HIS MASTER’S VOICE

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Introduction

Recently the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, explained one more time the Russian Geo-strategic objectives on the European continent. A concept, described and supported by the Russian policymakers; Rossotrudichestvo. One should objectively observe the term as a benchmark for the actions and activities of the Kremlin, because from the statements of Lavrov it became clear that:

"Amid lingering discrimination against compatriots in a number of countries, primarily in the Baltic countries and Ukraine, it is necessary to improve approaches to protecting their political, civil, and ethno-cultural rights. ... the situation today makes it necessary to step up efforts to protect the Russian language, preserve cultural heritage and historical memory, and generally tackle discrimination, including at the everyday level," ... I have highlighted the most important elements from these statements, explaining in what way the Kremlin has tried to support the achievements and interests of Russian-ethnical entities in other countries in order to suppress so-called “discrimination” against these groups.

We were, are and will always remain Russians.

The Russian Orthodox Church in the past three decennia has developed itself into a strong supporter of Putin’s geopolitical policies, using the statements that:

- “Being a Russian is being part of an ethnicity!”
- “Borders are artificially drawn lines on the map which are not supported by historical facts!”
- “Any other ethnicity can be welcome under the Russian umbrella!”

Although Georgia’s conflict with Russia has shown that the Russian foreign policy is merely based on economic and financial arguments, the Russian Orthodox Church continues to play the “cultural cohesion-card”. During the 18th Global Russian People’s Congress of March 11 2017, which met at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, the headquarters of the Orthodox Church, the congress declared that “The identity of the Russian is determined at the main altar of orthodoxy”. According to this council, “the year 2014 was a turning point in contemporary Russian history. We could not imagine that tanks, airplanes and artillery would be used against civilians, that parents, women and children in peaceful cities would be exposed to shelling and bombing,” (probably referring to the operations of the US led to support the anti-Assad coalition, not the military aggression against all “terrorists” in that
country by the units of the Russian Federation, where the definition “terrorists” means “all opponents of the Syrian dictator and his Russian ally”

Mobilization is therefore required!

“The sovereignty of Russia and the unity of its peoples are at stake!, according to the final statement. "In this situation, the Russian people must now show courage, decisiveness and solidarity like never before."

And continuing:

“The uniqueness of the ethno genetics of the Russian People is composed of its ability to assimilate other ethnic groupings like Tartars, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Jews, Poles, Germans French and other nationalities.” (Where “assimilate” and “dominate” are obviously different words but equal qualifications)

Obviously, the Church intends to stipulate that the ethnical diversity has never been contrary to the ambition for Russian unity. Violent confrontations have only contributed to achieve this unity. It seems that these religious-related declarations have provided a license for politicians to convert these into political benchmarks. In this way they became the main principles of Russian foreign policies. The Kremlin always made it very clear in what way it intends to approach and influence the countries of the former Soviet Union.

• **The Baltic countries.** For the entire Baltic region, the position of the Kremlin concerning these Baltic countries was formulated in an article on November 29. Russian political scientist and international journalist **Alexander Nosovich** wrote an article in a Pro-Kremlin media outlet Rubaltic.ru entitled, “**Russian will be forced to engage in the Baltics.**” He meant engage militarily! The article went on to state that the Baltic countries provoke Russia, “**which leaves the Kremlin no choice but to turn military attention toward the region on its western border**”*1.

• **Estonia and Latvia:** In Estonia 11% of the 1,25 million strong population is Russian speaking. Using these figures, Kremlin advisor **Sergej Markov** stated in November 2014: “**In a major war, nothing will remain of Estonia and Latvia**”
- **Belarus:** 72% of the 9.5 million inhabitants is Russian-speaking. In December 2010 Putin addressed the Belarussian population with the comforting words: "Russia has everything possible to support the economy and the social structure of Belarus. Which was nothing but substantial! On the other hand, we need to acknowledge that the government of Belarus follows a clear and solid policy to integrate the economy into that of the Russian federation. This choice deserves respect."

