



LATVIAN STATE SECURITY SERVICE (VDD)



ANNUAL
REPORT

2024

**ANNUAL REPORT
ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF LATVIAN
STATE SECURITY
SERVICE (VDD)
IN 2024**



FEBRUARY 2024

**LATVIAN STATE SECURITY SERVICE (VDD).
ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2024**

ISBN 978-9934-9176-5-3

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FOREWORD

In 2024, the aggressor state Russia remained the biggest threat to Europe's security. Russia continued the warfare in Ukraine, and in the name of its imperialistic global power ambitions further strived to destroy the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and murdered innocent civilians. In addition, Russia continued testing the resilience and unity of the Western countries by using increasingly aggressive methods.

To mitigate the risks posed by Russia to the security of Latvian state and population, last year Latvian State Security Service (VDD) continued implementing a wide range of countermeasures. Insofar as the secrecy requirements of the Service's work allow, this report provides a more detailed insight into VDD's activity.

According to VDD's outlook provided in the previous report, the aggressor state extended not only discrediting disinformation campaigns but also physical malign activities against the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO), European Union (EU) and member countries of these international organisations, including Latvia. The main goal of sabotage acts and other malign activities was to create fear and insecurity in Western societies and decision-makers, as Russia tried to not to allow or at least delay imposing new sanctions against it as well as provision of additional support to Ukraine.

Last year VDD detected and investigated malign activities implemented in Russia's interests also in Latvian territory. VDD detained the first perpetrator of malign activities, who was involved in provocative activities against the Memorial stone for Latvian legionnaires in Džūkste parish, already in the beginning of 2024. Shortly after that, an incident occurred against another symbolic object significant to Latvian nation – arson of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. Last year the Service detected also other provocative and malign activities in Latvian territory, assessing them under the light of probability of engagement of Russia's intelligence and security services. VDD continues investigating several such cases.

Considering the aims of Russia's malign activities in Europe, last year VDD implemented a wide range of

counterintelligence and preventive measures, including alerting the representatives of objects under possible threat about the risks posed by the aggressor state and providing recommendations to improve the security of such objects. In verifying the suspicious activities at such objects, VDD closely cooperated with the State Police and municipal police.

VDD constantly investigated malign activities organised by Russia's intelligence and security services in close cooperation with national partners and foreign partner services, especially partners from Lithuania, Estonia and Poland. Last year this cooperation resulted in discovering several groups of persons in the Baltic States who on behalf of Russia's intelligence and security services conducted malign activities.

Next to malign activities, Russia also continued its traditional intelligence activities against Latvia, mainly using Latvian nationals to obtain intelligence. Those Latvian nationals who continued to travel to Russia or its ally Belarus exposed themselves to extremely high intelligence and recruitment risks. VDD paid special attention to activities in Latvian territory of persons from this risk group. At the same time, within both its public communication and individual preventive talks, the Service warned such persons about the high risks, urging them to cease traveling to hostile countries.

In 2024, VDD continued cooperation with the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIDD) that informed VDD about suspicious activities detected at one of primary targets of Russia's intelligence and security services – military facilities.

Among VDD's priorities for 2024 remained engagement in migration control on Latvia's eastern border to prevent persons posing threats to Latvia's national security from entering the country. Within the year VDD officers in cooperation with border guard officers denied entry into Latvia to more than thousand foreigners who posed threats to national security. Among them were persons having connection with Russia's intelligence and security services and persons having participated in the warfare in Ukraine. Next to enhanced checks at border control points, the Service also paid increased attention to

activities of Russian, Belorussian and other countries' nationals in Latvian territory, especially when reassessing the residence rights granted to these persons.

A part of Latvia's society continued supporting the aggressor state. During 2024, the Service evaluated thousands of pro-Kremlin displays on the internet, as well as several hundreds of such displays in the urban environment, identifying and registering their authors. VDD held preventive talks with several hundred authors of the most aggressive pro-Kremlin displays warning them about the potential liability on case of committing the criminal activity. In several cases, the Service discovered elements of a crime and started investigation.

Evaluating the cases of possible violations of international sanctions continued to be a significant part of VDD's work in 2024. VDD evaluated several hundred reports about possible violations, in several cases also detecting grounds for initiating a criminal case. One of VDD's priorities in this field was to prevent Western technologies and goods of military use reaching Russia.

Terrorism threat level in Latvia remained low last year. Nevertheless, the Service detected several persons who were glorifying terrorism or even had started self-training for terrorist activity. VDD detained two such persons last year. As the migration flow towards the West intensifies, the threats of violent activities by Islamists, right- and left-wing extremists are expected to increase.

VDD's analysis shows that also in 2025 the threats posed by Russia's intelligence and security services to Latvia's national security will remain high, as they will continue aggressive activities against our country. Similar to other European countries, Russia's intelligence and security services may try to organise more diverse malign activities also in Latvia.

VDD highly values the engagement of society in identifying suspicious activity and threats and regularly reporting them to VDD. The participation of every member of society in strengthening national security remains crucial.

Sincerely yours,

Normunds Mežviets

Director General of Latvian State Security Service





01

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

Last year the main threat to Latvia's national security was posed by Russia's intelligence and security services that employed a wide spectrum of activity, significant resources and high aggression level. The main goals for Russia's intelligence and security services were intelligence collection and increasing the influence of the aggressor state in Latvia. Russian services used various methods – including malign activities – in their attempts to foster decision making in line with Russia's interests, damage the trust of society in Latvia's government and institutions, as well as Russia's main opponents NATO and the EU.

As VDD predicted in its previous report, in 2024 next to intelligence activities Russia's intelligence and security services continued to organise malicious activities against those European countries that stood for Ukraine's independence and provided support to maintain the defence capabilities of the war-torn country. Last year, VDD detected malign activities organised by Russia also in Latvia.

The goals of Belarussian intelligence and security services' activity last year remained connected with maintaining the viability of Alexander Lukashenko's regime, with intelligence and security services enhancing the counterintelligence regime within domestic territory and implementing active measures against foreigners entering Belarus, including Latvian nationals. As regards Latvia, Belarussian intelligence and security services were also interested in Belarussian diaspora, including the political opponents of A. Lukashenko who have taken refuge in our country.

Similar to previous years, China's intelligence and security services did not implement aggressive activities against Latvia's national security. Nevertheless, the intelligence and security services of this country tried to establish positions of influence among Latvia's politicians, academia and scientists, as well as continued to demonstrate interest about the possibilities to facilitate China's economic influence by investing into domains of strategic significance in Latvia.

To mitigate the threat posed by foreign intelligence and security services VDD implemented wide and systemic counteractivity.

1.1.

TRENDS OF RUSSIA'S INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES' ACTIVITY

Logos of Russia's intelligence and security services



GRU



FSB



SVR

Three Russia's intelligence and security services last year continued their operations against Latvia: Federal Security Service (FSB), Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia (GRU) and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).

In 2024, the activities of Russia's intelligence and security services directed against Latvia continued to pose the main threat to Latvia's national security, besides their activities became increasingly aggressive and visible. Next to covert intelligence gathering Russia's intelligence and security services organised malign activities in Latvian territory against a number of objects to increase fear and sense of insecurity in Latvian society.



Malign activities organised by Russia's intelligence and security services

Last year, the malign activities organised by Russia's intelligence and security services in Latvia were mainly directed against commemoration sites important to the Latvian nation: Memorial stone to Latvian legionnaires in Džūkste parish and the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. To identify the malign activities organised by

Russia's intelligence and security services, last year VDD cooperated with the State Police. Services also detected other harmful and provocative activities against objects in the territory of Latvia, the potential connection of Russia's intelligence and security services to these activities is being investigated.

Meanwhile the acts of sabotage in other European countries were directed against a number of targets, including critical infrastructure objects, e.g., railway and aviation infrastructure, as well as companies and other objects related to provision of civilian or military aid to Ukraine.

When investigating such cases VDD established that Russia's intelligence and security services recruit persons for the commission of malign activities through the online communication applications, e.g., "Telegram", while the officers of Russia's intelligence and security services themselves do not travel outside Russia nor directly engage in the malign activities. Last year the recruitment targets were either locals or residents of other states who could freely travel within the Schengen Area countries.

The persons recruited by Russia's intelligence and security services for the commission of the malign activities were mainly with poor education or criminal background, willing to conduct destructive tasks for a certain financial benefit, without worrying about the malign activity targets or potential consequences.

VDD's case analysis shows that last year officers of Russia's intelligence and security services were recruiting online mainly the organisers of the malign activities, who were then tasked to attract the executors. The latter were often unaware of the relation of the malign activities to Russia's intelligence and security services or remained unbothered by this fact. Thus Russia's intelligence and security services attempted to create a multi-layer agent network operating in Russia's interests with the majority of involved persons having no direct contact with Russia's intelligence and security services.

VDD considers that such tactics were chosen to complicate proving the connection between the malign activities and Russia's intelligence and security services and thus avoid directly escalating the conflict with NATO. VDD also considers that another aim of Russia's intelligence and security services was to create a false impression about the allegedly existing underground movement in Latvia and other European countries that supports Russia.

The goals of Russia's malign activities in Europe last year overall corresponded to the Soviet-era strategies used by the totalitarian power to weaken the opponents in preparation for a conflict or during one. Also nowadays the agent networks recruited by Russia's intelligence and security services continue to use rather

simple and easily obtainable means to carry out the malign activities, for instance, flammable household substances and improvised explosives.

VDD detected the use of online communication applications for recruitment purposes already back in 2021, however in 2024 the messaging applications became a tool frequently used by Russia's intelligence and security services to recruit agents for such activities like reconnaissance, destruction, damaging or staining of objects. Not only did the online communication applications allow Russia's intelligence and security services to ensure covert recruitment, but they also enabled the coordination of the persons involved and financial flow.

DESECRATION OF A COMMEMORATION SITE TO LATVIAN LEGIONNAIRES

On 29 January 2024, two persons on behalf of Russia's intelligence and security services in Tukums district Džūkste parish desecrated the "Memorial stone to Defenders of Kurzeme Fortification – soldiers of Latvian Legion" by pouring red paint on it.

Similar activities against monuments at the beginning of 2024 took place also in other Baltic States, therefore VDD investigated the incident in Latvia in close cooperation with partner services from the neighbouring countries, including Lithuanian police. In Latvia, VDD closely cooperated with the State Police.

VDD initiated the criminal case about the desecration of the memorial stone in Džūkste parish pursuant to Section 81¹ Paragraph 2, i.e., on suspicion of activity with the aim to assist a Russia's intelligence and security service in activity directed against the security of the state of Latvia. During the investigation VDD established that the desecration of the memorial stone on behalf of Russia's intelligence and security service was committed by two Estonian-Russian dual citizens.

VDD detained one of the perpetrators on the night of 8 February at Pāternieki border control point located at the Latvian-Belarussian border. As a result of close cooperation between the services of the Baltic States the other perpetrator was arrested in Lithuania, where a desecration of a monument had also taken place. In the Lithuanian city of Merkinė, similar to Latvia, a red paint was poured over the monument of the commander of Lithuanian national partisan movement Ādolfs Romanauks-Vanags.

Within the investigation VDD established that both persons used the private car of the perpetrator later detained in Latvia to visit all three Baltic States in the end of January 2024. In addition, VDD obtained information that the perpetrators received concrete instructions about the actions to perform from Russia's

military intelligence service GRU. Communication between the perpetrators took place on the online communication application "Telegram".

In VDD's assessment the desecration of commemoration site in Džūkste parish was intended as provocation to attract the attention of media and through that increase the sense of fear and insecurity in Latvia's society in accordance with Russia's interests.

Such activities against the monuments correspond to Russia's attempts to rewrite the history through spreading the narrative about the existence of Nazism in the Baltic States. Russia has already tried to attribute the participation in Nazi crimes to Latvian legionnaires as well as to the aforementioned commander of Lithuania's national partisans Ā. Romanauks-Vanags.

As a result of investigation on 29 November 2024 VDD asked the Prosecution Office to initiate criminal prosecution against the Estonian-Russian dual citizen detained in Latvia. The investigation against the other perpetrator continues in cooperation with Lithuanian police.



Photo: VDD

PROFILE OF A PERPETRATOR OF MALIGN ACTIVITIES

For the commission of malign activities Russia's intelligence and security services often choose persons with the following characteristics:

- existing criminal record;
- having contacts within criminal circles;
- low socio-economic status;
- lack of moral values;
- no stable job and income;
- excessive use of alcohol, narcotic or psychotropic substances;
- supports Russia and associates with the Kremlin's worldview.



Intelligence activities of Russia's intelligence and security services

Russian intelligence is traditionally interested in intelligence of political, economic and military character. At the same time the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state adjusted to the current agenda of Russia's foreign policy and collected information about chains of support to Ukraine, Kremlin opposition abroad as well as possibilities to influence the decision-making and public opinion in Latvia and other NATO countries.

In VDD's assessment the only existential threat to Latvia's statehood last year was Russia. Not only was the aggressor state interested to keep Latvia within its sphere of influence, but – in case of favourable conditions – also to establish a regime loyal to Russia in Latvia and ensure its complete political re-orientation to Russia.

The threat posed by Russia's intelligence activities remain cumulative. That is, each separate piece of intelligence obtained by Russia's intelligence and security services may not have immediate significance, however assessing it in the context of other intelligence, the main contribution of intelligence services to Russia's decision makers was formed – intelligence analysis which identifies the vulnerabilities of Latvia and ways for Russia to attain its goals against Latvia.

The main interest of Russia's intelligence services in Latvia last year were aligned to global developments.

- Russia recognises the possibility of a military conflict with NATO, therefore last year the necessity of the aggressor state to update its military intelligence increased, including with information about objects of strategic importance in the Latvian territory to destroy or occupy in case of war.

- Russia remained interested in the information concerning the international support to Ukraine and the stance of some NATO and EU member states towards Ukraine.
- Any news with propaganda potential remained of importance to Russia's intelligence and security services, for instance, cases that could be presented as violations of rights of Russians or examples of poor state governance. The intelligence and security services of the aggressor state were also interested to obtain information of compromising nature about Latvian state officials, as well as facts about Ukrainian refugees and Russian political opposition that could be used to publicly discredit these persons.

Next to intelligence gathering, another crucial task for Russia's military intelligence was the creation of support structures for potential acts of sabotage, diversions or other malign activities in the territory of Latvia.

VDD stresses that Russian intelligence officers can approach Latvia's residents not only with the aim to obtain information, but also by asking to complete seemingly legitimate and harmless tasks, for instance, rent premises next to a particular object, create a hidden compartment and store certain objects there or place an object at a concrete urban location. Through accomplishing such tasks support positions are created for Russia's intelligence and security services to use both in times of peace and in potential military conflict to carry out malign activities against the state of Latvia.

Last year the production capabilities of the military industrial complex of the aggressor state continued to suffer the negative impact from the restrictions imposed by the Western countries to deliver to Russia technologies, goods and production equipment which can be used for military purposes. To be able to ensure consistent replenishing of military resources, Russia's intelligence and security services intensively worked to circumvent the restrictions to deliver the necessary technologies and goods. They used shell companies and networks of trusted persons in Western countries to covertly transport the necessary technologies and goods to Russia. In this process both Russia's civilian and military intelligence as well as FSB, formally in charge only of internal security, played crucial roles.

Last year VDD established that some people of young age were involved in illegal provision of technologies required by Russia, about which VDD also initiated a criminal case. VDD has outlined in its previous reports the trend that Russia's intelligence and security services engage people of young age to accomplish their tasks. These cases clearly show that young people who are oriented towards easy money and for that are also willing to violate the law are among the recruitment targets of Russia's intelligence and security services.

DISCOVERED CASES OF ESPIONAGE

To increase the awareness about the intelligence risks posed by Russia VDD provides insight into two cases of espionage discovered by the Service. Court of first instance has found both persons guilty of espionage and sentenced them to prison terms of several years.

Transferring intelligence to Russia through “Telegram” application —

About the perpetrator:



Sergejs S.

- citizen of the Republic of Latvia
- worked as a taxi driver
- pro-Kremlin inclined
- active user of the “Telegram” channel “Baltic anti-fascists”
- transferred intelligence to the pro-Kremlin criminal organisation “Baltic anti-fascists”

Detention

VDD in cooperation with MIDD detected the person’s illegal activities for the first time in 2023. VDD detained the person on 15 August 2023.

About the crime

Open calls to collect information that could be of use to Russia’s state institutions including its intelligence and security services were regularly published on the “Telegram” channel maintained by the pro-Kremlin criminal organisation “Baltic anti-fascists”. Members of the criminal organisation regularly called to record developments in Latvia’s defence system, activities of NATO contingent in the territory of Latvia or activities in support of Ukraine.

Led by ideological motivation Sergejs S. responded to these calls and collected information about the militaries of Latvia and NATO allied forces,

developments at various objects of the defence system, Riga International Airport and Freeport of Riga, including about the incoming military cargo ships and warships.

The person sent the collected information to administrators of the “Telegram” channel “Baltic anti-fascists”, who had made several open statements that among the information recipients is also the Russian FSB.

Result of investigation

On 31 October 2024, the court of first instance sentenced the person to seven years of imprisonment with probationary period of two years. The court verdict has not yet entered into force.

It should be noted that on 2 May 2024 VDD initiated another criminal case against this Latvian citizen on suspicion of espionage. VDD established that during the time when the court had decided to discontinue his detention, Sergejs S. had unlawfully collected and transferred to Russia non-disclosable information about other persons who are suspected of espionage in Latvia and are placed in custody.

VDD detained Sergejs S. again on 13 May 2024 together with another person who was engaged in the criminal activity. On 21 October 2024, VDD asked the Prosecution Office to initiate the criminal prosecution of both persons.

Lessons learned

- Anti-state inclined person does not need to have access to classified information or restricted access objects to obtain intelligence of significance to Russia. Observations made in person about the developments in the vicinity of military or critical infrastructure objects can provide significant support to the adversary in constructing and updating its military plans, thus providing advantage to the adversary in case of a military conflict and negatively affecting Latvia’s defence capabilities.

- The significance of the messaging application “Telegram” in supporting Russia’s interests continues to increase: currently this platform provides unlimited possibilities not only to disseminate pro-Kremlin narratives, but also to recruit participants for operations inspired by Russia’s intelligence and security services. VDD reiterates that already in its previous reports the Service has informed about the recruitment of persons for intelligence and provocations by using the “Telegram” application.
- The members of discussion groups similar to “Baltic anti-fascists” may encourage other pro-Kremlin inclined persons to deliver intelligence information, using their ideological motivation and not revealing that the end-recipients of such information are Russia’s intelligence and security services.

Espionage on behalf of Russia’s military intelligence service

About the perpetrator:



Viktors V.

- citizen of the Russian Federation
- holder of Latvia’s permanent residence permit
- served in the USSR Baltic Fleet Air Force
- dislocated in the territory of Latvia during the Soviet occupation
- conducted espionage on behalf of GRU

Detention

VDD detained the person on 20 December 2023.

About the crime

The Russian citizen used his rights to permanently reside in Latvia to collect intelligence on behalf of Russia’s intelligence and security service about Riga International Airport, Skulte aerodrome, National Guard 17th Combat support battalion and developments within Mārupe municipality.

His main task was reconnaissance – visual in-person inspection of a certain area, objects therein and adversary’s defence positions. During the visual inspection of the area he took photographs and memorised the information required by the Russian military intelligence service.

As is characteristic to the majority of Russian spies, the person regularly travelled to Russia to pass the information and receive new tasks from his curator.

Result of investigation

On 14 January 2025, the court of first instance sentenced the Russian citizen to eight years of imprisonment with probationary period of two years. The person has appealed the conviction.

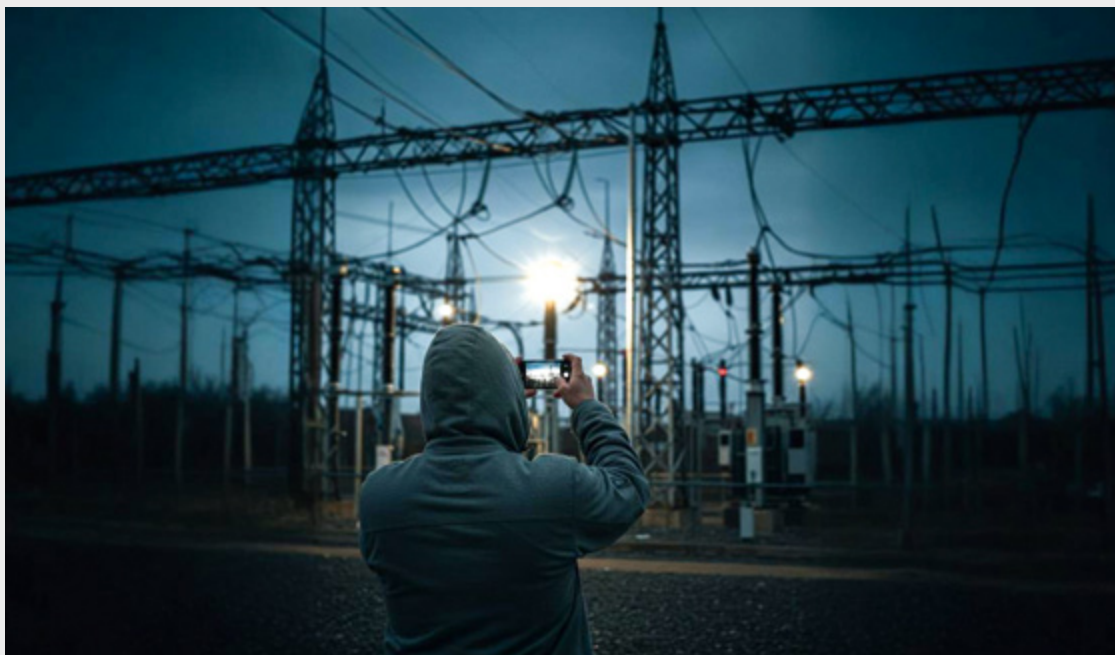
Lessons learned

- Russia’s intelligence and security services continue to widely use retired Soviet militaries as an intelligence resource. A sufficient number of these persons are still of the age when they are capable to collect intelligence, provide intelligence support or profile other Latvia’s residents for potential recruitment by obtaining and summarising the information characterising these persons.
- Particularly useful and open for cooperation with Russia’s intelligence and security services are those retired militaries who served in special units: special tasks forces, airborne, marines, battlefield reconnaissance and communications units.
- The collected information confirms the consistent interest of Russian military intelligence about the potential targets in case of war: units of Latvia’s National Armed Forces and critical infrastructure.
- Airports and aerodromes are among the most significant targets for Russian military intelligence, because in case of a conflict occupying or destroying them would significantly hinder the deployment of NATO allied forces to Latvia.

VDD recalls that no person should be considered guilty until their guilt has been proved in accordance to the law.

SECURITY OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Last year the threat posed by Russia's intelligence and security services to the security of Latvia's critical infrastructure remained high. Such objects were exposed to risks of both espionage and other malign activities. Therefore VDD urged both the security personnel of these objects and other members of society to immediately report any suspicious activity detected in the vicinity of critical infrastructure objects.



Illustrative image, Freepik

VDD stresses to all members of society that in such cases it is crucial to react as fast as possible, duly register the suspicious incident – preferably also by photo or video – and immediately report the incident to the State Police by calling 110. State Police officers will arrive on site if need be and also inform VDD about the suspicious activity.

To increase the capabilities of critical infrastructure security personnel to identify suspicious activities, last year VDD prepared and provided them with informative materials – booklets and posters with examples of suspicious activity and correct action algorithm in case of detecting such cases. The informative booklet with recommendations to the security personnel of the objects that was prepared by VDD is available also on the Service website www.vdd.gov.lv (under “Informative materials”).

Last year the officials in charge of security at critical infrastructure objects more often reported suspicious incidents to VDD, which the Service assesses as a positive indicator. The biggest increase in the

reporting frequency was from the representatives of transit and logistics objects. VDD considers that this trend demonstrates a gradual increase in the awareness among the security personnel about the existing threat. VDD duly assessed each reported case to establish the perpetrators of the suspicious activities and their aims.

In 2024, VDD continued to conduct unannounced security inspections at critical infrastructure objects to evaluate the efficiency of their counterintelligence regime and vigilance of the security personnel. VDD will continue such inspections also in 2025.

In addition, VDD performed regular in-depth vetting of persons employed at critical infrastructure objects to identify persons who pose intelligence risks. Personnel disloyal to the state in the critical infrastructure objects can bring significant harm to the security of these objects as they can access non-disclosable information. Based on the vetting results, VDD recognised several persons unsuitable to work in critical infrastructure objects.

INFORMATION

The critical infrastructure of Latvia – objects whose functioning is essential to the existence of a country and ensuring the basic needs of society. Such objects are, for instance, electricity, water and natural gas supply infrastructure, hospitals, bridges, airports, ports and railway objects.

The list of critical infrastructure objects is not publicly available to protect a part of objects from enhanced interest and decrease the intelligence risks

EXAMPLES OF SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY:

 <p>Filming, photographing or observing the object;</p>	 <p>unrelated persons attempting to enter the object;</p>
 <p>piloting a drone or UAV above the object;</p>	 <p>attempts to approach the object personnel, inquiring about its security regime, personnel;</p>
 <p>prolonged presence at the object or repeated movement along it without any apparent reason;</p>	 <p>making marks, attaching or burying things in the vicinity of the object;</p>
 <p>taking notes or drawing in the vicinity of the object;</p>	 <p>unannounced reparation works in the vicinity of the object;</p>
 <p>accessing the object during night time or late hours;</p>	 <p>unannounced visit of utilities provider at the object;</p>
 <p>provocative activity that could be aimed at testing the object security regime;</p>	 <p>usage of optical or electronic measuring devices;</p>
 <p>drawing or writing on the object, drawing graffiti in the vicinity of the object;</p>	 <p>usage of untypical communication devices, e.g. handheld transceiver;</p>
 <p>making a suspicious video call at the object;</p>	 <p>surveillance cameras installed in unusual places, e.g., in a forest near railway infrastructure or another crucial object;</p>
 <p>stopping a vehicle at the object, especially with operating dash camera;</p>	 <p>bag or another suspicious article placed in the vicinity of the object.</p>

1.2.

