



LATVIAN STATE SECURITY SERVICE



**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2022

ANNUAL REPORT

**ON THE
ACTIVITIES
OF LATVIAN
STATE SECURITY
SERVICE (VDD)**

IN 2022



APRIL 2023

**LATVIAN STATE SECURITY SERVICE.
ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2022**

ISBN 978-9934-9176-1-5

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FOREWORD

It has now been more than a year since Russia launched the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, undermining the territorial integrity of this independent and democratic country, and ignoring the international commitments it has undertaken. This is an unprecedented and unjustifiable act of aggression in the 21st century Europe, with countless war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Russian armed forces.

A year ago, Latvian State Security Service (VDD) opened a criminal case, becoming a part of the international team of investigators, and providing support in recording testimonies and evidence of crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine. There is no statute of limitations for aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and there is no doubt that the civilized world will do everything in its power to bring the perpetrators and accomplices of these crimes to justice.

The war in Ukraine has changed the global security architecture and has also had a lasting impact on Latvia's society. It has also introduced significant changes in the day-to-day operation of VDD, leading to expansion and intensification of countermeasures against the threat posed by the aggressor state Russia. Last year, the Service worked closely with the other two Latvia's intelligence and security services – the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIDD) and the Constitution Protection Bureau (SAB) – in ensuring the state security.

In 2022, VDD examined risk-related information on thousands of cases of various types. The Service implemented a systematic set of measures to identify and evaluate public statements by persons, who are pro-Kremlin and glorify the war, the employment of persons disloyal to Latvia in institutions and critical infrastructure objects, suspicious cases of information collection, as well as possible violations of sanctions imposed by the European Union (EU) against Russia and its allied countries. As far as the justified secrecy of the activities of the Service allows, VDD has compiled the publicly accessible results of its activities. In the report, the Service also provides analysis and assessment of significant processes in the field of national security in the past year, current risks and challenges to our national security.

The invasion of Ukraine by the aggressor state Russia last year reminded the Latvian public of the fragility of national independence, confirming the need to continuously improve the national security system and the range of instruments of the responsible institutions in the field of security. Within a short period of time, the Saeima adopted a number of significant amendments that expanded the possibilities for both VDD and other institutions responsible for state and public security to detect and prevent or reduce potential threats. The amendments included initiatives to strengthen the security of the information space of Latvia, reduce the negative consequences of Russia's "compatriot" policy and to promote economic security.

Although the Service's activities are mainly aimed at identifying and preventing threats before real harm is done to national security interests, the war launched by Russia in Ukraine contributed to a significant increase in the number of crimes within the competence of VDD to investigate. Therefore, in 2022, the Service initiated significantly more criminal cases than the average in previous years. The increase was mainly in crimes that are difficult to prevent, for example hate speech, which manifested itself in the denial of Russian aggression, the justification of war crimes committed, and inciting interethnic hatred.

The Service found no systemic links or targeted coordination of actions among suspects. However, analysis carried out by VDD points to significant damage caused to our country and society by Russia's long-standing information influence measures. Kremlin propaganda, which for years has been directly available in Russian to the Russian-speaking public, has contributed to a distorted, unrealistic perception of the world in this part of society.

In spite of the negative impact of pro-Kremlin narratives on society, the absolute majority of the Latvian population last year demonstrated undivided solidarity

with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. Due to the need to limit the financial resources of the aggressor state Russia for the continuation of warfare, the Latvian population responded pragmatically to the uncertain economic situation, which was caused by Russia's manipulation of energy prices and Latvia's previous reliance on Russian resources.

Already in recent years, VDD has stressed that Russia and Belarus cannot be regarded as reliable business partners, therefore both the public and private sectors need to continue to look for alternatives in areas such as energy and transit. In Service's assessment, there is no reason to believe that the situation is likely to change in the near or distant future. It is the contrary – also in 2023, new international sanctions and restrictions binding on Latvia will be imposed against the aggressor country Russia and its closest ally Belarus.

VDD thanks the people of Latvia for constantly providing support in the daily work of the Service, informing VDD about supporters of Russian aggression and other potential threats to the national security of Latvia. The active and purposeful participation of Latvian society in the identification of risk persons will play a significant role also during this year.

Sincerely,
Normunds Mežviets,
Director General of Latvian State Security Service



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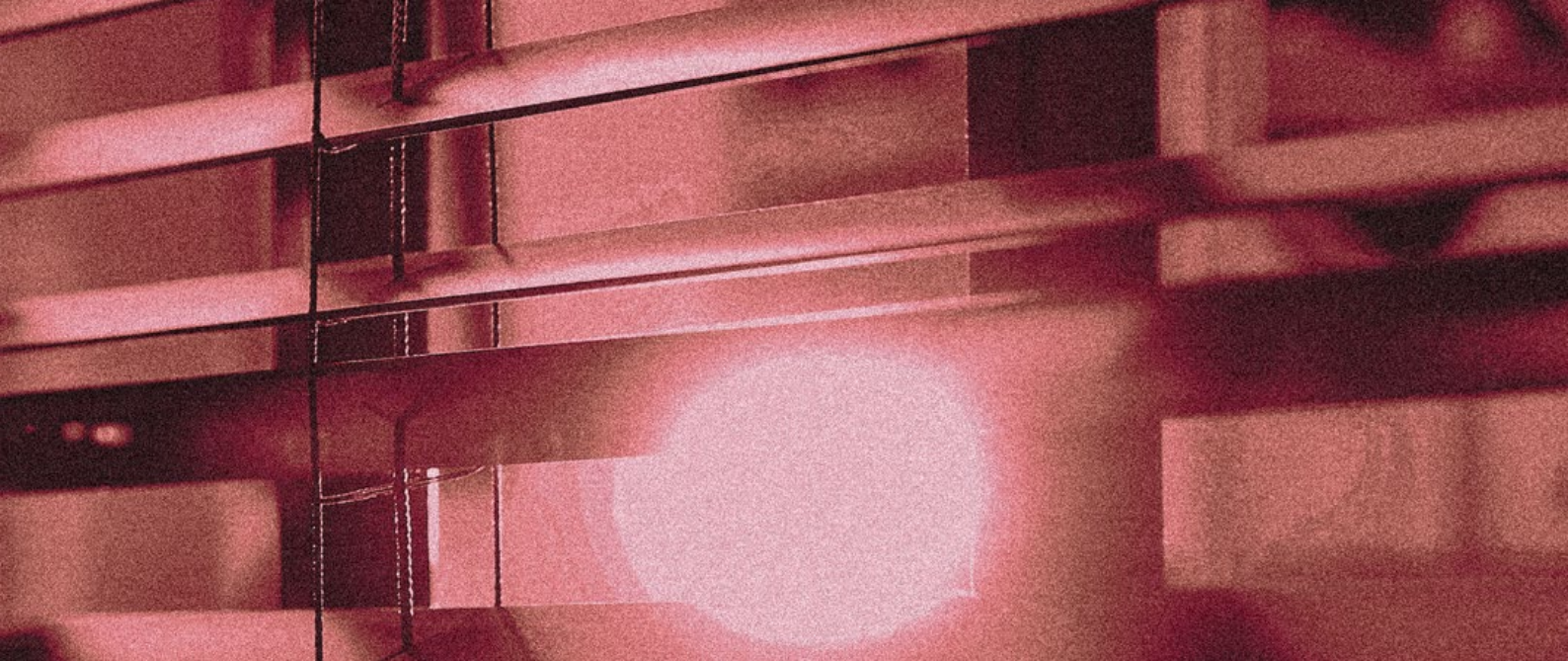
COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

When Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, VDD, in cooperation with other services, immediately reinforced and expanded the implemented counterintelligence measures for the identification and prevention of activities directed against Latvia by the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state. In connection with the launched war, one of the priorities of the intelligence and security services of Russia was to obtain information on the planned response steps of Western countries, including Latvia, and to implement measures to influence public opinion and political decision-making process in the interests of Russia.

As Russia in 2022 once again confirmed its status as an aggressor and its unfulfilled superpower ambitions, the threat from its intelligence and security services to the national security interests of Latvia increased. Russia has long regarded NATO as its main strategic adversary, and it is trying to obtain information about the activities, plans and military resources of the Alliance and its members. Amid rising tensions between Russia and Western countries after Russia's full scale invasion in Ukraine, Russia stepped up its efforts to gather intelligence about NATO and its members.

As evidenced by the criminal cases for espionage in VDD's records and cases referred for prosecution last year, Russian intelligence and security services are currently particularly interested in obtaining intelligence on military facilities. No less important for the Kremlin is information on critical infrastructure objects and other strategically significant objects in the territory of Latvia and other Western countries, which could potentially be used for diversions, sabotage or planning of military operations.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine clearly demonstrated the destructive impact of the activities of the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state on national security, highlighting several parallels with the situation in Latvia. There is also a large Russian diaspora in Ukraine, among which the Kremlin deliberately and systematically stirred up disloyalty toward state authority. As in Latvia, there were a number of pro-Kremlin foundations operating in Ukraine, which were involved in Russia's information influence activities. In view of these circumstances, a significant segment of the Ukrainian population was ready to provide support to the Russian occupation forces. The course of the war confirmed that all these vulnerabilities had also been exploited over the years by Russian intelligence services, forming a network of agents and positions of influence.



Last year, activities against Latvia were also implemented by the intelligence and security services of Belarus, Russia's closest ally, whose cooperation with the intelligence and security services of Russia strengthened even more as Belarus came under the increasing influence of Russia. This is also confirmed by the detention of a Belarusian citizen, an operation carried out by VDD in close cooperation with the MIDD last February, who, on behalf of the Belarusian military intelligence service, collected intelligence on Latvian military facilities, critical infrastructure and other strategically important objects in the territory of Latvia. The information collected by the Belarusian citizen detained for espionage is also within the focus of the interests of the Russian intelligence and security services.

China's intelligence and security services also maintained interest in Latvia, mainly in opportunities to promote Chinese influence and economic interests by investing in strategically important sectors and companies in Latvia. However, last year Latvia was not among the priority intelligence targets of the Chinese intelligence and security services and their activities did not pose a significant threat to the national security of Latvia.

1.1.

TRENDS IN THE ACTIVITIES OF FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

The war in Ukraine initiated by Russia introduced changes in the previous activities of the Russian intelligence and security services against Latvia and other NATO member states. In 2022, as a result of the countermeasures of Latvia and other Western countries, the threat that the intelligence and security services of Russia were able to pose under diplomatic cover significantly decreased. At the same time, intelligence from the territory of Russia continued to pose the

greatest threat, with officers of intelligence and security services using persons, who live or regularly enter Latvia, for the acquisition of intelligence.

In response to the invasion of Ukraine by Russian armed forces, Western countries expelled more than 370 Russian intelligence officers, who had hitherto been working under diplomatic cover at Russia's embassies and consulates. This was a significant blow to the Kremlin's intelligence capacity, especially given that similar mass expulsions of Russia's intelligence officers had also taken place in recent years.

Several countries – including Latvia – also closed Russian representations or downgraded their diplomatic status, making it difficult for Russian intelligence officers to use them as a “safe environment” for their activities. Traditional residencies thus increasingly lost their relevance in intelligence activities.

Last year, intelligence from the territory of Russia continued to pose the greatest threat to Latvia and other countries on NATO's eastern border. This type of intelligence gathering, where intelligence and security services' officers coordinate the collection of information about the country of interest from the territory of their own country, has been warned about by VDD in its earlier public reports. Within this type of intelligence activities, the intelligence and security services of Russia recruit and train residents of Latvia or residents of Russia, who have a legitimate reason to regularly visit Latvia, for the acquisition of intelligence.

As Latvia downgrades relations with the aggressor state Russia, the Russian intelligence and security services currently have fewer opportunities to establish contacts with the inhabitants of Latvia in the territory of Russia. This is especially true for Latvian state officials, whose work and private trips to the aggressor state have been almost completely suspended for security reasons. Therefore, a more significant role in the future will be

played by citizens of Russia who act for the benefit of intelligence and security services and can legitimately enter and reside in Latvia in order to implement the interests of their handlers. Cases of espionage discovered by VDD in recent years show that agents recruited by Russian intelligence and security services can perform the tasks given by their handlers for a long time without meeting with them in person. In these cases, communication and the transfer of intelligence is carried out using secret information-technical means.

In order to reduce the abovementioned threat, last year VDD intensified its assessment of the nationals of Russia and its allied countries in Latvia. Upon establishing a possible connection of foreigners with the intelligence and security services of Russia, VDD, in accordance with the procedures laid down in the regulatory framework, provided information regarding these persons to the Minister of the Interior, recommending to include them in the so-called black list or list of foreigners who are denied entry into the Republic of Latvia, and to expel them from the country. More in the subsection on countermeasures to the activities of intelligence and security services of Russia.

In the assessment of VDD, as the opportunities for Russian intelligence officers under diplomatic cover are decreasing, the intelligence and security services of Russia may try to send intelligence officers to Latvia under so-called non-traditional cover, i.e., without

diplomatic immunity. These “travelling agents” can pose, for example, as Russian entrepreneurs, academics, or journalists. For intelligence collection Russia could also use more intensively the so-called “illegals” – Russian intelligence officers posing as nationals of other countries.

1.2.

RANGE OF INTERESTS OF FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES IN LATVIA

Last year, the work of the Russian intelligence and security services was subordinated to the war in Ukraine launched by Russia and the achievement of Vladimir Putin’s goal of returning Ukraine to the Russian zone of influence. The war determined the interests of the Russian intelligence and security services also in Western countries, including Latvia.

The priority of the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state immediately after the invasion of Ukraine became the acquisition of pre-emptive information about the planned retaliatory steps of the West. Namely, on the political response, the planned economic sanctions and other restrictive measures against Russia, plans to provide support to Ukraine, as well as other measures. The intelligence and security services of Russia were

DIVISIONS OF RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES THAT POSE THE GREATEST THREAT TO LATVIA

All three Russian intelligence and security services – the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces (GRU), the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and the Federal Security Service (FSB) – have territorial intelligence divisions that are engaged in recruiting Latvian residents in Russia or recruiting Russian residents for activities in the territory of Latvia.



The intelligence centres of the Russian military intelligence service GRU, involving in cooperation Latvian nationals, seek information on the combat capabilities, material and technical provision, critical infrastructure and strategically significant objects of Latvia and its international allies. Such information is useful for Russia in preparing for a potential military conflict with NATO, as well as for planning diversions, acts of sabotage and other harmful actions.



SVR includes **RT branch** (from Russian – *Разведка с Территории*), whose primary focus is on intelligence from the territory of its own country. Officers of this branch of the SVR operate under cover in Russian institutions, enterprises, universities and scientific institutions. RT branch officers try to engage the cooperation partners of Russian institutions and companies in Western countries in secret cooperation. Such cooperation opens up opportunities to obtain intelligence from different backgrounds, as well as to form positions of influence to further Russian policy goals.



The FSB’s Fifth or Operative Information and International Relations Service and its subordinate intelligence units of regional departments are interested in engaging in secret cooperation Latvian residents who regularly enter Russia. The focus of interests is on individuals who could provide any intelligence of a political, economic or other nature. Such information is useful to the Russian regime when planning activities against Latvia.

also interested in the reaction and role of Latvia in the decision-making of NATO and the EU. Such information was essential for the Russian regime for planning further information influence measures in order to try to influence public opinion and the decision-making process in Western countries in accordance with Russian interests.

In connection with the growing tensions in NATO-Kremlin relations, the importance of Latvia as an intelligence target changed significantly over the past year. As the tension between Russia and NATO increases, it is especially important for the Kremlin to obtain and update intelligence necessary for the planning and implementation of possible military operations in the territory of Latvia. Taking into account these circumstances, the focus of the interests of the Russian intelligence and security services last year was and will continue to be:

- the presence of allied forces in the territory of Latvia, especially the capacity, activities and infrastructure used by the NATO enhanced Forward Presence battle groups in the territory of Latvia;
- the security situation and infrastructure in the border area;
- critical infrastructure objects and other strategically important objects to be destroyed or occupied in the event of war;
- personnel, material and technical resources and capacity of Latvia's intelligence and security services and emergency services;
- the situation and mood of the population in the regions of Latvia, especially the attitude towards Russia;
- potential for provoking internal unrest;
- information on the measures implemented in Latvia for the improvement of national security and possible deficiencies thereof.

Also, the following remain in the circle of interests of the intelligence and security services of Russia and other countries unfriendly to Latvia:

- Latvia's foreign and security policy;
- the internal politics and socio-economic situation of Latvia;
- strategically important sectors and companies in Latvia, and opportunities to gain influence in them in order to promote economic or political interests;
- public administration institutions, in particular the effectiveness of their policies, resources, international cooperation;
- information on shortcomings and "weak points" in the Latvian state, which can be used in discrediting campaigns against the Latvian state;
- information of a compromising nature about officials and employees of state and municipal institutions, including officers from law enforcement institutions, to be used to influence or recruit them.

Last year, the activities of the operational units of the FSB on the Latvian-Russian border intensified. Both the intelligence divisions of the FSB's Border Guard Service and officers from the FSB's intelligence and counterintelligence units regularly and actively operated at Russian border checkpoints, carrying out enhanced migration controls. The FSB was primarily interested in the flow of Ukrainian refugees, both for intelligence gathering about what was happening in Ukraine and for recruitment for further intelligence activities after entering the EU. Residents of NATO countries, including Latvia, were also subjected to stricter control by the FSB within the territory of Russia.

! SECURITY OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

VDD invites the inhabitants of Latvia to pay special attention and inform VDD regarding persons who perform suspicious activities near critical infrastructure objects, military objects, energy and logistics transmissions or any significant object. For example, filming, photographing or prolonged observation of these objects shall be considered suspicious activities. Also, illegal activities may be indicated by digging suspicious objects into the ground or fixing them in the vicinity of the object.

! VDD WARNS

When visiting Russia, the country's authorities may seek to create favorable conditions for attribution of criminal or administrative offenses in order to force cooperation with them in exchange for release from punishment.

1.3.

OBJECTIVES OF RECRUITMENT OF FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

Case studies conducted by VDD show that in the current circumstances, the Russian intelligence and security services mainly select persons who could potentially be willing to cooperate as recruitment targets. These include pro-Kremlin-minded persons, military veterans of the USSR, students at Russian universities, entrepreneurs with business interests in Russia and other persons who have reason to regularly travel to Russia. The information available to VDD shows that pro-Kremlin citizens of Ukraine were also among the

priority recruitment targets of the Russian intelligence and security services in the past year.

At the same time, the intelligence and security services of Russia – especially on the territory of their own country – will not hesitate to use threats, blackmail and other illegal methods to try to force the cooperation of any person who might provide information of interest to them.

One of the priorities of Russia's intelligence and security services is undermining international support for Ukraine. This applies not only to political decision-makers and the military, but also to individuals who organize or implement support activities.

! VDD WARNS

Russia's intelligence and security services could also pay attention to public organizations, individual activists and companies involved in providing support to Ukraine.

The goals of the intelligence and security services of Russia include not only the collection of intelligence, but also the formation of positions of influence. The intelligence and security services of the aggressor state are interested in recruiting persons who have enough influence to achieve decision-making in Latvia that is favourable to the Kremlin. The intelligence and security services of Russia also make use of people who, through their activities, can promote public dissatisfaction with the work of the government of Latvia, provoke unrest, reduce the sense of belonging to Latvia of minorities and foster the division of society according to ethnic, socio-economic or other characteristics.

In the assessment of VDD, the intelligence and security services of Russia will face difficulties in this area, since Western countries have become increasingly aware of the methods used by pro-Kremlin organizations to defend the interests of the Kremlin and the threat posed to national security. In this context, a network of influence agents, that does not express open support for Russia, but can influence political, social and economic processes in the Kremlin's favour, will play a greater role in the foreseeable future.

! REMINDER TO BUSINESSES

VDD invites entrepreneurs to pay increased attention to the origin and end-recipient of exported / imported goods. The Service reiterates that violating sanctions imposed by the EU is a criminal offence.

As Russia faced the largest sanctions in history last year, its intelligence and security services were increasingly involved in the implementation of various schemes to circumvent the sanctions imposed by the West, which would allow the importation into Russia of Western goods it lacks, in particular military and dual-use technologies. Russian intelligence and security services are looking to use Latvia as one of the transit countries in such schemes.

1.4.

ACTIVITIES OF THE BELARUSIAN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

In Belarus, the authoritarian and pro-Kremlin regime of Alexander Lukashenko remains in power. Over the past year, the intelligence and security services of Russia and Belarus cooperated closely, in particular in the field of military intelligence. At the beginning of 2022, VDD, in close cooperation with MIDD, detained a Belarusian citizen for gathering intelligence for the Belarusian military intelligence service. The information obtained in the course of the VDD investigation about the tasks given to the spy leads to the conclusion that they largely overlap with the interests of Russian military intelligence. In VDD's assessment, the synergy of the Belarusian and Russian intelligence and security services will only increase in the foreseeable future, with Belarusian intelligence acting as Russia's surrogates in the Baltic region.

Last year, the migration pressure artificially created by the Belarusian regime on the Latvian border also continued. During the year, Latvian State Border Guard prevented more than five thousand cases of persons from countries at risk of terrorism trying to illegally cross the border of our country. There was a risk that border offenders could include not only terrorist-leaning persons, but also persons connected to the intelligence and security services of hostile countries.

At present, the irregular migration route through Belarus is familiar to citizens of risk countries and illegal transporters and is likely to remain relevant not only in the short term, but also in the long term. According to the information available to VDD, migrants arrange for entry into Belarus themselves through various illegal transporters. However, the possibilities for migrants to be in the Belarusian border area and to cross the EU border illegally still depend on the political regime in Belarus and the support of its institutions. Russia also plays a role in the flow of illegal migration, as its territory is used by citizens of third countries as a stopping point on the way to Belarus.

Cases of espionage detected by VDD in cooperation with MIDD



In detecting espionage cases, VDD works closely with MIDD. Last year, as a result of the investigative work carried out within this cooperation, four persons were found guilty of activities directed against the security of Latvia.

Andris B.



Briefly about the person:

- citizen of the Republic of Latvia;
- age – 67 years;
- worked in business consulting, which allowed him to develop contacts with representatives of railways, ports and municipalities;
- spied for the Russian GRU;
- suspicions about cooperation since the 1980s when he served in the armed forces of the USSR.

Detained: 3 September 2021.

About the offense

Andris B. used the circle of contacts obtained in his professional activities to obtain and transmit intelligence to the Russian military service (GRU) intelligence on:

- combat capabilities, resources, procedures, plans and exercises of the National Armed Forces;
- procurements of the defence sector;
- NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup activities in the territory of Latvia.

