

## 5. SECURITY STUDIES

# INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTS ON DEFENSE AND SECURITY COOPERATION – THE CASE OF THE BALTIC STATES

OLEVS NIKERS, OTTO TABUNS

### ABSTRACT

This paper covers the institutional effects on defense and security decision making and cooperation among the Baltic countries, which has not been a subject of more detailed inquiry until yet. Research of this study is directed to follow up the policies set by the elected decision makers of the Baltic countries and the role of bureaucratic institutions into subsequent policy implementation within the field of defense and security. The first section provides theoretical overview of bureaucratic politics, relating the New institutional theory to the subject on debate over the bureaucratic institutions as a more independent actors, rather than integrated part of the democratic decisionmaking process, and focuses on American decision making within national security domains. The second section outlines the characteristics of current institutional defense cooperation among the Baltic countries which is followed by discussion on cultural behavior and organizational habits of the Baltics in the third section.

### KEYWORDS

Baltic security cooperation, bureaucratic policy, international politics, decision making, theory of institutionalism, public administration.

DOI: 10.26410/SF\_2/19/12

**OLEVS NIKERS**

PhD student at  
the Riga Stradins University  
Director of the Baltic Security  
Strategy Project.

**OTTO TABUNS**

Riga Graduate School  
of Law lecturer  
Latvia Weekly co-editor

## Introduction

While analyzing defense cooperation among the Baltic countries, it has been common knowledge that the development of Baltic military cooperation has been mainly influenced by such factors as common threats, geography and operational realities, the differences in development of the armed forces, and the lack of alternative platforms for cooperation until 2014. But there is another dimension, which has not been taken into account so often by

scholars and practitioners, namely, institutional and bureaucratic factors on the defense establishment and decision-making process within national security domain of the Baltic countries. Meanwhile the subject matter has been carefully examined within the American defense and security policy.

Indeed, all three Baltic countries – whether they want it or not – are interdependent in their national defense; if one of the countries would be invaded, it would directly

affect the neighbors. More or less aware of this military reality, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have always been tended to be supportive on deepening and strengthening of military cooperation, at least at the level of political declarations. As one of Latvia's officials has stated in study, conducted by Nora Vanaga, "the depth of Baltic defense lies in its unity," because the military region is complex and insecure due to its narrow land area between Russia and the Baltic Sea<sup>1</sup>.

### Theoretical perspective

Effects on bureaucratic policy on the various dimensions of policy making has been focus of multiple researchers within fields of comparative politics and public administration. In this section a brief overview of theoretical approach towards bureaucratic organizations is given. It also discusses the institutional relevance towards democratic societies. At the end, theoretical perspectives are complemented by empirical examples of American institutional decision making and policy implementation within national security and foreign policy domains.

According to the New Institutionalism theory, governments form their "business" environments for themselves, instead of adapting to it. Ideally, public administration would be driven by societal visions and political projects. According to Brunsson and Olsen, organizations that handle public affairs should be 'conceptualized as institutions rather than as instruments'. They generate and implement prescriptions that define how the game is played<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Nora Vanaga, *Baltijas valstu militārā sadarbība: kopīgas atbildes meklējums pēc Ukrainas krīzes*, Sargs. lv, August 5, 2016 <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/viedoklis/2016-08-05/baltijas-valstu-militara-sadarbiba-kopigas-atbildes-meklejumos-pec-ukrainas>

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Claude Thoenig, *Institutional Theories and Public Institutions.: New Agendas and Appropriateness*. Peters B.G. and J.Pierre. *The Handbook of Public Administration*, Sage, pp.185-101., 2011.

Public administration influence and simplify the way people think, interpret facts, act and cope with conflicts. The question is whether public administration undertakings always match societal needs and, if so – do they also help and enhance democratic participation? New Institutionalism considers dangerous the very idea that it is possible to reform and control public organizations top down and with a technocratic style<sup>3</sup>.

According to the New Institutionalism theory, public institutions question how far organized action can be planned, and to what degree some public order is achievable in pluralistic societies. Very often public institutions may experience a large degree of autonomy and follow a logic of their own, independently of outside influences or requirements. The historical process happens to select organizational forms that are not always efficient. Symbols, myths and rituals have more impact upon political and administrative events than immediate, narrow and selfish economic or power interests.

One might think that public organizations can be predicted and directed through the consequential path of their acting, while there are scholars who argue, that the logic of actions is an illusion. Public administrators make decisions according to some criterion of satisficing – kind of a tradeoff between the content of the problem they address and the level of uncertainty they face in real time.

Jean-Claude Thoenig suggests, that in order to understand how policy-making really is processed and handled inside organizations, new institutionalism provides an analytic grid. Empirical observation should consider three fundamental dimensions or aspects: the goals the various units pursue, the way information, opportu-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190

nities and support are mobilized for action taking, and the choice of decisions processes at work. It should identify how far in a given action set four main mechanisms may exist: conflict avoidance behaviors, uncertainty reduction processes, problem solving as solutions seeking and finding initiators, and organizational learning dynamics through former experience and rules of attention allocation.<sup>4</sup>

In fact public organizations function like political arenas. Power issues and power games model their functioning and their policies. Collective goals do not necessarily exist that would provide common references subsuming individual goals or particularistic preferences. Therefore institutional devices are needed in order to channel opportunistic behaviors and ensure some collective stability.<sup>5</sup>

Another important question is regarding the relevance of the bureaucratic functioning within democracies – how well institutions are built within the democratic systems, reflecting essence of democratic decision making and policy implementation and needs for national security in particular.

