path to the Digital Decade" to achieve the EU's digital transition by 2030, which means working on proposals for a secure internet, a European Digital Identity, and a trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (AI). The EC will work on the European Cyber Resilience Act to develop common cybersecurity standards for products.⁴⁶ A new challenge is presented by the adoption of the AI legislation, which will be the first of its kind in the world. Latvia represents a broad spectrum of interests in the digital field: together with its allies, it must build resilience against the threats posed or exacerbated by digital technologies and strengthen the principles of digital governance, which are based on respect for international law and human rights and which promote sustainable development. Latvia's goal is, on the one hand, technological leadership and the successful digital transformation of the entire European Union and, on the other hand, the strengthening of its own technological competitiveness.

Security issues

Ongoing geopolitical changes have highlighted the need to strengthen European influence in a rapidly changing world and to defend its values and interests. This is also reflected by the declaration by Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, who argued that 2022 is the year of EU defense, as well as by the increased 2022 security budget. Global humanitarian crises have highlighted the gap between the needs and the available resources, and the existing geopolitical challenges have led the EU to strengthen security through the Global Gateway strategy, which will be closely aligned with the Build Back Better World (B3W).⁴⁷ In addition, the EU is also considering a partnership with NATO, as there is talk about a new joint EU–NATO declaration and the creation of a European Defense Union. In 2022, the EC plans to prepare a defense package that will include a roadmap for security and defense technologies to foster research, technological development, and innovations and reduce the EU's strategic

dependence on critical technologies and value chains in the security and defense sectors. It is also planned to strengthen the EU resilience and open strategic autonomy, with the French presidency playing a certain role in this.⁴⁸ In 2022, Latvia will join the European Union in the development of the Strategic Compass, which is planned to be approved in the spring of 2022. It aims to define policy guidelines, setting out specific objectives and areas of action in four thematic segments: the nature of the security environment and the capacity to act; building resilience to protect against changing threats; the development of the investment climate; as well as the building of partnerships for the implementation of the EU's security policy. Overall, Latvia remains a reliable transatlantic partner in the field of security, in which NATO membership plays a major role.⁴⁹ Latvia views European Union security issues as an additional guarantor of its own security, especially by promoting the deepening of more profound relations between the EU and NATO and the conclusion of a new declaration.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our world today is still characterized by uncertainty, devastating events, and growing geopolitical tensions combined with climate change and an environmental crisis. Similarly, the European Union is facing new challenges requiring new answers and solutions. A key component of the EU is to work together to establish a common framework for development. The future of the European Union depends on achieving and developing internal unity, with the member states being aware that they are “playing on one team”. The current situation suggests that cooperation and solidarity are possible, but mainly occur during disasters, such as the epidemic we are currently facing.

Looking back at 2021 and the new challenges of 2022 reveals a European Union which is beginning to make its way back to stability. However, there is still a considerable range of unresolved issues, allowing the following recommendations to be made. Firstly, there is a need to address the existing level of misinformation in EU member states, as this hinders the overall progress of vaccinations and thus contributes to the emergence of new strains of Covid-19. Secondly, the Conference on the Future of Europe should be used as a truly binding and forward-looking mechanism that can really unite all the member states under a common goal, rather than acting as individual member states. It should be emphasized that following the conclusion of the conference there should be a continuation in the form of dialogues or negotiations. Thirdly, EU–transatlantic cooperation should be promoted. Notwithstanding the EU's plans to advance its strategic autonomy and security issues in 2022, the EU needs to continue to advance EU–NATO security cooperation. Fourthly, in its efforts to strengthen its position as an international actor, the EU must keep in mind the existence of internal movements and problems in

member states and institutions that need to be addressed first and foremost. Fifthly, the EU must ensure the strengthening of the democratic values and the rule of law by continuing to strengthen its mechanisms to ensure that all EU member states adhere to EU principles. Sixthly, Latvia must use the opportunities provided by international cooperation for digital technology companies and research.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Commission kick-starts work to make 2022 the European Year of Youth”, European Commission, 14.10.2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5226.
- ² Consolidated version of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union, 30.03.2010, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:6985a220-b291-422c-8e7c-e2625a041d0d.0015.01/DOC_3&format=PDF.
- ³ “Coronavirus: 70% of the EU adult population is fully vaccinated”, European Commission, 31.08.2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4362.
- ⁴ “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations”, Our World in Data, 07.12.2021, https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=OWID_WRL.
- ⁵ “Next Generation EU”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/eu-borrower-investor-relations/nextgenerationeu_en.
- ⁶ “COVID-19: the EU’s response to the economic fallout”, European Council, 01.12.2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/covid-19-economy/>
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ “COVID-19: the EU’s response to the economic fallout”, European Council, 01.12.2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/covid-19-economy/>.
- ⁹ “Next Generation EU”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/eu-borrower-investor-relations/nextgenerationeu_en.
- ¹⁰ “Next Generation EU: Eiropas Komisija Latvijai izmaksā priekšfinansējumu 237 miljonu eiro apmērā”, LV portāls, 10.09.2021, <https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/332305-next-generation-eu-eiropas-komisija-latvijai-izmaks-prieksfinesejumu-237-miljonu-eiro-apmera-2021>.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ “European Climate Law”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal/european-climate-law_en.
- ¹⁵ “Fit for 55. The EU’s plan for a green transition”, Council of European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/eu-plan-for-a-green-transition/>.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ “Europe Green Deal COM(2019)640”, European Commission, 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN>.
- ¹⁹ “2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade”, EU for Digital, 09.03.2021, <https://eufordigital.eu/library/2030-digital-compass-the-european-way-for-the-digital-decade/>.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ “Digitālās transformācijas pamatnostādnes 2021.–2027.gadam (informatīvā daļa)”, VARAM, 2020, https://www.varam.gov.lv/sites/varam/files/content/files/digitalas-transformacijas-pamatnostadnes-_2021-27.pdf.

- ²² Lībietis, U., "Polijas premjers: Arī uz Latvijas-Baltkrievijas robežas gaidāma migrantu krīze", LSM, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/polijas-premjers-ari-uz-latvijas-baltkrievijas-robezas-gaidama-migrantu-krize.a431033/>.
- ²³ "Asylum and return: Commission proposes temporary legal and practical measures to address the emergency situation at the EU's external border with Belarus", European Commission, 1.12.2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6447.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Zvirbulis, G., "Imigrantu centros vietu vairs nav; armija būvēs teltis", LSM, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/imigrantu-centros-vietu-vairs-nav-armija-buves-teltis.a416435/>.
- ²⁶ "Restrictive measures against Belarus", Council of European Union, 02.12.2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-belarus/>.
- ²⁷ "EU agrees new sanctions against Belarus over border crisis", The Guardian, 15.11.2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/15/eu-agrees-new-sanctions-against-belarus-over-border-crisis>.
- ²⁸ Szcus, A., "EU sanctions 6 more Russians involved in Navalny's poisoning", Anadolu Agency, 11.10.2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/eu-sanctions-6-more-russians-involved-in-navalny-s-poisoning/2389103>.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ "Coronavirus: Commission proposes an updated framework for travel from outside the EU, prioritising vaccinated travellers, with strong safeguards", European Commission, 25.11.2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6185.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ "EU Annual Budget for 2022", European Council, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/the-eu-budget/eu-annual-budget/2022-budget/>.
- ³⁴ "2022 EU budget: Council agrees its position", European Council, 14.07.2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/07/14/2022-eu-budget-council-agrees-its-position/>.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ "2022 Euro area recommendation", European Commission, 24.11.2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2022-euro-area-recommendation_en.
- ³⁷ "Budžeta prioritātes 2022. gadā – uzņēmumu konkurētspēja un produktivitāte, kā arī mājokļu pieejamības veicināšana", Ministry of Economics, 12.10.2021, https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/em-budzeta-prioritates-2022-gada-uznemumu-konkuretspeja-un-produktivitate-ka-ari-majoklu-pieejamibas-veicinasana?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow on 31 October – 13 November, <https://ukcop26.org>.
- ⁴¹ "The Convention on Biological Diversity's 15th Conference of the Parties", The Convention on Biological Diversity, 15.10.2021, <https://www.cbd.int/cop/>.
- ⁴² "Fit for 55. The EU's plan for a green transition", Council of European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/eu-plan-for-a-green-transition/>.
- ⁴³ "2022 Commission Work Programme", European Commission, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2022-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en.
- ⁴⁴ "A stronger EU engagement for a greener, peaceful and prosperous Arctic", European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5214.
- ⁴⁵ "Minister of Foreign Affairs: Minister of Foreign Affairs: In 2022, Latvia is preparing to apply for the role of an observer in the Arctic Council", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10.11.2021, <https://>

www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/minister-foreign-affairs-2022-latvia-preparing-apply-role-observer-arctic-council.

⁴⁶ “2022 Commission Work Programme”, European Commission, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2022-commission-work-programme-key-documents_en.

⁴⁷ “Global Gateway”, European Commission, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

⁴⁸ “Transcript: President Macron on his vision for Europe and the future of transatlantic relation”, Atlantic Council, 04.02.2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/transcripts/transcript-president-macron-on-his-vision-for-europe-and-the-future-of-transatlantic-relations/>.

⁴⁹ “*Drošības un aizsardzības politika*”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19.06.2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/drosibas-un-aizsardzibas-politika>.

LATVIA AT THE CROSSROADS OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

Mārtiņš Vargulis

Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs |
Lecturer at Riga Stradiņš University

Transatlantic relations have experienced a number of ups and downs over recent years, caused by both internal and external shocks. Both successes and upheavals have left their marks on the US's and EU's visions for the future development of defense policy and the role of transatlantic relations in addressing international security issues. Joe Biden becoming the 46th president of the US was perceived in several European countries as a return to normalized transatlantic relations, which had been particularly "impaired" during the previous US administration. Throughout 2021, these expectations have merged with closer relations, and there have also been some tensions, illustrating the conceptual challenges that lie between the two sides. The present dynamics of these relations now makes it possible to outline their development through the perspective of the coming years.

In terms of the challenges of transatlantic relations, internal discussions already underway in Europe have influenced their development. Calling into question the credibility of the current system has made it clear that the change of the US's role as the "global policeman" could have a significant impact on European security. A diversion of its focus and forces to other regions means changes to the overall security situation in Europe. Although in 2021 Joe Biden linked one of his first foreign and security policy decisions to the previous intention of withdrawing US forces from Europe, which he cancelled, it was still a signal that with changes in the US administration, Europe cannot be completely secure about the long-term US presence.

The promotion of close transatlantic ties has been an integral part of Latvia's foreign and security policy. Since regaining its independence, Latvia has relied on and sought ways of

strengthening its transatlantic ties. A shared understanding of the international security environment and a coordinated, unified transatlantic approach to security challenges is the cornerstone of ensuring Latvia's sovereignty and independence. Therefore, turmoil in the context of transatlantic relations has an impact on Latvia's foreign and security policy. Whether and how transatlantic relations will change in 2022, and the place Latvia will have in this transformation, is an important conceptual backdrop that will influence Latvia's foreign and security policy over the coming years.

SOLIDARITY AND SHARED UNDERSTANDING: (NON) CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS IN THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Solidarity and the desire to protect one's country and one's allies are essential preconditions in the overall context of transatlantic relations. Following Russia's aggression in Ukraine, a number of decisions were taken at the Wales Summit in 2014 and at the Warsaw Summit in 2016, illustrating a shift in the awareness and thinking among allies. Both summits showed that the allies had "reached" a common perception of threats, seeing Russian aggression in Ukraine as having long-term consequences for transatlantic security. A shared understanding of Russia's ambitions and revisionist approach in the international arena was demonstrated. This was a turning point in the security of the Baltic States. Prior to Russian aggression in Ukraine, several Central and Western European allies were rather interested in normalizing relations with Russia, even in the form of civil-military cooperation. From the point of view of the Baltic States, on the grounds of national threat assessment, such an approach was considered unfavorable and risky. Nevertheless, at the Wales and Warsaw Summits, heads of state and government were able to agree on far-reaching measures to strengthen the Alliance's collective defense and rapid-response capabilities, and to strengthen the central role of transatlantic relations in the provision of security while maintaining a clear and unified view of the threats and challenges the Alliance is facing.

However, over recent years, and especially in 2021, the issue of solidarity between transatlantic actors has been rightly analyzed (read: disputed). One of the most important elements of solidarity and unity is a shared understanding of the level and classification of threats. In 2021, the challenges for transatlantic relations continued to be exacerbated by different characteristics of the security environment. In this context, the internal inconsistencies of European countries play an important role in divisions in transatlantic relations. Although the US's focus in 2021 continued to be divided between the challenges posed by Russia and the People's Republic of China, its position *vis-à-vis* Russia has remained invariably strong. There is a need to further strengthen the defense

and deterrence policy against Russia, which several European NATO members see as a new potential source of tension.

From the point of view of Latvia (the Baltic States), such a US position has been vital in the context of common security. Any attempts to diminish the significance of Russia's aggressive policy in the process of NATO's future adaptation are seen as an issue of national security. The position of Eastern European countries results from the assertion that strength and power are factors that the Kremlin respects. This approach is also confirmed by the actions and words of Joe Biden, namely, that any aggressive actions by Russia would face a certain backlash from the allies and that NATO must now continue to strengthen its defense and deterrence policies.¹ Showing force, which can take the form of both large-scale exercises and the deployment of permanent allied forces, is the best signal to an aggressor to show that the defense of each country, and therefore also of the Alliance as a whole, is being seriously planned. Softening or downsizing any position will be seen as a weakness that Russia will take advantage of. In this context, the large-scale transatlantic military exercise "Defender Europe 2021" taking place in 2021 can serve as a reinforcing demonstration, and it can set an example for similar future activities for common transatlantic solidarity and unity.

CURRENT UPHEAVALS IN TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: THE LATVIAN PERSPECTIVE

As far as Latvia is concerned, transatlantic unity and solidarity form the cornerstone of promoting national security. In general, Biden's position on the importance of transatlantic relations, expressed not only in words but also in deeds, have strengthened transatlantic relations in 2021, which has been emphasized and positively assessed by several Latvian foreign and security policy agents. However, the inertia created by previous US presidents has contributed to the development of vectors that also have a lasting impact on US-EU relations today. In the context of transatlantic relations, "Trumpism" is still present as a issue that challenges transatlantic ties, mainly due to the inability of several European countries to fully contribute to the common defense spending pool. This has a lasting impact not only on public communication but also on the practical manifestation of policy. In 2021, Latvia's foreign and security policy continued to experience the presence of these upheavals.

The upheavals have created a rift, which several actors search for a place in or seek to fill with content favorable to them. One such actor is France with President Emmanuel Macron at the helm, who in 2021 has also continued to develop and advocate for the further development of the concept of Europe as an autonomous entity. The official

argumentation of France for the need for strategic autonomy focuses on several aspects: the pandemic, terrorism, and fundamental long-term transition processes and challenges, such as climate change, the digital transformation and various internal and transnational inequalities. Although Macron's doctrine includes several elements, its overarching goal, which has permeated 2021 and will continue to be present in 2022, is the development of a more self-sufficient and independent union capable of operating autonomously in the international system. As the French president has repeatedly pointed out, "we [Europeans] need two strong guiding principles: to get back on track with useful international cooperation that prevents war and addresses our current challenges; and to build a much stronger Europe, the voice, strength and principles of which can carry weight in this reformed framework".²

To this end, Emmanuel Macron has repeatedly emphasized the proposed creation of a "Paris Consensus", which, according to the French president, would be a "worldwide consensus".³ The call for a new worldwide consensus allows conclusions to be drawn on two things. Firstly, the existing "Washington Consensus", in which transatlantic relations have played a vital role in the joint projection of ideas, values and norms, has lost its credibility according to France. Secondly, it marks the emergence of an increasingly ambitious player in the international system. The display of ambition (muscle) affects and will continue to determine the strength and unity of transatlantic relations.

Challenging the US as a leader means undermining the dynamics of transatlantic relations that have existed for decades. These relations have reached a crossroads in which the further development and positioning of both the United States and European countries will play a crucial role. Finding a compromise between greater European autonomy and the US as the most important guarantor of security and strengthening transatlantic ties has been an element of maneuver that was present in Latvia's foreign and security policy in 2021.

LATVIA'S (EXPECTED) UNWAVERING POSITION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS IN 2022

Since regaining independence, two interrelated elements have affected Latvia's overall foreign and security policy: firstly, the "proximity" of the Russian threat and the possibility of a potential conflict and/or tension; and secondly, the transatlantic presence in the region in response to the security challenges presented by this Eastern neighbor. The dynamics of Russia's domestic political development, which has influenced its revisionist foreign policy, has created a need for Latvia to integrate more closely into

NATO and the EU, as well as to encourage closer integration between the EU and NATO. Integration, not competition, between the two halves of transatlantic relations has been identified as the most appropriate relationship model. Therefore, tensions in transatlantic relations are perceived as affecting (threatening) security.

Deterrence is one of the central pillars of Latvia's security policy. Deterrence is successful if the adversary is convinced that the losses incurred by engaging in hostilities outweigh the benefits. In order to enhance deterrence through various means of strategic communication, the most appropriate messages to a potential aggressor about the losses it may sustain from engaging in any kind of warfare against Latvia have been sought in 2021 as well. In this regard, the role of NATO, rather than the EU, in the context of Latvia's security policy has been perceived as the most appropriate channel to provide answers to the existing security challenges.

The involvement of certain countries and the way in which allies ensure their regional presence is crucial from the perspective of conveying strategic messages. In the context of this discussion, Latvia's foreign and security policy-makers have not refrained from publicly expressing the view that the presence of US forces that affects the overall calculations that are being made by relevant parties, including the potential aggressor as well. The US involvement in the region strengthens the credibility of deterrence and reduces the likelihood of miscalculations. The historical perception of the US as the main strategic partner that is able to provide security by deterring the adversary from initiating any kind of conflict has created a situation in which Latvia continues to emphasize and support the US position in the context of changing transatlantic relations. The US presence in the region in 2022 may play an increasingly important role in strengthening Latvia's foreign and security policy.

Although the issue of EU strategic autonomy has been topical in EU internal discussions and forums since Latvia's accession to the EU in 2004, the defense provision in Latvia's official policy has first and foremost been viewed and sought through the prism of embracing transatlantic relations and related measures promoting security. There are no expectations that this position might change in 2022 as the result of any internal or external turmoil. On the contrary, the strengthening of NATO's position can be enhanced and made more present in the discourse of Latvia's foreign and security policy in 2022. Already in 2021, the drivers of Latvia's foreign and security policy discourse have stated in several public discussions and messages that, first of all, NATO is the one that must be able to provide an answer to the existing security challenges in the region.⁴ This view has also been confirmed in official documents a number of times. Thus, for instance, the National Security Concept emphasizes the growing risks of confrontation and conflicts, which in the geopolitical situation of Latvia particularly enhances the importance of national defense capabilities and close cooperation with NATO allies.⁵ A clear separation of powers and functions between NATO and the EU in the field

of security and defense has been reaffirmed in other official national documents. It is defined also by the National Defense Concept:

- It is in Latvia's interests to continue engaging in the EU Common Security and Defense Policy and to continue contributing to the EU military missions and operations in regions whose security situation also directly affects the security of EU member states.
- Latvia supports EU defense initiatives, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defense Fund, to strengthen the security of EU countries.
- Latvia ensures collective defense only through NATO. Although defense cooperation within the framework of EU may complement NATO's efforts, it may not overlap with them.⁶

Therefore, in 2021 in the context of Latvia's foreign and security policy, there has also been the firm position that comprehensive security can be achieved only in the case of united and strong transatlantic ties.

As indicated above, in Latvia's view, the role of the EU in the context of security/defense is to complement, and not to compete with, the anchorage provided by transatlantic relations. The development of the EU strategic autonomy discussion, which in 2021 also influenced the development of the Strategic Compass, is seen as an issue and a challenging aspect from Latvia's perspective. Recognizing that the Strategic Compass is an ambition aimed not only at the common EU force but also at the command structure creates an internal debate, a challenge that leads to a lack of support for the further development of this discussion. There are several historical factors which prevent Latvia from strengthening this approach at the level of ideology and also of practical activities.

THE FOCUS OF LATVIA AND TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: THE PRESENCE OF HISTORICAL AWARENESS LOOKING TOWARDS 2022

Transatlantic relations have been affected not only by internal upheavals but also by external turmoil, which has led the US in particular to shift its focus to other international regions. In this context, the US's vision and policy regarding the challenges posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) have a general impact on the dynamics of transatlantic relations. This has a twofold effect: firstly, it reinforces the Baltic States' concerns about the US forward presence (focus) in the Baltic region, and secondly, it challenges the development of a common transatlantic position *vis-à-vis* the PRC.

Similar upheavals caused by the White House regarding shifts of the focus of foreign and security policy to other regions have been demonstrated by previous US administrations

as well. One of the most striking shifts in this type of policy, for instance, was witnessed in 2009, when a number of former Eastern European national leaders and high-ranking politicians sent a “firm” letter to the administration of the US President Barack Obama urging Washington not to forget about Central and Eastern Europe. It emphasized that “Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, however, we see that Central and Eastern European countries are no longer at the heart of American foreign policy. As the new [US] Administration sets its foreign-policy priorities, our region is one part of the world that Americans have largely stopped worrying about. Indeed, at times we have the impression that U.S. policy was so successful [in Central and Eastern Europe] that many American officials have now concluded that our region is fixed once and for all and that they could “check the box” [on issues concerning Central and Eastern Europe] and move on to other more pressing strategic issues”.⁷ Both the former President of Latvia Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga and the former Foreign Minister Sandra Kalniete were among the signatories of the letter. The letter confirms that any attempt to reduce the US’s presence in the region is perceived as a security threat. The United States is perceived as the most important guarantor of security, a fact which is not hidden in public communication either.

The US’s focus on the People’s Republic of China is already a source of concern for the Baltic States. It is assumed that the necessary security adaptation measures will be implemented “on the basis of measures implemented in Eastern Europe”. That is, given limited defense resources, activities in the Asian region can be complemented by capabilities used in Eastern Europe. In this context, the joint position of the Baltic ministers illustrates concerns about the shift in the focus of the United States. The joint position of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia demands that the United States and its NATO allies be wary of the challenges posed by both Moscow and Beijing. Otherwise, a single neglected threat can lead to a new aggression.⁸

Looking ahead to the perspective of 2022, the development of the new Strategic Concept of NATO will play a crucial role in ensuring the above-mentioned common classification of threats. One can already expect that the section of threats focusing on both Russia and the PRC may prove to be one of the most important objects of “heated” discussions. The level of danger recognized for each of the threats will determine the kind of policies the Alliance will pursue in the future, the adaptation measures that will be maintained in Europe, and the forces and capabilities that will be developed in the Asian region. The (in)ability to achieve a unified transatlantic policy towards Russia, to which adaptation policies in the context of NATO would be subordinated, can be considered the most significant achievement – or, on the contrary, the most significant failure – in Latvia’s foreign and security policy in 2022. The ability to convince the allies of the rightness and necessity of its position will be vital to achieving this goal.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN 2022 – AN OBSTACLE OR AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LATVIA TO STRENGTHEN THE TRANSATLANTIC TIES?

Does European strategic autonomy promote or hinder transatlantic relations? Is Latvia's concern that close EU integration and autonomy from its transatlantic partners will reduce security justified? On the one hand, European strategic autonomy can be seen as compatible with, and even a precondition for, stronger transatlantic ties. If the relationship between its members is static or unbalanced, this will lead to dissatisfaction in the dynamics of that relationship on both sides of the cooperation. The non-payment of the due European "levy" (mainly in the form of spending 2% of GDP on the defense sector) has periodically led to tensions on both sides of the Atlantic. It has also encouraged the strengthening of the defense and security sectors within the EU and the promotion of cooperation with strategic allies, leading, for instance, to the adoption of an intra-EU regulation governing third-party access to PESCO projects, in which the US can be involved and is being involved. The adoption of the European Defense Fund on equivalent terms is also underway. In order to become an autonomous player in the field of military security, the EU has been "forced" to develop its industrial base by upgrading the European defense industry. Looking for solutions to the shortcomings that currently exist in the military field is encouraged. The answer to the question of whether European strategic autonomy is an obstacle or an opportunity to strengthen transatlantic ties depends on how complementary, rather than competitive, EU capabilities can be with the development of US (NATO) capabilities.

The historical perception in Latvia's foreign and security policy discourse that it is the US, as the main strategic partner, who is able to promote security by deterring the adversary from initiating any kind of conflict has created a situation in which Latvia, together with other Eastern European countries, opposes the development of a closer and stronger EU strategic autonomy. Progress on the issue of EU strategic autonomy has confirmed and highlighted the division still existing between the "old" and the "new" Europe, where Latvia's position as a part of the "new" Europe has strengthened in 2021. Although the crises along the EU borders and outermost regions have encouraged the EU to become more "autonomous", the historically close cooperation between its internal actors (including Latvia) and the United States has played an important role in further strengthening the concept.

One can agree with the position that argues that European strategic autonomy is a self-evident and irreversible process of adaptation. Today, Europe is facing a number of conflicts or tensions on its borders that do not affect or are not in the interests of the United States. In 2021, this was confirmed and attested to by several challenges, the most pressing of which was the hybrid warfare implemented by Belarus, creating the

challenge of a flow of migrants, including on the Latvian border. Likewise, contrary to the EU, the US no longer engages in large-scale international missions in Africa and the Middle East, leaving crisis and conflict-management in the neighboring countries of Europe to Europe. Africa, as a region of European post-colonialism, retains its significance in the view of several European countries. EU missions and operations in this region could only intensify in the coming years. US involvement in these activities is not expected.

However, in reality, in conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh, Libya and Syria, Europe in general has played the role of a “witness”, leading to its exclusion from tackling regional conflicts in favor of other actors, including Russia, the People’s Republic of China, Turkey, etc. Given the different threat assessments and its involvement in other solutions to conflicts, a necessity has arisen for the EU to evaluate what military needs should be developed. It has also created the need to strive for strategic autonomy in order to maintain its influence on the geopolitical map of the world. The development of such a discourse does not exclude the possibility that Europe will be increasingly dominated by the position advocating the view that only a more capable, and thus more autonomous, Europe can meaningfully cooperate (compete) with the United States in order to, firstly, influence the terms of cooperation and, secondly, strengthen overall transatlantic ties and its role in the international arena. Consequently, there is an explicit need to further strengthen the European pillar in the field of defense and security. Namely, the pace of its development will be at the heart of the debate on strategic autonomy. This is often set as a political goal, which means mobilizing a much stronger military force among European countries and ensuring the implementation of defined European defense priorities.

One can expect that these – or challenges of a similar type – will occur with increasing inertia in the EU and, consequently, in Latvia’s foreign and security policy in 2022 and beyond. Consequently, it creates a need for addressing various gaps and shortages in capabilities, as well as being present and active in areas where European interests are in jeopardy. In order to be able to maintain the leading position and influence of the EU in several regions, Latvia will be “forced” to transform alongside the EU as it becomes more united and as a result more autonomous, which contradicts Latvia’s current position regarding the common security policy, where the EU and transatlantic partners are complementary rather than competing. European strategic autonomy is an unstoppable process driven by a number of central European actors. In the case of Latvia, in 2022 and beyond, it will be important to identify areas and gaps whose development would add value in the overall context of strengthening transatlantic relations. Thus, from Latvia’s perspective, the linking of the EU and the US in the complementing of capabilities rather than the overlapping of capabilities is essential in the context of both common transatlantic security and Latvian security in the coming years.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Latvia will have to be able to respond and adapt to the upheavals arising in the context of transatlantic relations in 2022 as well. Although with Joe Biden's position that "America is back", including in Europe, one can observe a general normalization of transatlantic relations, there are a number of cases – like, for instance, the Australian refusal to buy French-made submarines, linked to US influence – in which tensions are ongoing and will be continuing in 2022 and beyond. This has been fueled not only by the policies of previous US administrations, but also by the growing ambition of several European countries to pursue autonomous and alternative policies. With the shift in US focus to other regions, as well as growing tensions along the EU's borders, it cannot be ruled out that EU-US relations may become even more distant. In the context of this process, it is in Latvia's security interests to support policies that would reduce the potential for a gap in transatlantic relations. Being aware of the risks that weakened transatlantic relations may pose to Latvia's security, it would be in Latvia's interests to create and strengthen points of interaction in the dynamics of transatlantic relations in the coming years.

It is also inevitable that several EU countries will call for a more autonomous European strategy. In the context of the development of this strategy, Latvia would need to ensure that, firstly, it incorporates the security challenges the region faces and, secondly, it complements rather than competes with the positions established within transatlantic relations, including the place the North American countries have in the region and the need for that place. In the context of this discussion, it would be crucial for Latvia to call for the promotion of dialogue and an exchange of views with transatlantic allies.

Finally, as 2021 highlights, it is impossible to predict clearly the dynamics of relations and the potential challenges in the international security environment. Transatlantic relations will also survive their ups and downs. In the context of these upheavals, Latvia must be ready for the fact that both the stability and solidarity of transatlantic relations may be challenged from time to time. In order to reduce the appetite of external actors to challenge transatlantic unity, Latvia in 2022 must continue to maintain and publicly declare its firmness, which is proved not only in words, but also in real actions.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference", The White House, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/06/16/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-4/>.
- ² Stoicescu, K., "Does France Seek Alone European 'Strategic Autonomy'?", International Center for Defence and Security, 2020, <https://icds.ee/en/does-france-seek-alone-european-strategic-autonomy/>.

- ³ “The Macron Doctrine”, *Groupe d’études géopolitiques*, 2021, <https://geopolitique.eu/en/2020/11/16/the-macron-doctrine/>.
- ⁴ See, for instance: 1) “*Edgars Rinkēvičs Tallinā: Mūsu reģionā ir jābūt spēcīgai NATO kolektīvās aizsardzības klātbūtnēi*”, LV portāls, 2021, <https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/334078-edgars-rinkevics-tallina-musu-regiona-ir-jabut-specigai-nato-kolektivas-aizsardzibas-klatbutnei-2021>. 2) “Latvia’s defense minister: Are we entering a new era of partnerships?”, *Defencenews.com*, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/outlook/2021/01/11/latvias-defense-minister-are-we-entering-a-new-era-of-partnerships/>.
- ⁵ “*Par Nacionālās drošības koncepcijas apstiprināšanu*”, *Likumi.lv*, 2019, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/309647-par-nacionalas-drosibas-koncepcijas-apstiprinasanu>.
- ⁶ “*Par Valsts aizsardzības koncepcijas apstiprināšanu*”, *Likumi.lv*, 2020, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/317591-par-valsts-aizsardzibas-koncepcijas-apstiprinasanu>.
- ⁷ “An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe”, *International Center for Defence and Security*, 16.07.2009, <https://icds.ee/en/an-open-letter-to-the-obama-administration-from-central-and-eastern-europe/>.
- ⁸ “*Baltijas valstu ārlietu ministri aicina ASV Ķīnas izaicinājumu ēnā neatstāt Krievijas draudus*”, *Sargs.lv*, 20.10.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/viedoklis/2021-10-20/baltijas-valstu-arlietu-minis-tri-aicina-asv-kinas-izaicinajumu-ena-neatstat>.

DETERRENCE POLICY IN LATVIA 2021 AND 2022

Toms Rostoks

Director at the Centre for Security and Strategic Research

Latvia, in co-operation with its NATO allies, has been pursuing a deterrence policy in its relations with Russia for several years now. In his speech at the annual Foreign Policy Debate in the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) in January 2021, the Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs emphasized that despite the fact that Latvia spent 2.3% of its GDP on defence in 2020, it “should continue investing in its defence”¹. This applies to both military defence and strategic communication, strengthening political stability in the country and resilience to hybrid threats. This means that the Ministry of Defence is not the only one to play an important role concerning the issues of national defence, so do other ministries, local governments, the private sector and non-state partners.

There have been no significant positive changes in relations with Russia over the past year, therefore the importance of deterrence policy has not diminished. To the contrary, in the context of the events in Belarus, it has increased. According to the Commander of the Latvian National Armed Forces (NAF) Leonīds Kalniņš, military co-operation being strengthened during the *Zapad* military exercise is likely to “grow into the inclusion of the Belarusian army in the Russian defence system”² in the future. Although the Russian and Belarusian military exercise of September 2021 was expected with some concerns it passed without serious incidents. However, the growing influence of Russia in Belarus poses new challenges to Latvia’s security, revealing the hitherto unfinished work in border construction. Weaponization of migration against Lithuania, Latvia and Poland has raised questions about the state of security in Northern Europe. As the Russian influence in Belarus increases, so does the Russian ability to use Belarusian territory for military operations.

This chapter reflects the developments in the Latvian defence sector over the last year. Latvia’s defence expenditures have remained a priority after reaching 2% in 2018. The building of military capabilities, however, takes time, therefore the defence sector is expected to make gradual progress in strengthening its defence capabilities. Thus, the

purpose of this chapter is to look at the developments in defence sector in 2021 with a view to further developments in 2022. The second part of the chapter, however, focuses on changes in the academic discussions on the concept of deterrence and on NATO's deterrence policy in the Baltic States. The conclusions offer a summary and some generalizations about the possible defence priorities in the coming years.

DETERRENCE IN 2021

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the development of the National Armed Forces (NAF) has continued in 2021. However, national defence is a complex task, and none of the most important goals of the Latvian defence sector will be easily achieved in the coming years. Ironically, securing 2% of GDP for defence could prove to be the easiest goal. Therefore, for instance, the goal of increasing the number of personnel in professional units and in the National Guard is hampered by demographic factors, the limited labour market, and changes in the value system of the population. Work on strengthening the overall combat readiness has continued over the past year, with the most newsworthy procurement in 2021 being the contract for the purchase of 200 *Patria* armoured vehicles from Finland. It should be noted though that there have been other significant developments in the field of defence, but they have earned less public and media interest. One can mention examples like investments in the military base in Lūznava and the deployment of a combat support company in Stāmeriena, the digitization project that will allow the inventory of logistical assets to be carried out electronically.³ As a result of structural reorganization of the State Centre for Defence Military Objects and Procurement (VAMOIC) the State Defence Logistics and procurement centre (VALIC) became operational at the beginning of 2021. From now on, VALIC's task "will be to ensure the full management of the logistics cycle of individual equipment", while VAMOIC "will be responsible for the development and management of defence infrastructure".⁴ This type of public administration reorganizations is unlikely to arouse much public interest (as opposed to massive combat equipment). However, it is important for the defence sector as it separates the provision of troops from the development and management of national defence infrastructure.

In the continuation of this chapter, the author will focus on changes in the defence budget, increase of the number of personnel in the professional units of the NAF and the National Guard, capability development projects implemented by the NAF and the co-operation with the defence industry. The author will look at several capability development projects as deep as it is possible, as a more complete overview of developments in the defence sector is hampered by its specificities. That is to say, the countries implementing deterrence policy generally disclose a limited amount of

information on capability development projects, as more detailed information could benefit a potential adversary.

If at the beginning of the pandemic there were concerns about economic recession leading to a reduction in funding for the defence sector, this has not happened in practice, and government spending on the defence sector has increased significantly compared to 2020. If in 2020 the defence funding amounted to 664 million euros, then in 2021 it increased to 708 million euros. In turn, 747 million euros have been earmarked for the defence sector in 2022.⁵ In the conditions of the pandemic, with the initial increase in unemployment, the recruitment indicators of the NAF and the National Guard also improved.⁶ However, with the stabilization of macroeconomic indicators in 2021 and the decrease of unemployment, the NAF management has publicly expressed its wish to increase the salaries of NAF soldiers by 10% in order to improve recruitment numbers.⁷ As the remuneration levels in Latvia have continued to increase, the increase of the remuneration of soldiers of professional units in the coming years would be only logical. However, the defence sector is closely linked to the situation of the national economy. The wave of rising Covid-19 deaths in the autumn of 2021 and the governmental decision to impose restrictions aimed at easing the pressure on the health care system raises questions about the possibilities for sustaining economic growth. In 2020, during the pandemic, governments around the world spent significant resources to support the sectors which had suffered the hardest hits by the pandemic and to prevent a deep economic crisis. Although these measures have been relatively successful, governments cannot borrow indefinitely. If the Latvian government has to periodically close the economy due to Covid-19, it will also affect the defence sector. However, the increase in vaccination rates in Latvia in the autumn of 2021 gives reason to hope that the worst-case scenario will not come true.

An important goal in the coming years is to increase the number of soldiers in the National Armed Forces. Although the number of troops has slightly increased since 2014, which is considered a significant turning point for the defence sector, the ongoing capability development projects create a necessity for a more substantial increase in the number of troops. Latvia's current position has been focused on the establishment of a relatively small, but professional and well-trained armed forces with a high combat readiness. It is worrying, though, that the number of soldiers at Latvia's disposal might be too small, given the number of troops and armaments at Russia's disposal.⁸ Accordingly, the National Defence Concept approved in autumn 2020 defines an ambitious goal – to increase the number of soldiers to 8000 by 2024 while the National Guard should reach 10,000-men mark by 2024 and 12,000-men mark by 2027.⁹ Achieving this goal could prove to be a difficult task.

In order to substantially increase the number of soldiers of the National Guard, it will be necessary to change the relations of the society and the state in the field of

defence, namely, the goal would be to make the service in the National Guard a self-evident and respectable choice. This, however, will require a major effort on the part of the Latvian government. Several steps have been taken to achieve the set goals. Firstly, the provision of National Defence Training (VAM) at schools could become a turning point being one of the most important initiatives of the Ministry of Defence to encourage young people to make a personal contribution to strengthening national security. The number of schools where VAM will be taught will increase in the coming years. The interest of young people in the National Defence Training Camp has been particularly high in recent years, and the number of applications to these camps has exceeded than the actual number of places by far. Physical infrastructure for providing VAM summer camps in the coming years has also been prepared and the instructors have been trained. However, it will be possible to assess the real VAM results in the context of recruitment only after 2024, when VAM will become a compulsory subject in schools. Implementation of VAM is also going to require a considerable financial commitment. In 2022, just over two million euros will be allocated to the VAM, and when the program reaches the planned number of young people to be trained (approximately 30,000 persons in 2024/2025), the expenditure of the VAM program will reach approximately eight million euros. per year.¹⁰

Secondly, there is a work underway to raise the prestige of officers' profession so that young people with relatively high marks in secondary school would choose to conduct their studies at the National Defence Academy of Latvia. For instance, in 2021 the first students were admitted to Colonel Oskars Kalpaks Vocational Secondary School (*Pulkveža Oskara Kalpaka profesionālā vidusskola*)¹¹, and the aim of this school is not only to prepare high school graduates for service in the NAF and studies at the National Defence Academy, but also to raise the prestige of military education and profession in society. Persistent work aimed at young people could help attract more soldiers to the NAF, but it is still difficult to predict whether it will be possible to achieve such a significant increase in the number of soldiers as set in the National Defence Concept.

During the pandemic, the issue of vaccination sparked an intense public debate. In the first months of 2021, an important topic of discussion was the availability of vaccines. In turn, during 2021, as the availability of vaccines increased, the public's readiness to vaccinate and thus to protect themselves and the rest of the public from the spread of Covid-19 became the focal point of the debate. Initially, the pace of vaccination in Latvia in 2021 has been slower than in many neighbouring countries, and the Latvian society in this respect has been a laggard among its Baltic neighbours. The proportion of vaccinated people in Latvia also falls significantly behind the Nordic countries. A notable exception in this respect has been the defence sector setting an example for the rest of society, and this special status of the defence sector was also recognized in the spring of 2021 by the Ombudsman's Office.¹² Vaccination of NAF personnel was launched in May, and the

results have been successful, as the proportion of people vaccinated in the defence sector has been high compared to other sectors. The defence sector, with the involvement of the National Guard, has also played an important role in organizing the vaccination process, while offering National Guard soldiers the opportunity to contribute to the implementation of vaccination as a nationally important process. However, in 2021, the soldiers of the National Guard also had to perform potentially more dangerous functions, namely, to provide support to the State Border Guard in guarding the border with Belarus to counter Alexander Lukashenko's hybrid war against Latvia, using migration as a tool of pressure. Even cadets from the Latvian National defence Academy have been enlisted in this effort.

Capability projects usually create the greatest public interest. In this regard, the most visible project of 2021 was the conclusion of the contract for the purchase of *Patria* armoured vehicles. It is unlikely that other acquisitions of such magnitude will be made in the coming years. This is only logical, as military equipment is procured at early stages in the development of military capabilities, but in the following years more emphasis is placed on the purchase of ammunition and the maintenance and repair of military equipment. Military equipment (especially military platforms) is purchased with the aim to use it for many years. If maintenance and repairs are not carried out on due time, it becomes virtually impossible to use military platforms. Compared to 2017, when less than 135 million euros were allocated for maintenance, in 2021 a little more than 205 million euros were allocated for this purpose.¹³

New capability development projects require the development of new competencies and a clear view of what military capabilities are currently missing and what capabilities need to be developed. A major challenge in capability development has been the issue of costs, and Latvia has so far been frugal in the way it has spent taxpayers' money on military platforms, and it has paid particular attention to the issues of costs, maintenance and repair. One can easily imagine how difficult it would be to send armoured vehicles to another country each time there is a need for more serious repairs. This approach has also been implemented in the purchase of *Patria* 6x6 armoured vehicles, as this purchase has been beneficial for Latvia from several points of view. Firstly, the armoured vehicles will be delivered to Latvia gradually until 2029, but the first four armoured vehicles were received by Latvia already in October 2021.¹⁴ Secondly, armoured vehicles meet the requirements and needs of the Latvian NAF. Soldiers must be protected during military operations, so the purchase of armoured vehicles has been one of the most important priorities of the NAF in recent years. Thirdly, with the help of this procurement, the Latvian economy will also be strengthened, as it is envisaged that starting from 2023, armoured vehicles will be manufactured in Latvia.¹⁵ Maintenance and repairs of armoured vehicles will also be carried out in Latvia, thus creating jobs and ensuring that a large part of the funding allocated for defence needs remains in Latvia. Fourthly, it strengthens the development of the defence industry, which Latvia needs to reduce

its dependence on external suppliers. In the longer run, supporting Latvian defence industry could also strengthen Latvia's export capacity if local producers succeed in creating competitive military technologies that would be in demand in other countries.

