

# PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS IN MILITARY VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION: THE ESSENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS

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## Introduction

In recent years there has been increasing support from volunteers in providing vital public services. In Estonia some of the positions of the Rescue Service are manned by voluntary firemen, the Police Forces are assisted by volunteers, and recently the Estonian Defence League has assumed responsibility for the territorial defence. The need to create a positive work environment for volunteers in order to achieve better job performance has increased the need to study the relationships between the volunteers and the organisations that they assist. In the last decade the concept of the psychological contract has become of interest to researchers.

The psychological contract is defined as the belief in a reciprocal exchange agreement between a person and an organisation<sup>1</sup>. In the individual-organisation relationship, if the organisation's tenets coincide with a person's beliefs, then the psychological contract would precipitate a positive outcome, such as job satisfaction and superb job performance. The quality of the psychological contract, however, is determined by the organisational leadership and the organisation's human resource practices rather than by the workforce, as employers rather than employees are in the dominant and advantageous position by virtue of their capacity to design and develop the working conditions and employment relationships<sup>2</sup>. The psychological contract has also been called a silent contract because its content is individual and subjective; it is also often unacknowledged by the parties involved. A survey carried out among Estonian enterprises in 2013 indicated that the actual expectations of

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<sup>1</sup> **Rousseau, D. M.** 1989. Psychological and Implied Contracts in Organizations. – Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, 2(2), p. 121. [**Rousseau** 1989].

<sup>2</sup> **Randmann, L.** 2013. Differences in Psychological Contracts in Estonia: The Role of Individual and Contextual Factors. Thesis for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Estonian Business School, p. 18. [**Randmann** 2013]

an employee and their perceived obligations differ significantly from what the managers consider them to be<sup>3</sup>. Yet, the unwritten psychological contract is a powerful determiner of behaviour in the workplace, where a person's commitment to the organisation, motivation, loyalty, enthusiasm and overall satisfaction all depend on the content of the psychological contract and the fulfilment of expectations<sup>4</sup>.

In a volunteer organisation, where there are no written contracts and members contribute their free time without asking to be paid, the concept of mutual obligations becomes especially important. Mutual understanding of what is expected from both sides creates the basis of satisfying the needs of the volunteers as well as the organisation. In the last ten years the value-based dimension of the psychological contract has been of interest to researchers as the most salient aspect in motivating volunteers. However, the results from previous studies are somehow ambivalent and contradictory. Some researchers found no differences in psychological contracts of volunteers compared to those of the paid staff<sup>5</sup>; others say that volunteers' psychological contracts tend to strongly correlate to their personal values<sup>6</sup>. Some studies, nevertheless, argue that the content of the psychological contract has a tendency to depend on the environment and the context of the organisation<sup>7</sup>. It is apparent that these statements demand further studies and additional comparative data.

This article presents the results from the first phase of a three-phased study regarding psychological contracts in the military. The paper explores the essence of the psychological contract in the voluntary military organisation – the Estonian Defence League (EDL). This particular voluntary military organisation was chosen for the three reasons: 1) little research has been done on the military, particularly on voluntary military organisations; 2) volunteers in the EDL can be compared to non-volunteers of the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF); 3) taking into consideration today's security situation

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> **Van de Ven, C.** 2004. Chapter 3E – The Psychological Contract: A Big Deal! Behavioural Sciences Service Centre, Ministry of Defence, The Hague, NLD, p. 1. [**Van de Ven** 2004]

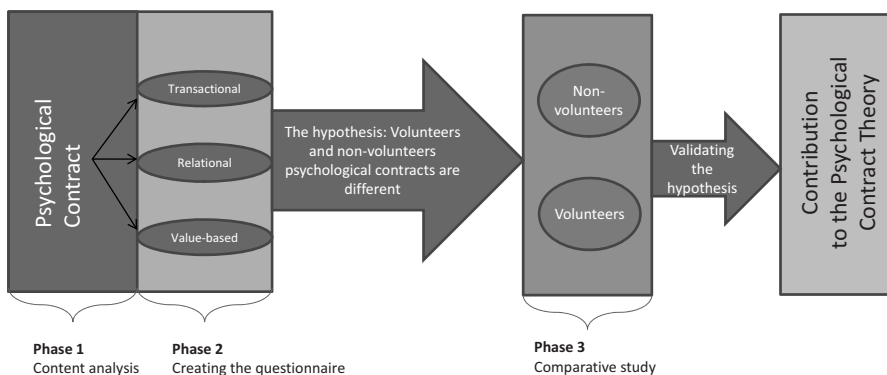
<sup>5</sup> **Liao-Troth, M. A.** 2001. Attitude Differences Between Paid Workers and Volunteers. – Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 11(4), p. 423. [**Liao-Troth** 2001]

<sup>6</sup> **Scheel, T.; Mohr, G.** 2012. The third dimension: value-oriented contents in psychological contracts. – European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology, 22(4), p. 403. [**Scheel, Mohr** 2012]

<sup>7</sup> **Greenberg J.; Baron, R. A.** 2000. Behavior in organizations: understanding and managing the human side of work (7th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. [**Greenberg, Baron** 2000]

in Europe, particularly in the Baltic Sea region, and the fact that participation in voluntary military organisations is related to motivational triggers, which is at the core of the psychological contract, perceptions of organisational and volunteer obligations of the EDL are of the utmost relevance at present. The overall aim of the three-phased study is: 1) to contribute to a greater understanding of the psychological contract concept by using the example of military organisations; 2) to provide practical suggestions to managers of organisations by ascertaining and analysing the expectations and perceived obligations of volunteers as well as non-volunteers.

