

First Years of the Re-establishment of Estonia's Naval Defence

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ABSTRACT

The Navy and the fleet had been very important to Estonia during the War of Independence of 1918–1920. The British fleet that arrived at the roadstead in Tallinn in December fended off the threat of the Soviet Russia's Baltic Fleet and guaranteed supply channels for weapons, volunteers and other aid to be brought to Estonia.

History and historians played an important role in the restoration of Estonian naval defence: the Estonian Academic Military History Society was founded in the Maritime Museum in 1988, and the Guild of Estonians Who Served in the Finnish Navy during World War II was established in autumn 1991. The submarine 'Lembit', which had been launched in 1937, once belonged to Estonia and was reclaimed from the Baltic Fleet in early 1992, became the first vessel of the Estonian Navy. The first naval units of the Defence League were also restored in 1992 and they took over a number of patrol boats of the Soviet border guard.

The naval defence of Estonia was built up in the cooperation and competition of several institutions – the Defence Forces, the Border Guards and the Estonian Maritime Administration. The establishment of maritime border guard units was considered of primary importance. Estonia received ships and boats from the Nordic countries, Germany and the US, and some Soviet vessels were also in working order.

Structuring the Naval Forces of the Estonian Defence Forces started later and the Commander of the Navy was appointed in February 1994. There were five officers, five non-commissioned officers and five conscripts serving in the Navy at the time. The Estonian flag was hoisted on the Estonian Naval Base at the Mine Harbour in Tallinn in September 1994. In the same year, Estonian seamen participated in the first major international naval exercise BALTOPS '94.

Introduction

Speaking of naval defence, we must keep in mind that the term means much more than warships with powerful weapons or efficient coastal batteries. The state has different functions to perform at sea: it must guarantee safe vessel traffic in territorial, inland and economic waters; ensure a functioning maritime distress and safety system; be ready to eliminate marine pollution; guard the sea border; protect territorial waters, coast and islands; secure national defence traffic on the sea; guarantee the functioning of marine communications; provide defence in the case of a hostile attack, etc. The other terms used for this area today are maritime security and sea power. As this is a broad subject, I will only discuss some aspects from the very first years. The generally known legislation concerning the restoration of Estonia's national defence will not be discussed. The organisation of Estonia's naval defence was initiated by civil structures as a result of the conditions in which the independence of Estonia was restored as well as the reluctance of the Russian Federation to start negotiations about the status and withdrawal of the Northwestern Army group and the Russian Baltic Fleet before the beginning of 1992.

As the size of this article is limited, my goal is to give a briefer overview of the situation that prevailed in the 1990s and to introduce the ideas for the development of the naval defence concept in the early years. There are no overviews of the development of the maritime affairs, including naval defence, in that period. However, some fragments of information can still be found. The collection *Jälle kakskümmend aastat mereväge* (Another Twenty Years of the Navy) about the time when the navy was re-established, was published in 2014, and it contains overviews and memoirs of the first days of naval defence and the navy.¹ Materials include media publications, documents in the archive of the Defence Forces Headquarters (hereinafter DFH) and the Navy, plus memoirs of contemporaries

¹ *Jälle kakskümmend aastat mereväge: Ülevaateid ja meenutusi. Esimene raamat.* Koostajad Kalev Konso ja Reet Naber (Tartu: Kaitseväe Ühendatud õppeasutused, 2014).

and the recordings kept in the archive of the Estonian Public Broadcasting Company. Unfortunately, not all documents from the first years have been preserved. New material has been published about the Estonian national fleets and to explain the functions of the Navy.²

Maritime activities were extremely important during the achievement and defence of Estonia's independence from 1918–1920 because the entire foreign communication of the warring state depended on the possibility of maritime navigation. Supplies of consumer goods and military equipment from the West were no less important. The military and political significance of the arrival of British warships in Tallinn was difficult to overestimate. The first volunteers were arriving from Finland to support the initially retreating Estonian troops, so the connection with our northern neighbours was essential for us.³

It's therefore no surprise that twenty-odd men, whose merit was guaranteeing maritime traffic, were awarded the Cross of Liberty after the War of Independence. The best known of these men were Chief of Navy Pilots, Lighthouse and Seamarks Administration Sea Captain William Dampf; Chief of Port Factory Administration Edgar Heinrichsen; Commandant of the Port of Tallinn Sea Captain Oskar Toomara; Mihkel Tiidus, Leonhard Stamm and Theodor Holm, the pilots who helped the British Squadron navigate to Tallinn through minefields.⁴

² Mati Terve, "Soovitused mereturvalisust tagava riigilaevastiku ülesehituse muutmiseks Eesti näitel" (Master's Thesis, Institute of Internal Security of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, 2011); Igor Schvede, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Assigning Coast Guard Duties to the Estonian Navy" (Master's Thesis, Baltic Defence College, 2003); Liivo Laanetu, "Totalforsvarets maritime komponent i Estland" (Graduation Thesis, Royal Danish Naval Academy, 2007), <http://lok.org.ee/kirjutised/kirjutis-nr-15/> (accessed 27.6.2014); Taavi Urb, "Cooperation of Coast Guards and Navies in Baltic Sea Region" (Graduation Thesis, Staff Course of Baltic Naval Officers, 2011), <http://lok.org.ee/kirjutised/kirjutis-nr-14/> (accessed 27.6.2014); Ott Laanemets, "Milleks meile merevägi?" Eesti Päevaleht, 19.12.2008, <http://www.epl.ee/artikkel/452781> (accessed 27.6.2014); Ott Laanemets, "Merepimedusega löödud," *Postimees*, 15.5.2010, <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/263085/ott-laanemets-merepimedusega-loodud/> (accessed 27.6.2014).

³ Mati Õun, Hannes Walter, Peedu Sammaloo, *Võitlused Läänemeres 1918–1919: Suurbritannia ja Eesti laevastik Vabadussõjas* (Tallinn: Olion, 2003), 13–19.

⁴ Mati Strauss, Jaak Pihlak, Ain Krillo, *Eesti Vabaduse Risti kavalerid. Register* (Viljandi: Viljandi Muuseum 2004), register.

The contribution of the pilots and those who trawled for mines can be explained with the frequently used example of the doubts of Commander Sir Edwin Alexander-Sinclair about whether sending his warships to the Gulf of Finland was even possible after the first ships hit mines in December 1918.⁵

Both the politicians and the general public gave a lot of attention to naval defence until the occupation of Estonia in 1940. Data pertaining to the Navy were some of the most protected state secrets.⁶

Naval defence has always been extremely important in securing Estonia's independence due to the country's geopolitical location.

