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MISSION REPORT*

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Defence and Security Committee (DSC) sent a delegation to Estonia and Finland on 11-15 June 2018. Despite their close proximity across the Gulf of Finland, the countries have starkly divergent security policies to take on the challenges of an increasingly challenged security environment in the Baltic region. As the delegation learned across its weeklong visit to the region, while Estonia is working hard to demonstrate its commitment to meeting the Alliance's Defence Investment Pledge and finding key ways to distinguish itself in the region and across the Alliance as a niche-player in cyber capabilities, it is still wholly dependent upon Allied support to maintain its security and territorial integrity. In stark contrast Finland made it clear to the delegation that, while it appreciates recent closer cooperation with NATO, it will remain independent and prove itself to be at least as reliable a partner to the Alliance as NATO Allies are themselves within the Alliance. Finland's desire to maintain its strategic capacity for self-defense permeated the diverse range of briefings with leading experts from the government to the armed forces to think-tank experts.

2. Given the distinct differences between Estonia and Finland – historical experiences, status as NATO Ally and NATO Partner respectively, as well as current security policies - this report is divided into two broad sections covering the range of mostly divergent topics covered in each country. The delegation from the NATO PA Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Cooperation (DSCTC) consisted of 20 NATO member-state and partner parliamentarians from 11 different nations throughout the visit to each country.

II. STANDING STRONG: ALLIED EFFORTS TO REINFORCE NATO'S DETERRENCE MOVES FORWARD IN ESTONIA

3. NATO's evolving deterrence posture along the Alliance's eastern flank is a clear demonstration of the transatlantic community's resolve to stand by all member states in an increasingly volatile European security environment. An increasingly emboldened Russia is challenging NATO's will with a range of aggressive actions, from conventional sabre rattling to destabilising hybrid tactics at the political, economic, and social levels. Nowhere is the new Russia challenge being felt more keenly than in the Baltic States.

4. In advance of the 2018 July Summit of NATO Heads of State and Government in Brussels, a delegation from the DSCTC visited the front lines of NATO's new deterrence posture in Estonia as part of its yearlong study of NATO's evolving efforts in its eastern territories.

Russian Meddling in the Baltic States

5. The Baltic States have become the frontlines of the escalating brinkmanship between Russia and NATO. The Defence and Security Committee has reported on the rising number of air, land, and sea incidents wherein Russian forces sought to disrupt exercises or test air policing efforts, etc. in the Baltic Sea and along the land border Russia shares with the Baltic States.

6. In addition, Russia has used the Baltic region to test its asymmetrical capabilities, now perceived to be a serious threat to Alliance cohesion. In April 2007, Russian cyber agents executed a coordinated distributed denial-of-service attack on the Internet servers of Estonia's government, security, banking, and media institutions. For over two weeks, these servers were knocked offline or rendered inoperable, crippling the country. In recent years, Russian cyber attacks and probing has become increasingly common and broader in size and scope. For example, in May 2017, Reuters reported that Russian-supported hackers were suspected of

having targeted the Baltic energy network as part of an “exploratory” cyber attack. A source claimed the hackers had attempted to test its defences without causing blackouts – a successful attack on this scale would be devastating for the entire region.

7. More broadly, the independent Baltic States serve as a constant reminder to Russia today of regions ‘lost’ after the fall of the Soviet Union. As a result, Moscow uses whatever means possible to undermine the independence of the states. As a report from the US Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs notes, Russia’s disinformation campaigns against the Baltic States are a coordinated effort to portray them “as failures [...] blighted by emigration and poverty—and run by a sinister elite of Western puppets with ill-disguised fascist sympathies.” These messages target Estonia’s Russian-speaking population and Russia’s population. Russian efforts also target Lithuania and Latvia as well in a similar fashion.

8. As Estonian government interlocutors told the delegation, the Estonian government has not censored the activities of Russia-backed media outlets, but rather has sponsored three Russian-language media outlets to provide alternate sources of news to its Russian population, as well as a truthful counter narrative to the relentless Russian propaganda blitz. It also runs a disinformation-awareness programme and publishes an annual review of the activities of Russian intelligence services.

