

SECURITY SITUATION IN THE BALTIC STATES IN 2015: THE ROLE OF RUSSIA



Jakub Janda

Head of the Kremlin Watch Programme
Deputy Director at European Values Think-Tank

Kremlin Watch is a strategic program of the European Values Think-Tank, which aims to unravel and confront instruments of Russian hybrid war which is focused against liberaldemocratic system.

This overview covers the events in 2015, based on the Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police (DP)¹, Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO)², and the National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department (VSD)³. All three reports identify the activity of the Russian government, military, and intelligence services as the primary threat to security and stability in the region.

The key objectives of Russia's foreign policy are to restore a status of the great power and secure a key role in international politics. An integral part of this is the attempt to establish a division of geopolitical influence spheres in which post-Soviet space is assigned to Russia's sphere of influence and Russia's "exclusive interests" in the neighboring states are recognized. Russia's leadership continues to consider the change of power and geopolitical orientation in Ukraine in early 2014 a violation of Russia's "vital interests" and penetration of the hostile West into its sphere of influence. Since Russia views the post-Soviet space as an arena of geopolitical competition and does not recognize the states in this space as proper subjects, it responds to mounting tensions with the West with renewed efforts to exert influence on its neighbors. To this end, a complex of political and diplomatic, economic, military measures as well as those related to energy and information is applied along with attempts to exacerbate social and ethnic tensions and instigate public protest".⁴

The Kremlin's multi-pronged aggression is sometimes said to be shaped by "Gerasimov Doctrine" named after the article "Value of Science Is in the Foresight", published by the Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov in 2013. The article and the Kremlin's subsequent actions in Ukraine and elsewhere speak of a "modern warfare relying on the combination of military might and the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures", as well as "firing up the local populace as a fifth column" and use of "concealed" armed forces.⁵

At the moment, the Baltic states assess the risk of open military confrontation between Russia and NATO as low. However, they are increasingly concerned about the use of hybrid methods to destabilize the region. In this review, we will cover several of them:

¹ <http://dp.gov.lv/en/?rt=documents&ac=download&id=15>. For more DP reports see <http://dp.gov.lv/en/>.

² https://www.kapo.ee/sites/default/files/public/content_page/Annual%20Review%202015.pdf. For more KAPO reports see <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>.

³ <http://www.vsd.lt/Files/Documents/636035032005780000.pdf>. For more VSD reports see <http://www.vsd.lt/PageEN.aspx?pageID=170>.

⁴ Assessment of Threats to National Security 2015 by the Second Investigation Department of the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Lithuania (available in Lithuanian only)

<http://www.kam.lt/download/48227/assessment%2520of%2520threat%2520to%2520national%2520security%25202015.pdf>

⁵ Valery Gerasimov, 2013, "Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations" http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf

- Support for extremists
- Manipulation through Russian diaspora
- Use of government-organized NGOs
- Using history as a tool
- Launch and expansion of media projects
- Intensified special services activity
- Cyber attacks
- Economic pressure

1. SUPPORT FOR EXTREMISTS

AIMS:

- Make Russian aggression in Ukraine or other neighboring states appear as a secondary problem
- Influence the target countries' internal and foreign policy decisions against their own interests
- Expand Russia's sphere of influence in Europe in exchange for cooperation in the Middle East
- Sow disorder and damage the integrity of the EU and NATO

TARGETS: The extreme right, national populists, and leftist populists.

MECHANISM: National populists who use the refugee crisis to instigate fear in the society are generally opposed to a European liberal and tolerant world view, the EU, and NATO. They find a suitable source of information and a media ally in pro-Kremlin propaganda; which gives them exaggerated attention. Leftist populists react to the national populist messages to raise their own profile and are in their turn supported by pro-Kremlin propaganda's glorification of the Socialist past. Eventually, criticism of Russian aggression is overshadowed by an irrational fear of the refugees or a concern about the rise of extreme right, making the public more open to hostile propaganda and likely to forget the difference between real and imaginary threats.

NARRATIVE: Conservative values (such as the nation-state, heterosexual family) are under attack and would be best protected by an authoritarian government model such as Russia's.

