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Defence Policies of the Baltic States: from the Concept of Neutrality towards NATO membership

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Introduction

In 1990 all three Baltic States declared their independence from the Soviet Union but the situation in these countries was unstable and unpredictable with Moscow implementing both direct and indirect military, political, and economical pressure. In this environment, the Baltic States were striving to establish a national defence system in order to exercise full sovereignty over their territory. On the political level the policy of neutrality was implemented. NATO membership at that time was considered to be not achievable option. During this period, the Soviet army was still deployed in the Baltic States. Therefore, the Baltic States' policy of neutrality was directly implemented as a mean to enable the departure of the Soviet armed forces.

After the withdrawal of Russian troops, the Baltic states applied for NATO membership, an action that would have been unthinkable in the first two years of independence when the Soviet army was still present on their territory. Indeed, the withdrawal of Russian troops created favourable conditions for a rapid change in the direction of the Baltic states' foreign and security policy. This moved away from a policy of neutrality, to become more clearly oriented towards integration into Western security structures and the implementation of common European principles.

The decision to apply for NATO membership was approved by the majority of citizens of the Baltic states and in effect resolved the Baltic states' major security policy dilemma at a stroke. Since this time internal clashes over defence policy have decreased significantly. Indeed, since 1994, arguments over security have ceased to be about its fundamental goals, more over how best to reach the agreed objective of NATO membership. The agreement over the primary goal of the Baltic states' defence policy eased strained relations between the political parties and provided an opportunity to create NATO interoperable and capable Armed Forces.

R.Vilpisauskas noted,[1] that implementation of changing concept was more a matter of external developments and foreign policies of NATO members rather than only internal determination of the societies to join the Alliance. The internal consensus played a great role in mobilising public support and allocating resources for needs of the defence in the aspirant states, but this was just one of the factors that made it possible one day to become members of the Alliance.

It took 10 years for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to achieve their goal and become members of two important organisations – NATO and the EU. Membership in the EU represents a clear indication that Baltic states successfully implemented reforms necessary to become western style democracy, while membership in NATO also signifies Lithuanian, Latvia and Estonian succeeded in their efforts to build their Armed Forces and provide capabilities to the Alliance.

This study seeks to explore how debate over NATO enlargement influenced Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian defence concepts, missions and capabilities of their Armed Forces. In this study I will prove that even though decision to apply for membership reflected internal consensus within society, the missions and structure of the Armed Forces was result of external developments, namely, the credibility of NATO commitment to the Baltics' and the issue of defensibility.

NATO integration as a part of transformation of the society

The demise of neutrality and strive towards NATO membership in the Baltic states was part of two parallel processes. First of all, it reflected transformation in Lithuania, Latvian and Estonia societies, development of true market economies, restoration of civil liberties and respect for human rights. In this context NATO membership was perceived as a tool to solidify and speed up the process of transformation which can take place only then a nation enjoys credible security guarantees and can use all its resource to create favourable living conditions.

On the other hand integration into NATO and EU was based on formation of 'European' or 'Western' identity which was associated with European way of life, cultural achievement, social welfare and prosperity. Both elements were closely interlinked and embraced positive attitude towards Western Europe and negative view towards Eastern neighbours. People

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[1] Vilpisauskas R. *Baltic States Membership in the WEU and NATO: Links, Problems and Perspectives*. NATO-EAPC Research Fellowship (1998-2000), Final Report. Vilnius, 2000.

perceived NATO as a winner of Cold War and attributed their freedom to the successful functioning of the Alliance. For them strive for membership became a natural extension of their fight for freedom against dictatorship from the East.

Officially shift from the concept of neutrality to collective defence did not happen overnight. The concept of neutrality in the Baltic states was predominant until year 1994 though actual change took part earlier. Until withdrawal of Russian troops stationed in their territory, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were hesitant to officially pursue military integration with NATO, fearing that this would create fierce reaction in Moscow and would damage on-going negotiation on the withdrawal of occupational troops.

The goal of the security policy stood out as that of "achieving maximal independence both from the East and from the West"[2]. Neutrality in this context was considered as a temporary measure to achieve certain objectives in certain period of time. It was painlessly abolished in 1994, when presidents of the Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia officially declared about seeking membership in NATO. The declaration to join NATO symbolised efforts and wish of the Baltic states to become part of European family. NATO was perceived not just merely as military alliance with security guarantees under Article 5, but as a symbol of civilised world, where Baltic states should find their proper place.

The wish to become members of NATO reflected "value driven" policy of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian elites. At the same time it coincided with hard-liners view of security situation in the region for whom quest for membership was considered as a way to escape Russian influence. Pursuit for NATO membership united different faction of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian political spectrum. In Latvia in the election of October 1998 saw six parties elected to the *Saeima*. Five of these, the People's Party, the Latvian Way, the Alliance for Fatherland, Freedom/LNNK and the New Party, declared committed to a western oriented foreign policy. In Lithuania thirteen major political parties in the Joint declaration confirmed their adherence to integration into transatlantic structures.

Broad consensus emerged not only among politicians but also within society. Support for integration into NATO remains very high despite NATO's and US military intervention in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. In all countries only small percentage of people are against membership most of whom represent Russian speaking minorities or people living in the countryside.

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[2] Miniotaite G. *The Security Policy of Lithuania and the 'Integration Dilemma'*, COPRI Working Paper, Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, May 2000.

