

# LATVIA'S SECURITY POLICY GOALS AND POSSIBILITIES

Dzintra Bungis

## 1. Introduction

The drive for independence from the Soviet Union and the restoration of the Republic of Latvia began in the late 1980s. According to the census of 1989, Latvians made up only 52 % of the population of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, as compared with 77 % in the independent Republic of Latvia just before World War II. Most Latvians felt, therefore, that without an independent state their existence as a nation in its traditional homeland was in grave danger. Their dream was to regain independence peacefully. Their Baltic neighbors – Estonians and Lithuanians – shared this dream. The Balts wanted to avoid an open conflict with the Soviet Union since that would have resulted in the decimation – possibly the annihilation – of their nations and dashed all chances of reestablishing their own independent and democratic states. Understandably, security concerns shaped the policies and actions of the seekers of independence. Their goals were lofty, but the chances of achieving them were slim. Even less probable was the regaining of independence without numerous casualties and destruction of property. Yet, as if by a miracle, the Balts succeeded: in August 1991 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regained their independence.

Almost a decade later, security – albeit in a broader sense – remains a major factor in determining Latvia's policies and actions. After half a century of foreign rule and alien ideologies, Latvians want to do their utmost to preserve their country's independence and safeguard its democratic institutions. They believe that the best way to accomplish this is through unambiguous affiliation with the Western democracies and their most influential and authoritative organizations: the EU and the NATO. The main reasons for wanting to belong to the EU and NATO are well known and have not changed since Latvia regained its independence; in the order of perceived importance, they are:

security;

affirmation that they have "returned to Europe";

economic and other benefits. Security remains the paramount reason. Latvia seeks membership of the EU mainly on account of the "soft security" that the Union offers.

Concomitantly, Latvia's pursuit of NATO membership stems primarily from the Alliance's ability to provide its members with "hard security". Latvia welcomes the plans for a European military force under the framework of the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and wants to contribute to its development. Yet Latvia remains firmly convinced that the European initiatives will neither diminish the need for NATO, nor render superfluous the participation of the United States in European security affairs. As Latvia's Minister of Defense, Girts Kristovskis, summed up, "more Europe does not mean less America". Keeping in mind its security aspirations, Latvia intends to finish quickly the negotiations for EU membership, complete the tasks and recommendations deriving from NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) so as to qualify in the year 2002 for an invitation to start the accession process; and participate actively in the endeavors of the US-Baltic Charter, as well as other international and regional organizations and cooperative frameworks.

Before turning to Latvia's security goals and the possibilities for attaining them, this study will take a brief look at a few key events in the early 1990s that have affected the country's quest for security, and the development of the armed forces. A review of Latvia's Security Concept will follow, though the Concept will serve here as a point of reference, not a measuring stick of achievements and shortcomings. In view of their relevance to security, Latvia's relations with other countries – especially the United States of America and the

Russian Federation – and international organizations – particularly the EU and NATO – will also be considered. From this discussion some prospects for the future will be delineated.

## 2. An Enduring Concern with Security

On 4 May 1990 the newly elected legislature of the Latvian SSR announced the start of a transition period intended to culminate in the restoration of the Republic of Latvia that had been proclaimed in 1918. The deputies also decided that henceforth their country be known as Latvia – or more formally, the Republic of Latvia. It could be argued that this decision put an end to the Latvian SSR, which had come into being in 1940 after Latvia had been invaded by the Red Army and incorporated into the USSR. The legislatures of the Lithuanian SSR and the Estonian SSR had already endorsed a similar course in March 1990. The Baltic strategy for independence was based on the notion of legal continuity. Since the division of Europe between Josef Stalin's Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler's Germany – as stipulated in the pact and the appended secret protocols that their foreign ministers, Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop, signed in 1939 – as well as the subsequent military occupation and forcible incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR were never recognized as legal by the Western democracies – Washington enunciated this policy in summer 1940 – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had never ceased to exist de jure despite the 51 years of foreign occupation. The Balts argued that the notion of legal continuity

- invalidated the idea of secession – first one has to join legally an association before one can secede from it – from the USSR, a step theoretically possible under the Soviet Constitution;
- rebutted any claims by Soviet hardliners that the Balts were fomenting sedition;
- removed the pretext for and reduced the likelihood of violence and bloodshed;
- offered the Soviet government under Mikhail Gorbachev a unique opportunity to uphold historic justice; and
- provided a peaceful solution to their quest for independence.

Though the Balts believed their arguments to be persuasive and legally sound, they were not so naive as to think that they had convinced Moscow to accept their views, reject the use of force and settle the remaining differences at the conference table. They knew that the path that they had chosen was perilous. They did not have to be told of the destructive potential of the OMON units of the Ministry of the Interior or of the massive presence of the Soviet military on their territory. Just as could have been expected, Moscow was furious over the Baltic strivings for freedom. Yet, while resorting to economic sanctions, show of force and sporadic armed attacks against the civilian populations in Lithuania and Latvia, Moscow did not launch an all-out offensive against all three Baltics.