According to Thomas H. Hammond, democratic systems has developed in way, that they take policy-making power from the hands of autocrats and their bureaucrats and place it in the hands of elected political leaders. As Thomas Hammond has noted, it is an irony of twentieth-century governance that, as the social and economic responsibilities placed on democratic governments have increased, their elected political leaders have responded by delegating increasing amounts of policy-making authority back to unelected offi-

cials-in particular, back to the bureaucrats.<sup>6</sup>

Hammond is questioning, whether it is true, that expansion of the modern welfare state has occasionally stimulated claims that modern bureaucrats have become our new rulers? “Would it be a gross exaggeration to say that the bureaucrats in democracies are generally able to operate independently from elected officials?”, Hammond is asking (Hammond, 2003). Nonetheless, these bureaucrats often have at least some independent policymaking power, whether explicitly delegated to them or not. Hence, it is important to determine the conditions under which bureaucrats in democracies have more independent policy-making power and when they have less.

According to Hammond, this is evident that bureaucrats-both within and across democracies-do vary in the extent to which they are controlled by elected officials. Regarding evidence for differences within democracies, for example, there is general agreement that the Federal Reserve System in the United States is able to operate more independently from the president and Congress as it makes monetary policy than are, say, the Department of Agriculture and the Agency for International Development as they make agricultural and international aid policies. Evidence for these kinds of differences across democratic systems can be found in studies such as Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981 and Weaver and Rockman 1993.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Thoenig, J.C. (2005) ‘Territorial Administration and Political Control. Decentralization in France’, *Public Administration*, 685-708.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 670

<sup>6</sup> Thomas H. Hammond, *Veto Points, Policy Preferences, and Bureaucratic Autonomy in Democratic Systems*, “Politics, Policy, and Organizations : Frontiers in the Scientific Study of Bureaucracy, Ed. by George A. Krause, and Kenneth J. Meier, University of Michigan Press, 2003. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rsub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3414592> p. 73-104.

<sup>7</sup> Aberbach, Joel D., and Bert A. Rockman. 2000. *In the web of Politics: Three Decades of the U.S. Federal Executive*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

According to Aberbach and Rockman, varying degrees of bureaucratic autonomy can have important consequences for the policies that emerge. The reason is that the policy preferences of the bureaucrats are not always representative of the policy preferences of their elected overseers. To the extent that the bureaucrats have policy preferences that differ from those of the elected officials, and to the extent that the bureaucrats also have some independent policy-making capability, then to that extent their policy choices will differ from those of the elected officials.<sup>8</sup>

According to David A. Cooper, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, and Jessica D. Blankshain there are two major reasons why the bureaucrats might develop an independent policy-making capability. One reason, which follows the tradition established by Weber, is that the bureaucrats may know more than the elected officials about what needs to be done and how to do it. Even if elected officials do not explicitly delegate policy-making authority to the bureaucrats, the bureaucrats' greater information, theoretical understanding, and operating expertise may give them scope for independent action.<sup>9</sup>

The other reason why bureaucrats may develop a capability for independent action is related to an age-old strategy for victory in both warfare and politics: "Divide and conquer!" If the elected officials are divided among themselves (i.e., if they have differing preferences over what they want the bureaucrats to do), then the bureaucrats may be able to conquer (in the sense of maintaining some scope for independent action). But if the elected officials are unified in what they want the bureaucrats

to do, the bureaucrats may have to do what they are told.<sup>10</sup>

Most discussions of bureaucratic autonomy have focused on the autonomy that stems from the asymmetries in information, understanding, and expertise; less attention has been paid to the bureaucratic autonomy that may result from divisions among the elected officials.<sup>11</sup>

The ways, how bureaucratic policy and institutions has shaped American decision making within national defense domain has been subject of "in-depth" analysis through difference periods of American diplomacy and national security developments.

Most recent evidence provided by Rebecca Ingber shows, that the 2016 U.S. presidential election and its aftermath have introduced many Americans to a new term in their political lexicon: the so-called "deep state." Some people allege that a collection of permanent civil servants and military, law enforcement, and intelligence officers work behind the scenes to shape U.S. national security policy along their preferred lines, largely ignoring the will of the duly elected President and his appointees.<sup>12</sup>

According to Ingber (2018) modern accounts of the national security state tend toward one of two opposing views of bureaucratic tensions within it: At one extreme, the executive branch bureaucracy is a shadowy "deep state", unaccountable to the public or even to the elected President. On this account, bureaucratic obstacles to the President's agenda are inherently suspect, even dangerous. At the other end, bureaucratic resistance to the President represents a necessary benevolent constraint on an otherwise imperial executive. This account hails the bureaucracy as the mod-

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 9 David A. Cooper, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, and Jessica D. Blankshain, *Deconstructing the "Deep State": Subordinate Bureaucratic Politics in U.S. National Security*, \ Foreign Policy Research Institute by Elsevier, 2018

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Ingber, *Bureaucratic Resistance and the National Security State*, 104 *Iowa Law Review*. 139, 2018

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

ern incarnation of the separation of powers, an alternative to the traditional checks on the President of the courts and Congress, which are faulted with falling down on the job. These “deep state” and “benevolent constraints” approaches to bureaucratic behavior track debates in the scholarship over the legitimacy of the administrative state more broadly, and are used as rhetorical devices to challenge or defend current allocations of power.<sup>13</sup>

### Current institutional Baltic defense cooperation

Empirical study of this paper will examine to which extent bureaucratic mechanisms of the Baltic countries are following the policies of democratically elected bodies. It will also look at what role in the decision making within the domain of national security are playing these institutions themselves – serving the interests of the national security.

Transition towards a well-functioning defense system is still ongoing, and has faced new challenges after Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2014. However, as pointed out by Glen Grant, certain high ranking civilians and military personnel in the Baltic countries are still in their positions since the mid-1990s, when absence of qualified professionals allowed them to take high positions within Ministries of Defense and the military – in the absence of any relevantly qualified and skilled local personnel.<sup>14</sup>

There are multiple political layers which influence regional defense and security policies, and are well connected with defense establishment of the Baltic countries.

