

---

# BALTIC MILITARY COOPERATION: PAST, PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Dr. Arūnas Molis\*

## *Abstract*

After five years of NATO membership the Baltic States still carry on with regional military cooperation projects. This is a unique phenomenon in Europe. Even the Nordic or Benelux states have not reached the level of integration and interdependence as the Baltic States have. Nevertheless, it is also true that after their accession to NATO the dynamics of Baltic military cooperation has slowed down. Joint projects very often undergo stagnation or are closed. Reasons for that range from chaotic foreign military assistance in the early 90s to poor management of cooperation projects. This article aims to provide an overview and to assess the main regional military cooperation initiatives as well as to outline prospects of their future development.

## **Introduction**

Academics and politicians tend to treat the Baltic States as a single geographical entity facing a common set of challenges and hence adopting similar strategies.<sup>1</sup> Shared history under the ruling of the Soviet Union, Russia, Germany and Sweden are usually named as the main causes that have created the feeling of “solidarity and unity” among the Baltic States. After the restoration of independence, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia endorsed these presumptions by institutionalizing their “special” relations: presidents of the Baltic States agreed on regular trilateral summits, while institutions like the Baltic Assembly, the Baltic Council of Ministers and many others involved experts of various fields into cooperation.

Since the early 90s the Baltic States have become important markets for each other’s goods; the countries have maintained close political and cultural relations and have pursued similar foreign policy goals. Perhaps even

---

\* Dr. Arūnas Molis is Chair of International Relations Studies at the Baltic Defence College, Tartu, Estonia. e-mail: arunas.molis@bdcol.ee

<sup>1</sup> Clark T.D., Jasutis G., “Lithuania’s commitment to NATO: explaining a Baltic paradox”. *Russia and Eurasia review*. Volume 2, Issue 7, 2003.

more importantly, the Baltic States have been concerned about the same “hard security” threats emerging from the East and threatening their welfare, sovereignty and sometimes even independence. Fifteen years ago NATO collective security guaranties were a long-term goal; therefore, encouraged by Western powers, the Baltic States launched *regional* military cooperation. In 1994 the Baltic Assembly (a forum of parliamentary representatives) recommended the Baltic Council of Ministers to prepare defense agreements among the three Baltic States, and a year later commanders of the armed forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania expressed their support for the establishment of the “Baltic state military union”.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, external pressure, practical interests and lack of alternatives impelled the Baltic States to include military affairs into a broader scope of Baltic cooperation. However, due to unresolved political disputes (e.g., undecided maritime border) and unwillingness to slow down the integration into NATO, the Baltic Assembly rejected the idea of creating the “Baltic state military union”. This decision reflects another tendency of Baltic States relations: despite a shared history and institutional ties, there are significant differences among the Baltic States. History and cultural identity, history of the statehood, language, dominant religion, geographical identification and even major external cultural influences differ considerably in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.<sup>3</sup>

Looking from the practical viewpoint, the Baltic States not only implement regional cooperation projects, but also compete for transit flows through their ports, for external and internal markets, foreign investments, etc. Lack of commonality was especially evident when neither Latvia, nor Estonia supported Lithuania’s claims to block the EU-Russia negotiations on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA); when the governments of Latvia and Lithuania were notably late expressing their political support to Estonia after cyber attacks (initiated by Russia) had started in 2007. In other words, despite the fact that the Baltic States share similar concerns regarding Russia’s behavior in the European neighborhood, have a common

---

<sup>2</sup> Jundzis T., *Baltic States: Cooperation on Security and Integration into the European Security System*. <<http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/94-96/jundzis/03-03.htm>>, 15 03 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Paulauskas K., “The Baltics: from nation states to member states” *EU-ISS Occasional Paper*, 62, 2006.

interest in preserving Transatlantic links and agree on many security and defense issues, differences in national interests and policies press to have doubts about the continuous present of the “Baltic unity”.

The main aim of this article is to analyze the reasons why regional military cooperation initiatives have lost their momentum. Another important direction of this research is to explore further prospects of Baltic military cooperation in the areas of security and defense. These objectives are accomplished by an analysis of non-classified documents related to Baltic military cooperation and consideration of the conclusions of other experts (A. Kasekamp, B. Hansen, E. Tromer, to mention but a few). In order to investigate attitudes of officers, state officials and academics<sup>4</sup> of the three Baltic States, a questionnaire was developed. Since the results of this research could only be considered as relatively reliable, the research was supplemented by qualitative unstructured interviews with officers who have experience in initiating, participating or “consuming” the results of cooperation among the Baltic States in military affairs. Thus, even though there are a lot of scientific articles written on the issue, the novelty of this work is determined by a critical and less idealistic approach towards Baltic military cooperation. Assumptions and conclusions of this research are also based on the experience of individuals directly involved in shaping and executing Baltic military cooperation projects.

