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ON NUCLEAR ISSUES

LATVIA

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Latvia, a NATO and EU Member State, presents a sceptical stance towards radical solutions in nuclear disarmament. The country perceives nuclear disarmament as a long-term process that requires a series of gradual steps and enhancement of transparency and security-building measures. Latvia has supported the continued basing of U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, while backing the idea of dialogue on such weapons between NATO and Russia. The country co-chaired the NATO Committee on Proliferation from July 2011 to July 2012.

NUCLEAR

Latvia does not possess, produce or host nuclear weapons on its territory. Latvia is a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and has an Additional

Protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The country is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and a participating state of the Wassenaar Arrangement.

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE, DISARMAMENT AND POSITION REGARDING NATO'S NUCLEAR POLICY

As Latvia became a NATO member in 2004, its participation in NATO's nuclear activities has been limited by the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act, in which the Alliance pledged that it had “no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.” The act has ruled out Latvia's direct participation in nuclear-sharing arrangements, but the country could

potentially perform non-nuclear supportive roles in possible nuclear operations of the Alliance.¹ Latvia also takes part in the works of the Nuclear Planning Group, and political discussions on NATO's nuclear policy.²

During the debates on the 2010 New Strategic Concept, Latvia stressed the primary importance of NATO's ability to perform its collective defence and

¹ The scope of such potential participation would, however, be further limited by the fact that Latvia does not possess combat aircraft.

² L. Kulesa, “The New NATO Member States,” in: P. Foradori (ed.), *Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Euro-Atlantic Security*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2013, pp. 143–144.

deterrence mission.³ In a joint communique from May 2010, the defence ministers of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia “emphasised that NATO’s nuclear capability remains indispensable for the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. An appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities based in Europe ensures credible deterrence of the Alliance.”⁴

The case for retention of “some” U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNWs) in Europe was also presented in the report “NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement,” published in May 2010.⁵ The document was supported by Latvia and prepared by the NATO Group of Experts, which included Aivis Ronis, who became Latvia’s foreign minister shortly before the report’s publication.⁶ Experts also recommended a dialogue between NATO and Russia on nuclear issues, including on transparency building-measures with regard to Allied and Russian NSNWs, and their possible mutual reductions. According to the document, any such cuts should be a subject to a decision by all NATO members.⁷

As NATO debated in the 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR), Latvia endorsed the U.S.–Russia negotiations on the potential reduction of NSNWs.⁸ The issue was also discussed in an article published shortly before the adoption of the DDPR at the Chicago summit and co-authored by former Latvian defence minister Imants Liegis.⁹

The article argued for the continued presence of U.S. NSNWs in Europe, and stressed Russia’s vast numerical advantage in that category of arms, as well as their presence near NATO borders and role in Russian military exercises in which the Alliance was depicted as an enemy. The authors advocated for NATO–Russia engagement in the process of enhancing mutual confidence and transparency regarding the NSNWs, as well as their reciprocal reductions. At the same time, the authors expressed their scepticism about Russia’s willingness to reciprocate such cuts, given the country’s growing reliance on nuclear weapons. It was also argued that unilateral reductions of American NSNWs would weaken the transatlantic link and put the credibility of U.S. commitment to

³ “Draft NATO Strategy Calls for Nuclear Disarmament,” *Global Security Newswire*, 1 October 2010, www.nti.org/gsn.

⁴ “Joint Communique of the Ministerial Committee,” Vilnius, 7 May 2010, www.kaitseministeerium.ee/files/kmin/img/files/2010-05-07_JC_3B_DefMin_Vilnius%282%29.pdf.

⁵ “NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement. Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO,” 17 May 2010.

⁶ “Sunday 30 May 2010—Summary of the Meeting of the Defence and Security Committee,” NATO Parliamentary Assembly, www.nato-pa.int.

⁷ “NATO 2020...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 43–44.

⁸ “Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia Girts Valdis Kristovskis at a Roundtable Discussion at the German Marshall Fund of the United States,” Washington, 22 February 2011.

⁹ I. Liegis, L. Linkevicius, J. Onyszkiewicz, “Why Europe Still Needs Nuclear Deterrence,” European Leadership Network, 21 May 2012, www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org.

Europe into question, especially as the United States was already reducing its conventional forces on the continent.

Such opinions were in line with the findings of studies based on interviews with Latvian officials and experts, conducted before the adoption of the 2012 DDPR.¹⁰ These studies noted that Latvia and two other Baltic States valued the importance of U.S. NSNWs primarily as means of reassurance and deterrence with relation to Russia. Nonetheless, other rationales were also noted, including the role of these weapons in deterring potential future threats to NATO, with reference to the possible acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran.¹¹

In the wake of the conflict in Ukraine and rising tensions between NATO and Russia, Latvian foreign minister Edgars Rinkēvics has criticised Moscow for threatening to aim nuclear missiles at Danish ships if Denmark joined the NATO missile defence system.¹² Latvia has, however, not referred directly to NATO's nuclear deterrence policy.

