



CONSTITUTION  
PROTECTION BUREAU  
OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF LATVIA

**2022  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

# FOREWORD



The year 2022 was, no doubt, a challenging one. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has opened a new page which will continue to test our strength and ability to operate effectively in difficult conditions.

The year 2022 will go down in history as the year of Ukraine, and if it had to be described in colors, it would be shades of yellow and blue. The information in this report is also presented in the context of the war initiated by Russia in Ukraine.

The ongoing war in our region has intensified the work of the Constitution Protection Bureau (SAB). In addition to military operations, Russia is also actively developing informational influence operations. Having a border with Russia, Latvia is particularly affected by this – the historical memory of the Latvian society as well as the geopolitical environment of our country and the large Russian-speaking population have a significant impact in this situation. At the same time, it is our experience and knowledge that enables us to provide our partners with valuable information and assessment of current processes which serve as a basis for NATO's decision-making and, therefore, the safeguarding of Latvia's security.

SAB's main tasks include intelligence and counter-intelligence activities as well as protection of classified information. So far our summary and analysis of classified information has been regularly presented to top government officials. However, in the new geopolitical

reality, we have started to offer our perspective on various current events to a wider audience in a series of informative and analytical articles.

In this series we try to, as far as legally possible, offer our expertise to provide a reliable source of information on current processes and important developments in Latvia. In order to reach a wider audience, we have also started to communicate on social media.

We hope that these steps towards a more open communication will contribute to the security and successful development of our country. In these changing times, we will continue to work with determination and a strategic view in the future.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "EGILS ZVIEDRIS". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

EGILS ZVIEDRIS  
SAB Director

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vladimir Putin's goal in launching a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine was to permanently restore his dwindling influence over this country. Along with geopolitical and imperialist considerations, the invasion was also driven by undisguised chauvinism, doubting Ukrainians' right to their country and even the very existence of the Ukrainian nation. For Putin, two revolutions, Russia's unsuccessful hybrid war and, above all, Ukraine's uncompromising policy, meant that the moment when Russia would forever lose its influence over Ukraine was rapidly approaching.

The Russian military machinery turned out to be dysfunctional, while Ukraine – too big and strong for Putin to achieve his goal. However, the already considerable and continually increasing losses of human, military-technical and economic resources do not mean that Putin has given up on his initial goal. Both Putin and Russia in general are ready to continue the war, while Ukraine is not and will not be ready to make concessions. It is almost certain that the war will continue throughout 2023. Russia still has the necessary resources, while Ukraine has the willpower and growing Western support for successful defence, and potentially also gradual recovery of occupied territories.

Over the past year, Russia's policy has become openly hostile not only towards Ukraine, but also the entire Western world. In response to the Western countries' extensive and consolidated political, military-technical and financial support for Ukraine, as well as the multiple rounds of sanctions, Putin chose to burn bridges and, at least formally, set a new geopolitical course. According to our information, Putin's regime believes that a new "cold war" has begun between Russia and the West. Consequently, Russia has decided to completely turn away from the West, focusing on Asia, Africa and Latin America, instead. Russia plans to exploit the anti-Western sentiments of these regions to form joint coalitions against the West.

Our information suggests that last year Russia tried to undermine the unity of the Western world, especially by hindering agreements on common economic sanctions against Russia and arms supplies

to Ukraine. Russia also tried to promote internal tensions and public dissatisfaction with the government or economic situation in Western countries, assuming that domestic problems could push certain European countries to reduce their political focus on Russia's war in Ukraine.

In 2022, intelligence and security services played an important role in Russia's aggressive policy against Western countries. Their main priority was Western reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including political reaction and formulation of positions, readiness to support Ukraine, unity of the international community and the coordination of actions between the countries. Military aid and supplies to Ukraine were and will continue to be at the top of Russia's intelligence priorities.

Cyber-attacks, a large number of which was also targeted against Latvia, remained an important asset for Russia's aggressive foreign policy. In 2022, Latvian cyberspace endured the most intense cyber-attacks so far. Our information indicates that in most cases the source of the cyber threat was Russia.

Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine confirmed that Putin's regime does not respect the borders of the countries that were restored or emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Kremlin considers these countries to be an exclusive area of Russian interests. SAB's information suggests that in 2022, Russia continued to use various open and covert methods to strengthen its influence in this region, which it calls the near abroad. Russia effectively exploited the economic dependence of the region to implement various circumvention schemes for Western sanctions. In SAB's assessment, the invasion of Ukraine did lead to a certain caution of these countries towards Russia, but, in the short and medium term, Russia will maintain its leading position in the region. It will, however, find it difficult in the long term to compete with other great powers and the desire of some countries of the region to strengthen their ties with the West.

The exception is Belarus. Due to both Russia's persistent policy and Alexander Lukashenko's geopolitical choices, Belarus has become Russia's satellite state. In 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine from the territory of Belarus was a clear indication of this. In our assessment, Russia has strengthened its long-term influence and presence in Belarus, turning Belarus into another country openly aggressive towards the West. In 2022, Russia's military used Belarus as its own territory and will continue to do so in the future. This poses a threat not only to Ukraine, but also to the Baltics and Poland. If deemed necessary, Russia has all

the means to force the Belarusian military to directly engage in the war, regardless of the possible consequences it would cause inside Belarus.

In our assessment, Putin's regime is stable, and there is no reason to expect a quick change in the leadership or political course of the country. Putin is in relatively good health, both physically and mentally, and given his chauvinist, revanchist and imperialist views and threat perception, the actions of Putin himself or members of the elite can be considered as rational. Inside Russia, Putin's regime is stronger than ever before, at least for now. Its long-term repressive policy, which was rapidly intensified over the past year, has ensured the regime an almost complete control and dominance in the Russian information domain. Any political opposition has been destroyed. Years of propaganda and repressions have made the majority of people intimidated and apathetic, prone to distance themselves from any politically sensitive topics. The core of the elite largely agrees with Putin and controls all the important instruments of power, from legislative and judicial institutions to executive structures such as the army and security and intelligence services.



## 2. RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

### REASONS BEHIND AND THE INITIAL PLAN OF THE INVASION

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale war in Ukraine, driven by the imperialist ambitions of its ruling elite to control territories that were once part of Russia's predecessor, the USSR. Vladimir Putin has always considered Ukraine as an artificially created nation that has no right to an independent and sovereign state. For Putin, Ukraine is a territory that has been taken away from Russia and over which it is necessary to restore influence. Therefore, his goal has long been returning Ukraine to Russia's sphere of influence and preventing its Euro-Atlantic integration. In 2021, Russia's ruling regime started to become increasingly convinced that this cannot be achieved with the methods used so far.

