

MISSION REPORT

DIALOGUE TRANSPARENCY PARTNERSHIP

**DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE (DSC)
Sub-Committee on Future Security
and Defence Capabilities (DSCFC)**

Riga, Latvia and Tallinn, Estonia

10-13 May 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Russia's unprovoked and illegal war on Ukraine has upended peace and security in Europe. In the face of the greatest security crisis in Europe since the end of World War II, Allies have demonstrated strong resolve to not only support Ukraine's valiant defence efforts, but also to have the forces and plans in place to defend all Allied territory and populations.

2. The war's reverberations are felt poignantly along NATO's Eastern Flank and across the Baltic states. Drawing on the memory of their own historical occupation and annexation by Moscow, Estonia and Latvia had long warned about Vladimir Putin's imperial ambitions and the security threat they posed in the Alliance's Eastern Neighbourhood. Since Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022, both Allies have been among the staunchest supporters of Ukraine and called for the Alliance to reinforce its defence and deterrence posture along its Eastern Flank significantly.

3. To better understand Estonia and Latvia's views on the changing security dynamics in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and the Alliance's upcoming revision of its posture along the Eastern Flank, a delegation from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's (NATO PA) Defence and Security Committee visited Riga and Tallinn from 10-13 May 2022. Twenty-two members from eleven NATO Allies and NATO partners Finland and Sweden¹ joined the visit. Andreas Loverdos (Greece), Vice-Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Future Security and Defence Capabilities (DSCFC), led the delegation.

II. CHANGING DYNAMICS OF SECURITY IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

4. Russia's decision to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February represents a sea change in BSR security environment. Regional security dynamics had been becoming increasingly challenging since Russia's brazen use of force in Eastern Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, but, as officials told the delegation clearly, February 2022 changed the situation completely, intensifying concerns about the potential threat of Russian military action against the Baltic states.

5. In the run-up to and immediately following Vladimir Putin's decision to escalate his war of aggression, Allies surged maritime, land, and air forces to the Baltic area to reinforce NATO's regional deterrence and defence posture. These moves were welcomed and provided a degree of reassurance, but interlocutors stressed that further reinforcements were needed to respond to the region's evolving security dynamics adequately. A regional defence plan was also put into action, but several speakers highlighted that the Baltic states still require better air and coastal defence systems – from stand-off precision strike weapons to more advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities – as well as more financial and direct mil-to-mil assistance to improve their collective deterrence and security. Such steps would help enhance deterrence not only vis-à-vis Russia, members were told, but also Belarus, whose growing military integration with Russia has deeply impacted perspectives on regional security.

6. Considering the radically altered regional security context, Estonian and Latvian officials informed the delegation how their respective governments have ramped up their own defence investments and military capabilities. Only a couple months prior to the visit, both Allies announced they would raise defence spending to 2,5 per cent of GDP, exceeding the NATO benchmark set at

¹ Finland was a partner state at the time of the visit. It joined the Alliance officially on 4 April 2023. Sweden's accession was pending at the time of the last update of this mission report.

the 2014 Wales Summit. For Estonia and Latvia this represents hundreds of millions in additional spending. However, as noted by one Estonian official, the spending underlines Tallinn's commitment to collective defence – "we do not want to be security consumers, but security providers." Tiina Uudeberg, Under-Secretary of Defence Planning at the Ministry of Defence of Estonia, noted this spending would include a focus on maritime capabilities, anti-tank missiles, air defence, munitions, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and military readiness. Briefers in Estonia and Latvia all underlined the importance of burden sharing and encouraged parliamentarians to urge their governments to not only hit, but even surpass the defence spending benchmarks already agreed upon by all Allies.

7. Russia's blatant aggression also pushed Finland and Sweden to abandon long-standing neutrality policies and apply for NATO membership – depositing their candidacies together on 18 May 2022. All experts and officials welcomed this development, noting that Finnish and Swedish NATO membership would heal an 'artificially-divided' Northern Flank. Briefers in Riga and Tallinn concurred that greater connectivity and interoperability between the Nordic and Baltic states will only help further strengthen and integrate the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture in the common Nordic-Baltic operational area. Marko Mihkelson, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu (Parliament of Estonia), welcomed the news, stressing that Nordic and Baltic countries face similar challenges and the same existential threat: the 'evil empire' that is the Russian Federation.

