

## Security Challenges of the Baltic Sea Region

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Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured to speak at the Paasikivi Society, which is known as a forge of the Finnish foreign policy thought. The words of one's neighbours must always be taken with a grain of salt, but I hope that our tonight's discussion will contribute to a better understanding of the security risks in our region.

28 years ago – in autumn 1988 – when the Singing Revolution had barely begun in Estonia, some first year history students of the University of Tartu were discussing the possibility of restoring Estonia's independence. We agreed then that Estonia could maybe achieve it by the year 2000. Things went differently, much better. We graduated 5 years later already in the Republic of Estonia.

Europe was undergoing dramatic changes that rippled across the world. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolised the beginning of a historic unification of the whole Europe. The world was liberated of the heavy tension of war, and Russia's democratic aspirations filled many with newfound hope. The atmosphere of the era was so positive that some even predicted the end of history.

These dramatic years had a huge positive impact on the Baltic Sea region. The restoration of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian independence, and the withdrawal of Russian troops, free elections in Poland, unification of Germany, accession of Finland and Sweden to the European Union, and finally Russia embarking on a path of democratic reforms created a situation unlike anything the region had ever seen before. The Baltic Sea was becoming the internal sea of a free and democratic world. Security issues took the back seat.

This is sadly no longer the case. There are a number of reasons for that. There is nothing exceptional in the dynamism of global development; having said that, the last quarter of a century has in fact deepened and sped up some very different processes at the same time, and this has not gone by without affecting our region.

There are three major issues that I consider equally important in making sense of the complexities of the security landscape of the Baltic Sea region today. Firstly, I will talk about an increasingly intertwined world; secondly, I will analyse the Russian factor more in detail; and thirdly, I will focus on how the countries in the region have tried to strengthen security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will start with the impact of the rapidly changing GLOBAL SITUATION on our surroundings. As I started working for the largest news daily in Estonia – the *Postimees* – in January 1993, during my final year in the university, the five employees of the World News Department had to share one outdated computer, and information from global news agencies reached us by fax. Just a few years later we were using a broadband connection to exchange information between the office, which had

moved to Tallinn, and the printing house, which had stayed in Tartu. And in 2000, as I was leaving my position as the Editor-in-Chief, online media was taking its first steps.

The triumph of social media has made many of us not only consumers of media but also its creators, as well as the storytellers of the new narrative. This is one of the best and universally most recognised examples of global integration and mutual dependence. The new media has made it possible to follow the news much faster and more directly, and to keep up with the debates in various countries. Free transmission of information has broken down invisible barriers or prejudices much faster than any diplomatic efforts.

Yet it is clear that the impact of contemporary media on security has grown alongside the advancement of technology. We have often been lagging behind in this, not realising the dangers that the digital media could cause, in a free society more than anywhere else. Trolling is a term that has been widely discussed also in the Finnish media. We are also very familiar with media spreading disinformation and blatant propaganda. Social media allows people of specific target groups to be influenced, and society can be subjected to dangerous rifts and antagonisms.

Information security is a complex subject for the free society, and yet this issue must not be ignored. I will only raise a rhetorical question: does it violate our common constitutional spirit if the Wild West that is the Internet freely spreads recruitment ads of extremists or international terrorist organisations?

I am not advocating a policy of bans; instead, I emphasise that this cross-border issue of international interest should be discussed by our decision makers much more widely. The better the society and its individual members are protected against external attempts to influence them, the better we can ensure security both at the national and regional level.

Information security is linked to a much wider set of issues – the cyber security. Over the last decade, this transnational security risk has become one of the top priorities for the national governments in our region, brought on by the fast development of communication networks, technology, and our need for information.

Since 2007, when the public and private sector web pages in Estonia were subjected to a massive wave of Denial of Service attacks, our region has been hit by a number of major cyber attacks. The Norwegian oil and gas industry was attacked by industrial spies in 2011, the leading defence industry companies in Denmark were attacked in 2012, the electronic communication network of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was attacked in 2013, and last year the Polish air carrier LOT was attacked, which disturbed the travel plans of more than one thousand passengers. Many international conflicts have proven that no future conventional war could be possible without involving the cyber space.

