

The Referendum and Latvian Security

Klavs Zichmanis

The post-election period in Latvia brought a new crisis - the referendum to add Russian as Latvia's second official language. This led to an extensive debate about Latvia's existential question, a question avoided by Latvia's society for 20 years; what kind of Latvia do they want? Seemingly Latvians want an independent Latvian-culture based state. To realize this goal it must understand the relationship of sovereignty to national security, know where long term threats to the state come from, understand security elements, and the possible threats to Latvian sovereignty.

With the exception of Belarus and Russia, Latvia's neighbors are members of either NATO or the EU, hence Latvia's allies. The only country making no secret of wanting to restore its influence in the Baltic States is Russia, thus the only possible threats come from there.

Sovereignty

Considering security, one must answer what is to be kept secure. The state and sovereignty are inextricably linked concepts. Modern state sovereignty is defined as the ability to express supreme power in a geographical area, regardless of external pressures. It takes the form of political power to rule, define and create law and includes social and economic power. Historically, sovereign power is associated with the ability to defend the interests of its citizens. If this is not possible, there is no sovereign state. Basic principles of sovereignty are territory, border inviolability, and a sovereign as the supreme legislative authority within a territory. The sovereign can be an autocrat or democratically elected. The state's fundamental duty is to guarantee its own sovereignty by establishing and implementing a national security policy.

Components of National Security

Western democracies define national security (NS) broadly - it is the unified status of a state and its society, created by purposeful action, which guarantees the independence of the constitutional order, territorial integrity, society's prospect of free development, prosperity and stability. A NS system is composed of government and administrative institutions and citizens, to which the law delegates the duties and rights set out by the state's national security powers. The NS system ensures the survival of the state through diplomatic, military, economic, social and political power. It unites the community by shared values and common objectives, forecasts and prevents internal and external threats in a timely fashion, and ensures effective management of public risk management. Threats may come from traditional sources, such as countries, or more modern ones i.e. terrorists, organized crime, multinational corporations and even NGOs (nongovernmental organizations).

To enforce sovereignty and security states have certain tools at their disposal. Diplomacy is used to bring together allies and isolate threats. For Latvia, Institutions like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the EU and NATO serving this purpose.

External physical security is ensured by effective military forces, intelligence services (to detect threats, espionage and protect classified information) and alliances like NATO. International security experts claim NATO membership was the reason why Russia did not attack Estonia

during the "Bronze Soldier" monument incident in 2007. Estonia suffered a serious cyber-attack instead. Internal physical security is ensured by police, counter espionage organizations (SAB - Constitutional Protection Bureau), civil defense and emergency authorities, which provide protection for critical infrastructure.

The economic security umbrella covers energy, banking, government revenues and expenditures, the underground economy (smuggling, envelope wages, and tax evasion) and general well-being. There are a number of public bodies dealing with transparency in banking transactions, the stock market, monopoly restriction etc.

Public safety is based on a sense of community with common state and societal goals and trust, a common language and personal identity. Educational and cultural institutions, language, citizenship and integration laws are institutions that promote community feeling. Latvian society is complicated by the relatively low percentage of Latvians (62%), many ethnic minorities (140) with one large one (Russians, about 25%), differing legal statuses (84% are citizens, about 3% foreign nationals, and 13% non-citizens) and economic polarization. Different segments of the population have differing interpretations of history caused by the Soviet occupation, the Soviet collapse and Latvia's renewed independence. In this situation creating a commonality is difficult, also hindered by an external threat - Russia's desire to regain influence in the former Soviet space. To achieve this goal, Russia is now using language as a battering ram.

Political security strengthens the state apparatus. Its mission is to provide a fair Constitution, a transparent and independent Saeima, an independent judiciary, constitutional and ethical laws and their implementation, and to defend the state and its citizens. The Constitutional Court, Ombudsman, Auditor General, CVK, SAB, elections and other public institutions, as well as a monitoring media, NGOs and a politically mature and vigilant citizenry together form a national security policy. Latvian political security is weak . an incomplete Constitution, weak or even contradictory laws, good laws which are not enforced, undeveloped procedures, i.e. the Presidential election process or the lack of consequences for anti-state activity by MPs (the supreme penalty for breach of the parliamentary oath: a harsh letter). That Lindermans, not a Latvian citizen, could hijack Latvia's political agenda, and threaten Latvia with further anti-state actions with no immediate reaction by authorities is a sign of weakness, of incomplete political security.

Although INOs (international non-governmental organizations) such as terrorists or organized crime can act independently, threats, including INOs, are mostly organized or supported by countries promoting their interests. Formal foreign policy is open using foreign ministries or other state institutions, however, formal or diplomatic channels have limited utility. *Privatized* foreign policy using hidden institutions, on the other hand, offer more flexibility and are harder to detect. Lindermans, as a Russian embassy official could be expelled from Latvia within 24 hours. Banishing Lindermans as a non-official is more complicated. Russian dissatisfaction with Latvian internal policies is not subject to serious diplomatic, military or economic sanctions. But using privatized foreign policy, Lindermans can organize signature collection for his referendum, Uzakovs can threaten with street riots and Urbanovs can promise bloodshed. Privatized foreign policy is more difficult to detect. The reoccurring theme in Russian foreign Policy is this . it is never guilty.

