

## ESTONIAN PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY: NOT ONLY ABOUT RUSSIA AND THE REFUGEES

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**ABSTRACT.** The current study focuses on the Estonian perceptions of security and on the defence situation both globally and locally. The dynamic results of the public opinion surveys on security risks conducted in Estonia over the last 10 years (2006-2016) will be presented. In addition, to understand whether some of the security risks could be over- or underestimated in Estonia, these results will be compared with the views expressed recently by the World Economic Forum, particularly the Global Risks Report 2016. Also, the arguments why some topics have played or are currently playing key role in the Estonian security perception will be presented and discussed.

### Introduction

Several recent crises such as Brexit, the victory of Donald Trump in US presidential elections, the European refugee crisis, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the global financial crisis illustrate unambiguously what could happen when “black swans” or “black elephants” suddenly appear. The term “black swan” was taken to the spotlight of the International relation’s debates by Taleb Nassim (Nassim 2007), referring to unpredictable events with enormous consequences about which we “don’t know that we don’t know”. In most cases we are willing to explain and predict these developments (the “black swans”) only after their occurrence

(Aven 2013). Following this very logic, the term “black elephant” was introduced by an environmentalist and investor Adam Sweidan and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Thomas L. Friedman in the 2010s (Friedman 2014), describing developments and problems with enormous consequences that are clearly visible but still ignored by everyone (the “black elephant”). They refer to phenomena like global warming, deforestation, massive freshwater pollution and other developments of global scale to illustrate the environmental “black elephant blindness”, and stress the need to “prepare oneself” as much as possible and to focus on the economic and national security value of ecosystems (Daase and Kessler 2007). Especially for small states located in civilization fault lines (Huntington 1993) consequences of black swans or black elephants can be complicated to cope with.

Keeping the same logic in mind, also recent political and economic developments in Europe and threats caused by Russian imperial ambitions could conditionally be classified as either “black swans” or “black elephants”. The signs of impending crises and conflicts were clear, even if only partially revealed. For instance, for quite some years already public support for EU membership in the UK has been one of the lowest among EU countries (see, e.g. Standard Eurobarometer 83/2015; 99), the migratory pressure on the EU as a whole has steadily increased already from 2013 onwards (Eurostat 2016; Asylum Statistics); Russia’s attempts in restoring its authority over the former Soviet territories have now lasted for almost 10 years, and the Greek debt level was high already from the 1990s onwards. In practice, these signs were in many respects ignored or not treated deservedly. Eventually, all the “unpredictable” events with enormous consequences – Brexit, the European refugee crisis, violation of the territorial integrity of a sovereign state in Europe, and the recent Great Recession – materialised and caused serious turbulences in Europe and beyond. In this light, it is of high importance to understand what are the

“known knowns” and “known unknowns”, but also what could be “unknown unknowns” and “what we don’t want to know” among the things and events that could cause serious turbulences. As far as security is concerned, on the one hand, this would contribute to the increase of its perception in a society. On the other hand, it would also help to make rational choices in addressing the actual defence situation and countering potential security threats (Rasmussen 2004). Additionally, security and threat perceptions both globally and in Estonia, have been and will be impacted by the constructivist aspect. The meaning of the same threat markers is differently understood by social groups and the meaning of markers may change during communication (Albert and Buzan 2011).

The current study focuses on the Estonian perceptions of security and the defence situation both globally and locally. The dynamic results of the public opinion surveys on security risks conducted in Estonia over the last 10 years will be presented. In addition, to understand whether some of the security risks could be over- or underestimated in Estonia, these results will be compared with the views expressed recently by the World Economic Forum, particularly, the Global Risks Report 2016. Also, the arguments why some topics have played or are currently playing a key role in the Estonian security perception will be presented and discussed. As the authors see it, the comparison and the further analysis contributes to the better understanding of whether there are any “black swans” or “black elephants” that people in Estonia do not realize currently, but which could cause serious turbulences also in Estonia if the “unlikely” risks should materialize in the future. The article uses a descriptive analytical approach and comparative method for analysis and conclusions.

## Mapping the global risks: A brief overview of the Global Risks Report 2016

To have a reference point to evaluate Estonian risk perception, the current study will first map and rank the risks evaluated in the Global Risks Report published by the World Economic Forum from 2006 to 2016 on aims to define global risks and trends, analyse interconnections between them and search for solutions (Global Risk Report 2016). The reports are based on the Global Risks Perception Surveys, conducted among the experts and decision-makers from business, academia, civil society and the public sector around the world. The most recent report was published in 2016, being based on the survey that was conducted among 750 experts and policy-makers in 2015 and next to the current threats provides valuable insights into the global security outlook in the next 20 years' perspective.

The 2016 Report defines 29 global risks and 13 global trends. Citing the report, "global risk" is defined as an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, can cause significant negative impact for several countries or industries within the next 10 years" (The Global Risks Report 2016, 11), The risks are divided into five categories: geopolitical risks (P), economic risks (Ec), societal risks (S), technological risks (T) and environmental risks (En). All these risks are analysed in a dynamic way, assessing in particular their likelihood and impact, their evolvement over the years, regional breakdown of the perceived likelihood of risks, interconnections among risks, and the level of concerns in the short and long term (Global Risk Report 2016, Part 1). A trend of risks is defined as a long-term pattern that is currently taking place and that could contribute to amplifying global risks and/or altering the relationship between them. Unlike risks, trends are occurring with certainty and can have both positive and negative consequences. Trends can alter how risks evolve and interrelate, and they inform efforts at risk mitigation" (The Global Risks Report 2016, 11). In

addition, long-term security risks are estimated and three alternative scenarios of the international security landscape to 2030 such as “walled cities”, “strong regions”, and “war and peace” are suggested (Global Risk Report 2016, Part 2). In the report, global risks are rated in two categories: first, how likely is their occurrence, and second, how large would their impact be. Moreover, the respondents were asked to consider global risks over a 10-year horizon, as well as to nominate the risks of highest concern over 18 months. The risks are also differentiated according to the regions.

