



THE VOICE OF THE BALTIC AMERICAN FREEDOM LEAGUE

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# Baltic Bulletin

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Summer 2023

## NATO heads to the Baltics

Powering up the eastern flank and support for Ukraine top the summit agenda

By Mara Gulens and Darius Furmonavicius

The NATO Summit, held in Vilnius, Lithuania, this July 11-12, is a milestone for NATO and a symbol of Alliance solidarity.

“Having all the Western leaders and main partners of NATO visiting Vilnius ... is a very strong strategic message,” Gabrielius Landsbergis, Lithuania’s minister of foreign affairs, said at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

The Vilnius summit will be attended by 33 heads of state and governments, including Sweden’s prime minister and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

“The backbone of NATO, once centered in Paris and Berlin, is

shifting eastward and now stretches from Helsinki to the Black Sea,” Congressman Mike Rogers, chairman of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee, wrote in *Foreign Policy*.

As the summit approaches, BAFL seeks support on key issues affecting the security of the Euro-Atlantic region, namely the strengthening of NATO’s eastern flank, support for Ukraine’s defense against Russia’s aggression and Ukraine’s future membership in NATO.

### Baltics know best

Since their restoration of independence 30 years ago, the Baltic states have maintained a firm position toward Russia.

“Eastern European nations—namely, Poland, Romania, Finland and the Baltic states—understand more acutely than their Western neighbors the threat posed by Russia and the imperative for collective resolve,” writes Rogers.

Russia’s aggression against peaceful and sovereign countries has continued into the 21st century with the invasion of Georgia in

2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and all-out war on Ukraine in 2022.

...cont’d on 4

### Finland, welcome to NATO

On April 4, 2023, Finland officially became the 31st member of NATO.

“When Putin launched his brutal war of aggression against the people of Ukraine, he thought he could divide Europe and NATO,” said President Joe Biden at the official flag-raising ceremony at NATO headquarters in Brussels. “He was wrong. Today, we are more united than ever.”



Finland’s flag is raised during a ceremony to mark the country’s accession to NATO on April 4, 2023. Photo: NATO

Finland’s entry into NATO marks a big geopolitical shift and adds 832 miles to the Alliance’s frontier with Russia.

Sweden, which submitted a bid to join NATO in 2022, has been to date thwarted by Turkish and Hungarian objections. Both Turkey and Hungary are NATO members. Ukraine’s membership bid will be up for discussion at the summit.



BAFL representatives in D.C. stand with Patrick Flood, senior national security advisor for Congressman Don Bacon (R-NE), co-chair of the House Baltic Caucus. From left: Tony Mazeika, Vija Turjanis, Danute Mazeika, Patrick Flood, Conrad Mazeika, Anne Smith. Photo: Staff



## President's letter

**Dear members, supporters and friends:**

It's a bellwether year for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

In July, the world will look to beautiful 700-year-old Vilnius, Lithuania, as it hosts the NATO Summit. Vital discussions will focus on Baltic security and Ukraine's battle against Russia's brutal and illegal invasion.

Russia's actions have highlighted the need for reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank. The Baltic states are most vulnerable to potential Russian attacks.

### **BAFL goes to Washington**

Given the war in Ukraine and the need to fortify the Baltic states before a Russian military reset, BAFL representatives traveled to D.C. at the start of the legislative season to meet with House Baltic Caucus co-chairs, Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus co-chairs and others.

Last year, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$225 million for the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI). This year, the Baltic Security Initiative Act would formally establish the program and provide \$350 million in funding to each of the Baltic states for the next three fiscal years.

### **Hello and goodbye**

BAFL welcomed new board members at our annual meeting. Davis Reins and Vytenis Vilkas are now on the executive board.

