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# The voluntary forces' role within the security systems of the Baltic countries: dissimilar but cohesive<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The war in Georgia in 2008 triggered discussions among the Baltic nations with respect to their national security and the need for closer cooperation. Already during the annual Baltic Defence Ministers' meetings in May 2011 and June 2012, the ministers agreed upon a new Baltic Defence Cooperation Framework.<sup>2</sup> As the threat assessment was similar in some respects, security cooperation under development and the war in Ukraine (2014) speeded-up processes such as raising military budgets, mainly in Lithuania and Latvia. Since 2014, the word “deterrence” has become more commonly applied in the political and military narrative along with “resilience” as an “integral part of NATO’s deterrence and defence posture.”<sup>3</sup> The three essential elements

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed in the paper are the Authors' personal stance and do not reflect the official position of the Baltic Defence College and its Framework Nations.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kaljurand *et al.*, *Developments in the Security Environment of the Baltic Sea Region up to 2020*, Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, September 2012, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> “Deterrence and defence”, NATO, 26 April 2021, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_133127.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm) [accessed: 15 November 2021].

of cohesion, capability and communication are implemented among nations to achieve desired long-term effects.<sup>4</sup> These concepts have been linked with investments in territorial defence forces along with other initiatives such as the Baltic Combined Joint Staff Element (B-CJSE),<sup>5</sup> the Headquarters Multinational Division North,<sup>6</sup> the NATO Air Policing mission, enhanced Forward Presence, and NATO Forces Integration Units, to support the regional security framework.

The purpose of the paper is to analyse the territorial defence forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as an integral component of regional security and defence, closely linked with society, national armed forces, and government. The focus is to present respective nations' approaches to building territorial forces and highlight similarities and differences. The assumption is that although the approaches differ in a few domains, all territorial defence forces are well embedded into national defence concepts. Therefore, last decade has brought about better cooperation among territorial defence forces, including cross-boundary operations and coordination, but still more needs to be done. The research is based on publicly available information, government documents, analytical studies of think tanks, and academic research works. The scope of considerations is limited to sources not covered by any confidentiality clauses and it covers the timeframe from the Baltic states' re-independence until 2021. Qualitative research applies analysis, critical synthesis, desk research and comparative studies methods. Quantitative data is utilized concerning Baltic countries voluntary forces as the cases studies of the research. The paper consists of an introduction and four sections discussing respective nations' territorial defence forces.

## Estonia

The Estonian Defence League (EDL) (Est.: *Kaitseliit*) was created as a self-defence organisation in November 1918, disbanded after the Soviet occupation in 1940, and reactivated in 1990. It is an organisation deeply rooted in society and historical traditions, enjoying wide support, and encouraging membership and participation. The Estonian Defence League Act<sup>7</sup> regulates the legal status of the EDL in defending the independence of Estonia and its constitutional order and ensuring the

<sup>4</sup> K. Paulauskas, "On Deterrence", *NATO Review*, 5 August 2016, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2016/08/05/on-deterrence/index.html> [accessed: 15 November 2021].

<sup>5</sup> "Baltics sign joint military command agreement", 19 February 2015, Eng.LSM.lv – Public broadcasting of Latvia, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/baltics-sign-joint-military-command-agreement.a118475/> [accessed: 17 November 2021].

<sup>6</sup> "Headquarters Multinational Division North inaugurated in Latvia", Republic of Estonia, Ministry of Defence, 11 March 2019, <https://kaitseministeerium.ee/en/news/headquarters-multinational-division-north-inaugurated-latvia> [accessed: 14 December 2021].