The regime saw the irreversible approaching of the moment when Russia would forever lose its influence over Ukraine. The window of opportunity to change the situation was rapidly closing. For example, in 2021, V. Zelensky began to actively oppose Russia's attempts to destabilize Ukraine, as well as to implement Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration processes more and more rapidly. It also became clear to Russia that it would not succeed in getting Ukraine to return to its sphere of influence, using the Russian-initiated and maintained Donbass conflict as an instrument of influence.

Even though Ukraine never posed any actual danger to Russia, in the heightened perception of the ruling elite, it was seen as an increasing threat to Russian security. In the eyes of the regime, Ukraine was increasingly developing into a country that is utilized by the West to weaken Russia and set a ground for potential military confrontation. The West's refusal to accept Russia's illegitimate security guarantee demands at the end of 2021 served as one of the pretexts for starting the war. Putin hoped that deploying his forces at Ukraine's border would convince the West and Ukraine to give in to Russia's demands.

Putin's plan was to make Ukraine dependent on Russia, leaving it no freedom of action in the future. The implementation of this plan foresaw Ukraine being made into Russia's satellite state, similar to Belarus. The



first step to achieve this was and still is the capture of Kyiv and the replacement of Zelensky. The further stages of the plan almost certainly envisaged the complete filtration (“denazification”) of the entire political and military elite and society, getting rid of any nationalistically minded people. At the same time, Russia planned to demilitarize Ukraine so that it is neither able to threaten Russia nor capable of resisting it.

## **THE REASONS FOR RUSSIA'S FAILURES**

In the first weeks of the war, the plan to take over Ukraine still seemed realistic to the Kremlin –Russian forces quickly reached the outskirts of Kyiv and occupied parts of Ukraine’s southern regions. However, Ukrainian resistance highlighted several of Russia’s military problems. As a result, Russia failed to achieve any of its self-proclaimed military objectives. For example, Russian forces have not come close to capturing of Donbas during the entire 2022.

The main reason for the failure of the Russian army in Ukraine was the weak strategic planning. Even though Russia had begun to deploy its forces at Ukraine’s borders already in the spring of 2021, the final decision on the invasion was made by Putin within a very narrow circle of people. Russia’s lower political and military levels were neither informed nor prepared. As a result, most of the theoretical plans were not practically achievable.

Russia’s ruling elite misjudged Ukraine’s political situation and military capabilities. Putin’s decision to start a war in Ukraine was guided by

wishful thinking. Both Putin and the Russian forces believed that the “special military operation” would end in a few days with a victory march in Kyiv. Putin did not foresee that his army would be met with a strong resistance from the Ukrainian military and the population would not perceive Russia as “liberators from Nazism”. Consequently, Russia had no initial exit strategy or plan “B” if the capture of Kyiv fails.

Lack of strategic planning meant a series of tactical mistakes for the Russian army. As a result, Russia was forced to repeatedly change its tactical goals – for example, from the capture of Kyiv to the “liberation” of Donbass. One of Russia’s most striking military failures in 2022 was the loss of almost all of the occupied Kharkiv region in just a few days in early September. The situation in the Kharkiv region vividly highlighted the weak defensive positions of the Russian forces and their inability to physically control the entire front line. This event also marked a change in the dynamics with Ukraine gaining the initiative in the war.

In the second half of the year, unable to control what was happening on the front line, Russia resorted to various desperate measures – annexation of the occupied Ukrainian territories, mobilization, increased rhetoric of nuclear threats. Our information suggests that Russian institutions were fully prepared for the illegal pseudo-referendums in Ukraine already in the summer, but the final decision to hold them was made by Putin only after the defeat in Kharkiv. Russia tried to primarily deter Ukraine by threatening to use nuclear weapons – any attack on the occupied territories would be seen as an attack on Russian territory and met with an according response.



Changes in the tactical approach of the Russian army have so far not achieved their goals. For example, although Russia formally annexed the Kherson region in early October, its forces had to leave the occupied and annexed parts of the region already in November. The withdrawal of Russian forces from the right bank of the Dnieper became one of the biggest political losses since the beginning of the war – Kherson was the only regional centre that Russian forces managed to capture since 24 February with Russian propaganda and a number of senior officials proclaiming that “Russia is here forever”. In October, the Russian military once again changed its tactics, launching a campaign of missile and drone attacks against the Ukrainian energy infrastructure. The campaign was intended to weaken the Ukrainians’ endurance during the heating season, reduce their resistance to the Russian forces and make them dissatisfied with Zelensky. Russia also hoped to force the Ukraine’s leadership to negotiate and give in to Russia’s demands.

The strategic mistakes created a series of practical problems for the Russian army – primarily affecting logistics and supply of forces. The already weak supply of armaments and equipment was precisely exploited by the Ukrainian army. As a result of continuous Ukrainian attacks on Russian military’s supply lines, ammunition depots and positions, Russian forces could no longer maintain their military positions and retreated from the right bank of the Dnieper in the Kherson region.

Despite the mobilization announced in Russia in autumn 2022, the number of soldiers is still not sufficient to resume new attacks. The Russian army struggles with shortage of people and the low level of training and motivation of the soldiers already deployed in Ukraine as well as the lack of elementary equipment, etc. With the onset of winter, Russian forces strengthened their defensive positions along the entire front line, planning to protect the captured territories. At the end of 2022, the only place where Russia carried out attacks was the Donetsk region, primarily Bakhmut.

## **POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE WAR**

In our assessment, the hostilities will continue at least throughout 2023. Russia has been using the winter to recuperate, but it is almost certain that both Russia and Ukraine will use opportunities for an offensive if they arise. Russia’s strategic objectives have not changed, so it likely plans to resume a new offensive after a period of rest during the winter. The Russian regime is still considering the possibility of renewing

the attack on Kyiv. The capture of Donbass will remain the minimum tactical goal.

The resumption of peace talks is currently not possible – Russia is not ready to leave the territory of Ukraine, while Ukraine is not ready for territorial losses. The signals sent by Russia about the readiness to resume negotiations can be regarded as a bluff. Russia would be the main beneficiary from any kind of truce. It needs time to regroup and prepare for new offensives.

For Ukraine to win, it needs significantly more Western military support. Both Russia and Ukraine lack armament and munition so one of the most important factors affecting the further development of the war will be the ability of both sides to obtain or produce them as soon as possible. The hostilities will also be affected by the ability to recruit additional soldiers and the financial and economic situation in both countries.

In 2023, Ukraine will continue to address the international community to prevent the onset of war fatigue. Russia will continue its efforts to undermine Western support for Ukraine, attempting to divide the West and continuing to spread nuclear threats.

Deterioration of Russia's positions will increase the risk of various desperate steps to change the situation in its favour. However, in our assessment, there is currently a low probability of Russia using nuclear weapons as it could lead to more direct Western involvement in the war and alienate Russia-friendly countries such as China and India. Nuclear weapons can be used if, in Putin's view, the existence of the regime is threatened. At least for now, there is no indication of that.



