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# Finland's Security System: Lessons for Central and Eastern Europe

## Abstract

The dynamically changing security environment in Europe means that states and societies must be prepared for all kinds of threat, including military ones. At the same time, it should be noted that most countries in Europe seem to be unaware of the reality of threats, especially the possibility of an attack from the Russian Federation. The exception is Finland, which has been continuously preparing for an attack from its eastern neighbour since the end of World War II. These preparations consist of building the appropriate infrastructure, including shelters that can accommodate almost the entire population of this country, and universal military training. Also important is the widespread social awareness of threats and the preparation of the country's residents in the event of crisis situations and crises.

The aim of this article is to analyse Finland's level of preparedness for crises, including wars, and to find an answer to the question of which of the solutions used in this country can be applied in other countries. To achieve the aim of these analyses, the author decided to analyse secondary sources, explore statistical data, and take a historical approach.

**Keywords:** Finland, security, civil defense, military service.

## Introduction

Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022 changed the course of events, and Finland decided to join NATO. However, it should be emphasised that since the beginning of its independence, this country has always been aware

of the threat of an attack from its eastern neighbour and has tried to maintain a balance in relations with both the Soviet Union (later Russia) and the West. Technological progress has led to the evolution of threats types. However, as a rule, the Finnish authorities and residents have always tried to be prepared to function in crisis situations caused by the actions of their eastern neighbour. This can be seen, for example, by analysing the communication routes in this country, which mostly run in the south-north direction. At the same time, Finnish society is being prepared to function in crisis situations such as long power and water outages, long-term disruptions in the Internet or banking services, natural phenomena such as storms or fires, and long-term crises such as pandemics or armed conflicts[1]. This preparation includes having cash (in case of a bank system failure), having food supplies whose preparation does not require the use of external energy sources or battery-powered radios[2].

At the same time, Finland has one of the largest shelter systems in Europe and the world, which can accommodate 4.8 million people out of 5.5 million inhabitants of the country. More than 90% of them can provide residents with protection against rocket or artillery attacks, and more than 80% of shelters will protect in the event of gas attacks or harmful radiation[3].

Finland's preparedness for crises is largely due to the history of the country and its people. It is also a derivative of the politically neutral and difficult natural conditions that have required them to be prepared for crises for hundreds of years. In this sense, it seems that the country can be an example for others. However, to draw from the good experiences of the Finns in this respect, it is necessary to analyse the way they prepare for crises. Therefore, both the legal system and the appropriate education of the society and its attitude should be taken into account. It is also necessary to recall the strategic reserves that can allow the state to function in the face of an interruption of external supply chains.

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[1] *Häiriö – I criisitilanteisiin varautuminen*, https://www.suomi.fi/oppaat/varautuminen, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

[2] Yle.fi, *Sisäministeriö Patista kaikkia kotivarakauppaan – joka codist pitäisi löytyä vett, heart, kindness I patteriradio*, https://yle.fi/a/74-20124941, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

[3] D. Mikołajczyk, *Schrony pomieszczą ponad 87 proc. Finów. Większość budowli wytrzyma atak konwencjonalny i promieniowanie*, https://infosecurity24.pl/za-granica/schrony-pomieszcza-ponad-87-proc-finow-wiekszosc-budowli-wytrzyma-atak-konwencjonalny-i-promieniowanie?utm_source=chatgpt.com, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyse the level of Finland's preparedness for crises, including wars, and to answer the question of which of the solutions used in this country can be applied in other countries. To achieve the objective of these analyses, the author decided to analyse secondary sources, explore statistical data, and take a historical approach.

## Civil defence shelters in Finland

In Finland, issues related to the construction of shelters for the public are regulated by the Rescue Act (*Pelastuslaki*) of 2011. According to this Act, owners of new buildings with a certain area are required to provide protective shelters for residents or users of these facilities[4]. According to this Act, in connection with new construction, the owner of the building must build a civil defence shelter in the building or nearby, the size of which can be estimated as sufficient for people living, permanently working or otherwise staying in the building. However, the obligation to build a civil defence shelter does not apply to temporary buildings that are used for no longer than five years. At the same time, a civil defence shelter must protect the people who stay in it from the effects of weapons and the collapse of the building, as well as from ionising radiation and toxic substances. The temperature, air quality, and level of hygiene equipment of the civil defence shelter must be sufficient for the purpose of use of the premises[5].