In the course of VDD's investigation, it was found out that Andris B. regularly maintained secret contacts with a GRU officer (handler), on whose behalf he purposefully collected, collated, analyzed and systematized information. His activities were coordinated during his annual visits to Russia.

The result of the investigation:

On 23 March 2022, the court sentenced this person to five years in prison for spying for Russia. The person fully admitted his guilt, and the verdict has entered into force.

What this case shows

- GRU continues to use agents recruited during the Soviet period. This is especially true if the agent has achieved the status of a professional and has acquired a wide range of contacts in strategically important sectors.
- Russia's military intelligence service is interested in cooperation with persons associated with logistics sector that plays an important role in providing transportation to NATO.
- This case vividly demonstrates that a well-trained agent can operate for a long time without direct supervision.

Valentins F.



Briefly about the person:

- non-citizen of the Republic of Latvia;
- age – 56 years;
- ran a construction business in Russia;
- worked in Latvia for an IT company;
- spied for the Russian GRU;
- served in the Soviet Special Operations Unit;
- suspicions about cooperation since 1991.

Detained: 21 October 2021.

About the offense

The person collected and conveyed to the Russian military intelligence service information about:

- the arrival and deployment of NATO forces in the Baltic States;
- airports used for military logistics;
- strategically important objects in the territory of Latvia;
- development of Latvia's defence capabilities and scientific sector;
- current internal political processes.

The evidence obtained in the course of the VDD investigation confirmed that the person regularly performed tasks for the Russian GRU for a long time. The person met with his handler in Russia, the rest of the time maintaining secret communication. This person made use of cipher clerk skills learned in the Soviet army, such as receiving coded messages by radio.

The result of the investigation:

On 17 May 2022, the court sentenced the person to five years in prison for spying for Russia. The person has appealed against the judgment of the court of first instance.

What this case shows

Persons who served in the "Spetsnaz", airborne troops or marines during the Soviet era are especially convenient recruitment targets for GRU. Such individuals already have specific knowledge and skills that can be useful in intelligence activities.

Ruslans T.



Briefly about the person:

- non-citizen of the Republic of Latvia;
- age – 45 years;
- ran a company that provided the maintenance and repair of cars;
- provided support for the Russian GRU in creating and maintaining diversionary support positions for the intelligence and security service;
- cooperated with the Russian intelligence and security service at least since 2010.

Detained: 3 November 2021.

About the offense

In the course of the investigation, it was found that the Russian military intelligence service had given this person a number of tasks:

- maintaining of conspiratorial premises;
- creating caches for diversions;
- assessing the operational situation in the vicinity of conspiratorial premises,
- following changes in laws relating to visits of foreign citizens to Latvia and rental of residential property.

VDD established that the person was recruited during a visit to Russia, in order to create support positions for the Russian military intelligence service for potential diversions in Latvia in the event of a military conflict. The person had set up several caches in a remote location for storing items necessary for diversions, informing the GRU representative of their location. During the investigation, VDD established that the person was aware that his actions assisted the Russian military intelligence service to threaten the security of the Republic of Latvia.

Result of the investigation:

The person was accused helping a foreign intelligence and security service to take action against the security of Latvia (Section 811 of the Criminal Law). The person was found guilty of the criminal offense, and on 4 January 2022, the prosecutor's office imposed a fine on him in the amount of 15,000 euros.

What this case shows

- No less significant than obtaining intelligence for the intelligence and security services of Russia are the support agents, who are able to ensure such interests as: maintain conspiratorial premises, provide communication channels, serve as couriers.
- Ukraine's experience shows that in wartime, a network of support agents may even have a greater destructive impact on the country's security than the collection agents.
- The GRU is not only interested in individuals with a military past or specific knowledge. In this case, willingness to cooperate was more important.

Andrejs M.



Briefly about the person:

- a citizen of Belarus without a permanent place of residence in Latvia;
- age – 33 years;
- profession – English private tutor;
- spied for the Belarusian military intelligence service;
- cooperated with Belarusian intelligence service at least since 2013.

Detained: 15 February 2022.

About the offense

The person regularly entered Latvia on a tourist visa in order to obtain intelligence on behalf of the Belarusian military intelligence service on:

- objects of the Latvian defence system;
- critical infrastructure objects;
- civil infrastructure facilities of strategic importance.

On each of his visits to Latvia, the citizen of Belarus secretly filmed and photographed at least one object which is important for the functioning of the state and society, for example, National Armed Forces (NAF) object, railway, electricity and gas infrastructure, airport, port and road hubs. In the course of the VDD investigation, 17 such episodes were established. The video recordings and photos were transferred by the person to the Belarusian military intelligence service. At the beginning of last year, Andrejs M. was detained by VDD, in close cooperation with MIDD, at the NAF Ādaži military base, about which he intended to obtain intelligence.

Result of the investigation:

On 28 October 2022, the court found the person guilty of espionage on behalf of Belarussian military intelligence, sentencing him to eight years in prison and probation for three years. The person is in custody, but has appealed the judgment of the court of first instance.

What this case shows

- As detailed intelligence as possible regarding military facilities, critical infrastructure and significant civil infrastructure objects for Russia and Belarus, which is in its area of influence, is useful for planning military operations in case of a possible conflict with Latvia or NATO. Such information may be used by hostile states for the planning and implementation of acts of sabotage and diversions in order to weaken the resilience and defence capabilities of Latvia as a member of NATO.
- Tourism is a convenient cover for persons seeking to photograph or film objects on behalf of foreign intelligence and security services.
- This case attests that the employees at the critical infrastructure objects must pay special attention to suspicious activities in vicinity of the critical infrastructure objects, informing VDD about it.

1.5.

INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES IN CYBERSPACE

In 2022, the cyberspace of Latvia experienced an unprecedentedly high intensity of cyberattacks. The cyberattacks were mainly related to the war in Ukraine initiated by Russia and were most intense during periods when decisions were taken in Latvia that were not in accordance with Russia's interests, for example, on providing support to Ukraine or on the need to dismantle "monuments" glorifying the Soviet regime and its army.¹

The most active figures in cyberspace were so-called "hactivist" groups, which bring together ideologically motivated, anonymous hackers and coding enthusiasts. In order to further the political goals of the aggressor state Russia, these hactivists last year carried out waves of Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks on various websites and information systems in Latvia. The cyberattacks targeted state and municipal institutions of Latvia, critical infrastructure objects and strategically important enterprises. As a result of these attacks, the operation of websites and other information systems was temporarily hampered or completely blocked. It should be noted that the DDoS attacks did not threaten the security of information stored in state institutions' resources. In VDD's assessment, their main goal was to disrupt the work of Latvian state institutions by creating tension, fear and psychological pressure in order to promote the adoption of decisions favorable to Russia.

VDD observed the highest intensity of cyberattacks in the cyberspace of Latvia in May 2022, when discussions and political initiative on the demolition of the so-called "victory monument" began, as well as in August, when the Saeima (Parliament) recognized Russia as a country supporting terrorism. Pro-Kremlin hactivists regularly attacked various targets in Latvia, in particular targeting state institutions, the financial sector, telecommunications companies, transport service providers and the mass media, who reported on Russia's crimes against Ukraine and exposed Russia's constant disinformation.

In order to create the widest possible public resonance and a sense of threat in Latvian society, pro-Kremlin hactivists regularly published reports on channels created in the communication application "Telegram" on supposedly hacked websites of state institutions and retrieved sensitive data. As VDD verified, the information published by the hactivists most often turned out to be disinformation – no damage was done to the resources of the state institutions or the data stored by them.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE CYBER INTELLIGENCE RISKS

It is recommended that state and municipal institutions, as well as enterprises and organizations of the private sector, take the following steps to reduce the threat posed by malicious hacking groups:

- strengthen cybersecurity measures, including the use of up-to-date software and hardware;
- regularly conduct information technology security audits;
- provide cybersecurity training for staff;
- follow the recommendations of the Information Technology Security Incident Response Institution of the Republic of Latvia (CERT.lv) and other institutions responsible for cybersecurity;
- establish effective cybersecurity incident response plans to minimise the damage caused by a successful cyberattack.

In addition to the DDoS attacks, pro-Kremlin hactivists performed targeted network scanning to uncover potential vulnerabilities that could later be used to retrieve sensitive data or perform destructive actions against computer systems. However, such cyber operations initiated by hactivists mostly proved to be unsuccessful due to the fact that they require a much higher level of knowledge and cyber intelligence skills. The second reason why most of the hactivist attacks were unsuccessful was the preparedness of users for attacks and the ability to respond in a timely manner using modern defense solutions.

However, the greatest threat in terms of potential consequences in the cyberspace of Latvia last year was created not by pro-Kremlin hactivists, but by hacking groups supported and controlled by the intelligence and security services of Russia. These groups typically have much better preparedness, skills, and technical equipment to carry out more sophisticated cyberattacks and potentially cause more damage. The objectives of these groups can be varied, such as compromising computer systems and extracting sensitive intelligence from them, sabotaging computer systems and their operation, or destroying the data contained in them. However, Russian-controlled hacking groups often compromise systems in order to obtain and consolidate a permanent hidden presence in infected systems. It is possible to use such a presence in the long term to carry out, if necessary, the previously listed malignant actions in the target computer system.

Similarly, groups backed by Russian intelligence and security services increasingly carried out supply chain attacks, which are now considered one of the biggest

¹ Monument – a sculptural formation in remembrance of a person or event. In Soviet times, the "monuments" installed in the territory of Latvia were another tool for supporting Russian propaganda and influence activities.

cybersecurity threats. In such cases, the attack on the information systems of the target institution is carried out by first attacking one of the links in the institution's supply chains. This may be a company that provides the institution with software, regular updates to it, computer systems, their maintenance, document management systems and their maintenance or other goods or services. For example, by infecting a software update with malware, hackers can potentially gain access to any computer system on which the infected update is installed. Such complex attacks are used to try to gain access to well-protected information systems. The consequences of attacks are very serious, since the attacker can gain access to a large number of computer systems and a significant amount of sensitive data.

VDD draws attention to the fact that cyberattacks most often succeed due to the lax or insufficiently serious attitude of the users of information technologies themselves towards cybersecurity. In the past year, the most frequent "weak points" that Russian-backed hacking groups managed to use to their advantage were poorly configured computer networks and poor cyber hygiene by computer users. The granting of disproportionate access rights to poorly protected user accounts also contributed to cyber intelligence risks. Concurrently, cyberattacks also had a positive impact on the security of websites and information systems of state institutions of Latvia, as they helped to identify and prevent vulnerabilities of these resources, strengthening the security of the cyberspace of Latvia.

COUNTERING THE ACTIVITIES OF RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

Enhanced protection of critical infrastructure objects

In order to reduce the opportunities for Russian intelligence and security services to obtain information regarding Latvian critical infrastructure objects, VDD last year intensified measures to ensure the protection of such objects. First of all, VDD regularly drew the attention of the personnel of critical infrastructure facilities to intelligence risks and the necessary measures to reduce them. Second, in the context of intelligence risks, VDD conducted vetting of persons employed in such facilities. In total, last year, VDD vetted 3806 employees of critical infrastructure. 75 of these persons were declared by VDD as inappropriate for work at critical infrastructure objects.² The most common reason for issuing a negative opinion was a set of circumstances that give reason to doubt the ability and willingness of such individuals to safeguard restricted or classified information. Among these circumstances was support of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.



Vetting of aviation industry employees

In order to prevent potential threats to civil aviation infrastructure and its operational continuity, VDD last year carried out vetting of persons employed in the aviation industry, performing in-depth checks of their previous activity.³ In total, VDD vetted 4899 persons employed in the aviation industry last year, with an increased focus on identifying intelligence risks. As a result, VDD identified 70 persons who may pose a potential threat to the security of civil aviation and the national security

interests of Latvia. Employers were given a negative opinion on these individuals, prompting them to be suspended from their duties for security reasons.



Migration control measures

In order to prevent the entry into Latvia of citizens of Russia or other countries with connections to the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state, VDD, in cooperation with other services, last year implemented enhanced migration control measures both inside the country and at the border. Persons who may pose a threat to the national security of Latvia were denied entry and residence in Latvia, and in cooperation with the State Border Guard such persons were expelled from the country. More in the section "Migration Control".



Informing the public

Last year, VDD regularly informed the public about the recruitment and intelligence risks related to the activities directed against Latvia by Russian intelligence and security services. In addition, officers of VDD gave briefings on this topic to officials and employees of state and municipal institutions. In total, VDD issued recommendations to 32 institutions last year on precautionary measures to reduce intelligence risks, conducting a total of 39 counterintelligence briefings. In total, the information was provided to about 1800 state and municipal officials and employees. VDD will continue this work in 2023.

² The assessment criteria are specified in Paragraph 16 of Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 508 of 6 July 2021 "Procedures for the identification of critical infrastructure, including European critical infrastructure, planning and implementation of security measures and operational continuity".

³ The vetting was carried out in accordance with Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 829 of 14 December 2021 "Procedures for the performance of a background check and the procedures for issuing and cancelling a civil aviation aircrew and airport identification card".

HOW TO RECOGNISE AN APPROACH BY A FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICE OFFICER

- As a general rule, at least initially, the officer does not reveal his affiliation with the service, instead impersonating membership of another profession.
- Intelligence and security services' officers are often poorly informed about the specifics of the profession they are using as a cover.
- The person may behave in an explicitly friendly way, show sympathy or, conversely, use compromising information, threats or blackmail to establish contact.
- In a foreign country, contact is often established with the involvement of relatives, friends or acquaintances living there.
- The person tries to arrange a private meeting in an informal setting.
- In the course of the conversation, the person shows increased interest in the situation in Latvia, in the workplace, etc.
- With a request for seemingly insignificant information for private purposes.
- The person offers information, an opportunity to earn money or help in exchange for services.

! Not always the intelligence and security service officer is seeking recruitment. They can also obtain significant information during a simple conversation.
! VDD urges citizens not to visit Russia or Belarus without special need.

! SEEK HELP

In case you suspect possible contact with a representative of a foreign intelligence and security service, we invite you to immediately inform VDD by calling the 24-hour phone number **67208964**, writing to info@vdd.gov.lv or making an appointment to visit VDD at 99A K. Barona Street, Riga. VDD guarantees the confidentiality of the information and its provider.

SIGNS THAT MAY INDICATE RECRUITMENT ATTEMPT DURING THE CROSSING OF THE EASTERN BORDER OF LATVIA:

- unusually intense scrutiny and detailed questioning;
- questioning is carried out by a person in civilian clothing, not in the uniform of a border guard;
- questions are asked that are not related to the competence of the border guard, for example, about the situation in Latvia;
- information of a private nature is requested – about the situation in the workplace, duties to be performed, contacts, financial situation;
- fabricated charges are made of an offence or crime, suggesting “cooperation”;
- A telephone number is given to call upon the next arrival in that country.



Criminal law measures

In 2022, VDD initiated four criminal proceedings related to suspected involvement of individuals in espionage, and continued its investigations into criminal cases initiated on suspicion of this crime in previous years. In two criminal cases, VDD obtained and corroborated the necessary body of evidence proving the cooperation of

individuals with the intelligence and security services of Russia or its closest ally Belarus, and referred the materials of these criminal cases to the prosecutor's office for the initiation of criminal prosecution. As a result of investigative work carried out by VDD, four spies were sentenced to prison last year. More in the chapter “Cases of espionage detected by VDD in cooperation with MIDD”.

FORECASTS

- This year, the greatest threat to the national security of Latvia once again will be intelligence from the territory of Russia. The intelligence and security services of the aggressor state will try to use both residents of Latvia and nationals of Russia or its allies who have a legitimate reason to regularly enter Latvia for the acquisition of information.
- As tensions between the Kremlin and NATO increase, the intelligence and security services of Russia may conduct even more intensive intelligence and other activities directed against the national security of Latvia. Against this background, VDD, in cooperation with other services, will continue to implement a robust counterintelligence regime.
- The intelligence and security services of Russia will continue to have a heightened interest in obtaining intelligence on the critical infrastructure of Latvia and other strategically important objects. Therefore, VDD,

in cooperation with persons responsible for security in critical infrastructure objects, will pay particular attention to the identification and assessment of suspicious cases.

- This year, increased risks could potentially arise from pro-Kremlin Ukrainian citizens, especially those who have been in Russia or the territories of Ukraine occupied by Russia for a long time. Such persons may manipulate the supportive attitude of the Latvian people towards Ukraine and the desire to provide assistance to the people who have suffered from the war.
- This year the threat caused by cyber intelligence will remain high. Therefore, everyone, especially state and municipal officials and employees, should pay special attention to cyber hygiene and the elimination of potential vulnerabilities in information and communication technologies.

MIGRATION CONTROL

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and confrontation with the civilised world last year forced Latvia to introduce additional security measures to control and limit migration. VDD, according to its competence, performed activities both on the eastern border of Latvia and within the country in order to identify Russian citizens and other foreigners who may cause risks to the national security of Latvia.

IDENTIFIED RISKS

- **Entry into Latvia of Russian and Belarusian citizens connected to intelligence and security services**

There is a risk that among the citizens of Russia and Belarus who enter Latvia, there may be persons connected to the intelligence and security services of these countries, the primary objective of which is intelligence or other subversive activities directed against the security of Latvia and NATO. Since the closure of Russian diplomatic representations, as well as other restrictions and sanctions against Russia, significantly undermined Russia's intelligence positions and capacity, the risk that the Russian intelligence and security services might try to send so-called travelling agents and Russian citizens cooperating with the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state, increased. Risks were also caused by the entry into Latvia of citizens of Belarus, Russia's closest ally, especially considering the close cooperation of the intelligence and security services of both countries.

- **Using the flow of war refugees to send in persons supporting Russian aggression**

Risk to the national security of Latvia is caused not only by the entry of citizens of Russia and Belarus, but also by pro-Kremlin citizens of Ukraine. There is a risk that among such Ukrainian nationals there may be persons recruited by the intelligence and security services of Russia, whose main purpose of arrival is the acquisition of intelligence or other activities in support of Russian interests.

- **Entry of persons inclined to terrorism into Latvia**

During the past year, foreigners from countries with a heightened presence of terrorist groups or other risks related to terrorism (hereinafter – terrorism risk countries) continued to enter Latvia. The most common reasons for the entry of such persons were studies in Latvian higher education institutions, job opportunities and family reunion. As in other years, last year there was a risk that radically inclined persons might enter Latvia from terrorism risk countries. The hybrid attack organised by Belarus also continued to pose terrorism risks, facilitating the entry of citizens of terrorism risk countries into the EU.

Measures to Address the Risks Posed by Russia and Belarus



Reinforced control of arrivals at crossing points of the eastern border of Latvia

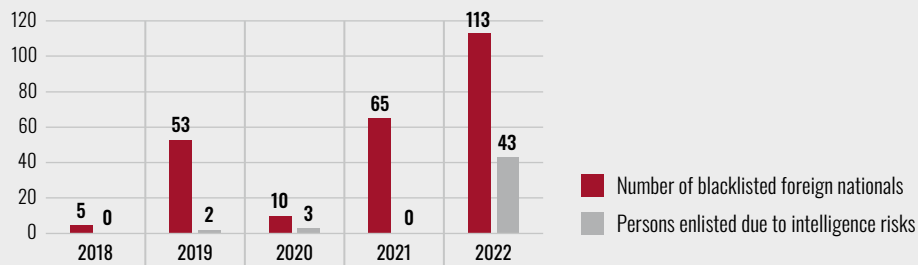
Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, VDD, in cooperation with the State Border Guard, the State Police and other institutions, has been carrying out enhanced control of foreigners entering Latvia on the eastern border of the country. In 2022, in-depth interviews with about 10,000 border crossers were conducted at border crossing points, with VDD analyzing the information provided by these persons to identify risks. Until the end of 2022, on the basis of the risks identified by VDD to the national security of Latvia, a total of 179 foreigners were denied entry to Latvia at border crossing points, of which 105 were citizens of Russia, 41 were citizens of Ukraine, 16 were citizens of Belarus, while the rest were citizens of other countries who supported the criminal regime of Russia.



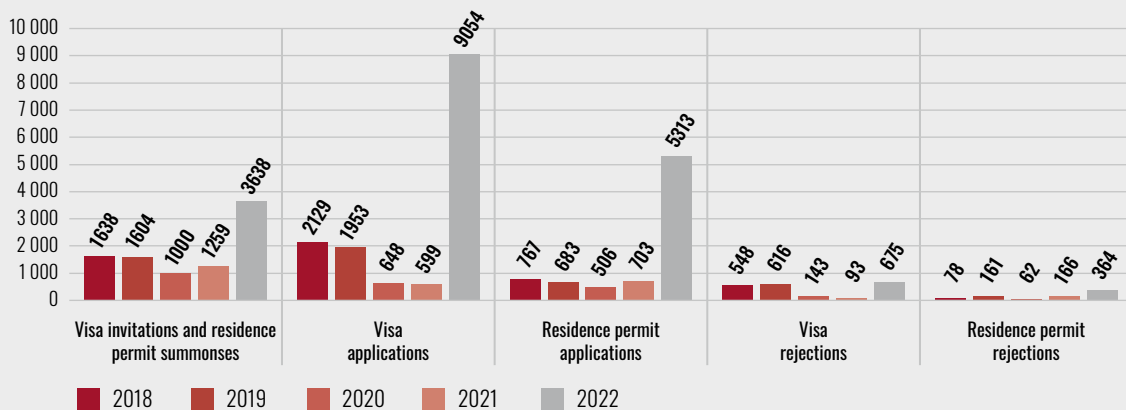
Blacklisting of foreigners

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, VDD has paid special attention to citizens of Russia and its allied countries who permanently reside or regularly enter Latvia. Upon establishing the risks caused by a foreigner to the national security of Latvia, VDD recommended that the Minister for the Interior include this person in the so-called blacklist or list of foreigners whose entry into the Republic of Latvia is prohibited. Last year, on the recommendations of VDD, 113 foreigners were blacklisted, of which 43 persons were denied further entry to Latvia directly due to intelligence risks identified by the Service. Certain individuals were banned from entering all Schengen area countries due to increased risks. 52 of those blacklisted were Russian citizens, 14 were citizens of Belarus, one was a citizen of Ukraine, and the other 46 were citizens of other countries. In cases where a foreigner was in the territory of Latvia at the time of inclusion in the list, the State Border Guard carried out the forced removal of this person from the country. Last year, the blacklist, according to the recommendations of VDD, included the largest number of foreigners in recent years (see diagram).