Latvia served as the European co-chair of the NATO Committee on Proliferation from July 2011 to July 2012.¹³ Latvia's priorities included countering WMD threats in the maritime environment, and the country co-organised two related events in its capital, Riga, in March 2012. These were the "NATO's 2012 International Partners' Outreach Event" and the "NATO Science for Peace and Security Advanced Research Workshop."¹⁴

NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT EFFORTS IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

Latvia has not delivered national statements at the 2010 NPT Review Conference or during the meetings of the Preparatory Committee for

the 2015 Review Conference.¹⁵ The country has, however, referred to the NPT process at other forums, such as the Conference on

¹⁰ See: J. Durkalec, "NATO Defence and Deterrence Posture: Central and Eastern European Perspectives," *PISM Policy Paper*, no. 29, May 2012; Ł. Kulesa, "Polish and Central European Priorities on NATO's Future Nuclear Policy," *BASIC NATO Nuclear Policy Papers*, issue 2, 2010; S. Shetty, I. Kerns, S. Lunn, "The Baltic States, NATO and Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe," *RUSI-ELN Occasional Paper*, December 2012, Royal United Services Institute.

¹¹ S. Shetty, I. Kerns, S. Lunn, "The Baltic States...", *op. cit.*, p. 17; J. Durkalec, "NATO Defence...", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹² A. Krutaine, K. Golubkova, "Latvia Says Russia's Military Rhetoric Is 'Alarming'," *Reuters*, 27 March 2015, www.reuters.com; "It's Denmark's Business to Join NATO Missile Defense System—Expert," *Pravda.ru*, 23 March 2015, <http://pravda.ru>.

¹³ "Seminar and Supporting Industries Exhibition on Weapons of Mass Destruction Non-proliferation in Riga on 20–22 March," Ministry of Defence of Republic of Latvia, www.mod.gov.lv.

¹⁴ "Countering WMD Threats in the Maritime Environment: 2012 International Partners' Outreach Event," NATO, www.nato.int.

¹⁵ Nonetheless, Latvian positions are represented in statements of the EU. EU statements are available at the site: "Non-Proliferation Treaty," Reaching Critical Will, www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/npt.

Disarmament (CD), in which it participates as an observer state, and the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly.

Latvia has stressed its support for the NPT treaty as a “cornerstone of the non-proliferation and disarmament regime.” The country has strongly supported the step by step approach to nuclear disarmament and 2010 NPT Action Plan, and called for its further implementation as well as for the enhancement of transparency and confidence-building measures.¹⁶

Latvia has explicitly endorsed initiatives such as the New START Treaty between the United States and Russia, while noting that U.S.-Russian arms control and disarmament efforts improve “predictability and stability” in Latvia’s region and could possibly serve as a basis for future treaties with the participation of other nuclear weapon states.¹⁷ The country has also praised reductions in the United Kingdom’s nuclear arsenal, the international partnership on nuclear disarmament verification announced in December 2014 by the United States, and the Nuclear Threat

Initiative,¹⁸ as well as the dialogue and cooperation between the nuclear weapon states within the P5 process.¹⁹

Latvian statements have advocated for the entry into force of the CTBT and the beginning of negotiations on the treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices (the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, or FMCT). Additionally, Latvia has been vocal in calls for the revitalisation of the Conference on Disarmament, as well as the enlargement of its membership.²⁰

Although Latvia has been supportive of various unilateral, bilateral and multilateral efforts that are complementary to the NPT, it expressed its scepticism towards initiatives that “may duplicate the work done in existing formats” and “may have a negative impact on the NPT process.”²¹ In this regard, Latvia has indirectly referred to the calls of some of states participating in the Humanitarian Initiative,²² which have sought a legal instrument banning nuclear weapons on the grounds of international humanitarian law, while the nuclear armed states have opposed such an idea.²³

¹⁶ “Statement on Behalf of the Delegation of the Republic of Latvia, Thematic Debate on Nuclear Weapons,” First Committee of the 69th UN General Assembly, New York, October 2014.

¹⁷ “Statement by His Excellency Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, to the Conference on Disarmament,” Geneva, 5 March 2014, p. 6.

¹⁸ See: “U.S. State Department and NTI Launch New International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification,” The Nuclear Threat Initiative, 4 December 2014, www.nti.org.

¹⁹ “Statement by His Excellency Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, to the Conference on Disarmament,” Geneva, 4 March 2015, pp. 5–6.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 7–9.

²¹ “Statement on Behalf of the Delegation of the Republic of Latvia...,” *op. cit.*

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ L. Kulesa, “The Nuclear Weapon Ban Is Inevitable—Too Bad That It Won’t Bring Disarmament,” European Leadership Network, 9 December 2014, www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org.

Latvia recognised the “grave and horrendous humanitarian consequences” of the potential use of nuclear weapons, and participated in the first and third conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, in Oslo, in March 2013, and in Vienna, in December 2014.²⁴ Nonetheless, the Latvian statement delivered at the Vienna conference highlighted that the reduction and total elimination of nuclear weapons requires the participation of states possessing nuclear weapons and a “conducive strategic environment.” Additionally, Latvia highlighted

the need for not only disarmament efforts, but also for an effective non-proliferation regime.²⁵ Similar arguments against a nuclear weapons ban and in support of a gradual approach to disarmament were presented in the Australian statement delivered in October 2013 at the UN General Assembly’s First Committee on behalf of 17 countries, including Latvia.²⁶

In March 2014, Latvia directly criticised Russia for its actions against Ukraine and violation of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.²⁷

Latvia participates in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

NUCLEAR SECURITY²⁸

The 2014 NTI Nuclear Materials Security Index ranked Latvia as 8th out of 151 countries without weapons-usable nuclear materials. Latvia is a state party to the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM), along with the 2005 amendment. The country participates in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT).