This Act is supplemented by the Regulations of the State Council for Rescue (*Valtioneuvoston asetus pelastustoimesta,* 407/2011). It states that for most buildings, a rescue plan must be developed, as referred to in Section 15 of the Rescue Act (379/2011). It is prepared for: 1) residential buildings with at least three residential units; 2) schools, educational institutions, and other similar facilities for teaching; 3) care and educational facilities and children's homes, community centres, day care centres for children, and other facilities for organising group care for children, with the exception of residential premises; 4) accommodation facilities referred to in the Act on Accommodation and Catering Services and camping sites and temporary

[4] *Pelastuslaki* 379/2011, https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2011/20110379, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

[5] *Väestönsuojaelementit*, https://www.elementtisuunnittelu.fi/runkorakenteet/perustukset-ja-vaestonsuojat/vaestonsuojaelementit?utm_source=chatgpt.com, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

camping sites referred to in the Act on Outdoor Recreation; 5) rooms intended for temporary mass accommodation of at least 20 people; 6) churches, libraries, sports and exhibition halls, theatres, petrol stations, fairgrounds, racetracks, amusement parks and similar meeting places; 7) shopping centres and similar premises and stores with an area of more than 400 square metres; 8) restaurants and similar establishments with more than 50 seats; 9) industrial, production, and warehouse buildings with an area of over 1,500 square metres; 10) animal shelters; 11) places where small-scale industrial handling and storage of hazardous chemicals may only be carried out by submitting a notification referred to in Article 24 of the Act on the Safety of Hazardous Chemicals and Explosives; 12) buildings and sites designated as cultural property and containing cultural property in international treaties binding Finland, as well as other buildings and sites protected as cultural property by acts and decrees; 13) workplaces where the number of employees and other persons present at the same time is normally at least 50; 14) tunnels over 100 metres long for public transport; 15) area production peat[6].

The laws in force in Finland mean that most areas where people live are prepared to protect them in the event of a crisis. However, it should be noted that legal acts alone are not able to prepare society for functioning in crisis situations. For this, appropriate education and military training of society are necessary.

## Finland's military training system

Currently, the military training system in Finland is based on the concept of universal defence and compulsory military service, and its main tasks are to prepare reservists and ensure the country's defense capabilities in crisis situations. Due to geographical conditions, the land forces constitute the majority of the national defence forces. In peacetime, the main task of the army brigade-level units is to train the army units that will be formed when ready. The army consists of infantry, artillery, anti-aircraft, pioneer, communications, technical service, and special forces[7]. It should be noted that conscription is seen as part of the Finnish independence history, but above all as a product

[6] *Valtioneuvoston asetus pelastustoimesta*, https://finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2011/20110407?utm_source=chatgpt.com, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

[7] *Maavoimien aselajit*, https://maavoimat.fi/aselajit, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

of its time, which acquired its true content and essence within the framework of the 19th-century Russian Empire as an autonomous Grand Duchy. At the end of the 19th century, pro-Finnish elites strongly promoted conscription as a Finnish defence system, while today Finland as a nation, and especially its citizens, support conscription as a central defense solution of Finland and consider it an almost sacred system that should not be abandoned[8].

Military service in Finland consists of various training periods and courses during them. All conscripts start their service from the same line. Depending on the training, military service lasts 165, 255 or 347 days. About 43% of conscripts serve 347 days,, about 14% 255 days and 43% 165 days. The service period is 165 days for those trained for crew duties and 255 days for those trained for tasks requiring special crew skills and those serving without weapons. Those trained as officers, non-commissioned officers, and for the most demanding special crew tasks serve 347 days. Conscripts are selected for training according to the needs of the Finnish Defence Forces. Selection takes into account the readiness and aptitude of the conscript, as well as the results of instructor and peer assessments. Competencies acquired by a person obliged to perform military service before starting military service are recognised before starting service, and the goal is to use these competencies in official tasks. Specialist knowledge of conscripts is used in special tasks[9].

The majority of Finland's defence capabilities are made up of reservists and units formed from them. It can be said that the capability of our Defence Forces in a crisis is equal to the capability of units formed from reservists. To maintain efficiency, reservists must also be trained. Training of conscripts and reservists forms a whole, in which both are important for the final effect[10].

Currently, the Finnish Defence Forces have around 900,000 trained soldiers in reserve, and reservists form the backbone of Finland's defence capabilities, as 97 percent of the Finnish war force consists of reservists[11].

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[8] K. Laitinen, *Tutkimustiivistelmä. Suomalainen asevelvollisuus. Historiallinen kaari, kehitys ja kansallinen olemus*, https://www.defmin.fi/files/336/2381_394_Laitinen-Nokkala.pdf, [accessed: 29.12.2024].

[9] *Varusmiespalvelus ja – koulutus*, https://intti.fi/palveluksessa, [accessed: 29/12/2024].