There is no doubt that it is cyber security that demands more attention and resources from us over the next years. Our experience indicates that right now governments are a step or two behind the hackers, cooperation. This is one of the fields with great potential for significantly improving the efficiency of security cooperation in the Baltic Sea region as well. The NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn gives us particularly in international level an opportunity to find a common ground, and I hope that beside Finland also Sweden will soon become our partner country.

The common ground in the Baltic region is the Baltic Sea. The Danish Straits have been a strategic bottle neck of international shipping for centuries. By the way, during the Cold War, the Danish Straits were the main target for the Soviet strategic air forces based in occupied Estonia.

Over the last decades, the importance of the Straits for oil transit, in particular, has increased. The Danish Straits are number five on the list of the world oil transit choke points, with volumes exceeding even those of the Suez Canal and the Bosphorus. Oil transit has quadrupled on the Baltic over the last fifteen years. The main reason for this has been the growth in Russian oil production and the larger treatment volumes in new ports.

The Baltic Sea is a very busy shipping area, particularly around the Gulf of Finland. About 2000 cargo ships are constantly at sea, and one in four carry oil or oil products. However, oil shipping is not the only factor to determine the strategic significance of the Baltic Sea in terms of energy security. Especially in the last decade, after the accession of the Baltic states and Poland to the European Union, a number of new energy connections have been or are being established, such as the EstLink power cables connecting Estonia and Finland, or the gas and power connections linking Lithuania and Poland, and Lithuania and Sweden. When the already functioning single Nordic-Baltic electricity market will be enhanced with a regional LNG terminal and a gas pipeline connecting Estonia and Finland, a huge step will have been taken forward in strengthening the regional energy security.

However, the Nord Stream gas pipeline, completed in 2012, has increased the strategic significance of the Baltic Sea more than any other project. The 1,222-kilometre gas pipeline is the longest ever built on a seabed. Independent analysts expressed their doubts about its economic viability even before its construction.

Soon we will face a new issue: the construction of Nord Stream 2 which has already met serious criticism in several European capitals, as well as in the European Commission and the European Parliament. There is no doubt that this pipeline would mostly serve the national interests of Russia, and would enable Moscow to significantly reduce gas transit worth of 2 billion USD through Ukraine, at the same time continuing to wield its influence on the Western political elite. Ensuring the security of the pipeline is already one of the priorities of the Russian Baltic Navy, and it has thus become part of a larger strategic picture.

However, no analysis of the security challenges posed in our region by global actors could be complete without discussing the migration crisis that has hit Europe, or the international terrorism that is associated mostly with Islamic fundamentalism. The nearly five year long war in Syria has been an excellent growth bed for those who are fuelled by the idea of the Caliphate, who are tired of the post-modern society, or have simply been marginalised in the society. It is an ideology that extends far across borders, and has not failed to leave a mark on citizens of our countries as well.

The dozens of jihadists who have gone to Syria from here will clearly pose a threat to the security of the Baltic Sea region once they return. Unfortunately, this will probably be a growing trend in the future.

So far, international terrorism has been a theoretical rather than a real threat in our region. Today this might not be so sure anymore. For example, do Nordic security services actually have a clear overview of who has entered the countries within the last twelve months?

The Swedish security police confirmed only recently that Islamic terrorists pose a very serious threat to their national security. In the EU, only Belgium has contributed more ISIS fighters per capita than Sweden. At least 300 Swedish citizens have joined the fight; 120 of them have returned, and represent a considerable security threat.