RECRUITMENT TARGETS OF RUSSIA'S INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

Last year persons with access to non-disclosable information remained the priority recruitment target for Russia's intelligence and security services. VDD established that part of Latvia's state and local government officials still underestimate the high risks posed by contacts with foreigners, especially during a stay in Russia or its allied countries.

Latvian nationals visiting Russia offered themselves to Russia's intelligence and security services as convenient recruitment targets. Despite the repeated warnings and calls of VDD and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to avoid all travel to Russia, the competent services registered nearly two thousand monthly travel cases of Latvia's residents to Russia. These Latvian nationals exposed themselves to high intelligence and recruitment risks. In comparison to 2023 when competent institutions registered the average of one thousand monthly travels to Russia by Latvian residents, in 2024 the number of these cases almost doubled.

The increase in the number of travels to Russia can largely be explained by Russia's protracted war in Ukraine. Namely, Latvian nationals whose relatives live in the aggressor state, who own a property there or need to arrange some formalities, could not or did not wish to postpone the travel to Russia anymore. Besides, one part of society has become used to the war in Ukraine and is less vigilant regarding the risks posed by Russia. VDD stresses that Russia's intelligence and security services aggressively use the opportunity to recruit foreigners in Russian territory where they enjoy the freedom to act and do not worry about any potential interventions by counterintelligence services of the Western countries.

Groups of society of especial recruitment interest to Russia's intelligence and security services:

- officers of law enforcement institutions, officials of courts and prosecution offices;
- employees of state and local government institutions;
- persons whose professional duties provide access to information about the operations, objects, personnel, logistics or action plans of NAF and NATO allied forces;
- persons having served in the USSR armed forces;
- Latvian residents, whose interests or connections (relatives, friends, property etc.) in Russia allows to exert pressure on them;

- members of public engaged in provision of support to Ukraine.

Representatives of the above-mentioned groups, especially persons related to the public administration, should not be traveling to the aggressor state. VDD reiterates that Latvian institutions have limited possibilities to provide help to Latvian nationals who are in difficulties in Russia.

Last year the Russian FSB remained involved in the migration control on border control points both on Latvian-Russian border and elsewhere in the Russian territory, for instance in Russia's largest airports. Latvia's residents and their private devices were subjects to in-depth verifications and interviews. According to information obtained by VDD the aim of such activities was to identify persons with recruitment potential. FSB officers asked Latvian nationals questions of profiling nature to establish their availability to access potentially useful information as well as readiness to collaborate for financial or ideological reasons.

In turn, for carrying out malign activities, last year Russia's intelligence and security services were most often directly or indirectly recruiting Latvian residents interested in easy profit: unemployed youth, students, persons with criminal background, as well as the disadvantaged with pro-Kremlin inclinations. These persons usually did not receive any specific training as the tasks they had to accomplish were not complicated.

ATTENTION!

Under current circumstances traveling to Russia and Belarus is dangerous and irresponsible. The intelligence and security services of these countries can use aggressive and illegal methods to obtain valuable information and force someone into "collaboration".



Illustrative image, Freepik

1.3.

TRENDS IN ACTIVITY OF BELORUSSIA'S INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

Logos of Belorussia's intelligence and security services



KGB



BGRU

Belorussian intelligence and security services – the State Security Committee (KGB) and Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of Belarus Armed Forces (BGRU) – last year mainly worked against Latvia from their territory.

The regular travels of Latvia's residents to this risk country despite the regular warnings from VDD and Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided a wide circle of persons for intelligence collection and recruitment to the Belorussian intelligence and security services. Last year Latvia's competent services registered the average of almost five thousand monthly cases of Latvia's residents traveling to Belarus. The travels were also facilitated by the visa-free regime introduced by Belarus.

In 2024, Belorussian intelligence and security services continued to aggressively use the possibility to recruit foreigners within the territory of Belarus. Also several Latvian nationals, who had entered the territory of this country hostile to Latvia, were detained in Belarus last year. Belarus power structures incriminated the detainees with various crimes and used the opportunity to comprehensively question the persons about the developments in Latvia.

Some of detained persons had also engaged in Belarus propaganda measures in exchange for dropping the charges, namely they provided interviews that glorify Belarus and belittle Latvia to TV channels under the control of A. Lukashenko. The aim of these staged "interviews" was to try and redirect the attention from the problems in Belarus by presenting the situation in Latvia and other NATO countries as significantly worse.

Similar to Russia's intelligence and security services, also Belorussian intelligence and security services last year were interested in obtaining intelligence about the critical and military infrastructure, as well as other non-disclosable information of strategic significance. VDD

assesses that the attempts of Belorussian political regime to increase the level of mobilisation and combat readiness of its armed forces pose threat also to Latvia, especially in the context of regional security and NATO Eastern Flank.

The main task for Belorussian KGB, similar to previous years, remained supplying A. Lukashenko's regime with information of political and economic nature as well as oppressing opposition movements in the Belorussian society. For this reason also information about the Belorussian diaspora in Latvia remained crucial for Belarus' intelligence and security services, including the political opponents of A. Lukashenko who have taken refuge in our country and persons close to them.

The KGB also implemented active measures to create disinformation that could be used to discredit Latvia and maintain Belorussian propaganda narratives within domestic audience. For instance, Belarus continued to direct artificially created illegal migration flow against Latvia, in parallel disseminating in the public environment disinformation about the alleged violence and other breaches of human rights by officials of Latvia's state institutions against the "refugees".

BGRU according to its competence continued to supply military intelligence to A. Lukashenko's regime, including about the critical and military infrastructure of foreign countries. The cooperation between Belorussian and Russian intelligence and security services continued also in 2024, as the Belorussian party collected information to satisfy Russia's intelligence needs.

VDD ALERTS!

Officers of Russia's intelligence and security services are increasingly recruiting the executors of various tasks in the online environment both by approaching the persons privately and publishing vaguely described job offers. All offers to receive easy profit for "simple jobs" should be assessed critically. VDD reiterates that criminal liability is foreseen for assistance to a foreign state in activity directed against the security of Latvia.



Illustrative image, Pexels

1.4.

TRENDS IN ACTIVITY OF CHINA'S INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES

Logos of China's intelligence and security services



Intelligence Bureau of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (JSD-IB)



Chinese Ministry of State Security (MSS), which conducts intelligence and recruitment of agents abroad



Chinese Ministry of Public Security (MPS), which provides support to MSS intelligence against foreigners on Chinese territory

Similar to previous years, also in 2024 our country was not a separate priority intelligence target for China's intelligence and security services. China continued to consider Latvia as a part of NATO and the EU which it sees as the main rivals in the competition for global influence. Chinese intelligence and security services focused on collecting intelligence about the agendas of these international organisations and strategic political course regarding China, including the role of Latvia in making decisions related to China.

According to information at VDD's disposal, currently China can attain its goals in Latvia without the aggressive involvement of its intelligence and security services. China can ensure a significant part of its intelligence interests through activities of various bodies established in Latvia.

Last year VDD continued detecting targeted attempts of China's representatives to create and strengthen positions of influence in the political, academic and research circles of Latvia. Creation of positions of influence is China's long-term goal to attain the making of political decisions favourable to it, foster the creation of a positive international image, influence the public opinion in China's interests as well as promote the international political initiatives and values of this country.

One of priorities for China's intelligence and security services last year was the creation of positions of influence in the scientific research field focusing on innovations and knowledge building. Taking into account that China's economic development model is innovation-based, one of the country's strategic goals is to reach the supremacy within the modern technology fields, such as AI tools, quantum technology, robotics and biotechnology fields.

Intelligence from territory remained the main modus operandi for Chinese intelligence and security services to obtain the necessary intelligence about the developments in Latvia. According to information analysis by VDD, officers of China's intelligence and security services avoid meeting their sources and other persons engaged in collaboration in the territories of Western countries as much as possible. Last year was no exception as officers of China's intelligence and security services communicated with experts of various domains mainly online, as well as organised in-person meetings in China and third countries friendly to China.



Illustrative image, Freepik

1.5.

CYBER INTELLIGENCE

Last year the amount of cyber attacks against Latvia increased, nevertheless the overall situation in Latvia's cyber space remained stable as the cyber attackers failed to significantly harm state and local governments' information systems.

Considering the increasing threat from foreign intelligence and security services and politically motivated hacktivist¹ groups, cybersecurity has become

¹ From the English words "hack" and "activist"; persons who, driven by political or ideological motives, carry out cyberattacks against the information systems of their opponents.

an integral part of Latvia's national security. The dynamic of the situation last year was defined by the geopolitical tension created by Russia's war in Ukraine and Latvia's support to Ukraine.

Most of the attacks against Latvia's cyber infrastructure were unsuccessful or failed to significantly impact the availability of services in the country. VDD considers that the state institutions have significantly improved their cyber defence capabilities which allows them to efficiently fend off most of the cyber attacks.

Similar to previous years, the biggest threat to Latvia last year was posed by hacker groups of Russia's intelligence services. In addition, VDD also detected the interest about Latvia by hacker groups of China's intelligence services which was however significantly smaller.

Among the most significant threats last year remained the so-called supply chain attacks which are carried out by compromising some particular stages of a delivery chain, for instance, an information technology (IT) company that provides to state institutions or large companies such daily IT services like software updates and computer system maintenance. By compromising the systems of such IT company with malware or spyware all end users of the company's services can become potential attack targets.

It is complicated for state and local government institutions to protect themselves from supply chain attacks as it is not always possible to check if the IT service providers and other cooperation partners are observing all necessary cybersecurity practices.

VDD's analysis shows that last year the intensity in activity of Russia's pro-Kremlin hacktivist groups increased, which was demonstrated through regular attacks against Latvia's institutions, local governments and companies of strategic significance. Such attacks were mainly politically motivated and reacted to Latvia supporting Ukraine or taking other steps contrary to Russia's interests. Mostly hacktivists carried out the distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) campaigns of low efficiency, which resulted in short-term access issues to state institutions' websites or other information systems, without permanent consequences.

In some cases the attackers used phishing, attempting to illegally obtain and publish data from state institutions. The attacks of hacktivists supporting Russia were often followed by largely exaggerated announcements on social networking sites about the alleged "success". These statements were often misleading and their main goal was to create the largest possible reaction and recognition from the pro-Kremlin inclined audience.

VDD considers that a large part of the cyber attacks were successful precisely due to the errors made by IT administrators or users. The cyber attackers used computer networks with poor or loose configuration and weak cyber hygiene.

VDD stresses that high risks of cyber espionage continued to stem from excessive access rights assigned to poorly protected user accounts to, e.g., data bases of national significance. The Service sees that the vulnerabilities detected in a part of state institutions indicate an insufficient training of personnel about cyber hygiene issues.

VDD considers that the rapid development of AI tools could foster the increase in phishing campaigns as well as facilitate social engineering campaigns, including from hostile intelligence and security services, which will require an even more increased vigilance and cautiousness from state institutions' officials and other Latvia's residents.

To successfully counteract to cyber attacks carried out by foreign intelligence and security services and politically motivated hacktivist groups, VDD sees the necessity to continue strengthening the national cyber defence capabilities, including through the introduction of automated monitoring and response systems within public and private sector infrastructure. The participation of the society and each individual in strengthening the cyber security is especially important as one of current lessons learned is that human negligence errors remain among the main vulnerabilities used for accomplishing cyber attacks.



Illustrative image, Freepik

COUNTERMEASURES TO ACTIVITIES OF HOSTILE FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES



Migration control

In order to prevent the entry or further stay in Latvia of persons posing intelligence risks, in 2024 VDD in cooperation with other services continued enhanced migration control measures both at border control points and within the country. Persons posing intelligence risks or other threats to Latvia's national security were banned from staying in our country.

VDD in cooperation with the border guards identified the most part of foreigners posing intelligence or other risks already upon them attempting to enter Latvia through the border control points. The risks posed by foreigners were identified through in-depth questioning and checking the information about these persons against various data bases. Based on risks to Latvia's national security identified by VDD, last year 1119 foreigners were denied entry into Latvia at border control points.

Based on VDD's recommendation, Minister of the Interior included another 19 foreigners in the so-called blacklist² in relation to detected risks to the national security (see more in the part "Migration Control").



Criminal enforcement measures

In 2024, VDD initiated five criminal cases on suspicion of espionage in Russia's interests, of these one case was initiated in close cooperation with MIDD. The Service also started to investigate five cases of providing assistance to Russia in activity directed against the security of Latvia, including performing malign activities on behalf of an intelligence and security service of the aggressor state.

VDD's investigations have so far resulted in obtaining evidence corroborating the guilt of persons in two criminal cases initiated for espionage, as well as in one criminal case for providing assistance to Russia in activity directed against Latvia. The case materials have

been referred to Prosecution Office to initiate criminal prosecution. The Service continues investigating the other cases.



Protection of critical infrastructure objects

Last year VDD continued to regularly brief the personnel of critical infrastructure objects about the intelligence risks, signs of suspicious activity and the correct action upon detecting such activity. The largest focus was on enhancing the awareness and vigilance of the objects' security personnel.

In addition, the Service continued vetting the persons employed in critical infrastructure objects to prevent the presence of persons that are disloyal and pose intelligence risks at these objects. Overall in 2024 VDD vetted 9170 employees of critical infrastructure objects and persons who needed to access critical infrastructure to provide various services. As a result of vetting, VDD provided negative opinion about nine persons, recognising them unfit to be employed at such objects³.



Vetting employees of aviation industry

Last year VDD also continued vetting⁴ the employees in the aviation industry with the aim to identify individuals posing intelligence risks. Throughout the year the Service vetted 4193 employees of the aviation industry.

As a result of vetting, VDD detected 13 persons who could pose threat to the security of the aviation field. Most of them were pro-Kremlin inclined and disloyal to Latvia, also openly supporting Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Whereas another part were supporting other ideologies hostile to Latvia. The Service provided negative opinion to the employers of these persons about their suitability to work in the aviation industry, suggesting to remove them from their functions due to security reasons.

² Full name of the list as stipulated in the Immigration Law – the list of those foreigners for whom entry in the Republic of Latvia is prohibited.

³ Vetting criteria are established by Article 16 of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.508 of 6 July 2021 "Procedures for Surveying Critical Infrastructure, Including European Critical Infrastructure, and for Planning and Implementation of Security Measures and Continuity of Operation".

⁴ Vetting was performed in accordance with the 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 Member and an Airport Identification Card".

Information measures

VDD continued informing the public about the threat posed by Russia's intelligence and security services by publishing information about activities detected by the Service directed against the security of Latvia and its population. The Service regularly alerted the public about the extremely high recruitment and intelligence risks stemming from travels to Russia or Belarus, and urged Latvian nationals to avoid all travel to these countries.

VDD officers also held briefings to state and local government officials and staff about the threats posed by foreign intelligence and security services. Last year VDD held the total of 40 briefings in state institutions, 20 public undertakings and 16 local governments, providing the total of 91 briefing. Information was provided to more than 7400 people, which is significantly more than in 2023, when around 2800 persons were briefed about the threat posed by foreign intelligence and security services. Last year VDD paid special focus on briefing the officials of local governments in the border areas of Russia and Belarus.

SEEK HELP!

In case of suspicions about a possible contact with an officer of foreign intelligence and security service we ask you to immediately inform VDD by calling the 24/7 phone **+371 6720 8964**, by e-mail **info@vdd.gov.lv** or upon previous appointment visit the Service at 207 Brīvības gatve, Rīga.

OUTLOOK

- In 2025, Russia's intelligence and security services will continue to act against Latvia at the same level of aggression. Considering Russia's strategic interests, the intelligence and security services of the aggressor state will extend both intelligence activities and various malign activities against Latvia.
- The risks of sabotage inspired by Russia's intelligence and security risks will play significant role in the spectrum of challenges to Latvia's security. As a part of hybrid warfare, sabotage can be used to destabilise the internal security of the country, damage infrastructure and create sense of insecurity in society. The increase in these risks is connected with the changes in the Kremlin's view as it interprets the invasion in Ukraine not as a local war but already as a geopolitical conflict with NATO.
- Traditional intelligence activities – recruiting Latvian nationals for prolonged and secret collection of information – will remain the basis for operation of Russia's intelligence and security services. They will maintain their interest in information about the military and civil protection field, but the intelligence and security services will also use all possibilities to obtain information about Latvia's energy and transit policies, events with propaganda potential and Latvia's positions on international relations matters regarding the Kremlin. Persons with the potential to influence the decision-making according to Russia's interests will also be recruitment targets.
- Belorussian intelligence and security services will continue close cooperation with their Russian homologues. This cooperation could manifest at information and physical levels, for instance, through organising incidents on the border or fostering the illegal migration.
- VDD does not predict aggressive intelligence activities against Latvia by China's intelligence and security services in 2025. Nevertheless, in the light of China's global geopolitical and economic ambitions, the representatives of this country will continue to work on creating informal positions of influence in political and economic fields. Collection of intelligence about the EU and NATO will remain among the goals of such connections.
- The level of hostile activities against the information systems of Latvian state and private sector will remain high as the cyber attackers will attempt to obtain valuable information, paralysing the accessibility of online resources significant to the society and trying to damage the trust of population in state institutions. Cyber attacks can also be carried out to spread Russian propaganda and disinformation, as well as support various hybrid activities against the state of Latvia.

MIGRATION CONTROL

Last year the intensive engagement of VDD officers in migration control continued in order to prevent persons posing threat to Latvia’s national security from entering our country. Service officers performed in-depth vetting and questioning of persons at the border control points, as well as implemented measures to identify risk persons among foreigners residing in Latvia. The foreigner vetting was comprehensive to identify all potential threats to Latvia’s national security, from counterintelligence to terrorism threats.



PROFILE OF FOREIGNER TYPICALLY REFUSED ENTRY TO LATVIA AT BORDER CONTROL POINT

Last year there were several changes within the typical profile of foreigners that were refused entry into Latvia by VDD officers at border control points.

Most significant trait – many Russian citizens had additionally acquired another citizenship. Russian citizens tried to use the other country’s passport to enter Latvia, often attempting to hide their Russian citizenship.

Gender: male;

Age: 30–55;

Citizenship: Russian, Russian-Ukrainian dual citizenship, Russian-Moldovan dual citizenship, Ukrainian, Belorussian or Moldovan citizenship.

Characterisation:

- Maintains contacts with persons in Russia’s or Belarus’ intelligence and security services, law enforcement institutions or armed forces, thus creating intelligence risks.
- Served in the armed forces of Russia or Belarus, especially in structures connected to intelligence activity or special tasks, such as special tasks forces, airborne, communications etc.
- Openly supports Russia’s war in Ukraine or, more often, refuses to provide opinion about it and take either side. In some cases – claims not to be interested in politics and events abroad, therefore has no opinion about who is to blame for the war in Ukraine.
- Has been involved in Russia’s non-military influence measures, such as propaganda and disinformation campaigns directed against NATO countries, including Latvia.
- During interview, foreigner provides false or distorted information, or short, generic and evasive answers.

VDD’s measures to prevent migration-related risks

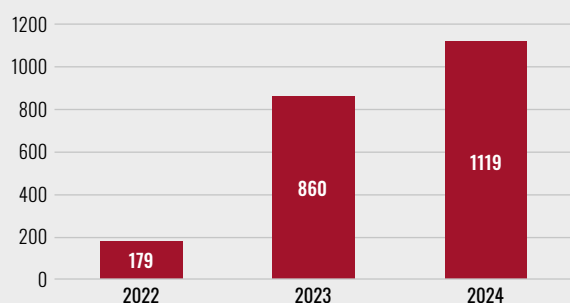


Enhanced migration control at border control points

Last year, VDD in cooperation with State Border Guard continued to exercise enhanced control of foreigners entering Latvia. Within vetting at border control points, services’ officers conducted checks and in-depth interviews of almost 4500 foreigners seeking to enter Latvia from Russia or Belarus. As a result, at border control points throughout 2024 VDD detected 1119 foreigners posing risks to Latvia’s national security and in cooperation with the State Border Guard denied these persons entry into Latvian territory.

Last year, the number of persons who were refused entry into Latvia by VDD was by 30% higher than in 2023, when 860 persons were refused entry into Latvia. Entering Latvia was refused to 240 Russian citizens, 137 Belorussian citizens, 119 Ukrainian citizens, 102 Moldovan citizens, 242 Russian-Moldovan dual citizens and 168 Russian-Ukrainian dual citizens. Entry to Latvia was also denied to nationals of other countries, mainly in connection with their activity in the interests of aggressor state Russia.

Foreigners refused entry into Latvia at border control points due to risks established by VDD





Blacklisting of foreigners

Last year, based on VDD's recommendation, the Minister of the Interior included 19 foreigners in the so-called blacklist or the list of those foreigners for whom entry in the Republic of Latvia is prohibited.

Of them, most part – 15 foreigners – were blacklisted based on intelligence risks established by VDD, whereas four persons were denied entry into Latvia in relation to threat to Latvia's constitutional order identified by the Service. Nine blacklisted persons were Russian nationals, six – Belorussian nationals, two Ukrainian nationals, one Georgian national and one Finnish national.



Vetting visa and residence permit applicants

Last year VDD performed the vetting of 6704 visa applicants and 15412 residence permit applicants.

The Service provided negative opinion about 233 visa applicants (168 Belorussian nationals, 38 Russian nationals, 19 foreigners from countries with enhanced presence of terrorist groups, one Ukrainian national and seven nationals of other countries).

The most common grounds for negative Service opinion were risks of intelligence or terrorism, replies provided by the person during the interview that contradict the national security interests (for instance, expressing support to Russian aggression against Ukraine), as well as other risk information obtained by the Service.

As regards residence permits, last year VDD recommended the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to refuse their issuance in 156 cases regarding 66 Russian nationals, 27 Pakistani nationals, 7 Belorussian nationals, 6 Cameroon nationals, 5 Chinese nationals and 45 nationals of other countries. The most common grounds for the Service's negative recommendation were risks established during vetting and applicants not providing the required information.

Additionally VDD performed the vetting of 14650 foreigners who had received invitations or summons to travel to Latvia by receiving visa or residence permit (guest workers for companies, family members of residence permit holders etc.).



Illustrative image, Freepik



Vetting the asylum seekers

Last year in accordance with its competence, VDD continued vetting asylum seekers from risk countries. The most often stated grounds for seeking asylum in Latvia by foreigners were persecution in their permanent residence country for religious or political reasons, threats to life and wellbeing posed by terrorist groups as well as threats posed by organised crime.

Last year VDD initiated the vetting of 896 asylum seekers, of them 468 asylum seekers from countries with heightened presence of terrorist groups, 34 Russian nationals, 16 Belorussian nationals, 378 – from countries with other risks, such as high organised crime level, large Russia's influence, internal or international armed conflicts. No derogatory information was established after vetting 854 persons, whereas regarding one Belorussian national VDD provided the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs a negative opinion in relation to the identified intelligence risks. The Service continues vetting 41 other cases.



02

PROTECTION OF OFFICIAL SECRETS

Last year VDD continued to control the observance of official secrets protection requirements in the largest part of state and local government institutions by vetting the trustworthiness of officials and compliance of infrastructure. The amendments to requirements for official secrets protection and the new requirement for leading local governments' officials to receive the personal security clearance introduced the most significant changes in the activity of the Service in this field.

The official secrets protection system of Latvia was strengthened last year when the new official secrets protection requirements set by the Cabinet of Ministers entered into force in January⁵. The requirements have been significantly enhanced to adapt to the current technological possibilities as well as geopolitical situation and risks. Most significant security enhancements were related to the physical security requirements for buildings or premises where work with information containing official secrets takes place or is being stored.

In June 2024, the amendments to the Local Government Law entered into force, henceforth imposing the obligation to receive the personal security clearance (hereinafter – PSC) also upon the local government executive directors and their deputies, but after the local government elections of 2025 – also to the chairpersons of local governments and their deputies.

These changes were introduced following the initiative of the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs, so that under the challenging geopolitical conditions the leading local government officials could also fully engage in taking decisions and implementing processes of national significance, allowing these persons to access information containing official secrets. The entry into force of these amendments was one of the reasons why the number of PSC candidates to be vetted by VDD increased in 2024.

⁵ Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.822 of 19 December 2023 “Regulations for protection of official secrets, classified information of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, European Union and foreign institutions”.



2.1.

INFORMING ABOUT THE ENHANCED REQUIREMENTS

To explain the changes in the requirements for the protection of official secrets and foster their implementation, last year VDD held five seminars to different audiences, briefing more than 600 persons in total about the current state of requirements.

One of these seminars was organised specifically for officials of local governments, as in 2024 almost all local governments for the first time faced the necessity to ensure adequate conditions to protect and work with classified information. VDD organised the seminar together with Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, and representatives from all 43 Latvia's local governments took part in it.

VDD officers held three seminars for state administration institutions, state agencies and public undertakings. Officials from almost 100 public administration institutions and their regional affiliations participated in these seminars.

VDD organised one seminar for companies holding facility security clearances (hereinafter – FSC) that are involved in executing such public procurements which require to work with information containing official secrets. Representatives of 10 such companies participated in the event.

Throughout the year VDD officers continuously provided individual consultative support to representatives of state institutions regarding the introducing of the enhanced requirements for the protection of official secrets.

2.2.

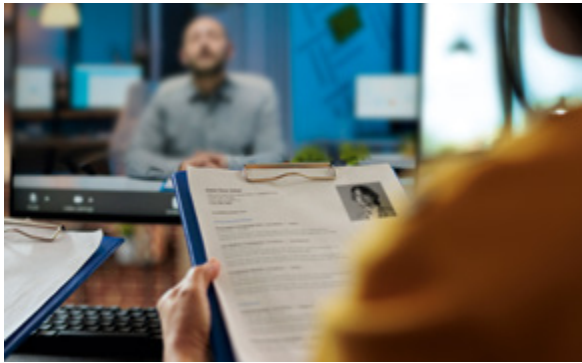
VETTING THE PERSONAL SECURITY CLEARANCE APPLICANTS AND HOLDERS

In 2024, VDD performed the vetting of approximately 2700 persons, in each case conducting an in-depth evaluation of the person's compliance with the requirements for working with information containing official secrets.

