

JOINT BALTIC AMERICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE, INC.



Representing:
ESTONIAN AMERICAN NATIONAL COUNCIL, INC.
AMERICAN LATVIAN ASSOCIATION, INC.
LITHUANIAN AMERICAN COUNCIL, INC.

Background **#BalticAdvocacyDay2018**

We are in town today for a Baltic Advocacy Day, coordinating the efforts of dozens of Baltic-Americans from across the country and with friends of the Baltics. We seek to raise awareness of the security issues currently challenging these three close allies of the United States. We are very concerned about the increasingly aggressive behavior of the Putin regime in Russia – from threats of direct military confrontation to the pressures of non-kinetic warfare, whether cyberattacks, disinformation, or energy security. The Baltic countries have long been targets of Moscow, but since Russia’s land grabs in Ukraine and Crimea, and now direct interference with democracy in the United States, European security depends ever more on maintaining strong democracies on its eastern borders. That’s what we’re here to advocate for today.

Specific items of interest:

- **Continued strong funding for the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for the Baltic countries.** We appreciate the increased 2017 funding levels, and we support further necessary increases for both programs for the next budget cycle within the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). We support having U.S. troops permanently deployed in the Baltic countries, in coordination with Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) deployments currently underway in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Baltics are important providers of valuable capabilities with respective NATO Centers of Excellence: cyber (Estonia), strategic communications (Latvia), and energy security (Lithuania). Each country also has important relationships with their respective partner states and their National Guards: Maryland (Estonia), Michigan (Latvia), and Pennsylvania (Lithuania). These ties, and their people-to-people components, should be supported.
- **House Baltic Caucus/Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus membership** – The HBC grew by over 20 members in 2017 – its largest increase since its founding in 1997. There are currently 74 members of this bipartisan caucus. The SBFC with seven current members is being reinvigorated. Caucus members share an interest in issues related to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and in the active transatlantic ties between the United States and these three NATO partners. Ask that the Member of Congress you’re visiting consider joining the appropriate chamber’s caucus. The co-chairs and contact points are Representatives John Shimkus (R-IL) and Adam Schiff (D-CA).
- **Sanctions** – the Baltic-American communities worked hard to support passage of the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), signed into law in August 2017 following near unanimous congressional passage. We also strongly support continued targeted sanctions via the Magnitsky and Global Magnitsky Acts. Strong sanctions against the Putin regime should be continued – and increased – as Russia does nothing to ameliorate its behavior, whether on a national scale or by its corrupt Putin cronies. These laws need to be implemented as designed.
- **Countering the Kremlin’s disinformation** – funding for programs to help fight against the Kremlin’s propaganda and disinformation campaigns need to be increased. Levels allocated for the Global Engagement Center, and other programs are insufficient when scaled against the massive amounts that the Kremlin puts into discrediting the United States, its allies, and Western values.
- **Support for Energy Security** – while support for export of U.S. energy supplies to the Baltic countries is welcome, particularly in the form of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), we also need to actively push back against efforts to build the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which is a security threat to the Baltics, and particularly Ukraine. Efforts such as the bipartisan March 15 letter of 39 Senators should be taken into serious consideration. Also, we need to discourage the construction of the Astravets Nuclear Power Plant in Belarus, as it poses a dangerous threat to Lithuania and its neighbors.

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