There have been other developments in capability development and the military industry. One of the military aggression scenarios Latvia has to take into account is an unexpected attack by a potential opponent, which makes the decentralization as important as high levels of combat readiness and mobility. This means investing in regional National Guard units, the backbone of which is made up of professional soldiers. In recent years, large-scale investments have been made in military facilities in the regions of Latvia. Although the largest and most important military base in Latvia, where soldiers of the Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade and soldiers of the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence reside, is located in Ādaži, the largest investments in 2021 were made in various regional military bases: helicopter hangar in Lielvārde (5 million euros), sports complex in Alūksne (3.8 million euros), and military bases in Valmiera (4 million euros), Alūksne (2 million euros), Preiļi (2.1 million euros), and Kuldīga (1.8 million euros).¹⁶ The military facilities of this type are also likely to have a positive impact on the local economy. Investments in regional military bases help to improve, for instance, the infrastructure of local roads, and they create jobs and additional opportunities for local businesses, such as catering for soldiers.¹⁷

In order to deter Russia much emphasis in recent years has been placed on organizing military exercises, as they strengthen combat capabilities and send a signal to a potential aggressor of the Alliance's readiness to defend Member States. Political decision-makers and defence experts in the Baltic States have had concerns that Russia could launch aggression under the guise of military exercises. Russia is organizing a large-scale military exercise "Zapad 2021", which takes place every four years, including in September 2021. During the Russian military exercise there was also a military exercise called "Namejs 2021" taking place in Latvia with the participation of 9,375 soldiers from Latvia and 615 soldiers from Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Norway, and Estonia.¹⁸ The military exercise "Namejs 2021" was particularly important for two reasons. Firstly, if a potential opponent conducts military exercises, then conducting military exercises in Latvia significantly increases combat readiness and provides the ability to react quickly to a military aggression. It was no coincidence that Latvia conducted its military exercise at the same time as Russia. Secondly, both hybrid warfare and conventional conflict scenarios were played out during the military exercise, and certain situations within the framework of the exercise were played out in Riga as well. Although the public perceived the course of military training with understanding, there was also a discussion in the society about what tasks soldiers may perform in an urban environment, even when they have coordinated their activities and informed the society in advance. As the readiness for a hybrid war scenario is important, the NAF soldiers will perform their tasks in Riga as part of their exercises in the coming years as well.¹⁹

WHAT WILL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT TASKS TO BE DONE IN THE DEFENCE SECTOR IN 2022?

There are two categories of tasks to be done here: the continuation of tasks already underway and the beginning of fulfilling new tasks. Firstly, it is important to continue doing tasks which have already been started. As the most important tasks in the coming years can be considered the activities towards continuation of a systematic work on the recruitment of soldiers to increase the number of the National Guard soldiers. In Latvia, the contribution of the population to national defence is voluntary, therefore the defence sector must convince people of the military profession's advantages. In the coming years, various groups of the population must continue to be addressed about professional military service and service in the National Guard, offering competitive salaries, social guarantees, interesting job responsibilities and the conviction that everyone's contribution to strengthening national security is important. The development of military capabilities will not be possible without the people who will provide them. The work done on specific military capability development projects, such as the project of *Patria* armoured vehicles will be no less important. The military units will continue receiving modern military equipment. The military infrastructure will continue receiving investments in the coming years as well. There has been more work done in the construction and renovation of military facilities in the last 5–6 years than in the first 25 years after the restoration of independence.²⁰

Secondly, there are several military capabilities that could be developed in the coming years. However, this depends on several factors such as the availability of funding, technological solutions, and the readiness of the Allies to sell specific military platforms to Latvia. One of the capabilities that the Latvian Armed Forces could develop in the coming years is the capability of combat drones. Already at the end of 2020, after the end of the active phase of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the Minister of Defence Artis Pabriks said that Latvia, taking into account the relatively long list of defence priorities, should work more actively on the development of anti-drone capabilities and that the use of combat drones might have good prospects in the Latvian NAF.²¹ The Bayraktar unmanned combat aerial vehicles, manufactured in Turkey, have already been purchased by Ukraine, which has used them against separatists.²² The Baltic States have also expressed their desire to purchase the High mobility rocket artillery systems (HIMARS). In October 2021, the HIMARS system was temporarily delivered to and deployed in Latvia to show how quickly the United States could help the Baltic States in the event of a military conflict. HIMARS missiles have an operating range of 70 to 500 kilometres. The Minister of Defence Artis Pabriks has mentioned that Latvia is negotiating with the United States with an aim to purchase such high-mobility rocket artillery systems.²³

It is worth mentioning the agreement reached in 2021 with the General Dynamics European Land Systems on the acquisition of the systems of M3 amphibious and pontoon bridges, which will strengthen the development of combat engineers' capabilities in Latvia and ensure a greater combat mobility, allowing NAF and Allied forces to cross water barriers without using civilian infrastructure.²⁴ It is possible that in the future Latvia could also consider the purchase of modern coastal defence systems, like the one Estonia has decided to purchase from the Singapore and Israeli company "Proteus Advanced Systems".²⁵ The purchase of such a system would protect against attacks from the sea, and the Blue Spear 5G missile system allows to strike at enemy ships within a radius of 300 km.²⁶ The question of acquiring modern medium range air-defence missile systems also remains open. However, these systems are expensive and cannot be purchased at the current size of the defence budget. As the Commander of the NAF, Lieutenant General Leonīds Kalniņš, noted, the purchase of medium range air-defence missiles and modern missile systems for coastal defence would require an increase of the Latvian defence budget by another 30%, which does not seem possible for now.²⁷ Although Latvia is currently unable to purchase these systems, the question of purchasing them in the future remains open, as in fact they are necessary. Moreover, the purchase of expensive and technologically complex systems should be considered a turning point in Latvia's approach to ensuring defence capabilities. So far, the defence sector has been spending its funding on used systems that are cheaper, thus the purchase of expensive air defence and naval defence systems would have a long-term impact on the defence budget, reducing the resources available for other needs.

IS THE VIEW ON DETERRENCE CHANGING?

In the context of deterrence, it is worth considering not only the activities the countries are doing to strengthen it, but also the academic debate on deterrence. The perceptions of experts and decision-makers on what deters and why may change over time, and these changes necessitate a reassessment of the measures taken by states in the name of deterrence. Certain deterrents that have previously been considered to be sufficiently effective may be considered less effective over time. Changes in the academic views on deterrence make it necessary to evaluate the current measures the Baltic States are implementing to deter Russia.

Overall, the deterrence system in Latvia and the Baltic states consists of four components: the military capabilities of the Baltic States²⁸; NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic states; the military mobility system that would allow a rapid transfer of NATO forces to the Baltic states in the event of a conflict; the collective amount of military (and also non-military) power of the NATO Alliance that would be directed against the

aggressor in the event of a conflict.²⁹ The results of deterrence in the Baltic region are only partly determined by the military capabilities of the Baltic states themselves, which means that other elements of NATO's deterrence posture have a large (perhaps even a decisive) influence. If these elements are created unsuccessfully, then the efforts to deter Russia may fail, so it is necessary to periodically assess how successfully these elements have been created and how they are functioning. The following paragraphs will focus on two elements of NATO deterrence system: Enhanced Forward Presence and the role of military mobility in deterrence.

How important in the context of extended deterrence is the contribution of small forward deployed military units? Such military units, referred to in the academic literature as tripwire force in the framework of extended deterrence, can be deployed in the territory of weaker allies to demonstrate the readiness of a militarily more powerful ally to defend these countries against external military aggression if necessary. The USA uses this approach very extensively, and small units of its armed forces have been deployed in many countries. In most cases, these military units are not large enough to have a decisive influence on the outcome of a military conflict, but they demonstrate the US interest in the respective country and its readiness to rush to aid if the need arises. As the US armed forces are considered to be the strongest in the world, the potential aggressor has to reckon with the fact that in the event of aggression, the aggressor would have to confront not only the small group of US troops stationed in the country against which the aggression would be launched, but also considerably larger US force which would be deployed later and which would be large enough to have a decisive impact on the outcome of the conflict.

The primary goal of small military units is to act as a deterrent in times of peace or to die heroically in the early stages of a military conflict, therefore paving the way for further escalation of the conflict, as described by Thomas Schelling while using the example of West Berlin during the Cold War.³⁰ However, the effectiveness of the tripwire force has recently been questioned. US political scientists Paul Poast and Dan Reiter believe that many of the cases in which small military units have served as a tripwire force cannot be considered as deterrent success stories, that is, the adversary in these cases did not want to launch military aggression. The effectiveness of deterrence with the help of small military units is called into question by two reasons. Firstly, it is widely believed that this type of deterrence could be effective, as in cases of someone using military force against US soldiers, the US society would demand decisive and aggressive action from its political decision-makers. However, such an assumption is questionable because it does not account for the ability of political decision-makers to influence public opinion in the direction they want. If political decision-makers do not want to escalate a conflict in which US soldiers have died, they will find ways to convince the public that their actions are correct. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that society will always make a choice in favour of escalating a conflict, as people may conclude that escalation would

result in much larger loss of human life. Secondly, deterrence with the help of small military units may not be effective if the opponent takes a decisive victory with a decisive action, resulting in a strong defensive position.³¹

The above factors are also important in the case of the Baltic states. If Russia carried out military aggression against the Baltic states, which would result in gaining control over the territory of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the recovering of the Baltic states by NATO would be a very difficult task. Moreover, escalation in the military conflict with Russia would be exceedingly dangerous because of its formidable conventional and nuclear military capabilities. Recovering the Baltic states would likely result in a very high number of victims on both sides of the conflict. In addition, it should be noted that US troops are not a part of NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States. The US soldiers are stationed in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, but they are not a part of NATO battle groups and therefore, in the case of Latvia, they are not integrated into the Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade. Put simply, they are not part of the tripwire force.

How does military mobility contribute to deterrence? If most military units and equipment have been prepositioned in the place where the confrontation with the potential aggressor could occur then the military mobility is relatively insignificant, and in this case the term 'military mobility' mainly refers to the ability of units to move quickly within the conflict zone in order to carry out combat missions and to resupply these units. However, military mobility is crucial in NATO's efforts to deter Russia, as the Alliance's military presence in the Baltic region is confined to relatively small units whose task is to signal the Alliance's determination to defend the Baltic States against military aggression instead of being able to repel an enemy attack or winning a war. The presence of tripwire forces indicates that in the event of a conflict, NATO will have to move troops and equipment to the Baltic states, with the task of gaining the upper hand in the respective military conflict. Given the military asymmetry between the military capabilities of Russia and the Baltic states, NATO should be able to provide support to the Baltic states on short notice. In the case of US failure Russia could gain a quick and decisive victory in the confrontation with the Baltic states, thus making their liberation much more difficult to achieve. This makes military mobility a crucial element of NATO's deterrence efforts in the Baltic states.

To what extent has NATO succeeded in strengthening military mobility in the Baltic States so far? Although significant progress has been made in this respect in recent years, the declining importance of military mobility after the Cold War and the insufficient investments suggest that it would be very difficult for NATO to move large numbers of troops and amount of military equipment to the Baltic states in a short period of time. As NATO's deterrence strategy in the Baltic states is largely based on military mobility, it should be an unquestionable priority for the Alliance in the coming years.³² This will

require not only significant financial investments, but also closer cooperation between the EU and NATO and between national governments and the private sector. Military mobility should be a constant priority, and the governments of the Allies should be aware that it is the military mobility that could be the reason for deterrence measures to either succeed or fail. According to a recent study by the Center for European Policy Analysis, European countries are far from meeting their military mobility targets.³³ To compensate for the difficulties associated with the relocation of large numbers of military equipment on European territory, the US as the strategic partner of the Baltic States has sought to demonstrate the ability to relocate certain military platforms and capabilities to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia quickly. NATO air forces would most likely be able to react relatively quickly if the Baltic states became the target of a military aggression. The demonstration in October 2021 with the rapid delivery and deployment of the HIMARS system in the Baltic States is also an attempt to show that, despite the challenges presented in the context of military mobility, the Alliance or individual Member States can provide certain elements of military mobility on short notice.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions on the deterrence measures implemented by NATO and Latvia can be drawn at two levels. At the national level, the Latvian defence sector is taking gradual steps to strengthen its deterrence and defence capabilities. There is a significant increase in the number of the National Guard personnel planned over the coming years that will depend on a successful implementation of the National Defence Training (VAM) program. There is an effort underway to raise the prestige of the military profession – and especially – the officers. There are new capability projects being developed in the defence sector, although Latvia does not yet have enough resources for certain capabilities. The defence industry is developing as well. These developments could be significantly boosted by the project of *Patria* armoured vehicles. However, there are other projects underway, for instance, work on the project of the unmanned aerial vehicles. The development of defence infrastructure is implemented in the regions of Latvia, thus strengthening defence capabilities and creating opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

At the NATO level, further work is needed to enhance the common deterrence strategy of the Alliance, with a particular focus on military mobility. The literature on military mobility and deterrence with tripwire force units has to some extent questioned the overall framework of the deterrence strategy. In terms of military mobility, much remains to be done, and doubts have been raised as to whether the deterrence of the enemy can succeed if it is carried out with the help of tripwire forces. It would be wrong

to assume that the current level of stability in the Baltic region is the result of deterrence, as it could just as well be the result of Russia's lack of motivation to challenge the Alliance in the Baltic region.³⁴ If 10 years ago the situation in the case of Latvia and Lithuania was very different, now the Baltic states can claim that they have done almost everything in their power to strengthen their defence capabilities. However, as this may not be enough, the Baltic States may want the support from their Allies to be adjusted to the level of the threat posed by Russia, which may change over time. Therefore, NATO's deterrence measures should be flexible and corresponding to the changes in the threats posed by Russia.

What should the Latvian defence sector do in the coming years? Long-term goals are also short-term goals. Most likely, the most important tasks to be done for the Latvian defence sector in 2022 will not differ much from the tasks that had to be done in 2021. The first part of this chapter has already addressed the areas where significant progress could be made in 2022. Therefore, in the reminder of this chapter the author will mention two other important goals, the implementation of which will be a significant priority in the coming years. Firstly, there will be the ongoing priority of recruiting personnel to the service in the NAF professional units and the National Guard. The planned increase in the number of soldiers of the National Guard should be considered as a challenge to the NAF's ability to attract people who are ready to voluntarily contribute to the strengthening of national security. Secondly, Latvia's current approach to the acquisition of military platforms has been aimed at achieving the best possible result with the least amount resources. Examples include the purchase of howitzers from Austria and the purchase of CVR(T) armoured vehicles from the United Kingdom. In other words, Latvia has been quite frugal. However, the future challenges in the defence sector could require more substantial financial allocations. If the goal is to buy missile systems for coastal defence or medium-range air-defence systems³⁵, then these are expensive and complex systems. Consequently, the question is not whether Latvia needs such systems, but rather - how such systems could be acquired. The acquisition of these systems is a complicated issue that should be addressed in close co-operation with NATO allies, and it is likely to affect the availability of funds for other defence priorities.

ENDNOTES

¹ Speech by Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs at the annual Foreign Policy Debate in the Latvian Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 28.01.2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/speech-foreign-minister-edgars-rinkevics-annual-foreign-policy-debate-latvian-parliament-saeima-28-january-2021-0>.

² "Nākotnē var sagaidīt Baltkrievijas armijas iekļaušanos Krievijas aizsardzības sistēmā", *Sargs.lv*, 17.09.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/arvalstis/2021-09-17/nakotne-var-sagaidit-baltkrievijas-armijas-ieklausanos-krievijas-aizsardzibas>.

³ Interview with Jānis Garisons, State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, 13.10.2021.

- ⁴ "Darbu sāk Valsts aizsardzības loģistikas un iepirkumu centrs", Ministry of Defence, 15.01.2021, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/en/node/9284>.
- ⁵ "Aizsardzības budžeta izlietojuma infografika", Ministry of Defence, 2021, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Bud%C5%BEeta%20infografika%202021.gada%20-%20kop%C4%93jais.pdf>.
- ⁶ Gavrilko, G., "Latvia", Defence Policy and the Armed Forces in Times of Pandemic, Rostoks, T., Gavrilko, G. (eds.), Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2021.
- ⁷ "NBS komandieris: Atalgojumu karavīriem vajadzētu palielināt par 10%", Sargs.lv, 02.09.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nozares-politika/2021-09-02/nbs-komandieris-atalgojumu-karaviriem-vajadzetu-palielinat-par-10>.
- ⁸ Hooker, R.D.Jr., "How to Defend the Baltic States", The Jamestown Foundation, 2019.
- ⁹ "Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija 2020", Saeima, 24.09.2020, https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/AiMVAK_2020_projekts.pdf.
- ¹⁰ "Aizsardzības budžeta izlietojuma infografika", Ministry of Defence, 2021, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Bud%C5%BEeta%20infografika%202021.gada%20-%20kop%C4%93jais.pdf>.
- ¹¹ "Darbu sāk Oskara Kalpaka militārā vidusskola", LSM.lv, 05.07.2021, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/darbu-sak-oskara-kalpaka-militara-vidusskola.a411642/>.
- ¹² "Tiesībsargs atbild: Par NBS obligāto vakcināciju pret Covid-19", The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, 14.03.2021, <https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/news/lv/tiesibsargs-atbild-par-nbs-obligato-vakcinaciju-pret-covid-19>.
- ¹³ "Aizsardzības budžeta izlietojuma infografika", Ministry of Defence, 2021, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Bud%C5%BEeta%20infografika%202021.gada%20-%20kop%C4%93jais.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ This factor is important as sometimes agreements are made for the purchase of military platforms that will be manufactured and delivered after several years or even later. An example of this is the agreement between Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom on the production and supply of submarines to Australia. Although a conceptual agreement was reached between the three countries in the autumn of 2021, Australia could receive the submarines no earlier than the second half of the 2030s.
- ¹⁵ "Pabliks: Parakstītā vienošanās par "Patria" 6x6 iegādi stiprinās NBS spējas un pašmāju industriju", Sargs.lv, 30.08.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/uznemejdarbiba-un-inovacijas/2021-08-30/pabriks-parakstita-vienosanas-par-patria-6x6-iegadi>.
- ¹⁶ "Aizsardzības budžeta izlietojuma infografika", Ministry of Defence, 2021, <https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Bud%C5%BEeta%20infografika%202021.gada%20-%20kop%C4%93jais.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ "Zemessardzes Latgales brigādes infrastruktūras attīstība sniegs pienesumu arī reģiona ekonomikai", Sargs.lv, 14.05.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-05-14/zemessardzes-latgales-brigades-infrastrukturas-attistiba-sniegs-pienesumu-ari>.
- ¹⁸ "Noslēdzas militārās mācības 'Namejs 2021'", Sargs.lv, 04.10.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/militaras-macibas/2021-10-04/nosledzas-militaras-macibas-namejs-2021>.
- ¹⁹ "NBS komandieris atzinīgi vērtē šī gada militārās mācības 'Namejs 2021'; "Rīgā trenēsies arī turpmāk", Sargs.lv, 28.09.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/militaras-macibas/2021-09-28/nbs-komandieris-atzinigi-verte-si-gada-militaras-macibas-namejs-2021>.
- ²⁰ Interview with Jānis Garisons, State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, 13.10.2021.
- ²¹ "Pabliks: Latvija apzinās dronu izmantošanas iespējas, bet NBS trūkst vidējās darbības rādiusa raķešu", Sargs.lv, 04.11.2020, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/tehnika-un-ekipejums/2020-11-04/pabriks-latvija-apzinas-dronu-izmantosanas-iespejas-bet-nbs-trukst>.

- ²² "Video: Ukraina operācijā Donbasā pirmo reizi izmantojusi kaujas dronu 'Bayraktar'", Sargs.lv, 27.10.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/arvalstis/2021-10-27/video-ukraina-operacija-donbasa-pirmo-reizi-izmantojusi-dronu-bayraktar>.
- ²³ "ASV Latvijā demonstrē augstas mobilitātes raķešu artilērijas sistēmas atgādāšanu un izvēršanu", Sargs.lv, 25.10.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/militaras-macibas/2021-10-25/asv-latvija-demonstre-augstas-mobilitates-rakesu-artilerijas-sistemas>.
- ²⁴ "General Dynamics European Land Systems' piegādās NBS M3 amfibijas un pontontiltu sistēmas", Sargs.lv, 25.10.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-10-25/general-dynamics-european-land-systems-piegadas-nbs-m3-amfibijas-un-pontontiltu>.
- ²⁵ "Igaunija pirms modernu krasta aizsardzības raķešsistēmu", BNN, 07.10.2021, <https://bnn.lv/igaunija-pirms-modernu-krasta-aizsardzibas-rakesystemu-390369>.
- ²⁶ Axe, D., "Estonia is about to aim missiles at a key Russian weakness", Forbes, 11.10.2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2021/10/11/estonia-is-about-to-aim-missiles-at-a-key-russian-weakness/?sh=414fa7cf3dbe&fbclid=IwAR1P0oRs1lB_kMCHAV5vhHUhMwKIQ4Ron3p9t-woBeq6_d6bHA6b-By1-leU.
- ²⁷ "Pretgaisa un pretkuģu ieroču ieviešanai kopējie aizsardzības izdevumi būtu jāpalielina par 30%", Sargs.lv, 02.03.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/viedoklis/2021-03-02/pretgaisa-un-pretkugu-ierocu-ieviesanai-kopejie-aizsardzibas-izdevumi-butu>.
- ²⁸ In current discussions on deterrence, the collective readiness of a society to resist an aggressor and to work together to overcome military and non-military crises also plays an important role. An ability of a society to unite in crisis situations can be characterized by various concepts, and in the case of Latvia, the concepts of resilience and comprehensive defence are the ones used most often. The role of societal resilience in deterrence is addressed in the following publications: Braw, E. "The Importance of National Resilience in Deterrence" in *Transatlantic Futures: Towards #NATO2030*, Sprūds, A., Vargulis, M. (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2020; Bērziņa, I., "Total Defence as a Comprehensive Approach to National Security" in *Deterring Russia in Europe*, Vanaga, N., Rostoks, T. (eds.), Routledge, 2019, p. 71–89.
- ²⁹ Lawrence, T., "Continuing to Build Credible Deterrence and Defence in the Baltic Region" in *Transatlantic Futures: Towards #NATO2030*, Sprūds, A., Vargulis, M. (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2020, p. 96–109.
- ³⁰ Schelling, T. C., "Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword", Yale University Press, 2008 (1966), p. 47.
- ³¹ Reiter, D., Poast, P., "The Truth About Tripwires: Why Small Force Deployments Do Not Deter Aggression", *Texas National Security Review* 4:3, 2021, p. 33–53; Reiter, D., Poast, P., "Death Without Deterrence, or Why Tripwire Forces Are Not Enough", *War on the Rocks*, 17.06.2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/death-without-deterrence-or-why-tripwire-forces-are-not-enough/>.
- ³² Scaparotti, C. M., Bell, C. B., "Moving Out: A Comprehensive Assessment of European Military Mobility", Atlantic Council, 2020.
- ³³ Brauss, H., Hodges, B., Lindley-French, J., "The CEPA Military Mobility Project: Moving Mountains for Europe's Defense", Center for European Policy Analysis, 2021, p. 41.
- ³⁴ Frederick, B., Povlock, M., Watts, S., Priebe, M., Geist, E., "Assessing Russian Reactions to U.S. and NATO Posture Enhancements", RAND, 2017.
- ³⁵ "AM meklē finansējumu, lai Latviju nodrošinātu ar vidējas darbības pretgaisa aizsardzības sistēmām", Sargs.lv, 27.01.2021, <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nozares-politika/2021-01-27/am-mekle-finansejumu-lai-latviju-nodrosinatu-ar-videjas-darbibas>.

LATVIA'S MILITARY DEFENSE AND CYBER DEFENSE: GROWTH CONTINUES, BUT ROOM FOR PROGRESS IS NOT DECREASING¹

Māris Andžāns

Senior Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs |
Assistant Professor at Riga Stradiņš University

The year 2021 continued to be defined by the Covid-19 pandemic all around the world. Naturally, it affected the defense of Latvia both in the physical space and in the virtual space as well. Regardless of the pandemic, the defense sector continued progressing as it has in recent years, although the sector's challenges remained relevant. The year 2021 also marked the first decade since the in-practice establishment of a national cyber security system in Latvia. However, the year 2021 was also a year of paradoxes. A curfew was introduced, and a civilian mobilization attempt was made in response to a pandemic instead of as a response to a military threat. Moreover, armed forces were sent to the border with Belarus and not to the border with Russia. This, once again, has led to a rethinking of both the range of security risks and the transformation of today's warfare environment.

DEFENSE SECTOR FUNDING: LATVIA STILL MAINTAINING A STABLE PRESENCE IN NATO'S "2% CLUB"

In 2021, looking at it against the background of other NATO member states, Latvia in financial terms looked similar to the previous year. For the fourth year in a row, Latvia is among those NATO member states dedicating at least 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) to defense. According to NATO estimates for the past year, Latvia's defense

expenditure reached 2.27% of GDP (see Figure 1). With this percentage ratio, Latvia ranked sixth among all NATO member states, immediately behind Estonia and ahead of Poland and Lithuania (see Figure 3).²

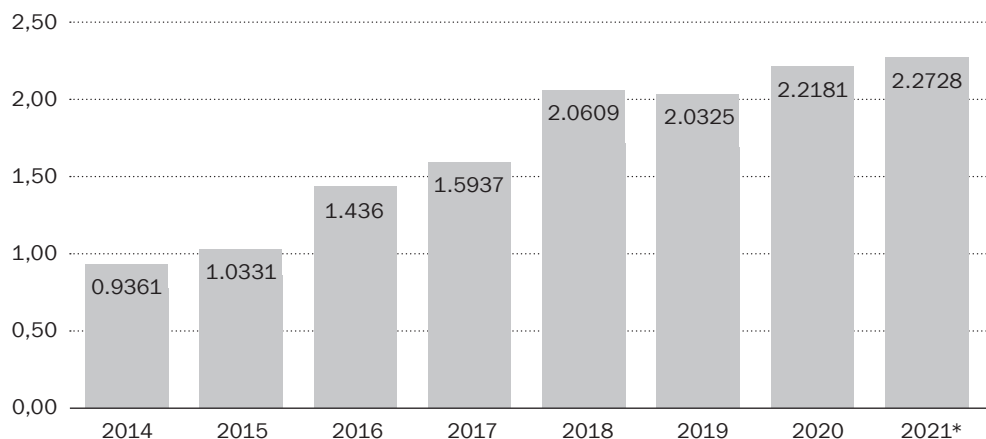


Figure 1. The defense expenditure of Latvia, as a percentage of GDP (data from NATO).³

* Estimates for the respective year.

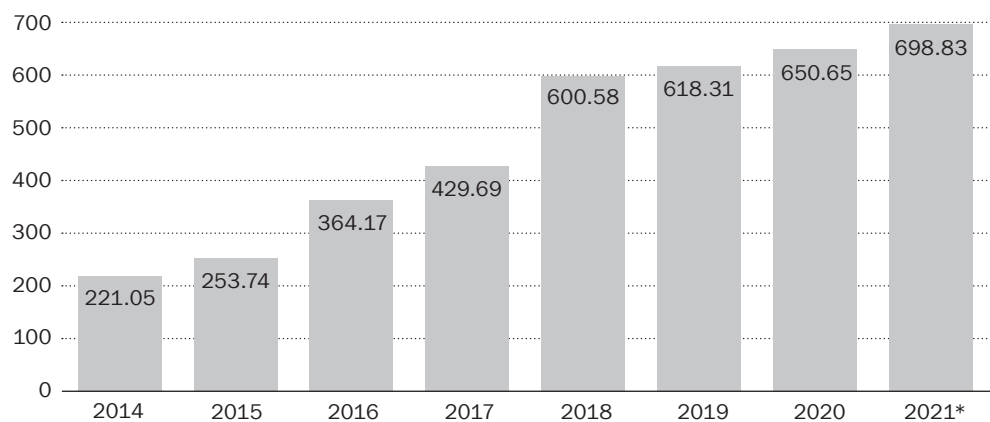


Figure 2. The defense expenditure of Latvia, in millions of euros (data from NATO).⁴

* Estimates for the respective year.

Latvia's defense expenditure also increased in numerical terms over the last year. According to data compiled by NATO, this should reach almost 699 million EUR, which is the largest amount of defense sector funding to date (see Figure 2).⁵ Among the 30 NATO member states, Latvia's expenditure was projected to be the 23rd largest, falling behind Lithuania and ahead of Estonia.⁶ Latvia also exceeded the NATO guideline of contributing at least 20% of the budget to equipment.⁷

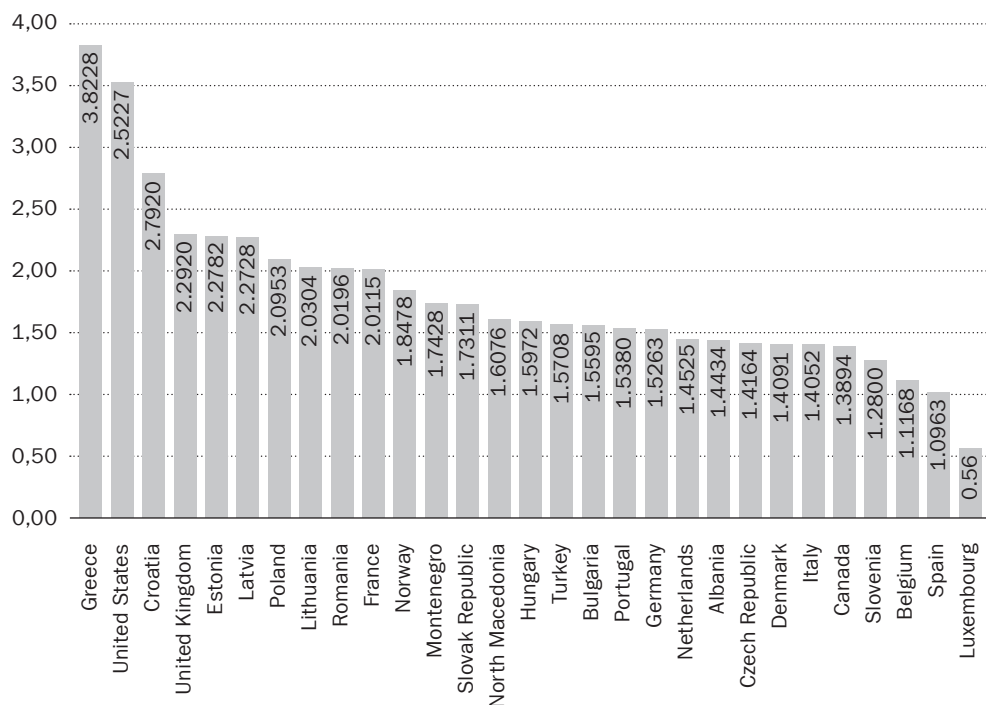


Figure 3. The defense expenditure of NATO member states in 2021 (estimates), as a percentage of GDP (data from NATO).⁸

According to the state budget for 2022, Latvia's defense expenditures will continue to grow and will reach 757.17 million EUR.⁹ This will be the largest amount of funding allocated to Latvia's defense sector to date. It will also continue to exceed 2% of GDP.

DEFENSE FUNDING: DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING EQUIPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The increasing defense sector funding has made it possible to further improve the equipment and infrastructure of the armed forces. In the context of infrastructure development, the improvements made in the Lielvārde Military Airfield should be highlighted. The airfield was finally certified and inaugurated for instrumental flights.¹⁰ The airfield also gained new objects – a headquarters building for the US Armed Forces, as well as a maintenance workshop and a storage facility (with a total cost of 3.8 million USD allocated from the US European Deterrence Initiative).¹¹

In terms of equipment, one should note the progress on the process of purchasing six wheeled armored vehicles. An agreement was signed for the purchase of armored vehicles manufactured by the Finnish company “Patria” for about 200 million EUR, which will be enough for the purchase and initial maintenance of more than 200 vehicles, as well as staff training.¹² At the end of the year, Latvia already received its first armored vehicles. It is expected that starting from 2023, these vehicles will be manufactured in Latvia.¹³

Among other additions to the National Armed Forces, one should mention the purchase of 18 used but modernized self-propelled howitzers from Austria. This addition complemented the 47 units of this kind received in 2018.¹⁴ A donation of ammunition intended for use with the howitzers has also been received from the United States.¹⁵ The National Armed Forces have also received sets of emergency medical kits, including specialized tents and medical equipment.¹⁶ Among the orders placed last year, one should note the orders for training simulators for anti-tank rocket launchers,¹⁷ unmanned ground vehicles for explosive ordnance disposal tasks,¹⁸ as well as an order for an amphibious bridge & ferry system.¹⁹ There were reports of delays in the delivery of four new “Black Hawk” helicopters for the National Armed Forces due to the global pandemic. The helicopters will be delivered between 2022 and 2024, thus concluding the delivery about a year later than originally planned.²⁰

The Latvian military industry continued its development as well. In November, for instance, a call for applications for a defense innovation research program was announced.²¹ In September, the company “LMT”, within the framework of the consortium “iMUGS”, presented 5G electronic communication solutions for military needs at Camp Ādaži. The presentation included the unmanned ground combat support system “Natrix” developed by another Latvian company, “SRC Brasa”.²²

Finally, after all the resource planning and supply troubles of previous years,²³ the new State Defense Logistics and Procurement Centre (VALIC) started operating in 2021. It is entrusted with the entire management cycle of defense sector resources, including centralized procurements in the defense sector (although there is a transitional period that will last until 2023). In turn, after the reorganization, the problematically functioning State Centre for Defense Military Sites and Procurement (VAMOIC) is tasked with the development and management of defense infrastructure.²⁴ In the meantime, also last year the State Audit Office revealed problems in the operation of VAMOIC – namely, long-term real estate management that runs contrary to state interests. Moreover, this “management” was conducted in a location which is more than symbolic – it was in the immediate vicinity of the headquarters of the National Armed Forces, thus limiting its own development plans as well.²⁵

DEFENSE PERSONNEL IN LATVIA AND ABROAD: FROM AFGHANISTAN TO KOSOVO AND THE LONG ROAD TO A STATE DEFENSE COURSE IN SCHOOLS

The number of Latvian military personnel continued to grow over the last year. According to estimates compiled by NATO, there should be nearly 7,400 soldiers in Latvia in 2021 (see Figure 4).²⁶ At the same time, data available on the National Armed Forces website at the end of 2021 showed only 6,600 persons engaged in professional service, as well as 8,200 national guard members and 3,000 reserve soldiers (NATO statistics does not include the National Guard, or representatives of similar organizations elsewhere, or reserve troops).²⁷ In NATO statistics, the number of Latvian soldiers ranks it 23rd among Alliance members, placing it behind Lithuania (16,800 soldiers) and ahead of Estonia (6,700 soldiers).²⁸

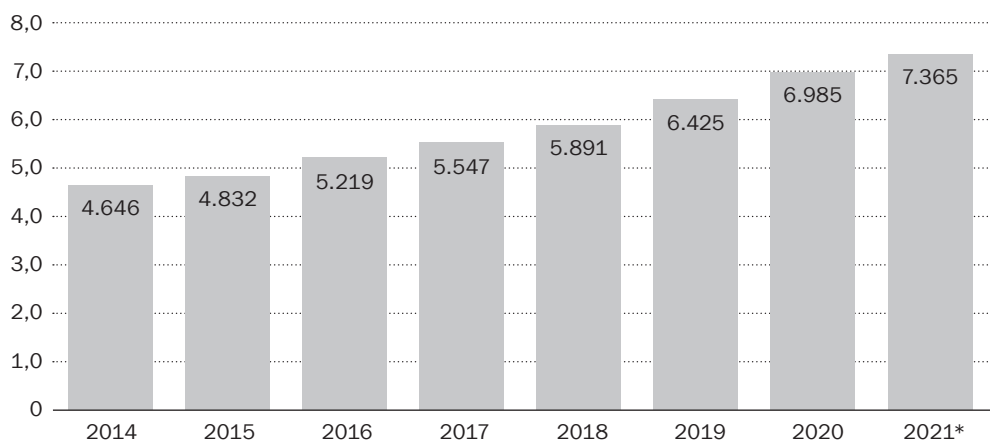


Figure 4. The size dynamic of Latvia's military personnel, in thousands (data from NATO).²⁹

* Estimates for the respective year.

At the same time, an aspect of personnel statistics where Latvia positively stands out among others should be noted, namely, the proportion of women in the armed forces. On average, women make up 12%³⁰ of the national forces of NATO member states, while in the case of Latvia it is 15.3%³¹.

In 2021, there were no significant changes concerning the problems with personnel numbers – more precisely, the actual number of national guards and reserve soldiers³² – which has become topical over recent years. On the other hand, the Ministry of Defense presented the Cabinet of Ministers with a report on progress regarding the introduction of a state defense course (subject) and the development of the Youth Guard. Progress

in preparing for the introduction of the new course is estimated as fine, although there have been difficulties presented by the pandemic; a lack of instructors has also been a challenge (the State Audit Office highlighted this risk last year as well³³). Among other things, the report replicated the controversial presumption that the new course in schools is a cheaper and more comprehensive alternative to the compulsory military service chosen by the other countries in the region: “Although the cost of compulsory service is very high and due to time constraints highly qualified military specialists cannot be prepared in compulsory service, military training has wide coverage in different groups of society and, thus, in general, a significant part of society is prepared to face a potential aggressor”³⁴.

In 2021, Latvia continued its participation in international missions and operations, also marking some symbolic turning points. Firstly, Latvia, along with other NATO members, concluded its nearly two-decade presence in Afghanistan. Soldiers from the National Armed Forces had been deployed in this country since 2003, both as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) until 2014 and thereafter as part of the Resolute Support Mission.³⁵ The withdrawal of US troops and the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as well as the rapid coming to power of the Taliban, has led to a re-evaluation of the usefulness of the efforts and resources invested by Latvia and other countries. However, the experience gained by soldiers in Afghanistan, as well as the solidarity shown to the United States and other NATO allies, the contribution to the Latvian economy, and increased visibility due to the transit of cargo to and from Afghanistan (the Northern Distribution Network), has been substantial enough.

The second significant turning point in Latvia's efforts to promote international stability in 2021 was the return of Latvian troops to Kosovo, where representatives of the National Armed Forces had previously been stationed until 2009. The NATO-led operation KFOR RC-E currently consists of 133 Latvian representatives, making it the largest Latvian foreign deployment at the moment.³⁶ In addition, last year, Latvian military personnel were deployed in EU and UN endeavors in Mali, as well as in the EU-led Operation EUNAVFOR Med and the US-led global coalition against the so-called Islamic State within the Operation Inherent Resolve. However, Latvia's contribution to these missions and operations is rather ornamental, as fewer than 10 Latvian representatives in total participate in all of them.³⁷

Representatives of the National Armed Forces continued to participate in various exercises both in Latvia and abroad. As is customary, the largest military exercise of the year was “Namejs”, gathering representatives of various Latvian institutions and other countries. However, the exercise attracted the public's attention due to a video showing a woman and a child frightened by the noise of shooting in the center of Riga. After the incident, the defense sector gave a rather peculiar view on the freedom of the public and of the internet, as the National Armed Forces called “[...] not to distribute this video, as

well as to delete the already published video [...]”³⁸. This video did not improve the image of the armed forces or of Latvia. However, it is naive to imagine that such a material could be completely removed from the public domain. It would also be worth reconsidering the level of self-criticism and the “pain threshold” of the defense sector, as one will have to reckon with situations of this type occurring in the future.

Finally, in a somewhat paradoxical way, the most significant involvement of the National Armed Forces in strengthening the external border has been conducted on the Belarusian border instead of the Russian border, as a result of the Belarus-instigated migration crisis in the summer and autumn of 2021. The National Armed Forces provided support to the State Border Guard not only in guarding the external border, but also in helping to build a temporary border fence.³⁹ In addition, in response to Belarusian actions, Latvia launched an approximately month-long military exercise in Latgale in November, involving about 3,000 soldiers.⁴⁰

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LATVIA'S DEFENSE: BETWEEN SUPPORT AND ARROGANCE

As in 2020, the global pandemic left an impact on the defense sector in 2021 as well. The vaccination of military personnel against Covid-19 went smoothly over the last year. However, some military personnel were also retired for refusing to receive the vaccine.⁴¹

In order to support the management of the Covid-19 crisis, the defense sector often provided assistance to the State Border Guard in controlling the state border, to the State Police in controlling compliance with the restrictions introduced for the reduction of the spread of Covid-19, and to the health sector in organizing the vaccination process.

One must, however, also mention controversial aspects concerning the defense sector in the context of pandemic. Following problems with logistics in the context of vaccines, at the beginning of the year ideas were voiced to hand over not only the process of vaccine logistics,⁴² but even the entire vaccination process to the National Armed Forces.⁴³ In this respect, notions of superiority and arrogance on the part of the defense sector at times emerged, with the Minister of Defense stating, for instance, that “[a]lso other ministries and civilian institutions must learn to work in the conditions of a crisis”⁴⁴. The capabilities and competencies of the defense sector were emphasized. However, recent problems concerning both pandemic-related and non-pandemic-related procurements in the defense sector were forgotten,⁴⁵ along with the fact that the development of the defense sector in recent years has enjoyed a privileged position compared to other sectors. Such dissonance was also shown in the context of the Informative report on the implementation of the comprehensive defense system in Latvia⁴⁶. In explaining this

issue, the Minister of Defense said that when there is a crisis “[...] everyone is asking the defense sector for help. We want civilian institutions to be able to do more for themselves.”⁴⁷

It is difficult to question the assumption that Latvia has problems with crisis management issues. The Covid-19 crisis has presented a good example in this context. However, cooperation between all institutions is important, including an active involvement on the part of defense sector institutions. In this regard, one should note that at the end of October, the first attempt made in the history of Latvia to activate the Mobilization Law by mobilization in the health sector was unsuccessful.⁴⁸ No mobilization was implemented, and partly as a result of this attempt, the Latvian Medical Association demanded the resignation of the minister of health.⁴⁹ The minister of health retained his post, but questions about Latvia’s crisis management and mobilization systems remain. These questions refer not only to the potential of civilian mobilization support for the defense sector, but also to the ability of the defense sector itself to operate in a real crisis.

Finally, one of the most surprising intentions expressed in 2021 came from the minister of justice – namely, that Covid-19 “[c]risis management should be handed over to crisis management experts from the armed forces [...]”. This initiative was based on the decision-making difficulties encountered in the Crisis Management Council.⁵⁰ This proposal, however, raised questions not only about attempts to evade political responsibility, but also about the balance between civilian and military institutions in democracies.

ALLIES AND THEIR PRESENCE IN LATVIA: NO CHANGES

June 2021 already marked four years since the arrival of the NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Latvia. According to data from NATO, in October, the Canadian-led battle group in Latvia consisted of almost 1,500 soldiers from 10 countries – namely, Canada and nine European NATO member states. Consequently, the battle group stationed in Latvia was still the largest of the four such units stationed in the three Baltic states and Poland.⁵¹ One should also mention the opening of the newly built Headquarters of the Canadian Armed Forces in Rīga, Latvia in June 2021 (its construction costs amounted to 18.5 million CAD) as an event of symbolic significance.⁵²

In addition to the Canadian-led NATO multinational battle group, US troops continued their presence in Latvia on a rotating basis as a part of Operation Atlantic Resolve. In March 2021, 10 US military helicopters arrived at Lielvārde for a new, presumably nine-month rotation.⁵³

Alongside the rotating, but so far constant, presence of foreign troops in Latvia, one could observe a number of other forms of allied solidarity and capability demonstrations. At the turn of March and April, the ports of Liepāja and Rīga welcomed ships from the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 1.⁵⁴ In 2021, strategic US bombers not only carried out training flights over the territory of Latvia,⁵⁵ but also performed their first drop of live aviation munitions from B-52 strategic bombers in the territory of the Ādaži range during an exercise in May.⁵⁶ In turn, in October, the Spilve airfield welcomed the landing of US aircraft, which demonstrated the rapid deployment of a High Mobility Rocket Artillery System (HIMARS).⁵⁷

Finally, Latvia hosted NATO foreign ministers at the end of November and beginning of December. Among other things, Latvia received solid statements of solidarity from NATO allies. The activities of the Russian armed forces around Ukraine, along with the Belarus-instigated migrant crisis, also handily underlined the necessity of having NATO allied armed forces in the Baltics.