Blacklisted foreign nationals



In-depth checks for visa and residence permit applicants performed by VDD



In-depth checks for visa and residence permit applicants

Since 2 September 2022, Russia and its closest ally Belarus have been included in the so-called list of risk countries, whose citizens are subject to additional vetting when issuing a visa or residence permit. Within the framework of the vetting, VDD obtains a wide amount of information regarding citizens of risk countries in order to ascertain whether the entry or stay of persons in Latvia is not related to risks to the national security of Latvia. Last year, VDD carried out a total of 9054 vettings on visa applicants and 5313 applicants for residence permits. In addition, VDD vetted 3638 foreigners on the basis of invitations and summonses issued by companies or residents of Latvia asking that a visa or residence permit be granted. The number of vettings carried out by VDD last year was seven times higher than in 2021. The reason for the significant increase in the number of vettings was the need for increased checks on Russian and Belarusian citizens. As a result of the vetting, last year VDD recommended to the OCMA in 675 cases to refuse to issue a visa, and in 364 cases to refuse to issue a residence permit.



Vetting the asylum seekers

In accordance with its remit, last year VDD vetted asylum seekers from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and terrorism risk countries. Some of the most common reasons for seeking asylum last year were fleeing war or repression by the Russian and Belarusian regimes. Last year, VDD vetted a total of 489 asylum seekers. 224 of them came from terrorism risk countries, while the remaining 165 came from Russia, Belarus, as well as war-torn Ukraine. As a result of the vetting, VDD recommended refusing to grant asylum to four foreigners – two Russian and two Ukrainian citizens.



02

PROTECTION OF OFFICIAL SECRETS

In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, last year the Kremlin needed more than ever to obtain intelligence on Western support for Ukraine and NATO's combat capabilities. Information that is official secret, and in particular NATO and EU classified information, has always been a priority target for Russian intelligence services.

However, due to the tensions caused by the war between the West and Russia, in 2022 the threat posed by the Russian intelligence services to persons who have been issued a security clearance for access to official secrets (hereinafter – security clearance) increased even more. Holders of security clearances should be aware that while access to information containing official secrets testifies to the trust they have from the State of Latvia, it also makes them a target of intelligence services of countries hostile to Latvia.

Official secrets' protection measures are the basis of any country's counterintelligence regime. The purpose of such measures is to prevent information related to the national security interests of Latvia from reaching hostile countries. The protection of official secrets is the responsibility not only of the Latvian intelligence and security services – VDD, MIDD and SAB – but also of each institution and individual who works with top secret, secret and confidential information.

In light of changes in regional security affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Service tightened its official secrets protection regime last year. This meant an even more in-depth and rigorous vetting of security clearance applicants. In total, more than 2000 persons were evaluated last year, assessing their suitability to work with classified information. VDD also paid special attention to persons to whom a security clearance has already been issued, if necessary, by initiating an extraordinary vetting. In cases where intelligence risks or other threats to the security of the protected information were identified, the Service denied the persons access to official secrets.



In addition to vetting persons, an important measure for the protection of official secrets, implemented by VDD in cooperation with the other two intelligence and security services, was assessing the suitability of the premises intended for handling classified information. In total, last year the Service conducted 29 such inspections, providing the institutions with recommendations for the improvement of security solutions and confidentiality regime.

VDD also continued to vet the companies that applied for industrial security certification. Last year, the Service verified the suitability of nine companies to fulfil orders that require familiarization with information containing official secrets. After vetting the merchants, VDD in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Law on Official Secret sent the compiled information and its recommendations to SAB for decision-making. In eight cases, as a result of the VDD assessment, confidence was obtained in the company's readiness and ability to ensure the protection of information containing official secrets. In one case, however, VDD identified risks and recommended refusing to issue the industrial security certificate.

2.1.

VETTING APPLICANTS FOR AND HOLDERS OF A SECURITY CLEARANCE

The discovery of classified information by hostile states may cause irreparable harm to the security, economic and political interests of Latvia. Therefore, only such persons who are loyal to the State of Latvia and who are ready and able to protect information containing official secrets may have access to official secrets.

In 2022, VDD continued to conduct both first-time vettings of persons prior to the commencement of work with information containing official secrets, as well as to reassess the reliability of existing holders of security clearances and their ability to protect official secrets. Repeated vettings of persons were carried out by the Service to decide on the extension of the period of validity of a security clearance, the scope of the person's activity changed or the need arose to use information of a higher order of secrecy at work and, as a result, the person required a security clearance of a higher category. VDD also continued to obtain and analyze information on persons even after the security clearance was issued. In cases where the Service obtained information about these persons indicating a potential threat to the security of the information to be protected, VDD conducted an extraordinary vetting.

In order to comprehensively verify the reliability and ability of a person to maintain an official secret, the Service collects and analyzes a wide amount of information regarding the activities of the person and their circle of contacts. If it was necessary to assess a particularly large amount of information, it was difficult to obtain information on certain stages of a person's life, or it was necessary to verify information that arouse suspicions about the reliability of a person, VDD also used the legally mandated right to extend the vetting period from three to six months. Last year, VDD extended the vetting period in 268 cases. In a large proportion of these cases, the extension of the vetting period was due to the need to obtain and verify information on the person's activities abroad.

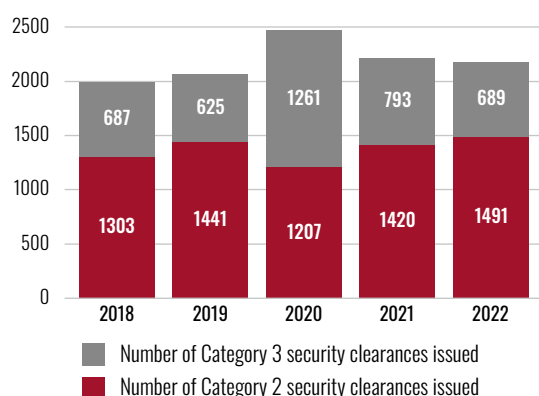
Last year, VDD conducted a total of 2273 in-depth vettings of persons. In 2180 cases, VDD found no disqualifying information⁴ and issued the individuals with security clearances. Of these, 1491 were

⁴ The reasons due to which persons are denied access to information containing official secrets are laid down in Section 9 Paragraph 3 of the Law On Official Secret.

Category 2 security clearances, which provide the right of access to confidential and secret information, and 689 were Category 3 security clearances, which provide the right to access only confidential information.

VDD also vetted 64 persons who applied for a Category 1 security clearance, which provides for access to confidential, secret and top secret information. In accordance with the procedures laid down in the Law On Official Secret, VDD sent the vetting materials of the applicants for the Category 1 security clearance and its conclusions to SAB for a decision on the issuance of a security clearance.

Dynamics of security clearances issued and vettings performed by VDD



Last year, VDD also regularly obtained and analysed information on individuals who already have access to official secrets. Upon detecting suspicious or risk-related activities by a holder of a security clearance, the Service commenced an extraordinary vetting. Last year, a total of 29 extraordinary vettings were carried out to determine whether the holder of the security clearance poses a risk of illegal disclosure or loss of protected information. The most common reasons for initiating such vetting were:

- regular trips to Russia, Belarus, CIS countries, China;
- violations of the requirements for the protection of official secrets;
- suspicion of involvement of a person in illegal activities;
- suspicion of abuse of office;
- the use of databases unrelated to professional duties;
- contact with persons disloyal to the state, engaged in criminal activities or who are under suspicion;
- suspicious financial transactions and savings of uncertain origin;
- obtained derogatory information, which indicates the possible unreliability of the person.

2.2.

REASONS FOR DENYING ACCESS TO OFFICIAL SECRETS

As in previous years, VDD obtained information on some of the security clearance applicants that indicated a high risk that official secrets could be disclosed intentionally or unintentionally. The Service also identified risks posed by individual holders of the security clearance to the security of classified information. In such cases, persons were denied access to official secrets.

One of the main purposes of the vetting of applicants and holders of a security clearance is to identify individuals who possess characteristics that make them easy targets for recruitment by foreign intelligence services.

! VDD WARNS

A set of views that do not comply with the interests of national security in the form of justification and support of the aggression carried out by Russia shall be considered as a significant risk to the security of classified information. Also, a careless attitude to the requirements for the protection of official secrets, a nihilistic attitude to laws and regulations, excessive alcohol consumption or other addictions, lack of integrity or negligence create risks that information containing official secrets may be deliberately or unknowingly disclosed or lost.

By denying such persons access to official secrets, the Service not only prevents potential violations of the regulatory framework, but also intelligence risks.

According to the case studies conducted by VDD, the risk of becoming a target of recruitment by the intelligence and security services of hostile countries is particularly high for persons who have committed illegal acts or acts contrary to generally accepted moral principles. Officers of foreign intelligence and security services can use such information to force the holder of the security clearance through blackmail, threats and psychological pressure to “cooperate” by obtaining and passing on protected information to them. In addition, persons who regularly deviate from laws and moral principles may potentially be inclined to ignore the requirements for the protection of official secrets. In view of these circumstances, VDD last year denied access to information containing official secrets to several persons who had systematically violated

laws and regulations and acted unprofessionally, unethically and in bad faith.

Last year, a decision to deny a person access to official secrets was adopted by VDD in 25 cases. Compared to 2021, when 12 persons did not pass the vetting, a negative decision was made more than twice as often in 2022. In 22 cases, VDD refused to issue a security clearance, while in three cases it cancelled a previously issued security clearance.

The reasons for VDD to deny a person access to official secrets were as follows:

- In 22 cases, in the course of the vetting, facts were established which give reason to doubt the person’s reliability and ability to maintain an official secret (Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 6 of the Law On Official Secret). Of these, in 19 cases a person was refused a security clearance, while in three cases a clearance already issued was cancelled.
- In two cases, the Service found that the applicant for the security clearance did not comply with the requirements of Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 3 sub article (b) of the Law On Official Secret, i.e. the person had been convicted of an intentional criminal offence.
- In one case, non-compliance was found under Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 3 sub article (a) of the Law On Official Secret – the person had been sentenced for an intentional criminal offence.

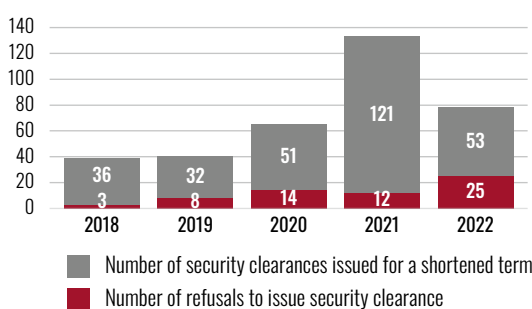
In the past year, the following reasons were grounds for refusal or cancellation of a security clearance:

- maintaining contact with risk persons in Russia or Belarus;
- expressing support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine;
- involvement in criminal activities and systematic administrative offenses;
- use of official position for selfish purposes;
- use of databases intended for work for private purposes;
- alcohol, gambling or other addictions;
- mental health or behavioral disorders;
- providing false information or concealing information from an intelligence and security service of Latvia;
- contacts with criminals;
- suspicious financial transactions and savings of uncertain origin.

In most cases, an adverse decision was based on a number of risk factors identified by the Service which taken together indicated a high degree of risk that information containing official secrets could be unlawfully disclosed or lost.

As in other years, at the request of the state institutions, VDD also made preliminary assessments of candidates for various positions, providing an opinion on whether a person would potentially be granted a security clearance. As a result of these assessments, VDD issued four negative opinions on the suitability of person for dealing with information containing official secrets.

Dynamics of security clearances issued and vettings performed by VDD



In 53 cases, VDD issued security clearances to persons for a shortened term, i.e. one, two or three years, instead of a maximum of five years. The Service makes such a decision in cases where, in the course of the vetting, facts or circumstances have been established which are considered to be risk factors, but in accordance with the Law on Official Secret there are insufficient grounds for the person to be immediately denied access to official secrets.

VDD reiterates that persons who have been granted a security clearance are obliged to inform in writing the entity of their employer tasked with supervising its confidentiality regime or competent Latvia’s intelligence and security service of any significant changes in the data indicated in the questionnaire submitted for obtaining a security clearance. For example, change of name, surname, citizenship, place of residence or contact details; cohabitation, marriage or divorce; administrative or disciplinary sanctions imposed; criminal liability or participation in criminal proceedings (including as a witness); contacts with foreign intelligence and security services; facing blackmail, threats or other risks.⁵ Such information must be submitted within one month.

! REMINDER TO SECURITY CLEARANCE HOLDERS

Failure to report any changes in the data indicated in the questionnaire may serve as one of the reasons for refusing to reissue the security clearance.

⁵ Changes to the questionnaire that a person is obliged to report are listed in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 21 of 6 January 2004 “Regulations for the protection of official secrets, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union and foreign institutions’ classified information” Paragraph 21⁶

WHEN THE ISSUANCE OF A SECURITY CLEARANCE IS REFUSED



Illustrative photo, VDD

Last year, five persons who were denied access by VDD to information containing official secrets exercised the right laid down in the Law on Official Secret to appeal the decision of the Service to the Prosecutor General. One of those persons also appealed to the Administrative Court against the unfavorable decision of the Prosecutor General.

All persons who challenged VDD's decision in 2022 were denied access to official secrets due to facts established in the course of the vetting, which give reason to doubt the reliability and ability of the persons to keep an official secret. In each of the cases, VDD had identified a number of facts and circumstances that indicated a high risk to the security of classified information.

- The person who tried to reverse the negative decision of VDD by appealing both to the Prosecutor General and then to the Administrative Court, failed to refute the violations found by the Service and prove their suitability to work with official secrets. VDD denied them access to official secrets in connection with an attempt to influence the progress of criminal proceedings in an unlawful manner, for which the person was subject to disciplinary sanction. The person did not inform the Service about the disciplinary sanction received and other changes in the data indicated in the questionnaire. Similarly, the person had used databases allocated for official purposes to obtain information for purposes other than the performance of official duties. VDD also found that the person had repeatedly provided false and distorted information, as well as concealed the information in order to mislead the Service.
- In the second case, VDD denied the person access to official secrets, because they publicly expressed support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. They constantly absorbed Russian propaganda, as well as participated in the celebration of the so-called "victory day" at the now dismantled object glorifying the occupation of Latvia by the USSR in Riga (the so-called "victory monument"). Also, the Service found that the person regularly visits Russia and maintains contacts with persons in Russia, among whom are individuals associated with the military structures of the aggressor state. In addition to the above, the person had not reported the changes in the data indicated in the questionnaire. The information obtained in the course of the VDD vetting indicated the person's sympathy for the aggressor state Russia and disloyalty to the State of Latvia. The Prosecutor General upheld VDD's decision as justified.
- In the third case, VDD refused to issue a security clearance to a person in connection with regular contacts with a person in Russia, as well as possible involvement in criminal activities – the sale of tobacco products without excise marking. In the course of VDD vetting, it was found that the person received income of unclear origin from other individuals to the amount of several thousand euros. Similarly, the person had unlawfully obtained information about other persons from workplace databases unrelated to the performance of official duties. This person had systematically violated various laws and regulations. The person also repeatedly failed to notify the Service of changes to the data in the questionnaire. The information

obtained in the course of VDD vetting formed the profile of an unreliable and dishonest person, whose readiness and ability to protect information containing state secrets cannot be relied on. It should be noted that the person had been issued a security clearance for a shortened period of time, since the previous vetting by VDD had already identified possible risks in the person's activities. Once again, the Prosecutor General upheld VDD's decision.

- In the fourth case, similarly to the third, a security clearance had previously been issued to the person for a shortened period. This time, the information obtained in the course of VDD's vetting was no longer compatible with the right of access to official secrets. Regular trips to Russia, contact with persons from criminal circles, possible involvement in criminal activities, unclear financial transactions, undeclared gifts, systematic non-compliance with

legal norms and moral principles, failure to report changes in the data indicated in the questionnaire – these were the reasons why the person's security clearance was not reissued. Having appraised the information obtained by VDD on the person, the Prosecutor General rejected the person's request to reverse the decision.

- In the fifth case, a person was denied access to official secrets in connection with regular trips to Belarus, violations of the rules for the storage and circulation of classified information, income and savings of unclear origin, failure to report changes in the questionnaire, as well as the provision of false information to the intelligence and security service of Latvia. The investigation into this case has not yet concluded, because the Prosecutor General, having read VDD's assessment, has instructed the Service to conduct an additional review to clarify the information.



03

PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

Russia's war in Ukraine has also significantly changed Latvia's internal security situation. The war has led to shifts in the character and intensity of Russian threats to Latvia's constitutional order. The united and powerful response by Western countries to Russia's aggression has reduced the range of non-military instruments of influence available to the Kremlin. The war has increased the demand within the Latvian society for a "zero tolerance" attitude toward pro-Russian activities. Under these conditions, Russia's "compatriot" policy and other forms of soft power deployed by Russia in recent decades have become ineffective.

Nevertheless, VDD considers that Russian threats to our constitutional order have not diminished. In the wake of social polarization experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, feelings of tension and uncertainty have risen in the society. Last year, Latvia saw the long-term effects of Russian influence activities, particularly on persons who have lived in the Russian-language information space. This could be seen in online comments made by some residents of Latvia, as well as in hooligan activity when symbols of aggression were displayed in public seeking to undermine Latvia's unwavering support for Ukraine. VDD carefully investigated every signal regarding pro-Russian and aggression-supporting activities.

Russian subjects also paid close attention to persons in Latvia seeking to support the war it started against Ukraine, desperately trying to find "opinion leaders" in these circles. The so-called "Baltic anti-fascist" project launched at the end of 2022 sought to create a virtual community of "compatriots" amongst apologists for Russian aggression who had fled from Latvia, whose rhetoric and slogans aimed at spurring local residents to more actively defend Russia's interests.

Under the cloud of Russia's threat to the civilized world, Latvia held its 14th Saeima elections last October and VDD was involved in providing election security. Voter participation was above average, in spite of efforts by various groups to raise tensions and cast doubts on the electoral process. The high level of voter activity was another demonstration of how Latvian society respects democratic values. VDD assesses that the elections took place peacefully and without significant security incidents.



VDD's scope of competence also includes monitoring and analysing radical and extremist threats. Russia's assault on Ukraine also influenced individuals with radical tendencies, as demonstrated by the involvement of Russia-supporting Communist-Marxist cells in defending Soviet "monuments." These activities were halted, and VDD continued to proactively combat efforts to popularise totalitarian ideologies in Latvia.

3.1.

THE EFFECT OF THE WAR ON LATVIA'S SOCIETY AND INTERNAL SECURITY

In the midst of the worst military crisis in Europe in three decades, overall, Latvia's society proved remarkably resilient. This manifested through the majority being able to put aside the divisions of the pandemic years in the face of the threat to Latvia and our region as well as through providing support to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees.

From the first days of the war, VDD has systematically gathered and analysed information about possible support for Russia's aggression. The Service believes that such activities have been marginal. However, a statistically significant group of Latvian residents continues to uncritically view the actions of that imperialistic state both historically and today. Some of these individuals not only view Russia in a positive light, but also their words and deeds give support to the Kremlin.

VDD's analysis shows that most of those residents who continue to support the aggressor state even after the assault on Ukraine have had long-term exposure to Kremlin disinformation and propaganda. Due to low levels of education, unfavorable social conditions or

other factors, this group has uncritically taken on the Kremlin's disseminated narratives as truth. Certain Russia-oriented "opinion leaders" have also had a negative impact, calling for "closer relations" with the eastern neighbor.

There are also individuals in Latvia who are hostile to the state of Latvia and its core values, national policies and foreign policy orientation. According to the Service's analysis, the attitudes of such persons towards Russia remained unchanged even after evidence surfaced about Russia's armed forces' crimes against civilians in Ukraine.

Even before the war, VDD was aware of pro-Kremlin individuals in Latvia who Russia systematically tried to make loyal towards the so-called "Russian world." Last year, due to Russia's serious threat to the civilized world, the Service significantly intensified countermeasures against pro-Kremlin activities. Since January 2022, the Service ramped up activities to control Russian "compatriot" organisations, radical parties oriented towards the Latvian-Russian electorate and individual activists.

3.2.

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR ON RUSSIA'S ABILITY TO CONDUCT INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES AGAINST LATVIA

Russia's launched warfare in Ukraine significantly reduced opportunities for the Kremlin's non-military influence activities in the West, including Latvia.

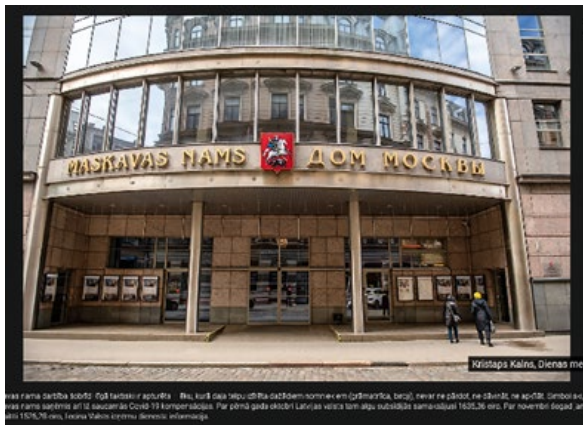
This particularly applies to the so-called "compatriot" policy, which was previously the cornerstone of Russia's "soft" power. The international sanctions imposed against Russia and its diplomatic isolation has enabled

PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

the dismantling of Russia's non-military influence architecture, which earlier served as a support structure for the aggressor state and played an important role in influence activities in Latvia. The Kremlin's active and important subjects were forced to reduce or terminate their operations in Latvia.

The closure of Russia's general consulates in Daugavpils and Liepāja significantly reduced Russian “compatriot” activities in the regions. Meanwhile, Russian diplomats in Riga were busy dealing with other matters arising from the new situation.

Riga's so-called “Moscow House,” established by the Moscow Municipality in 2004, had been a hotbed of “compatriot” everyday activities and events, but now has reduced its activities to a minimum. Another site supporting Russia's influence activities was the Jūrmala sanatorium “Dzintarkrasts” owned by Russia. It closed its doors in 2022, and its director Victor Danyilov was blacklisted by the Interior Minister of Latvia at the request of VDD.



The so-called “Moscow House” in Riga (screenshot from the website “Diena”).

Funds supporting Russian “compatriots” policy were also forced to suspend ongoing projects and collaboration with “compatriot” organisations in Latvia. Without funding from Russia, several “compatriots” organisations in Latvia halted operations or reduced them to a minimum.

