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Baltic Security amid Transatlantic Change

Keeping the United States Engaged while Strengthening European Defence

POLICY BRIEF



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POWERHOUSE LATVIA

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THE POLICY CHALLENGE

Preserve effective American engagement while turning greater European responsibility into forces and capabilities available for Baltic defence throughout the transition.

Introduction

For Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the transatlantic relationship has been both a foundation of national security and an expression of their place in the West. Their approach to defence has rested on the expectation that American engagement, European integration and NATO collective defence would reinforce one another. Today, the compatibility of these commitments can no longer be taken for granted. The Baltic states face a fundamental test of the assumptions underpinning their security: how to preserve the involvement of their most consequential military ally while preparing for Europe to assume substantially greater responsibility for its own defence.

The significance of the current disruption extends beyond disagreements with President Donald Trump or uncertainty surrounding individual statements from Washington. The review of U.S. force posture in Europe, led by Elbridge Colby, gives the debate an institutional and operational dimension. Colby briefed NATO allies on the ongoing review in August 2026, placing the future configuration of American military engagement directly on the Alliance's agenda. Its outcome remains open, but the review makes clear why Baltic policymakers must assess changes in military planning alongside political rhetoric.[1]

This creates a difficult position for Baltic foreign and security policymakers. Maintaining access, trust and practical cooperation with Washington remains essential to national defence. Yet preserving that relationship also requires navigating disagreements over European security, support for Ukraine and the principles governing relations among allies. Avoiding confrontation may protect cooperation in the immediate term, but it cannot substitute for a strategy that addresses the consequences of a changing American role. Equally, stronger European defence will offer limited reassurance unless political ambition translates into forces and capabilities available to defend the Baltic region.

The central challenge is therefore the management of a potentially dangerous transition. European allies may accept greater responsibility before they can fully perform the military functions that such responsibility entails. For the Baltic states, the consequences would be measured in reinforcement timelines, air and missile defence, intelligence support and the ability to sustain operations from the outset of a conflict. Greater European defence expenditure is necessary, but its strategic value depends on which capability gaps it closes, how quickly, and under whose responsibility.

This brief argues that the Baltic states should pursue continued American engagement and stronger European defence as mutually reinforcing objectives, supported by explicit arrangements for the transition between them. It examines how the United States and European partners are positioned in Baltic foreign and security policy documents, and how Baltic governments navigate tensions between preserving bilateral relationships and defending shared principles. The practical objective is to identify how Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania can help shape a division of responsibilities that strengthens regional defence while sustaining the transatlantic relationship on which their security continues to depend.

1. NATO, "Secretary General Welcomes United States Under Secretary of War for Policy to NATO Headquarters," August 27, 2026, https:// www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/08/27/secretary-general-welcomes-united-states-under-secretary-of-war-for-polic y-to-nato-headquarters.

Beyond Presidential Rhetoric: The Changing Terms of U.S. Engagement in Europe

The change confronting the Baltic states concerns the terms on which the transatlantic security relationship operates. Disagreements among allies are familiar, but the present challenge reaches into the relationship between American political commitment and the military responsibilities Washington is prepared to assume. For Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, this is a fundamental test of a security model in which sustained U.S. engagement has helped connect national defence to the wider power of the Alliance. The risk arises when uncertainty about that engagement coincides with a sustained Russian threat and an incomplete European capacity to compensate.

President Trump's approach gives this uncertainty a highly visible political expression. Yet concentrating exclusively on presidential rhetoric would obscure a more consequential development: the expectation that European allies should take ownership of conventional defence is being articulated through the institutions responsible for American defence policy. In February 2025, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth called on European allies to take responsibility for conventional security on the continent while reaffirming the United States' commitment to NATO. These positions were presented together: continued alliance membership alongside a demand for a different distribution of responsibilities.[2]

The distinction between burden-sharing and burden transfer is therefore central. Burden-sharing asks European allies to contribute more to a defence effort whose underlying American role remains broadly intact. A transfer of responsibilities requires Europeans to perform functions previously provided by the United States, potentially allowing American resources to be redirected elsewhere. In May 2026, Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Alexus Grynkewich described precisely this relationship: as European capabilities grow, the United States can reduce its presence and concentrate on critical capabilities that allies cannot yet provide. He characterised the adjustment as a process extending over several years.[3]

The U.S. review of force posture in Europe brings this debate into military planning. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte confirmed its announcement in June 2026 and described an anticipated period of consultation with allies. In August, Elbridge Colby briefed the North Atlantic Council on the ongoing review. This sequence matters because it places the future configuration of American forces within an institutional process, rather than leaving it solely at the level of political signalling. It does not establish what the final decisions will be: at the June press conference, Rutte explicitly stated that the outcome was not predetermined.[4]

2. Pete Hegseth, "Opening Remarks by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth at Ukraine Defense Contact Group (As Delivered)," U.S. Department of Defense, February 12, 2025, https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact/.

3. Alexus G. Grynkewich, remarks in "Joint Press Conference," NATO, May 19, 2026, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2026/05/19/joint-press-conference.

4. Mark Rutte, "Press Conference," NATO, June 18, 2026, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2026/06/18/press-c onference-following-the-meetings-of-nato-ministers-of-defence; NATO, "Secretary General Welcomes United States Under Secretary of War for Policy to NATO Headquarters."

