

Review article

Security policy and Armed Forces of the Republic of Estonia (2004-2021)

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ABSTRACT

After regaining independence in 1991, Estonia had to define its policy toward neighbours and set out a clear path regarding security issues. It is the smallest country in Europe that shares a border with Russia – a nation with which Estonia shares a common history with a negative outcome, and contemporary relations leave much to be desired. It is a country aware of its limited capabilities, which does not mean that it is passively waiting for the situation to develop. Through its policy, it is constantly striving to shape the security environment, both within its borders and in the Baltic Sea region. Estonia's accession to the European Union and NATO has permanently tied it to Western Europe. It is one of few countries that take a holistic approach to security that engages the entire society and, simultaneously, a place where citizens understand their role and the fact that independence is not given once and for all.

KEYWORDS

security policy, National Security Concept, Estonian Defence Forces, Estonian Defence League



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Introduction

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics collapsed in 1991. Estonia was one of many republics forced to redefine its place in the world and, most importantly, set a goal for its security policy after the end of the Soviet Union. Almost 20 years into the 21st century, it is still striving to strengthen its international position and role in the regional security system. Its political and military spheres have been re-evaluated. This work revolves around a time-based query covering the period from 2004, which is the year of Estonia's accession to the European Union and NATO. The research problem took the form of the following question: how did a country, which until very recently did not function independently on the global political and military scenes but rather constituted an integral part of another nation, widely regarded as a superpower, define its security policy? The theory that Estonia, a small country, has developed a holistic approach to the security system over a period of 17 years was adopted as a theoretical hypothesis. The study employs qualitative methods, including source, comparative

and historical analyses. The Constitution and the National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia of 2004-2017 can be identified as the most relevant sources of analyses.

For the purpose of the article, the national security (state security) shall mean a type of security whose subject is the nation organised into a state [1] while armed forces, army or military shall mean armed soldiers organised into military units of different types and sizes assigned by the state to secure its interests and conduct armed combat [2].

1. Internal affairs

The Republic of Estonia (Eesti Vabariik) is the smallest of the Baltic states and covers an area of 45,339 km². On land, Estonia adjoins the Russian Federation and Latvia, while its northern and western borders are marked by the waters of the Baltic Sea. Its capital city is Tallinn, with almost half a million inhabitants. The country is administratively divided into 15 counties. Apart from the state's capital, the main cities include Tartu, Narva and Pärnu.

According to 2021 data, Estonia is home to 1,330,068 people, including 914,896 Estonians. Among national minorities, the largest groups consist of Russians (322,700), Ukrainians, Belarusians, Finns and other nationalities.

In 1918, taking advantage of the civil war in Russia, Estonians proclaimed independence. However, their freedom was short-lived. In 1940, the country was seized by the USSR. After the outbreak of the Soviet-German War, the Germans took control of the area for three years, incorporating Estonia into the region of Ostland.

In August 1944, Soviet troops once again entered Estonia. It was not until the collapse of the USSR that freedom could be regained. Estonia declared its independence on 20 August 1991.

One of the biggest problems that the young democracy had to face after regaining independence concerned national minorities, particularly the largest one – Russians – which accounted for almost 30% of the country's population and whose rights were, and still are, constantly demanded by Russia. Practically every decision made by the Estonian authorities with regard to national minorities is met with criticism from Moscow. However, in many cases, the responsibility also lies with the Estonian side. An excellent example is the very restrictive Act on Citizenship of 1992¹.

Another issue that has been difficult for successive government coalitions to accept is the principle of border inviolability. Estonian politicians have frequently raised the subject of border revision at international forums and thus questioned the widely accepted European *status quo*. Based on the assumption that Estonia had been under Soviet occupation since 1944, its government believed that the Estonian-Russian border should run according to the provisions of the Treaty of Tartu of 2 February 1920, which concluded this unsuccessful for Russia war. The Treaty granted Estonia an area of 2,334 km², 90% of which at that time was inhabited by Russian-speaking residents. The country was deprived of these territories in 1944 after the Red Army entered its territory [3, p. 53-54].

Russia did not want to address the border issue in bilateral negotiations, justifying its position by stating that they respect the principle of the inviolability of post-war European borders, guaranteed by the CSCE documents. Demands for a revision of borders made by Estonia (even at the UN General Assembly) fail to receive international support. The International Court of

¹ For example, the period of residence in Estonia necessary to apply for Estonian citizenship was extended from 2 to 5 years. In addition, the Act stipulates that an Estonian citizen may not hold dual citizenship.

Justice in The Hague, to which Estonia has appealed, has not addressed the case either, as it can only consider disputed issues at the request of both parties, and the Russian Federation was not interested in doing so.