First steps of naval defence re-establishment

Historians and navy veterans were the first to suggest the **re-establishment** of naval defence. There were many persons involved in maritime affairs among the founding members of the Estonian Academic Military History Society established by the Estonian National Maritime Museum in 1988, and they were the first to start promoting the history of Estonia's maritime affairs and navy. Naval warfare historian Mati Õun was selected the chairman of the society. The first biggest initiative of the society was the organisation of reclaiming the historical icebreaker Suur Tõll from the Russian Baltic Fleet in the same year.⁷ Many patriotic Estonian men who cared about national defence joined it in the first years. The first Defence Ministers Ülo Uluots, Hain Rebas and Enn Tupp were members of the society. Roland Leit became the first Commander of the Estonian Navy.

The people who next got actively involved in naval defence issues were navy veterans, whose first public meeting was held on the 16th of

⁵ Õun, Walter, Sammalsoo, *Võitlused Läänemeresel*, 29–36; Reigo Rosenthal, *Laidoner-väejuht: Johan Laidoner kõrgema operatiivjuhi ja strateegia kujundajana Eesti Vabadussõjas* (Tallinn: Argo, 2008), 51–52.

⁶ Ivo Juurvee, *Rääkimine hõbe, vaikimine kuld. Riigisaladuse kaitse Eesti Vabariigis 1918–1940* (Tallinn: SE&JS, 2013), 225–232.

⁷ Mati Õun, *Eesti Akadeemiline Sõjaajaloo Selts. Esimesed 20 aastat* (Tallinn: Sentinel, 2008), 5–6.

April 1991 at the Maritime Museum. The Estonian Assembly of Sailors considers this its birthday. The decision to establish the Guild of Estonians Who Served in the Finnish Navy was made at the meeting of the Estonian volunteers who fought in the Finnish Navy held on the 19th of October 1991,⁸ and Ants Vaadre was elected its chairman. These three associations worked actively on the re-establishment of naval defence, published articles in the media, wrote memos to the authorities and met with several leading Estonian officials. The anniversary of the Estonian Navy was publicly celebrated for the first time in post-war Estonia on the 24th of November 1991 in the Old Town Music House. Director General of the Border Guard Board Andrus Öövel and member of the Assembly of Sailors Edgar Haavik spoke to the attendees.⁹

Takeover of submarine *Lembit* from the Soviet Union Baltic Fleet Museum

The first meeting of the management board of the Guild of Estonians Who Served in the Finnish Navy was held on the 14th of March 1992. The second item on the agenda of the meeting was the takeover of the Pirita-based submarine *Lembit* from the recipient of two Orders of the Red Banner, the Baltic Fleet Museum of the USSR.¹⁰ Letters were written to Prime Minister Tiit Vähi and, on the 28th of March, also to the Government of the Republic requesting support for the takeover of the submarine and

⁸ In Estonia, they are called 'soomepoisid' (the Finnish Boys) and they were a group of ca 3,500 Estonians who served in the Finnish army during the Second World War. They also include the Estonians who served in the Finnish Navy from 1941–1944 and formed ca 10% of the staff of the Finnish Navy at the time.

⁹ Jaak Sammet, "Eesti mereväeveteranid tulevad taas kokku," *Rahva Hää!*, 17.11.1991; Ants Vaadre, *Mereväepoiste tagakambri meenutusi* (Tallinn: EVG Print, 2010), 88–91.

¹⁰ Two modern submarines, *Kalev* and *Lembit*, were purchased for the Estonian Navy from the United Kingdom in 1937. Both submarines were included in the Baltic Fleet of the Soviet Union after Estonia was occupied in 1940. *Kalev* perished in the Second World War. *Lembit* survived the war and was exhibited in the Baltic Fleet Museum in Tallinn in 1979. See: Ragnar Kokk, *Eesti Merejõudude allveelaevad ja allveelaevnikud* (Tartu: Kaitseväe Ühendatud Õppetused, 2006).



Former sailors of pre-war Estonian Navy and Estonians who had been serving in the Finnish Navy during the World War II on a meeting in the Estonian Maritime Museum (21st of April 1991). Erich Tarkpea/ETA/Estonian Film Archives

giving it to the Estonian Maritime Museum. On the 10th of April the Prime Minister signed Order of the Government no, 169-k: the Estonian Maritime Museum had to take over the submarine *Lembit*, which used to belong to the Navy of the Republic of Estonia from 1937–1940, from the Baltic Fleet Museum on the basis of the Resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Estonia of the 23rd of January 1992 “Declaration of the buildings, structures, armament, combat equipment, gear and other assets of the armed forces of the former Soviet Union located in the territory of the Republic of Estonia as ownership of Estonia”.

After the meeting of the Assembly of Sailors and the employees of the Maritime Museum with the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces Colonel Ants Laaneots, the latter separated eight armed men under the leadership of Lieutenant Alar Laneman from the Headquarters Company, and

with their support, the submarine was taken over on the 28th of April.¹¹ Ants Vaadre later gave a colourful description of the takeover of *Lembit* to reporter of Eesti Raadio Lembit Lauri.¹² The flag of Estonia was hoisted on the submarine and a watch-keeping duty was organised.¹³ The visual observation of the movement of the vessels of the Baltic Fleet on the Tallinn roadstead and in the basin of the Pirita Harbour started on the initiative of Soviet reserve naval officer Vladimir Koppelman. All of these activities were coordinated with the DFH and the observation data were also sent to them. In his letter to Defence Minister Ülo Uluots, Koppelman reported that in order to make visual observation more effective, three seamen and a non-commissioned officer should start serving on the ship, and he could teach them how to signal as well as about artillery. The gun was being repaired at the time and the commander felt that it could be used to defend the Estonian vessels at the port during the departure of the ships of the Baltic Fleet of the USSR.¹⁴ At first, it was still uncertain that there was going to be no retaliation for the takeover, as there were incidents at night, incl. shooting. This is why strengthening security was discussed by the Border Guard Administration as well as among the members of the Defence League. A border guard boat stood by the opposite bank of the Pirita River for some time, and men took turns to be on night watch.¹⁵

On the 7th of July 1993, the 57th anniversary of the launch of submarines *Lembit* and *Kalev*, the Commander of the Defence Forces (hereinafter the CDF) General Aleksander Einseln thanked the crew of *Lembit* for their exemplary service and ordered the hoisting of the “pennant of senior (captain) on the roadstead”.¹⁶ On the 21st of November 1993 when the 75th anniversary of the Estonian Navy was celebrated on the premises

¹¹ Vaadre, *Mereväepoiste tagakambri meenutusi*, 91–92.

¹² Kirjutamata memuaare. Soome mereväes teeninud eestlased. Recording no ASCDR-2318, editor Lembit Lauri, aired on 11 September 2004, <http://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/kirjutamata-memuaare-kirjutamata-memuaare-soome-merevaes-teeninud-eestlased> (accessed 27.6.2014).

¹³ Reet Naber, “Allveelaeval Lembit heisati Eesti mereväe lipp,” *Meremees* 16, 13.4.1994.

