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Introduction

On February 24, 2022, when the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Baltic States - Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia - were among the first to respond to the request for military and humanitarian assistance. According to the Ukraine Support Tracker, between January 24, 2022, and January 15, 2023, they were among the largest providers of military aid to Ukraine relative to their GDP – Estonia - 1.469%, Latvia - 1.128%, and Lithuania - 1.145% (Trebesch et al., 2023). One of the most important motivating factors could be the common historical past connecting the countries: the states were all part of the Soviet Union, and later, they secured their independence (Simpson, 2023). Therefore, the population of these countries, understanding the price of freedom, strives to support Ukraine on the way to its victory comprehensively.

The historical experience of the Baltic States, which were under occupation until the collapse of the USSR, and the ongoing war in Ukraine have significantly influenced the perception of their security and the possible threat from Russia today. For instance, understanding the security challenges connected with the war in Ukraine, in 2023, the Latvian government adopted a law on compulsory military service, which had been abolished in 2006. This law restores mandatory military service for men and voluntary military service for women from January 1, 2024 (Fremer, 2023). Moreover, in 2024, the Baltic States and Poland called on the EU to build a defence line on the border with Russia and Belarus to prevent possible military and hybrid threats (Brzozowski, 2024).

The full-scale war in Ukraine forced the Baltic states' governments to reassess cooperation with Russia and evaluate the risks to their security because all three countries share a common border with the Russian Federation and are directly affected by Russian hybrid attacks. Hence, if the Russian Federation defeats Ukraine, Vladimir Putin's imperial ambitions could not stop there, and he could be able to occupy the Baltic countries again (Haynes, 2024). The mounting threat from Russia explains the Baltic State's deep interest and engagement in supporting and providing aid to Ukraine.

Accordingly, this paper investigates the relevance of the Baltic States' military aid to Ukraine since the Russian full-scale invasion. The first three sections are dedicated to Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian military support to Ukraine. The last section includes information on joint initiatives to support Ukraine and its people.

Lithuanian Military Aid

Lithuania is one of the first countries to actively and comprehensively support Ukraine in different spheres, including the military. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia, the Lithuanian government has provided about 641 million euros for military aid (BNS, 2024). Besides, in February 2022, a few days before the full-scale invasion, Lithuania sent its military support to Ukraine, which included a "Stinger" air defence system with 24 missiles and body armour for soldiers ("Turning empathy into actions", n.d.).

Another example of Lithuanian military aid is the fundraising campaigns for the Ukrainian army. On the initiative of Lithuanian journalist Andrius Tapinas, the Lithuanian people collected money for the Turkish-made Bayraktar drone for Ukraine in just three days. Subsequently, Turkey donated a drone, and they spent the collected funds on ammunition and other weapons for the armed forces of Ukraine. ("Turning empathy into actions", n.d.). Furthermore, the second Lithuanian fundraising campaign, "Radarom!", collected more than 8 million euros. They used these funds to purchase 1,115 safe soldier kits for delivery to the Ukrainian military (LRT.lt 2024). Thus, Lithuania endeavoured to provide the Ukrainian army with the necessary weapons to repel Russian attacks, helping to prevent further occupation of Ukrainian territories.

Latvian Military Aid

The Latvian government also quickly responded to Ukraine's request for help. For instance, at the beginning of March 2022, the Latvian government allocated 2.4 million euros for aid, of which 1.2 million euros were for equipment and weapons to support the Ukrainian army ("Latvia to send", 2022).

Moreover, the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation only strengthened relations between countries and took their partnership to a new level. Latvia is one of the countries that make the most considerable contribution to the military support of Ukraine and its Armed Forces. For example, the Latvian government has provided military aid for about 1% of its GDP since the beginning of the full-scale war. According to the Prime Minister of Latvia, Evika Siliņa, in 2024, the Latvian government will continue to provide military aid, which will amount to 0.25% of the GDP ("Latvia's support to Ukraine", n.d.; "Evika Siliņa: Latvia's assistance to Ukraine", n.d.).

Additionally, Latvia is involved in training the Armed Forces of Ukraine. About 4,000 Ukrainian soldiers underwent training with the participation of Latvian military instructors. ("Latvia's support to Ukraine", n.d.). "These trainings significantly improve the quality of staff preparation. At the same time, the Ukrainian side proposes to take into account the combat experience gained by the Ukrainian military in the further training process" – stated Colonel Mykola Huben', former Head of the Main Department of Doctrine and Training of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine ("Latvia increases training", 2023).