## **1. Main projects and reasons to cooperate**

Cooperating in military affairs prior to NATO accession, the Baltic States first of all sought to obtain experience in international cooperation and process of “consensus building”. In other words, working hard on the enhancement of interoperability between the Baltic States, Vilnius, Riga and

---

<sup>4</sup> In January 2009 the questionnaire was e-mailed to 70 respondents and 39 answers were received. The respondents were officers (current and former students and instructors of the Baltic Defence College as well as representatives of national military installments), civil servants (representing Ministries of Defense and permanent delegations to NATO) and academics (representing research institutions) from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The criteria for selecting responses were respondents’ work with security and defense issues on a daily basis and involvement in Baltic military cooperation projects.

Tallinn had in mind the improvement of interoperability with NATO countries, the development of defense structures in accordance with Western procedures, providing defense forces with more visibility, English language skills, etc. The format of regional cooperation was actively supported by the Western (Nordic) States<sup>5</sup>, since through the assistance to regional cooperation projects (especially if the goals of these projects were directed towards the preparation of international peacekeeping units) they could act without jeopardizing their relations with Russia.<sup>6</sup> B. Hansen even points out that, “in cases of mutual co-operation the Baltic States tend to be brought together by third parties as the Baltic States were more likely to co-operate externally than mutually”.<sup>7</sup> Others state that the most active promoters of Baltic military cooperation (e.g., Denmark) were primarily thinking about their own national security interests and the possibility to bandwagon the USA (by supporting Washington’s goal to limit Russia’s influence in this region).<sup>8</sup> Whatever the goals, the efforts of Nordic States to accelerate Baltic military cooperation resulted in concrete achievements: in 1994 Lithuanian troops were sent to an international crisis management mission, the Baltic States managed to establish joint control of the Baltic airspace, the economic zone, etc.

It should be clearly stated that from the outset the Baltic States did not perceive regional military cooperation as an alternative to Euro-Atlantic integration and membership in NATO. Therefore, it is no wonder that in the early stages of independence the Baltic States faced a dilemma of how to allocate their limited resources for national defense. It was not completely clear what should become a priority: 1) strengthening of territorial forces (since guarantees of collective defense did not apply to the region), 2) acceleration of regional cooperation projects and initiatives (in order to reach the same national security goals at lower cost) or 3) increasing participation

<sup>5</sup> Even the first package of documents related to military cooperation of the Baltic States (MoU On principles of cooperation in the training of Baltic UN peacekeeping forces) was signed not in Vilnius or Riga, but in Sweden (in Visby in 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Due to the Russian factor many Western states did not want to get involved in direct military cooperation with the Baltic States at all.

<sup>7</sup> Hansen B., eds., *The Baltic States in world politics*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998. p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> Nyhamar T., “Security Policies from Constraints to Choice”, in Heidar K, ed., *Nordic Politics: Comparative Perspectives*. Oslo, 2004. p. 228-246.

in international crises management operations (and demonstrating that even though they are not NATO members, the Baltic States deserve to be defended). The Baltic States attempted to develop all three directions of their defense policy, which allowed to preserve Baltic cooperation even after joining the Alliance. At present cooperation projects are run among the Baltic States' Land Forces, Navy and Air Force; some initiatives are started in the areas of training and education, etc. The most important projects of this cooperation currently are as follows:

Table 1. **Main projects of military cooperation of the Baltic States**

PROJECT	AIM	CAPABILITIES	REMARKS
<b>BALTBAT</b> HQ in Latvia Operational during 1994-2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peacekeeping unit for UN Chapter VI operations</li> <li>• Promotion of the cooperation among the Baltic States and between Baltic States and Western world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multinational staff</li> <li>• Multinational HQ, logistic company</li> <li>• Three rifle companies (one from each of the BS)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1998-2000 1/3 of the battalion was 3 times deployed to B&amp;H as part of the Danish Battalion</li> <li>• Never deployed to a mission as a battalion</li> </ul>
<b>BALTRON</b> HQ in Estonia Operational since 1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimize mine hazards</li> <li>• Enhance security of territorial waters</li> <li>• Help to remediate environmental damage</li> <li>• Participate in standing NATO forces (SNMCMG1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mine hunters and sweepers: LV contributes with 1 LINDAU and 2 CONDOR class vessels, EE with 2 FRAUENLOB and 2 LINDAU class ships, LT with 1 LINDAU class vessel</li> <li>• Each nation provides a staff ship for operations and exercises</li> </ul>	
<b>BALTNET</b> CRC in Lithuania Operational since 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Execute the common air surveillance</li> <li>• Implement the common acquisition projects</li> <li>• Organize common training activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baltic Air Surveillance Network and Control System</li> <li>• Combined Control and Reporting Centre (CRC)</li> <li>• Nodes (NN) in each of the Baltic State</li> <li>• Assigned to BALTNET in 3 BS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BALTNET is an integral part of NATO air Defense system, connected to NATINADS</li> </ul>

PROJECT	AIM	CAPABILITIES	REMARKS
<p><b>BALTDEFCOL</b></p> <p>Based in Estonia</p> <p>Created in 1999</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training at the operational level for OF3 level students</li> <li>• Higher command studies to prepare OF 4-5 officers and equivalent civil servants</li> <li>• Defense background training and studies for civil servants</li> <li>• Regular development seminars and study periods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directing Staff – 40 positions</li> <li>• Support Staff – 25 positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Military instructors and academics from more than 10 countries are employed by the Baltic Defence College</li> <li>• BALTDEFCOL educates officers coming from the Baltic and Nordic States, Western and Eastern Europe, Balkans, South Caucasus and other countries</li> </ul>

