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Introduction: Freedom and/or Security. Building Bricks for a Baltic Standpoint

In one of his articles on identity formation in the fluid globalized world, Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman compares human sociability to that of wasps studied in Panama. He challenges the assumption that living in the hive of birth defines an individual for his or her whole lifetime, declares identity as never fixed, and highlights the dynamics enacted through a tension between two poles, two values – freedom and security. He writes:

> [..] the efforts of 'identity formation' veer uneasily, as they must, between the two equally central human values: freedom and security. These values, equally indispensable for decent human life, are difficult to reconcile, and the perfect balance between them remains still to be found. Freedom, after all, tends to come in a package deal with insecurity, while security tends to be packed together with constraints on freedom. And as we resent both insecurity and lack of freedom, we would be hardly satisfied with any feasible combination of freedom with security. Hence, instead of a 'linear progress' towards more freedom and more security, a pendulum-like movement could be observed thus far, and most likely will be in the years ahead: first overwhelmingly and staunchly towards one of the two values,

> and then away from it and towards the other. Currently, it seems, in many, perhaps most, places on the planet, the resentment of insecurity prevails over the fear of lack of freedom (though no one can tell how long this tendency will last) (Bauman 2011: 431–432).

In this sense, Bauman's argument can be extended from the level of personal identity to the level of collective and political identity. If individuals negotiate identity between freedom and security, societies and states also negotiate belonging, borders, and responsibility through the same tension. The idea that the freedom/security opposition takes part in regulating not only individual identity-building processes, but also the normative framework negotiated between individuals, groups, and nation-states, therefore contributing to particular attitudes towards migration in cities, locations, and countries, was echoed also in other articles by the author (Bauman 2013; 2016). The special issue is organized around this idea that freedom and security function as key concepts through which normative frameworks are continuously (re)negotiated in public discourse. The contributions examine how these concepts are constructed as interdependent, competing, or oppositional across different social, political, legal, cultural, and technological contexts.

Bauman's note is certainly motivated by the observation of tendencies towards securitization. These tendencies are visible, among others, in the politicization of migration, the rejection of refugees, and the growing use of security language to justify exclusion (Bahadir Ileri 2019; Gattinara, Morales 2016; Hirschauer 2021). Paradoxically, when security discourse becomes primarily a discourse of restriction and exclusion, it may create new forms of insecurity: fear, mistrust, social fragmentation, and vulnerability among already marginalized groups (Bigo 2002).

For the history of theorizing fundamental protocols of sociality and sociability, the concept of freedom is important.

In classical and modern political philosophy, the relation between individual freedom, collective order, and state authority has been discussed from Plato (1997) and Aristotle (1998, 2009) to Hobbes (1996), Locke (1988), and Kant (1991). In the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt (1958) and John Rawls (1971) further developed these questions in relation to political action, justice, rights, and democratic institutions.

From there, a line connecting freedom and security to the level of human well-being and happiness can be traced. Widely held logics link security as a value to economic prosperity, following global comparative research on value systems that concludes that the value of existential security is less important where economic well-being and prosperity are growing, and the value system is tending towards what is described as post-materialist values (Inglehart 2008). However, the

movement towards post-materialist values has been uneven, and in many societies material security remains politically and socially central.

The twenty-first century is increasingly showing a backlash, where the rhetoric of danger justifies restrictions of liberal freedoms in the name of national and social security and individual and public safety (Norris, Inglehart 2019). The last two decades have been marked by overlapping crises: terrorism and counter-terrorism after 9/11, the global financial and economic crisis of 2008/2009, the Arab Spring of 2011, wars in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Ukraine, and Iran, ecological threats. They have also been shaped by the expansion of digital platforms, algorithmic curation, data extraction, disinformation, AI-generated synthetic media, and online harassment. These developments can intensify polarization, complicate the assessment of credible information, and place pressure on democratic institutions and public trust. At the same time, the rise of authoritarian populism has drawn on cultural anxieties, economic insecurity, and distrust of political and media elites (Bennett, Livingston 2018; Couldry, Mejias 2019; Jerit, Zhao 2020; Norris, Inglehart 2019; Tucker et al. 2018). This is especially relevant in a small, economically vulnerable and geopolitically exposed country like Latvia (Andžāns, Sprūds 2021; Andžāns 2023; Rungule, Seņkāne 2018), which re-introduced democracy after the fall of the Soviet Union by grounding its national identity and the idea of freedom itself in traditionalist-conservative ideas (Kruk 2018).