<sup>7</sup> The Estonian Defence League Act, Riigikogu, Tallinn, passed 28 February 2013, Riigi Teataja, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/525112013006/consolide> [accessed: 14 December 2021].

safety of citizens. Membership is voluntary, but it is a matter of pride and honour to be among the ranks. Becoming a member requires recommendations from two active EDL members and a small financial contribution. The organisation has its collegial bodies to manage and control the personnel, budget, and resources. The EDL Commander reports to the Estonian Chief of Defence, who has authority to command EDL units assigned to the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF) in wartime, and the command structure includes all non-combatant units. The EDL incorporates voluntary associations, such as the Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation, the girl scout organisation Home Daughters, and the scout-type youth organisation Young Eagles. The first delivers medical training, field catering, and basic military training and others are non-combatant entities oriented towards developing patriotic and national spirit to promote later joining the EDL and the EDF. The total number of EDL members is estimated to be 16,000 and with the supporting associations, the League consists of some 26,000 personnel organised in 15 district commands (*malevs*), which are organised in four regional commands contributing to the Estonian wartime structure (25,000 troops) and reserve pool (60,000 troops).<sup>8</sup> Regionalisation is a factor allowing operations in well-known terrain during peace, crisis, and war. The advantage of this is that the natural environment and urban terrain support unconventional operations by trained and properly equipped troops. The estimated EDL budget amounts to 8% of the military budget and funds for personnel, peacetime operations, maintenance, infrastructure, and training have been growing over the past several years. However, major investments (weapon, ammunition, and equipment) are within the EDF budget. The range of tasks for the EDL includes the following: Host Nation Support (HNS), irregular warfare, partisan type operations, sabotage, counter mobility, creation of pro-defence and patriotic attitude of society, crisis management, protection of public order and security of the key infrastructure.<sup>9</sup> An important characteristic of the EDL is the fact that its members are permitted to possess weapons at home, but only after completing training and medical check-ups. Furthermore, membership requires participation in military-type exercises with regular armed forces. The EDL units certify with "snap mobilizations," which are currently at an 85% success rate.<sup>10</sup>

The 2017 *National Security Concept of Estonia* highlighted collective defence, where deterrence and defence factors receive support from civil society within

<sup>8</sup> Estonian Defence League, 2019, <http://www.kaitseliit.ee/en/edl> [accessed: 20 November 2021].

<sup>9</sup> T. Małysa, "Wojska obrony terytorialnej w państwach bałtyckich", *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka*, no. 3, 2017, pp. 225–236.

<sup>10</sup> „WOT: zacieśniamy współpracę z Estonią” [interview with Col. Marek Oliwkowski, Polish territorial defence forces headquarters], 18 July 2018, Polska Zbrojna, <http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/25900?t=WOT-zaciesniamy-wspolprace-z-Estonia-> [accessed: 15 November 2021].

a comprehensive approach to national defence.<sup>11</sup> The *National Defence Development Plan 2017–2026* emphasised comprehensive defence, again mentioning the importance of the EDL.<sup>12</sup> The *National Defence Action Plan 2019–2022*<sup>13</sup> confirmed the EDL's role and a need for patriotic education, promotion of research and development activity, and investment into the national defence industry.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the importance of the EDL, as a wartime actor, has been increased.<sup>15</sup> The total number of EDL is to reach 30,000 members by 2022, who will be trained during extensive exercises program hand-in-hand with the Estonian Defence Forces.<sup>16</sup> Current funding allows “equipping six new Defence League territorial defence companies,” and by 2022, “six light infantry companies will have been added to significantly more mobile four battalions of the territorial defence structure of the Defence League.”<sup>17</sup> Financial resources enhance patriotic education, provide additional recruiting capabilities, and increase the number of instructors at EDL schools for training and education. Such complex decisions are to equalize the potential of the armed forces and the EDL, to extend membership and to limit mobilisation time. In February 2019, the Ministry of Defence approved the 2020–2023 development plan aiming to increase the EDL budget up to 43 million Euro annually and to invest “in the equipment of Kaitseliit-based territorial defence units” by 2023.<sup>18</sup> According to the EDF Commander (2021), the “state’s confidence is in its reservists, the majority of whom have their service weapons at home, with which they will be able to report immediately in case of danger” as it “is important already from the point of view of the formation of our units, but also in the case of doctrinally different possible scenarios.”<sup>19</sup> The new initiative is the organisation of a national defence education programme to increase the

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Defence, *The National Security Concept of Estonia*, Tallinn 2017, p. 3, [https://kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article\\_files/national\\_security\\_concept\\_2017\\_0.pdf](https://kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_security_concept_2017_0.pdf) [accessed: 20 November 2021].