The review's findings have reportedly been delivered to Secretary Hegseth, with options to follow for the President. Earlier decisions indicate how changes may be implemented. In May 2026, Washington announced a reduction of 5,000 troops in Germany, cancelling a planned armoured brigade rotation to Poland and the long-planned deployment of a long-range fires battalion to Germany. Current reporting suggests that further cuts could be smaller than allies had feared and concentrated in Germany, while the eastern flank could see a larger American presence. On 10 November, Poland's defence minister stated that the Pentagon had given a "green light" to a permanent U.S. presence, with a base for about 5,000 troops, and that a White House decision is expected in early December. For the Baltic states, the pattern matters more than the aggregate: a smaller footprint in Western Europe and a more permanent one on the eastern flank would change which functions remain available, and when.[5]

Domestic politics in Washington adds a further institutional layer. The U.S. midterm elections of 3 November 2026 are likely to change the tempo of the transition more than its direction. Congress already constrains reductions: the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act sets a floor of 76,000 U.S. troops in Europe, below which the Pentagon may not remain for more than 45 days without independent assessments, consultation with allies and a waiting period after notifying Congress. With about 78,000 personnel assigned to U.S. European Command at the end of September, that floor is close to binding. The new Congress convenes on 3 January 2027. Without veto-proof majorities, however, it cannot override the President on Ukraine or relations with Europe, and force posture remains an executive decision.[6]

The direction of travel was already visible at NATO's Ankara Summit in July 2026: the €70 billion in military support pledged to Ukraine for 2026 is provided by European allies and Canada, and the declaration set no date for the next summit.[7]

NATO's military leadership has meanwhile set out what allied forces must be able to achieve. At the Warsaw Security Forum on 12 October, SACEUR General Alexus Grynkewich, who also commands U.S. European Command and provided military input to the posture review, presented NATO's "Theory of Victory": a shared vision agreed in classified form by all 32 allies, though not a military plan. It has three stages: block an initial attack, blunt any continuing advance and, if required, break the attacking forces and the warfighting system behind them. Its aim is deliberately limited: to make aggression futile by forcing the attacker to culminate, rather than to seek its strategic defeat. For the Baltic states, this offers a yardstick for the transition. Blocking depends on forward forces and early warning; blunting on rapid reinforcement and air and missile defence; breaking on long-range fires, intelligence and multi-domain integration, where U.S. contributions remain particularly significant. Burden-shifting should therefore be judged by whether each stage remains executable at every point of the transition.[8]

5. Stars and Stripes, "US Troop Levels in Europe Near Congressional Threshold as Pentagon Considers More Cuts," November 15, 2026, https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2026-11-15/us-troop-levels-europe-eucom-nato-23470991.html; Bartosz Głowacki, "Poland Says Pentagon Supports Permanent US Base, with Decision Expected in December," Breaking Defense, November 11, 2026, https://breakingdefense.com/2026/11/poland-says-pentagon-supports-permanent-us-base-with-decision-expected-in-december/. The Polish minister's account has not been confirmed by the Pentagon.
6. Stars and Stripes, "US Troop Levels in Europe Near Congressional Threshold"; Council on Foreign Relations, expert assessment of the 2026 midterm elections and U.S. foreign policy, November 2026, https://www.cfr.org/articles/democrats-win-control-of-congress-heres-how-that-could-affect-u-s-foreign-policy.
7. Nadiia Koval, "The Ankara NATO Summit: A Reality Check on Words and Deeds," Kyiv Independent, July 2026, https://kyivindependent.com/the-ankara-nato-summit-a-reality-check-on-words-and-deeds/; Steptoe, "NATO's 2026 Ankara Summit Projects Conflict Rather Than Unity," July 2026, https://www.steptoe.com/en/news-publications/stepwise-risk-outlook/natos-2026-ankara-summit-projects-conflict-rather-than-unity.html.
8. Alexus G. Grynkewich, "SACEUR's Remarks at the Warsaw Security Forum," SHAPE, October 12, 2026, https://shape.nato.int/page11283634/speeches-and-transcripts/saceurs-remarks-at-the-warsaw-security-forum.aspx; Tim Martin, "Amid Unease in Europe, NATO SACEUR Bullish on 'Block, Blunt, Break' Theory of Victory," Breaking Defense, October 12, 2026, https://breakingdefense.com/2026/10/amid-unease-in-europe-nato-saceur-bullish-on-block-blunt-break-theory-of-victory/; Air & Space Forces Magazine, "Air Base, Overflight Access Key to Pentagon Review of US Military Forces in Europe," August 2026, https://www.airandspaceforces.com/air-base-overflight-access-pentagon-review-us-forces-europe/.

For Baltic policymakers, the assessment must therefore distinguish between political statements, changes to planning assumptions and decisions affecting forces and capabilities. Each can influence security, but through different mechanisms. Political uncertainty can alter an adversary's assessment of allied resolve. Planning changes affect which resources commanders can count on, particularly when demands arise in several theatres simultaneously, as the war with Iran has shown. Decisions on deployments determine what is physically available and how quickly reinforcements can arrive. These distinctions also explain why aggregate troop numbers cannot, on their own, establish whether a change strengthens or weakens Baltic defence.

NATO's own presentation of the transition combines greater European responsibility with continued transatlantic cooperation. In September 2026, Rutte described a more European Alliance as the means of keeping NATO transatlantic, while emphasising the need to translate national investment into integrated forces and credible plans. This is an argument for preserving the Alliance through a redistribution of effort, rather than treating European and American contributions as mutually exclusive.[9]

The Baltic concern is whether that redistribution can be managed without weakening deterrence during the transition. A continued political commitment to NATO does not settle the operational questions of which capabilities will remain available, which allies will replace particular functions, and on what timetable. Nor should an ongoing review be treated as proof of a predetermined American withdrawal. The policy task is to shape the transition while its terms are still being negotiated. Understanding how Baltic strategic documents position the United States and European partners provides a starting point for assessing the scope for such action.

The United States and Europe in Baltic Strategic Thinking

Baltic policy documents reveal an enduring commitment to transatlantic security alongside a growing emphasis on European responsibility. These positions are not inherently contradictory. The central question is how their relationship is evolving: whether stronger European defence remains principally a means of reinforcing American engagement, or increasingly also provides protection against uncertainty surrounding that engagement. The documents examined here suggest adaptation within an established Atlanticist framework, although the explicitness of that adaptation differs across countries and document types.