Modern military cooperation among the Baltic States began as early of 1990s,

when all three countries began to reform their armed forces. The assistance of foreign countries, mainly Northern European countries, was of great importance influencing the defense and security establishment of the Baltic countries, as they perceived the three Baltic States as a single entity. When evaluating the development of joint projects, it should be noted that it was difficult for Ministries of Defense in common effort with ministries of Foreign affairs to launch long term projects with deep impact on security and defense cooperation. BALTBAT project, recognized as a successful Baltic cooperation endeavor, ceased to exist after joining the Alliance (NATO). Although Estonia tends to seek alternative platforms for cooperation with the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) countries, in particular Finland to Sweden, this cooperation is on an ad hoc rather than strategic basis.

Members of the Parliament of the Baltic countries always have carefully listened to the advice of the credited and more competent and informed officials of the ministries of the defense and the foreign affairs. Especially it has been a tradition since the Baltic nations assumed membership within the NATO Alliance and European Union. Ministries of defense and of the foreign affairs usually set the Agendas for their Governments and Parliaments in order to follow up with the requirements of NATO accession within the complicated partnership requirements. Tradition of this “competence” has continued over the years of Baltic membership in NATO. Legislative bodies followed professional advice coming from defense establishment, questioning it perhaps in the general terms.

For example, when Latvia was on the way to comply with the rules and conditions set by European Union between 1998 and 2002, the Government piled hundreds

<sup>13</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Glen Grant, O. Nikers, Baltic armies still faced by cooperation, training and leadership challenges, *The Baltic Times* 2019 June 27, [https://www.baltictimes.com/baltic\\_armies\\_still\\_faced\\_by\\_cooperation\\_training\\_and\\_leadership\\_challenges/](https://www.baltictimes.com/baltic_armies_still_faced_by_cooperation_training_and_leadership_challenges/)

of Draft Laws to the Parliament and regularly checked if these regulations were successfully adopted. Similar “symbiosis” of government and Parliament were observed also within the policies of national security since Latvia and other Baltic nations opted for a NATO membership. This does not prove that institutions were working contrary the national security interests. This does, however, indicate the necessity to set boundaries as required by principles of democracy, where this relationship should be changed in favor of Parliament’s right to decide.

It can be argued that these were not Parliaments of the Baltic countries who were setting the particular tasks for the governments early 2000’s and later, but opposite – Ministries of Defense and Ministries of Foreign Affairs who tasked Parliaments of the Baltic countries to adopt certain legislation in order to fulfill conditions set by NATO and European Union. It can also be argued that this tradition can still be observed.

Therefore, transformation and development of the Baltic armed forces was determined by the agendas set by NATO and the EU Commission, which was passed directly to the ministries of the Baltic countries and subsequently to their Members of Parliament, meaning active participation of their armed forces in international operations or EU-led international operations. Although the participation of the Baltic countries in international operations was different in terms of contingents, the practical experience gained was similar. A positive exception is the participation of the Latvian Special Operations Unit in the Lithuanian Special Operations Force in Afghanistan 2011-2013 (MIL, 2014). As a result, the Baltic Armed Forces have developed in a complementary manner thanks to targeted foreign assistance, NATO membership and the same international operations. It was

much simpler task for Latvian government to reach agreement with Lithuanian government on cooperation within this project, as it was internationally determined by the existing NATO operation in Afghanistan.

Despite some success in institutional defense cooperation, there are factors that seriously hamper bureaucratic coherence among the Baltic countries and their institutions – and these issues are different spending priorities, divergent strategic views and personality disagreements in particular.

Different priorities how to allocate defense spending only partly explains why there is a lack of joint military procurement in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Latvian officials have differing views on joint military procurement as such, even if all three Baltic States would have the same financial means to purchase the same equipment – administrative and legal regulations make it much more expensive. As a result, some attempts of joint procurement resulted in more expensive projects, owing to different bureaucratic procedures. At the military tactical level, the situation is different and there is closer institutional cooperation, especially in the field of military training. For example, Estonia has conducted training in Latvia because of the lack of proper national facilities.

On the other hand, Estonians withdrew their participation from BALTRON project due to a lack of personnel and ships they were able to allocate due to the other organizational priorities. Estonians argued that, from a strategic point of view, membership of the NATO Permanent Minesweeper Group was far more important than membership of BALTRON, so it is clear that the reason for this decision was a lack of naval

military personnel<sup>15</sup>.

Disagreement within BALTRON project seriously affected the unity of the Baltic countries. Latvians and Lithuanians, on the other hand, criticized Estonians for inefficient use of money for defense<sup>16</sup>. Another argument is that, in absolute terms, the defense budgets of the Baltic States are not very different. The financial aspect has had a partial impact on the development of joint military projects and procurement in the Baltic States, but it has certainly hindered by constructive cooperation and good interpersonal relations.

There is no common strategic vision established institutionally among the Baltic States, basically, the Ministries of Defense – how defense and security cooperation should develop. Estonia is trying to position itself as a small but highly successful country that allocates a decent amount of financial resources to defense issues, providing criticism towards the other two Baltic States.

Lithuanians, on the other hand, have been seeing Baltic co-operation as a very ambitious project, lacking estimates for the practical implementation of their initiatives, yet being more supportive towards this concept than Estonia. Attitudes towards the Baltic defense cooperation from the side of Lithuanian defense establishment have dramatically changed since the moment of Russia's military actions in Ukraine in 2014.

Among initiatives which reflect the hardships of institutional defense cooperation among Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, is the creation of a joint Baltic division, which so far was not possible due to limited number of military personnel in all three countries, and issue of command and control over

such a unit. Latvians are usually those who always have been in favor of deeper military integration and interdependence the most, but strategically Latvian Ministry of Defense does not see greater value of insisting and pushing harder on more concrete defense and security synchronization among the all Baltic countries.