Let us imagine for a moment a scenario that I hope will never materialise. Yet we cannot forget that passenger traffic is also very busy on the Baltic Sea, especially in the Tallinn-Helsinki-Stockholm triangle. If we also add the summer cruise ships, the number of potential targets grows even higher. How well are we protected against the terrorist threat on the Baltic Sea? This big issue depends on a close cooperation between our countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your former Minister of Defence Mr Jyri Häkämies said in Washington in September 2007 that the three main security challenges for Finland and the Baltic region are RUSSIA, RUSSIA and RUSSIA. You know better than I do how the Minister's statement was received in the Finnish media. With the benefit of hindsight, however, it is clear that Häkämies was right.

Russia has again become the main security challenge for the Baltic region, especially over the last decade. As early as the era of Alexander Nevsky, but more prominently since the reign of Peter I at the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century, Russia's geopolitical interests have focused on access to Baltic Sea ports, and direct influence on the security policy options of this region.

In the 1990s, the world hoped that Russia would liberate itself from the vicious circle of the past and embark on a new path towards an open and modern democratic form of government, but these hopes began to fade quickly after the bloody war in Chechnya at the beginning of this century. It has become clear by now that the revolutionary year of 1991 was not a sign of Russia's radical renouncement of the repressive regime or its guardians. It was just a slight hiccup in Russia's long history.

A very important factor has been Russia's traditional belief in its divine character and its mission to save the Christianity. The idea of a "third Rome", formulated by brother Philophey in the Yelizar monastery in Pskov at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, seems to persist until this day. This has always drawn an invisible line between the West and Russia, sparking mistrust and unpredictability in relationships.

Almost all the classical Russian authors describe the West as morally decadent. This idea has been echoed from Pushkin to the Slavophiles. Herzen and Dostoyevsky called on Russia to become the saviour of the fallen West. Among other things, Dostoyevsky thought that "it was the holy mission of our great Russia to build a Christian empire that covers the whole continent".

The Russian elite of today, taking its cue from President Putin who is a great admirer of the philosopher Ivan Ilyin, is certainly familiar with one of his best known quotes: "With each attempt to divide Russia, and after each disintegration, it restores itself again by the mysterious ancient power of its spiritual identity."

In 1990, even before the Soviet Union collapsed, Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote in his programmatic work "Rebuilding Russia" that a new federation could be formed by Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the northern parts of Kazakhstan populated by ethnic Russians. With that, Solzhenitsyn demonstrated that Russian thinkers have not abandoned the ideology of "assembling lands" to this day.

In spring 2000, when Putin became President, a poll was carried out among university students in Moscow. One question concerned the borders of Russia. The result was a complete surprise: more than half of the respondents wanted to see the 1913 borders of Russia restored, or at least those of the Soviet period. This is only one of many public opinion polls that demonstrate the mindset persisting in Russia.

It is therefore no wonder that the occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014, committed in breach of all the fundamental canons of international law, was greeted with enthusiasm in Russia. Some analysts have pointed out that Crimea can be considered a first step in correcting “the historical injustice” and restoring Russia's “legitimate borders”.

By the way, only a few weeks ago, Russian President Putin emphasised the injustice of the borders, referring to Lenin’s short-sighted actions during the founding of the Soviet empire a hundred years ago. This mindset reflects a deep conviction in the justifiability of the expansionist policy and in a selective right to self-determination of peoples. Putin has hinted at that before. Probably the most expressively in 2005 when he described the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at the end of January, at the first larger press conference of this year, that the time for good relations with the West is over, and that there would no longer be "business as usual". Combined with the newest version of Russian National Security Strategy and the statements of the Secretary of the Security Council and former Director of FSB Nikolai Patrushev to the newspapers *Izvestia* and *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* at the end of last year, it seems that as far as the Kremlin is concerned, the Cold War has never ended and has been going on since 1945.

This is why the Western leaders, including the political decision makers of the Baltic Sea region, have to understand that if you measure the current events in a longer historical perspective, conflicts and geopolitical competition have sadly been the norm in the relationship between Russia and the West. The 1990s might just have been the brightest moment ever in the East-West relations.