Since Moscow's longer-term plans were unclear, the fear of war was palpable in the Baltic capitals. And yet, the Balts concentrated on transforming the Soviet Socialist Republics, where they had been living, into sovereign states of the future. They expected a protracted struggle with Moscow. But independence came with unexpected speed and ease. In August 1991, as the Soviet leadership was dealing with an unsuccessful coup, the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian parliaments decided to use this opportunity to fully reassert their independence. Within a week, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were recognized as independent states by the European Communities as well as the Russian Federation, and within a month -by the USSR and most Western democracies.

Despite their international recognition as independent states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were not fully free in autumn 1991: a strong Soviet military presence (estimated at around 120.000 men, of whom about half were stationed in Latvia) remained in their territories. After the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, these troops came under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. Although Russia was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of the Baltic States in August 1991, its leaders wanted the troops to stay in the Baltics indefinitely. They insisted that the Russian armed forces were needed to guarantee the safety of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Slavs if the conditions in the Baltic States became comparable to those in Yugoslavia. Obviously Moscow was resorting to rhetoric and casting aspersions, since there was no sign of a brewing ethnic conflict in the Baltics; what is more, none has erupted in the subsequent years. The negotiations were tough. In the end, the perseverance of Baltic negotiators and pressure from the West, particularly from Washington, persuaded Moscow to pull out its soldiers and close the military facilities in Lithuania in August 1993, and in Estonia and Latvia in August 1994.

A special agreement was negotiated between Latvia and Russia over the anti-missile radar station in Skrunda, since Russia claimed it needed a replacement and that it would take several years to build one in Baranovichi, Belarus. Thus, the Skrunda station was operated by Russian specialists until 31 August 1998 when it was shut down. The deadline for its dismantling was 29 February 2000, but the dismantling was finished already in October 1999. This entire process was closely monitored by OSCE and Latvian specialists. The withdrawal of

most of the Russian troops from Latvia in 1994 and the departure of the last Russian specialists and soldiers in 1999 attracted little public notice from the Latvians. Yet, psychologically, these events left their mark. They made the Latvians feel that finally they are in charge of their land and boosted their determination to succeed in the myriad tasks of state-building.

### **3. Latvia's Security Policy**

#### **3.1 Background**

The basic document on security and defense is the Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia. It first was adopted in 1995. A revised version, still in effect in spring 2000, was endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers on 6 May 1999. A composite document on Latvia's Security and Defense Policy dates from 15 July 1999. In recent years the Ministry of Defense has initiated more detailed analyses of some of the fundamental themes in the Concept, reviewed existing treatises and laws, suggested amendments, and – where necessary – drafted new documents and proposed new laws. Thus, a State Concept on Defense was drafted in 1999 and endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers on 29 June 1999. Activity in this regard has expanded under the leadership of Girts Kristovskis as Minister of Defense. Kristovskis himself is the author of several analyses, including National Security in the Context of Latvia's Parliamentary Democracy that was published in 1999 and the very comprehensive Report of the Minister of Defense to the Saeima (Parliament of Latvia) on the State Defense Policy and Development of the Armed Forces in 2000 which appeared in spring 2000. Thus, there is no paucity of official treatises on defense and security issues.

The Security Concept strives to be comprehensive, specific and brief – aims that are difficult if not impossible to reconcile. It is divided into five sections of unequal length:

General principles;

Realization of the state security policy;

Threats;

Reduction and prevention of threats; and

Conclusion. Though the overall organization of the Concept is straightforward, the points presented in each section do not always form an internally coherent unit. The most important points of the Concept are reiterated more clearly in the briefer and more up-to-date Latvia's Security and Defense Policy. In order not to get bogged down in a textual analysis of the Security Concept or the Security and Defense Policy, the focus here will be on the main tenets which are identical in both documents.

#### **3.2 The Principal Tenets**

Though neither the Security Concept nor the Security and Defense Policy formally define security, the term is used in the traditional and very broad sense to mean freedom from danger. Both documents state that Latvia's security derives from the safety of fundamental values and interests – independence of the state, territorial integrity, national and linguistic identity, a democratic system as defined in the constitution, market economy and human rights – as well as from the safeguarding of the interests of the people of Latvia – what these interests are is not explained. In effect, the points above are also Latvia's security goals. According to the Concept, Latvia's history shows that its security is linked to its geopolitical situation, economic development, relations with other countries, as well as the cultural potential of the people, the capacity of the civilian defense system and the ecological situation. Latvia's security is to be achieved through:

a stable domestic political, social and economic situation;  
the development of effective military structures;  
the creation of a civil defense network and systems to overcome threats to the state;  
the strengthening of democracy and the state's legal system;  
observance of international obligations and norms of justice; and  
integration into the Euroatlantic political, economic, security and defense organizations,  
particularly the EU and NATO. The Security Concept also stipulates that "while developing  
its security, Latvia does not threaten the security of another state".

The basic threats to Latvia's security are:

attempts to subvert the independence of the state, its constitutionally defined democratic  
system;  
efforts to make Latvia dependent – politically, economically, or otherwise – on another state;  
delays in Latvia's Euroatlantic integration;  
obstruction of societal integration of Latvia's multiethnic population; and  
obstacles to Latvia's economic and social development and to the growth of its defense  
capacity. It is recognized that danger can come simultaneously from many sources, both  
external and internal, which, in turn, can interact and thus exacerbate the overall situation.  
The basic premise is that threats stemming from external and/or internal factors can be  
prevented, diminished and eliminated; this can be done only through coordinated,  
simultaneous and concerted action, involving all options and aimed at all aspects of the  
menace. Domestically this means full utilization of the defense system and other domestic  
capacities. At the supranational level, there are mechanisms available to Latvia largely as a  
result of its affiliation with international organizations.