### 3. CHANGES IN THE RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Russia's invasion of Ukraine marked a new stage in the Russian foreign policy. Military failures and war crimes committed by the Russian army in Ukraine as well as Western sanctions and distancing from Russia have weakened its international role and reputation. Despite this, Putin's regime has not given up on its strategic foreign policy goal of restoring Russia's status as one of the world's power centres. To achieve this amid the current tensions, Russia is trying to adjust its foreign policy strategy and activities.

When making the decision to invade Ukraine, Vladimir Putin and his inner circle did not count on a strong reaction from the West and a possible negative impact on the Russian foreign policy interests. Our information indicates that even shortly before the invasion on 24 February 2022, Russian institutions continued to make plans for the expansion of Russian influence in the West, looking for mainly non-political points of contact and potential cooperation partners.

Instead, Russia has now lost its position in the West. Relationships with Russia have become toxic even among countries previously considered by Russia as constructive partners. Because of the sanctions, Russia faces significant problems in financing the activities of its agents of influence and pro-Russian activists abroad, including maintaining the projects of compatriot policy in Latvia and the other Baltic states. Western countries have also taken an active stance against Russia's tools of influence built up over decades, for example, by restricting the operation of Russian propaganda channels.

In 2022, the Russian Embassy in Latvia significantly increased its social media presence. Similar trends were also observed elsewhere in Europe. It is, most likely, done to at least partially compensate for the propaganda channels closed in Western countries and continue spreading the Kremlin's narratives. The Embassy's social media accounts have also become a comprehensive channel for official Russian propaganda and disinformation in Latvia. They contain republished messages of Russian government institutions and officials, information on various anniversaries significant to the "Russian world"

as well as reports on foreign policy events beneficial to the Kremlin and meetings of state leaders, proving that Russia is still a global power. The Embassy has also started republishing derogatory opinion articles about Latvia on its social media, especially the Telegram account. This new practice allows the embassy to seemingly dissociate itself from direct responsibility for the content, yet still spread it.

The invasion of Ukraine has also shown that Russia's ability to implement the so-called hybrid war is weaker than previously thought. Despite the high centralization of Russia's power vertical, its military structures and institutions responsible for influence campaigns carry out poorly coordinated and even contradictory activities. At the beginning of the war, the Russian Presidential Administration was still organizing campaigns aimed at improving Russia's image abroad (including Ukraine) by appealing to its positive and constructive foreign policy, while the Russian army was already conducting a full-scale conventional war in Ukraine, destroying any remaining international reputation Russia might still had.

Our information suggests that Putin's regime believes that a new "cold war" between Russia and the West has begun. Consequently, Russia wants to review its previous foreign policy and adapt it to the current geopolitical reality. The new perspective is reflected in the foreign policy concept formulated in 2022, in which Russia has decided to completely turn away from the West, instead focusing on Asia, Africa and Latin America. In this way, Russia hopes to overcome the negative consequences for its economy and international role caused by the





ever-increasing distancing from the West. Russia especially relies on China and India as potential markets for Russian goods, especially in the energy sector.

Russia plans to attract new international partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America by, for example, exploiting their anti-Western sentiments to form joint coalitions against the West. In our assessment, it could succeed as these regions have a rather low awareness of the threats posed by Russia combined with high receptiveness to its propaganda. This creates an enabling environment for Russia to discredit the West and spread propaganda about its supposedly neo-colonial policies, manipulatively diverting attention from Russia's own aggression against its neighbours. It is almost certain that Russia will use this approach at the upcoming Russia-Africa Summit in the summer of 2023 when the leaders of several African countries will gather in St. Petersburg.

Adjusting Russia's foreign policy strategy – turning from the West to other regions of the world – will be a long-term process. A smooth adjustment of the foreign policy will be hindered not only by Russia's weakened diplomatic positions, but also by the caution of other countries to directly support Russia, fearing possible Western sanctions. Despite Russia's announcements regarding the strategic partnership between the two countries, China has chosen to maintain a neutral position in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and expand cooperation with Russia only where it is beneficial, for example, by purchasing Russian energy.

The search for new global partners will not change Russia's confrontational and aggressive policy towards the West. Its main focus will remain dividing the West's unity against Russia. After the invasion of Ukraine, Putin and those close to him have solidified perception of the West as an external enemy and the most important threat to the regime's existence.

Our observations show that Russian institutions and the influence actors coordinated by them are already trying to adapt their activities to operate under the current restrictions, so far without any significant progress. It is very likely that Russia will increasingly rely on influence activities from its territory. Russia's approach towards the West is currently characterized by the Kremlin's assumption that Western societies will not be able to withstand the economic problems caused by the confrontation in the long term and will be forced to reduce sanctions against Russia.

One example of this approach is Russia's current energy policy. Russia has been reducing the supply of energy products to European countries for a long time, thus creating an energy crisis, high prices of gas and oil products and general concerns about a possible shortage of energy resources. Russia has turned energy into a weapon, allowing to inflict direct economic damage on European countries. Even though the consequent loss of European market has a negative impact on Russia itself, Putin's regime is ready to suffer economic losses in the name of geopolitical goals.

In our assessment, there is a high probability that Russia may decide to completely stop supplying energy resources to European countries in order to punish them for supporting Ukraine. This would most likely happen when Russia's energy blackmail against European countries would potentially have the greatest effect.



## 4. NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES OF RUSSIA

With the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has revealed itself as an openly aggressive neighbour that does not shy away from using military means to achieve foreign policy goals. At the same time, the war in Ukraine has decreased Russia's attention to other countries of the region<sup>1</sup>, thereby degrading Russia's image as guarantor of security and regional leader. In 2022, it was especially important for Russia to get political and economic support from its regional partners. It was partly achieved – the countries did participate in circumventing economic sanctions, but the only one to openly provide both political and military support was Belarus. Even though the neighbouring countries tried to implement a balanced foreign policy, Russia's war in Ukraine certainly reduced their desire to cooperate with the aggressor. Nevertheless, these countries did and will maintain close relations with Russia, at least in the medium term.

Control over the neighbouring countries is strategically important for Russia, and it is ready to use any means, including military, to secure it. Even though Russia is well aware of China and Turkey's growing influence in the region, it still considers the Western influence as the greater threat that should be prevented – the Kremlin launched an open military attack on Ukraine in order to prevent its permanent estrangement from Russia and further Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia also issued economic and military threats in response to Moldova's pro-European policy and its position in the war. It is possible that Russia's initial plan envisaged a significantly more aggressive and direct realization of Russian interests in Moldova, along with the successful subjugation of Ukraine.

Russia's failed invasion of Ukraine reduced its authority in the region. Until the war in Ukraine, Russia had enough resources and commitment to engage in military conflicts in the neighbouring countries, presenting itself as a regional leader and guarantor of security to other countries. A notable example was the 2022 mass protests in Kazakhstan when the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) first demonstrated combat readiness and engaged in the suppression of

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<sup>1</sup> Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan



protests. Although CSTO's role in suppressing the protests was rather small and symbolic, it was important for Russia to demonstrate its decisive role in the region and the readiness of the CSTO to respond quickly and prevent a "colour revolution" in Kazakhstan.