EXAMPLES: In Latvia, pro-Kremlin media depicts asylum seekers as threats to European security and values, and positions Russia as a true friend of Europe. World National Conservative Movement⁶, a cooperation network for radical right-wingers and conservatives, was created by a Russian ultra-rightwing organization: the Russian Imperialist Movement. Several anti-refugee activists in Latvia have

⁶ More on the Russian Imperial Movement, its views and international activity, including the attempts to form a World National-Conservative Movement and financing the far right abroad: "They position themselves as opponents of Russia's President Vladimir Putin, but have no problem with holding military training in Russia or sending military equipment and volunteers to Eastern Ukraine. They seem to have an understanding with the authorities." <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.cz/2015/09/russian-fascist-militants-give-money-to.html>

joined. DP believes such initiatives are aimed at gaining control over radical right-wing and conservative groups to put pressure on European decision makers in line with the Kremlin's foreign policy interests.⁷

In Estonia, Russian journalists were sent to Estonia on tourist visas to cover anti-refugee meetings and visit the Vao refugee center.⁸ They were seeking material to support propaganda messages about Estonia as an intolerant and hostile country that hates foreigners⁹ – implying both refugees and Russians. One of the crew's goals was to obtain confirmation from a Syrian refugee that Russia's military intervention in Syria was justified in order to stop terrorist attacks and the flow of refugees. Other messages were that Estonia's affairs and decisions are dictated by Brussels, the EU and Estonia's refugee policy is harmful, unpopular, and forces Estonians and local Russians to cooperate, Russia's image improving as a result.¹⁰

In Lithuania, the events organized by the far-right are frequently attended by pro-Kremlin media. Normally, they are used as "evidence" of the rise of xenophobia and Nazism in the country. However, protest campaigns held by the same people against the reception of refugees are presented "as a positive resistance of EU citizens against the EU policy that violates their rights".¹¹ The refugee crisis has been used by the pro-Kremlin propaganda to criticize NATO, the EU, and the Lithuanian authorities. The audience was told the crisis was sparked by the NATO operations in Libya and Iraq, and posed threats which the EU and Lithuania would not be able to cope with: such as the collapse of the Schengen zone, safe havens for terrorists, and demographic changes. Lithuania was also said to block Russia's initiatives to fight terrorism together.¹²

2. MANIPULATION THROUGH RUSSIAN DIASPORA

AIMS:

- Instigate segregation and undermine integration of Russian speakers through "compatriot policy"
- Control neighbors along the notion of "near abroad" or Russia's "sphere of influence"
- Use real and imaginary violations of rights of Russian-speaking minorities to justify military and political intervention in the affairs of its neighbors

⁷ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg.16

⁸ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.11

⁹ Examples: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/03/31/migrants/>, <http://svpressa.ru/world/article/131049/>,

¹⁰ More examples: <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2645581>, <http://www.rubaltic.ru/news/30032016-estontsy-boyatsya-bezhentsev/>, <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20150831/1026385494/Estonia-migrants-Russians-poll.html>

¹¹ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 51

¹² Ibid., pg. 36-37

TARGET: The Russian-speaking minority abroad

ACTORS: The Russian Embassies, Rossotrudnichestvo (federal agency under the Foreign Ministry), the Fund for the Legal Protection and Support of Russian Federation Compatriots Living Abroad, the Russian World, A.Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the Moscow Houses, and the Russian security services under diplomatic cover.

MECHANISM: The Kremlin's compatriot policy uses its international broadcast media, sponsored events, soft power, and manipulation of sensitive subjects to shift loyalty of the Russian-speaking population from their country of residence or citizenship to "mother Russia". It then attempts to use this group either as agents of influence or a pretext to further its foreign policy and military goals.

NARRATIVES: Emphasizing real or imagined discrimination of minorities in the Baltics, creating an image of the Baltic States as the enemy, legitimizing Kremlin's aggressive foreign policy, popularizing historical interpretations favorable to Russia, and promoting moral superiority of the "Russian world": over the West.

EXAMPLES: In Lithuania, the Russian Embassy interacted with the system of Russian language schools, aiming to develop a young generation of activists loyal to Russia. Conferences, trainings and camps were used to promote the Soviet concept of history favorable to Kremlin's interests and skepticism towards Lithuania's independence and statehood. Schoolchildren participated in trainings and competitions of the Airsoft military simulation games together with Russian teams.¹³ After VSD's 2014 review noted that Lithuanian Airsoft teams taking part in games in Kaliningrad were introduced to military tactics by the Russian Special Forces and may be prompted to join military actions alongside Russian forces¹⁴, Sputnik manipulated the quote to claim "Lithuania uses Airsoft tournaments to prepare for war with Russia."¹⁵

In Latvia, Rossotrudnichestvo continued trying to attract Russian speaking youth to study at Russian universities or visit Russia through programs Новое Поколение (New Generation) and дравствуй, Россия! (Hello, Russia!). According to the program description, they aim to "expand the circle of young political, business, social, scientific, and cultural leaders with a positive attitude towards Russia" and "an objective perception of social, political, economic, and cultural changes in Russia"¹⁶. While many states promote youth exchange, and it is natural for young people to visit and gain education in Russia, there are concerns over attempts to use these programs and study courses to develop loyalty to Russia, cultivate the participants as intelligence assets¹⁷, or agents of Kremlin's interests abroad in the future.¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., pg. 45-46