Latvia's 2023 State Defence Concept provides a clear account of the established approach. It treats the strengthening of the strategic partnership with the United States as critically important and identifies both American political willingness and timely military readiness as necessary for Latvia's defence. Continuous U.S. military presence is linked to immediate participation in defence operations. The European Union is assigned a different, complementary function: developing capabilities, supporting defence industry and strengthening resilience. Its security and defence instruments should reinforce NATO without competing with it.[10] The distinction is functional rather than an exclusive division of responsibilities: the United States provides a particularly consequential military partnership, NATO organises collective defence, and the EU mobilises additional instruments and resources.

9. Mark Rutte, "NATO 3.0: Why Rebalancing the Transatlantic Relationship Matters," annual lecture, NATO, September 16, 2026, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2026/09/16/annual-lecture-by-the-nato-secretary-general.

10. Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, The State Defence Concept 2023–2027 (2023), paras. 98 and 109, https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/The%20State%20Defence%20Concept%202023-2027_0.pdf.

Latvia's official foreign policy presentation in January 2026 preserves this transatlantic orientation while giving substantial attention to European and regional cooperation. Foreign Minister Baiba Braže described the American and Canadian presence as essential to Latvian and European security and expressed Latvia's readiness to host additional American troops. In the same address, she emphasised closer cooperation among Baltic Sea states and the EU's expanding role in defence financing, procurement and military mobility.[11] This combination suggests that Latvia is seeking to broaden the practical foundations of its security while sustaining American involvement. It does not, by itself, establish a doctrinal turn away from the United States.

Estonia's 2026 National Security Concept makes the connection between American change and European responsibility more explicit. It identifies changes in U.S. strategic interests and positions as one reason European countries must assume greater responsibility for common security. That responsibility encompasses higher military expenditure, the fulfilment of NATO capability targets and the development of European defence technology and industry. The document nevertheless maintains the importance of both transatlantic and European unity and supports a strong transatlantic relationship alongside greater European preparedness.[12] The significance lies in this formulation: uncertainty arising from American strategic change is incorporated into the assessment of the security environment, and increased European responsibility is presented as a necessary response. European cooperation therefore acquires a more explicit role in managing that uncertainty while remaining anchored in NATO.

Lithuania's policy trajectory similarly combines American engagement with a substantial role for European allies. The Ministry of National Defence's account of the adopted 2021 National Security Strategy identifies the objective of securing the largest possible permanent presence of U.S., German, British and other allied forces, alongside closer military cooperation with neighbouring states.[13] This establishes that the pursuit of a broader allied presence predates Trump's second administration. European military involvement cannot therefore be interpreted simply as a recent reaction to Washington.

The ministry's December 2025 account of proposed amendments retains NATO collective defence and the presence of U.S., German and other allied forces as central guarantees of Lithuanian security. It also highlights the stationing of the German brigade and continued development of bilateral cooperation with the United States.[14] As evidence of the government's proposed direction, this indicates continuity in the transatlantic commitment alongside a more concrete European contribution. The government approved the updated strategy in February 2026 and submitted it to the Seimas; this brief draws on the government's draft rather than the final parliamentary text.

11. Baiba Braže, "Address by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia Baiba Braže to the Saeima (Parliament) at the Annual Foreign Policy Debate on 29 January 2026," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, January 29, 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/address-minister-f oreign-affairs-latvia-baiba-braze-saeima-parliament-annual-foreign-policy-debate-29-january-2026.

12. Republic of Estonia, Estonian National Security Concept, June 10, 2026, secs. 3 and 4.5, https://kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2026-07/2026_06_10%20Estonian_National_Security_Concept_EN.pdf.

13. Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "The Seimas Approved the Reviewed National Security Strategy," December 16, 2021, https://kam.lt/en/the-seimas-approved-the-reviewed-national-security-strategy/.

14. Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, "The Government Passed Draft National Security Strategy," December 29, 2025, https://kam.lt/en/the-government-passed-draft-national-security-strategy/; LRT, "Lithuanian Cabinet Approves Updated National Security Strategy," February 25, 2026, https://lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2850323/lithuanian-cabinet-approves-updated-national-security-strategy.

Taken together, these sources support a qualified conclusion. They provide evidence of a widening emphasis on European responsibility, rather than a uniform Baltic reclassification of the United States as a less important partner. Estonia states the connection to changing American priorities directly. Latvia continues to pair the pursuit of greater U.S. involvement with European instruments and regional cooperation. Lithuania's proposed update sustains the American relationship while emphasising a major German military commitment. These differences matter, but the sources are not identical in status or purpose: an adopted security concept, a ministerial address and a proposed strategic amendment cannot be treated as interchangeable evidence of doctrinal change.

The emerging policy challenge is to make this combination operationally credible. Maintaining the United States as a central partner while assigning Europe greater responsibility requires clarity about which allies will deliver the capabilities needed for Baltic defence. Strategic language can preserve unity and signal adaptation, but its practical value depends on whether military planning, force availability and reinforcement arrangements reflect the same priorities. This creates the dilemma examined in the next section: how Baltic governments can preserve cooperation with Washington while responding to changes that require stronger European action.

Preserving Access, Defending Principles: The Baltic Policy Dilemma

For Baltic governments, continued engagement with Washington and the defence of European security principles remain closely connected objectives. American military involvement helps deter Russia; sovereignty, territorial integrity and the freedom of states to choose their security arrangements underpin the Baltic states' own international position. Tensions arise when a policy or statement from Washington appears to place these objectives in conflict. The challenge is to preserve effective cooperation while retaining the ability to disagree and to strengthen the European capabilities on which regional defence increasingly depends.

This dilemma operates at two levels. Externally, Baltic leaders must maintain access to American decision-makers and cooperation with European allies. Domestically, they must explain that approach within an information environment where the same American action can be interpreted as reassurance, abandonment or a transaction at Europe's expense. The Greenland case illustrates how governments can combine a clear statement of principle with an effort to preserve alliance cooperation. The subsequent analysis of Latvia's public information space examines the competing interpretations through which that balancing act is judged.

