

The Baltic states' Territorial Defence Forces in the face of hybrid threats

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Russia's annexation of Crimea and its aggression in eastern Ukraine have triggered a debate about the main directions of defence policy in the Nordic and Baltic region. In the Baltic states, but also in the Nordic countries and Poland, much attention is being paid to questions of Territorial Defence Forces (TDF). TDF are viewed as one of the elements in the national defence systems' response during the early stages of a hybrid conflict. The Baltic states have decided to adapt their Territorial Defence Forces to new threats by making a number of changes to their functioning, depending on the local conditions in each case. Given the growing uncertainty in the region, they have opted not to undertake any in-depth reforms of TDF at this stage, as that could entail a temporary disorganisation in the armed forces. In the coming years Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will invest in increasing the size and combat readiness of their Territorial Defence Forces, providing them with better training and equipment, and creating a system of incentives to encourage more people to serve in volunteer formations.

The Baltic states' Territorial Defence Forces and hybrid conflict

The threat of aggression involving methods similar to those employed in Ukraine is part of the pressure that Russia has been exerting on the post-Soviet area. The concept of so-called 'hybrid conflict' is a combination of conventional warfare using state-of-the-art technology (e.g. precision strikes against critical infrastructures, special forces operations) and indirect/non-military actions (no declaration of war, the use of armed civilians, avoiding clashes with the opponent's regular armed forces, information warfare).¹ Russia might use the presence of large Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic

states as a pretext to interfere with their internal affairs, which increases the possibility of hybrid conflict in Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. Russia could initiate such a conflict by instigating separatism, supporting protests staged by sections of the Russian-speaking community (e.g. over the status of the Russian language), sending groups of armed individuals wearing unmarked uniforms across the border, organising acts of sabotage against critical infrastructures, staging provocations with an ethnic or cultural background, undertaking actions aimed at disrupting the operation of public administration (e.g. cyber-attacks on government servers) and conducting disinformation campaigns. It is increasingly likely that Territorial Defence Forces could serve as an element in preventing hybrid conflicts. The Swedish model is a classic example of how TDF function. In Sweden the TDF are part of the armed forces, and are organised into units corresponding to the country's ad-

¹ Jānis Bērziņš, 'Russia's new generation warfare in Ukraine: implications for Latvian defence policy', Policy Paper № 02, National Defence Academy of Latvia, Centre for Security and Strategic Research, April 2014, <http://www.naa.mil.lv/~media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/PP%2002-2014.ashx>

ministrative divisions. In peacetime the competences of the Swedish TDF include participating in search and rescue missions, crisis response, border monitoring, guarding transport routes, protecting facilities against sabotage or attack, and carrying out reconnaissance missions. Its tasks in wartime include locating targets and providing targeting information for the artillery, as well as defending critical infrastructures (military bases, airfields, ammunition depots). TDF members are recruited from local communities, which means that they have very good knowledge of the area which they are responsible for. While TDF have little chance of prevailing over the enemy's regular troops or special forces, they are potentially able to neutralise groups of armed civilians, control riots, strengthen the security of critical infrastructures, or use their knowledge of the terrain to support asymmetric actions (guerilla warfare and sabotage), should the state lose control of parts of its territory. However, TDF are only part of the response to hybrid threats, which require a reaction of the entire national defence system.

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Even though the Baltic states have comparable military potentials and similar geopolitical situation, their volunteer formations differ substantially in terms of how they are organised. Estonia has retained the Finnish defence model (the principle of total defence, armed forces based on conscription, but with a professional component), and maintains a classic Territorial Defence Forces organised into units corresponding to the country's administrative divisions. Estonia's *Kaitseliit* (Estonian De-

fence League, with around 14,800 members²) is a land force formation whose tasks include anti-tank warfare and traditional TDF functions.³ In Latvia and Lithuania, the shape of TDF has been determined by the reforms linked to the NATO accession, which prioritised expeditionary capabilities at the expense of the capacity to defend state's territory. In these two countries, both of which have abolished conscription and introduced professional armed forces model (in 2006 in Latvia, and 2008 in Lithuania), TDF perform some of the tasks of reserve forces and traditional voluntary formations. In Latvia and Lithuania, the TDF are made up of land formations organised into territorial units, which serve as a reserve base for the professional armed forces: train the reservists and man the units in the other branches of the armed forces (see Attachment).⁴ Latvia's *Zemessardze* (Latvian National Guard, numbering around 8000 members) performs anti-tank and anti-aircraft tasks, duties related to countering weapons of mass destruction, and conducts engineering works. In addition to traditional TDF tasks, it may take part in international operations and participate in rapid reaction forces.⁵ Lithuania's *KASP* (National Defence Volunteer Forces, around 4500 members) perform tasks related to anti-tank and urban warfare, and may also take part in international operations.⁶ Lithuania also

² The total number of members including the women's organisation (*Naiskodukaitse*) and the youth organisations for girls and boys (*Noored Kotkad* and *Kodutütre*) is around 23,600.

