

# RIGA TEST FOR NATO, RUSSIA, AND THE WORLD

**T**he capital city of Latvia hosted in autumn a NATO conference on security and foreign policy. Under the auspices of the Latvian TransAtlantic Organization heads of states, ministers, politicians, diplomats, and scholars discussed both internal NATO issues, including relations with Russia, and vital problems of the Euro zone, restructuring of the global economy and the future of European economy. Follow the interpretations of modern security challenges provided by NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow and other participants in the Riga conference.

## BALTIC COUNTRIES IN NATO

Ten years ago then US Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow addressed a conference in St. Petersburg and said that Russia would have to reconcile with the admission of Baltic countries to NATO. In September 2012 he told the Latvian newspaper Chas in Riga that NATO takes into account the location of Latvia as a neighbor of Russia and the presence of a major part of Russian-speakers in assessing the situation and designing a strategy for regional development, including enhanced partnership with Russia. The commitment refers both to defense issues and politics. As Latvia is a NATO member, it is fully responsible for the security of the alliance. As Latvian armed forces are small its security is tightly linked to the military potential of the



whole alliance although Latvia participates in common operations, i.e. in Afghanistan, and supports regional missions, i.e. patrolling of the Baltic airspace.

*A year ago many Latvian non-citizens began to receive Russian citizenship. If Russia offers its passports to 300 thousand non-citizens can it threaten the security of alliance?*

I do not think the alliance is considering it as a security issue. The alliance deals with international security and global challenges, such as terrorism and regional instability... And this is a domestic issue, a nuance of the constitutional system which has to be resolved through an internal political process. Any pressure on the Latvian ally in domestic issues is out of our competence.

Vershbow's position on non-citizens is shared by Julianne Smith, deputy national security adviser to US Vice President Joe Biden. She said in Riga that non-citizens are a purely Latvian matter. It is even hard to imagine how the United States would deal with the problem. It is a unique and complicated situation with a long history. The US wants to help Latvia and promote dialogue, reach out to communities. But this is an internal problem and Latvia has to resolve it itself.

However senior analyst of the Swedish Royal Military Academy Retired Major-General Karlis Neretnieks believes that although the issue of non-citizens' disloyalty poses no threat to the security of Latvia and NATO it is still "a weak point for Latvia and Estonia which Russia can use in its propaganda. For example, statements can be voiced in the

OSCE and other international institutions that Latvians allegedly persecute Russians."

At the same time international relations expert from St. Petersburg State University Stanislav Tkachenko said the standoff between Baltic countries and Russia is subsiding. Economic cooperation is expanding while Russia has traditionally developed political contacts mostly with major powers.

Member of Strategic Advisors Group at the US Atlantic Council Professor Julian Lindley-French suggested to estimate NATO capabilities by the "Riga test": Can Riga residents sleep quietly under the alliance protective umbrella? The professor believes they currently can, however future remains unclear because such major power as China has a completely different perception of authority.

## NATO AND RUSSIA – STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Asked about the state of cooperation between NATO and Russia, which some politicians in Baltic countries view as enemy number 1, Alexander Vershbow replied without diplomatic conformities.

It is necessary to separate facts from inventions. With this aim NATO is holding conferences like in Riga. There is often a misunderstanding of NATO approach to relations with Russia. We consider Russia as our partner. We have a lot of common strategic interests with it although we have not yet reached strategic partnership which we hoped to do by signing with Russia the Basic agreement on mutual relationship, cooperation and security in Paris in 1997.

There are several items on which we differ. In the 1990s it was Kosovo and recently Libya. However we continue to closely cooperate in Afghanistan: there are transit agreements and a project to train Afghan helicopter pilots... Both parties are interested in having responsible leaders governing the country.

Russia is interested in preserving stability in Southern and Central Asia, while NATO is ready to expand the cooperation zone with Russia. There is productive interaction in the fight against terrorism and sea piracy. Although major mistrust remains in relations nevertheless NATO and Russia have proved they can constructively cooperate. Joint counteraction to XXI century threats will promote rapprochement between NATO and Russia. Such threats, as terrorism, nuclear weapon and ballistic missile proliferation call for mutually beneficial response that strengthens security both of Russia and NATO countries, including Latvia.