The Service considers that the previously active “compatriot” organisations are currently disoriented and dormant. Many Russian “compatriot” activists have declined to openly support Russia or get involved in propaganda, fearing criminal charges for justifying and glorifying Russia's warfare and the war crimes committed by its armed forces.

This demonstrates that the earlier campaigns by Russian “compatriot” activists were not a true reflection of self-expression of Latvian civil society or its residents.

Rather, they were efforts choreographed by the Kremlin to influence Latvian politics and society in line with Russia's foreign policy goals and worldview.

In the new situation, Russia's influence activities mainly focus on information campaigns, condemning Latvia for demolishing Soviet “monuments” and strengthening the position of the Latvian language in the public sphere. Russia has also sought to maintain contacts with individual “compatriot” activists by inviting them to conferences and other events in Russia and offering them the chance to appear on Russian propaganda shows.

Russia also continued to try and persuade young Latvians to study in the aggressor state's universities, as this would enable the Kremlin to recruit future “opinion leaders” for influence activities against Latvia. The Service has repeatedly warned that studying in Russia carries heightened espionage risks. It is notable that several Latvian nationals detained by VDD last year had been or are currently studying in Russia.

! VDD WARNS

Analysis of the Service shows that Russia's higher education institutions are under close watch by Russian security and intelligence services, and foreign students there are prime targets for these services. Therefore, VDD considers that Latvian nationals currently studying in or graduated from Russian universities should be barred from employment in state or municipal institutions, critical infrastructure or sectors critical for the national security.

3.3.

SOCIAL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT RUSSIA

In spite of widespread public condemnation of Kremlin's implemented military aggression in Ukraine, a small, pro-Kremlin minority continues to harbor nostalgic feelings toward Russia. However, those individuals who have loudly expressed support for the aggressor state had few connections with one another and were primarily driven by war propaganda or a refusal to look more deeply into political processes. Another factor was the hitherto extensive use of the Russian language in Latvia, which made it easier for the Kremlin to hold some Latvian residents in the “Russian world.”

Last year, amongst the political parties geared toward the pro-Kremlin electorate, the most active was the “Latvian Russian Union” (LKS), which VDD considers to have been useful for Russia in the implementation of its interests for many years. Its public activities and messages overlap with the Kremlin’s artificially generated narratives about Latvia’s supposed breaches of international human rights norms, while at the same time ignoring Russia’s crimes in Ukraine. Even after 24 February, LKS leader Tatjana Ždanoka continued to use her position as a Member of the European Parliament to defend the Kremlin’s aggressive foreign policy.

Last year, VDD carried out preventative measures against LKS, to restrict the potential negative impact on Latvia’s national security arising from the party’s activities. Before the adopting of amendments to the Law on Political Parties, VDD issued an official warning to LKS not to engage in activities which threaten national security.⁶ In early 2022, the Service also gave individual warnings to LKS leaders regarding criminal liability for providing assistance to a foreign state in actions against Latvia.⁷

Last year, VDD advised responsible institutions not to approve several protests and other public events planned by LKS, including a demonstration during the demolition of the “victory monument.” The Service assessed that such events created serious threats to public order and safety while also increasing ethnic tensions and intolerance within the society. This was affirmed by the displaying of symbols supporting Russian aggression at previous LKS events and statements of support for the aggressor state by participants. The LKS protests were partly integrated in the party’s election campaign.

After winning the votes of the pro-Kremlin electorate in the 14th Saeima elections, the party “Stabilitātei!” also demonstrated actions in support of Russia. In line with amendments made last summer to the Law on Political Parties, VDD preventatively warned the party not to give support to the aggressor state. Warnings were also given to party officials.

Russia typically tries to achieve its goals abroad by using politicians or parties as intermediaries.

Although in large Russia’s “compatriot” policy lost its position and most of the organisations involved actually ceased operations, some activists in 2022 continued to maintain ties with Russia and Belarus. This was mainly

done by participating in influence activities both in person by visiting Belarus and Russia, as well as online by giving interviews about Latvian politics and social issues in line with Kremlin narratives.

AMENDMENTS TO THE LAW ON POLITICAL PARTIES

Amendments to the Law on Political Parties came into effect on 22 June 2022, clarifying and expanding VDD’s mandate in the sphere of monitoring political parties. The Saeima adopted these measures as a matter of urgency, due to the reality created by Russia’s aggression and the risks posed by pro-Kremlin oriented persons and political organisations.

The amendments strengthened the prohibition for parties to act against the independence and territorial integrity of Latvia or other democratic states or to incite to violent overthrowing of democratic state structures. The amendments give the prosecutors’ office or the state security institution the right in the event of finding evidence of the aforementioned unlawful activities to issue a warning to the party to desist from such actions. In the event of repeated infringements, a court may order the dissolution of the party.



LKS leader Tatjana Ždanoka (from the right) and the activist Tatjana Andriječa who both in last year actively called for signing a petition against the demolition of Soviet “monuments” and against “russophobia” in Latvia which would then be submitted in the European Parliament.

Screenshot from the website “russkie.org”

⁶ Pursuant to Section 19 Paragraph 1 Article 12 of the Law on State Security Institutions, upon identifying evidence of possible illegal activity, VDD has the right to issue warnings to both natural persons and legal entities not to engage in illegal activities which are directed against or may harm State security.

⁷ In accordance with Section 811 of the Criminal Law – activities offering support to a foreign state or foreign organisation in undermining the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, statehood, state institutions or national security of the Republic of Latvia.

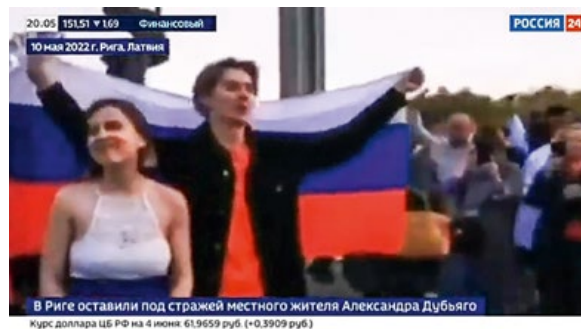
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Long standing “compatriot” activist Viktors Guščins was one of those who carried on with such activities. In late 2022, he received the Alexander Pushkin medal at the Russian Embassy in Riga, a prize awarded by Russia’s dictator Vladimir Putin who is accused of serious crimes. Last year, Putin also ordered that this prize be given to Tatjana Favorska, a board member within the union “Society of Russians in Latvia” and an LKS candidate in the 14th Saeima elections.

The Service also uncovered high levels of activity by pro-Kremlin minded residents on social media and video sharing platforms, primarily “Facebook”, “TikTok” and “Telegram”. The Service found many posts directly or indirectly supporting Russia’s assault on Ukraine and justifying Russia’s armed forces war crimes. In the vast majority of cases, the authors of these messages were established. Most of these persons had no links with the “compatriot” scene or pro-Kremlin organisations known to VDD and had not previously shown open support for Russia. Nevertheless, these persons quickly gained likeminded followers, thus providing significant support to the dissemination of Russia’s war propaganda in Latvian society.

Two young pro-Kremlin activists, Aleksandrs Dubjago and Viktorija Matule, who on 10 May 2022 turned up at the “victory monument” with a symbol of aggression in the form of the flag of Russia, were also previously unknown to VDD. The Service considers that their actions were directed at glorifying Russia and supporting aggression. A. Dubjago was arrested and is under investigation for supporting the aggressor state.⁸ A. Dubjago had previously studied in Moscow. Immediately after his arrest, A. Dubjago’s relatives were contacted by persons connected with Russian institutions. Meanwhile, his arrest and criminal charges were exploited by Russian propaganda outlets in their campaigns against Latvia. His case was presented as “proof” that “russophobia” is increasing in Latvia.

Following the 10 May events, V. Matule “fled” to Belarus, later spreading messages about her alleged persecution. Initially, she demonstrated her usefulness to Belarussian and Russian propaganda outlets by appearing on TV shows and giving interviews about developments in Latvia. Later she became actively involved in activities against Latvia on “Telegram” and “TikTok”.



Screenshot from Russian propaganda TV channel “Rossija 24” report on the arrest of A. Dubjago.

VDD considers that both cases reveal the ongoing interest by the Kremlin’s influence policy organisers to recruit promising individuals to conduct activities against Latvia. They also demonstrate the increasing importance of social networking platforms in furthering Kremlin’s aims, becoming the primary instrument for networking, organising, recruitment and agitation for the pro-Kremlin clique.

In some cases, pro-Kremlin sentiment spilled onto the streets. From 24 February until the end of the year, VDD and the State Police observed just over 1,000 incidents in public places which could be deemed as expressing support to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. The most visible examples were drawing the letter “Z” and similar hooliganism.

However, despite some isolated incidents, there were no mass demonstrations in support of Russia’s assault on Ukraine. Thanks to the Service’s systematic countermeasures, pro-Kremlin activists were unable to rouse likeminded followers to take part in street protests or civil disobedience backing Russian atrocities in Ukraine.

The only exceptions were the spontaneous, poorly organised pro-Kremlin gatherings on 9 and 10 May, and during the dismantling of the so-called “victory monument” and soviet “monument” in Daugavpils. Because of a successful cooperation between VDD and the State Police, the situation did not escalate on those critical dates.

Last year, the so-called “vaccine sceptics,” headed by certain Covid-19 deniers, also took a contradictory stance on Russia’s war in Ukraine. Members of this clique went against majority public opinion by declining to condemn Russian aggression or support the people of Ukraine affected by the war. The vaccine

⁸ Materials obtained during criminal investigation providing evidence of the demonstrative public displaying of symbols of Russian aggression were later forwarded to the State Police for decisions on administrative charges in accordance with Section 13¹ (public displaying of symbols glorifying military aggression and war crimes) of the Law on Administrative Penalties for Offences in the Field of Administration, Public Order, and the Use of the Official Language.

“REFUGEES” IN RUSSIA

Last year, the community of pro-Kremlin activists who fled to Russia became a new phenomenon on the activist stage.

This clique was formed by persons who emigrated from Latvia last year, citing spurious “russophobia” by the Latvian state, as well as Latvian nationals who had moved to Russia earlier, for example for study purposes. The most visible activities by these pro-Kremlin activists took place on the “Telegram” channel “Baltic anti-fascists”, which served as a new platform for spreading Russia’s propaganda narratives. These groups will be examined in more detail in the next chapter on information space security.

sceptics and the “opinion leaders” among them based their arguments on alternative, biased information sources, conspiracy theories and narratives spun by the Kremlin propaganda machine. Under the influence of alternative information channels, this part of society not only denied the fact of Russian aggression, they also criticized the need to remove Soviet

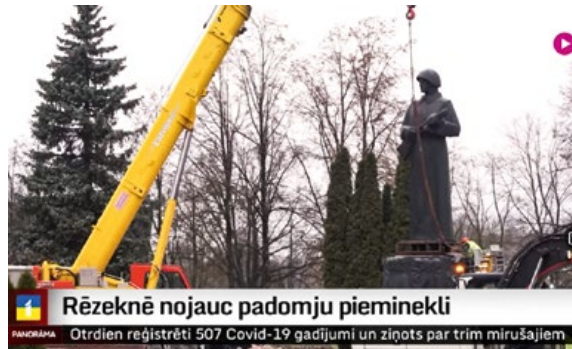
“monuments,” not objectively interpreted Latvian history and spread Russian propaganda narratives.

3.4.

DISMANTLING OF SOVIET “MONUMENTS”

Last year, Latvia was presented with a unique opportunity to get rid of the legacy of Soviet occupation. In just a few months, over one hundred Soviet “monuments” were taken down, including the main symbol of Soviet occupation – the so-called “victory monument”.

This process was especially significant, because Russia has long used military memorial policy as an effective influence instrument. For many years, objects glorifying Russia’s imperial and military history have divided society. The situation could not continue, therefore VDD considers that the decision to dismantle the Soviet “monuments” was an important for defending national security and the constitutional order.



Last year “monuments” glorifying the Soviet regime and army, which Russia for years was using as instruments for dividing Latvia’s society and implementation of its influence activities against Latvia, were dismantled.

Screenshots from LTV news channel plots in the platform “replay.lsm.lv”.

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There were several reasons why the dismantling of Soviet-era objects proceeded peacefully in 2022, without escalation or major protests. These included the unyielding support for removing the “monuments” expressed by the part of the society which supports Ukraine, and the consequential confusion and apathy amongst pro-Kremlin minded part of the society. Another important factor was the success of security measures implemented by VDD and the State Police in preventing potential provocations during the demolitions, as well as the “zero tolerance” policy by the State Police in relation to persons supporting Russian aggression.

Under these conditions, pro-Kremlin supporters mainly expressed their negative opinion of the removal of the “monuments” in aggressive comments in social media. A tiny number of pro-Kremlin activists were prepared to take to the streets to oppose the removals in Riga and Daugavpils, provoking conflicts and refusing to follow police instructions.

These persons were arrested, and analysis of their profiles revealed several common characteristics. Most were young men under the influence of alcohol; several had police records for prior offences; several had received sentences, including for violent crimes. In addition, during the dismantling of the “monuments” many pro-Kremlin activists already known to VDD periodically gathered in the vicinity of the “monuments”, including the most radical members and supporters of the party LKS and its leadership. This was especially apparent on the day the so-called “victory monument” was dismantled in Riga.

The “monuments” erected in Latvia during the Soviet occupation were used by Russia in its military-memorial work – for establishing interpretations in line with its foreign policy goals in Latvia’s society. Nevertheless, thanks to the countermeasures taken by VDD and other responsible state institutions, Russia was utterly unable to influence the desire of Latvia’s society to get rid of these objects glorifying the Soviet regime.

3.5.

SECURITY FOR THE SAEIMA ELECTIONS

Within its competence, VDD ensured free, fair and democratic conduct of the 14th Saeima elections. The Service considers that the elections were held peacefully and without any attempt to influence the outcome by foreign states. As no significant

infringements were established through election monitoring, VDD did not initiate any criminal cases last year for possible unlawful influencing of voters or tampering with election results.

Analysing the information space, the Service mainly focused on agitation activities by certain groups in Latvian society and political parties. In several cases, the messages made unjustified claims doubting election security or repeated and gave support to tendentious claims made by foreign states hostile to Latvia. However, the Service’s analysis did not indicate any real attempts by Russia to influence the 14th Saeima elections. As in previous years, Russian propaganda outlets coordinated their messages, with the difference being that last year their attention was focused on Ukraine.



Illustrative photo, VDD

A number of Covid-19 deniers and vaccine sceptics who had raised their public profile during the pandemic also ran in the elections. However, the results showed that such figures from the protest scene had little electoral support.

During the 14th Saeima election campaign, VDD observed a trend that had already been seen in previous elections, i.e. some candidates resurrected dormant parties which they had no prior connection with just a few months before the polls. This meant bypassing a number of laws, ignoring requirements for founding new political organisations and skirting bans on parties founded less than a year before elections. One such resurrected party gained enough votes to be eligible for funding provided by the state for political parties.

3.6.

EXTREMISM AND RADICALISM

To combat extremist threats, as in previous years, VDD systematically gathered information about both right- and left-wing extremist organisations and individuals. The Service also monitored persons with radical and extreme views with tendencies for radicalisation and violence.

Last year, the overall threat level to the constitutional order from radicals and extremists was low. Both right- and left-wing extremist organisations and individuals have long-term deficits in resources and organisational capacity in order to grow, conduct public activities and attract new members.

Last year the Service identified a slight increase in right-wing extremist’s activity, which was a reaction by members of these circles to Russia’s assault on Ukraine. Some right-wing activists mobilised in response to the events on 9th and 10th May at the so-called “victory monument” and also during the later dismantling of the said monument, expressing their readiness for a confrontation with pro-Kremlin activists.

Right-wing extremists tended to operate alone or in small groups. VDD also continued identifying young people who have become radicalised on the internet. The internet rather than real world activities served as the main platform for communication between right-wing extremists and for spreading radical ideas, thereby further radicalising the online environment. Right-wing extremists communicated via a variety of social media platforms as well as closed channels such as Telegram, where they spread anti-government as well as ethnically and racially hostile narratives.

In 2022 there was also a slight increase in threats to national security from left-wing extremist organisations and activists, mainly in connection with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Overall, such extremists are small in number and reluctant to network with other organisations.

Left-wing extremists, similarly as right-wing extremists, used the internet to further their activities and spread their ideas. Analysis of agitation content reveals a high degree of influence from Russian propaganda, and expressions of support for Russia’s foreign policy goals and military involvement in Ukraine.

VDD had longstanding knowledge of several Communist and Socialist agitators, which enabled the Service to learn in good time of their activities, especially in connection with the dismantling of the Soviet “monuments.”

To reduce the threat of expanded activities by left-wing extremists and the dissemination of Communist ideology, last year VDD advised the General Prosecutor’s Office and the National Electronic Mass Media Council to suspend within their competence the public activities of the Communist-oriented “Latvian Workers’ Front”.

Likewise, after evaluating the activities of two foreign nationals with Communist ideologies, VDD advised the Interior Minister to blacklist them. These persons were citizen of Russia Sergei Bolyavin and Lithuanian citizen Konstantinas Gorškovas. The Service considers that both men carried out activities in Latvia which threatened the constitutional order and posed long-term threats to public order and safety. Currently, on the basis of a decision of the Interior Minister, they are both banned from entering Latvia.



Sergei Bolyavin



Konstantinas Gorškovas

MEASURES FOR PROTECTION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER



Monitoring pro-Kremlin activities

Last year VDD intensified monitoring of the information space, to identify incitements against the state of Latvia and its society. Over the year, the Service identified several million posts and analyzed several thousands of them in depth regarding possible activities in support of Russian aggression. VDD monitored pro-Kremlin activities outdoors in cooperation with the State Police. The total number of identified cases, just over one thousand in total, is small in proportion to Latvia's population. The Service also paid close attention to the displaying of aggression-supporting symbols on personal clothing, vehicles and buildings.



Preventative talks and warnings about criminal liability

Providing support to a foreign country for activities against Latvia is a criminal offence. In cases where pro-Kremlin activities had indications of possible illegality, VDD issued warnings to the persons involved not to commit criminal acts aimed against the national security. Last year, the Service warned several dozen known Russian "compatriot" activists not to show support to the aggressor state. In accordance with amendments to the Law on Political Parties, VDD also issued warnings to two political parties – LKS and "Stabilitāte!".



Monitoring of protests and other public events

In accordance with its competence, VDD works with municipalities to evaluate protests or other public events requested for approval by organisations and individuals. If VDD finds indications of support for the aggressor state Russia or other threats to state or public safety, the Service recommends denying approval. In cooperation with the State Police, the Service closely monitored many pro-Ukraine events last year to proactively prevent any provocations or pro-Kremlin manifestations at such events.



Criminal law measures

For the most part, pro-Kremlin expressions threatened Latvia's information space and were connected with excusing Russian aggression and war crimes. VDD initiated criminal proceedings against several persons, regarding which more information is available in the report chapters on information space security and pre-trial investigations. Hooliganism and other activities on the street were under the remit of the State Police. Upon identifying such incidents, the Service forwarded information through the proper channels to the State Police for further analysis. There were also incidents recorded where Latvian nationals sought to support the aggressor state through other means. For example, last year the Service initiated one criminal case for illegal participation in the war in Ukraine by providing support to the Russian armed forces, and another case for financing armed conflict.



Administrative instruments

In addition to the aforementioned countermeasures, last year VDD also employed administrative measures to defend the constitutional order. For example, blacklisting is one of these examples. Last year, VDD recommended to the Interior Minister that several pro-Kremlin individuals who are foreigners should be banned from residing in Latvia. Among these persons were the aforementioned activists from the "Latvian Workers' Front" and the RF institutional representative V.Danyiloh. VDD also made use of administrative measures by approaching other institutions whose cooperation was required in restricting the activities of suspect organisations. For example, the Service informed the General Prosecutor's Office regarding LKS activities which threatened national security.

FORECASTS

- The Kremlin's influence architecture in Latvia built up over many years has actually crumbled. The Russian "compatriot" environment is fragmented and dormant, and with its "influence agents" brought to light, its effectiveness is currently low. However, Russia will not abandon these influence subjects until it finds other, more effective instruments. Certain groups of residents will continue to look favorably on the aggressor state, making them a potential source of Russian influence in Latvia. Russia will also try to exploit persons who doubt the need to support Ukraine and invest resources in strengthening Latvia's security.
- An increasing role in Russian influence activities will be played by certain key individuals, including Latvian nationals currently residing abroad. These persons, who fled from Latvia to Russia last year, or have lived in Russia for a longer period, will be used by the Kremlin as "opinion leaders," boosting their profile and popularity amongst pro-Kremlin elements in Latvia. In this context, persons who have graduated from colleges in Russia or are still studying there will be the next source of potential Kremlin influence activists.
- Russia's assault on Ukraine will continue to have a powerful impact on Latvia's society this year and it will also be manifested through incidents where pro-Kremlin positions are expressed.
- However the overwhelming society's condemnation of Russia's assault on Ukraine combined with countermeasures by Latvian institutions will further reduce the likelihood and expansion of pro-Kremlin activities. The values of the Latvia's society and its critical attitude towards the Kremlin will continue to be a force to reckon with for Russian influence activists.
- Persons acting in Russia's interests will play a waiting game while hiding their true intentions. They and the rest of the pro-Kremlin elements will continue to hope for a favorable outcome for Russia in the war in Ukraine and the restoration of earlier relations with Russia.



04

SECURITY OF THE INFORMATION SPACE

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was accompanied by massive war propaganda, which was especially intense in the initial phase of the war. In VDD's assessment, in 2022 Ukraine was significantly more successful than Russia in the propaganda war, and successfully defeated the Kremlin's lies and disinformation efforts. However, war propaganda, which was produced on a large scale and distributed on various information channels, also reached the information space of Latvia.

Therefore, in the interests of national security, it was vitally important to introduce new tools in the shortest possible time that would eliminate the threat posed to our country by the lies circulated by the Kremlin.

The analysis of VDD shows that in 2022, the Kremlin's information influence measures aimed at justifying war against Ukraine and war crimes committed by the Russian army posed the most significant threat to the security of the information space of Latvia.

The aggressor state Russia's massive propaganda campaigns and information influence activities were primarily aimed at glorifying Russia and its criminal leader. The Kremlin also sought to justify the war crimes committed in Ukraine by the Russian armed forces and the mercenary group "Wagner" through massive disinformation campaigns, including the murders of civilians, the destruction of cities and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Despite the fact that the primary target audience of these propaganda campaigns was Russian society, they also reached the inhabitants of Latvia.

