


# Preparing youth for defence: Socialisation, education, and training of young people in Europe for national security

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## Abstract

*This article compares military and defence-oriented training, education, and socialisation in seven European countries—Sweden, Germany, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland. The comparative case study approach has been employed to identify the systemic solutions employed in the defence education of young people in those European Union countries. The criteria that have guided the analysis of defence education in each country include purpose, characteristics, duration and possible shortcomings. The results identify common content and alternative delivery patterns and establish a research agenda for further study based on gaps in policy knowledge and programme evaluation. The defence education solutions implemented in each of the countries under analysis lead to conclusions and recommendations regarding the need to create common solutions in the area of cooperation between the armed forces and the civilian population of EU countries. The experience of each country shed light not only on defence-oriented training of young people but also on the potential of various activities aimed at strengthening national security.*

## Keywords:

European Union, defence education, socialization, training, national security

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## Introduction

In the twentieth century, on the basis of the ongoing transformations in the political, economic and social spheres, as well as the existing educational solutions, systemic solutions for the defence education of young people were crystallised in a number of European Union countries. Defence education, defined by [Kazimierz Żegnalek \(2005\)](#) as a process that includes all activities of teachers (instructors, commanders) and learners (students, soldiers, attendees, employees) that lead to mastery by the latter of a specific area of defence knowledge and acquiring practical skills and habits in that area, as well as their development of skills, interests, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions related to broadly defined defence. This process was initiated because of the need to prepare the widest range of social groups possible for potential action in situations of armed conflict. This need was not only pragmatic. According to the axiom operating in the societies of many countries, the defence of sovereignty is not only a function of the army and other uniformed services, it is also the duty of all citizens of the country ([Zadorożna, 2018](#)).

It has often been argued that compulsory military service is a social integrator ([Connor et al., 2021](#); [Itsik, 2020](#); [Kowalski, 2020](#); [Røislien, 2012](#); [Soboń and Urych, 2021](#)). However, the benefits for defence that arise from social capital are unquestioned ([Djoro et al., 2015](#); [Kwaśniak & Wojciszko, 2014](#); [Laužikas and Dailydaitė, 2013](#); [Loshytskyi et al., 2020](#); [Soboń, 2017](#); [Tumalavičius et al., 2020](#); [Urych, 2020](#)). The functioning of the military environment in balance with the civilian environment is therefore very important ([Islamgaleyev et al., 2020](#); [Kim et al., 2019](#); [Salihu, 2019](#); [Wilson and Ruger, 2020](#)). An example of such action is the youth military education that takes place in many countries of the European Union.

The goal of defence education for young people is to impart basic knowledge, skills, and pro-defence attitudes. It is worth noting that the formation of pro-defence awareness has grown even more important during the Covid-19 pandemic ([Urych, 2021](#)), which is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today ([Szymański et al., 2020](#)). Utilising the existing defence potential of the civilian population for non-military efforts in state protection and development costs virtually nothing ([Urych, 2021](#)). This is especially important in the wake of widespread recession and financial collapse ([Nicola et al., 2020](#)). Even more so, since the gradual unfreezing of global economies, demand for many services has not returned to pre-pandemic levels ([Bylen, 2020](#)). Harnessing the potential of defence education for high school students is also important given that the pandemic has shaken up the legal conditions for the safety and security of the populations of many democratic countries ([Kowalski, 2020](#)), the negative population growth between 2019 and 2020 ([Kozicki et al., 2020](#)), and the numerous problems associated with online education from the social exclusion associated with the lack of adequate computer equipment to the difficulties associated with verifying learning outcomes ([Śląski et al., 2020](#)).