Avoiding Confrontation with Washington

The strategic preferences examined in the previous chapter help explain why Baltic governments have strong incentives to keep disagreements with Washington manageable. Their pursuit of American presence, reinforcement and defence cooperation makes the preservation of working relationships a practical security interest. Yet a preference for avoiding confrontation cannot mean treating every American demand as compatible with Baltic interests. The relevant policy question is how to communicate disagreement in a way that protects both the principle at stake and the channels through which security cooperation continues.

Greenland provides a concrete illustration. On 23 January 2026, Latvia's senior foreign policy officials affirmed that Greenland forms part of Denmark while endorsing continued direct dialogue and efforts to strengthen Arctic security through NATO. Their joint position welcomed the prospect of further U.S.–Danish talks. The formulation combined a position on territorial status with an institutional route for cooperation. It also linked continued transatlantic engagement to closer cooperation with Nordic, Baltic and other European partners.[15]

The regional response also included explicit solidarity. At the Nordic-Baltic political directors' meeting on 20–21 January, participants reaffirmed support for Denmark and Greenland, sovereignty and territorial integrity, alongside NATO unity and coordination on Arctic security. Estonia went further in specifying a possible contribution: on 15 January, Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said that Estonia was participating in planning a European joint exercise and was ready, if necessary, to contribute troops to Greenland's security. He presented the initiative through collective defence planning and coordination within the Alliance.[16]

These statements indicate a shared effort to keep sovereignty and alliance cooperation in the same policy framework, with different degrees of practical commitment. They do not support a description of uniform Baltic silence or acquiescence. A more useful interpretation is that governments sought to defend an ally's position while keeping security concerns within a cooperative NATO setting. The evidence concerns their public positions; it does not establish what was said privately or prove that avoiding confrontation determined every decision.

This approach carries a communication challenge. Careful diplomatic language can preserve room for negotiation, but audiences may read it as reluctance to defend principles. Conversely, a forceful public disagreement can attract approval without producing additional security. Baltic leaders therefore need to explain both the position they defend and the practical cooperation they seek to preserve. The public narratives examined below help identify the context in which those explanations are received.

Donald Trump in Latvia's Information Space

Public discussion of Donald Trump matters to this brief because it forms part of the political environment in which Baltic leaders maintain relations with Washington. Narratives about American protection, pressure on Ukraine and accommodation of Russia provide the lens through which diplomatic restraint or public disagreement can be interpreted. They help define the arguments available to politicians and the explanations their choices may require. Monitoring Latvia's information space therefore adds a domestic perspective to the strategic dilemma. It identifies visible narratives, without establishing their effects on decisions or extending Latvian findings to the other Baltic societies.

15. Chancery of the President of Latvia, "President of Latvia Discusses Latvia's Foreign Policy Interests with Senior State Officials," January 23, 2026, https://www.president.lv/en/article/president-latvia-discusses-latvias-foreign-policy-interests-senior-state-officials.

16. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, "Undersecretary Roger after the NB8 Political Directors' Meeting: Supporting Ukraine and Increasing Pressure on Russia to Achieve a Just and Lasting Peace Is a Priority of Our Nordic-Baltic Chairmanship in 2026," January 21, 2026, https://www.vm.ee/en/news/undersecretary-roger-after-nb8-political-directors-meeting-supporting-ukraine-and-increasing; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, "Foreign Minister Tsahkna: Estonia Is Ready to Contribute with Boots on the Ground to Ensure Greenland's Security," January 15, 2026, https://www.vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-estonia-ready-contribute-boots-ground-ensure-greenlands-security.

This subsection uses an AI-assisted media monitoring workflow configured for PowerHouse Latvia's research needs. A media-monitoring platform retrieves accessible written items matching a predefined Boolean keyword query, groups them by date and source, applies location filters and assigns automated sentiment labels. Qualitative reading of selected records then examines the context behind the labels and peaks. The retrieval covers 20 July–18 October 2026. The query combines English, Latvian and Russian variants of Donald Trump's name, including "Trump", "Donalds Tramps", "Trampa" and "Трамп", with Latvia-related terms such as "Latvia", "Latvij*", "Riga", "Rīg*", "Saeima", "Rinkēvičs", "Siliņa" and "LSM". Applying the platform's Latvia location filter produced 1,938 mentions and 251 source or author entries. The latter are platform entities, not 251 independently verified media outlets. The unit counted is a retrieved mention, which can be a news item, post or comment; repeated publication is not equivalent to a new opinion.[17]

The evidence is limited to text accessible to the monitoring service: articles, posts, comments and written titles or descriptions accompanying audiovisual material. It excludes private conversations and unrecorded views, and does not independently analyse speech, images or audience reactions inside videos. Historical results were retrieved retrospectively: the platform identifies them as predating the start of topic tracking. No mentions appear before 3 August in the displayed series, so the opening gap cannot establish an absence of discussion. Platform coverage, keyword matching and automated location assignment further limit representativeness.

