



PUBLIC OPINION AND NATIONAL DEFENCE

Estonian Ministry of Defence

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SUMMARY

- The Rescue Service, the Border Guard, the Bank of Estonia and the Defence Forces are considered to be the most reliable institutions by over 80% of the population.

The Defence Forces are considered reliable by 87% of Estonians and 75% of non-Estonians. The reliability of the Defence Forces is at its highest level ever both among Estonians and non-Estonians. During recent years a decrease in the gap between the reliability percentages of Estonians and non-Estonians has been a prevailing trend.

The reliability of the National Defence League is traditionally below of that of the Defence Forces. The National Defence League is fully or rather trusted by 66% of the respondents, including 74% of Estonians and 46% of non-Estonians.

- Among the problems that should merit the attention of the government, the three most important ones are increasing the living standard of people, guaranteeing their security/fighting crime and ensuring the development of the economy. Those three areas have been among the five most important fields also in the previous six years. Compared to the previous years, the importance of the development of education and culture has increased (48%). The share of residents of Estonia who consider it important to deal with reduction of unemployment has declined significantly (43%).

The strengthening of the state's defence capacity and cooperation in NATO in ensuring the international security are still considered less important than other areas – the two abovementioned areas are ranked among the five most important ones by 12% and 5% of the respondents, respectively.

- The situation in the world is continuously considered to be unstable – the threat of military conflicts is considered to likely increase within the next decade by 43% of the respondents. Those who think the world is becoming safer constitute 12% of the respondents.
- • Extensive environmental pollution is considered to be the most likely threat to Estonia. Other potential threats are considered to be rather insignificant. The potential military attack by another country is considered to be one of the most unlikely threats (only the attack of UFOs is feared by fewer

people). The military attack of another country against Estonia is considered likely by 13% of the respondents.

- With respect to ensuring the security of Estonia, our allies are most often considered to be Finland (88%), Sweden (83%), Germany (68%) and the USA (67%). The countries seen as hostile include Russia (-41%), Iran (-22%) and North Korea (-20%).
- Estonia's NATO membership is most frequently considered to be one of the top factors in ensuring Estonia's security. It is followed by cooperation and good neighbourly relations with Russia and defence cooperation between the Baltic States. In comparison with previous research, defence cooperation between the Baltic States is more highly valued, while less value is attributed to membership in the European Union.

Estonia's NATO membership predominantly considered the most important factor among Estonians, while cooperation and good neighbourly relations with Russia among non-Estonians.

- 53% of the respondents find that Estonia's security has improved after joining NATO, 37% do not see any changes. Estonia is less secure in the opinion of 2% of the respondents. Over the last few years there has been an increase in the percentage of inhabitants who believe that joining NATO has had a positive effect on Estonia's security.
- Among other impacts that NATO membership has had on Estonia, the most positive ones are considered to be the development of infrastructure and technology in Estonia – NATO's impact in those areas is considered positive by 45% and 38% of the respondents, respectively. 29% of the respondents believe that joining NATO has positively influenced the development of Estonian economy and respect for human rights.

Potential negative influences are clearly seen by fewer respondents than positive influences. The belief that joining NATO has negatively influenced Estonia's relations with Russia continues to be predominant (48%), 10% of respondents believe that NATO membership has had a negative influence on Estonia's independence and environmental conditions.

- Estonia's NATO membership is supported altogether by 75% of the residents, 29% of whom support it definitely and 46% rather support it. Opponents to Estonia's membership in NATO total 17%. Support for NATO has been stable over the last year.

88% of Estonians and 44% of non-Estonians support Estonia's NATO membership.

- The percentage of the respondents who believe that they are very well informed or rather well informed about what membership in NATO means for Estonia is 3% and 39%, respectively.
- Both Estonians and non-Estonians most frequently receive information about Estonia's national defence and NATO from local sources. Estonians from

Estonian-language (television, printed media, radio) and non-Estonians from Russian-language (printed media, radio) local publications. Over the last year, the percentage of non-Estonians who have received information regarding this topic from Russian channels (41%) has increased significantly.