President Putin's speech at the security conference in Munich in February 2007 is a very important landmark in understanding the international ambitions of modern Russia. In this speech, Putin sharply criticised the Western countries, primarily USA, and announced Russia's ambition to reshape Europe's security architecture as a sovereign power. With this, a serious revisionist challenge was launched to the post-Berlin-Wall free Europe.

From then on, Russia has been steadily striving towards the target set by Putin. This can be seen in the suspension of participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe in 2007; the prevention of NATO's enlargement plans by military force in Georgia in 2008; the attack against Ukraine in 2014 to stop its integration into the Euro-Atlantic legal and commercial space; and the operation in support of Syrian President Assad that started in August 2015. These examples should give everybody a clear signal – if necessary, Russia will use conventional military force to achieve its political aims. Besides that, a rhetorical nuclear warning has been issued, supported by continuous exercises of the nuclear triad.

Although the war in Georgia did reveal certain weaknesses in Russia's armed forces in real life battle situation, over the recent years, the weapons modernisation programme, numerous exercises and battle experience gained in Ukraine and Syria have considerably improved the reaction and combat capability of Russia's armed forces.

While the West was enjoying the dividends of peace, Russia invested tens of billions of dollars into modernising its armed forces. At the same time, Russia has visibly strengthened its armed forces in the immediate neighbourhood of our region, from the Arctic to the borders of Ukraine. New military bases have been established and old ones reopened, the level of combat mobility has been increased, and aggressive spirit has been demonstrated at several exercises.

It should be pointed out that the exercises Zapad-1981 and Zapad-1984 did not differ from the exercises Zapad-2009 and Zapad-2013 by their orientation and goals. This is an eloquent fact that demonstrates Russia's persistent anti-West attitude.

The Zapad-2013 exercise, which took place before the war in Ukraine, once again allowed Russia to practice an attack against NATO members Poland and the Baltic States. The total war version was practiced for the first time, with multi-level scenarios of modern warfare including everything from mobilisation to the joint activities of agencies.

The Swedish Major General Karlis Neretnieks believes that it would be wrong to think of Russia's aggressiveness in our region as a problem of the Baltic States only. A hypothetical conflict would have a large impact on most of Russia's neighbours and on those who are interested in the security and stability of the Baltic Sea region.

However, developing military capability has not been the only element of Russia's anti-West policy. Russia has constantly been active in influencing the policies of the Western countries, establishing international propaganda channels and breaking the unity of the EU and NATO. Its aim is to dispel the perception that the West has of modern Russia, and to use the doubters as a vehicle to introduce the idea of a new security architecture that would bring peace. It sounds similar to the Soviet Union's calls for nuclear disarmament and support for the peace movement. We know very well what the actual aim of that deceitful peace policy was, and how it ended.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Nordic and Baltic region is one of the most peaceful and innovative regions of the world. In all country rankings, at least one, if not several, of the countries of our region are at the top. Very often we own the top. This is a value that should be protected and strengthened. And the best way for doing it is DEFENCE COOPERATION.

Estonia has gained enormously from its friendship with Finland since the far away times of the War of Independence. We would not be here today if Finland and other Nordic Countries had not given us long-time support in economy, or been an example in promoting open and democratic society.

And it has been Helsinki where, thanks to a happy combination of circumstances, at least two events of great importance to the security of our region – including the security of Estonia – have taken place during the last two decades. It would be appropriate to recall them briefly.

In March 1997, a historical event took place in Helsinki which marked a huge change in the security of the whole Baltic Sea region. It was the US-Russia Summit, where the presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin discussed the security of the Baltic States among other things. I remember the atmosphere very well, because I attended the event as a journalist. The public was terrified that a new Yalta agreement would be born.

The Clinton administration expert on Russia, the Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott later recalled the events in Helsinki. Yeltsin had suggested a gentlemen's agreement to Clinton. Instead of NATO enlargement, Russia offered to guarantee the security of the Baltic States. Clinton quickly refused, and a new Yalta agreement was avoided.