¹⁴ Letter of Vladimir Koppelman to Ülo Uluots, 27.8.1992, KVPSA K-13.

¹⁵ Peeter Ivask, Peedu Sammalsoo to the author on 10 October 2013.

¹⁶ Directive of the CDF no 11 of 7 January 1993, KVPSA K-12.

of the Assembly of Officers of the Border Guard Board, the widow, son and daughter of the former electrician of the submarine, Petty Officer 1st Class Rudolf Lepand (1908–1942) handed over the flag and jack of *Lembit*, which the family had hidden during the Soviet occupation, to the Estonian Maritime Museum.¹⁷ According to the directive issued by Captain (N) Roland Leit, the Commander of the recently established navy, on the 1st of August 1994, submarine *Lembit* was given the number '1' in the Register of Ships of the Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia and it was permitted to use the flag of the Estonian Navy from the 2nd of August.¹⁸

Start of the naval units in the Defence League

The Defence League also started establishing its naval units in the beginning of the 1990s. The later infamous voluntary light infantry company (*Jäägrikompanii*) was to become the coastal defence unit of Estonia. Pärnu County, Lääne County, Tallinn and Tartu County districts were the most active in the establishment of the naval units.

The first action by the members of the Defence League was the takeover of two boats of the former Soviet border guard troops. Namely, the Russian border guards had sold two Zhuk-class patrol boats to public limited company Favora at the end of 1991. The National Defence and Border Guard Board was the only one interested in the boats, and it confiscated and sealed the boats in expectation of the free transfer of military assets to Estonia.¹⁹ The basis for this was the resolution of the Supreme Council, which prohibited purchase and sale transactions with Russian army units, as their assets had been declared the ownership of the state of Estonia. The boats were not guarded and the seals didn't really hold anyone back, so the boats were pretty badly plundered by the end of the summer.

¹⁷ Ants Pärna, "Lipp on alles," *Meremees*, 21.12.1993.

¹⁸ Directive of the Navy Commander no 4, 1.8.1994, MVSA M-K-3.

¹⁹ Madli Vitismann, "Ostaks õige kahuri?" *Meremees*, 4.2.1992.

As there were rumours that the boats were going to be sold abroad, the Defence Initiative Centre²⁰ had the idea to take over the boats and use them for training. Operation Patrol Boat was commenced at Miidurand on the 8th of June 1992. Armed members of the Defence League from the Pärnu County, Lääne County and Tartu County districts plus the members from Tallinn gathered there. They were positioned at the harbour to defend the perimeter, on the tug *Sõru* and a boat that were at the harbour. The head of the operation was Chief of the Lääne District of the Defence League Margus Järve, and Chief of the Hiiu Subdistrict Ülo Tuisk was responsible for the sea phase. Captain Lembit Loot towed the boats to the Rohuküla roadstead under a guard of armed men. One of the boats stayed by the quay in Rohuküla, the other boat was taken to Orjaku harbour in Hiiumaa.²¹ The flag of the Naval Units was hoisted for the first time at the ceremony held on the Bürgermeister holm in Haapsalu on the 16th of September. The boat was named Edgar.²² The takeover was bold and demonstrative, and its main organiser Margus Järve was named the 'First Pirate of Estonia' by the people.²³

The boat was repaired and taken out to sea a couple of times, but it was then left idle due to the lack of fuel. It was handed over to the navy on the 14th of June 1994. However, it never took to the sea again. The other boat was somewhat more fortunate. After the requisition, it was named Erika and towed to Pärnu. In November 1993 the boat was given to the Department 7 (Navy Department) of the DFH. In the beginning of 1994 the first navy conscripts were referred to the vessel and repairs also commenced.²⁴ The Navy's auxiliary vessel *Ahti* towed the boat from

²⁰ The National Defence Initiative Centre was established in 1991 on the order of the Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Estonia (in exile) in duties of the President Heinrich Mark (the exile government stopped operating in October 1992 as the constitutional Riigikogu and President of the Republic stepped into office). It was a military structure that dealt with the development of the national defence concept, etc. It operated partly with the Defence League. It attempted to assume the role of the organiser of Estonia's military defence.

²¹ Report of the Chief of Staff of the Lääne District of the Estonian Defence League Ülo Tuisk to the National Defence Committee of the Supreme Council, 12.6.1992, KVPSA K-13.

²² Anneli Ammas, "Edgar õnnistati ja talle heisati lipp," *Lääne Elu*, 19.9.1992.

²³ Andres Raid, *Kui Eesti oli kodusõja lävel* (Tallinn: Eesti Ajalehed, 2010), 81–85.

²⁴ Directive no 63 of the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces of 9 March 1994, KVPSA.



*Hoisting the Estonian flag on the naval vessel Edgar (19th of September 1992).
Arvo Tarmula/Estonian Film Archives*

Pärnu to Tallinn on the 2nd of May 1994. On the 20th of September 1994 it was officially named *Grif* and given the bow number A-402.²⁵ The boat was repaired, but the electricity generator burnt out during the first time it was tested. The faults kept recurring and *Grif* was soon hoisted on the quay of the Mine Harbour, where it remained until its transfer to the Maritime Museum.²⁶

Another thing that must be mentioned when the establishment of the naval units is discussed is the restoration of the naval unit of the Pärnu County District of the Defence League on the initiative of Peeter Mürsoo in June 1992. This unit grew into one of the biggest of the naval units of the Defence League with more than 400 members registered by 1994.²⁷

²⁵ Directive of the Chief of Staff no 11 of 20 September 1994, MVSTA M-K-7.

²⁶ Reet Naber, "Mereväe algusaastad," – *Jälle kakskümmend aastat mereväge: Ülevaateid ja meenutusi. Esimene raamat.* Koostajad Kalev Konso ja Reet Naber (Tartu: Kaitseväe Ühendatud õppeasutused, 2014), 22–26.

²⁷ Kalle Ojaste, "KL Pärnumaa Malev," – *Eesti eest! Pilguheit kaitseleidu lähiminevikku 1988–2008*, peatoimetaja Merike Jürjo (Tallinn: Kuma, 2008); Peeter Mürsoo to the author.

In August 1993 the Ruhnu Island Group of the members of Defence League of the Pärnu County District started guarding the barracks on the island to prevent the state's assets from being plundered and destroyed, as they were needed for the development of the sea surveillance and defence systems. The Staff of the Ruhnu Group was set up there, and the establishment of the radio communication centre started.²⁸ The naval unit of the Port of Tallinn was restored on the 2nd of December 1994 when the Commander of the Defence League named the Naval Unit of the Tallinn District the successor of the pre-war Port of Tallinn Naval Unit.²⁹ The Naval Unit of Muhu commenced its operations in 1996.