THE SECURITY AND DEFENSE OF CYBERSPACE IN LATVIA: BETWEEN PROGRESS AND SPACE FOR MORE PROGRESS

The year 2021 marked 10 years since the entry into force of the Law on the Security of Information Technologies, which, among other things, decreed the establishment of the Information Technology Security Incident Response Institution (CERT.LV) and the establishment of a system of critical information technologies infrastructure. Eight years have also passed since the establishment of the Cyber Defense Unit of the National Guard.

Comparing national defense capabilities in cyberspace is significantly more difficult than in the physical space. In cyberspace, actors at different levels that exert a significant impact interact with each other on a constant basis – from individuals and cybercrime groups to national armed forces. Consequently, the range of subjects at risk and potential opponents is much wider. The perception of feeling secure can also be misleading in cyberspace, as dangerous incidents can occur without the victim's awareness, or they can occur quickly and without any previous indications.

Notwithstanding the complexity of measuring security in cyberspace, there are various indexes in which countries are compared and ranked. The methodology of these indexes differs, but common trends are clear enough. In general, Latvia looks decent at the global level. However, when comparing Latvia's position with its closest neighbors, Lithuania and Estonia, in three such rankings, it is clear that Latvia lags behind both (see Table 1).

According to the *Global Cybersecurity Index* from the International Telecommunication Union, Latvia has a room for progress concerning its organizational efforts (as do Lithuania and Estonia). In this index, Latvia lags behind both neighboring countries in terms of technical measures and capacity building.⁵⁸ In turn, in the view of the creators of the *National Cyber Security Index*, Latvia falls behind most in contributing to the global cyber security, in protecting digital services, and in its military cyber capabilities.⁵⁹ As for the *National Cyber Power Index* compiled by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Latvia is not even included in it, while Estonia and Lithuania are. The authors of that index explain that they chose the 30 analyzed countries, among other things, by the fact that the selected ones “[...] have indicated, either overtly or covertly, their desire to be considered as a cyber power”⁶⁰. This aspect could be explained by Latvia’s lack of strategic ambitions in the international environment, as noted in the previous index.

Table 1. Comparison of the Baltic states in international cyber security indexes (rank).

	Global Cybersecurity Index 2020 (International Telecommunication Union) ⁶¹	National Cyber Security Index (e-Governance Academy Foundation, Estonia) ⁶²	National Cyber Power Index 2020, in the category of the most comprehensive cyber powers (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School) ⁶³
Estonia	3	3	14
Latvia	15	25	–
Lithuania	6	5	27

Meanwhile, the year 2021 did not bring about any major incidents in Latvian cyberspace. As technical and virtual solutions made in other parts of the world are for the most part used in Latvia as well, the situation concerning incidents in general was similar to trends elsewhere. In other words, Latvian residents, companies, and state institutions were exposed to the same risks as other countries.

In the first three quarters of the year, the three most common types of threats in Latvia were configuration insufficiencies, malicious code, and intrusion attempts. Against the background of the Covid-19 pandemic, one can identify fraudulent activities in cyberspace – for instance, when cybercriminals pretend to be the providers of services that have become more relevant during the pandemic,⁶⁴ as well as the disruptions in public online services directly and indirectly related to vaccinations that occurred in February. Among the incidents that had an impact on in physical space, one can note the

interruption of train traffic in March at the Rīga Central Railway Station as a result of a microprocessor failure.⁶⁵

In September 2021, the name of Latvia gained a negative connotation at the international level as a result of the use of routers manufactured by the Latvian company “MikroTik” in large-scale botnet attacks. These attacks exploited a vulnerability that had already been discovered in 2018 but was not addressed by all users as recommended by the manufacturer. This botnet was given the name “Mēris” (Plague).⁶⁶

Just as there are exercises conducted in physical space, various types of exercises with the participation of Latvian institutions are carried out in cyberspace as well. Among other events, in April, Latvia participated in the “Locked Shields 2021” exercise, which is considered to be the world’s largest cybersecurity exercise (organized by the Tallinn based NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence, in cooperation with partners from Estonia and other countries).⁶⁷

The issue of human resources has been voiced as one of the challenges for Latvia. CERT.LV employs more than 30 people, but according to the head of the institution, this number of employees is not sufficient. The level of remuneration of employees also remains insufficient.⁶⁸ Although the Cyber Defense Unit of the National Guard has also grown in recent years, it faces a lack of human resources as well. Cyber defense units have not yet been established in all National Guard brigades over the last eight years, although that work is underway.⁶⁹

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: GROWTH CONTINUES, BUT ROOM FOR PROGRESS IS NOT DECREASING

Overall, the year 2021 was another year of growth for the Latvian defense sector. Funding continued to increase, and thus a wide range of development opportunities remained. The steady rate at which the country exceeds the NATO guideline of 2% of GDP for defense funding has allowed it to continue a number of development projects, one of the most important of these being progress on the delivery of the six wheeled armored vehicles. Along with the certification of instrumental flights, Lielvārde Airfield has finally become a full-fledged military air traffic support base and a potential support base for civilian needs as well. It is also important to note the implementation of reforms to the resource planning and supply system for the defense sector after a number of problems, although problems still remain to be solved.

The number of military personnel continued to increase gradually. Latvia’s alternative path to promoting greater involvement of members of society in national defense was

also moving forward. It should conclude in 2024 with the introduction of a state defense course in schools. There was progress in this regard; however, problems concerning the availability of instructors became more visible.

The Covid-19 pandemic and Belarus both continued to present paradoxes. A curfew and an (unsuccessful) mobilization attempt were enacted in response to the spread of a disease instead of as a response to a military conflict. The defense sector ensured a smooth vaccination process for its personnel and provided support to other sectors as well. In discussions on support for civilian institutions, however, there were aspects of arrogance and superiority displayed on the part of the defense sector. There was even the idea of handing over all Covid-19 crisis management to the National Armed Forces. Meanwhile, the migrant crisis caused by Belarus led to the necessity of strengthening the Belarussian border, which had long been considered relatively safe. In order to ensure this, the armed forces were involved. In addition, the most significant involvement of the National Armed Forces on the eastern border so far occurred on the border with Belarus, rather than Russia.

In 2021, Latvian troops, along with the troops of other NATO member states, left Afghanistan but returned to Kosovo. The allied presence in Latvia continued on a steady basis, both as a part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia and as part of a US military presence outside of NATO's multinational battle group.

Cyberspace faced the effects of the pandemic as well, with cybercriminals taking advantage of habits and services that have become more popular as a result of the pandemic. In international rankings, Latvia retains decent scores, although it falls behind both Lithuania and the well-known success story of Estonia. Although these ratings are relatively subjective, they show overall trends well. Latvia should continue to increase the number of cyber defense specialists and the resources available to them. It should also strive for wider international positioning and should contribute to solving cyber problems on a global scale, similarly to Estonia and Lithuania. In other words, Latvia should increase its ambitions on issues of cyber security and cyberspace governance.

In a way, the same is true for military defense. There, the Latvian situation can be viewed by applying either the principle of "a glass half-empty" or "a glass half-full". The progress is undeniable. However, the superiority of the military capabilities of potential aggressors, such as Russia and Belarus, is obvious as well. The closest NATO allies, Lithuania and Estonia, are also ahead in various respects: one can refer to both the armored vehicles that have been in Estonia's possession for a long time already or their recently purchased state-of-the-art naval mines (not to mention the recent decision to purchase coastal defense missiles), or Lithuania's most recent purchase of more state-of-the-art armored fighting vehicles and medium-range air defense system. Lithuanians and Estonians, who have received mandatory military service training, are also expanding the pool of human resources available for engagement by neighboring countries in crisis

situations. Meanwhile, Latvia is still about three years away from the full implementation of its distinct approach – namely, the introduction of a state defense course at schools. Also, unlike the case of Latvia, NATO allied military aircrafts continue to patrol, taking off from the airfields of both neighboring countries. Moreover, Lithuania has already welcomed the third rotation of a battalion-level unit of US troops.

Consequently, the Latvian defense sector should not only highlight its success stories, but also learn more from its neighbors and other countries. At the national level, the defense sector should also use its privileged position and the fact that it is funded from the state budget to support other sectors without undue pretenses.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This article is a translation from the Latvian version of this publication. This article is based on information available to the public as of 1 December 2021. It presents a continuation to the article in the previous yearbook and extends it with cyber defense issues: Andžāns, M., “Latvia’s defence: still gradually advancing” in *Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2021*, Sprūds A., Broka, S., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2021, https://www.lai.lv/publikacijas/latvian-foreign-and-security-policy-yearbook-2021-902?get_file=1.
- ² “Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2014-2021)”, NATO, 11.06.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2021/pr-2021-094-en.xlsx>, table 3.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid, table 1.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid, table 2.
- ⁷ Ibid, table 8a.
- ⁸ Ibid, table 3.
- ⁹ “2022. gada budžets stiprinās Latvijas drošību un industrijas attīstību”, Finanšu ministrija, 21.10.2021. Accessed November 26, 2021. <https://www.fm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/2022-gada-budzets-stiprinas-latvijas-drosibu-un-industrijas-attistibu>.
- ¹⁰ “Militāro lidlauku “Lielvārde” atklās instrumentālajiem lidojumiem”, Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 23.09.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/zinas/militaro-lidlauku-lielvarde-atklas-instrumentalajiem-lidojumem>.
- ¹¹ “Nacionālo bruņoto spēku Aviācijas bāzē atklās jaunu infrastruktūru,” Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 11.09. 2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/zinas/nacionalo-brunoto-speku-aviacijas-baze-atklas-jaunu-infrastrukturu>.
- ¹² “Latvija un Somija paraksta vispārīgo vienošanos par “Patria” 6x6 bruņumašīnu iegādi”, Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 27.08.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/zinas/latvija-un-somija-paraksta-visparigo-vienosanos-par-patria-6x6-brunumasinu-iegadi>.
- ¹³ “‘Patria Latvia’: No 2023. gada 6x6 transportlīdzekļi tiks ražoti un komplektēti Latvijā”, Sargs.lv, 01.09.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/uznemejdarbiba-un-inovacijas/2021-09-01/patria-latvia-no-2023-gada-6x6-transportlidzekli-tiks>.
- ¹⁴ LETA., “Latvijai piegādātas papildu 18 pašgājējhaubices”, Sargs.lv, 27.07.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/tehnika-un-ekipejums/2021-07-27/latvijai-piegadatas-papildu-18-pasgajejhaubices>.

- ¹⁵ "Nacionālie bruņotie spēki saņēmuši ASV munīcijas dāvinājumu", Aizsardzības ministrija, 03.06.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/zinas/nacionalie-brunotie-speki-sanemusi-asv-municijas-davinajumu>.
- ¹⁶ "NBS saņēmuši pirmos ROLE1 līmeņa neatliekamās medicīniskās palīdzības ekipējuma komplektus", Sargs.lv, 21.05.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-05-21/nbs-sanemusi-pirmos-role1-limena-neatliekamas-mediciniskas-palidzibas-ekipejuma>.
- ¹⁷ "Latvija no Zviedrijas partneriem pirks prettanku granātšāvēju "Carl Gustaf" mācību simulatorus", Aizsardzības ministrija, 07.05.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/zinas/latvija-no-zviedrijas-partneriem-pirks-prettanku-granatsaveju-carl-gustaf-macibu-simulatorus>.
- ¹⁸ "Uzņēmums "Telerob" NBS piegādās bezpilota sauszemes robotus inženiertehniskajam atbalstam", Sargs.lv, 19.10.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-10-19/uznemums-telerob-nbs-piegadas-bezpilota-sauszemes-robotus-inzeniertehniskajam>.
- ¹⁹ "General Dynamics European Land Systems' piegādās NBS M3 amfibijas un pontontiltu sistēmas", Sargs.lv, 25.10.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-10-25/general-dynamics-european-land-systems-piegadas-nbs-m3-amfibijas-un-pontontiltu>.
- ²⁰ LETA., "Pandēmijas dēļ aizkavēšies helikopteru 'Black Hawk' piegādes NBS", Sargs.lv, 03.11.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/tehnika-un-ekipejums/2021-11-03/pandemijas-del-aizkavesies-helikopteru-black-hawk-piegades-nbs>.
- ²¹ "Izsludināts valsts pētījumu programmas 'Aizsardzības inovāciju pētījumu programmas' projektu pieteikumu atklātais konkurss", Latvijas Zinātnes padome, 01.11.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://lzp.gov.lv/2021/11/01/izsludinats-valsts-petijumu-programmas-aizsardzibas-inovaciju-petijumu-programmas-projektu-pieteikumu-atklatais-konkurss/>.
- ²² "LMT projekta 'iMUGS' ietvaros demonstrēs 5G potenciālu autonomo militāro risinājumu lietošanā", Sargs.lv, 23.11.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/uznemejdarbiba-un-inovacijas/2021-09-23/lmt-projekta-imugs-ietvaros-demonstres-5g-potencialu>.
- ²³ For instance: "Nacionālo bruņoto spēku nodrošinājuma plānošanas un apgādes sistēmas darbības efektivitāte. Valsts kontroles revīzijas ziņojuma kopsavilkums – Rīga 2018. gada janvāris," Valsts kontrole, https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/lv/getrevisionfile//uploads/reviziju-zinojumi/2016/2.4.1-9_2016/NBS-apgade-kopsavilkums-2018-01-31.pdf; "Vai Jaunsardzes attīstības ceļš ir kvalitatīvs?", 2018, https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/lv/getrevisionfile//uploads/reviziju-zinojumi/2017/2.4.1-16_2017/RZ_Jaunsardze_18mai18_izlabotais_bez%20IP.pdf; "Lēmums Nr. 4-1.2/18-198/2", Iepirkumu uzraudzības birojs, Iesniegumu izskatīšanas komisija, 11.01.2019, <https://pvs.iub.gov.lv/uploads/files/lemumi/562838/lem562838.pdf>.
- ²⁴ "Darbu sāk Valsts aizsardzības loģistikas un iepirkumu centrs", Aizsardzības ministrija, 15.01.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/zinas/darbu-sak-valsts-aizsardzibas-logistikas-un-iepirkumu-centrs>.
- ²⁵ "Vai īpašumu Rīgā, Krustabaznīcas ielā 11 aizsardzības resors pārvaldījis valsts interesēs? Starppziņojums", Valsts kontrole, 2021, <https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/lv/getrevisionfile/29555-bPxQ-i0BjbDjrGu9taUyBkfjET-Kk29Ew.pdf>, p.5.
- ²⁶ "Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2014–2021)", NATO, 11.06.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2021/pr-2021-094-en.xlsx>, table 7.
- ²⁷ "Par NBS", Nacionālie bruņotie spēki. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/par-mums>.
- ²⁸ "Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2014–2021)", NATO, 11.06.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2021/pr-2021-094-en.xlsx>, table 7.
- ²⁹ Ibid., Table 7.
- ³⁰ "The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020", NATO, 16.03.2021, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/sgar20-en.pdf, p. 106.

- ³¹ LETA, "Latvijas armijā kaujinieču nav, taču armijā sievietes komandē kuģu apkalpes un vada bruņutehniku", Delfi.lv, 20.06.2021. Accessed November 22, 2021. <https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/latvijas-armija-kaujiniecu-nav-tacu-armija-sievietes-komande-kugu-apkalpes-un-vada-brunutehniku.d?id=53318777>.
- ³² For instance: "Valsts kontrole atturas vērtēt, vai ar piešķirto finansējumu ir sasniegts plānotais progress Zemessardzes attīstībā", Valsts kontrole, 03.09.2020. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/valsts-kontrole-atturas-vertet-vai-ar-pieskirto-financejumu-ir-sasniegts-planotais-progress-zemessardzes-attistiba>.
- ³³ "Par Aizsardzības ministrijas 2020.gada pārskatu", Valsts kontrole, 2021, <https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/lv/getrevisionfile/29456-E-h0nxcFlhHpRSgfUUaMvO4lN4lRbmVj.pdf>, p. 11.
- ³⁴ "Informatīvais ziņojums 'Par valsts aizsardzības mācības ieviešanas pirmajiem rezultātiem un uzlabojumiem Jaunsardzē'", 10.08.2021, http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2021_08/AiMzin_070621_VAMun-JS.1604.docx, p. 7, 1.
- ³⁵ "Iepriekšējās operācijas", Nacionālie bruņotie spēki. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/aktualitates-un-macibas/starptautiskas-operacijas/ieprieksejas-operacijas>.
- ³⁶ "Pašreizējās operācijas", Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 17.08. 2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/aktualitates-un-macibas/starptautiskas-operacijas/pasreizejas-operacijas>.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ "Nacionālie bruņotie spēki aicina plašsaziņas līdzekļus un sabiedrību neizplatīt video, kurā redzams, kā sieviete ar bērnu pārbīstas no šāviena", Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 17.09. 2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. [https://www.mil.lv/lv/zinas/nacionalie-brunotie-speki-aicina-plassazinas-lidzeklus-un-sabiedribu-neizplatit-video-kura](https://www.mil.lv/lv/zinas/nacionalie-brunotie-speki-aicina-plassazinas-lidzeklus-un-sabiedribu-neizplatit-video-kura-redzams-ka-sieviete-ar-bernu-parbitas-no-saviena).
- ³⁹ "NBS kaujas inženieri uz Latvijas robežas ar Baltkrieviju izbūvē pirmo pagaidu žoga posmu", Sargs.lv, 29.09.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/latvija/2021-09-29/nbs-kaujas-inzenieri-uz-latvijas-robezas-ar-baltkrieviju-izbuve-pirmo-pagaidu>.
- ⁴⁰ "Pabriks uzdevis bruņotajiem spēkiem sākt mācības netālu no Baltkrievijas robežas", LSM.lv, 14.11.2021. Accessed November 17, 2021. <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/pabriks-uzdevis-brunotajiem-spekiem-sakt-macibas-netalu-no-baltkrievijas-robezas.a430251/>.
- ⁴¹ LETA., "Atvaļināti pieci NBS karavīri, kas atteikušies vakcinēties pret Covid-19", Sargs.lv, 21.10.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-10-21/atvalinati-pieci-nbs-karaviri-kas-atteikusies-vakcineties-pret-covid-19>.
- ⁴² "Pabriks: Nacionālie bruņotie spēki piedāvās Veselības ministrijai pārņemt vakcinācijas pret Covid-19 loģistiku", Aizsardzības ministrija, 14.01.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/zinas/pabriks-nacionalie-brunotie-speki-piedavas-veselibas-ministrijai-parnemt-vakcinacijas-pret>; LETA., "Kariņš rosina vakcīnu loģistiku uzticēt bruņotajiem spēkiem", Sargs.lv, 11.03.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/latvija/2021-03-11/karins-rosina-vakcinu-logistiku-uzticet-brunotajiem-spekiem>.
- ⁴³ "Pabriks: Armija vienmēr gatava palīdzēt civilajam sektoram, taču nevar būt ielāps visam", Sargs.lv, 17.03.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-03-17/pabriks-armija-vienmer-gatava-palidzet-civilajam-sektoram-tacu-nevar-ielaps-visam>.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ In April 2020, the defense sector assumed responsibility for the pandemic-related procurement of material reserves and the management of these reserves. In the opinion of the State Audit Office, this procurement process became too complicated and difficult to comprehend, and in some cases the purchases were made at obviously higher prices than the same goods could be purchased elsewhere; the needs for procurable goods were not fully identified either ("Ne visos gadījumos rada pārliecību par ekonomiski pamatotiem lēmumiem, veicot COVID-19 aizsarglīdzekļu iepirkumus", Valsts kontrole, 17.08.2020. Accessed November 17, 2021. <https://www.lrvk.gov>.

lv/lv/aktualitates/ne-visos-gadījumos-rada-parliecību-par-ekonomiski-pamatotiem-lemumiem-veicot-covid-19-aizsarglīdzekļu-iepirkumus.).

See also footnote 23.

- ⁴⁶ "Informatīvais ziņojums 'Par visaptverošas valsts aizsardzības sistēmas ieviešanas progresu'", 18.03.2021. http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2021_03/AiMzin_010221.398.docx.
- ⁴⁷ LETA., "Pabliks: Civilās institūcijas patlaban nav līdz galam gatavas krīžu pārvarēšanai", Sargs.lv, 18.03.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/sabiedriba/2021-03-18/pabliks-civilas-institucijas-patlaban-nav-lidz-galam-gatavas-krizu>.
- ⁴⁸ "VM jau piektdien plāno valdībai iesniegt pieprasījumu mobilizācijas izsludināšanai", Sargs.lv, 26.10.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nozares-politika/2021-10-26/vm-jau-piektdien-plano-valdibai-iesniegt-pieprasijumu-mobilizacijas>.
- ⁴⁹ "Latvijas Ārstu biedrība pieprasa veselības ministra Daniela Pavluta demisiju", Latvijas Ārstu biedrība, Accessed November 17, 2021. <https://www.arstubiedriba.lv/latvijas-arstu-biedriba-pieprasa-veselibas-ministra-daniela-pavluta-demisiju/>.
- ⁵⁰ "Bordāns ierosina COVID-19 krīzes vadību nodot ekspertiem no bruņotajiem spēkiem", Jaunā konservatīvā partija, 18.10.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://konservativie.lv/2021/10/18/bordans-ierosina-covid-19-krizes-vadibu-nodot-ekspertiem-no-brunotajiem-spekiem/>.
- ⁵¹ "NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence", NATO, 03.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/2103-factsheet_efp_en.pdf, p. 1–2.
- ⁵² "Rīgā atklās Kanādas bruņoto spēku pavēlniecības Latvijā štāba ēku", Aizsardzības ministrija, 28.06.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/zinas/liga-atklas-kanadas-brunoto-speku-pavelniecibas-latvija-staba-eku>.
- ⁵³ "Latvijā ierodas nākamā ASV operācijas 'Atlantic Resolve' rotācija", Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 26.03.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/zinas/latvija-ierodas-nakama-asv-operacijas-atlantic-resolve-rotacija-1>.
- ⁵⁴ "NATO 1. pastāvīgā jūras pretmīnu grupa ierodas Latvijā", Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 26.03.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/zinas/nato-1-pastaviga-juras-pretminu-grupa-ierodas-latvija>.
- ⁵⁵ "ASV stratēģiskie bumbvedēji veikuši treniņlidojumus Baltijas jūras reģiona gaisa telpā", Nacionālie bruņotie spēki, 03.03.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.mil.lv/lv/zinas/asv-strategiskie-bumbvedeji-veikusi-treninlidojumus-baltijas-juras-regiona-gaisa-telpa-0>.
- ⁵⁶ "Pirmo reizi Ādažu poligonā bombardēšanu veic ASV stratēģiskie bumbvedēji 'B-52'", Sargs.lv, 23.05.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/militaras-macibas/2021-05-23/pirmo-reizi-adazu-poligona-bombardesanu-veic-asv-strategiskie>.
- ⁵⁷ "ASV Latvijā demonstrē augstas mobilitātes raķešu artilērijas sistēmas atgādāšanu un ātru izvēršanu", Sargs.lv, 25.10.2021. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/militaras-macibas/2021-10-25/asv-latvija-demonstre-augstas-mobilitates-rakesu-artilerijas-sistemas>.
- ⁵⁸ "Global Cybersecurity Index 2020", International Telecommunication Union, 2021. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.itu.int/epublications/publication/global-cybersecurity-index-2020/en/>.
- ⁵⁹ NCSI – National Cyber Security Index. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://ncsi.ega.ee/ncsi-index/?order=rank>.
- ⁶⁰ Voo, J., Hemani, I., Jones, S., DeSombre, W., Cassidy, D., Schwarzenbach, A., "National Cyber Power Index 2020. Methodology and Analytical Considerations", Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/NCPI_2020.pdf, p. 6.
- ⁶¹ "Global Cybersecurity Index 2020", International Telecommunication Union, 2021. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.itu.int/epublications/publication/global-cybersecurity-index-2020/en/>.

- ⁶² NCSI - National Cyber Security Index. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://ncsi.ega.ee/ncsi-index/?order=rank>.
- ⁶³ Voo, J., Hemani, I., Jones, S., DeSombre, W., Cassidy, D., Schwarzenbach, A., "National Cyber Power Index 2020. Methodology and Analytical Considerations", Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/NCPI_2020.pdf, p. 11.
- ⁶⁴ "Publiskais pārskats par CERT.LV uzdevumu izpildi. 2021. gada 1. ceturksnis (01.01.2021.–31.03.2021.)", CERT.LV, https://www.cert.lv/uploads/parskati/CERTLV-C1-2021_publ.pdf, p. 4, 15; "Publiskais pārskats par CERT.LV uzdevumu izpildi. 2021. gada 2. ceturksnis (01.04.2021.–30.06.2021.)", CERT.LV, <https://www.cert.lv/uploads/parskati/cert-ceturksna-Q2-atskaite-2021.pdf>, p. 4, 15; "Publiskais pārskats par CERT.LV uzdevumu izpildi 2021. gada 3. ceturksnis (01.07.2021.–30.09.2021.)", https://www.cert.lv/uploads/parskati/CERT-LV-Q3_2021_publ.pdf, p. 4, 14.
- ⁶⁵ "Publiskais pārskats par CERT.LV uzdevumu izpildi. 2021. gada 1. ceturksnis (01.01.2021.–31.03.2021.)", https://www.cert.lv/uploads/parskati/CERTLV-C1-2021_publ.pdf, p. 17.
- ⁶⁶ "Kiberlaikapstākļi (SEPTEMBRIS)", CERT.LV, 8.10.2021. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://www.cert.lv/lv/2021/10/kiberlaikapstakli-septembris>.
- ⁶⁷ "Publiskais pārskats par CERT.LV uzdevumu izpildi. 2021. gada 2. ceturksnis (01.04.2021.–30.06.2021.)", CERT.LV, <https://www.cert.lv/uploads/parskati/cert-ceturksna-Q2-atskaite-2021.pdf>, p. 5.
- ⁶⁸ LETA., "‘Cert.lv’ izjūt cilvēkresursu trūkumu", Sargs.lv, 22.03.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/latvija/2021-03-22/certlv-izjut-cilvekresursu-trukumu>.
- ⁶⁹ "‘Neredzami karotāji’ – ZS Kiberaizsardzības vienība aicina komandā IT speciālistus Rīgā un reģionos", 20.08.2021. Accessed November 12, 2021. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/nbs/2021-08-20/neredzami-karotaji-zs-kiberaizsardzibas-vieniba-aicina-komanda-it-specialistus-riga>.

THE YEAR OF BELARUS IN LATVIA AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: FROM A PROBLEMATIC NEIGHBOR TO A THREAT THAT IS THERE TO STAY ALSO IN 2022

Evija Djatkoviča

Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs

In the group of countries that make up the European Union's Eastern Partnership initiative, the year 2021 was marked by escalating situation in Belarus. The post-election crisis of 2020 exacerbated, and it made itself felt beyond national borders in 2021. The forced landing of a passenger plane in Minsk in the spring of 2021 became a wake-up call to the European Union and demonstrated the unpredictability of the Belarusian leader as well as the transnational nature of the domestic political events in this neighboring country. The unexpected migrant crisis, in turn, became a serious challenge for Latvia and other states bordering Belarus, thus illustrating the hitherto insufficient risk assessment in their relationship with this authoritarian state. In the span of a year, Belarus went from being a problematic neighbor to becoming a threat on a national and regional scale, raising concerns about further developments in this country and their impact on the situation in the region in 2022 and beyond.

BELARUS, THE EUROPEAN UNION, AND LATVIA: MORE UPHEAVALS, MORE DECISIVENESS, AND MORE SOLIDARITY?

In 2021, in response to the landing of the passenger plane by Belarus, the EU's determination to impose tougher sanctions increased. Latvia, together with the other Baltic States, mainly Lithuania, played an important role in this process. They took the lead in promoting the European Union's common sanctions policy towards Belarus. The first three sanction rounds aimed at individuals and certain economic players that were adopted in 2020, mainly for the purposes of sending diplomatic signals, were complemented by the closure of European airspace to Belarusian air carriers and by the introduction of economic sanctions.¹ The impact of sanctions in 2020 accounted for less than 1% of Belarusian gross domestic product, while in 2021 it is projected to reach 2.7%.² At the end of the year, the European Union launched its fifth package of sanctions. Given the type of sanctions, their real impact could reveal itself only over a longer period of time, becoming more visible in 2022. It could become clearer whether the economic pressure has proved to be a sufficient and generally effective way to influence the regime's behavior, or whether, on the contrary, they will lead to new foreign policy gambles and domestic political repressions.

As Belarusian international isolation continued and economic pressures increased, in the summer of 2021 the country launched a new form of aggression against its neighbors – both the member states of the European Union individually and the European Union as a whole. By orchestrating a large-scale flow of people from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa to the Belarusian border with Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia, Belarus has produced a migration crisis. As a result of this so-called hybrid aggression from Belarus, in 2021 several hundred people entered Latvia and several thousand people entered Lithuania. At the end of the year, the migration crisis, which will stretch into 2022, progressed into a serious military escalation on the Polish-Belarusian border due to the involvement of the armed forces on both sides. In the framework of the crisis, Belarus also announced the suspension of its participation in the Eastern Partnership initiative³ and the readmission agreement with the European Union.⁴

If the position of the Belarusian authorities remains stable, the country's relations with its western neighbors, Latvia among them, and with the European Union in general are likely to remain problematic in 2022 and beyond. The constitutional reform in Belarus that is due next year, the country's ever-closer integration with Russia and its need to demonstrate the usefulness of Belarus and its authorities to the neighboring superpower, as well as the economically strained conditions in the country, could result in new Belarusian attempts to escalate and review relations with the countries in the region. From this perspective, 2022 could become a testing year to evaluate the decisiveness and solidarity of the European Union. Further Belarusian foreign policy activities could

lead to a closer consolidation of the 27 member states, but they might equally break their unity. In these circumstances, and also in a broader context, Latvia's strategic interest in promoting a unified and joint EU position in solving various issues, especially ones concerning the regional security, remains unchanged.

LATVIA AND BELARUS: A 180-DEGREE SHIFT IN THE COUNTRY BILATERAL RELATIONS WITHOUT A PROSPECT FOR CHANGE

Latvian bilateral relations with its eastern neighbor experienced a further deterioration and a significant shift in their direction without any particular prospects for improvement. In the spring of 2021, political contacts and diplomatic relations between the countries were almost completely severed. The breaking point was experienced during the Ice Hockey World Championship in Riga, when the mayor of Riga, in the presence of the foreign minister, replaced the official flag of Belarus with the white-red flag used by the opposition. The event gained wide attention both in Latvia and abroad. In response to the incident, Belarus demanded the expulsion of all but one Latvian diplomat, and it received an equivalent request from Latvia.⁵ In this way, Latvian-Belarusian relations reached an all-time low this year.

The migration crisis initiated by Belarus also contributed to significant changes in the way Latvia perceives Belarus within the framework of regional security. The Belarusian-Russian military tandem has always been a focus of Latvia's attention, but until 2021, Belarus had not been perceived as a direct and immediate threat. In the field of security, the countries successfully cooperated in border controls, the prevention of smuggling, and arms control.⁶ The migration crisis of 2021, in turn, demonstrated Latvia's erroneous approach to building trust-based security relations with Belarus without adequate preparations, and it changed Latvia's perspective.⁷ It is likely that the migration crisis will serve as a lesson. And the cautious approach in dealing with neighboring countries, namely, third countries, will be maintained in the context of the planning and implementation of security not only in 2022, but also in the more distant future.

Events in Belarus have also had an impact on bilateral economic cooperation. However, the effects of the crisis are not entirely separable from those caused by other factors.

In 2021, Belarus continued to play an important role in the Latvian transit sector, though its decline continued also this year (see Chart 1). The decline in transit cargo took place both in the railway segment, where Belarus supplies one-fifth of the cargo volume, and in the port segment. The total volume of transit cargo transported by rail decreased by more than 10%,⁸ and the volume of transit cargo in Latvian seaports decreased by almost a quarter.⁹

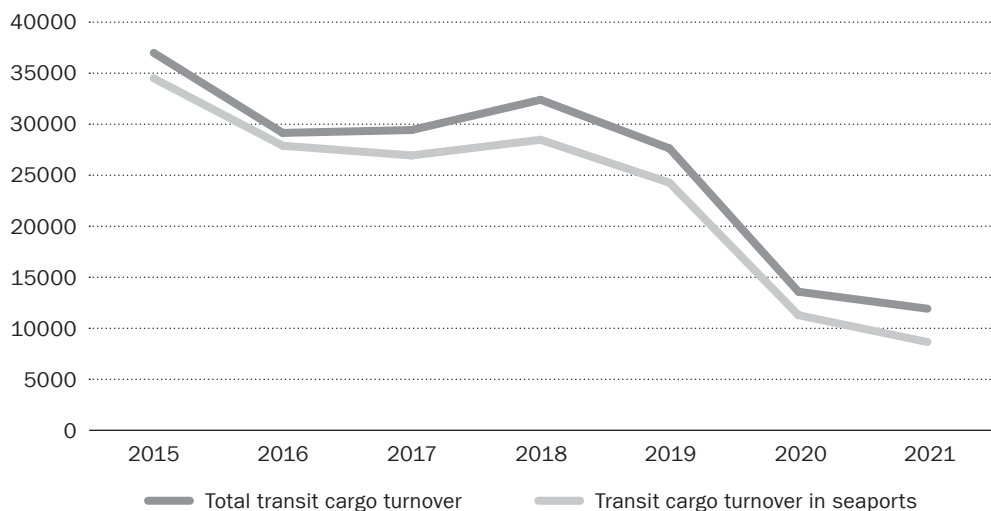


Chart 1: Comparison of railway cargo turnover by types between January and September, 2011-2021 (thousands of tons)¹⁰

Total trade relations with this neighboring country slightly increased. However, this was due to a significant increase in imports. The growth of imports has reached its highest level in recent years, exceeding the volume of Latvia's exports to the neighboring country by more than 60% (see Chart 2).¹¹ At the same time, Latvia's exports to Belarus fell by almost one-third.¹² While the negative trade balance remained, the share held by Belarus in Latvia's trade increased insignificantly this year.¹³

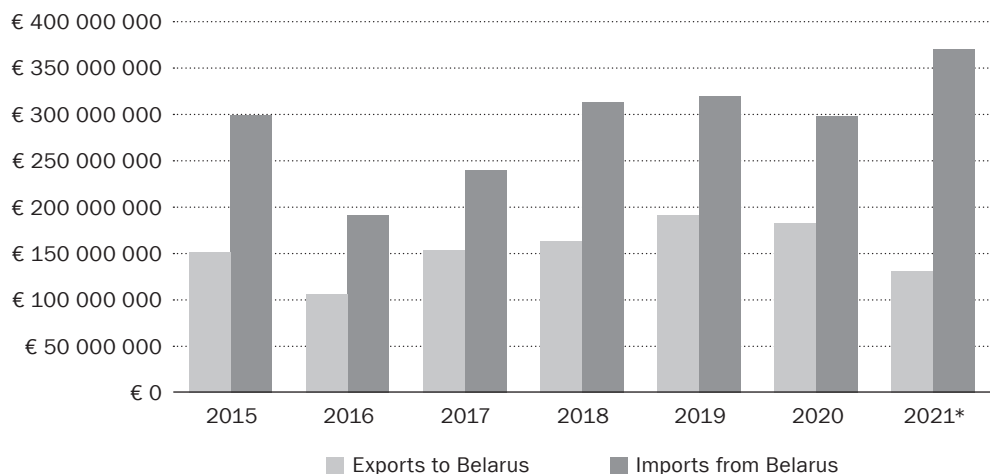


Chart 2: Latvia's exports to Belarus and imports from Belarus to Latvia (millions of EUR).

* Data as of 16 November 2021.¹⁴

The flow of direct investment from Belarus to Latvia also increased. By June 2021, the amount of accumulated investment from Belarus already exceeded the total amount of accumulated investment at the end of 2020 (see Chart 3). The increase in accumulated investment was 17% compared to the same period last year.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Latvia's investment in Belarus declined in 2021.¹⁶ The share held by the neighboring country in Latvia's total investment portfolio, although growing, remained low and in 2021 accounted for only about 0.5% of all investments in Latvia. Latvia's investment in Belarus, in turn, accounted for 3.4% of the country's total investment flow.

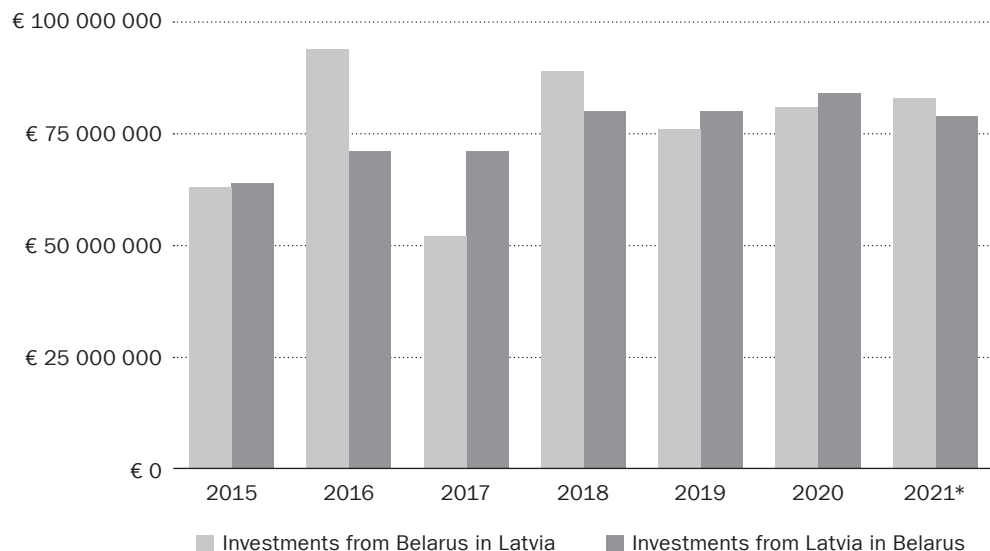


Chart 3: Direct investment from Latvia in Belarus and from Belarus in Latvia (millions of EUR).

* Data for the first two quarters of 2021.¹⁷

Overall, it can be concluded that no significant changes in Latvian bilateral relations with Belarus are to be expected in 2022. They will remain minimal politically and are likely to continue to shrink economically, especially in the transit sector. The substitution of the flag and the freeze in diplomatic relations transformed Latvia from a moderate commentator to a visible participant in the Belarusian crisis. On the one hand, the room for maneuver available to small countries in foreign policy crises is limited, meaning that symbolic gestures are one of the few practical measures these countries can resort to. On the other hand, the positive dynamics of political relations so far, the pragmatic approach to the initial stage of resolving the post-election crisis in Belarus, the high diplomatic cost of action, and the low practical utility of such action indicate somewhat rash behavior on the part of Latvia. This could hamper not only interstate contacts, but also, possibly, economic cooperation in 2022 and beyond, with A. Lukashenka remaining in power.

At the same time, political decisiveness and geographical proximity might encourage further investment and an influx of human capital from Belarus. However, the amount of investment will be closely related to Latvia's competitiveness in the context of work and life in general when compared to other countries in the region.

THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FROM A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE: A CHANGE OF FOCUS FOR LATVIA, A CROSSROADS BETWEEN STRONGER EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE FURTHER ALIENATION OF MEMBERS FOR THE PARTNERSHIP

The other countries in the EU Eastern Partnership initiative experienced different courses of events in 2021. In Ukraine, the establishment of the "Crimea Platform" to bring renewed attention to the occupation of Crimea became the focal foreign policy event. Latvia and the other Baltic States became active supporters of the platform.¹⁸ In 2021, Latvia strengthened bilateral relations and actively advocated for Ukraine's interests in international organizations, mainly in the European Union and NATO. A wide range of political actors were involved in the building of these relations – from representatives of parliament to the president of the state.¹⁹ In 2021, Ukraine became the closest political partner of Latvia in the EU Eastern Partnership initiative. Ukraine itself also continued to send intensive signals about its transatlantic development path and negotiated for its membership in the European Union and NATO.²⁰ Ukraine, together with Moldova and Georgia, established a platform for closer European integration – the "Associated Trio" – and the three together set the goal applying for membership in the European Union already this decade.²¹ At the same time, these countries drew attention to the uneasy question of the need to define clearer prospects for the Eastern Partnership countries to join the European Union. So far, these prospects have been rather hazy.²²

In Georgia, the year passed within the framework of an internal political crisis. The disputed results of the parliamentary elections in late 2020 and the politically driven litigation against opposition leaders created tensions between the long-standing ruling forces and the opposition movements. The situation paralyzed the functioning of the national parliament for a long time and raised concerns about Georgia's course of further democratization and transatlantic integration, leading both the European Union and the United States to join in the search for solutions. A new crisis outbreak was seen in the context of the 2021 local elections, when the former president and the opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili secretly arrived in the country to mobilize voter support.²³ With the opposition also losing these local elections and the ruling forces deviating from a number of reform plans, alongside the deterioration of Tbilisi's relations with Brussels

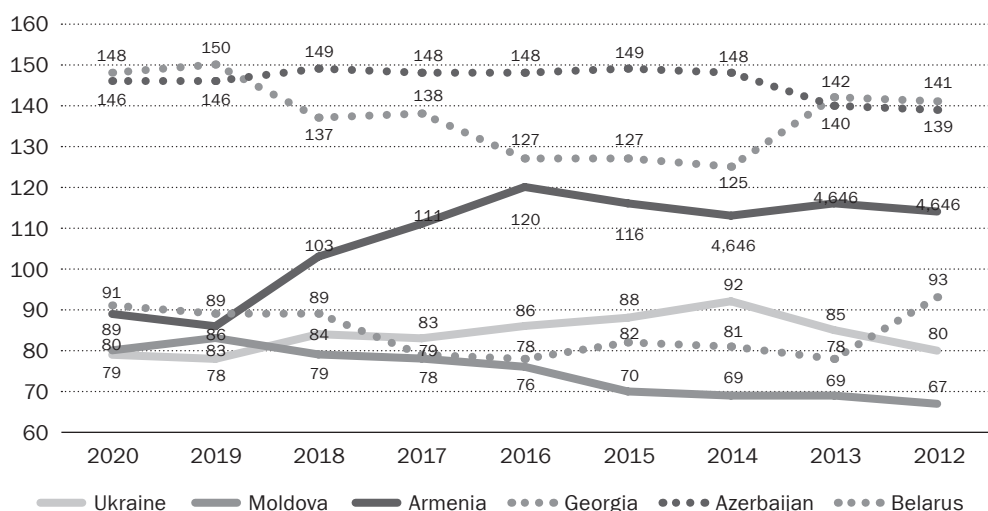


Chart 4: The position of Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus in the Democracy Index of *The Economist*²⁴

and Washington, Georgia began to sway away from its transatlantic political path and saw a further weakening of democracy (see Chart 4).

Meanwhile, Moldova reinforced its European integration path for the near future through its parliamentary elections in 2021. With the victory of pro-European forces, the parliament ideologically united with the similarly minded state president and signaled further determination towards reform and the European Union. Latvia has consistently expressed its support for the European integration trajectory of Moldova and Georgia. The change in political preferences in Moldova did not go unnoticed in Russia, and this led to tensions in the context of energy relations between the countries at the end of the year.

Finally, there were no shifts regarding the foreign policy path of Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, there were new escalations in the region, namely, in the context of the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, which raised concerns about the long-term stability of the situation.

