

**Testimony by Ambassador of Latvia to the U.S.  
H.E. Mr Andris Teikmanis at the hearing before the U.S. Senate  
Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS)  
Appropriations Subcommittee**

7 March 2017

**Latvia-U.S.**

Latvia and the United States have a century long history of truly friendly relations. The United States is our closest strategic partner. The Latvian-American strategic partnership has helped Latvia to safeguard its independence and build democratic society, has facilitated Latvia's integration into the Euro Atlantic community. Latvia highly values the extensive political dialogue and multifaceted co-operation developed over the years.

**Global security challenges**

We have to admit today that the world has become less secure and less stable over the past decade. Causes for instability are various and the geography of the threats is diverse. The continued U.S. global leadership is extremely important to safeguard an international rules based order. The strong transatlantic link is the answer to today's security risks – terrorism, radicalism, cyberwarfare, information confrontations. Latvia is ready to continue joining the U.S. in this important endeavor to make the world more secure and stable.

Since 2003, Latvian troops have stood shoulder to shoulder with the U.S. in the fight against terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. We both have made sacrifices. Latvia remains committed to fighting terrorism within the Global Coalition against ISIL and providing financial support and military expertise to those who fight ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Since 2014 NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga (*NATO StratCom*) provides in-depth analyses and recommendations on countering Russian and ISIL propaganda.

We could do more. We are ready to do more. In 2017 Latvia is considering additional contribution to the fight against terrorism in the form of financial assistance.

**Security situation in the region**

Threats around us have become more complex and harder to identify, quantify and pinpoint. Russia's actions *vis-à-vis* its neighbors show a disturbing and worrisome trend that we have to reckon with.

As it is evident from the new Russian National Security Strategy, Russia has defined NATO as its adversary and threat to its national interest. The Strategy also reflects the sentiment and desire for a world order with spheres of influence. This vision is outdated and unrealistic; the sovereign nations Russia wishes to subject to such division have their own vision and an active say in their development and choice with whom to ally themselves. This sovereign right may not be challenged.

What happened in Ukraine, and Russia's steady and systematic military build-up as well as the intensive military maneuvers in the proximity of NATO's borders – like the ones symbolically named “Zapad 2017” (which means “West 2017” in Russian) – have caused a significant deterioration in European strategic security environment and are challenging the European and international security order. This has direct impact on the national security of Latvia, Europe and NATO. We take it seriously. I do predict that we can expect continued pressure both in terms of military pressure and hybridized warfare employing both military assets and non-military means aimed at eroding and deconstructing the unity of Europe, the Transatlantic link and consequently - NATO. These actions include a range of instruments, including propaganda, economic pressure and financing of political campaigns to cyber-attacks and aggressive intelligence gathering.

To respond, we need a strong NATO as a source of stability and reliability. We need a prosperous and resilient European Union. We need an effective *Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE) capable of solving, not freezing conflicts. We need more co-operation at the regional level. To uphold our European values and principles, we have to back them with strong institutions and partnerships with its neighbors that are nurtured on a daily basis.

Being aware that internal and external security is interlinked, Latvia is doing its utmost to build on our own resilience, strengthen our border security and invest in our self-defense. However, our strength is in our solidarity! We are grateful to NATO and individual Allies, in particular, the U.S., for a significant military reinforcement experienced already. An enhanced military presence combined with assurance measures such as air policing and military exercises has provided us with visible reassurance.

### **NATO and U.S. presence**

Following swiftly on the heels of Russian aggression in Ukraine, NATO reacted by taking decisions to reassure Allies that were proper to deter Russia. And since then, it has proceeded

with strengthening strategic partnerships to build security together with non-NATO countries like Sweden and Finland in our region.

Thanks to historical decisions of the NATO Warsaw Summit on the deployment of four multinational battle groups to the Alliance's Eastern flank, including a Canadian-led Enhanced Forward Presence battle group in Latvia, we are more secure and reassured. This is a very practical expression of solidarity from our allies and a strong deterrent signal to Russia. Security in our region is greatly strengthened thanks to the Congress support for the U.S. European Reassurance Initiative/ European Deterrence Initiative, the *Atlantic Resolve* mission and the Foreign Military Financing for which we are grateful. Taking into account that challenges to our region are of a long term nature, we are looking forward to the continuation of the European Deterrence Initiative at the funding level of \$3.4 billion or higher. Likewise we hope that the Foreign Military Financing funding will be maintained or enhanced. These policies have strengthened our regional security and made a positive impact on addressing our immediate shortfalls in national capabilities.