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Estonian Military Defence 2026*, Tallinn, June 2017, [https://kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/sisulehed/eesmargid\\_tegevused/rkak2026-a6-spreads\\_eng-v6.pdf](https://kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/sisulehed/eesmargid_tegevused/rkak2026-a6-spreads_eng-v6.pdf) [accessed: 17 November 2021].

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Defence, *National Defence Action Plan 2019–2022*, updated 22 February 2018, <http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/en/objectives-activities/defence-planning/national-defence-action-plan-2019-2022> [accessed: 29 November 2021].

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Estonian defence budget 2021*, last updated 26 April 2021, <https://kaitseministeerium.ee/en/objectives-activities/defence-budget> [accessed: 20 November 2021].

<sup>15</sup> Estonian Defence League, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> S. Flanagan *et al.*, *Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States through Resilience and Resistance*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Defence, *National Defence Action Plan 2019–2022*, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> A. Vahtla, “Ministry of Defence approves 2020–2023 development plan”, ERR News, 2 February 2019, <https://news.err.ee/906911/ministry-of-defence-approves-2020-2023-development-plan> [accessed: 22 December 2021].

<sup>19</sup> Baltic News Service, “Herem: Estonia, Switzerland complement each other in field of reserve army”, Tallinn, 26 April 2021.

society's readiness to protect Estonia's independence and to promote patriotic spirit.<sup>20</sup> The EDL continues to play a significant role within the Estonian defence concept to defend the country and facilitate the deployment of Allied forces during crisis periods to fight together. In the case of occupation, the EDL has the potential to conduct robust resistance as it was in the past.

## Latvia

The Latvian National Guard (LNG) (Lat.: *Zemessardze*) was created on 23 August 1991 and the legal status was approved on 6 April 1993 by On the National Guard of the Republic of Latvia Act.<sup>21</sup> The LNG reports to the Latvian Chief of Defence as one of the services, supporting integration with regular units and inclusion into the national defence plan. Legally, the LNG "is a component of the National Armed Forces, the objective of which is to involve the citizens of Latvia in the defence of the state territory and society, and which participates in the planning and execution of the state defence tasks in accordance with the tasks determined in the Law."<sup>22</sup> The tasks of the LNG are: training of citizens for service; executing state defence tasks; participating in international operations and rapid reaction forces; delivering HNS; participating in emergency, fire-fighting and rescue work during emergencies; supporting government institutions in crime prevention, ensuring public order and security; supporting information technology security incidents; and finally, supporting the Recruitment and Youth Guard Centre in implementing its educational programme.<sup>23</sup> The LNG has established its military training areas such as exercise facilities and firing ranges in immediate vicinity to units. Moreover, the LNG has its own training centre, which works in close coordination with the Latvian National Armed Forces Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). *The State Defence Concept 2020* considers the LNG to be part of the state defence system with a crucial role in territorial defence enhancing the links between the society and the armed forces. Its major role is to defend Latvia on the basis of autonomous decisions without awaiting special orders from a higher level if a threatening situation is perceived and interpreted by LNG commanders as imminent and requiring action. Therefore, according to Article 25 of the National Security Law, "unit commanders need to be adequately trained and ready to get engaged in state defence based on the State Defence Operational Plan without in-

<sup>20</sup> Baltic News Service, "Estonia: national defense camps will be organised by the Defense League", the Press release of the Estonian Defence Ministry, Tallinn, 26 April 2021.

<sup>21</sup> The Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia, On the National Guard of the Republic of Latvia, 1993, with amendments from 1994, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2002, and 2003, [https://www.vvc.gov.lv/export/sites/default/docs/LRTA/Citi/On\\_the\\_National\\_Guard\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Latvia\\_.doc](https://www.vvc.gov.lv/export/sites/default/docs/LRTA/Citi/On_the_National_Guard_of_the_Republic_of_Latvia_.doc) [accessed: 22 December 2021].

<sup>22</sup> Saeima, The National Guard of the Republic of Latvia Law, Riga, 26 May 2010, section 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, section 3.

structions from the top.”<sup>24</sup> It requires qualified and knowledgeable leaders, so professional soldiers man LNG leadership positions. LNG members may keep weapons at home based on carefully established procedures, personnel self-awareness and individual proficiencies.