- **Ukraine:** 24% of the Ukrainian population is Russian-speaking. Putin stated in 2014: "The conversion of the Ukrainian people to Orthodox Christianity was the precondition of a common culture, values and civilization that have combined the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. We cannot live without each other. After the revolution the Bolsheviks have transferred significant portions of Russian Southern territory to Ukrainian territory"!*

- **Kazakhstan:** 95% of the 18 million Kazakh people are Russian-speaking. In August 2014 Putin stated "The Kazaks never had a state of their own. Nursultan Nazarbayev (president since 1991) has created this state. Nazarbayev is a professional and able statesman. Probably the most able in the entire former Soviet Union"

- **Georgia:** 9% of the 4.9 million inhabitants is Russian-speaking. Kremlin adviser Sergei Glazev stated in September 2013: “Two hundred years ago, Russian supported the creation of an orthodox Georgia and it took one hundred years of war to finalize the confrontation. The “conflict” of 2008 was an episode that has cause probably a wrinkle but has not been able to destroy the century-long friendship between the two nations! (Glazev can call it a “wrinkle” but it is for sure that this “century-long friendship” is since the “wrinkle” of 2008, like the same “century-long friendship” with Ukraine since 2014, is somewhat damaged, to say the least! Ed.)"

- **Moldova:** 5.9% of the 3.5 million inhabitants is Russian-speaking. Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov stated in 2014: "When Moldova loses its neutrality and will be incorporated in the western structures or if Moldova will give up its military neutrality, than Transnistria is fully entitled to decide about its future independence.”

The percentages and statements of the Kremlin spokesman obviously do not create a lot of comfortable feelings for the non-Russian speakers in the countries mentioned before!

**Remember Georgia!**

In Abkhazia, only 1.8% of the population are autonomous Abkhazians and only 3.0% South Ossetians in the Georgian province with the same name. The Russians fabricated a so-called “independence-movement” that fueled the “wrinkle” followed by driving away the Georgian speaking inhabitants in a classical “ethnic cleansing” operation. On top of that, Russian passports were distributed all over the occupied provinces. The Russian Orthodox Church became the state-religion and the Georgian Orthodox Church was marginalized. In schools, town halls and other local administrative units, Russian became the main language and the use of the Georgian language was forbidden to use in official documents in the occupied territories. Because of these clever and manipulative measures, the majority of the local population is not able anymore to communicate in their native language. An entire generation young, officially native Georgians is not able to communicate with Georgians in Georgia proper. Believers can only be members of the Russian Orthodox Church parishes
and the impression is awakened that the Russian speaking inhabitants in the occupied provinces is the majority in the territories. The next move was the replacement of the artificial “border” between main Georgia and the occupied territories 15 kilometers to the south by Russian Peacekeeping Forces. From that moment on the Russians were now able to control the oil and gas pipelines running through Georgia from Azerbaijan to the Black Sea. This was a simple and clear evidence that the entire request for Russian support by so-called “Independent movements” and the following occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was fabricated by economic and financial pretexts to get a foothold in the southern Caucasus. While in the position of only forty kilometers from the capital Tblisi, the Russians are able to blackmail the Georgian government any time they want by threatening to use the so-called “Peace Keeping Forces” to further engage deeper in Georgian territory. Russians has shown that they can be very “creative” in finding excuses for such an engagement!

Although Georgian ambitions to become part of western structures, including NATO, are temporarily eliminated and similar ambitions of Ukraine are also temporarily derailed, Putin does not seem to be convinced that a similar aggressive battle plan like in Georgia and Ukraine will be effective in all former Soviet states especially when considering and analyzing the effective countermeasures taken by NATO in the pre-phase of exercise ZAPAD 2017. He has now obviously chosen for a somewhat “refined” approach. As a result he has -again temporarily- postponed his plans to use ZAPAD 2017 as a pretext to make a next move into Ukraine and in the Baltic region. The battle plans were ready, as was the military component to execute these plans³. NATO’s countermeasures⁴ have obviously convinced Putin that a direct confrontation with NATO at the moment was not realistic and would have brought more doubt for a positive result

Probably Putin has envisaged another scenario than the successful operations in Georgia of 2008 and the limited and temporarily success in eastern Ukraine from 2014 till now, which contains a longer timeframe and a specific approach, he might have adjusted his priorities and concentrate his attention to the south or the east. Another possibility is that the upcoming presidential elections this year force him to focus more on home-bound developments. Whatever the result of these deliberations might be, in the final phase of every option; the military-operational option, is his last tool to get Ukraine or one of the Baltic countries back within the Russian sphere of influence.
Full speed ahead.

