

## **UL Summer School: Navigating Security in the Baltic States: The West's Stance on Its Borderlands**

The **UL Summer School** provides an in-depth exploration of the complex and evolving security dynamics that define the strategic position of the Baltic States within the broader geopolitical landscape. This interdisciplinary program bridges the domains of hard and soft security, equipping participants with a holistic understanding of the region's security architecture, resilience mechanisms, and policy responses to multifaceted threats.

Designed to foster critical analysis and practical insight, the curriculum addresses the security dilemmas faced by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as NATO and EU member states on the periphery of Western alliances. Participants will engage with the interplay of hard security measures, including military deterrence, defense strategies, and the strategic presence of NATO forces, alongside soft security concerns such as societal resilience, hybrid threats, and strategic communication in the face of information warfare and disinformation campaigns.

The program incorporates a comprehensive blend of academic and experiential learning formats, including expert-led lectures, interactive seminars, policy simulations, and field trips to relevant sites and institutions. Through this multidimensional approach, participants will examine the geopolitical dynamics of the Baltic region, particularly in the context of relations with Russia and other key actors, the operationalization of NATO's Article 5, and the EU's role in fostering regional security and stability. The course also addresses emergent challenges such as cyber threats, the weaponization of information, and energy security.

By delving into the unique geopolitical and strategic realities of the Baltic States, participants will gain a robust theoretical and practical foundation for understanding contemporary security dynamics. The program emphasizes resilience-building and the development of tailored policy solutions to address the vulnerabilities and strategic imperatives of the region. Additionally, the inclusion of real-world case studies and policy scenarios allows participants to simulate decision-making processes in high-stakes environments.

The summer school cultivates a collaborative learning environment, enabling participants to engage with leading scholars, policy practitioners, and fellow attendees from diverse academic and professional backgrounds. With state-of-the-art facilities and a curriculum grounded in cutting-edge research and practical expertise, the program provides an unparalleled opportunity to explore the critical security issues shaping the Baltic States as the borderlands of the West.

This advanced academic initiative is particularly suited for students and professionals in international relations, political science, security studies, and regional studies, as well as policymakers and practitioners seeking specialized knowledge on Baltic security. Participants will emerge from the program with enhanced analytical capabilities, a nuanced

understanding of the region's strategic challenges, and the tools to contribute to effective policy-making and strategic planning in an increasingly complex security environment.

**Learning Objectives:** Participants will acquire foundational knowledge of key concepts in hard and soft security dilemmas, with a particular focus on how smaller states can effectively deter and navigate relations with larger, more powerful neighbors. The program will also enhance participants' understanding of contemporary challenges such as countering disinformation, propaganda, and the proliferation of fake news, equipping them with the analytical tools and strategies necessary to address these issues.

**Target Audience:** This summer school is open to undergraduate (BA) and graduate (MA) students from diverse academic backgrounds. The program is designed to deepen participants' understanding of the political and security dynamics specific to the Baltic States, offering a comprehensive framework that spans the spectrum of security studies, from traditional military concerns to broader societal and informational dimensions.

**Structure and Delivery:** The study program includes a balanced mix of independent study, expert-led lectures, interactive seminars, and field trips to sites of strategic and political significance. All sessions are planned for on-site delivery, subject to public health considerations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This format ensures an immersive and dynamic learning experience, fostering critical engagement with the theoretical and practical dimensions of Baltic security.

**Credits:** 6 ECTS

**Language:** English

**Course director:** lect. S.Struberga

**Location:** Riga, University of Latvia

**Time:** July 21 till August 1, 2025

**Course fee:** 750 EUR

**Housing fee:** from 350 EUR (the approx. price for 14 days in the city)

**Minimum number of students:** 12

**Self-study:** *For participants who applying for Summer School (UL Track) will be sent a description of the task, which will have to be prepared before arriving in Riga*