From this point of departure, among the cross-cultural central questions is: how is the individual positioned between social discourses produced by different groups and sub-groups, and the state's responsibility to ensure law, protection, social justice, the quality of public services, such as health care, education, the culture of transparency, and so on? In his lectures in the late 1970s, Michel Foucault developed the concept of governmentality to uncover the interplay between the state's restricting power and its practice of reflective governance. That is a form of governance uniting both reflection and governing. In this framework, governance operates through discourse: through processes of meaning-making, legitimization, normalization, and disciplinary as well as biopolitical control (Foucault 2008; Henriqson 2014; Evans 2010). It strongly draws on fears and insecurities as Didier Bigo's concepts of governmentality of unease (Bigo 2002) and future perfect (Bigo 2024) imply. Thus, framed through security and emergency discourses, some lives may be represented as risks rather than as subjects of protection. This is where Agamben's concept of "bare life" becomes relevant: individuals are exposed to power while being excluded from full political and legal protection (Agamben 1998: 10).

Following a Foucauldian perspective the Copenhagen School securitization theory (Wæver 1995; Buzan et al. 1998) underlined the uses of speech in creating

meaning of danger. Criticizing the discursive positioning of phenomena like migration in the conceptual framework of security, security researcher Jef Huysmans writes:

> [..] functionalist accounts presume a deep structural relation between security and freedom that is both competitive and functional. This structure uses a negative concept of freedom combined with a limited altruism of human beings to explain that reducing constraints upon freedom necessarily increases abusive use of freedom thereby threatening the freedom of others. I then argue that one cannot presume that this tension between reducing constraints upon freedom and the use one will make of this freedom is necessarily politicized in security terms. To make this point I use the idea that definitions of security and insecurity are an outcome of a process of securitization in which actors talk a problem into a security problem. This means that the deep structural framing of the relation between security and freedom becomes dependent upon the success of a political discourse that presumes this relation (Huysmans, 2004: 295).

Thus, securitization is connected to the politicization of issues like migration (Bahadir Ileri 2019; Gattinara, Morales 2016; Hirschauer 2021).

In 2004, when Huysmans's article was published, Latvia, together with the other two Baltic countries – Lithuania and Estonia – and several Central and Southern European countries became members of both the European Union and NATO, which seriously contributed to the increase in its level of security. However, in a global perspective, the last fifteen to twenty years definitely tend to show growing insecurity – political, military, economic, ecological, social, and technological. The Russia's aggression in Ukraine (2014) and the following fullscale war (2022) contributed to the intensive (re)securitization in Baltic region (Kuczyńska-Zonik 2017; Fernandes, Correia 2018; Schulze, Pupcenoks 2025; Valentinavičius 2025). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic showed how quickly the questions of public health, collective protection and individual freedom can become politicized and securitized (Andžāns, Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2021). It also made visible the conflict between discourses of social safety/security and discourses of free choice, while reopening biopolitical questions about bodies, vulnerability, and state power.

Using mainly Latvian examples, this special issue is dedicated to the analysis of the interplay between freedom and security as a conceptual construct behind the regulation, legitimization, and construction of normative frameworks through discourses in different subfields of social life. The relationships between both central concepts – freedom and security – are analyzed in everyday experiences made in different institutions and settings: borders, courts, media systems, cultural conflicts, digital infrastructures, professional work, family life, health care, and education. Thirteen articles represent perspectives from different theoretical, conceptual, ideological, and philosophical positions, and present research work and discussions from different disciplines of the social sciences – philosophy, legal studies, media

and communication, anthropology, gender studies, and technology governance – but altogether they form a coherent volume providing perspectives on freedom and security in Latvia and the Baltic region.

However, the opposition between the two central concepts of this volume is not simplified. On the one hand, the authors of the articles argue that both values are interconnected in a complex relationship, where they can influence each other in positive as well as negative ways. Across the contributions, security is therefore not understood only as protection from danger, but as a condition that depends on autonomy, dignity, justice, trust, and participation. On the other hand, these articles also show how appealing freedom and security are to justify exclusion, control, censorship, hate speech, and attacks on individuals or groups. Such uses of security are identified and critically examined from a wide range of theoretical-methodological perspectives.