Shifts are possible in missile defense. So far Russia has refused to understand the missile defense designation and potential in Eastern Europe. Despite statements of Russian leaders we continue to insist the missile shield is in no way targeted against Russia. It is necessary to repel threats from outside Europe, in particular, from the Near East where danger is mounting. We hope the true state of things will be taken

into consideration and we shall progress towards productive cooperation to ensure defense of Russia and NATO with the capabilities of both parties.

*The Cold War seems to be over, but Russia is ready to respond to the "friendly" NATO move asymmetrically - deploy its missiles in Kaliningrad region...*

Russian leaders said they will deploy the missiles in case they feel a threat from the NATO system for their strategic security. By technical and geographic characteristics the missile defense cannot damage the Russian strategic potential either today or tomorrow. Both our missile experts and the Russian side have analyzed and documented it. It was clearly stated at the summit in Chicago in May.

**STILL FRAME.** *Karlis Neretnieks believes the deployment in Kaliningrad region of air defense S-400 missiles and surface-to-surface Iskander missiles will help Russia repel NATO might in case of a conflict with Baltic countries. Therefore, the alliance and the international community have to attentively follow the developments in the westernmost Russian*



**enclave specifically after Russia demonstrated readiness to use its armed forces in Georgia.**

*In Soviet times there were several major military surveillance facilities in Latvia. How possible is the deployment of similar NATO facilities?*

If you mean air defense radars, we do not need them there as the hotbed of threat is in the south. The key radar looking southeast is located in Turkey. Local radars are possible at airfields, but there will be no second Skrunda.

In general President Putin clearly occupies a skeptical position towards NATO. But I believe he understands the basic Russian interests. We are all in one boat in the modern world when the talk is about security threats. There is potential for cooperation. I hope the missile defense can act as a game-changer, i.e. can change relations. But even if there are no shifts in the missile defense in the coming years there are other potential cooperation spheres for the sake of eliminating reciprocal suspicions : conventional arms control, transparency and trust in the military sphere.

## ALLIANCE FUTURE

Speaking about the future of the alliance in connection with new challenges and initiatives to create European Union armed forces and a military alliance of northern countries Alexander Vershbow said that from the NATO point of view risks and challenges will always exist in the world. Time might come when NATO will stop being the right decision. The EU is developing the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) in which most NATO European allies are involved. There are regional initiatives, such as the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) which involves all Nordic countries, including non-members of NATO. They streamline interaction in training and military equipment and are less engaged in real operations.

In May the EU Navy carried out a major operation against pirates close to Somali coast. It was closely coordinated with NATO anti-piracy actions. The EU took over from NATO the mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. There is labor division: NATO is responsible for the military component while the EU for police and economic components. Each party has its strong and weak points and cooperation is necessary to succeed. NATO wants no monopoly. We are not going to deal with every problem.

*European Commission President Barroso proclaimed a course towards the establishment of European Federation which inevitably raises the issue of the creation of EU armed forces. Can they put in doubt the future place of NATO in the global security architecture?*

No. In case a decision is adopted to create EU armed forces to be the leading structure then deputy supreme commander of



the allied armed forces of NATO in the Atlantic could become the strategic commander of the EU armed forces and use the NATO potential to organize command and planning to support EU operations.

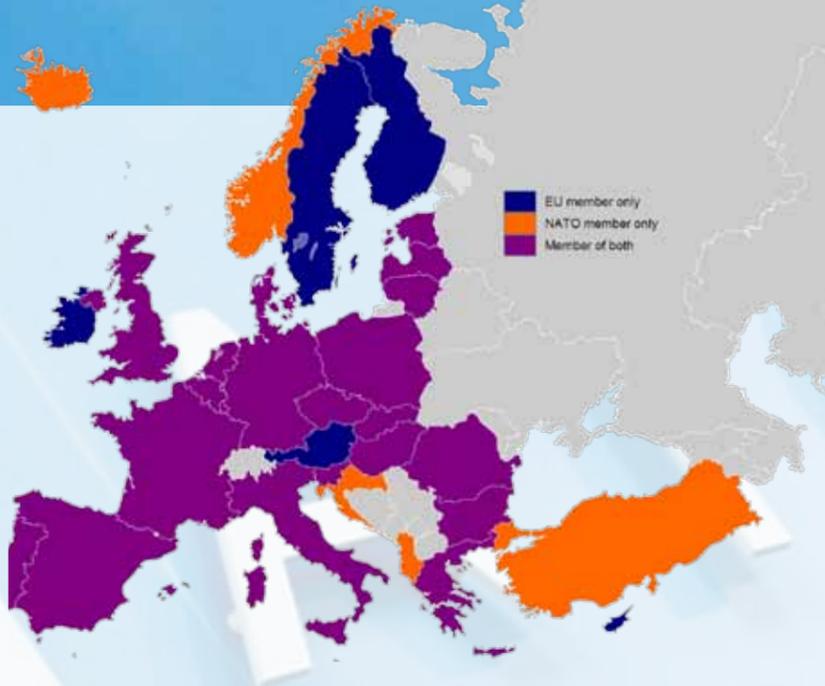
We can only welcome the emergence of various structures ready to join operations. It can be NATO, EU or a compact regional coalition. It is important to harmonize our capabilities for joint work in which it is not important who the boss is.