³ The Estonian Defence League Act, 28 February 2013, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/525112013006/consolide>

⁴ *Latvijas Republikas Zemessardzes likums*, 6 May 2010, <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=210634&from=off>; Ministry of National Defence (Lithuania), National Defence Volunteer Forces: tasks and functions, http://kariuomene.kam.lt/en/structure_1469/national_defence_volunteer_forces_1357/ndvf_tasks.html

⁵ Ministry of Defence (Latvia), The State Defence Concept, 20 April 2012, http://www.mod.gov.lv/~media/AM/Par_aizsardzibas_nozari/Plani,%20konceptijas/2012_va_EN.ashx

⁶ Ministry of National Defence (Lithuania), The Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania, 22 November 2012, http://www.kam.lt/en/defence_policy_1053/important_documents/strategical_documents.html

has the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, a paramilitary organisation operating under the auspices of the Defence Ministry; it has around 8000 members who will be incorporated into reserve units in wartime. For many young people, involvement in the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union is a way to prepare themselves to join the KASP later on.

Debates on Territorial Defence Forces in the context of the conflict in Ukraine

The conflict in Ukraine has triggered discussions about the reform and modernisation of Territorial Defence Forces in all the Baltic states. In Estonia, there is broad consensus that the country should keep its conscription system and not change the nature of the *Kaitseliit* as a traditional volunteer formation. Estonia has not amended its original *Plans for the development of national defence to 2022*, which provide for increasing the firepower, rapid response capabilities and training level of TDF. The priorities are: (1) to provide the volunteer formations with equipment similar to that of the regular forces, and further develop the *Kaitseliit's* anti-tank potential; (2) develop infrastructures such as shooting ranges and headquarters; (3) increase the organisation's size to 30,000 members by 2022. Battalion-size units will be replaced by more mobile companies, to be recruited from local communities.⁷ After the conflict in Ukraine broke out, Estonia decided to symbolically strengthen the *Kaitseliit*; in March 2014 the Ministry of Defence allocated €1 million to the renovation of the formation's building in Narva, a town with a Russian-speaking majority. The *Kaitseliit* staff would also like to increase the proportion of the organisation's members who are authorised to keep person-

al weapons and ammunition at home (to 75% in order to shorten the TDFs' reaction time).⁸ In the pre-election period, none of the major parties have come up with any proposals for thorough reforms of the volunteer formations. The changes that have been proposed concern, for instance, the creation of a coastal guard as part of the TDF, proposed by Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas's Reform Party which won the elections on 1 March 2015.⁹

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In Latvia, the reform and modernisation of the *Zemessardze* is one of the Defence Ministry's priorities. That is because in previous years the organisation has been underfinanced, and Latvia has plans to expand its reserve force and involve the public in building up the country's defence potential to a greater extent. The debates on Territorial Defence Forces in Latvia mainly concern purchases of new arms and military equipment, extending the duration and scope of exercises, increasing the voluntary formations' size and combat readiness, decentralising arms storage, and making service in the *Zemessardze* more attractive to citizens and employers.¹⁰ In 2014 the Defence Ministry provisionally al-

⁷ Ministry of Defence (Estonia), *Estonian Long Term Defence Development Plan 2009-2018*, 22 January 2009, http://www.kmin.ee/files/kmin/img/files/SKAK_2010_eng.pdf
Ministry of Defence (Estonia), *National Defence Development Plan 2013-2022*, 24 January 2013, http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/files/kmin/nodes/13373_NATIONAL_DEFENCE_DEVELOPMENT_PLAN_2013.pdf

⁸ 'Home guard wants more servicemen to store weapons at home', ERR, 4 February 2015, <http://news.err.ee/v/politics/a1f43a30-6bb0-4c76-9804-a1bf4f0c77ff>

⁹ Olivier Kund, 'National defence better off without resounding election promises' (interview with general Riho Terras, commander of the Armed Forces of Estonia), *Postimees*, 9 January 2015, <http://news.postimees.ee/3050895/national-defence-better-off-without-resounding-election-promises>