¹⁴ VSD annual review 2014, pg. 19 <http://www.vsd.lt/Files/Documents/635718603371696250.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://sputniknews.com/world/20150414/1020881531.html>

¹⁶ <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2747025>

¹⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/head-of-russian-cultural-center-investigated-as-spy>

¹⁸ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 11

CONSTRAINT: The “Compatriot policy” has so far failed to attract a broad support for Russian government policy among the Russian-speaking population of the Baltics; especially from the youth. Better quality of life in the Baltics and absence of many of the “problems” denounced in pro-Kremlin media played a role.¹⁹

3. USE OF GOVERNMENT-ORGANIZED NGOs (GONGOS)

AIMS:

- Create an appearance of “independent voices” supporting the Kremlin’s narratives
- Ensure the representation of pro-Kremlin voices at events held by international organizations
- Receive international response and validation

TARGET: Organizations and activists promoting the rights of Russian-speaking minorities

MECHANISM: The Russian government offers grants to organizations and activists abroad to produce and spread information materials, organize protests, and events that match Kremlin’s geopolitical goals. In the Baltics, funding is directed at organizations that can demonstrate the biggest problems in the target country, even if these problems are exaggerated or not actually present. “Systemic” activists are directly controlled by the Kremlin via embassies, umbrella “compatriot” organizations, and staff with security services background; “non-systemic” actors link up with officials and institutions in Russia through other channels. Despite these links, they claim to be “independent voices” and part of the host country’s civil society. With Russia’s financial support, they take part in international human rights forums, build media presence, and visit territories with questionable status (e.g. “election” observation in Crimea). The Russian government then uses this self-created evidence to show that “independent NGOs” support its messages.

NARRATIVES: The Russian aggression in Ukraine and hostility towards the Baltic States is the result of their governments’ oppression and discrimination of the Russian diaspora and Russian-speaking citizens. International human rights organizations unfairly single out the Russian government for criticism while they should be focusing on problems in the Baltics and other EU members: “the refugee crisis, problem of non-citizens in Latvia and Estonia, the incessant rise of racism, xenophobia and neo-Nazism in Western Europe, violations of rights of national minorities, including the Russian one, in Ukraine.”²⁰

EXAMPLES: In Estonia, the Russian government covered participation costs of two organizations in OSCE events in Warsaw²¹ and Vienna²², where they submitted their comments on minorities and the human rights situation in Estonia for inclusion in the final assessment. The umbrella organization for

¹⁹ <http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/opinion/the-new-generation-of-baltic-russian-speakers/>

²⁰ <https://ria.ru/world/20151202/1334191675.html>

²¹ www.rus.postimees.ee/3348111/

²² <http://www.osce.org/ru/pc/195371?download=true>

GONGOs is the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots of Estonia and is managed by the Russian Embassy.²³

In Latvia, the same activist was involved in the promotion of informational material “Persecution of dissenters in the Baltic countries”²⁴ at international forums which: described the presence of US and other NATO troops in Latvia as preparations for the “armed suppression of Russians in Latvia”²⁵; and attempted to act as an election observer in the internationally unrecognized Republic of Transnistria. He also produced a film on “traditional values” and “homosexual propaganda”²⁶. He competes for Russian funds with a variety of other systemic and non-systemic actors, some of whom belong to the umbrella Latvian NGO Council.²⁷

In Lithuania, Russia funds two organizations, the Centre for the Protection and Research of Fundamental Rights, and the Independent Human Rights Centre. Their members used international human-rights events in 2015 to blame Lithuania for violating the rights of ethnic communities and took part in pro-Kremlin propaganda campaigns against the US and NATO. The umbrella organization is the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots of Lithuania²⁸.

CONSTRAINTS: Economic difficulties have led to funding cuts, which heated up competition and tension between pro-Kremlin activists and organizations. At the same time, increasing awareness of the Kremlin’s real aims is making the messages propagated by GONGOs less credible abroad.

