

# Regional Security of the Baltic States: Challenges and Solutions

**Andis Kudors**

For the last four years – since the Kremlin exercised the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 – the public debate on national security unchangingly is keeping its momentum in the Baltic states. The topic of these discussions could be divided into two major themes: 1) raising security in the regional and NATO dimensions; 2) strengthening the Baltic own defence capabilities. There have been lots of achievements in both areas since 2014. While the debate on hybrid threats was prevalent after Crimean annexation, a few years later, the attention was focused on a broader range of issues, including NATO's mobility and readiness to provide an appropriate counterstrike in the event of a conventional war involving not only mobile combat groups but vast armed forces.

The NATO Warsaw Summit decided to deploy four multinational battalion-size battle groups on a rotational basis into Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Those forces are led by the UK, Canada, Germany and the United States, respectively. The aim is to deter Russia and to demonstrate to the potential aggressor the readiness to trigger the 40,000-strong rapid-reaction force and a full-scale NATO counter-assault.<sup>1</sup> Also, the Baltic governments are not sitting idly; since 2018, Latvia and Lithuania followed Estonia with allocating 2% of GDP in their defence spendings. The mechanisation of all three armies continues, as well as frequent military exercises aimed at training both Baltic soldiers and improving cooperation among the forces of Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, and the Allies. One of the specific challenges to which the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Peter B. Doran. "Securing the Suwałki Corridor, Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defence," Washington DC: *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 2018, p. 12.

answers have been sought is the Suwalki Corridor connecting Lithuania and Poland and an essentially important landfill for the arrival of NATO troops in the Baltic states by land. However, we should recall that there are also air and waterways that will be used if necessary.

It is also important to analyse the potential threats and to raise awareness about the processes taking place in Russia, which may affect the Kremlin's foreign policy decisions in one direction or another. The Baltic countries, as the frontline states, have increased analysis of their neighbour, which can also be useful for Western allies in developing an effective foreign policy in relations with Russia. It must be concluded that the West as a whole has failed to find the most appropriate approach in relations with Russia. Attempts of *engagement* and *reset* have not led to the expected result. This, however, does not mean that we should completely abandon the dialogue with Moscow. Rather, it must be understood that the dialogue is not an end in itself but an instrument. In addition, the collective west has to speak out from the positions of power with Vladimir Putin and the Russian elite, because Moscow has a great difficulty to understand any other language.

This article is designed as an insight into some of the security challenges and solutions in the security of the Baltic states. The article begins with what any security discussion should be started, namely, the threat. Representatives from NATO member states are no longer ashamed to talk of Russia as a possible source of threats. This is followed by two interconnected issues of NATO's agility, mobility and the Suwalki corridor. In conclusion, the practical steps taken by Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to strengthen their defence, including by means of updating the principle of comprehensive national defence, are examined.

## **Russia's factor in the Baltic (in)security**

There is an important question of whether Russia intends to attack the Baltic states in the short or medium term. First of all, observations have already shown that Putin and his elite are more

in need of keeping tension with NATO rather than of a large-scale war in which Russia would lose due to disproportionate forces. Putin needs this tension to justify the necessity and indispensability of the existence of his regime. A message about Russia as a 'besieged fortress' is well suited to address the less educated Russian public, which associates the former KGB officer Putin with a secure and decisive 'national leader' who is the only one able to stop NATO expansion at the borders of Russia.

However, maintaining *status quo* of his kleptocratic regime should be regarded as Putin's main foreign policy motivation enabling the elite to control a large part of the country's resources. Significantly, the Kremlin permits communists and extreme right-wing ideologies to be promoted in Russia, but not the liberal democratic ideas gaining strength. Communism and Russian nationalism, which, unlike Western nationalism, are closely linked to the idea of an empire as a natural form of Russia's existence, does not endanger Putin's great state idea as centrist synthesis of both approaches. On the other hand, liberal democracy (and democracy in general) is being demonised in Russia, because a real political process (rather than a fiction as it is now) would take place under it with the power regularly changing hands. This is in no way acceptable to the Putin's elite – the billionaires who control resources without any competition under oversight of just one arbitrator – Putin himself. Therefore, the influence of the West, which would bring about a democratic change in Russia's neighbouring countries and Russia itself, is being demonised. How to tune Russian public against the West? It would be difficult to explain that, for example, one of the Western values – the rule of law – is evil. It is easier to tell, however, that the West is immoral and NATO will soon attack Russia.