Taking advantage of the favourable international situation, on 18 June 1994, President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree unilaterally demarcating the Russian-Estonian border, which came into force on the date of Russian recognition of Estonia as an independent state (i.e. 24 August 1991). It virtually overlaps with the border between the Estonian SSR and the Russian Federative SRR. Delimitation of the border was completed in 1994 while fieldwork was concluded in late 1995.

The next agreement on the border was signed in February 2014 by Ministers of Foreign Affairs Urmas Paet and Sergey Lavrov, in which they re-established the course of the border along the Soviet lines. However, the parliaments of both sides have not ratified the agreement. In January 2020, President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas publicly indicated that the Estonian Parliament will accept only such an agreement that establishes a border in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Tartu. The Russians reject this solution [4].

1.1. Economic situation

After gaining independence, Estonia, similarly to the other Baltic states, was almost entirely economically dependent on Russia. The lack of natural resources (except for peat and bituminous shale) and the need to find markets for their products, particularly agricultural produce, forced Estonia to accept that Russia was the main supplier of natural resources for a long time. The Russians, aware of Estonia's difficult situation, frequently exerted economic pressure on this country. Estonia was, and still is, one of the most "unruly" countries with respect to Russia that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is why it is the only state that does not include a most favoured nation clause when trading with Russia.

In 2004, its GDP was USD 12.1 billion while in 2020, it was USD 30.6 billion [5]. According to data from Statistics Estonia, in the first quarter of 2021, the country's gross domestic product increased to EUR 6.9 billion, i.e. by 5.4% year-on-year. Compared to the last quarter of last year, the increase amounted to 4.8%.

Estonia has been a member of the WTO since 1999. It joined the European Union and NATO in 2004. Chronologically, its accession to the NATO structures occurred first. In Tallinn, as in Riga and Vilnius, the greatest threats to state security have always been perceived to lie across the eastern border – in Russia. 29 March 2004 was, to a large extent, regarded as a symbolic date of the end of the policy, the main goal of which was to increase security against the potential threat from across Lake Peipsi [6]. Military security provided by NATO was accompanied by safe and balanced economic development based on cooperation with Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Economic cooperation has taken on a new dimension due to the fact that these countries also belong to the European Union. Swedish and Finnish banks have "pumped" new capital into the Estonian economy by popularising loans. The country has undergone a process of computerisation on a scale unlike any other. Nowadays, over 90% of Estonia's territory has access to broadband Internet [7, p. 53]. The year 2010 can be regarded as the end of the stage of transformation and integration with the western world. In July 2010, the introduction of the common European currency was confirmed to take place on 1 January 2011, and two months earlier, the country became a member of the OECD.

Simultaneously, the Estonian economy was oriented towards cooperation with the Scandinavian countries, mainly Finland, to a much greater extent than that of the other Baltic

states. Finland sent numerous experts to Estonia to help in the country's post-independence reforms. Estonia has become a commercial outlet for Finnish goods.

Since the end of the 20th century, it has focused on developing the IT sector. In 2008-2009, its economy experienced a crisis, which was successfully resolved as early as 2010. Despite the dynamically changing situation in the following years, Estonia managed to become one of the countries experiencing economic growth. Wages have been steadily rising at an annual rate of around 5% since 2011. Estonia is considered one of the most dynamically developing countries among the new members of the EU [8].

1.2. Political system

The 1992 Constitution of Estonia contains a number of features typical of post-Soviet states, in which the change of regime (and also the restoration of independence) did not lead to the emergence of authoritarian tendencies. It is thus based on Western European standards of human rights and follows a parliamentary system.

The document states that: "Estonia is an independent and sovereign democratic republic wherein supreme political authority is vested in the people. The independence and sovereignty of Estonia are timeless and inalienable". Apart from this, the fundamental principles of its political system include the separation of powers, legalism (consisting in exercising state power solely based on the Constitution and laws that are consistent with it), as well as the recognition of universal standards and principles of international law as an inseparable part of the Estonian legal system [9].

The specificity of the country's recent history and the resulting circumstances can be seen in the constitutional provisions that strongly emphasise the sovereignty and independence of the state, as well as issues of citizenship and language.

1.2.1. Main elements of the government system

Legislative power rests with the 101-seat unicameral parliament, traditionally known as the Riigikogu. It is elected for a four-year term through proportional representation. Dissolution of the parliament before the end of its term is a presidential power but can be done only in situations provided for in specific constitutional provisions [9].

Since the accession to the European Union and NATO, the Estonian Parliament has been elected four times (2007, 2011, 2015, 2019). During this period, the liberal Reform Party² has maintained a steady lead. The second place is held by the Centre Party³, third by the conservative-liberal party⁴, which in the last two elections has fallen to fourth place after recognising the superiority of the Social Democratic Party⁵ in 2015 and the Conservative Party⁶ in 2019.