Table 2. **Other initiatives and directions of military cooperation of the Baltic States**

INITIATIVE	OUTCOME	REMARKS
<p><b>“Baltic battalion” for NRF-14</b></p> <p>Led by Lithuania</p> <p>Road map and generic structure approved in 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battalion is assigned to NATO Reaction Force (NRF)</li> <li>• Full operational capability is reached in 2009</li> <li>• Command element is assured by the HQ of the Danish Division.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lithuanian officer commands the battalion</li> <li>• Lithuania provides up to 50 percent of the total strength</li> <li>• Combat Support (CS) and Combat Service Support (CSS) capability elements are shared and led by the Baltic states</li> </ul>
<p><b>Joint procurement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jointly acquired “Carl Gustaf” grenade launcher ammunition</li> <li>• Jointly acquired Air control unit for common air surveillance and NATO Air policing mission.</li> <li>• LV and EE jointly acquire 3D long distance radars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint “Baltic” projects usually are the main impulse for joint procurements</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cooperation in operations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host nation support to NATO Air policing mission (conducted since 2004)</li> <li>• Post-mission information exchange</li> <li>• BALTSQLN – infantry company on rotation basis in B&amp;H and Kosovo (2000-2006)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Besides the preparation of a common battalion for NRF-14, LT and LV coordinate their efforts for joint participation in the EU BG in 2010</li> </ul>

In addition to the above-mentioned initiatives, it is also worth to pay attention to other regional activities in the military sector. For example, the Baltic States maintain close and very successful cooperation among their Special Forces; they also share information on incidents by their borders (including violations of the air space), constantly organize joint exercises and trainings, where militaries and civilians from the three states actively participate. During these exercises the standard procedures for the completion of combat operations are uniformed (e.g., exercises of the Baltic Battalion for NRF-14, Joint “Amber Sea” exercises, etc.), logistic compatibility within the Baltic national forces improved and the performance of the functions of a host nation support to allied forces tested (e.g. “Baltic Host” exercises together with Strike force NATO and EUCOM). However, these joint activities are of smaller scope and significance in comparison to cooperation in operations, harmonization of military education systems of the three Baltic States, and so on.

## **2. Critical assessment of military cooperation projects**

A few years after the restoration of independence the Baltic States wanted to demonstrate their political solidarity with NATO and ability to work under Western military standards. However, the Baltic States were too weak economically to equip their national armed forces for international peace-keeping operations. Nordic and some other Western states were keen to make donations to the Baltic militaries thus not only relegating burden or contributing to the improvement of the security situation in the region, but also getting rid of the outdated armament. Besides, their support to the Baltic States was in line with the then approach, which sought to involve the “newly independent” states in Euro-Atlantic integration. However, there was one factor preventing Westerners from providing direct military assistance to the Baltic States: Moscow’s reluctance. Therefore it was decided to provide assistance not to the National Armed Forces, but to the regional joint forces, officially designated for peacekeeping. The first attempt do so was channeling of military assistance through the BALTBAT project.

Some experts might argue that that was not the real goal; however, one fact is obvious - BALTBAT has never been deployed to international operations as a whole battalion (only part of the battalion, i.e., National Companies were sent abroad). One of the reasons for that was the fact that foreign donations assigned to BALTBAT in reality were designated for national Land Forces. However, uncoordinated donations from Finland (which mostly supported Estonia), Sweden (supporting Latvia), Denmark, Germany and other countries did not contribute to the creation of an integral Baltic battalion. Besides, alongside donation of armament Nordic and other Western countries provided their national expertise, viz., advisers and instructors, who had different views on training, further acquisition, generation of common procedures, etc. These factors stipulated the divergence of strategic concepts and doctrines of the Baltic States. Given these circumstances the creation and effective employment of the common battalion was nearly impossible.

Nevertheless, not all cooperation projects were “spoiled” by the uncoordinated support from the West, and not all of them converted into political, rather than military, initiatives. BALTDEFCOL and at some point BALTRON and BALTNET can be considered projects that have provided tangible benefits for the security of the Baltic States. BALTDEFCOL has filled the gap in the Baltic States’ national education systems by conducting four courses for officers and civilians: Joint Command and General Staff Course (11 months); Army Intermediate Command and Staff Course (5 months); Civil Servants Course (5 months); Higher Command Studies Course (5 months).<sup>9</sup> These courses are not to be found in the curricula of national military education institutions. It is worth mentioning with this respect that foreign instructors from Norway, France, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Romania, Canada, the United States as well as other countries are available for Baltic officers for the most part only in the Baltic Defence College.