How to prove to the Russian people that NATO is an aggressor? Here is the place for the information warfare – *reflexive control*, which involves actions by one country with predictable reactions from other countries. Russia illegitimately invades Crimea and is waging war in Donbas, thus causing anxiety in the Baltic states with a logical response of improving their defence capabilities. The Kremlin propagandists elide Russia's aggression and begin the narrative with the 'militarisation of the Baltic states'. This is

included in the big message about ‘aggressive nature of NATO’ and its ‘expansion’. This, of course, was not the main motivation of the Kremlin in the annexation of Crimea, but rather is an additional dimension.

This does not mean that the Baltic states were not able to show any reaction or strengthen their defence capabilities. The element of unpredictability stays throughout the course of Russia’s history and we have often witnessed rapid changes and catastrophes that may prove dangerous to our neighbours. We cannot be sure that the cult of war and aggression bred in Russia over many years will not spin out of control. If one were to compare the Baltic countries to three houses, they should have well locked and strong wooden or metal doors instead of cardboard or paper doors in any case, even if it is not clear whether a thief would visit them one night. ‘Cardboard doors’ were our defence in the beginning of the 1990s, when there was a lack of funding for everything, including security. Also, we have a neighbour whose house was plundered – it is Ukraine.

Another Putin’s motivation to launch a war in the Baltic states could be linked with his intention to weaken the collective west and the wish to destroy NATO. This would probably happen if after the Russian invasion in the Baltic states the counter-steps taken by other strongest NATO members would not follow. However, this kind of scenario was theoretically possible before 2014, but not now, when an attack on the Baltic states would be immediately received by an immediate military response from the Baltic states and almost automatically trigger the reaction of other NATO member states.

## **Speed of the NATO reaction**

Although the readiness of NATO to defend its member states has been strongly articulated over the last four years, there are still some concerns about the speed and effectiveness of the possible response of NATO forces in the Baltics. Ideally, NATO should by its presence eliminate the possibility of any military invasion. The Alliance troops deployed here have support functions – if

an attack takes place, it should be delayed until additional forces arrive.<sup>2</sup> Since 2014, there have been many speculations in the public sphere on how quickly the numerically and technically superior Russian forces would be able to occupy the capitals of the Baltic states in a potential event of the attack. For example, political observer Edward Lucas of *The Economist* expressed in 2014 the idea that three hours would be enough for Russia to capture the Baltic states.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former adviser to the U.S. President Jimmy Carter, speaking in the U.S. Senate Committee of the Armed Forces, said in 2015 that Russian forces could occupy Riga and Tallinn in a course of a single day.<sup>4</sup> It is important, however, to take into account the fact that both experts expressed these ideas at a time when the forces of the United States, Britain, Germany, Canada and other countries were not yet deployed in the Baltic states and Poland. In the case of such allegations, it is also necessary to take into account the purpose for which they are expressed. Both Lucas and Brzezinski spoke about hours and days in order to actualise the security problems of the Baltic states and encourage politicians to make important decisions about security in the Baltic Sea region. For example, Brzezinski emphasised the need to deploy U.S. combat units in the Baltic countries, thus deterring Russia from thinking of an invasion. Russian propagandists, on the other hand, are talking about the same topic in order to intimidate the Balts and to seed the distrust of NATO.

