

Address by President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs at the first State Defence Service graduation ceremony

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Madam Prime Minister!

Minister of Defence!

Commanders, officers, and instructors!

Soldiers!

Family members and relatives!

It is a special honour for me to be with you today to witness the graduation and completion of service of the first cohort of the State Defence Service.

I would like to say an emphatic “thank you” three times on this occasion. First of all, I am grateful to you, the soldiers who last year had the courage and initiative to enlist in the first cohort of the State Defence Service. You are now part of the history of Latvia and our National Armed Forces – you are the first graduating class to have completed military training and to perform commendably. The experience you have gained over these 11 months will certainly serve you well in the future. I am aware that many of you have opted for a professional military career while others will pursue civilian careers. Nevertheless, the skills, friendships and knowledge gained during your time in the military service will remain with you for the rest of your lives.

The second “thank you” extends to the commanders, officers, and instructors. I recall that you had concerns of your own when

the State Defence Service was launched. You were also preparing for an unknown experience, as only a few of you had previously undergone compulsory military service. You have shown high professionalism and the ability to turn people with no prior military experience into capable soldiers. Thank you so much for that!

A third “thank you” goes to the parents, relatives, and friends who also may have initially had some hesitation about their children's participation in the programme. Although today they are presented to you as soldiers, for parents, they will always be children, above everything else. I would like to express my gratitude for placing your trust in your children's decisions, the armed forces, and the country!

Upon leaving the service or soon transitioning into the professional service, many people will ask you: how did it go? From now on, you will be ambassadors for our Armed Forces. Be candid. Encourage people! And maybe use some opportunities to provide feedback about the potential areas for improvement. That is important for all of us.

I would like to congratulate you again on this sunny day of 31st May. I wish you every success in your future endeavours and to all of us – a safer and stronger country!

God bless Latvia!



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