

Government's activity upon preparing for emergencies endangering internal security (summary of the report)

*Have the activities for ensuring preparedness for
emergencies endangering internal security been
systematic?*

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19.06.2018–19.06.2023 (clauses 35 (1) 3), 3¹), 6²), 9), 10), 18¹), clause 35 (2) 3)
of the Public Information Act). Only the summary is for public use.

Dear readers,

The term “changed security situation” has been used across Europe repeatedly over the last few years; it has become a justification for many initiatives associated with security to a smaller or greater extent. People talk about hybrid crises which make it difficult to understand if and what exactly is happening in time. Estonia, too, is attempting to increase its preparedness for a potential crisis, and major field training exercises take place: the Reserve Force and Defence Forces have moved from the woods to city streets; police officers, border guards, rescue officials and medical specialists are involved; experts in all kinds of fields work somewhere in the background. This indicates that we are preparing for a potential crisis and our skills are improving. All this causes graying hair to the people working in crisis management, but their eyes are bright: there is work and challenges, everything is developing and flourishing, and the area is being prioritised. At least that is what it looks like.

The auditors of the National Audit Office of Estonia assessed the everyday activities of preparing for a crisis. The reality that remains a little hidden to us but without which preparedness would not be possible. About a year ago, the new Emergency Act entered into force, one of the objectives of which was to specify the functions of authorities participating in crisis management. Work on establishing implementing provisions for the new Act and analysing the risks and the process of resolving an emergency is still ongoing. This work requires experts to put in quite a lot of hours. Work is ongoing, but contrary to the traditions of the National Audit Office, it might be going even a little too swiftly this time around. Strangely, it has ended up that identifying similar risks and assessing hazards is currently carried out as two parallel independent processes – pursuant to the Emergency Act and pursuant to the National Defence Act and Security Authorities Act. The good thing is that both have more or less the same results. Doing similar things twice, however, does not mean that the result is twice as good. In the worst case scenario, it may result not in clarity but confusion, and doubts are sure to arise on whether the use of resources is reasonable. One proposition of the National Audit Office is to combine these two processes.

In Estonia, state authorities are responsible for the functioning of their area in a crisis just like on any given day. This means that each authority has to plan its activities also for situations when all our accustomed services are not completely operational and more people, more technology or more reserves are required. It is clear that the heads of authorities find it difficult to invest money and the working hours of staff in something that might never happen, particularly if resources are lacking even for resolving issues coming from every direction. As such, some authorities find themselves postponing activities associated with preparedness for an emergency somewhere to a better future which so far has not arrived yet. The Ministry of the Interior is entitled to carry out supervision over how authorities have performed the tasks associated with preparedness for a crisis prescribed to them. This supervision, however, is not being carried out, although perhaps it should be. Otherwise, deficiencies appear only when something has already happened.

We do not need a particularly strong imagination to describe a complicated situation. Just an extensive power outage is enough. Few hospital units are equipped with an autonomous power supply and even so only for a limited time. This is not enough, but there is no solution to the problem, nor is there hope that the Estonian Health Insurance Fund can fit such investments into their financing model.

In 2017 the government decided at a cabinet meeting that the ability of autonomous operation of hospitals must be significantly improved by 2020. There is a year and a half to go, but no ideas for resolving the situation are forthcoming, and the state budget strategy approved in the spring also does not appear to give hope for a solution.

The health care system plays a central role in an emergency, as no crisis can be resolved without helping the injured. Major exercises have highlighted deficiencies in the health care organisation during a crisis. The Health Board has confirmed during the audit that the accumulated problems are being resolved. There is now a plan for resolving the deficiencies and first steps have been taken in implementing thereof, but as always, compromises must be made, cooperation areas and funds have to be found, as without all this, the health care system cannot function long in a crisis.



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in June 2018

Government's activity upon preparing for emergencies endangering internal security (summary of the report)

Is ensuring the preparedness for emergencies endangering internal security systematic?

Summary of the audit results

What did we audit?

The objective of the audit was to assess whether the activity of state authorities upon preparing for emergencies endangering internal security is systematic. The National Audit Office focused on analysing the risks of an emergency and on the process of alleviating thereof using the example of the following events: mass disorder, blitz attack, hostage situation, extensive cyber incident, fire, explosion or collapse resulting in the injury of many people. Organisation of crisis management exercises and the preparedness of health care institutions to offer emergency care were also assessed.

The audit foremost addressed activities during the period from 2013 to 2017.