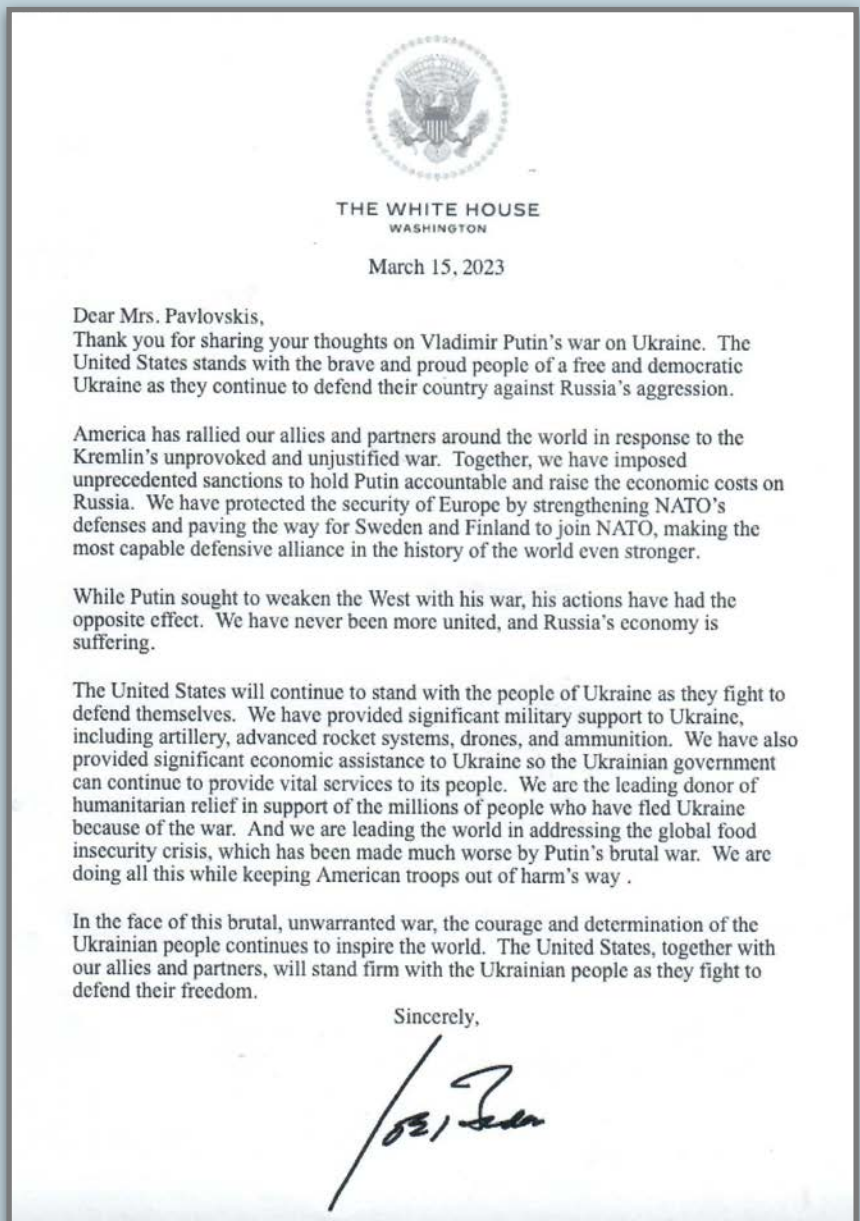
Sadly, we recently lost Heino Nurmberg and Aivars Jerumanis, two founding members of BAFL, and Maris Manteniaks, who joined the board in the early '90s.

### **Journey to NATO**

Attendees of BAFL's Journey to NATO Summit workshop in Los Angeles on June 3 heard from the Hon. Zygimantas Pavilionis, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lithuanian Seimas. Pavilionis urged the Baltic diaspora to support Baltic priorities at the NATO Summit, including NATO membership for Ukraine.

BAFL strongly urges you to participate in our online Calls to Action. By participating, you show that Americans care about the Baltic states, NATO and Ukraine.

*Conrad Mazeika*  
President  
*Baltic American Freedom League*



This letter is President Biden's response to Dace Pavlovskis, a BAFL member who contacted the president about Russia's aggression against Ukraine.



## Baltic priorities in Congress

### Baltic Security Initiative gets bipartisan stamp of approval

By Anne Smith

Russia's brutal and illegal war in Ukraine makes it clear that Russia does not respect its neighbors' borders. Removing vulnerabilities in NATO's defense of the Baltic states is critical.

We must complete security upgrades in the Baltic region to protect the interests of the United States in Europe.