RESPONSE: In Latvia, the DP proposed legislative amendments to make NGO funding more transparent.²⁹

4. USING HISTORY AS A TOOL

AIMS:

- Justifying the Kremlin’s conquering policy and incriminating governments that oppose it
- Ridiculing and refuting any approaches to history that conflict with Kremlin’s policy
- Mobilizing international and popular support

ACTORS: The Russian Historical Society, the Russian Military History Society, and World without Nazism

²³ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.8

²⁴ <http://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/186021?download=true>

²⁵ <http://vz.ru/politics/2015/5/27/747549.html>

²⁶ <http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/pb-gaponenko-poluchaet-iz-rossijskogo-fonda-sredstva-na-sozdanie-filmov-i-lagerej.d?id=46803707>

²⁷ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 13-14

²⁸ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 44

²⁹ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 12

MECHANISM: In shaping of historical narrative on the government level, the Kremlin chooses moments in history which suit its propaganda (selective approach), and constructs a new narrative compatible with current Kremlin goals (pseudo-historic approach). In 2015, Russia funded grandiose celebrations on May 9th around Eastern Europe, marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the World War II. New symbols, such as the “March of the Immortal Regiment”, were used to influence public sentiment, and modify and reinforce the desired collective historical memory. As before, St George Ribbon was employed as a way to show “patriotic spirit”. The ribbon had no public significance before 2005, and then revived as a response by the pro-Kremlin forces to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Since 2014, it became a symbol of public support to the Russian government, also associated with Russian nationalist and separatist sentiment.

NARRATIVES: Playing down Soviet Union’s policy of repressions; reviving Stalin’s personality cult as creator of Soviet power and ingenious leader of the Great Patriotic War; stressing Russia’s heroism and unique place in history as the sole victor of the war and safeguard against Nazism; accusing Ukraine, the Baltics, and others of Nazism; supporting conspiracy theories which declare the end of the “destructive Western civilization” era and look forward to the “renaissance of a new spiritual Russia”.

EXAMPLES: In Latvia, organizers of the “March of the Immortal Regiment”, used by the Kremlin to reinforce the desired collective historical memory, were awarded at the 2015 World Russian Compatriots Congress.³⁰

In Estonia, the Russian Embassy held an event to commemorate submarine Akula, which sank in Estonian waters in 1915, and asked history publisher Grenader to arrange an exhibition of its publications. Earlier, pro-Kremlin media had repeatedly described Grenader as neo-Nazi and accused it of the rehabilitation of Fascism. As Grenader had published relevant books about World War I and the submarine war in the Baltic Sea however, the organizers decided to be pragmatic and forget the differences. This is a good example of the emptiness of Russia’s accusations of Nazism and their use only for propaganda purposes.³¹

In Lithuania, Kremlin’s policy on history was aimed at “denying the fact of the occupation of Lithuania, justifying the mass deportations, and downplaying the restoration of Lithuania’s independence, the post-war resistance movement, the dates important for the development of national identity, and Lithuania’s image in the international arena”.³² Russian-funded projects included search for remains of Soviet and Russian soldiers from different epochs and rehabilitation of Soviet-era monuments.³³ The Episcopate of Vilnius and Lithuania constitutes part of the Patriarchate of Moscow and all Rus’, which has become an important soft power instrument for the Kremlin. On the one-year anniversary of the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the Episcopate hosted exhibitions of relics from the Pechersk Lavra

³⁰ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 14

³¹ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.12

³² National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 37

³³ Ibid., pg. 49

Monastery in Kiev (Ukraine). The likely aim was to prove that Russia and Ukraine had a shared history and at consolidate the status of the Moscow Patriarchate as the sole descendent of the Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Rus'.³⁴ Some of the adherents to Russian religious movements are also prone to believe and spread various conspiracy theories, such as the anti-Western 'Concept of Public Security'.³⁵

5. LAUNCH AND EXPANSION OF MEDIA PROJECTS

AIMS:

- Develop a favorable information environment inside and outside of Russia
- Strengthen and spread the Russian language and activate soft power instruments abroad
- Change the public opinion; influence domestic political processes; discredit the target country, its officials, and institutions; split the society, and raise support for the Russian government
- Spread confusion and undermine credibility of the rival international media

ACTORS: Russia Today, Sputnik, Media Club Format A3, Russia-sponsored regional media (Baltnews, Baltiiskii Mir, Pravozashchita section of Komsomolskaya Pravda v Severnoi Evrope), local media, foundations, academic institutions, think tanks, and art projects financed from the Russian federal budget

MECHANISM: The Kremlin has several tools of influencing the Baltic countries' public information landscape. It targets diaspora through major state-controlled TV channels (where all dissenting voices have been long silenced); funds creation of new media abroad, sometimes via front companies to make it look "independent"; it sends TV crews to the Baltic countries on assignments to collect very specific "evidence" which would support pre-set narratives; it attacks any media resource or actor which mentions or tries to combat pro-Kremlin propaganda; and it uses fake social media accounts and paid "trolls" to spread desired messages or pollute information space. Kremlin-owned TV channels enjoy a monopoly on the Russian-language coverage in the Baltic states³⁶, which has led to many inhabitants living in different cultural and information spaces and in rising tension. Pro-Kremlin media frequently employs fakes, conspiracy theories, and disinformation meant to confuse, disorient, and polarize the audience. Research made by the Open Estonia Foundation shows that ethnic Russians who live in Estonia and follow both Kremlin and Estonian media end up disbelieving everyone and are unable to form an opinion.³⁷ The Kremlin keeps a very tight grip on "editorial policy" of the loyal media. At Sputnik, it appoints editors with security background, performs background check on all participating journalists, and brings them to RT headquarters in Moscow for special training. Compared with retranslated Russia