Another example of effective and practical military cooperation among the Baltic States is BALTRON. Although political reasons for initiating cooperation among the Baltic States’ Navies were relevant, the practical need

---

<sup>9</sup> Baltic Defence College, “White Book 2008”, <<http://www.bdcol.ee/files/files/documents/White%20Book%202008.pdf>>, 21 02 2009.



to demine the Baltic Sea was of crucial importance. It is obvious that to perform a task like this with joint capabilities is more effective than to do it separately. What should also be underlined is that, besides performing “internal” duties, BALTRON serves as part of the training structure for NATO’s Mine Countermeasure (MCM) unit. In other words, through the BALTRON project Baltic officers and NAVY units prepare for participation in the activities of NATO Naval forces, such as Standing NATO Mine Counter Measures Group 1 (SNMCMG1). The success of this process is demonstrated by assigning one Estonian, Latvian or Lithuanian ship to the service to NATO Reaction Forces (NRF) on a rotating basis. In 2006 the Allied Maritime Component Command Headquarters Northwood showed recognition of BALTRON’s value by offering the Baltic States to nominate candidates for the position of Standing NATO Mine Counter Measures Group 1 commander. Meanwhile, to gain command experience in NATO units is one of the strategic goals of Baltic military cooperation.

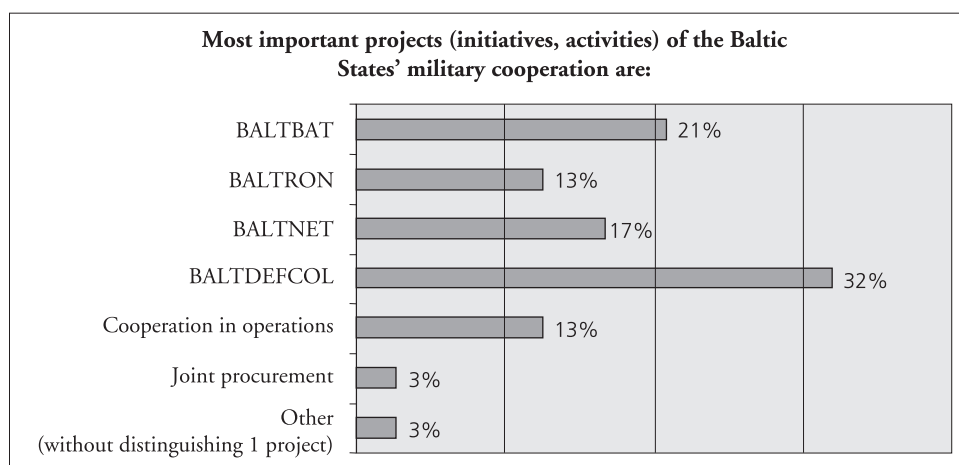
BALTNET is another Baltic military cooperation project inspired by specific military and security needs. The Baltic States have neither suitable jets to perform air policing tasks, nor separate capabilities to exercise air surveillance. Therefore, sharing costs incurred for the acquisition of new equipment was a logical and mutually beneficial decision. In the beginning the system of Baltic joint airspace control and BALTNET consisted of the joint Regional Airspace Coordination Centre (RASCC) in Lithuania and national control centres in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as national radar stations and communication lines. Since the accession of the Baltic States to NATO in 2004, BALTNET has been linked to the Alliance’s air defense system and has provided air surveillance data to the NATO Regional Air Operations Centre.<sup>10</sup> It can be noted that though foreign support of air defense equipment did not reach Baltic States in the early 90s, after NATO accession Norway provided RASCC with the required hard- and software, while other NATO countries provided their assistance by training its personnel. Baltic accession to NATO led to the alliance’s air policing operation, which in turn required air operations control capability. In order to ensure operation control capability, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania acquired the necessary hard- and software in 2005

<sup>10</sup> Estonian Ministry of Defense, <<http://www.mod.gov.ee/?op=body&id=384>>, 08 03 2009.

and started training their personnel. This is how the Baltic cooperation was once again triggered by the external factors.

When asked what has been the most important regional military cooperation project, activity or initiative, a few respondents of the survey refused to distinguish a single one. According to them, “cooperation should be assessed jointly, because one project does not provide a full picture”. Nevertheless, flagships of the current military cooperation can be easily identified from the graph below:

Graph 1. **Attitude towards the most important Baltic military cooperation projects**