BAFL urges continued support of legislation for Ukraine as it battles Russia's aggression. This includes support for pending resolutions condemning Russia's acts of genocide against the Ukrainian people and the horrific kidnapping of Ukrainian children and support for the rebuilding of Ukraine and integrating it into the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

We're also working with Congress to identify ways to recognize the Baltic states and NATO for selecting Vilnius as the summit's host city.

### Funding Baltic security

In May, House Baltic Caucus Co-chairs Don Bacon and Ruben Gallego and Senate Baltic Freedom Co-chairs Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the Baltic Security Initiative Act. We thank bipartisan members of Congress who co-sponsored House bill 2922 and Senate bill 1465.

Although Congress has been funding the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI) for the past few years, this bicameral and bipartisan bill will formally establish the program and further authorize funding for the next three years (\$350 million in FY24, FY25 and FY26).

This surge in funding will help Baltic military forces better prepare for Russian conventional military threats as well as gray zone threats such as cyberwarfare.

The bill urges the Baltic governments to match these congressional funding levels, which they have already well exceeded. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania take responsibility for their own security and have made significant purchases of U.S. and Allied security equipment.



BAFL board members met in D.C. for meetings earlier this year. From left: Danute Mazeika, Conrad Mazeika, Tony Mazeika and Vija Turjanis. Photo: Anne Smith

### Calls to Action

We urge you to send a letter to Congress that requests your representatives to support the BSI. Do not delay: these letters are crucial as Congress considers annual defense authorization and appropriation bills.

We also ask that you complete BAFL's Call to Action for the Holding Accountable Russian Mercenaries (HARM) Act. It will impose sanctions on the Wagner Group, which supplies Russia with arms from around the world. All Calls to Action can be found at [www.bafl.com](http://www.bafl.com).

### The House Baltic Caucus has grown

We're pleased to welcome new members Mike Quigley (D-IL), Chris Pappas (D-NH), Vicente Gonzalez (D-TX) and Pat Fallon (R-TX). ▲

ANNE SMITH is BAFL's advocacy advisor.

#### 2023 Events

##### 13th Youth Song and Dance Celebration

Tallin, Estonia | June 30 - July 2

##### 150th anniversary of the Latvian Song and Dance Festival

Riga, Latvia | June 30 - July 9

##### Young as Vilnius Music Festival

Vilnius, Lithuania | July 25



...**NATO** cont'd from 1

At last year's NATO Summit in Madrid, Russia was classified as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area."

There's no indication Russia plans to stop. Troop size is being boosted to 1.5 million, new military units are being established, and nuclear weapons are being moved into Belarus.

### Boosting democracy

The Baltic Security Initiative Act, recently introduced by the House Baltic Caucus and the Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus, will solidify the Baltic Security Initiative, which enhances and strengthens U.S. cooperation with the Baltic states.

"The Baltic countries are essential NATO partners in upholding democratic values abroad," says Dick Durbin (D-IL), U.S. Senate majority whip and co-chair of the Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus.

"Democracies rise and fall together," he says. "I will continue working in Congress on a bipartisan basis to support the democratic government of Ukraine and enact appropriate measures against continued Russian aggression."

"What all of us are fighting for, what Ukraine is fighting for, is not just a few hundred kilometers of territory," says Landsbergis. "It's either having aggressive Russia continuously fighting with its neighbors, being partnered with China and

offering a lot more disruption to global security or actually stopping them here now."

There's also the issue of ensuring continued global solidarity with Ukraine to "make sure Ukraine wins," says Mari-Ann Kelam, a former member of the Congress of Estonia and a BAFL board member. "Otherwise, Russia is going to continue to be a huge problem and it may not be immediate, but it will come."

### Bring in Ukraine

Ukraine has already proven that it can defend itself, democratic values and the rules-based international order. It is ready to become a full-fledged member of NATO.

"It is time to implement the Bucharest decision. NATO membership for Ukraine may be the best way to end the uncertainty about Ukraine's place in Europe," Daniel Fried, former U.S. ambassador to Poland, wrote in *Just Security*.

Ukraine's membership in NATO would strengthen the Alliance, ensure security and cost Allies less than what they currently spend on Ukrainian defense.

On June 1, the chairs of 22 NATO foreign relations committees signed a resolution that encourages NATO to abolish gray zones and invites Ukraine to join the Alliance during the summit.