Commander of the Estonian Special Forces Colonel Riho Uhtegi, referring to time frames, states that “They can arrive in Tallinn in two days. But they will die in Tallinn. And they know it... They will receive fire from every corner, at every step.”<sup>5</sup> One can agree with

---

<sup>2</sup> “NATO samita nezināmais – alianses vienprātība, LV portālam: Māris Cepurītis, LATO valdes loceklis,” *LV portāls*, July 10, 2018, <https://lvportals.lv/viedokli/297209-nato-samita-nezinamais-alianses-vienpratiba-2018>

<sup>3</sup> Edward Lucas. “Against Putin, It’s Time to Hark Back to Kennedy’s “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech,” *Politico*, August 22, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/08/only-obama-can-stop-putin-now-110264>

<sup>4</sup> “Bžežinskis: Putins Rīgu un Tallīnu var sagrābt vienā dienā,” *Delfi.lv*, January 22, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lv/news/arzemes/bzezinskis-putins-rigu-un-tallinu-var-sagrabt-viena-diena.d?id=45487322>

<sup>5</sup> Molly K. Mckew. “‘They Will Die in Tallinn’: Estonia Girds for War With Russia,” *Politico*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/07/10/they-will-die-in-tallinn-estonia-girds-for-war-with-russia-218965>

the Estonian military that in discussions about the vulnerability of the Baltic states, an important factor that is sometimes neglected is the desire of the people to fight and to defend their land.

Not only political decisions, but also road infrastructure in Europe that is not always suitable for transportation of armaments, as well as time-consuming bureaucratic obstacles, determine how quickly troops from other NATO countries can arrive here. For example, in order to get the U.S. units in Germany to Poland or to one of the Baltic states, they must obtain permissions from all countries whose territories need to be crossed.<sup>6</sup> One of the issues that was considered at the NATO July 11-12, 2018 summit in Brussels is military mobility – improving coordination and infrastructure. NATO defence Ministers supported the Alliance's increased preparedness – the so-called 4x30 initiative that will allow the Alliance to mobilise 30 mechanised battalions, or 30,000 men, 30 airborne squadrons, or 300 aircraft and 30 warships or submarines within 30 days. These units will act as support for the existing NATO Response Force.

## Suwalki Corridor

The speed and strength of NATO response and the mobility of troops are linked with the issue of the Suwalki Corridor, which the Russian forces could theoretically close during a war between Russia and NATO, thus preventing land communications between the Baltic states and other NATO members. The land segment between the Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus has attracted an increased attention from military personnel and security experts since the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) in a study about Suwalki Corridor points out, that *space*, *time*, and *scale* are the notions which apply in the context of the corridor.<sup>7</sup> Western

<sup>6</sup> "NATO samita nezināmais – alianses vienprātība, LV portālam: Māris Cepurītis, LATO valdes loceklis," *LV portāls*, July 10, 2018, <https://lvportals.lv/viedokli/297209-nato-samita-nezinamais-alianses-vienpratiba-2018>

<sup>7</sup> Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Peter B. Doran. "Securing the Suwałki Corridor, Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defence," Washington DC: *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 2018, p. 3.

forces need to be deployed close to the Suwalki Corridor and to demonstrate to their potential opponent that any military advance will be properly stopped (*space*). The Polish and Lithuanian forces (including the paramilitary forces), in co-operation with the allied forces, have to keep the corridor open until the arrival of NATO enforcements (*time*). Due to asymmetric and disproportional distribution of NATO-Russia forces, the advantages of Russia in this region are only short-term advantages, because in the case of war, the size of the force with time can change in NATO favour (*scale*).<sup>8</sup>

The militarisation of the Kaliningrad region and Russia's Western Military District continues. According to open sources, the total number of active forces in the Western Military District of Russia is 330,000.<sup>9</sup> CEPA researchers stress that in order to successfully resist a Russian attack, each of the Baltic states needs: "early warning of Moscow's covert subversion of a targeted area that can be thwarted or contained; capable forces that can respond quickly; and adequate infrastructure and prepositioned equipment to allow for the swift deployment of NATO troops."<sup>10</sup> If we can be more or less sure about the first two conditions, then the third one still requires more work. In order to improve its roads, ports and bridges, NATO has to cooperate with the European Union. For the next programming period the EU funds will be available for the first time in the field of defence of the Member States. It is important for Europe to develop military logistics, or 'military Schengen'. Latvia's Minister of Defence Raimonds Bergmanis has indicated that our scientists with the help of their counterparts from other countries will be able to use EU funds in the development of the military industry.<sup>11</sup>