³⁴ Ibid., pg. 47

³⁵ Ibid., pg. 48

³⁶ <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/13/latvia-resists-russian-soft-power.html>

³⁷ [http://oef.org.ee/fileadmin/media/valjaanded/uuringud/Current events and different sources of information](http://oef.org.ee/fileadmin/media/valjaanded/uuringud/Current%20events%20and%20different%20sources%20of%20information)

TV channels, information platforms such as Sputnik have small audiences, but they are probably established as long-term projects.

NARRATIVES: In Estonia: Estonia's increase in defense expenditure is unjustified; the Russian threat is exaggerated; Estonia's affairs and decisions are dictated by Brussels; Russia's foreign policy is justified.³⁸

In Latvia: Latvia "discriminates minorities"; Latvia is seeing "the rebirth of fascism"; Latvia is "a failed state"; Russian sanctions had a "devastating effect" on the Latvian economy; Latvia is "a puppet used by the USA/West against Russia"; the legitimacy of Latvia's statehood and independence is questionable.³⁹

In Lithuania: Lithuania's increased defense spending and the reinstatement of conscription are signs of aggression; NATO's military exercises and activeness in the Baltic region threaten Europe's security and stability; the increase in Russia's military presence in the region is a needed and justified response; Lithuania's support to Ukraine and energy policy are "political", "unreasonably costly", and "dead-end".⁴⁰

EXAMPLES: In Latvia, Sputnik began operations in February 2016. One of the objectives declared in its statutes is the "provision of operational information to the state organs of the Russian Federation about the socio-economic and political situation in the Russian Federation and abroad." Some of the authors publish under pseudonyms and try to hide their links to the platform. Russian and Latvian language versions of Sputnik Latvia have different content and specific messages to attract different audiences.⁴¹

In Estonia, the Sputnik portal was launched at the same time, but due to the lack of its own journalistic capacity, it translates articles from Russian into Estonian as a temporary measure. Kremlin propaganda attempted to discredit ETV+, a new Russian-language TV channel of the Estonian Public Broadcasting, labeling it a mouthpiece of the Estonian government and propaganda tool to influence minorities.⁴²

In Lithuania, 30% of the population, including nearly two thirds of the Russian speakers, follows daily the news announced by Russian state-controlled television channels. Six to eight percent of the population read Russian news websites daily. The Sputnik project is implemented directly through the baltnews.lt portal, which is financed in a non-transparent way through intermediary companies, and is not registered in either Russia or Lithuania. In 2015, there were several information attacks that received wide public attention, such as the launch of websites of people's republics of Vilnius, Latgale, and Baltic Russians; the falsified results of an opinion poll on the effect of propaganda; pro-Kremlin media citing a false

³⁸ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.10

³⁹ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 18

⁴⁰ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 36

⁴¹ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 18-19

⁴² Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.9-10

objective of a NATO military exercise (to annex Kaliningrad) after the website of the Lithuanian Armed Forces was hacked.⁴³

CONSTRAINTS: It's difficult to find local language journalists who would agree to work for the Kremlin; the EU sanctions against RT director Dmitry Kiselyov for destabilizing activities against Ukraine make setup of local Sputnik offices legally complicated; the visible reality is fundamentally and materially different from what is served up by the pro-Kremlin propaganda.

RESPONSE: In Lithuania, VSD drafted amendments to the Criminal Code that would criminalize disinformation, which is defined as the public dissemination of false information to harm the national interests of Lithuania or to destabilize the country.⁴⁴ In Estonia, several Russian TV crews on propaganda missions were detained and their visas cancelled for lying about purpose of visit on visa applications.⁴⁵ In Estonia, Sputnik bank accounts were seized and in Latvia registration of Sputnik representation office was blocked due to EU sanctions against RT director Dmitry Kiselyov.⁴⁶

6. INTENSIFIED SPECIAL SERVICES ACTIVITY

AIMS:

- To solicit people into illegal collaboration, collect information, and build positions of influence
- To organize information operations to influence the course of affairs of the target countries

ACTORS: Federal Security Service (FSB), the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), and the Main Directorate of Military Intelligence of the General Staff (GU, formerly GRU).