Looking to the future, one can expect that Latvia in 2022 will continue to implement a shift of foreign policy focus *vis-à-vis* the group of countries in the Eastern Partnership initiative of the European Union. As Belarus moves into the background, the intensity of bilateral and multilateral relations with Ukraine will continue to increase. This year's investment in strengthening relations will provide a good basis for further cooperation, including in the economic field, given the current possibilities and future prospects of the country's association agreement with the European Union. In terms of multilateral

relations, the support of Latvia and the Baltic States for the European integration of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia will remain important. Equally important will be their ability to encourage EU partner countries to define clearer prospects of membership in the organization, on the one hand, and their ability to motivate the associated countries to pursue democratization reforms in anticipation of favorable conditions for membership, on the other.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LATVIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION LOOKING TOWARDS 2022 AND BEYOND

In the context of the group of countries within the EU Eastern Partnership initiative, it was Belarus that dominated the agenda of Latvia and the European Union throughout 2021. It is likely to continue to play a key role in the debate among policy makers and analysts next year as well. Belarus surprised Latvia and the European Union not only with the scale of repressions within the country, but also with daring foreign policy maneuvers. These exacerbated relations between Belarus and its closest neighbors, including Latvia, which continued to make its 180-degree turn in the relationship, as well as influenced the overall approach of the European Union. Interestingly, the organization simultaneously demonstrated its ability and inability to act decisively in a crisis situation. The landing operation carried out by Belarus raised immediate concerns for many countries and led to the mobilization of a sufficiently rapid and strong response from the European Union. Meanwhile, the protracted, artificially created migrant crisis on the Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish borders was not a sufficient reason for further action by the European Union for six months. Observations show that national interests remain an absolute priority in the formation of the 27 sovereign states, and therefore there is room for raising awareness of solidarity, including with regard to the less influential members of the European Union. The organization's ability to remain united in the face of a crisis will continue to be an existential challenge for the European Union and a strategic interest for Latvia in 2022 and for the foreseeable future. However, Latvia and other countries in the region must remember that solidarity is a two-way street. This means that there is a better chance of reaching a positive outcome when providing regular support for the protection of the vital interests of other countries.

Looking back at the response measures implemented by Latvia and the European Union in 2021 regarding the events in Belarus, which took a firmer shape this year, it can be concluded that the situation is ambiguous. Each of the methods that have been tried or discussed in the hope of positively influencing Belarus's behavior towards its own people and the people of other countries have had both drawbacks and advantages. These are related not only to the dilemma of interests and values, but also to calculations of the

usefulness and morality of actions. On the one hand, there are expectations about the implementation of a more intense measure than the imposition of travel restrictions on Belarusian officials. On the other hand, the practical contribution of seemingly more decisive steps, such as restricting economic cooperation, is questionable, given the limited role of Latvia and the European Union as a whole in the critical economic sectors of Belarus. Moreover, restrictions on economic relations hurt both entrepreneurs here in Latvia and Europe and the suffering population of Belarus. Intense diplomatic signals are equally controversial. Looking towards 2022 from this perspective, it would be primarily necessary to improve the restrictions already in place. It is important to close the loopholes concerning restrictions on trade in potassium chloride (“potash”) products, as well as to apply the ban to the current cooperation frameworks covering the sanctioned sectors, not only to future ones.²⁵ Latvia, in this context, could take a greater lead in the European Union. In addition, looking towards the future, it is important to promote positive links with the people of Belarus who are not connected to the existing administrative system, making it easier for them to study, work, and enter into Latvia and the rest of the European Union. Although Latvia has begun carrying out activities in this direction, the scope of these could be increased, especially in the context of the level of activity in other countries in the region. In this way, Latvia would promote opportunities for representatives of the intellectual professions in the neighboring country so they could operate freely until such opportunities exist in Belarus again. Moreover, these measures would serve the economic interests of Latvia itself as well. In addition, the strengthening of relations with the people of Belarus would promote the formation of long-term Latvian “soft power” in Belarus.

The exacerbation of the Belarusian crisis in 2021 also highlighted a number of areas for improvement at the national level in the coming years. This revealed Latvia’s miscalculations in trusting its partnership with the “last dictator” of Europe. The migrant operation orchestrated by Belarus revealed significant shortcomings in the security of the Latvian-Belarusian border. As Latvia chose to prioritize the Latvian-Russian border, and the Latvian-Belarusian border was left neglected, the migrant crisis caught Latvia unprepared. Luckily the largest numbers of people went to Poland and these migrants reached the neighboring Lithuania sooner than Latvia, so the conditions provided Latvia with an opportunity to learn and respond accordingly. The slow process of border adjustment has highlighted the shortcomings of the legal framework for crisis situations, which is important to address in the name of future challenges.²⁶ These could reach Latvia and the European Union already in 2022. In addition, the Belarusian crisis served as a reminder in a broader context of Latvia’s vulnerability in the transit sector. Latvia’s high dependence on Russian cargo fluctuations in its relations with Russia – or its closest ally, Belarus – poses an existential threat to the viability of this sector. The events in Belarus reaffirmed yet again the risks posed by having a close partnership in politically dependent economic sectors with authoritarian countries. The reduction of

cargo from Russia and potentially Belarus demonstrates the need to work intensively on the reorganization of the Latvian transit sector, at both the level of the public and the private sector. This could start already in 2022 with an adjustment of the environment of the transit services, a diversification of cargo suppliers (outside the Commonwealth of Independent States), as well as a transformation of business forms in favor of creating higher added value.²⁷ New forms of business can also be considered in the context of the upcoming Rail Baltica railway line.

The ability of Latvia to use the opportunities created by the crisis in the neighboring country to attract companies and skilled labor emigrating from Belarus also raised questions. By the summer of 2021, the number of companies that had chosen Latvia as their new home was almost three times smaller than for Lithuania. The number of companies that were planning to go to the neighboring country exceeded the number of those who showed interest in Latvia by more than five times. Meanwhile, the number of visas issued to Belarusians in Latvia was almost fifty times lower than in Lithuania.²⁸ Although the amount of investment attracted from Belarus at the end of the year increased,²⁹ there is still a room for improvement in the business environment and the attraction of investment. A decisive and swift action is particularly important in the context of the Belarusian crisis, which might continue in 2022 and for some time to come, but not forever.

Finally, it is important to draw attention to the trends that can be observed in the wider group of countries in the EU Eastern Partnership initiative, especially in its most active member states. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, individually and collectively, committed themselves in 2021 to moving closer to the European Union. However, while Ukraine and Moldova continued their path to European integration in practice, Georgia has started to drift away. These countries signaled more strongly than before about the weak incentives for further national transformation stemming from the EU's conditionalities-based approach to support in combination with the uncertain prospects for membership. In this context, it is important for the European Union to launch and conclude the crucial political debate on the future of the organization (a "deeper or wider" European Union), including its prospects for enlargement, sometime soon. A clearer framework with appropriate sub-instruments is also needed for the Eastern Partnership initiative and other partnership formats of the European Union. Countries that have concluded association agreements and individual candidate countries are currently awaiting a decision in the context of the enlargement of the European Union. Not only do they have an individual interest in joining the regional union, but they also create a geopolitical space for the active struggle for influence of other international actors, primarily Russia. The European Union should be able to offer a competitive alternative offer in this race, in which Russia offers a simpler model of cooperation and often also more tangible short-term benefits. The forthcoming EU Eastern Partnership summit at the end of 2021 could mark the beginning of a debate that will extend into at least the beginning of

2022. As the development of prosperous and like-minded neighboring regions remains at the forefront of Latvia's long-term strategic interests, it is important for Latvia in 2022 and beyond to continue advocating the advancement of EU enlargement, to undertake a stronger leadership as concerns work with prospective member states in the Eastern Partnership, and to create a new foreign policy framework, with the promotion of relations between the European Union and Belarus currently becoming obsolete.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Timeline - EU restrictive measures against Belarus", European Commission, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-belarus/belarus-timeline/>.
- ² "European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the situation in Belarus after one year of protests and their violent repression (2021/2881(RSP))", European Parliament, 07.10.2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0420_EN.html.
- ³ "European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the situation in Belarus after one year of protests and their violent repression (2021/2881(RSP))", European Parliament, 07.10.2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0420_EN.html.
- ⁴ "Zakon Respubliki Belarusj 12 oktebrja 2021 g. no 125-z o priestonovki deistvia soglashenia mezhdu Respublikoi Belarusj i Evropeiskim Sojuzom o readmisii lic, prebivajusheh bez razreshenija", The National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus, 14.10.2021, <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12100125&p1=1&p5=0>.
- ⁵ "Atbildot uz Baltkrievijas rīcību, Latvija liek Baltkrievijas diplomātiem atstāt valsti", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24.05.2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/atbildot-uz-baltkrievijas-ricibu-latvija-liek-baltkrievijas-diplomatiem-atstat-valsti>.
- ⁶ Djatkoviča, E., "Perspective from Latvia: From Complacency to Anxiety" in Post-2020 Belarus: Security and Defence Implications for the Baltic States, Poland, and NATO, Andžāns, M., Djatkoviča E., et. al., Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2021, <https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/post-2020-belarus-security-and-defence-implications-for-the-baltic-states-poland-and-nato-949>, p. 15–25.
- ⁷ Djatkoviča, E., "Perspective from Latvia: From Complacency to Anxiety" in Post-2020 Belarus: Security and Defence Implications for the Baltic states, Poland, and NATO, Andžāns, M., Djatkoviča E., et. al., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2021, <https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/post-2020-belarus-security-and-defence-implications-for-the-baltic-states-poland-and-nato-949>, p. 18.
- ⁸ "Dzelzceļa kravu pārvadājumu apjomu salīdzinājums janvāris - septembris 2011.–2021. g. (tūkst.t.)", Ministry of Transport, <https://www.sam.gov.lv/lv/media/5985/download>, p. 6.
- ⁹ "Latvijas ostu kravu apgrozījuma salīdzinājums janvāris - septembris 2011.–2021. g. (tūkst.t.)", Ministry of Transport, <https://www.sam.gov.lv/lv/media/5985/download>, p. 1.
- ¹⁰ "Dzelzceļa kravu pārvadājumu apjomu salīdzinājums janvāris - septembris 2011.–2021. g. (tūkst.t.)", Ministry of Transport, <https://www.sam.gov.lv/lv/media/5985/download>, p. 6.
- ¹¹ "Eksports un imports pa valstīm, valstu grupām un teritorijām (KN 2 zīmēs) 2005–2021, Baltkrievijas imports Latvijā", Official statistics portal of Latvia. Accessed 16 November 2021, https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__TIR__AT__ATD/ATD020/.
- ¹² "Eksports un imports pa valstīm, valstu grupām un teritorijām (KN 2 zīmēs) 2005–2021, Latvijas eksports uz Baltkrieviju", Official statistics portal of Latvia. Accessed 16 November 2021, https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__TIR__AT__ATD/ATD020/.

- ¹³ "Eksports un imports pa valstīm, valstu grupām un teritorijām (KN 2 zīmēs) 2005–2021, Latvijas kopējais eksports un kopējais imports", Official statistics portal of Latvia. Accessed 16 November 2021, https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__TIR__AT__ATD/ATD020/table/tableViewLayout1/
- ¹⁴ "Eksports un imports pa valstīm, valstu grupām un teritorijām (KN 2 zīmēs) 2005 – 2021, Baltkrievijas imports Latvijā", Official statistics portal of Latvia. Accessed 16 November 2021, https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__TIR__AT__ATD/ATD020/; "Eksports un imports pa valstīm, valstu grupām un teritorijām (KN 2 zīmēs) 2005–2021, Latvijas eksports uz Baltkrieviju", Official statistics portal of Latvia. Accessed 16 November 2021, https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START__TIR__AT__ATD/ATD020/.
- ¹⁵ "Tiešās investīcijas, Tiešās investīcijas Latvijā (atlikums perioda beigās), Baltkrievija", Bank of Latvia, <https://statdb.bank.lv/lb/Data/128/92872c1a30a33fb0820d2770e13a5f16-html>.
- ¹⁶ "Tiešās investīcijas, Tiešās investīcijas ārvalstīs (atlikums perioda beigās), Baltkrievija", Bank of Latvia, <https://statdb.bank.lv/lb/Data/129>.
- ¹⁷ "Tiešās investīcijas, Tiešās investīcijas Latvijā (atlikums perioda beigās), Baltkrievija", Bank of Latvia, <https://statdb.bank.lv/lb/Data/128/92872c1a30a33fb0820d2770e13a5f16-html>; "Tiešās investīcijas, Tiešās investīcijas ārvalstīs (atlikums perioda beigās), Baltkrievija", Bank of Latvia, <https://statdb.bank.lv/lb/Data/129>.
- ¹⁸ "Saeimā nodibināta deputātu grupa Starptautiskās Krimas platformas atbalstam", Delfi.lv, 16.05.2021, <https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/saeima-nodibinata-deputatu-grupa-starptautiskas-krimas-platformas-atbalstam.d?id=53201169>; "Ojārs Ēriks Kalniņš par situāciju Krimā: Ukrainai svarīgs spēcīgs starptautisks atbalsts", Saeima, 28.04.2021, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/29761-ojars-eriks-kalnins-par-situaciju-krima-ukrainai-svarigs-spe-cigs-starptautisks-atbalsts>.
- ¹⁹ "Jaunumi", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 01.01.2021–15.11.2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi>; "Saeimas ziņas", Saeima, 01.01.2021–15.11. 2021, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas>; "Jaunumi", Valsts prezidents, 01.01.2021–15.11.2021, <https://www.president.lv/lv/jaunumi>.
- ²⁰ "PM Shmyhal: Ukraine aims to become EU and NATO member in 5–10 years," Ukrinform, 09.07.2021, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/3277947-pm-shmyhal-ukraine-aims-to-become-eu-and-nato-member-in-510-years.html>.
- ²¹ "Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova establish Associated Trio for successful European integration", Ukrinform, 17.05.2021, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/3246908-ukraine-georgia-moldova-establish-associate-trio-for-successful-european-integration.html>.
- ²² "Batumi Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State of Association Trio - Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine", The Official website of the President of Ukraine, 19.06.2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/deklaraciya-batumskogo-samitu-shvalena-glavami-derzhav-asoci-69609>.
- ²³ "Saakashvili obratilsja k storonnikam za minutu do aresta: 'Boremsja do poslednego'", Newsgeorgia, 01.10.2021, <https://www.newsgeorgia.ge/%d1%81%d0%b0%d0%b0%d0%ba%d0%b0%d1%88%d0%b2%d0%b8%d0%bb%d0%b8-%d0%be%d0%b1%d1%80%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b8%d0%bb%d1%81%d1%8f-%d0%ba-%d1%81%d1%82%d0%be%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%bd%d0%b8%d0%ba%d0%b0%d0%bc-%d0%b7/>.
- ²⁴ "Democracy index 2012 Democracy at a standstill", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012, <http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy-Index-2012.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex12>; "Democracy index 2013 Democracy in limbo", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013, http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2013_WEB-2.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=Democracy08;

- "Democracy Index 2014 Democracy and its discontents", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014, <http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy-index-2014.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=Democracy0115>; "Democracy Index 2015 Democracy in an age of anxiety", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015, <http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=EIU-Democracy-Index-2015.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2015>; "Democracy Index 2015 Democracy in an age of anxiety", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015, <http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=EIU-Democracy-Index-2015.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=DemocracyIndex2015>; "Democracy Index 2016 Revenge of the 'deplorables'", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, <http://felipesahagun.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Democracy-Index-2016.pdf>; "Democracy Index 2017 Free speech under attack", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=34079#:~:text=In%20the%202017%20Democracy%20Index%20not%20a%20single%20region%20recorded,in%20their%20regional%20average%20score>; "Democracy Index 2018: Me too?", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018, <https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2018/>; "Democracy Index 2019 A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019, <http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy-Index-2019.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=democracyindex2019>; "Democracy Index 2020 In sickness and in health?", The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020, <http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy-Index-2020.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=democracy2020>.
- ²⁵ "Council Regulation (EU) No. 2021/1030 (24 June 2021) amending Regulation (EC) No. 765/2006 concerning restrictive measures in respect of Belarus"; "Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/1031 (24 June 2021) amending Council Decision 2012/642/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Belarus," Official Journal of the European Union, 24.06.2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2021:224I:FULL&from=EN>.
- ²⁶ Djatkoviča, E., "Perspective from Latvia: From Complacency to Anxiety" in Post-2020 Belarus: Security and Defence Implications for the Baltic states, Poland, and NATO, Andžāns, M., Djatkoviča E., et. al., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2021, <https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/post-2020-belarus-security-and-defence-implications-for-the-baltic-states-poland-and-nato-949>, p. 18.
- ²⁷ Djatkoviča, E., "Gas and Dirty Money", Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS), 2021, <https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/gas-and-dirty-money-russian-corrosive-capital-in-latvia-941>.
- ²⁸ LETA, "LIAA: Baltkrievijas uzņēmumu piesaistē Latvijas konkurētspēja atpaliek no Lietuvas", 26.05.2021, Delfi.lv, https://www.delfi.lv/business/biznesa_vidē/liia-baltkrievijas-uznemumu-piesaiste-latvijas-konkuretspeja-atpaliek-no-lietuvas.d?id=53237683.
- ²⁹ "Investīciju apjoms deviņos mēnešos sasniedzis 500 miljonus eiro", Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, 03.11.2021, <https://www.liaa.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/investiciju-apjoms-devinos-menesos-sasniedzis-500-miljonus-eiro>.

THE CRISIS OF AFGHANISTAN: A TEST FOR THE EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN PARTNERSHIP

Gunta Pastore

Ambassador of Latvia to the Czech Republic, Northern Macedonia,
Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo

Last year, the Central Asia region experienced both positive dynamics and turmoil. It is said that there are not just five countries in the region (namely, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) but a sixth one as well – Afghanistan. In recent years, the countries of Central Asia have swiftly opened up to Afghanistan. Back in July, the ambitious cross-border infrastructure projects were discussed with the then-President of Afghanistan Ashraf Gani at the International Connectivity Conference in Tashkent, but by the end of August, Kabul had already fallen into the hands of the Taliban.

The withdrawal of the United States and its allies from Afghanistan was accompanied by dramatic scenarios of refugee flows and chaos in the wider Central Asian region, leaving a vacuum for Chinese and Russian dominance. At least for the time being, the countries of Central Asia are showing resilience, are more stable, are demonstrating a pragmatic approach and ability to make their own foreign policy choices.

Yet, stability can be fragile. In early 2022 Kazakhstan, most wealthy country in the region, was shaken by large and violent protests. In order to stop them the outside military support from the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was asked. It remains to be seen whether these events will have implications on changes in Kazakhstan, on its foreign policy choices, as well as on the developments in the region. The Central Asian region much depends on the situation in Afghanistan, on how its countries will strengthen their stability and security, and how they will be able to balance among the big players.

This chapter provides an insight into the relations between Latvia and the Central Asian countries over the past year, especially in the context of the Afghan crisis. It looks at what could be expected in Latvia's foreign policy in the region in 2022. It also offers recommendations. Latvia should continue advocating for EU's engagement in Central Asian countries to strengthen their resilience in the complex security environment. Latvia has been active in the development cooperation in Central Asia; its projects have been appreciated by the partners in region and should be continued. The region is dynamic and with a growing economic potential, raising the European business interest, hence Latvia should put more efforts in advancing economic cooperation, especially with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

LATVIA AND CENTRAL ASIA IN 2021

In its foreign policy, Latvia considers Central Asia, together with the Eastern Partnership countries, to be priority regions. The *2021 Foreign Policy Report* also defined a commitment to the “strengthening of cooperation with the Central Asian countries both at the bilateral level and by promoting a dialogue between the European Union and Central Asian countries”.¹

In 2021, the Central Asian region was not at the top of the priorities of Latvia's foreign policy, as concerns about security in its own region increasingly prevailed. However, Riga continued to position itself as the EU expert on Central Asia. In Brussels, Latvia has gained the reputation of being a strong advocate of the region, and it was achieved with its continuous efforts.² Furthermore, Latvia plays a leading role in the implementation of EU programs in Central Asia.

There have been positive economic processes in Central Asia with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan gaining momentum, thus attracting international interest. However, there have been huge challenges as well, including the Covid-19 pandemic affecting economies and increasing disparities, and the return of the Taliban to Afghanistan with increasing security risks.

In the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, Latvia supported the EU's joint solidarity efforts in Central Asia, where the most tangible achievement was the supply of EU vaccines. Unfortunately, the pandemic hindered the involvement of both the EU and Latvia in the region. Latvia's political dialogue with the Central Asian countries was reduced to a minimum. Trade volumes declined. And the implementation of Latvia's projects in the region was hampered. The first major face-to-face event was the Central-South Asia Connectivity Conference held in Tashkent in July, which was also attended by a high-level Latvian delegation.

With the Afghan crisis in August, the Central Asian region became the focus of attention for Latvia and the EU. The EU capitals were highly alarmed by the possible new refugee crisis, by the threat of radicalism and terrorism, as well as by the humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan. Brussels always pays close attention to everything related to Afghanistan.

One should remind that it was the launch of the US military campaign in Afghanistan in 2001 that was the driving force behind the EU engagement in Central Asia. The EU helps the region indirectly, through supporting reforms. Geographically, the EU is distant and, while everything runs its course, the EU institutions take care about implementing the agreed policies. But in the Afghan crisis, EU member states have specific interests, so the bloc cannot remain introverted.

Since August, senior EU officials intensively communicated with their Central Asian partners. Charles Michel, President of the European Council, took upon himself an active role in contacting the leaders of the region. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of Kazakhstan, later visited Brussels. There were also close contacts with Uzbekistan during high-level EU visits to Tashkent. Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan, also was in Brussels and spoke about the EU's assistance in strengthening its borders. The countries of the region have shown a constructive approach to the EU in the crisis. The intensification of the EU-Central Asia high-level dialogue is in line with Latvia's approach; Riga has always advocated for this in Brussels.

At the beginning of the crisis, emergency needs – the evacuation of one's own citizens and local partners – were at the forefront of the working agendas for Latvia and the EU and NATO alike. Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs also discussed cooperation regarding the organization of evacuating foreign citizens from Afghanistan with Uzbek partners.³ Second was possible refugee flows. Brussels addressed its partners in the region on how the EU would help the neighbors of Afghanistan, hosting large numbers of migrants and refugees. However, Kazakhstan referred to the position of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, that Central Asia won't be a gateway for Afghans seeking to move to Europe. Uzbekistan also warned the international community not to place burden on the region, putting additional pressure on a difficult socio-economic situation, but that it was also ready to help.⁴

In connection with the migration, the EU and Central Asian dialogue addressed another important issue for Latvia. Along with Lukashenko's growing hybrid operations on the Belarusian border with Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs urged the EU to work with Central Asian partners to strengthen their capacity to prevent Afghan refugees from being used for other countries' hybrid operations and reaching the EU's eastern border. The issue was effectively addressed by the EU institutions. For example, at the meeting of EU-Central Asian foreign ministers in November, EU High

Representative Josep Borrell asked for the support of regional partners in “preventing the instrumentalization of human beings”,⁵ and praised the decision of Uzbekistan to restrict flights to Minsk for a number of transit passengers.⁶ This was important support for Latvia that came at the right time.

Latvia paid a special attention to Central Asia in the EU discussions on addressing the Afghan crisis. In the EU development ministers meeting in October, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica stressed that it is essential to invest in the resilience of Central Asia in the context of Afghan crisis. At the December meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs supported greater EU involvement in Central Asia to promote its resilience, security, and development.

Despite the fact that the Afghan crisis dominated in the agenda, the EU-Central Asia cooperation succeeded in advancing the agreed plans and priorities. Such positive example in the area of economics was the first EU–Central Asia Economic Forum in Bishkek in November. The EU was represented by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and her deputy, Valdis Dombrovskis, demonstrating that the region is a strategic priority for the EU, confirming its interest in boosting economic cooperation. Latvian experts working in EU institutions are also to be credited for the successful running of this event.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 has delayed the practical implementation of the European Union’s development cooperation programs in the region. However, Latvia managed to continue its work. Latvia’s contribution to the EU Border Management Program in Central Asia, BOMCA, should be especially highlighted. Its 10th phase began in 2021 and it was intended to include Afghanistan as well, among other things. The program was adapted to the current situation, shifting support to Tajikistan, which has the worst situation in terms of the Afghan border. The conditions for implementing BOMCA were not simple, partly given the border dispute between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, the State Border Guard of Latvia’s leadership of BOMCA has so far been successful. Latvia continued to implement other projects in the region as well. Overall, Latvia has been active in the development cooperation, despite the Covid-19 pandemic and limited funding.

In the second half of the year, Latvia’s bilateral political dialogue with Central Asian countries at the level of foreign ministers intensified. Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs met with his colleagues from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan several times, both to discuss the problems in Afghanistan and to confirm Latvia’s interest in continuing the exchange of high-level visits.

Therefore, one can conclude that, overall, Latvia in 2021 followed its general broad priorities in Central Asia. Riga’s attention to the region increased in the context of Afghanistan. The Afghan crisis was a challenge, which EU and Central Asian countries

worked together constructively to address. Latvia supported strengthening of the EU-Central Asia partnership. Its constant engagement in development cooperation in the region through the EU and bilateral projects deserves special recognition.

LATVIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA – WHAT DOES 2022 PROMISE?

In 2022, one might expect that Latvia will continue its current foreign policy approach in Central Asia, ensuring continuity. Latvia and the European Union have interests in the region both due to Euro-Asian connectivity, energy resources, and the growing market, as well as in the context of security in Afghanistan and the wider region. Nonetheless, the Central Asian region is geographically far away, which means a lower intensity of EU's engagement.

Overall, Central Asia occupies a small albeit stable place in Latvia's foreign policy. Latvia has historical ties with the region and knowledge about it. Latvia is a constructive partner in Central Asia, where the focus lies on the positive dynamics of relations.

Before turning to Latvia's foreign policy priorities in Central Asia in 2022, it would be useful to outline the general context in the region – namely, the geopolitical environment.

As mentioned above, the region has an enormous potential, but equally enormous challenges as well. The growing security risks of Afghanistan, the interests of great powers lead to talk of the new “Great Game in Central Asia”. Not only do Russia and China have interests there, but so do Turkey, India, Iran and others.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan might eventually leave a vacuum for influence. Russia, the key security partner in Central Asia, reacted swiftly, including in the cooperation with China and the CSTO. Following the Afghan crisis, it conducted military exercises at the border and warned the Taliban not to threaten the Central Asia. The question is, however, whether the countries of Central Asia are interested in a large-scale Russian military presence.

China, the dominant economic power in Central Asia, has interests, investments and goals in the region that are at risk. During the Afghan crisis, China also increased its military activity in the region. China and Russia call each other strategic partners, they project an appearance of coordination, however, in practice their differing interests in the region may set the limits.

As for the United States, the question is whether, after leaving Afghanistan, it will find ways to remain in the region. It is not in US interests for Afghanistan to become a base

for a resurgence in terrorism. The United States is currently operating at full capacity in Central Asia⁷ as it is an important outpost.⁸ The question, however, is how the dynamics of Beijing-Moscow relations will play out in Central Asia and how this will affect the US's presence in the region. The worst-case scenario would be for pressure from Russia and China to force Central Asian countries to choose with whom to stay together in the future.

The crisis in Afghanistan shows that the countries of Central Asia might not fall so easily into the games of the great powers. The region is more stable than in the 1990s, and the countries are not involved in civil wars. Borders are strengthened, armies are better armed, and resilience against the Afghan threat is greater. All of them, with the exception of Tajikistan, build pragmatic relations with the Taliban, as they want stability, secure borders, the prevention of refugee flows and radicalism, and ongoing economic relations with Afghanistan. The countries of Central Asia seek to strengthen their independence by continuing to pursue the “multi-vector” foreign policy. Hence, it would be essential that Kazakhstan restores stability, and that outside military support does not affect its independent foreign policy choices.

In this context, the European Union gives the Central Asian states an opportunity to diversify partners. In the words of EU High Representative Josep Borrell, the EU is “a factor of balance and predictability in a volatile international landscape mired in great power politics”.⁹

Looking ahead, Latvian foreign policy makers will have enough to do *vis-à-vis* the region, both at the EU level and bilaterally. The Central Asian countries would like to see more ambitious EU engagement, given the interests of European countries in the region: migration, security, and the prevention of terrorism and extremism. The region sees the EU as a partner in the connectivity and reforms to introduce standards and to attract investment and technology. While still maintaining a realistic approach, the EU has sufficient resources for an active policy.

There is no doubt that in 2022 Latvia will continue to advocate for greater EU's engagement in Central Asia. There are two important directions: firstly, Afghanistan-related issues, and, secondly, the EU's support for economic reforms and the post-Covid-19 recovery.

Firstly, Afghanistan. The region enters the year 2022 with security risks. It can be expected that Latvia will support the EU's engagement with its Central Asian partners on addressing issues surrounding the Afghan crisis, the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people among them. It would be commendable if the EU–Central Asia high-level political dialogue maintains the previous dynamics. The EU special representative for Central Asia has also a role to play in the EU's dialogue with the countries of the region. New EU Special Representative Terhi Hakala has intensive work ahead to preserve the

legacy of his predecessor. Latvia's bilateral political dialogue will also be important. Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs has met with Central Asian partners several times to discuss the problems in Afghanistan and confirm Latvia's interest in continuing the exchange of high-level visits.

As regards migration, although the Central Asian states are not countries origin or transit, they have been involved in the transit of migrants to Belarus. The EU should follow developments to prevent the transit of migrants and their instrumentalization. Therefore, constructive EU–Central Asia cooperation on this issue will continue to be important for Latvia.

In the context of the Afghan crisis, the EU places particular emphasis on supporting border security in the region. Here the EU Border Management Program, BOMCA, has a very concrete contribution. BOMCA will continue its work in 2022. Moreover, it will enhance its support for Tajikistan, which is having the most difficulties in securing its border with Afghanistan. BOMCA will have a very intense work schedule. The representatives of the State Border Guard of Latvia that have been leading BOMCA for already eight years emphasize that EU support for technical equipment is important, but the knowledge Latvia and the EU transfer to their Central Asian partners is the most crucial aspect.¹⁰

The second area where it is important for Latvia and the EU to expand cooperation with Central Asia is the economy, including support for reforms in the region and the recovery following Covid-19. While the Afghan crisis undoubtedly dominates the EU–Central Asia dialogue, it is essential that it has not paralyzed the regular cooperation agenda. On the contrary, there is a mutually increased interest in the cooperation. Central Asia is an economically growing region with Uzbekistan as the driving force. The countries of the region are proactive in approaching the EU as a key supporter of modernization and reform efforts. There is also a growing European interest in the business opportunities in Central Asia. Indeed, the entrepreneurs see the risks, but they see also the large market and great opportunities.

In the economic cooperation, Latvia should continue to support greater EU involvement in the region, including by using the EU–Central Asia Economic Forum. The first Forum in Bishkek in November was viewed as “necessary and at the right time” to be continued. It raised the interest of the EU business community, given the positive developments in the region.¹¹

Central Asian countries, for their part, should make further efforts to improve the investment and business climate. From the Latvian perspective, the negotiations on the EU–Uzbekistan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement needs to be concluded as soon as possible. In 2021, Uzbekistan was admitted as a beneficiary country under the EU Generalized System of Preferences (GSP +), thus improving its access to

the EU market. To use this potential Uzbekistan should continue implementation of reforms to adjust international standards.

For the EU–Central Asia economic cooperation President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen set out three priorities - green recovery, digitization, and a better business environment.¹² Importantly, the green recovery and digitization also apply to connectivity. At the Connectivity Conference in Tashkent in July, EU High Representative Josep Borrell emphasized the EU's strong interest in developing sustainable connections with Central Asia and Afghanistan, while acknowledging that “we, in the EU, are not the only ones exploring ways to build connections in, and to, this region”.¹³

At the end of 2021, the European Commission launched the Global Gateway connectivity strategy. From the Latvian perspective, it is positive that this also includes the Central Asian region – something Riga has always actively advocated for. In this context Uzbekistan's proposal to hold an EU–Central Asia Connectivity Conference in 2022 is commendable. Yet, while connectivity is EU's great interest, it faces both financial and geopolitical challenges.

Closer Central Asian regional cooperation is essential for the EU involvement in the region in the area of connectivity, as well as in the economy and trade. There have been positive developments in recent years. The region has become more cohesive and there is more mutual trust. The issues of border management, trade, and water management are being discussed at the same table, and that is great progress.¹⁴ The unifying forces are Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, both of which “watch over” the others to some extent. In April, Uzbekistan helped resolve the border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The leaders of the five countries in the region also presented an unified approach in their meeting in Turkmenistan in August. Although there are some disagreements, all the Central Asian countries are willing to advance mutual trade and emphasize the reduction of barriers.¹⁵

Development cooperation will be an increasingly important part of Latvia's foreign policy in 2022, in which Central Asia is a priority region, both in EU programs and bilaterally. The EU's programs for the region for the next seven years, in line with the EU's strategy for Central Asia will focus on resilience and prosperity. These general concepts mean continuation of the current EU programs in the areas of water resources, energy, border management, and others. In the EU water management programs in Central Asia, Latvia especially highlights Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, where the clean technology cluster Cleantech has been operating for a long time, and Cleantech will continuously take part in these EU programs.

From the Latvian perspective, it is essential to continue other successful EU projects in the region. One should not forget the sphere of education, either, as it is necessary

for Central Asia in order to strengthen the region's competitiveness. Latvia has been active in this field since its presidency of the EU Council in 2015, with the Ministry of Education participating in the EU-Central Asia Education Platform. Care must be taken to ensure that education does not disappear from future EU work plans in the region.

The EU remains the largest donor in Central Asia, yet the resources should be efficiently used. The crisis in Afghanistan, for instance, as acknowledged by President of the European Council Charles Michel, exposed the weak spots of the EU, as "all the good the EU has invested in has been crossed out in one day". Perhaps EU support has been too superficial? Kyrgyzstan is also in the spotlight of critics. These trends suggest that the EU's approach to development cooperation might be more cautious in the future.

As regards Latvian development cooperation in Central Asia, in 2022 Riga will be active both bilaterally and, in the EU, as well as at looking for opportunities to attract other contributors. On the positive side, the projects in Central Asia in which Latvia was once involved are continuing. According to experts, "the Central Asian countries in looking at international standards in their reforms are trying to involve the world-class expertise, and Latvia is also appreciated".¹⁶ The development cooperation would have greater added value if it were an investment to the national economy as well.

Economic diplomacy is an important part of Latvia's foreign policy agenda. When, after the Latvian financial crisis in 2008, there was an incentive to look for new business opportunities, the most promising direction for the entrepreneurs and the government at that time seemed to be Asian markets, including Central Asia, but later the region disappeared from priority list.

In the field of economics, cooperation with Central Asia has brought mixed results. Latvia's export of education continues the positive dynamics. Uzbek students are the second largest group of foreign students in Latvia (with around 1,320 students). The Latvian University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LLU), Riga Stradins University (RSU), Turība University and others are active in Central Asia. On the other hand, Latvia's trade with countries of the region has continued to decline, including due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2021, the Latvian Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Issues with both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan finally took place, which was a very welcomed step. At the same time, it should be noted that while the governmental support for businesses is very important, but in the end, it is the entrepreneurs who seize or do not seize the opportunities. Latvian entrepreneurs are "comparatively tardy and lagging behind their neighboring countries. Lithuania in particular continues to actively conquer the Kazakh market and is rapidly entering Uzbekistan."¹⁷ There are some positive examples. Grindeks, for instance, increased sales in the region in 2021. And Olainfarm has been operating in Central Asia for many years, with Uzbekistan being recognized as its most dynamic and promising market.

For Latvia and the EU as a whole, Kazakhstan is an important partner. The OECD has pointed to Kazakhstan as the reform leader of Central Asia, while also encouraging it to diversify trade, implement privatization and continue reforms. While Kazakhstan was shaken by the turmoil, for the time being there has not been an impact on the trade with Latvia.

Uzbekistan is the driving force of the region. There have been significant reforms carried out during the presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, resulting in record growth in trade and tourism, even in the face of the pandemic. Tashkent has plans for rail connections to South Asia. Uzbekistan has ambitions to get the most out of all areas of cooperation.¹⁸ Uzbekistan is attracting ever-growing international interest, and there has been a high intensity of the incoming foreign visits and the delegations of business representatives.¹⁹

In this context, visits of Latvian officials to the countries of Central Asia would be a commendable step. It would be advisable to strengthen the economic component of these visits. The planned visit of Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš to Uzbekistan, along with a business delegation, which has been postponed due to the pandemic, is still in the plans.

As regards the transport and transit sector, Latvia must take the overall context into account. Belarus, an important partner for Latvia in the field of cargo from Central Asia, is now causing a “headache”. At the same time, Latvia sees new opportunities, particularly in the direction of Central Asia; as Minister of Transport Tālis Linkaits notes: “We have been working with Kazakhstan a lot lately. Our delegation of businessmen went there, and there was a meeting of the Latvian Intergovernmental Commission and Kazakhstan. The management of Kazakhstan railways will visit us soon. [...] Kazakh coal is now largely transhipped in Ventspils. There is also the direction of Uzbekistan”.²⁰ In the field of air transport, the good news is that there has been a resumption of the direct flight Tashkent-Riga, which was cancelled during the pandemic. It is also important to resume the airBaltic flight Riga-Almaty. However, one has to reckon with the growing geopolitical risks as regards the transit sector.

Overall, it can be expected that in 2022 Latvia’s foreign policy in the Central Asia region will maintain its continuity. Latvia will continue to support the stability, security, and economic reforms of the Central Asian region at the European level and bilaterally, including through practical involvement in project implementation. The embassies in Tashkent, Nursultan, and Riga are doing great job in promoting bilateral cooperation on a daily basis. It would be important to continue and advance high-level political dialogue and exchange of visits. More focus should be paid to Latvia’s economic cooperation with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the Central Asian region, much depends on how the Taliban will govern Afghanistan, how the countries in the region will strengthen their stability and security, and how they will balance their positions among the great players. The events in Kazakhstan put additional pressure, indicating that stability in the region can be fragile.

Despite the persisting complexity, the Central Asian states appreciate the EU engagement in the region. In turn, the European Union has valuable partners in Central Asia in the challenging international environment.

The region will be in the focus of Latvia and the EU, first of all, because of Afghanistan. The countries of Central Asia are showing resilience in the Afghan crisis and are involved in resolving it. In the crisis, they demonstrated constructive approach towards the EU and Latvia. Migration, regional security and others are issues to follow.

The Central Asian states in their “multi-vector” foreign policy seek cooperation with various partners outside the region as well, including the EU and Latvia. Therefore, it is important for the EU to continue its balancing role and involvement in the region.

From the Latvian perspective, it is essential to actively continue the high-level political dialogue between the EU and Central Asian states, that was intensified in the Afghan crisis.

Latvia should continue to support the reforms in Central Asian countries through the EU and bilateral development cooperation projects, which it is already implementing, as well as look for the new opportunities, thus also strengthening its role as a Central Asian expert.

Latvia’s development cooperation in the region would have greater added value if it were an investment to the national economy as well. Given the positive developments in Central Asia, more focus should be paid to Latvia’s economic cooperation with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Latvian experts should be actively involved in working with the Central Asia dossier in Brussels, as Latvia partially delegates cooperation with the region to EU institutions.

ENDNOTES

¹ “Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020.

² Anonymous interview with a representative of the EU institutions.

³ Twitter post by Edgars Rinkēvičs, 27.08.2021, <https://mobile.twitter.com/edgarsrinkevics/status/1431239560592347138>.

- ⁴ “After Afghanistan: Why Central Asia is more important than ever”, Atlantic Council, 27.09.2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/event/after-afghanistan-why-central-asia-is-more-important-than-ever/>.
- ⁵ “Afghanistan looms large at EU–Central Asia talks in Dushanbe”, Euractiv, 23.11.2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/news/afghanistan-looks-large-at-eu-central-asia-talks-in-dushanbe/>.
- ⁶ Josep Borrell Fontelles tweet, 22.11.2021, <https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF>.
- ⁷ Anonymous interview with a representative of the Latvian government.
- ⁸ “Outside looking in: After Afghanistan, U.S. scrambles for bases in central Asia”, Washington Times, 08.11.2021, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/8/us-scrambles-bases-central-asia-after-afghanistan-/>.
- ⁹ “My trip to Dushanbe: investing in our partnership with Central Asia”, European Union External Action Service, 26.11.2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/108026/my-trip-dushanbe-investing-our-partnership-central-asia_en.
- ¹⁰ Anonymous interview with a representative of the State Border Guard of Latvia.
- ¹¹ Anonymous interview with a representative of the Latvian government.
- ¹² “Speech by President von der Leyen at the EU-Central Asia Economic Forum”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_5803.
- ¹³ “The European Union: a reliable partner for sustainable connectivity in Central and South Asia”, EEAS, 15.07.2021. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/101814/european-union-reliable-partner-sustainable-connectivity-central-and-south-asia_en
- ¹⁴ Anonymous interview with a representative of the Latvian government.
- ¹⁵ Anonymous interview with a representative of the Latvian government.
- ¹⁶ Anonymous interview with a representative of the Latvian government.
- ¹⁷ Anonymous interview with a representative of the Association of the Latvian Businesses (*Latvijas uzņēmēju asociācija*).
- ¹⁸ “After Afghanistan: Why Central Asia is more important than ever”, 27.09.2021, Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/event/after-afghanistan-why-central-asia-is-more-important-than-ever/>.
- ¹⁹ Anonymous interview with an expert of an EU Member State.
- ²⁰ Randers, I., “*Satiksmes nozare ir visas ekonomikas asinsrites pamats*”, Interview with the Minister of Transport, Tālis Linkaits, LA.lv, 08.12.2021, <https://www.la.lv/linkaits-censas-klidet-mitus>.

LATVIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN 2022: AN INVARIABLY RESERVED APPROACH IN CONDITIONS OF (IN)VARIABLE TURBULENCE

Sintija Broka

Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs

In 2021, Latvia's foreign policy towards the Middle East was integrated with the broader approach of the transatlantic community. Therefore, this article has its limitations, as it falls within a narrower analysis of Latvia-Middle East foreign policy, with the author focusing on an analysis of the development of wider regional processes and their impact on transatlantic security and Latvia's security, as well as Latvia's opportunities in the region.