[10] *Reservin koulutuksen Merkits asevelvollisuudessa*, https://maavoimat.fi/-/reservin-koulutuksen-merkitys, [accessed: 30.12.2024].

[11] *Reservation runaasti yhteydenottoja Puolustusvoimiin – kokosimme ohjeita*, https://ilmavoimat.fi/-/1948673/reservilaisilta-runsaasti-yhteydenottoja-puolustusvoimiin-kokosimme-ohjeita, [accessed: 30.12.2024].

At the same time, people who perform critical tasks, including work in rescue services and supply security, may be exempted from reservist training. However, those who do not want to take part in military training (this applies to both conscripted service and reservist training) may be directed to other tasks related to ensuring state security. On the other hand, women's military service in this country is voluntary and currently stands at more than 1,500 per year[12].

It should also be emphasised that the Finns, to a much greater extent than the inhabitants of most European countries, are trained in the use of firearms. In relation to the number of inhabitants, Finland has the third largest number of firearms in the world[13]. This is due to the hunting tradition, especially in the north of the country. According to the Ministry of Interior, there are almost 1.5 million registered firearms in Finland and about 460,000 holders of firearms permits[14]. Therefore, in most cases, military training can start with a certain level of skill.

## Accumulation of strategic reserves in Finland

Finland has been preparing for a possible attack from the east since World War II. This also applies to stockpiling, where the country has at least six months of fuel, grain and medicines[15]. However, it should be emphasised that in order to be able to use strategic reserves effectively, it is necessary to ensure their efficient redistribution. In Finland, this is specified in the Government Decision on the Objectives of Supply Security of 1992 (857/1992). According to this legal act, security of supply refers to securing critical production, services, and infrastructure necessary for the maintenance of the population, the country's economy, and national defence in the event of serious disrup-

[12] *1555 naista hooks vapaaehtoiseen asepalvelukseen*, https://maavoimat.fi/-/1555-naista-haki-vapaaehtoiseen-asepalvelukseen, [accessed: 30.12.2024].

[13] *Pitäisikö asiden I'm going to Suomessa to be continued lainsäädännöllä?*, https://yle.fi/a/3-6137360, [accessed: 30.12.2024].

[14] *Suomessa on the valley have a drink aseita – tallaiset ovat to sleep no one säilyttämiseen*, https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/suomessa-on-valtava-maara-aseita-tallaiset-ovat-saannot-niiden-sailyttamiseen/8911596, [accessed: 30.12.2024].

[15] M. Mäki, *Financial Times: Näin Suomi on vuosikymmenien ajan varautunut sotaan*, https://www.verkkouutiset.fi/a/financial-times-nain-suomi-on-vuosikymmenien-ajan-varautunut-sotaan/#f4aebee5, [accessed: 30.12.2024].

tions and emergencies. Security of supply is based on well-functioning international markets, a diversified industrial base, stable public finances, and a competitive national economy. The most important threats to the functioning of society include: disruptions in the operation of telecommunications systems and networks, power outages, serious disruptions to the health and functional capacity of the population, and natural and environmental accidents. The most serious external threat to supply security is considered to be a crisis situation in which a country's ability to produce or source key products and services from abroad has temporarily deteriorated[16].

It should be noted here that Finland was the only country in Europe and one of the few in the world to pass the test in terms of strategic stocks during the Covid-19 pandemic, when global supply chains were disrupted. This was because after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was one of the few countries that did not stop preparing for all kinds of crisis. The remaining countries seemed to fall into lethargy, assuming that no threats to them would ever occur again. Some of them seemed to show wishful thinking even during Covid-19, and it was only the events in Ukraine in early 2022 that caused them to wake up. Although some countries seem to hope that everything will somehow pass by itself, and these countries do not incur any major costs.

Meanwhile, since the end of World War II, the most important issue for Finnish foreign and domestic policy has been finding its own way in the changing geopolitical situation. The President of Finland from 1956 to 1982, Urho Kekkonen, described the philosophy of Finland's security policy as follows: "Nation can only count on themselves. In this sense, the war years have taught us a lesson that has cost us dearly: no one will blow the fire for us. And if they do, we will get blisters on our faces. Experience has also taught us that in its foreign policy, no nation can afford to feel feelings, whether sympathy or antipathy – in the decision-making process. A realistic foreign policy must be based on knowledge of important factors in international politics, that is, knowledge of one's own country and the balance of power between states"[17].

[16] *Valtioneuvoston päätöshuoltovarmuuden tavoitteista,(857/1992)*, https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2013/20130857, [accessed: 30.12.2024].

[17] U. Kekkonen, *Nie szukajcie przyjaciół daleko, a wrogów blisko*, Warszawa 1983, p. 88.