Consensus within the Baltic states and lack of discussion among politicians on security policy issues allowed several observers declare existence of 'tunnel vision thinking' among the political elite's. For instance, F.Moller noticed "what is materializing in the Baltic states is a type of 'tunnel-vision': decision-makers can only see limited ways of achieving security and refuse even to discuss alternatives. This is as much a result of their security concepts as it is a product of how they conceive the states should be. […] A major result of the lack of alternatives is the absence of controversial public debate and the lack of interest or curiosity in the issue. All major political parties support the recent military policies, namely, the increase of military expenditure and integration in NATO. [3]

F.Moller in his observation failed to understand the complexity of value-, identity- and interest- driven approach towards integration to NATO. In the Baltic states security conceptions are as much about identity and state-building as are about security. Their aim is the construction of a collective self, meaning the identification of the individual with nation, organized politically and socially as modern, sovereign nation-state.[4] As the West in the Baltic states is being associated with prosperity, security and democracy whereas, the East is loaded with poverty, unpredictability, totalitarianism, insecurity. From the point of view of national security, West is not associated with any particular country. It is rather linked with their different alliances, and in particular, with the EU and the NATO as the most important ones. After regaining its independence Lithuania together with Latvia and Estonia were unwavering in its choice of integration with the West.[5]

It should be noticed that the concepts of the East and the West are highly value-loaded in the Baltic states. Security debates and perception of threats have been especially influenced by the period of almost fifty years of being part of the Soviet Union. It has been noted that "the experience of Sovietization was to have a profound impact upon the security aspirations and perceptions of the emergent Baltic political elites in the late 1980s"[6]. The Soviet Union, and later its successor Russian Federation, has been perceived in all three countries as the main threat to their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Although good neighbourly relations have been declared as another foreign policy priority, the perception of the potential threat related with uncertainty about Russia's internal political situation and its external policies have remained fairly stable.

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[3] Moller F. *The Baltic States: Security, Identity, and the Identity of the State*. Bonn International Centre for Conversation. Brief 25. 2002. p.48-51
[4] Moller *op.cit*. p.48
[5] Miniotaite *op.cit.*
[6] Herd G. P. *The Baltic states and EU enlargement, in Henderson*, K. (ed.) Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union, London: UCL Press, 1999, p. 259.

For instance, in April 2000 President Vaira Vike-Freiberga expressed concern over Russian foreign policy and warned of the possibility that Russia might use force against its neighbours at some point in the future. Later, next month, Latvian Minister of Defence G.Kristovskis described Belorus as a potential adversary of Latvia[7]. Similar statements allowed R.Vilpisauskas to conclude that despite occasional declarations that their countries wish to join the EU and NATO in order to become part of a united Europe in reality they the integration process takes place because of a "fear of a third country"[8]. Perceived threat from Russia has always been behind the wish of majority of political leaders in the Baltics to join these institutions as soon as possible. It should be noted, however, that there have been differences of official opinion in this respect inside these countries.

Therefore, not only is 'Europe' embraced as the safe way for 'European Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia', but it is also conceptualised as one of the security guarantees against potential aggression from Russia. According to I.Pavlovaite in hard-security terms, NATO is seen as the ultimate and more relevant goal than membership in the EU. However, membership in the two organisations is presented as mutually constitutive. The argument goes to say that the inclusion of Lithuania under the 'Europe' umbrella will bring security guarantees and secure 'European Lithuania [or Latvia and Estonia]'[9].

Public support for the Armed Forces and integration into NATO was one of the most important cornerstones of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonia integration strategies. According to a variety of surveys, the Baltic states' public does not perceive any military threat coming from the West, but many are concerned about a potential threat from the East. The dominant point of view expressed by the general public is that the Armed Forces would be unable to withstand a large-scale military invasion by a major power. Consequently, there is a widely held view that the Armed Forces are more important as an integration tool to NATO rather than essential element of national power.

Issues of security and defence policy have been raised from time to time in major newspapers, but they have never become a major issue on the political agenda. As far as the general public are concerned, the development of the structure and missions of the Armed Forces remains in a category of 'high politics' in which they appear to have little interest.

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[7] Horsley W. *Latvia Fears Russian Attack*, BBC News (30 April 2000).
[8] Vilpisauskas *op.cit.*
[9] Pavlovaite I. *Paradise regained: the conceptualisation of Europe in the Lithuanian debate*. COPRI Working Paper, Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 2000

As a result, residual negative associations with the Soviet army and a poor understanding of the role of new national defence structures still influence general views towards the military. The capitulation of the regular armies to Soviet forces in 1939-40 also seriously harmed the reputation of military forces. Against this background, military service remained unpopular, with a 1994 opinion poll in Latvia ranking the military eighteenth in a list of desired careers[10]. In 1993, Vitas concluded that Lithuania's military forces suffered from a chronic lack of popular prestige[11].

This conclusion is not necessarily the case today. In 2002 a public polls showed that of all state institutions, the Lithuanian Armed Forces ranked fourth in popularity in public opinion polls, surpassed only by the mass media, the President and the Church[12]. In Latvia, public support for the army rose from 3.7 per cent in January 1999 to 35.8 per cent in December. Only the Church and the mass media received higher confidence ratings than the military[13].

Several developments have contributed to this increasing positive attitude towards the Armed Forces from the Baltic states' public. First, the governments have made increasing efforts to present information to the public concerning defence policy and the Armed Forces. Senior officials now appear more frequently on television and in major newspapers than they did in the past and relations with the mass media have improved significantly.

Secondly, Western observers and officials have also frequently emphasised the successful evolution of the Armed Forces, and their positive opinions have been reflected in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian society. Participation in international peace operations and training exercises has demonstrated their growing military capability, and training and discipline in the Armed Forces have improved significantly.

Transformation of the Military

In the beginning of nineties the Baltic states were faced with the task of creating their Armed Forces 'from scratch'. As a result, and in contrast to the situation in many other post-communist countries, the military and the DS more broadly were not faced with making the

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[10] Viksne I. *Democratic control of armed forces in Latvia* in A.Cottey, T.Edmunds and A.Forster (eds), Guarding the Guards in Central and Eastern Europe, London, Palegrave publ., 2001.
[11] Vitas R.A. *Civil-Military Relations in Lithuania* in C.P.Danopoulus and D.Zirker (eds), Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet and Yugoslav Successor States, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996. p.73.
[12] Polls has been conducted by "Vilmorus." Results are published monthly it the biggest Lithuanian daily "Lietuvos Rytas." It should be noted, however, that the economic crisis of 1999 saw the armed forces resurgent popularity become somewhat dented.
[13] Viksne, *op.cit*.

transition from subordination from a deeply ideological political system (communism) to the one with fundamentally different values (liberal-democracy).