9. The Baltic region has also become an arena for dangerously escalating hard-power brinkmanship between Russia and NATO. As this committee has studied for the past several years, these incidents have escalated precipitously since 2014 to include incidents between opposing forces on land, in the air, and at sea. A few recent examples are enlightening the severity of the character of the incidents. In June 2016, Russian warships and aircrafts trailed 46 multinational ships during a US-led naval exercise in the Black Sea. Vice Admiral James Foggo, commander of the US 6th fleet, later stated the incident was a “photo exercise” by the Russian military. In June 2017, Estonia and Lithuania claimed that, over a seven-day period, NATO jets were scrambled 32 times from Ämari airbase in Estonia and Siauliai airbase in Lithuania to identify and escort Russian planes flying into Allied airspace over the Baltic Sea. Several incidents of Russia buzzing Allied war ships operating in international waters in the Baltic have been reported in recent years. In addition to this growing list of incidents, the Alliance has grown increasingly concerned about Russia’s deployment of anti-access/area denial systems around the Baltic Sea region. Such systems could substantially limit Allied land, air, and sea capabilities in the region should there be a need for Allied action, response, or reinforcement in a time of crisis.

Drivers of the Visit – NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics

10. As Estonia’s Foreign Minister Sven Mikser told the delegation in Tallinn: “The Baltics region is the only border between NATO and Russia where the Kremlin believes they have the advantage – in terms of space, the balance of forces, and time.” Mikser remained cautiously optimistic about the Alliance’s position vis-à-vis Russia: “They can be deterred,” he continued, “there have been positive developments since the standing up of the air-policing missions and the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP). This is a positive dynamic moving in the right direction. It is not complete, however, as many capability gaps still remain.”

11. The imbalance of forces and questions about the ability of the Alliance to reinforce its presence in the Baltics in the event of a contingency has raised considerable concern throughout the Alliance. Continued Russian brinkmanship in the region in the form of snap exercises as well as air and sea space violations is keeping military and political eyes on the region.

12. The most significant move to date by NATO to deter against any possible Russian adventurism is the enhanced Forward Presence established after the 2016 Warsaw summit.

The eFP consists of four multinational battlegroups manned by a cohort of transatlantic Allies stationed in the Baltic States and Poland on a permanently rotating basis. Commenting on the eFP, Chairman of the Defence Committee of the Estonian Parliament Hannes Hanso told the delegation: “This is an important signal at all levels. The eFP is far from a provocation of Russia – if it were, it would be rather weak. None of this would have happened if Russia had not made the moves it did in Crimea.”

13. The eFP battalions are relatively small when considering the size of the Russian forces manning the Western Military District, which shares a common border with all three Baltic States. The eFP battalions, however, are only meant to be a trigger for an overwhelming Alliance response, if Russia were to attempt any military reaction inside of Alliance territory. The nearly 1,000-strong multinational battalion in Estonia, stationed in Tapa, is currently being led by the United Kingdom and supported by Denmark and Iceland. When the delegation visited, France was leading the air-policing mission out of Amari Air Base. As briefers from the multinational battalion in Estonia told the delegation, the eFP works hard to complement the host country’s national defence forces in order to maintain and direct joint-enabled combined-arms capabilities. The ultimate goal of the multinational battalions, it was stressed throughout the visit, is to increase the credibility of NATO’s deterrence posture in the region and to defend the region, if necessary.

14. The precarious geographic position of the Baltic States, however, is leading to much speculation about the Alliance moving to further reinforce its now permanently-rotating presence in the region.

15. Allied planners are particularly focused on the challenge of the speed of reinforcement due to military mobility challenges and force readiness in Europe. The Baltic States are connected to NATO territory by a narrow 65km strip of land, known as the Suwalki Corridor, which is bordered to the West by the non-contiguous Russian oblast Kaliningrad and Russia-allied Belarus to the East. It is NATO’s most vulnerable chokepoint. Russia’s formidable integrated-defence systems in the area challenge all military supply links to the region.

16. The Alliance’s own infrastructural and bureaucratic deficiencies do not help with the dilemma of potential Baltic reinforcement. Recent reports have laid bare the insufficient infrastructure in NATO’s eastern territories, highlighted the cumbersome bureaucratic hurdles to personnel and materiel transfers, and the ability of European NATO Allies to rush the necessary brigades to the area in the event of a conflict.

17. Military mobility played a key role in the NATO Summit in Brussels this past July. There was strong Allied support, driven by the United States, to increase the number of troops available to reinforce the region in the event of a contingency. The proposal is being called the Readiness Initiative, or, sometimes the 30-30-30-30, as it was introduced by then US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis. The plan would require NATO to have 30 land battalions, 30 air-fighter squadrons, and 30 ships ready to deploy within 30 days of being put on alert. Further, NATO also created two new command structures with the express purpose of dealing with the military mobility challenge – one in Norfolk, Virginia, and the other in Germany. The new command in Norfolk will assist with the transatlantic transfer of equipment and personnel, while the command in Germany will handle the channeling of forces and materiel across Europe. Closer NATO-EU cooperation on the issue is also seen as a crucial means of addressing the challenge of infrastructural deficiencies.