¹⁰ Imants Viksne, 'Neapmācīts karavīrs ir lielākais risks' (interview with General Leonīds Kalniņš, commander of TDF in Latvia), *NRA*, 9 December 2014, <http://nra.lv/latvija/130431-leonids-kalnins-neapmacits-karavirs-ir-lielakais-risks.htm>

located extra funding to finance the *Zemesardze's* exercises and ammunition.¹¹ As a result, more members could be trained and the duration of exercises was extended from 8 to 10 days per year.¹² In 2015, €7.7 million has been allocated to the development of TDF and extension of the reserve system, which is €6.3 million more than in the previous year (in 2016 Latvia is planning to spend €6.6 million on TDF).¹³ By 2018, eighteen *Zemessardze* units with higher combat readiness and increased rapid response capabilities are to be established in Latvia. The TDF rapid reaction units will be better equipped and trained, thanks to devoting at least 20 days per year to training. The structural changes are expected to entail an increase in the number of *Zemessardze* members to 12,000 by 2020. In addition to those initiatives, arms and military equipment have been purchased from the reserves of the Norwegian army for €4 million (in October 2014). The TDF will get 800 Carl Gustav anti-tank recoilless rifles, 50 Scania trucks and 50 Mercedes-Benz all-terrain vehicles.¹⁴

In **Lithuania**, the annexation of Crimea has had less impact on the country's debates about the future of Territorial Defence Forces in the context of a possible hybrid war than it has in Latvia or Estonia. That is because Russian-speakers account for only around 6% of Lithuania's population (compared to around 27% in Latvia and around 25% in Estonia), which makes large-scale Russian-instigated protests less

likely to occur, although they cannot be ruled out completely. In Lithuania it is believed that a more likely scenario of a conflict with Russia would involve a conventional attack, e.g. an attempt at creating a land corridor to connect the highly militarised Kaliningrad oblast with the territory of Belarus.¹⁵

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Moreover, changes in the *KASP* will depend on the plans of investments in the development of Lithuania's land forces, with which its TDF are integrated (the main priority is to modernise the Iron Wolf motorised infantry brigade). Lithuania's response to the rising uncertainty in the region has consisted in forming a rapid reaction force (on the basis of the land troops), in which TDF members serve alongside professional soldiers. The question of the functioning of TDF in Lithuania has become part of a broader debate about vacant posts in many units (so-called 'dead souls'), imperfect reserve training systems and efforts to simplify defence command procedures.¹⁶ In 2015 Lithuania is planning to extend the duration of *KASP* exercises from 20 to 30 days per year and increase the number of soldiers called on to undergo reserve officers' training. In December 2014 the Lithuanian parliament amended the statute on the use of military force.

¹¹ €780,250, including €100,000 for the youth organisation *Jaunsardze*.

¹² Ministry of Defence (Latvia), 'Vējonis: Katrs apmācīts zemessargs un jaunsargs – neatsverams ieguldījums Latvijas aizsardzībā', 8 April 2014, http://www.mod.gov.lv/Aktualitates/Preses_pazinojumi/2014/04/08-02.aspx

¹³ Ministry of Finance (Latvia), Central Government Consolidated Budget in Brief 2014-2016, http://www.fm.gov.lv/files/valstsbudzets/Consolidated%20State%20Budget%20in%20Brief%202014_26022014.pdf

¹⁴ '18 rapid response units to be created in National Guard', SARGS, 30 July 2014, http://www.sargs.lv/lv/Zinas/Military_News/2014/07/30-01.aspx#lastcomment; 'Latvia to buy anti-tank weapons, armored vehicles from Norway', SARGS, 12 November 2014, http://www.sargs.lv/Zinas/Military_News/2014/11/12-02.aspx#lastcomment

¹⁵ Эгле Самошкайте, 'У Литвы есть проблема, очень важная для России', DELFI, 17 February 2015, <http://ru.delfi.lt/news/live/u-litvy-est-problema-ochen-vazhnaya-dlya-rossii.d?id=67188786>

¹⁶ Edmundas Jakilaitis, 'What would Lithuanian army need in case of military aggression?' (interview with general Vytautas Žukas, the commander of the Armed Forces of Lithuania, and the Defence Minister Juozas Olekas), DELFI, 28 November 2014, <http://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/defence/what-would-lithuanian-army-need-in-case-of-military-aggression.d?id=66525802>

The changes that have been introduced authorise the use of weapons by the armed forces (including the *KASP*) in four cases, including defence of the state's territory in the event of threats other than armed aggression.¹⁷ Moreover, some politicians have proposed the re-introduction of military training classes in schools, and for self-defence guard made up of local community members to be created.¹⁸