Developments in the society of Latvia, and especially in the information space, confirmed last year that the Kremlin's information influence activities in previous years have been fruitful. Proof of this was the support of the pro-Kremlin inclined part of Latvian society for Russian war crimes in Ukraine, which was confirmed in comments, posts and videos on social networking platforms and direct communication applications. Some well-known pro-Kremlin figures provided such support in partnership with Kremlin propaganda resources, who spread calls for violence and justified the murders of civilians.



Several former and current state officials also did so. In the assessment of VDD, pro-Kremlin manifestations were not coincidences, rather they were direct consequences of the information influence measures used by Russia against Latvia in recent years.

The past year has shown that certain groups of society are ready to consume war propaganda and see it as the truth. In the assessment of VDD, such an uncritical attitude to reality was also promoted by so-called “opinion leaders”, who appeared in the information space in connection with protests against the measures imposed to contain Covid-19. “Alternative” information channels still served as platforms where Russian war propaganda was available indirectly in Latvian society.

4.1.

RUSSIAN WAR PROPAGANDA AND ITS SUBJECTS

Last year’s information influence activities by Russia against Latvia were subordinated to the Kremlin’s war propaganda needs. Russia’s war in Ukraine was the central theme in all Russian information influence activities. Every subject involved in war propaganda served one purpose – to justify the war in Ukraine started by Russia and the war crimes committed by the Russian armed forces.

As the analysis of VDD shows, the war propaganda of the aggressor state Russia mainly focused on television channels and Internet sites primarily aimed at the Russian audience. The Russian people were constantly “fed” with interpretations and outright lies about the “special military operation”, the “Nazi regime” in Kyiv, “biological laboratories” in Ukraine, “provocations” by the West against Moscow and the “tricking” of Russia into the war.

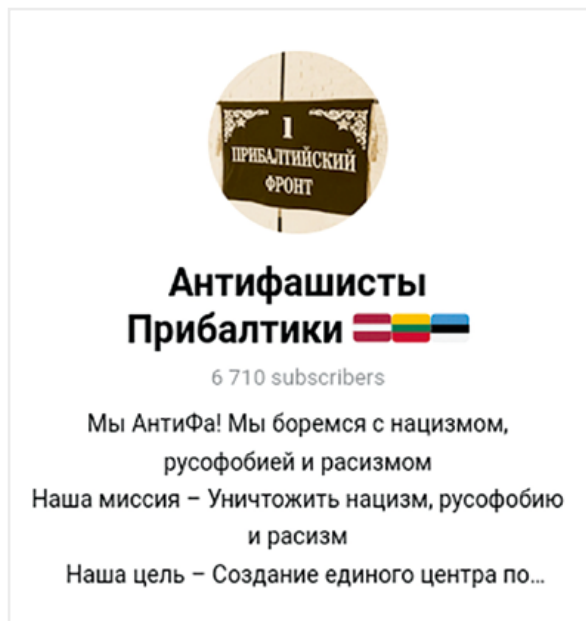
WAR PROPAGANDA

War propaganda – a branch of public relations engaged in purposeful and systematic manipulation in order to form a specific system of attitudes and beliefs of the population about war, to achieve public support for the necessity of war and methods of warfare, including methods that are internationally prohibited.

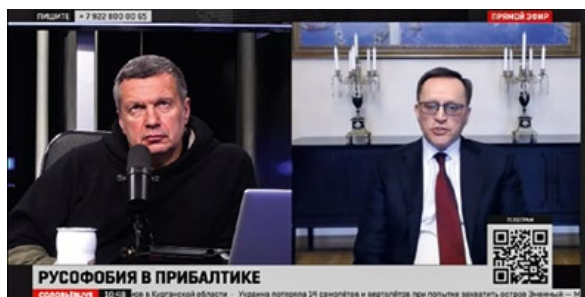
The task of war propaganda was also to artificially create an image of an “external enemy” for Russian society. Primarily, it was the imaginary “Nazi (in some cases also “fascist”) regime” in Kyiv. In other cases, it was NATO, the USA, Great Britain or the Baltic States. In some cases, it was more convenient for Russian propaganda subjects to use the term “Anglo-Saxons” to describe their “external enemy.” In the assessment of VDD, the disinformation created by the Russian propaganda machine for the domestic audience also had a significant negative impact on the information space of Latvia.

Russia’s war propaganda narratives reached Latvia thanks also to local pro-Kremlin activists and their accounts and groups on direct communication applications and social networking platforms. In addition to justifying the war crimes committed in Ukraine, the aim of these subjects was to increase tensions and feelings of fear in Latvian society. At the end of last year, groups of so-called “Baltic anti-fascists” were formed on the direct communication application “Telegram.” Some of the groups’ content was created and supplemented by several persons from Latvia, including Viktorija Matule (mentioned in the previous chapter), long-time pro-Kremlin activists Sergejs Vasiljevs and Vadims Avva, as well as LKS member Tatjana Andriječa.

The activists calling themselves “anti-fascists” tried in various ways to draw the attention of the Latvian public. They tried to incite Russian-speaking people living in Latvia to organize protest campaigns, to collect information about persons who were involved in the demolition of Soviet “monuments”, as well as to obtain information about the Latvian National Armed Forces. On 28 November 2022, the VDD initiated criminal case in relation to the activities of the so-called “Baltic anti-fascists” on the communication application “Telegram”.⁹



The Russian Embassy in Latvia was also an important subject in the Russian war propaganda architecture last year. Texts justifying the invasion of Ukraine and Russia’s war crimes were distributed by its staff to accounts created and maintained by the embassy on social networking and direct communication platforms. The embassy also provided significant support to Russian propaganda television channels, which produced materials on developments in Latvia.



Screenshot of M. Vanin in a broadcast with the aggressive Russian war propagandist Vladimir Solovyov.

Indicative of the standards of Russian diplomacy was the regular cooperation by then Russian Ambassador to Latvia Mikhail Vanin with the information resources used for Russian war propaganda purposes, in which calls for violence and threats to destroy other countries using nuclear weapons were made.

In the new circumstances, so-called “bloggers”, or individuals who publish videos based on Russian propaganda narratives on video-sharing platforms, also gained prominence in the Russian war propaganda machine. One such individual was Kirill Fyodorov, who made a video blog titled “A history of weapons” in Russian. Last March, VDD initiated criminal proceedings against this person for actions that acquit and glorify the military aggression of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine.¹⁰ In Service’s assessment, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s heated response to the detention of K.Fyodorov and the suspension of his video blog testify to the importance of such subjects in Russian war propaganda.

At the beginning of this year, K. Fyodorov pleaded guilty to the charges and received punishment for acquitting the war started by Russia, having reached agreement with the prosecutor’s office. Currently, K. Fyodorov has fled to Russia.

4.2.

RUSSIAN METHODS OF INFORMATION INFLUENCE

Last year, the range of methods directed against Latvia of information resources used for Kremlin propaganda purposes underwent significant changes.

By denying direct legal access to war propaganda channels, “Telegram”, “TikTok” and “YouTube” became the main platforms for the distribution of information campaigns against Latvia. They were used both by the traditional tools of Russian information influence, i.e. media companies and journalists close to the Kremlin, as well as by pro-Kremlin public activists whose public activities were aimed at spreading Russian propaganda messages.

In an attempt to circumvent the restrictions imposed due to EU sanctions, the authors for the information resources “Sputnik” and “Baltnews” created by the Russian information agency “Rossiya Segodnya”

⁹ Criminal case was initiated pursuant to Section 81¹ of the Criminal Law, for assisting a foreign state in an activity directed against the Republic of Latvia.

¹⁰ Criminal case was initiated pursuant to Sections 74¹ and 78 of the Criminal Law, for the acquittal and glorification of war crimes and crimes against peace and activities aimed at triggering national hatred and enmity.

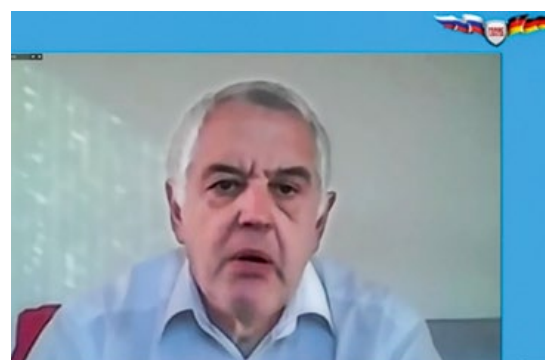
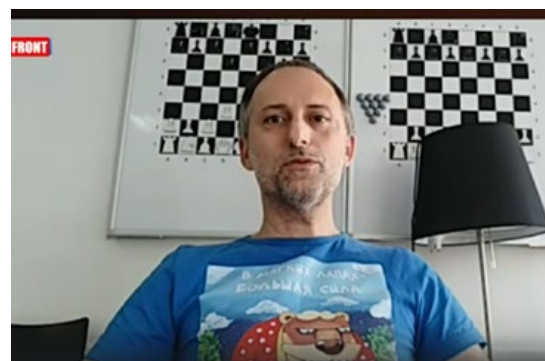
actively used “Telegram” channels. For example, the long-time “Sputnik” content creator Alexei Stefanov, tried to deliver messages justifying and supporting Russian war crimes to audiences in Latvia through his “Telegram” account. The creators of the Latvian version of “Sputnik” also used their “Telegram” account “Šproti v izgnanii”, where they systematically disseminated information justifying the murders of Ukraine’s residents and the destruction of cities.

The information dissemination opportunities offered by social networking and video-sharing platforms were also a valuable tool for the television channels of the aggressor country Russia to deliver their war propaganda messages to the audience in Latvia. Accessibility to Russian war propaganda distributed by Russian and Belarusian television channels was also facilitated by so-called “illegal operators”.

In Service’s assessment, pro-Kremlin activists who were presented in Russian media as “experts,” “politically persecuted individuals,” and “oppositionists” maintained their significance in Russia’s arsenal of war propaganda methods. Such were traditional pro-Kremlin activists such as Alexander Gaponenko, Yuri Alekseev and Ruslan Pankratov. These persons regularly participated, both in person and online, in broadcasts used for Russian propaganda purposes, which spread messages directed against Latvia. Although their statements were primarily intended for consumption by audiences in Russia, the fact that these persons are from Latvia contributed to the dissemination and use of messages in the information space of our country.

It should be noted that in the summer of 2022, R. Pankratovs, a former deputy of the Riga City Council from the political party “Harmony”, travelled to the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, where, impersonating a journalist, he participated in war propaganda events organized by the Kremlin. By granting R. Pankratov the status of a journalist, Russian information resources tried to “raise” his importance in the eyes of the general public.

In connection with the possible violations of the Criminal Law which resulted from the cooperation of R. Pankratov with Russian media companies, in 2022 VDD initiated criminal case against this person. In December, the Service referred the criminal case to the prosecutor’s office, prompting the prosecution of R. Pankratovs for committing criminal offenses stipulated in Section 78 Paragraph 2 and Section 84 Paragraph 1 of the Criminal Law for triggering national and ethnic hatred and violation of sanctions imposed by the EU. Currently, the criminal case is on trial, so VDD reiterates that no person is considered guilty until their guilt has been proven in accordance with the law.



Screenshots of Latvia’s pro-Russian activists and “opinion leaders” Ruslan Pankratov (from top), Alexei Stefanov, Alexander Gaponenko and Yuri Alekseev participating in Russian war propaganda TV broadcasts and video blogs.

4.3.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE INFORMATION INFLUENCE OF RUSSIA

The war propaganda created by the Kremlin inevitably also had an impact on the part of Latvian society which was previously used to consuming content produced in Russia on a daily basis.

Along with the restriction of the availability of Russian television channels and Internet sites, consumers of such content “switched” to less regulated or actually unregulated environments, such as “TikTok” and “Telegram”. These platforms not only provided an alleged sense of anonymity, but also provided an opportunity for inhabitants of Latvia who have long lived under the influence of the world view created by Russian propaganda to “reproduce” Russian war propaganda. Namely, to disseminate information aimed at justifying the war started by Russia in Ukraine, as well as to provoke the Latvian public to protests and unrest.

In the past year, VDD acquired, compiled and analyzed a significant amount of information disseminated on social networking platforms and direct communication applications containing narratives specific to Kremlin propaganda. Several hundred thousand posts published on social networking platforms in Latvia were subjected to in-depth analysis. In several hundred cases, VDD held talks with the authors of the posts to warn of criminal liability for expressing support for the war in Ukraine started by Russia and justifying the war crimes committed by the aggressor state.

The assessment of the talks indicates that the authors of the aggressive comments had consumed Russian propaganda for a long time and lived in the information space of that country. At the same time, the authors of the aggressive comments were not related to each other, and their actions did not pose a real threat to the national security of Latvia. In addition, most of the individuals who posted aggressive and hostile statements admitted that their actions were wrong, deleted the content disseminated in the information space, and refrained from potentially illegal behavior in the future. Only in rare cases, such as with persons suffering from mental illness or psychiatric disorders, did preventive actions fail to achieve results and the individuals repeatedly disseminated aggressive and hostile content. Talks with the authors of aggressive comments and warnings issued to these individuals also served as a preventive measure to prevent such persons committing other forms of aggression. Talks and warnings were also a tool to prevent the emergence of such levels of aggression in



Aggressive commentator's profile

Gender: male;

Age: 30–49 years;

Comment language: Russian;

Place of residence: Riga, Riga surroundings;

Nationality: non-citizen of Latvia;

Distributed content:

- calls for protests, undermining of the constitutional system and territorial integrity of Latvia;
- calls for violence against police officers, doctors, journalists, officials;
- calls for the demolition of the Freedom Monument;
- calls for national and ethnic hatred;
- acquitting Russia's war crimes and glorifying the war launched by Russia.

the information space of Latvia, which could potentially grow into street demonstrations and protests.

According to the analysis of VDD, persons supporting the war started by Russia and its war crimes come from different parts of Latvia. However, comments of this nature were primarily disseminated on social networking sites and direct communication platforms by persons living in and around Riga, which is explained by the large population of this region.

The Service's analysis also shows that an unprecedentedly high level of activity and aggression in Latvian society was caused by these events in 2022:

- the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and the first days of the war;
- activities of pro-Kremlin persons in Riga's Victory Park on 9 and 10 May 2022;
- demolition of the Soviet “monument” in Riga's Pārdaugava district on 23–25 August, 2022.

The abovementioned events caused the greatest outbursts of aggression in the information space of Latvia, and they were also exploited by subjects involved in the information influence activities of Russia. In VDD's

! VDD REITERATES

Public glorification, denial, acquittal or gross trivialization of genocide, crime against humanity, crime against peace or war crime are subject to criminal liability. Activity aimed at triggering national, ethnic, racial or religious hatred or enmity can also be subject to criminal liability.



Locations of the authors of aggressive and pro-Russian online comments recorded by VDD in the territory of Latvia.

assessment, the purpose of fanning aggression was to increase the already tense mood in society at that time, to undermine faith in the State of Latvia and our allies in NATO and the EU, to promote divisions between different groups of Latvian society, as well as to provoke Latvian society to unrest and violation of laws.

VDD in cooperation with other state institutions was able to ensure that the unrest provoked in the information

space of Latvia did not turn into direct violent protest actions, blatant justification of war crimes committed by Russia and street confrontation.

At the same time, the information obtained allowed VDD to identify the illegal activities of specific individuals. The Service initiated criminal cases against these persons, details of which are given in the chapter of the report on pre-trial investigations.

RUSSIAN WAR PROPAGANDA NARRATIVES

Last year, the Kremlin's propaganda narratives did not change significantly. Russian information resources spread the same lies that they have been circulating for several years, but which were adapted to the current situation in regional and international politics. At the same time, under these circumstances, Russia's war propaganda messages were primarily directed against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. The purpose of lies such as "Russia's special operation" and "Russia seeks to free Ukraine from the Nazis" was to justify the war started by Russia in Ukraine and the war crimes committed by the armed forces of the aggressor state.

In the context of Latvia, familiar narratives about the "fascists governing Latvia" and Latvia as a "failed state" prevailed. The allegations of rewriting history, which Russia itself has been doing all this time and which it is trying to do unsuccessfully even now, also did not disappear.

The Kremlin's war propaganda conveyed a new narrative about the need to "de-Nazify" Latvia as well. The single purpose of the message is to increase the level of fear and tension in Latvian society to such an extent that the narrative begins to influence decision-making in our country in accordance with the interests of Russian politics. The Kremlin's goal was also to get Latvian society to reduce its support for Ukraine and Ukrainians due to the fears created.

Likewise, the Kremlin's war propaganda machine tried with all its might to prove that Russia was at war with NATO, not just with the Ukrainian army. This narrative serves both to justify to its audience the many failures on the battlefield and to construct an image of NATO as an external enemy seeking to destroy Russian statehood.

4.4.

ÉMIGRÉ MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES FROM RUSSIA

Last year, when Russia began its invasion of Ukraine, a large number of employees of Russian media companies, journalists, so-called “bloggers”, as well as other persons related to the information space decided to move to the West, including Latvia.

In the assessment of VDD, the activities of independent media are currently impossible in Russia and Belarus, with the opposition environment as a whole under the strict supervision and control of the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state. Whereas in Russia the resources referred to as media actually serve the Kremlin, ensuring the production and distribution of war propaganda.

The editorial staff of Western broadcasters, such as “Radio Free Europe” and the BBC who have previously worked in Russia, as well as several independent journalists who have so far made a significant contribution to informing the Russian public about the war crimes committed by the Russian armed forces and the mercenary group “Wagner” and the real situation in Ukraine, have decided to move to Latvia. Western countries have also provided support to several media organizations previously based in Russia, raising hopes for reaching a wider audience in the aggressor country.

In accordance with its remit, VDD conducted vetting of representatives of the Russian media and their family members, i.e. citizens of Russia and Belarus, who showed a desire to move to Latvia by applying for a visa or residence permit.¹¹ The Service evaluated representatives of the Russian media environment both in the context of potential risks to the information space of our country, and paying special attention to possible intelligence risks. Overall last year VDD evaluated several hundred applications for visa or residence permits submitted by persons related to the Russian media environment.

In relation to the activities of Russian media organisations and their representatives who have moved to Latvia, in 2022 the Service identified certain risks. The most obvious example last year was the call made by the moderator of the “TV Rain”¹² channel Alexei Korostelev to help the Russian army in the war in Ukraine, as well as the subsequent sympathetic

attitude of the channel’s true beneficiary, Natalia Sindeeva, towards the soldiers of the aggressor state. Analysis by VDD shows that already earlier A. Korostelev has expressed sympathy for the Soviet army, the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and the imperialist ideology of Russia. For example, in 2014, A. Korostelev posted a picture with the flag of the so-called “New Russia” on his Instagram account and called for help for the so-called Donetsk “People’s Republic.” Taking into account the identified risks, based on the information provided by VDD, the Minister of the Interior included A. Korostelev in the list of persons who are denied entry to Latvia. He has appealed the minister’s decision.

Last year, on the recommendations of VDD, the Minister of the Interior included the pro-Russian activist Oksana Chelisheva, who calls herself a journalist of the Russian “opposition,” in the so-called blacklist. Supposedly fleeing repression in Russia, O. Chelisheva is currently residing in Finland. However, at the same time, she spreads messages directed against Western countries, including Latvia, as well as provides support to her spouse, long-time pro-Kremlin activist in Latvia Vladimirs Lindermans. O. Chelisheva also appealed the decision of the Minister of the Interior, but in March of this year the Administrative Court upheld the minister’s decision.



On 1 November 2022, the moderator of the “TV Rain” newscast, Alexei Korostelev, publicly thanked a Russian school teacher from the Bryansk region for “gathering together” 2nd grade pupils, dressing them up in Red Army uniforms and filming a song for the mobilized soldiers, wishing victory “over the enemy”. This post has been deleted from A.Korostelev’s account.

¹¹ Since 2 September, 2022, Russia and Belarus are included in the list of countries whose citizens are subject to an additional vetting upon being granted a visa or residence permit. More in the section “Migration Control”.

¹² Since 2017, the retransmission of the TV channel has been prohibited in Ukraine, since this channel visually depicted Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula as Russian territory.

COUNTERING RUSSIAN INFORMATION INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES



Closing propaganda channels

In order to reduce the information influence of Russia in Latvia, the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) restricted the retransmission of all television channels registered in Russia in the territory of Latvia. In the assessment of VDD, this was essential for the prevention of national security risks. Also, based on the opinions provided by VDD, the NEPLP limited access to more than 130 Internet sites that spread Russian war propaganda. Taking into account the information provided by VDD about the risks, the NEPLP also limited the availability of the Russian social networking platforms “VKontakte” and “Odnoklassniki”. Several channels created on the video-sharing platform “YouTube”, which spread Russian war propaganda messages, were also subject to restrictions.



Preventive talks and warning of persons

In order to reduce the involvement of the inhabitants of Latvia in committing criminal offences and acquitting war crimes committed by Russia, VDD regularly held talks with persons who had disseminated Kremlin propaganda messages on social networking sites and video-sharing platforms. The talks were of a preventive nature, with the persons being warned of a possible violation of the Criminal Law if they maintained

the rhetoric justifying Russian war crimes. Over the past year, the Service warned more than 800 Latvian nationals about criminal liability.



Criminal law measures

Last year, VDD initiated 34 criminal cases and took over four more criminal cases from the State Police, in which the Service assessed the involvement of Latvian nationals in acquitting war crimes committed by Russia and triggering national hatred. These cases were initiated mainly on the basis of statements identified by the Service on social networking and video-sharing platforms. More detailed information on the criminal cases investigated by VDD is provided in the chapter on pre-trial investigations.



Informing the public

With the aim of raising public awareness of the current challenges to the national security of Latvia, last year the Service also implemented measures in the field of public communication. VDD explained to the general public the current developments in Latvia and the European region, which directly and indirectly affected the national security interests of Latvia. The amount of public communication activities of the Service increased fivefold compared to previous years.

FORECASTS

- There is no reason to believe that Russia will reduce the scale of its war propaganda during this year. On the contrary, it is predicted that in an effort to strengthen the image of the West as an “external enemy” in Russian society, the Kremlin’s war propaganda machine will increasingly spread hateful and aggressive rhetoric against Latvia and the Baltic States in general.
- “Opinion leaders” and “experts” or so-called “talking heads,” i.e. persons who express pro-Kremlin comments or opinions on current issues, will continue to play a key role in Kremlin propaganda against Latvia. For such purposes, the Kremlin’s propaganda resources will use both traditional pro-Kremlin activists and persons previously unknown to the general public to spread the messages of the aggressor state.
- Propaganda audiovisual content created in Russia will be consumed by the audience in Latvia through social networking and video-sharing platforms such as “YouTube”, “Telegram” and “TikTok”, and the outlets of illegal operators.
- Also this year, security of the information space and the national security of Latvia require maintaining the course taken by Latvia of distancing and shielding Latvia’s media environment from content created in Russia. It should be taken into account that in wartime conditions, broadcasts, TV series, films and shows produced by media companies close to the Russian ruling regime are subordinated to the needs of war propaganda.
- Consumers of Russian-language media content who have lived in the Russian information space will continue to express themselves aggressively on social networking and video-sharing platforms. The Service will continue preventive work in order to prevent such persons from potentially threatening the national security of Latvia.