The LNG is made up of four regional brigades, composed of infantry battalions, in addition to a cyber-defence unit and a psychological support platoon, which are all subordinate to the LNG Commander. Some brigades possess Combat Service and Combat Service Support battalions and air defence companies to ensure independence and survivability on the battlefield. Operations link with the terrain from which volunteers originate, making a close link between the local population and respective units. Volunteers sign a contract which demands a mandatory minimum of twenty-one days of basic training during the first year, and additional service the following years. One specific characteristic is the formation of quick reaction platoons and companies being ready to react especially in the case of “hybrid” threats e.g., the so-called “little green men,”<sup>25</sup> and to support local administration in the case of social unrest. Each LNG battalion maintains company-size high readiness units with all necessary support elements, such as indirect fire support, anti-armour, and air defence units to respond to any threat including a direct attack. Moreover, there are enhanced rapid response capabilities of the Vidzeme and the Latgale National Guard units, which operate closely with professional land forces units.<sup>26</sup> The Latvian *State Defence Concept 2016* recognised the changes in the security environment and the Russian threat requiring investments in security, enhancing cooperation with partners, and strengthening self-defence capabilities within the collective defence.<sup>27</sup> In the *State Defence Concept 2020*, the LNG was seen as crucial in defending territorial integrity, requiring 10,000 LNG troops by 2024 and 12,000 by 2027.<sup>28</sup>

The *State Defence Concept 2020* highlighted the role of youth education<sup>29</sup> to reinforce societal resilience by integrating state defence subjects into curricula to underpin comprehensive defence systems, enhance patriotic spirit and civic awareness, boost

<sup>24</sup> Saeima, *The State Defence Concept*, Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, Riga, 24 September 2020, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Little green men – the term first appeared during the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation (2014), refers to soldiers in unmarked army uniforms, with Russian military weapons and equipment. The Russian Federation initially denied that these were troops of Russian soldiers, claiming that they were „spontaneous self-defence groups who may have acquired their Russian-looking uniforms from local [military surplus] shops”, but later admitted these were Russian special forces.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> M. Andžāns, V. Veebel, “Deterrence Dilemma in Latvia and Estonia: Finding the Balance between External Military Solidarity and Territorial Defense”, *Journal on Baltic Security*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2017, pp. 29–41.

<sup>28</sup> Saeima, *The State Defence Concept*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17–19.

the society's cohesion, and invest in leadership skills and physical training. An important time will be the academic year of 2024/2025, as state defence lessons will be mandatory in all Latvian secondary schools; and it is estimated that 30,000 young people (aged 15–17) will be taught and some 2000 will join summer camps annually.<sup>30</sup> Some students will be eager to join the LNG and the armed forces, and as a result, overall societal resilience will significantly rise in parallel with the number of citizens receiving training, specific knowledge, and skills. Furthermore, the Latvian Ministry of Defence has created its professional secondary school, or Cadets school, with a focus on leadership qualities, a sense of responsibility, and skills enhancing physical and mental strengths.<sup>31</sup>

## Lithuania

The Lithuanian Voluntary National Defence Service (Lit.: *Savanoriškoji Krašto apsaugos tarnyba*), later the National Defence Volunteer Forces (NDVF) (Lit.: *Krašto apsaugos savanorių pajėgos*), was activated on 17 January 1991. The Republic of Lithuania Law on the Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service formalized the NDVF, including the foundation of leadership and units.<sup>32</sup> Initially independent, the NDVF reported to the Lithuanian Land Forces in 2003. The range of tasks expanded and after joining NATO in 2004, besides national defence duties, the force became accountable for the Host Nation Support, high-level combat readiness, participation in missions abroad, and support for local administration during peace and crisis. Enhancement of the society resilience includes the organisation of seminars and educational campaigns to cultivate patriotic consciousness and to strengthen military-society relations.