In this paper (and in the first phase of the research) the expectations and perceived obligations of volunteers in the EDL were elicited and analysed, and the additional, conceptual and practical implications are also discussed. The first phase findings will provide specifics to create the questionnaire for the second phase; while the third phase will, in order to validate the hypothesis, make a comparison between the psychological contracts of the volunteers from the EDL to that of the paid staff of the EDF (Figure 1). The general proposition for the third phase of the study is that the psychological contract differs between volunteers and paid staff in a military organisation.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework for the three-phased study

This paper is divided into two parts. First, an overview of the pertinent literature and various approaches will be introduced and the organisational context will be explored. Second, the method, the results of the survey, and the conceptual implications will be discussed.

## Theoretical Background

### *Social Exchange Theory*

The concept of the social exchange dates back to the 1960's and is defined as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two parties<sup>8</sup>. Social exchange theory has placed the exchange perspective within the scientific study of human social behaviour sociology<sup>9</sup> and has been used to research and explain the individual's behaviour and development in an organisational context. Social exchange theory views exchange as a social behaviour that may result in both economic and social outcomes<sup>10</sup>. Although the concept is about the individual's pursuits to maximize her/his gains, it is also possible to observe social exchanges everywhere, not only in market relations, but also in other social relations such as friendship<sup>11</sup>. In the study of the employee-organisation relationships, the social exchange theory has been adopted<sup>12</sup> to conceptualise and examine psychological contracts.

### *Psychological Contract*

The concept of the psychological contract was conceived over fifty years ago. As early as 1962 Levinson *et al.* defined the psychological contract as a series of mutual expectations<sup>13</sup>. The most recognised definition however, comes from Rousseau's widely acknowledged research, which stated that the psychological contract is an "individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party. The key issue here includes the belief that a promise has been made and a consideration offered in exchange for it, binding the parties to

<sup>8</sup> **Homans, G.** 1961. *Social behavior: its elementary forms*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

<sup>9</sup> **Blau, P.** 1964. *Exchange and power in social life*. New York: Wiley, p. 239. [Blau 1964]

<sup>10</sup> **Lambe, C.; Jay, C.; Wittmann, M.; Spekman, R. E.** 2001. Social exchange theory and research on business-to-business relational exchange. – *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 8(3).

<sup>11</sup> **Burns, T.** 1973. A structural theory of social exchange. – *Acta Sociologica*, 16(3).

<sup>12</sup> **Thompson, J. A.; Bunderson, J. S.** 2003. Violations of principle: ideological currency in the psychological contract. – *Academy of Management Review*, 28(4), p. 571. [Thompson, Bunderson 2003]

<sup>13</sup> **Levinson, H.; Price, C. R.; Munden, K. J.; Solley, C. M.** 1962. *Men, management and mental health*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 21. [Levinson *et al.* 1962].

some set of reciprocal obligations”<sup>14</sup>. The parties to the relationship may not themselves be aware of these mutual expectations which can be unspoken, implicit, and are often frequently formed before or outside the current employment relationship<sup>15</sup>, but nonetheless govern their relationship to each other<sup>16</sup>. By filling the gaps between the formal contract and everything that applies to the working relationship, it reduces uncertainty, shapes behaviour, and gives people a sense of their place in the organisation<sup>17</sup>. Failure to acknowledge and understand the psychological contract can result in negative employee behaviour, such as poor performance and reduced commitment<sup>18</sup>. Later in 2014, Rousseau extended and refined the definition of the psychological contract to: “the individual’s system of beliefs regarding the exchange of obligations with another party, serving to foster the individual’s goals attainment”<sup>19</sup>.

In conceptualising psychological contracts different approaches have been introduced. One such approach posits the unilateral view and the bilateral view. In the unilateral view an individual’s belief in mutual expectations and obligations in terms of the relationship (the employee’s perspective only) has been considered (using the definition of Rousseau, 2014); in the bilateral view the employer’s as well as the employee’s perceptions of exchanged obligations are considered<sup>20</sup>. However, according to Freese and Schalk measuring a bilateral contract can be quite problematic as organisations have an entire set of actors who do not necessarily convey the same set of expectations. Moreover, in the event of a contradiction in the organisational contract, it is not clear what the psychological contract would entail in such case<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Rousseau 1989, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Conway, N.; Briner, R. B. 2005. Understanding psychological contracts at work: A critical evaluation of theory and research. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, p. 10. [Conway, Briner 2005]

<sup>16</sup> Levinson *et al.* 1962, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Van de Ven 2004, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, S. L.; Morrison, E. W. 2000. The Development of Psychological Contract Breach and Violation: A Longitudinal Study. – *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 21(5).

<sup>19</sup> Rousseau, D. M.; Montes S., Tomprou, M. 2014. Psychological Contract Theory 2.0. – *Academy of Management Review*, under 4<sup>th</sup> round review, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Herriot, P.; Pemberton, C. 1995. *New Deals: The Revolution in Managerial Careers*. Chichester: Wiley.