The competence of the parliament consists primarily in lawmaking, but also in electing the president⁷, taking a significant part in appointing the government and (upon the presidential recommendation) Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Chancellor of Justice, State Controller,

² Estonian Reform Party (*Eesti Reformierakond*, ER).

³ Estonian Centre Party (*Eesti Keskerakond*, EK).

⁴ Isamaa (literally translated as "the Fatherland") until 2018 operated under the name Pro Patria Union and Res Publica (*Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit*, IRL).

⁵ Social Democratic Party (*Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond*, SDE).

⁶ Conservative People's Party of Estonia (*Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond*, Ekre).

⁷ From 2001 to now, Estonia has had four presidents, the last two of whom have been non-partisan.

Commander of the Defence Forces and Chairman of the Board of the Bank of Estonia. The parliament may also introduce a state of emergency or martial law in the country (however, a motion of the president is necessary), as well as decide on state loans, the acceptance of other financial obligations by the state and the ratification of certain international agreements, which takes place at the request of the government [9].

The president of the Republic of Estonia can exercise a legislative veto, although the parliament can override this veto by re-enacting a given law. This obliges the president to sign it unless the legislation is brought before the Supreme State Court to challenge its constitutionality.

The Constitution provides for the issuance of presidential decrees with the power of law, although they can be released only in situations of state necessity and if the parliament cannot be assembled. Additional guarantees include the requirement of countersigning decrees by the speaker of parliament and the prime minister, as well as limiting the subject matter of decrees.

The Constitution has not granted the president a strong position. He or she is elected by the Riigikogu. If the parliament lacks the required two-thirds majority, the election is carried out by the electoral college, in which members of the parliament also have a majority. The presidential term of office lasts five years. Re-election is allowed only once while office termination occurs, inter alia, as a result of a final court conviction of the president.

The Constitution generally defines the president as “head of state of Estonia” and “supreme commander of national defence of Estonia”. It does not, however, formulate any further general tasks or areas of responsibility. The more significant presidential powers include the right to dissolve parliament (albeit only in specific situations, most of which involve parliament’s inability to perform its constitutional duties), exercise the legislative initiative and veto, challenge the legislation that has not yet been signed before the Supreme Court, participate in the process of appointing the government members, issue recommendations regarding the appointment of certain supreme state authorities by parliament and nominate judges, as well as certain extraordinary powers (such as the right to issue decrees with the force of law and impose martial law). The character of the presidential position is also influenced by the provision of Art. 86, which defines the government of the Republic of Estonia as the holder of executive power [9].

The government consists of a prime minister and ministers. The prime minister is designated by the president and must then obtain parliamentary confirmation of the mission to form the government. Subsequently, he or she presents the full composition of the government to the president, who appoints its members within three days. The government formed in such a manner does not need to obtain a vote of confidence from parliament.

According to the Constitution, the government resigns in the event of a vote of no-confidence, which requires a parliamentary resolution passed by a majority of MPs. The president may then dissolve the parliament. The government may also link the vote on a particular act to a vote of confidence, in which case, the rejection of the act obliges the government to resign and the president cannot dissolve parliament. The government is also obliged to resign when a new term of office of the Riigikogu begins.

The judicial authority includes the Supreme Court and local courts. Judges are appointed by the president, albeit on the motion of the Supreme Court. The appointment is permanent while the removal of a judge is allowed only by means of a court decision.

The Supreme Court is a court of cassation that performs the functions of a constitutional court. It has jurisdiction to declare laws or other acts invalid if they are “in conflict with the letter and spirit of the Constitution” [9].

The Constitution also provides for the creation of the office of the Chancellor of Justice, as “a public official who scrutinises legislative instruments of the legislative and executive branch of government and of local authorities for conformity with the Constitution and the laws, and who is independent in discharging his or her duties” [9, Art. 139]. The Chancellor is appointed by parliament, upon the recommendation of the president, for a seven-year term, during which he or she can only be removed by a court decision. The Chancellor has a number of specific powers, for example, he or she attends government meetings, appeals to the Supreme Court to examine the constitutionality of laws and other legal acts, as well as has the exclusive right to request that the parliament consent to the criminal prosecution of the president and other holders of the highest state offices.

The Constitution provides for as many as three procedures for its amendment. Furthermore, there must always be quite substantial time intervals between the subsequent readings of a draft. The first procedure requires the relevant draft to be passed by parliament (by a majority vote of all MPs) and submitted to a referendum. This is the only way to amend “the general provisions [...] of the Constitution and [...] the manner in which the Constitution is to be amended”. The second procedure requires the adoption of an act to amend the Constitution by two successive memberships of the Riigikogu. It must receive a majority of votes, but if a three-fifths majority is obtained in the second Riigikogu, the adoption of the constitutional amendment takes place at the first reading. The third procedure may only be used in cases of urgent necessity. In such instances, the decision to apply the third procedure to amend the Constitution must be passed by a fourth-fifths majority of members of parliament currently in office (which is extremely rare), and then decided by a two-thirds majority of MPs [9]. It should be noted that amendments to the Constitution cannot be introduced during a state of martial law or a state of emergency.

