

TENDENCIES OF BORDER GUARDS EDUCATION SYSTEM QUALITY IN LATVIA

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Abstract. *The novelty of the research is related to the need of Latvia as a member of the European Union and the Schengen area to continuously improve the requirements of vocational education, competence and professional qualification of border guards. The main objective of the research is to summarize the views of border guards on the positive achievements of the existing education system and the shortcomings detected for further improvement of the education system of border guards.*

The aim of the research is to summarize the views of border guards on the necessity of the vocational education including practical classes and training courses in the education system and possible solutions for further improvement, as well as the development of profession standards in a new quality and to develop cooperation between EU countries and neighboring countries to obtain knowledge and practical skills. The method of legal analysis was implemented by analyzing the requirements of the normative regulation concerning the professional qualification of border guards, the historical analysis method was used to explore the evolution of the professional education of border guards in the historical aspect, as well as the survey (questionnaire) method performing the survey of border guards of different educational levels has been performed. The research uses legal analysis, historical and survey methods. As a result of the research valuable information has been obtained that will serve to improve border guards profession and education standards. Since October 2017, the Rēzekne Academy of Technology continues to implement the long-term studies initiated by the European Regional Development Fund's Postdoctoral Research Support Project "EU External Border Security, Latvia's Internal Security" No. 1.1.2 / VIAA / 1/16/127. The cooperation partner of the project is the State Border Guard College.

Keywords: *Schengen acquis, study programs, the quality of vocational education.*

Introduction

The topicality of the subject is confirmed by the fact that both the European Union, the Schengen acquis (CIVITAS Institute for the Study of Civil Society, 2005), as well as national regulatory enactments, set requirements in several laws and regulations. against the competence of the authorities (Saeima, 2009, Article 1, paragraph 11), and the professional competence of the officials (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010, Paragraph 2.1), but without specifying the content of the concept of competence, it is limited to a number of requirements of

professional qualifications dispersed within the Schengen acquis (Gaveika, 2022).

Border guards' vocational education in the context of the EU Schengen legislation

The problem of the VRS professionalism was topical both in 2007 during the Schengen evaluation (Gaveika, 2008) before Latvia's accession to the Schengen area, as well as in the course of the evaluation of Schengen in 2012/13 and 2018, in particular in the improvement of professional qualifications, foreign language knowledge, structural cooperation, communication and management abilities (European Parliament, 2016). The requirements for the professional education of border guards were laid down in the standards of the profession of the inspector (LR Iekšlietu ministrija, 2009), the junior officer of the State Border Guard (Cabinet of Ministers, 2006a) and the Senior Officer (Cabinet of Ministers, 2006b).

However, in 2017, along with the entry into force of the new occupational classifier (Cabinet of Ministers, 2017), all the standards of the profession of border guards lost their validity.

In the development of new occupational standards, the views of different levels of border guards on vocational education are very important.

The aim of the study is to investigate the problems of the functioning of the EU external borders guarding system in terms of limiting illegal immigration in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean and Western Europe, their impact on the EU and Latvia's internal security, to offer the tools of the EU external borders guarding system improvement to reduce the risk of illegal migration in the EU and Latvia. The aim is to develop proposals for the improvement of the regulatory framework and the improvement of the efficiency of law enforcement activities in the control of external borders and implementation of the asylum procedure in the EU and Latvia, to promote the professionalism and capacity of law enforcement officials.

Within the framework of the project, various research and scientific activities were planned, including a survey of the State Border Guard personnel on the restriction of illegal immigration and improvement of the professional training and education system of the State Border Guard personnel. Initially, the concept of the survey (Indriksons, 2018) intended to survey the border guards on the basis of the requirements of the relevant professional standards. However, when developing the content of the questionnaires, it was found that the list of questions based on the profession standard is too broad. Whilst coordinating the survey (questionnaire) content with the State Border Guard's main administration, the questionnaire questions were grouped together in more concise questions.

