

**Meeting of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly**

**12-13 February 2015, Šiauliai**

**Speech by vice-minister Antanas Valys**

**Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania**

***Inclusion of civil protection/civil defence in the educational programmes of the Baltic States***

Dear members of the Baltic Assembly, honourable guests,

I am pleased to join you at this session and work together to find the best solutions to educate responsible citizens who love their countries.

It is obvious that Russia's aggression against Ukraine gave the impetus to today's discussion. This conflict has shown that a modern war is not limited to conventional military capabilities. An aggressor seeks to dominate both the traditional battlefield as well as less conventional spheres. The control of discourse in the media is especially important as it allows influencing the society. As a result, we find ourselves fighting the information war. All these factors have an impact on how Lithuania strengthens its defence. All in all, the overall preparedness of the citizens for defence becomes a matter of national security. The notion of civil resistance is expanding. Armed resistance is just one of the ways among a variety of means that citizens may employ to withstand an aggressor. It could also include words, computers, social media, and all things imaginable. This concept serves as the premise for our work at the Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania to strengthen civic and patriotic education.

In this regard civic education of secondary school students is among our top priorities. We are creating a tradition to organise the National Defence Day for students. Students representing the most active schools are invited to participate in various events organized in military units. Approximately 1,000 students had a chance to learn about military weaponry and equipment, attend lectures on state defence and military service last year. The initiative was a great success, so we are planning to continue the project and expand it.

Every year the Ministry of Defence and military representatives visit around one third of schools in Lithuania, or nearly 400 of them. During these visits, they talk about threats to national security, present methods of civil resistance and promote the military service. Recently, we have also started giving lectures on information warfare. Both students and teachers from around 40 schools attended

these lectures last year alone. We also organize Civil Resistance Day events at schools and summer camps to further strengthen students' understanding that every citizen is responsible for the national security.

Finally, we sponsor contests designed to spur a greater interest in state security and defence policy among students and their teachers, and raising their civic awareness as a result. This year a national competition that tests knowledge of the Lithuanian Armed Forces will take place for the 20<sup>th</sup> time. Its aim is to foster pride in one's country and military by encouraging the youth to learn about the role that the military has played in the development of Lithuania's statehood, as well as keep track of its recent activities and achievements.

In the field of youth education, a critical role is played by the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union. It is a voluntary paramilitary organization assisting the state in ensuring the national security. Having celebrated the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment last year, the Union demonstrated that its mission of strengthening Lithuania's defence is still very much relevant today. This is best illustrated by its ever-growing membership and increasing public visibility: almost 500 new members joined the Union last year.

The growth of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union provides new possibilities to develop one of its core activities – civic and patriotic children and youth education. The training programme of the Young Riflemen branch, designated for the members aged 11 to 18, as well as the summer camp project are gaining momentum. The branch consists of 164 local units with over 4,000 young riflemen participating in the programme that provides theoretical and practical training in military basics, and instils the sense of responsibility to one's country. Each academic year ends with a week-long summer camp to solidify and test the knowledge that the young riflemen have gained. Last year, the Union hosted over 40 summer camps with more than 3,700 participants.

Reacting to the developments in Ukraine, we made a political decision and commitment to strengthen civic education at secondary schools. We will enhance and expand the syllabus of the civic education course: a greater emphasis will be placed on national security issues and aspects of information warfare. One of our most immediate goals is to improve teacher competence in this field. The Military Academy of Lithuania and the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences have joined forces to establish a new bachelor level study programme "Pedagogics of History and Civic Education" starting, hopefully, this September. By developing such a specialised study programme, we seek to improve the quality of civic education and ensure that future teachers of the

subject do not lack in expertise, creativity, and critical thinking. We are also discussing the possibility to establish a new course on state defence for senior secondary school students. Therefore, we are especially interested in both Latvia and Estonia's experience, where similar classes have already been a part of their respective national curricula for a number of years.

In light of the changing security environment and public reaction, our goal is to inform the citizens about the matters of national security. Recently we published a manual providing information on what actions the state would take in case of an emergency and war-time situations. It also offers advice on what citizens themselves could do in time of crisis and to support state defence. The manual has received enormous attention both at home and abroad. News websites, papers, magazines and news agencies from the US to Australia passed the message urging to stay calm and coolheaded in case of a crisis. The manual is now being distributed to schools and libraries throughout the country, and we are already discussing the ways on how to adapt its contents for educational purposes.

We are proud of the fact that a lot has been achieved already. However, in the face of unfading danger, we should remind ourselves that it is important to finish what we started and do even more for our security. It is critical for us, the Baltic states, to work together and share our experiences in the fields of civic education and preparation of citizens for defence. Therefore, the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence welcomes the decision to make these issues a part of the Baltic Assembly agenda and give us a possibility to create a safer future for our countries by exchanging views and ideas, and learning from each other. Thank you for your attention!