The patriotic and pro-social values imparted in defence education, the educational content of education of a pro-defence nature, as well as the cognitive and utilitarian objectives of this education in many European countries, and, at the same time, the absence of academic studies on the subject led to the idea for this article, which is to analyse the defence education of youth in the systemic solutions of selected European Union countries. In order to achieve this aim, the systemic solutions of defence education in those EU countries in which this type of education has been approached systematically are described. The comparative case study approach has been employed to identify the systemic solutions employed in the defence education of young people in selected European Union countries: Sweden, Germany, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland. The countries selected for the analysis were those in which defence education is part of the school curriculum and

the same legal solution was introduced in defence education throughout the country. The criteria that guide the analysis of defence education in each country were purpose, characteristics, duration and possible shortcomings. The study also sheds light on conclusions and recommendations regarding the need to create common solutions in the area of cooperation between the armed forces and the civilian population of EU countries.

## Defence education for high school students in Sweden

In Sweden, under the aegis of the Swedish Home Guard (*Hemvärnet*), a youth organisation operates in the area of defence education, *Ungdomsverksamhet* ([“Ungdomsverksamhet”, no date](#)). The activities of the *Ungdomsverksamhet* youth organisation cover the whole country and are aimed at girls and boys between the ages of 15 and 20. The main purpose of *Ungdomsverksamhet* is to impart defence knowledge and information about the Armed Forces, thus providing pro-defence education and recreational activities. Training activities in *Ungdomsverksamhet* are primarily conducted by the Home Guard (*Hemvärnet*), but in some parts of the country also by other volunteer defence organizations such as *Försvarsutbildarna* and *Flygvapenfrivilliga* ([Matyasik and Wachowicz, 2011](#)). *Försvarsutbildarna* is the Swedish Federation for Voluntary Defence Education and Training. It is a nationwide volunteer defence organisation whose goal is to strengthen total defence by enhancing the ability of individuals and of society to cope with civilian and military crises. The organisation stands for the values of democracy, justice, freedom, and peace ([“Startsida”, no date](#)). *Flygvapenfrivilliga*, on the other hand, is the Air Force Volunteers Association. The organisation offers qualified military training for boys and girls up to the age of 15. The emphasis here is on volunteer work to protect national security ([“Flygvapenfrivilliga.se”, no date](#)).

The *Ungdomsverksamhet* youth organisation operates on the basis of the internal regulations of the Swedish Armed Forces (FIB regulation 1996: 8 with annexes) on the following principles:

- young people (girls and boys) over the age of 15 may participate in the *Ungdomsverksamhet*;
- young people between 15 and 18 may only participate in the organisation with the permission of their parents or legal guardian;
- after joining the organisation, a member receives a calendar showing all planned activities and progress within the organisation up to the age of 20 (participation in the youth organisation is only permitted up to age 20);
- training in the organisation is conducted at weekend courses and at summer and winter camps;
- in marksmanship training, young people under the age of 17 are trained (in shooting) with pneumatic weapons (shooting competitions with pneumatic weapons are quite popular), and after turning 17 they are allowed to train with automatic weapons;
- military training conducted within the *Ungdomsverksamhet* organisation focuses on military sports (overcoming obstacle courses; orienteering, which is quite popular in Scandinavian countries; grenade throwing), safety during training, principles of first

aid and basic survival rules, fitness hikes mostly in the mountains, and quite popular sports-defence competitions in which members of youth organisations from Norway and Finland also take part. Combat training is carried out for those who are at least 18 years old;

- young people in the *Ungdomsverksamhet* have the right to wear uniforms, mostly borrowed from the Armed Forces, without any military insignia, which may have their name and function sewn on the chest on the left; on the right there is a yellow patch with the word “youth” (“UNGDOM”); the Swedish flag is on the left sleeve and a general (tactical) *Ungdomsverksamhet* patch;
- young people in the *Ungdomsverksamhet* may not have any part in the Home Guard and may not be employed for participation in any armed actions ([Försvarsmakten, 2018](#), pp. 159 ff.).

Although there is no system of ranks in the organisation of the *Ungdomsverksamhet*, its members can develop themselves through the system of training - from basic to command training. It is worth pointing out here that four one-year training blocks are available:

- Basic Course (*Grundkurs* - GK);
- Advanced Course (*Fortsättningskurs* - FK);
- Leadership Course 1 (*Ledarskapskurs 1* - LK1);
- Leadership Course 2 (*Ledarskapskurs 2* - LK2) (“*Ungdomsverksamhet*”, no date).

