

Address by the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs at the Latvian National Defence Academy graduation ceremony of the Professional Bachelor study programme 'Military Leadership for the Land Force'

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Commander of the Latvian National Armed Forces!

Rector of the Latvian National Defence Academy!

Officers!

Graduates, relatives and friends!

This year marks several notable anniversaries. We commemorate the 105th anniversary of the founding of the War Studies School by the decree of General Dāvids Simansons, the Commander-in-Chief of the Latvian Army on 13 September 1919. This week marks the 22nd anniversary of the founding of the Latvian National Defence Academy, which restored the training and education of officers in Latvia. This year we also commemorate Brigadier General Valdis Matīss, the founder and the first Rector of the restored Latvian National Defence Academy, – he would have turned 80 years old.

Today, we congratulate 21 lieutenants, who began their training in 2019 as part of a cohort of 60 soldiers. Out of the 60, you have proven to be the most resilient on this journey. In line with the motto of the Latvian National Defence Academy, you have come through the thorns to the first star, and I am confident that there will be many more stars to come.

During my recent visit to the Academy, I observed that the learning process is challenging, interesting, and demanding. It has fully prepared you for your main mission – to serve as an officer of the Latvian National Armed Forces. Thank you for choosing

this path in your life. Today, I wish you all the best in carrying the sword of an officer with pride and honour. The military defence and security of our country depend on officers. The resolve, confidence, and knowledge you possess will make our country, Latvia, and our Armed Forces strong and resilient.

Today marks the beginning of your career as an officer, and with it comes the responsibility of safeguarding our country's security and defence. When you began your training in Alūksne in 2019, the world was far less turbulent. Now, Russia's imperialistic ambitions are on full display.

As we continue to develop our defence capabilities, including long-range weapons, drones, electronic warfare, and conventional arms, it is essential to acquire new knowledge. I am certain that the training and expertise you have gained here will equip you well for service in the Armed Forces.

As officers, you will be among the first to begin your service since the establishment of the State Defence Service. Many of you will likely have these young soldiers under your command. I urge you to ensure that young people remember their time in the service as valuable and worthwhile for themselves and their country. This will help us to have more volunteers in the State Defence Service and achieve the recruitment benchmark for our armed forces.

Today, I would like to especially congratulate Lieutenant Anna Zara, who is the only female officer in this course. Thank you for your courage and commitment. I wish you all the best for your future service. I am confident that your example will serve as a role model for other young women. It is crucial that we involve our society as a whole, and not just the select few in safeguarding the security of our country.

Additionally, I was pleased to learn that your cohort represents virtually every part of our country. Four of you are from Riga, and the rest are from all the regions and municipalities across Latvia. However, I wish more people from Kurzeme would dedicate their lives to serving in our country's Armed Forces.

Finally, I would like to address not only the new lieutenants, officers, and soldiers of our Armed Forces but also their relatives and friends who are in attendance.

When reading about what is happening in the world, you may wonder whether it is dangerous for your sons and daughter, friends and relatives to serve in the army and take on this honourable but risky duty. However, we must not succumb to a sense of doom. Together with our allies, we will do everything it takes to keep our country safe and secure so that no one becomes the target of an enemy attack. At the same time, it is our collective responsibility to prepare for all scenarios to prevent the worst from happening. Our society as a whole, the leadership of the country, and our Armed Forces share this responsibility.

I have full confidence that the Armed Forces will perform their duties with honour, as exemplified by these highly professional lieutenants. However, the wider public also has to support them. That is why raising funding for national defence, expanding the allied presence in Latvia, developing our country's military capabilities, protecting and policing our borders, supporting Ukraine, and joining the National Guard or the reserve service – all of these measures will help us protect our country's security, independence, and freedom, and advance its prosperity!

Let us all serve our Latvia with honour!



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