In general however, the development of the armed forces in the Baltic states has passed through several qualitative stages. These can be divided into three periods: First, the fight for independence and establishment of first military formations in 1990-92; Second, the period for preparation for total defence, which lasted until Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were invited to join the Alliance in 2002. Today the Armed Forces are undergoing new reorganisation – the old territorial defence concept, or preparations to fight alone, is replaced by the readiness to fight together with allies in other parts of the world.

The beginning was not easy. In Lithuania on 25 April 1990 the Lithuanian Government established a Department of National Defence.[14] The Lithuanian Armed Forces themselves grew from the Military Technical Sports Club, which was established by the National Defence Department at this time. A year and a half later, this organisation became the basis of the Rapid Reaction Brigade.

In Latvia at the end of August 1991, border protection forces were created under the supervision of the Department of Public Security. In September, Home Guard units were formed, with members being drawn from national lists. On 13 November 1991 the Government decided that a Ministry of Defence should replace the Department of Public Security. The new Ministry of Defence took over the property of the Department of Public Security, as well as the majority of its personnel, and the former institution was disbanded in December 1991.[15]

During this period, the Soviet army was still deployed on the territory of the Baltic states. Relations between the majority of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian citizens and Soviet servicemen were strained and there was constant tension on the ground. In general, the vast majority of the Baltic states public supported the withdrawal of Soviet troops from all their military facilities and bases in the country. The policy of neutrality was directly implemented as a means to enable the departure of Soviet Armed Forces.

The conceptual disagreements over the defence policy in combination with inability of senior officials from the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Ministries of Defence and other individual leaders to deal with defence issues, led to serious discontent amongst officers and serving

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[14] The exact status of this institution was the subject of some discussion at the time. After an evaluation of the political environment, it was decided to create a department rather than a ministry. This decision was changed in 1991, and the Department of National Defence became the Ministry of National Defence.
[15] Viksne *op.cit.*

personnel. Insufficient funding for clothing, housing, and salaries for military personnel also worsened this situation. Due to these factors, the popularity of military service declined and the number of qualified and skilled staff leaving voluntarily for the more lucrative commercial sector grew significantly[16].

For example, in Lithuania the serious crisis resulted from the actions of volunteers (National Defence Volunteer Forces - NDVF), and occurred in July 1993. Around a dozen NDVF volunteers retreated with their weapons into the woods surrounding the city of Kaunas. They demanded the removal of several senior civilian and military officials, and greater NDVF autonomy from the Ministry of Defence[17]. As with Lithuania, Latvian volunteers enjoyed high degree of autonomy and posed similar problems to Latvian authorities. However, it took until 1994 to formalise and codify many of the decisions taken in the immediate aftermath of independence. The Home Guard was placed under the control of the Ministry of Defence and integrated into the NDS.[18]

Another important step - creation of the legislative framework was implemented in a very short period from 1993 to 1995. Numerous laws, regulations, defence and security concepts were adopted by the state authorities. Most of them were based on similar documents that existed in Western democracies.

In Estonia the principles of democratic control are established by the Constitution, and other legal acts concerning National Defence: the Military Service Act (March 9, 1994), the Peacetime National Defence Act (February 6, 1995), and the Wartime National Defence Act (September 28, 1994). According to the Peacetime National Defence Act, National Defence is organised by the Riigikogu (the Parliament), the President, the Government and the Commander of the Defence Forces. The Government functions as the executive state authority for the administration of national defence. In May 1996 the Riigikogu adopted the "Guidelines of the National Defence Policy of the Estonian State". The purpose of this document was to ensure the stability of the development of National Defence and to guarantee civilian control over armed forces. On February 20, 2001 the Government approved the National Military Strategy which determines, with reference to the geopolitical environment and threat assessment, the missions of the Estonian Defence Forces, and gives guidance for their development and employment.

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[16] Tamulaitis G. *National Security and Defence Policy of the Lithuanian State*, UNIDR Research Paper 26, Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1994.
[17] Vitas, *op.cit.* p.82.
[18] Viksne, *op.cit.*

In Latvia in the early and mid-1990s, the Saeima (the Parliament) passed a number of laws which provide the legal basis for Latvia's armed forces, defence policy and civil-military relations. The November 1992 Law on the Defence Forces and the April 1993 Law on the Home Guard define the tasks of Latvia's armed forces, their organisation and recruitment procedures, guarantees of the human and social rights of servicemen and ex-servicemen. The November 1994 Law on State Defence defines the general principles of Latvian defence policy. In February 1995 the Saeima passed the Law on the Participation of the National Armed Forces in International Operations[19].

In Lithuania the basic principles of the Lithuanian defence establishment are embodied in the Lithuanian Constitution, in the Law on the Fundamentals of National Security, and in the Law on the National Defence System Organisation and Military Service. In addition in 2000 the Seimas passed the Law on Armed Defence and Resistance to Aggression. On October 2, 2000 the Military Defence Strategy of Lithuania was approved by the State Defence Council and confirmed by the Minister of National Defence on October 4, 2000. The Strategy evaluates the geostrategic environment, assesses potential threats, identifies the role and tasks of the Lithuanian armed forces and describes its development plans.

Creation of solid legal basis helped to streamline command and control and structural issues within Lithuania, Latvian and Estonian defence establishment. Even more, now the Baltic states even suffer from the number of different rules that regulates defence policy, structure of the armed forces and their oversight. Therefore, the major challenge became implementation all regulations, transformation of military culture and incorporation of Western style doctrines into the real life.

Many military and non-military factors have influenced the development of military culture in the Baltic states. These include the influence of the past, domestic political and social factors and the international context. Two different periods have played an important role in influencing post-independence defence establishment in the Baltic states. These are the Soviet era and the inter-war years. From the former, the Baltic states military inherited a negative attitude towards democratic control of the military. Significantly, however, the persistence of a communist or Soviet influence on military culture and practices has been more limited than in many other post-communist countries.