## **Tentative Summer School Programme:**

**Topic 1: The History of the Baltics as a Borderland of the West.**

***Lecture: Brief Introduction in History of Latvia. Lect. E.Engizīrs***

Through a lecture on the history of Latvia, students will acquire knowledge of crucial aspects such as the country's historical timeline, significant events, cultural influences, and

the impact of external forces on its development. Moreover, students will gain insights into Latvia's struggle for independence, societal changes, and the role of prominent historical figures in shaping the nation. In the history lecture focusing on Latvia, students will also comprehend the geopolitical context, including Latvia's relationships with neighboring countries and major global events that played a role in shaping its history. The lecture will delve into economic developments, political structures, and societal transformations across different periods. Understanding the challenges Latvia faced and how it overcame them will provide students with a comprehensive view of the nation's historical journey.

***Fieldtrip: to the Latvian War Museum or the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.***

A visit to the Occupation Museum or the Latvian War Museum will provide students with a firsthand understanding of the country's wartime experiences and periods of occupation. This will offer insights into the impact of World War II, the Nazi and Soviet occupations, and the resilience of the Latvian people. Moreover, students will explore specific artifacts, testimonies, and historical narratives that illuminate Latvia's struggle for independence and the human stories underlying these tumultuous times.

## **Topic 2: Baltic Societies in the 21st Century: An Ethnical and Linguistic Perspective.**

***Lectures (2): Baltic Societies in the 21st Century: An Ethnical and Linguistic Perspective***  
*Lect.S.Struberga*

The lectures will commence by delving into theories related to small states. After, the lectures will provide a brief overview on contemporary political realities of the three Baltic states with particular focus on ethnic and linguistic composition and developments in both ethical and linguistic dimensions. Linguistically, there exists a dynamic equilibrium between the preservation of Baltic languages (Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian) and the influence of global languages, as well as still existing heritage of the Soviet occupation in terms of Russian information and ideational influence on Russian-speaking communities. Hence, the linguistic affiliation of minorities in the Baltics has become a significant indicator of interpretations of realities. The lecture explores these details and elaborates on recent policies implemented after February 24, 2022, along with the ensuing reactions within various societal groups. Additionally, the lectures will empower students to formulate policy forecasts regarding the impact of ethical and inclusion policies on small states.

***Seminar:***

The seminar will focus on creating policy briefs using the analytical framework introduced in lectures, with a specific emphasis on policy planning and analyzing the potential impact of ethnic policies.

***Fieldtrip: to one of the Latvian NGOs that work to provide support for Ukrainian refugees in Latvia***

In Latvia, following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the non-governmental sector took the lead in effectively providing support to Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Latvia. State aid subsequently followed suit. Recognizing the pivotal role and significance of the non-governmental sector, partnerships and other collaborative mechanisms were established among the state, non-governmental organizations, and private sector. These partnerships enabled all stakeholders to sustain their efforts in supporting Ukraine and refugees from Ukraine. Visit to one of the active non-governmental organizations working with Ukrainian refugees will afford students the opportunity to acquaint themselves with civil society initiatives, collaboration with the state, and analyze current challenges.

**Topic 3: Relations between Russia and the Baltic States: Russia's Ambitions and Influence in the Baltics.**

***Lecture: Latvian-Russian Relations.***

*Assoc.prof. T. Rostoks*

Russia looms large in Latvia's foreign policy, but Latvian-Russian relations have been mostly dormant since 2014. There have only been a few high-level official visits of Latvian political leaders to Russia, and no sitting Russian prime minister or president has visited Latvia. The lecture seeks to unpack Latvia's complicated relationship with Russia. It covers the 30 years since Latvia regained independence from the Soviet Union. The lecture looks at military, economic, historical, and political aspects of Latvia's relations with Russia, while also paying attention on Russia's potential to mobilize its so-called compatriots in Latvia.

**Simulation game "Power and Revolution" (2 seminars)**

Lect. S. Struberga

"Power & Revolution" (also known as Geo-Political Simulator 4). Developed by Eversim, this game provides a detailed and realistic simulation of global politics, economics, and diplomacy. It offers players the opportunity to take on the role of a world leader, such as the president or prime minister of a country and make decisions that impact domestic and

international affairs. The focus will be on NATO and the decision-making process regarding the defense of the Eastern Flank (with emphasis on the Baltic States). The role of each participant and additional materials will be provided on the first day of the course.