After four years in the organisation as a 19–20-year-old, a cadet can receive credit for training that is considered on a par with the eighty days of basic military training in the Swedish Home Guard called *Grundläggande militär utbildning*. They may also receive credit for basic command training. These solutions offered in the defence education of high school students in Sweden has resulted in an increase in the number of young people interested ([Matyasik and Wachowicz, 2011](#)).

## Defence education for high school students in Germany

In Germany, as long as military service was compulsory (i.e., until 2011), defence education for schoolchildren was limited to teaching them how to behave in the event of a fire alarm and the principles of first aid. At universities, there was no separate subject either, and only elements related to defence education were introduced depending on the nature of the studies. In turn, the education of the population in the framework of universal self-defence was implemented through the mass media, in the form of specially prepared 5-10 minute broadcasts ([Soler, 2017](#)). However, due to the introduction of a professional army, there appeared a big problem with personnel shortages. Therefore, the Bundeswehr decided to direct an offer of military training to young people. Since 2012, the Bundeswehr has launched short training camps (7 to 14 days), in different parts of Germany during summer vacation, called *Heidecamp*. At these training camps, young people can learn about the advantages and hardships of everyday life as a Bundeswehr soldier (“[Heidecamp 2019](#)” - “[Die Bundeswehr zum Reinschnuppern](#)”, 2019). Participants can also get to know the “attractive employer, the Bundeswehr” up close ([Müller, 2017](#)).

*Heidecamps* are offered by all branches of the Bundeswehr, i.e. the Air Force, Navy and Land Forces. The Bundeswehr offers the largest selection of *Heidecamps* in tank units, mountain infantry, medical services, or newly formed IT battalions. The training programme includes topography and run/walk obstacle courses, principles of camouflage, camping, and special activities like riding in armoured vehicles. The camps are designed for those that are 15 and older. Since 2012, when there were 959 participants, interest in this activity has continually grown. In 2014, there were 1,326 young people who registered for *Heidecamps*, in 2015 there were 1,544, and in 2017 there were as many as 2,066 interested. This form of promotion of the Bundeswehr provoked strong opposition from the German left. In the Bundestag, the German Ministry of Defence was accused of failing to comply with the rules regarding the protection of children and young people. Furthermore, MPs on the left have announced that they will seek a ban on military service for people under 18 at the UN (in Germany, with parental consent, military service is possible at the age of 17). These measures have so far failed to change the nature of defence education for secondary school students in Germany ([von Menkens, 2017](#)).

## Defence education for high school students in France

In France, youth defence education has three levels:

- education as part of the school curriculum;
- participation in an educational programme that includes global defence and security classes (*classes de défense et de sécurité globales* - CDSG) supported by CDSG Centres;
- education in military classes in the Defence Cadets program, the *Cadets de la Défense* ("[Classe de Défense et de sécurité globales](#)", no date).

Programmes involving specific defence education conducted throughout the school term, especially in middle and high school, make up the first level. The second level is based on cooperation between schools and the armed forces under partnership agreements between sponsoring military units and schools. The programme is conducted through cycles of meetings with the military, during which the following takes place:

- visits to the sponsoring unit and practical activities;
- an exchange of correspondence between students and soldiers;
- participation in civil rallies;
- participation in military ceremonies (collections, military tattoo, assemblies);
- visits to memorial sites ([Ministère des Armées, 2019](#)).

It is worth noting that there are currently more than 300 CDSGs in France, involving more than 7,000 students and 150 units of the armed forces, departments and services.