The year 2021 has been a dynamic and challenging year for the Middle East. Under the veil of Covid-19, the region continues to face well-known yet periodically forgotten challenges. Although Latvia's opportunities in the region have progressed in two interrelated vectors – political and economic – it seems that this year also has been dominated by political challenges. Within the framework of this article, the author will look at the development of three processes and the role of Latvia as a member state of the European Union in them: 1) the change of power in Afghanistan, 2) the complicated efforts to re-spark the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), and 3) the escalation and development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

THE MIDDLE EAST IN 2021

The year 2021 was a difficult one for the Middle East in various ways. Throughout the region, the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic has been uneven, and vaccination rates are still low while the need for vaccines is still high in the poorest countries of

the region. Moreover, along with the outbreak of new conflicts, the region's frozen conflicts are seemingly being more and more forgotten. For instance, there have been no major conflict escalations over the past year in the Syrian conflict. And, even more importantly, there have been virtually no developments towards conflict resolution. The most significant aspect in this sector is the increased openness of the Arab states towards the regime of Bashar al-Assad, the President of Syria. A similar situation can be observed in Yemen as well. After several attempts to find a compromise with the Houthi insurgents, the efforts of Western and regional allies have not succeeded. The Houthis continue their military developments in close connection with Iran. Meanwhile, the attention of the international community is moving farther and farther away from the harsh realities in Yemen. As a result of currency devaluation and hyperinflation, the country's economy is on the brink of collapse, leading to a sharp rise in the food deficit affecting more than 50% of the country's population. Around 16 million people, including children, are living in conditions of acute hunger at a time when the reserves of the United Nations World Food Program are starting to run low as well.¹ Yemen is also struggling in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and with the vaccination coverage, with around 1.3% of the country's population currently fully vaccinated (counting people who have received two doses).² While the West tirelessly continues to remind us that "no one is safe until everyone is safe", this is a good time to remember that Yemen is still number one on the Emergency Watchlist, and political solutions have not yet been found.³

Also in 2021, this region saw various challenges that proved that it was undergoing developments at different levels and transformations at different speeds. Although there are countries where the situation could change from dire to very dire and where systematic challenges persist, there are also positive trends with positive shifts in narratives. It seems that there is a growing awareness among the region's countries about the role that the diplomacy and normalization processes play in conflict resolution. As evidenced by the development of relations and dialogues between Israel and the Arab states, the dialogue between the United Arab Emirates-Turkey and Iran, as well as the dynamics of Qatar's regional relations, there is a positive orientation towards a foreign policy governance that is based on dialogue and diplomacy.

However, one could say that the most significant event in the Middle East in 2021 was the change of power in Washington, causing changes at different levels. One of the most fundamental changes was the withdrawal of US and allied troops from Afghanistan, which has met to mixed views in the international community. Similarly, in 2021 we also saw an attempt by the US administration to restart its policy towards Iran, where, contrary to expectations, the goals have not been achieved. The United States also has a continuity of some kind in its relations with both Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as well as with the new Israeli government. The Israeli elections in 2021 achieved what other elections had failed to achieve in previous years – namely, a government was formed that was not

led by Benjamin Netanyahu. However, it is clear that the attitudes of the United States and its allies in the region will be the ones continuing to influence the wider dynamics of the Middle East throughout 2022.

LATVIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 2021

Latvia's attitude towards the region during the last year was formed on the basis of the main principles of the general foreign policy doctrine, and the region had neither a primary nor secondary role in the agenda of Latvia's foreign policy. Latvia, together with its allies in the transatlantic system, supported the Peace Plan for the Middle East, as a consequence of which the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco took a historic step towards the normalization of relations with Israel⁴ by initiating a dialogue between Israel and the Arab states. As regards the escalation of Israeli-Palestinian relations, Latvia called for a ceasefire in the armed conflict and for finding a diplomatic solution,⁵ while recognizing Israel's right to self-defense.⁶ However, the conflict revealed the weakest points of the US-initiated Peace Plan, which the international community will not be able to forget in the near future. In 2021, Latvia also continued its participation in international military operations and civilian missions led by the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, the OSCE, and other international organizations, including in Iraq, where support was provided to improve the capabilities of Iraqi security institutions, thereby contributing to the strengthening of international security.⁷ In its relations with Iran, Latvia, through the European Union, has called on all parties to establish a constructive dialogue and adhere to the agreement, placing high hopes on the ability of the United States and President Joe Biden to improve these relations.⁸ However, as we can see, the process is cumbersome and takes much more time, patience and diplomacy than originally expected.

From an economic perspective, 2021 allowed Latvia to carry out its participation in the "Expo 2020 Dubai", organized by the Ministry of Economics in cooperation with the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) and taking place in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. The exhibition provides ample opportunities to meet with potential cooperation partners and organize presentations of goods and services, thus promoting cooperation with the Middle East region, as well as promoting visibility, which allows companies to position themselves internationally. However, we will only be able to analyze in detail the success of our companies in this regard after 31 March.

LATVIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN 2022

The above-mentioned 2021 developments in the region also form the basis for reflections on what to expect from the region and where to focus in 2022. All indicators suggest that the complex competition for power and influence will continue to progress, both at the regional level and in the context of international players. Although the US is trying to limit its influence in the region, it is clear that competition and national transformation processes are happening at a time when geopolitical tectonic plates are shifting between the United States of America, China, Russia and the European Union, which shapes the approaches and roles of the actors in the Middle East as well. This situation is clearly demonstrated by the change of power in Afghanistan, by efforts to return to the Iranian nuclear deal, and by the development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The catalyst of international security – Afghanistan

Although the issue of Afghanistan is a widely discussed topic in various contexts, this article examines the effect of recent developments on the dynamics of the Middle East in the context of 2022. The end to the allied presence in Afghanistan last year has created a number of interlinked challenges, both in the region and internationally, including uncertainties about its medium-term impact on Afghanistan's neighbors and the stability of the region as a whole.

With the Taliban taking control over the whole of Afghanistan, there are growing concerns about the proliferation of extremists and terrorist groups, the deterioration of human rights, and the humanitarian situation and the rise in numbers of refugees, as well as a possible conflict between the region's internal rivals. The Taliban's victory encourages and motivates extremist groups in the region, creating new challenges for transatlantic security. In 2022, much will depend on the development of Taliban's power, as the Taliban's decisions underpin many of the long-term issues tied to the situation in Afghanistan and the wider stability of both regional dynamics and transatlantic security. Consequently, Western society, including Latvia, must actively cooperate on security issues with partners in the region. At present, Latvia has already made its contribution to the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations to support humanitarian aid programs in Afghanistan.⁹

Although the way the allies left Afghanistan is widely debated, in the context of the Middle East there is an ongoing narrative of unilateral decision-making which already began in the era of Donald Trump, starting with the withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal. Similarly, this time around as well, the US administration is widely criticized for the form of its departure, as it has repeatedly shown its allies in the region and major sceptics that the US, as far as issues of the Middle East are concerned, is an unreliable

partner that often goes against its own rhetoric on human rights and democracy. Therefore, the regional role of the United States from the perspective of the region itself is being questioned, and Iran will also have a lot to learn in 2022 based on the experience of Afghanistan.

Dancing in circles with Iran

Along with the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, the biggest challenges the Iranian government is facing in 2022 are the ones connected to public dissatisfaction about the country's political and economic situation. The current regime of sanctions directly contributes both to high inflation and to the decline in oil exports, as well as to the currency devaluation. The partial lifting of US sanctions would improve the situation. However, this is subject to a new agreement to restart the nuclear deal of 2015. The outcome of negotiations with stakeholders is crucial for Iran, as the possible lifting of sanctions would alleviate the country's economic situation, thus reducing overall public dissatisfaction.

The tense situation in US–Iran relations will continue to affect the security and stability of the entire Gulf region in 2022 as well. The negotiation process is slow and cumbersome. However, thanks to the cooperation of the parties involved, including the diplomacy of the European Union, a common understanding has emerged in early 2022 on how to define the issues on the agenda that is miles away from the expected set of solutions. The current pace of negotiations is insufficient and needs to be accelerated. In order to avoid threats to international peace and security in 2022 that are posed by the uncontrolled development of Iran's nuclear program and the new president's foreign policy ambitions, both sides need to clearly define their sets of challenges and priorities along with a realistic and pragmatic vision to address and achieve them.

The EU must strengthen its autonomy in its relations with Iran. Firstly, the EU, together with other stakeholders, in particular the US, should clearly indicate a path forward and a set of compromises that could curb the application of the draft law on the implementation of a gradual increase of nuclear activities adopted by the Guardian Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran in December 2020 (*Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions and Protect Iranian Nation's Interests*), which includes a gradual enrichment of uranium, an increase in storage volume, as well as an increasing deviation from the original protocol of the nuclear deal.¹⁰ Improvements in relations are possible, but the EU, including Latvia, must take responsibility and play their part. There is a need to raise the awareness of both the public and the elite on the concerns and perspectives of Iranian leaders and citizens. In Iranian opinion polls in October 2021, a majority said that Iran should strengthen its relations with Asian countries instead of the countries of the European Union; less

than 40% of Iranians were in favor of closer relations with the European Union, while a majority viewed China favorably.¹¹ It is of primary importance that Latvia, together with its EU partners, are working to build the trust of both the Iranian people and the elite. Latvia must work to strengthen the EU's autonomy from the United States, which would allow the EU member states, including Latvia, to trade legally with Iran. There is a need to build a respectful and trust-based dialogue. While a quarter of Iranians believe that Iran should completely withdraw from the nuclear deal, a complete loss of confidence and Iran's complete seclusion from the West and its siding with China is a very risky possibility that would lead to growing security challenges. Moreover, one has to take into account the ambiguity of the Chinese factor as well. It would be in Latvia's interest to gradually strengthen trade relations with Iran through EU-supported mechanisms, especially in the sector of transport and logistics. To ensure this, Latvia, in 2022, should engage in EU efforts to improve relations with Iran and work towards the autonomy of EU-Iranian economic relations.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict

The situation in Israel and Palestine is complicated by internal tensions on both sides. The clashes in Gaza in May 2021 constituted the deadliest outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent years. There are numerous causes underlying the 11-day clash that range from political ambitions to coincidences and various domestic political speculations. The situation was complicated by both the short working period of the US administration and Israeli domestic political challenges that arose while forming the government.

On the one hand, there is the discriminatory Israeli policy against the Palestinians. Israel is accused of perpetuating and practicing institutionalized discrimination against Palestinians living under its rule in both Israeli and Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.¹² As a number of international monitoring and human rights organizations, including *Human Rights Watch* and *Amnesty International*, regularly report, Israel maintains a discriminatory system that treats Palestinians unequally. Its more than half a century long occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip includes systematic violations of rights, including collective punishment, excessive use of force against protesters, the misappropriation and demolition of residential structures, as well as administrative detentions without charge or judicial process. In certain areas, the violations are so severe that they amount to the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.¹³

On the other hand, the political divisions in the corridors of Palestinian power are only exacerbating the situation. The *Fatah*-led government of Palestine has been in power in the West Bank since 2007 and has been recognized as the official government of the

Palestinian National Authority (the State of Palestine), while control of Gaza is effectively in the hands of *Hamas*. Tensions between *Fatah* and *Hamas* have dominated Palestinian politics since 2006, when *Hamas* won the last parliamentary elections of the Palestinian National Authority. In order to defend itself as the ruling party in Palestinian politics, *Hamas* is expected to continue to use the weakness of *Fatah* in 2022 as well. However, as long as this dysfunction persists in Palestinian domestic politics, the alienation of society from the political system will deepen. Consequently, it will be very difficult to achieve national unity, which is currently one of the main challenges for cooperation with the Palestinian political elite. Nevertheless, the clash in Gaza in May 2021 reaffirmed the ability of *Hamas* to take the political initiative. Despite the heavy losses inflicted on the civilian population in Gaza, the war immediately increased the popularity of *Hamas* among the local population, highlighting the powerlessness of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian National Authority.

Unfortunately, it is clear that there are no right answers to solving this conflict. The leverage at the disposal of international organizations is limited, and the US is still considered to be the key player with the greatest influence. At the same time, the crisis of 2021 demonstrated the reluctance of the United States and its allies, including Latvia, to challenge the *status quo*, with Washington repeatedly stonewalling the efforts of the UN Security Council to secure an immediate ceasefire.¹⁴ While, on the one hand, it can be seen as a diplomatic effort to resolve the situation behind closed doors, this obvious unequivocal support for Israel has historically already led to the end of a series of UN resolutions condemning violence against protesters, taking a stand against the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, and other internationally recorded violations carried out by the State of Israel.¹⁵ The unwavering Western support for Israel in 2022 will continue to fuel the disproportionate use of force against Palestinians, which was also evident in the clashes of May.

As a result of the reaction of the international community, the year 2022 promises to be more ambiguous. Although the Israeli-Palestinian issue has always led to differences of opinions, the involvement of advocates of human rights, political activists, and even members of society who are distant from politics, will be very important. In 2022, the dissonance between the political slogans of the great powers and the *Realpolitik* conducted by them will become increasingly pronounced. We have seen the dissatisfaction of the international community through protests in both the European capitals and in a number of US cities, where protesters directly turned against their Western allies for supporting Israel, including in the trade of arms and military equipment.¹⁶ In the medium term, the current public rhetoric could resonate in the power corridors of the European Union and Washington, which could potentially facilitate changes in the policy of Latvia and the allies regarding their unconditional support for Israel, which would certainly affect our foreign policy approach to this issue.

The arguments about Israel's rights to self-defense and its historical context are understandable. However, the author believes the existing challenges cannot be solved alongside the above-mentioned crimes. Israel's policy towards the Palestinians plays a crucial role in the long-term health of this relationship. The discriminatory system is increasingly contributing to the alienation of Palestinians from the Israeli elite and their siding with *Hamas*. On the other hand, for a dialogue to be possible, there must be two development-oriented parties in the negotiations. Therefore, in this case a dialogue cannot take place until there are legitimate elections in Palestine. It is clear that a mutually respectful compromise and a desire to improve the situation must come from both sides, which means that the conflict cannot be considered to be over.

The State of Palestine is legally recognized by 139 of the 193 member states of the United Nations – Latvia is not among them.¹⁷ Latvia supports the two-state solution in the Middle East Peace Process and utilizes the political consultation mechanism launched in 2010.¹⁸ There is also no common EU-level approach to this decades-long conflict, with the EU member states having different views on the issue. As recognized by Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs, the fragmentation of the international community is part of this problem.¹⁹ Consequently, Latvian foreign policy makers should take a stronger stand and condemn this discriminatory system. As a small country, Latvia cannot afford to be tolerant towards these types of violations. The objective of the European Union is also a two-state solution with an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbors.²⁰ Consequently, Latvian foreign policy makers should also take a strong position at the EU level and work with their allies to achieve the EU's goals. These calls so far have not succeeded, largely due to differences of opinions between countries in both the UN and EU systems. Therefore, Latvia must actively participate in the building of a common EU position with the aim of reconciling the two sides and finding a middle ground in the development of a two-state solution based on internationally agreed parameters. This conflict has contravened international peace-building efforts for decades. Therefore, it is time for the EU and Latvia to prove the opposite in their decisions and policies, and to engage in a very specific way in order to achieve real results that will eventually, at some point, end this cycle of violence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall dynamics of the region will not change – it will continue to be complex and affect various facets of geopolitical issues, both politically and economically. The region faces an enormous number of challenges, but its economic prospects should not be overlooked either. Various parties will continue their conflicts in the region. Regional

players such as Turkey and Iran will demonstrate their ambitions, while international players such as Russia, the United States, and China will stand for their interests. Trends in the context of basic human security, in particular as a result of the effects of climate change, point to the challenges that the region will face in the years to come. It is clear that the people and the national governments of the region are the key players. However, the transatlantic community has the opportunity to alleviate these challenges by providing a chance to increase international security and prosperity. An important precondition for the more active involvement of Latvia and the EU is the economic unity of the region.

In 2022, the Middle East won't be the first priority for Latvia, though strategic planning in this context would be useful. Traditionally, Latvia's foreign policy has been implemented by deepening cooperation in the European Union and NATO based on shared values.²¹ Similarly, membership in international organizations and support for democratic values and the international rule of law have become an integral part of Latvia's foreign policy.²² To a large extent, these foreign policy pillars will continue to shape the agenda of our foreign policy makers in 2022 as well.

In 2022, Latvia will continue to engage in EU-Middle East strategies on issues affecting both peace and regional security, as well as in the provision of economic support. It is important for Latvia and the EU to follow issues related to migration and the hybrid war instruments activated by the Belarussian regime. An active involvement and the building of a constructive EU dialogue with the national governments in the region could be a crucial dimension for Latvia's security. In this context, it is also important to talk about greater EU involvement in the Middle East peace processes, which would preventively protect us from both the economic challenges posed by the instability in the Middle East and reduce the challenges of migration and terrorist threats, as well as promote international security in general. It would be important to develop a more prioritized approach to the Middle East region in both bilateral and EU cooperation initiatives in Latvia's foreign policy in 2022. Latvia, together with its partners, needs to enhance cooperation with its partners and allies in the region through the promotion of stability in the region and positioning itself as a reliable cooperation partner.

ENDNOTES

¹ "Yemen alert: 8 million face reduced rations amid funding shortages", United Nations, Humanitarian Aid, 22.12.2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1108612>.

² "COVID-19 tracker", Reuters, 22.12.2021, <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/yemen/>.

³ "The top 10 crises the world should be watching in 2021", Emergency Watchlist 2021, International Rescue Committee, <https://www.rescue.org/article/top-10-crises-world-should-be-watching-2021>.

- ⁴ "Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021, p. 3–4.
- ⁵ "Ārlietu ministra ikgadējais ziņojums par paveikto un iecerēto darbību valsts ārpolitikā un Eiropas Savienības jautājumos," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021.
- ⁶ "Ārlietu komisija paziņojumā aicina pārtraukt bruņotos konfliktus starp Izraēlu un palestīniešiem", the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia (the Saeima), 18.05.2021, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/29809-arlietu-komisija-pazinojuma-aicina-partraukt-brunotos-konfliktus-izraela>.
- ⁷ "Ārlietu ministra ikgadējais ziņojums par paveikto un iecerēto darbību valsts ārpolitikā un Eiropas Savienības jautājumos," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021, p. 3–4.
- ⁸ "Rinkēvičs: Progress par Irānas kodolvienošanos iespējams pēc ASV prezidenta vēlēšanām", LSM.lv., 10.01.2020, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/rinkevics-progress-par-iranas-kodolvienosanos-iespejams-pec-asv-prezidenta-velesanam.a344286/>.
- ⁹ "Ārlietu ministra ikgadējais ziņojums par paveikto un iecerēto darbību valsts ārpolitikā un Eiropas Savienības jautājumos," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021, p. 6.
- ¹⁰ "Iranian Parliament Bill on Nuclear Program: Full Text in English", NIAC Action, 03.12.2020, <https://www.niacouncil.org/publications/iranian-parliament-bill-on-nuclear-program-full-text-in-english/?locale=en>.
- ¹¹ "Iranian Public Opinion At the Start of the Raisi Administration", School of Public Policy, Center for International & Security Studies at Maryland, 18.10.2021, <https://cissm.umd.edu/research-impact/publications/iranian-public-opinion-start-raisi-administration>.
- ¹² "Israel and occupied palestinian territories", Amnesty international, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>.
- ¹³ "A Threshold Crossed. Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution", Human Rights Watch, 27.04.2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>; "Amnesty International Report 2020/21. The state of the world's human rights", Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/POL1032022021ENGLISH.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ Lynch, C., Gramer, R., Detsch, J., Meakem A., "Biden Stonewalls U.N. Concern Over Israeli-Palestinian Clashes", Foreign Policy, 12.05.2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/12/biden-israeli-palestinian-conflict-united-nations-jerusalem/>.
- ¹⁵ "Security Council - Veto List", United Nations, https://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact_veto_table_en.htm.
- ¹⁶ Mansoor, S., "How Online Activism and the Racial Reckoning in the U.S. Have Helped Drive a Groundswell of Support for Palestinians", Time, 21.05.2021, <https://time.com/6050422/pro-palestinian-support/>.
- ¹⁷ "Diplomatic Relations", Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations New York, <http://palestineun.org/about-palestine/diplomatic-relations/>.
- ¹⁸ Ārlietu ministrija, "Notikušas Latvijas un Palestīnas Ārlietu ministriju politiskās konsultācijas", LV portāls, 11.09.2019, <https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/308069-notikusas-latvijas-un-palestinas-arlietu-ministriju-politiskas-konsultacijas-2019>.
- ¹⁹ "Intervija ar ārlietu ministru Edgaru Rinkēviču par karadarbību Tuvajos Austrumos", Latvijas Televīzija, <https://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/20.05.2021-intervija-ar-arlietu-ministru-edgaru-rinkevicu-par-karadarbibu-tuvajos-austrumos.id220297>.
- ²⁰ "Middle East Peace process", European External Action Service, 08.02.2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/middle-east-peace-process/337/middle-east-peace-process_en.

- ²¹ "Ārlietu ministra ikgadējais ziņojums par paveikto un iecerēto darbību valsts ārpolitikā un Eiropas Savienības jautājumos," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021.
- ²² Reire, G., "The role of international institutions and the rule of law in Latvia's foreign policy," in *Latvian Foreign and Security Policy. Yearbook 2022*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2022.

NATO'S SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA: IMPLICATIONS FOR LATVIA

Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova

Head of the Asia Program at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs |
Director of the China Studies Centre at the Rīga Stradiņš University

As a European NATO member bordering the traditional NATO threat – Russia – Latvia is naturally wondering what a wider NATO portfolio would mean for defense and security commitments in its immediate vicinity. A lot has changed since the NATO London Declaration first spoke of China's growing influence and international policies as presenting both "opportunities and challenges" for the Alliance in 2019. The NATO-level analysis needle has moved away from opportunities and into challenges – and the Latvian side has been a party to the process, making the People's Republic of China a new topic on the agenda for the next decade in two domains: the conventional security domain in the Indo-Pacific space and the hybrid influence domain in the transatlantic space.

Aiming to explore the future avenues of Latvia's position within NATO's China policy, this paper traces the origins of NATO's increasing spotlighting of China, explores whether NATO's prioritization of China would bring about less attention to the central threat for Latvia, namely, Russia, raises counter-arguments to this position, and ultimately argues that for the sake of a relevant, vigilant, united and agile Alliance, Latvia must adapt to the new reality in NATO planning and find ways to become a party in the conversation on NATO's political agenda vis-a-vis China.

LATVIA AND NATO'S EMERGING CHINA APPROACH

Since 2019, mentions of China have a new and increasing presence in NATO documents, as well as in the discussion on NATO 2030 goals and directions.

First arising at the London Declaration as a carefully worded recognition that “China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance”,¹ the red thread of China-as-challenge became more pronounced in the following years.

What to do about China was undoubtedly also one of the underlying questions on Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s mind as he “appointed a group of experts to support him in his NATO 2030 initiative and provide independent advice on how to further strengthen NATO’s political dimension”.² And the report that was delivered spoke of China just after Russia in the section on “Strengthening NATO’s Political Role and Tools with regard to Emerging Threats and Challenges from Every Direction”, outlining why China presents a growing concern for NATO: “China is [...] best understood as [a] full-spectrum systemic rival, rather than a purely economic player or an only Asia-focused security actor. While China does not pose an immediate military threat to the transatlantic area on the scale of Russia, it is expanding its military reach into the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Arctic.”³ The text thus outlines the global, not just the regional, nature of China’s growing military might.

The Brussels Summit Communiqué of 2021 famously refers to China 10 times, and while some of the mentions spoke of constructive engagement, most of the phrasing showed concern: “China’s stated ambitions and assertive behavior present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security. We are concerned by those coercive policies which stand in contrast to the fundamental values enshrined in the Washington Treaty. China is rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal with more warheads and a larger number of sophisticated delivery systems to establish a nuclear triad. It is opaque in implementing its military modernization and its publicly declared military-civil fusion strategy. It is also cooperating militarily with Russia, including through participation in Russian exercises in the transatlantic area. We remain concerned with China’s frequent lack of transparency and use of disinformation. We call on China to uphold its international commitments and to act responsibly in the international system, including in the space, cyber, and maritime domains, in keeping with its role as a major power.”⁴ The China factor had made it into the conversation on the future of NATO permanently. An important reason behind this was the fact that China had started to come up in the national foreign policy and security planning documents of member states – most visibly the US, but also Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, among others. In a sense, NATO was reacting to what was already on the agendas of many national governments,⁵ including the Latvian

one. As Helena Legarda and Meia Nouwens point out, “Beijing is also engaging in a wide range of influencing and hybrid warfare activities in NATO allied states [...] A more comprehensive response to China’s emergence as a global security actor and these arising challenges is therefore in NATO’s interest”.⁶

However, China entering the conversation on the future of NATO caused some voices to say that prioritizing China is, in fact, bad news for Latvia and its fellow Eastern European NATO members. The next sub-chapter explores this argument and provides possible responses to it.

ONLY ONE SPOTLIGHT? THE RUSSIA VS. CHINA ARGUMENT AND LATVIAN INTERESTS

Does the turn of the proverbial NATO spotlight towards China mean a shadow will fall over the traditional security concern of Russia, leaving Latvia under-protected and opening it up to opportunistic attacks? This does not seem to be the case.

Estonian Defense Minister Kalle Laanet has cautioned against a shift in NATO’s focus by saying “Russia, of course, wants that the U.S. attention is somewhere away, in the Pacific, and not in our region”, and he called for a common, strong and united NATO message to Russia.⁷ Indeed, often in discussions, a dilemma is presented between the interests of the north-eastern NATO members bordering Russia and wider NATO calls emanating from the members with a presence in the Indo-Pacific region, primarily the United States of America, to pay more political attention to China on the NATO level.⁸

However, Helena Legarda rightly argues against this reading: “The inclusion of China does not constitute a move away from NATO’s traditional focus on Russia, as demonstrated by the fact that Russia still took up much more space in this year’s communique (it was mentioned 63 times, while China was name-checked only 10 times). But the communique is proof of a new consensus among allies that they can no longer afford to ignore China’s global ambitions and activities”.⁹ Indeed, it is quite clear that the allied capitals understand that challenges posed by Russia are too important to be stuffed in the backseat of a new and enhanced NATO agenda; therefore, Latvia can be assured its grievances will not be left unaddressed. Russia’s continued actions in its neighborhood, including the decision to withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies in 2020¹⁰ and, most recently, its alleged support of Belarus’s weaponization of migration flows¹¹ to put pressure on Lithuanian, Polish and Latvian – effectively, NATO – borders, serve as arguments against NATO’s disengagement with the region, making a defense vacuum on NATO’s Eastern Flank unlikely. What’s more, the Russian threat can cause

the Alliance to grow. Public (33% of respondents are in favor of applying for NATO membership in early 2021)¹² and political¹³ support for Sweden's NATO membership are on the rise, and Russia is the single most important factor behind the Finnish "special relationship"¹⁴ with the Alliance. Russia will continue to be a relevant issue for NATO, simply because it has a wider scope than exclusively being on regional Baltic and Polish agendas.

On top of the fact that NATO is well-equipped enough to have multiple operational "spotlights", a case can be made that there is no trade-off between safeguarding Latvia along with the other Baltic nations and Poland from Russia and spotlighting China, because China and Russia are two very different cases from the perspective of goals, presented challenges, strategic planning and deterrence approaches.

Another offshoot of the "single spotlight" argument is that the United States of America is lobbying NATO's turn to China because it is in their national interest. As put by the Ambassador of the PRC to Latvia: "the United States ignores the history and facts of the South China Sea issue in order to protect its hegemonic interests".¹⁵ This activity, then, according to the argument, lowers engagement in line with the interests of other member states, and Latvia as a devoted transatlantic partner is following suit against its better judgement. PRC MFA spokesperson Hua Chunying makes a similar point, demonstrating that Beijing believes the US is using its position within NATO to pressure countries into securitizing China – away from their more immediate concerns: "We also noted that within NATO, there are objective and rational voices saying China is not an enemy. As a matter of fact, the greatest threat and challenge the world faces is unilateralism and bullying practices. There is no immunity even for US allies".¹⁶ Russia Today quotes Aleksandr Asafov in a similar vein, arguing the centrality of the US interests in NATO's China agenda, yet not going so far as to assume that this development would mean less NATO attention on Russia: "In this case, the task of the US is to 'sell' this threat to the Alliance and to destroy the economic ties between China and European Union member states. To this end, the mythical threat of a terrible China alongside Russia is created. It is the process of China containment as one of the basic goals of NATO".¹⁷ However, in reality, China is not just an issue for the United States – the sentiment, admittedly to different extents, is shared across the Alliance, including in Latvian foreign policy and security documents and beyond.¹⁸

Latvia indeed has already become more apprehensive of the situation. The latest Annual Report of the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union does bring up US-China strategic competition, but it also demonstrates a trend towards moving China out of the discourse on economic opportunities and increasingly placing it into the security domain for Latvia as well: "China is attempting to modify and alter international structures and norms, tailoring them to its own values

and world outlook. China invokes arguments concerning sovereignty and state security to limit the chances of international human rights mechanisms for investigating and preventing potential human rights violations. China promotes solutions in the field of the internet governance that would give states greater control over the activity of the internet users and the content they can access online”.¹⁹ The report avoids going too far rhetorically, yet it soundly states the issues Latvia finds worrisome – this shift in tone did not go unnoticed in the Chinese MFA, causing the Embassy of the PRC in Riga to publish a response statement “clarifying China’s positions”.²⁰ In fact, since 2020, the China question has been brought up on multiple platforms involving Latvia, and often at Latvia’s behest: “The relationship with China was also discussed, placing the emphasis on the importance of a concerted policy based on the protection of the region’s shared values and on mutual solidarity. The Latvian Foreign Minister called for further coordination of EU member states’ relations with China focusing on cooperation between the EU member states and China in the “27+1” format. At the same time, it was noted that China is also an important partner in tackling global challenges such as climate change”.²¹ This quote from the report on the Baltic, Nordic and Visegrad foreign ministers’ meeting in September 2021 demonstrates that Latvia acknowledges shared concerns, and so do its partners. Limiting the China question to the European “27+1” agenda may prove to be shortsighted.

Even for countries that were betting on China as an economic partner for diversification in the early 2010s, and which are certainly not at the forefront of the Western values policy, such as Latvia, the risks have become more pronounced. One can argue that the nature of the challenges posed to the member states by a rising and a more assertive China is a strong reason for the continued relevance of the Alliance as a whole, an impetus for unity between its members, and a reason for mutual engagement between these members in fine-tuning their national China approaches, thereby contributing to just what Latvia needs: a relevant, vigilant, united and agile Alliance to protect its borders.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the past year, Latvia has become more apprehensive of the security implications of China’s growing international role. One can conclude that, from a Latvian standpoint, China coming up on the NATO agenda more and more over the next decade does not go against national interests for at least three reasons, highlighted here.

First of all, the Alliance has no choice but to remain vigilant about Russia’s actions due to Russia’s continued actions in its neighborhood.

Secondly, there is no trade-off between safeguarding Latvia from Russia and spotlighting China because these are two very different cases from the perspective of goals, presented challenges, strategic planning, and deterrence approaches.

Thirdly, the challenge posed to the Alliance by a rising and a more assertive China is a strong reason for the continued relevance of the Alliance, an impetus for unity between its members, and a reason for mutual engagement between the members in fine-tuning their national China approaches – in this regard, Latvia could be an experience provider.

Thinking that China is too far away to matter to Latvia security-wise is myopic. Granted, Latvia will not be a player in the Indo-Pacific region, where China applies more conventional means of offsetting the security balance, but Latvia could well be affected by China's activities in Europe, where China operates via hybrid means – as some research has suggested it already has.

Latvia needs a relevant, vigilant, united, and agile Alliance, and therefore, it should not fall into an oversimplified understanding of NATO as just having the capacity for one spotlight, i.e., not being able to multitask. Latvia should adapt to the new reality in NATO planning, and it should find ways to contribute and become a party in the conversation over a joint NATO political agenda vis-a-vis China.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “London Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3–4 December 2019”, NATO, 04.12.2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm.
- ² “Independent Group”, NATO, <https://www.nato.int/nato2030/independent-group/>.
- ³ “NATO 2030: United for a New Era”, NATO, 25.11.2020, p. 27, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf.
- ⁴ “Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021”, NATO, 14.06.2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_185000.htm?selectedLocale=en.
- ⁵ Bērziņa-Čerenkova, U.A., “#NATO2030. Towards a NATO China Strategy”, International Centre for Defence and Security, 14.01.2021, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ICDS_Brief_NATO2030_Series_2_Aleksandra_Berzina-Cerenkova_January_2021.pdf.
- ⁶ Legarda, H., Nouwens, M., “NATO needs a China policy”, MERICS, 25.07. 2019, <https://merics.org/en/short-analysis/nato-needs-china-policy>.
- ⁷ Gould, J., “Russia fears complicate NATO’s new China focus”, Defence News, 22.10.2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2021/10/22/russia-fears-complicate-natos-new-china-focus/>.
- ⁸ Chatam House rule, Annual Baltic Conference on Defence, Tallinn, 2021.
- ⁹ Legarda, H., “NATO’s China Conundrum”, 01.09.2021, Internationale Politik Quarterly, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/natos-china-conundrum>.
- ¹⁰ “Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the Treaty on Open Skies”, NATO, 18.06.2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_184840.htm?selectedLocale=en.

- ¹¹ @KancelariaSejmu, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/KancelariaSejmu/status/1458115619459682314>.
- ¹² Vanttinen, P., "Swedes increasingly in favour of joining NATO", Euractiv, 12.01.2021, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/swedes-increasingly-in-favour-of-joining-nato/.
- ¹³ Duxbury, C., "Sweden edges closer to NATO membership", Politico, 22.12. 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/sweden-nato-membership-dilemma/>.
- ¹⁴ Huntington, C., "Sweden and Finland's special relationship with NATO", Atlantic Forum, 01.06. 2021, <https://atlantic-forum.com/content/sweden-and-finland's-special-relationship-nato>.
- ¹⁵ Paiders, J., "*Ķīnas vēstnieks Latvijā: Starptautiskajai sabiedrībai ir steidzams uzdevums palielināt taisnīgu vakcīnu sadali*", Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze, 03.09.2021, <https://neatkariga.nra.lv/intervijas/356807-kinas-vestnieks-latvija-starptautiskajai-sabiedribai-ir-steidzams-uzdevums-palielinat-taisnigu-vakcinu-sadali>.
- ¹⁶ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 5.12. 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1721889.shtml.
- ¹⁷ «Закрепление идей США»: почему генсек НАТО заявил об угрозе сближения Китая и России», Russia Today, 12.10.2021, <https://russian.rt.com/world/article/916472-stoltenberg-nato-kitai>.
- ¹⁸ For a wider overview of this topic, see: Bērziņa-Čerenkova, U. A., "NATO and China: Navigating the Challenges" in: "NATO 2030 Towards a New Strategic Concept and Beyond" Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, JHU, 2021.
- ¹⁹ "Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union 2020", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 27.01.2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2221/download>.
- ²⁰ "*Ķīnas Tautas Republikas vēstniecības Latvijā runasvīra komentārs par Latvijas valdības ārpolitikas ziņojumā pausto par Ķīnu*", Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Latvia, 08.01.2021, http://lv.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/202101/t20210109_9509341.htm.
- ²¹ "At the Baltic, Nordic and Visegrad Foreign Ministers' meeting, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland receive strong political support for the protection of the EU's external border", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 15.09.2021, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baltic-nordic-and-visegrad-foreign-ministers-meeting-latvia-lithuania-and-poland-receive-strong-political-support-protection-eus-external-border>.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE OF LATVIA'S INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Natālija Knipše

Fellow at the Freedom House

Contentious situations concerning potential human rights violations in 2021 need to be looked at through the lens of the realities that come along with a prolonged global pandemic, meaning, some forms of assistance can be a bit more complicated logistically because of epidemiological concerns, and internal affairs take up more of the time and attention of decision makers.

This chapter will explore the various types of human rights violations that occurred in Belarus in 2021 and the urgent action still needed regarding women's rights and the prevention of domestic violence through taking on international obligations.

OVERVIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN 2021

Violations against the civil society of Belarus

When addressing Latvia's reaction and involvement in potential human rights violations relating to the situation in Belarus, two main aspects come to the forefront – the treatment of activists and members of civil society who disagree with Lukashenko's regime, and the situation that was escalated by the Belarusian state at the borders it shares with its EU neighbors.

Ever since the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus in August 2020, the regime led by Europe's last dictator, Alexander Lukashenko has been terrorizing the people of Belarus by targeting those who dare to criticize or speak out against his actions by arresting individuals and raiding offices.¹ On 14 July 2021, Belarusian security forces raided over 20 civil society organizations in Belarus, searched houses, seized documents,

and arrested dozens of human rights activists.² Over the second half of 2021, the Belarusian authorities dissolved the majority of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on human rights and civil society issues, alleging they carried out activities beyond their official goals even though it is clear that the reason for their dissolution was the potential threat they posed to Lukashenko's regime.³ In total, 241 civil society organizations were liquidated; these organizations were working or focusing on a variety of topics and areas, from environmental and human rights to associations of motorists and local history organizations.⁴

The humanitarian crisis at the Belarusian border

The Latvian state and local institutions, as well as human rights NGOs, have been vocal, public allies of the people of Belarus – however, the attitude towards the Belarusian fight for democracy and the narrative surrounding it changed drastically when it reached the Latvia-Belarus border in the second half of 2021.

Hybrid warfare waged by the dictator of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, by directing thousands of migrants to the borders between Belarus and its European Union neighbors, led to not only a security crisis, but a humanitarian crisis as well. While the situation on the Poland-Belarus border was more drastic, but Latvia also had to weigh its options when deciding on what to do about the sudden influx of migrants at its border.

In October of 2021, the European Council turned to the European Commission to draft any necessary changes to the legal framework within the EU to respond to the weaponization of people by the dictatorial forces of Belarus, which called into question various provisions of Article 78(3) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which clearly states that if one or more member states is confronted by an emergency situation created by a sudden inflow of nationals from third countries, the Council of the European Union, upon a proposal from the European Commission, may adopt provisional measures for the benefit of said member states after consulting the European Parliament.⁵ So there is a set framework for reacting to situations like the one on the EU-Belarus border in 2021, at least regarding the management of a sudden influx of third country nationals on the EU's doorstep.

The potential human rights violations need to be viewed through the lens of the hybrid warfare activity of amassing migrants at the Latvia-Belarus border; however, the humanitarian perspective will remain prevalent in this analysis, also keeping in mind humanitarian law and the provisions set forth by the Geneva Convention, including the principle of non-refoulement.⁶ The principle of non-refoulement is one of the cornerstones of international refugee protection – it prohibits the expulsion or return in any manner

of a refugee to the frontiers of territories where their life or freedom would be threatened due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

A gender-focused view of the Covid-19 pandemic

While Latvia is a champion of upholding the rule of law, mainly because of the incredible accuracy and social relevance of its Constitutional Court, there are still areas of equal treatment within the scope of human rights that are not properly addressed internally, and these in turn affect international affairs, because some social groups are significantly less protected.

While Latvia has been a champion of women's rights at the United Nations level and has been very successful at inclusive representation there, the situation within the country is dire, especially regarding gender-based and sexual violence. Data from as recently as 2019 indicates that in Latvia 38.6% of women have suffered physical or sexual violence from the age of 15. Staggeringly, 32.1% of these women never told anyone about the violence they experienced, which is more than double the average in the EU. In Latvia, 60% of women have been subjected to psychological violence by a current or former partner and 14% have been victims of stalking.⁷ The situation is clearly dire and requires immediate action.

Latvia has signed, but has not ratified, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, more commonly known as the Istanbul Convention.⁸ Latvia has also not passed any legislation or made any other relevant legislative developments in the area since 2014 when the Istanbul Convention entered into force.⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN 2022

Supporting civil society in Belarus

While most civil society leaders and activists have left Belarus, Lithuania has taken greater strides in welcoming people fleeing Belarus, as well as providing assistance and a way to communicate with the world to the woman thought to be the winner of the latest Belarusian presidential elections, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, and the people who support her in her work. Moreover, the public support from Latvia towards the Belarusian people

and the lack of support from private Latvian companies is of note. Latvian companies (Grindeks, Olainfarm, Silvanols), alongside other large Western corporations, are some of the biggest advertisers on Belarusian state television channels, effectively sponsoring Lukashenko's propaganda machine, despite the well-documented and undisputed human rights violations that have been increasingly taking place in Belarus.¹⁰

While choosing how and where to advertise falls under the discretion of the private companies, in this instance it creates a complete dissonance with the public stance of the Latvian state. Keeping in mind that companies like Carlsberg, L'Oreal and Nestlé have either completely stopped or significantly reduced their advertising on Belarusian national TV, the aforementioned Latvian companies should be inclined to do the same, using the conduct of the Latvian government as an example for supporting the people of Belarus internationally. Political and economic sanctions cannot be effective if there is still a way for Latvia and the West more broadly to sponsor Lukashenko's propaganda. Latvia must stand with activists who are calling upon a halt of advertising in Belarusian state media and prevent Latvian-owned companies from continuing to do so.¹¹

Taking note of the way Lithuania has provided support, and possibly unwittingly presented a unified front both from the public and private sectors, is the only basis for well-rounded and effective support of the Belarusian people.

Support from Latvia cannot solely come from the non-governmental sector and activists without substantial governmental support. Investigations need to be conducted into the allegations of torture and various forms of inhumane treatment reported by activists in Belarus. And while the legal tools available may be scarce, all reports of torture and inhumane treatment must be properly documented, because this evidence can serve as grounds for investigation and properly tailored sanctions, and they could provide leverage when negotiating with leaders of the current illegitimate Belarusian regime. Alongside national support for local Latvian NGOs, while most Belarusian NGOs were shut down by Lukashenko's regime, there must be continuous support for the civil society of Belarus. Latvia needs to actively take part in ensuring that international organizations such as the UN or the OSCE prioritize Belarus and establish a presence there.

Latvian youth and NGOs have also been powerful advocates of supporting the people of Belarus, and with Latvia gearing up for a UN Security Council seat in 2025, the inclusion and consideration of youth representatives is an important show of inclusivity and long-term thinking. Thus, utilizing the ties the young people of Latvia have to their peers abroad and within the broader network of activists working on different human rights issues around Europe would not only serve the cause, but also improve the international image of how Latvia operates and the resourcefulness of our approach.

Addressing the crisis at Latvia's border with Belarus

Balancing the response to the hybrid warfare directed by Alexander Lukashenko must be done from a human rights perspective, keeping in mind the guiding principles of democracy and the fundamental rights of every human being.

While the European Commission has directed the need to comply with the principle of non-refoulement towards the Belarusian government, stating that migrants in its territory must be provided with adequate protection and must cooperate with the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration, not only is the authority of the European Commission low in the authoritarian regime, it is completely counter-intuitive since Alexander Lukashenko is the reason the migrants are in Belarus, and the responsibility of the care and humane treatment of the migrants amassing at Belarus's border with the European Union also falls on Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, because they need to be beacons of democracy. That does not mean opening borders to everyone and giving in to the hybrid warfare waged by Lukashenko, but it does mean using proportional and humane measures for operating under these difficult circumstances. Regardless of how the people at the Belarusian border arrived, they are entitled equal treatment when it comes to human rights and humanitarian aid by having access to resources to satisfy their basic needs. These migrants are unwitting pawns in Lukashenko's twisted power struggle for legitimacy, often at great cost to their families as they are forced to return home after spending all their resources with the hope of entering the EU through the Belarusian border. There needs to be bilateral and multilateral collaboration between the Latvian government and the leaders of the states these migrants are coming from to prevent this issue at its starting point in the home countries of the migrants. It is clear that many might try to enter the EU again, but it is not their desire to do so as unwitting proxies of hybrid warfare.¹²

Two cases have been initiated at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding Iraqi and Afghan nationals at the Belarusian border with Latvia and Poland, in which the ECtHR has decided to initiate interim measures concerning the situation that started on 25 August 2021¹³ by invoking Rule 39 of the ECtHR's Rules of the Court.¹⁴

While interim measures are often disregarded by the state they have been attributed to¹⁵ – and while Latvia did make some effort to ensure humanitarian aid in the form of ensuring food, water, clothing, medical care was provided to the people stranded at the border – the stance taken by the government was murky when viewed in the context of the expectations Latvia previously had for human rights standards elsewhere.

