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Multinational Force Ukraine Series

Estonia: Strong and Early Support, but Conditions Apply

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Political will

Estonia consistently ranks among the top per capita supporters of Ukraine, having provided military assistance worth more than 1.4% of its GDP (around €516 million). Aware of its limits as a small state, Estonia's foreign policy focuses on leading by example, shaping the public narrative, and building coalitions. Strong support to Ukraine is likely to continue since it has constantly been backed by more than three quarters of the population.

Estonia views Europe's security as inseparable from Ukraine's, emphasizing that Moscow's geopolitical ambitions have not changed since 2022. Recent drone incursions and airspace violations demonstrate that Russia has no intention of returning to normal diplomatic relations with Europe. The Estonian government warns that Europe's security would deteriorate further if Russia succeeded in its aims in Ukraine. Drawing on its own experience of occupation, Estonia places international law – notably the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty – at the center of its foreign policy. Hence, any peace or ceasefire agreement must not restrict Ukraine's future foreign policy choices or impose territorial concessions against its will.

The Estonian government holds the view that NATO and EU membership provide the most reliable long-term guarantees for Ukraine's security. Since the accession process may take time, Estonia welcomes the establishment of the Multinational Force Ukraine (MFU) that would provide security guarantees promptly after the war. In addition to building up Ukraine's army, the guarantees should pave the way for Ukraine's future membership in NATO and the EU.

Before deploying the unit in Ukraine, Estonia must seek a mandate from the parliament (Riigikogu). Once the MFU mandate is clearly defined, the initiative is likely to receive a majority approval in Riigikogu. Estonia is unlikely to join the MFU if the UK, Germany, and France opt out. A key prerequisite for participation is the establishment of a peace agreement or, at minimum, a ceasefire in Ukraine. Estonia insists that any ceasefire must not let Russia rebuild its military, stop military aid to Ukraine, or ease economic pressure on Russia.

Since the 1990s, more than 1,300 Estonian peacekeepers have participated in over a dozen international peacekeeping and crisis management operations, including backing allies in Mali, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Because the aims and outcomes of some of these missions have been unclear, the Estonian public has questioned the value of the sacrifices made. Thus, any mission to Ukraine will likely need an exit plan, at least an abstract one, that clearly defines the mission's duration, aims, and nature before Estonia is willing to commit.

As of 2025, 60% of Estonians oppose sending their soldiers to Ukraine. However, 48% believe Ukraine should not cede Russian-occupied territories for peace. Opposition to the MFU is not higher than opposition to previous missions Estonia has joined. Given robust public support for Ukraine, this mission may be easier to justify than earlier operations on distant continents. The government must continue educating the public on the issue and ensure that more reluctant parliament members support the initiative.

Military capabilities

Estonia's government was among the first to publicly declare its willingness to contribute to the MFU with a ground combat unit of up to company size (about 200 personnel), including training instructors and staff officers, and some 'military elements' such as a naval mine countermeasures vessel. Estonia will likely participate on land and at sea, but lacks capability to contribute in the air domain.

Estonian politicians from all major parties tend to agree that providing security guarantees to Ukraine serves Estonia's security. The debate focuses not on whether to send a company to Ukraine, but rather on the timing of such a decision. Critics argue that the government's decision to deploy troops should wait until conditions are clearly established. Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur emphasizes that discussions on the terms of the MFU must begin now so Europe can act promptly once a peace agreement or ceasefire is reached. He believes that Estonia should actively participate in shaping the mission's conditions and mandate. With the government's decision to proceed, the government can now engage in detailed planning with the defence forces concerning the mission's logistics and operational details. Early involvement in the planning process both at home and abroad increases the chances that the mission aligns with Estonia's national priorities.

As the Coalition of the Willing (CoW) may shape NATO's future power balance, Estonia considers participation in the MFU strategically important. Hence, the government regards it crucial to be at the negotiation table to safeguard its interests. By committing to the MFU, Estonia also aims to set a precedent among its allies. Estonia's small size limits its impact, but early commitment sends a dual message: to the Kremlin, that Estonia is not intimidated by Russia, and to the West, encouraging other countries to contribute.

In the short term, Estonia aims to secure ongoing international support for Ukraine. More broadly, Estonia has an interest in maintaining peacekeeping and military outreach operations as accepted tools of international politics. Through the CoW, Estonia aims to participate in shaping NATO's evolving power balance in Europe. It would be unlikely for Estonia to join the MFU if key allies opt out. Most importantly, Estonia's participation is conditional on a ceasefire or peace agreement and a clearly defined mandate of the mission.

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In the *Multinational Force Ukraine series* of policy briefs leading experts from allied countries assess key factors for participation in the Multinational Force Ukraine. This includes the political willingness of allies to deploy troops—on the ground, in the air, or at sea—to establish a military presence in or around Ukraine. They also examine the conditions for such deployments to occur (before, during, or after peace negotiations), the roles these forces would be expected to perform (defensive or offensive), the red lines imposed by national governments, and the specific capabilities each country could realistically contribute.

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