The other significant event took place in September 2001, when the Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was visiting Finland, gave a press conference. This was where he said for the first time that Russia had no fundamental objections to the Baltic States joining NATO. Although Putin did not fail to stress that it would be a wrong decision, the significant softening of Russia's rhetoric

gave the Western countries the possibility to move towards the 2002 Prague summit, where all three Baltic States received an official invitation to join NATO.

The accession of the Baltic States to NATO, the most successful defence alliance of the West, has considerably changed the security environment in the whole Baltic Sea region. I will speak about it in more detail.

During the last one hundred years, the Baltic and Nordic region has been the focus of close attention of the Soviet Union, and now Russia. As early as the 1920s and the 1930s, Moscow was trying to find legal ways to achieve a favourable position in regard to the Danish Straits.

The 1939 Stalin-Hitler pact gave Moscow the long-awaited opportunity to expand at the expense of the Baltic States and Poland. World War II and Stalin's victory in it increased the influence of the Russian empire in the Baltic Sea region to a level that the rulers of the Kremlin had never before achieved. The Baltic States were occupied, Germany divided, Poland submitted to an iron fist, and the Nordic Countries weakened through a fragmented security space and the so-called Finlandisation policy. Essentially, the Soviet Union together with the members of the Warsaw Pact could do as they pleased on the Baltic Sea.

In 1983, Jan Cody Gaudio was a MA student at the Monterey Naval Postgraduate School, researching the security aspects of the Baltic Sea region. He stressed that since the end of the Second World War, the USSR with its satellites had a clear strategic advantage in the Baltic Sea region over the Western countries. In naval forces alone, for example, the Warsaw Pact countries were six times stronger than NATO.

This created a situation where, while avoiding a nuclear war, the USSR could win a strategic victory by suddenly attacking the Danish Straits, for example. In 1968, Marshal Vasily Sokolovsky worked out an amended version of the preemptive blow tactics for the Russian Armed Forces. It is entirely possible that the current Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov used Sokolovsky's ideas in his doctrine. By the way, Gerasimov's Doctrine calls for a comprehensive approach to warfare, relying less on traditional force-on-force scenarios and more on principles of asymmetry by attacking and exploiting enemy weakness and avoiding areas of an adversary's strength. It calls for establishing favorable conditions as precursors for military operations through subversion, information operations, and cyber operations.

Going again back to 1983, Gaudio's paper also brought up the political aspects of Kremlin's activities that were influencing security in the Baltic Sea region. He stressed that keeping the Nordic States neutral and divided was in the best interests of the Soviet Union. He wrote that for Scandinavia, the so called "Finlandisation" constituted a much higher threat than a direct military intervention.

What is most striking, however, is the fact that the evaluation that Gaudio, now a Rear Admiral of the US Navy, gave to the security environment in our region 30 years ago feels as if it were written yesterday. Listen to what he wrote: "In the Baltic, there is a commanding case for looking anew at pre-positioning, including both men and equipment. With the current level of technology, modern warfare proceeds very quickly and allows little time for mobilization. The "expeditionary philosophy" of reinforcement from afar no longer has the degree of military or political utility that is possessed a few years ago. The alliance must rid itself of the idea that any defensive or preparatory response to Soviet expansion is, in itself, perceived as a provocation by the Kremlin. Allied defences that are perceived to be weak can constitute invitations to aggression."

Gaudio's quote brings us directly to the present day. A few days ago I read the latest report titled "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank" that was published by RAND Corporation, a US think tank. The report highlights the fact that in order to achieve an equilibrium of conventional forces and prevent a possible invasion threat, the Allies must considerably increase their military presence in the Baltic Sea region. Instead of the current company level, brigade-sized units must be deployed. Let us not forget that Russia's Western Military District alone has a 60 brigade sized strike force.