2. National security policy

2.1. Assumptions of the security policy

The security policy is based on the constitutional mandate issued by the legislator to protect the democratic operation of Estonia. All possible domestic and foreign policy measures are intended to serve this purpose.

In 2004, another National Security Concept was adopted, which placed a strong emphasis on internal security. The Concept highlighted the importance of individuals, whereas previously, the state organs and the constitutional order had been put in the first place. Furthermore, more attention was paid to energy, maritime, health and cyber security [10].

The 2007 cyber-attack on Estonia and the 2008 Russian-Georgian war raised concerns in Estonia, which led to a shift in the perception of threats. The National Security Concept of 2010 refers primarily to the goals set out in the Security Policy 2008-2015 of 2008 [11], and includes a modern definition of security policy, which attributes an essential role to society. Simultaneous cooperation of state authorities, the private sector and all citizens is expected to result in a high level of security. The document also accentuates international cooperation across the globe. The synergy effect is to be achieved through the broadly-defined accomplishment of security – i.e. combining foreign policy, national security and internal security – while the involvement of the entire society will allow the security policy of the whole state to succeed. It revolves around a holistic approach to security [12, p. 88].

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 led to a change in the public debate regarding security and defence policy in Estonia and other European countries. Russia began to be perceived as a direct threat to sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The discussed scenarios of a potential crisis covered a wide spectrum of threats, including a conventional military attack, unconventional actions (such as information warfare, cyber-attacks, diversion, inspiring minority protests), economic pressure and even a tactical use of nuclear weapons. The defence ministries of the Baltic states do not rule out the threat of armed aggression, yet consider it unlikely. In response to Russian actions, they have intensified efforts to increase their own military capabilities and advocate for the permanent presence of NATO forces on their territories [13].

In 2017, changes in the perception of threats and national security challenges led to the formulation of a new Security Concept that covers all trends and fields relevant to maintaining security and is based on active citizenship and a strong society. The Concept highlights socio-demographic factors, uneven regional development, poorly adapted social groups, growing social division and unification within NATO and the European Union. The need to maintain energy security, infrastructure, electronic communications and transport has been emphasised as well [14].

2.1. International determinants of Estonia's security

Estonia recognises generally accepted international standards, which state that every country has the right to select its own method of establishing security while being obligated to refrain from posing a threat to other countries. Estonia feels obliged to participate in the development of international security through contribution to international peacekeeping missions and the formation of collective defence. The security policy of this country should be seen as a continuation of the development of the international security system.

29 March 2004 marked a turning point in the history of Estonia. On that date, it became a member of NATO to then join the European Union on 1 May 2004. Both events entailed changes in security strategy and international cooperation. Estonia continues to increase its military and economic security, which has strengthened the country's relevance in the region and boosted its development.

According to Tallinn, NATO – both doctrinally and structurally (command and military structure of the Alliance) – should be focused primarily on collective defence. On the other hand, the country perceives its membership in the European Union through the prism of economic security (a common currency and market) and civilisational belonging (the West), although Tallinn also supports closer cooperation within the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy [15, p. 46].

The Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 materialised fears and outlined new negative scenarios, not only for Estonia, but also for other countries neighbouring Russia. The common policy enabled the increase of the NATO Response Force and the deployment of staff cells in the Baltic states, among others, which was decided on at the 2014 NATO summit in Newport. Furthermore, it was declared that the frequency and scale of military exercises and manoeuvres in the Baltic states would increase. The most important goal, however, was to increase the permanent presence of NATO troops in the region. Decisions made during the 2016 summit in Warsaw, at which it was decided that a British-French battalion would be deployed in Estonia, a Canadian battalion in Latvia, a German battalion in Lithuania and an American battalion in Poland, confirmed the direction of NATO's activities on its eastern flank.

In an interview given at the summit in Warsaw, gen. Riho Terras, commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, strongly emphasised that the presence of allied troops constituted a special type of a safety valve and their possible attack by an aggressor would much sooner trigger procedures associated with Art. 5 of the Treaty, which spoke of collective defence in the event of an attack on one of the members of the Alliance [12, p. 104].

2.2. Foreign policy

The turn of the 1980s and 1990s had a profound impact on the foreign policy of Estonia. Traditionally, Estonia had the best relations with Denmark and other Scandinavian countries. However, the regaining of independence significantly influenced the foreign policy of the new (small) state lying between Russia and the Baltic Sea. Factors affecting this foreign policy included the geopolitical situation, the size of the state, its transformation and historical determinants.

