

# **Securing Europe: Safeguarding Of the Baltics as A Starting Point for A More Cohesive Defence Approach**

**Anna Zaccaro**

PhD candidate University of Rostock

## **Abstract**

The geographical positioning of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States has historically made them contested territories, embroiled at the crossroads of conflicting spheres of influence. Over the past 150 years, this pattern has persisted, notably marked by the emergence of Germany and Russia as major powers. Despite a period of seeming marginalization following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the expansion of liberal order mechanisms in the former communist bloc, recent decades have witnessed a resurgence of geopolitical tensions, particularly in response to Western initiatives. This resurgence, underscored by Russia's assertive actions, challenges the narrative of a closed chapter in European history, raising questions about the security landscape of the region amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics. This paper delves into the evolving security threats facing Europe, with a specific focus on the Baltic states and their vulnerability to potential Russian aggression. It critiques the inadequacy of Europe's defense capabilities, which necessitates heavy reliance on NATO resources. By examining Russia's motivations, including historical perceptions of natural belonging, geographical proximity, and opposition to American influence, the paper underscores the imperative for the European Union to bolster its defense capabilities. It advocates for a strategic shift towards greater self-reliance to mitigate the risks of overdependence on external factors, such as the United States.

**Keywords:** Baltic Sea Region, NATO, NATO lake, Regional studies, Suwalki Gap