***Comprehensive National Defence in Latvia***

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The nature of current security threats is complex, often beyond mere military challenge, affecting areas such as information, cyberspace, functioning civic society, financial sector and other sectors. Targeted activities supported by foreign-based entities and aimed at destabilising or influencing a particular state, or society, have become a part of today's reality. Some countries have been caught applying influence, cyber attacks and other non-military means to make an impact on political processes in another country. In some countries, hybrid warfare has become an extension of foreign policy, a non-military way to strengthen national interests abroad.

The high degree of complexity of threats faced by Latvia means that national defence system and its conventional forces alone will not be able to address all dimensions of hybrid threats. Latvia needs a comprehensive state defence system, where all non-government and government actors are prepared to manage a crisis, ensure resilience against external impacts, resist and recover from major shocks and challenges. National defence system needs to be adjusted to solve these challenges. It must be based on trust and collaboration between people and government, the whole nation must support the state and its safety.

Russia is currently implementing aggressive foreign policy, strongly challenging the security across Europe. Russia has interfered with democratic processes in Europe and the USA, raising real concerns about similar policies being implemented towards Latvia. Nationally and internationally, Latvia has traditionally been heavily influenced by information from Russian Federation, its political and economic processes, energy policy and other initiatives. Such exposure, 2008 conflict in Georgia and the events which began to unfold in Ukraine in 2014, as well as Latvia's choice to stick to development principles and values contradicting Russia's interests, raise real concerns about Russia's possible intentions to undermine domestic political processes inside Latvia.

1. **SYSTEM**

Comprehensive national defence (CND) is designed to ensure security and crisis preparedness across all sectors, including preparedness for military conflicts. Since Latvia joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Latvia has been developing its defence system through strengthening its national and collective defence capabilities. NATO is the cornerstone of Latvia's security, and comprehensive national defence will not contradict NATO's collective defence objectives, plans and other regional initiatives. The key purpose of comprehensive national defence is to enhance Latvia's deterrence capabilities and build resilience against possible crises or armed conflicts.

**The objective** of CND is to get the Latvian population ready to defend the country, facilitate efficient crisis management at the national level and support critical functions of the state, including the work of government, energy supply, health care, logistics, international relations, sustainability of defence capabilities, internal security, economy and infrastructure, psychological resilience, etc., during crisis or other emergency. These critical functions will be planned, coordinated and implemented by government bodies in partnership with private actors, NGOs and inhabitants.

**The goal** of CND model is to identify specific defence responsibilities and roles of individual government bodies. It also strives to strengthen the ties with Latvian population, business community, NGOs and public administration to minimise the distrust among people towards the government bodies and between various social groups. Mutual trust is essential in bringing people of different backgrounds closer together. Partnership between private entities and public authorities is equally important in creating open personal contacts and contractual relations.

Ministry of Defence should set up and coordinate a decentralised system for planning and implementation of specific activities proposed and jointly executed by government agencies. Here are some proposed CND activities:

1. development of military capabilities and defence strategies
2. closer defence cooperation between private and public sectors
3. introduction into statehood course for Latvian schools and public awareness raising
4. civil protection
5. psychological defence[[1]](#footnote-1)
6. strategic communication[[2]](#footnote-2)
7. economic resilience
8. law enforcement and security agency capacity building
9. cyber security, etc.

CND model also extends to other areas like advanced military technologies and innovation, energy infrastructure security, personal income protection, political leadership and other fields. The scope of model may be adjusted and expanded as necessary.

* 1. **Development of military capabilities and defence strategies (Ministry of Defence, National Armed Forces, NAF)**

National military defence system of Latvia is based on military capabilities of NAF to defend Latvia's freedom, territorial integrity and sovereignty in case of an armed conflict. Current NAF focus is on priority capabilities like Special Forces, military engineering, air defence, intelligence, command and control, mechanisation, indirect fire support and other capabilities. NAF medium and long-term capability development priorities are described in NAF Development Plan. Priorities will be further elaborated in State Defence Concept 2020.

National Defence Strategy defines how NAF structures military defence. Defence strategy is reviewed and updated by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and NAF. MoD and NAF are already working on NAF personnel development and enhanced role of the NG. New NG units are formed, individual equipment is acquired. Defence strategy also covers other areas, including protection of critical infrastructure and government agencies, supply security, communication infrastructure security and other fields.