The automated classifier labels 1,560 mentions as neutral (80.5%), 240 as negative (12.4%) and 138 as positive (7.1%). Negative labels therefore outnumber positive labels by approximately 1.7 to one. These are machine-assigned text categories, not approval ratings for Trump. Manual inspection found critical and sarcastic texts in the positive category, unrelated articles matched through news widgets, and erroneous geographic assignments. Consequently, neither the neutral majority nor the negative–positive balance can be translated into the attitudes of Latvia's population.[18]

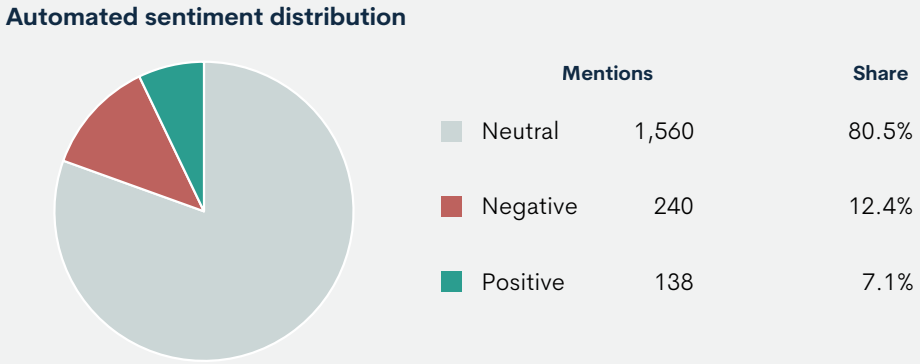

Figure 1. Automated sentiment labels for 1,938 mentions, 20 July–18 October 2026. These are text classifications, not public approval ratings. Source: PowerHouse Latvia monitoring snapshot, accessed 18 October 2026.

17. PowerHouse Latvia, "Sentiment toward Donald Trump in Latvia," research monitoring snapshot, July 20–October 18, 2026, location filter: Latvia, accessed October 18, 2026, private dashboard. The query, filters and interpretation were configured for this research using an AI-assisted media-monitoring platform. All aggregate counts and daily volumes in this subsection refer to this dashboard snapshot. The qualitative interpretation draws on purposively selected titles, excerpts, captions and comments, including peak-day records and records assigned positive sentiment; it is not an exhaustive manual coding of all 1,938 mentions. The query also relies on a fixed list of names, such as "Siliņa"; changes in office-holders during the period and coverage that omits these names are therefore not fully captured.

18. PowerHouse Latvia, "Sentiment toward Donald Trump in Latvia." For an illustrative classification problem, the positive-filtered feed included Georgs Kronbergs (@Mikipele6), X post, October 18, 2026, https://twitter.com/Mikipele6/status/2111761311218688302, whose excerpt criticises Trump's perceived pro-Kremlin position and hostility towards Ukraine. The retained aggregate figures precede manual exclusions and corrections; no validated error rate is available.

The composition of the retrieval also matters. Websites account for 1,603 mentions (82.7%), compared with 128 on X, 74 on Facebook and 66 on YouTube; the remaining 67 come from comments and other social platforms. Three domains – nra.lv, lsm.lv and tvnet.lv – contribute 688 mentions, or 35.5% of the total. The results therefore primarily describe the circulation of published coverage. Republishing, parallel language editions and repeated social promotion can multiply one story's visibility without demonstrating broader agreement with it.

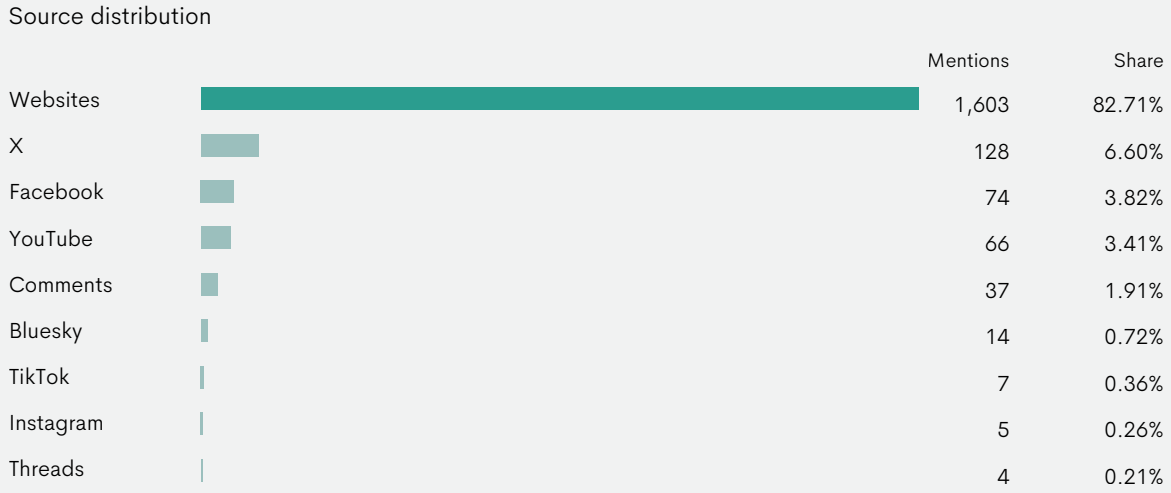

Figure 2. Mentions by source channel, 20 July–18 October 2026. Counts refer to retrieved items, including repeated publications. Source: PowerHouse Latvia monitoring snapshot, accessed 18 October 2026.

What attracts favourable assessments

One favourable frame connects Trump directly to Latvia's protection. On 1 October, President Edgars Rinkēvičs's written Instagram account of a meeting presented Trump's comments about Latvia and its defence efforts positively, including a reported assurance of protection. The message was reproduced in Latvian and Russian-language coverage. Its political significance is the public presentation of continued access to Washington and recognition of Latvia's defence contribution. This can support reassurance even when other American statements generate uncertainty; the monitoring does not show that a diplomatic assurance has changed military commitments.[19]

19. Edgars Rinkēvičs (@edgarsrinkevics), Instagram caption, October 1, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/Dd9bN3ixLVl/; LA.lv, "Mēs sargāsim pret sliktajiem puišiem! Tramps veltījis labus vārdus Latvijai," October 1, 2026, https://www.la.lv/mes-sargasim-pret-sliktajiem-puisiem-tramps-veltijis-labus-vardus-latvijai. Written content reviewed through the monitoring platform.

A second favourable frame is economic pragmatism. Some comments defend dealings with Russia through their claimed benefits for American farmers or fuel users, contrasting this with criticism of Latvian economic policy. Here, approval attaches to a leader portrayed as defending national material interests. Such arguments provide a possible bridge between foreign policy and domestic dissatisfaction: the same Russia-related measure can be framed as pragmatic economic protection or as a concession that undermines European security. The examples establish the existence of this argument, rather than its frequency or persuasiveness.