Based on the report, the following global risks with the highest likelihood for 2016 were outlined:

1. Large-scale involuntary migration induced by conflict, disasters, environmental or economic reasons;
2. Major property, infrastructure and environmental damage as well as human loss caused by extreme weather events;
3. Potential failure of the governments and businesses to enforce or enact effective measures to mitigate climate change, protect populations and help businesses impacted by climate change to adapt;
4. Bilateral or multilateral disputes between states which escalate into economic (e.g. trade or currency wars, resource nationalization), military, cyber, societal or other conflicts;
5. Major property, infrastructure and environmental damage as well as human loss caused by geophysical disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic activity, landslides, tsunamis or geo-magnetic storms.

Overall, three out of the Top-5 risks rated most likely constitute global environmental risks. At the same time, the risk rated as the

most likely was of societal background – large-scale involuntary migration – together with serious geopolitical risk of interstate conflicts with regional consequences which ranked as fourth. Two of the risks ranked most likely – large-scale involuntary migration and failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation – belong also to the risks with the largest global impact. However, in the short-term perspective over the next 18 months, societal (such as large-scale involuntary migration), geopolitical (e.g. state collapse of geopolitical importance; interstate conflicts with regional consequences; and inability to govern a nation of geopolitical importance due to weak rule of law, corruption or political deadlock) and economic risks (e.g. a sustained high level of structural unemployment or underutilization of the productive capacity of the employed population) are the main concerns of the survey respondents. What is more, large-scale terrorist attacks ranged slightly above the average level both in terms of likelihood and impact (Global Risk Report 2016).

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Top 5 risks in terms of likelihood</i>	<i>Top 5 risks in terms of impact</i>	<i>Top 5 of risks of concern for the next 18 months</i>	<i>Top 5 of risks of concern for the next 10 years</i>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Large-scale involuntary migration (S)	Failure of climate-change adaption (En)	Large-scale involuntary migration (S)	Water crisis (S)
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Extreme weather events (En)	Weapons of mass destruction (P)	State collapse or crisis (P)	Failure of climate-change adaption (En)
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Failure of climate-change adaption (En)	Water crisis (S)	Interstate conflict with regional consequences (P)	Extreme weather events (En)
4 <sup>th</sup>	Interstate conflict with regional effects (P)	Large-scale involuntary migration (S)	High structural unemployment (Ec)	Food crises (S)
5 <sup>th</sup>	Major natural catastrophes (En)	Severe energy price shocks (Ec)	Failure of national governance (failure of rule of law, corruption, etc)(P)	Profound social instability (S)

Table 1: The results of the Global Risks Report 2016

Source: The Global Risks Report 2016, Figure 1-4, Tables A-B, pp. 11, 13, 69–70.

At the regional level, economic risks – excessive debt burden which could generate sovereign debt crises and liquidity crises, high level of structural unemployment, asset bubbles in major economies, and severe energy price shocks – were mentioned by the respondents from Europe, and fiscal crises and unemployment together with the risks of unmanageable inflation and interstate conflicts were mentioned by the respondents from Russia. Estonia was mentioned once in the report in connection with cyberattacks that were perceived as the risk of highest concern in Estonia. The same applies to Germany, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Singapore, Switzerland, and the United States.

To summarise, as the authors see it, particular attention should be paid to the risks that are ranked most likely to materialize over the next 10 years and that could simultaneously have massive global impact. Thus, the direct focus should be on various societal, geopolitical and economic risks that need to be addressed as rapidly as possible. However, in the long-term perspective the environmental risks and broader societal risks (including, e.g. water and food crises) should not be underestimated.

### **What concerns the Estonians most? The results of the public opinion surveys on security and defence issues in Estonia in 2006–2016**

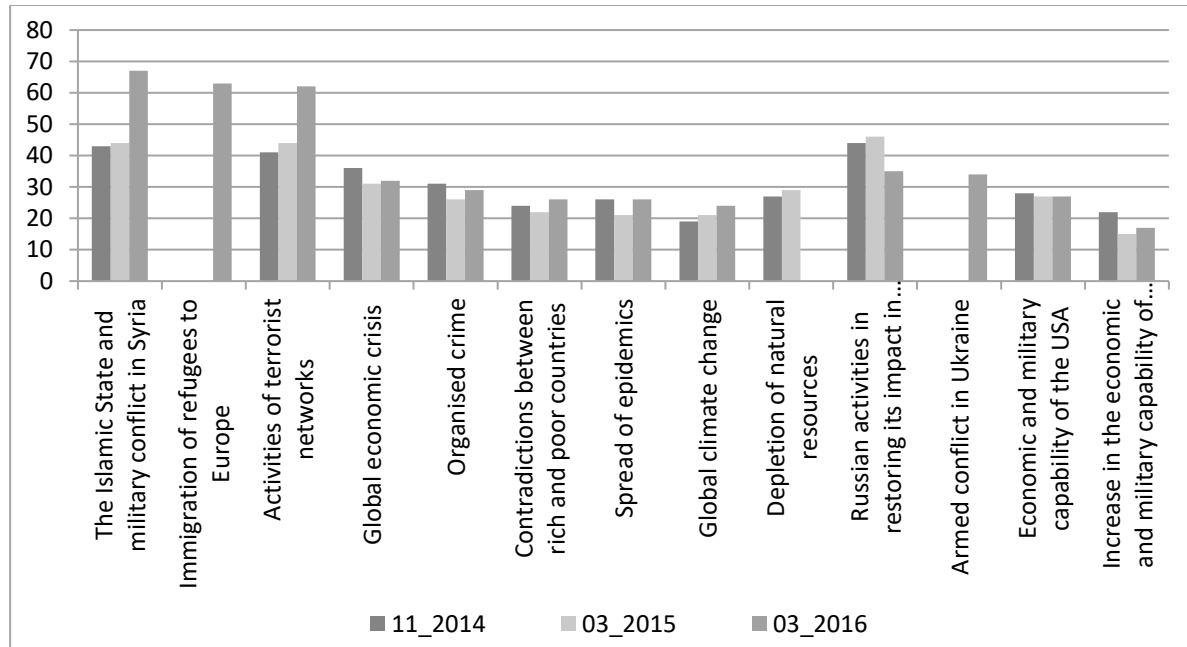
Public opinion surveys on security and defence issues have been conducted in Estonia over the last 15 years, from 2001 onwards. The surveys have been ordered by the Estonian Ministry of Defence and in the course of time conducted by four different social and market research companies (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016a and Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016b). The aspects of security were included to the survey from 2006 on and are comparable for two periods, from 2006 to 2016 and from 2014 to 2016. Among various topics, the surveys from 2006 to 2016 focus on the likelihood of different threats impending Estonia in