The total number of NDVF members is approximately 6000, expanding the current 4500 volunteers (called riflemen) and 500 active-duty officers and non-commissioned officers, who are assigned to major leadership and staff positions. To maintain specific skills, volunteers perform a three-week “boot camp,” or basic military training, to continue later with 20–50 days of military training per year.<sup>33</sup> The whole training period lasts around three months. The NDVF organisation consists of six territorial units, mainly light infantry sections covering the entire territory of Lithuania, which are ready to act in occupied territory and behind enemy lines.<sup>34</sup> Officially, the country

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Seimas, The Republic of Lithuania Law on the Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service, Vilnius, 5 May 1998, as amended in 1999.

<sup>33</sup> The National Defence Volunteer Forces, Karys.lt, 1 June 2020, <https://www.karys.lt/en/military-service/ndvf/402> [accessed: 21 January 2022].

<sup>34</sup> S. Flanagan *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

has passed the law regulating Rules of the Engagement (ROEs) and sanctioning of use of weapons during peacetime; the new law is based on experiences coming from the Ukraine war (2014) and the invasion of the so-called “little green men.” Such a proactive approach to facing non-military threats was important in speeding up the reaction time of military and voluntary forces in cases of provocations, attacks from armed groups, border crossing by armed people, and unconventional threats.<sup>35</sup>

The NDVF plans further investment in pro-defence education, including mandatory classes in schools to strengthen the NDVF link to the society and to increase patriotic spirit. Motivating citizens to defend the state, increasing resilience, including non-violent and armed resistance skills, are of great importance. Therefore, the Mobilisation and Civil Resistance Department under the MOD regularly visit schools and other institutions to provide lectures “combining both traditions and innovations.”<sup>36</sup> This is an integral part of patriotic education including also military unit visits, observing exercises, and joining summer camps. The NDVF cooperates with a paramilitary organisation, the Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union (LRU) (Lit.: *Lietuvos Šaulių Sąjunga*), a significant force of estimated 11,000 volunteers, who, as trained reserves, could join the armed forces or the NDVF and contribute to the national defence or resistance in the case of occupation. The LRU structure includes ten regions with light infantry-type companies cooperating with local communities, based on members coming from different social groups. The NDVF and Riflemen Union are not competing, as both have a niche in national defence. Therefore, both are supplementary organisations marked by good cooperation and relationship. The advantage of the LRU and the NDVF is their readiness to react quickly to crises or military conflict. Societal preparations are multidimensional, and one example is the development of the *Guide to Active Resistance* prepared in 2016 in cooperation with the armed forces and the LRU.<sup>37</sup>

## Similarities and differences in a collective drive towards cohesion

The perception of a threat is similar in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and the main threat towards their independence and territorial integrity is Russia. New situation

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of National Defence, “New Statute on Use of Military Force will allow to immediately use Armed Forces in response to non-conventional threats in peacetime”, 16 December 2014, [http://kam.lt/en/news\\_1098/news\\_archives/news\\_archive\\_2014/news\\_archive\\_2014\\_-\\_12/new\\_statute\\_on\\_use\\_of\\_military\\_force\\_will\\_allow\\_to\\_immediately\\_use\\_armed\\_forces\\_in\\_response\\_to\\_non-conventional\\_threats\\_in\\_peacetime](http://kam.lt/en/news_1098/news_archives/news_archive_2014/news_archive_2014_-_12/new_statute_on_use_of_military_force_will_allow_to_immediately_use_armed_forces_in_response_to_non-conventional_threats_in_peacetime) [accessed: 21 January 2022].

<sup>36</sup> See: Lithuanian Centre of Non-formal Youth Education, <https://www.lmnc.lt/en/> [accessed: 23 December 2021].