In the beginning of 2016, it seemed that a “Georgia-scenario” could be used for an attack on one of the Baltic countries, but the scenario of ZAPAD 2017 indicated that this approach has been adjusted to prevent that it could be successful to take on one of the Baltic countries (e.g. Estonia) but it would mean that the remaining Baltic countries will be stronger integrated in western political, economic and military structures with a definitely permanent stationing of substantial military air-, naval- and ground forces. Every indication shows that there is obviously a change of attitude in the attempts to weaken the mutual coherence of the Baltic countries and the drive to more integration in western structures.

The attitude has changed from a military-aggressive stance to much cheaper and probably even more effective hybrid operations and invest more energy in “Information Operations” and “cyber warfare”. Or like the Armed Forces Chief; Lieutenant General Valery Gerasimov*\(^5\) expressed: “Among such actions are the use of special operation forces, and stimulating internal opposition to create a permanent operating front though the entire territory of the enemy state as well as informational actions, devices and means that are constantly being perfected.”

The pre-phase of any military operation on Baltic territory, the Russian Main Stream Media like RT and Sputnik, supported by the troll factory in Saint Petersburg, will bombard the main Western outlets including the social media, with fake news to prepare the western population to accept a military operation in the Baltics by explaining that:

- The area has always belonged to the “Russian Area of Responsibility” (The Russian MIR/Ruskii MIR) and
- Such an operation meant only minor “border corrections” to restore historically wrong marked borders (forced upon Russia in a period of weakness) and not supported by a majority of the local Baltic population and not by provoking the rest of the western countries.

Key arguments will be the mutual use of the Russian language and the Russian Orthodox Church*\(^6\)

Analyzing Lavrov’s statements made in the post-ZAPAD period, the Kremlin has obviously already started with these hybrid attacks. By claiming that NATO has used the exercise ZAPAD as an excuse to “deploy the greatest concentration of military force after the second
World War in eastern Europe”, Lavrov claims that the West and first and for all NATO have violated the agreements as made in the “Russian NATO Founding Act” and that Russia has the right to react accordingly. This could mean that Russia can man and equip the small garrison near the construction site of Ostrovets in Belarus, some 40 kilometers from Lithuania’s capital Vilnius, in a way that it can control and blackmail all military and civilian transportation routes coming is and departing from Vilnius airport.

To support this opinion Lavrov claims that:

- NATO, led by the USA, has used ZAPAD as an excuse to deploy troops in Eastern Europa. Only in April 2017, before the start of ZAPAD, when hardly any sufficient information was available about the Russian-Belarussian exercise, NATO decided already to deploy a 4000 strong contingency of troops on a rotational base, spread out over Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This deployment is a political, not a operational indicator, because the deployment is that limited that it hardly can be qualified as a “substantial combat force”. And Lavrov is very well aware of this!

- NATO has developed plans to reinforce its air forces on a permanent base in the Baltic region. It is correct that the Americans have sent six extra combat fighters to Siauliai airfield in Lithuania but all of them were withdrawn after the exercise. (Reinforce the air forces in the Baltic region on a permanent basis?? Ed.)
- NATO has deployed 600 extra paratroopers to Poland and the Baltic countries. It turned out that this was not a reinforcement but a temporarily and not a permanent deployment, even without any armored vehicles.*
- Russia claims that the USA has sent the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team (2 ABCT) as reinforcement of NATO ground forces to Poland. It turned out that this battalion participated in the Exercise “Operation Atlantic Resolve”. This participation was already old news and made public in April 2017 and there was therefore no relation whatsoever with the exercise ZAPAD 2017.

Next to the statements Lavrov made about the “abuse of ZAPAD” was the fact that in February 2017 the two main disinformation outlets RT and Sputnik started a media offensive to maximize distrust and confusion amongst their home-bound, but also for their international readers and viewers.