the future. In addition, the last surveys from 2014 to 2016 also assess the effects of various factors on peace and security in general, as the Estonians see them. To introduce briefly the background of the surveys, in various periods the survey sample has varied from 1,000 to 1,250 persons. In recent public opinion polls (from 2014 to 2016), the survey method has been personal interview, in previous years, face-to-face interviews in combination with paper questionnaires were used. As additional sources for the current study, two separate Eurobarometer surveys also concerning possible threats and options for solutions were analysed (Eurobarometer 2014 and Eurobarometer 2015).

In the eyes of the Estonians, the key factors affecting peace and security around the world in 2016 are the activities of the Islamic State and the military conflict in Syria, immigration of refugees to Europe and activities of terrorist networks (respectively, 67%, 63% and 62% of the respondents agreed that the factor has “certainly” an effect on peace and security) (see, Figure 1). In this sense, somewhat differently from the overall results of the Global Risks Report, Estonians are extremely concerned about the activities of terrorist networks and terrorist attacks. This concern is partially also reflected in the general attitude of Estonians towards the massive influx of refugees in the EU countries – although the local political elite claims the opposite, among the public the recent terrorist attacks in Brussels, Paris and Nice tend still to be associated with the European refugee crisis (Veebel and Markus 2015). Accordingly, the share of respondents who are concerned about the activities of the Islamic State and terrorist networks has significantly increased in 2016 compared to the previous years, 2014 and 2015. This could be partially explained by the fact that two terrorist attacks from 2016 in Nice and in Brussels directly affected Estonians, as two Estonians were killed and several injured in terrorist attack in Nice in July 2016.

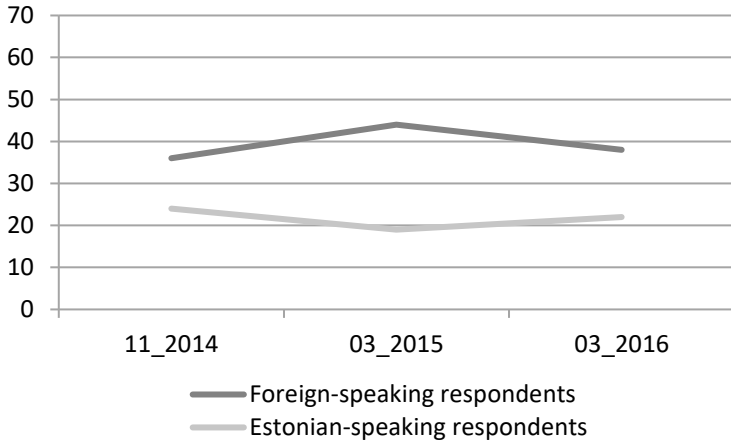
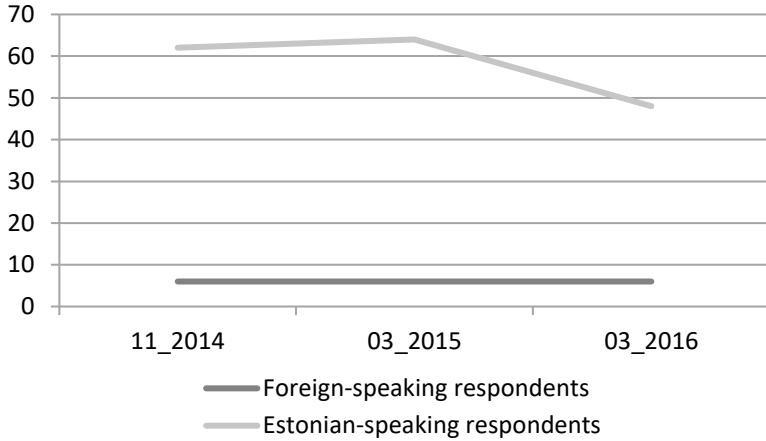
Figure 1: Variables impacting security in 2014–2016, based on the Estonian public opinion polls in 2014–2016 (% of respondents pointing that the factor has an effect on security).