<sup>21</sup> Freese, C.; Schalk, R. 2008. How to measure the psychological contract? A critical criteria-based review of measures. – *South African Journal of Psychology*, 38(2), p. 270. [Freese, Schalk 2008]

Consequences of the psychological contract can either result in fulfilment, leading to organisational commitment<sup>22</sup>, or a breach. A breach in the psychological contract occurs when one party in the relationship perceives the other to have failed to fulfil their promised obligations<sup>23</sup>. Most researchers warn of the negative consequences of a breach, which can lead to, for example, poor performance, sabotage, theft, aggressive behaviour and quitting<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, Cohen's study<sup>25</sup> presented surprising results. He found no relationship between the perception of a breach in the psychological contract to the organisational, job, group, or occupational commitments of Israeli bank employees (non-voluntary staff). He proposed that a valid reason for this could be due to the specific bank setting where, from the employees' point of view, a breach in the psychological contract is not a relevant concept. According to McCabe and Sambrook<sup>26</sup> an employee's response to their perceptions as to whether the organisation is or is not fulfilling its obligations will depend on whether the perceived breach involves professional or administrative obligations. Perceived administrative breaches are most often associated with thoughts of dissatisfaction, quitting and turnover, whereas perceived breaches of professional role obligations are most strongly associated with lower organisational commitment, job performance and a higher turnover<sup>27</sup>. Thompson and Bunderson<sup>28</sup> suggest that value-based psychological contracts are relatively resistant to minor breaches, because the mere pursuit of a cause is intrinsically rewarding and people will not risk jeopardizing the long-term attainment of this cause. In their investigation of volunteers of non-profit organisations in Belgium that promote a multicultural society, Vantilborgh

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<sup>22</sup> **Coyle-Shapiro, J.; Kessler, I.** 2000. The consequences of the psychological contract: a large scale survey. – *The Journal of Management Studies*, 37. [Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler 2000]

<sup>23</sup> **Robinson, S. L.; Rousseau, D. M.** 1994. Violating the Psychological Contract: Not the Exception but the Norm. – *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 15, p. 247.

<sup>24</sup> **Podsakoff, P.; Mackenzie, S. B.; Paine, J. B.; Bachrach, D. G.** 2000. Organisational Citizenship Behaviors: A Critical Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature and Suggestions for Future Research. – *Journal of Management*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> **Cohen, A.** 2011. Values and psychological contracts in their relationship to commitment in the workplace. – *Career Development International*, 16(7), p. 662. [Cohen 2011]

<sup>26</sup> **McCabe, T. J.; Sambrook, S.** 2013. Psychological contracts and commitment amongst nurses and nurse managers: A discourse analysis. – *Internal Journal of Nursing Studies*, 50, p. 963–964.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> **Thompson, Bunderson** 2003.

*et al.*<sup>29</sup>, confirmed that the interviewees mostly mentioned incidents of a relational nature when describing fulfilled organisation and volunteer obligations. This might be due to the fact that value-based obligations are less concrete, and lack a well-defined timeframe, they are therefore more difficult to fulfil<sup>30</sup>. They also accepted that there might be several reasons for this, such as, for example, the volunteers who perceived the value-based breaches had already left the organisation. They argued that it is likely that organisational practices in other non-profit industries create different expectations, and suggested that organisational characteristics should also be taken into account when studying the psychological contract in further studies.

Rousseau<sup>31</sup> distinguished between 1) transactional contracts, which involve highly specific exchanges of a narrow scope, mainly economic quid pro quo exchanges that take place over a finite period; and 2) relational contracts, which involve exchanges over longer-term time frames, such as the exchange of employee commitment for job security. Transactional contracts indicate, for example, a clearly defined formal exchange of competence and salary. Relational contracts on the other hand describe more open-ended and implicit socio-emotional reciprocal obligational aspects, such as friendship, for example.

The distinctions between transactional and relational contracts are not always clear cut. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler<sup>32</sup>, for example, emphasized the transactional dimension (e.g. fair pay), the relational dimension (e.g. job security, career prospects), and training obligations (e.g. the necessary training to do the job well, or the support to learn new skills). In a study conducted by Rousseau<sup>33</sup>, training obligations were combined with transactional factors, while in another study training was considered to be a relational factor<sup>34</sup>. Numerous studies, however, have been done on psychological contracts based on the transactional and relational aspects of the contracts.

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<sup>29</sup> Vantilborgh, T.; Bidee, J.; Pepermans, R.; Willems, J.; Huybrechts, G.; Jegers, M. 2012. Volunteers' psychological contracts: extending traditional views. – *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 41(6), p. 1086. [Vantilborgh *et al.* 2012].

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Rousseau, D. M. 1990. New Hire Perceptions of their own and their employer's obligations: a study of psychological contacts. – *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 11. [Rousseau 1990]

<sup>32</sup> Coyle-Shapiro, Kessler 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Rousseau 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, S. L.; Kraatz, M. S.; Rousseau, D. M. 1994. Changing obligations and the psychological contract: A longitudinal study. – *Academy of Management Journal*, 37.