Prospects for the development of Territorial Defence Forces in the Baltic states

Among the Baltic states, Latvia is planning to introduce the most far-reaching changes to the functioning of its Territorial Defence Forces to 2020–2022, while the plans for the modernisation of volunteer formations in Estonia and Lithuania will largely be about continuation of current practices. None of the Baltic states are aiming at a comprehensive reform of their TDF structures because such radical changes could lead to disorganisation in the short term, thus undermining their defence capabilities. Moreover, the fact that the units in question are volunteer formations limits the scope for expanding their combat potential, which cannot be built up above a certain ceiling in terms of, for instance, the level of training in operating hi-tech military equipment. The Baltic states

will therefore focus on attaining compatibility between units, increasing their level of readiness, exercises with regular troops (to improve interoperability) and implementing legislative changes to create incentives to encourage more people to serve in TDF. In Estonia, staffing and budget limitations will put brakes on the government's ability to deliver on its election promises concerning the modernisation of the *Kaitseliit*, as those postulates are not part of the country's *Plans for the development of national defence* to 2022. Estonia's defence expenditures will vary around 2.05% of the GDP, which means that a considerable new spending hike is unlikely. The defence budgets of Latvia

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and Lithuania are set to be gradually increased to 2% of the GDP to 2020, which will probably offer the government more freedom to set the level of spending on TDF and make the plans for the modernisation of the *Zemessardze* and the *KASP* more likely to materialise. In the coming years, both states will probably look for a systemic solution to the problem of insufficient numbers of trained reservists (as the TDF are in charge of training them). Moreover, the tasks related to the participation of the *Zemessardze* and the *KASP* in international operations will probably be limited, and the traditional TDF functions expanded.

The demographic crisis will remain the main factor affecting the Baltic states' ability to develop their Territorial Defence Forces, as it will hinder their efforts to increase membership and expand reserves. Latvia and Lithuania are considering reinstating conscription, should they fail to fill the vacant posts in the armed forces in other ways. Latvia has announced mandatory

¹⁷ 'Lithuania to spend over €17 million on weaponry for Land Force', DELFI, 3 July 2014, <http://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/defence/lithuania-to-spend-over-eur-17-million-on-weaponry-for-land-force.d?id=65205119#ixzz3Q8Vp1Eap>; Ministry of National Defence (Lithuania), '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://www.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

¹⁸ 'Lithuanian MP suggests returning military training to school curriculum', DELFI, 2 September 2014, <http://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/defence/lithuanian-mp-suggests-returning-military-training-to-school-curriculum.d?id=65728784#ixzz3Q8eINza6>; Andrius Kubilius, 'Main challenges of hybrid war – army reserve and local self-defence guard', DELFI, 12 November 2014, <http://en.delfi.lt/opinion/opinion-main-challenges-of-hybrid-war-army-reserve-and-local-self-defence-guard.d?id=66375066#ixzz3Q8dJ1zCT>

training for reservists this autumn (with around 2500 soldiers), and the Lithuanian parliament adopted legislation reinstating conscription for a period of five years (19 March 2015).¹⁹ While public interest in serving in TDF or paramilitary organisations has increased noticeably in all the Baltic states in the wake of the Russian annexation of Crimea, it will be a major challenge to transform such spontaneous reaction into a trend.²⁰ Investing in youth organisations

affiliated with the TDF, tasked with educating young people in the spirit of pro-state values, may help to consolidate the public's commitment to strengthening the defence capabilities of the Baltic states, without which the volunteer formations will not be able to function properly. The same applies to including the Russian-speaking populations in TDF activities on a larger scale. This is why in the coming years the Baltic states will face the important task of accelerating the process of their minorities' integration with the society and countering Russian propaganda, which represents the efforts to modernise TDF as a militarist policy.