Following the widely accepted form of such documents, the Concept lists the threats without  
pointing to their origin. Replying to a journalist's question whether Russia could be  
considered as a potential enemy by Latvia's armed forces, Commander-in-Chief Raimonds  
Graube provided the politically correct answer, saying that Latvia neither seeks an enemy, nor  
suggests which country might be a potential enemy; instead, Latvia concentrates on  
improving its ability to deal with possible threats. "Our focus is on educating our personnel".  
The document stresses that Latvia's external security can best be ensured through its  
integration into the European and transatlantic political, economic, security and defense  
structures – most notably the EU and NATO, the latter being depicted as "the most reliable  
security and defense organization in Europe" – and the maintenance of good relations with all  
its neighbors, including Russia and Belarus. Wide-ranging and in-depth cooperation among  
the Baltic States is a cornerstone of this process, especially since Latvia's security policy is  
rooted in the belief that any threat to one of the Baltic State is a threat to all three.

#### **4. The Development of the Defense Forces**

Traditionally, the backbone of any country's security and defense has been its armed forces.  
This is also the case of Latvia. Being a small country with very limited resources, Latvia  
wants to make the best possible use of all its resources and advocates the concept of "total  
defense," as practiced by the Scandinavian countries.

The development of Latvia's security and defense capacities gained momentum during the  
second half of the 1990s. The lengthy stay of Moscow's troops constrained Latvia's state-  
building especially in the years from 1991 to 1994, a time of fundamental transformations.

##### **Latvia's Defense Forces in 1999-2000**

All military forces

Leader

Size

Remarks

Latvia's National Armed Forces  
(Latvijas nacionālās bruņotās spēki)

Commander-in-Chief:

Col. Raimonds Graube

Chief of Staff:

Col. Gundars Abols

Total future strength planned:

50,000

in active service

5,700

in reserves

16,300

Land Forces

(Sauzemes spēki)

Commander-in-Chief:

Col. Raimonds Graube

Chief of Staff:

Col. Gundars Abols

about 1,500 officers, NCOs and professional soldiers

about 2,000 conscripts are trained each year -

service: 12 months;

services in reserves:

until the age of 55

Home Guard

(Zemessardze)

Commander:

Lt. Col. Janis Konanovs

about 14,500 volunteers

who serve part-time

Naval Forces

(Jūras spēki)

Commander:

Capt. (N) Ilmars Lesinskis

1,363 (incl. 166 civilians)

Air Forces

(Gaisa spēki)

Acting Commander:

Lt. Col. Vitalijs Viesins

210 plus 53 civilians

Sources: Girts Kristovskis, Aizsardzības ministra ziņojums Saeimai par valsts aizsardzības politiku un Nacionālo bruņoto spēku attīstību 2000. gada, Rīga: Defense Ministry of the

Republic of Latvia, 2000, pp. 8-23; NATO's Nations and Partners for Peace, Special Issue 1999: Getting Ready for NATO: the Baltic States, pp. 58-60.

Nearly everything had to be created anew, since the legal framework, practices and institutions underpinning a Soviet republic were anomalous for a parliamentary democracy. In several areas, however, it was impossible or seemed imprudent to proceed at full speed on account of the presence of foreign troops. Such problems were apparent in the development of defense and security capacities. Instead of tackling first things first according to a long-range plan, the focus was more on the short term. There was hesitation in starting major reforms, creating new institutions and adopting essential laws, policies and concepts. Hence, the piecemeal and sporadic nature of development of Latvia's defense forces – their institutional framework, infrastructure, as well as the civilian oversight and advisory bodies appropriate in a democracy. To illustrate, the Home Guard came into being in 1991, the National Defense Academy in 1992, but the National Armed Forces were established in 1994. Another example: a National Defense Council existed already in 1991, i.e. before any laws or theoretical documents on defense and security had been passed; in autumn 1993 it was replaced by the National Security Council. Thus, in order to achieve an integrated whole, revisions of the organizational framework of the existing entities had to be undertaken and lines of responsibility and subordination had to be redrawn.

These growing pains were largely overcome in the late 1990s. Progress became visible already in the mid-1990s. In September 1994, the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion (BALTBAT) was launched with the encouragement of NATO and the practical support of eight European countries and the USA. The purpose of the BALTBAT is to contribute to international peacekeeping efforts. At NATO's invitation, BALTBAT soldiers have served successfully in Denmark's unit of the SFOR in Bosnia and the KFOR in Kosovo. Denmark led the organization of the battalion, which is based in Riga. It consists of about 640 soldiers. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania each provide a third of the personnel and share in the command structure. Strengthening and reorganization of the BALTBAT began in the late 1990s so as to make it a battle-ready infantry battalion. At the same time, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been gradually assuming full responsibility and costs of the BALTBAT and each has been developing its own professional battalion: ESTBAT, LATBAT and LITBAT.