Yet, one quite separate dimension is the so-called value-based psychological contract. In a work situation values are seen as expressions of basic values<sup>35</sup>. Cohen<sup>36</sup>, for example, upon examining levels of commitment among bank employees (non-voluntary staff) found that personal values determine the levels of commitment in the workplace. Personal values shape peoples' life goals and activities. Schwarz<sup>37</sup> defined values 'as desirable trans-situational goals varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives'. Accepting that volunteers choose tasks, which benefit their personal motives<sup>38</sup> the importance of personal motivational values in forming a volunteer's psychological contract seems obvious and inescapable.

Already Blau<sup>39</sup> distinguished ideological rewards from economic and social rewards, because "helping to advance cherished ideals is intrinsically rewarding". When Thompson and Bunderson<sup>40</sup> made a first attempt to integrate a third, value-oriented exchange form, wherein an individual's personal values were taken into account when visualizing the basis of a psychological contract between a person and another party. They found that despite breaches in the economic and social aspects, employees might still remain loyal to the organisation. Since that study, personal values have been more thoroughly studied and described as the motivational factors of volunteers<sup>41</sup>. Scheel and Mohr<sup>42</sup> revealed that volunteers' value-oriented obligations are important for job satisfaction and working hours, but their relational obligations are not. They indicated that the values of the volunteers might be more directly attributed to attitudes (such as job satisfaction) and behaviour (such as devoting working time to value related tasks) than those of the organisation. Results from their studies validate values as a dimension of the psychological contract and support the aim to extend the dimensions of the contract.

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<sup>35</sup> Schwarz, S. H. 1994. Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values? – *Journal of Social Issues*, 50(4). [Schwarz 1994]

<sup>36</sup> Cohen 2011, p. 661.

<sup>37</sup> Schwarz 1994, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Houle, B.J.; Sagarin, B. J.; Kaplan, M. F. 2005. A functional approach to volunteerism: do volunteer motives predict task preference. – *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 27(4), p. 338.

<sup>39</sup> Blau 1964, p. 239.

<sup>40</sup> Thompson, Bunderson 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Cunningham, I. 2010. Drawing from Bottomless Well? Exploring the Resilience of Value-Based Psychological Contracts in Voluntary Organisations. – *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(5) [Cunningham 2010]; Vantilborgh *et al.* 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Scheel, Mohr 2012, pp. 403–404.



The research results regarding the psychological contract of volunteers, however, tend to be ambivalent and contradictory. A critical review of the psychological contract theory has noted that too many different variables have been included, and because of this “the psychological contract has in many ways become an analytical nightmare”<sup>43</sup>. Also, concerning previous research, a problem arises from the fact that empirical studies on volunteers’ psychological contracts often adopt conceptualizations from studies of paid employees<sup>44</sup>, and tend to overlook the significance of individual values<sup>45</sup>. For example, Liao-Troth<sup>46</sup> in his survey of paid and volunteer workers in a formal hospital setting in the US, demonstrated that volunteers and paid employees working in the same location, performing similar work, and subject to similar work rules, procedures, contracts, expectations, discipline, and evaluations, have similar psychological contracts, with the exception of benefits. Likewise, in his later study of voluntary firefighters in the US, he could not find a positive correlation between psychological contracts and the functional motive of values<sup>47</sup>. Scheel and Mohr<sup>48</sup>, while assessing results among parish volunteers of the Protestant Church in Germany, found the distinctive role of value-oriented content significantly and positively related to job satisfaction, as well as to time spent on volunteering. The study revealed that the value-oriented psychological contracts among the volunteers coincide with the universalism of one dimension of the ten individual motivational value types (from Schwarz, 1992<sup>49</sup>). Vantilborgh *et al.*<sup>50</sup>, while studying psychological contracts among volunteers in non-profit youth organisations, which promote a multicultural society in Belgium, confirmed that volunteers felt strong obligations related to contributing and demonstrating a credible commitment to a valued social cause, mission or principle. Similarly, according to Scheel

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<sup>43</sup> Cullinane, N.; Dundon, T. 2006. The psychological contract: a critical review. – International Journal of Management Reviews, 8(2), p. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Nichols, G.; Ojala, E. 2009. Understanding the management of sports events volunteers through psychological contract theory. – *Voluntas*, 20, p. 385. [Nichols, Ojala 2009]

<sup>45</sup> Vantilborgh *et al.* 2012, p. 1073.

<sup>46</sup> Liao-Troth 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Liao-Troth, M. A. 2005. Are they here for the long haul? The effects of functional motives and personality factors on the psychological contracts of volunteers. – *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 34(4).

<sup>48</sup> Scheel, Mohr 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Schwarz, S. H. 1992. Universals in the content and structure of values: Theory and empirical tests in 20 countries. – Zanna, M. (Ed.). *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 25, 1-65. New York: Academic Press.