#### **Topic 4: Constructing Security: Combing Resilience and Deterrence.**

##### ***Lecture: Deterring Russia in the Baltic Region.***

*Assoc.prof. T. Rostoks*

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the onset of the military conflict in East Ukraine have fundamentally altered NATO's relations with Russia. Since then, NATO has tried to deter Russia from initiating military aggression against the Baltic states, also known as the most vulnerable members of the Alliance. NATO's efforts to deter Russia have included clearly communicating resolve to defend the Baltics against potential Russia's aggression, more and more focused military exercises, and placing NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroups in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The lecture evaluates the main components of NATO's deterrence posture in the Baltic states, including Lithuania's, Latvia's, and Estonia's own military capabilities, the effects of NATO eFP tripwire forces, military mobility, and the combined military and economic power of the Alliance. Although deterrence has seemingly succeeded, deterrence successes are notoriously difficult to identify. The lecture also examines gaps in NATO's deterrence posture in the Baltic region.

##### **Lecture: Adapting Resilience: Shifting from Flexibility to Strategic Resistance**

*V. Rakstiņš, Resilience Expert*

This lecture will explore the dynamic evolution of resilience, tracing the trajectory from adaptive flexibility to strategic resistance. The lecture will delve into the pragmatic aspects of transitioning beyond mere adaptability in face of ever-changing realities and increasingly complicated environment. Participants will gain insights into the strategic dimensions of resilience and will learn from practical examples from Ukraine, Moldova, Baltics States. Thus, the lecture will provide practical frameworks and real-world examples to have lessons- to-be-learned about the shift from reactive responses to deliberate, strategic resistance.

#### **Topic 5: Strategic Communications: Utilizing Soft Power, Emotions, Shaping Narratives and Events to Influence Social Groups. How to Build Resilience?**

##### **Lecture: Navigating Global Disorder: The Crucial Role of National Coordination in Strategic Communications and Countering Disinformation**

*Lecturer- Strategic communications practitioner*

In an era marked by unprecedented global challenges, including conventional and unconventional warfare, the role of strategic communication practitioners has become more vital than ever since an effective communication is the linchpin for navigating through uncertainty. The lecture will underscore how strategic communication serves as a linchpin for building public trust, disseminating accurate information, and shaping perceptions amid circumstances. Drawing from practical examples from own experience, the lecture will highlight the consequences of fragmented or inconsistent communication strategies on a national and international scale. Also, the best practices in national coordination of strategic communications, encompassing collaboration between government agencies, private sectors, and civil society will be provided.

**Lecture and Seminar: Information Power Projections: Unraveling Propaganda, Disinformation, and Misinformation Tactics**

*Lect. S. Struberga*

The purpose of the lecture is to familiarize students with the meanings of contemporary and increasingly crucial concepts such as propaganda, information campaigns, misinformation, and disinformation. These concepts are integral to the political communication toolbox employed by various state and non-state actors seeking power in the 21st century. Through practical tasks and interactive learning methods in seminars, the lecturer aims to cultivate skills for practical analysis of political information campaigns. The focus will be on specific case studies and experiences from the Baltic States, situated as borderlands of the EU and Transatlantic community, and the broader Western hemisphere. Analytical tasks will facilitate the practical application of the acquired knowledge.

**Lecture: Narratives and Events, and Manipulation with Social Groups.**

*Prof. J.Škilters*

Humans are segmenting their perceptual and cognitive environment into objects -- in case of space, these are topologically constrained and extended parts of the world; in case of time these objects are events. Events consist of objects and their configurations that are modified according to certain principles that normally fit into a narrative structure. Event borders are sensitive to human perceptual and cognitive processing. In my talk i will briefly explain the experimental evidence and theoretical background of the work on event perception and will show that individuals and social groups are sensitive to events both as containing shared past (and therefore generating common ground) but also as units linking attention. In the latter case humans might be attentionally blind and therefore get manipulated if their attention is guided by one event sequence (one narrative structure) while there is a parallel one that is outside of the attention. Several demonstrations and results of experiments will be provided. Human sensitivity to events can be used to impact or manipulate also for political purposes.

