



Baltic States' Intelligence Services Report Increased Threat from Russia

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An increasing and more aggressive level of Russian espionage was noted in the latest annual assessments by the counter-intelligence services of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Particular attention should be devoted to the activity of Russia's internal security service (FSB) in its reconnaissance of border areas and in coordination with Belorussian intelligence services. Given the military potential of Russia and Belarus, these reports require preparation for a much broader spectrum of hybrid warfare scenarios in the region. In response, the Baltic States, in addition to a NATO forward presence and all members reaching the level of 2% of their GDP spent on the military, need to invest far more resources in their intelligence services, border protection, cybersecurity and countering Russian propaganda.

Common Estimates of the Russian Threat. Russia's aggression in Ukraine and provocative military activities towards NATO has influenced threat perceptions among the Baltic States. The Baltics' intelligence and counter-intelligence agencies line up in their estimates of the Russian strategy of domination of the post-Soviet area and rebuilding its global power status, mainly by undermining the cohesion of NATO and the EU. Since 2014, the public reports by the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian counter-intelligence services stress there has been intensified espionage by Russia towards all three Baltic States. In addition to traditional espionage, Russia's military intelligence (GRU) and civilian counterpart (SVR) are trying to manipulate the Baltic States' internal politics and broaden their spy networks there. Apparently, one new element in these reports is increased activity by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). The main aim of these agencies' activities is to stir up Russian-speaking minorities, i.e., mainly ethnic Russians, but also Belarusians and Ukrainians. In Lithuania, this group comprises 8% of the population (Russians total 5%), in Estonia, it is around 30% (25%), and in Latvia, it is around 35% (25.8%). Russia controls a number of minority organisations and employs propaganda based on its concept of a "Russian world" and exploitation of alleged human rights abuses in the Baltic States. In the Baltics' assessments, this approach by Russia creates dangerous pretexts for potential interventions into their states' internal affairs. This is an important change in the Baltics' threat perceptions compared to assessments from before 2014, when they were much more concerned about Russian economic pressure, especially in the energy sector.

Lithuanian Estimates. Reports by the country's counter-intelligence service (*Valstybės saugumo departamentas*, or VSD) notes the SVR's focus on political and economic issues and GRU's focus on military planning and infrastructure in Lithuania. It is estimated that a third of Russia's embassy personnel in Vilnius are intelligence officers. GRU is especially interested in NATO Baltic Air Policing (and its base in Šiauliai), exercises, and the locations of new Alliance units in Lithuania, as well as in the country's reactivated military conscription system. At the same time, VSD stresses the FSB's growing role and the use of blackmail to recruit informants among Lithuanians visiting Russia. FSB is particularly interested in the organisation and personnel of the Lithuanian Border Guard, and current investigations by VSD are confirming spy networks run by the FSB unit in Kaliningrad. Lithuanian VSD and military intelligence are also indicating tight coordination of operations by Russian and Belorussian special services. In 2014, Belorussia's GRU was highly effective in recruiting informants among Lithuania's military. The civilian intelligence service of Belarus (KGB) is also analysing Lithuania's border areas but is much more concentrated on efforts against the Belarusian émigré opposition in Lithuania. VSD also points to propaganda and the use of "historical policy" by Russia, using websites such as Sputnik and Baltnews and the Format A3 journalist club. Russia is also seeking more contacts among Poles, which

are the biggest ethnic minority in Lithuania (numbering about 6% of the population). In a joint assessment by both Lithuanian secret services, Russia wants to preserve its advantage in certain military aspects in the Baltic region to increase the effect of isolation in case of a conflict. Lithuanian military intelligence also estimates that Russian armed forces are capable of mobilising units from its Western Military District (MD) for use against the Baltic States in 24–48 hours, i.e., faster than the first decisions and reactions of NATO in such a case.

