

President of Latvia: National Guard is the symbolic assurance of our nation's readiness to defend Latvia

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National security

Egils Levits



On 4 February, President of Latvia Egils Levits attended the regular Military Council meeting at the National Armed Force Air Force Base *Lielvārde*.

President Levits' statement following the meeting:

'Today I chaired the regular Military Council meeting. Chief of Defence Staff, National Armed Force commanders, Defence Ministry experts and I met to discuss our national security and defence.

A week ago, on 26 January, I issued a statement on the threat of Russian aggression against Ukraine and demands on NATO, detailing Latvia's position in this matter.

Latvia and all its NATO allies are ready to help Ukraine come out of current crisis caused by Russia. We all want free and safe Europe for all European countries. We condemn any attempts to divide Europe into spheres of influence.

If Russia decides to invade Ukraine, response of NATO member states, the sanctions, will be harsh. As a NATO member state, Latvia is actively involved in coordinating Alliance's response. USA, Great Britain, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and other NATO Allies have and will continue to provide Ukraine support it needs to defend itself against the aggressor.

Ukraine will receive *Stinger* air-defence systems and other equipment from Latvia. In addition, NATO will strengthen its military presence in Alliance's Eastern Flank as necessary, deploying forces to Poland and the Baltics.

NATO, which is the strongest military alliance in the world, also continues to maintain dialogue with Russia in an attempt to deescalate the tensions.

Today Military Council also confirmed the assessment that I gave in my 26 January Statement. As the Statement reads, Latvia has taken a firm and clear stance, which is fully in line with that of the whole NATO.

Let me now address two specific issues: stronger National Guard and interior agencies.

Article 3 of the NATO Treaty requires each member country to maintain and develop their individual capacity to resist armed attack. We have raised our defence spending to 2.3% of GDP to develop the national defence system. We have strengthened our army, especially the National Guard, and supported the Cadet Force (Youth Guard). We are gradually integrating national defence curricula in school system.

Every Latvian citizen can join the national defence. Enrolment in National Guard is one of such options. We will accept everyone. Everyone is capable to contribute. We will find the right place and task for everyone. We need you to collectively protect our families, compatriots and the state.

The bigger the National Guard, the safer we are. People's commitment to defend freedom, and the more consolidate we are, the harder it is for others to beat us.

Thousands of Latvians, both professional troops and volunteer force of the National Guard, are ready to defend Latvia at any time. But there are many more Latvians who would gladly help protect their families, households and land. This is the right time that each of us asks ourselves: how much am I ready to contribute to Latvia? How can I defend it? What other training do I need to be able to do that?

National Guard is not just one of the military units. It is the symbolic assurance of our nation's readiness to defend Latvia. National Guard is the mirror image of our diverse civil society where people from all over the political spectrum, irrespective of their affiliation, are ready to come together and defend Latvia's freedom and national defence just as we did it on Barricades.

All patriots of Latvia that meet recruitment criteria are welcome to join national defence and enlist in their local National Guard chapter.

However, today we are faced with other threats that are not limited to military. Those are hybrid threats, as we know them. These threats may include information attacks (using fake news), economic pressure (by, for example, stifling gas supply), cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, and many other kinds of threats.

Resilience against these threats is one of our top priorities. Security services and interior agencies play a major role in ensuring such resilience. They must be effective and provide us with all the necessary warnings. Work on better capacity to do so never ends.

Safeguarding of border with Belarus was a unique challenge our Border Force, State Police and National Guard had to face in mid-2021. Thank you for doing a good job with that!

Budget allocations to Interior Ministry and state security agencies have increased in recent years.

But this funding is far from adequate. Our internal security is incomplete without strong State Police, Border Guard, firefighters and rescue service. I will call upon the government and Saeima to allocate additional budget funding for national security, especially the internal security, next year. These areas must be our top priority.

We are a member of NATO, and we are protected by Article 5 of its Treaty, which says that an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies. Troops of 10 members of the Alliance have been deployed to Latvia on permanent basis.

Our armed forces are well-trained and equipped. They are completely competent to defend Latvia and assist the international missions, and their professional efficiency is well appreciated.

We stand by our solidarity and commitment to NATO's collective defence. We have no doubt that other Allies are ready to show

the same kind of solidarity. That is why we are so reassured about our security.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all those National Guard members who have joined the force, and everyone who supports them: their families and all Latvian people who are concerned and involved with Latvia's national defence and security.

Freedom is not a gift. You must fight for it. Defend it. I appeal to all residents of Latvia. Join the National Guard, or just any other way to support our national defence and security. Thank you!

<https://www.president.lv/en/article/president-latvia-national-guard-symbolic-assurance-our-nations-readiness-defend-latvia>