



## SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

### Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: S2-20-0011

Project manager: Christofer Berglund

Project title: “Conscription as Political Socialization in Divided Societies? Evidence from post-Soviet Estonia and post-independence Finland”

#### **1. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them**

Our research project revolved around the relationship between minorities and militaries in divided societies. In the popular imagination, armies are often thought of as a “school for the nation,” capable of turning reluctant recruits into dedicated patriots. But in divided societies this process is fraught with pitfalls. Minorities might not see the state as “theirs” to defend; and the state might not trust minorities to bear arms. If minorities retain ties to a hostile neighbour, then cooperation becomes extra difficult. In this project, we studied this credible commitment problem in two cases from the region: Finland after the civil war and Estonia after the restoration of independence. What relationship developed between “reds” and the Finnish Defence Forces; and between Russians and the Estonian Defence Forces? Results from the investigation are manifold but can be boiled down into three core points:

- Will to fight can be engineered in divided societies

Findings from archival studies in Finland and from public opinion polls in Estonia suggest that will to fight can be fostered, even in divided societies. In Finland, officers inherited from the militaries of foreign states overcame distrust and coalesced under a set of common professional standards that fostered cohesion among soldiers. In Estonia, the will to fight varies along intergroup lines but these differences are a result of attitudinal orientations. Interventions that instil trust in the defence forces and feelings of national pride, in particular among the next generation of citizens, can nurture the will to fight.

- Institutional design is critical to support cooperation

Findings from elite interviews in Estonia suggest that institutions are essential to foster trust in divided armies. Cooperation problems between officers inherited from the Soviet Union and those returning from service in Western militaries, as well as between those who had received their ranks from the government-in-exile, subsided once shared standards for testing and recruitment limited the potential for exploitation inside the



organisation. With institutions in place to ensure merit-based treatment, ever more citizens of Russian heritage took up the opportunities made available to them in Estonian uniform.

- Discrimination is damaging to national defence

Findings from promotion decrees and longitudinal conscript polls in Estonia suggest that soldiers of Russian heritage are more prone to drop out of service, in part because of language hurdles and in part because of disinterest. Among draftees, perceptions of intergroup relations have significant downstream implications for unit cohesion and the will to fight. To inhibit feelings of discrimination from “spilling over” into the organization, it is important to detect and address lopsided recruitment patterns.

## **2. The project’s contribution to the international research frontline**

Some of our results go against the grain of prevailing wisdom. First, militaries in states emerging from colonial rule struggle to live up to their image as “national” institutions. Officers are either inherited from the *ancien regime* or exiles returning from training abroad. Intragroup rivalries preceded the search for shared standards. Not until their codification did the next generation of officers unite around a national esprit de corps.

Second, a common tongue is insufficient to generate cohesion. In both cases, officers communicating in a shared language struggled to cooperate. In Estonia, Russians capable in Estonian did not report higher will to fight than co-ethnics unable to speak Estonian. Linguistic barriers are still important to overcome but additional institutions (see the first paragraph) are needed to foster cooperation among soldiers from different backgrounds.

Third, external threats might compel groups to close ranks instead of turning against one another. According to extant expectations, defence planners facing hostile neighbours will recruit distrusted groups but consign them to menial or expendable posts, thus making discrimination inside the armed forces more manifest. Yet, in neither of our case studies could we detect signs of such “stacking” at times of increasing geopolitical tensions.

Other findings confirm prior research. Data from both cases suggest that institutions are essential to solve credible commitment problems in the defence sector. If promotion procedures are professional, officials can trust minorities to fulfil their duties and minorities can trust officials to protect their rights. However, if either side suspects the other of deception, then intergroup cooperation might soon collapse. It is not enough to



harbour good intentions – these must be signalled too. Monitoring perceptions of intergroup relations is critical to predict downstream effects for national defence.

We are still in the process of publishing and disseminating these research findings. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and several periods of parental leave, data collection commenced later than envisaged. However, I expect the project to generate more articles than anticipated in the application. Compared to the four articles foreseen in 2020, one article has been published; three are still under review; and another three are in preparation.

### **3. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe**

The project has shed novel light on the role of the armed forces as an arena for socialization. Neither the past relationship between “reds” and the Finnish Defence Forces nor the present relationship between Russians and the Estonian Defence Forces have been the subject of sustained investigation using first-hand sources. We have pushed the research front forward in this respect. To do so, we leveraged our access to archives in Finland and defence planners in Estonia. We also fielded a questionnaire to 4000 Estonian conscripts, thus gathering fine-grained data on socialization inside the armed forces. From this vantage point, we can suggest measures to foster cohesion and will to fight. Actionable recommendations in these respects are valuable. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, states across the region are scaling up their militaries, (re)introducing conscription and involving ever more societal stakeholders in defence planning. This presents a dilemma to countries that count Russian minorities among their citizens.