<sup>37</sup> *Lithuanian Guerrilla Warfare Manual – Translated to English*, Breach Bang Clear, 2 November 2016, <https://www.breachbangclear.com/lithuanian-guerrilla-warfare-manual-translated-to-english> [accessed: 23 November 2021].



supports familiarisation with one another, information exchange (although there are some national limitations), assistance in crisis, and mutual support during war. Therefore, the three nations continue to intensify cooperation due to common operational space and historical memories of resistance. One important goal of this cooperation is to strengthen against and counter constant pressure, and alone they are too weak to face a complex threat, especially as combined military budgets of the Baltic countries are approximately 2.5 billion Euro. This amount is not enough to develop armed forces able to face the Russian threat. Building up a military domain and resilience within the territorial defence forces becomes the most effective when complemented by a common voice within foreign and security policy, enhanced defence cooperation, and efforts to unify initiatives regarding energy and transport sectors. The uniting factor for the three Baltic states is the strategic partnership with the United States (US). This includes direct relations within the US Army National Guard State Partnership Programme: Estonia – Maryland, Lithuania – Pennsylvania, Latvia – Michigan, to maintain relations and exchange experiences. Following the success of the cooperation between the Baltic states' territorial defence forces, there is a new cooperation between the Lithuanian NDVF and the Polish Territorial Defence Forces (TDF; Pol.: *Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej*), allowing cross-boundary engagement. The TDF's Commander lieutenant general Wiesław Kukuła highlighted that Poland has created its territorial defence forces "based on Lithuanian experiences."<sup>38</sup>

However, there are differences among the three Baltic nations related to the concepts of the TDF including subordination, command and control, structure, capabilities, and some tasks. When considering the ratio between the civilian population and TDF members, the best example comes from Estonia. Nevertheless, all nations are investing in TDF units and there is growing recognition of the need for closer cooperation, especially in a wartime scenario when the aggressor does not respect national borders. In 2016, one of the best examples of regional cooperation occurred when the Estonian Defence League, the Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Force and the Latvian National Guard all signed a cooperation agreement facilitating yearly "staff consultations where chiefs of staffs of the Baltic States' volunteer forces discuss combat training, sports and cultural cooperation for the following year."<sup>39</sup> This agreement included partnership of selected TDF units and decisions about extending exercises, especially cross-border ones. Another example of effective cooperation between

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<sup>38</sup> B. Łapszewicz, "Obchody 28. rocznicy utworzenia Ochotniczych Sił Obrony Kraju", *Kurier Wileński*, 17 January 2019, <https://kurierwilenski.lt/2019/01/17/obchody-28-rocznicy-utworzenia-ochotniczych-sil-obrony-kraju> [accessed: 24 November 2021].

<sup>39</sup> J. Martinaitienė, "Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Force strengthens cooperation with Latvian and Estonian counterparts", Lithuanian Armed Forces, 17 January 2018, <https://kariuomene.lt/en/lithuanian-national-defence-volunteer-force-strengthens-cooperation-with-latvian-and-estonian-counterparts/14479> [accessed: 24 November 2021].

the TDFs is the constant interaction between the EDL Regional Command “South” and the Latvian 2<sup>nd</sup> *Zemessardze* Brigade, enhanced from the combined battalion and brigade level planning and execution of exercises and operations. Territorial defence forces are an important capability of all Baltic countries, based on the assessment of security threats and regarding NATO’s Article 3 obligations.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, role in shaping patriotic spirit among citizens is key in creating resilience and resistance spirit. There is also multinational cross-boundary cooperation, like the 2<sup>nd</sup> Estonian Brigade training together with the Latvian 2<sup>nd</sup> *Zemessardze* Brigade during the annual exercise “Siil [Hedgehog] 2018,”<sup>41</sup> but it is not yet a permanent annual exercise.

Another similarity between the Baltic nations is the necessity to face non-military or paramilitary threats, therefore there are established laws allowing a quick and independent reaction at the lower levels of the chain of command (in all nations, especially Latvia and Lithuania). Additionally, TDFs support mobilization during war, but the challenge is the response time, thus, constant readiness is critical, as the time for reaction in the case of military aggression will be limited. In general, reaction time is not a major challenge for TDFs because members and volunteers already live or work in the operational area. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania use TDFs to build reserve capacity based on constant training regulated by national laws allowing workers to be released for such duties by private businesses. As volunteers come from all groups of society and possess a variety of personal and professional skills, their roles can expand beyond regular training based on initiative, out-of-the-box thinking, and creativity. As TDFs are voluntary, the motivation and readiness to dedicate one’s fate to national defence is very high in the three Baltic countries. To sustain it, they all invest in defence education and forming patriotic spirit. This idea is the most important for Latvia and Estonia, as they aim to significantly raise the number of members.