This was particularly the case in the volunteer services (NDVF in Lithuania, Zemesargs in Latvia, Kaitseliit in Estonia), whose members were made up almost entirely of young

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[19] Viksne, *op.cit.*

volunteers. Indeed, it might be said that at present, the vast majority of commissioned and non-commissioned officers in the Armed Forces have only ever served within their own national defence systems.

Former Chief of Staff of Estonian Defence Forces Ants Laaneots recalls:[20] "in 1992, when we made an attempt to create a general list of Estonian officers with professional military background, we found only 431 names, including 16 officers in the western armies. The rest had a background in the Soviet armed forces. We only managed to include about 60 people out of the whole group in actual service, which was an insignificant number compared with our real need. "

The Baltic states' pre-war armed forces are most closely associated with the war for independence against Russia of 1918-1920. Previously, however, well-organised and highly influential military personnel actively participated in a coup d'etat in 1926 in Lithuania, which brought an authoritarian regime to power. During this period, in all Baltic states some high ranking military personnel continued to exercise a significant influence upon the political life of the country, and, although military obedience to civil authorities was respected in principle before 1940, democratic control was totally absent in practice.

These historical legacies had some influence on the establishment of the DS in the early 1990s. The Baltic states' military establishment showed itself to be keen to transmit the best values of the professional, well organised, and respected pre-war Armed Forces into the modern Armed Forces, and the partisan legacy struck a chord with the more recent struggle for independence in 1991. On the other hand the adoption of the traditions of the pre-war military was sporadic and varied in different services within the DS.

The model for the development of a modern military in the 1990s reflected the prevailing mood in Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian societies, which was keen to combine traditions of the past with an acceptance of liberal-democratic values. As a result, even though the initial units of the Armed Forces were created from volunteers and former officers of the Soviet army, their new structure and doctrine reflected a more 'western' approach to military reform. Importantly, however, a residual Soviet influence amongst some elements of the Armed Forces' officer corps did lead to a certain resistance to a 'westernisation' of military norms and values.

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[20] Laaneots A. *Democratic Control of Armed Forces: The Case of Estonia.* Presentation at the conference "Civil-Military Relations and Defence Planning: Challenges for Central and Eastern Europe in the New Era", Kyiv, 2000.

The international context, and particularly the Baltic states' desire to join NATO has played a prominent role in the development of democratic control of the AF. The formal request for NATO membership signalled the new priority in their foreign and security policy goals. This step also marked a qualitatively new stage in the development of military establishment, and encouraged the adoption of the western model for management of the Armed Forces. The position of the political authorities towards this principle was positive and there was no significant opposition from within the military.

Although NATO has not adopted formal membership criteria, there is no doubt that ability to contribute to NATO missions or democratic, civilian control of the military has become a de facto pre-requisite for aspiring members. In the case of the Baltic states, NATO signalled that its requirements must be unambiguously entrenched in the Baltic military structures. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia rapidly undertook required reforms. NATO provided not only requirements but also instruments to accomplish this task. Countries' engagement in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), in particular the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) and more recently Membership Action Plans (MAPs), have had a significant impact because they required countries to adopt detailed defence planning standards and practices operating within NATO[21]. Similarly, NATO member states and Partner countries have also provided training and development opportunities for the Baltic states military and civilian personnel in their defence education establishments, and this has allowed officers to become more familiar with NATO command and control procedures[22].

Another important influence on the development of the Armed Forces has been the encouragement of international contacts and military co-operation. Creation of the multilateral Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonia battalion (BALTBAT) was of particular importance. The business of administering this multinational project with participation of many Western European states helped to establish defence bureaucracies and encouraged the development of Western military culture.[23]

Since August 1994, for example, the Baltic states' troops have participated in UNPROFOR, IFOR, SFOR, AFOR and KFOR missions, recently Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian units were deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. In all cases they operate as a part of multinational

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[21] Cottey A., Edmunds T. and Forster A. *Conclusion: soldiers, politics and defence in postcommunist Europe* in A.Cottey, T.Edmunds and A.Forster (eds), Guarding the Guards in Central and Eastern Europe, London, Palegrave publ., 2001.
[22] *Defence White Paper 1999*. Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, Vilnius: MND Publishing Centre, 1999, p.39.
[23] *Lessons learned from the BALTBAT projects. An evaluation of the multilateral project supporting the Baltic battalion between 1994 and 2000*. MoD Denmark, MoD United Kingdom, 2001. p.5.

formations. Around 1030 soldiers have been deployed from BALTBAT units in peace support operations in the Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina.[24] This is a considerable number of personnel in the Baltic states context, as it does constitute nearly 10 per cent of the total number of professional soldiers in the Armed Forces. This number is likely to increase in the future.

Assistance from Western countries contributed considerably in the area of training and education to change the attitude of the military culture. As P.Goble pointed out, "even in the best of circumstances, the experience of all armies suggests, it takes 10 to 15 years to "grow" new field grade commanders and almost as long to train the non-commissioned officers - sergeants and corporals - who are the backbone of NATO-style forces." [25] Subsequently, education and training emerged as a key priority in the development of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian Armed Forces and in Western assistance to the Baltic states. Thousands of Baltic states' officers and civil servants have undergone training in Western military educational institutions. In 1999 the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) located in the Estonian city of Tartu started to train senior staff officers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania at the brigade level according to NATO standards. The College is commanded by a Danish general, with the United States, Germany, Denmark and other Western countries being major providers of funding and teaching staff.

Domestic achievements vs. geostrategic realities

Determination to join NATO became reality only after ten years of genuine efforts of all candidates to transform their countries, modernise military establishment and convince NATO members that their membership would bring value to all European nations including Russia. Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian policy was to do everything what is in they hands (reaching political consensus, establishing legal framework, introducing western style training, etc.), to present they case to the Alliance. Still their fate was not so much consequence of their domestic achievement but rather a derivative of external developments. Due to geostrategically complicated situation and contradicting interest of major European powers such as Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia the 'Baltic issue' became a real headache for many decision makers in most of European capitals.