The good response from all participants to the BALTBAT led to the formation of the Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON), based in Tallinn, in 1997; the founding of the Baltic Defense College in Tartu, Estonia, on 16 August 1999; and the establishment of the Baltic Regional Airspace Surveillance Network (BALTNET) in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 2000. A Baltic naval training center is being planned in the Latvian port city of Liepaja. All these institutions would not have been possible without the generous European and North American guidance and aid. The Baltic Security Assistance (BALTSEA) was created in 1997 to coordinate assistance in the Baltics and act as a political forum. It consists of representatives of defense and foreign ministries and general staffs of the Baltic States, the Nordic countries, Belgium, Canada, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and the United States.

While developing its own armed forces, Latvia has been actively involved in endeavors that transcend its borders. Riga firmly believes that Latvia's security is greatly enhanced through cooperation with other countries, organizations, and participation in international maneuvers and peace-keeping missions. The latter also provide an opportunity for the Latvian soldiers to work together with soldiers from different lands so as to achieve common goals; raise their professional skills; and

demonstrate that they are both willing and able to do their share for European security.

Latvia aims to have a modern, well-trained, rapid-reaction defense force of 50,000 that can interact in Estonia and Lithuania and that is interoperable with NATO. Concomitantly Latvia wants to institute "total defense". For a nation of 2.42 million, this would not be a small defense capability. Nonetheless, some outside observers question Latvia's defensibility and

claim that the Baltic States are indefensible. Riga takes serious note of these doubts. The prevalent view in the Latvian security circles is that no state is totally defensible. Latvia must resist an aggressor effectively. Consequently, it must rely on its will to defend itself and on the quality of its forces to do this well. At the least, this would enable the Latvian government to seek international political and military support. Moreover, a credible deterrent – Latvia's forces with backup from NATO forces when necessary – would dissuade a potential aggressor from even contemplating an attack and thus make the whole region more secure.

Owing to the numerous priorities of state-building and the scarcity of resources, the defense budget has been very small. This, of course, means that the weapons, equipment and infrastructure leave much to be desired. In 1998 Latvia's defense spending amounted to only 0.65 % of GDP. Since then the budgetary allocation for defense purposes has grown. In 2000, 43.05 million lati (LVL) or about 73 million USD are to be spent for defense; this sum is expected to constitute about 1.04 % of GDP. According to law, by the year 2003, the defense allocation will be 2 % of GDP which is the amount recommended by NATO to countries aspiring for membership.

Money is certainly a crucial factor. But even more important is a clear vision of what needs to be done and how to do it. Hence, the Defense Ministry's emphasis on planning – a development plan for the next 12 years was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers in December 1999 and a four-year plan was being completed in spring 2000 – and efficient management of the available personnel and materiel. Defense Minister Kristovskis is also focusing, as he likes to put it, on the soldier. Thus, steps are being taken to improve the training and education of the military, provide the soldiers and officers with solid career opportunities, improve their living conditions and raise their remuneration. About 25 % of the recruits are also taught Latvian, since they come from areas where Russian is the principal language of communication rather than Latvian. The Defense Ministry is also implementing a public relations strategy to publicize what the military is all about and to raise its prestige. All this should foster a feeling of solidarity between the civilian population and the soldiers and create a solid foundation for "total defense."

## **5. A Stable Political, Economic and Social Environment**

In the nine years of regained independence, Latvia has become a lively parliamentary democracy. While the average life span of a government has been about one year and all elections have brought changes in the composition of the Saeima, the major policy priorities of the state and the moderate-right political orientation of both the government and the parliament have remained constant. In its 1997 Opinions of the candidate countries' preparedness for membership of the EU, the European Commission described the Baltic States as showing "the characteristics of a democracy, with stable institutions guaranteeing the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities." Having created a functioning market economy, Latvia was invited in December 1999 to begin accession negotiations for EU membership – an unequivocal recognition of Latvia's political and economic achievements.

Nonetheless, Latvia has not yet attained the economic prosperity and the cohesive, integrated society that have been its aims. Though the country's macroeconomic indicators show steady, if uneven, progress and seem to prove that the country has fully recovered from the deep recession that accompanied the transformation of the communist command-style economy to a free market economy, the quality of life of much of the population is low. Latvia still ranks among the poorer candidates for EU membership. In terms of GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standard, Estonia had attained 36 % of the EU members' average; Lithuania – 31 %;

and Latvia – only 27 %. All the other candidate countries except Romania with 27 % and Bulgaria with 23 % ranked higher.

Furthermore, there is plenty of crime and corruption. The people are acutely aware of these problems, their impact on society and the economy, as well as the difficulty of preventing and combating crime. An anti-corruption program has been instituted but corruption cannot be eradicated overnight. More headway has been made in the fight against organized crime. Several leaders of criminal organizations have been brought to justice. Concomitantly, the legal system and the law enforcement institutions are being strengthened. Both in the fight against crime and corruption, Latvia is utilizing the expertise and means of cooperation generously offered by the countries with which it has diplomatic relations, and by the CBSS and the EU. These joint efforts to bolster the rule of law are bringing progress.