The third level of defence education for young people in France includes the Defence Cadets programme, or the *Cadets de la Défense*. This level was launched in 2005 at the initiative of the then Minister of Defence, Michel Alliot-Marie, with the idea of restoring

the ties between society and the military, which had been greatly weakened by the suspension of compulsory military service ([Ministère des Armées, 2008](#)). The idea from 2005 was to start classes with elements of defence training beginning in 2008, to be run initially by volunteer reserve soldiers with the support of local sports and martial arts clubs. The cadets were also inspired by the French programme for young firefighters (known as *jeunes sapeurs-pompiers* - JSP), which currently involves nearly 30,000 young people aged 11 to 18 in more than 1,500 units. The goal of the programme is to inspire young people to become active citizens and then join the fire and rescue services proper ([“Devenir jeune sapeur-pompier”, no date](#)).

Since 2008, the programme has been hosting middle and high school students in military units in partnership with surrounding schools. Based on an agreement between the school director and the military institution, twenty-five Cadet Centres have been established. Classes are conducted by teachers of civics and reserve soldier volunteers. These classes are related to the formation of civic attitudes; there are also sports and entertainment activities. This education takes place outside of school over fourteen days spread over the whole year. The training cycle ends with a five-day mini camp. The programme is supervised by the army and national education staff ([“Cadets de la défense”, no date](#)).

It is worth noting that at the beginning of 2016, a similar programme, Civil Security Cadets (*Cadets de la sécurité civile*), was launched in France, which operates on the basis of an agreement between the Minister of National Education and the Minister of the Interior ([“Sécurité”, 2015](#)). This agreement has resulted in a close partnership being formed between schools and fire and rescue services within the respective territorial divisions. This programme consists of 30 hours delivered throughout the year on Wednesday afternoons (a day usually reserved for extra-curricular activities in French schools) and consists of three modules:

- preliminary first aid;
- civics training;
- fire training ([“Cadets et cadettes de la sécurité civile”, no date](#)).

In addition, on July 1, 2015, the French Ministry of Defence introduced a form of volunteering, the *service militaire volontaire* (SMV). To be eligible for defence education under the volunteer programme organised by the army, one must be at least 18 years old and no older than 25 when applying, physically fit, and able to assume the duties of national service. The volunteer must not have a criminal record. Volunteer service is entered into for a period of twelve months and can be extended to a maximum of five years. During enlistment, volunteers receive a complete package with everything they need for participating in the programme (uniforms, athletic attire). They must wear the regulation uniform during all training. Volunteers are fed, housed, use the laundry facilities and receive a monthly salary of €313 or €676 depending on whether they are at the level of a trainee or a technician ([Tourneur, 2017](#)).

The programme provides for two types of involvement: volunteer trainee or technician. The first is aimed at young people without professional qualifications who will be able to choose a specialisation from the industries offered, such as hospitality, construction, preventative and security services. The second option is for young people who already have qualifications. At the end of the first military training session, this second level supports the supervision of trainees. The SMV system begins with the basics of operating in a military environment. For four weeks, volunteers learn teamwork, discipline, punctuality,

practice physical activities, participate in civic missions, have refresher courses in maths and French, and take a driving licence examination and first aid certification (PSC1). They are then deployed in the professional stream they chose earlier. The employment offers correspond to the needs for workers in different areas and vary from one SMV centre to another. It is worth mentioning that all education is done under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence.

French President Emmanuel Macron announced a dramatic change in the system outlined above in 2019. According to the plan announced by President Macron, a two-stage training programme is to be implemented in France, which will involve teenagers of both genders. The first stage is a mandatory, month-long training that will focus on exploring the issue of civic culture. Final decisions have not been made, but it is likely that this form of defence education will range from working with charities to traditional military training with the armed forces, police and firefighters ([Rachwalska, 2018](#)).