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[24] Lessons learned … *op.cit.* - p.5
[25] Goble P. *The Baltics: Analysis From Washington--Transforming Post-Communist Militaries.* Radio Free Europe. Reports, 18 August 1999 (RFE/RL)

The issue of Baltic membership in NATO first time appeared on political agenda in 1996 when NATO Allies discussed first wave of NATO enlargement. It is not a secret that the failure of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia during the first wave of NATO enlargement was a direct consequence of prospective political costs associated with Baltic NATO membership. Despite economical and social progress in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the logic of the 'Russia first' approach assumed that the invitation of the Baltic states could have negative consequences for democracy in Russia, would bring Russia back to authoritarism or even confrontation between the former Cold War adversaries.

Several reasons contributed to the lack of commitment to the Baltic states in 1996. First of all, their membership was not considered as a vital element for the security of Western Europe. R.Asmus and R.Nurick have pointed out "what the Baltic states most lack is the active support of the strongest European powers in the Alliance - Germany, France and the United Kingdom. When many NATO members ask themselves whether the Alliance would and should be willing to go to war to defend the Baltic states against foreign aggression, the answer is often muted and unclear, and sometimes simply negative[26]". Most American decision makers were convinced that "the United States has no significant strategic or economic interests in these [Baltic] countries, and certainly none that are anywhere near as weighty as the very substantial strategic assets risks and costs that would come with a US commitment to them[27]".

A similar logic was heard, albeit on a smaller scale, before the second wave of NATO enlargement. Already before the September 11 events, on September 3, the Russian President Putin stated in Helsinki that he believed it was up to the Baltic States to decide whether to join or not although he saw no particular reasons for that[28]. A shift in Russian priorities and the emerging strategic partnership with the US solved the dilemma of "unbearable costs" of being in the Baltics and made it more acceptable for American and European decision makers.

Still, even at the beginning of 2001, most Western analysts were convinced that Lithuania will not be invited during the second round of NATO enlargement. For example, on 30 April 2002 the influential think-tank Stratfor published analysis called "Baltic States membership in NATO unlikely[29]". The analysis argued that military costs of Baltic's membership in NATO

[26] Asmus R., Nurick R. *NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States*, *Survival,* Vol.38, N 2, 1996, p. 124.
[27] Kurth J. *The Next NATO: Building an American Commonwealth of Nations.* The National Interest**,** Fall 2001, http://www.expandnato.org/kurthnato.html
[28] Gorenburg D., etc. *The Expansion of NATO into the Baltic Sea Region: Prague 2002 and Beyond.* CNA Corp., Centre for Strategic Studies, 2002. p.27
[29] Strategic Forecasting *Baltic States Membership in NATO Unlikely*, Global Intelligence Update, 27 04 2001, http://www.stratfor.com

by far exceed limited capabilities their can bring to the Alliance. Contrary to Stratfor's forecast in November 2002, NATO decided to invite Lithuania and its neighbours to join the Alliance. "Suddenly" it appeared that Allies were ready to sacrifice part of their resources in providing security guarantees to earlier thought undefendable nations. This historical turn reflects decreasing costs and increasing interest and benefits of involvement into the Baltic region.

September 11 terrorist attacks radically reshaped American and European thinking on many NATO membership criteria. The US and its Allies now pays more attention to the countries that share the same values and belief and are ready to stand beside America in fighting terrorism and promoting democracy. J.Kurth has pointed out that in a very short time the Baltics have successfully established liberal democracy, the free market and the rule of law. "If any countries ever deserved to become members of NATO by virtue of their achievements […], these do[30]".

Until now, Western countries have strongly believed in democracy in Russia. The first wave of NATO enlargement was strongly related to the fear that the admission of the Baltic states would strengthen nationalism in Russia, thus putting democracy in Russia under risk. Now fewer illusions exist about democracy in Russia, especially if one compares its progress to the achievements of Central and Eastern European countries. Today, only Belarus remains a black hole in the process of turning Europe into a fully democratic continent. Therefore, in the future Poland and Lithuania will have to play a significant role in strengthening American and European efforts to democratise this country.

J.Kurth continues, that "today, ten years after their heroic restoration of their national independence, the Baltics have been extraordinarily successful in establishing and embodying the American values of liberal democracy, the free market and the rule of law[31]". US and European politicians frequently stress that democracy is the ultimate measure against terrorism. By offering moral and practical support after the terrorist attacks the Baltic nations, along other European nations, psychologically and in real terms became valuable allies to America and its people. Even more, the new Central and Eastern Europe democracies started to transfer democracy to other regions. Their specific area of expertise and the knowledge of their eastern neighbours can provide a significant contribution to the extension of liberal-democratic values to Ukraine, Belarus, countries of the Caucasus or Central Asia.

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[30] Kurth *op.cit.*
[31] Kurth *op.cit.*

In addition, growing economy accompanied by successful negotiations over EU membership hinted that the Baltic states, along with other Central and Eastern European nations would stabilise Eastern shores of the Baltic sea. Strategic partnership between the US and Russia, growing Baltic military expenditures and increasing military capabilities, EU membership mean lower costs and increasing benefits of Alliance involvement in the region. New NATO - Russia relations significantly decreased the fear of confrontation with Russia over the next wave of NATO enlargement.

The importance of the Baltic states during the antiterrorist campaign has undergone significant changes. If, earlier the region was perceived mainly as tool to contain Russia, now, the Baltic region obtained the new status. During the antiterrorist campaign, debates over NATO enlargement ceased to be confrontational issue between Washington and Moscow. Both Russia and America were fighting terrorists in different parts of the world. The Baltic states and their neighbours lost their confrontational status and became an integral part of a free and democratic Europe. From zone of confrontation Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia became tools to promote democratic values and interests.