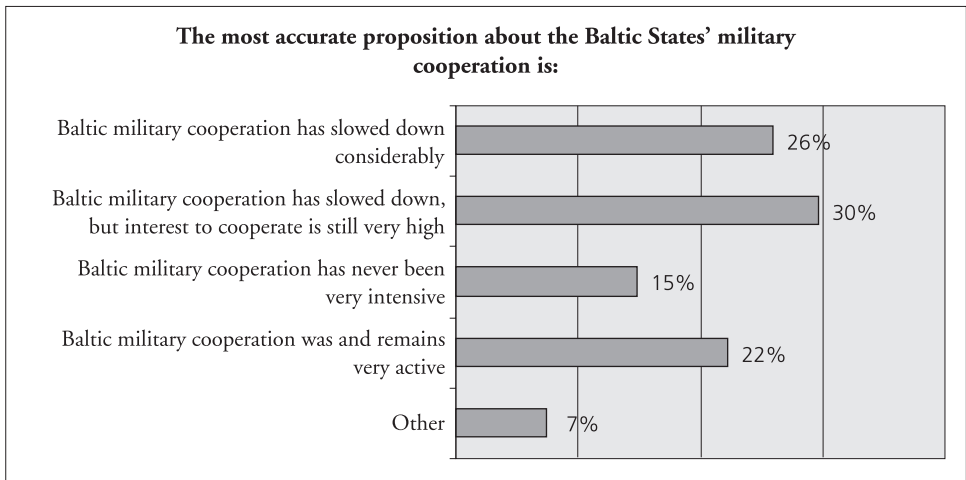


Thus, when talking about the most successful initiatives, a lot of respondents first of all referred to BALTDEFCOL. It was noticed that this high standard military training institution provides training that is not to be found at the national level. Attitude towards the BALTBAT project was rather different. According to some experts, BALTBAT project played a more symbolic role without performing military duties of greater significance. Others recognize BALTBAT as an initiative that triggered Baltic military cooperation in other spheres. While commenting on BALTNET, BALTRON and other Baltic military projects several respondents raised concerns about the future of those projects if they are not incorporated into the NATO framework of cooperation.

### 3. Main obstacles for deepening Baltic military cooperation

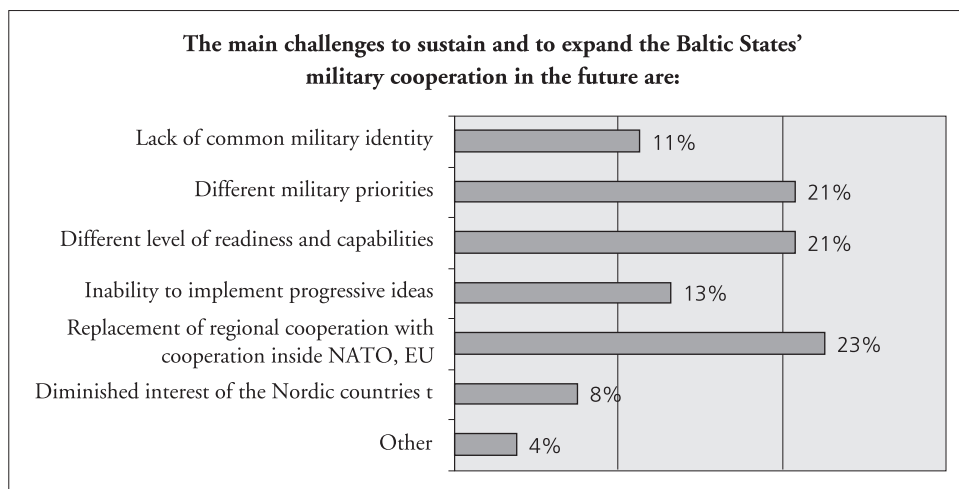
As has already been mentioned, military cooperation among the Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the early 90s allowed the Baltic States to demonstrate their ability to act in the international environment and to attract foreign donations. At the same time this cooperation prevented Moscow from spreading its military influence in the Baltic region. However, after joining NATO factors triggering military cooperation among the Baltic States lost their previous significance and cooperation became less vigorous. This outcome is also reflected in the results of the survey:

Graph 2. **Opinion on the current stand of Baltic military cooperation**



As can be seen from the results of the research, the Baltic States do preserve interest to cooperate, however both politicians and officers at the tactical and operational levels are no longer so enthusiastic. As a consequence, new initiatives are not translated into specific projects: the Baltic States have never managed to agree on the creation of a combined air wing; nor have they agreed on joint actions in the area of military environmental protection, nor finalized the standardization of military educational systems, nor considerably strengthened connections in operations (the only combined settlement is with Danish battalion in KFOR, etc.). During the assessment of the main reasons of this tendency respondents concentrated on several aspects:

Graph 3. Most important challenges to Baltic military cooperation



Thus, the main reasons impeding regional military cooperation may be summarized in the following way:

- **Newly opened cooperation possibilities with NATO and the EU partners.** On the one hand, this process is quite natural. After the Baltic States had been recognized as full-fledged members of the international community and later on became members of NATO and the EU, they started selecting partners for cooperation following the principle of who would best serve their foreign, security and defense policy goals.<sup>11</sup> This is how Lithuania and Poland created the joint LITPOLBAT battalion, invited Ukraine to join this military unit, and now are considering transferring the LITPOLUKRBAT project to the new level by forming a three-country brigade.<sup>12</sup> At the same time Estonia is maintaining close relations with Finland implementing principles of territorial defense, buying armament (anti-aircraft weapons,

<sup>11</sup> Tromer E., "Baltic perspectives on the European security and Defense policy" in *Bailes A, Herolf G., Sundelius B, ed., The Nordic Countries and the European Security and Defense Policy*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006, p. 364-391

<sup>12</sup> This brigade is expected to reach its operational readiness and be able to perform military tasks independently (without logistics support) in 2011 thus considerably accelerating Ukraine's cooperation with Western military structures.

air surveillance radars), and participating at the creation of common military units designed for EU or UN rapid reaction operations (e.g. joint EU Battle Group)<sup>13</sup>.