05

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Last year and Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that economic cooperation with this aggressor state, including importing energy, is highly risky for Latvia's political and economic security. These risks must be considered by the state in planning and implementing long-term economic policy as well as enterprises that should critically evaluate doing business with partners in Belarus and Russia.

Last year, the international community continued tightening economic and financial sanctions on Russia, aiming to weaken the aggressor state's economy and its ability to wage war against Ukraine. Western sanctions were also imposed on Russia's allies Belarus and Iran owing to their support for Russian aggression.

Numerous Russian and Belarussian nationals were barred from entering EU, and property and funds held by these persons in Europe were frozen. The EU imposed extensive restrictions on imports of Russian and Belarussian goods and significantly reduced their ability to acquire high value added products and technologies made in the EU. Due to both the sanctions and as a demonstration of condemnation of Russian aggression, many multinational companies withdrew from Russia and Belarus, further isolating those countries. However, Russia and its allies continued to seek ways to circumvent import and export restrictions imposed by the EU.

As the range of Western sanctions expanded, last year saw a significant rise in the number of reports received by VDD from financial institutions and other persons regarding possible circumventing or attempted breaches of sanctions. Analysing these reports, in several cases VDD warned the persons involved about criminal liability for sanctions breaches. In several instances, criminal cases were initiated.



VDD considers that the sanctions could be made more effective as the Western countries improve the cooperation mechanisms for identification of schemes to circumvent sanctions and introducing measures to prevent the possibilities to implement such schemes. Harmonisation of legislation of EU member states would be an important step in this direction.

Enterprises also have an important role to play by re-evaluating their business orientation and critically appraising their partners in the East. Even in cases where partners are not directly subjected to international sanctions binding on Latvia, they should consider the dynamic nature of sanctions imposed on Russia and high reputational risks. As Russia continues its aggression against Ukraine, even stricter sanctions can be expected against Russia and its allied states.

In 2022, VDD also continued to monitor the developments in Latvia's energy and transport sectors, where the consequences of Russia's continuing aggression pose additional challenges. While the Service considers that the situation in the energy and transport sectors has stabilised, it is important to continue seeking alternative energy and cargo sources.

5.1.

SANCTIONS AND FINANCE SECTOR SECURITY

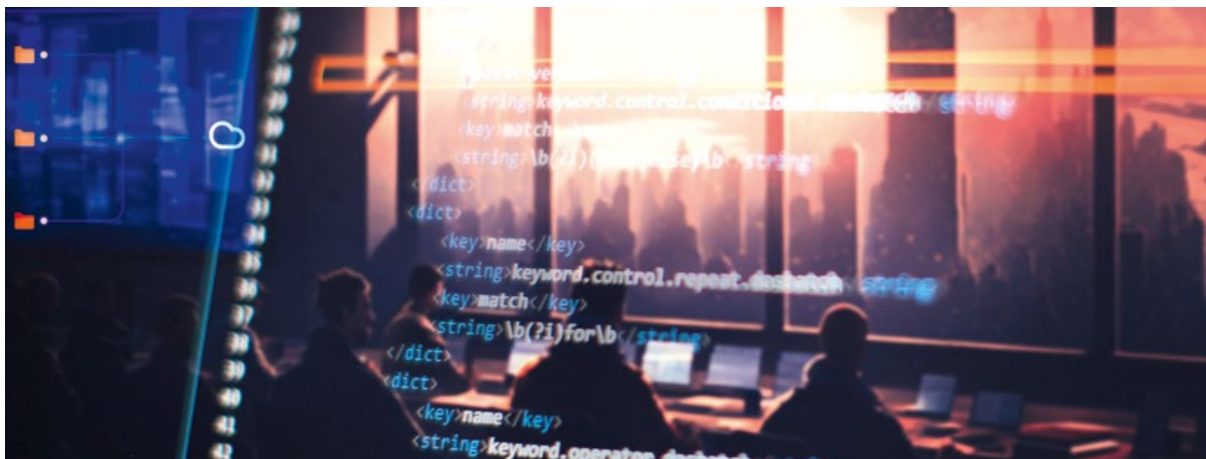
Breaches of international sanctions carry significant damage risks to national economic security and reputation. As VDD's remit includes investigating crimes against national security, last year the Service closely monitored the implementation and application of sanctions in Latvia. VDD checked reports of possible sanctions breaches and closely examined attempts to circumvent them, as well as implemented preventative measures to dissuade people from breaking the law.

The implementation of sanctions in Latvia was conducted by state institutions in cooperation with the private sector in accordance with their respective spheres of competence. Sanctions implementation took place gradually, applying several exemptions and transition periods, thus giving Latvian companies time to complete contractually mandated activities and find alternative business partners. Due to a number of exemptions to sanctions, in 2022, economic cooperation with Russia and Belarus was not reduced as rapidly as it should have been based on the announcement by Western countries of unprecedented sanctions in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Service believes that considering the various transition periods, the impact of sanctions on Russia will grow in the long term.

Taking into account the unprecedented scope of financial and economic sanctions and the speed of change, both the state and private sector faced challenges last year in applying the sanctions.

For the financial sector, the biggest challenge in VDD's view was risk reduction measures to prevent the malicious abuse of Latvia's financial system to provide financial means to persons subjected to EU sanctions

The extensive sanctions against Russia and Belarus significantly increased the time required for processing financial services and the number of declined transactions. Due to the high risk of sanctions breaches in relation to transactions with natural persons and legal entities in Russia and Belarus, several banks completely stopped servicing payments involving those countries. Banks took special cautionary measures regarding transactions with countries which have declined to join Western sanctions against the aggressor state Russia. These include more detailed scrutiny of information and documents to ensure that transactions involving higher risk countries do not benefit sanctioned persons or relate to goods or services subject to sanctions.



Illustrative photo, source – Freepik

The Service considers that the readiness of the banks to control sanctions violation risks and prevent financial crimes has increased significantly, also due to the financial sector risk reduction measures introduced in recent years.

VDD analysis shows that the biggest challenges in customs control last year were related to controlling the compliance with sectoral sanctions to prevent cargos of sanctioned goods from crossing Latvia's external borders. Due to the restrictions on imports and exports with Russia and Belarus, several enterprises with Eastern market interests sought alternative markets and sources of raw materials. They began exploring business opportunities in countries bordering Russia and other Central and East Asian countries. Some companies tried to circumvent sanctions by routing their products or raw materials through these countries to hide their origin or end-recipient in Russia or Belarus.

Sanctions violations risks grew significantly in the transport and logistics sector, due to the fact that Latvia has direct road and rail links with Russia and Belarus.

Last year, VDD detected several suspicious import and export deals transiting through Latvia, involving companies from Western Europe and the Middle East. Several attempts by rail and road freight haulers from Latvia and other European countries to deliver prohibited goods to Russia and Belarus were prevented at Latvian customs checkpoints. Various fraudulent schemes were arranged to circumvent sanctions, involving intermediaries and fictitious delivery contracts, forged customs declarations and manipulated declaration data.

VDD cooperated with the State Revenue Service (VID) to prevent sanctions breaches mainly by providing pre-emptive information about suspicious transactions. The Service also informed VID about potential sanctions violations risks in areas within VID's remit, for example persons' intentions to import or export goods subject

! ATTENTION

VDD considers that there is an especially high risk of sanctions circumvention for transactions with imports or exports of goods under trade restrictions through Russia and Belarus. There is a risk that these goods are actually loaded or unloaded in Russia or Belarus with the dispatcher or recipient only formally indicated as a company in Kazakhstan or another Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) country.

to sanctions. The Service also closely evaluated information submitted by VID about possible sanctions breaches, which it used in further activities within the Service's remit.

As the sanctions regime continues, VDD considers that Russia will increasingly try to circumvent the sanctions, including by using Latvia's transit corridor. Russia will try and exploit its political and economic influence in Central Asian countries to use these countries to continue trading with the West. This is evidenced by an increase last year in the volume of goods and prevented sanctions breaches in the cross-border transactions with the aforementioned countries. Latvia's geographic location, developed road, rail and port infrastructure and existing business links with the East all remain important factors in choosing Latvia to circumvent sanctions.

Latvian entrepreneurs must be cautious about establishing businesses in sectors which are related to the economic interests of the aggressor state Russia. The Service believes that they should be especially wary of doing business with third country nationals involving sanctioned goods or services. It is vital for Latvia's national security to strengthen the capacity of border and customs controls to prevent sanctions breaches and raise the effectiveness of sanctions imposed on Belarus and Russia.

VDD CHECKS OF POSSIBLE ATTEMPTS TO BREACH SANCTIONS

Last year, VDD regularly received and evaluated reports from banks and other financial market participants about possible or attempted breaches of sanctions and the assets frozen in respective accounts to prevent the breaches. The Service also analysed reports from other persons and conducted appropriate operational activities to verify the information.

In total, last year VDD received 341 reports of possible or attempted breaches of sanctions. Of these, 292 or 85% of reports came from credit institutions, 34 were from state institutions, and 15 were from private sector representatives (ten legal entities and five natural persons).

It is noteworthy that institutions and private individuals informed the Service of possible breaches in different ways. As a result, some reports provided information about a single transaction or a bundle of related transactions, while others informed about several unrelated transactions. Therefore, the real number of cases of possible breaches of sanctions that was evaluated was even higher.

By comparison, in 2021 VDD received 123 reports of possible or attempted breaches of sanctions, and a year earlier there were just 30 reports. The Service considers that this increase is logical given the expansion of sanctions against Russia and Belarus.

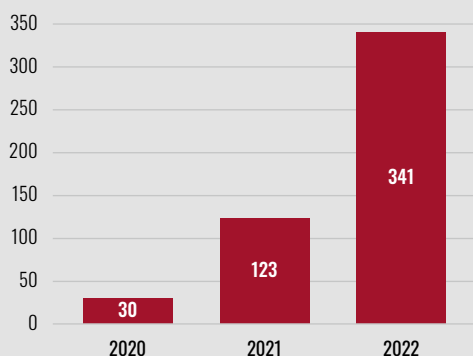
The large number of reports from credit institutions indicates that Latvia's financial system is prepared to control sanctions violation risks and prevent financial crimes. However, the growth in

the number of reports also points to potential risk control deficiencies in other business sectors, including lack of understanding of restrictions applying to transactions with countries subject to sanctions and other high risks subjects. In some cases, private individuals and companies used the financial sector as a source of information and a tool to verify their business partners and obtain explanation about the sanctions regulations. Similarly, some state institutions sought VDD's advice on whether they should continue or start cooperating with persons or institutions related to high-risk countries.

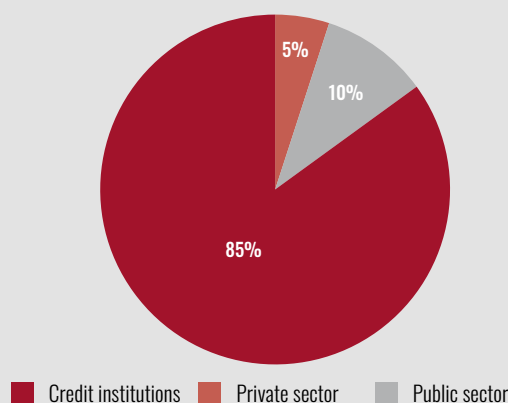
The Service considers that more needs to be done to deepen understanding about sanctions-related issues and to revise risk control procedures in both the state and private sectors, to ensure that enterprises and institutions can effectively manage risks associated with their work.

As in previous years, last year VDD mainly received reports about possible breaches of sanctions imposed by the EU, whose investigation is within the Service's remit. EU sanctions are binding on all natural persons and legal entities in Latvia. Of these reports, around 66% were for possible breaches or attempts to breach EU sanctions against Russia. This was a turnaround compared with 2021, when the majority of reports were regarding possible breaches of EU sanctions against Belarus. In 2022, around 33% of total reports related to possible breaches of EU sanctions against Belarus. The Service also received one report of possible breaches of EU sanctions against North Korea.

Dynamics of reports received by VDD in the last three years

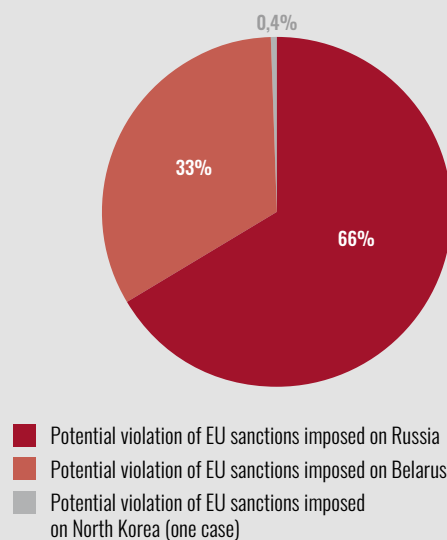


Number of reports received by VDD by reporting source



VDD also received several dozens of reports from financial sector members regarding possible breaches of US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctions against Russia and Belarus. Two reports were received regarding possible breaches of OFAC sanctions imposed upon a Latvian national. While breaches of OFAC sanctions are not a criminal offence in Latvia, these sanctions are binding on all Latvia's financial and capital market participants and breaching them can result in large fines from regulating bodies. Moreover, everyone should be aware that the US may impose secondary sanctions or other countermeasures against persons disregarding the OFAC sanctions.

Reports received on potential violations of sanctions, by country



Last year, VDD also received one report of possible breaches of United Kingdom sanctions against Russia. While sanctions unilaterally imposed by the UK are not binding on Latvia, the Service assessed the persons involved according to its remit.

Additionally, VDD reiterates that both EU and NATO member countries' sanctions must be observed in relation to public procurements tenderers.

Analysis by the Service indicates that the character of reports received changed in 2022. Whereas in the first six months the majority of reports related to transactions with persons on sanctions lists, in the second half of the year there were more reports of transactions of goods on the lists. This is explained by the fact that later in the year transition periods for import and export of various sanctioned goods expired, but the goods deliveries between Latvia and Russia or Belarus continued.

Based on 181 reports, last year VDD made in-depth case studies and fact findings. As a result of operational activities, the Service initiated seven criminal cases for possible breaches of sanctions. VDD officials also held talks with the persons involved in possible attempts to breach sanctions, warning them of possible criminal liability. In 2022 more than 20 persons were issued the warning about the unacceptability of sanctions violations.

Last year the Service also evaluated several potential transactions from the point of view of sanctions observance. VDD provided its opinion to competent institution regarding the intent of local and foreign businesses to purchase shares in companies registered in Latvia, which are subjected to EU restrictive measures, i.e., are under indirect control of persons enlisted on the EU sanctions list.



Illustrative photo, source – Freepik

5.2.

VETTING THE INVESTORS

In 2022, VDD continued vetting of foreign investors in accordance with EU regulations.¹³ The Service assessed whether foreign citizens or companies investing in strategically important enterprises or sectors would have a negative impact on Latvia's national security.

VDD analysed each case individually to determine whether a specific foreign investor or significant changes in the ownership structure of a foreign investor could pose risks to national security or public order. The Service also appraised the impact of the investment on critical infrastructure, technologies and resources which are vital for maintaining security or public order. VDD took into account the context and circumstances of the investment. For example, particular attention was paid to whether a potential foreign investor is directly or indirectly controlled by a third country government through significant funding (including subsidies), or whether this investor manages government-directed projects or programmes abroad.

In accordance with procedures set out by the Cabinet of Ministers¹⁴, the Service evaluated information received from the Ministry of Economy on foreign direct investments, which are assessed in another member state. Last year, 366 such requests were received from the Ministry of Economy. VDD provided a negative assessment in two cases, which were connected with planned investments by a Russian company in another EU member state. The Service found that in both cases the investors had close ties to the Russian government and may have played a role in the annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of situation in Ukraine. The active presence of such companies in EU territory would create favourable conditions for Russia's economic and military interests, which is contrary to the security interests of Latvia and Europe as a whole.

Last year saw a decline in the volume of foreign direct investment in EU member states due to the uncertainty created by Russia's military aggression, energy supply problems, economic recession risks in Europe and inflation.

The Service's analysis shows that as in previous years, the majority of foreign investment comprised mergers of North American companies or acquisition transactions with EU companies, as well as investments in new development projects and EU enterprises. This was followed by UK-related investments and investments from European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states. The sectors attracting the most foreign interest were communications and IT, trade, finance and manufacturing, including renewable energy projects.

In accordance with the National Security Law, VDD continued vetting the investors in enterprises of national security significance. In 2022, the Service analysed and advised decision makers on a number of potential investors and possible risks they might present.

VDD also continued vetting foreigners who are applying for temporary residence permits (TRP) in exchange for making investments in Latvia in accordance with Section 23 Paragraph 1 Articles 28, 29, 30 or 31 of the Immigration Law. Therefore, last year the Service continued evaluating the potential risks posed by such persons and the impact of their activity to national security, presenting recommendations to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs for making decisions.

Reacting to the Russian and Belarussian threat, on 9 April 2022 the Saeima adopted important amendments to the Immigration Law, stipulating that until 30 June 2023 no first time TRP will be issued to Russian or Belarussian citizens in exchange for investments.

However, citizens of these countries may still apply for TRP based on humanitarian grounds, family reunion, employment, studying or student practice. In such cases, in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations¹⁵ the Service according to its remit conducted in-depth vettings, analysing the TRP applicants' circle of contacts and other critical information.

Analysis conducted by VDD shows that persons from third countries who had not received TRP in exchange for investments often submit their documents again on the basis of the aforementioned exceptions. For example, often citing employment, humanitarian concerns or marriage to a Latvian citizen.

¹³ Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union.

¹⁴ Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.606 of 3 October 2017 "Regulations Regarding the Information to be Submitted to the Authority Determined in the National Security Law and the Handling of Information on Foreign Direct Investments".

¹⁵ Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.540 of 30 August 2022 "Amendments of Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.554 of 21 June 2010 "Regulations on countries whose citizens are subject to additional evaluation when applying for visas or residence permits".

ECONOMIC SECURITY

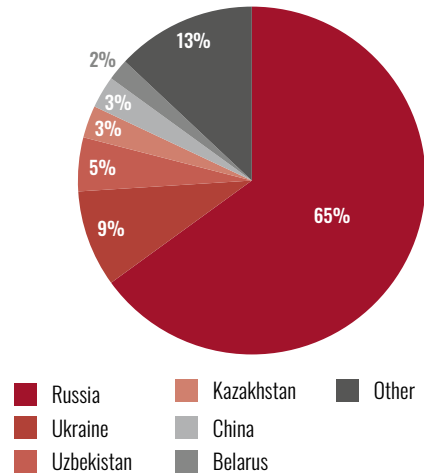
Despite amendments to the Immigration Law, the Service considers that the risks posed by Russian and Belarussian citizens residing in Latvia have not significantly decreased. Although first-time TRP applications are no longer considered, there remains a large number of TRP applicants based on the aforementioned exemptions.

Last year, VDD vetted 1206 persons including their family members (spouses and underage children) seeking TRP in exchange for investments. A total of 892 persons made repeated requests for TRP on this basis, while 314 persons made first-time requests.

As in previous years, last year the highest level of interest was for obtaining TRP in exchange for acquiring real estate in Latvia. In 2022, this comprised 1090 persons or 90% of all TRP applications. There was considerably less interest by foreign investors seeking TRP in exchange for investing in share companies (84 persons), and even less in credit institutions' subordinated capital (24 persons) or interest-free state bonds (8 persons).

The largest group of TRP applicants were citizens of Russia – 781 persons. Other applicants were citizens of Ukraine (112), Uzbekistan (59), Kazakhstan (42), China (31) and Belarus (26). A further 11 persons from terrorism risk countries expressed interest in obtaining TRP in exchange for investments. VDD also vetted 293 persons, including their family members, who had

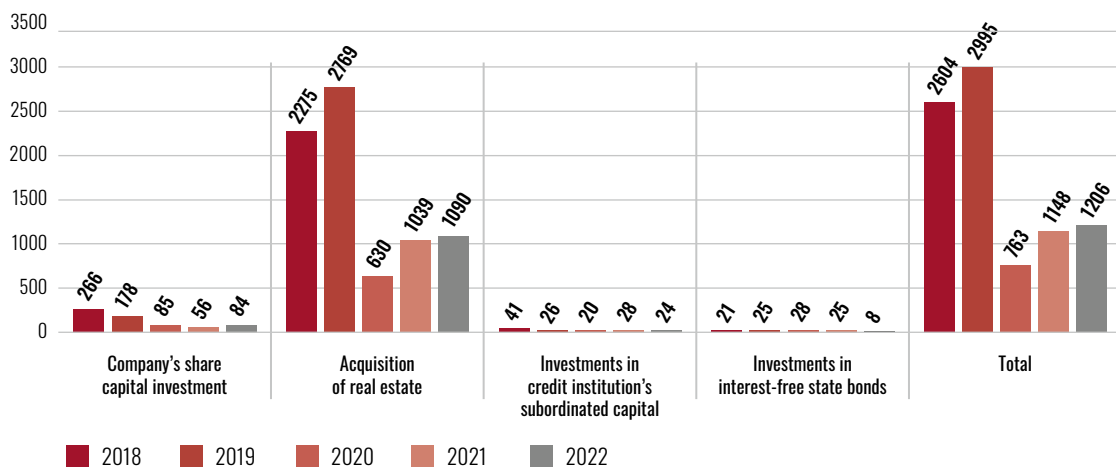
TRP applicants by nationality



previously obtained TRP for investments and are now applying for permanent residence permits.

Last year the Service continued to closely collaborate with the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to improve the mechanisms for vetting the residence permit applicants. For example, requiring the submission of additional documents for more in-depth vetting in cases where there are risk factors. In several cases, refusal to submit the requested documents has resulted in the annulment or rejection of a residence permit application. Last year, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in consultation with VDD declined to issue residence permits to 152 persons.

Dynamics of TRP applicants by investment type



5.3.