## **Lecture: Emotions (Individual and Social) and Their Impacts on Large-Scale Groups.**

*Prof. J. Šķilters*

**Description:** In my presentation I will (a) show the complexity of the definitions that are applied to emotions within different theoretical frameworks in the 21st century, (b) explore differences between individual and collective (community level) emotional reactions, and (c) show some evidence that large-scale social groups can be strategically manipulated by coordinating their emotions (examples from recent cases in social network communication will be provided). Finally, some generalisations will be formulated emphasising the costs and benefits of emotional reactions in large-scale social groups but also the danger of emotional impacts in respect to political contexts will be highlighted.

## **Lecture: Humour as a Communication Tool: The Case of New Year's Eve Television in Russia.**

*Prof. Žaneta Ozoliņa*

Humour entertains but can also be used for propaganda purposes if it reaches a large audience and influences their emotional response to specific topics. Prof. Ž. Ozoliņa will present results of case study which focuses on humour as a comprehensive concept: elements of humour that serve a propagandistic function, including shared knowledge, the target audience, the perception of humour, the functions of humour, and the communication process, are identified and analysed in New Year's Eve programming on Russian television.

## **Literature for Preparatory Reading**

Banka, A. & M. Bussmann. "Uncomfortable neighbors: NATO, Russia and the shifting logic of military exercises in the Baltics." *Defence Studies* 23.1 (2023): 1-24.

Ozoliņa, Ž., Šķilters, J., Struberga, S., *Humour as a Communication Tool. The Case of New Year's Eve Television Shows in Russia*. In Defence. Strategic Communications. Vol.4. ISSN 2500-9478. NATO Riga: Strategic Centre of Excellence. pp. 105-132

Pupcenoks, J., Rostoks, T., and Mierina, I. (2023). "Microfoundations of Threat and Security in Ethnically Diverse States: Lessons from Russia's "Near Abroad."" Nationalities Papers. DOI:10.1017/nps.2022.109

Sazonov, Vladimir, Ploom, Illimar and Veebel, Viljar. "The Kremlin's Information Influence Campaigns in Estonia and Estonian Response in the Context of Russian-Western Relations" *TalTech Journal of European Studies*, vol.12, no.1, 2022, pp.27-59. <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjes-2022-0002>

Struberga S., *Weaponization of Information in the Baltic States: How Resilient are Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia?* In *Russia Conference Proceedings 2022*. Ed. Šrāders, S. University of Tartu Press. ISBN 978-9949-03-568-7 (print); ISBN 978-9949-03-569-4 (PDF)

Struberga S., Ozoliņa, Ž., *Crisis Communication and Resilience: Are Russian-Speakers in the Same Positions as Latvians?* In *Social Sciences*, MDPI. ISSN: 2076-0760

### **Additional Readings:**

Ed. Rostoks, T., Vanaga N. (2018). *Deterring Russia in Europe* (1st ed.). Taylor and Francis.

Ozoliņa, Ž., Reire, G., Denisa Liepniece, Kvesko, A., Struberga, S. (2017) *Euro-Atlantic Values and Russia's Strategic Political Communication in the Euro-Atlantic Space*. Riga: Centre for International Studies for NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence pp. 259

Ozoliņa, Ž., Struberga S., *Crisis Communication During the Pandemic: the Latvia's case*. In *Manufacturing Government Communication towards COVID-19: a Crisis, Realities*. Springer. ISBN: 978-3-031-09230-5

Struberga, S., *Russian Speaking Community in Latvia: On Who's Side in Times of War?* In *ICE Policy Papers*, Institute of Central Europe, ISBN: 978-83-67678-06-3