Source: Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016a and Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016b

The recent Russian activities in restoring its authority over former Soviet territories are also assessed as a threat to peace and security by the Estonians (35% of the respondents agreed that this factor has “certainly” had an effect on peace and security), however, to a lesser extent and quite surprisingly this factor has declined in importance in 2016, despite Russia’s constant pressure on NATO and, indeed, on Estonia within it. Intriguingly, even if predictably, this is also one out of two categories for which the assessments of the local Estonian-speaking and Russia-speaking communities differ drastically (see, Figure 2). In the last three years, on average 58% of the Estonian-speaking respondents see Russian activities in restoring its authority as a threat, but only 6% of the foreign-speakers (i.e. Russian community) agree to that. Thus, not really surprisingly, the same phenomenon of divergence in opinions occurs in the opinion of the people about the effect of economic and military capability of the USA on peace and security around the world. The difference here is once again fundamental – whereas the Estonian-speaking community sees the USA as a reliable ally and a reliable guarantee to peace and security in the region in the framework of NATO partnership, the foreign-speakers (mostly Russian) see the increase in the role of the USA as a potential threat (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016a and Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016b).

Figure 2: Responses to the question “Dangers to peace and security in the world” 2014–2016:



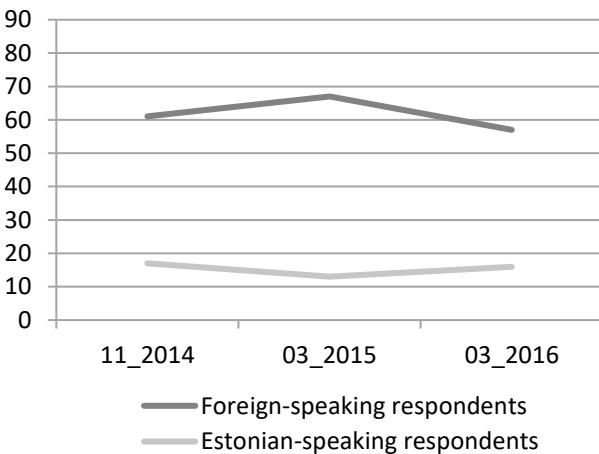
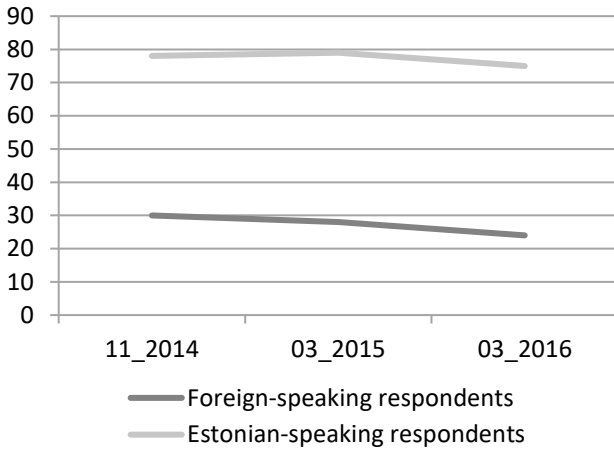
- (a) Russia’s attempts to restore its impact in areas that belonged to the Russian empire
- (b) Economic and military capability of the USA

Source: Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016a and Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016b

This conclusion is also confirmed by the differences in opinion regarding NATO membership (Figure 3(a)). In the last two surveys covering years 2014–2016, people were asked about the important factors that would ensure maximum security to Estonia and whereas approximately 2/3 of the Estonian-speaking respondents named NATO membership, only 24–30% of the foreign-speaking respondents agreed to that. At the same time, a large majority of the foreign-speakers strongly supported cooperation and good contacts with Russia (about 57–67% of foreign-speaking respondents). Merely 13–17% of the Estonian-speaking respondents agreed with that (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016a and Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016b).

Although both economic and environmental risks were highlighted by the experts in the Global Risks Report 2016, these factors are considered as rather less important on peace and security in Estonia (see, Figure 1). The same applies to some broader societal risks (e.g. opposition between rich and poor countries).

Figure 3: “Security guarantees for Estonia” 2014–2016: (a) Membership in NATO; (b) Cooperation and good relations with Russia (% of respondents).



(a) Membership in NATO  
good relations with Russia

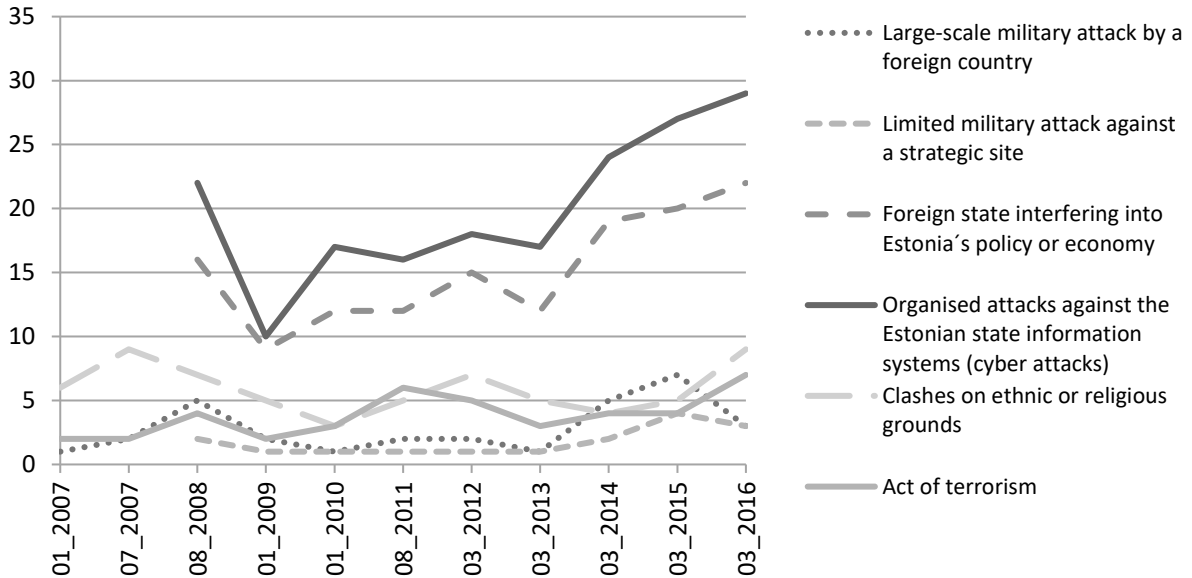
(b) Cooperation and  
good relations with Russia

Source: Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016a and Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016b

More information on perceptions of security in Estonia is provided by the public opinion surveys from 2006 to 2016, focusing on the probability of different threats endangering Estonia in the forthcoming years (see, Figure 4).