Military failures and the need to devote its increasingly limited resources to the war in Ukraine reduced Russia's involvement in other conflicts in the neighbouring countries. In 2022, Azerbaijan and Armenia regularly violated the Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement reached by Russia in 2020. These violations discredited Russia's dominant role in the region. It is almost certain that Azerbaijan used Russia's weakness to pressure Armenia and extend its control over Nagorno-Karabakh.

In 2022, military failures and Western sanctions forced Russia to strengthen economic cooperation with neighbouring countries. Putin paid visits to the leaders of Central Asian countries, Armenia and Belarus, and the mutual trade between Russia and regional partners was growing. Russia successfully exploited economic dependence of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, using these countries to circumvent the Western sanctions. The countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia re-exported the products sanctioned by the West to Russia, while Russia re-exported petroleum to Central Asia to be further sold as a product of these countries.

Two-way migration between Russia, Central Asia and the South Caucasus has also increased since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This region became the most important migration destination of Russian citizens and companies. Russian citizens fled the mobilization, while

companies moved to escape Western sanctions. As a result of the mobilization-induced emigration, Russia became increasingly dependent on the labour force of Central Asian countries – migrant workers offer a solution for labour shortages inside Russia and are also used in the reconstruction of the occupied territories of Ukraine.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine forced the neighbouring countries to be even more cautious in balancing their foreign policy. In 2022, they were trying to both maintain good relations with Russia and express support for Ukraine. In public rhetoric, most of the neighbouring countries expressed support for Ukraine's territorial integrity or took a distinctly neutral position. They did not participate or abstained in the UN votes, condemning the war started by Russia and the illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories. The exceptions were Moldova and Georgia who joined the Western countries in UN votes and public rhetoric, but did not join the Western sanctions due to their close economic ties with Russia.

It is almost certain that Russia will find it difficult in the long term to compete with the growing influence of China and Turkey in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Similarly, some countries of the region will still try to strengthen ties with Western countries, moving away from political and economic cooperation with Russia. Despite this, in the short and medium term Russia will partially succeed in strengthening its economic and political influence in Armenia and Central Asia, maintaining its leading position in the region.



## 5. RUSSIAN DOMESTIC POLICY

The unsuccessful war in Ukraine forced Russia to devote most of its domestic attention to risk and threat management as well as mobilization of resources at all levels. As a result, the already extensive restrictions and repressions reached an almost totalitarian level. Contrary to certain expectations, the elite closely consolidated around Putin as the guarantor of the existing system and thus their own influence and well-being. The mobilization of necessary war resources did not go as smoothly for the regime – the temporarily sufficient human and financial resources contrasted with the ever-increasing lack of weapons and equipment. 2022 has shown that Russia will have enough resources to continue the war for at least another year. Also, despite the challenges caused by the war, Putin’s regime is stable, and its existence is not threatened, at least in the near term. Now more than ever, Putin and the regime see remaining in power as their top priority. No compromises will be allowed in regards to this.

After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, different opinions about the decentralization of Russia and decline of Putin’s power could often be found in various media both in Latvia and abroad. In our assessment, at least for the time being, Putin’s regime is stronger than ever. Its long-term repressive policy, which was rapidly intensified over the past year, has ensured the regime an almost complete control and dominance in the Russian information domain. Any expression of opinions not corresponding to the interests of the regime is severely punished. Any political opposition has been destroyed. Years of propaganda and repressions have made the majority of people intimidated and apathetic, prone to distance themselves from any politically sensitive topics. The core of elite largely agrees with Putin and controls all the important instruments of power, from legislative and judicial institutions to executive structures such as the army and security and intelligence services. Elites dissatisfied with the war and its consequences are forced to either accept it or leave Russia, losing their status and prosperity, or worse.

Putin’s actions and his efforts to preserve power could sometimes look like a weakness of the regime, as in the case of the public conflict



between the Russian Ministry of Defence and the ultra-nationalist Yevgeny Prigozhin. However, it once again shed light on the nature of Putin's regime – he has to balance the interests of various members and groups of the elite, without giving one of them a decisive advantage. Prigozhin is completely dependent on the resources provided by the regime and operates within the framework set by Putin. As Prigozhin's role grows, especially regarding the war in Ukraine, which is important for Putin, this framework naturally expands. At the same time, Prigozhin is a controversial figure, even by Russian standards, and there is a very low probability of him actually obtaining an official position at the federal or even regional level. Mutual competition between representatives of the elite or their groups is an integral feature of Putin's regime and does not threaten his position in it.

It is almost certain that the 70-year-old Putin is facing various health issues. He is, however, considered to be relatively healthy – both physically and mentally. Putin's actions can be seen as rational and natural, if we consider his views and convictions. In our assessment, Putin's world view is based on a revanchist nostalgia for the Soviet Empire, a pronounced and still growing conservatism as well as a dogmatic conviction that Russia has been taken advantage of after the collapse of the USSR and is constantly under threat. Physical strength, superiority, loyalty and unanimity are among Putin's highest values. He has a pronounced lack of empathy. In general, Putin is a relatively typical autocrat with mediocre abilities whose main goal is to hold on to power as long as possible.

The gap between the real Putin and the way his personality is presented by Russian propaganda continued to rapidly widen over the past year. It became increasingly clear that the Russian leader is afraid of his people and is only ready to participate in sterile and pre-staged interactions with them. Putin lacked the charisma and courage to approach the Russian society with bad news or unpopular decisions. These were mostly entrusted to subordinates, leaving only the good news for Putin himself. The model of power, in which an artificial leader, physically and ideologically isolated from the outside world, receives artificial public support in an artificial election process became more and more vivid.

Contrary to Putin's initial plan, the war he started in Ukraine also became an internal political problem and test to Russia. The explosions and destruction caused by the war reached not only the regions near the Ukrainian border, but also more remote areas and the illegally annexed Crimea. Ukraine's ability to attack Russian territory created and will continue to create an additional burden on Russian security services, especially the Federal Security Service. The presence of the war was also increased by introduction of increased security regimes throughout Russia and the extensive – albeit until 23 September covert – mobilization.

Despite the chaos and unconventional methods, such as involving janitors in handing out mobilization summons or large-scale mobilization of prisoners, the regime managed to mobilize several hundred thousand people for the war in Ukraine. Yet it also showed the generally low motivation of the Russian people to voluntarily die for the insane ambitions of a narrow circle of elites. While people suffering from poverty were mainly motivated by the blood money offered by Putin, adventurers like *Wagner* mercenaries simply seized the opportunity to kill. The mobilization also shed some light on the surprisingly poor material provision of the allegedly second strongest army in the world – many recruits had to purchase their own uniforms, weapons and other equipment.