There are also divergent views on what a strategic partnership should be, since each of the Baltic States seeks to build cooperation on a bilateral basis. Estonians seek it with Finns and Swedes, Latvians with Norwegians and Swedes, and Lithuanians with Poles. As mentioned above, none of these efforts can be considered successful, as cooperation is only on an ad hoc basis, and the Scandinavian countries are reluctant to form a strategic partnership with the Baltic States because of their attitude towards Russia. Thus, the differing strategic visions of the Baltic States, often determined by national interests, are what seriously hinder cooperation between them, and the financial aspect is secondary, as it always follows a strategic setting.

Disagreements between individuals are among the most institutionally related factors, which affect Baltic defense cooperation. Mutual relations between certain officials of the Ministries of Defense of the Baltic States are another pressing issue that hinders dialogue and military cooperation, as they have a significant influence on other policy makers.<sup>17</sup> Research conducted by Nora Vanaga reveals, that personal disagreements and rivals between certain officials among Ministries of Defense may require the direct intrusion from higher level government<sup>18</sup>.

Strategic disagreements based on na-

<sup>15</sup> Nora Vanaga, *Baltijas valstu militārā sadarbība: kopīgas atbildes meklējumos pēc Ukrainas krīzes*, Sargs. lv, August 5, 2016 <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/viedoklis/2016-08-05/baltijas-valstu-militara-sadarbiba-kopigas-atbildes-meklejumos-pec-ukrainas>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Jermalavičius, Tomas. 2009. «Baltic military cooperation: past, present and future.» In: *Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2009*, edited by A. Kasekamp. Tallinn: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, pp. 123-148.

tional interests exist in all sectors of the Baltic States. Military co-operation is usually cited as one of the good examples of co-operation between the Baltic States. In the defense sector, according to Vanaga research (Vanaga, 2014) policymakers in the Baltic States act rationally, but they value short-term perspectives without seeing the positive aspects of cooperation in the long-term as more important than the negative. Regarding the long-term perspective, the Latvian official, who has experienced the development of Baltic military cooperation from its inception, is optimistic that the leaders (both political and defense ministry officials) come and go, but given the nature of Baltic cooperation and the main objective, which includes practical action, is permanent and stable<sup>19</sup>.

The main areas where countries are actively working together are, first and foremost, the diplomatic level, which means that cooperation among the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and other diplomatic channels work better, that inter-expert cooperation among the defense establishment of the Baltic countries.

Different, institutionally established and maintained defense concepts are another issue of current bureaucratic mis-coordination among the Baltic countries. There are many questions that arise from this issue, and as it was questioned by Glen Grant in the Baltic Interoperability Report – 1) is it possible at all to have military interoperability between the states with totally different security concepts, 2) do decision makers understand what it all means to fight seriously, 3) is there the political will to send troops to another country, and 4) who can

and will give the orders?<sup>20</sup>

The established differences are shown as follows – the average size of the Estonian Regular Armed Forces in peacetime is about 6000 persons, of whom about half are conscripts. Thus the reality is about 2500 regulars of all ranks and in all three services. The Voluntary Defence League is highly recruited with about 15000 members. The planned size of the operational (wartime) structure is 60000 personnel with the high readiness reserve of about 21000 personnel. This largely conscript system is based upon a mix of historical desire for high numbers, a tactical approach to defending territory at all costs, Soviet legacy thinking from the original designers and a heavy influence from Finland<sup>21</sup>.

Latvia is a country of 1.9 million people and dropping daily. It has a small professional army but this has been starved of resources for 10 years since the international financial crisis in 2007, when it abolished conscription. It is now playing catch-up in terms of procurement. It has 5500 professionals and can deploy a regular Brigade of 2 mechanised Latvian battalions and a Canadian mechanised battalion.

Lithuania adopted professionalization in 2008 with mainly British organisations, training and structures and was then clearly the most operational of the three. After the Ukraine invasion in 2014 they decided to go back to conscription to double the force. This immediately watered down the quality, stretched the system and brought equipment and readiness problems across the whole force.

Another issue, which reflects low profile of synchronization of defense and security concept and strategy among Baltic defense establishments are absence of coherent defense policies regarding the most

<sup>19</sup> Nora Vanaga, Baltijas valstu militārā sadarbība: kopīgas atbildes meklējumos pēc Ukrainas krīzes, Sargs. lv, August 5, 2016 <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/viedoklis/2016-08-05/baltijas-valstu-militara-sadarbiba-kopigas-atbildes-meklejumos-pec-ukrainas>

<sup>20</sup> Olevs Nikers, Otto Tabuns (Ed) Baltic Interoperability report, The Jamestown Foundation 2019, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

pressing security issues, namely Air Defense and Maritime security. Against such a threat, the Baltic States presently possess only very limited air defense capabilities. A comprehensive air defense system, however, is well beyond their financial reach.<sup>22</sup>

There is a need for a maritime security strategy which should be developed in the nearest future and which is still ignored by decision makers of the Baltic countries or those who influence these decisions – officials of the ministries of Defense of the Baltics and their budget allocation priorities. Such a Maritime strategy would discuss the maritime situation, the threats, and the importance of the maritime domain to the national economy and security and verbalizing how it wants to efficiently and effectively tackle the maritime missions it needs to ensure its security.<sup>23</sup>

Defense and security establishment is not only influenced by differences in budget allocations, conflicting strategies and personal factors of the officials of ministries of defense. Another factor, that has impact of institutional behavior of the Baltic defense sector and its institutions are the influence of international actors, mainly – NATO and U.S. as a strategic partner is separate.