The Service vetted both first-time and repeated PSC applicants. In addition, VDD conducted extraordinary vetting of PSC holders in cases when new risk-related information was obtained about them. In several cases following the request of state institutions the Service also assessed information about candidates for high-level posts, providing prima facie opinion about the possibility to issue the PSC to the respective persons.

In 179 cases, the comprehensive vetting of the PSC candidates required more time than the standard 3 months, so the Service exercised the right provided by the Law on Official Secret to prolong the vetting to six months. Similar to other years, the prolonging of the vetting was mainly related to a wide range of information that needed evaluation, difficulty to obtain information about certain stages of candidates' lives as well as risk factors established during the vetting.

More often than in previous years, the necessity to study cryptocurrency and digital wallet transactions posed additional challenges to the Service during the vetting of PSC candidates. VDD also focused on suspicious money transfers and loans.



Illustrative image, Freepik

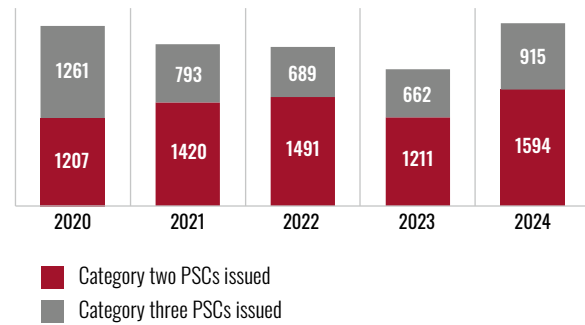
As a result of vetting, last year VDD issued the total of 2509 PSCs. Of those, 1594 were category two PSCs which allow to access confidential and secret information. 915 were category three PSCs which only allow to access confidential information.

It should be noted that in 98 cases VDD issued the PSCs for a reduced term, i.e., for one, two or three years instead of the maximum of five years. The Service made such decisions in cases when the vetting revealed facts which raise suspicion about potential threat to the security of the information to be protected, however within the meaning of the law do not constitute sufficient grounds to refuse the PSC issuance. In such cases VDD continued to pay increased attention to the activities of these persons also after issuing the PSC.

In addition, similar to previous years, VDD supported the Constitution protection Bureau (SAB) in vetting the candidates for category one PSC, which authorises accessing the highest grade of protected information – the top secret information. While category one PSCs in Latvia are issued only by the SAB⁶, the category one PSC applicants are vetted by all three Latvia’s intelligence and security services, each within the institutions under their supervision⁷. Respectively, a part of decisions by SAB on the issuance of category one PSC are based on the results of vetting performed by VDD or MIDD. Last year VDD acquired and evaluated information about 79 candidates for category one PSC. The information obtained during the vetting along with the Service’s assessment was passed to SAB for decision.

Since any disclosure of official secrets may result in an irreversible harm to national security, VDD continued assessing the activities of persons also after the issuance of the PSC. In case risks to the security to the information to be protected were established in

PSC issuance dynamic



the behaviour, activity or circle of contacts of the PSC holder, VDD performed an extraordinary vetting. Overall in 2024 the Service performed 71 such vetting.

The grounds for extraordinary vetting of the trustworthiness of the PSC holders last year were similar to those from other years:

- regular travel to Russia or Belarus, as well as other countries supporting Russia;
- repeated violations of requirements for the protection of official secrets;
- suspicion of engaging in criminal activity;
- using limited access data bases outside one’s professional duties;
- contacts with pro-Kremlin inclined persons;
- connections with persons involved in criminal activities;
- suspicious financial transactions and savings of uncertain origin.

The Service performed additional vetting also in case the official entered a civil partnership or marriage to verify if no persons who could threaten the security of information to be protected had appeared in the official’s circle of contacts together with their partner.

Last year more often than in previous periods the grounds for initiating extraordinary vetting were based on suspicion of gambling, narcotic substances or alcohol addiction. Officials with addiction problems are an easy target to intelligence and security services of hostile countries because such persons are easy to manipulate with. Intelligence officers can encourage the addicted person to illegally disclose official secrets while they are under the influence of intoxicating substances or use their wish for additional income to finance their

⁶ Article 6 of Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.822 of 19 December 2023 “Regulations for protection of official secrets, classified information of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, European Union and foreign institutions”.

⁷ Section 10 of the Law on Official Secret enlists institutions where each Latvia’s intelligence and security service performs the vetting to establish compliance of persons with the security requirements.

addictions and cover debts. The intelligence officers may also threaten to destroy the official’s reputation by bringing the addiction out in public.

Following requests of several state institutions, last year VDD vetted 25 candidates to high-level posts, providing prima facie assessment on whether in case of appointment they could be issued the PSC⁸. During the initial vetting of these candidates the Service did not establish derogatory facts that would serve as obstacle in issuing the PSC.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the initial vetting cannot be considered a comprehensive and thorough assessment resulting in the PSC issuance. Should the candidate be appointed to the particular post, they must undergo a complete vetting during which the Service obtains and assesses a significantly larger amount of information. However, the initial vetting does allow in some cases to establish risks posed by the candidate to the security of the information to be protected in an accelerated procedure.

In comparison to 2023, last year the number of persons vetted by VDD increased by almost 700, which can be explained by several reasons. First, the unprecedented requirement for vetting the local government executive directors and their deputies, requiring the PSC since 2024. Second, some state institutions undertook new functions and thus new posts were established. Third, several institutions expanded the list of posts where officials, considering the geopolitical situation, need to access official secrets for proper performance of their professional duties. Finally, several state joint stock companies last year wanted to prolong their FSCs, thus their leading officials and a part of staff also had to repeatedly receive the PSCs.

In 2024, VDD vetted the top officials of 82 local governments – executive directors and their deputies. Of those, in 14 cases VDD had to prolong the vetting duration due to the large amount of information that required evaluation or the necessity to conduct in-depth examination of some established facts. Among the most often reasons for prolonging the vetting were, e.g., former municipal cooperation projects with Russia, contacts with persons in Russia or Belarus, as well as travels of local government officials to these countries hostile to Latvia.

Within vetting the executive directors and their deputies of all local governments, VDD refused the issuance of the PSC to one local government executive director because the Service detected risks posed by the person to the security of information to be protected. The Service denied the issuance of the PSC pursuant to Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 6 sub article “a” of the Law on Official Secret i.e., due to facts established during the vetting which give grounds to doubt the person’s trustworthiness and capability to safeguard official secrets.

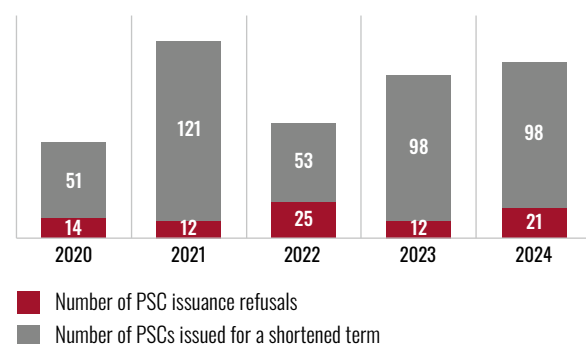
Officials of eight local governments were issued the PSCs to a shortened term: two officials were issued PSCs for two years, four – for three years and two – for one year instead of the maximum of five years. The grounds for issuing the PSCs for a shortened term was information discovered by the Service which is related to potential risks to the security of information to be protected, however within the meaning of the law do not constitute sufficient grounds to refuse the issuance of the PSC.

2.3.

GROUNDS FOR REFUSING THE PERSONAL SECURITY CLEARANCE ISSUANCE

In 2024, VDD took the decision to refuse the issuance of the PSC in 21 case. Of those, eight refusals were for first-time applicants, whereas 12 – to repeated applicants. As a result of extraordinary vetting, in one case the PSC issued to an official was annulled.

Dynamic of PSC issuance refusals and issuance for a shortened term



⁸ Pursuant to Section 10 Paragraph 1 of the Law on Official Secret.

The grounds leading to a negative Service decision:

- In 11 cases VDD discovered information leading to doubting the person's trustworthiness and ability to protect official secrets (Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 6 sub article "a" of the Law on Official Secret). Of those, in one case the Service discovered the risks posed by the person to the security of the information to be protected during an extraordinary vetting.
- In six cases, the vetting revealed information about psychological or behavioural issues of the person, including in connection with addictions, leading to doubting the person's ability to observe the official secrets protection requirements (Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 7 of the Law on Official Secret).
- In three cases the Service refused the PSC issuance because the person had deliberately committed a crime (Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 3 sub article "a" or "b" of the Law on Official Secret).
- In one case, next to facts raising doubts about the person's trustworthiness and ability to protect officials secrets, the Service also discovered information indicating that issuing the PSC to the person would contradict the national security interests (Section 9 Paragraph 3 Article 6 sub article "a" or "b" of the Law on Official Secret).



Illustrative image, Freepik

ATTENTION!

Criminal liability is foreseen not only for deliberate illegal disclosure of official secrets, but also for disclosure due to negligence or loss. Whereas the violations of requirements for protection of classified information despite the lack of harmful consequences may result in disciplinary action.

In most cases, VDD refused the PSC issuance for several reasons. Similar to 2023, last year the most common grounds for refusing or annulling the PSC were:

- regular travel to Russia or Belarus and other countries supporting Russia;
- maintaining communication with risk persons in Russia or Belarus;
- contacts with pro-Kremlin inclined persons;
- supporting Russia's aggression against Ukraine;
- connections with persons involved in criminal activity and substantiated grounds about the candidate's involvement in criminal activity;
- commission of crimes, including the abuse of authority;
- repeated violations of requirements for protection of official secrets;
- systemic administrative violations;
- use of limited access data bases unrelated to performance of one's professional duties;
- cases indicating the person's unfairness, untrustworthiness or recklessness;
- deliberate provision of false or misleading information;
- suspicious financial transactions and savings of unclear origin;
- alcohol, narcotic substance, gambling or other addictions;
- mental disorders;
- unethical, inadequate, unpredictable and indecent behaviour;
- frequent failure to update the data of the questionnaire submitted to VDD.

Last year three persons exercised the rights provided to them by the Law on Official Secret to appeal VDD's decision to refuse the PSC issuance to the Prosecutor General. None of the appeals during their examination resulted in rebutting the derogatory information obtained by VDD which served as basis in refusing the PSC issuance. Thus, the Prosecutor General recognised VDD's decisions to refuse the PSC issuance to these persons as substantiated and they remained in force.

These three persons also appealed the decisions of the Prosecutor General to the last possible instance – the Administrative District Court. However, also the court deemed VDD’s decisions to refuse the PSC issuance substantiated and thus did not change them.

2.4.

INSPECTING PREMISES AND VETTING ECONOMIC OPERATORS

Last year VDD continued inspecting the observance of requirements for the protection of official secrets in institutions under VDD’s purview for secrecy regime. During the inspections the Service officers inspected the compliance of infrastructure, security regime and information circulation procedures with the requirements for protection of official secrets.

In comparison to the 20 institutions inspected in 2023, in 2024 VDD inspected two. The decrease in the number of inspections is related to the entry into force of the improved official secrets protection requirements on 1 January 2024. The institutions were given until 1 January 2025 to improve internal regulations and physical security procedures in addition to the existing requirements. As for the infrastructure intended for

working with official secrets, the institutions are given up until 1 January 2029 to ensure its compliance with the requirements.

Due to these circumstances last year only a few institutions submitted to VDD their applications about their readiness to be inspected, whereas the other institutions continued adjusting the infrastructure to the new requirements. As a result of inspections, the Service provided the institutions with recommendations to improve their physical security procedures and solutions.

VDD also continued vetting economic operators and public undertakings seeking the FSC issuance. In 2024, the Service vetted the readiness and ability of 11 economic operators to conduct work that requires the necessity to access official secrets and ensure their protection.

After comprehensive vetting of economic operators VDD in accordance to the procedure laid down in the Law on Official Secret referred the collected information and VDD’s assessment to the SAB for decision. In 10 cases VDD’s vetting activities did not reveal facts raising doubts about the readiness or ability of the economic operator to ensure the protection of information containing official secrets. Whereas in one case VDD established risks and recommended to refuse the FSC issuance.

VDD REITERATES!

Every PSC holder is obliged to inform no later than within a month the respective intelligence and security service about the changes in the previously submitted questionnaire data, such as change of name or family name, acquiring citizenship of another country, entering marriage or civil partnership, travel to countries outside the EU and NATO, possible contacts with officers of foreign intelligence and security services⁹. The information shall be submitted in a written form to the official or body in charge of ensuring the secrecy regime in the respective institution or to the respective intelligence and security service.

⁹ Changes that have to be reported are enlisted under the sub-article 38.6 of Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.822 of 19 December 2023 “Regulations for protection of official secrets, classified information of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, European Union and foreign institutions”.



03

PROTECTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

Last year Russia had limited possibilities to influence processes in Latvia with political, diplomatic, humanitarian, legal and other non-military tools not only because of the international sanctions, but also due to the need for the aggressor state to divert large human resources to its warfare in Ukraine. At the same time, Russia continued to pose the most significant threat to Latvia's constitutional order, using all currently available tools to attain its goals.

In 2024, Russia continued to work with Latvia's "compatriot" environment mainly in a remote mode. At the same time, the Kremlin used various motivations to encourage the "compatriots" living abroad, including in Latvia, to move to Russia or visit events taking place in Russia or its ally – Belarus.

In 2024, attracting Russian-speaking youth living in Latvia to the so-called Russian world remained a priority for Russia. The aggressor state continued to invest significant resources to facilitate the availability of study programs and interest education to foreigners.

Russia also continued working on disseminating and strengthening the interpretation of history favourable to the Kremlin in Latvia. As usual, it emphasised narratives with unjustified glorification of Russia in the context of the Second World War history.

VDD's countermeasures and the dominantly negative attitude in Latvian society against Russia significantly hindered the possibilities for the aggressor state to attain its goals in Latvia by using non-military influence measures. Nevertheless, some groups of society, including the pro-Kremlin activists who had fled to Russia and Belarus, continued to provide direct and indirect support to Russia's interests.



3.1.

SOCIAL MOOD AND INTERNAL SECURITY

Last year the social mood in Latvia was influenced by various domestic, socio-economic and geopolitical developments. One of factors with the largest impact on the social mood was Russia's war in Ukraine.

VDD's analysis shows that the majority of Latvia's society continued to support Ukraine, as well as firmly stand against Russia's aggression and any pro-Kremlin manifestations in Latvia. The majority of society also supported political decisions aimed at strengthening Latvia's internal security and the position of the official language.

At the same time, there was a part of Latvia's society that continued to covertly or openly support Russia and its military aggression against Ukraine. This part of society were mainly persons who use Russian in their daily communication. These members of society were negatively inclined not only regarding Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, but also regarding the measures introduced by Latvia to strengthen its internal security and facilitate the usage of official language. Such attitude in most cases resulted from protracted consumption of Russian propaganda, with Russia's narratives continuing to affect the opinions and mood of these people.

The part of society under the influence of Russian propaganda and lies continued to interpret the developments in Latvia and elsewhere in accordance with the worldview constructed by the Kremlin. For instance, the attempts of Latvia's politicians and institutions to facilitate the usage of official language in the public space were falsely interpreted as russophobia, although their main goal was to encourage active

participation of Russian-speakers in Latvia's society. The work of Latvia's institutions towards strengthening the internal and external security was perceived by this part of society as provoking Russia.

VDD assesses that the contrasting opinions in the society last year manifested as latent ethnic tension. The part of society supporting Russia demonstrated resentment and negative attitude against the state of Latvia, which in turn was unacceptable to the majority of Latvia's society condemning Russia.

The part of society supporting Russia last year mainly expressed its opinions on social networking sites (see more in the chapter on information space security). At the same time, there were several hundred cases when persons demonstrated their support to the aggressor state through various means in the urban environment. Similar to 2022 and 2023, also last year the State Police most often detected the "Z" letters drawn with spray paint along with other symbols demonstrating support to Russian aggression in the urban environment. VDD and State Police also detected persons who demonstrably wore such symbols attached to their garments, had them attached to or displayed inside their vehicles.

Some cases of hooliganism against vehicles with Ukrainian number plates as well as displays of aggression against Ukrainians were registered in the urban environment. In 2024, VDD also received information about several dozen acts of hooliganism against the flag of Ukraine or public space objects dedicated to support Ukraine. Such anti-Ukraine and other pro-Kremlin displays in the street environment last year were most often registered in February and March (38 and 58 cases respectively), when events in support to Ukraine were taking place in Latvia in connection with the second anniversary since Russia's invasion in Ukraine. The increase in activity of pro-Kremlin inclined part of society in this period confirmed it maintained the hateful attitude against the state of Ukraine and Ukrainian people.

PROTECTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

As regards the displays of support to Russia in the street environment, last year they were most frequently registered in May (115 cases), when Russia celebrated the so-called “victory” day. Overall, the amount of pro-Kremlin displays in the urban environment last year decreased.

Pro-Kremlin displays detected in street environment



3.2.

MAIN ORGANISERS OF RUSSIA'S NON-MILITARY INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

Under the influence of sanctions introduced by the Western countries, in 2024 Russia had a limited range of non-military influence tools at its disposal, that would allow to influence the political and social agendas of Latvia and other countries in accordance with the interests of the aggressor state. Nevertheless, Russia continued to regularly respond to developments in Latvia's domestic policy aimed at decreasing Russia's historical influence in Latvia. Russia's reactions were mainly present in the information space, as propaganda resources and other supporters of Russia's interests disseminated narratives about the alleged “russophobe” policy implemented in Latvia and the alleged threats posed by the Baltic States to the so-called Russian world (see more in Chapter 4 about the information space security).

Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with members of Russian diplomatic corps residing in Latvia continued to play an important role in organising and implementing Russia's non-military influence

measures against our country. Russia's Presidential Administration continued to coordinate Russia's influence activities against Latvia and other Western countries at strategic level.

Russia continued to use also diplomatic and judicial tools to internationally discredit Latvia and other Baltic States. For example, the aggressor state regularly used its membership status in such international organisations as the United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to try and convince the international society about the alleged discrimination and violations of Russian-speakers' rights committed by Latvia's institutions. Russia's representatives regularly criticised Latvia's decision to quit teaching Russian language as the second foreign language in schools, calling upon international human rights organisations to act against the discrimination of Russian-speakers in Latvia.

Last year Russia's institutions and media controlled by the Kremlin in Russia and Belarus organised various forums and round-table discussions, with the aim to improve the image of Russia's reigning the regime both to the domestic audience and within Russian diaspora abroad. The event participants discussed such issues as work with “compatriots” abroad, possibilities to attract the Russian-speaking youth to the so-called Russian world, improving the resettlement programs for “compatriots” as well as the problem of “rebirth of fascism and Nazism” in Europe. The events were also attended by the pro-Kremlin inclined Latvian nationals, who have fled to these countries, for example, Ruslans Pankratovs, Andrejs Mamikins and Romāns Samuļs.

The federal agency under the auspices of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs “Rossotrudnichestvo” maintained its role in attracting students from Latvia and other Baltic States. Through the international program “Erasmus+” also students of a school in Riga visited the representation of “Rossotrudnichestvo” in Austria – the Russian House in Vienna (in German – “Russisches Haus in Wien”), which hosts events to consolidate Russian “compatriots” and maintain them within Russia's influence sphere.

Last year “Rossotrudnichestvo” implemented a number of measures to encourage the “compatriots” living abroad to move to Russia. For instance, the agency in cooperation with news agency TASS created a new digital service – the map “Fatherland” (in Russian – “Rodina”), to increase the sense of belonging to Russia within the “compatriots” living abroad. The digital platform additionally outlines the necessary steps

within the Russian “compatriot” voluntary resettlement program to obtain Russian citizenship in priority procedure. It should be noted that these steps also include registering at the local war commissariat.

Russian fund “Historical memory” (in Russian – “Istoricheskaya pamyat”) continued work on distorting and falsifying Latvia’s history. VDD’s analysis shows that last year Russia purposefully spread tendentious interpretation of historical events, to increase the support of Russia’s society to war in Ukraine as well as imbed a hostile attitude against the Baltic States in its population. On international arena, Russia tried to portray the Baltic States, especially Latvia, as countries cultivating Nazi values already since the Second World War. In VDD’s assessment, the Kremlin’s historians under the auspices of this fund tried to put the liability about the Nazi crimes to Latvians and other nations occupied by the USSR.

Russian Fund for Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad (in Russian – “Pravfond”) continued to provide support to “politically persecuted” “compatriots”, who sought to avoid liability for the crimes they committed in Latvia.

Last year also the Russian Embassy in Latvia continued its activities. Representatives of the embassy regularly marked commemoration days significant to Russia’s military-memorial policy, supported persons who wished to resettle to Russia or maintain their residence rights in Latvia, established contacts with activists from “compatriot” environment, as well as continued to organise processes to attract Latvian youth to studies in Russia.



Russian Embassy’s chargé d’affaires to Latvia Dmitriy Kasatkin during the celebration of Russia day or Sovereignty day in embassy’s premises. Photo from Russian Embassy’s “Facebook” page.

3.3.

ATTRACTING YOUTH TO RUSSIA’S NON-MILITARY INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

Russia’s attempts to attract youth to activities of Russian “compatriot” environment have so far been futile, therefore in 2024 the aggressor state continued to invest significant resources to ensure the availability of study programs and organise international events to attract the Russian-speaking youth from abroad and maintain them within Russia’s sphere of influence. Attracting youth remained among Russia’s priorities last year. Different forums and conferences held in the aggressor state sought solutions to attract the Russian-speaking youth living abroad, identifying state-sponsored studies as one of the main tools.

In VDD’s assessment, by creating a favourable environment to the Russian-speaking youth of Latvia and other countries, Russia continued its attempts to attract and “raise” the next activists and leaders of the “compatriot” environment to represent the interests of the aggressor state abroad. Russia’s attempts to attract youth to the so-called Russian world attested that one of the long-term goals of this country remains the strengthening and disseminating outside Russian borders of the Kremlin’s distorted worldview.

In addition to offering study possibilities, Russia continued to organise international events of educational nature for youth, including in Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia. In summer 2024, international youth camp “Artek” took place in Simferopol in the Crimea occupied by Russia. The camp was of military-patriotic nature and it propagated the ideas of Russia’s imperialism, which serve as basis for Russia’s desire to renew the influence and control over the former USSR countries. Youth from Latvia also participated in the camp.

According to VDD’s analysis, last year Russia expanded its offer to youth by organising various grant competitions for participation in interest education and culture activities in Russia. In VDD’s assessment the aim of such informal events is to gradually create a part of society which would be interested in restarting the cooperation with Russia.

STUDY OPPORTUNITIES AND CULTURE EVENTS – TOOLS TO ATTRACT AND INFLUENCE THE “COMPATRIOTS” LIVING ABROAD

Risks from studying in Russia

VDD has summarised the risks that Latvia’s youth expose themselves to as they choose to study or acquire knowledge and skills in other formats in Russia.



Latvian flag at the 10th International Youth Industrial Forum “Engineers of the Future”, which took place from 23 June until 3 July 2024 in the Russian city Tula. Photo from a website of a company engaged in the event “Tulatochmash.ru”.

High intelligence and recruitment risks

Students are considered an elevated risk group, which Russia’s intelligence and security services purposefully scrutinise and from which they recruit the potential information sources and persons for creating positions of influence.

Ideological indoctrination

Russia is moving towards an absolute ideological indoctrination of younger generations, creating a nation that is loyal and obedient to the Kremlin with its preferred worldview. Russia is trying to gradually revive the Soviet-era practice when the ideological upbringing of youth was systemic and planned with the aim to create a deep conviction about the correctness of the preached ideas. In this way, Russia strives to enhance the sense of belonging in the students to the so-called Russian world space, opposing the Russia’s value system to the democratic values of the Western countries.

Creating positions of influence

Russia’s institutions are interested in acquiring contact persons who in the future could lobby Russia’s

interests abroad. Russia requires such position in various domains.

Incompatible education system

Those studying in Russia must remember that the education certificates issued in Russia may not be recognised by the Latvian Academic Information Centre. Thus, the diplomas issued by the aggressor state may not provide the right to exercise the chosen profession in Latvia. In addition, mostly potential employers treat candidates who have obtained education in Russia with suspicions, especially if the graduation took place after Russia’s invasion in Ukraine on 22 February 2024.

Limited job possibilities in Latvia

In the light of the high intelligence risks, the graduates of Russia’s educational institutions have almost no chance to be hired by any Latvian state or local government institution, especially if the professional duties include work with official secrets. It also applies to job possibilities in public undertakings, companies of significance to national security, associations and foundations, as well as critical infrastructure objects.

Culture events – Belorussian “soft” power tool

Last year Belarus organised international music, art, culture and other events that were also attended by Latvian nationals. These events were organised as seemingly apolitical and directed towards the intercultural cooperation, nevertheless they are considered the so-called soft power tool of Russia and Belarus, used to facilitate the attaining of foreign policy goals of these countries, including creating and maintaining a part of society in Latvia that is benevolent to them.



A. Lukashenko personally engaged in resolving the situation with four detained Latvian youngsters, to “rebut” with the help of propaganda the statements of Western countries about the authoritarian regime of Belarus, its support to Russia’s war in Ukraine and Belarus’ hybrid activities against the West. Screenshot from Belarus propaganda resource “Belta.by”.

Last year there were several episodes when Latvian nationals who had entered Belarus were used for its propaganda activities to discredit the Western countries and improve the image of Belarus.

In 2024, VDD held preventive talks with members of Belorussian diaspora organisations and persons who had travelled to Belarus, warning them about risks that arise from staying within the Belorussian territory.

VDD alerts – participation in seemingly apolitical events in Belarus is also connected with high risks.