The men from Tartu also showed initiative. The Inland Naval Unit, which had 37 members in 1997, was established by the Tartu District on the 29th of March 1995. Tartu City Government had the tugs *Ahti* and *Baikal*, which were renamed *Tarbatu* and *Vaike*, taken to the subdistrict. *Tarbatu* was repaired and it assisted during the construction work on Kärevere Bridge. The vessels were rented out in 1997 and later sold.³⁰

Estonian Maritime Administration establishes coastal defence

The organisation of Estonian maritime affairs first started in the area of government of the Minister of Transport, still formally in Soviet times. Namely, everything that concerned maritime affairs, including the activities of the Estonian State Shipping Company, were under the central management and strict control of the USSR Maritime Ministry. The sea transport workgroup of the Council of Ministers of the Estonian SSR started operating on the 10th of October 1989. On the 1st of December, the Transport Committee adopted the resolution on the formation of the

²⁸ Report of the Chief of Pärnu County District of the Defence League Peeter Määrsoo to the Commander of Defence Forces, 18.8.1993.

²⁹ Reet Naber, Kuno Peek, "Meredivisjon," – *Kaitseliit Tallinnas 1917–2010: juubeliraamat sõnas ja pildis*, peatoimetaja Merike Jürjo (Tallinn: Kuma, 2010), 125.

³⁰ Taivo Kirm, "KL Tartu Malev," – *Eesti eest! Pilguheit kaitseliidu lähiminevikku 1988–2008*, peatoimetaja Merike Jürjo (Tallinn: Kuma, 2008), 212, 235.

National Maritime Administration. The Estonian Maritime Administration (EMA) was established on the 16th of January 1990, and its statutes were approved on the 29th of April 1990. The primary task of the EMA was to explain on what different levels maritime economy was an important area of activity and that the revenues it generates are important for the entire state. The newly established Administration had to resolve issues concerning the sea border of Estonia, the establishment of the Estonian Ship Register, the work of ports and the preparation of the documents of seamen as well as cooperation with international maritime organisations. The four most important divisions formed in the course of the work were the Administrative, Maritime Safety, Coast Guard and Lighthouse and Hydrography Divisions.³¹ On the 31st of January 1992 Estonia became a member of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). In June the same year, the Riigikogu adopted the “Estonian Merchant Shipping Code”.³² On the 13th of July 1992 the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved the “On Shipping on the Territorial and Inland Waters of the Republic of Estonia”.³³

One of the most complicated tasks of the EMA was the development of the hydrography division, which is extremely important for the state both in the development of merchant shipping as well as from the military aspect. The Chief Administration of Navigation and Oceanography of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR wanted to enter into an agreement that would have left the organisation of maritime safety in Estonia under its administration for at least another ten years. They demanded huge amounts of money for transferring the materials and data to the Estonian authorities. The goal of the Maritime Administration, however, was to take over the hydrography of the territorial waters of Estonia by the end of 1992. Director General of the Estonian Maritime Administration Nathan Tõnisson already went on his first work visit to St Petersburg at the end

³¹ Kalle Pedak, “Eesti Veeteede Amet,” – *Eesti Laevanduse Aastaraamat 1995*, toim. Enn Kreem (Tallinn: Sekstant, 1996), 7–8.

³² “Kaubandusliku meresõidu koodeks,” RT, 1991, 46, 577, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/30363> (accessed 27.6.2014).

³³ “Laevanduse kohta Eesti Vabariigi territoriaal- ja sisemerel,” RT 1992, 33, 439, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/29651> (accessed 27.6.2014).

of November 1991. The situation on the sea routes was quickly becoming dangerous. Several lighthouses had been turned off in the Pärnu region in summer 1992, and getting to the Port of Pärnu at night was therefore difficult. Negotiations about transferring the assets of and responsibility for the Tallinn hydrography region started in September 1992. The agreement was signed at the level of the military issues workgroups of experts and delegations on the 30th of September 1992. Commander of the Russian Baltic Fleet Admiral Vladimir Jegorov arrived in Tallinn on the 3rd of August 1993 to prepare for the visit of Commander of the Russian Navy Feliks Gromov. The agreement about the handover of the hydrography equipment, structures and systems by the 1st of September 1993 was signed during this visit. The final deadline for the removal of the Tallinn Naval Base of the Baltic Fleet from Estonia was agreed at the same time. Guaranteeing maritime safety in the coastal waters of Estonia was the task of the state of Estonia from the 1st of October 1993; this task was performed by the EMA. The representatives of the EMA took part in the work of the IMO for the first time in autumn 1993. In 1994, Estonia became a member of the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) and in 1997 it became a member of the International Hydrographic Organisation. These two organisations played an important role in the fact that hydrography and navigation aids were transferred to Estonia relatively fast, even before the departure of the Russian troops.³⁴

According to the Merchant Shipping Code, the functions of the Coast Guard Division of the EMA include rescuing human lives and the organisation of the elimination of pollution on the sea, participation in the supervision of the requirements for fishery and environmental protection as well as the use of the economic zone and continental shelf. The Coast Guard Coordination Centre was established for the collection and transmittal of information. The EMA had 33 different vessels by the end of 1994.³⁵

³⁴ Peeter Peetsalu, *Heitlike aegade tuules: Veeteede Ameti ajalugu* (Tallinn: Olion, 2008), 91–92.

³⁵ Pedak, “Eesti Veeteede Amet,” 8.



Half-sunken Russian military vessels in Paldiski Northern Port (April 1993). Harald Leppikson/Rahva Hää/ Estonian Film Archives

The seriousness of the EMA about naval defence is illustrated by the letter about the draft of the naval defence concept sent by Director General Sea Captain Tarmo Ojamets to Defence Minister Hain Rebas on the 8th of February 1993.³⁶ The letter contained a thorough analysis of issues related to national defence and maritime affairs. Most of these options are still as topical today. It was recommended to add the environmental risk to the security risk described in the draft. Back then, it was already a reasonable fear that, considering the deteriorating condition of the Baltic Sea, every event of pollution, not to speak of massive events of pollution, threatened to cause an ecological catastrophe that the Rescue Service could not eliminate alone, and the help of the units of Defence Forces would also be required. The open view of national defence is illustrated by the proposal to expand the staff of the Defence Forces with the air force, a fleet and coast guard, and to change the part of the EMA's fleet that

³⁶ Letter from Director General of the Estonian Maritime Administration Tarmo Ojamets to Defence Minister Hain Rebas of 8 February 1993, KVPSA K-14.

worked on guaranteeing maritime safety, i.e. the fleets of the Lighthouse, Hydrography and Pilotage Division. Suggesting the use of the speed boats that were subordinate to the chiefs of the army brigades as the watercraft of the Defence Forces in the draft concept is mentioned as another weakness from the viewpoint of naval defence. Ojamets emphasised that the only thing that can guarantee Estonia has any kind of seapower is an independent navy that could consist of one or two frigates or corvettes, two or three torpedo or missile boats, two or three fast patrol boats, two or three minesweepers and one tanker – supply vessel, plus landing ships for the coastal defence brigade. This vision was of course out of this world considering the means of a small country, but if treated as a description of the actual navy needs of the state, it actually made sense. This was the first time that the importance of having minesweepers in securing maritime safety during peacetime was emphasised. The fact that access to Estonian ports could be obstructed with mines in the event of an armed conflict was also raised as an important threat. The development of the coast guard was separately discussed. Its tasks were to coordinate and organise the rescue of human lives and eliminate pollution in the Baltic Sea, inspect adherence to the state's law in inland and territorial waters and the economic zone, and participate in national defence against armed violence. It was also recommended that it should control the sea border with the units of the Defence Forces located on the coast.