What drives criticism

The critical material repeatedly links Trump's treatment of Ukraine and relations with Putin to the possibility of future insecurity for Latvia. October coverage includes reported pressure on Ukraine's leadership, possible restrictions on intelligence cooperation, and controversy surrounding Russian fuel and sanctions. The common concern is that a settlement pursued by Washington could weaken the state resisting Russian aggression while improving Moscow's position. These items are evidence of how the debate is framed; the monitoring alone does not independently verify every underlying allegation or policy announcement.[20]

The transfer from Ukraine to Latvia is explicit in the TV3 Plus written title of 15 October asking whether Trump would also betray Latvia. Its description places the prospect of American help alongside Trump's relationship with Putin. This is a particularly consequential frame for policymakers: criticism of one president can become uncertainty about the practical availability of the United States as an ally. However, neither a provocative headline nor the views and likes attached to a video demonstrate that its audience accepts that interpretation.[21]

What the attention peaks reveal

The daily series reaches 67 mentions on both 27 August and 17 September; another cluster occurs on 10–15 October, with 288 mentions across those six days and a local high of 57 on 15 October. These are peaks in retrieved attention. They cannot, by themselves, establish a change in sentiment, the number of people reached or a causal effect on public understanding.

20. For examples in the monitored coverage, NRA, "Zelenskis atklāj, ar ko Tramps piedraudējis Ukrainai," October 15, 2026, https://nra.lv/pasaule/532213-tramps-draud-partraukt-izlukosanas-informacijas-apmainu.htm; LSM, "Krievijas dīzeļdegvielu caur Latviju nevedīs," October 15, 2026, https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/15.10.2026-krievijas-dizeldegvielu-caur-latviju-nevedis.a667821/. Titles and excerpts reviewed through the monitoring platform.

21. Новости+ | TV3 Plus Latvija, "Трамп предаст и Латвию? Ответ президента и новая угроза. «Новости+», 15 октября 2026 г.," YouTube, October 15, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyKIcVJslRc. This analysis concerns the written title and description retrieved by the monitoring platform, not an independent assessment of the video's spoken content.

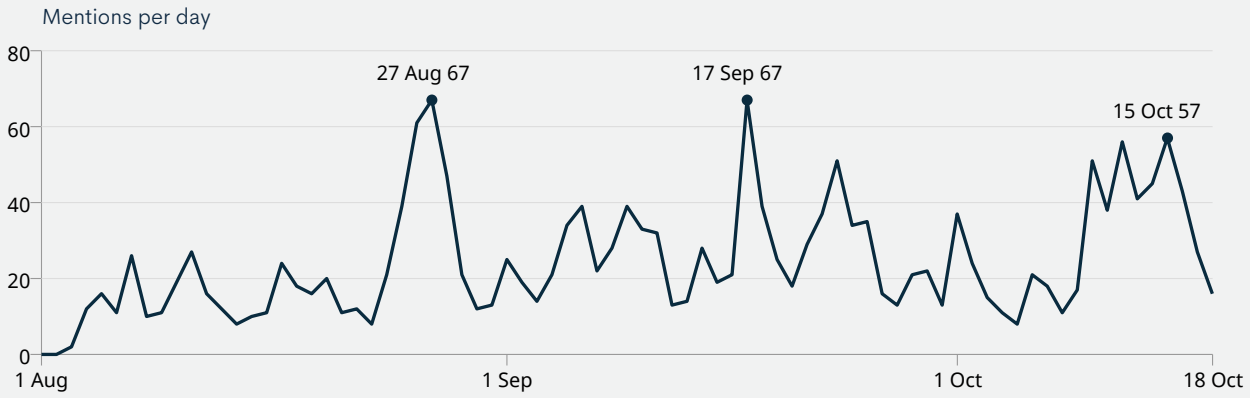

Figure 3. Daily mentions tagged Latvia, 1 August–18 October 2026. Display starts on 1 August; the first retrieved records are dated 3 August. Counts show attention, not approval. Source: PowerHouse Latvia monitoring snapshot, accessed 18 October 2026.

The 27 August records juxtapose Trump's reported assurance that Putin would not attack NATO territory with scepticism about relying on Russia's promises. Coverage of a reported CIA director's Moscow visit supplies a parallel narrative of American deterrent activity. One event therefore supports competing interpretations: evidence of protection, or evidence of excessive confidence in Putin. The policy-relevant distinction is between reassurance based on personal assurances and reassurance supported by observable allied preparedness.[23]

On 17 September, numerous records concern Latvia's entry bans on Russian figures, with headlines referring to reported financing connected to Donald Trump Jr.'s wedding. Repetition across outlets and language editions helps explain the attention peak. It also exposes a retrieval problem: references to the president's family are captured by the same name query, although they need not express an assessment of presidential policy. The October cluster brings the focus back to Ukraine, Russian fuel and American reliability. Attribution of each peak to individual stories remains qualitative, because the full daily corpus has not been manually coded.[24]

23. Delfi, "Putins neuzbruks NATO teritorijai, apgalvo Tramps," August 27, 2026, https://www.delfi.lv/46713439/arzemes/120132061/putins-neuzbruks-nato-teritorijai-apgalvo-tramps; LA.lv, "CIP direktora vizīte Maskavā nozīmē tikai vienu – sliktas ziņas gan Putinam, gan viņa cilvēkiem," August 27, 2026, https://www.la.lv/cip-direktora-vizite-maskava-nozime-tikai-vienu-sliktas-zinas-gan-putinam-gan-vina-cilvekiem; Vilmārs Vecvagaris (@VVecvagaris), X post, August 27, 2026, https://twitter.com/VVecvagaris/status/2093071141640302961. Examples as retrieved by the monitoring platform.