The responses of the personnel on the vocation education of border guards

The survey of the personnel of State Border Guard personnel was conducted by lecturer of the Border Guard and Immigration Services Department of the State Border Guard College lieutenant colonel Dr. paed A. Indriksons and lieutenant colonel Mg. iur. I. Adijane in cooperation with post-doctoral researcher Dr. iur. Arturs Gaveika, State Border Guard College and the Central Board of the State Border Guard (Figure 1).

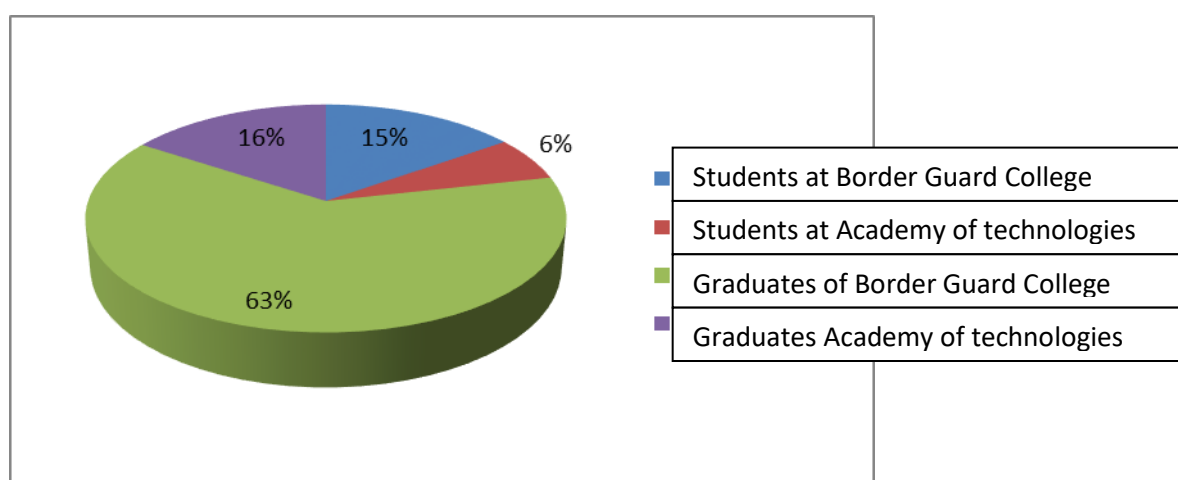


Figure 1 The level of respondents' vocational education (made by author)

Taking into account the fact that there is higher number of officials of the State Border Guard who have graduated the State Border Guard College than from the vocational Bachelor's study program "Borderguarding" of the Rezekne Technology Academy, the percentage of respondents who participated in the survey also show predominance of officials from the State Border Guard who have graduated the State Border Guard College. It can be concluded that in the processes of acquiring education the State Border Guard officials encourage to think about the necessary improvements, officials show more initiative in proposing improvements both in the vocational education system and the possibilities for improvement of the border guarding system.

The largest section of the survey included statements about the system of vocational training and education (Figure 2). Most of the officials of the State Border Guard believe that during the acquisition of the study programs of the State Border Guard College and Rezekne Technology Academy, sufficient skills are acquired during subjects as first medical assistance, guaranteeing safe action in case of need (30% agree, 46% somewhat agree), training on restricted information non-disclosure in the State Border Guard (agree 27% and 41%

somewhat agree), training in anti-corruption legislation, anti-corruption and anti-corruption in the State Border Guard (agree 21% and somewhat agree 52%).

Regarding the adequacy of the knowledge and skills required for the service acquired during the acquisition of the State Border Guard College and Rezekne Technology Academy study programs, the answers of the surveyed officials indicate that theoretical knowledge is acquired more than practical skills. 13% of respondents believe that all theoretical knowledge is acquired, 61% somewhat agree to this statement, while practical skills are assessed as fully acquired by 11% of respondents, another 37% somewhat agree. Thus, more than half of the respondents' replies indicate that vocational education programs lack the acquisition of practical skills. Those surveyed who have more than 10 years of experience in the State Border Guard mostly believe that theoretical knowledge is acquired at a sufficient level, while those with the lowest professional experience up to 5 years believe that theoretical knowledge is not at sufficient level.