Latvia currently does not operate any nuclear reactors. Its sole research unit in Salaspils was shut down in 1998.²⁹ Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the GE Hitachi corporation have planned to start joint construction of the Visaginas nuclear power plant in Lithuania, as minority shareholders, by 2015. The project has, however, experienced delays and there was no a final agreement to begin the works as of April 2015.³⁰

²⁴ “Statement on Behalf of the Delegation of the Republic of Latvia...,” *op. cit.*

²⁵ “Statement by Mr. Aivars Puriņš, Director of Security Policy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia,” The Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, 8–9 December, 2014.

²⁶ “Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons Delivered by Ambassador Peter Woolcott, Australian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva and Ambassador for Disarmament,” First Committee of the 69th UN General Assembly, New York, October 2013.

²⁷ “Statement by His Excellency Mr Edgars Rinkevics...,” *op. cit.*, 5 March 2014, p. 2.

²⁸ This section provides basic information on Latvia’s engagement in international cooperation on nuclear security. For more detailed data see: “Latvia,” Country Profiles, The Nuclear Threat Initiative, www.nti.org/country-profiles/latvia.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ “Estonia and Latvia Still Waiting for Profitability Assessment of Lithuanian NPP,” *DELFI News*, 10 April 2015, en.delfi.lt.

Latvia became a country free of highly enriched uranium (HEU) in May 2008 after the removal of spent HEU fuel to Russia. A similar return of fresh HEU fuel occurred in 2005. Both transfers took place within the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI), run by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), and in cooperation with Russia and the IAEA.³¹

Since 2007, the U.S. DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration has assisted Latvia in countering the smuggling of nuclear and radioactive materials within the "Second Line of Defence" programme. The assistance focused on the installation of detection equipment at Latvian border crossings, and training of Latvian personnel.³²

MISSILES

MISSILE DEFENCE

Latvia neither possesses nor plans to acquire ballistic missile defence (BMD) capabilities. There are no plans to deploy any BMD installations on Estonian territory. The country supports the deployment of elements of the U.S. missile defence system in Europe (the European Phased Adaptive Approach, or EPAA) as part of NATO's ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability. It also supported previous plans of the George W. Bush administration to deploy missile defence installations in Poland and the Czech Republic.³³ Riga reacted mildly to

the cancellation of the Bush-era plans by the Obama administration in September 2009.³⁴

According to studies based on interviews with Latvian and regional officials and experts, conducted before the 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, Latvia has shared the views of other Central and Eastern European (CEE) states in respect to BMD and Russia. They have not objected to dialogue between Russia and NATO on missile defence, or to some cooperation between the two parties. CEE countries have, however, stressed that the Alliance should proceed with deployment

³¹ "Final HEU Shipment Leaves Latvia," *Global Security Newswire*, 16 May 2008, www.nti.org/gsn.

³² "U.S., Latvia Commission Radiation Detection Equipment at Freeport of Riga," National Nuclear Security Administration, 15 June 2012, nnsa.energy.gov.

³³ "Foreign Minister Pabriks' Statement on Global Anti-missile Defence System," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 26 February 2007, www.mfa.gov.lv.

³⁴ N. Greenhalgh, "Mixed Baltic Reaction to Dropped Missile Shield," *Baltic Reports*, 18 September 2009, balticreports.com.

of its independent BMD system regardless of Russian objections.³⁵

Latvia voiced concerns over the deployment of Russian missiles in its vicinity,

while emphasising that NATO's BMD system is not aimed at Russia and is designed to protect the Alliance from threats emanating from "third countries."³⁶

BALLISTIC AND CRUISE MISSILES

Latvia does not currently possess, produce or host ballistic or cruise missiles on its territory. Riga has not expressed an intention to acquire such capabilities. Latvia is a subscribing state to the Hague Code of

Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation. The country is not a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), although it abides by MTCR guidelines.³⁷

CHEMICAL

Latvia does not possess or pursue chemical weapons. Latvia is a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC),

as well as a member of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Australia Group (AG).

BIOLOGICAL

Latvia does not possess or pursue biological weapons. The country is a party to

the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC).

³⁵ J. Durkalec, "NATO Defence...", *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8; "Foreign Minister: Working on Long-term Involvement of International Community in Afghanistan, Region's Neighbouring Countries Must Be Considered," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 8 December 2011, www.mfa.gov.lv.

³⁶ "Foreign Ministry comment to the Press About Russia's Iskander-M Missiles Near the Border of Baltic States," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 17 December 2013, www.mfa.gov.lv.

³⁷ "Latvia," *Country Profiles, op. cit.*