Several events attended by Latvian nationals last year:

- From 5 until 7 July in the border area around the tripoint of Latvian, Russian and Belorussian border the annual event allegedly dedicated to the friendship of nations “The Kurgan of friendship” took place. During the event, the victory of the Soviet Union over the Nazism in the Second World War was glorified, thereby disseminating the interpretation of historical events constructed by the Kremlin. In VDD’s assessment, the main goal of this event is to absorb Latvia back into Russia’s sphere of influence. The event was organised by Russia and Belarus as the activities glorifying the Soviet army took place in the territories of these countries.
- From 9 until 15 July in Vitebsk, Belarus, the 33rd international art festival “Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk” took place. A. Lukashenko delivered the festival’s opening speech. The goal against Latvia – to restore the cooperation in the culture field, normalise the cooperation of states outside politics, thus trying to allegedly separate the regular public from the policy makers and implementers.
- From 26 until 28 July Braslaw, Belarus, the annual music festival “Viva Braslav” took place. Four young people from Latvia also intended to attend this festival, however their trip ended with detention as the Belarus border guards allegedly discovered a marijuana package in their car.

3.4.

GROUPS OF LATVIA'S SOCIETY AND ACTIVISTS WHO CONTINUED TO SUPPORT RUSSIA'S INTERESTS

In 2024, various organisations and individual activists maintained a pro-Kremlin mood in a part of Latvian society as their narratives directly or indirectly copied the Kremlin's propaganda narratives. The "compatriot" environment organisations and activists continued to support the aggressor state Russia in Latvia, although cautiously and passively. Few political parties orienting towards the Russian-speaking electorate also continued spreading narratives in line with Russia's interests in Latvia.

 **Organisations and activists of Russian "compatriot" environment**

In comparison to previous year, overall in 2024 the characteristics of the so-called organised "compatriot" environment remained the same – divided, disoriented and unable to organise significant activities in support of Russia allowing to attain the goals of Russia's "compatriot" policy in Latvia. "Compatriot" organisations held events to commemorate dates of historical significance to Russia, while trying to stay under the radar of law enforcement institutions.

VDD officers regularly held talks with heads of organisations and individual activists, warning that participation in events organised by Russia can be regarded as provision of support to implementation of Russia's goals in Latvia. The most intensive talks with representatives of "compatriot" environment the Service held before the 9 May to prevent potential activities in support of Russia, especially glorifying the war crimes of the aggressor state.

According to VDD's prognosis, the takeover of the so-called "Moscow house" by the Republic of Latvia contributed to further disorienting the Russian "compatriot" environment. In fact, last year there were only two "compatriot" events outside the "Moscow house". Namely, the closed format congress organised by "Latvian Russian community" in January 2024 in the premises of the Slavic culture association "Harmonika". After the congress until the end of 2024, the "compatriot" organisations were unable to find a place for regular gatherings. In relation to this, at the very end of 2024 – on 26 December – the Russian Embassy organised a closed "compatriots" event in its premises, gathering representatives of some "compatriot" organisations.



Last year Latvia took over the so-called "Moscow House" that had protractedly served to organise activities directed against the interests of Latvia. Screenshot from LTV show "De facto" of 4 February – the removal of letters of building's former name "Moscow House" from the facade.



V. Guščins (first from left) in 2024 in the "Victory museum" in Moscow. Photo from the so-called World compatriot coordination council site "Vksrs.com".

Russia's retaliatory measures to the takeover of the "Moscow house" were wide. Russia tried to use the takeover of the "Moscow house" to discredit Latvia internationally as unreliable partner for investments and cooperation. Russia also used aggressive rhetoric to try to stop the "Moscow house" auction process, including threatening the potential buyer of the building with judicial proceedings in Russia.

In VDD's assessment, Russia's response confirmed the former significance of the "Moscow house" in organising and implementing Russia's non-military influence measures in Latvia. Since its establishment in 2004, the "Moscow house" operated as the central point of support for various influence activities implemented by Russia against Latvia. In this building Russian Embassy and other subjects of "compatriot" policy regularly held events where they disseminated narratives justifying Russia's aggressive policy as well as interpretation of historical events in line with Russia's interests.

The longstanding "compatriot" activist, head of unregistered "compatriot" organisation "Latvian Council of Civic Organisations" (in Latvian – "Latvijas Sabiedrisko organizāciju padome") Viktors Guščins maintained his ties with Russia. In June and October last year, he attended the 49th and 50th World "compatriot" coordination council meetings in Moscow where he



Longstanding pro-Kremlin activist V. Lindermans with his birthday gift – champagne from Russian-occupied Crimea. Photo from V.Lindermans' "Facebook" account.

continued to create and maintain the contacts with Russian officials as the representative of Russian "compatriot" interests in Latvia. The graduate of History faculty of Leningrad State University, named after A. A. Zhdanov (currently – Saint Petersburg State University) V. Guščins last year published another (thirteenth) book about the history of Jelgava, using the materials from Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga and Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg. The book describes historical events in accordance with the interpretation of history constructed by the Kremlin.

The head of Latvian Association of Fighters of Anti-Hitler Coalition – Gaļina Muštavinska, organised activities in line with Russia's military-memorial policy in Latvia. She organised events on commemoration days of Second World War events significant to Russia, which have protractedly been used by the aggressor state propaganda to disseminate the interpretation of historical events in accordance with the Kremlin's interests. These events commemorated the tragic events of the Second World War and honoured the fallen, at the same time maintaining the narrative constructed by the Kremlin about the alleged rebirth of Nazism in Latvia.

Several pro-Kremlin activists already mentioned in previous VDD's reports, for instance Aleksandrs Gapoņenko, Vladimirs Lindermans, Tatjana Andriječa, Aleksandrs Giļmans and Alla Berezovska last year mutually coordinated their activities in relation to judicial proceedings initiated against them and developments in Latvia's domestic policy. The pro-Kremlin activists publicly interpreted the charges against them as a targeted action by the state of Latvia against the Russian-speakers and political retribution with protectors of "compatriots".

In VDD's assessment the decrease in intensity of public displays of these and other pro-Kremlin activists was not related to changes in their ideological convictions, but rather a wait-out strategy as they follow the course of Russia's war in Ukraine. Although primarily the individual pro-Kremlin activists focused on the defence

within the judicial proceedings brought against them, they also sought ways how to cautiously express narratives supporting Russia and its aggressive foreign policy, without violating the boundaries of the law.



Pro-Kremlin activists who have moved to Russia or Belarus

Pro-Kremlin activists moving from Latvia to Russia or Belarus and continuing their activities directed against Latvia from there remained a continuing trend also in 2024. Their motivation remained unchanged – activists tried to avoid criminal liability for crimes incriminated to them in Latvia and saw profit opportunities as they participated in implementation of propaganda and other influence measures directed against Latvia.

In 2024, two known pro-Kremlin activists fled to countries unfriendly to Latvia – Staņislavs Bukains and Jurijs Aleksejevs, both subjects to ongoing criminal cases against them. S. Bukains fled to Russia in July 2024 because he was facing conviction to prison time from 10 years up to lifetime for leading the pro-Kremlin criminal organisation "Baltic anti-fascists" and participating in the crimes committed by this organisation. With VDD's investigation open, the person suspected of the commission of especially serious crimes was applied the security measure – arrest, however after investigation was concluded and the case was referred for prosecution, the court decided to release S.Bukains on bail of 40 thousand euros. Additionally S.Bukains was not allowed to leave the country, nevertheless he illegally fled to Russia by crossing the Zilupe river on SUP board.

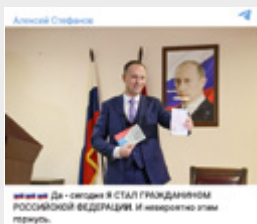
In October 2024, the pro-Kremlin activist J. Aleksejevs fled to Belarus. As he himself stated on "Facebook", it was due to the judicial proceedings against him – the activist was charged with performing activity directed against the sovereignty of Latvia in an organised group, as well as illegal purchasing and storing of firearm ammunition. In addition, he had earlier been found guilty for triggering national hatred and circulating child pornography, with the court sentencing him to prison time of 13 months. He has not served this sentence either. J. Aleksejevs reached Belarus via Lithuania as he bought a bus ticket in Vilnius to Minsk.

The cases of Latvian nationals moving to Russia and Belarus were conveniently used by these countries in their attempts to discredit Latvia by regular tendentious reports about persons having decided to leave Latvia's allegedly repressive regime. Such persons were also used to tarnish Ukraine, NATO and the EU. VDD observed that Latvia's pro-Kremlin activists who had moved to Russia were initially intensively exhibited on Russia's propaganda channels, but afterwards became obsolete.

RUNAWAYS TO HOSTILE COUNTRIES



Pro-Kremlin activist J. Aleksejevs leaving Latvia for Belarus to escape the potential liability for his crimes. Photo from J. Aleksejevs' "Facebook" account.



Within its attempts to discredit Latvia and improve its image, Russia publicly highlighted Latvian nationals who obtained Russian citizenship. Among them, the pro-Kremlin activist Aleksejs Stefanovs who was granted Russian citizenship in January 2024, and announced it on his "Telegram" channel. VDD has asked the OCMA to revoke his Latvian citizenship.



Article published in September 2024 on portal Jauns.lv about the political party "Stabilitātei!" acting against the measures to strengthen the positions of the Latvian language, in this case – testing the official language knowledge. Screenshot from Jauns.lv.

ATTENTION!

The persons accused of crimes against Latvia's security were mostly able to escape to Russia or Belarus due to the security measures unrelated to deprivation of liberty that were applied to these persons during the processing of their criminal cases. VDD considers that the only efficient security measure to prevent the suspects from fleeing Latvia and continuing their activities against Latvia from the territory of Russia or Belarus is detention.



Political parties representing Russian-speakers

Political parties oriented towards the Russian-speaking part of society played significant role in shaping the public opinion and mood of this electorate, among them "Latvijas Krievu savienība" (in English – "Latvian Russian Union", hereinafter – LKS) and "Stabilitātei!" (in English – "For Stability!"). Similar to Russia's propaganda resources, these political organisations criticised Latvia's attempts to facilitate the use of official language in the public space, interpreting it as unjust turning against the Russian-speakers.

VDD considers that political parties representing the Russian-speakers benefit from this part of society feeling resentment and being separated from the rest of society, because such mood improves the possibilities for these parties to receive support in the elections.

Similar to previous years, also in 2024 the political parties oriented towards the Russian-speaking electorate tried to obtain the maximum support from this group. Parties increased their activity prior to the European Parliament elections of June 2024, trying to mobilise the potential voters. There were several political parties oriented towards the Russian-speaking electorate rallying for seats in the European Parliament.

The political organisations oriented towards the Russian-speaking part of society expressed narratives in line with Russia's foreign policy interests. Similar to Russia's propaganda resources, also these political parties in their public communication deliberately distorted and misinterpreted the political processes in Latvia to confuse and also mobilise for support the Russian-speaking target audience.

For instance, any attempts from Latvia's institutions to expand the use of official language within society these parties interpreted as displays of russophobia, discrimination and violation of rights of Russian-speakers, thus hindering this part of society from learning Latvian language in line with Russia's interests. What these parties did omit was that mastering the Latvian language would facilitate a comprehensive integration of Russian-speakers in Latvia's society and weaken the possibilities for the aggressor state to manipulate with this part of population through propaganda and disinformation.

In their public communication, these parties tried to strengthen the already existing false beliefs within the Russian-speaking part of society about Russia and Belarus being Latvia's neighbouring countries that do not pose significant threat. These political parties emphasised the need to restore economic and other cooperation with both countries.

SECURITY OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS



Screenshot from portal "Tvnet.lv".

Last year one of VDD's priorities in protection of constitutional order was ensuring the course of honest, uninfluenced and democratic European Parliament election in Latvia.

In securing the course of election, the Service implemented various measures. Service officers maintained regular communication with the Central Election Commission and polling station commissions as well as inspected polling stations. The Service also verified information submitted by the public about potential violations during the election. In total, VDD established 39 situations that required verification of circumstances.

In most cases, the Service identified insignificant deficiencies in ensuring the course of election that with the engagement of VDD were immediately prevented. Other reports of potential breaches were not confirmed.

VDD did not establish attempts by local subjects or unfriendly countries to interfere in the course of the European Parliament election in Latvia. Therefore, in 2024 VDD did not initiate criminal cases for unlawful activity in connection with the election. In VDD's assessment, the European Parliament election in Latvia took place without disturbances.

Last year VDD detected a decrease in LKS international scale activity directed against Latvia. VDD sees two reasons behind the decrease. First, on 22 February 2024 VDD initiated a criminal case against the longstanding leader of LKS Tatjana Ždanoka on the grounds of suspicion on providing assistance to Russia in activity directed against Latvia. Second, LKS failed in the European Parliament elections of June 2024 and did not get any seats in this internationally significant institution.

At the same time, LKS continued targeted provision of distorted information to other international institutions about the situation of Russian-speaking population in Latvia. As a result of such activities not only did LKS discredit Latvia on international scale, but also provided additional reasons for Russia to turn against Latvia.

3.5.

EXTREMISM AND RADICALISM

To reduce threats to Latvia's constitutional order and public safety, in 2024 VDD continued collecting information about organisations, informal groups and individuals supporting extremism. The Service also obtained information about members of public who turned to radical ideologies and were prone to violence.

Last year, neither organisations supporting right-, nor left-wing extremism had significant resources and organisational capacity to violently turn against Latvia's constitutional order and directly harm Latvia's national security.

Extremists residing in Latvia mainly expressed themselves on social networking sites and online communication applications, spreading ideas of extremism and purposefully creating contacts and exchanging experience with extremists of other countries. Some local activists travelled abroad to meet their peers in person. Interest about radical ideologies was mainly present in youth environment.

In response to dissemination of ideas of right- and left-wing extremism and the increase in displays of violence based on these ideas, in 2024 VDD implemented systemic measures to reduce the spread of extremism and radicalism. VDD in cooperation with the State Police carried out several detentions and other measures to limit the activities of so-called skinheads in Latvia.

In VDD's assessment, last year the increase of extremist and radical displays in society were fostered by several global developments, such as Russia's war in Ukraine,

the flow of immigrants of other races to Europe, including Latvia, the Israeli military operation in the Middle East and visibility of LGBTQ+ rights issues.



Risks posed by right-wing extremism

Right-wing extremists mainly published hateful and aggressive comments about immigrants, people with different skin colour and LGBTQ+ community in the internet environment – social networking sites and online communication applications. Such content was easily accessible on platforms like “Telegram” and “TikTok” also to youth who often perceive this type of information uncritically and can radicalise under its influence.

Similar to 2023, also last year VDD observed that mostly young people, including minors, turn to right-wing extremism. These persons mostly radicalise on social networking sites and online communication applications, especially “Telegram” and “TikTok”, where extremist propaganda along with other content that is radical or justifies violence are disseminated without any control.

Extremism supporters under VDD’s radar often consumed such content in closed communication groups where information from Russia’s information space prevailed. Next to extremism propaganda, also narratives supporting Russia’s foreign policy interests were regularly disseminated in these communication groups.



Risks posed by left-wing extremism

Throughout previous years, including 2024, VDD observed among youth an increasingly uncritical perception of left-wing extremism ideologies, such as communism, neo-Marxism and anarchism. In this relation, also last year the spread of left-wing extremism ideas and support to them increased in Latvian society.

Last year VDD discovered the emergence of a few informal groups that joined a small number of persons supporting anarchism and other left-wing ideologies. VDD also established that in the past year some activists tried to spread the ideas of anarchism and communism to a wider society. Most often, these activists tried to spread the left-wing extremism ideas particularly among youth.

In VDD’s assessment the spread of such ideas and emergence of groups of persons supporting left-wing extremism within Latvian society is a dangerous trend as the left-wing extremist ideologies per se pose threat to Latvia’s constitutional order and state existence. Besides, such organisations are especially useful to Russia who thinks of itself as the heir of the communist Soviet Union.

Similar to other European countries, also in Latvia left-wing extremists last year paid particular attention to Israeli military activity in the Middle East and expressed support to Palestinians.



Measures to reduce the spread of extremism and radicalism

In response to the increase in radicalisation risks in society, last year VDD implemented a wide spectrum of preventive measures to reduce the spread of extremism and radicalism in Latvia, focusing on early identification of radicalisation cases.

VDD officers intensively acknowledged situation within various groups of society subjected to radicalisation risks. Service officers did explanatory work with state and local government institutions as well as representatives of private sector whose daily operations are related to groups of society at risk of radicalisation. During both wider scale and individual meetings with representatives from various fields, Service officers provided briefings about signs of radicalisation as well as obtained information about risk persons.

Considering the trend for extremism ideas to spread among youth, last year VDD officers visited more than 600 Latvia’s education establishments, including schools, where they briefed the administration, social educators and psychologists about the signs and risks of youth radicalisation. As a result, VDD also identified several young people who had become captivated by radical ideologies online.

Among the youth raising Service’s interest, for some the interest about radical ideologies combined with increased aggression that displayed through physical attacks on their peers. VDD officers held talks with these young people and their parents, warning about the liability in case of committing criminal activities.

Last year VDD also prepared and distributed informative materials about right- and left-wing extremism, including typical characteristics and symbols.

RESTRICTING SKINHEAD ACTIVITY



Screenshot from portal LSM.lv

Last year VDD in cooperation with State Police implemented several measures to restrict skinhead activity in Latvia. Services enforced measures against skinheads who glorified Nazism as well as conducted violent activities against other persons.

One of VDD's tasks is to identify persons with signs of radicalisation. Last year VDD within the informal

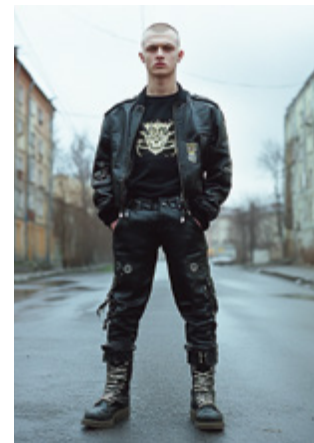
skinhead groups identified several persons posing risks, whose activities the Service reported to the State Police.

State Police according to its competence initiated several criminal cases against skinheads for a number of crimes: public glorification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace and war crimes committed by Nazi Germany; conducting activities aimed at triggering racial hatred; robbery etc. Several skinheads had inflicted bodily damage to persons with different views, besides they filmed their activity and afterwards published the videos on social networking sites. In several cases, the skinheads had attacked the food delivery couriers of other races.

Within the criminal cases, VDD officers supported the State Police in detaining the skinheads as well as within the searches performed at their places of residence and gathering. Overall, last year 11 skinheads were detained, including the leaders of two informal skinhead groups, who currently remain in custody.

Profile of a Typical Skinhead

- male aged from 14 until 22;
- basic or secondary education;
- upbringing by a dysfunctional family;
- daily consumer of content on social networking sites and communication applications in Russian language
- demonstrates interest in various combat sports, such as close combat, as well as firearms and knives;
- supports radical ideologies, such as Nazism or national bolshevism;
- Ready to use physical violence to attain goals.



AI-generated image of so-called skinhead

COUNTERMEASURES TO ACTIVITY POSING THREAT TO LATVIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER



Monitoring pro-Kremlin and other radical activity

Last year VDD continued to analyse the information received from the State Police about the detected pro-Kremlin displays in the urban environment, for instance, drawing Russian aggression symbols "Z" and "V". The Service evaluated these cases in accordance to its competence with the aim to detect among the authors

of such manifestations persons who could pose real threat to Latvia's constitutional order.

The number of pro-Kremlin displays in the urban environment was similar to that in 2023, mostly in between 10 to 30 monthly cases. Months with dates that increase the ethnic tension were an exception, for example, 24 February, 16 and 25 March, as well as 9 May – during these months there were more new pro-Kremlin manifestations in the urban environment.



Criminal enforcement measures

Last year VDD initiated 24 criminal cases on suspicion of criminal activity related to possible threat to the constitutional order of the state of Latvia, i.e., independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic order. Of those, five cases were initiated on suspicion of providing assistance to Russia in activity directed against Latvia, whereas four cases against Latvian nationals were initiated on suspicion of violation of prohibition to serve in Russia's armed forces. Another two cases were initiated about collecting financial or other economic means for Russia's armed forces, and one – for activity aiming to assist Russia to act against Ukraine.

VDD also initiated 12 criminal cases on suspicion of hate speech in support of Russia's aggression and interests, i.e., for public glorification and justification of war crimes and / or triggering national hatred and enmity as persons through hateful statements instigated others against Latvians and Ukrainians.

As a result of investigating crimes related to threats to Latvia's constitutional order, last year VDD passed 10 criminal cases to the Prosecution Office asking to initiate criminal prosecution against persons. In two cases, the Service incriminated the persons in participation in warfare in Ukraine on Russia's armed forces' side, in seven – in hate speech in support of Russia's aggression, whereas in one – in assistance to Russia in activity directed against Latvia.



Preventive talks and warning about liability

Last year VDD continued holding preventive talks with persons whose public statements or other activity indicated that these persons could potentially engage in criminal activity directed against the constitutional order of the state of Latvia. During the talks, VDD officers warned these persons about the liability in case of committing the criminal activity.

In 2024, VDD held preventive talks with almost 600 persons, with the total number of persons warned since Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2022 exceeding 1800. Among them were members of different societal groups: internet commentators, persons having publicly exhibited symbols that glorify Russia's aggression, members of pro-Kremlin environment etc.



Controlling protests and other public events

Service continued cooperating with local governments of Riga and other Latvia's cities, assessing the announced protests, marches and other public events according to its competence. The Service researched the aims of these events, their organisers and other engaged persons, as well as predicted the potential reaction from local and international community. When detecting risks of illegal activity or threats to public safety from the event, VDD recommended not to authorise the event.

Last year, the Service recommended not to authorise five public events. Within the planned events, VDD detected such risks as exhibiting objects that glorify totalitarian Soviet power, possible justification and glorification of war crimes or terrorism, calls for aggression and threat to overall security and public order in relation to high probability of physical conflicts. The Service also assessed these events as having the potential to foster the division of Latvian society, increasing ethnic tension and worsening international relations.

In nine cases, VDD provided recommendations to local governments about additionally required measures to ensure security, such as organising and engaging adequate resources from the State Police and municipal police to ensure public order and react to potential incidents or restrict access to event site.

Prior to public events of heightened risk VDD also provided its assessment and recommendations to the State Police which is in charge of ensuring public safety and order during such events.



Administrative instruments

Last year VDD continued to employ various administrative instruments to prevent threats to Latvia's constitutional order posed by Latvian nationals and foreigners.

The Service continued collecting information about foreigners whose activities pose threats to Latvia's constitutional order, and recommended to the Minister for the Interior to blacklist these persons, thus banning them from entering and staying in Latvian territory. In relation to identified risks to Latvia's constitutional order, last year VDD recommended to blacklist four persons: two Russian nationals, one Belorussian and one Finnish national.

Last year VDD continued to exercise rights stipulated in the National Security Law to recommend to the Minister for the Interior to apply to certain Latvian residents the restriction to leave the territory of Latvia in case the persons is planning to engage in a military conflict abroad, terrorist activity or other activities which may result in the person posing threat to national security upon their return to Latvia.

Last year VDD prepared and submitted information to the Minister for the Interior about three persons that should be imposed the restriction to leave the country. The reasons behind using this administrative tool were the support of these particular individuals to Russia's aggressive foreign policy and warfare in Ukraine. VDD had obtained information that these persons had already travelled to Russia to perform activities directed against the national security interests of both Latvia and other independent, sovereign and democratic countries.

In addition, in 2024 VDD asked the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to revoke Latvian citizenship to five persons, whereas for two – to revoke the status of Latvian non-citizen as the Service obtained information that these persons in addition to their status in Latvia had accepted Russian citizenship. According to current legal regulations, Latvian citizens are not allowed to have dual citizenship with Russia¹⁰, whereas the status of Latvian non-citizen can only be maintained to a persons who does not have any other citizenship¹¹.

Among these 7 persons were several supporters of Russia's interests who already are under VDD's radar, for example, propagandist Aleksejs Stefanovs, Russian "compatriot" policy activist and observer of the pseudo-referendum organised in Russian-occupied Donetsk region in Ukraine in 2022 Alīna Gerliņa, as well as Ilijass Biks-Bulatovs who is wanted for active participation in warfare against Ukraine and against whom VDD on 21 July 2024 asked to initiate criminal prosecution.

OUTLOOK

- Russia will continue to adapt to the negative influence of international sanctions by seeking new solutions to work with "compatriots" abroad. Russia will also extend attempts to foster the resettlement of "compatriots" living abroad to its territory.
- Russia will continue to develop academic instruments to attract youth, as well as organise informal and interest education-related events in the territory of Russia and Belarus. Russia will continue to invest resources to attract youth, continuing its yet futile attempts to raise future leaders of the "compatriot" environment and promoters of Russia's interests abroad.
- Russia will enhance activities in the military-memorial field, and the central event of 2025 will be celebrating victory in the so-called Great Patriotic War. Attempts to mobilise "compatriot" organisations can be anticipated, including the USSR pensioners' associations in Latvia, as well as facilitation of the veteran participation in events organised by Russia in both premises of the Russian Embassy and Russian territory.
- Latvia will continue to experience latent ethnic tension, which will be maintained by pro-Kremlin displays on social networking sites and urban environment, which for the majority of society are unacceptable. VDD predicts that the pro-Kremlin inclined part of society will continue to be guided by Russian propaganda and lies, with which the aggressor state has protractedly and purposefully fostered the distrust and resentment within this part of society against the state of Latvia.
- In relation to the upcoming municipal elections of 2025, the political parties that are oriented towards the pro-Kremlin inclined electorate will extend more intensive public activities. In their bid for power in several Latvian local and regional governments these parties will try to mobilise potential voters. It can be foreseen that the pre-election rhetoric of these parties will contain the usual narratives fostering Russia's strategic interests. That in turn will negatively impact the overall mood of the audiences of these parties and the ethnic tension level in Latvian society.
- Increasing security risks will be posed by persons who will self-radicalise under the influence of extremist propaganda materials freely available in the internet environment. These materials can push the persons to physical violence against people with different opinions and certain groups of society, e.g., migrants of other races or minorities.

¹⁰ Section 9 of Citizenship Law.

¹¹ Section 1 of the Law on the Status of those Former USSR Citizens who do not have the Citizenship of Latvia or that of any other.