As an authoritarian and centralised state, Russia can make decisions quickly, while NATO is a community of nations and

---

<sup>8</sup> Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Peter B. Doran. "Securing the Suwałki Corridor, Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defence," Washington DC: *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 2018, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Peter B. Doran. "Securing the Suwałki Corridor, Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defence," Washington DC: *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> "Virzāmies uz visaptverošu valsts aizsardzību, LV portālam: Raimonds Bergmanis, aizsardzības ministrs," *LV portāls*, April 03, 2018, <https://lvportals.lv/viedokli/294543-virzamies-uz-visaptverosu-valsts-aizsardzibu-2018>

taking joint decisions may take more time. However, the Russian side must take into account that in the event of its invasion, the Baltic states will begin resistance without any harmonisation, and also other NATO members such as the United States, Britain, Poland, etc. can carry out its counter-measures against Russia straight away – in the first hours of the conflict, besides that, the strikes can be targeted not only against the invading Russian forces in the Baltic states, but also in Russia’s own territory. CEPA researchers also point out that “in the case of the United States, this could mean strikes deep inside Russia against infrastructure and energy facilities, as well as cyber attacks to shut down Russian communications, disrupt economic activity, and provoke societal dysfunction.”<sup>12</sup> And even more to that – “the United States may even need to expressly reassert that its extended (nuclear) deterrent is the backbone of its ironclad commitment to Article 5. Any Russian use of nuclear weapons will be met with an overwhelming and devastating NATO nuclear response – thereby undermining Moscow’s confidence that it can ever prevent the injection of U.S. and NATO forces into a contested theatre.”<sup>13</sup>

Western countries are no longer the same as before Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the pink glasses are off, especially in the defence institutions of the NATO member states. The Kremlin should no longer expect the indecisiveness in the NATO capitals. The activation of Article 5 of the NATO will be almost automatic rather than a result of long negotiations.

## “Think global, act local!”

All three Baltic countries as the frontline states in the vicinity of Russia are more sensitive towards the aggressive vibrations beyond their borders than their allies in Western Europe. Although in the course of joining NATO, the Baltic states made the commitment to achieve the level of spending equivalent to 2% of GDP, but in the

---

<sup>12</sup> Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Peter B. Doran. “Securing the Suwałki Corridor, Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence, and Defence,” Washington DC: *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 2018, p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



years of crisis defence was one of the sectors most affected by austerity measures cutting the budget by almost a half in Latvia. The events of 2014 in Ukraine contributed to the acceleration of the financing of this sector. The decisions of the NATO Wales Summit also ensured Latvia's and Lithuania's decision to achieve 2% in 2018. Estonia has devoted 2% of its GDP to defence spending for several years, while according to the *IHS Markit* data, the growth of Latvian and Lithuanian defence budgets has been the highest in the world in recent years.<sup>14</sup> Lithuania's defence spending has risen from 267 million euros in 2013 to 724 million euros in 2017.<sup>15</sup> Estonia plans to allocate 523,6 million euros or 2,14% of GDP to defence in 2018.<sup>16</sup>

Following the NATO Summit in Brussels in July 2018, Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs called to spend 2.5% of GDP for defence. Such a move, which is considered by Lithuania and Estonia too, would provide a reserve for defence. In addition, it should be taken into account that the share of defence spending is calculated for the previous year, so if the economy is growing rapidly, then the estimated amount already calculated may turn out to be, for example, 1.9%. Early warning, air surveillance, anti-air defence, mobility capabilities, land-based combat capabilities and host state support were identified as priorities for the development of the Latvian National Armed Forces. One of the biggest purchases and projects of the Latvian Army is the mechanisation of the Land Force. It includes both the purchase of combat reconnaissance armoured vehicles from the UK and the continued supply of self-propelled howitzers from Austria. In 2018, Latvia will receive Stinger air defence systems from Denmark.