Based on the results of public opinion surveys from 2006 to 2016, two types of threats – cyberattacks and foreign state interventions into Estonia’s policy and economy – were considered highly probable in Estonia in the forthcoming years and their importance can be seen as steadily increasing over time. This partially overlaps with the conclusion of the Global Risks Report 2016, that cyberattacks are perceived as the risk of highest concern in Estonia. Also the likelihood of terrorist attacks is perceived as increasing, according to the public opinion survey results. Against the background that differences of opinion have recently increased between the Estonian-speaking community and the mostly Russian-speaking community in Estonia, it is also important to emphasize that the assessed probability of clashes on ethnic or religious grounds has increased in recent years. It is vital to mention that it has reached the same level seen in 2007, during the turbulent times when Estonia faced street riots organised by some members of the foreign-speaking community in Estonia (see, also Section 4). However, as the authors see it, in the light of the European refugee crisis the increase in the probability of such clashes is rather more likely to happen on religious grounds than on ethnic grounds. The probability of environmental accidents in Estonia (such as extensive marine pollution, explosion of a fuel train in an oil terminal or nuclear disaster at a nuclear power station) is relatively low and rather decreasing, as indicated by the public opinion survey results.

Figure 4: Probability of different threats endangering Estonia in the forthcoming years, 2006–2016 (% of respondents who answered “very probable”)







Source: Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016a and Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016b

## **A look at the general security attitudes in Estonia in 2004–2016**

After the restoration of Estonia's independence in 1991, the country has linked its security with the full integration with the European and transatlantic security networks, the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Today, more than ten years since joining those networks, the statement "Estonia's security is currently better ensured than ever before" is often used at the national level. It mostly refers to the reliable military deterrence and collective defence provided by NATO. At the same time, the current debate on security interests and guarantees in Estonia is more than ever driven by the fear of Russia's aggression. The biggest concerns in Estonia are clearly related to the recent events in Ukraine and the military conflict in Georgia almost a decade ago. In this light, the so-called "Russian card" has also been, to a greater or lesser extent, shaping the security concept of Estonia over the last decade.

Overall, the security situation in Estonia can be seen to have been redefined four times during the last decade. First, in 2004 initiated by the membership of NATO and the EU accession, a "multilateral soft security paradigm" started to dominate both public opinion surveys and security policy planning (Riigikogu 2004). This vision was shared by the political elite and the majority of the population. The regional security space was perceived in the framework of the post-modern security logic where territorial and total defence concepts were seen to be obsolete and stagnated. Against this background, the main focus was on collective defence measures, international missions, special mobile capabilities and specialization in the framework of collective security organisations. Russia was not taken to be an aggressive neighbour, but as a gradually developing and generally peaceful strategic partner in need of assistance in modernization and democratization.

Some novel security concerns were raised in 2007, when also the first signs of the change in attitude towards formerly positive image of Russia occurred in Estonia. This was related to the events accompanying the removal of the so-called Bronze-soldier in Tallinn. Among the public and policy makers in Estonia, the illusion of Russia as a strategic partner of the EU and a peaceful neighbour began to fade. But as the situation resolved more or less peacefully, no major visible changes in the security policies were made by NATO, the EU, or by Estonia.

However, what changed the existing security perspective relatively dramatically for Estonia was the Georgian–Russian war in 2008. Among the public and the political elite in Estonia, Russia was increasingly seen as a real threat in terms of conventional war, eager to re-occupy former Soviet territories. Still, what complicated the situation was that this change was not felt in the similar way by NATO and most of the EU allies. As France, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom mostly did not share this general vision of the Russian threat, Estonian politicians and military leaders suddenly found themselves alone with their internal fears. Accordingly, Estonia continued treading two parallel paths, focusing on international missions and post-modern securitization approach while simultaneously feeling deeply concerned about Russia’s activities abroad.

The Ukrainian–Crimean–Russian events in 2013–2014 amplified the Estonian security concerns and internal fears even further. There were many obvious reasons for this. First, the situation in Ukraine from 2014 on reminded Estonians quite accurately of the situation in Estonia in the 1940s when Estonia lost its independence after Russia had first proposed to establish its military bases and then used the deployed forces to occupy the country. Second, the reactions of France, Germany and Italy to the violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine were seen to be rather inadequate by the Estonian military leadership and the local

political elite. Both these circles started to worry about the question whether their allies understand the Russian “near abroad” principles<sup>1</sup>. Third, in order to minimize Russian attempts to put pressure on Estonia, suddenly it appeared that fast reforms in the Estonian security and defence sectors may be needed to increase the territorial and total defence components in Estonia. Hence, an urgent need appeared to purchase infantry fighting machines, self-propelling artillery and air defence equipment.

In terms of the future, under the label of protecting Russian citizens in these countries the Russian Federation is expected to go on with its pressurizing policy towards former Soviet Republics. Nevertheless, as could also be seen from the results of the public opinion surveys presented in the previous section (see, first and foremost the categories of “Large-scale military attacks by a foreign country” and “Massive street riots” in Figure 4), despite these upsetting developments the public in Estonia is not overly concerned about the possibility of the Russian Federation directly attacking Estonia in the upcoming years or the local Russian-speaking minority initiating riots and pushing for autonomy referenda.