Western sanctions initially caused a shock to the Russian economy. However, the high price of energy and the decisive policy of the Central Bank helped to maintain a relative stability for the Russian economy, at least in the short term, and guaranteed a sufficient funding for the war. Contrary to some expectations, the Russian economy, which is mainly focused on the export of natural resources, wasn't immediately destroyed by the external pressure, mainly due to its size, integration into the global economy and control of the state.

Russian economy will continue to decline for half a year or so, followed by a prolonged stagnation, gradual degradation and increased dependence on the Asian countries, especially China. At least during 2023 sufficient financial resources will be ensured mainly through increased taxes, use of reserves and borrowing in the internal financial market, essentially “money printing”. It is expected that the war and mobilization will increase Russia’s labour problems, making it more and more dependent on migrant workers from neighbouring countries.

It is almost certain that Putin will run in the upcoming presidential elections in 2024, and until then he will try to secure at least minimal victories on the battlefield in order to present them to the public and the elite as his success. He will most likely announce his participation in the elections at the end of 2023. There is also a low probability that the presidential election will be postponed due to the war and related restrictions. In 2023, Russia will have to reckon with a most likely increasing number of Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory. Putin will probably implement another mobilization to send tens of thousands of Russian citizens to a certain death, while continuing to lead the country via video broadcast.



## 6. ACTIVITIES OF RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

In 2022, Russia's intelligence and security services continued their aggressive work against Western countries, including NATO and EU members. Their main tasks include obtaining information and implementing influence operations in order to change political attitudes of the West in Russia's favour or implement and support measures weakening the political elites of countries with a negative attitude towards Russia.

In 2022, the agenda of Russia's intelligence and security services was mainly determined by the war in Ukraine. The intelligence priority was Western reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including political reaction and formulation of positions, readiness to support Ukraine, unity of the international community and the coordination of actions between the countries. Military aid and supplies to Ukraine were and will continue to be at the top of Russian intelligence priorities.

Russia's intelligence services actively followed decisions regarding the West's sanctions on Russia: the decision-making process, forecasts regarding potential areas and subjects of the sanctions, implementation procedures as well as the impact of the sanctions on the economy, energy sector and public opinion of the European countries. They are also involved in the creation of schemes to circumvent the sanctions.

Residencies of the intelligence and security services under the guise of Russia's diplomatic missions have so far been an important mechanism and operating platform for the Russian intelligence abroad. In 2022, Western countries carried out numerous expulsions as a response to the war started by Russia in Ukraine. As a result, several hundred intelligence officers were forced to stop their work abroad. Latvia expelled three spies working under the cover of the Russian embassy in Riga. The mass expulsions were aimed to convey a clear message and condemnation of the war started by Russia and reduce the working capabilities of Russia's special services in Europe. However, while temporarily reducing operational capacity of the intelligence services, they did not change Russia's increasing efforts to implement special operations in the West.

Russia is at least partially attempting to restore the reduced number of intelligence officers in diplomatic missions, and they will continue to be an important cover for Russian intelligence. We can, however, also expect an increase in other types of intelligence operations with various methods and types of cover. Activities carried out from inside Russia will continue to grow, and more attention will be paid to Western nationals traveling to Russia. Latvian nationals who travel to Russia for work or to visit relatives should be aware of the possibility of coming under the radar of Russian authorities.

Operations in Western countries are also carried out by traveling officers of Russia's special services. Various smaller tasks given by the services can also be carried out by agents posing, for example, as tourists. It is possible that the traveling officers' activities will increase. In 2022, some countries have publicly discussed such cases. For example, in October 2022, Norwegian officials announced that they had repeatedly detected illegal drone flights operated by Russian citizens over strategic locations and believed that foreign intelligence services were behind these.

Over the past year, media have published several cases in which the activities of the so-called Russian illegals have been detected in Europe. Illegals are intelligence officers who have a foreign identity and are stationed abroad for a long-term work. They usually don't have any apparent connection to Russia. For example, in April 2022, the Netherlands deported a man who posed as a Brazilian citizen and planned to have an internship at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The person turned out to be a Russian spy with a false identity. In December 2022, two Argentine "citizens" accused of using fake identities to spy for Russian military intelligence were arrested in Slovenia. Training illegals, providing them with a false identity and a credible legend as well as infiltrating them abroad is a time-consuming and resource-expensive operation, which means their number cannot be rapidly increased; however, it must be assumed that Russia will intensify the use of this resource.

The Kremlin is interested in undermining Western unity, especially by preventing joint economic sanctions against Russia and arms supplies to Ukraine. Likewise, it is in Russia's best interests to promote internal tensions and public dissatisfaction with the government or economic situation in Western countries, assuming that domestic problems could push certain European countries into reducing their political focus on Russia's war in Ukraine. It is important for the Kremlin to discredit Ukraine in the eyes of the West, making both decision-makers and the

public doubt whether it is necessary to support Kyiv. To achieve this, it is important to coordinate the propaganda with influence operations carried out by intelligence and security services – obtaining intelligence information, looking into possibilities for new influence operations, working with agents of influence, including the allocation of funding to various individuals and groups in Europe that could be used to lobby Russia's interests. The Kremlin's interests are often lobbied through economic interests and entrepreneurs whose activities are related to Russia.



## 7. BELARUS

In 2022, Russia's war against Ukraine clearly showed its ever-increasing influence on Belarussian politics, military, economy, information domain and state administration. Even though so far Belarussian forces have not been directly involved in Russia's war against Ukraine, Belarus does provide logistical, medical and technical support to the Russian army and is therefore jointly responsible for Russia's aggression in Ukraine. At the moment, Russian military is using Belarus as its own territory, thus increasing the threat posed to the neighbouring countries, including Latvia.

The invasion of Ukraine confirmed that Belarus is no longer making independent decisions regarding its security policy, but merely acting in accordance with Russian instructions. Our information suggests that the illegitimate Belarussian leader Alexander Lukashenko, just like most Russian officials, was not informed about the upcoming war and only learned about it on 24 February 2022.

Under the guise of war, Russia strengthened its military presence and influence in Belarus, ensuring its military a full freedom of movement. With the deployment of a regional military group in October 2022, Russia achieved a permanent presence of its forces in Belarus, which Belarus had resisted for years. Belarussian military personnel are training Russia's newly mobilized soldiers in Belarus for the war in Ukraine, as Russia now lacks experienced instructors due to its heavy losses on the battlefield. Belarus is also regularly sending its military equipment and ammunition to Russian army, while Russia is deploying an increasing amount of its air defence and missile systems on the Belarussian territory.