III. NATO'S REINFORCED ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE

8. NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battle groups represent a key form of Allied deterrence in the BSR. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and escalating concerns over Baltic area security, Allies agreed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit to establish the forward-deployed multinational battle groups, each led by a different nation. While the decision represented a noticeable reinforcement of Allied collective defence, the BSR remained a key vulnerability due to Russia's persistent and reckless brinkmanship and the fact that the battlegroups, as fielded, remained inadequate for the defensive purposes of Allies' stated objectives. Allies agreed to reinforce NATO's eFP in the BSR and establish four additional eFP battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia at an extraordinary summit in Brussels held in March.

9. The surge of new forces and capabilities was on full display during the delegation's visit to NATO's eFP battlegroup stationed at Ādaži military base outside of Riga. Allied forces on the base had almost doubled in the few months just preceding the delegation's visit to about 5,500, paralleling troop surges and new battlegroup formations all along NATO's Eastern Flank. As the lead nation of the battle group, Canada has contributed a notable percentage of these reinforcements under Operation REASSURANCE, which renewed a year ahead of schedule due to the rapidly changing security situation in the region. In discussions with military leadership, the delegation was briefed on the battlegroup's key priorities, such as developing its capabilities and the role it plays in the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture, as well as its training exercises and member states' key contributions.

10. Members were equally informed on how the sharp increase in troop numbers and assumed further reinforcements of the eFP (to be considered at the upcoming Madrid Summit) constitutes a noticeable challenge with regards to logistics, the infrastructure of the base, as well as its training capacity. The delegation was informed that the aim is to transition the base over the next two years to adapt to these important changes. Despite these challenges, members were told the battlegroup was 'able and ready' to defend Latvian territory if necessary.

11. As part of the surge of forces and capabilities to the region, Alliance has beefed up its air-policing operations – a strong demonstration of Allied unity within NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) framework to help ensure the integrity of the airspace of Baltic Allies. To this end, the delegation also visited Lielvārde Air Base in Latvia, where U.S. and Latvian officials briefed the delegation on the Air Force’s role, capabilities, and equipment as well as the engagement of the United States as part of a rotational exchange programme that helps further ensure the security of Latvian airspace. In a strong display of transatlantic solidarity, US support of NATO Eastern Flank reinforcement has been critical since Russia’s intentions in Ukraine became clear. The United States now has over 105,000 troops stationed across Europe, the most since 2005.

IV. RUSSIA’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: TRAJECTORY OF THE WAR, GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND THE ALLIED RESPONSE

12. Throughout the visit, parliamentarians heard that reinforcements to Allies’ presence in the region is critical considering Russia’s war against Ukraine and its enduring threat to regional and Euro-Atlantic security. A range of government officials and security experts also shared their perceptions of the trajectory of the war, the future course of relations with Moscow, and what would constitute Russia’s strategic defeat. This war, argued Jonatan Vseviiov, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, is not only a war against Ukraine but also one against the pillars of European security and the principles that the European Union (EU) was built upon.

13. Russia’s transformation from an autocratic to dictatorial state which seeks to redraw Europe’s borders illegitimately by force means there can be no return to the status quo ante, members were told. At this critical juncture, Estonian and Latvian representatives were in clear agreement that Allies must not compromise when the core principles of European security are at stake and when disagreements with the Russian regime are so fundamental. Artis Pabriks, Minister of Defence of Latvia, recalled that mistakes had been made vis-à-vis engagement with Russia, particularly with regards to assumptions over the benefits of economic interdependence, but a clear change in strategy is now needed: “We have made mistakes in Georgia, Crimea, and Belarus for years and no one wanted to listen...if Ukraine falls, we have nowhere to retreat – this is our last chance.” Should we fail to stand up to Putin, Vseviiov added later in the visit, he will have pushed us back into an era of spheres of influence in which small states no longer have a say and risk being swallowed up.

14. Officials argued strongly that Allies should not rest on their laurels after the Ukrainian Armed Forces managed to hold off Russia’s initial offensive. In their view, while Russia’s military has underperformed in Ukraine, it must not be underestimated. Estonia and Latvian officials are closely observing Russia’s military tactics and told parliamentarians they were learning more about Russia’s capabilities and strategy. Reminding members of the Kremlin’s broad and imperial ambitions however, interlocutors warned that despite early failures, Putin still aims to take all of Ukraine and fundamentally alter the European security architecture we have established over decades. As a result, the Russian Armed Forces will almost certainly reorganise themselves, and continue to pose a threat to security in the BSR and along the entire Eastern Flank.