- “The Balts prepare to attack Russia, supported by the additional NATO forces deployed on their territories. These reinforcements are the biggest since the Second World War. A schematic comparison about the balance of forces proves the ridiculous opposite
• “The Baltic countries are almost bankrupt. This is the result of their anti-Russian foreign policy. ([http://bit.ly/2m0Cfvi](http://bit.ly/2m0Cfvi) TV Zvezda). It turns out that since the Baltic countries became members of the EU, their GDP has increased substantially since 2004. According to Eurostat, Estonia’s GDP has grown with 45%, Latvia’s GDP grew with 39% and Lithuania’s GDP with 42%. This increase is expected to grow further in the coming years.

• “Russian speaking natives in the Baltic countries were better off during the Soviet period than nowadays. A simple comparison in purchasing power, minimum wages and pensions (also available for Russian speaking Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians) shows indeed the remarkable difference of four to five time stronger in the current situation than in the past.

Putin uses different characters to spread his warnings and statements, among which his media outlets and his minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov are the most vocal. The first category using “alternative reality” (a sophisticated expression for “Fake news”) and the last using plain lies to spread “His masters voice”.

A ventriloquist attitude

Sputnik and Lavrov claim that the Balts use an increasing system of ethnocide. Proof for this is the Baltic support for the revolutionaries in Chechnya in the nineties and the support for the “illegal fascist regime” in Kyiv that is supported by the West. The Baltic countries have become a “Place des Armes” for an attack on Russia.

The 3500-word unsigned article entitled “How We Will Reorganize the Baltic Region” is one of the most detailed offerings of its kind, something intended to (again) support Moscow’s claim that the three Baltic countries are not full-fledged states and to sow fear and division in each of them. “Despite what their governments claim and what many in the West believe”, the portal says, “the countries of the Baltic region are not monolithic. Each has its own wound which Russia not only can but must exacerbate … in order to completely reform the political space [there] in the national interests of Russia without war or a clash with NATO.”

The way forward, Sputnik Pogrom says, is to “support regionalists” in each of the three, to “assist” those in various parts of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, to recover their genuine identities that Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius have sought to repress, to promote the rights of Russian speakers, and to transform the historical narratives of the three countries. Among the mechanisms Moscow should use, the portal continues, are “promoting the historical memory of residents of the regional communities,” demanding that they be given “regional autonomy or self-administration,” and “the transformation of regional dialects into independent languages or alternatively the revival of ancient but now forgotten languages.”

All those things are intermediate steps toward the acquisition by these regions of “independence” from the three Baltic countries and then either their integration into Russia in the manner of Crimea and Sevastopol or their close alliance with Moscow on the pattern of South Ossetia or Abkhazia. (Which is de facto a lie, because the two Georgian provinces are basically already integrated as “Krays” into the territory of the Russian federation!)
But the portal argues that “the most likely points of potential instability and thus for the application of soft force are [the three Baltic capitals] where a significant part of the population consists of representatives of national minorities, and chiefly of the Russian-language community.”

While decision makers in the Kremlin may not do everything the article calls for, clearly there are many in Moscow who have been thinking long and hard about how to break up three NATO member countries by using soft power and other means.

Next, it says, Moscow should focus on “existing regional projects” like Latgale in Latvia, the Narva region in Estonia, and Vilno kray in Lithuania” even as it promotes new regional movements like Klaipėda (Memel) kray, Suvalkia (Aanatvyagia), and Zemaitiia in Lithuania, Courland in Latvia, and the islands of Hiiumaa and Saareman (Oessel and Dago) in Estonia.

The article discusses in detail the situation in each of these places, the levers Moscow can use, and what it describes as “the best outcome for Russia” in each case. And then it turns to a discussion of how to “strengthen pro-Russian influence among the three titular nationalities by promoting a broad rewriting of the national narratives of those peoples.

The article concludes that Moscow will likely have the greatest success in promoting its ideas in Latvia, given the high rate of inter-ethnic marriage – “20 percent of Latvians are married to representatives of other nationalities, in the overwhelming majority of cases with Russian speakers – and the large share of Russian speakers among Latvians.