- **Different military capabilities (equipment, experience).** Looking from the current perspective it would be correct to say that at the initial phase of the creation of Baltic States' Armed Forces (AF) the long-term vision of what the AF should look like, how they should be equipped and what tasks they should perform was not developed. Some authors might argue that in the early 90s the Nordic States approached the Baltic States with "comprehensive advice";<sup>14</sup> however, contrary pieces of "comprehensive advice" followed from UK, US and other countries. Military planners became hostages of the situation as they had to rely on what was offered in the form of advice, channeled in the form of donation or bought from abroad for practical short-term needs.<sup>15</sup> Two types of consequences can be made with this respect. First of all, selectively implemented concepts of foreign advisers as well as equipment obtained from different countries in a variety of conditions has created practical obstacles for cooperation in operations, building common units, saving recourses on equipment maintenance etc. Secondly, some Baltic States have been more active seeking "to get whatever possible", while others – less. This has become an implication for further increasing divergence in the field of military experience.
- **Diverging military priorities and level of readiness.** After the coup of Lithuanian volunteers in 1993, Lithuania started to pay more attention to regular AF, whereas Latvia and Estonia allocated a big share of resources for non-deployable Homeland security forces.<sup>16</sup> In other words, Lithuania was sending troops to international peacekeeping

---

<sup>13</sup> Participation in the EU Battle Group project is a perfect illustration of the diverging interests of the Baltic States and different approaches to closest partners: Lithuania and Latvia (together with Germany and Slovak) contribute to the EU Battle Group led by Poland, while Estonia is taking part in the creation of the Nordic EU Battle Group alongside Finland, Sweden, Ireland and Norway.

<sup>14</sup> Clemmesen M., "The Baltic States towards the end of the second two decades of independence", <<http://blog.clemmesen.org/2009/02/21/towards-the-end-of-the-second-time-the-baltic-states-have-two-decades-of-independence/>>, 17 03 2009.

<sup>15</sup> This is how Lithuania acquired flotilla ships from Russia, radio stations from Belarus etc.

<sup>16</sup> Interview at the Baltic Defence College, November 2007.

missions at the time when the other two Baltic States were taking care of the entire defense and territorial forces. Later on Riga and Tallinn gradually changed their priorities; however, up till now capabilities and the experience of taking part in international operations, commanding international units and national brigade size units differ considerably among the Baltic States. Therefore, it is not surprising that Lithuania does not demonstrate huge interest in developing regional military cooperation: its readiness is much higher as compared to that of Latvia and Estonia both in absolute and comparative terms.

- **National ambitions and poor management.** Apart from the Lithuanian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan, all three Baltic States cooperate with different partners when contributing to NATO ISAF operation in this country. On the one hand, it may be concluded that this may be due to the aforementioned factors (different levels of readiness, different strategic goals and partners, etc.). Nevertheless, of equal importance is the fact that “all three defense organizations are suffering from the poor management and leadership skills. National or sometimes even personal ambitions of senior officials are amplified in a tri-lateral framework, thus impairing implementation of new ideas as well as fostering a general sense of dissatisfaction with trilateral cooperation”.<sup>17</sup> In some cases successful cooperation projects or initiatives rely on close personal contacts among the officials of the three Baltic States; however, a project managed without a clear “project officer” (who permanently works on it) in the relevant country is doomed to stagnate.
- **Lack of resources.** In some cases (for example, having in mind Host Nation Support to the NATO Air policing mission or BALTNET) deepening of integration is prevented by an apparent shortage of resources. Found among states with the smallest defense budget in NATO (1.01% of GDP in case of Lithuania<sup>18</sup>), the Baltic States plan further reductions of expenditures and shared costs, which will also limit common acquisitions, common training etc. Therefore it may be con-

---

<sup>17</sup> Explanation of one of the answers to the Questionnaire.

<sup>18</sup> Lithuanian Ministry of Defense, *Lithuania – among the states with the smallest Defense budget in the NATO family*, <<http://www.kam.lt/index.php/en/182793/>>, 28 03 2009.

cluded that regional military cooperation in the short- and medium-term will be successful only if: 1) cooperation does not require allocation of a considerable amount of human resources, 2) cooperation helps to implement national security and defense-related interest, 3) cooperation contributes to the savings of financial resources.

#### **4. Prospects and future directions of Baltic military cooperation**

On the basis of the analysis presented in the previous section it becomes evident that at least several factors infringing cooperation among the Baltic States are in one or another way related to the chaotic planning of defense in the times when the Baltic States AF had just been created. On the one hand, the problem of logistical interoperability (which determines obstacles to cooperation in other sectors) between the Baltic AF could be solved by joint acquisition of new equipment (for example, for the joint Baltic Battalion which is designed for NRF-14 stand-by period). However, several problems arise as far as joint acquisitions are concerned. First of all, the Baltic States do not only differ in terms of how advanced they are. They also lack a common vision of how those differences could be tackled. In other words, the Baltic States Armed Forces have different acquisition priorities. Second, due to the lack of resources the Baltic States pay more attention to repairing and modernizing armament rather than to buying it.<sup>19</sup> Even those national projects of acquiring new equipment that have started recently are not coordinated, as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia do not feel real added value in doing this. Finally, the ability of equipment dealers to convince Baltic officials to buy a specific product also plays a role in this regard. Lack of transparency in public procurements leads to further deepening the differences in armament sphere.