As it was noted in study, conducted by Māris Andžāns and Uēis Romanovs (2017), Western partners were tended to support trilateral projects as a way to reach out to the three similar countries at once rather than treating each separately. Initially, each of the three countries was mentored by the Nordic countries – Estonia by Finland, Latvia by Sweden and Lithuania by Den-

mark, the only NATO member state among the informal mentors. This factor not only led to a coordinated approach as the Nordic countries supported the trilateral projects, but also resulted in a diversity of military approaches and military cultures among the three, thus impeding military cooperation to this day (in particular, the influence of Finland on Estonia has differentiated Estonian Defence forces from Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts, with strong emphasis on territorial and total defence in the former)<sup>24</sup>.

As noted by Māris Andžāns, first intentions to cooperate trilaterally among the Baltic States were expressed as early as 1991. But the first significant common project deserving the utmost attention was the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT), inaugurated in 1995. Its primary roles were to contribute to the peacekeeping efforts of the international community and to enable Baltic cooperation with NATO in the same field.

“However, BALTBAT served a much broader spectrum of matters. First, it was used as a role model for other trilateral cooperation projects in the future. Second, it provided a platform for the professional development of military personnel and contributed to the improvement of military capabilities in the three states. And, finally, BALTBAT supported Baltic States’ NATO membership aspirations by providing international experience and an opportunity to position themselves as contributors to international security, emphasize Māris Andžāns. The BALTBAT project was closed in 2003, just before the Baltic Countries joined NATO.

According to Māris Andžāns, “during the past few years, with the increase of the

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence, A. Challenges in Developing a Common Baltic Air Defense, in Nikers, O., Tabuns O. (eds) Baltic Interoperability Report, The Jamestown Foundation, 2018, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> O. Nikers, O. Tabuns (Ed.) Baltic Security Strategy Report, The Jamestown Foundation, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/product/baltic-security-strategy-report/>

<sup>24</sup> Māris Andžāns, Uēis Romanovs, The Trilateral Military Cooperation of the Baltic States in the “New Normal” Security Landscape, Riga Conference papers 2017 <http://liia.lv/en/news/insight-into-the-riga-conference-papers-2017-security-in-the-baltic-sea-region-realities-and-prospects-641>

defence budgets, the Baltic States have initiated a number of very similar capability development projects independently from each other, including the procurement of infantry mobility and force protection platforms (armoured vehicles), indirect fire support systems (self-propelled howitzers), anti-tank, air surveillance and air defence systems. These procurements have not only demonstrated different choices in equipment, but also different primary cooperation partners, with Lithuania choosing Germany as its main supplier, Estonia retaining Finland as an example and partner, and Latvia following a less coordinated approach to partnering (Andžāns, Romanovs 2019).

Therefore, it is possible to follow in conclusion, that ministries of defence of the Baltic Countries do not see or utilize benefits of joint procurements. From this authors' perspective, increasing the trilateral cooperation in the procurement domain would allow saving resources and increasing military interoperability. Joint procurement projects would not only allow purchasing equipment at a lower price but would enable three states to benefit from the sharing of resources required for the project management, allow saving financial resources for training of the military personnel operating and maintaining the equipment as well as decrease life-cycle management expenses. In the longer run, the possession of similar equipment would gradually close the gaps in military doctrine, military culture and capabilities, thus setting the preconditions for an expansion of military cooperation.

Further strengthening the existing trilateral cooperation in the military education and science should be considered. BALTDEFCOL could offer much more than the current courses if conditions were set right. First, the college could become a regional

centre of excellence for professional military education, enabling effective sharing of educational resources, professional development opportunities for instructors and management of best practices processes and databases. Second, the college could boost its research capabilities by becoming the hub of expertise on regional military security matters and professional military education. On top of that, decision makers should consider also broadening trilateral cooperation in military science. As it was pointed out by Māris Andžāns and Uēis Romanovs, currently, the only Baltic military education establishment to offer an opportunity to study for a doctoral degree is the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (in collaboration with other Lithuanian universities), though only in political science.<sup>3</sup> Given the limited number of potential candidates, it would be wise to consider a common Baltic doctoral programme in military science that could give a boost to military research in the Baltics and attract potential military science students from overseas (Andžāns and Romanovs, 2017).

According to Glen Grant, the three Baltic States have a strong record of coordinating policy positions at key times. They coordinated well in regard to Baltic Air Policing, or in their approach to the Wales and Warsaw Summits. Also in 2017 all three Baltic countries uniquely concluded a "military Schengen" agreement for simpler and faster movement of NATO Allied Forces within Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, a move that NATO now wants to implement throughout Europe. The importance of this 2017 agreement should not be underestimated. However, aside from the flagship initiatives of the 1990s (BALBAT, BALTNET, BALTRON and BALTDEFCOL) when outside pressure and assistance heavily encouraged cooperation, the three states have achieved lit-

tle else together when it comes to concrete projects<sup>25</sup>.

As it was emphasized by Glen Grant, expert within the Baltic Security Strategy Project, trust, which is probably the most important factor in successful defence cooperation, is missing at all levels. Strong notions of sovereignty, differences in strategic culture, and a lack of alignment of defence planning also stand in the way of defense cooperation among the Baltic nations.

“Now any increased joint capabilities and abilities need to be publicly demonstrated to Russia, meaning that already existing joint capabilities need to be coordinated at the regional level. Instead of determining and meeting the individual needs of Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania, a politically clear focus on the regional level is needed. In this regard, problems in one of the Baltic countries in developing its military resources are and should actually be a common concern for all three Baltic countries. Should this idea of joint efforts not be acknowledged and adopted swiftly enough in the Baltic region, help should be provided by NATO in the form of guidelines to local politicians of how to jointly plan, train and develop military capabilities”, says Glen Grant (Grant, 2019).