The basis of Russia's foreign policy towards Latvia is its diaspora policy designed to expand Russian influence: the Russian diaspora should remain abroad, obtain unconditional citizenship, and Russian should acquire official language status. This links Russian foreign policy directly to events in Latvia: the first battle is language; the next will demand implementation of the OSCE recommendation allowing non-citizens the vote in local elections and demand unconditional citizenship.

Internal and External Threats

What are the internal and external threats to Latvia in the near future? First, Latvia's decision in 1991 to compromise with the existing Soviet elite rather than go in a new political direction embedded difficulties in long-term reconstruction of the country. The compromise allowed the old elite to favorably privatize for themselves state assets, resulting in great influence, buying bureaucrats, politicians, other powerful figures, and most important media outlets. They gained control of information, political discourse and promoted certain politicians and political views, which often coincided with Russia's interests. The last two elections limited the direct impact of the old elite on government, while other levers remained intact. As long as the old elite have much of the power, the revolution started by the Popular Front in 1988 is not complete.

The second threat: Latvians still behave like a minority rather than as the titular nation, with all the rights to form a sovereign state at its discretion. Defending Latvian interests too often means taking a defensive position instead of going on the offensive. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is often "surprised" about some Russian announcement. There is excessive attention to political correctness, that is, what will others think of us. The oligarch owned media have over-advertised every instance where Latvia ranks last in Europe. However, Latvia is in first place in obedience; it more faithfully fulfills EU directives and regulations than any other nation. There is palatable discomfort to confront and solve major problems. Latvians uncritically adopt their opponents' arguments thus unnecessarily taking blame for imagined rights abuses . the Stockholm syndrome. Passively standing on the sidelines in the struggle for Latvia could be fatal.

The third internal threat is economic. The national treasury is burdened with extra-budget expenditure requests in the current difficult circumstances: pension indexing (SC), warding off theft of state property (AirBaltic), rescuing bank depositors (Krievu Banka), attempts to undermine the stability of other banks (Svebanka) and by the non-stop referenda and elections. Failure to agree on a Latvian energy policy also hinders development of the country. Without economic growth, the population is concerned with subsistence and emigration issues, not defending sovereignty.

The most significant external threat is the referendum on language. In 2011 Ossetia, Ukraine, and Latvia proposed Russian as the second official language. The cause is not "dzintari i", the proposed switch to Latvian as the sole language of instruction, SC inability to be in government or any other domestically generated reason. Using these as reasons only serves to avoid involving and blaming Russia. Others have been mentioned: "an insult to Russian-speakers", "self-respect" or some other imagined injustice. A referendum in three countries on the same subject is an International event with a common link. The desire to expand influence into neighboring states and diaspora policy requirements clearly show that the referendum is

Initiated by Russia.

The Russian language campaign tells former Soviet states, the EU and US, that Russia is the dominant power in the post-Soviet space. The referendum outcome in Latvia is of particular importance. A favorable outcome for the Russian language will make it an EU language, further easing the debasing of Latvian sovereignty, and perhaps making it the first Russian controlled state in the EU and NATO. For Russia, an unfavorable referendum result will still be useful. Ethnic tensions and instability in Latvia will continue for a time. It will be used for further shocks, all sorts of accusations and pressure to implement other diaspora policy objectives for which Latvia must be ready. Will the majority of Latvian Russians allow Russia to use them to further its foreign policy goals will be seen in the referendum results?

To achieve one's objectives requires strategy, tactics and patience. The result should look natural, logical, gained without resistance, and unobtrusive. SC inability to get into government after the 10th and 11th Saeima elections weakens the party and creates a need for increased pressure tactics. By supporting Lindermans' extremists, SC expresses two things: first, SC moves itself to the center of the political spectrum, saying to the government that it should talk to SC; otherwise extremists will pose difficulties for Latvia. Second, SC expects to use the language issue to recover the support of the Russian electorate, thus preserving their own and Russia's interests.

Why is Russia forcing the language issue in three places and why now? The reasons are many but the important one is Putin's return to presidential power. He hopes to create the Eurasian Economic Union, hopefully returning Russia to superpower status. It is based on the Soviet Union model, which requires a russified space. Latvia chairs the EU Council for the first half of 2015. To make the presidency difficult or perhaps even subjugate Latvia, Russia wants to generate difficulties in advance.

There are also Latvian domestic reasons for Russia to push this issue now. The usefulness of oligarchs as Russian proxies fell after the last two elections, forcing the SC to be more open in its tactics and aims. Latvia's demography is becoming less favorable to Russian interests. The percent of Latvians over the past ten years has increased 4% to 62% of the population. At the same time Russians have declined 3% to 27%, other Slavs decreased from 9.5% to 7.7%. Over the same period Latvians have declined by 86,509 (-6.3%), Russians by 146,821 (-20.9%) and Russian decline will continue short-term. In 2011, citizens accounted for around 84%, non-citizens (nepilsoņi) about 13%, of which ¼ are retirees. Young non-Latvians generally speak Latvian and their views differ from their parents.

In the near future military threats to Latvia are unlikely; however, there is noticeable cultural and psychological pressure to alienate Latvia from Latvia.

The referendum does not automatically result in dire consequences. Lindermans may have achieved the opposite: he has mobilized Latvians to take responsibility, be active, and finally take a stand on the future of their country. Historically Latvian politics shows focused decision making and direct action in times of crisis. The Saeima is currently in a serious mood concerning sovereignty protecting issues. Thanks Ilyich.