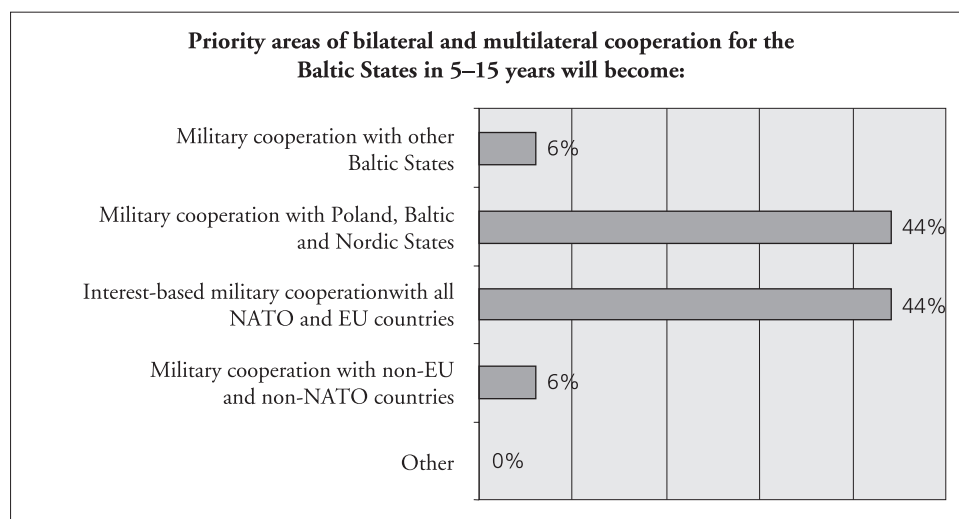
Despite all existing differences one of the most important assumptions in maintaining effective military cooperation among the Baltic States is to find the bottom line where 1) countries are all too small to do it on their

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview at the Baltic Defence College, March 2008

own, and 2) countries are on a similar level of development. Some examples are presented below: a few years ago Lithuania initiated and later Estonia and Latvia joined its efforts in NATO and PfP cooperation programme providing support to Georgia in the disposal of outdated and hazardous ordnance (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Romania, Switzerland and Georgia itself allocated nearly 500,000 Euros to finance the initiative). The goal of the project is very specific and clear - the disposal of almost 9000 S-8 rockets in the former military bases. Undoubtedly, these common efforts of the Baltic States do increase security in Georgia and the whole South Caucasus since the weapons could pose considerable threat in the wrong hands. At the same time this project reflects a new tendency of the Baltic States military cooperation: the latter is not limited within the regional boundary. The results of the survey only endorse the assumption that broader than regional cooperation will prevail in the nearest future.

Graph 4. **Attitudes towards future cooperation formats**



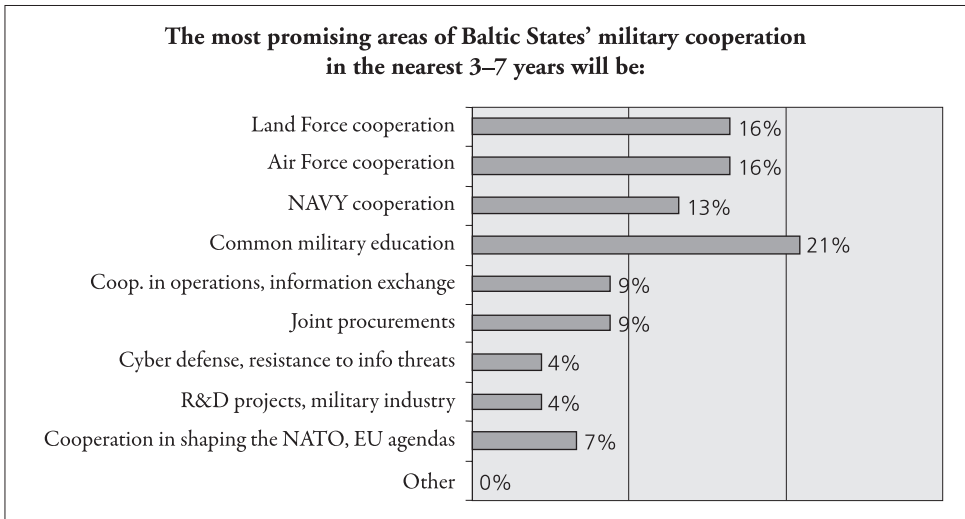
The logic of *shared interests* could be applied not only to NATO projects,<sup>20</sup> but also to bilateral and trilateral cooperation in the areas of research and development, cooperation in military industry, education, air policing, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Such as a joint acquisition of three Boeing C-17 Globemaster III aircrafts under the NATO Strategic Airlift Capability program by three Baltic States and 7 other NATO Member States.