Along with promotion of democracy, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are practically contributing to peace and stability with political and military means. In the future NATO countries expect their increasing role in common military out of area operations. All newcomers have deployed decent-sized capabilities in the Balkans, in addition most of them have forces in other parts of the world, such as Afghanistan or Iraq. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia politically and practically contributed to both operations with small albeit important contributions. The ability to contribute became one of the keys to the membership in NATO. Therefore, even though the Baltic region does not have the capabilities that could influence the world's military balance, the active participation of the Baltic states in the anti-terrorist campaign and peace support operations contributes to the stability in other parts of the world. Although here the Baltic region is not an independent actor, it is valuable as a promoter of the global strategy of the West

Making full use of favourable circumstance NATO decided to consolidate the Baltic region, on the one hand, by providing security guarantees to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, on the other – by expecting the newcomers to be reliable partners and supporters of western values and interests.

Military reform - new missions for the Armed Forces

Invitation to NATO has dramatic impact on the future plans for development of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian armed forces. Membership implies conceptual changes in defence concepts, doctrines and defence plans. Concepts of neutrality and collective defence require different set of military capabilities that nations have to create in order to assure credible deterrence and defence. While being candidates for NATO membership Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia prepared their armed forces development plans working on assumption that in worst case scenario they will fight alone. The Baltic military planners were planning to establish large mobilisable force that in the case of aggression all national resources are utilised for defence, that every citizen and the nation resist the aggressor or invader by all possible means not forbidden by international law.

NATO membership presents the Baltic states military with different challenges for the development of their Armed Forces. Credible Article 5 guarantee does not require to keep large and static forces structure and allow Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians concentrate their resources for out of area operations. Vice versa non-credible Article 5 guaranties would force Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia create forces exclusively for self-defence with small fraction of forces devoted to international operations. Therefore, issue of defensibility is of particular importance to the Baltic states defence planning.

F. Stephen Larrabee during his testimony before US Senate Foreign Relations Committee emphasises the importance of NATO's credible commitment to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. "The key challenge is to ensure that Article 5 is not a "hollow" paper commitment. While enlargement to the Baltic states is largely being carried out for political reasons, the military dimensions remain important. Thus in the post-Prague period the US and its NATO allies will need to give more attention to the military dimensions of carrying out an Article 5 commitment to the Baltic states.[32]

Stratfor argued that the military situation in the region raises serious challenges for NATO troops to move into the Baltics: "Defending and reinforcing the region is difficult because of the region's broad front, limited depth and restricted lines of communication. In the event of war, the Baltic states would need to be reinforced, as Russian forces would neutralize the Baltic states in their move to protect Kaliningrad and its port facilities. NATO would need to move reinforcements overland, because Kaliningrad would make air and sea resupply difficult. The road networks, developed over years of Soviet rule, favor Moscow. Limited

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[32] Larrabee F.S. *The Baltic States and NATO Membership.* Testimony for the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations April 3, 2003.

ability to reinforce the region would allow Russia to secure the Baltic states, leaving a large number of NATO troops waiting on the beach for rescue[33]".

A hypothetically worst case scenario in greater detail was presented in the study *Strategic and Operational Implications of NATO Enlargement in the Baltic Region* prepared by the Institute of Foreign Policy Analysis. They concluded that "should a worst-case scenario play out, the operational requirements for NATO and U.S. forces are likely to be similar to those that they would need to respond to a major threat in another theater, such as the Persian Gulf. These would include core warfighting capabilities such as strategic lift, rapid reaction forces, the ability to deliver massed air-to-ground strikes in the early stages of a conflict, air-to-ground surveillance, and special operations forces (SOF) [34]".

According to the IFPA, the United States is likely to be the prime supplier of both the Allied air support and special operational forces units. The present capabilities the US would allow fulfilling its commitments, but it is worth considering that the ability of the United States to respond could be taxed if US forces were engaged elsewhere in another major operation. The main conclusion from the operational study on Baltic defence assumes, that "as long as Russia confines itself to conventional options, the prospects for successfully defending the Baltic states under worst-case scenarios are good. However, the defensive equation becomes complicated when the potential for Russian use of weapons of mass destruction is considered[35]". The IFPA assumes that a hostile regime willing to attack the Baltic states outright, in all likelihood, would not limit itself to conventional options. At the very least, Alliance and Baltic defence planners should not rule out the prospect of Russian WMD employment simply because it would violate international norms or risk provoking a broader conflict.

The issue of defensibility of the Baltic states is not frequently raised in official or academic circles, no public publications are available on this subject. However, during unofficial discussions several basic models for Baltic defence come out[36]. The first option could be labelled as "the Polish model". It is premised on the existence of a sufficient base of indigenous forces that would be reinforced in a crisis from outside. This model requires the Baltic states to develop, or allies to be ready to rapidly deploy, to the Baltic states a considerable quantity of conventional armaments (tanks, artillery, armoured combat vehicles,

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[33] Strategic Forecasting *Baltic States Membership in NATO Unlikely*, Global Intelligence Update, 27 04 2001, http://www.stratfor.com
[34] Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (IFPA) *Strategic and Operational Implications of NATO Enlargement in the Baltic Region*, 2002. p.3.
[35] Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis *op.cit.*.
[36] Larrabee *op.cit.*

attack helicopters, fighters). In the second, "technological", model reinforcements would come from 'over the horizon'. They would be largely based on American air power and precision guided munitions. The third option is a hybrid model which rests upon the employment of modest reinforcements, but would also include "over the horizon" air strikes. In theory, there exists the deterrence by retaliation model. Attacks would be carried out against the aggressor's civilian and economic targets using WMD.

All options have a different level of support in the US and among its allies and new members of NATO. It is clear that the deterrence by retaliation model would draw least support among all nations and the Baltic states. The US might prefer "technological" model, assuming that financial costs associated with this model would be modest and the capabilities required already exist. The technological model is not acceptable for the Baltic states, because it rests only upon political US commitment and does not assure its physical presence in the region.