As far as the acquisition of practical skills is concerned, answers are also given about the duration of the practice, most of who consider the practice time too short. Looking at the responses to the respondent's service experience in the State Border Guard, it must be concluded that those respondents who have more than 10 years of service tend to agree that the internship is too short, while those respondents whose length of service is shorter respond almost similarly, half of them believe that the internship is too short, the other part does not agree with this statement.

Respondents' views on the necessary skills in emergency situations, exceptional situations and military threats to the Republic of Latvia were shared in half by the respondents, while in the case of acquired skills and skills to survive in difficult circumstances, most of the interviewed officials of the State Border Guard believe that they have not acquired sufficient level i.e. 19% are of the opinion that it has not been acquired and 39% more likely disagree than agree to the acquisition of such skills and abilities. The biggest negative indicator in the responses is the ability to maintain and use high-tech technical equipment for border guarding (motorcycle, car, etc.) - (disagree by 34% and 35% somewhat disagree).

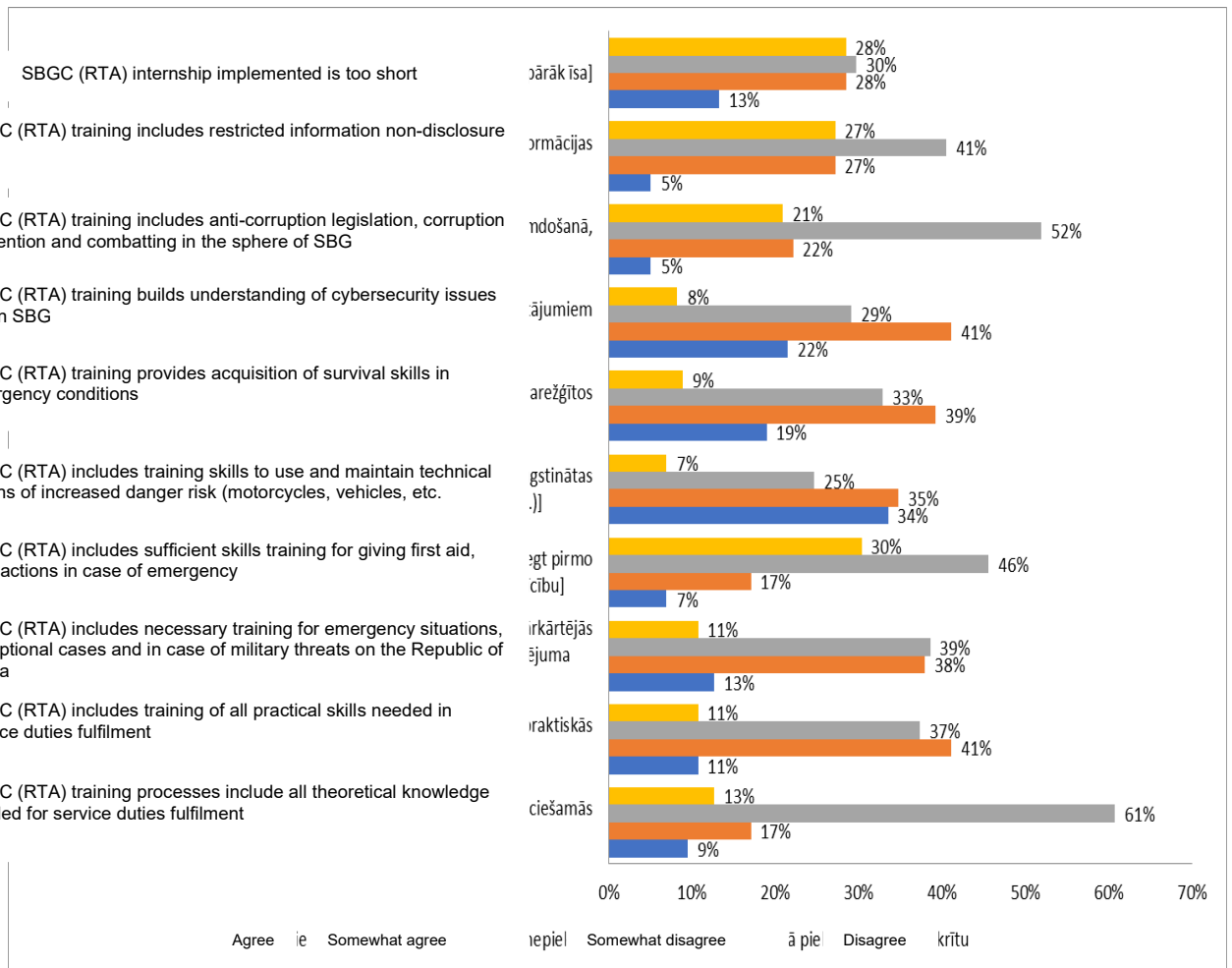


Figure 2 Characteristics of vocational education and training (made by author)

Respondents provided extensive answers about the possibilities for the improvement of the vocational training and education system of the border guards, which included proposals regarding changes in the education programs of the State Border Guard College and Rzekne Technology Academy, as well as the practice in the structural units of the State Border Guard, as well as the transfer of experience from other European Union countries as well cooperation between educational institutions and structural units of the State Border Guard, which would include not only the exchange of information, but also the organization of joint training and participation of the State Border Guard units in the training process as guest lecturers, thus sharing the most up-to-date information on border control and immigration control. Figure 3 shows the distribution of answers.

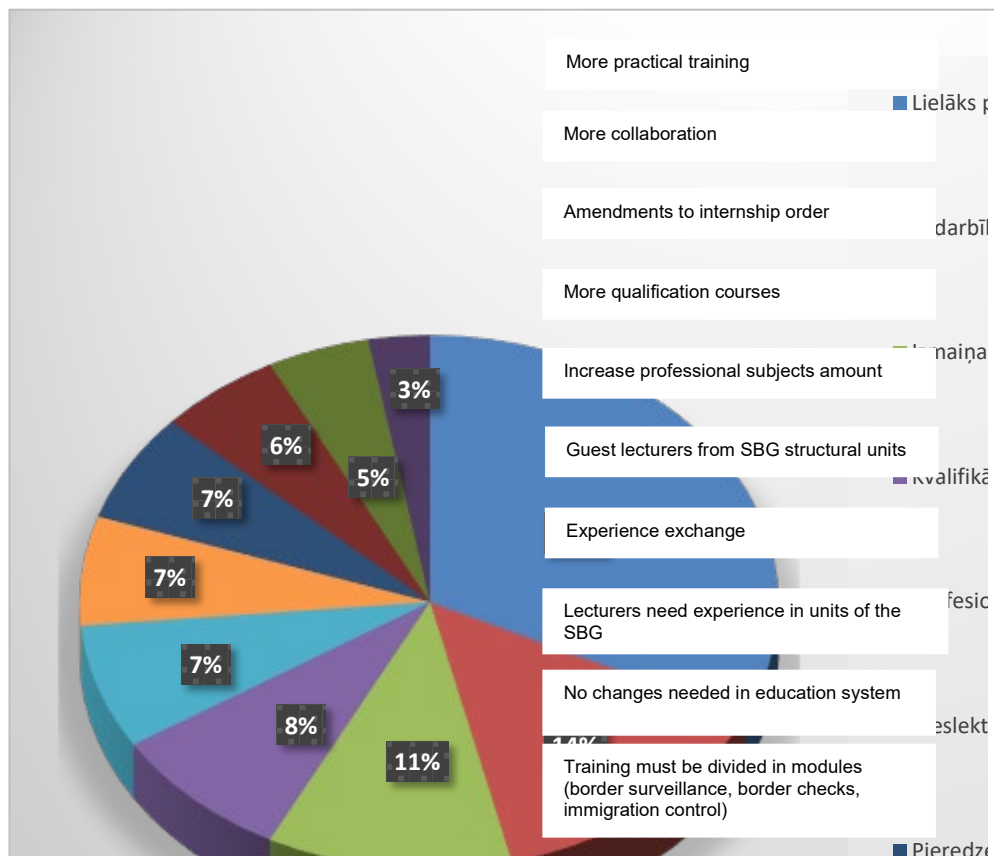


Figure 3 Opinion of the State Border Guard officials on the most effective factors for improving vocational education (made by author)

