

Putin will win the Baltics as Hitler did with Germany - Democratically

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No matter how paradoxical it sounds, Putin can gain control of all or some of the three Baltic States in a democratic way. Just like Hitler did with Germany. The weakest of these countries, Latvia, is the first and closest goal. Of course, the difference is that Putin must gain control of this neighbour, which will be done by local political forces loyal to him.

The takeover methodology in Latvia is likely to be very similar to that in prewar Germany; Putin's Russia-friendly parties can win in parliamentary elections next year. They will then form a rigorous parliamentary coalition; form a government, and of course, take control of the power structures, the army, the security services, the public media and other important institutions. The next step, whether and when to leave the European Union and NATO, will be just a technical issue. In any case, Latvia will be controlled by the Kremlin, and as we know, Moscow has a lot of experience in running puppet governments. The reputation of NATO, the United States and President Trump is on the line and will be an extremely painful slap in the face. Not only because of the loss of Latvia, but because Putin will have elegantly made a gap in NATO's defensive wall and undermined the stability of the EU.

About a year ago, such a scenario seemed only theoretically possible, because there were no reliable indicators that the Kremlin could succeed. Now, there are many such indicators: a highly professional PR team has begun a determined effort to achieve a takeover. Of course, there are a number of politicians and experts who regard such concerns as over-the-top, or reject it as an impossible scenario. This is exactly what Kremlin manipulators need – to dull vigilance, reduce the feeling and perception of danger. They carry out this task in a sophisticated manner as the vigilance of Latvian society is reduced by massive propaganda instruments and is purposefully lulled and poisoned. Awakening may turn out to be overwhelmingly too late. In October 2018, the Latvian parliament could theoretically be controlled by Kremlin-friendly forces, which will soon give Putin valuable and important 'gifts' very necessary to him for many reasons. The stakes are extremely high, and therefore the fight in the next elections is expected to be brutal.

What is the Kremlin's plan to regain the Baltic States or, at least, Latvia under its control? As mentioned earlier, Latvia's parliament would be controlled by two or three pro-Kremlin parties who then form a government and restore the Kremlin's influence. At present, there are two such parties: "Harmony" (Saskaņa) and the "Union of Greens and Farmers" (ZZS). The first party is openly friendly to the Putin regime (it signed an agreement with Kremlin's "United Russia" party), but for tactical reasons, does not emphasize this relationship. But their voters do not doubt it, and serious political observers have no illusions either. They try to influence Western diplomats that this is not the case, though only diplomatic beginners or the incorrigibly naive think so. Unfortunately, this is not a rarity either in Latvia, Brussels or Washington.

Harmony leader Nils Usakov is able to create a Western, civilized, political image, which easily confuses self-assured Westerners. Usakov's smile is the traditional banana peel on which various high-ranking Western politicians have slipped, including some in Washington. In fact, Usakov is a close and loyal friend to Putin's inner circle, especially the brutal Putinist, the official spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov's "nightingale", Mariya Zakharova. She herself has testified to this in her notorious press briefings. Usakov's closest associate, Jānis Urbanovičs, is seen as a particularly important person in Moscow, and is two-faced to the point of schizophrenia – supposedly representing a social-democratic party, but driving a millionaire-class SUV.

Another Kremlin-friendly party is the political alliance (ZZS). The leading players there are former high-ranking Communist functionaries and their followers. Many of them have long-standing corporate ties with Moscow and

in most cases, the first and often the only foreign language is Russian. For them, the "Russian world" vision is much closer and more understandable than the West. It is almost encrypted in them. They have successfully passed this thinking and vision of the world to their newest members. Like their mentors, many have sucked up the "byzantine cynicism" and the "double speak" described in Orwell's book "1984". It should also be remembered that former Communist Party functionaries may not necessarily be former KGB members. But, if they formerly had dealings with or 'sold their soul' to the Kremlin, it is naive to think Putin has forgotten them. It is likely that many of past "details" are found in Moscow's Communist Party archives or questionable mutual business dealings.