"Europe will never be secure from Russia until it can militarily stop Moscow's attacks," Andriy Zagorodnyuk, former Ukrainian defense minister and distinguished fellow of the Atlantic Council, wrote in *Foreign Affairs*. "It is time to let Ukraine join NATO: not sooner or later but now."

"The Kremlin must see no alternative beyond withdrawal to its own borders and acceptance of Ukraine's recognized sovereign territory," Charles Barry and Christopher Skuba wrote in the Atlantic Council's April 11 issue brief.

"Getting to Vilnius with all Allies unified behind the goal of enabling Ukraine's victory is the foremost strategic priority for the Alliance." ▲

MARA GULENS is editor of the Baltic Bulletin. DARIUS FURMONAVICIUS, PHD is a member of BAFL's Advisory Board.

### Happy 700th anniversary, Vilnius!

This year's NATO Summit is being held in the historic capital city of Vilnius, Lithuania. Situated in the country's southeast where the Vilnia and Neris Rivers meet, the city is also celebrating its 700th anniversary with a stream of cultural and economic events.

Vilnius has a typically complicated Baltic history. The city was first mentioned in the letters of Grand Duke Gediminas in 1323. It's been the seat of various rulers and kingdoms, and it's been destroyed and rebuilt. Today, it's a vibrant, modern city at the heart of Europe.

Visit [www.700vilnius.lt/en/](http://www.700vilnius.lt/en/) and [www.govilnius.lt](http://www.govilnius.lt).



This year marks the 700th anniversary of the founding of Vilnius. Photo: govilnius.lt

## Belarus in the middle

### Liberation from Kremlin occupation must follow Ukraine's NATO membership

By Darius Furmonavicius

In his inaugural address to the Lithuanian parliament on July 12, 2004, President Valdas Adamkus expressed hope that Belarus would once again choose a democratic path forward, the Königsberg region would become more welcoming to Europe and Russia would engage in European-Atlantic collaboration.

Fast forward to 2023. All three processes have made sharp reversals, and the security and stability of the Baltic Sea region and Europe are under threat.

Change can be successful only if the United States remains engaged in Europe, particularly in the Baltic states.

#### On Russia

Russia's brutal and unprovoked war on its neighbor Ukraine has shattered peace in Europe and impacted stability everywhere," said President Biden in National Security Strategy, a report released in 2022.

"[Russia's] reckless nuclear threats endanger the global non-proliferation regime," Biden continued. The Russian government is pursuing an imperialist foreign policy with "the goal of overturning key elements of the international order."

But the report falls short of spelling out the elements of Ukrainian victory, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky defines as

- liberation of all Ukraine from Russian occupation;
- withdrawal of Russian military and security forces from all post-WWII Soviet-occupied territories;
- withdrawal of all Russian military forces that lie within a few hundred miles of internationally recognized Ukrainian-Russian borders;
- initiation of an international war crimes trial of President Putin and thousands of his collaborators; and
- reparation for the occupation of Ukraine (as well as the Soviet occupation of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, parts of Finland and Japan).

An invitation to Ukraine to join NATO during the Vilnius summit could send a clear signal to the Kremlin to stop the war.

It would encourage Russian citizens to rid themselves of imperialist ambitions, revive the concept of democracy in Russian-occupied Belarus and facilitate the liberation of Belarus from Russian occupation.

#### On Belarus

Since its illegitimate presidential election in 2020, Belarus has become increasingly integrated with the Russian terrorist state.

Belarusian authorities continue to push Iraqi, Asian and African migrants into Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Since August 2021, Poland has denied entry to 45,000 illegal migrants and Lithuania has denied entry to 20,000.

Massive EU border fences are being constructed by Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland. Lithuania has completed 502 km of a planned 600-km fence that borders Belarus.

Still, the Kremlin uses illegal migrants as weapons who attempt to destroy fences and cause border conflicts.

We must continue to call for democracy and free elections in Belarus.

#### On Königsberg

The most vulnerable area is the Suwałki Gap, a thin strip of land between Poland and Lithuania, sandwiched between Russian military bases in Kaliningrad and Belarus.

If the Baltic states were cut off from the land corridor with Poland, the situation would remind us of U.S. and British airlifts to West Berlin in 1948 and 1949.