Another critical issue for Latvia's military defence is individual willingness to resist occupation and proactive strengthening of weaker elements of resistance. This requires full government and citizen engagement. Every inhabitant of Latvia should be given a specific role and position in the resistance. From NAF perspective, if Latvia would fully or partly lose legitimate control over its territory during a crisis or armed conflict, resistance would be one of the ways to protect Latvia. Proactive development of dual use infrastructure, which can be utilised in times of crisis or war, planning and adoption of national defence and resistance models, are a part of a responsible approach.

Military component is an integral part of CND. Beside military capability, it also provides individual engagement in national defence processes. Bigger professional force and stronger National Guard are priorities of the State Defence Concept 2016, which should remain valid. Other civic engagement mechanisms should also be built to ensure Latvian population's involvement in national defence.

* 1. **Closer defence cooperation between private and public sectors (all government bodies)**

It is important to ensure that defence issues are jointly coordinated by all government bodies. Section 23.2 of the National Security Law already provides that all ministries must conduct sectoral threat assessments and develop plans for addressing identified risks. In addition, Section 31 of the SDC stipulates that government bodies must identify threats and threat reduction measures in their particular sectors. However, implementation of SDC has shown that some government bodies do not have threat response protocols. Therefore, government bodies should be closer engaged in coordination of activities. This could also be solved by establishing a national risk management framework.

Latvian population should be able to see the defence sector and NAF not only during public events and public communication. Formal cooperation between NAF and other public bodies, private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders should be more visible. NGOs should be given specific national defence roles and participate in defence planning. Government must proactively build cooperation with NGOs, approaching each of them individually.

Government bodies should build frameworks for self-organised community response, national and local volunteer networks ready to help manage a crisis or an armed conflict. Therefore, different government bodies should start developing such frameworks. Participation of NG in local events and activities should strengthen the civil-military bond between the defence sector and local communities. This would help NG enhance trust towards soldiers, and an efficient way for NG to show its commitment and support to local communities.

Annual defence training should be offered to selected groups of professionals and experts, including opinion leaders, public officials, mass media, local governments, NGOs and other industries. Several week-long training would enhance public understanding of national defence sector processes while focusing on topics like crisis management, communication, latest defence sector developments, cyber security, human security and other areas.

Latvian NGOs ready to get more actively engaged in strengthening of national defence should be identified and given socially important functions. Government should create partnerships with NGOs for carrying out public crisis response campaigns and public awareness events. Population should also be educated and trained on how to, for example, provide first aid and act in case of a disaster or cases when public alert system or early warning system is activated[[3]](#footnote-3).

Private sector would also play an important role in strengthening of the national defence. Terms of engagement, however, have to be clear and acceptable to both sides. Information Note *Achieving* *deeper cooperation between the defence sector and Latvian defence and security industry,* presented by the Ministry of Defence to the Cabinet of Ministers already in 2016, underlines that defence industry should be built and operate in a way, which enables it to contribute to NAF efforts to achieve peace-time, crisis and war-time goals, as well as reduce NAF supply security risks.

In 2017, Latvian parliament, the Saeima, adopted amendments to the Defence and Security Procurement Law. The new framework introduced additional exemptions on secure supply of goods/services vital for national defence and implementation of NAF tasks identified in external legal frameworks. It was a major step towards greater role of Latvian defence industry in national defence. Moreover, to strengthen the supply security of defence products and services, as well as create clear and transparent framework for cooperation between Latvian defence industry and government bodies, including defence industry’s responsibilities and tasks in scope of the comprehensive national defence model, MoD should find strategic defence industry partners in each of the key national defence areas.

* 1. **Introduction into statehood course for Latvian schools and public awareness raising (Ministry of Education and Science, other government bodies)**

Respect for Latvia’s statehood, inhabitants and national security should be taught from the first years of primary education. Education should promote critical thinking and patriotism. Teachers should be trained on how to deliver those skills to children. National defence school courses are a first step towards a more coordinated and integrated way of promoting the sense of duty.

It is critical to bring government closer to people and develop trust in government. It is necessary to implement information and awareness raising campaigns targeting different professional groups. Direct communication, for example, workshops, conferences and discussions with educators, mass media, large and medium-size enterprises, local governments and representatives of other significant sectors, would help deepen the understanding of national defence challenges, the role, position and duty of each industry with respect to comprehensive national defence. It is also necessary to put in place cooperation arrangements with educational institutions and civil industries to collect the feedback. Such feedback would provide national defence and security services information about civic initiatives, opinions and recommendations about the overall structure, development of comprehensive national defence model.

