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# PUBLIC OPINION AND NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Estonian Ministry of Defence**

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## SUMMARY

- The residents of Estonia regard the Boarder Guard, Bank of Estonia, Chancellor of Justice and the Defence Forces as the most trustworthy institutions in Estonia. The first two are regarded as definitely reliable or rather reliable by more than 80% of the respondents, the second two by about 80%.
- The political parties in which the proportion of non-trusters exceeds the proportion of trusters by as much as 34% are predominantly regarded as the least trustworthy. Compared to the surveys of the last two years, the confidence in the Government of the Republic has increased considerably; confidence in the President has clearly decreased in the two years.
- 85% of the Estonians and 68% of non-Estonians trusts the Defence Forces; among non-Estonians, trust is increasing. The confidence in the Defence League is lower, remaining similar to the average percentage of confidence in the institutions. 77% of Estonians and 47% of non-Estonians have confidence in the Defence League. In both nationality groups, the confidence in the Defence League has increased compared to November.
- The security of the world is still viewed in a negative light. Half of the respondents believe that the threat of military conflicts will rise in the world in the following decade, 12% believe the world will become safer. Compared to November, the number of people who expect the threat to increase has grown by 6%.
- 17% of the respondents consider it likely that in the future, Estonia might face a military attack by a foreign state. Among Estonians, the number of people who regard this attack as likely is 10% higher than among non-Estonians.
- 29% of the residents of Estonia consider it likely that in the nearest five years, there will be an international terrorist attack in Estonia resulting in casualties. Non-Estonians perceive the danger of a terrorist attack more sharply than Estonians.
- The factors that are most often seen as ensuring the security of Estonia are membership in NATO, cooperation and good neighbour relations with Russia and membership in the European Union. In the case of the first two factors there are still very clear gaps between the opinion of Estonians and non-Estonians: while Estonians have clearly most often mentioned (76% of respondents) membership in NATO, non-Estonians have mentioned this as many as 46% less (28% of non-estonians). Relations with Russia as a security-guarantee have been mentioned clearly more by non-estonians (68% vs 36% of Estonians). Both Estonians and non-Estonians regard the European Union equally important.

- Most of the respondents regard Estonia's joining NATO as having a positive impact on the security of the country. 51% found that after joining NATO, security has increased. 67% of people supporting membership in NATO believe that security is increasing. In the past few years, the belief into the increase of the security caused by the joining to NATO is showing an up-trend.
- The support for Estonia's membership in NATO is still strong: while in November 73% of respondents supported membership in NATO, in this survey there were 74% of supporters. 87% of Estonians support Estonia's membership in NATO. Non-Estonians are still considerably less supportive – 43% support the NATO membership.
- In the past year, people's awareness of what it means for Estonia to be a member of NATO has decreased. If in the present survey, 38% of the respondents regarded themselves as very well informed or rather well informed, then this percentage was 45 in the autumn and 47 a year ago. Estonians were more informed (43% versus a quarter of non-Estonians).
- Both Estonians and non-Estonians have obtained the most information about Estonian national defence and NATO from local media. In case of both Estonians and non-Estonians, the three most often used media are printed press, television and radio. Differently from Estonians, non-Estonians mainly use local media in Russian. Non-Estonians have obtained relatively little information from media in Estonian.
- Should any other country attack Estonia, 69% of the respondents would approve initiating military resistance (29% strongly approve and 40% rather approve). The proportion of the people objecting the initiation of resistance has slightly decreased compared to the autumn.
- In case Estonia is attacked, 61% of the respondents are willing to participate in defensive action, including 64% of Estonians and 54% of non-Estonians. In the past year, willingness to participate in defensive action has decreased. Among men, 73% of Estonians and 60% of non-Estonians are ready to take defensive action.
- In case of an attack, 14% of the respondents would attempt to leave Estonia, which is 4% more than in the autumn. 39% of the respondents would definitely not leave and 37% would not be likely to leave. The proportion of people willing to leave has decreased more among non-Estonians.
- 44% of the respondents regard it necessary to increase the expenses made for ensuring national defence, which is clearly more than appeared from the survey conducted in last autumn. The proportion of those who prefer to keep the defence expenses on the current level has decreased.
- The most preferred direction in the development of the Defence Forces is the development of small units that would be ready to take part in the military missions of NATO: this was supported by half of the respondents. 34% of the respondents preferred a numerous army assigned to defend the territory of Estonia.
- Military service is regarded as necessary or rather necessary for young men by 88% of the respondents; only 10% find it to be absolutely unnecessary or rather unnecessary.

- In the question concerning transition to professional army, we have specified the wording of the multiple choice answers compared to the previous surveys. As up to this survey, the preservation of the general conscription was used as an alternative to the transition to professional military service, then in this survey, the former has been replaced with the preservation of obligatory military service. It appears that one-third of the respondents are in favor of the transition to a professional army, which is 12% more than in November. More than half of the respondents - 63% - preferred the preservation of obligatory military service. Only a quarter of Estonians support the transition to professional army, whereas among non-Estonians, the preferences concerning the alternatives divide into two equal groups.
- 45% of the respondents have a positive attitude towards the participation of Estonian servicemen in international military missions; slightly more – 49% - oppose to this. The proportion of opposers last exceeded that of supporters in the spring of 2004 right after the first Estonian soldier perished during the mission in Iraq. 52% of Estonians support participation in missions, among non-Estonians, the percentage is 30.
- The attitude towards the prolongation of the mission in Iraq is mainly negative. Should it appear at the end of the year at the expiry of the mandate of the mission that without external forces, the stability of Iraq cannot be ensured, 62% would not approve of the prolongation of the mission by the Riigikogu; 31% of the respondents would support the prolongation of the mission. When comparing to November, the support to the prolongation of the mission has decreased.