Julianne Smith linked future NATO efficiency to the possibility to combine the emerging trend to reduce defense appropriations with alliance capabilities.

Today we are ready for everything, but what will happen in 2020-2025? Shall we have enough resources? We do not have an answer so far. The political and financial decisions which we shall adopt in the coming five years will determine NATO future.

In his turn, Karlis Neretnieks said that while the US defense strategy mostly targets Asian countries EU countries will have to care about their security themselves. That will inevitably keep defense appropriations at not less than two percent of the GDP and promote further integration into a common European defense system.

It is noteworthy that addressing the Riga conference Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks called on NATO allies to pay more attention to low-cost "smart defense" and the development of regional defense schemes that will engage northern countries and Poland, as well as Sweden and Finland which are not NATO members.



### POST SCRIPTUM SUCCESS OF EUROPEAN RUSSIANS – SOFT POWER FOR RUSSIA

In the middle of October the Latvian TransAtlantic Organization (LATO) held a meeting in Riga with Vice President of the US Atlantic Council Damon Wilson to discuss the impact of upcoming presidential election in the United States on the European policy of NATO.

The high representative of the TransAtlantic movement said under any president the United States will work on the European track and despite wide-spread perceptions will remain interested in a strong and influential European Union. He confirmed that even with certain disagreements with the Russian leadership the Russian Federation remains a strategic priority for the United States and NATO.

Speaking on the Latvian role in the European policy of NATO Wilson called on the Latvians to frequently remind of themselves and display more initiative in projects related to Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, and Belarus for which the Latvian experience may be an example.

Asked about a possible Latvian role in NATO policy on the Russian avenue the vice president of the Atlantic Council said Latvia knows Russia and the Russians better than they do it in Brussels or Washington. Therefore, in case of an active participation in discussions of strategic issues and vital political matters Latvia can play a major role by contributing to the perception and formation of the western policy towards Russia. Latvian researchers and politicians can contribute to the formation of a new NATO policy on the avenue. At the same time the influence of

business, friendly, and cultural relations with Russia at the level of officials, communities, organizations and individuals should not be forgotten. All of it shall be considered as soft power influence on Russia. An important issue is the possibility for Russian-speakers in Latvia to be within the EU and NATO framework. The successful existence of European Russians is a major argument for Russia.

### POST POST SCRIPTUM THERE IS DEFINITELY NO THREAT FROM RUSSIA!

In late October Latvian Ambassador to NATO Maris Riekstinsh said in an interview with the Diena newspaper that Latvian housewives can calmly do their job as there is definitely no threat coming from Russia. However Russia wants to keep the myth that NATO fighters in the Latvian sky are something abnormal. It is time to recognize it is also the sky of NATO.

The ambassador to NATO and former foreign minister is convinced the Baltic airspace patrolling mission is a good example of "smart defense". "We do not spend major funds to buy several aircraft. We free the funds and use them in common interests. For example, we participate in the mission in Afghanistan while aircraft of other countries help us control the airspace of NATO. One of the things people do not like to admit is that our airspace is also NATO airspace," Riekstinsh said.

Igor VATOLIN,  
for Amber Bridge



# РУССКИЕ САМОЦВЕТЫ

## RUSSKIYE SAMOTSVETY



Россия, 195112, Санкт-Петербург, пл. Карла Фаберже, д. 8, с 10.00 до 21.00 (ежедневно)  
 тел.: (812) 528-01-03, (812) 528-03-72, факс (812) 528-09-18, e-mail: office@russam.ru  
 www.russam.ru Интернет-магазин: www.russammarket.ru