

Euro-Atlantic *dominion Maris Baltici*
Multidimensional security threats in the Baltic Sea basin
Practical recommendations for local and national governments and civil societies

Since Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014, and especially after the full-scale invasion in 2022, the Baltic Sea region has become the most important arena of potential conventional warfare between the EU and NATO and the Russian Federation. It is already a key area of hybrid warfare (disinformation, cyber-attacks, sabotage, border violations, incursions, armed incidents, etc.) waged by Russia against NATO and the EU. The effective military deterrence of Russia (hard security) and increasing the resilience of societies and public institutions in the region (soft security) can be accomplished through implementing a whole-of-society strategy crucial to avoiding escalation and conventional war. This strategy to guarantee soft security involves all sectors – the government and its subordinate structures, private business, local government, civil society (including NGOs), and ordinary citizens. It concerns especially cognitive and hybrid threats.

Certainly, NATO and the EU's potential to achieve these two strategic objectives in the Baltic Sea region has increased significantly in recent years. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine led Finland and Sweden to join NATO (in 2023 and 2024, respectively), which has significantly strengthened the Alliance's position in the region. The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) and the Baltic states (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) are currently proportionally at the forefront in terms of support for Ukraine (military, financial, and humanitarian aid). Poland is one of the key donors of aid to Kyiv in absolute terms. Poland has become home to the second-largest group of Ukrainian refugees in the world and has been serving as a strategic hub for comprehensive support to the Ukrainian armed forces.

Since 2014, and especially after 2022, the Baltic states have significantly intensified their cooperation in multilateral (regional, NATO, EU) and bilateral formats in the field of security. On the other hand, there is still significant untapped potential for cooperation between them and a huge room for improvement. Raising regional cooperation to a higher level is particularly necessary now that the US, under President Donald Trump, is no longer an unambiguously reliable ally for the countries of the region and is increasingly becoming, at the very least, an unpredictable challenge.

It is particularly important to increase synergy between hard and soft security through the exchange of information, know-how, and best practices, as well as the creation of new, unconventional forms of cooperation (out of the box). Therefore, the College of Eastern Europe (KEW), which has extensive experience in organizing round tables with partners from Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic, together with Gdańsk, the Union of Baltic Cities, the Embassy of Lithuania and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (to be confirmed), in partnership with other stakeholders, propose to initiate a Baltic round table on soft and hard security. The first event will be held in Gdańsk at the end of November 2026. In the future, it could rotate annually around various Baltic cities.

The seminar in Gdańsk would bring together around 25 to 30 security experts, including former and active military personnel, representatives of local governments, state institutions and diplomats, experts, scholars and non-governmental organizations from Poland, the Baltic and Nordic states, and Ukraine. The mix of practitioners and experts of different professional backgrounds will constitute part of the key added value of our project. The participation of Ukrainian local government

officials and experts would aim at sharing with the Baltic partners the best practices used in Ukraine to defend itself against Russian aggression.

The round table would consist of a networking dinner and three panels: Russia as a fundamental threat in the region (case studies), lessons from Ukraine, and know-how of the Nordics. The discussion will concentrate on practical solutions and recommendations for public (central and local) and civil actors based on the whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach (the sharing of best practices and know-how). We will focus particularly on non-kinetic threats to security in the Baltic region. The topics discussed will include *inter alia*: societal resilience and crisis preparedness, Russian state and non-state actors in hybrid threats, critical infrastructure sabotage, and terrorism and drone attacks.

Proceedings during each panel will be divided into blocks: a short presentation followed by a Q&A. A very detailed agenda for each panel (concrete topics, issues, case studies, etc.) would be prepared in advance and would consider the current situation regarding hard and soft security and the expectations and needs of the main stakeholders.

The results of the discussions—conclusions and recommendations—would be published on the KEW website as a short policy paper. In order to bring the topics of the meetings to a wider audience, some of the participants will be interviewed for the English and Polish webpages of KEW's media outlets, while others will be recorded for podcasts. In Gdańsk, we will also hold a public debate organized in cooperation with the University of Gdańsk.

The strategic goal of the project is to strengthen political coordination among participating states, cities, institutions and civil societies and enable regional issues to be consistently raised within the EU, NATO, and other international formats. In this way, the project will reinforce collective regional efforts to develop practical, bottom-up, task-oriented models of resilience in the Baltic Sea region.

Tentative programme

First Day 30.11.2026

Evening - Dinner (Mixer)

Second Day 1.12.2026

9:00-9:15 Welcome remarks

9:15-11:15 Eagle eye's view: Russia as a fundamental (and concrete) threat in the Baltic region

During this panel, key developments and possible scenarios concerning hard security (kinetic warfare) and the most important military threats and challenges in the Baltic region posed by Russia will be assessed in-depth (case studies) and then discussed. We will focus especially on Russia's strategies, plans, tactics and toolbox (instruments, agents of influence, etc) particularly concerning cognitive warfare and hybrid threats.

11:15-11:45 Coffee break

11:45-13:45 Society and state at war: Lessons from Ukraine

This panel will integrate Ukraine's war experience into the regional dialogue and serve as a source of inspiration and toolbox with practical solutions for the Baltic allies. We will learn from Ukrainian allies how to counter the full spectrum of hybrid and kinetic military attacks, drawing lessons from the best practices presented by Ukrainian local governments and experts.

13:45-14:45 Lunch

14:45-16:45 Best practitioners in the EU and the NATO: Know-how of the Nordics and plans of Poland and the Baltic states

The panel will concern efficient responses to the full spectrum of hybrid and cognitive threats in the Baltic region. It will create a platform for presenting best practices from the Nordic countries and their policies, as well as effective practical models concerning societal resilience and crisis preparedness and management. Meanwhile, experts and officials from Poland and the Baltic States will present their detailed plans regarding the development of these sectors of national security in the nearest future.