TARGETS: People with access to state secrets or employed in influential positions (intelligence, security, and law enforcement officials; diplomats; representatives of political parties, state, and local officials), but also those with no such access at the moment: visitors who cross the Russian border; students from the Baltics in Russia; people with ties to Russia or positive view of its policy; people involved in illegal cross-border activity; businesspeople with interests in Russia; journalists; and research institutions.

MECHANISM: SVR conducts intelligence activities in the political, social, economic, and energy spheres by applying human intelligence methods, using diplomatic positions abroad, establishing cover organizations and illegal border crossings. FSB conducts most of its activity from the Russian territory, where it recruits visiting foreigners to gain insight into strategic objects abroad. GRU provides intelligence

⁴³ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 38

⁴⁴ 2015 Annual Report of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 12 (available in Lithuanian only) <http://www.vsd.lt/Files/Documents/635948636434075000.pdf>

⁴⁵ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.11

⁴⁶ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 18

to the Russian Armed Forces; hence its activities are mostly directed against target countries' defense capabilities.

The Russian intelligence services mainly conducted their recruitment attempts within Russian territory by using blackmail or manipulating the visitor's possibilities to conduct their business in Russia. FSB officers can access information about the visitor's job and reason for visit submitted for visa purposes, and this can be used to identify potential recruits. For targets with access to state secrets or influential positions, the Russian security services gather information about their personal and job-related characteristics and weak points (addiction, gambling, financial hardships, etc.), motivation to cooperate (disappointment with one's job, desire to take revenge, emotional ties with Russia, positive view of Kremlin's policy) before making contact. Russian intelligence and security staff also operates abroad under diplomatic cover as well as under cover as businessmen, journalists, researchers, members of delegations, and NGO staff. They attempt to recruit assets, conduct intelligence interviews, maintain ties with diplomats, carry out surveillance, and collect information while attending various events.

The main topics of interest for Russian intelligence in all three Baltic countries are:

- current events related to the EU (such as Latvian presidency in the EU council)
- NATO (military exercises, additional capabilities deployed and planned for deployment)
- response to the events in Ukraine (e.g. Lithuania's aid to Ukraine)
- personnel, activities, and material/technical capabilities of the military, intelligence, security and law enforcement institutions in the target country
- socio-political situation, economic environment, energy policy, and strategic infrastructure

EXAMPLES: In Latvia, the Russian intelligence services conducted propaganda operations, such as the report by Russian TV channel NTV on the so-called "unmasked NATO spy", Latvian citizen Andrejs Dudarevs.⁴⁷

In Estonia, an Internal Security Service officer, Eston Kohver, was kidnapped by the Russian FSB, convicted to 15 years imprisonment, and later returned in a prisoner exchange.⁴⁸ Furthermore, three Estonian residents involved in voluntary secret cooperation with the FSB were convicted. Neither of them had direct access to state secrets, but they were targeted and recruited due to their illegal cross-border activities.⁴⁹

In Lithuania, VSD assesses that a third of the Russian diplomatic corps are intelligence and security agents. The Russian intelligence services were attempting to build a web within the Lithuanian Interior Ministry and engaged in intimidation of Lithuanian officials and their families in Russia. Furthermore, two individuals suspected of espionage for Russia, an officer of the Air Force of the Lithuanian Armed

⁴⁷ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 8,

http://www.baltictimes.com/latvija_in_brief_171804575754f76fd673784/

⁴⁸ <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-estonia-eston-kohver-swapped/27272168.html>

⁴⁹ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg. 18

Forces and his contact, were detained. There were also attempts to infiltrate Lithuania's continuous mandatory basic military service system.⁵⁰

RESPONSE:

Latvia amended its Criminal Law and reviewed criminal liability for spying to increase the ability of its security institutions to counter hostile activities through counterintelligence and preventive measures.⁵¹

Estonia introduced additional responsibilities for persons with the right to access to state secrets. They include the obligation to inform about private visits to high risk countries, such as Russia and Belarus, and to follow security guidelines while in those countries. Failure to do so can serve as grounds for the revocation and refusal to extend or grant a clearance.⁵²

In Lithuania, VSD drafted amendments to the Interior Service Statute which would prevent a person from joining the Interior Ministry system if there is reasonable suspicion it would threaten national security.⁵³

7. CYBER ATTACKS

AIMS:

- Cyber espionage: gaining an advantage in the areas of defense, politics, economics, technology, and planning of military operations
- Cyber influence operations: obtaining inside information which is to be disclosed at the "right" moment and in the "right" context to attract maximum attention and impact
- Cyber sabotage: rendering networks or systems inoperative at a particular moment, changing them, or deleting data processed on them

ACTORS: The Russian security and intelligence services (FSB, subdivisions of Ministry of Defense); hackers employed, controlled, or funded by them (financially motivated criminal hackers, hacktivists, patriotic hackers); criminal entities providing cyber-attack services (DDoS attacks, malware, C&C servers, botnets).