15. Experts and officials also warned that Russia’s actions not only affect the Euro-Atlantic area but will reverberate globally. They stressed that faced with Russia’s revisionism, Allies must not allow impunity to become the new norm. As argued by Rihards Kohls, Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the *Saeimas* (Parliament of Latvia), autocracies worldwide are trying to use any means possible to break the post-war order established by the West. A warning was also issued that China is watching how Allies and the West react to Russia’s aggressive behaviour and what the outcome will be resulting from its war.

16. Over the course of the visit, members also wrestled with the complex question of what Russia's defeat may resemble. Kristi Raik, Deputy Director of the International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS), argued that, short-term, defeat would include the liberation of Ukrainian territory that Russia has occupied since 24 February. However, this alone is insufficient. For example, settling the issue of Crimea will likely be a longer and separate process, but cannot be overlooked. All officials and experts agreed that Allies must unequivocally convey that there can be no legitimization of the changing of borders through force. While the future of the regime is to be decided by the Russian people, briefers expressed hope justice could be eventually delivered in front of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for those responsible of the war's conduct.

V. ASYMMETRIC WARFARE: CAPABILITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

17. Throughout the visit, the delegation was urged not to forget the importance of the evolution (and complexity) of hybrid threats in parallel to conventional threats emanating from Russia as well as other revisionist actors. To better understand these challenges, the visit included briefings by government and industry experts as well as the NATO-accredited Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence and the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence.

18. **Energy security** - Estonia and Latvian briefers highlighted Russia's continued use of energy resources as political and economic leverage over Europe as a salient example of attempts to undermine Allied cohesion through asymmetric methods. Both governments have for years called for European Allies to end their energy dependence on Russia and were the first countries to halt Russian gas imports in April 2022. For Latvia, the challenge is complex – moving from 90 per cent dependency to 0 – but parliamentarians were informed of its efforts to move away from Russian energy, such as by plugging into and building alternative networks, investing in renewable energies, and purchasing liquified natural gas (LNG). One official also noted the European Commission should have a role in easing the burden involved in the shift away from Russian energy through common purchases for the European market, while Europeans should also invest more with alternative energy partners such as those in Central Asia or the Caucasus. In response to a question regarding Latvia's capacity to withstand the shock of drastically reducing and eventually cutting all imports of Russian energy, Atis Lejiņš noted that the country was well prepared for the scenario and had stocked its strategic reserves.

19. **Border crisis** - The delegation was also briefed on the Belarusian regime's provocations at the border of several Eastern Flank Allies in 2021. General Guntis Pujflats, Chief of the State Border Guard, told the delegation that President Aleksandr Lukashenko, with the support of the Kremlin, engineered a border crisis with Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland by encouraging and transporting migrants, primarily from the Middle East, towards EU territory via Belarus. For Latvian officials, it is clear the weaponisation of migrants constitutes an act of hybrid warfare aimed at weakening the EU's asylum system and destabilising the Alliance's Eastern Flank. Adapting to the developments at the Lithuanian border, Latvian officials implemented security measures necessary to calm the situation and illegal border crossings had stop by the end of the year. Parliamentarians were warned that Allied borders could be used once again in the future as a vulnerable point that Russia and Belarus could exploit to cause instability and fear in our societies.

20. **Strategic communications & information warfare** - The visit highlighted the Kremlin's use of information warfare to shape narratives, influence public opinion, and undermine Allied support for Ukraine. While the information sphere has long impacted war and conflict, it is now more important than ever due to the nature of our information- and technology-based societies,

parliamentarians were told. In this context, Jānis Sārts, Director of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, told members in Riga that “strategic communication is a now a key national security capability if you have it and a key vulnerability if you do not.”

21. Sārts noted the strategic communications campaign led by the United States and United Kingdom thwarted Russia’s information space manipulation initiative prior to the full-scale invasion and was key to rallying Allied support for Ukraine. Multiple speakers agreed that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy effective communication skills played a critical part in Ukraine winning the information war in the West, as did the efforts of ordinary Ukrainians who have shared accounts of Russian atrocities in real time. Accordingly, members were informed that there is a correlation between the degree of information made available and the level of atrocities seen in warfare.

