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Date: 02/12/2022 12:49 EET

Subject: Answers to the Questionnaire for EBCO's Annual Report 2022

Dear Ms Tsouni,

Please find attached the 02.12.2022. letter of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia No. MV-N/2462

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No. MV-N/2462

Rīga, 02-12-2022

Answers to the Questionnaire for EBCO's Annual Report 2022

Dear Ms Tsouni,

It is a great pleasure to provide you updated information on the National Defence Course. In the sections below you will find answers to your questions, but should you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Kristers Grauze (+371 67335257, Kristers.Grauze@mod.gov.lv), Deputy Head of the Structure and Military Personnel Development Planning Section.

1. How was the conscription ended? It was suspended or abolished? Which year and by which law/decision? Please share it with us. In case it has only been suspended, what measures are in place to ensure that military service remains on voluntary basis, and what are the plans to finalise its abolition?

The conscription was abolished in 2006 by a decision of the Latvian parliament. Since 2007 Latvia has only professional voluntary military service. However, considering the current geopolitical conditions and national interests, the Latvian parliament (Saeima) supported in the first reading the law aiming to re-establish the conscription. The proposed law also re-establishes alternative service, considering the rights of conscientious objectors. It is expected that the 2nd and 3rd reading will take place in the upcoming months.

2. How was the human right to conscientious objection to military service first recognised? Which year and by which law/article of Constitution? Is it recognised in peace time, in general/partial compulsory mobilisation, and in war time?

The Law on Substitute (Alternative) Service that was passed in 1990, couple of months before the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia introduced the Alternative Service as a possibility to opt-out the Soviet mandatory military service. The law stated that the purpose of the Alternative Service is to ensure the freedom of conscience and beliefs of a person. Since then till 2007 (when conscription was abolished) the Alternative Service option was available for those who were objecting military service.

3. What is the legal minimum age for voluntary enlistment in peace time, in general/partial compulsory mobilisation, and in war time?

The minimum age of recruitment in Latvian National Armed Forces is eighteen. The same minimum legal age applies to mobilization during war time.

4. How is the human right to conscientious objection recognised for the professional members of the military? What are the procedures to allow the early release of a serving member of the military who develops conscientious objections? Please provide for the recent years the number of applications, the number of acceptances, the number of rejections, and, if relevant, the grounds of rejection.

Considering that Latvia currently has only professional military service, a serving member of the military can freely and at any time terminate the service contract on the basis of mutual agreement with the Latvian National Armed Forces.

5. Under which Ministry is the national defence training subject administered?

The National Defence Course is an integral part of the secondary education curriculum. The main document specifying its content is the State education standard. The State education standard is developed by the Ministry of Education and Science and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. Currently, in the State education standard the National Defence Course is categorized as a special course, meaning that it is voluntary course, but starting from 2024-25 school year this course will be mandatory for all secondary school students.

At the moment each secondary school voluntarily decides on introducing the National Defence Course in their curricula. Up till now, the National Defence Course is taught in more than 97 secondary schools. National Defence Course's teachers are employed by the Cadet Force Centre, a civil institution under the Ministry of Defence.

6. How is the subject arranged? What is the content of it?

The content of the National Defence Course was developed by the Cadet Force Centre in close collaboration with the National Centre for Education, an institution under the Ministry of Education and Science. The content is publicly available both on the webpage of the National Centre for Education and on the webpage of Cadet Force Centre. Additionally, the Cadet Force Centre provides the teachers with detailed plan, instructions and guidelines for every single lesson.

The National Defence Course consists of several modules where students are taught a range of theoretical and practical skills. Those modules are:

- Security and defence of a nation-state, role of civil society and civic engagement;
- Resilience in crises, leadership and command;
- Skills and competencies for defence.

Additionally, students can engage in extracurricular activities (summer camps). Participation in those camps is voluntary.

7. What aged students are obligated to participate in the subject?

The course has been developed for students in 10th and 11th grade (or 2nd and 3rd study year in vocational education). Usually, students in those grades are 16-18 years old. As it was mentioned above, the National Defence Course will be mandatory for students in secondary schools only starting from 2024-25 school year.

It is important to note that secondary education is not compulsory in Latvia, although the proportion of the population who complete it is high.

8. How large is the curriculum of this subject in total per person? For example, in hours.

The National Defence Course is 140 academic hours long. The course is implemented in 2 academic years.

9. Are there some parts of the subject trained under the military / military like organisations?

No, Cadet Force Centre is a civil institution subordinated to the Minister of Defence. In addition to higher pedagogical education and qualification to teach defence skills to qualify for teaching the National Defence Course, the teacher has to fulfil several extra requirements (e.g. complete the Course on the Rights of the Child etc.).

10. Is there weapons training?

Module "Skills and competences for defence" includes the topic "Safe handling of weapons, shooting with a pneumatic weapon". The time allocated for this topic altogether is 31 academic hours. During those lessons students learn about weapons, development of weapons through history, operating principles of weapons, moral responsibility using weapons and safety rules. To acquire practical skills students try out shooting with a pneumatic weapon (a weapon that fires using air pressure).

11. Is there a possibility to object from the training because of one's conscience? What are the consequences for objectors?

The law on the National Defence Course and Cadet Force states that for students who, due to their religious or philosophical beliefs or due to other objective circumstances, are unable to participate in particular activities that are a part of the National Defence Course, the teacher provides alternative study topics and individually adjusts the study process. There are no consequences for this choice.

12. How the new law is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and especially with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict?

The objectives and content of the National Defence Course is in line with values and ideals embedded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child especially emphasizes that a child's education should help their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. It should also build their respect for other people and the world around them and they should respect the values of their own country. Education should prepare children for responsible life in a free society.

The purpose of the new law is to guarantee an opportunity for a child or a young person to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities suitable for their age and interests.

The activities included in the National Defence Course don't lead to any obligations regarding National Armed Forces. The minimum age of recruitment in Latvian National Armed Forces is 18 and Latvia has fully voluntary military service (no conscription).

Sincerely,



Jānis Garisons
State secretary

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