However, as can be seen from the results above, Baltic military cooperation will most probably be integrated into the broader context of the Baltic-Nordic cooperation or cooperation inside NATO or the CFSP/ESDP framework. Regional cooperation will not disappear as long as the Baltic States feel proximity of their interests, goals and military capabilities. However, the intensity of Baltic cooperation may sink after the Baltic States have recognized that they are able to cooperate with other partners on an equal basis. This is especially true of Estonian (which maintains very close relations with Finland) and Lithuanian (seeking closer cooperation with Poland) visions on military cooperation. On the other hand, as can be concluded from the results of the survey, despite some ill blood and skepticism, presence of goodwill and intensive contacts can restore the “lost dynamics” of cooperation within the “traditional” formats, too:

Graph. 5 Attitudes towards the future areas of the Baltic military cooperation



Although the respondents were skeptical about such a possibility, one of the basic future directions of the Baltic military cooperation may be joint aspirations to shape NATO and CFSP/ESDP political and military agendas. Manifestations of these efforts may already be seen: the Baltic States constantly reaffirm their common goal to seek the continuation of NATO Air

Policing mission at least until 2018, they jointly support NATO enlargement, the extension of NATO MAP towards Ukraine and Georgia, strengthening NATO's support for Ukraine's and Georgia's political, economical, defense and security sector reform, etc. In exchange for the support of other countries in these spheres, the Baltic States may jointly promote accession talks with NATO candidate countries in the Balkans. In other words, in future diplomatic defense and military cooperation may become no less important than cooperation in the field.

One more future direction of Baltic military cooperation could be strengthening of certain NATO defense capabilities. The transforming nature of threats triggers transformation of the Alliance, its strategies, structures and capabilities. For the Baltic States this also means a possibility to consolidate their efforts when proposing amendments to the NATO's Strategic Concept or other permanently reviewed strategic and operational documents of the Alliance. Last but not least, working jointly the Baltic States may hope for further progress in NATO involvement in such sensitive areas as cyber defense, energy security, etc.

## **Conclusions**

Gaining international experience, tackling the most relevant threats and demonstrating the abilities of "young" Armed Forces were of crucial importance for the Baltic States, which wanted to re-emerge on the international scene. For that reason and with active support from the Nordic States such military cooperation projects as BALTBAT, BALTRON, BALTNET were launched. The logic of doing this was simple: cooperating in the field of military affairs in the region the Baltic States could expect to be invited to contribute to international peacekeeping missions and thus reaffirm their aspirations for NATO membership.

As observed by A.Kasekamp and V.Veebel, the "prospect of NATO membership probably did more to promote Baltic cooperation than any other idea".<sup>21</sup> However, several aspects should be stressed with this respect. First of all, regional cooperation (even including the Nordic States) has never been

---

<sup>21</sup> Kasekamp A., Veebel V., "Overcoming doubts: The Baltic States and European Security and Defence Policy", *The Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2007* 9 (32), 2007. p. 14.

seriously considered as an alternative for NATO collective security guaranties. Therefore, suggestions from some experts that “Latvia’s, Estonia’s and Lithuania’s unity could in time become a confederation with common Baltic state armed forces”<sup>22</sup> or J. Gabliks’ idea about the formation of a Baltic-East European “NATO” (which would include Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland) cannot be seen as an option for the Baltic States. In this light the point raised by P. Vares seems more equitable. He maintains that “Baltic functionaries as well as public opinion consider Baltic cooperation, if not the last then at least one of the less meaningful choices in Baltic foreign policy alternatives”.<sup>23</sup>

After the accession to NATO, regional cooperation did not disappear; the Baltic States managed to spread cooperation into new relevant spheres. The Baltic States joined their efforts quite successfully sharing post-mission information, preparing units for NATO and the EU Rapid reaction forces, controlling the airspace, providing the host nation support for NATO Air policing mission, etc. While demonstrating their solidarity by supporting the integration of the Eastern neighborhood countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures, the Baltic States strengthen their voice inside the Alliance. Completely new or previously little-known projects, such as jointly countering cyber-, informational-, psychological-, and energy security- related threats have emerged on the cooperation agenda partly due to the Baltic States’ efforts. Therefore, it may be presumed that permanent meetings of the Baltic States’ Defense Ministers, Chiefs of Defense, Chiefs of Staff, representatives of Defense Committees of the three Baltic parliaments and other officials will be followed by relevant proposals in the future.

On the other hand, new massive projects of regional cooperation among the Baltic States have not been initiated. Those implemented “by inertia” are negatively influenced by significantly diverging defense concepts, increasing distinctions in the sphere of armament and readiness as well as mis-

---

<sup>22</sup> This viewpoint was defended by the 5th Saeima (Parliament) representative, member of the Baltic Assembly, M. Budovskis (Udris J., *Baltijas valstu vienotība* aug. Latvijas Vestnesis. November 3, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Vares P. “Dimensions and Orientations in the Foreign and Security Policies of the Baltic States”, *New Actors on the International Arena. The Foreign Policies of the Baltic Countries*, Tampere: Peace Research Institute, 1993, p.21.

management while running the projects. Therefore there is nothing unexpected in the fact that right after joining NATO and the EU the Baltic States started to prevail in cooperation in the framework of NATO and ESDP or in cooperation on a bilateral basis (Lithuania – with Poland and Denmark, Estonia – with Finland, etc). This allows one to make the conclusion that in the medium- and long term the Baltic States may succeed in maintaining regional cooperation only if: 1) new “common denominators” are found, 2) effective policy and management framework to advance the projects is forged, 3) “know-how” experience of more developed defense organizations is applied.