If freedom and security are not mutually exclusive but interdependent, if there is no "freedom instead of security" or vice versa, the question can be asked: what kind of security protects freedom, and what kind of security begins to undermine it? From classical philosophy and the constitutional history of Latvia to contemporary human rights and issues related to freedom of expression, authors are searching for models of well-being and refined principles of co-existence without domination, with the ensuring of social guarantees, without surpassing the borders of privacy, but ensuring justice and fighting impunity. Human dignity, professional and private autonomy, individual choice, and artistic expression can therefore be treated as starting points for thinking about security that protects rather than limits freedom. In the context of digital communication, platforms, algorithms, and AI, these values become especially important for resilience.

To do so, the articles included in this selection propose variations of changes to the traditional understanding of security as military protection. Security itself appears as a manifold constructed concept including human rights, informational security, cultural security, digital security, and social and infrastructural aspects of security. Latvia forms a meaningful case for in-depth analysis because several dimensions of insecurity intersect there: a relatively recent history of state-building, collective trauma, geopolitical vulnerability, economic and demographic challenges, uneven infrastructure, dependence on global digital platforms, limited institutional trust, and low investment in education, research, and design. It reveals that it is important to discuss and elaborate on the role of institutions, shortcomings and gaps in their functioning, and their critical role in ensuring secure freedoms, especially in digital environments. But it is equally important to turn public attention to the most vulnerable groups – children, asylum seekers, minorities, artists and journalists

exposed to harassment, censorship, and self-censorship when performing their professional roles, solo mothers, young rural doctors, and communication participants as data subjects.

Special issue: the contents This special issue consists of four parts. The first part gives an insight into philosophical, historical, and normative roots of the contemporary discussion around freedom and security.

The article by Kristaps Zariņš and Anete Būmeistere on "Retrospective on Freedom and Security at the Crossroads of Eras: The Convergence of Aristotle's and Epicurus' Concepts of State, Politics and Happiness" (Zariņš, Būmeistere 2026, this issue) establishes a conceptual ground for the whole selection. While Aristotle (2009) locates his view on security outside the individual, connecting with civic institutions and the system of principles, Epicurus (2012, 2026) underlines the factors, such as freedom from fear and excessive desire. Both see freedom and security as necessary – not opposed – elements.

Būmeistere and Zariņš, in the second article "In Search of the Foundations of Freedom and Security: Latvian Social Democrats on the Eve of the Constitution" (Būmeistere, Zariņš 2026, this issue), further look at the competition of three ideological systems in the discussions on the development of the first Constitution of the Latvian Republic. They concentrate on the proposal of Social Democrats to include social justice elements as preconditions for the legal system based on freedom to ensure security / order.

The following two articles are devoted to the important issues in contemporary legal discussion in Latvia. Ēriks Treļs and Ivans Jānis Mihailovs describe in their article "Hate Speech vs. Freedom of Expression: The Situation in Latvia" (Treļs, Mihailovs 2026, this issue) the institutional failure of Latvian authorities to fight hate-based crimes and protect individual security.

Similarly, Ilze Bērziņa points out in her article "Freedom and/or Security – Human Rights Challenges" (Bērziņa 2026, this issue) that the international courts may interpret Latvian reading of human rights in problematic cases involving security, for example, when Latvia rejects migrants at its borders.

The migration, especially from Belarus, is understood in Latvia as part of the hybrid warfare, and this is in the center of two articles starting the second part of the issue.

For a closer look, involved arguments and framing of the hybrid warfare in Latvian media discourse not only research articles by Anna Elizabete Griķe and Ieva Raubiško ""Weapons" of the "hybrid war": Treatment of irregular migration in the

Latvian discourse of national security" (Griķe, Raubiško 2026, this issue) and by Elīna Graudiņa, Vija Sīle, Mairita Satika and Vents Sīlis "The Representation of Hybrid Warfare in Latvian Public Media (LSM.lv): An Analysis of the Last Decade" (Graudiņa et al. 2026, this issue) but also provide the evidence even if events are seen from different standpoints, building on different discourses.