Moreover, Latvia's economy appears to be acquiring robustness. It managed to survive the ripple effects of the Russian financial crisis of August 1998 with modest growth of the economy both in 1998 and 1999. This can be attributed in particular to the government's prompt recourse to damage-control mechanisms and the Westward orientation of Latvia's economy: in 1999 about 63 % of Latvia's exports went to EU countries and about 55 % of its imports came from EU countries.

The building of an integrated, loyal and cohesive society is also bearing fruit, albeit slowly. The greatest challenge in this regard has come from the so-called Russian-speakers on account of their ethnic and cultural differences, and – in many cases – their Soviet view of history. An additional complicating factor stems from Moscow's encouragement of the Russian-speakers to address their complaints to Moscow rather than to Riga. This practice tends to perpetuate the image of Russia's preeminence over the former Soviet republics and slow down the integration of the Russian-speakers in Latvia.

The Russian-speakers' share of Latvia's population in 1989 was 42 %, but ten years later – about 37 %. In the early 1990s thousands of Russian-speakers returned to their homelands; many of them had been affiliated with the Soviet military-industrial complex. Over one half of those who stayed are stateless. The EU and the OSCE have been encouraging the naturalization of non-citizens because both organizations are convinced that a country's democratic foundations are secured by an integrated population of whom the majority are citizens. The two organizations also urged Latvia to liberalize the citizenship law of 1994. Since the adoption of the amended law in 1998, there has been a significant rise in the naturalization of the Russian-speaking population, particularly among the ethnic Russians, of whom 42 % were citizens of Latvia on 1 January 2000; the respective figures for Belarusians and Ukrainians were only 23,04 % and 9,98 %. By 1999, 23.859 persons had been naturalized, of whom one half were naturalized in 1999. But by October 1999 applications for citizenship for only 282 children born in Latvia had been submitted by their stateless parents. There are about 20.000 children who could gain citizenship in this way. At this pace it would take several decades for all of Latvia's stateless residents to become citizens. Deeply convinced of the importance of citizenship both for the individual and the state, President Vaira Vike-Freiberga has on several occasions invited the stateless to opt for Latvia, to learn the Latvian language and become citizens.

On 1 January 2000 about 24 % of Latvia's population were stateless. Public opinion polls show that most of them would like to become citizens of Latvia. Their meager or non-existent knowledge of the Latvian language has been the main obstacle. The Latvian authorities have done much to provide and improve Latvian-language instruction to non-Latvians (both schoolchildren and adults). Since these projects involve very large segments of the population and the country's resources were inadequate to fund this long-term endeavor, Latvia managed to obtain financial assistance and expert advice from European and North American organizations and governments. The results have been very positive.



A significant stride forward was the adoption by the government of a comprehensive Social Integration Concept. Although it is too soon to assess its impact, what is evident is that the time taken to draft, discuss, and revise the document sensitized Latvia's multi-ethnic population to the complexity of the issues involved and the importance of goodwill and generosity in order to arrive at viable solutions. All this reveals an attitudinal evolution among the people of Latvia in the past decade. Instead of living only in the past, dwelling on the injustices that they suffered under foreign occupation or longing for "the good old days" of Soviet rule, people have come to understand that they can do more for themselves and the country where they reside by living in the present and making plans for the future. This attests to adaptation. Still to be attained is a sense of belonging, a voluntary allegiance to the land and its people. Clearly, all this will take time.

## **6. Foreign Relations and Euroatlantic Integration from a Security Perspective**

Latvia's security is inextricably linked to its geopolitical situation and its bilateral and multilateral relations. Since regaining its independence, Latvia has established diplomatic relations with over 100 countries throughout the world. These relations can be described in general as very good. The only country with which Latvia's relations have been problematic is Russia. In a nutshell, the difficulties stem from Moscow's perception of Latvia as a runaway child that must be returned willy-nilly to Mother Russia's fold. In contrast, Latvia sees itself simply as an independent state wanting to have good-neighborly relations with all its neighbors. In this spirit, Latvia maintains fine relations with international organizations. It belongs to the United Nations, the OSCE, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Council of Europe and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). It is a candidate for membership of the EU and an aspirant to membership of NATO.

Latvia's wide-ranging foreign relations reflect a contemporary perception of security. Owing to incredible technological advances, the world has shrunk to a global village. Regardless of physical distance, isolation is nearly impossible, while inter-relatedness is a fact of life. Threats may originate next door or from the other side of the globe. Thus, security no longer depends upon an agreement between neighbors, but must be considered in a regional and global context. This was one reason why the Latvians turned down President Boris Yeltsin's proposal of 25 October 1997 that Russia guarantee unilaterally the security of their country. This is also an important reason why Latvia promoted the May 2000 joint appeal from the nine countries bidding for NATO membership for all of them to be invited in 2002 to start the membership process.

Latvia has cooperation accords on defense matters with 14 countries; contacts related to defense and security issues exist with 30 countries. Riga values highly these defense-related bilateral ties. Nonetheless, the sine qua non of Latvia's security is membership in the EU and NATO. It follows, therefore, that some of Latvia's most active relations are with members and aspiring members of the Alliance and the Union. The following brief review of Latvia's foreign relations will be limited to those countries and organizations that have the most impact on Latvia's security: the other two Baltic States, the Nordic countries, Germany, Russia and the United States, as well as the EU and NATO. Due to space limits, this section will not expand upon, for example, Latvia's flourishing relations with France, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland and the Czech Republic.

