

WRITTEN QUESTION P-4782/08
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to the Council

Subject: Activities of Estonian 'volunteers' during the war in Georgia

Soon after the start of the military confrontation between Georgia and Russia, which was caused by the Georgian attack on the town of Zchinwali in South Ossetia, there was a call from the Estonian Reserve Officers' Association for volunteers to be recruited for a mission to support Georgia in the war against Russia and also for uniforms to be worn on the mission. It was announced that the volunteers would be transported in a government plane which was to take humanitarian aid to Tbilisi and fly Estonian citizens out of Georgia. The call came, among others, from Priit Heinsalu, chair of the Estonian Reserve Officers' Association, and Indrek Tarand, former diplomat and now director of the Laidon Museum. Some 50 people answered the call and flew to Tbilisi, although media reports stated that they did not fly in a government plane. The volunteers are said to have included members of the Estonian paramilitary armed forces, the Kaitseliit, as well as Estonian reservists.

1. What does the Council know about this initiative involving Estonian volunteers? Does the Council know whether members of the Estonian armed forces or official Estonian security forces took part in this initiative, and if so, how many? Does the Council know whether any participants in this initiative are still in Georgia?
2. As far as the Council is aware, did any Estonian citizens take part in the fighting between Georgia and Russia?
3. What does the Council think of the fact that the call to take part in this initiative was made by former members of the Estonian armed forces and government?
4. Has this initiative featured in discussions between the Council and the Estonian Government, and if so, what did this involve?
5. Does the Council consider initiatives involving the sending of volunteers from a Member State to a conflict zone to be a suitable way of helping to reach a peaceful solution? If not, what measures has the Council taken in order to prevent such initiatives in the future?