The association of farmers with the Green Party is a fiction because the Latvian Green Party itself is fictional. The greens, of course, will deny it, but their main role in Latvian politics is to be corps de ballet dancers in this old communist political circus. It's been like that for years, and they do not know any other way of functioning. For years, hundreds of thousands of tons of illegal waste has been imported into Latvia, yet Green Party functionaries in environmental institutions did not "notice" this until tons of dangerously polluting garbage burnt this summer. Of course, ZZS is trying to deny its closeness to the Kremlin and Putin's loyal Harmony. However, regular joint votes in parliament indicate the opposite. Currently, Harmony and ZZS is a couple, who live in an officially unregistered relationship, but after the next parliamentary elections nothing will prevent them from finally formalizing this relationship and form the ruling coalition.

At the end of last year, several surveys showed that these two parties have relatively high and stable ratings. Of course, ratings can still fluctuate, but both getting over 50% of parliamentary seats looks real. There is no doubt that both party specialists and their friends in Moscow understand and see this. It was expected that they might find the above-mentioned goal tempting, to gain control of Latvia without brutal military annexation or sending in "little green men", by completely democratic means. The presence of strong NATO allies and a highly motivated Latvian army, a military takeover would not succeed. However, in order to achieve the takeover of power in a formally democratic manner, well-coordinated and precise action is needed. The brigades of the Kremlin and their friends seem to have already begun work.

What is needed to implement this plan?

1. Avoid controversy so that voters and their allies who are opposed to Russia, will not mobilize.

This is happening. In Harmony rhetoric, with few exceptions, almost all criticisms of the European Union and NATO have disappeared. What a miracle! They are trying to emphasize that they are a moderate Western-style social-democratic party, rather than a pro-populist one. Many choose to believe this and try to persuade themselves that, when it comes to power, Harmony will not be against NATO and/or the EU. This is a naive illusion. To Harmony's friends in the Kremlin and Putin himself personally, it is of existential importance to get NATO at least out of Latvia. Similarly, Moscow's ideologues suddenly appear to be absolutely indifferent to Latvia, saying that they really do not need it. What an unexpected surprise! For centuries it needed Latvia, but suddenly it doesn't? And Russia does not need it enough to get rid of its imagined propaganda bogey, NATO? Such drastic changes in rhetoric cannot happen without a forward-looking, disciplined puppet masters' team.

It is also said that Harmony will never be in government unless it gets 51% of votes by itself, which is unrealistic. The impression is that ZZS will never agree to form a coalition with them. Leading members of the ZZS themselves also promise that it will "never" form such a union. They say many loyal members will not allow this. However, this statement is questionable, as members have long been conditioned to obey the directives of party commanders unconditionally. The promise creates the false impression that bringing Harmony and its Kremlin friends to power is an unrealistic scenario not worth worrying about. But at the same time it is already apparent that both forces are successfully coordinated and vote together on important decisions. There is no doubt that at the X hour, Moscow's puppets will know which "tail" of which leading ZZS

member to pull to force a loyal coalition for the Kremlin. Restoration of Russian influence in Latvia would be an extremely important diplomatic coup both internally and externally. Remember, it would also hurt Russia's economic adversary, the EU. The benefits to the Kremlin would be much greater than the actual geopolitical weight of Latvia. Of course, Kremlin manipulators are still trying to vulgarize caution against Russia, mixing it with the overused cliché "The Russians are coming". The impression is created that only national paranoiacs are worried by Russia's plans, those whose brains are stuck in the old "The Russians are coming" slogan. It is a very effective strategy to make anyone who warns of the true intentions of the Putin regime seem like a bumpkin.

Of course, it is also true that the Russian threat is so often repeated that many voters are simply tired of this topic. As a result, voters often suspect politicians of disregarding other issues. Deliberately or inadvertently, this excessive use of the Russian threat has the opposite effect. That, of course, does not eliminate the seriousness of this threat - Russia does not cease to be an unpredictable threat merely because some in society are tired of it.

2. In order to strengthen the future prospects of Harmony and ZZS, opponents must be divided, marginalized and discredited.

It is not quite clear whether with the help of friends in the Kremlin the competitors of Harmony and ZZS's have been diluted into mutually cannibalizing groups of 7-8 parties. Only two or three such parties have a reasonable chance of entering the next Saeima (parliament), but with insufficient total votes to form a partisan coalition. Other opposition parties may not reach the 5% barrier. This is the limit guaranteeing access to the Saeima. These small parties will squander the votes of Kremlin's opponents, as the Saeima winners will divide the under 5% votes among themselves, thus gaining more seats. In any case, it seems that the Kremlin's PR people can rub their hands - their opposition will be successfully diluted. Of course, they have allies among the small parties too, the most prominent being, "From the Heart for Latvia" with Inguna Sudraba. On entering the Saeima, these can strengthen the pro Kremlin forces without necessarily being a part of the coalition.