## 6.1 European Neighbors

Considering Europe's geostrategic architecture, the Baltic States form a single entity, hence the importance that Latvia has consistently accorded to maintaining close ties with Estonia and Lithuania and to emphasizing the commonality of the Baltic States rather than their differences. The three have worked together throughout the twentieth century but the nature of their cooperation has varied, depending on their own priorities and on external forces. Their longing for independence brought them together during World War I and accelerated their cooperation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. State-level cooperation between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania resumed after the respective legislatures adopted the declarations on the restoration of the 1918 republics. On 1 December 1990 the Baltic deputies met in Vilnius and founded the Baltic Assembly of parliamentarians. Subsequently, the Assembly has convened twice a year. Upon regaining independence in 1991, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania tended to assert themselves in the international arena as individual states. Yet throughout the years there has been fine cooperation in various realms, especially the military. Regular trilateral meetings of the presidents and ministers have facilitated the resolution of many issues, including the delimitation of state borders and the use of coastal waters. The border issues were settled between Estonia and Latvia in 1997 and between Latvia and Lithuania in 1999. Strain from competition for EU membership was evident in 1997, but that has dissipated. In the late 1990s the level of joint activity rose significantly. The three Baltic States realize that cooperation benefits not only themselves but enhances their image abroad as countries capable of integration into the European, Transatlantic and world communities.

Due to proximity and common political and economic interests, Latvia's closest partners are the other members of the CBSS: Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Russia. The founding of the CBSS in March 1992 in Copenhagen at the initiative of Germany and Denmark has promoted regional cooperation and allowed for regular discussions of common concerns among representatives of the Baltic rim countries. Though the CBSS does not focus on the hard-core security issues, its sessions are an excellent venue for unofficial discussions among statesmen on sundry issues, including security.

Latvia's relations with the Nordic Countries predate its regaining of independence and go back to December 1990 when the Danish government invited Baltic and Nordic foreign ministers to meet in Copenhagen on the occasion of the opening of a Baltic information office. A Latvian Information Office was opened in Copenhagen on 20 December 1990. Despite the very tense situation in the Baltic Soviet republics in January 1991, Baltic leaders were invited once again to Copenhagen – to attend, albeit unofficially, the session of the Nordic Council from 27 February to 1 March 1991. Denmark signed cooperation accords with Latvia on 18 March 1991. Despite Moscow's strong disapproval, the Nordics were not intimidated. Sweden's positive attitude toward Baltic independence was also remarkable, especially in view of its postwar neutrality policy. The pro-Baltic sentiments stemmed in part from a reassessment of Stockholm's relations with Moscow and a growing voter dissatisfaction in Sweden with the long-ruling Social Democrats, who had prided themselves on cordial relations with the USSR. This change was especially apparent in 1989 when Sweden opened a consulate in Riga – a decision made in the spirit of expanding relations with the Baltics, rather than a sign of recognition of the Soviet rule over them. A Latvian Information Office was opened in Stockholm on 15 January 1991. Current relations between Latvia and the Nordic countries are warm, reliable and multi-faceted. Since the restoration of Baltic independence, the Nordic countries have provided political support, generous monetary assistance and expertise in order to promote various reforms and the development of Latvia's military capacity.

Fine cooperation has existed since August 1991 between Germany and the Baltic States; the framework accords on bilateral cooperation date from August 1996. Germany has become the Baltic advocate in the EU. This policy, started under Chancellor Helmut Kohl and continued

under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, is valued highly by the Balts. But Germany's attitude of "neither isolating nor provoking Russia" worries the Balts. Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel met his Baltic counterparts in Riga in October 1997; his words helped dispel these concerns and solidify German-Baltic relations. Kinkel said that Germany is aware of its historically determined responsibility for the fate of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; as an advocate of the Baltic States, Germany feels duty-bound, both morally and politically, to act jointly with its Western partners to ease the way back to Europe for these nations. On 23 January 1998, while attending the CBSS summit in Riga, Chancellor Kohl apologized to the Baltic States for the past: "Germany has not forgotten the deal between Hitler and Stalin. This will never happen again." Regarding Baltic security, Germany continues to play an important role both in the training of personnel and supply of materiel.

## 6.2 Russia

Undoubtedly Russia is one of Latvia's European neighbors. But Russia's instability and unfriendly gestures toward Latvia have led many Latvians to place it in a category of its own – as a country where threats to Latvia's security could originate. This perception among the Latvians has been buttressed especially by the rhetoric coming from Russian leaders. For these reasons Russia will be considered here separately.

