

19 April 2016

Comments of Auditor General Alar Karis to the audit “Course and effectiveness of the establishment of the Police and Border Guard Board”

Fewer crimes are registered in Estonia than ten years ago, and fewer people are also injured or killed in traffic accidents. It can be said that Estonia has become a safer, more secure place. The majority of the indicators used to assess the performance of the Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB) and the results of surveys of people's feeling of security suggest this. This is a trend that takes us further and further away from the criminal 1990s.

Security consists of two parts. On the one hand, it is perception – the belief that our more or less comfortable everyday life will stay as it is. On the other hand, security means the prevention of possible incidents and real protection when something does happen. The first cannot exist without the second, which is why it's important that risks in the case of potential crises are managed in addition to the guarantee of everyday security. People are increasingly more aware of security as the responsibility of each and every one of us but, in addition to this the majority of people also associate the activities of the Police and Border Guard Board with security. This means that the success of the PBGB is closely related to both sides of security.

In this audit, the National Audit Office has taken a look behind the scenes of the PBGB to see how the agency was established and assess the opportunities of the PBGB to continue operation in the same manner as today.

The biggest merger of agencies in Estonia took place six years ago. The result was the establishment of the Police and Border Guard Board, which has 6,000 employees. The merger of agencies was planned and prepared long in advance but, as always, it was a rush in the end – the recession also put some pressure on the pace of the merger. Some plans were not realised by the time of the merger. This is why work on the achievement of the merger's goals is still ongoing.

The state has saved a lot of money since the establishment of the PBGB, especially on manpower. However, this was not planned at the time of the merger – the explanatory memorandum to the draft act clearly states that no savings were planned in terms of staff costs. Reducing the number of support staff was planned before the merger of the agencies, but they were to be retrained or the money released from their salaries was to be used to hire employees for the agency's principal activities. The PBGB has successfully reduced the number of people who provide support services – the number of support employees has decreased by as much as 56% from 2008-2015. The labour costs of police officers, border guards and citizenship and migration officers decreased at the same time. The PBGB had to cut its staff costs more than other public agencies.

The board deserves recognition for the work it has done in the development of the organisation. The agency has become more efficient, but the number of people engaged in the principal activities of the PBGB on a daily basis has also decreased. The agency currently employs about 5,000 people, which is 1,000 fewer people than in 2010. Even for an

organisation the size of the PBGB, this is a major decrease, but the agency seems to be functioning as if nothing had happened. This seems impossible. It is almost impossible. The actual shortage of labour is usually not visible.

The National Audit Office prepared a forecast of changes in the human resources of the PBGB until 2025 and the analysis indicates that the agency is actually struggling – its workforce will continue to decrease significantly, i.e. by more than 1,700 people in the coming years. What it means is that the PBGB will not be able to perform its functions in the future. This is a problem that must be dealt with immediately.

Alar Karis
Auditor General