In 2020, the European Commission proposed a new Pact on Migration and Asylum, setting out the core principles and vision for how the EU should approach migration. Solidarity and responsibility were set forth as the guiding principles to rebuilding trust between member states to manage migration collectively.¹⁶ As the European

Commission set forth in its council decision of 1 December 2021, the measures that may be applied to control the situation cannot in any way disrespect the fundamental rights of migrants or the international obligations taken on by Latvia.¹⁷

Harmonizing Latvia's approach to gender equality and domestic violence

The first step to end the dissonance between Latvia's internal and international stance on women's rights and domestic violence would be ratifying the Istanbul Convention, a move which has in the past year been made more realistic by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia.

On 4 June 2021, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia decided case No. 2020-39-02 brought to the court by 21 members of the Latvian parliament – it decided that Articles 3(c), 4(3) and 12(1) of the Istanbul Convention were in compliance with the preamble and Sections 1, 99, and 101 of the Latvian constitution, that Article 4(4) of the Istanbul Convention was in line with Section 91 of the Latvian constitution, and that Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention complies with Section 112 of the Latvian constitution.¹⁸ Therefore, the Constitutional Court has deemed that aspects of the Istanbul Convention that some members of the Latvian parliament thought were unconstitutional are in fact constitutional, removing any potential barriers for ratifying the convention in that regard.

Section 9 of the law on International Treaties on the Republic of Latvia sets out the circumstances under which the Latvian parliament needs to ratify treaties, and therefore the cabinet of ministers could express in a motivated submission to the parliament the necessity of ratifying the Istanbul Convention, because the Constitutional Court has found even the most contentious parts of the Istanbul Convention to be compatible with the constitution of the Republic of Latvia.¹⁹ Therefore, there is a legal possibility for the cabinet of ministers to move forward with ratifying the Istanbul Convention, which is an internal policy change, but would send important international signals about Latvia's commitment to combatting domestic violence.

The situation created by the pandemic could be seen as an additional cause to accelerate ratifying the Istanbul Convention. The UN has dubbed domestic violence a "shadow pandemic", highlighting that during the global spread of Covid-19, domestic violence shelters and helplines have also reached capacity.²⁰ This further emphasizes the direct impact on the safety and physical and mental health of women and anyone else exposed to domestic violence in a time when even more of our time is spent at home.

Keeping in mind the current composition of the cabinet of ministers, it could be productive for the further development of Latvia's position in international affairs and

the international political and diplomatic landscape if the cabinet of ministers ratified the Istanbul Convention as soon as possible, in an effort to unify and harmonize Latvia's international image and approach to sexism and gender-based violence both internally and externally. Latvia had previously agreed to strengthen its legal framework in line with the provisions set out in the Istanbul Convention already by 2018,²¹ however, no substantial developments have occurred, and not ratifying the Istanbul Convention could be one of the main reasons for inaction and for the fact that the only changes happening are related to peripheral issues which, while important, are not nearly effective enough to provide effective protection.

A comparative study of Estonia and Latvia, the former having ratified the Istanbul Convention, showed that ratification of the Istanbul Convention had a significant impact when drafting policy and enacting legislative change in the country, making it an effective instrument of international law by causing multi-sectoral change and creating preventive measures in countries that have ratified it.²²

To summarize, Latvia cannot continue positioning itself as a champion of women's rights internationally if the situation inside the country is steadily degrading while there are simple catalysts like ratifying the Istanbul Convention available – it has been found compatible with the constitution of the Republic of Latvia and there potentially is enough political will in the cabinet of ministers to make it a reality.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Лукашенко: НПО и западные СМИ под видом демократии насаждали в стране террор”, Zerkalo, 03.07.2021, <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/290.html>.
- ² “Belarus: Freedom House Condemns Sweeping Attack on Human Rights Defenders, Civil Society Groups”, Freedom House, 16.07.2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/belarus-freedom-house-condemns-sweeping-attack-human-rights-defenders-civil-society-groups>.
- ³ “Belarus: Sweeping closure of dozens of NGOs as the crackdown on civil society continues”, Amnesty International, 23.07.2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/belarus-sweeping-closure-of-dozens-of-ngos-as-the-crackdown-on-civil-society-continues/>.
- ⁴ “Как в Беларуси уничтожают гражданское общество”, Motolko Help, 05.10.2021, <https://motolko.help/ru-infographics/kak-v-belarusi-unichtozhayut-grazhdanskoe-obshchestvo/>.
- ⁵ Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union. Consolidated version, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT>.
- ⁶ “Proposal for a Council Decision on provisional emergency measures for the benefit of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland”, Explanatory Memorandum, European Commission, 01.12.2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2021%3A752%3AFIN&qid=1638547296962>.
- ⁷ “Crime and violence”, Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, https://www.csb.gov.lv/en/gender-equality-indicators/Crime_Violence.
- ⁸ “Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence”, <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>.

- ⁹ “Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe. The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges,” European Parliament, 10.2020, p. 34., [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658648/IPOL_STU\(2020\)658648_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658648/IPOL_STU(2020)658648_EN.pdf).
- ¹⁰ “Western companies continue to advertise heavily on Lukashenko’s TV stations”, Libereco. Partnership for Human Rights, 06.12.2021, <https://www.lphr.org/en/westliche-unternehmen-werbung-staatsfernsehen-belarus/>.
- ¹¹ “Откажитесь от заказа рекламы в государственных СМИ Беларуси!”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%8C-%D0%BE%D1%82-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC%D1%8B-%D0%B2-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%8B%D1%85-%D1%81%D0%BC%D0%B8-%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%BB-%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%B8>.
- ¹² “Lukashenko sends mixed signals over Belarus migrant crisis”, Politico, 16.12.2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/alexander-lukashenko-sends-mixed-signals-over-belarus-poland-migrant-crisis/>.
- ¹³ “Court indicates interim measures in respect of Iraqi and Afghan national at Belarusian border with Latvia and Poland”, European Court of Human Rights, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/app/conversion/pdf/?library=ECHR&id=003-7100942-9612632&filename=Interim%20measures%20Poland-Latvia-Belarus%20border.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ “Rules of the Court. Registry of the Court”, European Court of Human Rights, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/rules_court_eng.pdf.
- ¹⁵ “European Court Grants Interim Measures in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”, International Justice Resource Center, 14.10.2020, <https://ijrcenter.org/2020/10/14/european-court-grants-interim-measures-in-nagorno-karabakh-conflict/>.
- ¹⁶ “A fresh start on migration: Building confidence and striking a new balance between responsibility and solidarity”, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1706.
- ¹⁷ “Proposal for a Council Decision on provisional emergency measures for the benefit of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland”, Explanatory Memorandum, European Commission, 01.12.2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2021%3A752%3AFIN&qid=1638547296962>.
- ¹⁸ “Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia in case No. 2020-39-02”, 04.06.2021, https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/web/viewer.html?file=https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-39-02_Spriedums.pdf#search=.
- ¹⁹ “On International Treaties of the Republic of Latvia”, Law adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/57840-on-international-treaties-of-the-republic-of-latvia>.
- ²⁰ “The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19”, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>.
- ²¹ “Latvia promises to bolster laws and support partners to fight violence”, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/step-it-up/commitments/latvia>.
- ²² Jonite B., “Fighting Injustice Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Implementation of the Istanbul Convention and its Effectiveness in Combating Violence Against Women”, University of Oxford, 2021.

TOWARDS A MORE GENDER-ATTUNED FOREIGN POLICY

Elizabete Elīna Vizgunova-Vikmane

Associate Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs |
Researcher at the Public Policy Management Institute (Lithuania)

The different areas of activity of Latvia's foreign and security policy, which are well documented in this yearly edition, are multiplying. Whereas the analyses of some well-established, traditional areas that are linked to the overall goal of Latvia's foreign policy to "ensure the irreversibility of the country's sovereignty and independence"¹ are well elaborated, other "softer" areas have gained little to no attention. Gender equality is now a highly debated topic both at the European level (emphasized by Ursula von der Leyen's European Commission sharpening the focus on gender equality² through Gender Equality 2020–2025 and a commitment to gender mainstreaming³) and in the EU member states. Gender equality in the EU has come to signify something more than a value that binds together EU member states, as per Article 2 of the Treaty of the EU:⁴ nowadays, this attitude can also signify resistance towards, or the selective employment of, European values. The role of gender as a factor in foreign policy making is therefore an area that is starting to feature more heavily in the external agenda of democratic countries.

Latvia has long prioritized gender equality in its foreign policy direction pertaining to human rights and development cooperation. However, the last two years have been particularly memorable. In 2020, the country approved its first National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (WPS NAP). Latvia also joined Canada's Group of Friends of 1325 to promote the goals of UNSCR 1325.⁵ In 2021, Latvia started its membership in the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), which will last until 2025. These steps signaled Latvia's growing interest in assuming the role of a gender-equality champion globally, as the country has committed to global human rights and European values in a world where their meaning and content are subject to heated political debate.

This essay will describe the various gendered dimensions of Latvia's foreign policy. The essay will start by investigating the country's international commitments on gender equality and the national commitments that Latvia is already implementing in its foreign policy in 2021. The essay will put forward three recommendations for Latvia's foreign policy to become more attuned to the growing demand to address inequalities throughout all policy making fields in 2022.

GENDER IN LATVIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN 2021

Latvia's commitment to gender equality is embedded in its membership and active participation in the UN, NATO, and the EU. The gender perspective is deeply embedded in the organizational and functional logic of these international organizations. They often see themselves as beacons guiding the legal and policy preconditions for the international community in integrating women into all spheres of power.

At the same time, Latvia's foreign policy also directly integrates gender into several fields of its activity. The subsequent chapters will present an overview of the gendered dimensions of Latvia's foreign policy.

Commitments to international organizations

In July 2020, Latvia released its first WPS NAP for 2020–2025. In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Security Council Resolution 1325 and the subsequent nine resolutions on Women, Peace and Security marked the beginning of a new process in promoting international peace and security, with a special focus on the prevention of gender-based violence, as well as women's representation and involvement in military conflict resolutions and peacekeeping processes. Latvia's plan has three main tasks: (1) raising public awareness of gender equality issues and eliminating gender-based violence, especially in the younger generation; (2) training for the defense and home affairs sector, including the establishment of a "gender advisor" position; and (3) the transfer of Latvia's experience and knowledge.⁶

The plan was well-placed in terms of timing, marking the 20th anniversary of the resolution itself and recognizing the magnitude of the Covid-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on women.⁷ Indeed, as the press release of the MFA noted, "there has never been a more relevant time to discuss the WPS agenda than during global pandemic".⁸ However, researchers have noted that while the NAP was on the

government's agenda five years before, it was only implemented in 2020, suggesting it was not a high priority. However, it has certainly become one that Latvia is taking up as the country becomes a candidate in the UN Security Council Election in 2025.⁹

In 2021, Latvia started its membership in the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), which will last until 2025. At sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, the participants discuss progress achieved in the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995, BPfA), which is the principal political document for women's equality at the international level (and which Latvia is a signatory of). The BPfA commits to 12 critical areas of concern (women in the environment, women in power and decision-making, the girl child, women and the economy, women and poverty, violence against women, human rights of women, the education and training of women, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women and health, woman and the media, and women and armed conflict).¹⁰ The commission discusses current developments concerning gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as producing thematic resolutions and general conclusions.

European Union Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), in its fifth review of BPfA implementation in EU member states, indicates that several fields of action still require critical attention in Latvia. These include the risk of social exclusion, where the gender gap is particularly pronounced. The report expresses concern over misconceptions about the content and the ratification process of the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (hereinafter "the Istanbul Convention").¹¹ Similar concerns are expressed regarding LGBTQI+ rights.¹² Overall, the rights-based challenges of Latvia and the other EU member states are named as crucial for the advancement of the goals of the BPfA.

A yet another commitment Latvia firmly holds is the one towards NATO. According to the Summary of the *National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives*, in 2018, Latvia was among the leading nations in NATO, both in the National Armed Forces and the Paratroopers, with the percentage of female staff being 15.3% and 17% respectively.¹³ The same year, Latvia even ranked first in the representation of women among successful recruits (37%).¹⁴ Latvia came third in terms of the success rate of women applicants being recruited (83%).¹⁵ Essentially, the growing presence of women in defense structures is explained both by the application of the principle of the prohibition of discrimination¹⁶ and the growing efforts to recruit women in the defense sector, which includes active stereotype-breaking information campaigns.¹⁷

An equally important commitment for Latvia pertains to the EU. Here, Latvia is bound by the overall direction taken by the European Commission and the EU to make

gender equality an increasingly important topic on the agenda. The EU commits to promoting gender equality internally through the various goals defined in the 2020–2025 Gender Equality Strategy, which aims at “achieving a gender-equal Europe where gender-based violence, sex discrimination and structural inequality between women and men are a thing of the past”.¹⁸ The EU also promotes gender equality externally through Gender Action Plan III for 2021–2025 (also known as GAP III), which sets out an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in all the EU’s external actions.¹⁹

Latvia’s foreign policy and gender equality

Overall, Latvia’s foreign policy directly integrates gender into several fields of its activity. In the field of external development assistance, gender equality is seen as a component on par with good governance, democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. From 2016–2020, Latvia’s development cooperation framework allocated 8% of its official bilateral development assistance to supporting gender equality in development cooperation countries.²⁰ Latvia considers gender equality to be a precondition for financing development cooperation projects. Thus, projects applying for funds committed to development cooperation are only chosen if gender equality principles are observed.²¹ A key partner is the MARTA Resource Centre for Women, which works with partners in Central Asian states to increase awareness about economic opportunities for women and girls.²²

A second direction is pronouncements of gender as a priority of Latvia’s external action. One such instance is seen in the Presidency of Latvia in the Council of the EU, when gender equality was one of the thematic priorities of Latvia. The presidency drew attention to reducing the pension gap between women and men, adopting council conclusions on this matter at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council of Ministers on 18 June 2015, and preparing practical proposals on promoting economic empowerment for women in developing countries.²³ Gender equality was also a priority for Latvia as it was elected to the Human Rights Council of the UN for the term 2015–2017. Furthermore, in 2018, Latvia announced that gender and arms-related gender-based violence would be the official theme of its Presidency of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). In this framework, the presidency decided to focus on the following issues: (a) gender-balanced representation in ATT-related decision-making processes; (b) the gendered impact of armed violence and conflict; and (c) the implementation of risk assessment related to gender-based violence in line with the treaty. The ATT is the first international treaty that formally recognizes the link between the arms trade and gender-based violence.²⁴

Women representing Latvia internationally in 2021

Latvia is highly aware of the good reputation it has when it comes to gender equality in the international arena. The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2021* report includes Latvia among the 10 economies (alongside such global champions as Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Sweden) that score 100 on the *Women, Business, and the Law Index*. The index measures the laws and regulations that affect women's economic opportunities in 190 economies.²⁵

These good results also translate externally. Latvia certainly keeps up its reputation, as a total of 53% of the diplomatic corps are constituted by women, with 40% of ambassadors internationally being women.²⁶ On top of that, a woman holds the position of parliamentary secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia. A recent study by the Latvian Institute of International Affairs entitled *Women in Latvia's Foreign and Security Policy* attempts to tell the story of women in power positions since the reinstitution of independence from the perspective of researchers and practitioners. The book concludes that a career in the diplomatic service primarily depends on talent and passion, not gender, and that glass ceilings and "sticky floors" are becoming increasingly irrelevant.²⁷

In 2021, women represent Latvia in seats of power on a level which is unprecedented for a country not only on a European level, but even on a global one. A Latvian assumed her duties as the UN assistant secretary-general for human rights in January 2020. This is the highest-ranking post in the UN structure ever held by any Latvian expert. A Latvian diplomat is currently the assistant secretary general of NATO for public diplomacy, which is the highest position that a representative of Latvia has ever held at NATO. A woman from Latvia is also the secretary-general of the European Commission.

It is therefore clear that improving prestige and ensuring not only the qualitative, but also the quantitative representation of women in the international arena are important goals for Latvia's foreign policy.

2022: NEW IMPETUS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AFTER COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on gender equality globally. EIGE has noted that "measures to contain the pandemic [are] taking a heavy and disproportionate toll on women's employment and increasing the time required for caring responsibilities".²⁸ Therefore, in the recovery phase the global community will need to ensure that recovery measures are gender sensitive.

On the global level, UN Women has released its Strategic Plan for 2022–2025, which mentions that the pandemic “has compounded all aspects of inequality and rolled back the hard-won gains”.²⁹ The plan aims to encourage UN member states to take seriously the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, Particularly SDG 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”). Latvia’s *Report to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2018 on the Implementation of SDG 5* points to several issues which link to gender inequalities being deeply ingrained in the societal tissue of Latvia.³⁰ It is likely that Latvia’s efforts to achieve the SDGs in the rest of the year and in the coming decade will be coupled with post-pandemic economic recovery activities.

A new push to catch up on gender equality goals is also expected at the European level. Gender mainstreaming is considered as cross-cutting component of all EU policies, including Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021, establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). This regulation sees gender equality as crucial for the green and digital (or “twin”) transitions that are at the center of EU policies.³¹ The European Parliament’s FEMM Committee, along with authoritative gender equality experts across the EU, has called for the inclusion of gender equality in the RRF scoreboard of gender-disaggregated indicators, which would track the progress of recovery plans for women and men alike.

The European Commission is putting increasing emphasis on gender equality by creating new tools for review and regulation through an update of the “better regulation toolbox”, by focusing on the significant factors impacting gender equality, territorial and rural issues, and geopolitical contexts, and by incorporating the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially in impact analysis (i.e., the requirement to divulge which SDGs have been contributed to and how).³² In addition, the European Commission is also working to launch the Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring portal, which will make it possible to track progress towards a Union of Equality.³³

Developments on an international level clearly indicate that Latvia will have the task of paying close attention to gender equality, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS A FOREIGN POLICY ATTUNED TO GENDER EQUALITY

Latvia’s international and national commitments indicate that gender already has an important role in ensuring peace and security in the eyes of Latvian policy makers. However, it is true that gender rarely merits the place it deserves in the policy

conversation. Conversations on gender equality are often seen as side-tracking the core issues of international security and great power competition.

Whereas other feminist scholars would argue that Latvia should approach foreign policy from a “gender-sensitive” perspective,³⁴ the author of this article encourages policy makers to consider a position that is *more attuned* to the shifting emphasis of political science doctrines that now consider issues of “soft security” much more. The core argument this essay puts forward is that Latvia’s foreign policy already has dimensions in which it gives gender equality an appropriate level of attention. The next step would be to ensure that Latvia deals with the major criticisms linked to its international commitments pertaining to gender equality. The potential actions that could be taken to achieve this are within reach in terms of Latvia’s present foreign policy commitments. They would also contribute to the process of Latvia achieving its aim of becoming a fully-fledged UN Security Council member in the 2026–2027 period.

Tackling gendered insecurity at home by honoring Latvia’s foreign policy commitments to European and transatlantic values

As noted in this article, and to the surprise of the international community, this small Northern European country has been punching above its weight when it comes to gender equality overall. Perhaps accidentally, it leads in several prestigious gender equality indicators.

However, these achievements are coupled with remaining hurdles at home. Latvia’s *Report to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2018 on the Implementation of SDG 5* points to several issues which link to gendered inequalities that are deeply ingrained in the societal tissue of Latvia.³⁵ The very core of these issues pertains to an understanding of women’s and men’s different social roles which can be updated and adapted to the requirements of the 21st century by ratifying internationally recognized instruments such as the Istanbul Convention.

The Istanbul Convention, which deals precisely with the social roles of women and men, has generated heated debates among politicians, legal experts and opinion leaders alike.³⁶ However, the Council of Europe has acknowledged that speculation over the “hidden agenda” of the Istanbul Convention amounts to mere speculation and misinformation regarding this piece of legislation.³⁷ Ratification by the majority of EU member states (currently the convention has been ratified by 21 out of 27 EU member states), as well as recognition of the importance of the Istanbul Convention as a benchmark for international standards on combating violence against women and domestic violence by directly referencing it in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025,³⁸ should be

enough proof of the necessity to ratify and take full advantage of this instrument. The convention promotes education on and understanding of the structures underlying the issues that men and women face.

Further strengthening Latvia's image as a country focused on human rights and international law

Gender equality is, by nature, a policy topic that cannot be confined to a single realm of policy making. Since the era of the Suffragettes, it has been an international commitment, primarily driven by grassroots organizations and supported by well-meaning political forces that sincerely believed in the equality of all of a country's citizens.

Latvia's path towards its candidacy for the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the period 2026–2027 provides Latvia's diplomatic service, the media, politicians, and other stakeholders with unprecedented opportunities to learn more about global political issues.³⁹ The candidacy process and a potential election to the UN Security Council could also mean that Latvia can strengthen its bilateral ties with other democratic countries, globally and regionally, that share many of its foundational principles, including gender equality.⁴⁰

Putting more emphasis on gender equality externally and internally can therefore be an opportunity for Latvia to present itself as a candidate that is strongly dedicated to the achievement of the UN SDGs.

Continuing good public diplomacy actions, with a strong emphasis on gender equality

The optimistic numbers surrounding Latvia's representation internationally by women bear testament to the enabling structural circumstances in Latvia's foreign policy-making environment, where "glass ceilings" are shattered by the talent and distinction of women. However, the author of this article would like to point to a visible shortcoming of Latvia's public diplomacy – that is, its ability to properly "sell" this achievement through public diplomacy efforts.

Whereas the branding of Latvia internationally is not an issue discussed in this article, Latvia's recent history is littered with examples of Latvian women leading Latvia at the most decisive turning points of the country's contemporary history. Therefore, the introduction of gender equality as a component of shaping Latvia's external image should be considered.

Such an effort would require skilled thinkers to re-conceptualize how to communicate and which actions should be communicated. However, the effort and investment would pay off, considering that the groups behind anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-democratic narratives are galvanizing in this vacuum and shaping Latvia's image in its stead. The subject of branding Latvia as a country of opportunity for all opens a debate about existing conceptions of Latvia's cultural diplomacy. However, it also invites a new round of imaginative policies that would attract much broader audiences (including the youth).

CONCLUSIONS

Gender equality is a topic that is slowly entering policy conversations that are linked to foreign policy in Latvia. The year 2020 was marked with many activities in Latvia's foreign policy agenda that contributed to improving the profile, knowledge, and debate on gender equality; however, 2021 has seemingly brought attention to other tasks. Despite this, this essay argues that Latvia's foreign policy is already well-attuned to gender equality topics in some dimensions. Based on the good practices already put in place by Latvia's foreign policy makers, this essay encourages taking further stock of policy directions that are already a part of Latvia's foreign policy.

This essay offers three recommendations for the further integration of gender in Latvia's foreign policy agenda. Firstly, it suggests refocusing on immediate priorities, such as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The ratification process is a step in the right direction in terms of Latvia's commitments to the European and transatlantic community of values. Secondly, the article suggests taking full stock of the learning experience offered by Latvia's candidacy to UN Security Council for the 2026–2027 period. The global policy agenda of UN Security Council members demands that Latvia generate new knowledge and approaches to many “soft” security issues, including gender. Whereas the author of the essay acknowledges the work done by Latvia in this field, more could be done to ensure that Latvia's new status is strongly associated with the values of democratic states. The third recommendation logically emerges from Latvia's success story in becoming a land of opportunity for women and men alike. The author suggests that more emphasis should be put on this fact when exercising Latvia's public diplomacy. The external image of Latvia can inevitably change the image of Latvia within, thereby creating desirable conditions for Latvia's democratic society to thrive.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work concerning national foreign policy and the European Union 2020”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2221/download>.
- ² Scherpereel, J. A., “Pursuing ‘full gender equality’ in the European Commission: the case of a constrained selector”, *European Politics and Society*, 17.11.2021, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23745118.2021.2003068?src=&journalCode=rpep21>.
- ³ “A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025”, EUR-LEX, 05.03.2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>.
- ⁴ “Consolidated version of the Treaty of the EU”, EUR-LEX, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT>.
- ⁵ “Par Nacionālo rīcības plānu Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Drošības padomes rezolūcijas Nr. 1325 ‘Par sievietēm, mieru un drošību’ mērķu īstenošanai Latvijā 2020.-2025. gadam”, *Likumi.lv*, 15.07.2020, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/316163-par-nacionalo-ricibas-planu-apvienoto-naciju-organizācijas-drosibas-padomes-rezolūcijas-nr-1325-par-sievietem-mieru-un-drosibu-merku-istenosai-latvija-20202025-gadam>.
- ⁶ “The Government approves Latvia’s first National Action Plan on the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Latvia for the term of 2020–2025”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 14.07.2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/government-approves-latvias-first-national-action-plan-implementation-un-security-council-resolution-1325-women-peace-and-security-latvia-term-2020-2025>.
- ⁷ “Par Nacionālo rīcības plānu Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Drošības padomes rezolūcijas Nr. 1325 ‘Par sievietēm, mieru un drošību’ mērķu īstenošanai Latvijā 2020.-2025. gadam”, *Likumi.lv*, 15.07.2020, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/316163-par-nacionalo-ricibas-planu-apvienoto-naciju-organizācijas-drosibas-padomes-rezolūcijas-nr-1325-par-sievietem-mieru-un-drosibu-merku-istenosai-latvija-20202025-gadam>.
- ⁸ Kalnina Lukasevica, Z., quoted in: Dean, L. A., “The Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Latvia: Room for Improvement?”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 16.02.2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/02/the-implementation-of-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-in-latvia-room-for-improvement/>.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ “The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20”, UN Women, <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>.
- ¹¹ “Beijing +25: the fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States”, EIGE, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/beijing-25-fifth-review-implementation-beijing-platform-action-eu-member-states>.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ “Par Nacionālo rīcības plānu Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Drošības padomes rezolūcijas Nr. 1325 ‘Par sievietēm, mieru un drošību’ mērķu īstenošanai Latvijā 2020.-2025. gadam”, *Likumi.lv*, 15.07.2020, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/316163-par-nacionalo-ricibas-planu-apvienoto-naciju-organizācijas-drosibas-padomes-rezolūcijas-nr-1325-par-sievietem-mieru-un-drosibu-merku-istenosai-latvija-20202025-gadam>.
- ¹⁴ “Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives”, NATO, 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/9/pdf/NCGP_Full_Report_2019.pdf.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.

- ¹⁶ Vizgunova, E., "Women in Latvian and Estonian Military: NATO's Poster Students?" in *The Riga Conference Papers 2019: NATO at 70 in the Baltic Sea Region*, Sprūds, A., Andžāns, M., Šrāders, S., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2019.
- ¹⁷ Vizgunova, E., "Dzimums, dzimte un seksualitāte Latvijas drošības un aizsardzības struktūrās" in *Sievietes Latvijas ārpolitikā un drošības politikā*, Sprūds, A., Vizgunova, E., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2020.
- ¹⁸ "A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025", EUR-LEX, 05.03. 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>.
- ¹⁹ "2021 report on gender equality in the EU", European Commission, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union: 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2021_printable_en_0.pdf.
- ²⁰ "Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Latvia", Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 17.11.2021, <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/Latvia%20Implementation%20of%20the%20SDG%202018-single.pdf>.
- ²¹ "Par Nacionālo rīcības plānu Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Drošības padomes rezolūcijas Nr. 1325 'Par sievietēm, mieru un drošību' mērķu īstenošanai Latvijā 2020.-2025. gadam", Likumi.lv, 15.07.2020, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/316163-par-nacionalo-ricibas-planu-apvienoto-naciju-organizācijas-drošības-padomes-rezolūcijas-nr-1325-par-sievietēm-mieru-un-drošību-merķu-īstenošanai-latvija-20202025-gadam>.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ "Results of the Latvian Presidency of the Council for the European Union", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/2204/download>.
- ²⁴ Alvarado Cobar, J, F., Maletta, G., "The inclusion of gender-based violence concerns in arms transfers decisions: The case of Arms Trade Treaty", 23.10.2019, SIPRI, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2019/inclusion-gender-based-violence-concerns-arms-transfers-decisions-case-arms-trade-treaty>.
- ²⁵ "Women, Business and the Law 2021", World Bank, https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2021/02/WBL2021_ENG_v2.pdf.
- ²⁶ "Z. Kalniņa-Lukaševica, 'Sievietes, miers un drošība' tematika nekad nav bijusi tik aktuāla", LV portāls, 01.10.2020, <https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/320485-z-kalnina-lukasevica-sievietes-miers-un-drošība-tematika-nekad-nav-bijusi-tik-aktuāla-2020>.
- ²⁷ See "Sievietes Latvijas ārpolitikā un drošības politikā", Sprūds, A., Vizgunova, E., (eds.), Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2020.
- ²⁸ "EU research shows Covid-19 poised to end progress on gender equality", EIGE, 15.07.2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/news/eu-research-shows-covid-19-poised-end-progress-gender-equality>.
- ²⁹ Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Strategic Plan 2022-2025, <https://undocs.org/en/UNW/2021/6>.
- ³⁰ "Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Latvia", Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 17.11. 2021, <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/Latvia%20Implementation%20of%20the%20SDG%202018-single.pdf>.
- ³¹ "Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility", EUR-LEX, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241>.
- ³² "Better Regulation Toolbox", European Commission, November 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/br_toolbox-nov_2021_en_0.pdf.
- ³³ "Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal", European Commission, <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ges-monitor>.

- ³⁴ The EIGE defines “gender sensitive” as: “Policies and programmes that take into account the particularities of the lives of both women and men, while aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote gender equality, including an equal distribution of resources, therefore addressing and taking into account the gender dimension”. Source: EIGE, gender-sensitive, <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1211>.
- ³⁵ “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Latvia”, Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 17.11.2021, <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/Latvia%20Implementation%20of%20the%20SDG%202018-single.pdf>.
- ³⁶ Luksa, M., “*Stambulas konvencija: dzinējspēks pret vardarbību vai Trijas zirgs (II)?*”, LV portāls, 26.04.2018, <https://lvportals.lv/norises/295146-stambulas-konvencija-dzinejspeks-pret-vardarbibu-vai-trojas-zirgs-ii-2018>.
- ³⁷ “The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention): Questions and answers”, Council of Europe, <https://rm.coe.int/istanbul-convention-questions-and-answers/16808f0b80>.
- ³⁸ “A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025”, EUR-LEX, COM/2020/152 final, 05.03.2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>.
- ³⁹ Bukovskis, K., “*Latvijas intereses un iespējas Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Drošības padomes nepastāvīgās dalībvalsts statusā*”, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2020, https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/latvijas-intereses-un-iespejas-apvienoto-naciju-organizacijas-drosibas-padomes-nepastavigas-dalibvalsts-statusa-873?get_file=1.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.

LATVIA AND ENERGY: WELL-CONNECTED, WITH POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF AVAILABLE CAPACITY

Reinis Ābolģiņš

Energy market expert at the Public Utilities Commission

One must look at the development of the energy sector in both the national and international context. The energy policy of the European Union is grounded upon the principles of secure supply of energy, energy security, energy solidarity, climate neutrality, and independence from external energy supplies. These principles are inherent to the development of the Latvian energy sector as well, and their selection has not been a random choice. There are complex technological, regulatory, commercial, and political considerations behind them. One of the key principles of these is the free and efficient functioning of the energy market. It is not always simple or easy to create a free and efficient market. And an open market does not always guarantee sufficient competition and the security of energy supplies. The national energy markets are interconnected in wider regional and even continental markets. Latvia belongs to both the smaller energy market of the Baltic States and the wider Nordic and Baltic energy market. Connectivity is an important precondition for a stable functioning of energy systems and for the competition needed to provide the best energy prices for consumers. However, connectivity does not necessarily mean there is a sufficient capacity to produce or deliver energy to consumers. And the ability to supply energy does not always mean the delivery of energy at an affordable price for consumers.

LATVIA ON THE WIDER STAGE OF THE REGIONAL ENERGY SECTOR

Given the fundamental upheavals in the global, European, and Latvian energy markets in 2021, one can expect that 2022 will carry on in the context and mood of evaluating the events of 2021. Compared to previous years, the main differences are expected to concern changes in the attitude towards the actual cost of energy and the vulnerability of European countries and societies in similar situations. However, leaving the comfort zone helps to develop solutions that reduce risks and reduce the likelihood of the risks materializing in the future. The knowledge Latvian decision-makers have gained in 2021 will also make them evaluate more carefully every decision that is expected to have a long-term impact.

The rise in prices of energy and energy resources in 2021 was caused by the combined concurrent impact of several factors. In addition, this impact went beyond the situation in Latvia and the Baltic Sea region, as the prices of energy and energy resources rose worldwide, thus demonstrating the global nature of the energy market. The rise in prices on the Nordic-Baltic power exchange Nord Pool was primarily caused by changes in the balance between supply and demand, which has an essential link to climate conditions. The prolonged period with little or no precipitation in the Baltic Sea region, more irregular wind power than in previous years, high gas prices, and high CO₂ prices are all factors that have had a significant impact on electricity market prices not only in Latvia but also in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, where electricity has almost always been significantly cheaper than in other countries of the region.

THE INTERNATIONAL NATURE OF LATVIA'S RISKS

In the context of external relations, Latvia's actions in the field of energy policy must be viewed more broadly than only from the viewpoint of the national level. From the perspective of the development of the Latvian energy system, an essential factor is the way all the three Baltic States deal with energy production and transmission, as they can be considered a single energy market. The situation with regard to the energy supply is very different in each of the three countries, but in general it is characterized by a shortage of electricity and the need to import electricity from other countries in the region. Although the Baltic States are well connected to the Scandinavian electricity market, the halt in commercial electricity flows between Belarus and the Baltic States is exacerbating the deficit not only in Lithuania but also in Latvia. Electricity trade with Russia is not very active either, and the volumes traded are not large. And there is a need to develop new electricity generation capacities in all three countries.

In Latvia's situation, it is important to be aware of the risks related to the energy sector. As is the case with all the Baltic States in general, the biggest vulnerability of Latvia is related to its ability to produce all the necessary energy and the need to import primary energy resources or electricity from other countries. Latvia is able to produce less and less electricity for its own consumption.¹ While electricity imports come mainly from member states of the European Union and European Economic Area participating in the Nord Pool trading system,² natural gas is mainly imported from third countries, with the Russian Federation, a country many EU member states have strained political relationships with, being the largest single supplier.

The experience of the last five years has shown that energy prices can be low (and even lower) for a long period of time. Both the price of electricity in the Baltic Sea region and the price of natural gas on the global market reached new lows. In the second half of 2020, electricity consumers enjoyed the lowest prices in history. The winners of this were electricity users purchasing it at stock exchange prices. A similar dynamic was observed in the gas market as well. The past five years have been marked by a downward price curve,³ with growing consumer optimism about natural gas as a cheap, available, easy to use technologically and an efficient energy source with relatively low GHG emissions.⁴

In many energy markets, natural gas technologies are being chosen to replace coal and shale, which are significantly more harmful to the environment and climate⁵ and which are significantly more carbon intensive. Over the last decade, such trends have been observed in China, the United Kingdom, the United States,⁶ and Germany. In Germany, influential political forces have even actively called for the inclusion of gas in the EU green finance taxonomy as an important resource for the transition to cleaner energy.⁷ The desire to use natural gas was also stimulated by the low price of this resource until the global energy market became increasingly marked by energy deficits in the second half of 2021 and the price of natural gas increased ten-fold compared to the same period in 2020. This global situation also directly affected consumers in Latvia, once again leading to the conclusion that Latvia is such a small player in the context of natural gas prices that it does not affect anything and has to adapt to the global situation.

THE ESCALATION OF ENERGY PRICES IN LATVIA

The year 2021 in the energy sector was characterized by highly dynamic resources and prices. The first five months of the year were comparatively customary in energy markets, with price changes being in line with seasonal fluctuations. The exception was CO₂ prices, which have been rising since the beginning of 2021.⁸ In June, the prices for such an important primary resource as natural gas began to rise, and prices for electricity

also rose. Compared to June 2020, in June 2021, the average monthly price on the Nordic and Baltic power exchange Nord Pool was 76.23 EUR per megawatt hour (EUR/MWh) without VAT, or 97.18% higher. However, the most significant price increase took place in the second half of 2021. In July and August, prices increased slightly in nominal terms compared to June, but they reached new records – 88 and 87 EUR/MWh, respectively. In the autumn, prices experienced a significant increase: from September to November, electricity prices reached an unprecedented level – the average monthly price in September, October, and November exceeded 100 EUR/MWh. Both the price records of the Nord Pool system and the records in many price areas fell in November. In the Latvian price area, the average monthly price in November reached 125.39 EUR/MWh,⁹ exceeding 600 EUR/MWh on some days and some hours of the day, and on the morning of 7 December the prices reached even 1000 EUR/MWh during the peak.

In the context of gas prices, it must be understood that neither Latvia, nor the Baltic States, nor even the Baltic States and Finland, when taken as a single market, are large enough players to influence the global gas market, and therefore nothing depends on them – they must pay for this convenient energy resource as much as suppliers demand. The good news is that there is no longer one single supplier, and the supply routes are diversified as well. A liquefied natural gas terminal is operating in Klaipėda, and the Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania (GIPL) will become operational in 2022.¹⁰ GIPL is expected to significantly improve the Baltic States' ability to reduce gas supply risks and to respond actively to situations of crisis.

Also, electricity supply risks can no longer be viewed in a local context alone. It is one thing if the Baltic States are unable to produce all the electricity they need. And it is quite another thing if deficits occur even in countries like Finland and Denmark, with Sweden and Norway unable to produce enough electricity to easily cover such regional deficits by using technologies that have the lowest production costs. The formation of electricity prices is influenced by many factors, including those beyond the control of individual states.

Interconnected national energy markets generally provide benefits and greater opportunities for managing energy supply risks. After the launch of the NordBalt interconnection in February 2016, the electricity price in Lithuania and Latvia, for instance, decreased, while it increased in the third zone of Sweden (SE3). However, negative side effects are also possible: a high electricity price in one price area can also lead to higher prices in adjacent price areas connected to the respective area. In 2021, many Nord Pool price areas within the single electricity market felt this impact. At the beginning of December 2021, the Baltic States, along with Finland and Sweden's third (SE3) and fourth (SE4) price areas, experienced unprecedentedly high electricity prices, which can be explained mainly by insufficient electricity generation and transmission capacities as well as cold weather conditions.¹¹

THE PRICE OF HEAT IN LATVIA IS FORMED IN ASIA

The availability of water and wind resources in the Baltic Sea region in 2021 was directly affected by climate conditions. In turn, the dynamics of heat prices were determined by the sharp changes in the price of natural gas in the global market. The high gas prices were caused by a number of factors: a colder winter and other climate events in those regions of the world where natural gas is used to produce heat, a shift to cleaner production technologies and resources, as well as a higher demand in the most solvent markets. Countries experience an indirect impact of climate conditions on the price of natural gas. The previous winter was relatively cold in the most solvent natural gas consumer markets, primarily in the Far East and South-East Asia (Japan, South Korea, and China), which significantly increased the demand for natural gas in this region of the world.

The demand for natural gas continues to be driven by the substitution of dirtier fossil fuel power plants with cleaner natural gas technologies in China. In turn, China is an insatiable gas market, with a consumption of 330 billion cubic meters of gas, which makes it the world's third-largest natural gas market, lagging behind only the United States and Russia. China is also the second-largest importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) (at 94 billion cubic meters), falling just a little behind Japan. It should be noted that China is followed by South Korea, India, and Taiwan as the largest importers of LNG.¹² All of these countries represent one region.

These Asian countries are the five largest LNG importers on a global scale. Moreover, while LNG imports in other countries have changed minimally in recent years, China's imports of liquefied natural gas have grown by 155% since 2016.¹³ When demand in these markets grows, it has an immediate effect on gas prices in all the other markets, with the exception of the United States, which produces its own gas and exports it to other world markets. The gas prices of the US Henry Hub have been significantly lower than in other global gas markets over the past decade.¹⁴

The Baltic States are a small player in the global gas market, and there is nothing that depends on them. Consequently, Latvia needs to think about how to reduce the risks associated with fluctuations of gas prices as it is a country that produces a significant part of its electricity and heat using imported natural gas. The natural gas price was also affected by a significant increase in the price of CO₂ in the EU ETS¹⁵ and by the Russian Federation's manipulations of the gas market, as it both promised to increase production and supply if the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is certified¹⁶ and threatened to reduce supply if the pipeline is not certified.¹⁷ Latvia has been against this project and it should maintain consistency on this issue, as the pipeline operator is expected to try to provoke diverging views among EU countries in order to reduce the unity of EU countries in the context of the implementation of external energy relations, as it has done before.

LOOKING TOWARDS A SAFER AND GREENER ENERGY IN THE FUTURE

In order to reduce the risks related to energy production and price fluctuations in international markets, the European Union, including Latvia, will place an even greater emphasis on the ability to generate electricity on its own, thus reducing the need to import expensive fossil fuel resources. The EU has already been pursuing an energy policy that improves EU energy security for more than a decade. The EU Energy Security Strategy, approved in 2014, outlined and strengthened a number of significant areas or pillars for future policies and actions, also emphasizing the essential role of the principle of solidarity and cooperation in emergency situations, as well as the essential role of energy production, the diversification of external supplies, and other action policies.¹⁸

Over the last more than 10 years, by using funding opportunities for Projects of Common Interest (PCI)¹⁹ of the EU Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the EU has supported investments in renewable energy production, electricity transmission, and gas transmission and storage infrastructure, including in Latvia, where support has been provided for the construction of the Kurzeme Ring²⁰ to enhance the electricity supply to the western regions of Latvia, as well as the modernization of the Inčukalns underground gas storage²¹.

The European Green Deal can be considered to be the handbook of the European energy and climate policy²². And, as far as its implementation is concerned, every EU member state has a role to play. From the electricity production perspective, Latvia has always emphasized that a significant part of its electricity is generated using renewable energy sources (RES). Thus, Latvia is among the leaders among the EU member states in this regard. However, it should be noted that Latvia has done relatively little to ensure the continuation of this leadership by investing in new production capacities for at least the last 20 years: the cascade of hydroelectric power plants (HPP) on the Daugava River was built many decades earlier. Investments in technology maintenance and efficiency increases have certainly been made and are still being made, but they cannot be considered as entirely new RES capacities. One can say that Latvia, to a large extent, has not yet utilised its RES potential.

In turn, a significant portion of heat demand is covered by the use of fossil fuel resources – namely, natural gas. About a third of the entire Latvian housing stock is located in Riga, the capital of Latvia. The energy efficiency of buildings is low. Therefore, in order to provide heat during the heating season, it needs a high amount of energy resources. The natural gas market in Latvia is open and has been operational since April 2017, and it provides an opportunity for gas traders to purchase and supply gas from various sources. Alternative supply routes are also available: although the supply of natural gas by pipeline from the Russian Federation still dominates, it is possible to import gas through

the Klaipėda Liquefied Natural Gas terminal. As the Baltic gas transmission system is connected to the Finnish gas transmission system, gas supplies are also available from Finland through the Balticconnector interconnection.²³ It is planned that the Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania – or the so-called GIPL pipeline – will also start operating commercially in 2022.²⁴ It is important to note once again that the planning and implementation of all the major energy infrastructure projects would not have been possible without proper international cooperation, in which technical, regulatory and political aspects play an important role.