European NATO members would prefer the traditional "Polish" model. For the Baltic states it would mean the creation of large territorial forces able to conduct large-scale operations inside the country, but barely able to participate in "out of area" NATO operations. Considering that NATO nations are moving towards small, mobile and rapidly deployable units, the territorial model defence model does not seem to be a feasible model for the Baltic states.

Most likely, the final decision will reflect a compromise between the needs of the Baltic states and capabilities of the allies. Such compromise means that reinforcements would come from European NATO members and from the US. The hybrid model guarantees that deterrence would include the elements of the inevitability of defence and retaliation. For Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia this means that deterrence would be highly enhanced by the physical presence of the US in the region. This presence might be manifested in the form of common initiatives, military training and exercises or even permanent location of US troops.

Some restrictions to these models could arise from Russian policy to minimise the consequences of US engagement in the Baltic region. First of all, Russia seeks to establish political and legal limitations for America's presence. In real terms, this means that the Allies will be denied the opportunity to deploy nuclear weapons and establish military bases on the territory of new NATO members. Secondly, the existing arms control regime will be extended to the Baltic states. Already in 1993, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia joined the Vienna Document on confidence and security building measures and exchange of military information. In the 1999 Istanbul Summit, all Baltic states declared that they are considering the possibility of accession to the CFE Treaty, provided the accession terms were in their

national interests. In addition, in 2002, Lithuania and Estonia applied for membership in the Open Skies Treaty, and the Open Skies Commission at the OSCE approved their application. The Open Skies Treaty creates the regime for aerial observation, which aims to improve openness and transparency among state parties.

These measures diminish the reliability of deterrence since they put limitations on the presence of the Alliance on the territory of the new members. Most likely, because of political considerations, the US and other allies will be willing to pay this price. Arms control regime and limitation of troops in this sensitive area will provide additional guarantees to Russia that in times of crises no huge military potential would be concentrated in the Baltic states. These are political costs and they make a significant part of the NATO enlargement process.

The changing attitude towards defence potential of the Baltic states most obviously reveals US recommendations on major issues of Lithuanian defence policy. In 1997-1998 groups of experts from the US State and Defense Departments led by Major General Kievenaar carried out "Lithuanian Defense Assessment" where the US expressed its recommendations on the development of national armed forces[37]. On Lithuania's request a similar study was made again in 2001[38].

A comparative analysis of both documents illustrates different approaches of the US towards Lithuania and the capabilities the US thinks Lithuanian can provide to its allies. The first study clearly advocated the principle of territorial defence and a big force structure that comes with this principle. The Assessment gave only short notices about the capabilities Lithuania could offer to peace support operations or NATO Article 5 operations, Host Nation Support (HNS) issues were not mentioned at all. The US recommended allocating resources to strengthen national defence capabilities indicating that in case of aggression Lithuania should rely only on its own armed forces.

The study carried out in 2001, showed a completely different approach towards the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The study provides a detailed assessment what Lithuania could offer to the US and NATO, what set of capabilities and infrastructure could be used for the purposes of the Alliance. A huge attention is paid to C3I (command, control, communications, intelligence), interoperability with NATO, English language knowledge, HNS and to Klaipeda sea port and Zokniai airbase in particular. The study does not mention the model of

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[37] Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and the United States European Command *Lithuanian Defense Assessment*, 1998.
[38] Office of the Secretary of Defense. International Security and European Policy. *Strategic Review of the Defense Plans and Military Capabilities of the Republic of Lithuania*, 2001.

territorial defence and expresses doubts about the static force structure – the US urges to create forces interoperable with NATO.

The changing attitude towards Lithuanian defence model shows that the US started to consider Lithuania and the other two Baltic nations as reliable partners able to participate in international US-led missions. A shift from territorial defence to more mobile deployable units and emphasis on HNS provides clear indication the Baltic states that in case of aggression they will not be left alone. So far, the NATO has not presented a concrete plan of action on how the Alliance could defend the Baltic states, but preliminary thinking is already under way.

Creating capabilities for the Alliance

After invitation Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as reliable members of the Alliance must provide capabilities for the full spectrum of Alliance missions. This also allows countries to review their defence planning principles and concentrate resources on areas that are necessary for NATO.

All Baltic states have very good preconditions to transform their armed forces into NATO interoperable and capable forces. One can remember, that military integration of the new members of 1999 has proved to be more difficult than expected. According to L.Wallin, "insufficient knowledge of English within their militaries, slow progress in reforming defence structures and planning, insufficient resources to bring about the necessary modernization of their NATO incompatible materiel, and the unreformed attitudes and outmoded operational concepts still prevalent in their officer corps are often quoted examples of obstacles to integration. In most, or all, of these respects the Baltic states have an advantage compared to the new members of 1999 as well as to their fellow candidates[39]".

A.Wilk in his report *The new members of the new NATO"*, written for the Center for Eastern Studies, emphasized that "since armies [of the Baltic states] were created from scratch in the 1990s (without any old equipment and materiel), they did not have any significant problems with adjusting themselves to the NATO standards expected of them. (The up-to-date materiel and equipment were usually presented to them by the Western countries.) A considerable increase in the expenses for the modernisation of the armed forces is of large significance

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[39] Wallin L. *NATO Enlargement in the Baltic Sea Area – Possible Consequences for Sweden*, The TESLA Group, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2002.

here. In the case of joining NATO, the three Baltic countries (as the only candidates so far) would have the armies already adjusted to its standards[40]".

All Baltic states rapidly undertook required steps to adjust their defence plans to new requirements. In 2003 Lithuanian minister of Defence L.Linkevicius clearly stated that "due to their history, the Baltic states should feel vulnerable to traditional military threats but instead we are among those who argue that NATO must transform itself from an immobile defence alliance in the heart of Europe into a flexible and rapidly reactive force capable of intervention wherever needed to prevent a conflict rather than to stop one that already started. To match our words with deeds our countries are boldly and rapidly transforming the armed forces, dropping outdated territorial defense posture and acquiring modern military capabilities so as to become trustworthy new allies within a new alliance ready to meet tomorrows security challenges. This implies a major shift in our planning assumptions from a reactive Cold-war type defensive posture to a proactive planning that would enable timely action instead of reflection[41]".