Latvian Estimates. Reports by the country's counter-intelligence service (Drošības Policija, DP) for 2014–2015 indicate unflagging espionage by SVR and GRU. Their goals are to influence public opinion and decision-making in Latvia and to weaken its position in the EU. The report by DP does not elaborate on this thread but claims that during Latvia's presidency of the Council of the EU in 2015 it noticed covert attempts to discredit the country. Latvian counter-intelligence also stresses the increase in activities by FSB, focused on recruiting informants among citizens of Latvia. With at least as much intensity is Russia's activities towards the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia and particularly its younger generation. The Russian Cooperation Agency has special programmes for young people, including visits and stipends for higher-level Russian schools. Despite less funding for pro-Russia organisations in 2015, no weakening in the level of propaganda in cyberspace was observed. Russia uses various Russian-language media in Latvia to create a favourable message (*Sputnik*, *Baltnews.lv*, *imhoclub.lv*, *zarya.lv*, *baltijalv.lv*). In addition, organisations and parties representing the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia have a strong position. In the last parliamentary elections in 2014, Harmony Centre (*Saskaņas Centrs*), was supported by 23% of voters.

Estonian Estimates. The report by Estonia's security service (*Kaitsepolitseiamet*, or *KAPO*) for 2015 also indicates the involvement of the Russian embassy in financing and managing Russian-speaking minority organisations. These activities are strengthened by information operations conducted by Russian television, the Voice of Russia (radio), *Sputnik* online and *Baltiysk Mir* magazine. Additionally, the Russian Historical Society and World Without Nazism are used to create propaganda and falsification of history while also aiming to discredit Estonia in the domestic and international arenas. Moreover, *KAPO* warns of increased FSB activity in cyberspace and in targeting Estonian citizens visiting Russia. The report discusses the discovery in 2015–2016 of the dealings with FSB of three Russian citizens of Estonia with a criminal past. In 2015, one of them was exchanged for *KAPO* officer *Eston Kohvera*, who had been abducted and "convicted" in a show trial in Russia.

Estonian military intelligence (*Teabeamet*) warns that Russia wrongly interprets the intentions of NATO and the EU as hostile, which could result in disproportionate reactions, including military means against Russia's neighbours. Even if Estonia is not a military priority for Russia, threats against Estonia might follow from escalations of a crisis in another region, such as the Ukraine or in the Arctic. The Estonian estimates of Russia's military potential highlight a lack of balance in its capabilities, including a lack of assets for a long-term conflict, poor training among draftees, and delays in the modernisation of armament. According to *Teabeamet*, the weakness of Russia's conventional forces explains its preference for hybrid warfare and deterrence with tactical nuclear arms. Russia's forces in its Western MD are currently able to mobilise and use 15 augmented battalions (or five mobile brigades), which have professional soldiers and the latest armaments. These forces might be reinforced by its special forces, airborne forces and 1st Tank Army from the Central MD.

Conclusions. The analyses by the Baltic States' special services clearly indicate that Russian intelligence activities in this region are of a larger scale and more aggressive than observed in other European countries. The involvement of the FSB in scouting the border (so-called "shallow intelligence") and its own espionage networks in the Baltics draws attention because it had been carried out in the past almost exclusively by SVR and GRU. This may reflect not only the growing role of FSB in Russia but also the agency's ambition to expand its presence to neighbouring countries, including those belonging to NATO. The close coordination of activities and tasks among the intelligence services of Russia and Belarus can attest to the importance attributed to the recognition of infrastructure around the Suwalki Gap. Although the Baltic States assess a conflict with Russia as unlikely, they do not exclude this possibility. Also, from a military point of view, the forces of Belarus should be considered subordinate to the command and operational control of Russia's armed forces. Considering the scale and resources of the Russian propaganda operations, it must be assumed that the tensions regarding the Russian-speaking minority will remain the main instrument of pressure on the Baltic States. Despite the different situation of these minorities in Ukraine and in the Baltic countries, Russia can use these minorities as an excuse or basis for aggression. For all of the Baltic States this means the necessity to adapt to many different hybrid warfare scenarios. Following the conclusions of the NATO Summit in Warsaw, a forward presence of three multinational NATO battalion battle groups (each with about 1,000 troops) from the beginning of 2017 in the Baltic States might deter Russia from some of these scenarios and from conventional aggression. In addition to the need for every NATO state to reach the level of 2% of GDP on military expenditures, the Baltic states must invest more resources in their special services, border protection, cybersecurity and combating Russian propaganda.