- Military resistance against possible invaders is considered necessary by 78% of the residents, which exceeds the research results of the last few years by about 10%. Notably military resistance is considered almost equally important by both Estonians and non-Estonians (77% and 80%, respectively).

If Estonia were attacked, 66% of the respondents would be ready to participate in the defence activities according to their capabilities, while 26% of them would do so definitely.

In case of an attack, the number of respondents who would definitely leave or be likely to leave Estonia is 3% and 13%, respectively. While over the last few years, the desire to leave Estonia in case of a military attack has been ca 10% higher among non-Estonians than among Estonians, two surveys conducted in 2006 have shown a result in case of non-Estonians that is not significantly different from that of Estonian respondents (in spring the difference was 3%, now it is 0%).

44% of the respondents would certainly not make any attempt to leave Estonia, 35% are likely not to do so (a total of 79%).

- An increase of the expenses for ensuring the national security of Estonia is supported by 39% of the residents (5% of whom definitely support an increase), which equals to the percentage of respondents who support maintaining the current level of expenses (40%). A decrease of defence expenses has been supported steadily over the last year by 11% of the respondents.

The current precise size of defence expenditure (1.56% of the GDP) is known by 28% of the respondents. Increase of the defence expenditure up to the allowed level of 2% of the GDP is supported (after the clarification of the current level) by 40%, 10% would prefer that the expenses exceed 2% of the GDP. Maintaining the expenditure level below 2% is preferred by 37% of the respondents.

- The majority of the population (88%) principally support the decision to increase the monthly compensations to conscripts as of the beginning of 2007. 46% of the respondents agree fully with the decision to increase the compensation from the present level of 150 kroons per month on average to 3000 kroons per month; 42% support the increase of the compensation, but not to such a large extent. Only 8% of the respondents are against increasing the compensations, 2% of whom find that conscripts should not be paid any compensation at all.
- Exactly one half of the respondents find that the monthly compensation to conscripts should be around 2000 kroons or below that amount. An average

compensation of 3000 kroons or more would be preferred by a total of 43% of the population.

- Completion of the service in the Defence Forces is considered necessary for young men by 86% of the respondents (58% of whom consider it a definite necessity). The imposition of the duty to serve in the Defence Forces on young women equally with young men is considered unnecessary by 88% (52% of whom believe that this reform must definitely not be carried out). The imposition of the duty to serve in the Defence Forces on young women is considered necessary by a total of 8% of the respondents.

The attitude towards evasion of military service is prevailing negative. 63% of all the respondents condemn such behaviour or have a negative attitude towards it. 30% of the respondents have an understanding attitude towards evasion and 1% approve of it.

Alternative service in rescue work, environmental protection or in other areas for young men who are unfit for military service is considered definitely necessary or rather necessary by 75% of the respondents. 21% believe that the implementation of alternative service is unnecessary.

- Estonia's transition to a fully professional army is supported by 13% of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (78%) support the preservation of the current system where the professional army is combined with compulsory military service.
- The continuing participation of Estonian military units in the composition of international military forces in different crisis regions in the world is supported by 50% of the residents, of whom definite and likely supporters account for 14% and 36%, respectively. The continuation of activities in the crisis regions is supported by 59% of Estonians and 29% of non-Estonians.
- Those who would themselves be definitely or rather ready to participate in some international mission account for 29% of the respondents who have undergone military service, i.e. 7% of the whole population. With a probability of 95%, a total of 9 800 – 26 900 persons would like to participate in a mission.

10% of the respondents have a positive attitude towards serving professionally in the armed forces, while 4% of the respondents have repeatedly thought about serving professionally in the armed forces (31 300 – 57 500 persons).

- The main role of the National Defence League is most frequently seen in acting as an organization which ensures internal security (52% of the respondents). 23% of respondents think that the National Defence League should be preserved in its current form. Each of the other alternatives is supported by less than 10% of the respondents.