<sup>50</sup> Vantilborgh *et al.* 2012.

and Mohr<sup>51</sup> value-oriented obligations are relevant in work relationships when employees' expectations are related to the belief that their contribution to their organisation simultaneously serves a valuable cause and that the employment relationship is based on value-oriented promises and obligations that foster that mission. This is analogous to the findings of the 2002 study of the Commonwealth Games in the UK, where Ralston *et al.*<sup>52</sup> found that the volunteers valued being part of a prestigious event, and promoting their city to the world. Aside from contributing their skills and experience they were happy to assist and take part in any activities that required any kind of commitment<sup>53</sup>. While studying community rugby clubs, Taylor *et al.*<sup>54</sup> also found that the paid staff and volunteers had different expectations. However, most researchers accept that the results should be used with caution as they may not be generalizable and indicate a need for further research<sup>55</sup>. They exteriorize the need for expanding samples and taking into account context-specific aspects. Cultural, national and demographic aspects<sup>56</sup> should be considered in future research, as well as situational and individual<sup>57</sup> aspects.

The content of a psychological contract differs across a number of societal, organisational and individual levels<sup>58</sup> and may contain hundreds of factors, which can be very specific to a certain organisation or a person<sup>59</sup>. Freese and Schalk in their analysis of various ways to measure psychological contracts raised the issue of the generalization of available questionnaires, as many questionnaires are based on other questionnaires. They pointed out the need to assess the relevance and appropriateness of the items in formerly used settings, asserting that "it is more important to establish whether the list has been constructed in a methodologically sound way and whether the list of items suits the sample that is being assessed", and that "simply adding or

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<sup>51</sup> Scheel, Mohr 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Ralston, R.; Downward, P.; Lumsdon, L. 2004. The expectations of volunteers prior to the XVII Commonwealth Games 2002: a qualitative study. – *Event Management*, 9(1/2).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, T.; Darcy, S.; Hoyer, R.; Cuscally, G. 2006. Using psychological contract theory to explore issues in effective volunteer management. – *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 6(2).

<sup>55</sup> Scheel, Mohr 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen 2011, p. 661.

<sup>57</sup> Greenberg, Baron 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Rousseau D. M.; Tijoriwala S. A. 1998. Assessing psychological contracts: issues, alternatives and types of measures. – *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 19. [Rousseau, Tijoriwala 1998]; Conway, Briner 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Freese, Schalk 2008, p. 275.

deleting a couple of items of an existing questionnaire is not an appropriate method". At the same time appropriate measures usually contain the content of common interests and needs of specific groups<sup>60</sup>.

### Organisational Context

The Estonian Defence League as a defence organisation has deep roots in Estonian society. It is an organisation that was created in 1917–1918 prior to the War of Independence through a citizens' initiative to defend Estonian families, homes, villages and communities from retreating and looting Russian troops and Bolsheviks. Later when the War of Independence commenced, the organisation became institutionalised, and dealt mostly with internal security support activities. After the war the EDL was dismantled due to the naïve belief that the peace treaty with Soviet Russia had made self-defence obsolete and redundant. Yet the rise of the communists and the failed Soviet-backed coup d'état in 1924 validated that the decision to disband the EDL was imprudent, and the Estonian Defence League was reinstated. The EDL quickly became the most prominent and numerically superior group compared to any other organisation of interwar-era Estonia. Membership in the EDL was regarded as an expression of an ordinary citizen's patriotism, as well as their will to defend. The people-centric approach was maintained throughout that period until the first Soviet occupation when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union implemented the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. At the behest of the Soviet occupational powers, the EDL was disbanded and many of its members were repressed – imprisoned or executed, with membership being the only charge against them. The organisation officially ceased to exist during the Soviet occupation. In 1990 a citizens' initiative group sought to restore the EDL and to reintroduce all pre-occupation legacies and customs, wherein a society-centric approach and bottom-up initiative are the prominent principles.

Today the spectrum of EDL tasks is broad, and ranges from assistance to civilian agencies to actual warfighting, which makes it truly comprehensive. The latter is also supported by membership specifics. Moreover, the EDL recently assumed full responsibility for the territorial defence of Estonia, making it one of the most accountable stakeholders in national sovereignty<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> **Randmann** 2013, p. 60.

<sup>61</sup> **Estonian State Defence Development Plan 2013–2022.**

EDL members are ordinary Estonian citizens coming literally from each and every profession and social group, which makes the organisation quite society-centric. It is, by Estonian standards, a vast and complex organisation. It has different categories of employment. These include: a) active duty military personnel, b) contractors, c) voluntary members. Unlike other voluntary military organisations in other countries, the 16,500 voluntary members of the EDL are not paid for their service, and on the contrary, many of them are willing to commit not only their free time but also their material resources. This makes the EDL a rather unique organisation and a rare phenomenon among its sister voluntary organisations worldwide. Understanding voluntary members' motivation and expectations is particularly complicated; yet if successful research underpins the correct motivational aspects, it will enhance the voluntary commitment accordingly. If an organisation knows what the commitment aspects are, it allows the leaders to pay attention to these aspects, to motivate the volunteers and to sustain the organisation. Consequently, a wise application of voluntary contributions to state security is required in order to prevent overstretching it. It must be sustainable, affordable and cost effective, and it must achieve the same standards as the standing forces.

Taking into account the past historical and geopolitical situation, and due to the present Ukrainian-Russian conflict threatening European security, and also considering the fact that the desire to join voluntary military organisations has increased, it can be deduced that the motivation to volunteer is predicated upon higher-level personal values, and it is precisely these values that play the primary role in forming the volunteer's psychological contracts.