04

INFORMATION SPACE SECURITY

In 2024, Russia's war propaganda and information influence measures were the non-military influence tools that Russia most often used against Latvia's security interests. VDD's analysis shows that in comparison to previous year Russia increased the intensity and aggressiveness of its information influence measures. Russia used the most various spectrum of information resources to ensure the dissemination of information based on war and aggressive foreign policy propaganda narratives to the audience in Latvia.

Since the invasion in Ukraine in 2022, the media used by Russia for its war and aggressive foreign policy propaganda have limited possibilities to disseminate content in the territory of Latvia. The prohibition to rebroadcast TV channels registered in Russia and Belarus remains in force. Accessing over two hundred internet sites used for Russia's propaganda is also restricted in Latvia.

Russia continued adjusting its propaganda operating principles to these conditions and also during the previous year Russia's war propaganda reached Latvia's society through social networking sites, video sharing platforms and online communication applications. Within Russia's information influence activities against Latvia an increasing role was played by persons who had "fled" from Latvia to Russia so they could glorify Russia's war from there as well as justify the murdering of civilians and destruction of cities in Ukraine.

Similar to previous years, also in 2024 VDD conducted a comprehensive monitoring of Latvia's information space to detect activities of persons directed against the security interests of the country. The goal of VDD's monitoring activity was to register pro-Kremlin displays, statements provoking national hatred and posts glorifying Russia's war crimes. Last year the Service identified a number of persons who engaged in disseminating such statements on social networking platforms.

4.1.

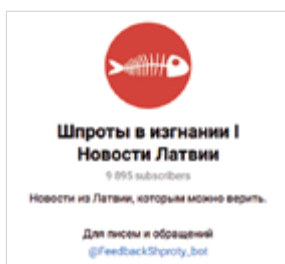
SUBJECTS OF RUSSIA'S INFORMATION INFLUENCE AND THEIR GOALS

In 2024 the content of Russia's TV channels remained a significant resource for Russia's propaganda activities. It reached the Latvian public on video sharing platforms and online communication applications, as well as on sites distributing TV channels that were maintained by illegal content distributors. At the same time, the availability of Russia's and Belarus' TV channels to Latvian public was continuously facilitated by their availability for analogue broadcasting in the border area of Latvia. Therefore the population in the border area were subjected to comprehensive Russia's aggressive foreign policy and war propaganda.



Subjects of Russia's information influence

Last year, a part of Latvian society used "Telegram", "TikTok" and "YouTube" as significant information sources. In parallel, Russia's media companies also used these platforms to disseminate both entertaining content and the content created by Russia's political "discussion" shows.



Screenshots of "Telegram" channels "Shproti v izgnanii" and "Baltnews".

In its war propaganda and information influence activities Russia continuously tried to maintain the impression of separation between art, culture, entertainment and sport from politics. However in VDD's assessment these areas remained closely connected with politics and thus served as significant tools of Russia's influence activities.

VDD assesses that the content created by Russia's propaganda resources easily reached the audience in Latvia via messaging application "Telegram"¹². For instance, such Russian media companies under EU sanctions as "RIA Novosti" and "Izvestija" distributed their content on "Telegram". The "Telegram" channels of "Rossiya Segodnya" projects "Baltnews" and "Shproti v izgnanii" also continued operating. Individuals from Latvia were involved in creating content for these two channels, and it was tailored to Latvian audience.

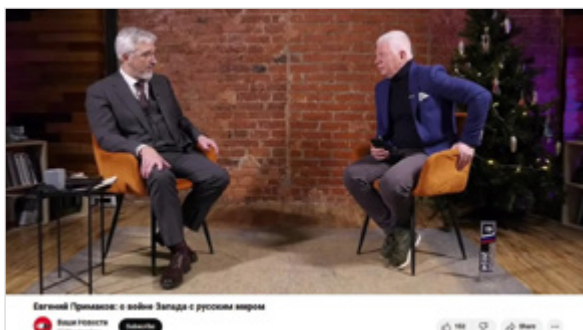
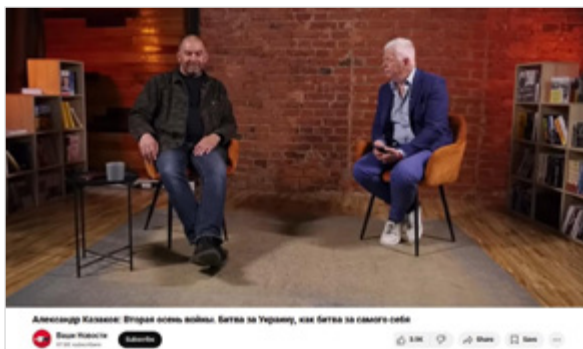
Russia's intelligence and security services also actively used the "Telegram" environment, combining disinformation campaigns with information collection activities. An explicit example of such activities last year was the "Telegram" channel maintained by the pro-Kremlin criminal organisation "Baltic anti-fascists", where massive and aggressive disinformation and propaganda campaigns targeting the Baltics and Ukraine were combined with collection of information in the interests of Russia's intelligence and security services.

In VDD's view, content posing risks to security of Latvia's information space and overall national security interests was also widely available on the video sharing platform "TikTok". On this platform there was a large scale spread of Russia's disinformation, including war propaganda, as well as narratives directed against Latvia and other NATO countries. Terrorist content and

¹² At the end of 2024, "Telegram" decided to limit access to a number of Russian propaganda media "Telegram" channels, including channels of "RIA Novosti" and "Izvestija".

content inviting to violence was also freely available to a wide audience on “TikTok”. The results of information space monitoring conducted by VDD lead to conclude that during last year the highest user aggression level migrated from “Facebook” to the comments environment of “TikTok”.

Last year Russia had limited opportunities to directly use the supporters of Russian regime and its war crimes that reside in Latvia. Therefore in its information influence activities Russia used basically all the best-known pro-Kremlin activists who had moved to Russia – Vadims Aleksejevs, Sergejs Vasiljevs, Aleksejs Stefanovs, Andrejs Mamikins, Ruslans Pankratovs, Igors Gusevs, Kirils Fjodorovs and others. VDD assesses that each of these activists “enacted” his own function in the whole of Russia’s propaganda.



Screenshots from V. Aleksejevs’ interviews with the Russian propagandist Alexandr Kazakov earlier expelled from Latvia and the head of “Rossotrudnichestvo” Yevgeniy Primakov.

V. Aleksejevs can be considered as expressing the most aggressive opinions. He regularly appears on propaganda shows of Russia’s TV channels. He also created his own “Telegram” channel “Russkiy Dnevnik” and actively cooperated with the pro-Kremlin information resource “Vashi Novosti”, as well as creators of “Telegram” channel “Bunker na Lubyanke”. Last year V. Aleksejevs also visited Ukraine’s territories occupied by Russia, taking part in the so-called “press tours” organised by Russia’s Ministry of defence or in fact Russian GRU.



Screenshot from a video published on A.Mamikins’ “YouTube” channel where he announces he is internationally wanted.

In 2024, the former member of European Parliament from Latvia, who has also worked in Latvia’s Russian-language media A. Mamikins also performed activities in support of Russia’s propaganda. He provided support to Russia’s information influence activities by maintaining his “YouTube” channel as well as appearing on Russia’s propaganda TV shows.

According to VDD’s information, the activities of pro-Kremlin activists who have moved to Russia can largely be characterised as competing for the attention of Russia’s propaganda curators and financing. In the name of Russia’s propaganda goals they presented their flight from Latvia as a success story, supporting the spread of various lies about our country.

In the last autumn, VDD detected an increase in the volume of comments in Russian language posted in Latvia’s segment of the social networking platform “Facebook”. VDD’s analysis shows that this trend was related to increased activity by the so-called “internet trolls” or fake profiles of foreign origin posting in Russian language¹³. The goal of these profiles was to increase the tension and dissatisfaction within society to destabilise the internal situation in Latvia.

In most cases the maintainers of such accounts engaged in discussions about Russia’s war in Ukraine, Latvia’s national economy and other topics that caused increase agitation in Latvia’s society. The posts by these accounts were based on narratives characteristic to Russian propaganda, aiming to discredit Ukraine, turn against Latvia and other Western countries and provoke the dissatisfaction of Latvian society with the developments in the country and ruin the trust in Latvia’s officials and state institutions.

VDD’s analysis shows that the usage of so-called “internet trolls” remained a widely used Russian tool against the West. However, in VDD’s assessment their impact on developments in Latvia’s society was minimal.

¹³ “Trolls”- persons with hidden true identity, who deliberately and purposefully post abusive or provocative content in the public space. Russia uses “trolls” to disseminate the war propaganda narratives and information discrediting the political, social or economic processes of Latvia and state officials.



Goals of Russia's information influence

VDD's analysis shows that Russia's information influence activities were mainly aligned with Russia's foreign policy goals – divide and destabilise the transatlantic community and societies of Western countries, including Latvia, discredit Ukraine and its statehood, purposefully turn against Latvia's officials and state institutions, as well as regain the benevolence of international community.

The Service considers that provoking and maintaining disagreements and discords within both the transatlantic community and Latvian society was one of the main goals of Russia's information influence activities. Russia purposefully tried to extend provocative activities in the information space to destabilise the internal situation of Latvia by surfacing topics both sensitively perceived by the society and with the potential to cause discord and disagreements.

Within its information influence activities Russia used every event and situation to disseminate versions about illegitimacy of Ukraine's institutions and doubt Ukraine's statehood. The aim of such campaign was to multiply the doubts within the Western society about the necessity to continue providing support to Ukraine in its fight for independence and territorial integrity as well as foster society's psychological fatigue of war and the necessity to constantly support Ukraine.

Last year VDD also detected that resources used in Russia's information influence campaigns were involved in tarnishing campaigns against the top state officials of Latvia and other Baltic States, as well as their state institutions, law enforcement institutions, and intelligence and security services by spreading disinformation and lies about them. For instance, Russia used the show "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" for this purpose.

4.2.

INFORMATION INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES OF BELARUS

Last year Belarus' information resources also provided support to Russia's war and aggressive foreign policy propaganda. Belarus information resources, including the TV channel "Belarus 1", news agency "Belta" and a number of channels on video sharing platforms created materials aimed at discrediting Latvia and glorify Belarus. For instance, the TV channels used for Belarus' propaganda goals often disseminated lies

about the alleged violent treatment of the illegal border crossers by Latvian border guards on the Latvian-Belorussian border. Such materials usually used also violent images (photo or video) to create the maximum possible empathy.



Screenshots from reports discrediting Latvia and glorifying Belarus demonstrated on Belarus propaganda TV channels about a migrant allegedly beaten by Latvian border guards, the "escape" of some family from Latvia and the youngsters in whose vehicle the Belarus border guards allegedly discovered a package with marijuana.

Last year the curators of Belarus' propaganda regularly used persons who had moved from Latvia to Belarus to glorify the Belorussian regime. In October 2024, Belarus' information resources widely depicted a story about a family that had moved from Latvia to Belarus due to the alleged "russophobia" and "Russian-speaker discrimination". Belarus' disinformation campaigns also used the travel of four young adults from Latvia to Belarus to the music festival "Viva Braslav" from 26 to 28 July. During the border crossing, the young adults were detained by Belarus border guards who claimed to have found a package with marijuana in their vehicle. They were detained and interrogated, and later forced to provide interviews glorifying the Belarus' regime to its information resources.

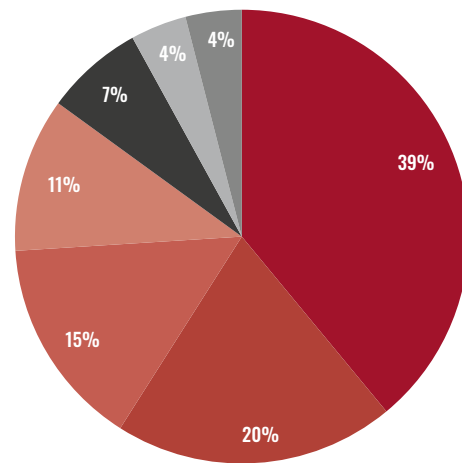
Last year Romāns Samuļs also continued intensive activity from Belarus as he maintained his channel on the video sharing platform “YouTube”. R. Samuļs used this channel to disseminate content that glorifies Belarus and discredits Latvia by interviewing pro-Kremlin activists and creating reports from different cities in Belarus.

In VDD’s assessment the primary audience of Belarus’ propaganda activities were the country’s own population. The Belorussian media were overall depicting Latvia and Western countries as morally decadent, violent and aggressive. In this way Belorussian propaganda tried to frame Latvia and the West as the “external enemy” to consolidate the Belorussian public opinion in support of the reigning regime, which in turn was presented as the guarantee for Belarus’ security and stability.

In addition, Belarus’ propaganda information resources were creating such materials to construct a version about Belarus as a country that respects human rights, treats foreign travellers decently even if they violate the regulations, and cares about the “refugees”.

war propaganda glorified or justified Russia’s war in Ukraine and spread statements aimed at triggering national, ethnic and racial hatred, as well as statements directed against the Republic of Latvia. In comparison to 2023, the spread of such narratives slightly increased. This indicates about the remaining tension in Latvian society, related to Russia’s war in Ukraine and the resulting local-scale processes in Latvia’s domestic policy and society.

Topics of aggressive comments



- Glorification, justification of Russia's war in Ukraine
- Calls for unauthorised and violent protests
- Triggering of national, ethnic and racial hatred
- Triggering of social hatred and enmity
- Statements, invitations directed against the Republic of Latvia
- Other aggressive narratives
- Threats, calls for violence against state officials

Last year VDD also detected several posts and comments on social networking sites where aggressively inclined persons called to turn against the top state officials, as well as engage in unauthorised and violent protests. In comparison to 2023, the spread of narratives calling

4.3.

CONSEQUENCES OF WAR PROPAGANDA

Despite the afore described Russia’s information influence activities, VDD assesses that overall last year the situation in Latvia’s information space remained stable and calm. Russia’s information influence activities were unable to destabilise Latvia’s internal political situation and influence decisions about significant developments in Latvia’s politics, economics and societal life according to the Kremlin’s worldview.

In most cases registered by the Service aggressively inclined social network users under the influence of

IN 2024, DISPLAYS OF AGGRESSION IN THE INFORMATION SPACE EXACERBATED DUE TO:

- second anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February;
- Latvian Legionnaires Commemoration Day on 16 March;
- Russian presidential elections on 17 March;
- Commemoration Day of Victims of Communist Terror on 25 March;
- 9 May or day when Russia celebrates the so-called “victory” in the Second World War;
- Ukrainian Vyshyvanka day on 16 May;
- Dismantling and moving of monuments glorifying Soviet regime and Russia’s imperialism, as well as renaming of streets.



The distribution of authors of comments that are aggressive and support Russia within the territory of Latvia, as detected by VDD in the internet environment in 2024

for violent protests decreased. The manifestations of aggression can overall be explained as the emotional response of the discontent part of society to the current developments in country's domestic policy, social and economic domains.

Less often VDD detected statements aimed at triggering social hatred and enmity against certain groups of society. They were mainly aimed at State Police officers, journalists, medical professionals and LGBTQ+ community. Several posts glorifying terrorism and encouraging activities of terrorist nature were also detected last year. These posts were mainly the radical reaction to the terror act of 22 March in Russia's concert hall "Crocus City Hall".

Last year VDD continued to hold preventive talks with authors of aggressive posts. The evaluation of the talks shows that the authors of aggressive narratives had protractedly consumed Russia's propaganda, as well as content based on disinformation and conspiracy theories that is widely available on a number of social networking sites.

The verbal aggression of social networking sites' users nevertheless remained occasional and the activities of these persons did not pose direct threats to Latvia's national security. As a result of talks, most post authors expressed readiness to further refrain from publishing similar content, as well as deleted the aggressive posts identified by the Service.

4.4.

CHINA'S INFORMATION INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

As Russia's war in Ukraine continued, China expanded its information influence activities in Europe to improve its public image, which suffered after China expressed its ambiguous position regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Namely, last year China continued to position itself as a responsible superpower and trusted cooperation partner which stands for peace and global development, at the same time opposing the allegedly aggressive West – the US and NATO – to itself. In this way China tried to weaken the strong transatlantic ties between Europe and the US.

China implemented a part of these influence measures in a covert manner. China's representatives and opinion leaders friendly to it integrated narratives in line with China's interests in rhetoric seemingly unrelated to politics, including in the attempts to address young audience on social networking sites, primarily – "TikTok". Thereby China implemented its long-term intent – to create public benevolent to it to implement its foreign policy goals.

In Latvia, China continued to purposefully establish and strengthen position across various domains to obtain the lobby for its interests in political, economic, academic, scientific and research, as well as cultural

and media environments. VDD's analysis shows that by spreading China's official narratives in Latvia's information space, the supporters of China's interests in Latvia became a part of China's comprehensive global propaganda campaign. VDD identified cases when persons benevolent to China, including from political circles, systemically stressed in the public space China's accomplishments and opportunities offered, uncritically encouraging Latvia's politicians, entrepreneurs, researchers, students and other members of society to a more active cooperation, including in sectors related to risks of economic dependence and data security.

VDD considers that information influence measures implemented by China in Latvia were not of the same scale and aggression as those of Russia. However, China's information influence measures were systemic, gradual and oriented towards reaching long-term goals, using methods of the so-called "soft power". In VDD's assessment the information influence activities implemented by China are connected to risks because through its activities China is attempting to weaken the transatlantic ties between the EU and the US, as well as foster the dissemination of narratives aligned with its geopolitical interests in Latvia's information space.

COUNTERACTION TO INFORMATION INFLUENCE MEASURES



Monitoring the information space

Last year VDD continued to constantly monitor the information space to identify persons and groups posing potential threat to Latvia's national security. Throughout 2024, the Service conducted an in-depth evaluation of thousands of comments and videos posted online, which expressed support to Russia's aggression, as well as contained statements directed against the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, state authority and constitutional order of Latvia.

In such cases VDD identified the authors of the posts and implemented preventive measures to tackle the potential threat. VDD's analysis showed that overall during last year in comparison to 2023, the level of aggression on social networking sites and online messaging applications did not significantly change.



Criminal enforcement measures

Last year VDD performed an in-depth analysis of thousands of comments and posts on social networking sites "Facebook", "TikTok", "Telegram" and "Youtube" to identify aggressive statements in the context of elements of crimes stipulated in the Criminal Law.

Last year VDD initiated 12 criminal cases in relation to public statements in support of Russia's aggression and interests. Of those, five criminal cases were initiated for online activity aimed at triggering hatred against Latvians and Ukrainians, two – for public

glorification and justification of Russia's war crimes, whereas another five – for both aforementioned crimes simultaneously (see more in Chapter 7 about the pre-trial investigation).



Preventive talks and warnings

Within its preventive work VDD continued to hold talks with persons who had made posts on social networking sites and online communication applications expressing support to Russia or spreading narratives in line with aggressor state's interests. Last year the Service officially warned more than 300 Latvian nationals, who had spread aggressive comments on various online platforms, about the criminal liability enforceable in case of commission of a crime.



Closing of propaganda resources and other tools

According to its competence, in 2024 VDD continued assessing the operation of various internet sites to identify those that are used in Russia's information influence activities or purposefully and systemically disseminate content that may pose threat to Latvia's national security. Upon detecting such internet sites, VDD in accordance with the procedure stipulated in the Electronic Communication Law informed the National Electronic Mass Media Council, with recommendation to restrict access to these sites from the territory of Latvia. Last year the Service recommended the restricting of access to over 40 such internet sites.

Last year VDD also intensively cooperated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in evaluating the potential effects on society from planned events of guest artists from Russia, Belarus and other countries, paying special focus on the artists' stance regarding Russia's aggression. VDD asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to declare eight artists *persona non grata* as their performance in Latvia could potentially be used for the propaganda purposes of Russia's war.

VDD also held talks with a number of companies engaged in event organisation, warning their representatives about the underlying risks from potential cooperation with artists who continue to perform in either Russia or Belarus or have expresses support to these aggressor states in their rhetoric.



Informing the public

In 2024, the Service continued its public communication, so that by aligning it to the counterintelligence and investigation interests turn the attention of Latvia's society to the current security situation in our country as well as in the broader region. Within its public communication VDD also stressed the risks stemming from the aggressive measures implemented by Russia's and Belarus' intelligence and security services against the residents of our country within the territories of Russia and Belarus. VDD reiterates to avoid all travel to these countries hostile to Latvia.

OUTLOOK

- Russia and its ally Belarus will continue to widely deploy propaganda and information influence measures as a tool to keep their local populations calm and destabilise the Western society. Russia's and Belarus' propaganda and information influence measures will continue to negatively impact also Latvia, especially the uncritically-minded part of society.
- Russia will continue aligning information influence measures to the geopolitical situation and society's information consumption habits. VDD anticipates that the significance of insufficiently controlled online communication applications and video sharing platforms in Russia's information influence activities will increase. In addition, Russia will try to use AI tools to implement its influence activities.
- The information dissemination and consumption trends of 2024 confirmed, that "TikTok" is becoming a platform where the level of verbal aggression is rapidly increasing. Russia will use this situation in its interests, namely to divide Latvia's society and increase tension through purposeful exploitation of various sensitive topics.
- In May 2025, it will be 80 years since the end of the Second World War. In VDD's assessment, in relation to this fact Russia will enhance non-military influence activities aimed at spreading interpretations about the course of the Second World War according to Russia's geopolitical interests. In parallel, Russia will extend propaganda and disinformation campaigns to spread false and discrediting narratives about Latvia.
- China will continue to use the opinion leaders and "lobbies" of its interests in areas significant to Latvia's national economy, as well as political and academic circles, to construct public opinion benevolent towards China. It will try to extend information influence campaigns directed at weakening the belonging of Latvia's society to the West and fine-tune our country's population to support the worldview of the Chinese Communist Party.



05

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Last year the direct and indirect cooperation of local businesses with Russia remained the main source of risks to Latvia's economic security and international reputation. VDD and other responsible services continuously assessed suspicious transactions by Latvian companies to detect and prevent violations of international sanctions. At the same time, Latvia continued to gradually move towards severing economic ties with Russia.

Last year, VDD continuously collected and analysed a wide range of information in order to identify violations of the EU sanctions imposed against Russia and Belarus. The Service obtained information on suspicious transactions both from its operational activities and from other institutions, companies and citizens.

In the area of financial security, last year VDD continued vetting potential foreign investors who wished to gain influence in commercial companies of importance to Latvia's national security or residence rights in Latvia based on investments.

In the area of Latvia's energy security, last year VDD paid increased attention to the processes related to the planned disconnection from the BRELL¹⁴, electricity supply grid in February 2025 and strengthening the security of Latvia's critical energy infrastructure objects.

In the transport sector, VDD continued to monitor the difficulties related to the need to shift from cooperation with Russia and Belarus to new sources of freight flows. Challenges related to the planned construction of the "Rail Baltica" railway line were the key issue in this sector last year, which VDD, within its remit, also focused on.

¹⁴ BRELL – electricity supply grid, which on the basis of an agreement concluded in 2001 until now connected the electricity supply systems of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to Russia and Belarus; the abbreviation contains the initials of the involved states.



5.1.

SITUATION REGARDING APPLICATION OF SANCTIONS

In the past year, VDD continued to pay close attention to processes that could negatively affect the security of Latvia's financial sector and the implementation of the international sanctions regime in our country.

Information on risks to the country's economic security was obtained by VDD both through operational methods and by analysing multi-source information, including open source information. In order to timely identify risks, the Service also assessed various processes both in Latvia and abroad that may have an impact on economic security. VDD informed the responsible institutions about the identified risks and took measures within its competence to prevent the risks.

In 2024, cross-border business transactions with sanctioned goods and services eastwards by both local and foreign economic operators continued to pose significant risks. The Service's analysis shows that trade in sanctioned goods with countries in Central Asia and Middle East that have not imposed trade restrictions with Russia continued to pose increased risks of sanctions violations.

To circumvent sanctions, unscrupulous economic operators continued to conceal the true nature and links with Russia of their business transactions. They manipulated information on the actual composition, origin or end-recipients of shipments, used intermediaries not only in third countries but also in Europe, and chose complex and economically unjustified delivery routes and modes.

Last year, in order to detect violations of the EU sanctions imposed against Russia or Belarus, VDD continuously obtained and analysed information on possible cooperation of Latvian nationals with natural and legal persons included in the the EU sanctions lists. The Service also regularly checked suspicious transactions of local entrepreneurs with companies in third countries where EU sanctions against Russia are not supported and applied¹⁵. In addition, VDD increased its focus on service businesses to identify cases where services were provided to natural or legal persons on the EU sanctions lists or were in breach of the EU ban on the provision of certain services to subjects in Russia or to companies abroad linked to the aggressor state.

VDD's analysis shows that the methods of sanctions evasion did not change significantly last year. The Service observed similar trends in cases of circumvention of individual sanctions imposed against natural and legal persons in Russia and in cases of circumvention of import and export bans on certain goods.

Sanctioned persons attempted to hide their links with Russia by using start-up companies in third countries and by appointing formal managers and non-sanctioned persons of trust in the management and ownership structures of the companies. Similarly, unscrupulous businesses attempted to circumvent sanctions by setting up seemingly legitimate transaction schemes, concluding fictitious contracts and arranging the supply and payment for sanctioned goods through unrelated companies and supply routes in Europe and third countries.

In the assessment of VDD, the use of such schemes was possible due to the existing deficiencies and often overly formalistic approach to monitoring compliance with sanctions and identifying the real beneficiaries of foreign companies.

¹⁵ Investigation of violations of sectoral sanctions or import or export bans imposed on concrete goods is within the remit of State Revenue Service.

In addition, gaps in the EU sanctions legal framework and enforcement, including exceptions in the EU sanctions framework for imports of certain Russian goods into the EU and exports of the EU goods to Russia, continued to create conditions favourable for sanctions evasion. The possibility of transit of sanctioned goods through Russia and Belarus to other countries also facilitated the circumvention of sanctions. This possibility was also used fictitiously to conceal that Russia or Belarus was the true end-destination of the sanctioned goods.

5.2.

INVESTIGATING SANCTIONS VIOLATIONS

Last year, VDD initiated seven criminal cases on suspicion of violating the EU sanctions imposed against Russia. Unlike in other years, the majority of these criminal cases – five – were initiated by the

Service in connection with the provision of services and employment relationships with companies in Russia or sanctioned companies in other countries.