ENERGY SECURITY



Illustrative photo, source – Freepik

The war in Ukraine has had a significant impact on energy resource availability in Latvia. As in the rest of Europe, Latvia experienced sharp energy price fluctuations and uncertainty over supply. Latvia's energy sector and consumers will need to accept high energy prices also into the future.

By its actions last year, Russia showed it is an unreliable energy supplier. As European countries sought substitutes for Russian natural gas, the Kremlin continued to use energy to further its interests. The aggressor state Russia tried to stir up uncertainty and confusion in European governments, societies and natural gas markets to promote gas price increases. However, thanks to prompt action by European states and favourable external circumstances, it was possible to stabilise the situation in natural gas markets.

VDD considers that turning away from Russian natural gas will enable Latvia to reduce energy security risks arising from the previous extensive proportion of natural gas imports from Russia. The Service believes that in the current circumstances, rejecting the usage of Russian energy resources is absolutely essential for

strengthening Latvia's national security, even though in the short term it will create additional burden to the Latvian economy.

Natural gas supply issues and high prices partially impacted electricity production. VDD analysis indicates that the position of the Baltic States' energy systems within the so-called BRELL¹⁶ group offers Russia the opportunity to use potential premature disconnection from BRELL as an influence instrument for its own interests. At the same time, the Baltic States can technically implement early synchronisation with Europe, meaning that Baltic electricity transmission system operators will be able to supply consumers with electricity.

In 2022, leakages caused by deliberate actions from the "Nord Stream" gas pipeline raised concerns in European countries, including Latvia, about energy infrastructure security. VDD considers that in the current conditions of Russian aggression, greater attention must be paid to physical and cyber security of energy infrastructure. Last year, the Service worked intensively with energy infrastructure managers by supervising the implementation of physical security measures, checking information about suspicious activities near such objects and making recommendations for increasing the security for the aforementioned infrastructure.

No final resolution was found last year on the issue of building a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Latvia. VDD considers that the creation of LNG supply infrastructure in Latvia would strengthen the country's energy security. However, careful analysis must be made of the economic justification for building an LNG terminal at a time when LNG supply capacity is increasing in the Baltic Sea region while at the same time natural gas consumption is declining.

Last year, while the increase in energy prices placed a burden on Latvian households, the government's support measures successfully moderated the impact of higher bills. VDD monitored the socio-economic impact of higher energy prices in the regions, including a growing mood of protest in certain social groups, which Russia tried to encourage.

VDD considers that Latvia must seriously prepare for the next heating season by ensuring stable natural gas deliveries from LNG terminals in Finland and Lithuania to the Inčukalna Underground Gas Storage Facility.

¹⁶ Belorussia, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. The BRELL energy group has existed since the Soviet period. It is based on an agreement between Belorussia, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to synchronize their electricity networks and operate in a single regime.

5.4.

TRANSPORT

Last year, uncertainty prevailed in the transport sector as the traditional cooperation with Russia and Belarus was restricted. However, while the transition period was still in force, during which restrictive measures against Russia were gradually implemented, intensive shipment of cargos from this country continued via Latvia's railways and major ports.

The Service considers that transport companies must be aware that under the current circumstances, the previously profitable cargo business with Russia and Belarus cannot continue. VDD has information that some transport enterprises have as yet not fully abandoned plans to process cargos from Russia and Belarus if this can be done without breaching sanctions.

Shipments from Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries were also observed in Latvia's transport corridor. There are growing concerns that Russia may exploit these countries to circumvent sanctions imposed to it. VDD analysis suggests that Russia has no interest to allow cargos from Central Asia to cross its territory to the West without interference. Russia's position on this matter may lead to restrictions on transporting Central Asian cargos through Latvia.

There will therefore be continuing uncertainty this year regarding cargo shipments from the East.

But despite these challenges, cargos continue to move through Latvia. By intelligently adapting to the current situation, Latvia's railways and major ports can continue their operations.

At a time when Latvia's transport sector is adjusting to smaller freight volumes, it is even more important to continue in a well-targeted and timely manner the "Rail Baltica" project.

The Service considers that "Rail Baltica" is a strategic infrastructure project that will improve people's mobility and serve as basis to attract new freight sources. Moreover, introducing the European rail gauge is vital for increasing the defensive capabilities of Latvia and the Baltic States.

Last year, VDD was involved in evaluating tenderers for construction contracts to build the "Rail Baltica" mainline. The Service also vetted the employees of the "Rail Baltica" construction project developers who will have access to critical infrastructure elements. Within the vetting VDD focused on preventing potential threats to national security interests. On the initiative of VDD and in cooperation with the institutions involved in planning the construction and security of the "Rail Baltica" project, at the end of 2022 the railway infrastructure project "Rail Baltica" was included on the list of critical infrastructure objects.



Illustrative photo, source – Freepik

FORECASTS

- As Russia continues its aggression in Ukraine, we anticipate more sanctions will be imposed on Russia and its allies. Meanwhile, Russia will continue to try and bypass Western sanctions, using friendly states as cover and cooperating with enterprises oriented toward the Eastern market.
- The financial sector will continue applying precautionary measures to transactions flowing in the Eastern direction. Companies which continue doing business with the aggressor state Russia and its allies will face increasing risks in banks of having their financial assets frozen for possible sanctions breaches.
- To make sanctions more effective, Western countries must improve their cooperation, harmonise laws and regulations governing sanctions within the EU and encourage observance of sanctions in countries which are neutral toward Russia's aggression. Harmonised EU regulations would also significantly improve coordination in implementing sanctions.
- Energy security and accessibility of energy resources remain critical issues for EU countries. Although concerns about energy resource shortages have eased in Latvia, timely preparations for the next heating season must be made at both the state and business level.
- Western countries must continue reforming their energy policies, finding new energy sources and shifting to more environmentally friendly technologies for producing electricity. This would reduce the opportunity for the aggressor state Russia to earn revenue from energy trading which it can use to fund the war in Ukraine.



06

COUNTERTERRORISM

The past year in Latvia and elsewhere in the world passed without significant new trends in the field of counterterrorism. In a number of Western European countries the terrorist threat remained high, while in other regions it was elevated or low. VDD analysis of terrorism cases shows that persons planning, carrying out and supporting terrorist acts primarily under the influence of propaganda materials disseminated by terrorist organisations.

In 2022, the Islamist terrorist groups *Daesh* and *Al-Qaeda* continued to pose the most significant terrorist threats to the security of European countries. *Daesh* and *Al-Qaeda* did not have sufficient combat capacity to carry out attacks in other regions of the world outside their areas of direct activity. At the same time, these groups and their supporters continued to distribute terrorist propaganda on various online platforms, under the influence of which supporters of the radical interpretation of Islam living in Europe engaged in terrorist activities.

Terrorist attacks in Europe were still mostly carried out by so-called homegrown or solo terrorists, who act alone and are inspired by the spread of propaganda by terrorist groups or attacks by other terrorists.¹⁷

The terrorist threat posed by far-right extremists also remained at an elevated level. In the past year, far-right extremists in Europe spread their propaganda materials and engaged in attacks against various minority groups.

In Latvia, the terrorism threat level remained low. For preventive purposes, VDD, as in other years, focused on groups at risk of radicalisation and obtained information on persons whose behaviour showed signs of radicalisation. The Service also took measures to prevent the potential threat posed by such persons. Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine did not directly affect the terrorism threat situation in Latvia, nevertheless it surfaced certain risk factors.

¹⁷ Homegrown terrorists – radicalised individuals who were born, raised and socialised in Europe.



Over the past year, the Service continued to improve the national counterterrorism system, ensuring the exchange of information with other institutions involved and coordinating measures in the fields of terrorism prevention and response. In order to test the readiness of the responsible institutions to prevent and overcome a terrorist threat, last year VDD organised two training events for the institutions involved in counterterrorism measures: table-top exercise “Code Red 2022” for the implementation of the National Counterterrorism Plan and the counterterrorism response training “Liedags 2022” with full-force deployment.

6.1.

TERRORIST THREAT SITUATION IN EUROPE

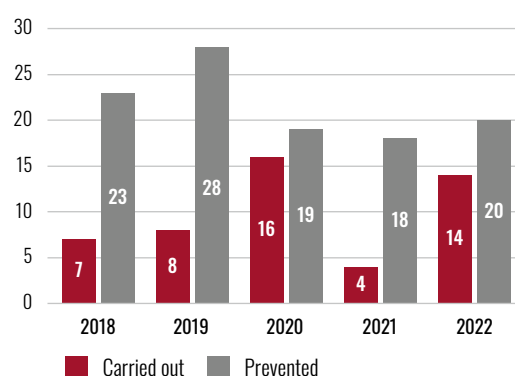
In 2022, terrorists carried out 14 terrorist acts in Europe. These were all small-scale attacks. At the same time, the authorities of European countries managed to prevent 20 more planned attacks last year. Of these, 11 were planned by radical Islamists and nine by followers of other ideologies justifying violence. Compared to 2021, last year there was an increase in the number of terrorist attacks. In contrast, the number of attacks prevented was similar to previous years.

VDD’s analysis shows that the number of attacks that took place was influenced by the increase in the activities of far-right extremists. While terrorists carried out more attacks in the past year than in 2021, none of the attacks in Europe were large-scale terrorist attacks. In the Service’s assessment, the increase in the number of attacks does not in itself indicate a significant increase in the terrorist threat.

In Europe, as in previous years, attacks were carried out by so-called homegrown terrorists, who derived ideological motivations and practical information for committing terrorist acts mainly from propaganda materials produced by terrorist groups. Terrorist propaganda circulating online contains practical advice for committing terrorist acts and continues to encourage people to engage in violence.

Terrorist content on the internet continues to serve as a catalyst for the radicalisation of individuals and can be used to recruit persons and incite violence. To mitigate the risks posed by terrorist propaganda, in 2021 the EU adopted Regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online¹⁸, which applied in EU Member States as of June 2022. This Regulation lays down uniform rules against the misuse of hosting services for the online distribution of terrorist content¹⁹. The Regulation applies to hosting service providers that store and distribute user-generated content online, such as social networking sites, video, image and audio

Terrorist attacks in Europe



¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2021/784 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online.

¹⁹ Hosting services – services for the storage of online information.

sharing platforms, as well as file sharing and so-called cloud services.

In some countries, the terrorist threat continued to be posed by right-wing and left-wing extremists. The threat posed by right-wing extremists is evidenced by a series of planned attacks, and three attacks carried out, targeting members of various ethnic and sexual minorities. In one case, right-wing extremists attacked members of Europe's LGBTQ+ community. Far-left extremists, on the other hand, carried out attacks on a church and media infrastructure.

Civilians in mass gatherings and law enforcement officials were once again the main targets of Islamist terrorist attacks last year. However, in one case, Islamist terrorists carried out an attack on members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Terrorists mainly used simple methods of operation to carry out the attacks. Of the 14 attacks that took place, various types of sharp objects were used in eight cases. In four attacks, terrorists used improvised or homemade explosive devices or improvised combustion devices. In two attacks, terrorists used firearms.

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine did not have a significant impact on the counterterrorism situation in Europe. At the same time, a number of risks were identified that in the long term may lead to an increase in the terrorist threat and a deterioration of the security situation.

The war caused by Russia could, in a similar manner to the 2015 refugee crisis, be used by extremists from third countries linked to terrorist organisations or supporting the ideology of terrorist organisations to enter Europe under the guise of refugee flows. The war will also contribute to an increase of distribution of weapons trafficking. Weapons can be smuggled from Ukraine into the hands of European extremists and used for terrorist purposes.

6.2.

TERRORISM THREAT TRENDS IN LATVIA

Last year, as in previous years, the terrorism threat level in Latvia remained low and terrorist acts did not take place. Nor were terrorist groups or activities of individual terrorists detected in Latvia. At the same time, persons who showed interest in the Islamic ideology spread by terrorist groups also came to the attention of VDD last year.

The main terrorist threat in Latvia was caused by the possible radicalisation of individual residents. VDD observed the interest by individual persons in the ideology spread by terrorist groups, while at the same time, it did not find a direct connection between these persons and terrorist organizations or their representatives.

Last year, the Service paid increased attention to the impact of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the terrorist threat situation in Latvia. Although no significant impact was identified, certain risk factors were detected. Within the scope of its competence, VDD carried out in-depth checks on border crossers in order to detect and prevent the entry of terrorism-linked persons into the country, taking advantage of the migration crisis caused by the war. While in 2022, the Service did not detect the entry of such risk persons into the country, the experience of other European countries shows that such risks exist.

The information currently at the disposal of VDD does not indicate possible changes in the terrorist threat situation in Latvia.

It is predicted that in 2023 the terrorist threat level will also remain low. The main terrorist threat will continue to arise from the radicalisation of individuals and their potential involvement in violent activities. There are also risks that persons linked to terrorism may enter the country through migrant flows.

6.3.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES FOR THE REDUCTION OF TERRORISM RISKS

In line with the current level of terrorist threat and risk analysis, the Service implemented a number of preventive measures last year to ensure the effective functioning of the counterterrorism system.

As the leading authority of the Latvian counterterrorism system, VDD developed and improved cooperation and coordination mechanisms with other institutions involved in counterterrorism measures. Last year, as in previous years, the Service organized two meetings of the Expert Advisory Council of the Counterterrorism Center. At these meetings, experts from various sectors and institutions discussed the current trends of terrorist threats in Europe and Latvia, appraised VDD's implemented and planned activities in the field of counterterrorism, as well as made proposals for the

further development of the counterterrorism system. The war launched by Russia in Ukraine and its impact on the security situation in Latvia were one of the most important topics of discussion.

The Service also carried out a survey of terrorism risk objects, made recommendations for the improvement of the physical security of objects, as well as participated in the planning and provision of physical security at high-risk public events. The Service also continued its work as the national contact point for reporting suspicious transactions with explosives precursors, managing cooperation and exchange of information with the largest merchants involved in the circulation of explosives precursors²⁰ in Latvia.



Measures to prevent radicalization

Prevention of radicalisation is one of VDD's activities in the field of counterterrorism. The assessment of the threats posed and the timely identification of persons at risk of radicalisation is an important prerequisite for the prevention of terrorist crimes. In order to identify and prevent cases of radicalisation in a timely manner, last year the Service in cooperation with other competent institutions evaluated and monitored persons showing signs of radicalisation.

The inter-institutional working group "Prevent" led by VDD whose main task is to coordinate measures to prevent radicalisation in the country, also continued its work. "Prevent" includes representatives from several state and municipal institutions, whose daily work is closely related to the groups in society most at risk of radicalisation.

Last year, five meetings of "Prevent" were held, during which the trends of radicalization in Europe and Latvia, the impact of the Ukrainian conflict on the polarisation of society in Latvia, as well as other topical issues were analyzed. In addition to promoting cooperation between institutions in the prevention of cases of radicalisation, "Prevent" also organised training events and seminars. Last year, VDD held several informative seminars for representatives of competent authorities on the signs of radicalisation and recommended actions in identifying a person's possible radicalisation.

With the introduction of the Regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online, VDD has been designated as the competent authority responsible for taking the measures contained in this

Regulation. In accordance with the requirements of the Regulation, the Service has set up a national contact point to which citizens can report terrorist content on the internet. In order to facilitate the timely identification and removal of terrorist content from the internet, the Service has established cooperation with associations representing the electronic communications sector and the members of these associations to whom the Regulation applies. Last year, VDD did not need to issue orders for the removal of terrorist content, as such content was not identified in the information space of Latvia.

CONTACT POINT FOR REPORTING TERRORIST CONTENT

If you discover publications, videos or other types of content on the internet that invites people to engage in terrorist activities, justifies terrorism or provide instructions on how to carry out terrorist activities, VDD asks you to report this by sending information to the e-mail address kontaktpunkts@vdd.gov.lv.

The Service calls for the reporting of any content aimed at justifying terrorist activities.

In such cases, it is recommended that you send both a hyperlink to the terrorist content and a screenshot of it to the Service.



Strengthening of security at terrorism risk objects

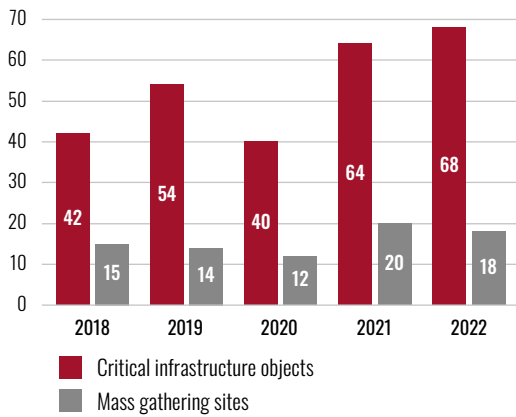
Last year, VDD continued its work in the field of security of terrorism risk objects. As in previous years, the Service conducted an evaluation of the security regime at critical infrastructure objects and mass gathering sites and made recommendations for improving the security of these objects. Also, according to its competence, VDD evaluated and approved the persons responsible for security in the objects, as well as vetted the persons who needed to access the restricted access areas in the critical infrastructure objects.

At terrorism risk objects, the Service conducted a number of notification checks to verify how easily contact persons could be reached and their ability to respond to crisis situations. In 2022, VDD surveyed 68 critical infrastructure objects, evaluating the implemented security measures and compliance with these measures, the relevant internal procedures and emergency action plans. In 43 cases, the Service provided recommendations to the responsible persons

²⁰ Explosives precursors – substances and mixtures of substances that can be used to make explosives, although they are marketed for completely different purposes, such as use in agriculture, construction or pharmaceuticals.

of critical infrastructure facilities for the improvement of the physical security regime.

Terrorism risk objects inspected by VDD



The recommendations were mainly related to the need to improve internal security procedures, coordination of security work or security systems. In addition, the Service sent updated recommendations for emergency response to all facilities.

Also last year, VDD inspected 18 mass gathering sites, including seven shopping centers, seven hotels and four entertainment and cultural venues. The Service provided recommendations and additional consultations to the personnel responsible for security at these sites for the improvement of physical security measures.

Taking into account the war in Ukraine initiated by Russia, in 2022 the Service paid increased attention to the security of critical infrastructure and the measures taken at these objects to eliminate potential threats. Based on analysis by VDD, recommendations were provided to the objects regarding possible risks and the necessary action in case of identification of various threats.

Improving the security of public events

Fulfilling the requirements laid down in the second half of 2021 in the Law on the Safety of Public Entertainment and Festivity Events on the planning, organisation and provision of security measures, last year VDD initiated cooperation with the largest organisers of public events, municipalities and responsible institutions.

As part of strengthening the security of public events, the Service evaluated security plans for elevated-risk events²¹. As a result of the evaluation, VDD approved 22 submitted safety plans, but in one case the plan was not approved, because the organiser of the public event had not met the requirements provided for in the regulations, which could negatively affect the safety of the planned event.

Last year, VDD, in cooperation with the largest organisers of public events and responsible institutions, developed guidelines for planning, organising and ensuring the safety of elevated-risk events. Also, Service officials attended 14 elevated-risk events to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures specified in the security plans. After these events, VDD made recommendations to their organizers for the improvement of security measures in the future.

Control of the circulation of explosives precursors

Trends in terrorist threats in Europe and elsewhere in the world show that explosives and improvised explosive devices are being used more rarely in terrorist attacks. Despite this, terrorists remain interested in the possibilities of acquiring explosives and making bombs.

In line with the EU regulation on the marketing and use of explosives precursors, last year VDD continued its cooperation with companies trading precursors²². The Service updated information about companies and online stores engaged in the sale of precursors, and provided them with methodological support. VDD also cooperated with the VID in relation to cases of transit, import and export of explosives precursors to third countries.

In order to inform merchants and state institutions involved in the trade of explosives precursors regarding developments in precursor's circulation domain, the Service in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture organised the annual informative seminar "Reiters 2022." During the seminar, VDD discussed security issues regarding the circulation of explosives precursors with the largest merchants involved in the circulation of explosives precursors in Latvia and provided recommendations on how to detect suspicious transactions, theft or disappearance of precursors.

²¹ Elevated-risk event: a public event whose planned total number of visitors and participants exceeds 5,000 people, or – in case the event is held in the border zone or the target audience of the event is a group of specially protected persons – 1,000 people; or an event that is considered to be an elevated-risk event by its organiser and for which a permit is required under Section 5 of the Law on the Safety of Public Entertainment and Festivity Events. Under this Law, specially protected persons are children, seniors, persons with reduced mobility and persons with special needs.

²² Regulation (EU) 2019/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the marketing and use of explosives precursors, amending Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 98/2013.

6.4.

IMPROVING RESPONSE CAPABILITIES

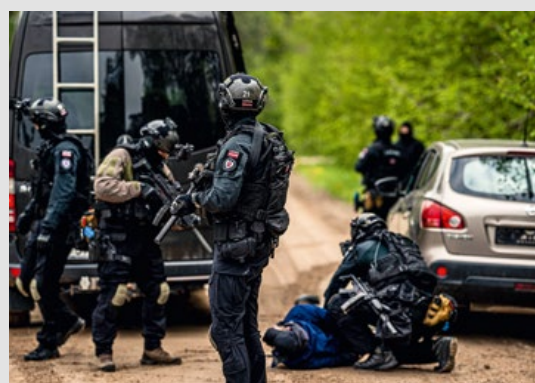
In order to test and improve the cooperation and response capabilities of operational services and other institutions involved in the counterterrorism system in cases of terrorist attacks, last summer VDD organised the national level counterterrorism training with full-force deployment “Liedags 2022”.

The training took place at the stadium “Daugava” in Liepaja, and more than 300 representatives from the institutions involved in counterterrorism measures took part: VDD, the State Police, Emergency Medical Service, the State Fire and Rescue Service, the Prosecutor General’s office, the Liepaja Municipal Police, the State Border Guard and the National Armed Forces.

The purpose of the training was to test the ability of regional units of the institutions to respond in accordance with the counterterrorism plan “Crowd”²³. The training scenario was developed by the Service in line with current terrorist threat trends in Europe. It was intended to play out the actions of the services in a situation where several terrorist attacks took place during a public event, using sharp weapons and ramming a vehicle into a crowd of people. In order to achieve the goal set in the training, the services carried out a wide range of counterterrorism measures: notification, arrival at the scene, coordination of resources, medical assistance, rescue work, carrying out operational and investigative activities, as well as neutralizing and detaining the terrorists.

At the end of 2022, VDD organized the table-top exercise “Code Red 2022” for the announcement of terrorist threat levels and the implementation of the National Counterterrorism Plan.