To ensure peace and security in our region we must increase our deterrence level. Russia's propaganda claims that NATO is planning an assault. These allegations cannot be taken seriously. Equally there are no grounds for Russia to exert pressure on Sweden and Finland. By playing on the verge of diplomatic ethics, Russia is trying to dictate security related choices as if they were not dealing with two independent states.

My political career in the Estonian Parliament has not been long, only dating back to 2003. Yet, during this relatively short period I have personally witnessed a very important breakthrough in the way my Nordic colleagues approached security policy. There are many factors behind this, and I have highlighted some of them in my speech. But most importantly, this is the first time that such a lively discussion and increasing agreement on security issues is taking place in our region. We have always been divided by outside forces, or have been held back by fears of the past.

Today we are the closest to creating a common ground for the security policy in the Nordic and Baltic region. This year, Estonia is directing defence cooperation between the Baltic States. We are definitely going to contribute to broadening cooperation with NORDEFECO, especially concerning the exchange of confidential information.

In an article they published a month ago, the Prime Ministers of Sweden and Finland stated that Russia's aggression towards Ukraine has become the greatest challenge for Europe since the Cold War. "We both highlight the importance of pursuing a long-term strategy for peace and stability in Northern Europe and the Baltic region," wrote Juha Sipilä and Stefan Löfven. They added, however, that the policy of neutrality of their countries is still a valuable asset.

At the same time, 25 prominent Swedish diplomats and military officers published a joint statement in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. They presented arguments as to why Sweden must join NATO. Among other arguments, the article stressed that accession to NATO would increase Sweden's international importance and the security of the Baltic Sea region. Not being a member of NATO, on the contrary, would further destabilise the security of the region.

The authors wrote, "a war scenario in the Baltic States is probably the only location that could pose a threat to Sweden for the foreseeable future. Swedish NATO membership is also necessary in order to avert such a threat – and to create a stability that prevents war. Our security is inextricably linked with the other Baltic States security."

According to Pauli Järvenpää, a Finnish security expert "in Russian military planning Finland does not seem to receive any special classification for being militarily non-aligned. It seems that Finland now lives in the worst of all the possible worlds: Russia regards Finland as a threat, yet Finland, being outside of NATO, is not covered by the North Atlantic Alliance's Article V security guarantee."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no doubt that we are living in turbulent times. A world order that has been mostly static

during the Cold War is being replaced by something completely new. This does not only concern the relationships between countries, or their dynamics. Occasionally this includes obscure factors that can act across borders and on a global level.

The Western world is objectively weakening. Asia is on an economic upheaval. Russia is carrying out its revisionist policies, and the Islamic world is fighting a religious war. All of this paints a rather turbulent picture of our present and future.

We are facing challenges where free and democratic countries of the Baltic Sea region have no other alternatives but to cooperate and accept the superiority of the international law when deterring threats to their security.

In 1997, the Estonian President Lennart Meri spoke to this very audience. Speaking about the relationships between Finland and NATO, Meri said: "Estonia does not know what you will decide. More important than this decision is the freedom to think of one's security in a new set of categories." Meri was a visionary. His words still hold true today, even though the world is a much more complex and more threatening place than 20 years ago.

Estonia did not hesitate much while making its free choice. The loss of our freedom in the turmoil of the Second World War, and the years of occupation that followed, had done their job. Accession to NATO became our most important dividend of peace. We strongly believe that only comprehensive security and shared values can create conditions that are necessary to maintain a country that is truly free and cares for the well-being of its citizens.

In the same speech, Meri also spoke of the relations with Russia. He highlighted three main starting points. Firstly, cooperation must be based on mutual benefit. Secondly, cooperation must be based on international law. Thirdly, cooperation must be based on long-term perspectives. And these are the principles we based our relations with Russia on. We hope to live and develop in a mutually beneficial relationship. We want to live in peace and create the conditions where no one in this region has to live in fear of war ever again.

Thank you for your attention.