However, as in any other organisations there are different reasons for people to join the organisation. Although the EDL does not offer any salaries or compensation for its volunteers, it still offers multiple opportunities for its members, mostly through various kinds of socialization, training and career prospects. Hence, all three parts, transactional, relational and value-based parts have to be considered in the context of the psychological contract of the EDL. Also, taking into consideration that there are implicit and explicit promises regarding the exchange involved, it is reasonable to begin with the development of the content of the psychological contract and create a questionnaire to find out the members' perceived obligations, both, their own, as well as those that they perceive the organisation's obligations to be.

## Method

A survey was conducted to identify EDL members' perceived obligations, both their own and those of the organisation. Considering that the psychological contract measurement should assess mutual obligations and promises from both sides, two open-ended questions were asked.

- 1) Which obligations do you feel you have towards the Estonian Defence League? Name at least three.
- 2) Which obligations do you think the Estonian Defence League has towards you? Name at least three.

Together with the two open questions, there were also compulsory background questions with multiple-choice answers included in the questionnaire. The background of the breakdown of the questions is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The respondents' background

<b>Division within the organisation</b>	70% were members of the Defence League; 30% were members of the Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation
<b>Age</b>	4% of the members were below 20 years of age; 51% of the members were aged 20–39; 38% of the members were aged 40–59; and 7% of the members were aged 60 and above
<b>Length of service</b>	12% of the members had served less than one year; 44% of the members had served 1–10 years; 29% of the members 10–20 years; 15% of the members over 20 years
<b>Education</b>	51% higher; 43% secondary; 6% basic education
<b>Family status</b>	74% were committed (marriage/cohabitation); 26% single
<b>Rank</b>	68% private; 32% officer/non-commissioned officer
<b>Position</b>	38% managerial; 62% non-managerial
<b>Gender</b>	63% male; 37% female
<b>Nationality</b>	98% Estonians; 2% other
<b>Family members in the EDL</b>	42% also have other family members in the organisation; 58% do not
<b>Activity in the last 4-month period</b>	38% participated more than 3 times in exercises; 47% participated between 1–3 times; 15% had not participated in any exercises over the last 4-month period

Before the questionnaires were delivered to the responders electronically, a pilot study using a paper format was carried out among 20 volunteers from the Estonian Defence League. In total, 434 volunteer members from the Headquarters of the Estonian Defence League, Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation (sub-unit in the EDL) and different regional units across Estonia participated in the survey. The survey was carried out between October and December 2014, and responses were gathered into the Google Form, exported and analysed using the MS Excel Worksheet 2010.

Content analysis was used to study the content of the psychological contracts. Content analysis is essentially the processing, coding and grouping of free responses given to open-ended questions on the basis of certain parameters. The main advantage of this type of analysis is that while the answers are processed, it is possible to group answers with similar content, while at the same time pay attention to the few answers that occur rarely but may contain important aspects.

## Results of the Survey<sup>62</sup>

### 1. Perceived Volunteer Obligations

Figure 2 shows the results of the obligations of the Estonian Defence League as perceived by the volunteers, with the numbers in the Figure representing



**Figure 2.** Content analysis of the perceived volunteer obligations

<sup>62</sup> **Kiili, S.** 2015. Volunteers' perceived obligations in the Estonian Defence League. International Centre of Defence and Security. Tallinn. <<http://www.icds.ee/publications/article/volunteers-perceived-obligations-in-the-estonian-defence-league/>>, p. 4–11.

the number of grouped 'key words and expressions' found in the answers of the respondents. It is followed by an explanation on a group basis.

### ***1.1. The obligation to train, participate and self-develop***

The obligation to participate in training, military exercises and other events (competitions, leisure activities, meetings) was the most often cited among the answers (in 223 cases). Some answers mentioned that self-development should be sustainable. There were those who responded that they acquired knowledge to better sustain the defence needs of the country ("the obligation to learn how to wage war even better", "gathering enough knowledge to protect the country and ensure its safety") but there were also those who found that they were obligated to acquire knowledge which would also help them in their daily activities ("implementing the knowledge in civilian life").

### ***1.2. Representing the organisation and passing on its values***

In this regard, (in 136 answers) the following characteristics were brought out: dignified behaviour, creating a positive image, being a role model for the young as well as other members of the Defence League ("I am a reflection of the organisation"), expressing and spreading patriotism ("instilling faith in our independent defence capabilities in others and raising their will to contribute to the defence of the country", "showing my presence"), maintaining the good name of the Defence League ("flying the flag of the Defence League", "wearing the uniform with pride"), spreading national-defence related ideas more widely, acknowledging and promoting the organisation and recruiting new members.

### ***1.3. Preparedness to defend***

The obligation to be ready to defend – to defend family, close ones, community, village and country – was enumerated in the third set of answers ("in case of danger you need to contribute, not run away", "being ready for quick action if a situation arises", "defending the country if necessary", "I am here to protect the independence of my country"). In some instances it was stated that the obligation to contribute goes beyond national defence, and also requires participation in resolving situations related to natural disasters, crises and other emergency situations, involving a whole community (public and private sector, unions, groups of people).

#### ***1.4. Obligations deriving from regulations and rank***

Here the respondents listed obligations deriving from laws, regulations and rank, as well as specific obligations delegated by a leader. The 48-hour participation obligation, the obligation to pay the membership fee, as well as being responsible for and treating the equipment with care were also highlighted, among other things.