The challenge is that all three countries tend to use long term plans and programming tools with heavy legal frameworks that discourage rapid change. Greater flexibility of planning is needed in order to provide the conditions for common acquisition and to reduce duplication and waste. Modest results have already come from ammunition procurement. Setting up a Baltic States Ammunition and Fuel agency are two key subjects where enhanced capability can be sought and this could be expanded to

other common procurement areas if successful.

Nonetheless, the big challenge now appears to be who will lead the changes needed. The three countries have shown little willingness for radical solutions themselves, preferring to stick to well-worn national plans and programs.

According to the conclusions of the Baltic Security Strategy project (BSSP) on political level there are issues related to ability to conduct joint projects as well as relations with allies, delivery of joint messages – that is constantly discussed between ministers, Chiefs of Defense/ Chiefs of Staff, Policy directors, commanders of all services, as well as SOF and voluntary force commanders have a meetings at least twice per year. System is both vertical and horizontal – questions of smaller significance are resolved “on the spot”, more important issues are pushed “up the ladder” from lower levels of decision-making to higher. Good practical example is ability of quick exchange of information among 3B about cyber incidents and even perceived preparations for a cyber-attack on information systems and networks<sup>26</sup>.

The three states also looked more often to outside countries (and usually different ones) for working military cooperation not to the other two. This conceptual division also extended to development of each state’s volunteer forces. These forces, aimed at bringing the military closer to society, are now organized and subordinated in a different way in each country. As a result, they have few opportunities in the way of tactical cooperation for using their military capabilities in any joint fashion. The first logical conclusion is that for cooperation to be successful it has to be at the manage-

<sup>25</sup> O. Nikers, O. Tabuns (Ed.) Baltic Security Strategy Report, The Jamestown Foundation, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/product/baltic-security-strategy-report/>

<sup>26</sup> O. Nikers, O. Tabuns (Ed.) Baltic Security Strategy Report, The Jamestown Foundation, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/product/baltic-security-strategy-report/>

rial or operational level not unit level as the national defence systems are unlikely to change after years of individually focused development.

As it was emphasized by the BSSP experts, many joint initiatives of the Baltic countries were “foundered” upon budgets and bureaucracy and the defence ministries often appeared to lack energy to overcome the problems. In 2016 Estonia decided to leave the project needing the finances to focus instead on the standing NATO mine countermeasure squadron. It is a point worth asking why all three countries did not try to cooperatively change BALTRON into a standing NATO squadron themselves that would have given them excellent command opportunities. This single nation focus appears symptomatic of the national development of all three states.

Other Baltic cooperation has been with BALTCIS, strongly supported by Germany, BALTPERS and BALTMED both initiated and supported by Sweden. As with other cooperative ventures, these have increased operational capability of the three nations but they have not developed the tri-national capability at the strategic or operational level<sup>27</sup>.

## Cultural behavior and organizational habits – the Baltic States

Another factor that has strong influence the institutional cooperation among the Baltic countries is cultural features, which are dominating societies of the Baltic countries. Organizational cultures in the three Baltic countries are strongly shaped by cultural differences within the societies of every Baltic nation.

Analysis, provided by Glen Grant within the Baltic security strategy project shows, that Estonians in general welcome manag-

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

ers that give them the opportunity to state their opinions and express disagreement, as well as to be included in the decision-making process. But in the defence system the country has a serious cultural fault line: the military leadership largely retains the old Soviet ways of thinking and acting and demonstrates very high power distance tendencies. The military boss-subordinate relationship is visibly more hierarchical than the national score. This brings reduced capacity for independent thought or for proactive working<sup>28</sup>.

This is much less so with the volunteers in the National Guard where hierarchy works more by friendship than by order. Power distance also creates a difficult relationship between the military and MOD. The Soviet thinking norms based upon power have little time for civilians or women and their non-military judgement. Civil control of the military has often proven difficult if not impossible. This has created tension in the even quite recent past concerning the direction that Estonian defence should take. This has reflected in how the budget should be spent; with a straight opposition between a desire for numbers on the side of the military and coherent and affordable capability on the side of MOD. There is significant improvement as reflected in audit office reports but key areas of weakness still exist (Grant, 2019).

According within the Baltic Interoperability report (BSSP, 2019), Estonia is also an Individualist country with a score of 60/100. Most Estonians believe that everyone should be allowed to do their own thing, reach new heights or even dig their own graves. They certainly do not see themselves as “Baltic”, more Nordic or European. Work situations are driven more by a task-orientation than by a relationship-orientation, which is to

<sup>28</sup> Olevs Nikers, Otto Tabuns (Ed) Baltic Interoperability report, The Jamestown Foundation 2019.

say that for Estonians, work relations serve a functional purpose. Achievement is reflected directly on the person responsible. Estonians tend to be direct communicators. They usually say what they mean and mean what they say and there is limited time for small talk. It is therefore not surprising that they tend to gravitate towards culturally like-minded countries such as Finland, the US and UK for their defence relationships. Fortunately it is UK that is deployed with them in eFP. Given the respect that the Estonian military has for UK after many years of working together on NATO operations, it is unlikely there will be personal tensions about strategy or the need to change. But this Estonian characteristic makes it very hard to assess if in a time of crisis and with differing views on strategy, civilian control of the military would remain solid against a combination of individualistic and power based military tendencies. In WW2 the Estonian Signal Battalion disobeyed the political order to lay down arms when Russia threatened and went to Narva to fight<sup>29</sup>.

Another factor which is affecting the institutional cooperation according to Glen Grant is the complete difference between the political pragmatism of the MOD versus the very different and more inward looking character of the military staff. Both see international interoperability as a good thing but the underlying motivation is totally different. In MOD it is seen as a political necessity for joint and cooperative NATO action against Russia (outward looking), in the staff it is a way to get more resources for the defence of Estonia (Inward looking).