The public reactions to the actions of the parties in the Ukrainian conflict were decidedly different in Estonia. In general, Russia was clearly seen as an aggressor and initiator of the conflict. The Western world was seen as being too passive and, in particular, the EU was secretly suspected to entertain some support for the Russian explanations. NATO was not expected to intervene in any other way in the conflict other than offering media support to

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<sup>1</sup> Russian foreign policy concept popularized by former Russian minister of foreign affairs Andrey Kozyrev, referring that Central and Eastern European states formerly belonging to the Soviet Union or socialist block can and should be treated differently by Russia, from states in Western Europe in terms of their sovereignty (see Cameron and Orenstein 2012).

Ukraine and delivering emergency equipment. Finally, Ukraine itself was partially seen as responsible for the events, due to the tremendous corruption and the choices former political leaders had made. Still, in general, Estonians very emphatically condemning the events in Ukraine, largely because of the relatively numerous and friendly Ukrainian community in Estonia. Although, it could also partly be taken vice versa, the local Ukrainian community became close since Ukraine fell under Russia's attack.

However, despite the fact that the current debate on security interests and guarantees in Estonia is more than ever driven by the fear of Russia's aggression, in the long term even the most radical political parties or movements in Estonia do not perceive the country as the next possible target of Russian aggression. From the "big powers", the USA is seen as the main ally and source of both moral and military support, followed closely by the United Kingdom. At the same time, compared to the latter, Germany is seen as a less committed partner, also because of the Nord Stream gas pipeline connection with Russia. Regionally, Finland is trusted most among the Nordic countries, while from Sweden or Poland not too much support is expected. The closest neighbours to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, are seen as committed partners (Veebel 2016). Yet, as it is realised that all three Baltic countries are facing similar threats from Russia, instead of offering help, Latvia and Lithuania may also need assistance themselves.

### **Cybersecurity concerns and future outlooks**

Cyberattacks are perceived as the risk of highest concern in Estonia. As the authors see it, risks related to cyberattacks are clearly felt by Estonia for two reasons. First, the country has faced serious cyberattacks in 2007 already, which makes Estonia more sensitive to these issues. More specifically, only a few hours after Estonia relocated a memorial to Soviet soldiers in spring 2007, the

country faced cyberattacks that lasted a period of 22 days and were combined with several bouts of public unrest organised by some members of the local Russian-speaking community. Aggressive attacks hampered the functioning of numerous Estonian websites, weakened the public infrastructure, harmed the telecommunication and banking sectors and caused financial losses. Among various methods, illegal robot networks (or botnets) consisting of 85,000 computers from 178 countries were used in three waves to attack the websites of the Estonian parliament, presidency, ministries, political parties, commercial banks, big news agencies, telecommunication companies and even the emergency call service (CERT 2007). As a response, these websites were closed to foreign internet addresses on security grounds over a certain period and were accessible only for domestic users. For example, the website of a major local news agency was inaccessible to international visitors for a week. These actions were considered to be the first incident of modern cyber warfare (the so-called *Web War I*), where organized and guided cyber-attacks were used to target a particular country. Although the organizers of the attacks could not be identified with absolute certainty (next to Russia, computers from the USA, Japan, Vietnam, China, Egypt and other countries were also used for coordinated cyber-attacks), in the early phase of the attacks some of the internet addresses of the attackers pointed directly to Russian state institutions. Nonetheless, while perhaps not surprisingly, Russia has denied its participation in these cyber incidents, but at the same time also declined to cooperate in a joint investigation.

The second reason for this awareness, this paper argues, has to do with the fact that Estonia has been one of the digital pioneers in international cyber security. This makes the topic more visible in Estonia. Fortunately for such a small country, contrary to military capabilities, the size of a country does not make any difference here. As regards cyber war, the whole world is the new battlefield

where quality, initiative and position are often more important than quantity. However, there exist several potential risks to Estonia's leading role in cyber defence that the country should be aware of in order to avoid. For example, the current national initiative could be discouraged by outdated rules, moral dilemmas, inadequate legal procedures, incompetent rotation and unwillingness to contribute to the area financially and in terms of international cooperation. To maintain its progressive reputation in this area, first and foremost, both the resources and the knowledge of private and public sector need to be combined, thus guaranteeing sufficient flexibility when countering the cyber threats.

As it is no secret from the public opinion surveys in Estonia that people feel increasingly threatened by Russia's aggressive behaviour in its neighbouring countries, there is a good reason to question whether Russia would consider using the "cyber war" techniques again to destabilize Estonia or the Baltic region. At the same time, based on Russia's strategy applied in regional conflicts with its neighbours since 2007, it is highly likely that the elements of "cyber warfare" shall also play an important role in the possible future conflicts fuelled by Russia. Namely, similar or even more advanced patterns compared to Estonia were observed during the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 and during the on-going Ukrainian conflict since 2013. In Georgia, the targeted denial-of-service attacks (DDOS) were combined with military attacks both to impede strategic communication at the national level and to give rise to panic among civilians. During the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Russia's strategy has among other methods focused on disinformation and psychological warfare by the online media and various webpages, massive internet trolling in social media, and even mobile phone operators to destroy both the morale of the Ukrainian soldiers as well as to attack their families and relatives. Yet, considering Russia's current ambitions in Ukraine as well as

its limited financial resources, it can be assessed as rather unlikely that Estonia would become the most important target for cyberattacks initiated or supported by Russia in the coming years (Veebel and Markus 2016). However, as both the profile and the dimension of the “cyber war” from 2007 have shown, Estonia is vulnerable to threats arising from modern cyber warfare. If there is going to be a change in the international power balance in the future in Europe or in transatlantic relations, it may happen that Estonia (or any other Baltic country) comes under pressure again.