For Estonia, the natural course of cooperation involves the Scandinavian countries, with which it is linked not only by a common history but also by cultural and political ties. Scandinavia has proven to be a perfect economic partner, a guide on the road to integration with international organisations and an intermediary in political matters [6].

Tallinn sees Moscow as its greatest threat, which is why the accession to NATO and the EU was one of the most vital steps at the beginning of the 21st century.

It is worth mentioning that today, Estonia is the only place where the European Union does not have an official border – the then president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, withdrew his signature from the 2005 Treaty [6].

After joining NATO and the EU, Estonia developed quickly and efficiently, building an image of a modern, successful and influential country in the region. However, in 2007, mass protests that quickly escalated into riots, most likely inspired by the Russian embassy, broke in connection with the relocation of the Bronze Soldier statue, which commemorated Red Army soldiers, from before the Tallinn's National Library to a military cemetery on the outskirts of the city.

The conflict not only paralysed Tallinn for several days but also caused a definite cooling of relations with Russia. The latter, sensitive to symbolism and history, diverted its goods to Latvian and Lithuanian ports, as well as blocked the Narva border crossing [7]. These actions significantly affected the Estonian economy. The country also fell victim to one of the largest cyber attacks of this century. More than one million infected private computers, controlled by Russians, from 174 countries worldwide were used for this purpose [12, p. 89].

“Since 2007, Tallinn has been trying to play first fiddle with NATO and the EU in the field of cyber security solutions and strategies. At this point, it is worth mentioning the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence operating in Tallinn, which is authorised by NATO and often raised by Estonians to the status of a NATO institution” [6].

Estonia is a member of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Council of Europe. Furthermore, it belongs to a number of international organisations such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Atomic Energy Agency, International Labour Organisation, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Monetary Fund, International Criminal Court and World Trade Organisation. For the first time in history, Estonia is a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and its term spans from 2020 to 2022.

Additionally, Estonia maintains bilateral cooperation with a number of European countries, implementing programmes aimed to enhance defence capabilities. However, it is the United States that has provided the largest financial support for various infrastructure projects over the past 22 years at USD 369.3 million. Figure 1 shows the amount of support provided in consecutive years.

Estonia aims to use US aid to address critical capacity gaps in its long-term development plans.

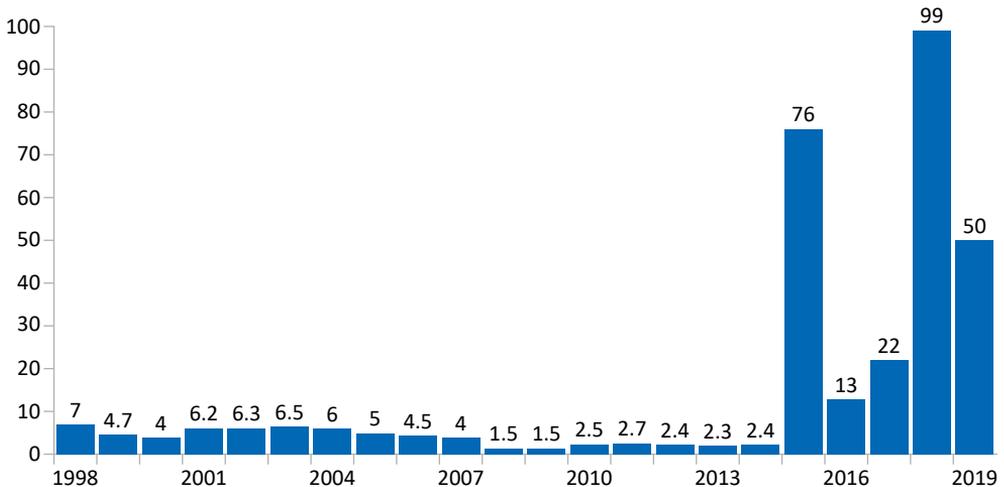


Fig. 1. US military aid to Estonia (USD million)

Source: [16].

3. Estonian Defence Forces

The main duty of the Defence Forces consists in protecting and defending the national territory.

The armed forces are the basic part of the Estonian Defence Forces. Their size is maintained in accordance with principles of the state's capabilities and tasks assigned to the Defence Forces.

The principle of civilian control of the military is implemented through the imposition of responsibility and corresponding constitutional obligations on the president and the government.

The supreme commander of the Defence Forces is the president, who in matters of national defence is advised by the National Defence Council, which is composed of the president of the parliament, prime minister, minister of defence, minister of internal affairs, minister of foreign affairs and chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on National Defence.

According to the Estonian Defence Forces Organisation Act of 2008, tasks of the Defence Forces include military defence of the state, participation in collective self-defence, preparation for military defence of the state and participation in collective self-defence, as well as participation in international military cooperation [17].