18. Many have noted that the Readiness Initiative can be seen as a challenge by the United States to its European Allies to demonstrate an increased willingness to meet the demands of the Alliance’s new defence and deterrence posture. With fast-paced adaptation demands to deal with eastern and southern flank challenges, a rise in terrorist-related incidents, and other

destabilizing hybrid threats at all levels, NATO members must invest more to cover the rising costs of security across the Alliance.

19. Currently, the United States is paying an imbalance of the costs of NATO adaptation. The burden sharing issue remains a key question brought to the table by the U.S. as Allies discuss their future. As Estonian Defence Minister Jüri Luik told the delegation quite plainly: “The truth is, there is not enough investment to cover the costs for today’s security needs. The problem is political. The will has to be there. All Allies have to take this issue seriously.”

20. Over the past several years, the United States has increased its investments in European security, particularly raising its profile in Eastern Europe. Funded under the moniker *The European Deterrence Initiative*, the United States is leading the multinational battalion in Poland and investing additional billions to improve infrastructure, increase exercises, and rotate more personnel and equipment into the area. The DSCTC delegation witnessed US efforts in the Baltics firsthand by its participation in the distinguished visitors’ day events of the US-led *Saber Strike* exercise.

21. *Saber Strike* is an important exercise coordinating all Baltic States and Polish forces, US Army Europe, along with many other NATO allies and partners. Over several weeks, 20,000 forces conducted the exercises in the Baltics and Poland. As US Commanders told the delegation, *Saber Strike* is an important platform for the continuous commitment of the United States to the region. As one commanding officer told the delegation: “*Saber Strike* is about how Allies are building deterrence together. It is a clear demonstration of our collective defence capabilities.”

22. As briefers told the delegation, the exercise seeks to demonstrate a ‘fight tonight’ deterrent capability via a credible collective-defence scenario. The United States sends over 15,000 forces to train in the exercise annually in an effort not only to improve readiness but also to enhance interoperability. Ultimately, this would lead to an increased freedom of movement and operational reach for the Alliance in challenging areas such as the Baltics.

Estonian Defence Priorities and Defence Investments

23. Throughout the visit, Estonian interlocutors made it clear the nation was eager to support Allied initiatives within the country to help guarantee the continued independence and territorial integrity of the nation. The deteriorating security environment with Russia in the Baltics (and with NATO more broadly) is driving Estonia’s enthusiastic commitment to Allied defence investment initiatives. In parallel, there is clear domestic support and across governments inside of Estonia to set the example of the Allied-wide parameters for increased defence investment – particularly the Wales initiative of dedicating 2% GDP to defence spending, 20% of which to be dedicated to new purchases. As a result of its enthusiastic embrace of the Wales Defence Spending Pledge, Estonia is one of the few countries that consistently maintains its defence expenditures at 2% of GDP.

24. Estonia spent approximately EUR 524 mil in 2018 on its defence forces representing approximately 2.14% of its total GDP. As briefers noted, the government voted through a revised defence spending plan in 2017 – the 2017-26 National Defence Development Plan (NDDP). The NDDP focuses on the need for increased heavy armor mobility and firepower, as well as additional pre-positioned weapons stocks. The NDDP also increased the number of annual conscripts to 4,000, which raises the number of active duty forces to approximately 7,000. Estonian interlocutors noted that with the addition of reserve forces and the Estonian Defence League, in the event of a contingency, the government could field as many as 85,000 forces total to defend the nation.

25. Russia has tested Estonia's capabilities with scheduled and surprise military drills near the border, border incursions, and military build-ups. Briefers also noted that the Estonian Special Operations Forces play a major role in Estonia's national defence. Their primary role is to respond to and lead unconventional warfare capabilities. Operational capabilities remain in the development phase with 2019 being the target for "the command implementing structural changes [...] to improve its warfighting and operational capabilities."

26. Estonia has also distinguished itself in the cyber domain. The government adopted a national Cyber Security strategy in 2008 and even added a Cyber Security Council to the government's Security Committee. In addition, Estonia hosts the NATO Cyber Center of Excellence (CoE) as well as two major Allied annual cyber exercises – *Locked Shields* and *Cyber Coalition*. Estonia's efforts to distinguish itself as a niche security provider for the Alliance, briefers noted, underlines its commitment to the transatlantic bond.