Estonian Military Aid

Estonia is a leader among the Baltic states in providing military assistance to Ukraine. Estonian military aid is worth almost 500 million euros, more than 1.4% of the country's GDP. Since the beginning of full-scale war, military aid packages have included anti-tank mines, howitzers, machine guns, vehicles, personal protective equipment, diving equipment, etc. Estonia was also among the first countries to send weapons such as Javelin anti-tank missile systems before the full-scale Russian invasion ("Estonia's aid to Ukraine", n.d.).

In addition to supplying the necessary weapons, Estonia provided basic military training for more than 1,300 Ukrainian soldiers in two years (ERR News, 2023). Also, in 2024, Estonian military instructors, as part of the Interflex Operation, joined the Ukrainian military's training in Great Britain, providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge in handling weapons and shooting, as well as basic drills on the battlefield ("Estonian Defense Forces", 2024).

Furthermore, the Estonian government is considering sending its troops to Ukraine to take over the "rear" roles of Ukraine's armed forces (Ferran, 2024). It is clear that such a decision is grave and requires consideration of possible consequences. On the one hand, such actions can cause an escalation of the conflict, provoking Russia to even more terrible actions, for example, the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Ukraine. On the other hand, sending troops to Ukraine will help strengthen the country's defence capabilities, which can affect the war's course.

Joint Initiatives in Supporting Ukraine

The Baltic countries are an example of how small states launch significant initiatives to support Ukrainian military defence capabilities in countering aggression from the Russian Federation. They participate in other military operations and missions to provide their support.

In December 2023, during the visit of the Minister of Defence of Latvia, Andris Sprūds, to Kyiv, he proposed creating a coalition of drones for Ukraine. The Drone Coalition, which currently includes 14 countries, was created on February 14, 2024, led by Latvia and coordinated in cooperation with Great Britain. The coalition is helping Ukraine with the production of drones in the West and their supply, as well as contributing to the capabilities of coalition allies (Drone Coalition, n.d.). For instance, during April and May 2024, Ukraine received 135 different drones from Latvia. During July 2024, they plan to gradually deliver more than 2,500 drones worth 4 million euros (LETA, 2024). In addition, on July 10, 2024, the states member of the coalition signed a Memorandum of Understanding and created a special fund of 45 million euros for Ukraine to ensure the rapid purchase and delivery of drones ("Joint Statement", 2024).

The Baltic states are also actively involved in the Ukrainian military training. For example, as mentioned earlier, in January 2024, the Estonian authority decided to join the Interflex Operation, which is led by Great Britain, to train the armed forces of Ukraine (ERR News, 2024). In total, during the two years of the operation's existence, military instructors from different countries trained 40,000 Ukrainian soldiers, providing them with basic military skills, knowledge in tactical medicine and engineering, and testing their skills in field training ("Two years of training", 2024). Such training missions are essential for the Ukrainian army because they allow using of and training with Western weapons, which partners then supply to Ukraine to defend against Russian aggression. Additionally, they provide a possibility to exchange knowledge and experience that the Ukrainian soldiers gain on the battlefield.

Conclusion

Even before the full-scale invasion of Russia began, the Baltic states were among the first to start supplying military aid to Ukraine. Understanding the importance of Ukraine's victory and the potential threat to its security, they continue to provide it with comprehensive support. Military assistance and the provision of the necessary weapons are some of the critical aspects and prerequisites for achieving victory in the war.

Military instructors from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia directly help train the Ukrainian Armed Forces and actively participate in the initiatives of other countries, such as Operation Interflex. Necessary weapons, military equipment, gained experience, etc., help strengthen Ukraine's defence capability and support peace and security in Europe. Therefore, European countries and other states that condemn the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine must take an example from the Baltic countries if they want the war to end as soon as possible. Only joint efforts and assistance will strengthen the position of the Ukrainian side during negotiations with Russia. At the same time, the countries supporting Ukraine must interact more intensively with each other, avoiding lengthy bureaucratic processes that constantly slow down aid provision to Ukraine.

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