In recent years, the coordination competencies of the office of the prime minister have been strengthened (until 2015, the overall approach to security was managed by the Ministry of

Defence). The responsibilities of the National Security and Defence Coordination Unit have been expanded. Apart from supporting the work of the Government Security Committee and coordinating special services, its tasks consisted in organising defence planning, ensuring the government's situational awareness and advising the prime minister in the area of national defence. Currently, the Government Security Committee is composed of the prime minister and the heads of the ministries of foreign affairs, defence, internal affairs, justice and finance, as well as coordination of special services [15, p. 40].

In 2014, legal acts that ensure the functioning of the comprehensive security system were updated and organised. The 2015 National Defence Act replaced the previous legislation regulating peacetime and wartime. This was also the year that the Government Communication Unit was created and assigned the responsibility for strategic communication. The Emergency Act was amended in 2017. The new legislation regulates issues of mobilisation, as well as unifies and accelerates decision-making processes, abolishing the division between peacetime and wartime conditions. It also clarifies the responsibilities of all ministries in the event of a crisis or an armed conflict. The crisis management system is tested during annual exercises involving the government. The adoption of the Civil Protection Concept in 2018 was also significant.

The military defence of Estonia constitutes the responsibility of the Estonian Defence Forces (which function as reserve forces, which means that the main part of the country's defence forces consists of units in reserve) and the Estonian Defence League (which executes territorial defence duties). Both formations report to the minister of defence.

More than 4,000 individuals are on permanent standby, which in turn falls in line with the Defence Force's readiness for rapid response (approx. 29,000 people in total). Another 4,000 comprise the supplementary reserve. Furthermore, over 30,000 reservists have been trained in the Estonian Defence Forces. In total, the Estonian Defence Forces consist of about 230,000 people listed in the mobilisation register [18].

In contrast, the Estonian Defence League has 16,000 members. The Estonian Defence League and related institutions: Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation (Women's Home Defence) and youth organisations for boys (Young Eagles) and girls (Home Daughters) consist of 26,000 volunteers [20]. Figure 2 shows the number of citizens that belong to these organisations.

3.1. Estonian Defence Forces

The Defence Forces operate on the principles of a reserve army, which means that individuals who have received military training are part of the reserve. Therefore, the training of recruits in the reserve has a decisive influence on the combat readiness of the Defence Forces. Quick and efficient mobilisation of reservists is a key element of effectiveness.

Military service is based on compulsory conscription. The service cannot last more than 12 months. Currently, it ranges from 8 to 11 months, depending on the type of tasks performed. After its completion, the reservists undergo exercises at least once every five years, but not more often than once every three years. According to the Constitution, it is possible to complete alternative service, but this solution is not very popular among people of the conscription age. Since 2013, women can also apply to join military service. The latest opinion poll published in the first quarter of 2021 indicates that 90.2% of Estonian residents believed that young people must complete conscription service [21]. Figure 3 depicts the steady increase in the number of soldiers between 1998 and 2019.

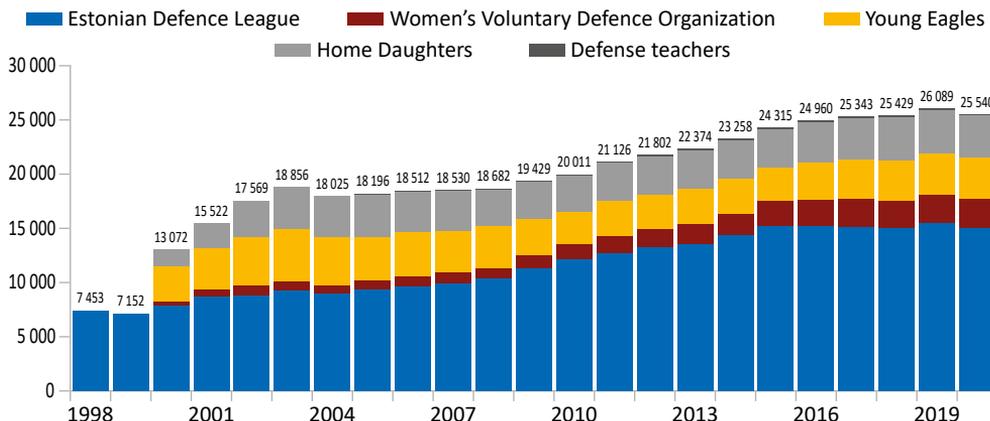


Fig. 2. Number of citizens affiliated with pro-defence organisations
 Source: [19].