Despite the lack of support from previous governments, relative divisions (see p. 152–153) had already been formed in the EMA. The coast guard at first had three ships in its use, which allowed it to start having more of a say in the performance of the tasks considered to belong to the Border Guard Board, Customs Board and the Marine Inspectorate. A positive example cited was the successful elimination of the pollution created by the approximately 100 tons of heavy fuel oil that poured into the sea from the tanker *Kihnu* after she got stranded in Kopli Bay in 1993.

Ojamets also suggested that the ships administered by the EMA must be treated as auxiliary vessels of the navy that will be armed if necessary. As a leftover from the Soviet era, the students of the Estonian Maritime Education Centre also had to pass a military course, which at the level



Estonian Border Guard is taking over Russian naval installations on Naissaar Island (August 1993). Harald Leppikson/Estonian Film Archives

of ship leadership corresponded to the training of navy reserve officers. Graduates acquired the lowest ranking of naval officer (Second Lieutenant in the USSR). It was also suggested that working on the EMA's ships could be made equivalent to serving in the Navy. The management of the EMA warned the Minister about the uncontrolled development of the Defence Forces and Border Guard, as it could lead to the emergence of two armed forces: one of them in the area of administration of the Ministry of Defence and the other in the Ministry of the Interior. "The second one is planning to develop three armed services: the army, the navy and the air force, whilst the first is rather vague about the need for navy and air force (according to the draft concept), or even denies it. The state can hardly sustain the double economic burden this would create. A large part of the present border guard units could be added to the Defence Forces; the naval ships (Navy) and air force would be parts of the Defence Forces. This would end the abnormal situation whereby the majority of

the Defence Forces are actually not under the leadership of the Ministry of Defence or the DFH and national defence is organised in the area of administration of two ministries.”³⁷

The EMA submitted the draft regulation “About the Estonian Coast Guard” to the Government on the 30th of March 1993. An explanatory memorandum about the main trends in the development of the coastal defence and an overview of the work performed with the Maritime Administration of Sweden since 1991 were enclosed with it. The draft stipulated that the majority of the tasks within the competence of the state on the sea and on lakes Peipus, Lämmijärv and Pskov would be performed by the EMA in close cooperation with the navy. Many may have been scared by the clause that the Border Guard Board had to transfer all armed vessels, coastal radar stations and the Navy Department to the DFH and unarmed vessels to the EMA by the 1st of June 1993.³⁸

In reality, some tasks and fleet of the coast guard were transferred to the Border Guard Board with a Government resolution in 1995. The vessels that were used to abate pollution had to be transferred to the Maritime Inspectorate, which also had its own fleet, fishery protection and patrol boats.³⁹

Development of maritime border guarding units

Due to the circumstances, the Border Guard, which had grown from the Estonian Domestic Defence formed by the Ministry of the Interior on the 17th of May 1990, was also forced to start developing its fleet.⁴⁰ One of the obligations assumed during the negotiations with the leadership of the Soviet border troops in September 1991 was to organise joint service with

³⁷ Response of the EMA to letter of the Ministry of Defence no 81 of 27 January 1993, KVPSA K-14.

³⁸ Draft Regulation of the Government of the Republic, 30 March 1993; Explanatory Memorandum, 25.3.1993, MVSA F7-k10.

³⁹ *Eesti Laevaregistrid*, peatoimetaja Andrus Maide (Tallinn: Veeteede Amet, 1995), 124.

⁴⁰ Henn Karits, “Mehed, kodu kaitsma!” – *Leegitseval piiril: varipiirist ja sidesõjast vabaduseni 1990–1991*, koost. Henn Karits, Aadu Jõgiaas (Tallinn: Eesti Kodukaitse Ajaloo Selts, 2012), 26.

the Soviet border guards according to the agreement made between the Government of Estonia and the Soviet KGB⁴¹ and to start establishing maritime border guarding units.⁴² On the 1st of August 1992 the Russian border guards stopped guarding the northern and western borders of Estonia, and watercraft was therefore required to get the sea border under control.

The border guard boat PVK-001⁴³ (built in 1968) became the first vessel of the Estonia border guard fleet. It was a gift received from the Coast Guard of Sweden in April 1992 – the vessel was presented at a ceremony held in Karlskrona. The boat performed its first important task, greeting the Swedish royal couple on the ship during their visit to Estonia, in April 1992. In 1992 the border guard fleet received three patrol boats from Finland and then two more boats from Sweden in 1993. PVL-105 *Torm*, which was received from Norway, was also given to the border guard.⁴⁴ It was initially meant for the navy, and since the same Storm-class fast patrol boats had also been given to Latvian and Lithuanian Navy, the Estonian Navy saw the opportunity to develop a joint naval squadron on the basis of the same type of boats for participation in the NATO PfP (Partnership for Peace) training events. Despite the numerous requests sent by the Commander of the Navy to the Commander of the Defence Forces and the Ministry of Defence, it was still given to the border guard.⁴⁵

The Maritime Department was formed in the Border Guard on the 1st of June 1992, and the first specialist, Commander Senior Grade Ants Toomepuu was commissioned on the 28th of August. His task was to develop the concept for controlling the sea border, and he became the first commander of the Single Squadron of Border Guard Boats constituted on the 1st of February 1994. The Single Squadron was in charge of all bigger border guard boats and speed boats; its tasks included guaranteeing

⁴¹ In the Soviet Union border guards were subordinate to the KGB.

⁴² Vabariigi Valitsuse korraldus nr 299-k, 9.9.1991 komisjoni moodustamise kohta piirikaitse ja tolli Eesti Vabariigi võimkonda allutamise küsimuste lahendamiseks.

⁴³ PVK – piirivalvekaater (border guard boat).

⁴⁴ PVL – piirivalvelaev (border guard ship).

⁴⁵ Commander of the Navy R. Leit to Commander of the Defence Forces Aleksander Einsehn on 16 November 1994; Commander of the Navy Roland Leit to Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence Tarmo Mölder on 17 November 1994, KVPSA.

the completion of the crews of watercraft, the organisation of in-service training, the planning and organisation of repairs and maintenance of watercraft, and supplying the craft with fuel and lubricants, spare parts and other necessary equipment.