III. PREPARED FOR SELF-DEFENCE, FINLAND STILL WORKS TO SOLIDIFY ITS PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE EURO-ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

27. The delegation from the DSCTC continued its journey across the Gulf of Finland to Helsinki to meet with parliamentary peers, high-level government officials, members of the nation's armed forces, as well as civil society. A pervading message throughout the visit to Helsinki was that, as the Baltic Sea security environment heats up, the Finns know they are ready to defend themselves if necessary. While a strong message of independence and self-reliance pervaded the DSCTC visit, it was also clear Finland views itself as a valuable security partner in the Euro-Atlantic community as well as the international arena. With clear deference for its history, Finland is forging ahead as a dynamic contributor to regional and international security.

Finnish Perspectives on the Changing Security Environment

28. The continued security and prosperity of the Baltics states is a major priority for Finland. In addition to human contacts and humanitarian concerns, Finland has major economic and trade links with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Any disruption to air flight, shipping, or communication over the Black Sea would severely impact Finnish society.

29. The increasing military activity in the Baltic Sea is a major concern for Finland. According to the prime minister's Government Defence Report for 2017, "[t]he early warning period for military crises has become shorter and the threshold for using force has been lowered." The report calls Finland to improve its responsiveness and defence capabilities. As Finland's President Sauli Niinistö told the delegation: "We do not feel particularly unsafe here in Finland, but we are seeing increased military activity in the Baltic Sea, especially since Crimea. We continue to promote better dialogue between NATO and Russia, but we are also realistic in our assessments of the evolutions of the security environment in this region".

30. Dramatic shifts in the Baltic Sea region would have serious consequences for Finland. A full 80-90% of Finland's imports and exports are shipped through the Baltic Sea, as such the nation places great importance of unencumbered sea lanes of communication. As briefers told the delegation, Finland imports 100% of its natural gas and 84% of its crude oil from Russia, making it very vulnerable to supply disruptions. Finland recently approved a permit for Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline. However, the country retains substantial concerns about its environmental impact. Regulators require that some 87 undetonated wartime bombs be removed before construction begins. An alternative project discussed with the delegation is the Baltic Connector pipeline, set to finish in 2020, will connect Estonia and Finland to the Continental European Network, increasing energy security and expanding competition. When

completed, the pipeline will change some of the dynamics of the energy transfer grid in the region.

31. Security of supply into Helsinki is part and parcel of the nation's comprehensive security. As officials at the National Emergency Supply Agency put it quite clearly: "A functioning economy, secure infrastructure, and national defence all combine to secure the vital needs of the population; all three must work in harmony." Still, as Chief of Defence Staff Lieutenant General Timo Kivinen noted, "any military crisis in the region would put Finland directly in the middle," which is focusing the nation's leaders' attention today.

Finland and Russia: History Overshadowing the Present Day

32. Throughout the visit to Helsinki, the nation's history with Russia and the impact of this variable on Finnish perceptions today was discussed at virtually every meeting. The following is a brief overview of Finnish history vis-à-vis Russia; a subsequent discussion of the policy's today reflecting the impact of that history will follow.

33. After centuries as a province of Sweden, Russia annexed Finland in 1809. It remained a province of the Russian Empire until the 1917 October Revolution, when it declared independence. In the subsequent power vacuum, Finland collapsed into civil war between left-leaning, Soviet-supported forces and conservative, German-supported forces. At least 36,000 people, 1.2% of the population, died and around 80,000 prisoners, including 1,500 children, were captured. Faced with painful reconciliation and the weakness of both Russia and Germany after World War I, Finland pursued a social and political settlement based around parliamentary democracy.

34. In 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. Finland repelled the invading forces for several months, relying on winter temperatures and Finland's difficult terrain to inflict heavy casualties on the Soviets (estimated between 321,000-381,000). Despite suffering 70,000 casualties itself and ceding substantial territory, Finland retained its independence and autonomy. During the Cold War, Finland proclaimed its neutrality and maintained a cautious foreign policy to avoid further conflict with its neighbour. It has maintained its non-aligned status in the post-Cold War era, though it joined the European Union in 1995 and the euro zone in 2002.