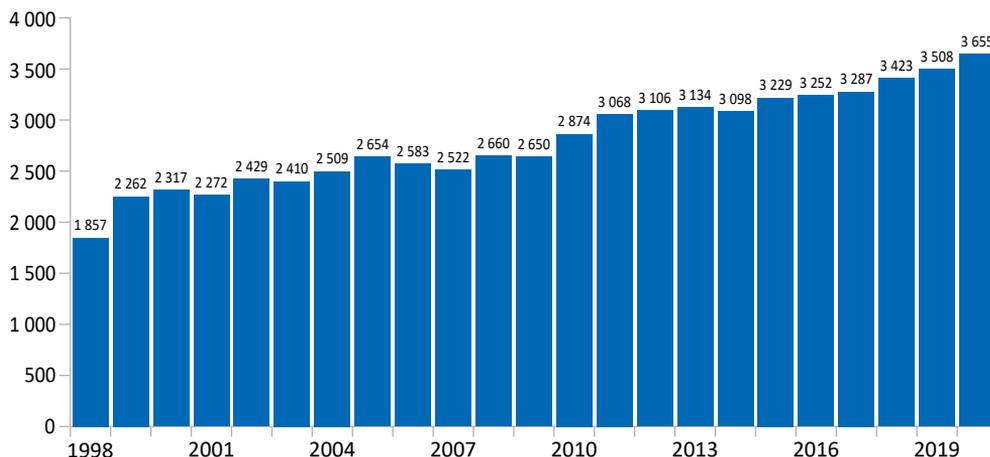


Fig. 3. Number of active soldiers (at the end of the year)
 Source: [22].

Armed forces are used to defend the state both externally and internally. The Estonian Defence Forces Organisation Act defines external defence as:

- military defence of the state,
- preparation for the military defence of the state,
- participation in international military cooperation.

There are three states of readiness: time of peace, time of crisis and time of war.

During peacetime, the Defence Forces maintain combat readiness, monitor and control the airspace (the Estonian Air Force is assisted by NATO troops), train conscripts, develop reserve units and participate in international missions of NATO, the EU and the UN.

For the army, a time of crisis involves an increased level of combat readiness. During such a period, the military is partially or fully mobilised and prepares for war. The reception of allied troops on Estonian territory takes place as well.

Wartime entails the defence of the territorial integrity of the country. During this period, the Defence Forces coordinate and assist allied troops in relocating to Estonian territory and cooperate with them to maintain control of air, land and sea space.

In terms of the internal dimension, the state defence consists primarily in supporting other uniformed services and civilian bodies during, for example, the elimination of the effects of natural disasters and catastrophes. The Defence Forces are also involved in ensuring security and providing assistance in the event of emergencies. These days, it also means anti-terrorist and counter-terrorist activities.

The Estonian Defence Forces are divided into three types of troops: Land Forces, Navy and Air Force.

The Land Forces currently consist of two infantry brigades and the Internal Security Service (responsible for territorial defence and support of civilian structures). The role of the Navy is to defend territorial waters, port areas and the coastline. Estonia is the smallest NATO country with the Air Force, whose tasks include the monitoring and protection of airspace, as well as the operation of air bases. Cooperation with NATO states as part of the Air Policing mission and integration with the NATINADS system is also critical [23, p. 206].

The military service is based on the compulsory conscription of citizens aged between 18 and 27. Their training takes place in special centres, where conscripts are qualified up to and including the battalion level. This is also where reservists are trained.

Candidates for reserve non-commissioned officers and officers are selected from recruits, based on their leadership qualities, in the first stage of training.

3.2. Estonian Defence League

The Defence League is Estonia's second military organisation after the Defence Forces. It is a voluntary association with traditions dating back to 1918. The League operates under military regulations and its members are trained and armed. It is led by a commander, who is a soldier in active service and reports directly to the Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces. The organisational structure of the Defence League consists of the Headquarters of the Defence League, 15 territorial defence regions, the Cyber Defence Unit, the Defence League School and related organisations (listed above). It is an apolitical organisation, which is explicitly stated in Art. 6 of the Estonian Defence League Act: "[a]ll political activities of political parties and other political associations are prohibited in the Defence League" [24].

Its main goal is to strengthen the free will and initiatives of the public to defend Estonia and its Constitution. Its main tasks include:

- promotion of patriotism,
- preparation of military defence of the state (military and educational training),
- ensuring the security of citizens,
- protection of strategic facilities.

In times of war, activities of the Defence League essentially consist of territorial defence functions, which are in line with the assumptions of total defence – an important element of the National Security Concept of Estonia. Territorial defence is a war-time-only structure consisting of four areas [23, p. 194].

3.3. Expenditure on defence

In accordance with the programme aiming to adapt the Defence Forces to NATO standards, the expenditure on defence grew from 0.7% of the GDP in 1992 to 1.8% of the GDP in 2001 to reach the assumed 2.0% in 2002. Now, it is 2.3% of the GDP in the budget of a country inhabited by 1.3 million people. Figure 4 shows the amount of defence expenditure in the Baltic states over a period of more than twenty years.