Of these, in three cases related to the provision of services, VDD detected possible violations of individual sanctions or sanctions imposed against specific Russian nationals. Namely, Latvian nationals had provided services to a company controlled by a person subject to the EU sanctions. For example, Latvian nationals had performed the duties of a sales manager for such a company, which could be assessed as providing economic resources to a person subject to sanctions¹⁶.

In other two cases, the Service detected possible violations of the so-called sectoral sanctions, i.e. the unauthorised provision of certain services to companies registered in Russia. In both cases, Latvian nationals had provided IT consultancy services¹⁷ to a company in Russia, e.g. by participating in software development and implementation contrary to the EU ban.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESSES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF SANCTIONS EVASION

VDD recommends that Latvian businesses, when assessing any potential transaction, always carefully check whether it is related to the risks of violation of the the EU sanctions against Russia and Belarus.

VDD recommends that all parties involved should be carefully assessed before engaging in transactions to avoid unwittingly becoming part of a scheme to circumvent sanctions against Russia or Belarus.

- Particular caution should be exercised in business transactions involving goods subject to the EU import or export restrictions. In addition, the Service underlines that the EU has also imposed a ban on the provision of a number of services to companies and other subjects registered in Russia and Belarus.
- VDD warns that one of the signs of a potential attempt to circumvent sanctions is the involvement of subjects related to Russia or Belarus in import or export transactions with third countries involving sanctioned goods or services.
- VDD stresses that sanctions circumvention may involve not only companies but also individuals with private or economic ties to Russia or Belarus.
- In VDD's assessment, not only banks and other credit institutions, but also other businesses should continue to regularly identify and manage the risks of sanctions violation related to their business activities. VDD recommends that businesses periodically improve their internal risk control mechanisms and implement appropriate risk mitigation measures.



Illustrative image, VDD

¹⁶ According to Article 1 (d) of the Council Regulation (EU) No 269/2014 of 17 March 2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, “economic resources” means assets of every kind, whether tangible or intangible, movable or immovable, which are not funds but may be used to obtain funds, goods or services.

¹⁷ Article 5n Sub-article 2 of Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

SANCTIONS BREACH DETECTED – UNAUTHORISED SUPPLY OF SERVICES TO RUSSIA



Illustrative image, Freepik

Last year, as a result of VDD's investigation, the prosecutor fined a Latvian citizen for breaching EU sanctions by providing quality management and efficiency improvement advice to a company in Russia.

The criminal case against this Latvian citizen was initiated by VDD in 2023 pursuant to Section 84 Paragraph 1 of the Criminal Law. The Russian company with which the Latvian national cooperated is engaged in the development of information systems software and provides its services to both Russian state institutions and private sector companies, which continue to operate in Russia despite the aggressor state's war in Ukraine.

VDD's investigation revealed that the Latvian citizen, who was registered as an economic operator, had concluded a contract with a company registered in Russia to provide management, planning, organisation, efficiency and control consultancy. In return for a fee, the person had carried out an analysis comparing the work planned by the company with the work actually carried out and had made recommendations to the company to improve its performance. On 29 February 2024, VDD referred the criminal case to the Prosecution Office, asking to initiate criminal prosecution against the person.

VDD draws attention to the fact that the Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine prohibits the provision, directly or indirectly, of accounting, auditing, including statutory auditing, bookkeeping services or tax advice, or economic and management consulting or public relations services to the Russian government or to legal persons, entities or bodies in Russia.

Investigation result:

The person pleaded guilty and was fined €7,700 under the prosecutor's penalty order.

VDD REITERATES!

Violating the EU sanctions against Russia and Belarus is a criminal offence in Latvia punishable by up to eight years' imprisonment. It is the responsibility of businesses to make sure that a transaction will not result in a breach of sanctions. Ignorance does not exempt from liability.

One criminal case for possible violation of EU sanctions was initiated by the Service in connection with the unauthorised supply of certain goods to Russia. In another criminal case, the Service investigated the possible involvement of a Latvian national in a financial transaction scheme for the benefit of a sanctioned person.

As a result of the investigations, VDD obtained sufficient body of evidence in two of the criminal cases initiated in 2024, asking the Prosecution Office

to initiate criminal prosecution of the suspects. The criminal cases referred for prosecution relate to the provision of services. Four criminal proceedings initiated in 2024 are still under investigation by VDD, while one criminal case was discontinued, as the Service did not establish the elements of a crime during the investigation.

In addition, last year VDD referred a criminal case initiated back in 2023 for violation of sanctions for criminal prosecution, in which a fine was imposed on the person (see more on this case under "Sanctions breach detected – unauthorised supply of services to Russia").

Next to criminal proceedings, VDD officers held preventive talks with business representatives, individual economic operators and natural persons whose activities were identified as posing a risk of a potential violation of sanctions.

5.3.

INVOLVEMENT OF VDD IN IMPROVING THE SANCTIONS REGIME AND COMPLIANCE CONTROL

Last year, VDD continued cooperation with state institutions involved in the coordination, implementation and compliance control of sanctions, including informing the responsible institutions about the risks of sanctions violations identified by VDD and the possibilities to improve the sanctions regime imposed against Russia and Belarus.

In 2024, VDD provided its assessment to senior state officials and the Bank of Latvia on developments in the business environment and deficiencies in the sanctions regime that pose risks of sanctions evasion. The Service drew attention to the risks related to the different scope of restrictions on imports and exports of goods against Russia and Belarus. With significantly fewer goods banned for import to Belarus, Russia could use its closest ally Belarus as a proxy for obtaining certain banned goods from European countries.

In addition, the Service drew attention to the need to reinforce controls on shipments transported to other countries via Russian or Belorussian territory, recognising the risk that goods may not reach their declared end-destination.

Last year, VDD recommended the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to name certain Russian companies to the EU sanctions list for publicly supporting the Russian government and military aggression against Ukraine. This year, VDD, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, continues collecting the evidence needed to include such subjects on the EU sanctions lists.

Last year, VDD also provided the Financial Intelligence Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Customs Board of the State Revenue Service with information obtained by the Service on foreign companies, mainly from Kyrgyzstan, which are used as proxies to circumvent sanctions and purchase goods for the Russian military industry.

The Service also informed senior state officials of the risks associated with the possible economic interests and activities in Latvia of certain individuals close to the Russian political elite.

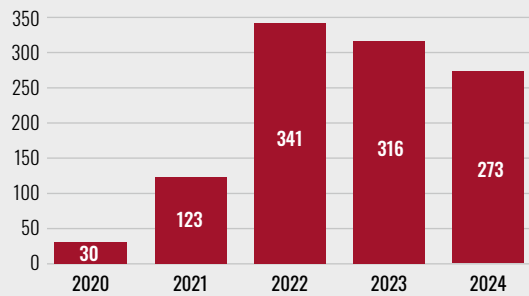
REPORTS RECEIVED OF POSSIBLE BREACHES OF SANCTIONS

Last year, VDD continued to receive regular reports of possible violations of international sanctions from both public institutions and the private sector. The Service analysed each case in depth. When signs of a crime were identified, VDD pursued criminal proceedings. When potential risks of sanctions violations were identified, VDD held talks with the persons involved and implemented other preventive measures.

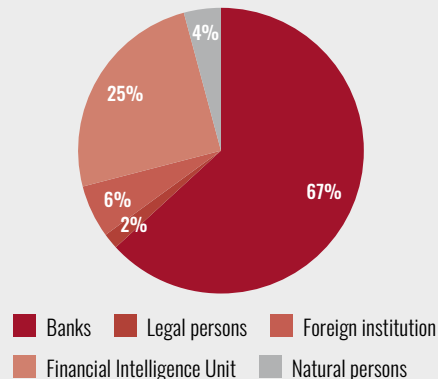
In 2024, VDD received 273 reports of possible sanctions violations. 150 reports came from banks, 14 from natural persons and six from legal persons. The remaining 103 reports were received by VDD from state institutions, the majority of which – 83 – were from the Financial Intelligence Unit.

The decrease in the number of reports compared to the previous two years was due to the clarifications introduced by the Financial Intelligence Unit in 2023 to the guidelines for reporting suspicious transactions, which require information on possible cases of sanctions evasion to be provided to the Financial Intelligence Unit instead of VDD. As a result of this change, VDD received significantly fewer suspicious transaction reports.

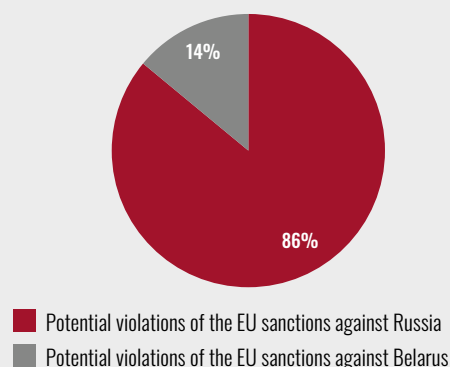
Dynamic of reports received by VDD over last five years



Reports received by VDD, by origin



Reports received of possible EU sanctions violations, by sanctioned country



According to the amended guidelines, upon receipt of information on possible circumvention of sanctions, Financial Intelligence Unit shall conduct an in-depth investigation of the case and inform VDD of its findings. It is expected that, due to the changes in the reporting guidelines, the Service will continue to receive fewer reports of suspicious transactions, while the proportion of reports in which the competent authority – the Financial Intelligence Unit – has provided a qualitative analysis of the case will increase.

The majority of the reports received by VDD last year, or 63%, were about possible violations of the EU sanctions against Russia, while 10% – about possible violations of the EU sanctions against Belarus. The Service also received reports on possible violations of sanctions imposed by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) – 17%, as well as possible violations of national sanctions imposed by various countries – mainly the UK and Ukraine (10%).

It should be noted that the Latvian Criminal Law does not provide for liability for violations of the US OFAC sanctions and other national sanctions. At the same time, VDD recommends that entrepreneurs and other Latvian nationals critically assess the possibilities of cooperation with natural and legal persons included in these sanctions lists, especially if they have provided support for Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

As in 2022 and 2023, the majority of reports received by VDD last year concerned possible breaches of EU sectoral sanctions or bans on imports or exports of specific goods imposed against Russia or Belarus. The Service also received a significant number of reports concerning possible violations of the so-called individual sanctions, or restrictions on cooperation with specific Russian and Belarusian nationals. These reports concerned possible violations of sanctions imposed by the EU, the US OFAC, the UK and Ukraine against specific individuals.

Last year saw an increase in the number of reports received by the Service on possible violations of the EU ban on the provision of certain services to Russia or Russian nationals. The reports concerned possible involvement of both Latvian nationals and nationals of other countries, who have been granted a temporary residence permit in Latvia, in the provision of unauthorised services to the aggressor state.

As a result of the analysis of the reports, VDD in a number of cases held talks with the persons involved in the transactions, warning them of the criminal liability for sanctions violations. In some cases, the assessment resulted in initiating a criminal case.

5.4.

INVESTOR VETTING



Illustrative image, VDD

Last year, VDD continued vetting investors who, on the basis of their investments, claimed to acquire a significant shareholding or decisive influence in commercial companies of importance to Latvia's national security¹⁸. Within the vetting, the Service assessed whether investments by foreign citizens or companies in strategically important companies and sectors of national economy would have a negative impact on Latvia's national security.

In 2024, the Service within its remit vetted six potential investors in commercial companies of national security significance, providing opinions on them to the Ministry of Economics. In one of these cases, VDD issued a negative recommendation to the Ministry of Economics based on the investor's links with Russia discovered by the Service.

¹⁸ Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.311 of 20 June 2023 "Procedure for preventing threats to commercial companies, associations and foundations significant to national security".

ECONOMIC SECURITY

In this case, the investor sought to acquire a decisive influence in a commercial company of national security importance, which would allow the investor to gain control over decision-making in the commercial company.

In accordance with the EU regulation¹⁹ and the procedure established by the Cabinet of Ministers²⁰, the Service also assessed the information regularly received from the Ministry of Economics on potential direct investments of third-country investors – companies and natural persons that are being assessed in other EU Member States. In 2024, the Service received 275 notifications from the Ministry of Economy on potential direct investments of third-country investors in other EU member states. As a result of vetting, VDD did not identify any risks to Latvia’s national security interests related to these investors and investments.

In 2024, VDD also continued vetting potential shareholders and true beneficiaries of Latvian commercial banks and other financial service providers. Last year, VDD performed vetting of four such cases, in two of them providing negative opinions to the Bank of Latvia on potential shareholders whose past performance had been identified as posing elevated risks.

In other cases, where national level decisions related to sectors or infrastructure of significance to national economy had to be taken, VDD assessed particular companies at the request of the decision-makers. Last year, VDD issued four such opinions to state institutions and public undertakings. Two were related to bidders in nationally significant procurements, one to a potential merger, and in another case, the evaluation

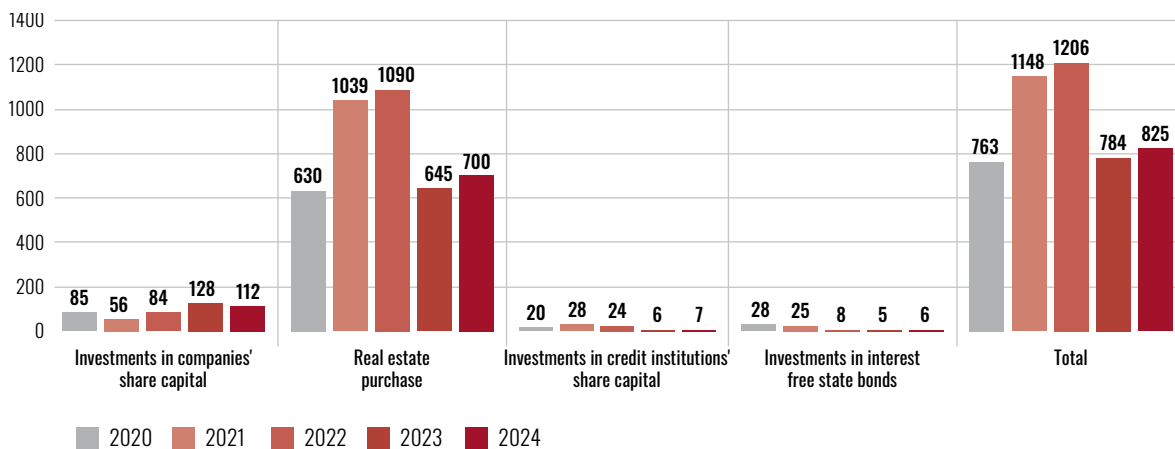
was carried out because a Latvian company was linked to a company registered in another country and the latter included on that country’s national sanctions list. As a result of vetting, no risks to our national security interests were identified.

Last year, VDD also continued vetting foreigners who wished to obtain a temporary residence permit (TRP) in our country on the basis of investments made in the Latvian economy. This possibility is provided for in Section 23 Paragraph 1 Articles 28, 29, 30 and 31.

The Service carried out vetting of foreign nationals from the so-called risk countries, the list of which is set out in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 21 June 2010 No. 554 “Regulation Regarding the Countries for the Citizens of which an Additional Assessment shall be Performed when Issuing a Visa or a Residence Permit”. In the course of vetting, the Service assessed whether the stay of these foreign nationals in Latvia could pose a risk to Latvia’s national security. VDD forwarded its findings to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs for a decision on the possibility of issuing a TRP.

Last year, VDD received 825 applications from foreign investors for TRP based on investment in Latvian economy. This number includes both investors (377) and their family members (448 in total – spouses, minor children, etc.). 604 persons reapplied for a TRP on investment grounds as their previous permit was about to expire. 221 persons applied for a TRP for the first time, 92 of whom were investors and 129 – their family members. The Service also continued vetting processes of investors and their family members from 2023.

Dynamic of TRP applicants, by type of investment



¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.606 of 3 October 2017 “On information to be provided to the institution determined in the National Security Law and actions regarding information about foreign direct investments”.

As in previous years, the majority of foreigners vetted by the Service last year wished to obtain a TRP on the basis of real estate purchased in Latvia. In 2024, there were 700 such persons, or 85% of all TRP applicants vetted by VDD. 108 foreigners applied for a TRP on this basis for the first time, while 592 – repeatedly. 322 of them were real estate buyers, while the remaining 378 were their family members.

Last year, 112 foreigners applied for a TRP based on investment in a capital company. 103 foreigners applied for a TRP on this basis for the first time, while nine applied for it repeatedly. Of these, 49 were investors in a specific capital company, while the remaining 63 were their family members.

As in other years, only a few risk country nationals – seven persons – applied for a TRP in Latvia on the basis of investments in the subordinated share capital of credit institutions. Five of these persons applied for the first time, while two submitted repeated applications. Four of these persons were investors, while the remaining three were their family members.

The lowest number of foreigners applying for a TRP last year was for investments in interest-free government bonds (six persons). Five of them applied for a TRP for the first time, whereas one – repeatedly. Two of these persons were investors, while the other four were their family members.

Among the nationals of risk countries vetted by VDD last year who sought to obtain a TRP on the basis of investment, the largest number were Israeli nationals (128 persons). The most frequent applicants for investment-based TRPs last year were also citizens of Uzbekistan (90 persons), China (90 persons), Kyrgyzstan (85 persons), Ukraine (70 persons), Türkiye (65 persons), Russia (60 persons) and Kazakhstan (41 persons). A small number of TRP applicants came from almost 30 other countries.

The Service cooperated closely with the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in the process of vetting foreigners. Last year, a total of 537 foreigners who had applied for a residence permit in connection with an investment were refused or had their TRPs revoked. The high number of TRP refusals was mainly due to the large number of Russian citizens who groundlessly applied for a TRP in exchange for investment. According to the amendments to the Immigration Law of 23 September 2022, Russian as well as Belorussian citizens are no longer eligible to apply for residence in Latvia in exchange for investment. Last year, a total of 344 Russian citizens were refused or had their TRPs revoked, most of whom had applied for a TRP by the end of 2023.

5.5.

ENERGY SECURITY



Illustrative image, Freepik

The main priority for Latvia's energy security last year remained the preparation for the desynchronization from the BRELL electricity supply grid linking Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia with Russia and Belarus, and connecting to the continental European energy network.

In the face of the risk that Russia might prematurely disconnect the Baltic States from BRELL, VDD closely followed the developments and regularly informed the senior state officials of the current situation.

In the second half of 2024, VDD monitored the information space, assessing the manifestations related to the planned disconnection from BRELL. The Service paid increased attention to the narratives disseminated in the Russian and Belorussian information space on this subject, as well as to the cases of disinformation dissemination in Latvia.

Russia and Belarus tried to use the disconnecting of the Baltic States from BRELL to discredit Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, presenting the disconnecting as imprudent action that in the long run will leave the Baltic States with increased electricity prices and decrease in energy security. Russia and Belarus continues their attempts to doubt the capability of the Baltic States to independently ensure stable operation of the electricity network.

Complete finalisation of the desynchronization process and introduction of the new electricity balancing market will require the whole year. In VDD's assessment, although initially the disconnecting from BRELL will create additional costs, in the long term it is a strategic and justified step to reduce Russia's influence possibilities and strengthen the energy security of the Baltic States.

VDD continued cooperation with public undertakings to improve the security regime at critical energy infrastructure objects. At this moment the protection of the critical energy infrastructure is extremely crucial, given the disconnection from BRELL and the acts of sabotage carried out by the aggressor state Russia in the Western countries. At the same time, after the desynchronization from BRELL, Latvia's energy security will significantly depend on availability of interconnections at regional level.

In the end of last year, VDD closely followed the developments related to the damage to EstLink 2 underwater electricity cable linking Finland and Estonia in the Gulf of Finland, including through communication with its foreign partner services. This incident repeatedly confirmed that the Baltic States must continue to strengthen the physical and cyber security of their energy infrastructure.

5.6.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN TRANSPORT SECTOR



Illustrative image, Freepik

Last year under the influence of international sanctions the volume of cargos from Russia and Belarus continued to decrease, however the turnover with these countries still remained. VDD stresses that in case of continuing economic cooperation with Russia and Belarus, one should account for heightened sanctions evasion risks. Last year VDD regularly assesses cases related to freight transport of which information indicating risks of sanctions evasion was obtained.

In VDD's assessment, Latvia must continue to reduce the volume of economic cooperation with Russia and Belarus. In addition, on national scale the development strategies of state infrastructure and public undertakings must be constantly updated, thus re-orienting the operation in accordance with Latvia's long-term interests, which imply maximum economic independence from aggressor state Russia.

Last year, a wide negative resonance in the public space was caused by the challenges related to the construction of European-gauge railway "Rail Baltica" in Latvia. "Rail Baltica" is a project of interstate significance and its construction in Latvia should be synchronised with other Baltic States, in the coming years focusing and attaining significant progress in the construction of "Rail Baltica" main track from Lithuanian border to Estonia.

Connecting the "Rail Baltica" main track with Riga city centre and Riga International Airport with current gauge rails of 1520mm is intended only as a temporary option. Thus, Latvia must intensively work on the optimal solution so that in the future Riga could be connected with European-gauge railway of 1435mm.

In VDD's assessment, it is short-sighted to perceive "Rail Baltica" only through the prism of European-scale mobility possibilities for Latvian population. From the perspective of Latvia's economic interests and transport sector development already at this stage cargo handling must be considered so that the main track could be fully exploited even in the case of Salaspils intermodal logistics center construction will not yet be finalised. Efficient cargo turnover possibilities are crucial, especially considering the significance of "Rail Baltica" in improving the military mobility, which is directly related to Latvia's national security interests.

Last year VDD continued informing senior state officials about the detected risks for the "Rail Baltica" project course. In addition, following the project implementers request VDD according to its competence evaluated 15 companies – candidates for engaging in "Rail Baltica" project implementation.

In relation to the established risk factors, VDD recommended the project implementers to critically assess potential cooperation with four of the candidates. The established risk factors were affiliations in Russia or China, as well as historic cooperation with Russia. The Service also continued vetting persons who in connection with engagement in project implementation required to access non-disclosable information about the railway track construction or critical infrastructure objects. Within a year, VDD vetted 252 such persons and did not establish among them persons posing intelligence or other risks.

OUTLOOK

- In VDD's assessment Latvia's economic security will continue facing challenges from sanctions evasion risks related to eastward flows of import, export and transit. As the economic cooperation with Russia continues, Latvia's responsible services will have to invest significant resources to identify cases of sanctions evasion, their investigation and prevention.
- Some Latvian businesses will remain interested in continuing the cooperation with Russia or Belarus, also seeking ways to circumvent the EU sanctions. Elevated sanctions evasion risks will continue to stem from transactions of local companies with companies in third countries that have not imposed restrictive measures against Russia and Belarus.
- This year purposeful and systemic work will be required in Latvia to ensure a stable functioning of the electricity network after the disconnection of the Baltic States from BRELL. Taking into account the malign activities organised by Russia against a number of objects in Western countries, critical energy infrastructure protection measures will retain their significance in Latvia.
- The transport sector will continue to face the current challenges related to decrease in cargo turnover and necessity to reorient from the former intense cooperation with Russia and Belarus to new sources of cargo flows. In this complex situation, it will be crucial for the companies operating in the transport sector to introduce smart adaptive measures to continue their economic operations.
- In 2025 Latvia will have to continue tackling challenges related to implementation of "Rail Baltica" railway project, which is significant to strengthen Latvia's national security. The aggressor state Russia will use the delays in project implementation in its propaganda to discredit Latvian government and other institutions, as well as denigrate the significance of this strategic project in the eyes of society.



06

COUNTERTERRORISM

Terrorists and supporters of violent ideologies continued to threaten European security also in 2024 by carrying out terror attacks in several countries. The terrorism threat level in Latvia remained low. Nevertheless, considering the terror attacks in other countries, VDD continued implementing a wide range of preventive measures to keep the terrorism risks at minimum.

Last year the Islamic terrorist groups *Daesh* and *Al-Qaeda* as well as terrorist groups related to them posed the most significant terrorism threat to the security of European countries. These groups expanded their activity across several global regions, especially in Afghanistan and Sahel, as well as tried to facilitate terror attacks in European countries by spreading terrorism propaganda.

In 2024, the armed conflict in the Middle East between Israel and the terrorist groups supported by Iran further influenced the European security situation as several violent incidents took place also in Europe.

VDD's analysis last year surfaced several new trends. Namely, increasing youth, including minors, engagement as well as increase in the AI-generated propaganda material volume.

Right- and left-wing extremism terrorism threat level remained elevated. Last year, right- and left-wing extremists carried out several terror attacks in European countries.

To reduce terrorism risks in Latvia, VDD purposefully collected information about persons whose behaviour demonstrated signs of radicalisation. The Service implemented measures to prevent their potential engaging in terrorist activities, in more serious cases also initiating a criminal case against the person.

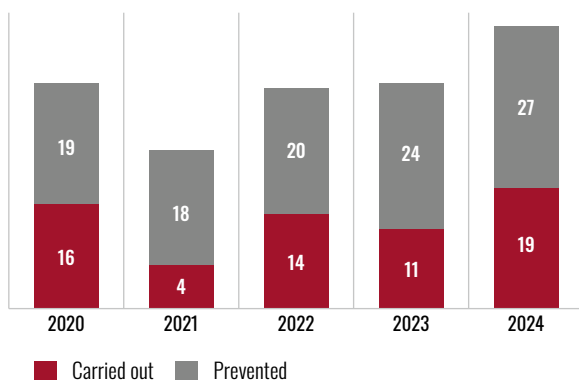


6.1.

TERRORISM THREAT SITUATION IN EUROPE

In 2024, Europe experienced 19 terror attacks, all of which – small scale attacks. Of those, 16 were carried out by radical Islamists whereas three – by followers of other ideologies that justify violence. The services of European countries succeeded in preventing 27 attacks. Of those, 25 were plotted by Islamists and two – by followers of other ideologies justifying violence.

Terrorist attacks in Europe



The increase in the number of terror attacks in Europe in comparison to previous years can be explained by the impact of the Middle East armed conflict on European security situation. In relation to developments in the Middle East, attacks were turned against Israeli embassies and companies in Europe that supply the Israeli armed forces with various technological devices. Several European countries maintained high or elevated terrorism threat level during 2024.