The planning system now must work on assumption that in case of crisis or war reinforcement of allies would come to the Baltic states. Therefore, they have to prepare forces that can act together with forces of NATO countries. There is no need for keeping big structure of Armed forces; it is enough to have small, well-prepared and armed, easily deployed and tenable armed forces. After NATO invitation all Baltic states decided to reviews the development of its forces and gives priority to development of capabilities necessary for acting along with NATO. Only in this way they considered be able to use the existing human and financial resources in the most effective way and to achieve the best results for themselves and for NATO.

The main goal of the defence reform is to maintain forces at a level that will allow responding to major crises when the need arises, and that are capable at other times of undertaking their peace time missions, meeting present and future international commitments and responding to short-notice requirements. Professional equipped with modern armament systems, deployable and mobile, established in line with NATO standards Armed Forces would guarantee reliable contribution for full spectrum of operations including collective defence. Personnel management is a key area that deserves preferential treatment as it is considered to be of great importance to the overall development of defence capabilities.

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[40] Wilk A. *The new members of the new NATO*, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/epub/eRap2002/ecz_01.htm
[41] Linkevicius L. *Live after Enlargement*. Keynote Speech at Vilnius Roundtable Northeast European Security After the 2004 Dual Enlargement: The End of History? June 6, 7 2003.

The important motto in the integration into NATO became finding national "niche" in the structures of Alliance forces. Participation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in international operations shows that it is able to contribute effectively to the operations of Alliance providing specialist groups of such fields as military engineering and medicine as well as Special Forces. This should help to share more effectively the burden with other members of NATO. The mentioned capabilities already receive most increasing attention in the Baltic states.

To sum up: NATO expects from the invitees to develop small and mobile forces that could contribute to Alliance missions. On the other hand, according to the report by Centre for Naval Analysis, "despite their relatively advanced state of preparation, the Baltic States' small size and limited resources mean that they will never be significant contributors to NATO military forces. Their air forces are entirely dedicated to surveillance, with no attack and limited air defense capability. Their armies are currently capable of fielding no more than one NATO-interoperable battalion per country, although there are plans to increase this to a brigade per country by 2006[42]". Despite their small size, the Baltic States could provide capabilities that would enhance NATO's military capability. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia agreed with NATO to prepare and maintain one battalion-size task force that could be used for deployment in crises response operations. In order to implement that promise, for example, Lithuania is giving priority to the Reaction Brigade (RBde) which one battalion might be deployed outside the Lithuanian territory for Article 5 operations. In addition, air-defence weapon systems "Stinger" and the Medium Range Anti-tank weapon system "Javelin" to be delivered to RBde in coming years will improve combat capabilities of the unit.

The CNA stressed that "most important, their inclusion will extend NATO's air surveillance system to cover the entire Baltic Sea and a large part of northwestern Russia." [43] The Institute of Foreign Policy Analysis emphasises another aspect of BALTNET's integration which is important for the US. "Collectively, all three Baltic nations comprise a cohesive strategic space that has particular relevance for integrated air and missile defense operations and the defense-in-depth of Northern European Alliance territories[44]". In 2002, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia announced that they are procuring new radars for the BALTNET – Lithuania has decided to obtain two middle-range, Latvia and Estonia opted for one long range radar each.

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[42] Gorenburg *op.cit.* p.11
[43] Gorenburg *op.cit.* p.2
[44] Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis *op.cit.* p.4.

These plans have already triggered a negative reaction in Russian mass media, which claim that data from new radars could be transferred to American intelligence networks or the BALTNET could be plugged into the missile defence system.

Conclusion and recommendations

Creation of democratic society and market economy, creation of modern Armed Forces and participation in crises response operation paved a way for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to membership in NATO. Two main factors had a fundamental impact on the evolution of the Armed forces in these countries. First, the development of the Armed Forces started from a very limited base in the early 1990s, and as a result, the military had no preconditions or preconceptions over its particular role and place in society. As a result, the armed forces institutional interests and commitments to the old regime were extremely limited. Secondly, the core of Lithuania's, Latvia's and Estonia's foreign and security policy were focussed on integration with the West, and meeting the accession criteria for membership of Western institutions. As a result, common European values and principles were strictly implemented, and their continued development remains high on the political and public agenda.

Internal reforms and political consensus made the Baltic states allowed them to get invitation to the Alliance. Still, decision on their invitation was made considering overall European security architecture. In their strive for NATO membership the Baltic states became active participants of European security architecture. As the small states positioned in a sensitive geostrategic part of Europe, where great powers possess opposing and even conflicting interests, the Baltic states became subject of global politics. After September 11 changing threat perceptions in the US, Europe and Russia has significant effect upon the transformation of the Alliance and terms of accession.

The invitation is not the end of the history on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. In order to ensure that their efforts to join NATO were not in vain Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia must continue their reforms and continue working with their partners increase security in Europe and beyond its borders. Specifically, following recommendations must be considered:

1. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia must recognize that as full NATO members, they will have a meaningful voice in debates and discussions on key matters of the Alliance's business. They must use they voice to support the transformation of the Alliance so that it would remain a viable defence organisation.

2. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia must enhance their efforts to reach out to Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasus. The specific knowledge of the region and confidence that

NATO's security guarantee provides should make it easier for them to engage their eastern neighbours. Lithuania could serve as a bridge between Russia and the Alliance.

3. The Baltic states should openly state that they no not perceive any military threat from the East and rely on Alliance' security guarantees. In practical terms that would lead to the abolishment total defence concepts. Armed Forces development plans should concentrate on capabilities that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia can provide for the Alliance.

4. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia must continue the serious work of preparing and improving their militaries for operations with the Alliance. Expediting and expanding plans and facilities for Host Nation Support (HNS) should be a priority in this regard, as should the development of effective capabilities for operations in crisis response scenarios. The Baltic states should create modern reserve structure that provides personnel to active units and is able to be deployed for out of area crises response operations.