In an interview with Defence24.pl, Estonian Minister of Defence Kalle Laanet said: “The government has allocated 2.31% of the GDP for the next year’s defence expenditure. This means that next year, we will have more than EUR 100 million of additional money. Our total defence budget will come to roughly EUR 750 million. In 2021, it is EUR 645 million. This is the biggest and fastest increase in the whole period of our independence” [25].

The Centre for Defence Investment purchased Korean self-propelled weapons as part of the largest tender for the supply of weapons systems to date. The first delivery arrived last year, with 18 more systems due to be supplied in 2021 and 2022 [26].

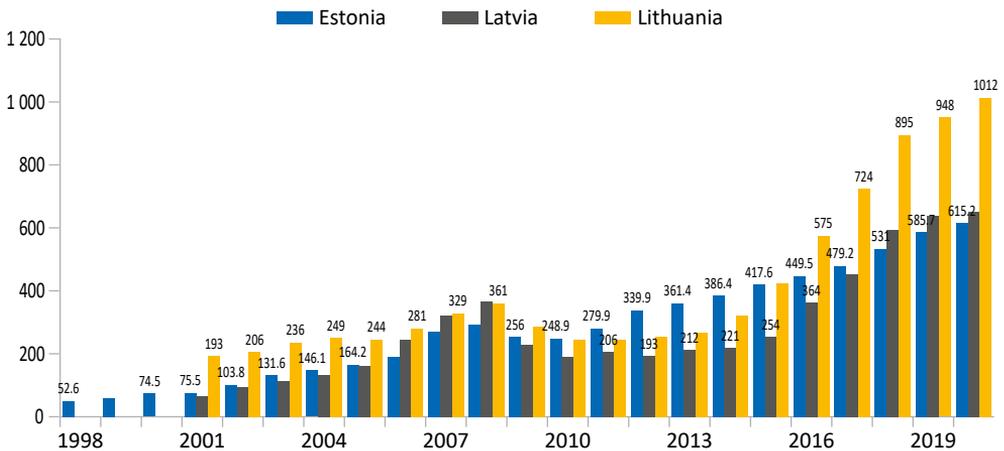


Fig. 4. Expenditure on defence in the Baltic states (EUR million)

Source: [27].

Conclusions

The analysis of documents, including the successive National Security Concepts and the security system of the Republic of Estonia, conducted as part of this study shows that the last twenty years have seen a fundamental change in the country’s external security situation. Through its invitation to NATO and the European Union, Estonia has become part of a formal group of democratic and stable countries with great prospects for development.

The discussed country plays a significantly greater role in the region than its territorial, economic or demographic potential would suggest. Estonian leaders believe that the security of the Euro-Atlantic area has become indivisible for all countries in this part of the world in the face of global challenges, political and economic interdependence, as well as technological developments.

Estonian politicians perceive NATO membership as the only possible way of guaranteeing the long-term security of the country. This conviction is based on a realistic approach to the combat capabilities of their own armed forces. Apart from the acquisition of security guarantees, the affiliation to NATO also involves an obligation to perform tasks arising from its status.

The National Defence Development Plan for 2017-2026 assumes that by 2026, the First Infantry Brigade will be developed into a mechanised infantry brigade while the Second Infantry Brigade will become a combat-capable motorised light infantry brigade. The country's defence force will also increase by more than 10 companies of light infantry, and the modernisation of the Defence League's infrastructure will continue to ensure a high level of training for volunteers [28].

A non-military approach to defence has increased in importance in Estonia. The participation of the whole society in defence and counter-attack ensures its high degree of readiness to defend its country. The state defence system is constantly being developed and in the case of an attack, Estonia will defend its entire territory.

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Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Polityka bezpieczeństwa i Siły Zbrojne Republiki Estonii (w okresie 2001-2020)

STRESZCZENIE

Estonia jest najmniejszym krajem, który sąsiaduje z Rosją. Wspólna historia nie jest tym, co łączy te dwa kraje, a i w ciągu ostatnich 20 lat nie było się bez zgrzytów. Obecna sytuacja również pozostawia dużo do życzenia, tym bardziej należy się przyjrzeć, w jaki sposób ewaluowało w Estonii podejście do bezpieczeństwa. Jest to kraj zdający sobie sprawę ze swych możliwości, co wcale nie oznacza, że biernie oczekiwał na rozwój sytuacji. Estonia swoją polityką po ponownym odzyskaniu niepodległości w 1991 r. dąży do kształtowania środowiska bezpieczeństwa nie tylko w wymiarze wewnętrznym, ale również w regionie.

Estonia jest jednym z niewielu krajów podchodzącym do zagadnienia bezpieczeństwa całościowo, angażując w nie całe społeczeństwo, a jednocześnie krajem, w którym obywatele rozumieją swoją rolę i że niepodległość nie jest dana raz na zawsze.

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