The theoretical arguments are supported by the interview by Sofija Anna Kozlova with Daniel Sharp, the professor of political philosophy of the University of Vienna whose works on borders, migration and human rights in recent years have been published in journals like *Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* or *Ethics*. This part of the special issue is concluded with the article that looks on relationships between creative expression and securitization of the public space in Latvia by discussing several loud scandals of emerging censorship from the perspective of security "Securitizing Culture: Artistic Freedom and Radical Nationalism in Post-2022 Latvia" (Isaacs et al. 2026, this issue).

The following sections of this special issue focus on freedom and security from the broader socio-technological perspective. The technological development in the media and high tech, followed by rapid polarization and mushrooming of filter and information bubbles, challenges the classical conceptualizations, also extending the list of human rights and social values, by that of data protection, privacy and freedom of expression and accountability. How safe are we using the global giant platforms with complex ownership structures and hidden political agendas? In other words, who stands behind the news?

The value of platformization with the focus on communication rights, values and regulation in online platforms environment is discussed with the globally recognized scholar, José van Dijck, the author of *The Platform Society* (2018) and *The Culture of Connectivity* (2013). The interview aims to address questions about the dynamics of platform development alongside the national and EU regulatory responses to challenges to our privacy, security, and protection of media critical infrastructure.

The related overall challenge for freedom and security in the Age of Platforms, most recently highly impacted by the Artificial Intelligence Era is among the contexts of a study by Kaspars Eihmanis, Vents Sīlis and Mārtiņš Mintaurs, entitled "Freedom, Security, and the Digital Subject: Confluence Approaches to Autonomy in the Age of Acceleration". The authors take a Latvian perspective to investigate the legal challenges and gaps in digital democracy, which includes cultural path-dependencies in civic trust and social activism (Eihmanis et al. 2026, this issue).

In the following paper, Ilva Skulte, Anda Rožukalne and Alnis Stakle take a media freedom perspective to critically address the safety of journalists. In their study,

entitled "Media Freedom in Public Interest: How Defining Journalism to Ensure Safety for Journalists in Latvia is an Issue of National Security", the questions on journalism safety are addressed to journalists, editors, and other media workers providing highly relevant empirical evidence of physical threats, online harassment, psychological stress, and precarious employment (Skulte et al. 2026, this issue).

The media influence and its power are further explained through the lens of a case study by Lāsma Šķestere, focusing on "Freedom under Pressure: How Information Subsidies Shape Media Pluralism in Latvia" (Šķestere 2026, this issue).

Finally, the focus of this special issue travels from a broader perspective on informational autonomy, digital infrastructure, and democracy towards studies orientating freedom and securities and the everyday issues. It begins with an interview with Skaidrīte Lasmane addressing questions about freedom, security, choice, and expression, and offering fertile ground for understanding broader contexts, such as welfare, care, civic and media literacies, and early school systems education.

On the surface, Elza Lāma and Gatis Lāma, in their article "Single, Not Lonely: Solo-Mothers (Re)securing Independence and Reframing Solo-Motherhood in Latvia," offer a mixed-methods approach to explore narratives, stereotypes, and the foundations of single mothers as one of the vulnerable groups in Latvian society (Lāma, Lāma 2026, this issue).

There is also a highly focused case study of life decisions by general practitioners (medical students, residents, and early-career) of the health care system of Latvia, with Anna Žabicka, Inguna Potetinova, Dina Bite, Ieva Puzo, Ieva Griķe and Ilze Grope presenting findings from qualitative semi-structured interviews on the freedom of movement, structural constraints, and personal life projects (Žabicka et al. 2026, this issue).

The scholarly articles conclude with the case study of legal education by Inga Kudeikina and Sandra Kaija, which places the security challenges within the sustainability of education systems in their study "The sustainability of legal education in the modern world: challenges and prospects for development". The systemic overview of values and the quality of legal education calls for greater flexibility and adaptability in legal systems, alongside more experimentation and collaboration in literacy processes (Kudeikina, Kaija 2026, this issue).

We are grateful to all the authors and contributors involved in the creation of this special collection. We hope this multilayered perspective will find its time and place in contributing to the critical importance of freedom and security in the Baltic and beyond.

We wish everyone good reading.

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