Moscow will face more problems in dealing with the Estonians, the article continues, because the rate of inter-ethnic marriage is much lower (only seven percent) and Russian language knowledge is less as well. It recommends that Moscow promotes itself as “the chief homeland” of the Finno-Ugric peoples as a way around this.

To get this process moving, the Sputnik Pogrom portal says, Russians should stop using Baltic toponyms and replace them in every case with Russian names in order to stress the Russianness of the region.

Thus, not “Tallinn” but Reval of Kolyvan, not “Tartu” but Yuryev, not “Ventspils” but Vindara” and so on. And it suggests that Russians are fully justified in doing so given that the Balts substitute their national names for Russian ones in the areas they claim: Thus, Latvians call Putalovo in Pskov oblast Abrene, Estonians call Ivangorod Jaanilinn, and Lithuanians refer to East Prussia/Kaliningrad as Karalyaucius.

What is striking and undoubtedly intended to be striking is the level of detail this article offers. While decision makers in the Kremlin may not do everything the article calls for, clearly there are many in Moscow who have been thinking long and hard about how to break up three NATO member countries by using soft power and other means.

That should be a matter of concern given that Moscow has demonstrated elsewhere that it views regionalism in other countries but not of course in its own as an important resource it can use to promote Russian interests by weakening the countries where such regionalism exists or can be created.
The article clearly explained why Russia should exploit the existing differences between the three Baltic countries, to destroy the stability of and the unity between the countries in order to explain the populations that the Russian speaking entities have the “right” and even the “duty” to join “Mother Russia”. The contradiction between the so-called differences and unity is obviously not important.

**Next step**

Lavrov’s statements, supported by the Sputnik article explain which steps the Kremlin intends to make in the future. Both follow loyally the guidance of the Kremlin and every indication shows that its intention is to “correct historical mistakes” Of course without a confrontation with NATO and the West in general. Lavrov, his media instruments and the Saint Petersburg Troll factory should prepare the West for a “Georgia scenario”

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*1 According to Aleksander Krol’s analysis published by the Warsaw Institute in July 2017 entitled “Russian Information Warfare in the Baltic States — Resources and Aims”, the narratives most propagated by Kremlin or Kremlin-aligned outlets manipulate history by glorifying the Soviet past of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, suggest economic or demographic decline of the Baltic states, and create a negative image of the broadly defined “West”, European Union (EU), and NATO.

*2 Which was an obvious indication of Putin’s fairytale of “Novorossiya”

*3 The Russian Military districts South and Center had massed four armies (the 1st, the 2nd, the 40th and the 8th Army) to restart military operations in Ukraine and two Armies in East Prussia and Belarus and in Russia (1st Tank Army) including the Baltic Fleet and the Black Sea Fleet to engage in the Baltic countries.

*4 NATO organized, under Swedish command, exercise “Aurora 17” with 30.000 participants showing that NATO understands the threat Moscow causes in the Baltic Sea region. Also, information was spread that NATO was about to operationalize a new HQ in Constanța, Romania to counterbalance the increasing Russian threat coming from the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

*5 Transcribed from a speech made three months after his appointment as chief of the general staff, this depiction of a hybrid battleground involving “political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures” appeared prophetic a year later. Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms popped up in Crimea to launch what became the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula, following demonstrations against a pro-western government orchestrated by Russian agents.

*6 The Orthodox Church has a special position in the Ruskii MIR. And promotes Russia as the leading force of the maximally 300 million believers in the Orthodox religion and therefor the Church has a dominant position that claims that they have also a leading role within Christianity.

*7 One of the “agreements” was that both parties would avoid stationing substantial number of troops on a permanent base alongside the Russian Eastern European border.
*8 The Lithuanian Deputy Minister of Defense stated: “We are reinforcing the air police mission for this period (of Zapad). And we are glad to also have additional land troops here.”

*9 ‘Enthocide is the purposely destruction of a culture. Although the definition s related to genocide, ethnologists do not agree on a acceptable definition. It comes close to what Russia does in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Crimea.