### **Addressing traditional military threats: is NATO sufficient or does Estonia need European Army?**

After the restoration of Estonia’s independence in 1991, Estonia has linked its security with the full integration and partnership with the European and transatlantic security networks. The transatlantic partnership is also considered as the key element of the Estonia’s defence doctrine. This is clearly reflected in the National Security Concept of Estonia for the period 2013–2022, stating that “Estonia views its national security as an integral part of international security./.../ NATO, with its transatlantic nature and the principle of collective defence serves as the cornerstone of European security and defence./.../ Estonia regards its security and the security of its allies as indivisible — the factors affecting the security of its allies also affect Estonia, and vice versa./.../ Estonia ensures credible deterrence and military defence through NATO’s collective defence./.../ Estonia develops national military defence capabilities, which form a part of NATO’s collective defence.” (Riigikogu 2010). At the national level, the statement “currently Estonia’s security is better ensured than ever before” is often used, which clearly refers to reliable military deterrence and collective defence provided by NATO (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016).



The debate on the traditional security interests and guarantees in Estonia is mainly driven by the concern of potential Russian aggression and related options for collective transatlantic deterrence. According to the Eurobarometer survey from 2015, about 86% of the respondents in Estonia agreed that war or political instability in regions outside the EU could result in a threat to the internal security in the EU (the country's most popular choice in this category) (Eurobarometer 2015). Direct concerns in Estonia are clearly related to the recent events in Ukraine and military conflict in Georgia almost a decade ago. In addition to that, other topics such as the outlook of economic relations between Russia and Estonia as a potential security guarantee in the region, the unexpected result of the US presidential elections (European Council on Foreign Relations 2016) and the future developments of NATO are also in the picture, shaping the debate on the security matters in Estonia. In 2016 related to the UK's vote on Brexit, additional concerns related to transatlantic and European unity and integrity in terms of defensive alliance and anti-Russian deterrence were also risen.

According to the national public opinion surveys, the key factor in ensuring Estonia's security and defence is considered to be NATO. A survey conducted in 2009 (Kivirähk 2009) indicated that 61% of the respondents (and 78% of the respondents with Estonian citizenship) considered NATO to be the main security guarantee in Estonia, whereas only 44% mentioned the EU and 23% of the respondents stated that Baltic cooperation and Estonia's independent national defence capability are important. The attitude towards NATO has not remarkably changed over time: in 2016, 59% of the respondents (and 75% of the respondents with Estonian citizenship) considered NATO to be the main security guarantee in Estonia. However, today the share of the respondents who also stress the role of the Estonia's

independent national defence capability has increased, being 41% of the respondents (Estonian Ministry of Defence 2016).

The possible alternative idea to create a European Army, as proposed by Jean-Claude Juncker in March 2015, has received rather modest reactions in Estonia. The same applies to the most recent strategy document at the EU level, “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe/A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy”, presented to the member states on 28 June 2016. The political elite and military circles have treated the idea of a European Army mostly with caution and even pessimism. The media debates were practically non-existent, being limited only to several rather skeptical headlines and mostly focused on the question of why we should restrict ourselves only to the European common military forces, whilst at the same time knowing that there exists a much wider and fully functioning transatlantic security network. The overall criticism in Estonia is mainly directed to the unreasonable duplication of military structures and inefficient usage of the EU military resources.

At governmental level, it has been repeated by cabinet ministers (e.g. the former Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas) that NATO membership and the idea of collective defence and solidarity of NATO allies should not be questioned and debated. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Keit Pentus-Rosimannus (RE), has stated that European security is based on transatlantic relations which cannot be replaced by a European Army. She also outlined that the member states’ commitments to NATO should be considered to be a priority, and that duplication of the governance structure of military forces should be avoided, considering that financial resources are limited. In this light, the proposal to establish a European Army is impracticable in the short term. However, she also emphasised that the capabilities of national military forces should be strengthened, starting with the increase in

the military expenditures. At the EU level, the focus should be on finding additional resources for joint financing of EU operations, which would contribute to the strengthening of the military capabilities of the EU.

Among military experts, former Lt Gen Johannes Kert has argued that the EU's efforts consolidating its foreign policy, which among other instruments includes military forces, seems to be a rational step and that common military forces combined with the EU membership in NATO would give a boost to the increased standardization, more optimal usage of resources in Europe and more operative decision mechanism. He suggests that the European Army will be created in the 2030s. However, he puts into question the real ability of a European Army to function as a tool of collective deterrence. (Kert 2015). Former CHOD General Ants Laaneots has stated that the idea to create an EU Army could get entangled in the different demands of the EU member states (Laaneots 2015). He used the example of Afghanistan to show that the EU countries have different demands and limits in military action.

However, another Eurobarometer survey from early 2014 (Eurobarometer 2014) indicated that people in Estonia are rather undecided, as 47% of the survey respondents were in favour and 44% of the respondents opposed the idea of a European Army. At the EU level this result is still rather positive, considering that on average 46% of the respondents in the EU-28 supported the idea and 47% were against it. In addition, when interpreting this result one should also take into account that this comparative survey was conducted in 2014, before the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and the European refugee crisis erupted. Thus, it can be reasonably expected that today the public opinion in Estonia could be even more in favour of the creation of a European army than in 2014.

## **Are there any “black swans” or “black elephants” looming on the horizon for Estonia?**

Against this background, it is justified to ask whether there are any signs of unpredictable events with massive consequences which we either “don’t know yet” or “would rather prefer to ignore”. The following discussion is necessarily of subjective nature and reflects solely the views of the authors. However, next to the clearly perceptible threats such as acts of terrorism, Russia’s aggressive attitude towards its neighbours and risks related to the “cyber world”, Estonia should – more than the country has done so far – focus on three categories of potential “black swans”/“black elephants”: a) risks related to the loss of credibility of the national government; b) regional economic outlook and economic risks; c) the role of the Russian-speaking community in Estonia in ensuring security and stability of the country.