In addition, specific guidelines for integration of comprehensive national defence and statehood into higher learning should be adopted to ensure student uptake of and engagement in comprehensive defence. Scientific institutions should regularly be given government research projects. Such projects would become a part of national cross-disciplinary defence innovation platform, which would span from social sciences to science, technology and engineering.

* 1. **Civil defence and disaster management (Ministry of Interior, local and central government bodies, legal and private entities)**

In July of 2017, during the 27th NATO summit in Warsaw, Poland, the heads of states and governments agreed to continue further efforts in promoting civil and military resilience of member states. Leaders also acknowledged the need to observe the seven NATO civil resilience baseline requirements. Development of civil resilience capabilities required by NATO is integrated into national defence sector objectives, and those NATO requirements should be implemented comprehensively.

Civil defence is an element of national security. It is implemented through legal acts determining the rights, obligations and responsibilities of government and local actors, legal and private entities with regard to civil defence. More active civil-military coordination, resource sharing and capability harmonisation would lead to closer civil-military relations as part of the efficient and strong national defence system.

Given the experience of other countries and the nature of armed conflicts, Latvia should consider accessible safe zones – safety patches near populated areas and within easy reach. Latvia should also identify and implement, if necessary, other measures needed to ensure that public infrastructure can be used in an aftermath of potential emergency/crisis.

Inhabitants should be aware that responsible authorities will not have required capacity to protect all inhabitants in the case of emergency at once, or during the first days or hours of war. Population needs to be trained on how to take care of themselves, their family members and relatives in those initial stages of disaster or war. Government is responsible for creating frameworks for self-organised community response. Everyone should know how and be able to engage, to the extent of their willingness. However, it is critical for population to be able to self-organise and to know how to behave through various stages of emergency or war.

It is also important to make sure people are committed to national defence, ready to engage in civil defence and lead various efforts. Latvia should probably also facilitate volunteer collaboration with, for example, State Fire and Rescue Service through volunteer brigades.

* 1. **Psychological defence (State Chancellery, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Culture and other responsible authorities)**

Psychological defence of Latvian population depends on its resilience to negative campaigns and psychological operations against the state, processes within the country or particular events, etc. People’s confidence in the current way of life, the need to protect it and defend it, should be strengthened. Availability of information and campaigns have significant role to play in boosting this confidence through nationally-integrated communication campaigns focusing on the future of the nation and common goals.

Greater social cohesion enhances psychological security because the likelihood of internal conflicts is lower. Community bound by loyalty to its state, instead of affiliation with an ethnic group, should be able to resist provocation, focus on national defence and avoid ethnic conflicts. Nation’s intellectual unity may be decisive during a war and crucial to people’s desire to resist an aggressor.

Personal commitment of Latvian people is also important. It determines the level of civil participation in domestic political and social processes. Higher civic engagement reflects people’s concern for on-going processes at national level. It also shows people’s commitment to internalise mistakes in such processes.

In times of disaster and war, various non-governmental actors, for example, religious organisations become vital in providing people’s psychological comfort, giving them strength to withstand and overcome hardship. A permanent dialogue with religious organisations should focus on their role and actions during a crisis or war. People should be able to continue their religious practices and find comfort in faith. It is essential for everyone in emotional and physical distress.

* 1. **Strategic communication (State Chancellery, Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre and all government bodies)**

Strategic communication at the level of central government and public bodies has become a necessity in the current environment, and it is used to encourage population to respond and act in a certain way. Government’s public communication uses storytelling and illustrations, creating people’s emotional response to particular topic. Successful implementation of comprehensive national defence model requires skills-based and agile leadership. Information campaigns introducing the comprehensive national defence model should involve opinion leaders who would explain why and how the CND is built.

Government communication and public events should consistently emphasise the continuity of Latvian state, its past and future continuity. From the perspective of national security, continuity grows from people’s confidence in current processes, participation in public activities, furthering of culture and history, emergence of new traditions. Continuity of the state also relies on government communication during a crisis or in cases when the legitimate power of the state is under threat. If Latvia lost its sovereignty as a result of external influence, resilient communication with international community and Latvian population inside the country would be a strong reassurance of state continuity.

Information resilience against negative portrayal of Latvia in international mass media should be reinforced in the long run. Critical thinking and accessibility of information should be promoted to shape the attitude. Professional standards and the overall quality of the most important national news platforms, Latvian mass media, should be improved to prevent false, unverified information from spreading and misleading society about events and developments inside Latvia and abroad. Public broadcasting services need quality enhancement support and help in increasing their viewership. Science journalism should also be facilitated at the national level.