35. Finland shares a 1,340km land border with Russia and Russia's posture in the region has changed significantly in recent years, Finnish defence officials told the delegation. Increased force structure in the Kola Peninsula, the build-up of anti-access area denial systems in the Saint Petersburg region, and large-scale snap exercises in the Arctic and Baltic Sea regions are forcing the Finnish government to conclude the significant shift in the security environment means that the early warning period in crisis times has greatly shortened, requiring new levels of force and civilian readiness.

36. "We have a long history of war against Russia." Juuka Juusti Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence of Finland told members of the DSCTC. "We believe it has taught us a lot about the Russians. We did not believe the world had changed two decades ago the way many other states in Europe had. As a result we have been preparing for the future better than most nations in Europe."

Finnish Armed Forces – Doctrine and Capabilities

37. As the delegation learned, Finland is working to increase the strength and readiness of their forces. Finland has already increased the wartime mobilization forces from 230,000 to 280,000 today; hypothetically even scalable to over 900,000 in the event all trained conscripts are called upon to defend the nation. The last decade Finland has focused on strengthening

the mobility and firepower of its land forces. As a result, Finland now has one of the biggest field artilleries and tank forces in Western Europe. The Ministry of Defence's next focus will be the Navy, followed by the Air Force in relatively rapid succession. Precision strike capabilities will be essential to all services.

38. Throughout, the Finnish Defence Forces have maintained focus on developing state-of-the-art cyber and communication systems. Finland published a national cyber security strategy in 2013, the implementation of which was revised in 2017. The current strategy embodies a whole-of-nation response capacity – from the state to the private sector to the individual. The armed forces also includes a cyber defence concept and Helsinki plays host to the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. As briefers at the centre noted to the delegation, the CoE's strategic goals run the gamut from building member state capabilities to be prepared and more resilient against hybrid threats to improving multilateral response capabilities from attribution to action, in particular briefers noted, the centre is focusing on stronger EU-NATO cooperation in the domain.

39. Despite these very large potential wartime force numbers for a nation of just 5.5 million, the peace time defence force structure is relatively small, standing at just 21,500, with an additional 21,000 and 18,000 immediately available conscripts and reservists respectively. As the commander of the Kaarti Jaeger Regiment told the delegation, the maintenance of a strong conscription system in Finland is “a means to keep younger generations focused on defence of the nation as a priority.” In addition to national pride and duty, the commander added about the conscription system: “ If you want to maintain your passport, you have to serve in Finland.”

40. In addition to self-reliance, Finland is increasing its international defence cooperation at the bi-lateral and multilateral levels. Finland and Sweden have a special level of bi-lateral defence cooperation: As the nation's recently published defence white paper notes, for example, there will be no limits for defence cooperation between the two. In addition, Finland has developed its bi-lateral defence cooperation with the United States, which began in earnest, officials noted, with Finland's acquisition of the Boeing F-18 multirole combat fighter back in the 1990s.

Multilateral Defence Cooperation

41. Finland also views its defence cooperation with the EU and NATO to be essential. “When Finland joined the EU in 1995, it was the end of Finnish neutrality as it had been understood for most of the 20th century,” an official from the Finnish Foreign Ministry told the delegation. Finland has always been very supportive of European defence cooperation, and views a stronger European Defence posture as a benefit for all European states – whether in NATO or not. Still, as defence officials cautioned, a stronger EU on defence and security, such as through the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) initiative, must be done with an understanding of the key role NATO plays as the cornerstone of broader European security and with the understanding that each participating nation only has a single set of armed forces upon which to draw.

42. As the European security environment has shifted over the last several years, the paradigm of NATO-Finland relations has changed as well, officials noted. Finland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative in 1994, but in response to rising tensions in Europe Finland was identified as an Enhanced Partnership partner in 2014. As defence officials made clear, Finland adds significant capabilities, particularly in terms of territorial defence, and is an important player when considering the regional balance of forces.

43. When thinking about its relationship with NATO, Mr. Juusti put it succinctly: “Finland must be at least a reliable Partner with NATO as NATO Allies themselves are within the Alliance.” By way of example, Finland will surpass the 2% GDP in defense spending benchmark by the

early 2020s. Still, officials were quick to note that a strong partnership with NATO does not mean Finland has plans to seek NATO membership any time soon. Public support to join the Alliance is only about 25%, but there is strong and clear public support for continued close cooperation with NATO.

44. As Ilkka Kanerva, Head of the NATO PA delegation to Finland told the delegation: “The possibility of NATO membership is a good card for Finland to have in its hand, but not to play it.” Still, as many officials and analysts hinted to the delegation throughout the visit, future Finnish membership of NATO cannot be counted out.