24. For the September example, TVNET, "Latvijas 'melnajā sarakstā' iekļauj hokejistu Ovečkinu un Trampa dēla kāzas finansējušo Krievijas oligarhu," September 17, 2026, https://www.tvnet.lv/8548137/latvijas-melnaja-saraksta-ieklauj-hokejistu-oveckinu-un-trampa-dela-kazas-finansejuso-krievijas-oligarhu. This citation identifies the narrative in the retrieved coverage and does not independently substantiate the financing allegation. For October examples, see the preceding citations to NRA, LSM and TV3 Plus.

Implications for Baltic Foreign and Security Policy

These patterns suggest that Latvia's public communication should connect continued engagement with Washington to concrete security outcomes. Meetings and supportive statements can demonstrate access, but officials should explain how cooperation translates into military presence, exercises, reinforcement and capabilities. Equally, criticism of specific American decisions should be explained through Latvia's interests in Ukraine's security and resistance to Russian aggression. This would make it easier to sustain cooperation without presenting every presidential statement as proof that uncertainty has disappeared.

The peaks also identify moments when timely explanation may be especially useful. When reporting shifts from Ukraine to questions about Latvia's own protection, officials can distinguish what has changed, what remains uncertain and what Latvia is doing with European and American partners. Future monitoring should track these security narratives separately from personal, family and domestic American controversies. Manual validation, removal of duplicate and irrelevant records, and separate analysis of Latvian and Russian-language texts are necessary before making stronger quantitative claims.

For the Baltic states collectively, the implication is to connect diplomatic restraint to an active security agenda. Preserving channels to Washington should support specific objectives in force presence, intelligence cooperation and reinforcement planning. European capability development and regional cooperation should address identified gaps and be explained as contributions to credible collective defence. This would give governments a more substantive account of their policy than reassurance based principally on access to the White House.

The Greenland case shows how solidarity with a European ally can coexist with cooperation within NATO. The Latvian monitoring underscores the need to explain that combination at home. A credible position acknowledges uncertainty, states the principles guiding disagreement and connects diplomatic engagement to practical commitments and capabilities.

Managing the Transition to Greater European Defence Responsibility

The Baltic response to transatlantic change should focus on shaping the transition between existing American contributions and greater European responsibility. The central risk is a mismatch in timing: U.S. military commitments could change before European allies can perform the functions affected. Maintaining dialogue with Washington is essential, but its practical purpose should be to secure clarity about those functions, the conditions under which they remain available and the arrangements required to prevent gaps. Stronger European defence becomes strategically meaningful when it improves the forces and support available for Baltic defence throughout this transition.

Preserving the American Contributions That Matter Most

Baltic governments should frame discussions of American engagement around operational functions as well as troop presence. Intelligence and surveillance, air and missile defence, command and control, reinforcement and the sustainment of operations deserve particular attention. NATO's capability development framework already links defence planning to the effects that forces must deliver, and identifies air and missile defence, long-range weapons, logistics and large land formations among its priorities. This provides a common basis for discussing responsibility with Washington and European allies.[25]

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should seek a coordinated assessment, through the relevant NATO planning channels, of which American contributions are most consequential for regional defence and which European substitutes are realistically available. Public sources cannot establish the full distribution of these dependencies; that assessment requires access to military planning and readiness information. Its purpose would be to distinguish contributions that must be retained during the transition from those that European allies can assume sooner, and to identify where additional arrangements are needed.

The resulting agenda should connect bilateral engagement with an agreed allied plan. Requests for continued U.S. involvement would be stronger if accompanied by specific Baltic and European contributions: infrastructure prepared for reinforcement, available support personnel, compatible equipment and funded capabilities. Such contributions can make American engagement more effective and demonstrate responsibility. They should be pursued for their defence value, without assuming that higher spending or a favourable bilateral relationship will automatically secure a particular American deployment.

Turning European Investment into Available Forces

The financing framework has expanded, but expenditure commitments must be translated into usable military capacity. The Hague Summit Declaration commits allies to defence and security-related investment of 5% of GDP annually by 2035, including at least 3.5% for core defence requirements. It also requires annual plans showing an incremental path towards the core target. For Baltic security, the relevant question is how those plans improve readiness, available forces and sustainment before the end of that spending horizon.[26]

The EU's Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030 proposes capability coalitions, greater joint procurement and projects to address critical shortfalls. It also envisages a military mobility area coordinated with NATO. These proposals offer instruments that Baltic governments can use to connect European resources with regional requirements. Their value depends on implementation: a financing decision, a procurement contract and an operational unit represent different stages of progress. European programmes should therefore be assessed against delivery, training, maintenance and availability for the missions they are intended to support.[27]

25. NATO, "NATO's Role in Capability Development," updated September 29, 2026, sections "NATO Capability Targets" and "NATO Defence Planning Process," https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/natos-role-in-capability-development.

26. NATO, "The Hague Summit Declaration," June 25, 2025, paras. 2–3, https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/06/25/the-hague-summit-declaration.

27. European Commission, "Readiness Roadmap 2030," sections "Closing Europe's Capability Gaps by 2030" and "Towards an EU-Wide Military Mobility Area," accessed October 18, 2026, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/readiness-roadmap-2030_en. The roadmap's objectives and milestones are proposals and do not, by themselves, establish delivery of the capabilities described.

Baltic cooperation with Nordic allies, Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom should concentrate on a limited set of shared operational priorities. Air defence, surveillance, ammunition, maintenance and reinforcement support are suitable areas for examining joint provision. The choice of projects should follow assessed military needs and NATO requirements. Joint procurement can improve compatibility and predictability, but partners also need agreements on staffing, operating costs, access during a crisis and replacement of expended stocks. These arrangements determine whether a jointly acquired system becomes a dependable contribution to regional defence.

