

Estonian experience of Defence Reforms

- For international seminar on Armenian Defence Reforms
- February 5, 2007 Yerevan

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make an address on behalf of the Estonia.

I would like to thank the George Marshall European Center for Security Studies and the Ministry of Defence of Armenia for their kind hospitality holding the conference in this very important topic - the Civilianization of the Ministry of Defence and Amending the Law on Defence. The Armenia's willingness in reforming its defence and security sector is a clear sign of the country's ambitions to continue its cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic security structures. Thus, sharing Estonia's experience in this area and Euro-Atlantic integration more generally, I feel profound responsibility.

While comparing tasks faced by the Estonian defence sector about ten years ago with the situation in this country at the moment, there are clearly a few major differences.

First of all, our defence reform was very much focused on gaining NATO membership. And of course we were lucky not to be in the middle of military conflict, although nowadays a frozen one, like is the case with Nagorno-Karabakh. But despite of those differences I'm sure our experience could be useful for your reforms as well.

Today I would first like to point out three "categories of aspects" that are supposed to be dealt with during the transition process which in our case is integrating into NATO, and then concentrate on personnel policy aspects of this process.

The most important “psychological” issues

Estonia is eager to support Armenia and we value highly the friendship and co-operation between our countries. I can assure you that up to now the co-operation has been mutually beneficial and, being a country which implemented these reforms a decade ago, it is our firm desire to continue to enhance our co-operation on the practical level.

We could not have achieved our present status without support from our friends. This seminar shows you have been able to establish close ties with many friendly countries as well. According to our experience there was a need for clear principles while discussing defence reform with our partners.

To my mind the following basic principles are important to be taken seriously:

- While giving promises, say YES only if you can keep promises;
- Do not use negative (or self-destructive) arguments, because that will never work and does not lead to your goals;
- Do not use any excuses why you cannot do this or that, because complaining and pointing at others does not work in this context;
- Never use history as an argument.

Well, we know from our own experience that sometimes it is rather difficult to follow these principles. But at the end of the day it will produce positive results.

The most important “tactical” aspects of defence reforms

Strong political support and consensus amongst major political parties on the Defence Reform is of vital importance. While discussing defence reforms in Estonia you have to keep in mind our NATO aspirations of the time. It would be wrong to say that we reformed our Defence Forces because we were told to do so by NATO or by

its member states. No – there was clear understanding in Estonian society that in order to have efficient defence structure major reforms are necessary.

But as we all know, to implement reforms is sometimes really painful and this obviously means that there are many people opposing those reforms.

We have to admit that in our case it was much easier to implement many of those reforms (which otherwise might have been quite unpopular) because the whole reform process was so closely connected to idea of gaining NATO membership. As NATO membership had a huge support among the electorate (according to different opinion polls between 75 and 85 per cent of voters were for) even the opposition parties did not want to be perceived as opponents of reforms.

Estonia's NATO membership was largely achieved because of general support for NATO among all Estonian major political parties. Since the withdrawal of the Russian (former Soviet) troops from Estonia in 1994, all Estonian major parties represented in the parliament have officially agreed that military developments should be directed towards gaining interoperability with NATO. The fact that accession to NATO was Estonia's main security and defence policy priority was mentioned in all coalition agreements between parties forming the government between 1998 and 2004.

2. Public awareness of NATO and more generally of defence matters is of utmost importance while integrating to the Euro-Atlantic community. We considered it especially important to maintain a strong public support for our defence reform and integration into NATO. And as I already mentioned we did it! We carried out regular public opinion polls. Since 1999 the activities of the press and information departments of the MoD and MFA were focused on raising public awareness about defence policy and NATO related topics. The polling on NATO and defence issues continues even now.

3. NATO integration is very closely related to the **creation of civil society**. The Estonian Civil Society Development Concept, approved by our parliament in 2002, facilitated the smooth implementation of the integration process. The concept was meant to support the development of citizens` associations, which is aimed at ensuring the continuity of the democratic process by involving all inhabitants.

It is also important to work with a wider society and with the NGOs in order to raise the public support to the defence reform.

4. Democratic management questions have to be discussed and solved at the highest national political level, not merely within the MoD. One has to have a clear understanding, what is **the system of democratic control** and how will it be managed from the level of the President to the government down to the armed forces.

5. It is important to have **institutional guarantees** ready to assure that plans will be implemented. Firmly set institutional mechanisms and structures should not disappear after another election.

6. **Investing into the staff**. I will come back to personnel policy later during the presentation but at this point I would like to stress the importance of professional and foreign language(s) (English and French) skills. The widespread introduction of English language training throughout the defence and security sector and meeting NATO required standards for language training is of utmost importance. Teach English to higher as well as to other officers. That helps to engage them in the international co-operation, peacekeeping activities etc.

It is also very important to guarantee a balanced career system for the Armenian well-trained and educated officers.

7. **Open-minded and sincere communication with Western advisors** – ask for their advice, ask clear, honest questions and be open-minded while listening their advice, because there is no need to repeat the mistakes, if any, made by others. Because “lessons learned” is a mighty tool in the reform process!

Transparency and openness from your side is essential if the foreign experts are to provide their help and advice.

Membership Action Plan (MAP) aspects

To use most effectively several formats offered by NATO, two of them – Planning and Review Process (PARP) and Membership Action Plan (MAP) – gave us very valuable experience. Due to the participation in the PARP and later on in the MAP process, our defence policy planners and military personnel became familiar with the principles of collective planning.

Of course Armenia has not applied for the Membership Action Plan but as you have agreed Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO our experience with MAP hopefully has some relevance for you as well.