In Estonia, the biggest purchases in 2018 are the replacement of assault rifles, the continuation of the acquisition of the combat vehicles CV90 and the purchase of large-calibre ammunition. In the coming years, Lithuania will receive new armoured vehicles worth EUR 385 million, anti-tank rocket systems for USD 28 million

---

<sup>14</sup> Gunta Gleizde. "2% no IKP: Kā mūs aizsargās?" Budžeta kāpums algās, kaujas mašīnās un ekipāžumā," *Delfi.lv*, December 12, 2017, [www.delfi.lv/business/budzets\\_un\\_nodokli/2-no-ikp-ka-mus-aizsargas-budzeta-kapums-algas-kaujas-masinās-un-ekipeju-ma.d?id=49564681](http://www.delfi.lv/business/budzets_un_nodokli/2-no-ikp-ka-mus-aizsargas-budzeta-kapums-algas-kaujas-masinās-un-ekipeju-ma.d?id=49564681)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

and other equipment.<sup>17</sup> In Estonia, the largest military exercises since the restoration of independence in 1991 took place in the first half of May 2018. The manoeuvres were attended by over 13,000 active members of the Estonian Armed Forces, reserve, national guard organisation *Kaitseliit* (Defence League), and troops from other countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania et. al. The main role in the drill was played by the Estonian national guard organisation *Kaitseliit*. During the exercise, both the battle preparedness and skills of the units of the armed forces and the cooperation between the *Kaitseliit* and the the armed forces were tested.

Similarly to Estonia, the voluntary National Guard has also become a significant defence structure in Latvia. Since the illegal annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression in the east of Ukraine in 2014, the number of national guards has increased substantially in Latvia. This indicates the readiness of many Latvians to defend their country. In 2014, the number of recruited guards has almost doubled compared to the previous year, and in 2015, the increase was almost 50%.<sup>18</sup> An informative report on the development of economic incentives for companies employing national guards and reserve soldiers to motivate their regular participation in the training, prepared by the Ministry of Defence, was adopted at the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia on December 19, 2017.

## Comprehensive defence system

The development of the National Guard will go hand in hand with increasing of the awareness of the Baltic states over the past years about significance of comprehensive national defence in which the military and civilian spheres are intertwined. In 2018, the Amendments to the National Security Law are being drafted

<sup>17</sup> Gunta Gleizde. "2% no IKP: Kā mūs aizsargās?" *Budžeta kāpums algās, kaujas mašīnās un ekipējumā,* *Delfi.lv*, December 12, 2017, [www.delfi.lv/business/budzets\\_un\\_nodokli/2-no-ikp-ka-mus-aizsargas-budzeta-kapums-algas-kaujas-masinas-un-ekipejuma.d?id=49564681](http://www.delfi.lv/business/budzets_un_nodokli/2-no-ikp-ka-mus-aizsargas-budzeta-kapums-algas-kaujas-masinas-un-ekipejuma.d?id=49564681)

<sup>18</sup> Dace Skrejja. "Krimas faktors stimulē Latvijas Zemessardzi, būtiski audzis uzņemto zemessargu skaits," *Delfi.lv*, July 07, 2018, [www.delfi.lv/business/budzets\\_un\\_nodokli/krimas-faktors-stimule-latvijas-zemessardzi-butiski-audzis-uznemto-zemessargu-skaits.d?id=50220071](http://www.delfi.lv/business/budzets_un_nodokli/krimas-faktors-stimule-latvijas-zemessardzi-butiski-audzis-uznemto-zemessargu-skaits.d?id=50220071)

in Latvia, which defines the principles of comprehensive national defence and specifies the cases when the Cabinet of Ministers has the right to decide on the mobilisation of national guards and reserve soldiers.<sup>19</sup> An effective mechanism can be achieved through military mobilisation to overcome the threat before the declaration of a state of emergency or the state of war. Changes to the law were necessary, because until now, a large mobilisation is foreseen only during a state of emergency, causing a possible delay. Today's military threat is dynamic, i.e., it can develop without initial necessity for a state of emergency based on indicators for such declaration.

