

# Participation of the Latvian National Armed Forces in International Operations



Participation of the Latvian National Armed Forces (NAF) in international operations has both: political and military significance. By joining international operations, Latvia strengthens the internal security of the country and demonstrates that it is an active member of the international community.

Significance of international operations has increased after Latvia has joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU), which makes our country jointly responsible for consolidation of the global security processes.

## International operations are considered to be the following:

- international peacekeeping operations, the purpose of which is to re-establish and maintain peace in conflict zones and in which the personnel engaged have the right to participate in hostilities;
- international peacekeeping operations, the purpose of which is to re-establish and maintain peace in conflict zones and in which the personnel engaged does not have the right to participate in hostilities, except in cases when it is necessary for the purposes of self-defence;
- international rescue operations, the purpose of which is to eliminate the consequences of natural disasters, evacuate civilians from dangerous locations or perform activities of similar nature;
- international humanitarian operations, the purpose of which is to render assistance to civilians who have suffered as a result of hostilities or other extreme circumstances;
- international military operations, which aim is to exercise the inherent rights of the United Nations member states to collective self-defence which are fixed in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

## The National Armed Forces units participate in international operations on the basis of:

- a resolution, recommendation or request of such international organisations of which the Republic of Latvia is a member state or with which the Republic of Latvia co-operates;
- a request of a NATO or EU member state.

Decision on participation of the Latvian NAF units in international operations is taken by the Parliament.

The length of international operation term is 6 months; and only soldiers of professional military service are entitled to participate in them.

Soldiers' suitability for international operations is assessed on the basis of their physical condition, health condition, professional skills and experiences, characteristics from their place of service and knowledge of foreign languages.

Before their deployment to international operations, soldiers must complete a special training course, where they learn skills required for co-operation with soldiers of other countries, enhance their professional skills, as well as learn more about the country and residents of the respective international operation.

During international operations, the Latvian soldiers obtain valuable experiences, which cannot be obtained otherwise. Preparation of soldiers for deployment to international operations is also one of the ways to prepare able soldiers and test efficiency of their training programmes.

In 2006, there will be 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary since Latvian soldiers participate in international peace-keeping operations. During these years, the participation of the NAF in international operations has become a significant development task of the Latvian armed forces.

The Latvian NAF soldiers have been participating in the peace-keeping operations in the Balkan region since 1996; the participation in the international monitoring mission to Georgia was commenced in 2000, but in 2003, soldiers have commenced their participation in the international operations in the Persian Gulf region.

## Currently, the Latvian NAF participate in 5 international operations:

- Bosnia and Hercegovina,
- Kosovo,
- Georgia,
- Afganistan,
- Iraq.

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The first international operation the Latvian soldiers were deployed to was the peace- and stability-keeping mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Latvia has been participating in this operation since 1996. Originally this was a NATO-led operation but, due to the improvement of security situation, the NATO presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina was gradually reduced until the EU took over the command of this operation at the end of 2004.

The long-term goal of the European Union Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR - ALTHEA) is to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes a stable, lasting, peaceful and multi-ethnic country, which co-operates with its neighbouring countries and takes all the necessary steps to become an EU member state.

Latvian soldiers participate in the EUFOR - ALTHEA mission by performing the duties of staff officers.



## GEORGIA

Latvia has been participating in the international monitoring mission of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) since 2000.

The main goal of the mission is to monitor activities in the Georgian borderline, as well as to facilitate negotiations between the conflicting parties in order to solve the conflict in South Ossetia peacefully.

Latvian soldiers participate in this mission in the capacity of international observers.

## KOSOVO

Latvia has been participating in the Kosovo Forces (KFOR) since 2000.

The purpose of the KFOR operation is to establish and maintain secure environment in Kosovo - to provide law and order, to follow observance of agreements signed upon ending of the conflict, and to facilitate observance of them, if necessary, as well as to support the UN international mission to Kosovo.

Latvian soldiers participate in the KFOR mission by performing the duties of the Military Police and staff officers.

## AFGHANISTAN

Latvia has been participating in the NATO's International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan since 2003.

The purpose of the ISAF mission is to support the Government of Afghanistan in maintaining of security within the competency of international operation in order to ensure secure environment for the work of this Government by establishing relevant security structures. The tasks of this operation also include the reconstruction of provinces by ensuring the implementation of civil administration, legislation, judicial system, public services, demobilisation and disarmament projects in Afghanistan.

Latvian soldiers participate in the ISAF mission to Afghanistan by performing the duties of explosive ordnance disposal, staff officers and security unit.

## IRAQ

Latvia has been participating in the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) lead by Coalition Forces since 2003.

The purpose of the OIF mission is to facilitate the implementation of security and democratisation processes in Iraq by maintaining law and order and assisting the local residents to rebuild the country after the war.

Latvian soldiers participate in the OIF mission by performing the tasks of infantry company and staff officers.