Sequencing Changes against Demonstrated Readiness

Baltic governments should advocate a transition in which changes to American contributions are coordinated with the demonstrated availability of replacement capacity. Relevant milestones would include delivery of equipment, trained personnel, functioning command arrangements, sufficient stocks and successful exercises. This is a proposed safeguard for allied negotiations, rather than a claim that the Baltic states can control American force decisions. Where timelines diverge, allies should identify interim arrangements and assign responsibility for the remaining risk.

Reinforcement deserves the same discipline. Forces assigned to a defence plan must be able to move, arrive, integrate and continue operating under pressure. Baltic governments and contributing allies should test these requirements together, including the availability of transport, border procedures, reception facilities and alternative routes. Investment in mobility should be judged by the operational problems it resolves. Exercises should inform subsequent infrastructure and readiness decisions, while protecting details whose disclosure could undermine security.

Progress should be reviewed through a small set of measures tied to regional defence: whether priority capabilities are operational, whether forces meet agreed readiness requirements, whether reinforcement arrangements work in exercises and whether sustainment is funded. Classified reviews can assess the full military picture; public reporting can explain progress and unresolved challenges without revealing sensitive plans. This would also give political leaders a firmer basis for the public explanations discussed in the previous chapter. The aim is a negotiated division of responsibilities that preserves effective American engagement while making Europe's larger contribution credible at each stage of the transition.

Strengthening Baltic Influence through Coordinated Action

Baltic influence depends on turning regional priorities into decisions that allies can implement. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania cannot determine Washington's global allocation of forces, but they can coordinate their requests, demonstrate their contributions and build support among partners. The diplomatic objective should be to shape the terms of cooperation while those terms are still being negotiated, using the military requirements identified in the previous chapter.

Agreeing a Shared Baltic Agenda

The three governments should agree a limited set of priorities for engagement with Washington and. European partners. Shared requests should specify the military function required, the implementation problem and a proposed solution. Coordination should accommodate differences in geography and national partnerships within a regional plan. Foreign and defence ministries should prepare common positions before major allied consultations and assign responsibility for follow-up. National initiatives would then reinforce the Baltic agenda while retaining flexibility for bilateral opportunities. Success should be assessed through commitments obtained and problems resolved.

Building Coalitions around Specific Decisions

The Nordic-Baltic format provides an existing basis for wider coordination. At their April 2026 meeting, the foreign ministers agreed priorities for the NATO ministerial meeting and summit, while Latvia's foreign minister linked greater European responsibility to continued transatlantic cooperation. The June E-PINE consultations brought American, Nordic and Baltic officials together to discuss European security and allied cooperation. These channels show that regional coordination and direct engagement with Washington can proceed together.[28]

These formats should build support for continuity in critical allied contributions, reliable reinforcement and European projects addressing regional requirements. Cooperation with Poland, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada should serve the same agenda. Informal formats can prepare positions and practical cooperation; formal NATO and national channels remain necessary for decisions on forces, funding and command. Each initiative should identify the responsible decision-makers, resources and delivery review.

Sustaining Relationships across American Institutions

Engagement with the United States should extend across the administration, Congress and the institutions responsible for implementing defence cooperation. Latvia's July 2026 visit to Washington included meetings with senators, administration officials and defence representatives, illustrating the breadth of channels already in use. The policy task is to connect these relationships to a consistent account of Baltic security needs and contributions.[29]

Cooperation across American political parties and institutions should sustain attention to Baltic security beyond personal relationships with a president. Officials should explain regional defence through shared allied objectives and address disagreements over sovereignty and Ukraine through consistent principles.

28. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, "Baltic and Nordic Foreign Ministers Decide on a Joint Position for the NATO Ministerial Meeting and Summit, and on Continued Support for Ukraine and Tightening Sanctions against Russia," April 30, 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baltic-and-nordic-foreign-ministers-decide-joint-position-nato-ministerial-meeting-and-summit-and-continued-support-ukraine-and-tightening- sanctions-against-russia; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, "Estonia Hosts US, Nordic and Baltic Foreign and Security Policy Consultations," June 3, 2026, https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-hosts-us-nordic-and-baltic-foreign-and-security-policy-consultations.

29. Embassy of Latvia to the United States, "Foreign Minister Strengthens Latvia's Strategic Partnership with the US in Washington," July 17, 2026, https://www.usa.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-minister-strengthens-latvias-strategic-partnership-us-washington.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Transatlantic change confronts the Baltic states witha problem of strategic transition. American engagement remains essential, while stronger European responsibility must produce forces and capabilities available for regional defence. The documents examined show adaptation within an enduring Atlanticist framework. The central risk is that changes in American contributions could outpace Europe's ability to assume the affected functions.

The Greenland case demonstrates the possibility of defending principles while preserving alliance cooperation. The Latvian monitoring adds a domestic perspective: reassurance and fears of abandonment coexist in public communication, shaping the context in which leaders explain their choices. These findings describe visible narratives rather than representative public opinion. Baltic policy should combine continued engagement with Washington, European capability delivery and clearer explanations of the security outcomes it seeks.

Priority recommendations

1. **Agree a common Baltic negotiating agenda.** Foreign and defence ministries should identify the critical allied contributions to retain, the European capabilities to develop and the concrete commitments sought from each partner.

2. Link the transition to demonstrated readiness. Seek agreed milestones for equipment, trained personnel, command arrangements, stocks and exercises. Where replacement capacity is delayed, negotiate interim arrangements and identify the remaining risk.

3. Direct European resources towards regional requirements. Prioritise joint projects that address assessed defence gaps. Include operating costs, sustainment and crisis availability in procurement decisions, and test reinforcement arrangements with contributing allies.

4. Build support across partners and institutions. Use Baltic and Nordic–Baltic coordination alongside direct engagement with the U.S. administration and Congress. Connect wider allied cooperation to specific decisions, responsible institutions and delivery reviews.

5. Explain policy through security outcomes. Communicate what cooperation delivers, where uncertainty remains and which principles guide disagreement. Use validated public monitoring to identify questions requiring explanation, alongside representative research on public attitudes.