22. Briefers warned Russia will continue to spread misinformation and use strategic communications to sow doubt and raise fears, such as its threats of nuclear escalation should Allied support for Ukraine continue. As Sārts noted, “we are now in a time of competition and conflict of systems trying to shape the world to their likeness; and we are returning to the ups and downs of nuclear rhetoric.” Minister Pabriks recalled that during the Cold War, anytime there was a nuclear threat, it was met with a stiff Western response. In the current context, he urged Allies to maintain the logic of mutual assured destruction (MAD) - should Russia threaten, Allies must have a parallel response.

23. The issue of information warfare and Russia’s attempts to spread misinformation is particularly relevant in Estonia and Latvia, two countries with notable Russian minority populations. In Latvia, briefers noted that the Russian minority remains somewhat divided on its views of Russia and the war: one third are in favour, one third are against, and another third are indifferent. Members heard that Kremlin maintains a strong grip on the cognitive space of Russian speakers, while an Estonian interlocutor lamented the ‘tragic mistake’ made in not effectively reaching out to Russian minorities in way that promotes our culture and values. Parliamentarians were told that, as a result, strategic communications are necessary to break down the wall erected by continued Russian propaganda. While it will be difficult to shift this cognitive obduracy, an Estonian official noted that investments must be made in Russian-language media institutions to have a positive long-term engagement and ensure that our message gets through to Russian speakers. However, it must be done in a better way, as “we cannot fight propaganda with propaganda.”

24. **Cyber security** - Parliamentarians were equally reminded of the critical importance of cybersecurity and the need to maintain not only defensive, but offensive capabilities as well. The cyber domain is critical in the sense that it has an impact on all others (i.e., a through-domain). Estonia prides itself on its cyber capacities and officials told the delegation it believes it can be a high-level contributor, ready to enhance cooperation to strengthen Allies’ collective cyber capabilities. As one official noted: “Estonia sees its role as contributing to the security of others - [the nexus between] cyber security and defence is an area in which we can provide support and give something back.”

25. The delegation was briefed on how Russia and the People’s Republic of China have exploited cyber space and utilise other hybrid means to undermine Allied interests. Both nations are also racing to integrate new disruptive technologies to usurp Allies’ leading edge in technological innovation. To keep pace with Moscow and Beijing’s significant capabilities in the cyber domain, experts stressed that members must understand how information and technologies impact the battlefield and work to maintain their collective technological edge. To this end, Mihkel Tikk, Director of the Cyber Policy Department at the Ministry of Defence of Estonia, highlighted the critical role played by the private sector in driving today’s innovation, as well as the need for greater private-

public sphere cooperation to secure our cyber defence. Cyber experts remarked that NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) initiative can play an important part in this process and help ensure Allied primacy in the cyber domain. In line with Estonia's leading role in cyber defence capabilities, it has partnered with the United Kingdom to host the European headquarters of the DIANA initiative.

VI. BALTIC SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE

26. Throughout the visit, Latvian and Estonian officials were consistent in their message of strong solidarity with Ukraine. Both Allies stand out amongst its most ardent supporters, providing economic, militarily, and political assistance. Their support is largely driven by historical context and the prevailing sentiment across government and society that Ukraine's ongoing defence of its territorial integrity and democracy is intrinsically linked with their own futures. In discussions with the delegation, officials recalled the Soviet occupation in the Baltic states, which lasted longer than many in Western Europe realise. In Estonia, for example, Russian troops did not leave until 1994 – three years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

27. Officials and experts were united in their calls for two key actions by Allies to best position Ukraine for victory: a maximisation of sanctions against Russia and a sharp increase in military support to Ukraine. Continued and stronger sanctions, experts told the delegation, are an important tool for imposing costs on Russia and pressurising the regime. Estonia and Latvia implemented sanctions that go beyond those adopted by the EU and officials stressed that due to Russia's resilience, sanctions cannot go far enough.

28. In parallel to stronger sanctions, officials and experts repeated the importance of increased military assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Estonia and Latvia have taken on a prominent leadership role in providing military assistance, underscored by their substantial contributions of vital and battlefield-essential weaponry and equipment. These contributions, among others, include Javelin anti-tank missiles, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, howitzers, small arms, communications equipment, and ammunition. While both countries have smaller military budgets compared to their larger European neighbours, officials were quick to note they are doing all that they can. Estonia, for example, has provided approximately 200 million USD in military assistance, and ranks as the world's largest donor when adjusted for GDP per capita. As the war progresses and enters a new stage, Artis Pabriks argued that Ukraine will need more NATO equipment and heavy weaponry. Allies must move quickly and avoid wasting time differentiating between offensive and defensive weapons – lives are being lost as we delay, Pabriks contended.