As can be seen in Figure 1.8, a large part of the respondents believe that the quality of the vocational education system of border guards could be improved by making amendments to the study programs of the State Border Guard College and Rezekne Technology Academy, firstly by increasing the number of practical classes, including practical classes in cooperation with the State Border Guard units, allowing students to maximize bringing practical tasks to the real life, thus better preparing them for different situations in the practical service. Respondents believe that guest lecturers from the State Border Guard structural units should be invited to the training process, officials of different levels of management of the units, such as the Heads of Border Guard Units, were named. Respondents were convinced that all lecturers participating in the implementation of professional education programs of the Border Guards require prior practical experience in the structural units of the State Border Guard, and the lecturers must maintain their qualification continuously, regularly, practicing in the structural units of the State Border Guard every year. Respondents emphasized that professional subjects cannot be taught by a lecturer who currently does not have links with current events of the State Border Guard. Several respondents suggested extending study time. There were

also suggestions for taking over the experience of other countries in the professional field of border guards, but there was no indication of what specific issues would need to be changed according to the experience of other countries.

As one of the biggest changes in the study programs, the officials of the State Border Guard interviewed mentioned the necessity to reduce the number and volume of general education courses, accordingly, increasing the amount of study courses concerning the performance of tasks of the State Border Guard. Areas such as border surveillance, border checks, immigration control, administrative practice, document examination were named.

As educational programs also include internships in structural units of the State Border Guard, respondents also actively put forward proposals specifically on this issue. The main aspects of the internship were indicated as the extension of the internship time, more practical tasks and situation analysis during the practice, more involvement in the real assignments, the possibility to practice in the units of the State Border Guard where the future student deployment is planned.

Very extensive responses were given to the need for training courses. The officials of the State Border Guard surveyed emphasized the necessity to arrange the system for sending of the State Border Guard personnel to the qualification upgrading courses. Various options were presented in the respondents' proposals, but the common aspect was that it was necessary to regularly re-send to the qualification improvement courses, because the situation in the juridical field as well as in real life nowadays is rapidly changing. It has been repeatedly stressed the need to issue certificates for the completion of qualification courses for a limited period, after which it would be mandatory to retrain in these courses. Respondents believe that in this way it would be easier to plan and control the training needs of personnel in the State Border Guard units. With regarding to training courses in e-environment, respondents indicated that they did not prove their usefulness.

Some of the factors that could affect the quality of education systems were the more rigorous selection of candidates for training as well as tighter discipline control and upbringing during the study process.

Conclusions

Officials of the State Border Guard surveyed consider that particular attention should also be paid more to regular and optimally planned acquisition of qualification improvement courses, continuous collaboration with the competent authorities of neighbouring countries, as well as the authorities of the Republic of Latvia involved in immigration control.

The quality of vocational education in general is satisfactory in the opinions of the officials of the State Border Guard surveyed. The main suggestions, which in the view of the respondents could be to improve the training - increase of the proportion of professional study courses as well as the number of practical classes in the education programs of both the State Border Guard College and Rezekne Technology Academy.

Further development of the border guard education system requires the development of high-quality, proportionate and sustainable border guard profession standards that meet the requirements and conditions of both the European Union and Latvia.

In general, it should be concluded that the majority of the officials of the State Border Guard surveyed believe that the illegal border migration could be reduced by a better arranged state border, which would include various innovative technical solutions. Many officials of the State Border Guard are convinced that better infrastructure and material and technical facilities would improve the border guard system, thus preventing illegal crossing of the state border.

The answers of the interviewed State Border Guard officials were concrete, practically feasible, which indicates the respondents' understanding and ability to assess the situation by identifying the necessary changes and directions of development.

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