The coming decades are expected to bring fundamental changes in the way we plan, produce, and consume energy. There will be an increasing emphasis on the production of renewable and inexhaustible energy resources and increasing their share in gross final energy consumption. The energy industry and even entrepreneurs in the transport sector are already actively re-planning and reorganizing production, realizing that they will no longer be able to operate as before. In recent years, the state-owned energy producer AS Latvenergo has also publicly announced its plans to develop new RES capacities,²⁵ deciding in favour of investing in the development of wind energy and strengthening this intention by joining the Latvian Wind Energy Association.²⁶

Although changes have occurred and still occur relatively slowly in Latvia, it can be expected that developments in neighboring countries, in Europe as a whole, and in the wider world will reach Latvia, causing changes in both attitudes and opportunities and making the country pay more attention to developing renewable energy and to making a sustainable energy policy in general, both in line with the European Green Deal and with its own convictions. Investing in a sustainable energy and climate policy will soon play a critical role in ensuring a country's international competitiveness. In terms of developing and strengthening competitiveness, the dominant development areas are linked to energy efficiency, smart devices, and a smart energy system with hybrid energy production, storage, and consumption solutions. Although the attention of many countries is focused on the faster and wider deployment of individual technologies (in the case of Latvia, this means wind power plants and solar PV power plants), the researchers and analysts of energy systems emphasize the benefits of developing hybrid energy systems on both local²⁷ and systemic scale.²⁸

Ongoing processes will also be affected by the need to deal with non-standard situations. The development of the energy system is mainly determined by planning within the framework of the Ten-Year Network Development Plan (TYNDP) of the transmission system operators. The TYNDP is a national document prepared by the electricity and gas transmission system operators of each European country. These plans include areas for development and outline projects that are coordinated at the highest level. The most critical TYNDP projects tend to have the status of projects of national importance, and many of them, following sufficiently complex political, administrative, and technical

coordination at the national and EU level, are granted the status of a Project of Common Interest (PCI), which facilitates the launch and implementation of these projects. This means that planning the development of an energy system takes into account various factors – consumption data, dynamics and forecasts, as well as production and transmission capacities – and a special attention is paid to the interconnectivity of the energy infrastructure of different countries or their ability to ensure physical energy flow across borders.

The interconnectivity of energy systems is a critical factor in assessing the interaction of the energy sector with a country's external relations. Cross-border energy flows can be both an element in securing the continuity of an energy system and an expression of solidarity, but energy can also be used for political and economic influence. At the EU level, the construction of interconnections has a special role to play in implementing the principle of solidarity. It provides for the establishment of regional groupings of countries in the EU to help provide neighboring countries with necessary energy resources in emergency situations. Over the past decade, the Baltic States have successfully implemented the EU-backed regional Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP),²⁹ both by strengthening the infrastructure elements of the national energy systems of all the three countries and by creating and upgrading interconnections – critical physical infrastructure that improves the opportunities for electricity and gas transmissions. EU Projects of Common Interest (PCI) continue to be co-financed by funds from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF): in 2021, the construction of a third electricity transmission interconnection between Latvia and Estonia was completed.³⁰ It will significantly improve the ability to provide sufficient electricity flows between Latvia and Estonia. Joint electricity generation projects can also serve the interests of several countries in the region. Latvia and Estonia, for instance, have conceptually agreed to develop an offshore wind park in the Gulf of Riga on the Latvian–Estonian border. The third interconnection is important for receiving the energy from the planned offshore wind park into the transmission network.

In this situation recommendations might have a long-lasting character: the Baltic States, along with other members of the Baltic Sea region and the rest of the EU member states, experienced a dramatic rise in energy prices in the second half of 2021. This is the first time the countries of the region have faced this kind of experience. The relevant parties will analyze it and seek ways to preclude and prevent similar crises in the future, or to reduce their negative effects. The conclusions will serve as a basis not only for planning the future development of the energy sector, but also for deciding on actions to be taken in specific situations, which provides for the introduction of preventive regulation if certain defined criteria are met.

This crisis of energy prices will lead to an increased focus on solutions at both national and supranational levels. At the national level, much more attention will need to be

paid to improving energy efficiency in the fields of housing, the public sector, services, and the industrial sector. At the supranational level, solutions will need to be found to make the energy market work more efficiently. This will include improvements in the functioning of the single Baltic and Finnish gas market, as well as improved coordination between electricity transmission system operators in the Baltic Sea region to ensure that the electricity exchange brings the best results for electricity users by precluding market manipulations that are able to artificially raise energy prices. Institutions ensuring market supervision will play an essential role here, and usually these institutions are the national energy regulators (in Latvia, it is the Public Utilities Commission).

The coordination and deployment of local, regional, national, and cross-border energy solutions is critical to strengthening energy security and reducing dependence on external [fossil fuel] energy supplies. Looking further ahead, 2022 could bring a renewed discussion on the need for another interconnection between the Baltic States and Scandinavia. And this time it could be planned and built between Latvia and Sweden (more precisely, Sweden's price area number three [SE3]), thus ensuring the opportunity to transmit electricity between Sweden and Latvia, as well as improving the opportunity to make optimal use of the potential of the offshore wind parks already built and planned to be built over the next 10 years.

The construction of offshore transmission infrastructure by integrating transmission system elements and wind farms into a single energy system is a development area that has been actively explored over recent years, leading to the conclusion that such an infrastructure integration must be a part of the emerging smart energy system. This scenario is also present in the scenarios prepared by the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E) within the framework of the Ten-Year Development Plan for the development of energy systems up to 2030 and beyond.³¹

PRIORITIES: COOPERATION, SOLIDARITY, SYNCHRONIZATION, AND THE GREEN DEAL

Overall, in the context of all these challenges, it would be logical to maintain a higher priority for closer regional cooperation and solidarity, as well as the implementation of policies, action areas, and activities associated with the principles of the European Green Deal as the dominant areas of research, development, and actions in the energy sector in 2022. The integration of renewable energy resources and technologies into the energy system as an aim and a task to implement will have to be increasingly planned for in the regional context. The synchronization of the Baltic electricity networks with

continental Europe will remain a top priority as concerns international cooperation. However, in the context of the crisis of energy prices in the second half of 2021, the challenges of international cooperation concerning electricity trade with third countries will continue to have a high priority status on the agenda. This particularly refers to electricity trade with Belarus, as the Baltic States have committed to avoiding buying electricity from it, thus demonstrating political solidarity and a clear implementation of their attitude towards the issue of the Ostrovets (also, Astravyets) nuclear power plant, where cooperation between the Baltic States has not been ideal³².

The impact of the above factors on the energy supply of the Baltic States will further strengthen technical, regulatory, and political cooperation with the aim of being integrated into the energy system of continental Europe. It is also Latvia's goal to be connected and operate without significant limits on the availability of transmission and generation capacities, and this goal can only be achieved through close international cooperation in the field of energy.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *"Elektroenerģijas tirgus apskats"*, Augstsprieguma tīkls, <https://ast.lv/lv/electricity-market-review>.
- ² "About Us", Nord Pool, <https://www.nordpoolgroup.com/About-us/>.
- ³ "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021".
- ⁴ "Natural Gas: Providing More and Cleaner Energy", Shell Global, <https://www.shell.com/energy-and-innovation/natural-gas/providing-more-and-cleaner-energy.html>.
- ⁵ "The Role of Gas in Today's Energy Transitions", International Energy Agency, 2019, <https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-gas-in-todays-energy-transitions>.
- ⁶ Kondash, A. J., Patino-Echeverri, D., Vengosh, A., "Quantification of the Water-Use Reduction Associated with the Transition from Coal to Natural Gas in the US Electricity Sector", *Environmental Research Letters* 14, No. 12, 04.12.2019, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/AB4D71>.
- ⁷ "Germany's SPD Pushes for Inclusion of Gas in EU Green Finance Taxonomy", EURACTIV.com, 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/germanys-spd-pushes-for-inclusion-of-gas-in-eu-green-finance-taxonomy/>.
- ⁸ "Carbon Price Viewer", Ember Climate, 2021, <https://ember-climate.org/data/carbon-price-viewer/>.
- ⁹ "Market Data - Day-Ahead Prices", Nord Pool, 2021, <https://www.nordpoolgroup.com/Market-data1/Dayahead/Area-Prices/ALL1/Hourly/?view=table>.
- ¹⁰ "Gas Interconnection Poland – Lithuania (GIPL)", Amber Grid, 2021, <https://www.ambergrid.lt/en/projects/gas-interconnection-poland-lithuania-gipl>.
- ¹¹ "Market Data - Day-Ahead Prices", Nord Pool, 2021, <https://www.nordpoolgroup.com/Market-data1/Dayahead/Area-Prices/ALL1/Hourly/?view=table>.
- ¹² "Statistical Review of World Energy 2021".
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ "Carbon Price Viewer", Ember Climate, 2021, <https://ember-climate.org/data/carbon-price-viewer/>.

- ¹⁶ "Russia Says Nord Stream 2 Clearance May Cool Gas Prices in Europe", Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-made-mistake-ditching-long-term-gas-deals-putin-2021-10-06/>.
- ¹⁷ "Nord Stream 2: Gas Prices Soar after Setback for Russian Pipeline", BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-59306223>. "Gas Price Windfall Makes Gazprom Patient over Nord Stream 2 Delay", Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/gas-price-windfall-makes-gazprom-patient-over-nord-stream-2-delay-2021-12-03/>.
- ¹⁸ "EU Energy Security Strategy", Eiropas Komisija, 2014, https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/publication/European_Energy_Security_Strategy_en.pdf.
- ¹⁹ "Projects of Common Interest - Energy", Eiropas Komisija, https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/infrastructure/projects-common-interest_en.
- ²⁰ "Kurzemes loks", Augstsprieguma tīkls, 2021, <https://ast.lv/lv/transmission-network-projects/kurzemes-loks>.
- ²¹ "Inčukalna PGK modernizācija", Conexus Baltic Grid, 2021, <https://www.conexus.lv/incukalna-pgk-modernizacija>.
- ²² "The European Green Deal", Eiropas Komisija, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf. "What Is the European Green Deal? What Will We Do?", Eiropas Komisija, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_19_6714.
- ²³ "Balticconnector", Elering, 2020, <https://elering.ee/en/balticconnector>. "Baltic Connector", Baltic Connector Oy, 2020, <http://balticconnector.fi/en/>.
- ²⁴ "Gas Interconnection Poland – Lithuania (GIPL)", Amber Grid, 2021, <https://www.ambergrid.lt/en/projects/gas-interconnection-poland-lithuania-gipl>.
- ²⁵ LETA., "Latvenergo: Latvijā jāattīsta vēja enerģijas izstrāde", Diena.lv, 21.03.2019, https://www.diena.lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/_latvenergo_-latvija-jaattista-veja-enerģijas-izstrade-14217077.
- ²⁶ "Latvenergo pievienojas Vēja enerģijas asociācijai", Latvijas Būvzinieņu savienība, 03.11.2021, <https://buvzinierusavieniba.lv/latvenergo-pievienojas-veja-enerģijas-asociacijai/>.
- ²⁷ Wijeyesekera, B., "The Future of Rural Energy Is Hybrid Renewable Systems", Engineering For Change, 01.09.2021, <https://www.engineeringforchange.org/news/future-rural-energy-hybrid-renewable-systems/>; Mohan L. K., Iromi Udumbara Ranaweera, K. M., Sisara Gunawardana, A. G. B., "Techno-Economic Sizing of off-Grid Hybrid Renewable Energy System for Rural Electrification in Sri Lanka", Sustainable Energy Technologies and Assessments, Vol. 11, 01.09.2015, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seta.2015.03.008>, p. 53–64.
- ²⁸ Asmae, B., El Mrabet, R., "Hybrid Energy System Models", Academic Press, 2021.; "Are Hybrid Systems Truly the Future of the Grid? NREL's Magic 8-Ball Says: 'Concentrate and Ask Again'", NREL, 17.06.2021, <https://www.nrel.gov/news/features/2021/are-hybrid-systems-truly-the-future-of-the-grid.html>; Schleifer H. A., et al., "The Evolving Energy and Capacity Values of Utility-Scale PV-plus-Battery Hybrid System Architectures", Advances in Applied Energy, Vol. 2., 26.05.2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adapen.2021.100015>.
- ²⁹ "PA Energy - BEMIP Action Plan (for Competitive, Secure and Sustainable Energy)", Eiropas Komisija, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/BEMIP_Action_Plan_2015.pdf.
- ³⁰ "Igaunijas-Latvijas 3. starpsavienojums", Augstsprieguma tīkls, <https://ast.lv/lv/transmission-network-projects/latvijas-igaunijas-3-starpsavienojums>.
- ³¹ "TYNDP 2020 - Scenario Report", ENTSO-E/ENTSOG, 2020, <https://2020.entsos-tyndp-scenarios.eu>. "TYNDP 2020 Project Collection", ENTSO-E. "Electricity System Needs Factsheet: Latvia", ENTSO-E.

³² LETA., *“EM: Astravjēcas AES saražotā elektroenerģija nenonāk Latvijas tirgū”*, 22.02.2021, Diena.lv, <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/em-astravjēcas-aes-sarazota-elektroenerģija-nenonak-latvijas-tirgu-14257472>.; Klūga, M., *“Latvija skeptiska par Lietuvas datiem saistībā ar Astravjēcas elektrību Baltijā”*, LSM.lv, 20.02.2021, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/latvija-skeptiska-par-lietuvas-datiem-saistiba-ar-astravjēcas-elektrību-baltija.a393732/>.

THE DATA GOVERNANCE POLICY AS A TOOL FOR LATVIAN ECONOMIC AND SECURITY DIPLOMACY

Ēriks Kristiāns Selga

Non-Resident Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)

The past year has only exacerbated the “new normal” of the international political environment. The Western-led international multilateral order is becoming more timid, and – in light of the growing role of new polar powers like China – individual countries like Latvia are carefully considering their positions in an increasingly complex network of political relationships and economic interdependencies. Latvia remains part of the 17+1 format to promote business and investment relations with China, while siding against the use of China’s Huawei technology in its 5G networks.¹ Similarly, new tensions are appearing in Europe – Latvia must now adapt to a reality where Nordstream 2 is going online after protracted Baltic resistance to the project, even in light of US sanctions against relevant stakeholders.² The failure of the EU to collectively react to the needs of the Covid-19 crisis has only compounded skepticism of European solidarity.³

A new paradigm has thus come into force. It is a paradigm of withdrawal to internal affairs and a recalibration of external affairs. The vulnerability of partnerships that have long been taken for granted – from practical economic supply chains to policy solidarity – has been confirmed, and countries like Latvia are left to take stock and review the role of such relationships. Looking back at last year’s *Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook*, new “pivots” were introduced as opportunities for Latvia to maneuver its security diplomacy; solidarity among the Baltic States,⁴ digital diplomacy,⁵ or even closer ties with France⁶ were proposed as options worth exploring.

In this contribution I argue that Latvia has another venue to attend to – its data governance policy. Propelled by the Covid-19 pandemic, most sectors in the transatlantic area are quickly becoming digital, growing increasingly dependent on data flows to provide vital goods and services, including healthcare systems, transportation,

international commerce, and national security mechanisms. Societal dependence on data is thus an irreversible phenomenon, magnified by the advent and diffusion of new technologies – such as the internet of things (IoT), distributed ledger technology, and artificial intelligence (AI) – and accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.⁷ Data has therefore been compared to the most valuable resources in the world, including oil, oxygen, and water.⁸ Like the counterparts of these analogies, control over data is an increasing priority for national and international policymakers, perhaps even *the* strategic priority, internationally and domestically.

The importance of data governance to internal, foreign, and security affairs is only growing, and given the innately internationally interconnected nature of data, it is quickly becoming an area of heightened policy interests, allegiances, and increasingly of conflicts. Much of this came into the spotlight in 2021. The *Schrems* decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union shut down the existing data transfer mechanism between the US and EU. China's new 2021 Data Security Law extends extraterritorial rights to the collection of sensitive data.⁹ The US enacted various policies against Chinese technology in their territories. These conflicts are canaries in the coal mine, anticipating much deeper fractures in the global data economy, spurred by the rising concept of “digital sovereignty”.

This year has also highlighted Latvia's strong data governance foundations. The new digital transformation guidelines and the Ādaži 5G tests are both examples of the unique advantages of small and nimble digitally native countries like Latvia to command data governance policy. As data governance becomes a stronger economic and security policy object, however, Latvia must ensure that it exploits these advantages in the right international forums. A stronger presence in data governance policy discussions presents a fitting opportunity to become a European, and even a global, leader. Not only would this build much-needed resilience against growing data-enabled risks in Latvia, but it would provide a channel to multiply its influence against bigger and thus digitally slower countries.

In the following sections I will elaborate on (1) Latvian data governance in 2021, (2) the international tensions stemming from data governance differences, (3) why data governance policy is lagging in larger countries, and (4) how Latvia is uniquely suited to an international leadership role in digital governance.

LATVIAN DATA GOVERNANCE IN 2021

It has been a globally formative year for digital policy securitization around the world, among Western allies, in the EU, and for Latvia. NATO adopted the Artificial Intelligence Strategy, aiming to cover the use of advanced digital tools in collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. The European Commission set out the 2030 Digital Compass, aiming, in part, to elevate digital issues among its members and internationally. Latvia has similarly moved forward with a foundational digital policy and data governance initiatives this year.

In early 2021 Latvia released the *Digital Transformation Guidelines for 2021-2027*, which aims to rapidly develop digital skills and set the foundational guidelines for the next generation of data products and services. Alongside sector-specific data pools to be created under the EU digital strategy, the Latvian guidelines posit the use of a broad range of initiatives, from healthcare to security, justice, and even infrastructure, among others. A key to the future success of these policies is the tradition of the Latvian public and private sector to quickly and effectively mobilize available resources to reach their goals. Over 200 representatives of dozens of stakeholders were consulted in the drafting of the digital transformation guidelines alone, highlighting the public and private sectors' ability to rapidly mobilize and aggregate insight towards drafting the guidelines.

Within just a few months, many of the goals set out in the document have already been begun to be put in place. For example, the digital transformation guidelines established an Information Society Council that meets with stakeholders from the private, public, military, and civilian sectors at the highest executive level to directly exchange digital threat information.¹⁰ As sectors become more dependent on data flows, the Information Society Council can dynamically react to changes in threats. This model establishes a common ground for realignment across divergent data governance and cybersecurity regimes. These channels are helpful in lessening divergences in practical cyber threat aversion, and they aim to aid in normative alignment across the numerous sectors involved.

This strategy was the subject of the first OECD assessment oriented at future-forecasting.¹¹ Though the strategy was generally lauded, the recommendations highlighted a few core areas of focus for additional development. First, the government should focus on elevating the whole-of-government approach for a single cohesive and interconnected strategy for digital development across sectors.¹² Second, digitalization should be fostered as the main instrument of growth and innovation.¹³ Third, the government should ensure that there is a holistic cybersecurity policy for behaviors at both application levels as well as hardware levels.¹⁴

The advantage of this flexibility has been manifested in the security sphere. Latvia was the first country in Europe to launch a 5G military test site at Ādaži, allowing the

Canadian-led NATO battlegroup to test a new generation of mobile technologies, including unmanned aerial vehicles, computer vision, and other sensor solutions.¹⁵ These tests will allow Latvian and allied armed forces to assess a host of new sensors, defense systems, and platforms using emerging cellular network technology like autonomous vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and other innovations.

The test site is a major achievement in Latvian security diplomacy. However, it is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the data governance implications for Latvia. Regarding the effective use of data for security purposes under NATO's dual use doctrine or for the general security of critical national functions, the test site highlights the ability of the Latvian government to mobilize private-public relationships, economic resources, and technological know-how through a whole-of-government approach. An effective example of this was in the quick turnaround of Latvia's CERT regarding the "Mēris" vulnerability, in which the CERT worked quickly with one of Latvia's largest ICT manufacturers to block vulnerabilities that spanned thousands of networks around the globe.

Latvia's whole-of-government approach to data governance in 2021 has also manifested beyond the test site. Latvia remains at the forefront of digital portability, with new modern and interconnected data management systems being created across several public and private sector intersections, including full-chain case management and analysis systems for law enforcement, advanced data analytics tools for financial integrity operations, and the exploration of cross-border data testing for smart infrastructure.

LATVIA'S ADVANTAGES IN ITS DATA GOVERNANCE POLICY

The need of nations to control data inflows and outflows is becoming increasingly clear. Though these data governance frictions are broad in scope, at the moment the policy has expanded to only a small portion of the broader "Internet Regime Complex".¹⁶ The majority of data-enabled governance remains at the discretion of national governments. Reverting to the three pillars of data, each aspect remains incohesive at an international level at a time when international data flows are critical to the global economy. As highlighted by the recently created EU-US Trade and Technology Council, many questions remain unanswered – yet they are a priority. The Council has set working groups on topics like technology standards, clean technology, secure supply chains, information technology security and competitiveness, and technology platforms, among others.¹⁷ These are areas where there are as yet no established international agreements or even forums – and thus, it represents an opportunity for nations that are front-runners in the creation and management of digital solutions.

Adapting data governance to the increasing needs of governments requires a near-holistic approach that unites all facets of the private and public sectors. The private sector provides most of the infrastructure and data flow processing across the Internet, while major decisions are taken at a government level with the input of civil society for policy standards. It is at this grassroots level where there is an opportunity for a digitally enabled country like Latvia to have a leadership role.

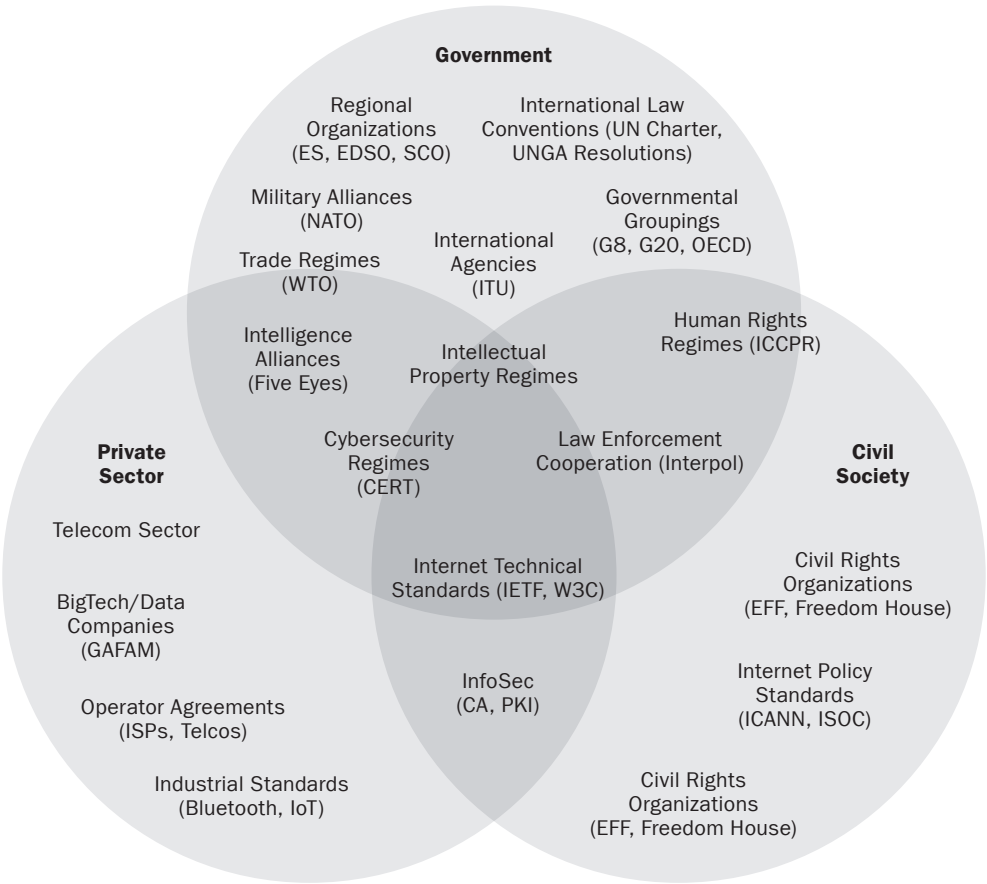


Figure 1. The Internet Regime Complex.¹⁸

To govern data effectively in a way that fosters instead of decreases its fruits, there is a need to call on three core government capacities: the ability to generate and secure a variety of data; the ability to capture large volumes of data; and the ability to interact with high levels of data velocity. In practice, this requires government systems to generate and collect digitalized data, be interconnected, and have a data analytics capacity. Achieving this mix of capacities is difficult, especially for larger countries that are slogged down by

old legacy systems. For most traditionally powerful countries, digital prowess is present only in piecemeal sectors, with adaption lagging behind significantly. In the US, this led to significant problems in Covid-19 relief-based data portability needs,¹⁹ while Germany has only recently issued a plan to initiate data cooperation between federal and state-level agencies,²⁰ and the UK is dependent on numerous obsolete systems, preventing digital transformation.²¹ Such inabilities have cascading effects on all current critical functions, and they are also significant impediments in the development of new digital-native initiatives like smart cities, smart infrastructure, digital identity, and more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2021 Latvia proved its data governance capacity to its allies. Going forward, Latvia must ensure that it extends this experience and its best practices with partner countries and internationally more generally. There are several untapped forums where Latvia should increase its presence to consolidate value and take a leadership position.

First, Latvia should seek to actively take part in the sub-discussions and working groups that underlie the EU-US Trade and Tech Council. This is the primary channel for discussing transatlantic data governance issues, and the Latvian test site experience is directly transferrable. In particular, attention should be paid to secure supply chains, ICT security and competitiveness, and the misuse of technology working groups. These discussions will set the direction of the transatlantic digital partnership, channeling back to NATO and other security discourse fora.

Second, Latvia should seek to participate more actively on data governance issues with its EU partners. Under the EU Digital Compass, the EU aims to promote alignment and convergence with EU regulatory norms and standards on issues ranging from data protection to tackling disinformation, internet governance, digital finance, or e-government. In practice, much of this will take place through Team Europe Initiatives – another new joint coordinated programming approach between EU institutions and member states.²² Latvia should not be afraid to take the helm of one such project that deals with digital advancement. For example, Latvia should join the Digital 4 Development Hub for international partnerships, which many of Latvia's closest partners are already part of.²³

Third, Latvia should ensure that it is active in the expanding mosaic of cyber-resiliency initiatives that is tying together both the security sector and civilian governance. In practice, this would manifest in proactively implementing the EU comprehensive data securitization package, starting with the Cybersecurity Strategy, which brings together a variety of rules and includes supranational and national intelligence agencies, law

enforcement, defense authorities, and industry stakeholders.²⁴ Within this framework, a minimum set of security standards is established, which Latvia should aim to introduce.²⁵ Furthermore, current proposals entail a pan-EU authority, the ENISA, with the mandate to increase operational cooperation between member states at the EU level, with a view to establish of a European cybersecurity certification framework to assess the risks of digital products and services.²⁶ Latvia should make sure that its delegations take part in the work of ENISA through its CERT, and that the civilian-military feedback loop from participation in these functions is effective.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Elksnitis, U., “Cooperation between Central and Eastern European Countries and China”, <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv>; “Latvia Sides with US in Huawei 5G Fight”, LSM.eng, 20.02.2020, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/economy/economy/latvia-sides-with-us-in-huawei-5g-fight.a349114>.
- ² “Gazprom Plans to Start Nord Stream 2 Gas Pipeline Next Month”, Bloomberg.Com, www.bloomberg.com.
- ³ “How Europe Failed the Coronavirus Test”, POLITICO, 07.04.2020, www.politico.eu.
- ⁴ Veebel, V., “How to understand who is your ally and who is your opponent: changes in the international security landscape for Estonia and Latvia”, in Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2021, Sprūds, A., Broka, S., (eds.), Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts, 2021.
- ⁵ Savickis, S., “Public diplomacy: on the way to a virtual environment”, in Latvian Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2021, Sprūds, A., Broka, S., (eds.), Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts, 2021.
- ⁶ Lieģis, I., “The answer is shelterin’ from the wind” in Latvia Foreign and Security Policy Yearbook 2021, Sprūds, A., Broka, S., (eds.), Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts, 2021.
- ⁷ DeNardis, L., “The Internet in Everything: Freedom and Security in a World with No off Switch”, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2020.
- ⁸ Hirsch, D. D., “The Glass House Effect: Big Data, the New Oil, and the Power of Analogy”, Maine Law Review, Vol. 66, June 2014.
- ⁹ See *infra* Section I for a deeper discussion of the Chinese Cybersecurity Law.
- ¹⁰ “Digitālās transformācijas pamatnostādnes”, 2020.
- ¹¹ “OECD Reviews of Digital Transformation Going Digital in Latvia”, OECD, 2021, www.oecd-ilibrary.org.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ “Latvia Launches First 5G Military Test Site in Europe”, LSM.lv, 13.11.2020, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/defense/latvia-launches-first-5g-military-test-site-in-europe.a381607>.
- ¹⁶ Broeders, D., Berg, B., “Governing Cyberspace: Behavior, Power, and Diplomacy”, Digital Technologies and Global Politics, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.
- ¹⁷ “EU-US Launch Trade and Technology Council”, Eiropas Komisija, <https://ec.europa.eu>.
- ¹⁸ Figure 1 is the author’s adoption of the following works: See Nye, S.J., “The Regime Complex for Managing Global Cyber Activities”, Global Commission on Internet Governance, 2014, <https://dash.harvard.edu>; Klimburg, A., Faesen, L., “A Balance of Power in Cyberspace”, Governing Cyberspace, 2020, p. 145.
- ¹⁹ Mazmanian A., “Legacy Systems Crumble under High Demand”, FCW, 05.04.2020, <https://fcw.com>.

- ²⁰ “Germany’s New Data Strategy May Come ‘too Late’,” DW, 28.01.2021, www.dw.com.
- ²¹ “Keeping Old Computers Going Costs Government £2.3bn a Year, Says Report,” BBC News, 05.08.2021, www.bbc.com.
- ²² “WBT A Quick Guide to Joint Programming,” European Commission, <https://europa.eu>.
- ²³ “D4DHUB,” *D\$DHUB*. Accessed November 21, 2021, <https://d4dlaunch.eu>.
- ²⁴ Didenko, A. N., “Cybersecurity Regulation in the Financial Sector: Prospects of Legal Harmonisation in the EU and Beyond,” *Uniform Law Review*, 25(1), 2020, p. 20–29.
- ²⁵ The Security of Network and Information System (NIS) Directive establishes a baseline that that can be overridden by other sectoral rules; see Directive (EU) 2016/1148 of 6 July 2016 Concerning Measures for a High Common Level of Security of Network and Information Systems Across the Union (OJ L 194/1) art 1(7) (NIS Directive).
- ²⁶ The instrument was adopted in its final form in April 2019. See Regulation (EU) 2019/881 of 17 April 2019 on ENISA (the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity) and on Information and Communications Technology Cybersecurity Certification and Repealing Regulation (EU) No 526/2013 (Cybersecurity Act) (OJ L 151/15).

INFORMAL AMBASSADORS: THE POTENTIAL OF DIASPORA PROFESSIONALS IN SCALING THE FOREIGN POLICY CAPACITY OF LATVIA

Elīna Pinto

Head of the European Latvian Alliance |
Member of the Board of the European Movement – Latvia

NETWORKS AS A CRYSTAL LATTICE OF INFLUENCE IN THE 21ST-CENTURY DIPLOMACY

This is the era of networks. In the arenas of media and information and of goods and services, as well as in the field of ideas and influence, one has to attach an ever-increasing importance to the ways that horizontal networks, characterized by direct trust and practical applicability between governmental and non-governmental actors, complement and reinforce the traditional vertical structures of power.¹

Therefore, in the field of innovation, for instance, the classic triple helix approach (synergy between government, industry and academia as the main actors) has grown into a quadruple one, adding users/civil society as an equally significant player in the field of innovations. As a result of public involvement in the area of innovation, we experience the establishment of “dynamic relationships, synergies, collaborations, coordinated environments, and value creation activities”,² while also adding aspects of creativity and multiculturalism, as well as enriching the creative process and strengthening the concordance of innovations with the broader global context by using such a “beyond the box” perspective.³

In line with the spirit of the era, we also speak about the formation of “network diplomacy” in the field of diplomacy. This means further developing the “two-track diplomacy” or “multi-track diplomacy” approach, which has already embraced the added value of non-governmental actors and negotiations in foreign affairs, though mainly in

the field of conflict resolution.⁴ The plurality of informal players suggests a “new world order” where government representatives operate in networks that go beyond merely *ad hoc* cooperation, even if they are not fixed in a formal structure.⁵ This change is also described in the way that “diplomacy has gone from a closed enterprise characterized by embassies, elite recruitment, diplomatic pouches, and formal cables, to a more open and transparent endeavor”.⁵

The network diplomacy approach is pragmatic as well. In the context of the budget priorities of small- and medium-sized countries, including Latvia, the structural needs of foreign affairs are often out-rivalled by other urgent priorities, from healthcare and maintaining economic competitiveness to guarding borders and social policy. Most countries cannot afford to join all the international fora, to open embassies in every country of the world, and to directly engage in the countless global communication bubbles. It would create extremely high financial and management costs. However, a strategic and targeted networking provides leverage for increased diplomatic influence in the landscape of 21st century international relations and is key to the successful interest representation. With the help of a network diplomacy approach, Latvia can also scale its international performance, ensuring effects than outmeasure its direct resources.

THE PROFESSIONAL DIASPORA: LATVIA'S NATURAL PARTNER IN NETWORK DIPLOMACY

A natural high-potential partner for Latvia's network diplomacy is its diaspora. Its pertinence is based on existing historical, cultural, linguistic, diasporic, or other types of social linkages. In the framework of the so-called “diaspora diplomacy”, diaspora activists, agitators, advocates and ambassadors apply their local experience, contacts and roles in shaping the information environment to promote the security and strategic policy objectives of their countries of origin.⁷ The engagement of diaspora representatives is also an effective way of multiplying messages in the field of nation-branding.⁸

In the case of Latvia, this has been historically demonstrated by the “national political activities” of Latvian exiles in sustaining the existence of the Latvian people under the conditions of Soviet occupation, promoting the liberation of Latvia from occupation, and the restoration of democratic order in Latvia,⁹ as well as their subsequent support provided to Latvian diplomatic service in the context of Latvia joining NATO and the maintenance of ongoing support by the US government for Latvia's security and defense.^{10,11} The activities of the modern day diaspora in the field of culture and traditions also serve to strengthen the international image of Latvia as a “country of culture”, while using various cultural events and festivities for the purpose of public diplomacy.

The local, as well as the umbrella, organizations of diaspora provide informational and organizational support to the classic diplomacy actors (diplomats, honorary consuls) in many places across the world.

New opportunities for engaging diaspora resources for Latvian foreign policy objectives have been opened up by the approach of pragmatic cooperation that is integrated into the 2018 Diaspora Law. It marks a broader view of cooperating with the diaspora, namely, that it occurs not only in the traditional field of national identity and belonging, but also in the pragmatic direction of attracting capital. In theory, five dimensions of diaspora capital are distinguished: financial, intellectual, political, cultural, and social.¹² In order to exploit this capital, the Diaspora Law progressively emphasizes that one of the policy tasks is “to promote the involvement of diaspora in the development and promotion of the national economy, export, and investments of Latvia, knowledge and technology transfer, state administration, research and development”.¹³ These measures are also included in the *Policy plan for Work with the Diaspora 2021–2023*.¹⁴

This approach is consistent with the vision that professional diaspora can both help to enter foreign markets or facilitate the attraction of potential investors – by reducing the transaction and information costs of various types of cooperation formats – as well as facilitate the access to the latest foreign experience in technology, management and policy making.¹⁵ Also, from the perspective of Latvia, “the role of [professional diaspora] lies both in the identification of competences and solutions for urgent problems that the national state is clearly unable to cope with, and in the maintenance of daily links between sources of already identified necessary competencies and, in our case, Latvian institutions, industry clusters and their individual participants. Researchers have formulated a term for this, namely, ‘innovation diplomacy’, and its natural agents are, in fact, the professionals of national diaspora”.¹⁶

A prerequisite for innovation diplomacy is the openness of the parties to a two-way dialogue. On the part of diaspora, it requires them to overcome a frequently observable inclination towards “mentoring or chastising”. Therefore, it is important for the diaspora to actively and closely follow the current developments in Latvia, as in certain areas those even surpass foreign achievement. On the part of Latvia, this requires a readiness to listen to initiatives, to apply practices that are effective abroad, and to engage diaspora partners in discussions on common goals as of early stages. The contribution of a network of professional diaspora envoys can be both passive, acting as a channel for the propagation of official messages of Latvia, and active, operating as a reflexive channel for international knowledge transfer, thus bringing new perspectives and practices to the public administration and policy arsenal of Latvia, as ‘social remittances’.

On the part of the non-governmental sector, the above mentioned areas of activity are developing within the traditional diaspora organizations. One example is the World Latvian Economics and Innovations Forum (PLEIF), which aims to raise Latvia’s

competitiveness globally, contributing to strengthening the Latvian economy and attracting capital in the form of innovations, finance and knowledge to Latvia. Similarly, in order to strengthen cooperation in the field of science and research, the Ministry of Education and Science holds a quinquennial World Congress of Latvian Scientists. In addition, after an intermission of more than 25 years, the World Congress of Latvian Lawyers was held in 2018.¹⁷

The Business Forum by the American Latvian Association (ALA), known as Spotlight Latvia, as well as the Latvian American Chamber of Commerce, Lat-Cham, are initiatives that contribute to the development of Latvia's economic ties with US market players. Diaspora professionals in different fields such as creative industries,¹⁸ finance management,¹⁹ healthcare²⁰ and others have been gathering together under the wing of the European Latvian Association²¹ since 2014. The Latvian Medical and Dental Association is one of the oldest diaspora professional associations, and it continues to actively work in the healthcare sector.

Moreover, in recent years, new and more narrowly focused organizations (diaspora-organized trade chambers, local clubs of diaspora entrepreneurs, associations of students and scientists abroad, and medical organizations²²) and their associations have been flourishing aside from these multi-purpose diaspora umbrella organizations. These professional communities and organizations are new partners of high potential, which can be involved in specific areas or roles to expand the field of Latvia's foreign affairs in geographical, thematic and communicative terms.

GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONALS: A YET-UNTAPPED RESOURCE FOR LATVIAN DIPLOMACY

In the context of the implementation of foreign policy tasks, diaspora professionals in international governance field have a special role as concerns cooperation with the Latvian diplomatic service and public officials of different sectors. This community is still an undervalued informal resource for improving Latvia's diplomatic capacity and the development of public administration.

Who are these “diaspora governance professionals”?

Basically, we are talking about professionals working in international organizations: Latvian nationals in the service of the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), Council of Europe (EP), NATO, the OSCE, OECD institutions and bodies, as well

as organizations, courts and tribunals belonging to these systems (in the capacity of permanent officials or fixed-term employees), at different professional levels, from administrative specialists and experts to senior management-level officials, regardless of whether or not they have at any stage of their career belonged to the Latvian public service (this refers to all three branches of power, not only the executive).

More widely seen, this community of governance professionals can also include specialists working in international non-governmental organizations (dedicated to human rights, the environment and climate, anti-corruption, etc.); professionals posted to international missions for conflict resolution, peacekeeping, electoral observation, technical assistance and development cooperation; expert consultants providing professional analysis and impact assessment services to international bodies; as well as professionals working in foreign public services. Trainees or interns of these organizations and bodies who intend to develop their careers in this direction should also be counted in. This group, as a whole, could be qualified as diaspora governance professionals.

Latvia can be proud of its top level professionals in leadership positions of the general secretariats of international organizations, of its representatives in international courts, tribunals and international commissions, of high-level policy advisers to EU senior officials and the advisory offices of the UN bodies, as well as of an even greater number of middle-level managers and experts in various sectors. Numerically, most of these professionals operate in the EU civil service.²³ However, Latvia so far has not identified the total number of its governance professionals of different statuses operating in all international organizations. It could be estimated at several hundred. This is nevertheless a fluctuating number, taking into account the mobility of these professionals between Latvia and abroad, as well as between different international bodies.

About 150 people have engaged in the informal cooperation initiatives launched so far. This shows a high degree of interest and, at the same time, a considerable growth potential for the development of this type of professional cooperation in the framework of the development of Latvia's foreign policy and public administration.

What is the potential of governance professionals in scaling the diplomacy of Latvia?

Informal exchanges with diaspora professionals in international organizations can contribute to the substance of Latvian diplomacy, expand its communicative scope, and serve as a resource to strengthen the capacity of the public service in Latvia.

The substantive contribution can take the form of providing contextual information on possible solutions to issues of interest to Latvia, early informal leads on expected

regulatory acts and considerations relevant to their development, or indications regarding the considerations of the actors involved. This can help to adequately calibrate Latvia's positions for a successful defense of its interests internationally and for internationally informed decision-making at the national level. A useful contribution to the activities of the Latvian diplomatic service may also come through the specialized expertise of diaspora professionals on issues where the Latvian diplomatic service and public administration as a whole, due to its scale and capacity, do not have sufficient internal resources for an in-depth analysis. This may refer both to specific far-away geographical regions, to historically complex political processes as well as to issues of high technical or advanced specialization.

Secondly, diaspora governance professionals can also broaden the communication network of Latvian diplomacy. This can take the form of the so-called "contact brokerage", helping to reach out to and open the doors of hard-to-reach officials or political actors for direct exchanges. Diaspora 'envoys' may also strengthen Latvia's official communication by informally explaining the rationale and nuances of Latvia's position to stakeholders in their professional fields. By sharing Latvia's positions on their social networks, diaspora professionals can also trigger algorithms within the digital playgrounds of public diplomacy.²⁴ However, it is also necessary to take into account the opposite effect of this attention – through diaspora professionals, their host organizations may catch sight of certain rhetorics of national politicians intended for local political consumption, but of concern to international organizations and international law. This may include positions which do not correspond to Latvia's internationally declared fundamental goals, thus hindering their implementation by the diplomatic service.

The involvement of diaspora governance professionals in the public discussions of Latvia²⁵ can also promote comprehension of the role, objectives and tasks – as well as the internal processes and considerations – of international organizations among Latvian decision makers, opinion leaders and, especially, the wider circles of society.

Thirdly, diaspora governance professionals can also serve as a resource to strengthen the capacity of the Latvian public service. A dynamic, innovative and internationally persuasive operation of public service is becoming increasingly important. The already well-known challenges presented by Latvia's financial and demographic situation are increasingly complemented by the need to ensure the resilience of policies in conditions of political fragmentation and volatility, as well as deep public mistrust in government. Taking into account the inextricable links of Latvian governance standards, practices and regulations with the agenda of international organizations, the professionalism of international representation by public servants is a factor not only in the foreign service, but in sectoral ministries and independent institutions as well.

Latvia can attract both human resources and knowledge capital for the development of its public service from diaspora governance professionals. This can be accomplished through exchanges of experience and good practices, engaging these professionals as lecturers in professional training processes, organizing joint conferences, as well as temporarily or permanently integrating them into Latvian public institutions and bodies. Such mobility of governance professionals between Latvia and international organizations so far has been based on individual initiative and previous personal contacts. This is especially true for diaspora professionals who have not previously worked in the Latvian public service. To move from the logic of “being acquainted” to the logic of “positioning”, it would be important to change the short-term thinking framework of “gone, therefore lost” and “not familiar, therefore not interesting” at the systemic level.