* 1. **Economic resilience (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economics)**

Latvian population is concerned with its financial and social well-being, social protection and future opportunities. Economic shocks may raise doubts about Latvia’s ability to provide safety and security. Economic resilience should ensure that the core government services remain intact in case of disaster or war.

More responsible approach towards national security requires creation of essential commodities reserves at the national level. These commodities would be stocked to ensure that core functions of the state can be sustained for at least three weeks following the crisis. It is also necessary to create a list of necessity goods, which would be distributed to Latvian population to make sure every inhabitant has personal stock for the case of crisis. Such personal reserves should last, and person should be able to survive without any assistance, at least for a week.

Personal financial security depends on employers’ ability to keep businesses running despite crisis or war. Latvian business owners should make sure their employees are protected from crisis or war. Large enterprises, employing over 250 workers, should ensure that core operations of their organisations are not affected by a disaster or armed conflict. These companies should support the economy by providing the necessary goods and services during the emergency or war. MoD should be in charge of collaboration with flagship companies, offering necessary information about national defence developments and agreeing with business owners on what the specific role and responsibilities their companies would have with respect to national defence.

Latvia’s economic resilience and stability is important in ensuring that the economy keeps running despite a crisis or armed conflict. Right now Latvia has no action plan based on economic potential of Latvia, or clear division of responsibility between the private and public actors. There should be one responsible authority for the whole country. Responsibilities of private players should also be clearly defined to ensure the overall coordination of economic processes during a crisis or war.

1. **OUTCOMES**

Introduction of comprehensive national defence in Latvia should ensure that:

1. public bodies, according to their scope of competence, are given specific tasks and roles in the national defence model
2. local authorities, NGOs, business community, population and other stakeholders are aware of their role in the national defence system
3. national and local level planning and decision-making frameworks are put in place to help identify potential crisis and mitigate its consequences
4. partnerships are introduced as a way of formalised cooperation between the government, defence sector, businesses and NGOs
5. instruments and roles, vital in ensuring core government functions during a potential crisis or war, have been identified
6. Latvian people respect their state and are committed to its security, they are aware of their responsibilities and ready to strengthen the national defence
7. Latvian population is resilient to attempts to sway people’s minds and openly spread disinformation, people have critical thinking
8. Latvian population is capable of self-organised community response to local and national level challenges because government has created adequate frameworks and models.
9. **CONCLUSIONS**

Latvia should adjust its national defence model to changing security situation and threats. National defence model should integrate national defence initiatives or public body activities and private sector, business, NGO, population and personal input.

The long-term benefits of such comprehensive approach to national defence should ensure population's respect for the state and its security. It should also bring inhabitants closer to the government and eliminate any possible social tensions.

Comprehensive national defence can evolve into a trust-based cooperation between the stakeholders, and close-knit partnerships. It should encourage joint efforts in ensuring government and population crisis and national security threat preparedness, as well as readiness to face national security challenges in the long run.

1. **Way Forward**

Ministry of Defence should facilitate sectoral threat identification, assessment and management process at the level of line ministries based on, inter alia, current threat assessments. Sector representatives should collaborate with MoD on development and adoption of methodology for evaluation of threats and proposed policy initiatives. MoD should also coordinate cross-sectoral working groups.

Based on the requirements for comprehensive national defence model, all line ministries, State Chancellery, Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre should assess and identify activities and bottlenecks for implementation of this model in their specific sectors. Assessments should be conducted with as broad participation of public as possible by conducting sector-specific public discussions and other consultation activities together with, for example, Union of Local Governments, Latvian Employers' Confederation and other NGOs.

State Defence Concept 2020, drafted by the Ministry of Defence, should specify comprehensive national defence responsibilities of public bodies with respect to the sectors they are overseeing.

1. Psychological defence may be described as an integrated set of consistently planned and implemented activities aimed at protecting society against intentional or unintentional negative external or internal influence and undermining of people's will to defend their state. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Strategic communication consists of strategic actions aimed at reaching the strategic goals of the country, or individual government body. These actions are derived from the content of the strategy. It also involves close focus on active coordination and management of the impact of such actions on the society and specific target groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. One of such potential partners would be the Latvian Red Cross. Government and the Red Cross would team up to offer Latvian population free first aid training and vital crisis health, survival and rescue instructions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)