Geography, history, and culture have all played an important role in the relations between Latvia and Russia. Czar Peter the Great saw the Baltics as his "window to the West." This was sufficient reason for imperial Russia to bring them under its rule which ended during World War I. After two decades of independence, the Baltic States were subsumed by the USSR. They regained their independence half a century later. To this day many Russians consider Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as "nasha Pribaltika" (our Baltics). One of the more recent examples of such thinking comes from Russia's former General Procurator, Yury Skuratov, who asks: "Why do Russians not like Gorbachev? Because he betrayed us and allowed the USSR to disintegrate. On its way to independence Estonia could have easily become today's Chechnya. According to the USSR Constitution, Gorbachev should have used force against you. Danger for you, however, has not disappeared. It is sufficient to have 15-20 % aliens in the population to destabilize the situation, even to the point of armed conflict." Asked if the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was legal, Skuratov answers indirectly: "Estonia's joining the USSR in 1940 was formally legal. The fact that you left the USSR without observing the law could become fatal for you. Time is passing. Russia could once again become a superpower. Then the new division of the world will begin. And you can find forces both in Estonia and Russia who would claim that Estonia left Russia [sic.] illegally. In that sense you are living on a landmine." For the Balts, Skuratov's unusually frank and direct words are disquieting and serve to conjure up terrifying memories of World War II and reminders of the Cold War. Moreover, such rhetoric encourages the Balts to pursue with even greater energy their path to NATO and the EU.

According to its foreign policy guidelines on the Baltic States, Russia assumes unilaterally the responsibility to defend the rights of the Russian-speakers residing there. This has taken the form of public complaints in the media and in international forums over perceived violations of their rights. In addition, the complaints are frequently followed up by loud condemnations – occasionally retaliation – of the alleged abuses. In this connection, the Russian Duma has been preparing a bill on economic sanctions against Latvia; in spring 2000 the bill was awaiting adoption. Although, according to the evaluations of the EU, the OSCE, and other international organizations, there are no systematic violations of human rights or the rights of minorities in Latvia, both the Duma and the Russian government have continued to make

unsubstantiated claims to the contrary. Thus, after the OCSE and the EU had expressed satisfaction over the amended language law passed by the Saeima, Moscow still claimed that the law was discriminatory and even went so far as to recommend to the EU in December 1999 to reconsider the invitation to Latvia to start accession negotiations. The EU did not heed Russia's advice. Such actions from Moscow have led Riga to believe that Moscow is using the Russian-speakers as a tool to achieve its own domestic and foreign policy aims. More recently, after Latvia had sentenced two former Soviet veterans of World War II, Vasily Kononov and Mikhail Farbtukh, to jail for having committed crimes against humanity, some Russians protested at the Latvian Embassy in Moscow and attempted to damage the building. The Russian leaders were so angry that they accused Latvia's judicial system of using a double standard, of exonerating Nazis while persecuting those who fought against them during World War II. Latvia's President Vike-Freiberga rejected these charges. She told the BBC in April 2000 that the recent aggressive declarations from Russia hark back to the Cold War and expressed concern that these might be a warning that Russia could use force to take over the Baltic States. She stressed that any attack on Latvia will be an attack on the European Community and that "By implication it will be an attack on the NATO which, after all, supports so far, in principle, the NATO enlargement in this region of the world". These remarks prompted vitriolic responses in Moscow, including accusations of "whipping up military hysteria", using "crude and unfriendly rhetoric against Russia to substantiate NATO membership for Latvia", and continued violations of ethnic and minority rights. More reassuring, however, were Moscow's denials of harboring aggressive plans toward the Baltic States. In an interview published in "Der Spiegel" in May 2000 the President continued to speak her mind. This interview and her remark that Russia is unpredictable and could therefore pose a threat to Latvia also elicited bitter criticism from Moscow.

### 6.3 Relations with the United States

In stark contrast, Riga has enjoyed cordial, stable, uninterrupted diplomatic relations with Washington ever since the United States recognized Latvia de jure on 28 July 1922. The reason: Washington's non-recognition of the legality of Soviet annexation of the Baltic States during World War II. President Vike-Freiberga sent a letter of thanks to President Clinton for the consistent US support of Latvia and the other two Baltic States. In the interwar years Baltic-American relations were multi-faceted, but from June 1940 to August 1991 their focal point was the restoration of independence. Latvians recall with fondness the conference in Jurmala, Latvia, in 1986. Organized by the Chautauqua Institution and hosted by the Soviet "friendship" committee, it was modeled after an American-style town meeting. At the Jurmala conference US Ambassador Jack F. Matlock delivered the opening remarks in Latvian and Russian, stressing that the "US government had never recognized the illegal seizure (of the Baltic States) and would continue to insist that only the peoples of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had the right to determine whether they wished to be independent or part of a larger union". This statement angered Moscow, but encouraged Latvians not to abandon their dream of freedom.

After Latvia regained its independence in 1991 Washington has warmly supported its integration into European and Transatlantic political, economic, security, and defense institutions. President Bill Clinton visited Riga in summer 1994 and has met with Baltic leaders on many occasions. He and the Baltic presidents signed The Charter of Partnership among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia, and Republic of Lithuania, in Washington on 16 January 1998. The Charter provides the framework for US support of and cooperation with the Baltics. Though not stipulating

specific security guarantees, the Charter stresses that Europe will not be fully secure unless the Baltics are secure and adds that the US "welcomes the aspirations and supports the efforts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to join NATO". The Charter has been followed up by regular meetings, accords, and programs. Conferring with the Baltic foreign ministers in Washington on 16 July 1999, US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott indicated that despite Russia's vehement opposition, Baltic membership of NATO is almost inevitable. He explained: the Baltic States "are not only eligible for membership in the Alliance, they are making very real and concrete progress in that direction. No country should be excluded from eligibility for the Alliance on the grounds of either geography or history".