Finland's NATO membership increases the security of the Baltic states, the Baltic Sea region and Europe. However, it's cheaper to deter the Kremlin from aggression than to engage in military confrontation. The Baltic states urgently require a permanent, increased American military presence.

In his famous Europe-whole-and-free speech in Warsaw in 2001, President George W. Bush said: "I believe in NATO membership for all of Europe's democracies that seek it and are ready to share the responsibilities that NATO brings ...

"Let us tell all those who have struggled to build democracy and free markets what we have told the Poles: from now on, what you build, you keep. No one can take away your freedom or your country." ▲



The Suwałki Gap is a thin strip of land between Poland and Lithuania. Source: 2019 Geopolitical Futures



## Regulating wartime conflict

### Lessons from WWII on prosecuting Russian war crimes

By Gintas Kazlauskas

The Nuremberg Trials of 1945-46 set a new standard for the prosecution of war criminals. “Murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation ... [and] persecutions on political, racial, or religious grounds” were all targeted as war crimes, according to the Allied International Military Tribunal.

What went missing and continues to be an issue was consensus about how and when to prosecute.

Take Ukraine. Prosecutors have identified at least 90,000 war crimes committed by Russian soldiers and mercenaries. These crimes include executions of civilians and prisoners of war, torture, sexual violence and the abduction of children.

On March 17, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin. He is accused of deporting Ukrainian children to Russia.

In response, Russia’s former president Dmitry Medvedev suggested that “it’s quite possible to imagine a hypersonic missile being fired from the North Sea from a Russian ship at The Hague courthouse.”

In other words, Moscow has little regard for war crime accusations. Any damages inflicted while enforcing the “historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” to quote Putin, are fair game.

#### Historical strategies

Consensus on prosecuting war criminals remains as elusive as it was when U.S. officials struggled to avoid rewarding the Soviets while ensuring justice for Holocaust survivors after WWII.

In 1979, the U.S. Congress established the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) to prosecute immigrant war criminals, specifically Holocaust perpetrators, residing in the United States. By 2010, approximately 300 prosecutions had occurred; 100 individuals had been stripped of citizenship, and 70 had been deported.

But issues were evident from the get-go to anti-Communist and Baltic activists.

Extradition required legal agreement between two sovereign, judicially independent states. Sending Baltic war criminals to Soviet-occupied Baltic nations implied that Soviet annexation was legitimate and contradicted the U.S. State Department’s nonrecognition policy.

In 1986 on CNN’s Crossfire, BAFL co-founder Anthony Mazeika and Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman debated the morality of OSI trials.

Mazeika stressed the hypocrisy of the OSI working with “the former partner of Nazi Germany, a signer of the

Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, [which] initiated the Second World War” and which was “responsible for millions of people dying.”

Cooperation between U.S. and Soviet judicial authorities gave Moscow public relations victories. But according to OSI historian Judy Feigin, at least one case involved a witness who later recanted a forced, false testimony. During the Cold War, critics also protested that Soviet archives were inaccessible.

The extradition question vanished in 1991 with the restoration of the Baltic states’ independence.

#### Global standards

By 2010, the OSI had been reorganized as the Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section (HRSPS). Emphasis shifted from the Holocaust to the abuse of child soldiers and criminal networks committing immigration fraud.

In 2022, the Department of Justice appointed HRSPS director and OSI veteran Eli Rosenbaum to oversee resources designated for Ukraine. They include operational assistance and advice for criminal prosecutions. The HRSPS also trains prosecutors and sends advisors to The Hague and Kyiv.

But there’s a hitch. The United States and Turkey are the only NATO countries without ICC membership. U.S. policy, which ranges from tacit cooperation and indifference to freezing the assets of ICC personnel, varies with each presidential administration and doesn’t provide a stable foundation for international legal cooperation.

American concerns include the lack of constitutional guarantees for accused U.S. nationals. The United States implicitly demands institutional reform in exchange for a more permanent relationship.