The purpose of the exercise was to test the ability of institutions involved in the counterterrorism system to respond to a growing terrorist threat. During the training, special attention was paid to mutual exchange of information, efficiency and coordination of preventive measures specified in the National Counterterrorism Plan in conditions of changing terrorist threat, as well as to the expansion of the operational management center and the ability of institutions to coordinate the supply and redistribution of material and technical resources. Based on the lessons of the exercise, the National Counterterrorism Plan will be updated this year.



Photos of the training “Liedags 2022” organized by VDD

²³ On 7 September 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers approved “Action plan in the event of terrorist attacks” (Counterterrorism Plan “Crowd”), which determines the action of the responsible authorities if a terrorist attack has been carried out in the territory of the Republic of Latvia in a public place, using a vehicle, sharp weapons, firearms, improvised explosives, or combined methods of attacks.

Also, in order to strengthen the response capabilities of the institutions involved in the field of counterterrorism, VDD improved various response plans. Based on the standard response plans “Ship”²⁴, “Aircraft”²⁵, “Object”²⁶ and “Crowd”²⁷ approved in 2021, last year the Service reviewed and approved the updated support plans of the institutions. These response plans are designed to ensure an effective and coordinated response by all services and institutions involved in counterterrorism activities in the event of a terrorist attack.

6.5.

PROCESSING OF AIRLINE PASSENGER DATA

Last year, VDD continued to improve the state information system – Airline Passenger Data Register. The aircraft passenger data gathered in the system were successfully used in the detection and prevention of serious and especially serious crimes, as well as terrorist activities. By submitting to VDD a substantiated and judge-authorized request, investigative and other authorized bodies were able to obtain information about the flights of persons involved in criminal activities.

The abovementioned information system provides continuous verification of incoming passenger data by comparing them with national and international law enforcement databases, as well as watchlists of competent authorities. As the system finds correlations, VDD officials conduct an in-depth review of the information. Upon confirmation of information about the presence of a criminal or a person at risk on

a particular flight, the Service informs the authority responsible for further actions. Last year, the Service ensured the processing of requests from competent authorities and the issuance of information in the system 24/7, in cooperation with other intelligence and security services and law enforcement institutions.

At the beginning of 2022, amendments to the Aircraft Passenger Data Processing Law were adopted, enabling competent authorities to request and receive passenger data from the system in an accelerated manner in specific cases. The new arrangements make it much easier to receive and use passenger data in cases where suspects have already been identified and information about them needs to be received immediately.

Planning further improvement to the information system, last year VDD made preparations for the implementation of a new EU Internal Security Fund project, starting from 1 January 2023. Within the framework of the project, it is planned to develop the interoperability of the Airline Passenger Data Register with other national and international information systems and to increase the capacity of the Service in passenger data processing.

Last year, VDD participated in various formats of international cooperation (UN, OSCE, Interpol and others), providing training and support to several third countries, such as Moldova and Botswana, which have only recently started to implement passenger data processing solutions. Taking into account the previous experience of Latvia in international and European aircraft passenger data processing issues, in June 2022 Latvia was elected as the chairing country of the EU Informal Passenger Data Register working group.



Illustrative photo, source – Shutterstock

²⁴ 7 September 2021 Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 641 “Action plan in the event of a threat to ships, ports and port installations (Counterterrorism Plan “Ship”)”.

²⁵ 7 September 2021 Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 640 “Action Plan in Case of Threats to Civil Aviation Aircraft and Objects (Counterterrorism Plan “Aeroplane”)”.

²⁶ 7 September 2021 Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 638 “Action plan in case of threats to land objects (Counterterrorism plan “Object”)”.

²⁷ 7 September 2021 Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 639 “Action Plan in the event of terrorist attacks (Counterterrorism Plan “Crowd”)”.

FORECASTS

- In Europe, the most significant terrorist threat this year will come from Islamist terrorists. The terrorist groups *Daesh* and *Al-Qaeda* will continue their efforts to spread terrorist propaganda on the internet in order to encourage the radicalisation of Muslims living in Europe, to attract new supporters and to incite terrorist activities in EU countries. Therefore, uniform measures by EU Member States to identify terrorist content and remove it from the internet will remain relevant this year. Terrorist groups will also continue their efforts to restore their combat capabilities.
- The main targets of terrorist attacks in Europe in 2023 are expected to be mass gathering sites, law enforcement officers and symbolic objects.
- According to VDD, the terrorist threat level in Latvia will remain low this year. At the same time, the involvement of individuals in terrorist or terrorist support activities cannot be excluded. Against this background, VDD will continue to implement measures to identify and prevent possible radicalisation of persons.
- The consequences of the war in Ukraine launched by Russia will continue to be relevant. VDD will continue intensive work with terrorism risk objects for the identification of suspicious activities directed against the security of such objects. The Service will also continue to analyse and apply the lessons provided by Russia's war to the development of national response capabilities.
- Taking into account regional security trends and the suspension of direct air traffic with Russian and Belarusian airports, it can be predicted that in the next few years risk persons will try to enter Latvia using connecting flights through third countries or intra-EU flights.



07

PRE-TRIAL INVESTIGATION

Last year, VDD's investigative work increased significantly. Whereas the Service took on 27 new criminal cases in 2020 and 33 in 2021, in 2022 this almost doubled to a total of 64 new criminal cases. Of these, 50 criminal cases were initiated by VDD on its own initiative, while another 14 were taken over from other institutions according to jurisdiction: 13 criminal cases from the State Police and one from the Prosecutor General's Office. The Service also continued its investigation into criminal cases initiated in previous years.

The increase in the amount of work for VDD in the field of pre-trial investigations was mainly due to the war launched by Russia against Ukraine and supporters of aggression in Latvia.

Firstly, last year, the Service became involved in the international investigation of crimes committed by the Russian regime and armed forces in Ukraine, obtaining testimonies and evidence from war refugees who have taken refuge in Latvia. Namely, on 15 March 2022, VDD initiated criminal case pursuant to Sections 71², 72 and 74 of the Criminal Law on crimes against humanity and peace, and war crimes committed by the aggressor state Russia. In order to identify and interview war refugees who have witnessed crimes by the Russian armed forces against civilians and civilian infrastructure, a special investigation team was established in Latvia, with reinforcements from the State Police and the State Border Guard. The Latvian investigation team has joined the international Joint Investigation Team (JIT) and is in constant communication with investigators in Ukraine and the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. For more details about the investigative work in the aforementioned criminal case, see the section "Criminal case for crimes of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine".

Secondly, the war launched by Russia against Ukraine highlighted pro-Kremlin inclined persons in Latvia who did not shy away from expressing public support for Russia's aggression against Ukraine and could potentially also pose a threat to the security of Latvia. Last year, 26 criminal cases were initiated in connection with public statements made by individuals, which contained elements of war crime acquittal and glorification (Section 74¹ of

the Criminal Law). In 16 of these criminal cases, VDD also assessed the activities of these persons, which are aimed at triggering hatred and enmity against Latvians or Ukrainians (Section 78 of the Criminal Law).

Also in 2022, VDD initiated three criminal cases on suspicions of possible activities against the Republic of Latvia (Section 80 of the Criminal Law) and provision of assistance to a foreign state – Russia – in activities directed against the Republic of Latvia (Section 81¹ of the Criminal Law). One of these criminal cases has been initiated in connection with the provocative activities directed against Latvia’s national security interests in groups created by the so-called “Baltic Anti-fascists” on “Telegram”, which has already been discussed in the report chapter on the security of the information space.

In addition, VDD initiated one criminal case in relation to suspicion of illegal participation by a Latvian national in the hostilities in Ukraine, providing support to the Russian armed forces (Section 77¹ of the Criminal Law). As well as one criminal case has been initiated for the provision of support to Russian soldiers involved

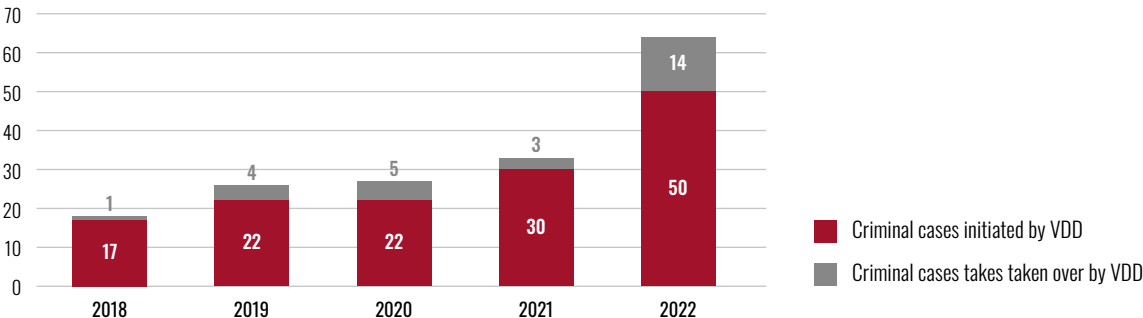
in the warfare in Ukraine through the collection of financial means and other goods (Section 77² of the Criminal Law).

Although last year the aggressor state Russia mainly concentrated its forces and resources on achieving its goals in Ukraine, the interest of the Russian intelligence and security services in obtaining information about developments in Latvia did not decrease. In 2022, VDD initiated four criminal cases related to suspected spying for Russia, as well as its closest ally Belarus.

Last year, as in other years, criminal cases were initiated both on the basis of information obtained as a result of the operational activities of the Service, as well as on the basis of information contained in applications and e-mails of natural and legal persons.

In total, VDD reviewed several thousand citizens’ reports, with the Service evaluating the information provided in them about possible illegal activities. In the absolute majority of cases, the information provided related to potential hate speech or support of Russian interests online.

Dynamics of VDD criminal cases



PRE-TRIAL INVESTIGATION

In parallel with the investigations, VDD conducted verifications with the aim of obtaining more information in order to decide on the need to initiate criminal case. In 42 cases, during the verification, VDD did not find any basis for initiating criminal case pursuant to the Criminal Law and decided not to initiate criminal case.

VDD also obtained information about possible illegal activities whose investigation falls within the competence of other law enforcement institutions. In such cases, the Service forwarded the information obtained to the competent institution for further evaluation.

Last year, VDD referred 25 criminal cases to the prosecutor's office for prosecution, prompting a total of 32 persons to be prosecuted, three of whom were state officials at the time of the crime.

Of the criminal cases referred for prosecution, the majority – 17 – were initiated in 2022, four in 2021, two in 2020, one in 2019, and one in 2018.

Among the criminal cases referred for prosecution, the following stand out distinguished:

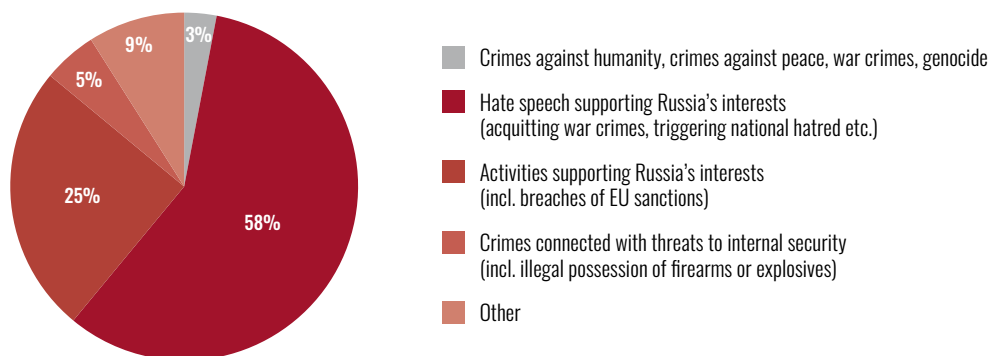
- six criminal cases initiated simultaneously for acquitting and glorifying war crimes and triggering national and ethnic hatred;
- five criminal cases for triggering national and ethnic hatred or enmity;
- two criminal cases for espionage;
- two criminal cases for disclosing non-disclosable information and for inciting disclosure of non-disclosable information;
- one criminal case for acquitting and glorifying war crimes;
- one criminal case for unlawful participation in an armed conflict;
- one criminal case for providing support to soldiers of the aggressor state Russia involved in the hostilities in Ukraine through collection of financial means and other goods;
- one criminal case for violating EU sanctions by a group of persons by prior agreement and money laundering on a large scale;
- one criminal case for violating EU sanctions and triggering national hatred and enmity.

In turn, 13 criminal cases were sent by VDD to other investigative bodies last year in accordance with jurisdiction. Of these, 10 criminal cases were sent to continue investigations by the State Police, two by the State Revenue Service, and one by the State Border Guard.

In 2022, VDD terminated 34 criminal cases in the Service's records. The 17 criminal cases that were in the Service's records for a long time were terminated on the basis of amendments made last year to Section 392 of the Criminal Procedure Law, providing for the termination of criminal case with the consent of the supervising prosecutor if it has not been possible to identify the person who committed the crime by carrying out all the necessary criminal procedures. Two more criminal cases were terminated because, having carried out all the necessary criminal procedures, it was not possible to obtain evidence of the guilt of a person in the commission of a criminal offense. Eight criminal cases were terminated due to the lack of elements of the crime, and six were terminated due to expiry of the statute of limitations. Additionally, one criminal case was terminated, with the Service establishing in the course of the investigation that no criminal offense had occurred.

At the start of 2023, there were 41 criminal proceedings in VDD's records.

Criminal cases initiated and taken over by VDD by type of criminal offence



CRIMINAL CASE FOR CRIMES OF THE RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES IN UKRAINE

Photo: Pexels

Within the framework of the criminal case initiated on 15 March last year, the investigation team led by VDD identified eyewitnesses to crimes committed by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine, interviewing war refugees who had taken refuge in Latvia. In order to make a significant contribution to the international investigation, VDD investigators focused on obtaining testimony about specific episodes of crimes when Ukrainian civilians or civilian infrastructure suffered, as well as about persons involved in criminal activities.

In addition to obtaining oral testimony, one of the main goals of the investigators was to collect and

consolidate material evidence by evaluating videos and photos submitted by war refugees, as well as various documents. For example, doctors' reports on injuries, death certificates and other documents.

IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVIEWING OF WITNESSES

Eyewitnesses to Russian crimes were identified last year by approaching and interviewing war refugees both in the refugee support centres established in Latvia and at border control posts. In this work, officials of the State Police and the State Border Guard provided significant support to VDD.



Apartment building in Ukraine which suffered the attack of Russian armed forces. Photo: Freepik



Most witnesses have testified to VDD about the Russian armed forces attacking civilians and residential buildings.

Photo: Pexels.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, officials of VDD and other institutions have interviewed several thousand Ukrainian nationals on the external border of Latvia. Most of the border crossers were unable to give testimony useful for the progress of the criminal case or refused to testify. Some of the Ukrainian nationals had not been direct witnesses to the crimes of the Russian armed forces, as these people had managed to avoid a direct encounter with the troops of the aggressor state by fleeing. For some war refugees, Latvia was only a temporary stop on the way to other EU countries, and they were informed about the possibility of giving testimony in the destination country. Likewise, some declined to testify, because talking about what they have experienced is too difficult at present. While this trend has continued, officials of both VDD and the State Border Guard continue to offer Ukrainian nationals the opportunity to testify.

In the course of its investigation, VDD learned that war refugees had been photographed and fingerprinted in filtration camps set up by Russian authorities. The content of individuals' mobile phones has also been audited, forcing the deletion of photos and videos recording the damage caused by the hostilities. Similarly, persons in filtration camps have endured cruelty and torture from Russian officials.

CONTENT OF TESTIMONIES

In 2022, within the criminal case a total of 92 persons provided information to VDD about crimes by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine. More than half of the testimonies heard in the course of the investigation was found to be relevant to the progress of the investigation. This includes, for example, testimonies of crimes committed by the Russian armed forces against Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, i.e. the targeted destruction and shelling of residential buildings, educational institutions, hospitals and roads.

Evidence of crimes committed by the Russian armed forces against Ukrainian civilians, such as the deliberate killing and abuse of the peaceful Ukrainian population as "human shields", has also been recorded. Several witnesses personally witnessed shelling, pointing out that it was directed directly at civilians and not at Ukrainian soldiers. Russian soldiers also purposefully fired on civilian cars, resulting in the deaths of relatives of witnesses.

The Service has obtained evidence from war refugees about the advance of Russian armed forces in Ukrainian territory and the weapons used, including banned ones such as phosphorus missiles.



Photo: Pexels

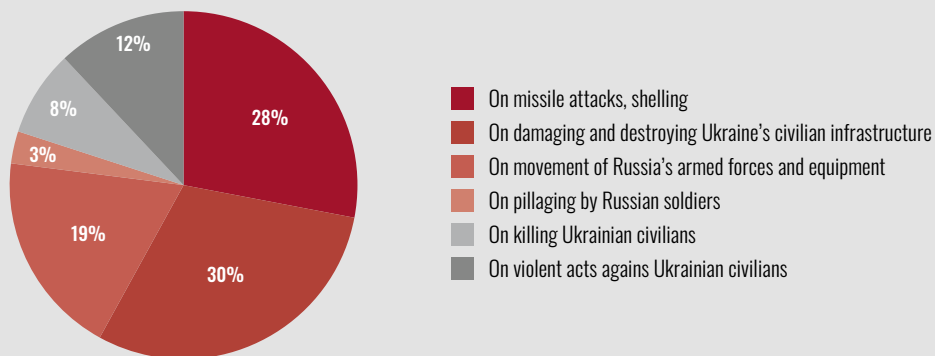
War refugees have testified of pillaging by soldiers of the Russian armed forces. Soldiers in Ukraine have demolished and looted residential houses, searched for food. They have also shelled private homes and taken away mobile phones from residents for their own needs.

VDD has also recorded testimonies of Ukrainian nationals about the emotional and physical violence experienced in filtration camps both in the occupied territories of Ukraine and on the territory of Russia. In the camps, Ukrainians have been intensively questioned about the layout of streets in cities and locations of military equipment.

Some of the testimony is viewed as background material. Individuals said they saw damaged buildings, civilian infrastructure and the dead after shelling. These persons were mostly hiding in the basements of houses or other hiding places during military action.

The Service has also managed to obtain photographic images and video recordings from witnesses recording the crimes and damage done by the Russian armed forces. Photos and video footage are attached to the criminal case as evidence.

Contents of testimonies given by war refugees





08

DIGNITARY PROTECTION

Russia's war in Ukraine and its aggressive rhetoric against Western countries last year determined the need for VDD, along with other areas of activity, to pay increased attention to the protection of the dignitaries of the State of Latvia. After 24 February, ensuring the safety of Latvian dignitaries as they went on visits to war-torn Ukraine became topical for the Service.

Faced with the difficulties caused by the sanctions imposed by the EU, representatives and supporters of the criminal regime of the aggressor state Russia last year fiercely targeted leaders of the EU and its Member States in their rhetoric. Threats were also made against the dignitaries of Latvia.

In the online environment, VDD also observed various activities directed against members of the Latvian government and other officials. For example, in several channels created on "Telegram", persons dubbing themselves "Baltic Anti-fascists", along with other activities directed against Latvia, collected sensitive information about Latvian state officials who, in their political and public activities are opposing the war waged by Russia in Ukraine. Under the threat of retaliation by Russian authorities, persons used psychological pressure to try to influence the decision-making process and public opinion in Latvia in accordance with the interests of Russia.

Taking into account the aggressive targeting of Latvian officials by representatives and supporters of the criminal regime of Russia, last year VDD enhanced and improved security measures for the protection of dignitaries. Also, taking into account the experience of Ukraine, action plans for the protection of the dignitaries in the event of a potential military attack on Latvia were reviewed and improved by the Service.



In 2022, VDD continued to provide full-time security for the Speaker of the Saeima and the Prime Minister, ensuring the safety of these officials both during public events and in their daily routines. In turn, the Military Police of the National Armed Forces continued to take care of the security of the President of Latvia in accordance with the previous practice.

Ensuring the security of the dignitaries, VDD coordinated security measures for 45 public events in Latvia, where dignitaries protected by the Service participated. The Service was involved in both the planning and implementation of security measures.

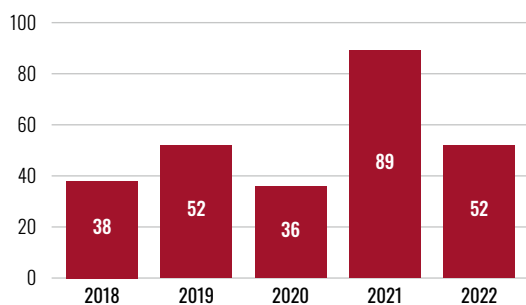
Likewise, VDD bodyguards accompanied protected dignitaries on visits abroad. VDD bodyguards ensured security of the Speaker of the Saeima on nine business trips to foreign countries, and ensured the security of the Prime Minister on 16 business trips abroad.

In order to ensure the safety of the highest officials of Latvia when visiting Ukraine, last year VDD adapted its security measures and equipment for work in a country at war.

During their visits to Ukraine, the dignitaries of Latvia were accompanied and guarded by a specially trained and equipped group of VDD officials. VDD group ensured both the safe movement of officials around the war-torn country and security at the places they stayed in Ukraine. Accompanied by VDD officers, the highest officials of Latvia visited Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Chernihiv, Hostomel, Irpin and other cities that had suffered from attacks by the Russian armed forces last year. While in Ukraine, VDD officials worked closely with Ukraine's partner services.

In addition to the dignitary protection, VDD is also responsible for the safety of certain foreign officials during their visits to Latvia. The duties of the Service's bodyguards include ensuring the safety of the heads of foreign parliaments and governments and foreign ministers, as well as the heads of international organisations – United Nations, Council of the European Union, European Parliament and European Commission. On the suggestions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Administration of the Saeima, the bodyguards of VDD also ensure the safety of representatives of other foreign and international organisations during visits to Latvia.

Providing security for foreign government and international organisations representatives visiting Latvia



In total, in 2022, the bodyguards of VDD provided security for 52 representatives of foreign governments and international organizations during their stay in Latvia. As last year Latvia did not host large-scale events such as the meeting of NATO foreign ministers at the end of 2021, a smaller number of high-ranking officials visited Latvia, for whose security VDD was responsible during their stay in Latvia. Nevertheless compared to previous years, the number of foreign dignitaries protected by VDD in 2022 was one of the largest.

DIGNITARY PROTECTION

By implementing measures corresponding to the level of threat, VDD ensured the physical safety of foreign dignitaries, their safe movement, security of their temporary residences, as well as information protection

measures. Visits to Latvia by foreign dignitaries protected by the Service took place without significant security incidents.



The Speaker of the 13th Saeima Ināra Mūrniece and Prime Minister Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš attending the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Aglona in August 2022. Photo: Administration of the Saeima.

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