Mr Jüri Luik, the former Estonian Minister of Defence, in his speech during the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Meeting in defence ministers session in December 1999 in Brussels, has said, “The (Estonian) Annual National Programme (ANP) is the most extensive and comprehensive defence-related planning document approved by the Estonian government so far. MAP gave us an impetus to review our plans in the entire field of security and defence and has consolidated co-operation among various governmental departments involved.”

What is the magic of the MAP?

Participation in the MAP provided us with an experience in planning and implementation. The MAP helped us to identify objectives, tasks, structures, resources, responsibilities and timelines.

First, we learnt that objectives in the MAP/ANP need to be coherent with the other planning documents. All assessment documents presented to NATO must be coherent.

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Second, the people dealing with NATO all throughout the countries' state agencies need to be determined to work as a team. From our experience it means very close cooperation between NATO department in the MFA, MOD, NATO division in the General Staff and a defence section at the Mission in Brussels.

The main positive effect of the ANP has been in the fact that it has provided Estonia with a well-functioning internal co-ordination and reporting system on defence and security policy. It has clarified the Estonian defence planning system. Five successfully accomplished ANP cycles (1999-2003) have set an interdepartmental pattern to discuss security issues at governmental level and thus improved administrative co-operation. All responsible agencies reported twice a year to the Prime Minister.

The ANP explained the functioning of Estonian interdepartmental co-operation in the framework of two committees and explained the division of responsibilities during the process of writing the ANP.

The Government Committee on NATO Integration was set up in August 1999 in order to be able to discuss defence policy issues and adopt decisions related to NATO integration at the highest political level. The Government Committee included the following members: Prime Minister (Head of the Committee), Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, Minister of Interior, Minister of Justice, Minister of Economic Affairs and Communications (since 2003), Chief of Defence.

The Government Committee's main duties included the discussion of Estonian co-operation plans with NATO, preparation of synchronized defence and security policy proposals for the Cabinet, and an assessment and approval of the ANPs.

The Interdepartmental Experts' Committee on NATO Integration was set up in July 1998 in order to discuss NATO integration issues and adopt necessary decisions at the level of experts. The Experts' Committee included representatives from the following agencies: Ministry of Defence, State Chancellery, General Staff, Ministry of Foreign

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Affairs, Rescue Board, Border Guard, Ministry of Finances, Ministry of Interior, Office of the President, Parliament, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications

The main duties of the Experts' Committee included the preparation, analyze and assessment of general issues of Estonia-NATO co-operation, presentation of respective reports and suggestions to the Government Committee, as well as co-ordination of the Estonian dialogue with NATO.

Both committees were administered and financed by the Ministry of Defence.

In order to effectively coordinate the interdepartmental work concerning NATO integration, there needs to be a central body directing national preparations for NATO membership. In Estonia, the Defence Policy block within the Ministry of Defence was the central co-ordinating body.

Close interdepartmental cooperation was required, because each chapter required an input from a wide range of state institutions. All arising questions were solved at the forum of Interdepartmental Experts' Committee on NATO Integration.

The MAP process provided advice and assistance in the development of Estonia's defence system, because various state agencies worked closely together in order to achieve NATO membership. The desire to become a NATO member motivated the interdepartmental co-operation.

The successful implementation of the tasks and duties taken upon in the ANP led to Estonian membership in NATO.

Personnel policy and the transformation of the defence sector

In 1991 after we regained independence we had to start from the scratch in creating the Ministry of Defence and our armed forces. The number of native Estonian officers

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serving in the Soviet Army was relatively small. So we didn't inherit much from the past.

This has had both positive and negative aspects. In the early years we had a huge shortage of professional personnel. It took many years to educate qualified staff – both civilian and military. And although situation has improved tremendously since then I would have to admit that we are still short of professional staff, especially after relatively large number of officers and civil servants have been appointed to positions in NATO headquarters.

But starting from the scratch had some advantages as well. We never faced the problem of civilianization of our MoD. Ministry of Defence was established in 1992 as a civilian organization. Vice versa – my personal opinion is that we need more officers working in our MoD. At the moment we have only 14 officers out of 240 employees what is more than ever before since 1992 but still by far not enough.

For a decade the Ministry was about completely manned by civilians and of course the General Staff by officers. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to acknowledge the fact the way of thinking of military and civilian people is sometimes rather different and having the officers and civil servants working separately for two different organizations in two separate buildings inevitably occasionally led to unhealthy rivalries.

So more than fifteen years into independence and nearly ten years after we started with our defence reforms we are still working hard to find the right balance of civilian and military personnel within the MoD.

There is one more issue I would like to emphasize. One of the leading American think-tankers Anders Aslund has mentioned on several occasions that the stability of the civil service has been the key to success of Estonia. In 1993 Estonian Parliament passed the Law of Government which has been behind this stability. According to this law a Minister is the only political figure in the whole Ministry. (Well they have two or three political advisers as well but their role is not too prominent in daily business of the Ministry.) Permanent Undersecretary and his or her Deputies as well as the

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Heads of Government Agencies will remain in office despite the change of a Minister. For example during the last six years Estonian MoD has witnessed five different Ministers but only two Permanent Undersecretaries and as far as I know in Latvia the Permanent Undersecretary has been in office for more than ten years.

This has led to creation of well motivated and highly professional class of civil servants and has helped to have continuity in state affairs.

I would like once again to thank the organizers and to stress that I am impressed with what I have seen so far. I am also very optimistic about your objectives.

I believe in your future. I wish you good luck!