This approach to security is also confirmed today. In a statement to Reuters, the Commander of the Finnish Defence Forces, General Timo Kivinen, said that Finland had been preparing for a Russian invasion for decades[18].

## Conclusions

Finland seems to be one of the few countries that adheres to the Latin maxim *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, which roughly means that if you want to live in peace, you have to be prepared for war. This also applies to all kinds of crisis situations and crises. In the case where the state is prepared for such situations, the negative consequences of such events are much smaller than in the case of surprise. It should also be emphasised that wishful thinking does not mean that even these unlikely events will not occur. This applies not only to decisions at the level of state authorities, but also to households and individuals.

In Finland, apart from the preparation for crises at the national level, individual residents of this country are also mostly prepared for crisis situations. This involves, among other things, maintaining a high level of fuel in cars, having a certain amount of cash and households having a certain amount of food. This seems to be desirable not only in the case of military threats but also natural disasters. One can imagine a situation where there is a longer interruption in the supply of electricity. In such a case, the society loses access to financial resources and the ability to make purchases. The author of this article's own experience shows that the residents of Finland are able to function almost normally in such a situation for at least a few days. However, it should be emphasised that this preparation is at the same level throughout Finland. Due to the climatic conditions, the level of preparation is higher among residents of Finnish Lapland.

However, regardless of the part of this country, its residents are prepared for the occurrence of crisis situations and crises. It is also worth mentioning that decisions regarding increasing the level of state security, which are made by the Finnish authorities, are met with understanding and approval by the

[18] *The main thing comment Reuters: Suomi valmistautunut Venäjän hyökkäykseen "vuosikymmeniä"*, https://www.iltalehti.fi/kotimaa/a/be4a39db-2f8a-48b6-b062-bc95aedd2937, [accessed : 30.12.2024].

society of this country. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that, for example, mandatory military training for all residents of most other countries would not meet with social opposition or even cause riots. It can also be assumed that in the case of unpopular actions, which are supposed to increase the level of security, the Russian disinformation machine will be launched.

Therefore, in order to implement the existing solutions in Finland in other countries, it is necessary to raise public awareness of the threats in them. In the case of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, this applies especially to the military threat from the Russian Federation. However, it seems that the West does not notice that Russia operates in a completely different political culture, where human life has no significance. What can be implemented most quickly in other countries and is already working in Finland is the implementation of the concept of comprehensive defence at the level of the state, the armed forces, and the civilian population. It should also be remembered that everyone is responsible for their own security. In every crisis, especially in the event of war, there is no possibility that the services responsible for the security of citizens function in the same way as in the absence of threats. To sum up, it should be emphasised that Finland is the only country in Europe that is constantly preparing for all kinds of threat, including, in particular, an attack from the Russian Federation. However, other countries seem to be immersed in internal conflicts, often fueled by the Kremlin authorities. This not only leads to unpreparedness for a potential attack but also significantly weakens their defense potential. Therefore, research on the preparedness of societies for crises should be holistic and take into account every factor that occurs. In turn, when preparing strategies and procedures to deal with threats, all possible, even the most unlikely, events should be taken into account. This is because an event whose probability is negligible is not impossible.

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## System bezpieczeństwa Finlandii: lekcje dla Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej

### Streszczenie

Dynamicznie zmieniające się środowisko bezpieczeństwa w Europie powoduje, że państwa i społeczeństwa powinny być przygotowane na wszelkiego rodzaju zagrożenia, w tym militarne. Jednocześnie należy zaznaczyć, że większość państw w Europie wydaje się nie zdawać sobie sprawy z realności zagrożeń, szczególnie możliwości ataku ze strony Federacji Rosyjskiej. Wyjątkiem jest Finlandia, która od zakończenia II wojny światowej w sposób ciągły przygotowuje się na atak ze strony swojego wschodniego sąsiada. Przygotowania te polegają na budowaniu odpowiedniej infrastruktury, w tym schronów, które są w stanie pomieścić niemal całą populację tego państwa oraz powszechnym szkoleniu wojskowym. Istotna jest również powszechna społeczna świadomość zagrożeń i przygotowanie mieszkańców tego państwa na wypadek wystąpienia sytuacji kryzysowych i kryzysów.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza poziomu przygotowania Finlandii na kryzysy, w tym wojny, oraz znalezienie odpowiedzi na pytanie o to, które z rozwiązań wykorzystywanych w tym państwie mogą być stosowane w innych krajach. Aby przeprowadzić te analizy autor zdecydował się na analizę źródeł wtórnych, eksplorację danych statystycznych i podejście historyczne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Finlandia, bezpieczeństwo, obrona cywilna, służba wojskowa.