¹⁹ 'Rezerves karavīru mācības Latvijā varētu notikt jau gada beigās; iesaucamo skaitu vēl precīzē, SARGS, 2 March 2015, <http://www.sargs.lv/lv/Zinas/Latvija/2015/03/02-01.aspx#lastcomment>; 'Defence Ministry submits draft law on conscription to Lithuanian government', DELFI, 3 March 2015, <http://en.delfi.lt/lithuania/defence/defence-ministry-submits-draft-law-on-conscription-to-lithuanian-government.d?id=67331554>

²⁰ Imants Vīksne, 'Neapmācīts karavīrs ir lielākais risks' (see footnote 10); 'Resolve of Estonians Always High', Says Head of Defence League, ERR, 26 September 2014, <http://news.err.ee/v/society/0cf2524d-ccd9-4832-99c8-f030e5cf418a>

APPENDIX

Territorial Defence Forces in the Baltic states*

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
1. Military spending (2013)	2% of GDP (US\$479 million)	0.9% of GDP (US\$291 million)	0.8% of GDP (US\$354 million)
2. Armed forces	conscription, with some elements of professionalization number of drafted soldiers: 2500 number of professional soldiers: 3250	professional size of armed forces: 5310 soldiers	professional size of armed forces: 9100 soldiers
3. Branches of the armed forces**	Land Forces (5300 soldiers) Air Force (250 soldiers) Navy (200 soldiers) Territorial Defence Forces (land forces, 14,800 members)	Land Forces (3850 soldiers) Air Force (310 soldiers) Navy (550 soldiers) Special Forces (n.d.) Territorial Defence Forces (land forces, 8000 members including 600 permanent professional personnel)	Land Forces (3500 soldiers) Territorial Defence Forces are part of Land Forces, 4500 members including 700 permanent professional personnel Air Force (1000 soldiers) Navy (600 soldiers) Special Forces (n.d.)
4. Number of Territorial Defence Districts	15 (5 in wartime)	3	6
5. Tasks of Territorial Defence Forces in peacetime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defence education for the public, promotion of pro-state attitudes - organising exercises for members, participation in domestic and international military drills, - crisis response, rescue missions, co-operation with the police, border guard and fire brigade, - cyber-defence - guarding of government buildings, embassies and military facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defence education for the public, promotion of pro-state attitudes - organising exercises for members, participation in domestic and international military drills, - crisis response, rescue missions, co-operation with the police, border guard and fire brigade, - cyber-defence - destroying explosives - training of reservists - participation in international operations and rapid response forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defence education for the public, promotion of pro-state attitudes - organising exercises for members, participation in domestic and international military drills, - crisis response, rescue missions, co-operation with the police, border guard and fire brigade, - training of reservists, - participation in international operations - managing the conscripts database, ensuring recruitment of the armed forces, performing military conscription for training and exercises

* Imants Vīksne, 'Neapmācīts karavīrs ir lielākais risks' (see footnote 10); 'Resolve of Estonians Always High', Says Head of Defence League, ERR, 26 September 2014, <http://news.err.ee/v/society/0cf2524d-ccd9-4832-99c8-f030e5cf418a>

** Based on the information released by the Defence Ministries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the TDF in question, as well as *The Military Balance 2014*.

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
6. Tasks of Territorial Defence Forces in wartime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - deploying units with wartime duties to other branches of the armed forces, - providing host nation support (HNS) - sabotage and guerrilla warfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing military and technical support to regular forces, - providing host nation support (HNS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing conscripts appointments in wartime, - providing host nation support (HNS)
7. Arms and military equipment	IMI B-300 and Carl Gustav man-portable anti-tank system, PVPJ 1110 recoilless rifles, BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers	Bofors L/70 anti-aircraft autocannons , RBS 70 man-portable air-defence systems, Spike anti-tank guided missiles, Carl Gustav man-portable anti-tank systems, PVPJ 1110 recoilless rifles, Škoda vz.53 field guns, 2B11 Sani mortars, Bandvagn 206 tracked articulated, all-terrain carriers	light weapons such as AT-4 and Carl Gustav man-portable anti-tank systems
8. Entitlements of members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - remuneration for extra tasks (e.g. supporting the border guard), - up to 10 days of annual leave for drills, - reimbursement of the costs of participation in drills (e.g. transport to the military unit), - insurance as in other branches of armed forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - optional remuneration for participating in exercises (5% of professional soldiers' monthly pay per day of drills), - €9.96 catering refund per day during drills (if the military unit does not provide meals), - unpaid leave from work to take part in exercises (employers must be notified in advance of the drill by the commander of the military unit) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - remuneration for participating in exercises (corresponding to the pay of same-rank professional soldiers), - reimbursement of the costs of participation in drills (e.g. transport to the military unit), - catering refund during drills (if the military unit does not provide meals) - unpaid leave from work to take part in drills
9. Minimum duration of training per year	16 days***	10 days	20 days
10. Participation in international operations	n.d.	Kosovo, Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan	Kosovo, Afghanistan

*** This is the duration of exercises in the first year of service in TDF. In successive years, Kaitseleit members are required to take no less than 2 days of exercise a year, but many of them take 8–12 days per year.

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