How has cooperation with diaspora governance professionals developed so far?

The official Foreign policy report of 2015 entailed a specific commitment by the Latvian Foreign Service: “For the sake of achieving foreign policy goals, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be active in mustering and mobilising all intellectual resources available for Latvia, including the expertise of Latvian citizens who work in international organisations and the potential of Latvian diaspora organisations.”²⁶ What progress has been reached regarding the implementation of this intention?

The first steps towards organized cooperation were taken by professionals working in the institutions of the European Union (EU). This was motivated both by “demand”, namely, a real need to strengthen Latvia’s capacity in EU affairs, and also by “supply”, namely, the large number of professionals of Latvian origin who have gained experience and contacts in EU policies and institutions since Latvia’s accession to the EU. A positive example of long-standing sectoral cooperation is the annual conference of interpreters and translators, which focusses on exchanges on current language and translation issues in EU institutions.²⁷ In 2013, an informal group of Latvian professionals working in EU institutions known as “the Group of Presidency Friends” (*Prezidentūras draugu grupa*)²⁸ invited the EU Secretariat of the Latvian presidency and the Permanent Representation of Latvia to the EU to cooperate in the preparation of the Latvian Presidency of the European Council. Seminars dedicated to this issue brought together more than 100 Latvians working in EU institutions in Brussels. They drew up an analysis and recommendations regarding the priorities for Latvia’s EU Presidency, as well as regarding Presidency’s management, and offered informal support for the implementation of the Latvia’s Presidency program.²⁹

After the Presidency, the Representation of Latvia to the EU, ELA and the Latvian Association in Belgium (LBB) continued the practice of holding topical discussions on EU policies. The Representation of Latvia to the EU also assigned one diplomat to maintaining contacts with diaspora professionals in EU institutions. The legal basis for this was laid by amendments to the Regulation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ārlietu ministrijas nolikums*),³⁰ which tasked the Ministry and diplomatic missions with cooperating with the diaspora, including through the promotion of the participation of the Latvian diaspora in the Latvian economy, politics, cultural life, education and science.

These steps provided an impetus to building a sustainable framework of cooperation. In 2016 and 2017, the Group of the Presidency Friends approached the State Chancellery with proposals aimed at the development of the know-how and professionalism of the Latvian public service in relation to EU affairs and at promoting effective representation of Latvian interests in the EU and in other international organizations. The group encouraged setting out a mobility plan for governance professionals between Latvia and EU institutions and other international bodies at different professional levels; this could be complemented by joint activities in the area of professional development and networking initiatives. The group pointed to Estonia's example which had established a regular networking forum for its nationals working in international organizations and national public service professionals.³¹ A similar specialized forum for international governance professionals in Latvia was for the first time organised by ELA and the European Affairs Committee of the Saeima. This forum brought together around 50 Latvians working in the EU, UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, and OECD bodies, as well as representatives from Latvia's public administration and non-governmental organizations.³² Following the forum, the State Chancellery showed an interest in the possibility of inviting diaspora professionals to apply for positions as middle and senior managers in Latvia's public administration.³³

A new opportunity to strengthen the framework of cooperation with diaspora governance professionals was provided by the drafting of the Diaspora Law, adopted in January 2018. Among other proposals, ELA suggested that Diaspora Law would also include regulation that would facilitate engaging professionals working in international organizations to transfer to the Latvian public service.³⁴ Some of the proposals were included in the Diaspora Law, though so far they have not been implemented.

NEW DRIVE AND TRACTION: OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN SUSTAINABLE COOPERATION IN 2021–2022

With the widespread introduction of various forms of distance working due to the influence of Covid-19, there is now a favorable environment for a real-time networking of diaspora professionals scattered across countries and organizations. Moreover, 2021, along with giving new breath to the strategy of nation-branding and Latvia's plans to be a candidate for the seat of the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, has renewed the pragmatic interest of the Latvian diplomatic service and public administration to strengthen cooperation with diaspora professionals. Based on the groundwork described below, that the year 2022 could mark a new phase in developing a high value-added two-way cooperation among governance professionals..

The cooperation of governance professionals

At the beginning of 2021, a movement of diaspora entrepreneurs, professionals and scientists known as *#esiLV-Ekonomiskā sadarbība un investīcijas Latvijai* (ESI.LV 2020) (*#esiLV – Economic Cooperation and Investment for Latvia*) was officially founded.³⁵ Among other activities, cooperation of diaspora governance professionals were resumed under its auspices.

In January 2021, with a view to the centenary of Latvia's *de iure* international recognition, *#esiLV* gathered 57 diaspora professionals from international organizations and foreign institutions based in Europe and its neighboring regions, in the United States, in Oceania, in Central Asia, and in the Middle East, as well as Latvian officials and policy makers. This discussion asset out a “diagnosis” of Latvia's international image and reputation, highlighted the Latvia's strong points on which to base the forthcoming campaign to join the UN Security Council (UNSC), and appealed for continued cooperation in nation-building, offering contribution of specialists from international organizations to the Latvian UN SC campaign.³⁶ In follow-up, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited *#esiLV* representatives to join consultations with the Latvian non-governmental sector on substantive elements of Latvia's campaign for the UNSC.

In order to strengthen cooperation and knowledge exchange among professionals working in the field of human rights both in Latvia and internationally, and to raise public awareness of human rights issues, *#esiLV* in cooperation with the media portal *Tvnet.lv* held a live debate with the candidates for the post of Ombudsman in March 2021.³⁷

In order to develop informal links between diaspora professionals in the field of governance and their Latvian colleagues, an online conversation cycle called “Diplomātu pusdienas” (Diplomatic luncheon) was started with the participation of personalities

in Latvian and international diplomacy. The first conversations with the experienced Latvian diplomats Ojārs Ēriks Kalniņš and Solveiga Silkalna, both born outside Latvia, asserted the importance of this kind of networking with a view to strengthening Latvia's foreign policy positioning.

The President of Latvia, Egils Levits – who himself was one of the original members of the “Group of Presidency Friends” – hosted a gathering of professionals of international organizations in Riga Castle in August 2021. The visit included diaspora professionals from Brussels, Luxembourg, Paris, Berlin, Islamabad and Jakarta, who declared their willingness to share their knowledge and experience in order to strengthen Latvia's public service and the image of our country in the international political arena.³⁸ The economic aspect was also noted: Latvian entrepreneurs and the economy as a whole could benefit from being better informed about public procurement calls by international bodies.³⁹ Professionals of international organizations also expressed readiness to engage in educational initiatives and with media to raise the awareness of general public about the importance of international organizations in national processes.

Nation-branding and sectoral diplomacy

By fully entrusting the coordination of the development of a unified national image to the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) (Ministry of Economics 2021),⁴⁰ work was started on a new approach and a new mission to strengthen Latvia's international positions. Following the #esiLV letter to the President of Latvia,⁴¹ LIAA invited diaspora professionals to engage in workshops on nation-branding, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs included a representative of the diaspora as a member of the Latvian External Image Policy Coordination Council, namely, Ieva Jākobsone Bellomi of the movement #esiLV.⁴²

Following the first Latvian Creative Diaspora Cooperation Forum in Berlin,⁴³ and grounded on vivid positive examples of creative ambassadors from among the diaspora, #esiLV in 2021 called for developing a strategic vision for Latvian cultural diplomacy as part of the activities within the new *Cultural Policy Guidelines for 2021–2027 “Culture State”* (*Kultūrpolitikas pamatnostādnes 2021.–2027.gadam “Kultūrvalsts”*) and proposed concrete implementation activities. This could include establishing a diaspora network of “Envoys of Latvian culture” at three levels (top-level internationally recognized creative professionals; creative professionals with experience in the management of cultural processes and with a network of industry contacts and cooperation partners abroad; and representatives of wider diaspora communities who demonstrate practical experience and an interest in cultural diplomacy processes, including representatives of diaspora artistic groups). These envoys would support the Latvian cultural diplomacy processes

abroad, complementing the work of the Ministry of Culture, the Foreign Service and LIAA in an coordinated and professionalised manner.⁴⁴

An element of “Diaspora Diplomacy for Science” was included in the activity plans of the Ministry of Education and Science in 2021 for the first time. In order to integrate more successfully into international scientific circles and to attract research resources to Latvian science, this initiative intends to reach out to potential foreign partners of interest to Latvian scientific institutions by using the help of diaspora scientists. For the first time, as of 2021 there is also a seat for a representative of diaspora scientists on the Advisory Scientific Board of the Latvian Council of Science, following the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science. The person delegated for this task is Dr. Alvis Brāzma based in the United Kingdom. These steps confirm a growing awareness of the research-based conclusion that the Latvian scientific diaspora can be an important resource for developing international cooperation, especially taking into account the currently extremely low science funding and Latvia’s low results in European evaluation of innovation performance.⁴⁵

A strategic and structured method for engaging with professional diaspora can contribute to the international positioning of Latvia as a creativity-based and knowledge-based innovation economy. It can complement channels of official diplomacy with the contribution of informal envoys, especially in areas where Latvia has so far rarely established positions for dedicated attachés, like, for instance, in the field of culture, education and science. These are valuable additional tools of “network diplomacy” which complement the classical diplomacy methods.

Future opportunities and challenges for attracting informal envoys from the ranks of diaspora professionals

The involvement of professional diaspora to advance Latvia’s foreign policy goals in 2022 may help respond to capacity needs. The internal resources of the diplomatic service will be occupied by the traditional tasks, including in response to geopolitical tensions and crises in the region and on the global scene. Diplomats will need to be actively engaged in polishing the national image of Latvia and broadening diplomatic contacts in order to prepare the ground for the candidacy of Latvia for the seat of the non-permanent member on the UN Security Council. Additional workload, especially in the pre-election period, will also be created by domestic political communication and practical tasks to ensure the legislative elections abroad in autumn 2022.

Moreover, 2022 marks a new phase in Latvian public diplomacy after five intensive years of the national programme on the Centenary of statehood. According to the Annual Foreign Policy Report, the Centenary public diplomacy programme “has increased the

attention of our partners with regard to Latvia's achievements and promoted further cooperation in economy, security, culture and education".⁴⁶ for the benefit of Latvia, it would be important to ensure permanent follow-up to and capitalize on the bilateral and multilateral initiatives launched during the Centenary period. It would also help underpin and communicate Latvia's competitiveness while recovering from the Covid-19 crisis.

Well-considered involvement of professional diaspora, including governance professionals, could help to solve the resource challenge for the implementation of the broad range of aforementioned diplomatic tasks. The year 2022 will reveal if there is genuine interest and practical readiness of all parties to implement specific cooperation initiatives and build a sustainable engagement framework for the future. In this context, one can highlight three specific tasks for engaging with governance professionals and three challenges for strengthening wider cooperation with the professional diaspora.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN 2022 IN TERMS OF COOPERATION WITH DIASPORA GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONALS?

Firstly, specific cooperation initiatives capitalizing on the experience of governance professionals should continue. For instance, it is good practice to engage diaspora professionals in the discussions of the Foreign Service on the content and calibration of the UN Security Council campaign. Co-ownership of this kind would strengthen the content of the campaign, as well as facilitate the participation of diaspora professionals based at the UN and in other structures in campaign support activities.

Secondly, the dynamics of cooperation could be maintained by establishing a regular cooperation forum for strengthening informal links and knowledge transfer among diaspora governance professionals and members of the Latvian public service. The year 2022 will show if the commitment made in August 2021 by the President of Latvia, the State Chancellery and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to hold such a forum (PC 2021) is upheld.⁴⁷ The necessary prerequisites exist for this, both at the grassroots level and action policy documents (Diaspora Action Plan 2021). This forum could serve as an agora for in-depth discussions on practical formats of cooperation, for setting up sectoral working groups with specialists from the Latvian public service, and for informal exchange of experience and contacts.

Thirdly, the National public administration development strategy should draw on the resource of diaspora professionals in the field of governance. The current Public Administration Reform Plan only refers to international organizations as a destination of "the outflow of qualified specialists"⁴⁸, and this is not farsighted. In developing

a long-term vision for Latvia's public administration, it may be useful to draw on the 2016/ 2017 proposals of the Group of the Presidency Friends which define the global dimension of human resource policy for national public administration. This would mean complementing this policy with an international mobility strategy, including with regard to the progression of governance professionals to international positions of strategic importance for Latvia, a continuity of length-of-service, and well-considered plans for the return/reintegration of diaspora professionals in the relevant fields and positions of the Latvian public service. This approach is already being pursued by other countries in our region, such as Denmark.⁴⁹

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WIDER COOPERATION WITH THE PROFESSIONAL DIASPORA IN 2022?

In order for “network diplomacy” to bear its expected fruits, the current holding of *ad hoc* events and “the logic of projects” should be complemented by a sustainable framework for daily cooperation that naturally incorporates representatives of the professional diaspora into the ecosystem of Latvia's foreign affairs, economy and sectoral policies. This would establish a direct operational link between processes in Latvia, on the one hand, and global trends and opportunities, on the other. As has been aptly observed, “the innovation of the role of the diaspora is remarkable, and there is a need for a constant and institutionalized engagement of its competences”.

Such an approach, for instance, has been effectively applied by the Lithuanian government and the Investment Promotion Agency ‘Invest Lithuania’ in cooperation with Global Lithuanian Leaders (GLL), an organization that manages a worldwide network of Lithuanian diaspora professionals. GLL played a key role in communicating to and purposefully engaging with Lithuanian professionals working in British companies with the intention to attract to Lithuania⁵⁰ shared services centers and, in the context of Brexit, fintech companies⁵¹. Such results cannot be achieved by a single get-together or a spontaneous call, but rather require a well-functioning permanent framework of cooperation, which is then used in specific situations to effectively mobilize networks of diaspora professionals.

Therefore, the state should evaluate and strengthen the most appropriate formats for a maximally effective cooperation with the professional diaspora. According to the Diaspora Law, the coordinating body for cooperation with the diaspora is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which also chairs the meetings of the Diaspora Advisory Council. The human resources currently allocated to diaspora affairs in the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs may be adequate for core work regarding the identity elements of diaspora policy. The new pragmatic dimension of cooperation, however, requires linkages with the management of the broader tasks of Latvia's foreign policy and with other areas of national development, like governance, economics, culture, science, etc.

The introduction of this dimension would require elevating the work of the Diaspora Advisory Council to a new level of quality or else involving the professional diaspora in dedicated formats of sectoral cooperation – such as the National Development Council and sectoral policy development councils. This would allow providing more specialized contributions by professional diaspora and integrate them into the daily work of policy development structures of Latvia. Moreover, Latvia's diplomatic and economic representations abroad play an important role in maintaining exchanges with the diaspora professionals in the countries in which they currently reside.

In the field of nation-branding, effective contribution of diaspora would be facilitated by suitable practical formats and tools. Representation in the Latvian External Image Policy Coordination Council ensures that diaspora views can be expressed at policy level, but this could be boosted by cooperation tools at the operational level - in both proactive positive branding activities and in crisis communication. To this end, it may be helpful to include diaspora “envoys” in the information flows of the Foreign Service and LIAA, as well as in regular trainings or consultations on topical and strategic issues regarding Latvia's foreign policy, economy and national image-building, similar to the practice with regard to honorary consuls. In complex or particularly significant cases, it may be useful to share background or guidance notes of the foreign service with key opinion leaders within diaspora, especially in situations presenting reputational risks to the state and where there are no official diplomatic missions of Latvia present.

The professional diaspora itself, too, faces the challenge of realistically calibrating and structuring its engagement. As has been aptly pointed out, “[...] it is a dilemma between social interaction and pragmatism. One does not exclude the other, however, Latvia is in serious need of focused and targeted diaspora activity in problematic or simply important areas”.⁵² Pragmatic cooperation requires investing one's time and effort, and it is a precious resource in the lives of active professionals. It is therefore essential to properly motivate and utilize this kind of engagement.

Self-organization of the professional diaspora is the key to effective communication with partners in Latvia and representative involvement in cooperation formats. Self-organisation structures cooperation, simplifies communication, ensures that the right professional is approached at the right moment and in the right place, and helps ensuring that the positions expressed by these professionals are based on a broader analysis from different countries or sectors. A good example is the approach of the movement #esiLV which builds thematic and sectoral clusters of professionals, entrepreneurs and scientists

from different industries who collaborate in a single framework and develop common positions. Such self-organization should be advanced by identifying and mapping a broader range of interested professionals from different sectors and organizations and by maintaining an active contact database, as well as by finding resources to finance the functioning of a permanent office or coordinator. Besides, traditional diaspora umbrella organizations are and will remain important partners for Latvia in the wider field of diaspora engagement.

The above steps would define the scope for a broader strategic plan on strengthening Latvia's international positions and contributions to national development by attracting the social capital of its professional diaspora. The international race for highly skilled workforce is increasingly exacerbating, while technology developments and Covid-19 have accelerated changes in lifestyle and the workplace setup, thus creating ever new opportunities for real-time cooperation across borders. The diaspora and its professional capital are like the global cloud file of Latvia. A forward-looking, consistent, practical approach to networking diplomacy is a way to connect with this cloud, thus scaling Latvia's ability to carry out its many foreign policy, governance and economic tasks. The year 2022 will show whether we are ready for this.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ When it comes to “networks and networking”, the first thought is often about digitization or twitterization. These networks truly play a huge role in every field today. Digital channels and platforms, however, are both tools and “passive networks”. This article will focus on another kind of networks, the so-called “active networks”, or the interactions between a wider number of non-governmental actors.
- ² Nina, H., Höglund, L., Linton, G., “Quadruple helix as a network of relationships: creating value within a Swedish regional innovation system”, 2019, p. 523–544. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08276331.2019.1643134>.
- ³ Elias G. C., Campbell, D. F. J., “Developed Democracies versus Emerging Autocracies: Arts, Democracy, and Innovation in Quadruple Helix Innovation Systems”, *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship* 3:12., 2014, <http://www.innovation-entrepreneurship.com/content/pdf/s13731-014-0012-2.pdf>.
- ⁴ Diamond, L., McDonald, J. W., “Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace”, Kumarian Press, 1996, <https://www.imtd.org/>.
- ⁵ Slaughter, A. M., “A New World Order”, Princeton University Press, 2004.
- ⁶ Manulak, M., “Why and How to Succeed at Network Diplomacy”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 01.2019, p. 171–181., DOI:10.1080/0163660X.2019.1593668, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332460109_Why_and_How_to_Succeed_at_Network_Diplomacy.
- ⁷ Bela, B., Mierīņa, I., “*Diasporas ieguldījums Latvijā un tā apzināšanas iespējas*”, Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo zinātņu fakultātes Sociālo un politisko pētījumu institūta Diasporas un migrācijas pētījumu centrs, 2018, https://www.diaspora.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/diaspora/petijumi/GALA_Diasporas_ieguldijums.pdf.

- ⁸ Dinnie, K., "Nation branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice", 1st Ed. Elsevier Ltd, UK, http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/nation_branding/Nation_Branding_-_Concepts_Issues_Practice_-_Keith_Dinnie.pdf.
- ⁹ Beķere, K., "Latvijas neatkarības idejas uzturēšana Trimdā no 1940. gadu vidus līdz 1980. gadu otrai pusei: politiskā darbība", (Maintaining the Idea of Latvia's Independence in Exile from the Mid-1940s to the Second Half of the 1980s: Political Activity) Doctoral Thesis, University of Latvia Faculty of History and Philosophy, 2020, https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/bitstream/handle/7/53000/298-78886-Bekere_Kristine_kb10114.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- ¹⁰ "PBLA vesture", World Federation of Free Latvians (PBLA), 2021, <https://www.pbla.lv/par-pbla/vesture/>.
- ¹¹ Ārlietu ministrija, "Ārlietu Ministrs: Amerikas Latviešu apvienība ir nozīmīgs Latvijas sabiedrotais, atbalsts un partneris kopīgo mērķu īstenošanā", 25.10.2021, <https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/333915-arlietu-ministrs-amerikas-latviesu-apvieniba-ir-nozimigs-latvijas-sabiedrotais-atbalsts-un-partneris-kopigo-merku-istenosana-2021>.
- ¹² Petkevičiene, D., "Diaspora engagement possibilities for Latvian business development", 2016, <https://www.liaa.gov.lv/lv/download/liaa-diaspora-research-paper.pdf>.
- ¹³ Latvijas Vēstnesis, "Diasporas likums", Likumi.lv, 2018, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/302998-diasporas-likums>.
- ¹⁴ Latvijas Vēstnesis, "Par Plānu darbam ar diasporu 2021.–2023. gadam", Ministru kabineta rīkojums Nr. 33, Likumi.lv, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/320368-par-planu-darbam-ar-diasporu-20212023-gadam>.
- ¹⁵ Kuznetsov, Y., Sabel, C., "International migration of talent, diaspora networks, and development: Overview of main issues", Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills: How Countries Can Draw on Their Talent Abroad., Kuznetsov, Y (eds.), WBI Development Studies, p. 3–19.
- ¹⁶ Melķis, D., "Redakcijas komentārs: Diasporas iesaistes jēdzīgums prasa abpusēju fokusēšanos", Dianas Bizness, 28.07.2017, <https://www.db.lv/zinas/redakcijas-komentars-diasporas-iesaistes-jedzigums-prasa-abpuseju-fokusesanos-465062>. Melķis, D., "Rīcīpolitikas uzņēmēji inovācijas diplomātijā: Latvijas-Lielbritānijas tirdzniecības kameras piemērs", private research, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/33298822/Didzis_Melkis_Innovation_diplomacy_short.pdf.
- ¹⁷ World Congress of Latvian Scientists, 2018, <https://congress.sciencelatvia.lv/programma-2/#tab-id-2>.
- ¹⁸ European Latvian Association, 2019, <https://ela.lv/lv/par-radoso-diasporas-sadarbibas-forumu-berline>.
- ¹⁹ European Latvian Association, 2017, <http://baltic-ireland.ie/2017/05/38374/>.
- ²⁰ European Latvian Association, 2019a,, <https://ela.lv/lv/aicina-diasporas-medikus-sadarbibas-foruma-atbalst-latvijas-veselibas-aprupes-nozari>.
- ²¹ "Diasporas ekspertu vadībā izvērtētas Latvijas iespējas transporta un loģistikas, kosmosa industrijas, reģionu attīstības un investīciju piesaistes jomās", European Latvian Association, 23.11.2018, <https://www.latviesi.com/organizaciju-jaunumi/diasporas-ekspertu-vadiba-izvertetas-latvijas-iespejas-transporta-un-logistikas-kosmosa-industrijas-regionu-attistibas-un-investiciju-piesaistes-jomas/>.
- ²² Association of Diaspora Nurses and Midwives, <https://dimva.lv/>.
- ²³ Report (COM/2018/377 final/2 of August 24, 2018) from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council pursuant to Article 27 of the Staff Regulations of Officials and to Article 12 of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union (Geographical balance) 2018, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1535555848758&uri=C_ELEX%3A52018DC0377R%2801%29.

- ²⁴ Savickis, S., *"Publiskā diplomātija prioritāšu krustcelēs"*, Latvijas ārējā un drošības politika. Gadagrāmata 2020, Sprūds, A., Broka, S., (eds.), Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts, 2020, https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/latvian-foreign-and-security-policy-yearbook-2020-831?get_file=1, p. 207-216.
- ²⁵ It should be noted that some professionals in the service of international organizations are not entitled to publicly represent their organization's position on specific issues (they must follow a specific internal procedure and positions are expressed at the level of higher officials and/or representatives of public relations). However, there is the possibility to exercise a certain degree of discretion as concerns informal communication and the clarification of general issues.
- ²⁶ "Annual Report on accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union in 2015", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2015, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/annual-report-accomplishments-and-further-work-respect-national-foreign-policy-and-european-union-2015-2016>.
- ²⁷ *"Tulkotāju konferences"*, Ārlietu ministrija, 2020, <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/eiropas-savieniba-arpolitika/sabiedribas-informesana-es-jautajumos/es-informacijas-sniedzeji/tulkotaju-konferences>.
- ²⁸ The Group of Presidency Friends (Prezidentūras draugu grupa) was initiated (in alphabetical order) by: Ivo Alehno, Andris Gobiņš, Ilze Juhansone, Ingrida Labucka, Egils Levits, Valda Liepiņa, Elīna Pinto, Anita Zikmane.
- ²⁹ Pinto, E., *"Ceļā uz pirmo Latvijas prezidentūru ES: Prezidentūras draugu iniciatīva Luksemburgā un Briselē"*, Latvijas prezidentūras ES sekretariāts, 2014, <http://www.es2015.lv/lv/gatavosanas-prezidenturai/pieredzes-stasti/264-elina-pinto-cela-uz-pirmo-latvijas-prezidenturu-es-prezidenturas-draugu-iniciativa-luksemburga-un-brisele>; Pinto, E., *"Prezidentūras draugi" – atbalsts Latvijas prezidentūrai ES*, Asociācijas "Luksemburga–Latvija" ziņas, 2014, <https://latviesi.lu/lv/jaunumi/prezidenturas-draugi-atbalsts-latvijas-prezidenturai-es>.
- ³⁰ Latvijas Vēstnesis, *"Grozījumi Ministru kabineta 2003. gada 29. aprīļa noteikumos Nr. 237 'Ārlietu ministrijas nolikums'"*, Likumi.lv, 2016, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/283199-grozijumi-ministru-kabineta-2003-gada-29-aprila-noteikumos-nr-237-arlietu-ministrijas-nolikums>.
- ³¹ Pinto, E., Alehno, I., Gobiņš, A., Juhansone, I., Labucka, I., Levits, E., Liepiņa, V., Zikmane, A., *"Prezidentūras draugu grupas 2017. gada 29. aprīļa iesniegums Valsts kancelejas direktoram 'Priekšlikumi par Eiropas Savienības civildienesta un Latvijas atgriezeniskās saites stiprināšanu'"*, 2017. Available at the author.
- ³² *"Forumā Saeimā pulcējas starptautiskajās organizācijās strādājošie latvieši un Latvijas institūciju pārstāvji"*, Press Service of the Saeima, 28.07.2017, <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/26073-forums-saeima-pulcejas-starptautiskajas-organizacijas-stradajosie-latviesi-un-latvijas-instituciju-parstavji>.
- ³³ The questionnaire administered by the ELA revealed that 80% of respondents had work experience of different durations and at different management levels, and about one-fifth was interested in temporarily or permanently moving to work in the Latvian Civil Service, while another one-fifth did not exclude such a possibility depending on the conditions and indicated their interest in regularly receiving information about job opportunities in Latvian institutions. This, however, was not followed by any further measures on the part of the State Chancellery. Data available through the author.
- ³⁴ ELA proposals:
- For the Cabinet of Ministers to establish a procedure on how professionals working in the service of international organizations can join the Latvian State Civil Service, according to the length of service and level obtained while being employed in the international service;
 - To ensure the recognition of professional experience acquired in the service of international

organizations by the state and local government institutions of Latvia;

- To establish a simplified procedure in respect to diaspora members for a simplified equalization and recognition of the education, academic degrees, and vocational qualifications, including in regulated professions, that were acquired abroad, thus providing for the possibility to work in a particular sector or higher education institution in Latvia;
- For the insurance contributions made by diaspora representatives and their family members in the European Union and EEA countries to be taken into account in calculating the average salary in terms of their average social insurance contributions in cases where diaspora representatives or their family members are eligible for maternity, paternity or parental allowance upon their return to Latvia.

(The full text of the proposals and their annotations is available through the author).

The Diaspora Law included the task for state institutions to “purposefully involve diaspora in the development of the national economy, state administration, and science of Latvia” and to this end to “ensure that the professional experience of diaspora members which is obtained during service in international organizations is recognised in the state and local government authorities of Latvia” (Diaspora Law, Section 13, point 4). To support remigration, the Diaspora Law also included proposals for the recognition of foreign qualifications (Diaspora Law, Section 15, Paragraph 3, Point 2), as well as the recognition of time periods of social security contributions made in EU/EEA countries (Diaspora Law, Section 15, Paragraph 4).

- ³⁵ Ēķe-Začeste, I, “Pragmatiskā saliedētība. Kustība #esiLV – latvieši ārzemēs kā ieguvums Latvijai”, Delfi.lv, 2021, <https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/izstastit-saliedetibu/kustiba-esilv-latviesi-arzemes-ka-ieguvums-latvijai.d?id=53689621>.
- ³⁶ Pinto, E., “Latvijas tēls: skats no starptautiskajām organizācijām – Starptautiskajās organizācijās strādājošo Latvijas profesionāļu ideju darbnīca par godu Latvijas starptautiskās de iure atzišanas simtgadei. Atziņu apkopojums”. Available at the author.
- ³⁷ “Latvijas starptautiskie cilvēktiesību eksperti debatēs ar Tiesībsarga kandidātiem”, Latviesi.com, 27.02.2021, [https://www.latviesi.com/jaunumi/latvijas-starptautiskie-cilvektiesibu-eksperti-debates-ar-tiesibsarga-kandidatiem](https://www.latviesi.com/jaunumi/latvijas-starptautiskie-cilvektiesibu-eksperti-debates-ar-tiesibsarga-kandidatiem;); “Tiesībsarga amata kandidātu vērtēšana: “Nedēļas fokusā” – kurš būs labākais tiesībsargs?”, TVNET.lv, 2021, <https://www.tvnet.lv/7189197/tiesibsarga-amata-kandidatu-vertesana>.
- ³⁸ Biedrība “Ekonomiskā sadarbība un investīcijas Latvijai”, “Starptautisko organizāciju profesionāļi gatavi sadarbībai Latvijas labā”, Latviesi.com, 16.08.2021, <https://www.latviesi.com/organizaciju-jaunumi/starptautisko-organizaciju-profesionali-gatavi-sadarbibai-latvijas-laba>.
- ³⁹ Pudule, Z., “Diasporas profesionāļi sniegs regulāru ieguldījumu Latvijas valsts pārvaldes stiprināšanā”, Baltic-Ireland.ie, 2021, <http://baltic-ireland.ie/2021/08/50115/>.
- ⁴⁰ “Information report ‘On the development of a unified national image’”, Ekonomikas ministrija, <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/mk/tap/?pid=40491531>.
- ⁴¹ Biedrības “Ekonomiskā sadarbība un investīcijas Latvijai” (ESI.LV) 2020. gada 27. jūlija iesniegums Valsts prezidentam “Par Latvijas vīziju un valsts tēla veidošanu”. Available at the author.
- ⁴² Pudule, Z., “Neveidot valsts tēlu ar skatu uz savu nabu”, LSM.lv. 10.11.2020, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/zinu-analize/neveidot-valsts-telu-ar-skatu-uz-savu-nabu.a380769/>.
- ⁴³ Freinberga, I, “Radošās diasporas forums Berlīnē: radošo personību devums kultūras diplomātijā”, Latviesi.com, 11.11.2019, <https://www.latviesi.com/jaunumi/radosas-diasporas-forums-berline-radoso-personibu-devums-kulturas-diplomatija/>.
- ⁴⁴ Biedrības “Ekonomiskā sadarbība un investīcijas Latvijai” (ESI.LV) 2021. gada 23. maija iesniegums Kultūras ministrijai Nr. esiLV/IZ/2021/5 “Par priekšlikumiem pamatnostādņu projekta “Kultūrpolitikas pamatnostādnes 2021.–2027.gadam” pilnveidošanai (VSS-386)” Available at the author.

- ⁴⁵ Kaša, R., Cara, O., Melķe, Z., Mieriņa, I., “*Sadarbība izcilībai: Latvijas un diasporas pētnieku skatījums uz savstarpējo sadarbību*”, Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo zinātņu fakultātes Sociālo un politisko pētījumu institūta Diasporas un migrācijas pētījumu centrs, 2021, <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/media/13358/download>.
- ⁴⁶ “Foreign Policy Report”, Ārlietu ministrija, 2020.
- ⁴⁷ “President of Latvia: it is important for Latvia to put the knowledge and experience of Latvian experts working for the international organisations to good use for our country”, Presidential Chancery, 2021, 17.08.2021. <https://www.president.lv/en/article/president-latvia-it-important-latvia-put-knowledge-and-experience-latvian-experts-working-international-organisations-good-use-our-country>.
- ⁴⁸ “Public Administration Reform Plan 2020”, State Chancellery, 2017, <https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/valsts-parvaldes-refomu-plans-2020>.
- ⁴⁹ “Action plan to promote Danes in the EU”, Ministry of Finance of Denmark, 2017, https://en.fm.dk/media/15619/ActionplantopromoteDanesintheEU_web.pdf.
- ⁵⁰ “New GLL program: investment ambassadors”, Global Lithuanian Leaders, 29.07.2016, <https://lithuanianleaders.org/articles/new-gll-program-investment-ambassadors/>.
- ⁵¹ “UK fintechs seek ‘cure for Brexit’ in Lithuania”, France 24, 21.02.2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210221-uk-fintechs-look-cure-for-brexit-in-lithuania>.
- ⁵² Melķis, D., “Redakcijas komentārs: Diasporas iesaistes jēdzīgums prasa abpusēju fokusēšanos”, Dienas Bizness, 28.07.2017, <https://www.db.lv/zinas/redakcijas-komentars-diasporas-iesaistes-jedzigums-prasa-abpuseju-fokusesanos-465062>.

CONTRIBUTORS

Reinis Āboltiņš is an energy market Expert at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Previously, he was an energy market expert at “Lattelecom” and a consultant to the Saeima’s European Affairs Committee, specializing in energy, the environment, and climate issues. Before joining the Saeima, he was an Energy Policy Researcher at the Public Policy Center Providus, a member of the President’s Energy Security Commission, a member of the Energy Committee of the Ministry of Economics, and an expert in the Energy and Transport Working Groups of the Foreign Investors’ Council. Āboltiņš is a lecturer for the “Energy Policy and International Relations” study course at the University of Latvia and a guest lecturer for the “European Energy and Environmental Law” course at the Riga Graduate School of Law. Āboltiņš is a doctoral student and lecturer for the “Energy and Environmental Science” study program at Riga Technical University.

Māris Andžāns is a Senior Research Fellow at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs and an Assistant Professor at Riga Stradiņš University. In 2019/2020 was a Visiting Fulbright Scholar at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC. He has 10 years of experience in the public administration of Latvia. He has served in different positions related to the coordination of EU and NATO issues, the security of transport and communications, civil-military cooperation, aviation, electronic communications, and postal issues. He has also chaired the National Cyber Security Council of Latvia and the Dangerous Goods Movement Consultative Council of Latvia.

Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova is a Political Scientist, China scholar, Head of the Riga Stradiņš University China Studies Center, Head of the Asia Program at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, and a Member of the European Think-tank Network on China. Bērziņa-Čerenkova has studied at Beijing Language University, Beijing Normal University, et.al. After defending her doctoral dissertation on traditional Chinese discourse in Hu Jintao’s report to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, she held a senior visiting research scholar position at Fudan University School of Philosophy, Shanghai, China (2014/15) and a Fulbright Visiting Scholar position at the Center for East Asia Studies, Stanford University, US (2019/20).

Sintija Broka is a Researcher and Project Manager at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs and a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at Riga Stradiņš University. Sintija Broka holds a bachelor's degree in International Economics from the University of Latvia and a master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy from Riga Stradiņš University. She has recently worked as a visiting Ph.D. fellow at the University of Ghent and an economic researcher at the United Arab Emirates Embassy in Riga. She is currently studying Arabic Studies at the Middle East Institute in Washington. Sintija Broka's academic interests include political and economic sustainability in the Middle East, religion and politics in the Middle East, as well as the policy dynamics of the Gulf region.

Evija Djatkoviča (Vagale) is a Researcher and Project Manager at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. Djatkoviča holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a master's degree in Diplomacy from the University of Latvia. Her professional experience is related to international relations and policy analysis. Djatkoviča has worked for the Slovak Embassy in Riga and the consulting company "Civitta Latvija", as well as for the OSCE Election Assessment Mission. Her academic interests focus on the analysis of Russia in terms of regional security from the perspective of both soft power and hard power. A recent analysis of Belarus and Ukraine has come onto her spectrum of research interests.

Natālija Knipše is a Fellow at the Freedom House organization working on the Europe and Eurasia team. She was previously Latvia's Youth Delegate to the United Nations (2020, 2021) and is a civic and political engagement activist, and she interned at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. She also holds an undergraduate law degree from the University of Latvia and has previously worked in constitutional law and human rights law.

Rihards Kols is a Member of the 13th Saeima and serves as the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Saeima. Kols is a representative of the Saeima to the OECD, and the Deputy Chairman of the National Alliance "All for Latvia!" – "For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK" political party. Kols graduated from the University of Westminster with a specialization in International Diplomacy. Kols is also the Chairman of the Board of the "Latvian Flag" association and a Member of the Board of the "European Movement in Latvia" association. He is a member of the "Atlantic Council" organization, as well as part of the Latvian National Guard.

Imants Lieģis is a Senior Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. He has cooperated closely with the institute since 2011. He was a Latvian public servant for 28 years, between 1992 and 2020, during which time he served as Latvia's Minister of Defense (2009–2010), a member of Latvia's 10th Saeima (Parliament), and a career diplomat with ambassadorial postings to NATO, France, Spain, Hungary and the Benelux countries. He is on the Advisory Board and is an active member of the European Leadership Network. He has published widely on foreign affairs and defense and security matters.

Aleksandra Palkova is a Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. She analyzes the political and institutional processes of the European Union, produces scientific publications, organizes conferences, and conducts projects. Palkova is an International Relations master's student and a laboratory assistant at Riga Stradiņš University (RSU), where she analyses security and climate policy issues. Aleksandra Palkova is a former exchange student at Western University in the Netherlands. Since 2021, Palkova has been an Associate Researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

Gunta Pastore is Latvia's Ambassador to the Czech Republic and a non-resident Ambassador to Northern Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Previously, Gunta Pastore has been the head of the European Union Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the head of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Division of the ministry, worked in the Latvian embassies in Denmark and Sweden, and has been the Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Speaker of the Saeima. She coordinated EU–Central Asia cooperation during the Latvian Presidency of the EU Council (2015). Pastore holds a doctorate degree in Political Science and International Relations. She participated in a research exchange at the Swedish University of Defense (2012–2013). Her research interests include the role of the EU member states in shaping EU foreign policy.

Elina Pinto is the Head of the European Latvian Alliance (*Eiropas Latviešu apvienība*) and a Member of the Board of the “European Movement – Latvia”. Pinto has extensive experience in the Latvian non-governmental sector and international organizations and missions. She has been an advisor of President of Latvia Egils Levits in matters of modern state and sustainability and the head of the Human Rights Department of the Ombudsman's Office in Latvia. Pinto is active in strengthening the civil and economic participation of the diaspora in Latvia. In media, she represents issues related to emigration, the socio-economic development of Latvia, and the European Union. Her higher education has been acquired in the area of justice, specializing in the European Union, human rights, and democratization.

Gunda Reire is an Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and Director of the Center for International Studies. She also holds the position of visiting lecturer at the Riga Graduate School of Law and Riga Stradiņš University. Combining both academic and practical spheres of politics, she has served as Deputy Chairperson of the Strategic Analysis Commission under the auspices of the President of Latvia, as the Chief of Staff of the Speaker's Office, and as advisor to several ministers. She holds a doctoral degree in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Latvia. Reire has also studied Political Science at the Humboldt University of Berlin (Germany) and Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg (Germany), and she held a Residing Fulbright Research Fellow position at the John Hopkins University's SAIS Center for Transatlantic Relations. Her core research interests include international peace and security, multilateral cooperation, strategic communication and Russia studies.

Edgars Rinkēvičs has been the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia since October 2011. Between 2008 and 2011, Rinkēvičs was the Head of the President's Chancellery. Between 1997 and 2008, he was the State Secretary of the Ministry of Defense. From 2005 to 2007, Rinkēvičs was head of the NATO Summit Latvia Task Force. In 1997, Rinkēvičs obtained a master's degree in Political Science. From 1999 to 2000, he studied at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces of the US National Defense University, where he received a master's degree.

Toms Rostoks is a Director at the Center for Security and Strategic Research at the National Defense Academy of Latvia. He also holds the position of Associate Professor in International Relations at the Department of Political Science at the University of Latvia. Toms Rostoks has written a number of articles and book chapters. He has been an editor for several scientific writings on deterrence, state intentions, Latvia's foreign and security policy, Latvian-Russian relations, and human security and small states. His current research interests are related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the defense policy and armed forces of the Baltic Sea region, Latvia's foreign and security policy, NATO's military deterrence measures in the Baltic region, and the choice between compulsory and a professional military service.

Ēriks Kristiāns Selga is a Non-Resident Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), where he is focused on researching the role of data governance in law. He is currently extending his understanding of data governance as a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Hong Kong, and he works as a risk analyst at the Financial Intelligence Unit of the Republic of Latvia.

Andris Sprūds is the Director of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. He also holds the position of Professor at Rīga Stradiņš University and is the Dean of the European Studies Faculty. Andris Sprūds has an MA in Central European History from the CEU in Budapest, Hungary, and in International Relations from the University of Latvia. He has also obtained a Ph.D. in Political Science from Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Andris Sprūds has been a visiting student and scholar at Oxford, Uppsala, Columbia and Johns Hopkins University, as well as at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and Japan's Institute of Energy Economics. His research interests focus on energy security and policy in the Baltic Sea region, the domestic and foreign policy of post-Soviet countries, and transatlantic relations.

Mārtiņš Vargulis is a Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. He holds an MA in International Relations and currently continues his PhD studies at Rīga Stradiņš University. In his research and academic career he has focused on issues concerning Russia (particularly security, the economy, and soft power), the World Trade Organization, NATO and EU security-related issues, as well as the European Neighborhood. He is the author of numerous articles and the editor of several books.

He is also a lecturer at Riga Stradiņš University. In his long-standing professional career as a representative at the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Latvia, he has been Head of the Defense Policy and Strategy Section as well as a diplomat at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Latvia to NATO and the EU.

Elizabete Elīna Vizgunova-Vikmane is a Researcher at the Public Policy Management Institute (PPMI) in Lithuania and an Associate Researcher at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, as well as a Ph.D. student at Riga Stradiņš University. Vizgunova-Vikmane specializes in the analysis of public policy and international relations from a gender perspective. Vizgunova-Vikmane is the editor of the book *Women in Latvia's Foreign and Security Policy* (Latvian Institute of International Affairs) and is currently studying gender issues in the project on Fundamental and Applied Studies ("*Starp valsts iestāžu uzraudzību un neiejaukšanos: viendzimuma seksuālo subkultūru prakses Padomju Latvijā, 1954-1991*"). Vizgunova-Vikmane holds a master's degree from the European College (Warsaw, Poland) and Sciences Po (Paris, France) and a bachelor's degree from Riga Stradiņš University.



Supported by



Ministry of
Foreign Affairs
Republic of Latvia



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS SAEIMA

In cooperation with



LATVIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY YEARBOOK 2022

The Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA) is the oldest Latvian think tank that specializes in foreign and security policy analysis. LIIA was established in 1992 as a non-profit association with the aim of providing Latvia's decision-makers, experts and the wider public with analysis, recommendations and information about international developments, regional security issues, and foreign policy strategies and choices. It is an independent research institute that conducts research, develops publications and organizes public lectures and conferences related to global affairs and Latvia's international role and policies.

21 Pils Street, Riga, LV-1050 | www.liia.lv