Why is this important to taxpayers?

In the Internal Security Development Plan 2015–2020, a total of 11.82 million euros have been planned for the cost of the programme of crisis prevention and increasing preparedness for emergencies, but this only reflects the expenditure of the area of government of the Ministry of the Interior. Expenditure incurred upon establishing preparedness for emergencies is several times more than that. Estonia has chosen the decentralised model of preparing for emergencies, i.e. all authorities must be ready to perform their functions also in a crisis. This obligates the authorities to incur expenditure associated with preparation, which establishes preparedness for situations that occur rarely or don't occur at all. The timeliness of preparations and justification of expenditure is fully revealed only once the crisis is at hand. The audit outlines the areas of preparing for emergencies which can improve the process and increase the preparedness when contributing to them.

What did we find and conclude from the results of the audit?

In the opinion of the National Audit Office, preparedness for emergencies endangering internal security is not ensured systematically in the state. Too much working time is spent on analysing the risks of events endangering internal security, but the measures for alleviating risks are not implemented systematically. As such, authorities responsible for resolving emergencies lack information on which risks have been alleviated and which have not.

Many authorities do not document or analyse the results of crisis exercises, which is why there lacks certainty that lessons are learned from exercises. Hospitals and the ambulance are unable to provide

emergency care during a long-term crisis, because they are dependent on electricity, heating, water, etc., but each authority making separate investments for ensuring the autonomous supply thereof is unreasonably expensive.

A lot of working time is spent on analysing the risks endangering internal security, but the results are not used effectively to alleviate the risks. Risk analysis takes place as two parallel processes: a) an assessment of the risks endangering the security and constitutional order of the state is carried out pursuant to the National Defence Act and the Security Authorities Act as an input for the National Defence Development Plan, and b) an analysis of risks associated with emergencies endangering internal security is carried out pursuant to the Emergency Act. Risks identified with two separate risk analyses are similar, but the objectives of developing the capabilities established for alleviating thereof are different, and they cannot always be associated with critical gaps in the capability in risk analyses drawn up on the basis of the Emergency Act. In summary, double the working hours are spent on determining similar risks, but the results of one of these are not used as an important input in planning the activities of authorities.

Institutions resolving emergencies are not aware of which steps, if any, have been taken within the institution itself or by institutions involved to alleviate the identified risks. Authorities leading the process of resolving an emergency and those involved in the process lack a comprehensive overview of taking the measures for preventing emergencies and alleviating the consequences listed in the risk analyses. As a result, there is the risk that the authorities cannot fully account for the actual capabilities and gaps in capability when planning their work as well as when resolving an emergency.

Organisation of crisis exercises does not ensure that lessons are learned from the conclusions drawn in the course of the exercises. There are deficiencies in documenting and analysing the results upon organising exercises, and as such, it is often not possible to determine what was learned during the exercises and how this knowledge was implemented. There is no procedure for resolving issues identified in the course of exercises at the Police and Border Guard Board and the Health Board. Exercise materials are not stored systematically, which is why there is no overview of the issues discovered in the course of the exercises, proposals for resolving thereof, and the status of resolving thereof. Due to the aforementioned, the Police and Board Guard Board and the Health Board are unable to ensure a systematic resolution of issues discovered during the exercises. All cooperation exercises (between several institutions) included in the audit sample pool exhibited repeated problems associated with previous training of people involved in emergency response and awareness of the roles of each institution, their work distribution and management.

The Health Board is not familiar with exercises organised by hospitals and with the issues discovered in the course thereof. This casts doubt on the ability of the Health Board to operatively resolve the issues of ensuring the continuity of emergency care. Hospitals and ambulances are the providers of a vital service of health care – emergency care. The new Emergency Act that entered into force on 1 July 2017

obligates the providers of vital services to carry out an exercise associated with ensuring the continuity thereof once every two years, and the authorities organising vital services are obligated to check compliance with this requirement. So far, the Health Board has not been informed of the exercises of hospitals, which is why the Health Board is unable to quickly resolve issues of ensuring the continuity of vital services discovered in the course of exercises.

Health care institutions providing emergency care (hospitals and ambulance) include those who are not capable of independently ensuring the continuity of their service. The provision of emergency care by hospitals and ambulance depends on several other vital services (electricity, heating, water, etc.) that some health care institutions are not prepared to ensure themselves over a long enough time. Deficiencies in the independent ability of providers of vital services to ensure the continuity of their service are known to the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Health Board, the Ministry of the Interior as well as other organisers of the provision of vital services. The Government of the Republic has decided that the Ministry of Social Affairs is to resolve the issue by 2020, but there is no clarity on how to finance it or divide the expenses.