However, despite the ever-increasing Russian pressure, Lukashenko has, since the beginning of the war, avoided a direct involvement of the Belarussian army in the hostilities in Ukraine, fearing a possible public dissatisfaction and destabilization of the political situation which could lead to the fall of his regime. It is very likely that Russia also wants to avoid a scenario in which it would be forced to deal with another "problematic" neighbour. However, Lukashenko's ability to manoeuvre is limited. If deemed necessary, Russia has all the means to force



the Belarusian military to directly engage in the war, regardless of the possible consequences it would cause inside Belarus.

Although anti-regime protests have significantly decreased since 2020, public dissatisfaction with the political situation in Belarus remained high in 2022. And yet, despite public dissatisfaction, Lukashenko has managed to regain control over the domestic policy. The probability of new protests is currently low, and, since most of the opposition has either been imprisoned or left the country, it does not threaten the stability of Lukashenko's regime.

Lukashenko has achieved the current situation by continuing repressions, the number of which kept increasing in 2022, targeting the opposition, non-governmental organizations, mass media as well as the civil society in general. In 2022, the number of political prisoners in Belarus exceeded 1,447. For example, at the end of October, more than 45 employees of the Academy of Sciences were detained – most were released after interrogation and checking the contents of their mobile phones, some were sentenced to imprisonment. At the end of the year, repressions were also directed against the largest Belarusian companies and organizations.

In 2022, Lukashenko continued to eradicate any civil activity in Belarus. According to the data of the human rights research group *Lawtrend*, 1,102 non-governmental organizations closed their operations in Belarus by the end of November 2022 – 699 were forced to close, while 403 decided to close their operations themselves. Changes in

the law now require all political parties to re-register by the summer and autumn of 2023. People not residing in Belarus, which means most of the opposition, will no longer be allowed to join or lead a political party. These changes will significantly limit the activities of parties not supporting the regime. In addition, the law *On Citizenship of the Republic of Belarus*, signed by Lukashenko on 10 January 2023, foresees a possibility to deprive representatives and supporters of the opposition of the Belarussian citizenship, thus limiting their opportunities to return to the country.

Lukashenko has remained in power mainly due to the Russian financial and economic assistance. In 2022, Russia continued to largely support Belarus, providing it with financial loans and relatively cheap energy. As a result, up to 60% of Belarus's external debt is made up of loans that have been borrowed either directly from Russia or through various organizations with close ties to the Kremlin, such as the Eurasian Development Bank. The support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further isolated Belarus from the rest of the world, leaving Russia as the sole guarantor of the survival of Lukashenko's regime.

In 2022, Russia continued to use this dependence to secure its interests in Belarus and control Lukashenko. Loans provided to Belarus were granted with conditions. So, for example, just a few days after the Russian 1.5-billion-dollar loan on 7 October, Lukashenko announced the deployment of the joint Russia-Belarus regional military group on Belarussian territory.

In 2022, Russia also managed to speed up the integration of the two countries within the framework of the Union State, finally forcing Belarus to agree to Russia's conditions on various issues, which Lukashenko had been trying to negotiate on. For example, the creation of a unified tax system, which will allow Russia to easily control the economic and financial situation of Belarus.

2022 confirmed that Russia has strengthened its long-term influence and presence in Belarus, turning it into another country that is openly aggressive towards the West. In our assessment, the threat to Latvia and other members of NATO and European Union (EU) from the territory of Belarus will continue to increase. For example, the risk of illegal migration from Belarus is still increased, although the scale of Lukashenko's illegal migration campaign has been significantly smaller compared to 2021.



## 8. SAEIMA ELECTIONS

On 1 October 2022, the Latvian parliament, Saeima, was elected. 19 political parties had submitted their lists of candidates with a total of 1829 people running for the 100 seats of the Saeima. Seven political parties made it into the parliament, receiving 5% or more of the votes. 916,368 people or 59.41% of eligible voters participated in the elections, with 26,146 people or 16.13% voting abroad. 914,022 valid election envelopes were counted, containing 903,639 valid ballots.

SAB's main tasks during this process included identifying hidden or open support for certain political parties, identifying and analysing Russia's influence measures (e.g., propaganda and disinformation campaigns in the media aimed at supporting or discrediting certain parties or discrediting the electoral process, or social media campaigns with the involvement of Latvian pro-Kremlin activists) and monitoring the cyberspace (monitoring the IT infrastructure and identifying cyber-attacks for political purposes, including exfiltrating data that may be used in future influence operations).

Taking into account the international experience over the previous years and Russia's large-scale military aggression against Ukraine, launched on 24 February 2022, state security agencies paid increased attention to the activities of propaganda media, financed and supported by Russia, during the period leading to the elections. No coordinated information influence operations were directly detected.

SAB did not observe any significant changes in the content of Russia's propaganda media during the pre-election period: instead of supporting a specific party, the Kremlin's messages continued to create a negative image of Latvia. The propaganda media had a reactive rather than a proactive approach, reacting to local events or statements by officials.

The pro-Kremlin media mostly targeted the Russian-speaking population of Latvia on their social networks. Before the Saeima elections, these media focused on messages about discrimination of Russian-speakers in Latvia, criticizing the government. The articles mostly used a fear-mongering tactic – equating anything considered as anti-Russian to “Nazism”, accusing the Latvian government of

“Russophobia” and portraying Latvia’s Russian-speakers as victims who are suffering because of the current government. The elections-related content had a minimal resonance in the information domain.

The observed narratives were mostly opportunistic and published in response to current events in Latvia – politicians’ efforts to limit the use of the Russian language, Saeima adopting a statement recognising Russia’s violence against civilians as terrorism and Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism, and the demolition of Soviet-era monuments (especially the so-called Victory Monument in Riga<sup>2</sup>). It should be noted that only a small number of publications reported exclusively on the elections or tried to influence the voters. Posts that openly discussed threats to the upcoming elections attracted a very little interest.

SAB observed a common tendency among the political parties that had a very small chance of breaking the 5% barrier in the elections. The representatives of these parties expressed concerns about discrimination and distrusted poll results, suggesting that the ratings of the parties are not objective and fair. These statements served as the basis for later statements about unfair elections, possibly mobilizing their voters for action on the day the official results were announced.

Even though no direct Russian interference in the elections was detected, we can still conclude that in the long term Russian propaganda messages have reached a significant part of Latvian society. According to a survey made by the research centre SKDS from 22 April to 2 May 2022, 45.7% of the Russian-speaking households in Latvia had a negative perception regarding NATO’s presence in Latvia and 41% of them believed that Russia’s interventions in other countries are justified and necessary.

At the moment, Russia’s opportunities to spread its messages have become more limited, as Western countries have blocked access to propaganda media and expelled Russian diplomats. Despite this, Russia is trying to find new channels for its information activities, which, in SAB’s opinion, will be quite challenging.

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<sup>2</sup> The so-called Victory Monument was erected in 1985 to commemorate the Red Army’s victory over Nazi Germany in 1945. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the monument was dismantled on 25 August 2022.

