

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” JFK

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In 2000 Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century." Since then, he has been trying to regain world power status for Russia by forcing the components of the former Soviet Union into the Russian lead "Eurasian Union".

The Baltic States had long warned the West of this possibility; the West smiled and called the Balts "paranoid". Since the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the West has adjusted their assessment of Russia to new realities, especially after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and took military action against Ukraine. Today, the West's take on Russia parallels the Baltics.

Being the weakest of the Baltic States (see Unified Goal below) and therefore easiest to subvert, Putin's plan for dominating Latvia is not by military occupation, but economic pressure through investments, and buying loyalty from segments of the local political power elite. Russia wants to take over Latvia, much like Hitler took over Germany in 1933 in a "democratic" way. Therefore, the 2018 Parliamentary election outcome is decisive for the future of Latvia.

The importance of these elections and the threat to Latvia's sovereignty cannot be overstated. The current situation in Latvia is the most serious since 1990 when Latvians decided to renew their country. The rights acquired at that time must now be exercised and a decision made to defend the country. The election campaign will be dirty and unequal, because Russia has money, organization, and experience in dismantling and destabilizing societies and countries. It will not easily give up the power it currently holds over Latvia.

However, Latvia is able to resist in a democratic struggle; the pro-sovereignty forces must win a controlling majority in the Saeima (Parliament). Alternatively, a victory for Putin's forces means the defeat of democracy, and renewed Russian dominance in Latvia.

The pro-independence forces must recognize the seriousness of the situation, unite to protect Latvia's sovereignty, join political parties that value independence and unequivocally demonstrate to the world their desire for sovereignty by citizens voting in great numbers for independence parties.

The Seriousness of the Situation

As mentioned above, Russia wants to draw Latvia into its sphere of influence by buying local allies, "investing" with the aim of maximizing Russia's economic impact and installing a pro-Russian government in Latvia. Hybrid war methods are being used against Latvia: at first soft power, later phases include military rule. Of the eight phases in a hybrid war, several signs of the first four have already appeared in Latvia. Currently, of the parties represented in the Saeima, the majority are sympathetic to Russian interests: Harmony (S), Green Farmers (ZZS), and For Latvia from the Heart (NSL). S will play a leading role, the ZZS mission is to attract Latvian voters, and NSL, now disintegrating, is a party created and financed by Moscow. More clandestine supporters are in the Regional Association (RA). So far, none have openly campaigned in favour of Russian interests, but it would not be inaccurate to call this informal coalition as treasonous.

To ensure the success of the pro-Russian forces, preparation time is needed for a takeover of power. Therefore, a year after the 2014 elections the ZZS brought down Laimdotas Straujumas (Vienotība) government, and appointed Maris Kučinskis (ZZS) prime minister. Three years are enough to comfortably change senior civil servants, arrange support for the informal coalition, shape the views of society through the media, and destroy any opposition. This is why it was necessary to wait until 2018. The ZZS must ensure that the election outcome is not questioned on any grounds, technical, ethnic or legal. The pro-Russian forces must

avoid the errors made in 1941 (direct illegal military occupation and incorporation) by using democratic means, at least overtly, and still achieve their goals.

The seriousness of the situation is underlined by the improvements in Latvia's military defense: the military budget was increased to 2% of GDP; NATO forces are now stationed in all the Baltic States; Last November, the Ministry of Defense introduced a voluntary military reserve service; cyber-attacks on NATO forces in the Baltic States are increasing; following the Russian-Belarusian "Zapad" war games in September, military assistance units were left behind in Belarus; and a previously signed "Belarus/Russia Technical Deployment Contract" came into force. Leonīds Kalniņš, Commander of the National Armed Forces, acknowledges that "Russia's military action shows aggressiveness, not friendship or a desire only to improve its defense capabilities."

One Major Unified Goal

The election goal for the pro-sovereignty forces is simple and easy to understand: defend Latvia from foreign military, political and economic threats. Why is it so hard to activate Latvians into political action? An insight into this question is provided by Ph.D. political science student, journalist and podcaster Kristaps Andrejsons. In his opinion, "we are not "servile people" as often claimed, but an enterprising, initiative and creativity endowed nation ... Latvians must get rid of the internal gulag, or the prisoner's syndrome ... we are not a suffering people." Be proud of your history, which should be remembered, but not repeated. Latvians have international success in music, sports, science and business. "We are productive, we are fighters, we can and do - this must be the attitude."

"A political characteristic of Latvians is to look for a savior, who will take care of everything. It has already happened five times in previous Saeima elections and the sixth still to come. This shows that the people are not yet ready to take political responsibility. Latvians do not yet fully understand the idea of sovereign power belonging to them - we decide our own destiny democratically, instead of going to local powerbrokers. Likewise, Latvians must rid themselves of assertions like: "If someone steals and is corrupt, but gives something to others, it is acceptable"... [it is not]... In order to get rid of the servitude syndrome, people must develop critical thinking and be aware of their own value." We will then see the common goal and understand what needs to be done.