The Ministry of Social Affairs nor the Health Board have offered sufficient support to the providers of vital services of health care upon assessing and alleviating the risks of continuity. There have been no clear guidelines acceptable to the hospitals for drawing up continuity documents, so the quality and thoroughness thereof fluctuates and, as a rule, does not enable using them upon ensuring and developing continuity.

What did we recommend as a result of the audit?

Recommendation of the National Audit Office to the State Secretary in cooperation with the Minister of Defence and the Minister of the Interior: consider combining the two processes: analysing the risks of emergencies endangering internal security that is carried out pursuant to the Emergency Act and the assessment of risks endangering internal security that is carried out pursuant to the National Defence Act and the Security Authorities Act. Additionally, analyse the possibility to combine the management of the process of preparing for emergencies endangering internal security and the comprehensive national defence process, bringing the task of coordinating the entire process to the Government Office. The recommendation helps to minimise the risk that implementation of measures for alleviating risks is overlooked in the daily activities of authorities.

Recommendation of the National Audit Office to the Minister of Health and Labour, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Minister of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology in cooperation with director generals of associated authorities of the area of government: analyse the possibilities for ensuring the obligation of each provider of vital services to independently ensure the continuity of the service in a more cost-efficient manner and develop a sustainable financing model.

Recommendation of the National Audit Office to the Director General of the Health Board: develop a procedure for implementing the conclusions of exercises and the supervision thereof, improve the record-keeping of participating in exercises, and establish all this with a

guideline governing the organisation of exercises. To this extent, use the best practices and ensure a uniform understanding of organising exercises, cooperate and use the experience of the Rescue Board and the Police and Border Guard Board in this area.

Recommendation of the National Audit Office to the Director

General of the Health Board: also establish a procedure to receive an overview from the providers of vital services of their training exercises and of the issues identified within these (exercises), develop a working process for resolving the identified issues, and pay more attention to the security of the information systems of providers of vital services: develop requirements for protecting information systems (involving specialists in the area if necessary) and ensure that providers of vital services would implement these.

Recommendation of the National Audit Office to the Director

General of the Rescue Board, the Police and Border Guard Board, and the Health Board: pay more attention to the training needs discovered in the course of exercises and one again commence with organising cooperation training for operative services.

Response of the Government Office: in the opinion of the State Secretary, it is not reasonable to combine the process of assessing risks endangering internal security and the security of the state with the management of the process of preparing for emergencies endangering internal security and the broad national defence process, because the risks and effects of emergencies endangering internal security and the risks and effects associated with the security of the state are different. Pursuant to the National Defence Act, capabilities and activities are planned against threats to the security of the state (independence and sovereignty, territorial integrity, constitutional order, and the security of the people as a whole). Such threats are usually caused by the systematic activity of an adversary. Risks associated with emergencies do not have the same degree of severity, and the cause is usually not the systematic activity of an adversary.

The State Secretary found that the performance of functions associated with the security of the state is not helped along by combining the management of the process of preparing for emergencies with the management of the broad national defence process and concentrating the coordination of the entire process at the Government Office. The State Secretary deemed the current crisis management solution to be expedient, according to which the Government of the Republic and the Prime Minister focus on resolving crises endangering the security of the state, and the resolution of emergencies is handled at the level of the head of a state authority or a minister.

The State Secretary added that in a situation where several planning activities arising from the recently adopted National Defence Act and the Emergency Act are carried out for the first time, it is not reasonable to immediately start changing the established system.

That being said, however, the State Secretary believes that state authorities and local authorities are able to synchronise the activities to be carried out pursuant to the Emergency Act and the National Defence Act to a certain extent and, if possible, use risk analyses prepared pursuant to

the Emergency Act also for planning the national defence action plan. The State Secretary also found that the Ministry of the Interior and the Government Office should, if possible, submit common or at least synchronised information requests and give tasks to the responsible persons in a coordinated manner.

Response of the Ministry of the Interior: Ministry of the Interior deemed it necessary to consider the opportunities for integrating the risks and assessments of risks endangering internal security. The Ministry of the Interior pointed out that at the moment, getting a comprehensive overview of threats that would enable assessing the likelihood of threats and risks realising and the combined consequences thereof is complicated at a strategic level (Government of the Republic, Riigikogu). Ministries and authorities in the area of government also find it difficult to shape politics and prioritise the budget when the national overview of all threats and risks is not comprehensive.