European services last year especially focused on the heightened risks of violent attacks by radically inclined Muslims to revenge the cases of burning the Quran and other cases of turning against religious symbols important to them. To mitigate the risks of violent attacks, several European countries last year amended their legal regulations forbidding public desecration of religious texts.

Attack risks to mass gathering sights, especially during international sports or culture events, pertained. VDD's analysis shows that attacks by individual persons to mass gathering sites in Europe remain possible, including with the aim to avenge the developments in the Middle East.

Similar to previous years, also in 2024 the terrorist attacks were mainly carried out by representatives of two groups of society. First, the so-called home-grown terrorists or persons born, raised, educated and protractedly residing in Europe, who had radicalised under the influence of Islamist terrorist group propaganda. Second, asylum seekers who had entered Europe from countries with heightened terrorist group presence.

VDD's analysis of European cases shows that also in 2024 youth remained among the groups most vulnerable to radicalisation risks. Furthermore, last year European services repeatedly identified minors related to terrorist activities.

The radicalisation of individuals and their engagement in terrorist activities was continuously fostered by the propaganda disseminated by terrorist groups online. Besides, some terrorist propaganda materials were tailored to address youth audience. The content of propaganda materials disseminated by terrorist groups was mainly ideological and justifying violence, as well as contained practical advice in carrying out terror attacks. Terrorist groups increasingly used AI to generate and multiply informative visual materials, e.g. posters and incitements.

Last year, European services continued to identify radically-inclined persons from Central Asia region, who engaged in organising various attacks and supporting terrorism.

These persons had a connection with the affiliation of the Afghanistan-based terrorist group *Daesh – Islamic State Khorasan province* (ISKP). Furthermore, the engagement of Central Asia region representatives residing in Europe in attacks and terrorism support activities was fostered by their cultural and linguistic connection to North Afghanistan population.

In 2024, the Afghanistan Islamist terrorist group ISKP for the first time engaged in organising several attacks outside Afghanistan, thereby demonstrating its capacity to carry out terror attacks outside of territory it controls. The Afghanistan-based terrorist group last year continued to strengthen its positions as their threat to the security of European countries increased.

Some European countries continued to face threats from right- and left-wing extremists. The right-wing extremism threat last year was demonstrated by several planned and one accomplished attack to members of ethnic minorities, whereas left-wing extremists carried out two attacks against critical infrastructure.

In 2024, terrorists continued using simple methods of attack. In most last year cases – 12 – terrorists used sharp objects, mainly knives. Four attacks were carried out by improvised flammable liquid bottles or explosives. Firearms were used twice, whereas one attack was carried out by ramming a vehicle into a crowd.

6.2.

TERRORISM THREAT TRENDS IN LATVIA

The terrorism threat level in Latvia remained low in 2024. Similar to 2023, the Service did not detect the presence of any terrorist groups or persons in the country that would be related to international terrorist groups.

VDD continued to focus on the impact of the Middle East conflict on Latvia's security situation. Within its competence, VDD conducted enhanced monitoring of developments related to this conflict within Latvia's society, including within the Muslim community. Although the latter maintained the interest in developments in the Middle East, VDD did not establish supporting of terrorist groups or calls to engage in violent activities.



POINT OF CONTACT FOR REPORTING TERRORIST CONTENT

VDD has been designated as the main competent authority in Latvia under the regulation in force in EU countries to address the online dissemination of terrorist content²¹, which takes measures to limit the distribution of radical content in Latvia's information space, including the point of contact function for reporting such content.

According to the Regulation, VDD has the right to issue terrorist content removal orders that provide for the removal of threat-generating content from websites registered in Latvia in cooperation with representatives of the electronic communication industry of our country.

In 2024, VDD did not receive reports on terrorist content published in the Latvian information space, or content calling to engage in terrorist activity or join terrorist groups, content glorifying terrorism or containing manuals for making explosives, firearms, poisonous or hazardous substances for carrying out a terror attack. Nor was such content detected by the Service on Latvia's internet sites. Therefore, last year VDD did not issue any orders to remove terrorist content.

Should you detect terrorist content online, please inform VDD via e-mail kontaktpunkts@vdd.gov.lv.

²¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/784 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online.

DETECTED CASES OF RADICALISATION



Illustrative image, VDD

Self-training for terrorism and procuring explosives

Latvian non-citizen converted to Islam came under VDD's radar due to activities on messaging platform "Telegram", where the person intensively engaged in chats within groups supporting extremism and terrorism. VDD initiated the criminal case against the said person on 22 April 2024.

During the investigation VDD established that the person is expressing support in the internet environment to ideology preached by the terrorist group Daesh. VDD detained the suspect on 2 May, when during search at the person's place of residence more than 400 grams of trinitrotoluene – TNT, utile for explosions, were seized. Ammunition utile for

shooting as well as a package of sulphuric acid were also found on site. In addition, the person had stored detailed instructions for carrying out terror attacks, including manufacturing explosive devices.

The information obtained by VDD during the investigation showed that the person was preparing to carry out a terror attack.

On 2 September, VDD asked the Prosecution Office to initiate criminal prosecution against the person for self-training for terrorism, as well as purchasing and storing explosives and firearm ammunition.

Propagating Islamic terrorism

Within the monitoring of information space, VDD detected a Latvian national, who on several "X" posts had expressed support to the ideology justifying violence preached by the Islamist terrorist groups.

VDD initiated the criminal case against the person on 16 September 2024 pursuant to Section 79⁶ of the Criminal Law, i.e., on suspicion of public justification and glorification of terrorism.

VDD established that the person had glorified the terrorist group *Al-Qaeda* and the dictator of the aggressor state Russia Vladimir Putin on "X". VDD continues investigating the case.

In Service's assessment, the main terrorism risks in Latvia continue to stem from individual radicalisation cases. Similar to previous years, VDD identified enhanced interest of some Latvia's residents about terrorist groups and their ideology. The Service also identified several persons whose activities contain elements of terrorism justification and glorification. Targeted collection of information about persons with signs of radicalisation resulted in VDD initiating two criminal cases last year on suspicion of crimes committed by such persons (see more under "Detected cases of radicalisation").

In addition to the mentioned two criminal cases, last year VDD initiated one criminal case for attempted terrorism in the neighbouring Lithuania, detaining the suspects – two Spanish nationals – in the territory of Latvia (see more about this criminal case in Chapter 7 about the pre-trial investigation). The activities of these persons were targeting an object related to provision of support to Ukraine and are assessed as malign activities in the interests of Russia.

6.3.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO DECREASE TERRORISM RISKS

Last year, VDD continued its systematic work towards prevention of terrorism. The Service in close cooperation with other institutions took measures to identify and prevent cases of radicalisation of individuals. VDD officers surveyed terrorism risk objects, including public sites, providing recommendations to improve their security. VDD officers also issued recommendations for safe course of public events of heightened risk. In addition, the Service continued to function as the national contact point for reporting suspicious cases with explosives precursors.

In 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the National Counterterrorism Plan, which VDD had improved and amended according to latest threats. The Plan sets

out the preventive counterterrorism measures to be taken by Latvia's institutions depending on the level of terrorism threat announced in the country.²² This classified document contains more than 500 different preventive measures.

The updated Plan contains two new categories of preventive measures: cooperation between authorities in the supervision of unmanned aerial vehicles' (drones) flights and coordination of restrictions on the circulation of explosives precursors. Following the approval of the plan, last year the Service started to coordinate the updating of the internal action plans of the participating institutions in line with the changes introduced, which will continue in 2025.

As in previous years, the Counterterrorism Centre Expert Advisory Council continued its work. During last year's meetings, VDD counterterrorism experts discussed current terrorism threat trends in Europe and Latvia with representatives of several ministries, other Latvia's intelligence and security services and other institutions. Experts from VDD also briefed the participants about the accomplished and planned activities of the Service in the field of counterterrorism. In addition, VDD experts made proposals for the development of the counterterrorism system.



Radicalisation prevention measures

Preventing radicalisation and limiting the spread of ideologies justifying violence was also one of the main objectives of VDD's activity in the field of counterterrorism last year. In order to timely identify individual cases of radicalisation and prevent potential terrorist activities, VDD collected and evaluated information on individuals who display signs of radicalisation in their behaviour. Each such case was carefully assessed by the Service and appropriate measures were taken to prevent further radicalisation.

In 2024, VDD also continued to organise and lead the work of the Inter-institutional Working Group on Preventing Radicalisation "Prevent"²³. Last year, several meetings of the working group "Prevent" were held in which officers of VDD and representatives of several other institutions analysed current trends of radicalisation in Europe and Latvia.

VDD experts and working group members also assessed the established and anticipated impact of various terrorism-related incidents and armed conflicts in Europe and elsewhere in the world on the society polarization and security situation in Latvia. At the same time, VDD counterterrorism experts regularly consulted the other members of the group on various issues related to radicalisation.

Within "Prevent", last year VDD counterterrorism experts held 16 seminars on radicalisation for different audiences: officials of various state institutions, school directors and social educators, social services employees and representatives of family courts. During these seminars, VDD officers briefed the total of about 650 persons about the signs of radicalisation and prevention measures.



Strengthening the security of terrorism risk objects

Last year, VDD continued its systematic and targeted work to strengthen the security of terrorism risk objects – critical infrastructure and mass gathering sites.

The Service continued its regular cooperation with the contact persons in charge of security at the facilities. VDD officers carried out surveys of the objects and evaluation of the physical security regime, resulting in recommendations for improvement of the safety of the objects. Service officers also conducted training seminars on the recognition of suspicious activities and correct action in case of detecting such activities for personnel responsible for the safety of objects. In addition, Service officers examined the facilities' security staff response capabilities in practice by organising unannounced training.

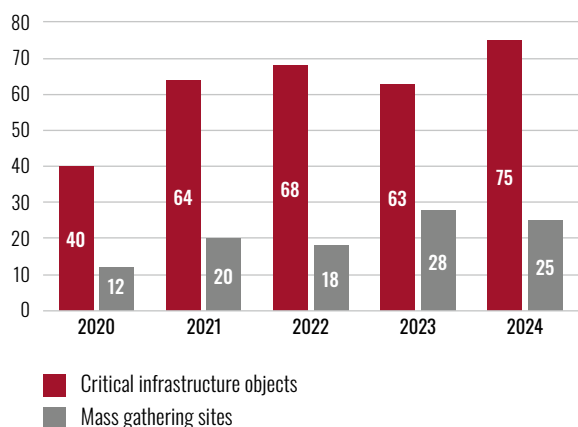
In 2024, VDD officers surveyed 100 terrorism risk objects. 75 of these were critical infrastructure objects, while 25 – mass gathering sites.

As a result of the critical infrastructure inspection, VDD identified shortcomings in the safety regime of 56 objects, providing recommendations for improvement of safety. The Service recommendations were mainly related to the need to improve coordination of security work, internal procedures and training, as well as to improve security systems within the objects, such as video surveillance cameras or access control systems.

²² The higher the terrorism threat level, the more preventive measures need to be taken by the involved institutions.

²³ Inter-institutional working group "Prevent" was established in 2019 by VDD's Counterterrorism Centre Expert Advisory Council, which also oversees the groups activities.

Terrorism risk objects surveyed by VDD



Among the surveyed mass gathering sites were nine shopping centres, ten entertainment and sports centres, as well as six hotels. As a result of the surveys, the Service identified deficiencies in the security regime of 10 objects and provided recommendations for improving security. At the same time, recommendations on action in case of identifying suspicious activities or objects were provided to 20 facilities.

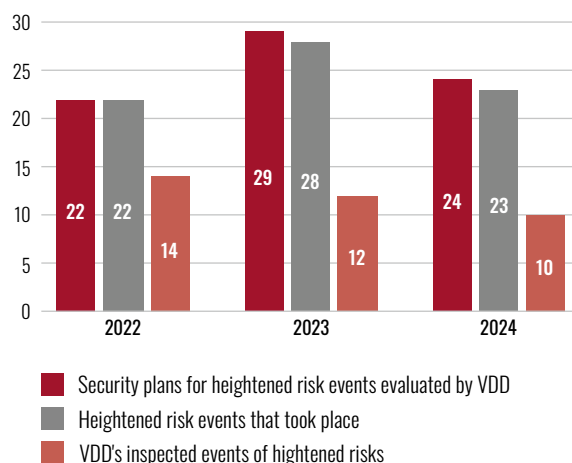
The number of training seminars organised by VDD on the security of terrorism risk objects increased significantly last year. In 2024, the Service organised 52 such seminars, for a total of 3093 persons (in 2023 – 429 persons) involved in planning and ensuring security measures at terrorism risk objects.

In 2024, VDD repeatedly warned the public about possible Russian efforts, as in other European countries, to organise malign activities against critical infrastructure objects in Latvia. VDD paid special attention to informing the security personnel of the facilities about risks from Russia and signs of suspicious activities (see more in the Chapter 1 under “Security of critical infrastructure”).

Similar to other years, last year the Service according to its competence vetted persons who applied for posts related to security of critical infrastructure objects. As a result of vetting, in 2024 the Service approved 19 persons responsible for safety and 21 person responsible for continuity of operations.

In the past year, the Service continued its work on enhancing the security of ionising radiation objects by engaging in the improving of the regulatory framework. VDD officers also provided advisory support in drafting the physical protection and transport safety plans for six ionising radiation objects, also providing the final approval of the plans.

Security measures’ control for events of heightened risk



Improving the security of public events

To reduce the risks of terrorism in public events, in 2024 VDD continued to carry out explanatory work with the largest public event organisers, municipalities and other services on security requirements set out in regulatory enactments. As part of its explanatory work, the Service organised several inter-institutional meetings as well as trainings for major public event organisers.

Last year the Service evaluated and approved security plans of 24 heightened risk events. Of these, VDD officers were present at 10 events to verify the full implementation of the security measures included in the plan and to assess their efficiency.

Explosives precursors’ circulation control

VDD’s analysis of the terrorist attacks that have occurred in recent years shows that the use of self-made explosives and explosive devices in terror attacks is decreasing. This trend is linked to the strict control introduced by the EU over the trade in explosives precursors or substances used in the manufacture of explosives.

However, radically inclined persons maintained interest in the manufacture of explosive devices, and continued attempting to manufacture such devices. The continuing interest in the manufacture of explosive devices for the organisation of terror attacks was confirmed within the criminal case initiated by VDD in 2024 for self-training for terrorism as manuals for making explosive devices were seized.

VDD continued to act as the national point of contact by maintaining reporting channels for suspicious transactions with precursors, as well as their disappearances or thefts. Within the year, the Service received no reports of suspicious cases involving explosives precursors. At the same time, VDD continued to work systematically with the economic operators involved in the circulation of explosives precursors, explaining potential risks and drawing their attention to the obligation to inform VDD about suspicious attempts to purchase substances that can be used for the manufacture of explosives.

VDD reiterates that economic operators selling any substances included in the list of explosives precursors are obliged to inform VDD of any suspicious cases involving explosives precursors in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2019/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the marketing and use of explosives precursors. For example, economic operators must report to the Service thefts of such substances, attempts to purchase large amounts without a reasonable explanation, and attempts to buy precursors, avoiding the presentation of a document confirming identity.

Last year the Saeima adopted a new Law on the Circulation of Explosives Precursors²⁴, which establishes an inspection body in accordance with the EU regulations that has the right to issue administrative penalty to economic operators and other persons for violations of the circulation of explosives precursors. With the entry into force of the law in October, the State Police became the inspection body.

VDD also continued to maintain regular exchange of information with the State Revenue Service on cases of transit, import and export of explosives precursors to countries outside NATO and the EU.

INFORM VDD!

If you have information about plans or attempts to purchase components for the manufacture of explosives or explosive devices, please provide all details of the specific case to VDD! You can contact the Service via e-mail kontaktpunkts@vdd.gov.lv or by calling the 24/7 phone **+371 6720 8964**.

6.4.

IMPROVING RESPONDING CAPACITY

Similar to other years, one of the priorities of VDD in the field of counterterrorism last year was to check and maintain the readiness of Latvia's institutions to respond to various incidents of terrorist nature. To achieve this objective, the Service continued to organise various scale counterterrorism exercises for operational services and other institutions involved in the counterterrorism system.

Last year the Service continued to focus on strengthening the response preparedness of regional departments of the operational services and municipalities of Latvia. On 10 October, VDD organised the most ambitious counterterrorism training so far with full force deployment in two populated areas in Vidzeme simultaneously – Valmiera and Jāņmuiža.

More than 500 participants from a number of institutions participated in the “Wolmar 2024” exercise. According to the training scenario developed by VDD, performers of terrorist roles had taken the participants of a public event as hostages. Operational services, several special operations units and other institutions involved in the exercise acted in line with the Action Plan on Land Threats (the counterterrorism Plan “Object”) to release hostages, save victims and detain terrorists.

Similar to other years, by organising a counterterrorism exercise with full force deployment VDD provided a platform to other Latvia's services to test the action plans and cooperation mechanisms in case of a possible terror act in simulated real-life conditions, so that the existing procedures could be improved if need be. VDD has been organising counterterrorism exercises with full force deployment already since 2007, with “Wolmar 2024” being the thirteenth such exercise.

In addition, VDD organised the training of officers of individual institutions, such as the State Police, on response algorithms in the event of terrorist threat, focusing on the principles of institutional cooperation at the site of the event and mutual activity coordination.

²⁴ Adopted on 16 September 2024, entered into force on 22 October 2024.

COUNTERTERRORISM TRAINING “WOLMAR 2024”



Photos from exercise “Wolmar 2024” organised by VDD. Photos – VDD, NAF

6.5.

PROCESSING OF AIRCRAFT PASSENGER DATA

In 2024, VDD continued updating and improving the State information system “Aircraft Passenger Data Register”, ensuring its efficient use within investigation of various crimes and strengthening of national security. In cooperation with partner services from Latvia and other EU member states as well as other institutions VDD used this system accumulating aircraft passenger data to prevent threats to national security, investigation and solving of serious and especially serious crimes as well as terrorism activities.

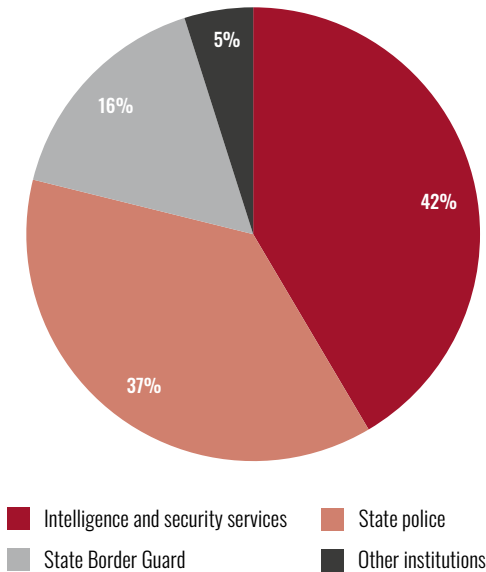
Last year, Latvian and the EU institutions submitted to VDD for processing a significantly higher number of requests for passenger data. In 2024, the Service received and processed 887 justified requests for data. Of those, 685 were submitted by Latvia’s intelligence and security services and law enforcement institutions, whereas 202 requests – from other EU member states or Europol.

The most common grounds for requesting passenger data for Latvia’s and foreign institutions last year were related to national security threats, organised crime memberships, money laundering and counterfeiting, as well as illegal turnover of narcotic and psychotropic substances.

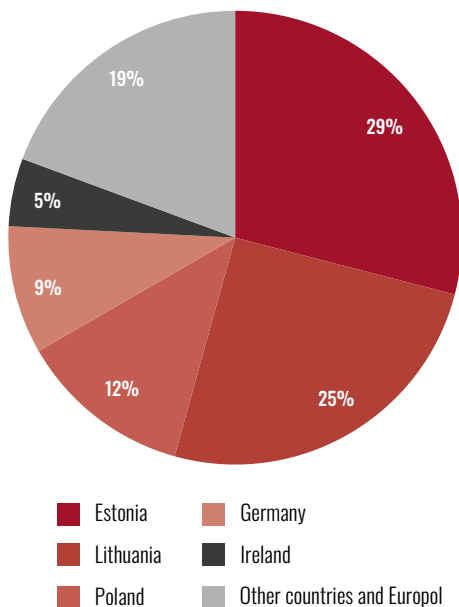
COUNTERTERRORISM

VDD also provided support to the State Police with bulk passenger data analysis in order to discover and neutralise the operations of several international fraudulent networks in the territory of Latvia. Through request processing, last year VDD identified several thousand risk persons who took flights both within and outside the EU. The most common airports on their routes were those of Helsinki, Brussels, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Istanbul.

Passenger data requests by Latvia's institutions



Requests for passenger data from foreign countries



Since Russia's invasion in Ukraine, direct flights from Russian and Belorussian airports to the EU member states are no longer allowed. Nevertheless, last year VDD established that in order to enter Latvia and other EU member states risk persons from Russia and Belarus used connected flights with transfer in third countries, such as Türkiye or the UAE.

Similar changes were observed in the illegal migration routes. To ensure a comprehensive entry and exit control with preventive risk analysis of such cases, also in 2024 VDD continued to strengthen cooperation with other Latvia's intelligence and security services and State Border Guard. In the framework of this cooperation VDD developed specific risk analysis criteria and conducted in-depth travel data analysis for some flight routes.

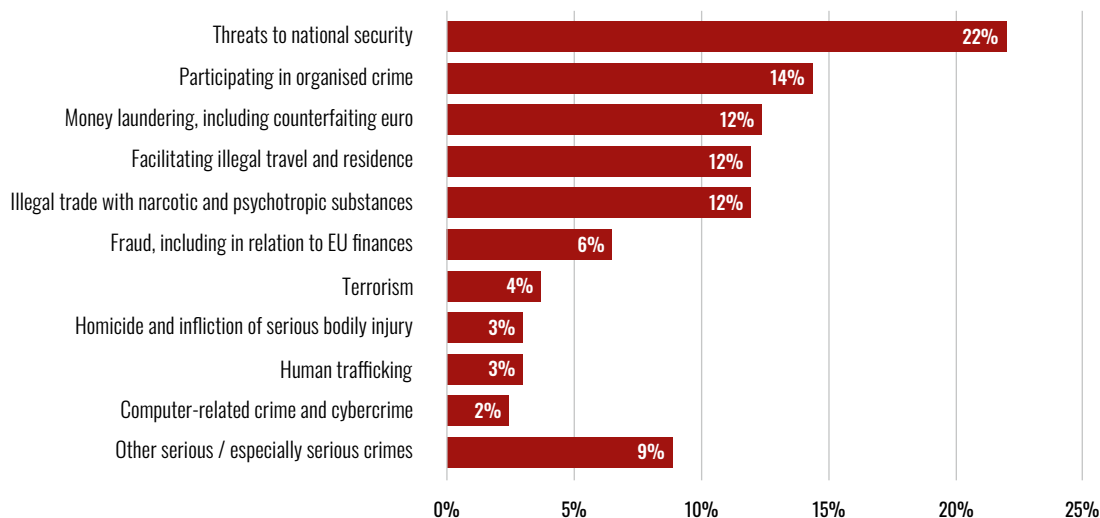
Aircraft passenger data register also ensured the continuity in checking the inbound passenger data against international wanted and criminal databases. The system also ensured an automated check of the inbound passenger data against the watchlists created by Latvia's and European intelligence and security services and law enforcement institutions that are included in the register. In case of a hit, VDD officers additionally verified the data and in case the hit was confirmed informed the competent institutions about the identified persons and their travel plans.

Last year, VDD provided to the competent institutions of Latvia and other EU member states as well as Europol pre-emptive information about more than 14 thousand risk persons. This information provided a significant support to investigations of responsible institutions and allowed to prevent individuals dangerous to society from entering Latvia and other EU member states.

Considering the notable increase in requests and passenger data volume, in 2024 VDD improved the system's data processing capacity and implemented significant improvement work with the financial support of the EU Internal Security Fund. The improving of the system will continue also in 2025 with incorporation of new technological solutions and closer cooperation development with national and international partners to strengthen national security.

With respect to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling in case C-817/19, last year VDD in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior started drafting the amendments to the Aircraft passenger data processing law. The amendments aim to introduce the ECJ recommendations on the processing of passenger data as well as apply the current EU regulations to passenger data processing and protection.

Passenger data requests to VDD, by types of crime



To foster international cooperation within passenger data analysis, last year VDD continued to participate in the international cooperation programs of the UN Counterterrorism Bureau and OSCE. The Service also provided practical support and training in processing passenger data to partners outside the EU, including

institutions of Ukraine and Moldova. To strengthen the cooperation within the EU, VDD continued chairing the EU Informal Passenger data register working group which deals with improving and aligning at the EU level of passenger data processing and exchange.

OUTLOOK

- Islamist terrorists will remain the most significant threat to European security as they will plan and carry out new attacks. The engagement of right- and left-wing extremists in terrorist activities is also foreseen.
- Several European countries will maintain high terrorism threat level also in 2025. Terrorism threats in Europe will be enhanced by the armed conflict in the Middle East, which may incite incidents against objects in Europe that are connected with the Jewish community or Israel.
- Mass gathering sites, symbolic objects and officers of law enforcement institutions will remain the main targets for terrorist attacks in Europe.
- VDD assesses that the terrorism threat level in Latvia in 2025 will remain low. Main terrorism risks will stem from individual cases of radicalisation and potential engaging in violent activities.
- At the same time, the risk of malign activities, which in essence are similar to terrorist activities, organised by Russia's intelligence and security services will remain high in 2025. Similar to 2024, malign activities can target symbolic objects significant to the Latvian nation, as well as, similar to Western Europe, critical infrastructure objects (see more about malign activities in Chapter 1 about counterintelligence).



07

PRE-TRIAL INVESTIGATION

With Russia remaining the most significant source of threats to Latvia's national security, last year VDD mainly investigated crimes committed in support of the interests of aggressor state. The Service increasingly focused on investigating cases of espionage and malign activities targeting various objects.