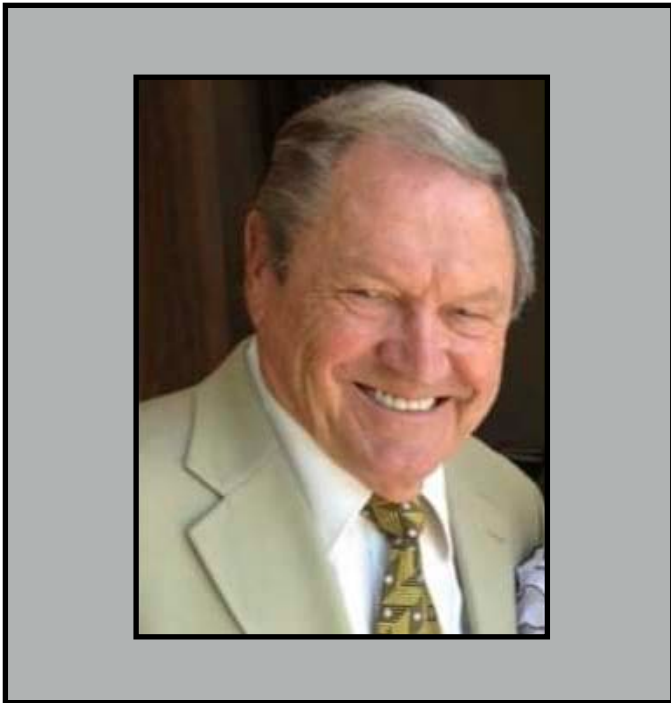
Joining the ICC would signal commitment to higher standards and improve the credibility of U.S. foreign policy. Western strength can’t be defined by mere force; it must be complemented by strength of character. ▲



The Russian-occupied city of Mariupol is seen through a shattered window. Photo: Danylo of Mariupol

## In Memoriam: Ivars Miculs

April 18, 1937-December 11, 2022



Ivars Miculs, a longtime BAFL board member and vice president, passed away in December 2022. He was 85 years old.

After earning a master's degree in chemical and nuclear engineering, Miculs went to Mesa, Arizona, where in 1972 he helped found the Arizona Latvian Association.

He and his family moved to southern California where he began work in the Space and Communications Division at Hughes Aircraft Company. He chaired the Latvian Association of Southern California for 24 years.

Miculs joined BAFL in the 1990s and was elected to the board in 2002. He served as vice president, executive vice president and even interim president.

His can-do personality, outgoing disposition and resourceful spirit provided BAFL with many contacts and opportunities. He was well known in the Latvian and Baltic communities in North America and the Baltic countries. He had friendly working relationships with many Latvian ambassadors, honorary consuls and politicians.

Miculs served as vice president of the American Latvian Association, and he often helped run events and voting at annual congresses. His involvement brought many BAFL resolutions up for discussion.

Over the years, Miculs made many trips to Washington, D.C., to meet members of the Congress and other political leaders. He worked fervently to help the Baltic countries gain NATO membership, and in 2003 helped defeat a U.S. Senate amendment that would have decreased funding for the preparation of the Baltic nations' membership in NATO.

In 2004, Latvia awarded commemorative medals to Miculs and eight other BAFL board members for helping Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia gain NATO membership.



BAFL's executive board after presenting Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga (far right) with BAFL's Freedom Award in Latvia in 2006. From left: Valdis Pavlovskis, Vija Turjanis, Imants Leitis, Dace Pavlovskā and Ivars Miculs. Photo: Pres. Vike-Freiberga's staff.

In October 2021, Miculs was awarded the Three Star Medal, the Latvian government's highest honor, which is bestowed on civilians for their work on behalf of Latvia and Latvians.

BAFL will sorely miss Ivars Miculs's energy, common sense, charm and wit. ▲



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### Leave a lasting legacy! Make a bequest

Bequeath a portion of your estate to BAFL. Donations and membership fees cover BAFL's annual expenditures. However, these fluctuate significantly from year to year, and your donations are invaluable.

BAFL is a charitable, 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. It may be advantageous for you to bequeath appreciated property—including real estate, stocks and bonds, or works of art—to avoid incurring applicable taxes if you sell the property yourself.

If you have questions, please contact BAFL treasurer Vytenis Vilkas at *treasurer@bafli.com*. We recommend you speak with an attorney and a tax advisor about any legal or tax questions.

### Your feedback please!

What would you like to see more of in the *Baltic Bulletin*? Is there something we missed? Did you catch an error?

Please drop us a line at *editor@bafli.com*.

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