The Border Guard College started training marine border guards in the building of the Maritime College in 1992. The first group referred to the navy was also trained there.⁴⁶ The fleet started growing, especially after Sea Captain Tarmo Kõuts became the Director General of the Border Guard Board in June 1993. The border guard development concept was officially approved in 1993. The State Borders Act and the Border Guard Act were adopted by the Riigikogu in 1994. This legislation also determined the tasks of border guards on the sea.

The Russian landing barge PVL-104 *Tiir* and two boats were purchased in 1994 to maintain a connection with the islands. Finland donated three border guard boats and 11 motor boats. The border guard boats PVL-105 *Maru* and PVL-107 *Kõu* were received from Finland in 1995. The EMA transferred three boats in the same year. Training boat PVL-108 *Linda* was received in 1996 and PVL-109 *Valvas* was received from the US Coast Guard in 1997. The construction of new vessels in Estonia also started on the initiative of the Board of Border Guard: PVL-103 *Pikker* was built in 1995.⁴⁷ Ice class border guard boat PVK-010 was built in 1997 and PVL-111 *Vapper* in 2000. The fast growth of the fleet increased the need for qualified seamen. The first post-war course for Estonian naval officers was therefore launched in 1996 and most of the graduates went on to serve as border guards.⁴⁸ The Border Guard was also made responsible for the organisation of search and rescue in Estonian waters from 1995. This meant that in addition to guarding the sea border, the border guard vessels also had to be ready to save human lives at sea and on transboundary water bodies. The obligation to carry out surveillance to detect marine

⁴⁶ Tarmo Kõuts, "Eesti Merepiirivalve," – *Eesti Laevanduse Aastaraamat 1995*, toim. Enn Kreem (Tallinn: Sekstant, 1996), 46–48.

⁴⁷ *Register of Border Guard Boats* (Border Guard Board, Marine Department: Tallinn, 1997).

⁴⁸ *Tallinn: entsüklopeedia 2*, peatoim. Jaan Tamm (Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, 2004), 64.



First vessel of the Estonian Border Guard fleet, border guard boat PVK-001, built in 1968 and donated by Swedish Coast Guard arriving in Tallinn (15th of April 1992). Tiit Veermäe/ETA/Estonian Film Archives

pollution and to inform the Maritime Inspectorate was also assigned to the Board of the Border Guard. Border guards also took part in field training in addition to their everyday obligations. The organisation of the tri-lateral sea rescue training of Finland, Russia and Estonia started in 1995.⁴⁹

Vice Admiral Kõuts had a very positive opinion of the Border Guard of the first years: “Back then, the Border Guard was the best organised defence structure in the country, as the creation of the Defence Forces had only begun and there was nothing they could do anyway due to the presence of the Russian troops. [---] Our Border Guard was actually strong at the time as an organisation, as they had many enthusiasts in their personnel who were literally ready to jump to the defence of our country. Andrus Öövel had done a great job. We managed to motivate the staff to

⁴⁹ Tarmo Kõuts, Ants Toomepuu, “Eesti piirivalvelaevastiku arendamisest ja rahvusvahelisest koostööst. Ülevaade” (manuscript, Tallinn, 1997), copy in author’s possession.

operate as one team back then. The selection of staff and career management created a national defence attitude and the mood was extremely positive.”⁵⁰ Let me add that the later commanders of the navy, Captain (Navy) Jaan Kapp and Commander Senior Grade Ahti Piirimägi gained their first leadership experience when serving in the Border Guard.

Concepts of re-establishment of the Estonian Navy

All other authorities had started to operate actively by the time the restoration of the Estonian Navy started. As a result of this, the navy faced bigger problems in finding staff, funding and equipment, including watercraft. The main reason why no attention was given to the establishment of the navy at first was its high cost (as is the case with the air force), but Estonian society had also become alienated from maritime affairs during the years of occupation.

On the 18th of March 1993 the Chief of Staff Colonel Ants Laaneots sent a long memorandum to President Lennart Meri, asking for his opinion of the problems that had emerged in the naval defence of the Republic of Estonia. He explained the situation where Estonia like every other independent country has the obligation to perform national defence and maritime safety tasks. He expressed his disapproval of the fact that whilst the Coast Guard Division of the Maritime Administration had started to perform these tasks, the Border Guard Board was trying to establish its own fleet. His position was that it was essential to create a navy within the composition of the Defence Forces of Estonia, which would perform military tasks and consist of two main parts: coastal defence units and a fleet. Laaneots emphasised that a system consisting of three maritime components would be impractical and expensive. He gave examples of how a civil organisation – a coast guard to which the authority of border police had been granted – performs some of the tasks during peacetime

⁵⁰ Velly Roots, Tarmo Kõuts, “Eesti oli, on ja peab jäämagi mereriigiks!” *Kultuur ja Elu* nr 2 (2008), http://kultuur.elu.ee/ke492_tarmo.htm (accessed 1.12.2013).

in Sweden, the US and many other Western countries. The coast guard cooperates closely with the navy and the latter only acts in the event the coast guard cannot cope on its own. He found that the creation of such a system (coast guard + navy) would also be practical in Estonia, because it would allow the state to save on resources and make operative management simpler.⁵¹

The proposals submitted by the heads of the Defence Forces and the Maritime Administration have been discussed in different commissions since 1994.⁵² Unfortunately, this topic is still high on the agenda, as no solution has been found to the problem of combining the functions of national fleets and coastal bases.

Colonel Laaneots submitted the vision of the DFH about the navy at the meeting about the development of the main positions of the defence concept in February 1993: he mentioned the formation of coastal defence units as the most burning issue, which should be followed by the completion of the navy with patrol boats, minesweepers, battleships, speed boats and transport vessels. The coast guard should be made responsible for the sea border guard tasks, where a civil structure would operate with the vessels of the navy, without a separate border guard fleet. However, the situation on the sea border back then was such that the Border Guard with its four vessels performed practically all of the obligations of an independent state on the sea.⁵³

The search for people began as naval issues were becoming increasingly more important. This was difficult, as there were few qualified specialists in Estonia and the majority of nationally minded specialists were already working in the EMA or the Border Guard.

⁵¹ Letter from the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces Colonel Ants Laaneots to the President of the Republic of Estonia of 18 March 1993, KVPSA K-5/153.

⁵² For example, Minutes no 65 of Government of the Republic Session, 15.9.1995: [---] "Minister of the Interior Heiki Ariike and the Ministry of Roads and Communications, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Defence are required, considering the opinions expressed during this Government session, to study in depth the issues related to the use of vessels belonging to the authorities operating in the areas of government of the ministries and to make the relevant proposals to the Government". [---].

⁵³ Presentation by Colonel Laaneots on 19 March 1993, MVSA F7-k10.