TARGETS: defense systems, government institutions (in particular Foreign Ministries), industries, telecommunications systems, energy and critical infrastructure (disruption of which would have critical implications for everyday life), and media representatives.

MECHANISMS: Setting up a cyber attack requires people with relevant qualifications, as well as technological and financial resources to carry out the attack and hide its source. Systemic and targeted

⁵⁰ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 23-28

⁵¹ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 8

⁵² Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.21

⁵³ 2015 Annual Report of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 11 (available in Lithuanian only)

<http://www.vsd.lt/Files/Documents/635948636434075000.pdf>

searches are continuously performed to identify the targets' vulnerabilities. Attackers always have an "order" specifying which institutions in which states to focus on and what information is in demand. Once an attack has begun, it can go on for years. The hacking spyware used in cyber-espionage is regularly updated and modified, making it harder to detect. Third party hackers, infected computers, and constantly evolving technology are employed to make the origin of the attack untraceable. However, patterns of behavior, political motivation of attacks, and analysis of threat reports by international IT security experts raises strong suspicions that some of the campaigns originate in Russia.⁵⁴ Russia is known as a heavyweight in the cyber arena.⁵⁵ It has special military units dedicated to cyber espionage, where hackers are recruited straight out of university.⁵⁶ The FSB Military School near Moscow is often referred to as the world major hackers' school.⁵⁷

EXAMPLES: In Lithuania, the web page of the Joint Staff of the Lithuanian Armed Page was hacked and false information was planted regarding the objective of NATO's Saber Strike military exercise.⁵⁸ Pro-Kremlin media later presented this fake as original information to demonstrate Lithuania's hostile intentions in the Baltic Region (to annex Kaliningrad Oblast).⁵⁹

VSD and KAPO also cite the events in Ukrainian energy systems on Christmas 2015, when malware was allegedly used to cause large-scale power outages.⁶⁰

8. ECONOMIC PRESSURE

AIMS:

- Using Russia's position as main the energy supplier and important trade partner to many post-Soviet and EU member states to put pressure on them in policy and security matters (e.g. decisions on sanctions against Russia⁶¹, decisions on NATO bases)
- Preventing diversification of energy supply which would threaten Russia's dominant position
- Forcing neighbors to join regional integration projects in which the Kremlin dominates decision-making in exchange for favorable energy prices and market access

⁵⁴ https://ccdcoe.org/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdf/CyberWarinPerspective_Weedon_08.pdf

⁵⁵ <https://cryptome.org/2013/03/call-to-cyber-arms.pdf>

⁵⁶ http://www.cse.wustl.edu/~jain/cse571-14/ftp/cyber_espionage/

⁵⁷ <http://resources.infosecinstitute.com/the-most-hacker-active-countries-part-ii/>

⁵⁸ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 38, 40

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/lithuanian-military-website-hacked-to-suggest-invasion-of-russia-47331>

⁵⁹ <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20150611/1023226099.html>

⁶⁰ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg.22; National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 41; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-malware-idUSKBN0UE0ZZ20151231>

⁶¹ <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/competing-interests-threaten-baltic-pressure-russia>

- Gaining control of strategic enterprises abroad to exploit their market position, access critical infrastructure facilities, and influence political processes in the country

ACTORS: Russian state companies (e.g. Gazprom, Rosatom), investors (often Russian entities concealing the real origin of cash flows), and Eurasian Economic Union.

TARGETS: Energy, transport, IT, critical infrastructure (seaports, railways, energy networks and interconnections), and other strategically important economic sectors.

MECHANISMS: Russia is particularly sensitive to changes in the energy sector: its main source of revenue and influence. It attempts to slow down and weaken the EU Energy Union Strategy by discrediting the idea, offering profitable projects or transactions (e.g. Nord Stream pipeline) to certain EU member states, lobbying against market liberalization and legislative amendments through local actors, and acquisition of strategic energy infrastructure in the EU. Kremlin's other tools of economic influence are politically motivated, protectionist transport and trade policy, as well as attempts to gain control of strategic enterprises, corrupt local business elites, and force its neighbors to join regional integration projects.

EXAMPLES: In Latvia, natural gas monopolist Latvijas gaze, part-owned by Gazprom, opposed the liberalization of the gas market and actively lobbied market regulator and political parties against the adoption of new Energy Law.⁶² In Lithuania, Gazprom exited from the management of gas companies in 2014, but sought to maintain its positions and present the liquefied natural gas terminal in Klaipeda as a poor alternative to Russian gas. Russia has also implemented two nuclear power plant projects near the Lithuanian borders, in Kaliningrad Oblast and Astravyets, Belarus, which could hinder further integration of the Baltic Region into the Western European energy system and synchronous electrical grid.⁶³

In Estonia, Russian corruption has a cross-border effect as Estonian businesspeople, political parties, local government, and council officials do business with Russia or benefit from Russian state funds. They encounter corruption (have to give a cut to Russian officials responsible for awarding of grants, tenders, and contracts) and later adopt the same methods in Estonia.⁶⁴ This makes them susceptible to blackmail.