## Defence education of high school students in the EU Baltic States – in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia

In 2018, members of the Latvian Parliament voted to include defence education (*Valsts aizsardzības mācība* VAM) in the curriculum set out in the nationwide secondary education standard as a compulsory subject from 2024 ([“Valsts aizsardzības mācība”, no date](#)). This decision was made on the basis of a pilot defence education programme launched in September 2018 by the Latvian Ministry of Defence. Up to September 2018, National Defence was taught in elementary schools in Latvia, but it was optional and conducted by only nineteen schools that followed different programmes ([Rokis, 2018](#)). Based on this experience, schools were allowed to join the new youth defence education programme if they met four criteria:

- the school had already introduced the national defence doctrine programme;
- the school must be prepared to implement the process of teaching the national defence doctrine;
- the school must have an appropriate teacher/instructor with the appropriate qualifications;
- in September 2018, there could be no fewer than ten students who chose to participate in these classes.

The programme includes two years of defence education in the 10th and 11th grades of elementary school, with National Defence Education training to be uniform in all schools. It is planned to take place once a month, while a ten-day practical skills camp is to be held in the summer. At the same time, young people may choose in which summer term they wish to attend the training camp.

The proposed programme of National Defence Education is divided into four blocks: national (civic) education, survival school, physical training and military preparation, which is equivalent to the training at the first level of infantry school of the basic course in the Latvian Armed Forces and, after passing this stage, the student can become a reserve soldier. In addition, only a quarter of the classes consist of theoretical training; the rest are practical classes. However, the purpose of the National Defence Education project is

not to pre-select and recruit participants to the Latvian Armed Forces. The main goal of this systemic form of defence education is to prepare and develop “upstanding Latvian citizens” who have basic military skills and can deal with crisis situations (Rokis, 2018). It should be pointed out that as of September 2020, approximately 1,900 high school students have begun National Defence training in health, safety, and physical activity at 68 educational institutions across Latvia (“Valsts aizsardzības mācība”, no date).

In addition to the educational programme is the Youth Guard in Latvia (the *Jaunsardze ir Aizsardzības*). An institution that is subordinate to the Latvian Ministry of Defence, its main purpose is to organise and ensure the process of training young people in national defence, to educate them in national defence, and to promote patriotism, civic awareness, fellowship, courage, physical fitness and discipline. At the same time, the task of the Youth Guard is to interest young people in military service (“Par Jaunsardzes centru”, no date).

The conditions for joining the *Jaunsardze* are that the applicant is between 10 and 21 years of age and can speak the official language of the Republic of Latvia. Admission to the Guard takes place only with the written consent of parents or guardians. The Youth Guard Centre at the beginning of the school year enters into an agreement with a student’s legal guardian regarding their participation in the *Jaunsardze* movement. If the young person has reached the age of 18, a contract is concluded directly with that individual. The training process for young guards is carried out as “voluntary education in areas of interest.” Each young guard takes a solemn pledge that reads: “I, (name, surname), a young guard of the Republic of Latvia, solemnly promise that I will spare no effort or thought to create a better life for the benefit of my Country and the citizens of Latvia. I promise in good faith to perform my duties as a young guard” (“Kā kļūt par jaunsargu”, no date).

After taking the solemn oath, the student receives the uniform of a young guard. Education in the *Jaunsardze* is organised according to the academic year as established by the Council of Ministers. The programme continues for eight school years, which are divided into four consecutive levels (one level lasts two school years). After completing the programme and passing the Level IV final exams, a young guard may continue in the programme as a trainer until reaching 21, an assistant instructor of the guard (“Paraugprogramma”, no date).

On the other hand, in secondary schools in Lithuania, the Lithuanian Department of Mobilization and Civil Resistance at the Ministry of Defence, together with the Physical Training Centre of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, have prepared a Homeland Defence (*Krašto gynyba*) module since 2011 (“Kūno kultūros modulis „Krašto gynyba”, no date). This module consists of a 34-hour programme designed for students in grades 11-12 (boys and girls), during which students improve their physical fitness, learn patriotic values and attitudes and develop a sense of civic responsibility, learn teamwork, and develop leadership skills. The aim of the project is to educate citizens with strong characters who are not afraid of responsibility, are loyal to their homeland, obey the law and standards of conduct, respect their country and think about becoming defenders of Lithuania. Thus, the mission of the project is to educate youth to defend the homeland, promote and support national identity, citizenship, patriotism, freedom and independence (“Kūno kultūros modulis „Krašto gynyba”, no date).