Lieutenant Senior Grade Edgar Haavik started serving as the head of the Planning Department of the Ministry of Defence on the 22nd of June 1993. Relatively soon, on the 30th of June 1993, he was appointed the Senior Officer of Department 6 of the DFH and, from the 1st of July, the acting commander of Department 6 with the directive of the Commander of the Defence Forces.⁵⁴ On the same day Igor Schvede was commissioned as the Senior Officer and Chief Naval Armament Specialist of Department 6. The newly recruited naval personnel had two chairs and a table in the building of the DFH when they started their job of building up the navy.⁵⁵ Their first task was to develop the necessary plans. They requested that the Ministry of Defence transfer the military base and coastal base with quays at the address Küti 17, Tallinn, to them⁵⁶ and intended to station a marine unit and the guard unit of the port there.⁵⁷ Taking over the Paldiski Northern Port was also planned in the beginning. The Commandant of the Paldiski Northern Port was appointed in January 1994. The lack of resources did not allow the navy to start using these sites and the Commander of the Navy suggested that they be given to private companies.⁵⁸ Consequently, the Paldiski Northern Port was given to the Paldiski City Government in 1995. By June, it was clear that it was also impossible to create the planned coastal defence units any time soon due to the economic situation of the state.

Vessels were the next concern.

The Statutes of the Register of Ships of the Defence Forces of the Republic of Estonia were approved on the 30th of September 1993. All of the ships and other watercraft for the defence of the Republic of Estonia were those whose total length was 12 m and over and which belonged to the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and the Defence League were to be entered in the list.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Directive of the Chief of Staff of 2 July 1993 no 154, service record, KVPSA.

⁵⁵ Author's interview with Captain (N) Igor Schvede.

⁵⁶ The exposition of the Seaplane Harbour of the Maritime Museum is now located there.

⁵⁷ Letter from the Chief of Staff to the Minister of Defence of 18 August 1993, KVPSA K-5/524.

⁵⁸ Letter from the Commander of the Navy to the Commander of the Defence Forces of 22 June 1994, MVSA M-K-8-1.

⁵⁹ Directive of the CDF no 21 of 30 September 1993, KVPSA K-13.

The first one dealt with was auxiliary vessel *Revalia* (later renamed *Laine*), whose fate had been very complicated. *Revalia*, which had been rebuilt from a fishing trawler into a passenger ship, had been withheld by the Finnish coast guard on the 2nd of February 1993, as there were 108 illegal Kurdish refugees onboard. The owners brought the ship back to Estonia. The Ministry of Defence bought it on the 13th of July 1993 and gave it to the Naval Department in September.⁶⁰

Another two remarkable events occurred in November 1993: Government Order 637-k of November on the sale of research vessel *Livonia* and the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Estonian Navy in the Assembly of Border Guard Officers on the 21st of November. *Livonia*, which was in the balance sheet of the Marine Institute, was sold as a vessel not needed by the state of Estonia. The Swedish Navy, which bought the vessel in 1996, is still using it, and after its modernisation in 2003, it also took part in operation *Atalanta* (EUNAVFOR) in the European Union's action against piracy.

Formation of the navy staff

Sea Captain Roland Leit, who had been granted the rank of Captain (Navy) by the President the week before, was called to active service and appointed the Commander of the Estonian Navy on the 1st of February 1994.⁶¹ Captain (N) Leit remembers that the priorities of the re-establishment of the Navy were determined at the first meeting held in the DFH in January: finding the personnel, i.e. officers, non-commissioned officers as well as conscripts; obtaining the vessels for the Navy; finding accommodation for the staff; and studying options for the establishment of a naval base.

⁶⁰ Kalev Konso, *Eesti mereväe sümboolika kataloog 1993–2011 = The symbols and insignia of the Estonian Navy 1993-2011* (Tartu: Kaitseväe Ühendatud Õppeasutused, 2011), 29.

⁶¹ Service record, KVPSA; Roland Leit, "Eesti Mereväe osa Eesti Kaitseväe taasloomises" (manuscript).

Commander Veljo-Harivald Pärli,⁶² a former Swedish naval officer whose presence was invaluable for the young Navy, was called to active service and appointed the Chief of Staff of the Navy as of the 21st of April 1994. He compiled the first post-war naval regulations (revised the naval regulations of 1929) and a number of rules required for the organisation of the service. Commander Pärli himself has said that this period in Estonia was one of the most interesting ones in his life, because it was the first time that he could rebuild something and witness the birth of a navy.⁶³ Lieutenant Senior Grade Haavik had also compiled the development concept of the Navy by 1994. There were five officers, five non-commissioned officers and five conscripts serving in the Navy as of the 1st of March 1994. Fifteen conscripts were transferred from the Single Signal Battalion to the Navy in relation to the completion of the Navy, and they were sent to study in the Tallinn Border Guard College.⁶⁴ An agreement was signed with the Border Guard Board for teaching the speciality of ordinary seaman.⁶⁵

A few other men were added to the ranks of navy specialists, and a directive of the Commander of the Defence Forces established the foundation for the formation of the navy and air force on the basis of Departments 6 and 7 of the DFH as independent legal entities with their own seals and insignia. The commanders of these armed services were granted the right to assign the military ranks on non-commissioned officers to members of the Defence Forces, and to issue directives and orders for the organisation of the service of military units and authorities.⁶⁶ This directive was complemented by the directive of the Chief of Staff of the 17th of June, which determined the buildings at Erika 13, Tallinn, as the location of the Naval Staff.⁶⁷ The Commander of the Navy signed his first directive on the 27th of June, confirming the fact that the Estonian Navy

⁶² Service record, KVPSA.

⁶³ Veljo-Harivald Pärli to the author, 5.3.2013.

⁶⁴ Directive of the Chief of Staff of 28 March 1994, MVSA M-P-6.

⁶⁵ Agreement between the Border Guard Board and the Defence Forces Headquarters, 5.4.1994, MVSA M-K-8.2.

⁶⁶ Directive no 24 of the Commander of the Defence Forces of 13 April 1994, KVPSA K-13.

⁶⁷ Directive no 155 of the Chief of Staff of 17 June 1994, KVPSA K-13.

had been established and that it consisted of the following units: leadership, Naval Staff, Paldiski Northern Port, auxiliary vessel *Ahti*, auxiliary vessel *Revalia*, patrol boat *Grif* and the mine countermeasures group. There were 42 men in total.