The monument was a subject of long-standing controversy in Latvian society – every year on 9 May, thousands of Russian-speakers gathered at the monument to commemorate the victory over Nazi Germany, while most Latvians saw it as a painful symbol of the Soviet occupation of Latvia (1945–1991) and the crimes committed by the Soviet regime. Over the last 30 years there had been several unsuccessful calls to remove the monument.



## 9. CYBERSECURITY

In 2022, Latvian cyberspace endured the most intense cyber-attacks so far.

Cyber-attacks are carried out in waves and their number is increasing both because of the wider usage of Internet and cyberspace and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

In 2022, the number of incidents registered and processed by the Information Technology Security Incident Response Institution CERT.LV increased by 40%. The search for vulnerabilities in IT systems of the state administration increased 7 times, while the number of attacks quadrupled. Our information indicates that in most cases the source of the cyber threat was Russia.

According to the data collected by CERT.LV, increased activity of cyber attackers was observed even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There were attempts to collect information, looking for vulnerabilities of Latvian IT resources. Since February 2022, the number of attempted intrusions of Latvian infrastructure has noticeably increased. In the spring, distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks also started to appear.

In 2022, we had to face the most intense DDoS attacks in the history of Latvia.

Hacktivists supporting Russia's aggressive policy regularly continue their activities in Latvian cyberspace. There has also been a varying intensity of DDoS attacks targeting government institutions and critical infrastructure, including financial institutions and transport and communications services as well as various businesses. Cyber-attacks have been carried out in waves, reaching the largest numbers in May and August, coinciding with Latvia's decisions to provide various support to Ukraine. Periodically, there had been even daily DDoS attacks on government resources. The attacks were successfully repelled and did not cause long-term disturbances to the systems.

In our assessment, the purpose of Russian hacker DDoS campaigns is to intimidate, demonstrate power and create a wide resonance. They also try to obtain information that could provide

political, military or economic advantage as well as prepare the environment for destructive cyber operations in the future.

DDos attacks do not harm the security of information stored in information systems, they are designed to interfere with or block the operation of websites. Russian hacktivists' attacks are usually accompanied by an information campaign exaggerating the success and impact of the DDos. These campaigns are mainly targeting audience inside Russia, emphasizing Russia's strength and capabilities as opposed to the weakness of the West.

Targeted attacks via e-mail also remain common.

Phishing attacks with the aim of defrauding financial funds have been attempted, for example, in the name of Latvian national post office *Latvijas pasts* and one of the largest banks *Citadele*. Potential victims received e-mails containing fraudulent links and invitations to make payments. Phishing attacks are often used by cyber units of Russian intelligence and security services to gain access to institutional e-mails and computer networks.

Recently, there has been an increase in the use of the so-called supply chain attacks. In this case, the malware is embedded in hardware or software used by a large number of companies and organizations (e.g., a widely used accounting program) and gives hackers access to end-user computers and data.

There have also been several cases where fraudsters approached Latvian media and state institutions, pretending to be a politician or a well-known representative of the opposition and offering telephone conversations or interviews which could later be used for discrediting purposes.

The security of Latvian cyberspace is monitored by competent authorities. Nevertheless, we would also urge the Internet users to pay close attention to the security of their devices. SAB recommends using the *DNS firewall* developed by CERT.LV and NIC.LV. It is a free tool for protecting individual users and organizations from cyber threats like fake bank websites, fraudulent trading platforms, virus-spreading websites, etc.

In 2023, Latvia must continue to strengthen its cyber security and national cyber defence capabilities. To do this, it is necessary to improve the cybersecurity management model and the legislation defining the security requirements of information and communication technologies. The first step has already been taken – the draft of the *National Cyber Security Law* has been prepared, providing the regulatory framework in

the field of cyber security. To improve resilience against cyber-attacks and reduce digital security risks, it is necessary to strengthen the ability to use technological solutions wisely and acquire defensive skills in the face of cyber security challenges.



## 10. PROTECTION OF NATIONAL, NATO, EU AND FOREIGN CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

Latvian national classified information – Official Secret – is information, the loss or unlawful disclosure of which may harm the security, economic or political interests of the state. In accordance with the Law on Official Secret, protection of national classified information is carried out by all three state security agencies – SAB, State Security Service and Defence Intelligence and Security Service.

SAB as the Latvian National Security Authority (NSA) is responsible for protection of NATO and EU classified information in Latvia. The ability to provide protection of NATO and EU classified information is a prerequisite for Latvia to be considered a full-fledged partner in these organizations. Regular assessment visits are conducted to check the compliance of the Latvian system for protection of NATO and EU classified information with NATO and EU security requirements.

SAB is also responsible for the protection of classified information of foreign states and institutions, including the drafting of international agreements on exchange and protection of classified information.

### VETTING FOR ACCESS TO NATIONAL, EU AND NATO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

Vetting for access to national classified information is carried out by all three state security agencies. Security clearances for access to SEVIŠĶI SLEPENI (Latvian national TOP SECRET) information are issued only by SAB, based on the vetting carried out by all three state security agencies. In 2021, SAB issued 931 security clearances for the access to national classified information, including 331 security clearances for access to SEVIŠĶI SLEPENI information.

In 2022, SAB denied access to national classified information in four cases. The decision of a state security agency to deny the access to national classified information can be contested to the Prosecutor General, whose decision can be further appealed to the Regional Administrative Court. In 2022, none of the decisions taken by SAB to deny the access to national classified information was contested to the Prosecutor General or appealed to the Regional Administrative Court.

Security clearances for access to NATO and EU classified information can only be issued to people who have already been granted access to national classified information. NATO and EU clearances are issued only by SAB based on a vetting that includes analysis of the vetting materials for access to national classified information and gathering of additional information necessary to make the final decision regarding granting access to NATO and EU classified information. In 2022, SAB issued 1955 security clearances for access to NATO classified information, and 1998 security clearances for access to EU classified information.

In 2022, SAB denied access to NATO and EU classified information in four cases. SAB's decision to deny access to NATO and EU classified information is final and cannot be further appealed.

SAB would like to highlight the following as particularly high-risk criteria for people who were vetted for access to both national and NATO and EU classified information in 2022: gambling, excessive debts (including the so-called quick loans) and/or unclear financial transactions, regular contacts and/or trips to Russia, Belarus and other CIS countries, China as well as provision of false information or concealment of information during the vetting process.

## **INDUSTRIAL SECURITY**

Facility Security Clearance (FSC) confirms the right of a company to participate in public procurements involving access to national, NATO and EU classified information, as well as the ability of the company to protect such information. The vetting of companies for the access to national classified information is carried out by all the three state security agencies, whereas the vetting for access to NATO and EU classified information is carried out only by SAB. The decisions on issuing FSCs are only taken by SAB.

As of January 2023, there were 96 valid FSCs for access to national classified information, five for access to NATO and three for access to EU classified information. In 2022, SAB has issued 29 FSCs and made changes to two previously issued FSCs.