Certified non-governmental organisations, mainly the Union of Lithuanian Riflemen, but also the Lithuanian Scouts organisation and the Federation of the Future, a Catholic youth organisation that deals with physical culture, are involved in organising defence training for young people in Lithuania (“Nevyriausybinių organizacijų”, no date).

In the Republic of Estonia, on the other hand, there is a territorial formation called *Kaitseliit*, or the National Defence League, which operates as a volunteer organisation under the auspices of the Estonian Ministry of National Defence. It is the *Kaitseliit* organisation that bears the burden of the defence preparation of young people, and as a result, *Kaitseliit* is the leader and main provider of the National Youth Education Programme. The purpose of the programme is to expand the activities of the National Defence League youth organisations and to enable more school-age children to become active in defence and civic education. To this end, the budget of the youth organisations of the National Defence League has been increased by €500,000 since 2018. The programme wraps up with training camps conducted by the National Defence League. In 2018, summer training camps were organised in which around one thousand young people participated.

Within *Kaitseliit* there is a youth-oriented organisation called the Young Eagles, with traditions that date back to 1930. The mission of the Young Eagles is to provide the best development and opportunities for young people in defence and civic education through volunteering, so that “every young person with a passion has the opportunity to contribute to Estonian national defence.” The Young Eagles organisation accepts young people from the ages of seven to eighteen ([“Isamaaline haridus ja huvitegevus tuleb viia iga nooreni”](#), 2017).

## Defence education for young people in Poland

After Poland regained its independence, defence education of young people was addressed systematically in 1923 and was treated mainly as a general preparation of the widest possible ranks of society for military service. Therefore, implementing the idea of defence education for young people, attempts were made to combine physical education with military training. It was important for young people that the Military Preparation, and later Defence Preparation subjects were available in all schools or at selected levels of education ([Urych, 2019](#)).

The gradual removal of the military content in general education caused deficiencies in the preparation of young people for military service, and the needs in this area were growing, mainly due to the shortened duration of basic military service. Recognising the conditions for military education at the time, the ministries of education and national defence began working together on an experiment with military-profiled classes in the 1998/1999 school year. The aim of the undertaking was, among other things, to work out a new and systematic defence education for young people which would make it possible for graduates of secondary schools to have military preparation for the armed forces. This educational experiment ran from 1998 to 2003 and enjoyed increasing popularity. At the peak of its activity, there were 97 military-profiled classes all over Poland and they educated over 2,800 students. Despite its success, the experiment in military-profiled classes was abandoned in 2003 ([Urych, 2019](#)).

The growing interest among Polish young people in defence education provided an impulse for developing a new formula for the operation of uniformed classes. This was achieved in 2002 by the Minister of National Education and Sport ([Rozporządzenie...](#), 2002). A formula for defence education for young people was developed based on the pedagogical innovation of military classes. This resulted in the operation of various military education programmes and changed in 2017 with the systemic solution of Certified Military Uniformed Classes. The educational content is provided in five main thematic blocks: basics of civic and military education, combat training, logistics training, legal training, and evaluation of the training level. In this form, the military education programme

includes 185 hours of theoretical and practical classes, including 45 hours of theoretical classes, 90 hours of practical classes, 30 hours of self-education classes and 50 hours in the form of a training camp at a military training area. In turn, during the summer vacations after the completion of schooling, the graduate volunteers, who confirm their fitness for active military service as part of their qualification for military service, are scheduled for short-term preparatory military training ending with taking the military oath. Military education under this unified formula will end in 2024, having included more than 120 high schools ("[Certyfikowane Wojskowe Klasy Mundurowe](#)", no date).