Engage In Political Parties

There is no evidence that the parties currently in the Saeima have the will or ability to clearly formulate and lead this single goal: The Unity Party (V), thanks to Mrs. Aboltina, has been destroyed, and no longer oppose the oligarch ZZS; The Regional Association (RA) also supports Lembergs moves; NSL and ZZS are hopeless supporters of Russia; NA is busy with insolvency issues, and a worrying tendency to play games with language issues with Harmony.

Businessman and investor Andris K. Bērziņš assesses two new parties not yet elected to the Saeima: "... To me the most important issues are national defense and justice, which does not seem to be part of the Movement for "Par!" (KP) ... it looks like the party will pursue a clearly socialist economic policy, which I completely disagree with.... The new conservative party (JKP) focuses on the country's most important issues. The values of the party are rooted in the defense of the "November 18" republic, in strengthening democracy and the rule of law, as well as a clear orientation towards the West. Party president Jānis Bordāns was the only minister of justice during the last 20 years, who was actually trying to reform the legal system, for which his party (NA) expelled him. JKP's board has been augmented by two former KNAB's investigators, whose fierce and selfless struggle against corruption was halted by KNAB itself. The JKP has no big sponsors, and is solely funded by membership fees and in spite of that, it already is one of the largest parties in Latvia."

"I will not run for the Saeima - my skills are more in the business area. But in my spare time I help a lot in the role of rank-and-file member. I invite others to make their X-hour choices and to be active in parties defending the future of our country. The excuse that there is "no time" is lame. Talk to another father of four children, a guardsman, a public servant and a full-time entrepreneur...We are one of the few peoples who have exercised self-determination and have their own country. It was won by the blood of our ancestors. If we do not fight the apathy of the sofa and Facebook, if we do not engage in political action, then we can lose that freedom. How will we explain that to our grandchildren? If Latvia does not use this opportunity to block a Russian take-over, then it will be necessary to fight for independence later, like Ukraine." Entrepreneur Berzins's article appeared in November on irir.lv.

Parties need to be carefully assessed, whether they see the seriousness of the situation, and thus the single main goal. Latvia has one of the lowest participation rates in political parties in Europe. The low participation creates instability in parties and their management. Without member supervision, party elites have a tendency to do what they want. Without more members, parties are forced to seek sponsors, who eventually determine party policy.

Participate In the Election

The main thing is to take action. What's the right thing to do? The answer is clear, go vote!

85% of Latvia's residents are citizens, about 3% are citizens of other countries, and the remaining 12% are so-called "non-citizens". Latvians comprise 73% of all citizens, the rest 27%. Countrywide by nationality, 62% are Latvians, about 26% Russians, and 12% others. In the first Latvia (1918-1941), on average 80% (between 84-74%) of voters participated in elections. In post-Soviet Latvia, on average 69% voters participate, with a noticeable drop of 31% between 1993 (90%) and 2014 (59%) in 21 years.

According to the Central Statistical Bureau (CSP), the population on Jan.1 2017 was 1,950,000. Let's take a look at the data for Riga, because it dominates Latvian politics in many ways. 641,400 or one third of the population lives in Riga. Of those, 78% are Latvian citizens, 4% are citizens of other countries, and 18% or 114 361 are non-citizens. Riga's population is diverse. The largest share of citizens in Riga live in Bieriņi (94%), the highest proportion of non-citizens is in Daugavgrīva (56%) and Bolderāja (50%) (CSP). Latvians in Riga number 47% or 301 500 inhabitants. This is 61% of voters, enough for a controlling majority in Riga, both in the city council and in the Saeima.

The Latvian Diaspora's actions can be decisive. All votes outside Latvia are added to Riga; approximately every 5,000 votes represent 1% of Riga voters. About a hundred thousand Latvian citizens live abroad. If a quarter of them vote, the diaspora would increase the participation in Riga by about 5%. If all these voters supported the sovereignty forces, this would increase the participation of Latvians in elections by 8%, from 61 to 69%. An impressive figure!

During municipal elections in June 2017, after some encouragement the number of voters increased by three percent compared to 2013. However, the result was enough to stymie Harmony (S) plans. In Riga, S coalition lost 7 seats in the council and the Young Conservative Party (JKP) was elected as the largest party in opposition. The success of S in Liepāja and Daugavpils was also muted. People began to realize that greater participation in elections could be decisive, and changes are possible. The results in municipalities prove that the popular phrases "my vote makes no difference ... we can't change anything" is false logic. Each voice is important. To maintain Latvian independence and democracy, we should realize that participation in elections for Latvians is pretty much mandatory. Let's all vote in 2018 and encourage our friends and relatives around the world, including Latvia, to do the same.

However, the choice of party will be very important. Not all seemingly "Latvian" parties are for sovereignty and democracy. It is too early to evaluate them. A period of party amalgamation and coalition building adjustments

is just beginning. There may even be more new parties. You will have to choose. Parties will be discussed at a date closer to the election.