29. Discussions on Ukraine and its democratic future underlined the Estonian and Latvian belief that this war is a critical moment for the Euro-Atlantic community. One official sounded a clarion call to the delegation: "Ukraine is fighting this war for all of us. We cannot lose this war. Otherwise, Russia will not stop. We know this for sure. While you did not heed our warnings in the past, please do so today." Government representatives called for the Euro-Atlantic community to develop a closer relationship with Ukraine, including via a Membership Action Plan (MAP), as well as the delivery of EU candidate status. If the EU can succeed in bringing in Ukraine and rebuilding the country, it would represent a sea change in the EU's global positioning, the delegation heard. Officials were quick to note, however, that discussions about the end of the war were premature, and that there could be no peace negotiations or diplomatic settlement without Kyiv's agreement.

VII. 2022 STRATEGIC CONCEPT AND REVISION OF THE ALLIANCE'S DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE POSTURE

30. Faced with Russia's revisionism, aggressive military posture, and brutal invasion of Ukraine, parliamentarians heard that a revised Allied deterrence and defence posture resting on a viable reinforcement strategy is urgently required. At this critical juncture, interlocutors advocated to bolster defence capabilities not only across the Baltics, but all along NATO's Eastern Flank to repel any attack on Allied territory.

31. Allies have been reviewing and adapting their defence posture both before and after the outbreak of the war. Throughout the visit, parliamentarians engaged in discussions with officials on the significant decisions to be made at the upcoming Madrid NATO Summit in June. Officials stressed the necessity of significant reinforcement of Allied forces and capabilities in their own territories. Officials told the delegation that there must be sufficient NATO forces in the BSR to send the message to the Kremlin that any attack against an Ally would be too costly. Without a viable reinforcement strategy, it could send the wrong signal to our adversaries, Russia first and foremost.

32. All interlocutors called for the revision of Allies' current 'trip wire' defence posture, which they considered to be outdated. As one speaker noted: "The 'trip wire' concept for the defence of Allies' eastern territories is no longer sustainable – not a single square meter of Allied territory can be overtaken. We must defend every bit of our lands from day one with a new 'forward defence' concept." Instead, NATO must revise its defence and deterrence posture to be able to defend every square meter from day one - i.e., deterrence by denial. Interlocutors admitted it was no longer possible to explain to their populations that our collective defence posture is premised on the idea that Allies would liberate their territory.

33. In addition, Allies will also adopt a new Strategic Concept, which will not only likely signal a renewed emphasis on collective defence efforts, but also reassess Allies' views of the increasingly complex international security environment. Kyllike Sillaste-Elling, Under-Secretary for Political Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, admitted the document is much anticipated considering the last Strategic Concept was published in 2010. Officials noted the document will reflect Allies' understanding of the acute threat from Russia and will also highlight the other significant challenges facing the Alliance. For example, China's rise and antagonism towards the rules-based international order has forced Allies to move China to the centre of their collective agenda. In the last Strategic Concept, Russia was mentioned as a 'partner', while China was not even mentioned.

The delegation engaged, among others, with the following speakers:

Ministry of Defence of Latvia

- Artis Pabriks, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence

Foreign Affairs Committee of the Saeima

- Rihards Kols, Chairperson

Defence, Internal Affairs, and Corruption Prevention Committee of the Saeima

- Juris Rancans, Chairperson

State Border Guard of Latvia

- General Guntis Pujāts, Chief of the State Border Guard

NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence

- Jānis Sārts, Director

NATO eFP in Adazi

- Colonel Sandris Gaugers, Commander, Land Forces Mechanised Infantry Brigade

Foreign Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu

- Marko Mihkelson, Chairperson

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia

- Jonatan Vseviov, Secretary General, former Ambassador of Estonia to the United States
- Küllike Sillaste-Elling, Director General of the Department of NATO and Transatlantic Relations

Ministry of Defence of Estonia

- Tuuli Duneton, Undersecretary of Defence Policy
- Tiina Udeberg, Undersecretary of Defence Planning
- Laura Oolup, Acting Director of the Cyber Policy Department

International Centre of Defence and Security (ICDS)

- Kristi Raik, Deputy Director and Head of the Foreign Policy Programme

The delegation also met with representatives from the following institutions and organisations:

- Lielvārde Air Base
- Latvijas Mobilais Telefons (LMT)
- Riga Technical University
- Estonian Defence Industry Association

[Photos of the visit](#)