By introducing the new provision, which lay down general principles for the defence of state, the law is supplemented by an article describing the duties and rights of citizens in the event of a military incursion. Among other things, they are urged not to cooperate with illegal administrative authorities and armed units of the aggressor.<sup>20</sup> It is also stipulated that citizens can “exercise civic disobedience by opposing illegal government institutions and armed units of the aggressor; demonstrate armed resistance to such armed units; provide all types of support for civil disobedience and armed resistance actors, as well as for units of the armed forces of NATO or EU member states that implement the military defence of the country, in support of the National Armed Forces and their tasks.”<sup>21</sup> Such principles are related both to the specifics of contemporary warfare and the bitter historical experience of Latvia during the Soviet occupation of 1940. The prevailing social mood in Latvia is associated with the desire to never allow the events of 1940 to be repeated.

These changes to the law are a logical continuation of the 2016 amendments to the National Security Law of Latvia, which already extended the definition of war at that time, imposed immediate defence measures in the event of a threat without waiting for a separate decision, as well as a ban on the prohibition of armed resistance. This means that in the event of disrupted command chain, the soldiers of the battalions have the authority to exercise

---

<sup>19</sup> Linda Balode. “Nacionālās drošības likumā plāno izmaiņas, par kurām jāzina katram,” *LV portāls*, June 19, 2018, <https://lvportals.lv/skaidrojumi/296652-nacionalas-drosibas-likuma-plano-izmainas-par-kuram-jazina-katram-2018>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

armed resistance. Estonian military doctrine provides for active resistance to the aggression without delay and a special order from above. This order, known as the Order No.1. was issued by Alexander Einseln, the first Commander of Estonian defence Forces after country's independence.

The description of such mechanisms in the legislation acts is working in three ways: 1) the strengthening of defence capabilities with a clear mechanism of action that makes it impossible not to resist the enemy; 2) raising patriotism of the citizens and informing about their responsibilities and rights during the war; 3) signalling to the potential enemy that the attack on Latvia will become very costly.

## Conclusion

Assurance of defence capabilities will not only grow with the messages of NATO representatives about the readiness to defend the member states, but also with real improvements in the speed and mobility of the reaction in Europe. To improve the mobility of NATO forces, the work on the interconnectivity of Germany, Poland, the Baltic states, and the Black Sea region should be continued for the rapid deployment of forces in the case of necessity. Rapid border crossing is critical.

Speed of NATO response depends also on threat identification and decision-making in NATO structures. For a rapid identification of threats, it is necessary to continue and improve communication between NATO security services. Such a rapid exchange of information was evident during the *Zapad-2017* training; it has to continue further. In addition, it must also apply to NATO partners in the region – Finland, Sweden, and Ukraine. In terms of mobility, not only the mobility of NATO forces in general and the ability to quickly arrive in the Baltic states, but also the Baltic forces themselves and already deployed forces of other NATO countries in the Baltic states, are under discussion. The Russian leadership should expect that the surprise actions may not be just their tool.

Apart from purely military issues, one must also consider the vulnerability of the media space and the dependence of the Baltic

states on the energy sector in Russia. Military activity requires good supply of energy resources, fuel, etc. Cyberspace has already been successfully recognised as a war zone, and Russia must expect that the time may come when the West not only protects its own systems, but can also give a painful strike, if necessary.

The Suwalki Corridor from a challenge can turn into a NATO advantage if effective planning and appropriate deployment of forces in the region will continue. The Baltic states have taken fundamentally important steps in improving their defence capabilities, including increasing defence spending to 2%, and considering an even greater increase. The mechanisation of the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian forces will continue, until it reaches the level of a modern European army. In the context of a comprehensive national defence update, potential invaders should expect that not only armoured personnel carriers, but soldiers and even civilians with a high level of motivation for freedom and a spirit of resistance will counter them on the *Day X*.

Unfortunately, many politicians in the West continue to pursue a 'better not to seek trouble' position vis-a-vis Russia, and try to appease a country that has shown itself to be an aggressor in Ukraine. Every now and then the question arises - will NATO with military consolidation in the Baltic states not provoke the Kremlin to any military step? The answer is negative, since Putin may rather be provoked by the weakness of the neighbouring countries, as it was partly in the case of the Crimean annexation. A firm stance and self-confidence of NATO will not provoke Putin - in contrary, it would provide a stabilising effect.