#### ***1.5. Helping and teaching others***

The obligation to contribute to the education of the youth was also mentioned ("responsibility for raising competent future generations"), as well as for passing on knowledge and experience to new members and subordinates. The obligation to diversify the organisation using personal knowledge from civilian life was also listed. Specific skills (medicine, information technology, shooting skills) as well as simply lending a helping hand when needed were further named.

#### ***1.6. Responsibility, honesty, loyalty***

The obligation to take responsibility was mentioned most often in this subgroup. This was followed by honesty and sincerity, loyalty, solidarity, faithfulness, integrity (keeping one's promises), respect for one another (politeness, correct behaviour), loyalty to one's homeland and each other, patriotism and loyalty to ideas. Two answers also mentioned the obligation to keep the organisation free of corruption.

#### ***1.7. Time***

The respondents considered it their obligation to find the time and be more engaged, in some cases it was pointed out that there is not enough time after fulfilling family and work responsibilities.

#### ***1.8. Team spirit and social life***

The respondents felt the obligation to contribute to developing a team and promoting social life (creating a positive team spirit and sense of belonging, promoting cooperation, good relations). The obligation to remain motivated, motivate others, and contribute to creating a sense of belonging was mentioned.



### ***1.9. Development of the organisation***

Contributing to the development of the organisation, thinking together, making propositions, and bringing out new ideas were listed. One of the respondents felt there should be a greater obligation to emphasize the development and strengthening of defence capabilities instead of ceremonial and aesthetic events (placing wreaths and opening monuments).

### ***1.10. Organising exercises and events***

The obligation to organise or help in organising events, contribute to exercises, organise military competitions, and youth events were brought out.

### ***1.11. No perception of obligations***

There were those who responded that they did not feel any obligations towards the EDL ("there are no obligations because I am a volunteer") or at least could not think of any ("no obligations yet, I just started"). The most remarkable aspect, however, is revealed by the answers of those claiming that they do not perceive obligations because "everything I do, I do out of my free will, sincere wish and sense of mission". The lack of obligation was also explained by the fact that "the desire and habit of going and doing something for, or in the name of the Defence League cannot be called an obligation, because it has become my lifestyle" or "I do not feel any obligations towards the Defence League as an organisation. I do not feel that the Defence League is a brotherhood or an order, whose members should swear loyalty to the organisation. I take the responsibility of defending my home and family. The Defence League should grant me good possibilities for doing that by providing training and machinery", "I do not perceive any obligations, I do not feel that I should participate in every exercise and event if I have more important things going on in my personal life. And, yet, I am always there and present and I don't know why. It could be that I do it owing to my inner values".

### ***1.12. Health***

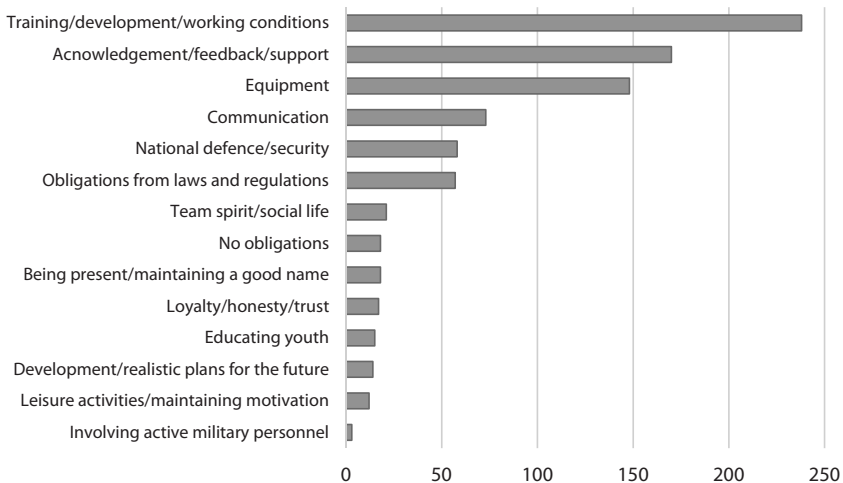
Some of the answers mentioned the obligation to keep oneself healthy, both mentally and physically.

### 1.13. Cooperation

Some answers highlighted the obligation to develop cooperation with local government units.

## 2. Perceived Organisational Obligations

Figure 3 shows the results of the organisational obligations perceived by the volunteers (in response to the question “Which obligations do you think the Estonian Defence League has towards you?”), where the numbers in the Figure represent the number of grouped ‘key words and expressions’ found in the answers of the respondents. It is followed by an explanation on a group basis.



**Figure 3.** Content analysis of the perceived organisational obligations

### 2.1. Training, support of personal, development and working conditions

Most of the respondents (238 cases) considered the organisation of basic military training, training courses, military exercises and other events, as well as the support of personal development and the creation of the corresponding working conditions to be the essential obligations of the organisation. Some of the respondents felt that training should be based on the present national defence needs and in the event of war (“the organisation should not deal with unrelated events, only combat training”) but, on the other hand, according to some respondents, the Defence League is obligated to provide knowledge outside of the organisation and teach skills necessary for everyday life.