RESPONSE: Latvia has adopted amendments to its Energy Law stipulating that the gas market must be liberalized by April 3rd, 2017.⁶⁵ Lithuania completed the construction of electricity interconnections with Sweden and Poland.⁶⁶ Operating the liquefied natural gas import terminal in Klaipeda (Lithuania)

⁶² Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 25

⁶³ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg.36

⁶⁴ Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service, pg. 7

⁶⁵ Annual Report of the Latvian Security Police, pg. 25

⁶⁶ National Security Threat Assessment of the Lithuanian State Security Department, pg. 34

improved energy security in the region as a whole and allowed to reduce purchase price of the Russian gas.⁶⁷

CONSTRAINTS: Russia's economic and energy leverage is weakened by its increasing economic isolation, falling energy prices, the EU's move towards an Energy Union (with more integration, liberalization, and diversification), and China's competing interest in the region. Unfortunately, that makes it more likely to use military instruments to maintain dominance in what it sees as its geopolitical sphere of influence.

9. INTERCONNECTED METHODS

The methods which Kremlin uses to project power and exert influence, described above, are not independent of each other, but rather part of a complex strategy to exert pressure on its opponents, promote forces, messages, and policy decisions favorable to the Kremlin.

Russia's pressure on the EU public and governments to split the European Union



Source: 2015 Annual Review of the Estonian Internal Security Service

⁶⁷ <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/gazproms-new-strategy-of-control-recapturing-the-eu-gas-market/>

CONCLUSION

In its attempts to regain its historic sphere of influence and obtain an advantage in the crisis of relations with the West, the Kremlin employs tactics which avoid direct and overt confrontation, which focus on the opponent's weaknesses, and which exploit internal divisions. This is expected to continue in the foreseeable future, as the Russian population seems willing to support the high costs of such a policy⁶⁸. The Baltic states remain concerned with the possibility of a local military conflict in which they might become isolated. Influence operations and disinformation campaigns threaten to damage solidarity and cohesion within and between the US and European governments and societies. However, it would be wrong to conclude that the Kremlin is succeeding. Its aggression and manipulations are constrained by limited economic resources (as internal crisis is compounded by Western sanctions and low oil prices), increasing internal competition and hostility among its agencies and supporters, and limited credibility abroad (as observed reality is demonstrably different from what is served up by the Kremlin propaganda). These weaknesses should be the focus of efforts to safeguard national and European security in the face of the threat posed by the hostile Kremlin policies.

⁶⁸ Polls show that official propaganda channeled through Russian TV has a strong effect on public opinion, or at least on the opinions expressed in public. Thus, a siege mentality develops, where West is blamed for Russia's economic woes, Russia's involvement in Ukraine and Syria is widely supported, and president Putin's approval ratings remain high and respond positively to military action. [Link](#), [link](#), [link](#).

Do you like what we do?

Support us! Our work is possible due to individual donors such as yourself.

Use the form at: <http://www.europeanvalues.net/o-nas/support-us/>

Or send your donation directly to our transparent account: 2300405420/2010.

© **Evropské hodnoty z.s. 2016**

The European Values Think-Tank is a non-governmental policy institute defending liberal democracy.

Our vision is that of a free, safe and prosperous Czech Republic within Central Europe that is an integral part of the West.

We help to face aggressive regimes, radicalisation within the society, the spread of authoritarian tendencies and extremist ideologies including Islamism.

We provide decision-makers with expert recommendations and we systematically watch and evaluate their performance. We consider active citizens, accountable politicians, political parties that fulfil their role, as well as cohesive society that shares the values of individual freedom, human dignity and equal rights to be the principle elements of a functioning liberal democracy.

Since 2005, as a non-governmental and a non-profitable organisation which is not linked to any political party, we have pursued research and educational activities. In addition to publishing analytical papers and commentaries for the media, we organise conferences, seminars and training sessions for both experts and the wider public. Our events provide a platform for dialogue amongst politicians, experts, journalists, businesspeople and students.

EUROPEAN VALUES THINK-TANK

Vlkova 36, 130 00 Praha 3

info@evropskehodnoty.cz

www.europeanvalues.net

[facebook.com/Evropskehodnoty](https://www.facebook.com/Evropskehodnoty)