The huge success of Certified Military Uniformed Classes and the need for legal regulations resulted in the development of the current form of defence education for Polish young people, namely Military Preparation Units (MPUs). The first MPUs were launched in the 2020/2021 school year. 130 units were opened, in which about 3,500 students began their education. A uniform programme in the area of military preparation in the theoretical part is conducted by the school, and in the practical part by the sponsoring military unit. The training ends with a 50-hour training camp held at the beginning of the last year of schooling.

The minimum number of hours in a high school or technical school is 230. This includes 53 theoretical hours and 177 practical hours, including a training camp. The programme includes four thematic blocks: the fundamentals of military education (drill, military regulations, knowledge of the Polish Armed Forces), training in selected legal regulations (including issues related to the protection of classified information), logistics training (e.g. construction and operation of equipment, environmental protection, fire prevention) and combat training (including tactics, shooting training, reconnaissance, defence against weapons of mass destruction, communications, topography, medical, engineering and fitness training). The Minister of National Defence provides financial support for MPUs in the form of targeted grants. The scope of this type of assistance is defined by legal regulations ([Rozporządzenie...](#), 2020)

It is worth pointing out that the students enrolled in the military preparation units obtain the following benefits: the possibility of shortened preparatory service, and consequently becoming a soldier of the personal reserves of the Polish Armed Forces or entering into active military service, as well as applying to military universities (receiving additional points in the recruitment process). Thanks to this form of defence education for young people, the Polish state, in turn, hopes to increase the number of personnel reserves, increase the number of people trained in the event of a military conflict, as well as to support a variety of activities to address local threats and strengthen national security. At the same time, the number of people with formed patriotic, pro-social and pro-defence attitudes is increasing.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The need to use the potential of each state for a variety of activities aimed at strengthening its security, present in contemporary social discourse, as well as the numerous advantages of youth defence education in European Union countries were reasons for analysing the current systemic solutions for this type of education in this article. The following conclusions and recommendations for youth defence education in the selected EU countries have been drawn based on the research results. In countries where defence education is a part of school curriculum (Sweden, Germany, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland), country-specific legal solutions were introduced throughout the country. A unified system of solutions in the field of defence education should be

implemented in all European Union countries. This requires the creation of a single system - the EU defence education curriculum, which should take into account good practices in the defence education of various countries. For example, it is worth noting the increased interest in defence education in Sweden due to the possibility of completing the four-year training, which is treated on a par with the eighty-day basic military training in the Swedish National Guard, especially since in many EU countries, such as in Germany and Poland, in connection with the introduction of the professional army, the problem of staff shortages arose. The military training programme which was introduced in Germany, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland is an interesting option. In addition, the French Ministry of National Defence introduced a form of volunteering for a period of 12 months to 5 years to encourage young people. This practice should also be used when creating a uniform system of defence education in the European Union. It would also be valuable to include educational content that is attractive and of interest to young people in various EU countries and it would also be worthwhile to take advantage of the practical learning that is carried out in some countries, such as charitable, voluntary or community activities.

Practical solutions in the area of cooperation of the armed forces with the civilian population of EU countries also require consideration. It would be advisable to develop a comprehensive concept of cooperation between units of the Ministry of Defence and high schools, taking into account mutual needs and capabilities.

It also seems valuable that the entities responsible for defence education in a given country are willing and able to draw on the knowledge and experience of other European Union countries in this area. It seems necessary to cooperate and share conclusions related to various forms of defence education, e.g., during seminars or academic conferences on defence education.

Deeper and broader quantitative and qualitative research on defence education in various EU countries also seems justified. Such research is needed because of the interest of the armed forces in actions for national security in situations involving certain non-military threats, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Further research needs to be done, the results of which could be used to identify implications for practical application in all countries of the European Union.

The article not only describes, but also attempts to evaluate, the defence education of young people in selected European Union countries, noting its main tenets and values. The results are subject to certain limitation. Although the analysis was based on available sources, and despite all efforts to maintain scientific objectivity and a holistic view of the issue, it is probably not without its fragmentary aspects. Nevertheless, the lack of studies on defence education for young people in the systemic solutions in selected European Union countries means that the article may contribute to further in-depth analysis in this area.

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