Latvia also has a low score on the power distance dimension (44/100). Latvians show tendencies to prefer equality and a decentralisation of power and decision-making. Control and formal supervision is generally disliked among the younger gen-

eration, who demonstrate a preference for teamwork and an open management style. However within the military there still exists a caucus of older officers similar to those in Estonia who favour control and discipline as the key tools for leadership. Long meetings and some intolerance of ideas are still in vogue. But the low power distance overall likely reflects the ease with which the country was able to move to professional forces in 2004. The authoritarianism power based style of conscription is seriously disliked by the public as a Soviet hangover. Conversely despite the low power distance there is a normal military sense of loyalty and deference towards authority and status. This attitude makes Latvian forces respecting of political authority and thus more likely to cross borders if ordered than their northern counterparts<sup>30</sup>.

Latvia is an Individualist country with a high score of 70/100, and it is important to remember that Latvians remained individualist during the soviet occupation. The score accentuates the aversion of being controlled and told what to do. Historically this came out as delaying or trying below the surface to reshape unpopular orders; something that still occurs today in all walks of life. The younger generation are more focused on their own performance rather than that of the groups. This means that the professional military take their personal professionalism as soldiers extremely seriously. This fits well with professional structures and the Latvian soldiers are very western in a results focused way. This innate professionalism also cuts across culture to create a level of team flexibility the other two would find hard to deliver<sup>31</sup>.

As a Feminine country with a score of just 9/100, Latvians are modest, keep a low profile and do not wish to offend anyone.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Conflicts for Latvians are usually deeply threatening. This makes them very solid as a group for obeying orders and far more likely to follow a politically difficult line. Although the Latvians are considered a relatively reserved culture, they are tolerant towards the culture of other nations so mainly due to their long experience of mixing with others nationalities. For the military working with allies and sharing is a more common theme than trying to keep secrets. This may have both good and bad aspects<sup>32</sup>.

With a score of 63/100, Latvians have a high preference for avoiding uncertainty. This manifests itself with allies as accepting that an idea is good but then not passing the idea further up the chain for fear of disturbing things. This frustrates the Canadian EFP troops greatly as they think a problem or matter will be resolved because they have aired it in meetings with the Latvians. In actuality it goes nowhere. This desire not to “concern” more senior staff in a crisis could have serious implications and lead to breakdown in chain of command communications and understanding, especially between national guard and regulars.

According to the Glen Grant’s study (Grant, 2019), in Lithuania The Power distance dimension has a low score on this dimension of 42/100 and this extends more into the military culture than the other two. Lithuanians show clear tendencies to prefer equality and a decentralisation of power and decision-making. NCOs are highly respected and can and do act above their rank. Control and formal supervision is generally disliked among junior staffs, who demonstrate a preference for teamwork and an open management style. The senior leadership still have a power based attitude but seemingly less than the other two states. Similarly there is a strong sense of loyalty and deference towards author-

ity and status amongst the older generation who experienced Russian and Soviet dominance.

Baltic Interoperability report suggests, that the relatively high individualism dimension in Lithuania of 60/100 reflects in the strength of inward loyalty and looking after ones own family first. Lithuanians speak plainly without any exaggeration or understatement; this too represents individualism. They are tolerant in that they do not care too much about what other people do as long as it does not annoy them; what you do and how you live your life is your business. This has reflected in their Baltic Cooperation stance where they judge the activities for their military improved performance rather than any desire for a better joint system (BIR, 2019).

As a Feminine country with a very low score of 19/100, Lithuanians are modest and keep a low profile. They usually communicate with a soft and diplomatic voice in order not to offend anyone. Conflicts for Lithuanians are usually threatening, because they endanger the wellbeing of everyone, which is also indicative of a feminine culture. Although the Lithuanians are considered a relatively reserved culture, they are tolerant towards the culture of other nations and welcome the other eFP members as their own. Like Latvia this is partly due to their long experience of mixing with others nationalities. But this tolerance and wish not to offend could also have serious implications for interoperability both with the Germans and perhaps with allies if they need to give an order for a critical and perhaps dangerous task.

The high score of 65/100 on uncertainty avoidance reflects in a built-in worry about the world around them. This worry joins the natural softness and some aspects of power reflecting in a respect for finding managers who need to be seen as knowing

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

everything and able to lead. This respect takes the uncertainty away from them self. It also explains why qualifications and formal titles are lauded and often included on business cards. Other signs of high uncertainty avoidance among Lithuanians are reluctance to taking risks, bureaucracy and emotional reliability on plans, rules and regulations. It needs serious note that plans may not be followed but their existence is vital for reducing stress as they reduce uncertainty. The importance here for interoperability is clear. If it is not already written, it may simply not happen. Flexibility will not be a Lithuanian trademark, concludes Baltic Interoperability Study (BIR, 2019).

Glen Grant argue, that one cultural conflict within the system likely came from the individualism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions. These underscored the change back to conscription bringing the need for a safe Lithuanian solution rather than face the uncertainty of reliance upon NATO or allies. But these traits also work strongly against the high risk to the country of deploying precious troops outside of borders. They will go if ordered because internal national conflict would be frowned upon but they might not "rush" to do so<sup>33</sup>.

These cultural factors listed above explains a lot of current dynamics of the security and defense cooperation among the Baltic nations, and outlines another perspective of the mechanism, how current institutional collaboration is setup between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

## Conclusions and recommendations

While it has not been a subject of extensive study before, this paper concludes, that institutions and administrative bodies across the Baltic countries always has had

their discretion and impact on rather politically driven processes and played a key roles in matter of cooperation and synchronization of the Baltic defense and security.