The continued U.S. commitment to NATO is essential to preserving the irreversibility of these decisions. Latvia highly appreciates the very clear and resolute statement by the U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis at the NATO Defense Ministerial meeting in Brussels last month, thus reconfirming the U.S. strong support to the Alliance. The meeting of the Presidents of three Baltic States and the Vice President of the U.S. in Munich in mid-February reassured us even further in this respect.

Having said this, I would like to add that Latvia shares the notion that NATO must be capable of confronting the 21st century threats. We agree there is a need to modernize NATO, to streamline the Alliance's military command structures, to place greater focus on counter-terrorism and cyber security, on information warfare. NATO has to have appropriate investment in military capabilities that can be achieved by equally sharing the burden of our collective security.

### **Latvia's contributions to defense**

Latvia is also stepping up and pulling more weight. Latvia is among the best examples when it comes to raising a nation's own defense capabilities. In case of military aggression, our own forces will be the first responders. We are well aware of that challenge, therefore Latvia has spent last two years boosting its military capacity and improving the interagency coordination. For the current fiscal year, our defense spending has increased by 22%, reaching 1.7% of GDP. Our commitment to NATO target of 2% will be reached next year – in 2018.

Since joining NATO in 2004, Latvia has not only been a recipient, but also a provider of security. In proportion to our population of two million, count us amongst the top contributors

to international peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. We have also contributed to the missions in the Balkans, Mediterranean, Mali, the Central African Republic, and off the coast of Somalia.

### **Supporting our Eastern neighbors**

Transatlantic resolve is also needed to continue strengthening resilience of the EU's Eastern neighbors who constantly encounter threats to their territorial integrity and statehood as a result of Russia's aggressive actions. Europe and the U.S. should stand firmly on calling Russia to comply with international rules and its commitments, in particular - fully with the Minsk Agreement. Transatlantic unity is of utmost importance in this respect. The latest escalation in the Eastern Ukraine underlines this. We need to keep up pressure on Russia to de-escalate the situation and facilitate peaceful resolution of the conflict in Ukraine. We should continue supporting Ukraine both practically and politically, because the success of Ukraine to firmly stand on its own feet will be the best response to the concept of spheres of influence.

Europe and the U.S. should join their efforts to also help Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova counter threats of hybrid nature that are a mix of various elements including information warfare. Latvia has been active in providing its support to the Eastern partners to counter propaganda and to strengthen independent media through various frameworks - NATO (*NATO StratCom*), the European Union (*East StratCom Task Force*), regionally and nationally (*Baltic Centre for Media Excellence*).

I would like to mention two examples of very practical approach and support towards the Eastern Partnership countries. Firstly, *the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence* recently completed a study on skills and training needs of independent media in the Eastern Partnership countries. We encourage all donors to use the findings of the study to improve the coordination and targeting of their media support programs.

Secondly, Latvia is interested in the success of the *Creative Content Support Fund* that is now being established with support from the *European Endowment for Democracy* and the British Government. The Fund will strengthen the capacity of the independent media to offer Russian-language audiences a strong alternative to the Kremlin-controlled media. We encourage the U.S. to consider supporting this important initiative.

### **In conclusion**

We are living in very turbulent times. The international rules based order has been challenged. The European security architecture has been shaken up as a result of the more aggressive, assertive and adventurous foreign policy pursued by Russia. The other fundamental change in Europe's security has come with the appearance of incidents of terrorism on European soil. The transatlantic community needs to address these threats jointly. To be successful and effective in this endeavor we need a strong NATO, the transatlantic link and solid unity among the Allies. We should also support our neighbors for them to strengthen their resilience— both in the East and the South.

During the pivotal times in history, the Alliance has always proven to be effective, credible and united. Solidarity is the key word here. I believe this spirit of solidarity will bring us to wise future decisions.