In comparison to 2023, the number of investigations started by VDD within criminal cases was higher, reaching the total of 51 criminal cases. At the same time, similar to 2023, the grounds for initiating criminal cases were mainly suspicions on committing such crimes as hate speech in support of Russia's aggression and interests, violation of the EU sanctions imposed against Russia, espionage and other activities against Latvia's national security for the interest of Russia. In contrast to previous years, in 2024 the malign activities organized by Russia targeting objects within Latvian territory also came to Service's attention.

The most complicated and time-consuming criminal cases from the investigation point of view were cases about espionage, malign activities in support of Russia's interests and violations of the EU sanctions. In cases of espionage, the volume of investigative work was increased by the secrecy measures implemented by the suspects, whereas in cases of malign activities – multi-layer networks of subordination created for the purpose of carrying out the activities, within which a part of persons were not directly connected with Russia's intelligence and security services. As regards the cases of possible violation of the EU sanctions, in-depth research was required to investigate complicated sanctions circumventing schemes with foreign companies as intermediaries.

As a result of its investigative work, last year VDD obtained and corroborated the necessary evidence body with 21 criminal case, so that these cases could be referred to the next stage – the Prosecution Office to initiate criminal prosecution against the suspects.

Next to investigative work, VDD also performed in-depth verification of collected information with the aim to both establish the elements of a possible crime to initiate a criminal case and to assess the potential future risks created by persons and prevent the committing of potential crimes.



INVESTIGATION OF RUSSIA'S WAR CRIMES IN UKRAINE



Residential area in Ukraine, destroyed by Russia's armed forces. Photo: Oleksandr Rakushnyak, EU

Last year VDD continued to participate in the work of the Joint Investigation Team,²⁵ a format of seven competent institutions from European countries that closely cooperate to investigate the war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace committed by Russia in Ukraine.

VDD continued to identify the witnesses to Russia's crimes who had entered Latvia. Last year, Service officers interviewed 90 persons about their

experiences in Ukraine, therefore the total number of persons who gave their testimonies from the beginning of investigation exceeds 230. Service gathered the testimonies, obtained documents as well as digital evidence (photos, videos etc.) saved in witnesses' smartphones and other data mediums about the crimes committed by Russia's armed forces in Ukraine.

Last year, VDD officers spoke not only to Ukrainian civilians taking refuge in Latvia, but also to the soldiers from Ukraine's armed forces who had arrived to Latvia for medical and rehabilitation treatment. VDD officers also spoke to Latvian nationals who had joined the international units of Ukraine's armed forces. VDD obtained testimonies about various episodes of Russia's war crimes that are significant to the course of the international investigation, such as using the phosphorus munitions in populated areas, which is forbidden by the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, as well as missile strikes targeting Ukraine's civilians and civilian infrastructure.

In addition, VDD officers together with State Border Guard officers regularly questioned and vetted Russian nationals entering Latvia, to identify persons who participated in the warfare in Ukraine. Last year, Service officers identified several such persons and during the questioning of these Russian nationals obtained information significant to the investigation. Such Russian nationals were denied entry into Latvia.

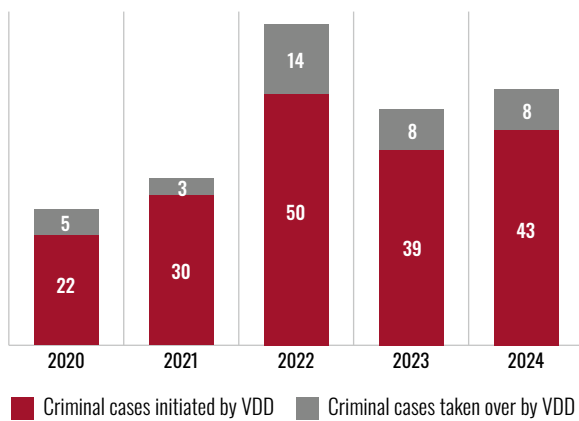
²⁵ The Joint Investigation Team for the investigation of Russia's war crimes was established on 25 March 2022 with the support of the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), and currently its participants are the competent institutions of seven states – Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania, as well as Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC and Europol.

7.1.

INITIATED CRIMINAL CASES

In 2024, VDD launched investigations into 51 new criminal case. Of those, 43 criminal cases were initiated by VDD upon Service’s initiative, whereas eight were taken over from other institutions according to jurisdiction – five cases from the State Police, and one from State Border Guard, Latvian Prison Administration and Prosecutor General’s Office accordingly. VDD also continued investigations within criminal cases initiated in previous years.

Dynamic of VDD’s criminal cases



The most common grounds for initiating criminal cases last year was the so-called hate speech in support of Russia’s aggression and interests, which were among the most common grounds for VDD’s criminal cases also in previous years. In 2024, VDD initiated 12 criminal cases on suspicion of such crimes. Five criminal cases were initiated by VDD on suspicion of statements aimed at triggering national hatred or enmity, mainly against Latvians or Ukrainians. Two cases were initiated on suspicion of justification and glorification of war crimes, whereas five criminal cases were initiated by VDD after the Service established the elements of both aforementioned crimes within the public statements of individuals.

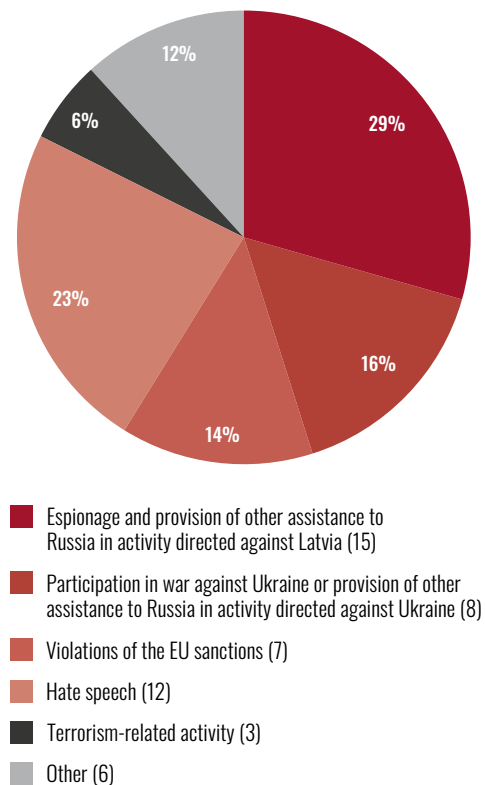
Similar to previous years, among the most often occurring grounds for initiating a criminal case in 2024 were suspicions on violation of the EU sanctions imposed against Russia. Last year VDD initiated seven criminal cases on suspicion of committing this crime. Unlike previous years, last year the most part – five – of these cases were connected with various services

provided by Latvian nationals and them being employed by companies in either Russia or other countries also subjected to sanctions (see more in Chapter 5 about economic security).

VDD stresses that the EU has imposed restriction to provide a number of services to institutions, companies and other subjects of the aggressor country, for instance, consulting related to information technologies or legal consulting, advertising and public relations services, services of accounting, auditing or record keeping, market research or public opinion polling²⁶. In addition, it is forbidden to provide directly or indirectly any services or economic resources to legal and natural persons included in the sanctions lists.

One criminal case was initiated on suspicion of violation of the EU sanctions in relation to illegal provision of certain goods to Russia, whereas another one – for the engagement of a Latvian national in a finance transaction scheme for the interests of a person under sanctions.

Criminal cases initiated and taken over by VDD, by type of crime



Last year VDD initiated five criminal cases on suspicion of espionage on behalf on Russia’s intelligence and security services. In identifying such cases VDD

²⁶ Comprehensive list in the Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia’s actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

continued its close cooperation with MIDD that regularly provided information to VDD about suspicious activity in vicinity of military objects in Latvia. Another five criminal cases were initiated by VDD on suspicion of assisting Russia in activity directed against Latvia. For example, VDD started to investigate the desecration of Memorial stone to Latvian legionnaires in Džūkste parish and deliberate arson of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia as possible provision of assistance to Russia's intelligence and security services in activity directed against Latvia (see more in Chapter 1 about counterintelligence).

Last year VDD also identified several persons who may have participated in the warfare in Ukraine, siding with Russia's armed forces. Scrutiny of these cases resulted in VDD initiating four criminal cases within a year for violating the prohibition to serve in Russia's armed forces and one case – for engaging in warfare against Ukraine.

VDD also identified persons who had engaged in activities related to terrorism. VDD initiated one criminal case for self-training or preparing for terrorism, one case for public justification and glorification of terrorism and one case for attempted terrorism. Last said criminal

case was initiated in relation to the attempt to carry out a terror attack in Lithuania as VDD officers detained the perpetrators – two Spanish citizens – in Rīga (see more under “Cooperation with Lithuanian partner services in detaining criminals”).

VDD initiated criminal cases also on suspicion of other crimes: disclosing non-disclosable information, provision of assistance to Russia in action directed against Ukraine, collecting and transferring financial or other means to Russia's armed forces in Ukraine etc.

Similar to previous years, also in 2024 VDD most often initiated criminal cases based on information obtained through its operational activity. Criminal cases were also initiated based on information provided by other services. Last year VDD maintained a productive exchange of information on possible crimes with MIDD, the State Police, Financial Intelligence Unit and other institutions.

In some cases, VDD initiated the criminal cases based on information submitted by natural and legal persons. Additional criminal cases were initiated by separating them from other existing criminal cases on VDD's books.

COOPERATION WITH LITHUANIAN PARTNER SERVICES IN DETAINING CRIMINALS



Illustrative image, VDD

On 17 September 2024, VDD initiated a criminal case on suspicion of attempted terrorism in Russia's interests in the neighbouring Lithuania.

The criminal case was initiated pursuant to Section 79¹ of the Criminal Law and in close cooperation with Lithuanian partner services. VDD obtained information that two Spanish nationals had tried to arson the

infrastructure of a company in Šiauliai producing technologies and engaging in provision of support to Ukraine. The persons were disturbed in the middle of committing the criminal activity, therefore they failed to complete the intended malign activities.

VDD established that after the terrorism attempt the individuals fled to Latvia, hoping to escape the radar of Lithuanian responsible services. However, on the same day VDD officers detained these Spanish nationals in Rīga. During criminal proceedings VDD seized data mediums and garments worn by perpetrators during the terrorist activity in Lithuania.

Within the investigation, VDD established that the persons were recruited to commit the crime on the communication application “Telegram”.

VDD extradited both detained persons to Lithuanian responsible services on 18 October, whereas on 20 November the criminal case materials were sent to Lithuanian authorities for further investigation, including the potential evidence obtained from these persons.

7.2.

IN-DEPTH VERIFICATIONS

Last year society, civic organizations, companies and other entities continued to regularly submit information to VDD about possible criminal activities. Service officers evaluated all provided information to decide on further action.

Similar to 2023, also last year the most part of information received in VDD was about possible hate speech in the internet environment: provoking national hatred and enmity or justifying and glorifying war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace, mainly in relation to Russia’s war in Ukraine. Another significant amount of submissions indicated about possible violations of the EU sanctions imposed against Russia.

In six cases, based on the received information VDD initiated criminal cases. Half of these applications were submitted by natural persons, whereas the other half – by companies. In addition, in many cases VDD considered the provided information sufficient for launching in-depth verification and obtain additional information through operational activity or other methods.

The verifications had different aims: not only to establish the elements of a potential crime, but also to identify persons causing risks and potential threats in cases when the crime had not yet been committed. In several cases VDD officers held preventive talks with the involved persons to prevent criminal activity.

In 40 cases, the in-depth verification did not confirm the statements made in initial applications about the crime and VDD took the decision to refuse to initiate criminal case, informing also the author of the application about the Service’s decision. Whereas in 174 cases VDD officers provided written explanations to the application authors about the possibilities to solve their particular situations.

A part of applications submitted to the Service contained information about possible criminal activity whose investigation falls under the jurisdiction of other investigative bodies. VDD forwarded these applications to the respective competent institutions for further assessment.

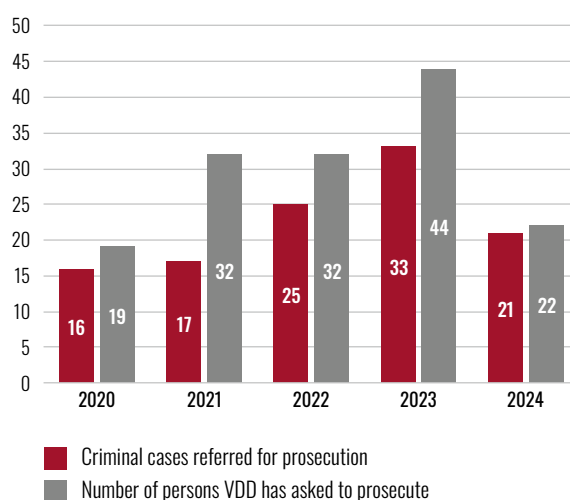
7.3.

CRIMINAL CASES REFERRED FOR CRIMINAL PROSECUTION

In 2024, VDD referred to the Prosecution Office 21 criminal case, asking to initiate criminal prosecution against 22 persons in total. One of these persons at the moment of commission of the crime was a state official.

Of the criminal cases referred for prosecution 12 were initiated in 2024, seven – in 2023, whereas two – in 2022.

Dynamic of VDD’s criminal cases referred for criminal prosecution



Among the cases referred for criminal prosecution, the most noteworthy are:

- two criminal cases for espionage, in one of those a person additionally incriminated with storing of firearms ammunition and explosives without proper authorization;
- one criminal case about assistance to a Russian intelligence and security service in activity directed against the Republic of Latvia by desecrating a commemoration site significant to Latvia;
- one criminal case for organizing the arson of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (deliberate damaging of third party property);
- one criminal case about disclosing information obtained within the pre-trial investigation without the authorization of investigator or prosecutor;
- three criminal cases for violating the EU sanctions imposed against Russia;

- two criminal cases for participating in war in Ukraine, siding with Russia's armed forces, in one of those a person additionally incriminated with violating the prohibition to serve in Russia's armed forces and illegally crossing Latvian state border from Russia;
- one criminal case for self-training (preparing) for terrorism and storing firearm ammunition as well as purchasing and storing explosives without proper license;
- one criminal case for self-training for terrorism and public justifying and glorifying of terrorism, as well as disseminating materials that glorify, justify and incite to terrorism;
- four concurrent criminal cases about public justifying and glorifying of war crimes, as well as for statements aimed at triggering national hatred and enmity;
- three criminal cases for public glorifying and justifying of war crimes.

Similar to 2023, also last year VDD had most often asked the Prosecution Office to prosecute persons for hate speech in support of Russia's aggression and interests. The Service referred for criminal prosecution 7 cases for public glorification and justification of war crimes as well as statements aimed at triggering national hatred and enmity, mainly against Latvians and Ukrainians. Four of these criminal cases VDD had initiated in 2023, two in 2024 and one in 2022.

Three of cases referred by VDD for criminal prosecution were initiated on suspicion of violation of the EU sanctions imposed against Russia. Of those, two cases were initiated in 2024 and one in 2023 (see more in Chapter 5 about economic security).

In 2024, VDD referred for criminal prosecution several criminal cases for different collaborations with Russia's intelligence and security services. VDD sent to Prosecution Office two criminal cases initiated on suspicion of espionage, seeking the criminal prosecution of three persons in total. One of these cases with two suspects was initiated last year. The other criminal case against a person was initiated in the end of 2023. Within the investigation of this case, the Service had also discovered storing of firearms ammunition and explosives without proper authorization (see more in Chapter 1 about counterintelligence).

Additionally, VDD also referred for criminal prosecution one case for carrying out malign activities on behalf of Russia's intelligence and security service, namely, for desecrating the commemoration object to Latvian legionnaires in Tukums district Džūkste parish, asking the Prosecution Office to accuse the person in providing assistance to Russia's intelligence and security service

in activity directed against Latvia (see more in Chapter 1 about counterintelligence).

It is noteworthy that last year VDD referred for criminal prosecution two criminal cases where persons are incriminated with self-training for terrorism or obtaining manuals, knowledge and know-how in order to conduct or facilitate terrorism. VDD assesses that in one case the person had started an actual preparation for terrorist activities as in the place of residence of this Latvian non-citizen VDD discovered the explosive TNT, functioning ammunition as well as a package of sulphuric acid. This criminal case was initiated by VDD in 2024, whereas the second case – in 2023 (see more about the detected cases of radicalisation in Chapter 6 about counterterrorism).

In two cases, last year VDD asked the Prosecution Office to start criminal prosecution of persons for participating in warfare in Ukraine, siding with Russia's armed forces. One of persons was detained on 7 October 2024 in cooperation with State Border Guard after illegally crossing Latvian border, whereas the other person remains on the wanted list. The criminal case against the detained person was initiated by VDD last year, while against the wanted person – back in 2022.

7.4.

CRIMINAL CASES TRANSFERRED TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS OR TERMINATED

Last year, VDD transferred eight criminal cases to other investigative bodies in accordance with jurisdiction. Six criminal cases were transferred to the State Police, one – to Latvian Prison Administration and one to a Lithuanian investigative body.

In 2024, VDD terminated 10 criminal cases that were on Service's books. Of those, six were terminated as during the investigation no crime elements were established, two – because the investigation revealed the crime had not been committed. VDD ceased investigation in one criminal case as no method available to the Service allowed to identify the perpetrator. Another criminal case was terminated as after conducting all possible investigative proceedings it was not possible to obtain sufficient amount of evidence to prove the guilt of the potential perpetrator.

At the beginning of 2025, VDD has 39 criminal cases in its books.

WANTED BY VDD SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR



Maksims Liničs

Wanted since 11 December 2024 on suspicion for committing crimes stipulated in Section 74¹ and Section 78 Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Law, i.e., public glorification and justification of Russia's war crimes as well as activity aimed at triggering national and ethnic hatred and enmity (against Latvians).



Aleksejs Stefanovs

Wanted since 14 December 2023 on suspicion for committing crime stipulated in Section 84 Paragraph 1 of the Criminal Law, i.e., violation of the EU sanctions by ensuring economic resources to the Kremlin propaganda site "Sputnik".



Andrejs Mamikins

Wanted since 22 May 2024 on suspicion for committing the crime stipulated in Section 74¹ of the Criminal Law, i.e., public glorification and justification of Russia's war crimes.



Romans Samuļs

Wanted since 28 September 2023 on suspicion for committing the crime stipulated in Section 89¹ Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Law, i.e., participation in the pro-Kremlin criminal organisation "Baltic anti-fascists" and the especially serious crimes committed by this organisation against Latvia.



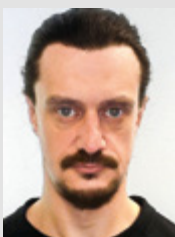
Vadims Aleksejevs

Wanted since 14 May 2024 on suspicion for committing crimes stipulated in Section 74¹ and Section 78 Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Law, i.e., public glorification, justification and denying of Russia's war crimes as well as activity aimed at triggering national and ethnic hatred and enmity (against Latvians).



Viktorija Matule

Wanted since 28 September 2023 on suspicion for committing the crime stipulated in Section 89¹ Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Law, i.e., participation in the pro-Kremlin criminal organisation "Baltic anti-fascists" and the especially serious crimes committed by this organisation against Latvia.



Konstantīns Rudakovs

Wanted since 9 May 2024 on suspicion for committing crimes stipulated in Section 74¹ and Section 78 Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Law, i.e., activity directed at denying the crime against humanity – the deportations of Latvian people committed by the Soviet Union, and provoking national and ethnic hatred and enmity (against Latvians and Ukrainians).



Sergejs Vasiļjevs

Wanted since 28 September 2023 on suspicion for committing the crime stipulated in Section 89¹ Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Law, i.e., participation in the pro-Kremlin criminal organisation "Baltic anti-fascists" and the especially serious crimes committed by this organisation against Latvia.

**Juta Vasiļevska**

Wanted since 22 August 2023 on suspicion of committing crimes stipulated in Section 78 Paragraph 2 and Section 81 of the Criminal Law, i.e., activity aimed at triggering national and ethnic hatred and enmity (against Latvians), as well as for invitation directed against the Republic of Latvia.

**Aleksandrs Cvetkovs**

Wanted since 19 October 2022 on suspicion of committing crimes stipulated in Section 74¹ and Section 78 Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Law, i.e., justifying Russia's war crimes as well as activity aimed at triggering national and ethnic hatred and enmity (against Latvians and Ukrainians).

**Ilijass Biks-Bulatovs**

Wanted since 22 August 2023 on suspicion for committing the crime stipulated in Section 77¹ of the Criminal Law, i.e., unlawful participation in warfare in Ukraine siding with Russia's armed forces.

VDD reiterates that no person shall be considered guilty until their guilt in committing the crime has been proved in accordance to the law.

You can contact VDD by calling the 24/7 phone **+371 6720 8964** or by e-mail **info@vdd.gov.lv**.



08

DIGNITARY PROTECTION

Last year Latvia hosted several significant international events for which VDD in close cooperation with other institutions implemented security measures to protect Latvian as well as many foreign heads of parliaments and governments from potential threats. In 2024, the Service provided physical security to the largest number of foreign dignitaries of last five years during their visits in Latvia.

In 2024, VDD bodyguards provided continuous protection of the Chairperson of the Saeima of Latvia and the Prime Minister. Service bodyguards ensured their safety not only within national territory but also during official foreign visits if there was such need. Last year VDD officers provided protection to the Chairperson of the Saeima during 15 foreign visits, whereas to the Prime Minister – during 23 foreign visits, organising the security measures in line with the respective threat level for each visit.

Specially trained and equipped team of VDD officers last year escorted Latvian dignitaries in their visits to Ukraine, providing their protection in conditions of a military threat. In total VDD ensured the safety during three such visits, and in close cooperation with Ukrainian partner services ensured the security of the Chairperson of the Saeima, Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior. During their official visits, Latvian dignitaries met with their Ukrainian counterparts as well as visited Kyiv, Lviv, Chernihiv, Yahidne and other areas that had suffered the attacks of the army of aggressor state Russia.

To detect threats against the dignitaries under VDD's protection, in 2024 the Service continued analysis of statements made online against these dignitaries. In case threats of violence were detected, the Service examined the situation to establish and prevent the possibility of a real threat. In some cases VDD also held talks with the threat authors, warning about the underlying criminal liability in case the threat would be implemented.

Similar to other years, also in 2024 Service bodyguards provided security to foreign dignitaries within Latvian territory. According to the Service



jurisdiction, VDD bodyguards provided security of heads of foreign parliaments and governments, ministers of foreign affairs, as well as heads of international organisations during their official visits to Latvia. Last year VDD organised undisturbed stay in Latvia of 115 foreign representatives, which is the highest number of foreign officials protected by the Service within last few years. The increase in the number of protected foreign dignitaries can be explained by the Third Parliamentary Summit of the International Crimea Platform taking place in Riga, which was attended by a large number of high level officials from a number of states and organisations.

For the foreign officials entering Latvia, the Service ensured physical integrity, undisturbed movement, security for their place of stay and measures to prevent unsanctioned obtaining of information at the disposal of these officials. The set of security measures was determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the results of threat analysis conducted by VDD.

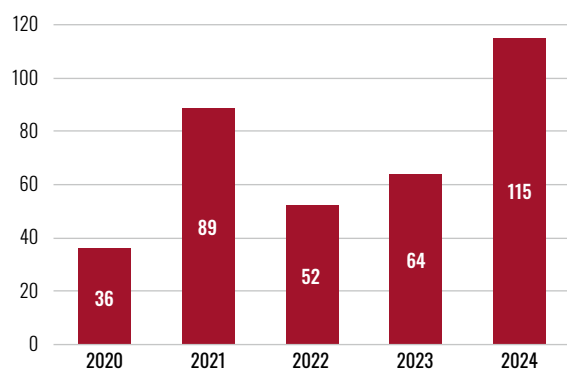
Considering the threat posed by Russia, VDD engaged in implementing the security measures during the visit of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky on 11 January 2024. VDD provided all necessary support to the NAF Military Police, whose jurisdiction also includes the protection of the President of Latvia and foreign Presidents during their official visits to Latvia.

VDD also implemented enhanced security measures during the visit of the US Congress delegation on 30 August 2024, when representatives from the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and committees on Armed Services and China Affairs visited Latvia. Both visits took place without any significant security incidents.

Last year VDD continued organizing and implementing security measures for various scale national and international events, where the dignitaries under Service's protection participated. Overall, throughout

2024, VDD in close cooperation with the State Police and other services provided the protection of Latvian and foreign dignitaries as well as public security and order during 46 different scale events in Latvia.

Provision of security to foreign officials during their visits to Latvia



The largest of the said events was the Third Parliamentary Summit of the International Crimea Platform on 24 October, organised by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia and the parliament of Ukraine with the aim to underline the crimes committed by aggressor state Russia and increase support to Ukraine. Delegation from around 50 countries participated in the Summit. During the event, all implementation of security measures was led and coordinated by VDD throughout constant liaising with other engaged institutions.

Taking into account the scale of the Summit and Russia's interest to discredit such events in support of Ukraine, about 500 officials from 13 institutions were involved in supervising the security of the Summit and its participants. VDD resources were deployed at the venue – Radisson Blu Latvija Hotel, places of stay of foreign delegations and elsewhere in Riga. As a result of security measures implemented by VDD and other services, there were no significant security incidents during the Summit.



On 23 August, during the meeting of Baltic and Nordic countries' heads of parliaments the top officials of eight countries laid flowers at the Freedom monument in honour of the 35th anniversary of the Baltic Road. VDD bodyguards provided the security of these dignitaries. Photo: Reinis Inkēns, Saeima

VDD also organised enhanced security measures during the meeting of Baltic and Nordic countries (NB8) parliamentary heads, which took place during the week of the 35th anniversary of the Baltic Road from 21 to 23 August 2024. The NB8 format comprises five Nordic countries – Denmark, Island, Norway, Finland and Sweden, and the three Baltic States. Heads of parliaments from these eight countries during their meeting in Cēsis discussed further counteraction to Russia's aggression and support to Ukraine.

The meeting ended on 23 August when the NB8 heads of parliaments gathered at the Freedom square and during a solemn ceremony in honour of the 35th anniversary of the Baltic Road laid flowers at the Freedom monument. During these three days, VDD organised security measures in Cēsis and Rīga, focusing of ensuring the security of the heads of parliaments and event venues. No significant security incidents occurred during these events.

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