A small fleet was beginning to form. The Kingdom of Denmark had given the patrol boat *Mallemukken* to the Defence Forces of Estonia on the 29th of March 1994; it was renamed *Ahti* and entered in the list of naval ships as an auxiliary vessel.⁶⁸ On the 1st of September 1994 the two reconnaissance vessels of the former German Democratic Republic, which were a gift from the Federal Republic of Germany and had been preserved for several years, docked at the Mine Harbour, which had been taken over from the representatives of the Baltic Fleet the day before. They were named *Sulev* and *Vambola*. The mineship *Sulev* was repaired, and in summer 1995, it took part in the first joint naval exercise of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania Amber Sea '95. The most important voyage of the vessel was the visit of Prime Minister Mart Laar to Sweden in August 1999. This was the first official visit on a warship after the war. A small auxiliary boat, *Mardus*, was also obtained from Denmark in December.⁶⁹

A ceremonial formation was held and the flag of Estonian Navy was hoisted at the Mine Harbour on the 1st of September 1994, the day after it was taken over. Vessels could once again be based at the historical naval harbour. The harbour and buildings left behind by the Russian fleet were in a dire condition and moving the staff took until November. Norwegian company AS Newt lifted out the wreckage that had been sunk in the basin of the harbour, and elimination of the environmental pollution lasted for many years.

Close cooperation with the Latvian and Lithuanian navies also started in 1994 and considerable help was received from the countries that supported us. The establishment of a joint naval squadron was planned from the very beginning to advance our integration with international military structures. In the same year, the first young men were sent to Sweden and

⁶⁸ Directive of the CDF no 2 of 15 April 1994, KVPSA K-13.

⁶⁹ Kalev Konso, *Eesti Mereväe sümbolika*, 35–37.

Finland to study the specialty of naval officer. In June 1994 the Estonian naval officers participated for the first time in the largest international naval exercise in the Baltic Region, Baltic Operations (BALTOPS '94), but this time as just observers.

Navy as armed service

The Ministry of Defence sent the “Development Plan of Defence Structures for 1995-1997” to the Defence Forces for review in autumn 1994. The need to start developing the new armed services of the navy and air force was also mentioned in the plan. The need for them was justified as follows:

- a) they are extremely operational;
- b) they have the function of strengthening other organisations in peacetime and they must be able to protect the state's domestic and foreign policy interests (strengthen the border guard), they can be efficiently used for the promotion of defence policy cooperation (visits, joint exercises), and the state can also use these armed services to demonstrate its presence in one or another area of the region as well as its preparedness to protect its interests;
- c) based on the results of the introductory research carried out by the Ministry of Defence, it can be said that the scientific and industrial capacities of Estonia make it possible to arm these services with weapons, which is an effective deterrent of aggression;
- d) the establishment of their bases in certain areas will have a positive infrastructural impact;
- e) bases have already been allocated to these armed services; their technical condition is such that reconstruction cannot be delayed any further. It must start in 1995; such delays will cost the state dearly both in financial and political terms.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Development Plan of Defence Structures for 1995–1997. Letter of Defence Minister Enn Tuppil no 01-11/1469 of 4 October 1994, MVSA F7-k10.

The structure of the Defence Forces approved by the Government in 1997 prescribed the formation of the Naval Staff, Naval Base and the 1st Naval Squadron.⁷¹ The “Fundamentals of Estonian National Defence” prepared at the time when Andrus Öövel was the Defence Minister and approved by the Riigikogu in May 1996 also provided a stronger foundation for the activities of the Navy by formulating the objectives of its development: prepare the defence of territorial waters, the safety of marine communications, naval infrastructure, and the education and training of naval officers and guarantee them with opportunities to participate in international cooperation. This document also mentions assembling the vessels at the disposal of the Navy, Border Guard and Estonian Maritime Administration into the single system of the Navy and its military preparedness, and training would be inspected by the Commander of the Defence Forces. A joint coastal service had to be created to organise the expedient operations of this system.⁷²

In 1997, the Navy obtained the minesweepers *Kalev* and *Olev* from Germany. The agreement for the foundation of the Baltic Naval Squadron (Baltron) of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was signed on the 16th of April 1998. The objective of the cooperation project was to develop the capacity of the seapower of the Baltic States for cooperation in international formations, primarily with NATO units, and to increase their mine-countermeasures capacity. The leading country of the international workgroup was Germany, and the supporting countries were Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. A new era in the life of our Navy had began.

⁷¹ Vabariigi Valitsuse määrus nr 92 “Kaitseväe struktuuri ja paiknemise kinnitamine,” 29.4.1997, RT I 1998, 28, 365.

⁷² “Eesti riigi kaitsepoliitika põhisuundade heakskiitmine,” 7.5.1996, RT I 1996, 33, 684, MVSA M-K-10.

Summary

Several authorities were working in parallel in the establishment of Estonia's naval defence. This led to the situation where many important issues have still not been resolved to this day due to limited material and human resources and the insufficient capacity to perform. This lack of cohesion was an obstacle to the modernisation of the fleet, and the state counted largely on foreign aid.⁷³ Many problems that were topical in the days when our naval defence was created are still up in the air. We're still 'struck by sea blindness'.⁷⁴

In conclusion, I would like to quote the opinion of General Laaneots of the first years in the development of our naval defence and of the present situation: "Estonia is a maritime nation with its larger number of islands and a strategically (both militarily and economically) important transit gate between Russia and Western Europe, i.e. in a way, Estonia also performs the functions of border defence in the interests of NATO and the European Union.

Looking from the angle of NATO, the Baltic States are a peninsula difficult to defend from the viewpoint of guaranteeing their security, as they're separated from Northern and Western Europe by the Baltic Sea and therefore only have a narrow, 70-km land connection via Poland between the Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus. The only and the primary threat to the three Baltic States is Russia, which has declared that restoring the control of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet territories as its main task. The Russians keep practicing closing this corridor during their military exercises (such as Zapad in 2009). The military aid of NATO can reach Estonia mainly by air and sea, which is difficult, as it requires keeping the marine communication lines open. For this purpose we need the capacity for mine countermeasures and the defence of marine communications, which are purely military tasks. The activities

⁷³ Reet Naber, "Eesti riigilaevastik," – *Eesti Laevanduse Aastaraamat 1998*, toim. Enn Kreem (Tallinn: Sekstant, 1998), 47–50.

⁷⁴ Ott Laanemets, "Merepimedusega löödud."

of NATO are a team game; we must be equal (*per capita*) contributors to the team if we want it to defend us. Many countries have one universal national fleet – the Navy, which performs both military as well as maritime border guarding and other maritime security. I know of no opposite examples of where the border guard also performs military duties and is subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior.

Estonia's problem for 20 years now is that we have three national fleets: the Border Guard Board, the Estonian Maritime Administration and the Navy each have one. [---] Sensible small countries have combined them into one and made them universal a long time ago. Even in Latvia, the Navy is the one that deals with maritime border guarding, not to speak of countries like Israel, etc. A single Navy, which would perform the tasks of all of the existing 'fleets', would allow us to react considerably more flexibly to various problems that might occur at sea and considerably cut the state's costs, as only one naval base would be necessary (instead of the present three).⁷⁵

Despite the harsh verdict of the former Commander of the Defence Forces, the development in the area of naval defence has been remarkable considering that it had to be done from scratch and all we had was good intent.

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⁷⁵ General Ants Laaneots to the author on 21 March 2013.

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