The next goal is to discredit and marginalize opponents. This is especially true of the largest, more serious parties. In this respect, the former power party, the Western-oriented Unity looks like the new victim. The current leadership has led the party almost to a ratings catastrophe. Now some of the current Unity Saeima deputies have joined a new political force "We are for!" (WAF). As this crisis has been in the making for several years, it is unclear why this split has taken place at this late date. Theoretically, the remaining part of Unity and the new WAF forces have a chance of entering the next parliament. It is precisely at this moment that you can see the Kremlin's PR political campaign bearing fruit.

Solvita Aboltina, the former leader of the Unity party, is obviously the destructive factor in Unity. She is one of the most unpopular politicians in the country. However, despite political logic, she doesn't leave active politics, continues as the party whip in parliament, but stubbornly continues to destroy her party. It is unofficially known that the most influential informal leader of the ZZS, Aivars Lembergs, an old and hardened ex-Communist functionary, is encouraging her. It is said that a special "golden parachute" is promised for her, an ambassadorship to a "warm country". Complementary interviews by the loyal oligarch media also encourage her. The support of ZZS is understandable: the longer Aboltina stays in the party, the greater the likelihood the Kremlin friends will not see Unity in the next Saeima. Lembergs drips poison in her ear, creating the feeling that it is actually warm honey with milk. If this continues, in the next Saeima elections Unity can expect a shameful collapse.

Another strange phenomenon is WAF. In this grouping, one of the most prominent politicians is Ilze Viņķele, a former Minister of Welfare. This group tries to position itself as a party based on values that characterize the

best Western political traditions. However, the same Viņķele was caught lying signing an important contract, knowing in advance that she will not honour it. Caught in this lie, without shame, she admitted that she crossed her fingers during the signing of the contract. This contradicts the promise of a high political standard. Of course, you can say that it was an isolated incident, a one-off.

At the same time, Latvia is notorious for its high level of social inequality. And this is a serious issue the EU, IMF, OECD and other serious organizations have pointed out for years. Major responsibility for this must be borne directly by Unity and Viņķele herself, who significantly impacted social policy when she was in charge of the ministry. She particularly aggressively opposed the demographic support program to alleviate a low birthrate which is now one of the most serious problems for Latvians as a nation and a major threat to the stability of the national economy. She did not succeed in stopping support programs, the poverty risks for families with children declined somewhat, and the birth rate in the country increased. All considered, she is a highly controversial politician and will sooner sink the new WAF force rather than build it. The people who invited Viņķele to join the new party, deliberately or inadvertently, have done a service for the pro - Kremlin's faction. Whatever their arguments favoring Viņķele, their true intentions are worthy of serious suspicion.

In any case, Harmony and its ZZS allies in the next coalition have done their job professionally and efficiently by the book. Public attention has been diverted, the competition split and saddled with ratings worries. No doubt that this "work" will continue and, similarly, other potential competitors will also be destroyed. Counteraction, including from Western allies, is weak. Many comfort themselves by thinking that the Russians "will not be that crazy," much the same as many people comforted themselves before Brexit.

Is Latvia's possible return to Russia's orbit a threat to the other Baltic States, Lithuania and Estonia? The situation there is different, but by expelling Latvia from NATO, a dangerous hole in the overall regional defense system is created. Most importantly, this would be a relatively clean Kremlin victory - a blow to NATO and, consequently, to the reputation of the USA without military aggression and in a formally democratic way. Hitler has already proven that democracies' weaknesses can be exploited to seize power and then used in the most villainous way. These methods are well known to the old KGB man on Kremlin's throne and his friends in Latvia. Thinking, hoping that this will not happen, is naïve, irresponsible and not enough. Politicians, whose ambitions and ego are above national interests, are criminals, and so are their supporters. Because of them, Latvia is on very thin ice. Kremlin specialists are cutting this ice with an evil smile. Self-confident, arrogant and self-respecting politicians are their favorite quarry.