Following the logic of evidence provided in this paper, the main factors, that put institutions in the position of importance of political decision making and provides them a great deal of autonomy within its implementation of defense and security policy among the first are the political processes and related administrative obligations, which were driven by accession of NATO early 2000's and integration within Western political and economical space since restoration of the statehood of the Baltic nations in 1991.

Second, these are institutionally deeply rooted different defense concepts of the each Baltic nation and differing defense spending priorities, rules and regulations, which has led to the failure of some previously successfully launched intra-regional cooperation projects like BALTRON, and inability succeed common Baltic procurements as a long term project.

Third, these are regional cooperation preferences which differs among the Baltic nations and are also reflected in the institutional priorities within Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – for Estonian looking more to the Northern partners and Lithuania to the Poland. While these preferences are beginning to shift at Lithuanian side, these are still pretty strong for Estonia.

Fourth, these are factors of expert knowledge and competence arising from nature of the bureaucratic organizations themselves – while in the elected bodies politicians retain their positions for few or several years, bureaucratic machine runs much longer based on their well regulated institutional memories and officials, who sometimes hold their chairs for decades.

<sup>33</sup> Olevs Nikers, Otto Tabuns (Ed) Baltic Interoperability report, The Jamestown Foundation 2019

Also it is necessary to underline personal relationships among the high ranking officials and politicians, which very often becomes "insitutionalized" factors along official milestones of the cooperation as the laws, concepts, administrative regulations and other formal rules.

And last factor, that has its crucial importance on the insitutional dynamics are cultural features of the societies, which is rather similar for the Baltic countries, but these are similarities, that rather split than unite, and are also reflected in the insitutional behaviour of the defense and security establishment.

As for the recommendations, we would like to suggest for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania ought to consider the following steps to address the institutional imbalance of the national security discussion and decision making:

- 1) Establish a structured and systematic Baltic cross-border public debate on security (as part of total defence). This would both raise intraregional awareness as well as societal understanding of security policy and defence spending.
- 2) In order to rise the competence of elected bodies, mandate the participation of politicians in a regional strategic course at the Baltic Defence College to teach and discuss security issues, increasing their capacity of independent informed decision making on these issues.
- 3) Coordinate among Ministries of Defense their defense spending priorities annually, and harmonize national legislation in order to successfully proceed with long term procurement projects in the future.
- 4) Introduce permanent rotation of officials among the Ministries of defense of the Baltic countries.

## References

- Aberbach, Joel D., and Bert A. Rockman. 2000. *In the web of Politics: Three Decades of the U.S. Federal Executive*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Andžāns Māris, Uēis Romanovs, *The Trilateral Military Cooperation of the Baltic States in the "New Normal" Security Landscape*, Riga Conference papers 2017 <http://liia.lv/en/news/insight-into-the-riga-conference-papers-2017-security-in-the-baltic-sea-region-realities-and-prospects-641>
- Cooper A. David, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, and Jessica D. Blankshain, *Deconstructing the "Deep State": Subordinate Bureaucratic Politics in U.S. National Security*, \ Foreign Policy Research Institute by Elsevier, 2018
- Jermalavičius, Tomas. 2009. «Baltic military cooperation: past, present and future.» In: *Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2009*, edited by A. Kasekamp. Tallinn: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute
- Hammond H. Thomas., *Veto Points, Policy Preferences, and Bureaucratic Autonomy in Democratic Systems*, "Politics, Policy, and Organizations : Frontiers in the Scientific Study of Bureaucracy", Ed. by George A. Krause, and Kenneth J. Meier, University of Michigan Press, 2003. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rsub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3414592>
- Lawrence, A. *Challenges in Developing a Common Baltic Air Defense*, in Nikers. O., Tabuns O. (eds) *Baltic Interoperability Report*, The Jamestown Foundation, 2018
- Nora Vanaga, *Baltijas valstu militārā sadarbība: kopīgas atbildes meklējums pēc Ukrainas krīzes*, Sargs.lv, August 5, 2016 <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/viedoklis/2016-08-05/baltijas-valstu-militara-sadarbiba-kopigas-atbildes-meklejums-pec-ukrainas>

- O. Nikers, O. Tabuns (Ed.) Baltic Security Strategy Report, The Jamestown Foundation, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/product/baltic-security-strategy-report/>
- O. Nikers, Baltic armies still faced by cooperation, training and leadership challenges, The Baltic Times 2019 June 27, [https://www.baltictimes.com/baltic\\_armies\\_still\\_faced\\_by\\_cooperation\\_training\\_and\\_leadership\\_challenges/](https://www.baltictimes.com/baltic_armies_still_faced_by_cooperation_training_and_leadership_challenges/), Interview with Glen Grant
- Olevs Nikers, Otto Tabuns (Ed) Baltic Interoperability report, The Jamestown Foundation 2019
- Thoenig, Jean-Claude, Institutional Theories and Public Institutions.: New Agendas and Appropriateness. Peters B.G. and J.Pierre. The Handbook of Public Administration, Sage, 2011.
- Thoenig, J.C. (2005) 'Territorial Administration and Political Control. Decentralization in France', Public Administration
- Rebecca Ingber, Bureaucratic Resistance and the National Security State, 104 Iowa Law Review 139, 2018

### Information about authors

**Olevs Nikers** is PhD student at the Riga Stradins University and Director of the Baltic Security Strategy Project. Since 2016 he is a Senior analyst at the Jamestown Foundation and a member of the Association for Advancement of Baltic Studies. Master's degree in International Affairs at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University, in 2016. Fellowships Program of The World Affairs Institute in 2017.

**Otto Tabuns** is a visiting lecturer at the Riga Graduate School of Law and co-host of Latvia Weekly current affairs podcast. Strategic and regional defense policy analysis expertise.