The risks related to low credibility of national government have been reduced after forming a new coalition and appointing a new prime-minister in December 2016. The expectations to new prime minister Jüri Ratas (Centre Party) are high (TNS Emor 2016) and list of urgent reforms is challenging, as it is not only the economy that has been left to its own and the tax system which is petrified and thereby a hindrance to the development of a modern service economy, but also the public health, pensions and education systems are in need of an overhaul.

A small and open country, Estonia is necessarily vulnerable to external political and economic shocks. Hence it cannot afford even small political turbulences inasmuch as these could make the country unstable and vulnerable. Recent events during the presidential elections in Estonia in August-September 2016 have revealed how fast the political horse-trading could transform into a source of public dissatisfaction with both the current political system and the legal regulations, particularly the procedure for the

election of the president of the republic. Should the public support to the coalition parties decrease even further and “the horse-trading” between the coalition parties remain unchanged, it could pose some security risk to the country.

In addition, regional economic risks – as also stated in the Global Risks Report 2016 – should not be underestimated in Estonia. Due to high openness, the country is highly vulnerable to the economic developments of its economic partners. It is worrying that according to the recent flash estimates by Statistics Estonia from 11 August 2016, the GDP of Estonia increased 0.6% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2016 compared to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 2015 and 0.3% compared to the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 2015. According to the second estimates from September 2016, the GDP increased 0.8% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2016 compared to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the previous year. This result was significantly weaker than expected (Statistics Estonia 2016). Recently, also the dynamics of the oil shale industry has acted as a brake on the economic growth in Estonia (only 10% of the traditional sectoral volume has been produced in recent year)<sup>2</sup>. In general terms, as the rather modest economic outlook combined with turbulences in the political sphere could pose serious security threat at the national level should be seriously addressed. Although here some exogenous factors such as the economic outlook for Finland and Sweden are playing a major role, Estonia itself should focus more on the measures to raise its economic potential, also in comparison with its closest neighbours Latvia and Lithuania. As a remark, in recent years, economic growth in Estonia has heavily relied on the increase in employment. However, this is not an option anymore and any future growth can only rely on an increase in productivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Among the reasons, the most important are: low global oil and gas prices; the EU regulations, which make heating with oil-shale not profitable and development of alternative energy sources for electricity in recent years.

Finally, the role and importance of the large Russian-speaking community (however, many among them are not supporters of current Russian political regime) in Estonia cannot be overestimated. The long term policy, which has not seriously tried to integrate Russian speakers into the society, or engage its leaders into public debates, or provided much needed support for integration (e.g. the availability of language courses), has left it in the hands of Russia's state-controlled and heavily propaganda-laden media. While there are historical reasons for the Estonian community to be wary of extending their warm welcome to Russian speakers, it should have been all the more the role of the political elite to have attempted to achieve some vital steps of integration. Instead, the party system has exploited the wider distrust among the communities and rather deepened that. Nevertheless, the possible threats related to the separateness of this ethnic/ linguistic group have been increasingly debated and analysed since the events of 2007–2008. The discussions have intensified again since the end of 2013. The results of the public opinion surveys on security matters clearly refer to the fundamental difference in opinions between the Estonian-speaking and foreign-speaking respondents on main threats. To decrease the likelihood that these differences grow into a much larger conflict, the Russian speakers need to be integrated more. Several proposals have been made, most of them offering additional rights for non-citizens. These rights consist of both material and legal assets, which can be offered simultaneously. For example, it is already understood that more comprehensive language training programs are needed. However, despite this new level of understanding, the key questions still tend to fall back to the fundamental historical distrust. Thus, it has been asked whether a simplification of the process of acquiring Estonian citizenship for the Russian speaking minority would increase their loyalty to Estonia, and whether most of the Russian-speaking non-citizens are interested in acquiring Estonian citizenship at all. In addition, as the author sees it, there

is a potential risk that the loyalty of the Russian-speaking non-citizens could decrease in the light of the recent EU-wide efforts to reallocate refugees. If this vulnerable group feels that no, or relatively little, attention will be paid to the Russian-speaking community and the non-citizens – compared to the reallocated refugees who are currently receiving significant attention from the Estonian government – their discontent might even increase, thereby posing an additional security threat to Estonia and playing into the hands of Russia.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to map and analyze Estonia's perceptions of security threats in the context of global security problems as revealed in the respective surveys. The main theme of this paper has been related to differentiating “black elephants” from “black swans”, i.e. “known unknowns” from “unknown unknowns”. If the latter category is by definition tricky to deal with, a relatively common problem is to mistake the former for the latter. It may be characteristic of an age to overlook certain obvious signs that do not cohere with its dominant ideology, it is all the more vital to become aware of those unknowns we could actually be aware of. Thus, if on the global scale the “black elephants” have been outlined, for Estonia they mostly concern the social, political and economic weaknesses that the political elite has had difficulties to adequately address.

On the social front these are the deep divisions between the Estonian and Russian-speaking communities, which can develop into a source of tensions and instability. The party-political landscape itself is barren of trust and goodwill, even among the so-called progressive parties. Finally, economic planning at the governmental level requires fresh angles of analysis and more ideas together with joint action to get the economy to grow again, and to

counter growing unemployment and young labor force leaving Estonia.

While Estonia's main security concerns are related to NATO and its ability to deter Russia, reforms are also needed in terms of the European Union's competitiveness, cohesion, institutional integration and long term economic sustainability. More attention is also needed to understand, to define and to overcome the core-periphery development gap in the EU to prevent a financial or debt crisis from re-emerging in the Eurozone.

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