The Ministry of the Interior also supported the recommendation to combine the process of preparing for emergencies endangering internal security with the process of preparing for broad national defence.

The Ministry of the Interior deemed it important that authorities associated with organising vital services analyse different solutions and opportunities for improving the continuity of services and take these into account upon establishing new requirements. That being said, the Ministry of the Interior did not agree that they should participate in developing sustainable means of financing for vital services, because this does not directly fit in with their functions.

Response of the Ministry of Defence: Ministry of Defence deemed the recommendation of the National Audit Office to combine the two processes appropriate: analysing the risks of emergencies endangering internal security that is carried out pursuant to the Emergency Act and the assessment of risks endangering internal security that is carried out pursuant to the National Defence Act and the Security Authorities Act. The Ministry of Defence found that this creates a potentially better opportunity for assessing the realisation of threats and risks and for organising a comprehensive procedure.

The Ministry of Defence also deemed it important to consider combining the process of preparing for emergencies endangering internal security with the process of preparing for broad national defence.

Response of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications: the Ministry develops the requirements for the continuity for vital services to be organised by the Ministry pursuant to the Emergency Act, the implementation of which helps to increase the continuity of the providers of vital services as well as the society as a whole. Both providers of vital services as well as supervisory authorities have been involved by areas, which ensures the development of requirements to be implemented as good as possible together with sustainable financing.

Response of the Ministry of Social Affairs: the Ministry of Social Affairs responded that although the Health Services Organisation Act prescribes a basis for financing the preparedness of service providers for a crisis from the budget, this has so far not been done, because there has

been no accurate overview and agreements on which resources are necessary for everyday operation and which resources are required separately for preparing for crises and for resolving thereof. For this reason, the majority of service providers have implemented foremost measures that they have been able to organise within current financing to prevent or alleviate risks so that the volume of treatment does not decrease and the quality of treatment does not worsen. Because so far, continuity has not been precisely defined, there is no systematic preparation for long-term interruptions.

The Ministry of Social Affairs announced that the Minister of Health and Labour has established the "Description and the requirements for the continuity of vital services to be organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs" with regulation no. 17 of 21 April 2018. These requirements in turn are the basis for risk assessments and plans for the continuity of a vital service to be drawn up for health care providers, which provide in more detail which measures and in which volume are already implemented; which gaps of capability are present in the area; which solutions should be and would be reasonable to develop in the future; and which revenue and expenditure and risks accompany them.

Based on the aforementioned, we have in cooperation with the Health Board and the Estonian Health Insurance Fund planned to develop the principles of covering the expenses of preparing for crises and maintaining the preparedness, following which we will submit to the Government of the Republic a more detailed overview of the capability being developed in the area together with a detailed schedule of implementation, including the necessity for additional resources.

Response of the Police and Border Guard Board: the Board promises to take the provisions of the audit report into account in its future operations. The first four test trainings of cooperation training of operative services will take place in 2018, and the training necessity for the following years will be assessed together with the partners and planned pursuant to thereof.

Response of the Health Board: the Health Board will establish the guideline governing the organisation of exercises within authorities during the first quarter of 2019. Both the needs of the Board as well as health care providers will be taken into consideration upon drawing up the guideline.

A relevant procedure will be developed for the record-keeping of participation at exercises by the end of 2018. All conclusions drawn from the exercises will also be recorded and necessary follow-up activities will be planned. In order to get an overview of the exercises of providers of vital services, a respective procedure will be developed in the first quarter of 2019 at the latest.

According to the Cybersecurity Act, all providers of vital services are obligated to draw up risk analyses of information security that form an important part of the risks analyses and plans for the continuity of emergency care. Issues associated with ensuring cybersecurity shall be addressed and counselling shall be carried out by the Health and Welfare Information Systems Centre of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Health Board believes that service providers themselves should ensure the

awareness and training of their staff and regularly implement internal measures for ensuring security as one preventive measure for cyber threats addressed in risk analyses.

Response of the Rescue Board: the Rescue Board pointed out that the “Manual for ensuring the preparedness of the Rescue Board staffs”, which establishes the system of measures for sustainable operation of staffs, was enacted on 15 January 2018 with the directive of the director general of the Rescue Board. The manual covers the planning of personnel into staffs, the procedure of training thereof, and minimum requirements for management environments.