#### 6.4 Latvia's Relations with the EU and NATO

Latvia's relations with both the EU and NATO date back to 1991 and have developed very well. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are progressing steadily toward membership of the EU and NATO. Baltic relations with the EU and NATO began only in 1991 after Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had regained independence. Having been invited to start EU accession negotiations in December 1997, Estonia expects to be ready to join the Union in 2003. Latvia and Lithuania received invitations to begin accession negotiations in December 1999. Latvia, however, intends to catch up with the 1997 invitees and be in the first wave of countries admitted into the EU in this century. Lithuania aims to be ready to join the Union in the period 2004 - 2007. All three Baltic States anticipate being in the EU by 2010. There is an enormous amount of work to do, but the Latvians' strong determination to succeed is certainly a help.

A big boost in the form of moral support from the EU and its members states is in the form of moral support. Riga has felt particularly heartened by the objections raised by Danish, Swedish and German leaders in spring 2000 to Russia's venomous invective against Latvia earlier that year. The strongest wording appears in the "Statement on Latvia of the Permanent Council No. 284," issued on 25 May 2000 by the Portuguese Presidency of the EU. The statement rejected both Russia's complaints regarding Latvia and its policy toward Latvia and Estonia: "Latvia is an associated member country of the EU and a future member state. The EU has far-reaching demands on its future members, including democracy and Human Rights. Latvia has made tremendous progress in this regard. The EU has decided that Latvia fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria." In conclusion, the statement adds: "In the last months the Russian Federation has made severe accusations towards Latvia and Estonia using exceptionally strong language. This policy is not only counter-productive, but simply not acceptable in today's Europe."

As for NATO, Latvia is an aspiring member working hard on its Membership Action Plan so as to be invited to start the accession procedures at the Alliance's summit in 2002. Latvia has felt encouraged by the recent visits of Secretary General Robertson in March 2000.

To boost greater public support for Latvia's membership of NATO, leading figures in Latvian society founded LATO. This idea was welcomed by NATO officials. Moreover, Robertson and other top representatives of the Alliance, including General Wesley Clark, have said that they consider Latvia a strong candidate for membership. Thus, Latvia feels hopeful about getting the invitation in 2002.

Nonetheless, compliments are not promises. As has been pointed out before, any country's membership of the EU and NATO hinges on three elements: the country's ability to fulfill the membership criteria, the organization's preparedness to accept new members, and other factors. Concerning the first element, it is quite obvious that Latvia is doing its best to meet the requirements of membership of both organizations, but it has not met them all.

Concerning the second element, both the EU and NATO have to complete internal reforms in order to integrate successfully new members in their ranks. If the EU has decided in principle that Latvia is a bona fide candidate for membership, a similar decision has not been arrived at by the Alliance. The debate among NATO members over the wisdom of admitting the Baltic States into the Alliance at some point in the future has not been finished. Thus there is a fundamental difference in Latvia's status vis-à-vis the EU and NATO. The third element is the so-called other factors. Of these the most important are the United States and Russia. The US is the foremost member of NATO and interested observer of the EU. It is also a vocal advocate of Latvia's membership of both organizations. Russia is neither a member of the EU nor NATO, but has a special relationship with both. Moscow is using these possibilities to further its own interests and to influence the future course of the two organizations, including the admission of new members. Until recently, Russia was adamantly opposed to NATO's eastward enlargement and made veiled threats of appropriate reaction should the Alliance invite the Baltic States to join; in recent months its statements concerning the Alliance and its enlargement have been less consistent. Nonetheless, there is insufficient ground to surmise that Moscow has become reconciled with the idea of having NATO members at its Western borders. As for the EU, Russia's attitude toward its eastward enlargement was acquiescent if not enthusiastic. Since mid-1999 Moscow's attitude has become even more conditional, in that it wants assurances that Russia would not suffer in any way when the Union admits new members. Hence, the attitude can be called conditional acquiescence. As far as Latvia is concerned, Moscow sees Latvia's membership of the Union as contradicting its view that Latvia belongs to Russia's sphere of vital interest. This appears to be the main explanation for Moscow's recent spate of invective and bullying tactics against Latvia. Nonetheless, what counts for Latvia is not so much what Moscow says, but how Moscow's words are perceived by the members of the Alliance and the Union. Thus, owing to all of these considerations, it is not possible to predict when Latvia might join the EU and NATO.

## **7. Summing Up**

Looking back at Latvia's views on how to best achieve security and what Latvia has done in this direction, there is a basic harmony between deed and intent. Latvia is clearly working hard to improve the various domestic aspects of security, ranging from economic reforms and societal integration to the development of its own and Baltic armed forces. At the same time, it is focusing on strengthening its affiliations with other countries and organizations throughout the world so as to become both a benefactor of and contributor to global security. Concerned with the erratic behavior and instability of Russia, it continues to try to build good-neighborly relations with its bigger neighbor, because ultimately both countries will benefit. In terms of its own security and identity as a European state, Latvia sees the best confirmation of both through membership of the EU and NATO.

Dr. Dzintra BUNGS  
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP),  
Forschungsinstitut für internationale Politik  
und Sicherheit, Ebenhausen (Deutschland)