In 2022 SAB refused to issue an FSC in eight cases, revoked a previously issued FSC in four cases and issued an FSC with a reduced validity period in 15 cases. The decision of SAB to refuse the issuance of an FSC or revoke a previously issued FSC can be contested to the Prosecutor General, whose decision can be further appealed to the Regional Administrative Court. In 2022, SAB's decision to refuse or

revoke an FSC has been contested to the Prosecutor General in seven cases and appealed to the Regional Administrative Court in four cases. All decisions made by SAB were left unchanged.

We would like to highlight the following among the main reasons for refusal of an FSC or its issuance for a reduced period of validity in 2022: company's violations regarding protection of classified information or its failure to comply with the requirements for protection of classified information, concealment of the true beneficiaries or provision of false information to the state security agencies, unclear financial transactions, regular violations of tax policy, as well as systematic violations of national legislation.

## **PHYSICAL SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION**

The inspection and certification of premises of government institutions and companies used for handling of national classified information is done by all the three state security agencies, while the premises for handling of NATO and EU classified information are only certified by the SAB. The certification process includes inspection of the physical, electronic, procedural and personnel security, as well as management of classified information.

SAB also advises government institutions and companies on issues regarding physical security of premises and management of classified information, as well as emergency evacuation and/or destruction of national, NATO and EU classified information. SAB monitors and controls the management and protection of all NATO and EU classified information released to Latvia, based on the systems and procedures introduced and maintained by SAB Central Register.

As of January 2023, there were 28 sub-registries or control points certified for work with NATO and EU classified information, including diplomatic missions of the Republic of Latvia abroad.

## **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

National classified information can only be exchanged with institutions or companies of other countries if Latvia has concluded a bilateral agreement on the exchange and protection of classified information with the respective country. The development of these agreements falls within the competence of SAB. When developing the

agreements, SAB takes into account the areas, in which a regulatory framework for exchange of classified information is currently needed, such as the presence of NATO forces in Latvia within the framework of Enhanced Forward Presence or cooperation with a country in the field of industrial security. It should be noted that the drafting of agreements is a long-term process involving two countries with different regulatory framework, both regarding the protection of classified information and drafting and ratification procedures of the agreements.

In 2022, the text of the bilateral agreement with the United States of America was approved, the necessary provisions for signing of the agreement are currently being prepared. At the initiative of the Netherlands, the text of current agreement was re-examined. Drafting of bilateral agreements was continued with Croatia and North Macedonia. Negotiation process was started with Poland.

SAB represents Latvia in NATO and EU forums, in which member develop a unified framework for protection of classified information: NATO Security Committee, the Security Committee of the Council of European Union, the Security Expert Group of the European Commission and the Security Committee of the European External Action Service.

Since 2003, SAB has been representing Latvia in the Multinational Industrial Security Working Group composed of more than 30 member states and several international organizations. The Working Group develops common principles and procedures for international cooperation in the field of defence and industrial security. Most of the procedures and documents developed by MISWG are also used by NATO and EU.

In 2022, the SAB continued work on a new version of the Cabinet of Ministers' regulation No. 21 of 6 January 2004 Regulation Regarding the Protection of Official Secrets and the Classified Information of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, European Union and Foreign Authorities.



## 11. LEGAL MOBILE INTERCEPTION

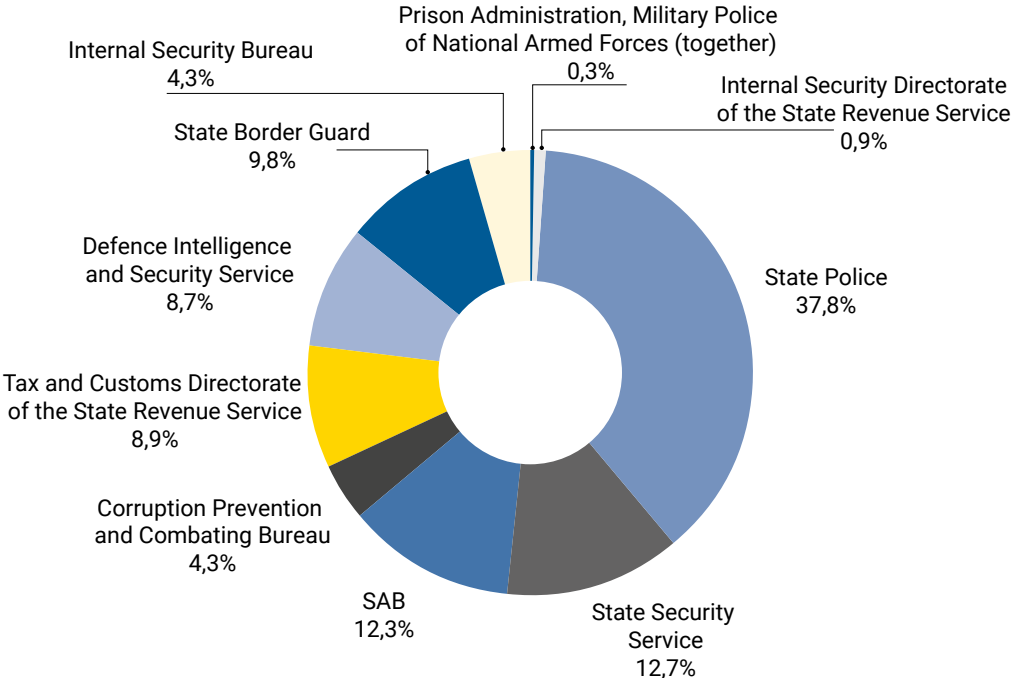
SAB hosts the technical facilities and equipment that ensures legal mobile interception for law enforcement agencies and state security agencies. The data obtained during the interception are transferred to the initiator of the particular interception who has received a warrant from the Justice of the Supreme Court. The competence and responsibility of SAB includes legal interception, protection of technical parameters and methodology of the interception, as well as the protection of the obtained data from unauthorized disclosure before they are delivered to the initiator of the interception.

Prior to the beginning of the legal interception, SAB receives the necessary documentation from the initiator of the interception, in which the following is stated:

- Registration number of the initiating decision;
- Official who has taken the decision;
- Head of the institution who has confirmed the decision;
- Justice of the Supreme Court who has issued the warrant;
- Telephone number to be intercepted;
- Duration of the interception.

The legal supervision of mobile interception is ensured by the Prosecutor General and specially authorized prosecutors. Parliamentary control is exercised through the National Security Committee of the Parliament. As in previous years, SAB has not committed any violations regarding mobile interception in 2022. The proportional usage of the legal interception by law enforcement agencies and state security agencies is provided in the following chart.

# PROPORTIONAL USAGE OF THE LEGAL INTERCEPTION BY INSTITUTIONS





## 12. CONTACT US

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