The Baltic nations have recognized modern changes in the operational environment; therefore, training not only occurs in typical wooded military bases, but also in urbanized areas. These concepts come from recently learned lessons, unconventional warfare principles, the reality of contemporary battlefield, and technological development. Recently, some new capabilities, such as cyber units in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania or psychological support detachments, have emerged. One common characteristic are planned investments to enhance combat power, more intensive exercises with regular armed forces units, and the procurement of more sophisticated weapon systems, especially anti-tank and air defence capabilities to mitigate the Russian advantage presented by armour units and air force. A limitation

<sup>40</sup> “Resilience and Article 3”, NATO, 25 June 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_132722.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm) [accessed: 24 November 2021].

<sup>41</sup> “Exercise Siil 2018 – Allies Defending Estonia”, Joint Forces – News, 18 July 2018, <https://www.joint-forces.com/exercise-news/15960-exercise-siil-2018-allies-defending-estonia> [accessed: 17 February 2022].

is the voluntary character of TDFs, resulting in limited capability and readiness at basic levels,<sup>42</sup> as those are not comparable with professional soldiers. This is an outcome of the specific training and limitations to facing hostile forces' regular armour and mechanized forces and blocking them. Additionally, more advanced systems require more training to operate and use them in joint organisations. Therefore, TDFs employ specific tactics using terrain to their advantage in support of national armed forces. The nations acknowledge their abilities to conduct delaying actions, ambushes, and attacks on combat service and combat service support units. One of the desired goals is to gain time for regular forces mobilization, which is critical because of the limited operational depth of the Baltics. Regarding payments and reimbursements, Latvia and Lithuania pay their volunteers for participation in training or exercises, but Estonia does not. Lithuania and Estonia include defence education in schools' curricula recognizing the value of such an approach. Latvia is comprehensively designing a new concept of mandatory education for young generation acknowledging that such an approach is critical. The demography as a challenge for Baltic countries in further development of their voluntary forces will persist regardless of growing interest among population to join them. Next, especially in the case of Estonia and Latvia, the process of the further integration of Russian-speaking populations into the society and territorial defence forces must be taken seriously, also with respect to mitigating the effects of Russian propaganda on their solidarity with respective nations.

## Conclusion

Although conceptually the models of the three Baltic nations differ, their roles are similar regarding the ability to conduct operations in well-known terrain and in support of local communities. Growing cross-border cooperation among Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian TDFs create a unified operational area, undivided by borders. The support of regular units must be enhanced in planning and executing operations. This is another key aspect which must be properly addressed and constantly maintained. As of ongoing investments, they will play a more significant role in facing "hybrid" challenges first, and although they will not be able to stop powerful conventional aggression or offensive operations quickly, they will be able to disrupt, delay and restrict any advance and movement of the enemy. TDFs will have limited combat potential and psychological preparation due to less training than the national armed forces, however, TDFs are best suited to build and preserve resilience deep within society. This type of force is very important for small nations as part of deterrence to

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<sup>42</sup> P. Szymański, J. Gotkowska, "The Baltic states' Territorial Defence Forces in the face of hybrid threats", *OSW Commentary*, no. 165, 19 March 2015.

discourage aggression against their territory and independence. Looking outside the Baltics, it is about assuring allies and partners of readiness and capabilities to fight for the countries' sovereignty. Therefore, the evolution of TDFs will continue and their role will increase and they will prove to be a credible constituent of the national defence capabilities of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

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## The voluntary forces' role within the security systems of the Baltic countries: dissimilar but cohesive

### Abstract

The three Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, gained independence for the second time in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and are now investing in the whole society's approach to defence, recognizing the threat from Russia, especially after the wars in Georgia (2007/8) and Ukraine (2014, 2022). Voluntary territorial defence forces are an important constituent of their national defence strategies. This paper aims to analyse these forces as an integral component of national security, based on a close connection with society, armed forces, and government. The similarities and differences between the three different volunteer forces will be highlighted and ultimately proven how they are strongly embedded in national and regional security setup, while also enhancing cross-border cooperation.

Key words: territorial defence forces, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, security