### **4. New research questions that the project has led to**

One remaining question is, of course, whether the patterns identified from Finland and Estonia recur in the militaries of other divided societies. Can the findings travel outside of the conditions associated with our cases? Of particular interest is their implications for the Russian armed forces, whose lopsided promotion structure – with Slavic officers in charge and ethnic soldiers at the bottom – invites speculation about discrimination and the potential for internal discord. Under which circumstances do minorities start to point to their record of service and sacrifice in order to fight for their rights? It is a question that has arisen also on the other side of the frontline, among Ukraine’s “rainbow” (LGBT) soldiers.



## 5. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

### Scientific articles

- Berglund, Christofer, Kasearu, Kairi and Kivirähk, Juhan. 2022. "Fighting for the (Step)motherland? Predictors of Defence Willingness in Estonia's Post-Soviet Generation." *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 49 (2): 146-169 [OA].
- Berglund, Christofer. Under review. "Brothers in Arms? Estonia's Defence Forces and the Trojan Horse Dilemma."
- Käihkö, Ilmari. Under review. "Legacies of Empire: Explaining the Rise of Esprit de Corps in the Interwar Finnish Armed Forces."
- Berglund, Christofer, Kasearu, Kairi and Lillemäe, Eleri. Under review. "Viribus Unitis? Representation and Recruitment Cleavages in the Estonian Defense Forces."
- Lyall, Jason, Berglund, Christofer, Kasearu, Kairi and Lillemäe, Eleri. In preparation. "Divided We Fall? Determinants of Unit Cohesion in Multiethnic Militaries."
- Berglund, Christofer, Lyall, Jason, Silm, Kristjan and Truusa, Tiia-Triin. In preparation. "Call to Arms? Predicting Will to Fight in Multiethnic Militaries."
- Kasearu, Kairi, Ekman, Joakim and Berglund, Christofer. In preparation. "School for the Nation? Unpacking the Effects of Intergroup Contact During Conscript Service."

### Monographs

- Käihkö, Ilmari. *'Slava Ukraini!' Strategy and the Ukrainian Spirit of Resistance, 2014-2023*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2023 [OA].

### Book chapters

- Käihkö, Ilmari. Forthcoming. "Learning Civil-Military Lessons from Finland for Ukraine." In: *Postwar Security Sector Reform - Striking a Balance between Effectiveness and Democratic Accountability within the Defence Sector*. Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

### Conference presentations (selected)

- Berglund, Christofer, Kasearu, Kairi and Kivirähk, Juhan. 2021. "Fighting for the (Step)motherland? Forecasting Will to Defend in Estonia's Post-Soviet Generation."



Presentation at the Conference of the European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS) Tartu, 19 – 23 July.

- Berglund, Christofer. 2022. “School for the Nation? Will to Fight among and Manpower Policies toward Russian-speakers in the Estonian Defence Forces.” Presentation at the Conference of the International Studies Association (ISA) Nashville, 28 March – 2 April.
- Käihkö, Ilmari. 2022. “Slava Ukraini! Strategy and the Spirit of Ukrainian Resistance 2014-2022.” Presentation at the Conference of the Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki, 26 – 28 October.
- Berglund, Christofer. 2023. “Viribus Unitis? Recruitment and Retention of Russian-heritage Officers in the Estonian Defence Forces.” Presentation at the Conference of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) Philadelphia, November 30 – December 3.
- Berglund, Christofer. 2024. “Brothers in Arms? Estonia’s Defence Forces and the Trojan Horse Dilemma.” Presentation at the Conference of the European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS) Stockholm, 1 – 5 July.

Public outreach (selected)

- Käihkö, Ilmari. 2022. “Culture and Ethnography in Understanding the War in Ukraine.” *Society for Cultural Anthropology Fieldsights*, 28 March.
- Berglund, Christofer. 2023. “Samhällskontraktet centralt för försvarsviljan bland unga i Estland.” *Perspektiv Öst*, 23 March.
- Käihkö, Ilmari. 2023. “Jos Totuus on Sodan Ensimmäinen Uhri – Tutkijan Sananvapaus Tuntuu Olevan Seuraava.” *Yle*, 19 January.
- Käihkö, Ilmari. 2023. “Oikeutettu Sota Ei Salli Hirmutekoja.” *Yle*, 31 May.
- Käihkö, Ilmari. 2023. “Suomi Hävisi Talvisodan.” *Yle*, 27 April.