In some cases, allowing members to practice sports and maintain physical fitness were brought out, as well as providing material and other kinds of support for the duration of military exercises, such as, transportation to exercise sites, providing sufficient food and ammunition, and ensuring good health during exercises (providing medical aid).

### ***2.2. Involvement, support and feedback***

Here, it should be mentioned that volunteers who contribute their scant free time to the organisation should be treated with respect. Flexible schedules, personal opportunities, skills and wishes should be taken into consideration, and in addition the volunteers should be provided a role that is in accordance with the person's abilities (enabling the person to do what they have been trained for, such as for instance, work as a paramedic). The principle of fair treatment at every level was brought out, as were the obligations of recognition (perhaps something as simple as some words of gratitude or a pat on the back), support (including moral support) and feedback on completed work ("so I know that I am needed"). It was mentioned that "actual work, not the length of time with the organisation should be recognised" and that "the Defence League must protect, defend, motivate and reward its active members and officials according to their activity and contribution", "without the volunteers, there would be no organisation." More personal communication and organisational activity to decrease the passivity of members ("the decrease in activity is accompanied by the danger of remaining passive for a longer period of time") were also expectations.

### ***2.3. Equipment***

In regards to equipment (uniform, armament, ammunition, communication equipment, protective equipment) it was thought that at least bare necessities should be provided by the organisation ("We should not have to buy the boots ourselves", "We should receive a new uniform after completing the basic training"). Some of the respondents added that contemporary, continuous, relevant training and proper gear are necessary for completing the tasks set by the organisation.

### ***2.4. Communication***

Here, the obligation of the organisation to pass on information in a timely manner using electronic means (e-mail) was highlighted. Some of the

respondents wished to receive information strictly relevant to them; others expected more information concerning various possibilities (changes and the decision-making process in the organisation, training possibilities and all sorts of events). The Defence League is obligated to “keep members informed of the situation in the country and share information concerning the development of the organisation”.

### ***2.5. Providing a sense of security, national defence***

Here, it was outlined that the obligations of the Defence League are to defend the state, provide a sense of security for the state’s inhabitants, develop combat readiness, defend Estonia in the event of a threat, develop a management capability so that it would be able to function in a crisis, contribute more than is expected, and ultimately “avoid another 1939.” Preventing war by demonstrating and increasing military capabilities so that the organisation would become “a deterring force of unknown size to the enemy” was also listed as an obligation. It was noted that the organisation must “provide the opportunity to protect one’s homeland” and suggestions were made as to how to best improve the managing structure so that the organisation would be more efficient and able to react more quickly in today’s circumstances (“The Defence League as a tool”).

### ***2.6. Obligations deriving from laws and regulations***

Here, it was expected that the organisation would fulfil the obligations proceeding from laws and regulations, including reimbursing expenditure and providing social and legal safeguards as well as providing compensation in the amount of the average salary in case of longer (week-long) training gatherings. The existence of clear and specific goals was also specified.

### ***2.7. Team spirit and social life***

Here, the respondents found that it is the duty of the organisation to ensure the vitality of the teams and good cooperation between them, and to facilitate a sense of belonging via a supportive circle of friends.

### ***2.8. No obligations***

Here, the answers were “I don’t know”, or “none, since I just joined”. At the same time, the following comments deserve attention: “I have no sense

of obligation towards the Defence League because I am a volunteer and perform my obligations with great joy and put my heart in them”; “It is a voluntary organisation. When I became a member, I did not expect the organisation to fulfil any obligations towards myself. The first brief contacts have given me positive experiences. This means that the Defence League is well-prepared and I cannot think of any obligations to list here”; “As far as I am concerned, the Defence League has fulfilled its obligations”. One of the respondents expressed that the Defence League seems to have more rights than obligations.

### ***2.9. Being present and maintaining a good name***

Here, the obligation of representing the organisation to the community and raising interest in becoming a member was brought out, as was maintaining and improving its reputation by, for example, “ensuring that the Defence League is well-known and maintaining the continuing trend that the organisation is viewed positively in the society”. The reputation of the organisation was associated with one’s own reputation as a member (“improving the reputation of the Defence League, as well as mine”, “ensuring the good reputation of the Defence League means ensuring my good reputation”).

### ***2.10. Honesty, loyalty, trust***

Here, the obligations of the organisation to be honest, loyal, transparent, open, and to trust its members’ competence, and not grow corrupt were brought out.

### ***2.11. Educating***

The obligation of the organisation to instil patriotism in the young was stressed here.

### ***2.12. Development***

It was suggested that the Defence League needs to be capable of adapting to changes and developments coming from the surrounding environment, thereby ensuring continuity and the ability to adapt. The state’s capabilities, as well as the regional differences of different districts need to be taken into account. Firm and realistic future plans as well as clear aims were stressed.

### ***2.13. Leisure activities, motivation***

It was pointed out that the organisation should offer variety, adventures, different activities, useful ways of spending free time, and should try to make the tasks motivating. The activities should also be well-planned and meaningful ("trying to ensure that being a member of this organisation would continue to be exciting and motivating according to possibilities").

### ***2.14. Involving active military personnel***

It was mentioned that the organisation should hire competent and active paid employees, who would have a sense of mission, and supplement the working hours of the volunteers by contributing their own free time as needed.

## **Discussion and Implications**

The purpose of this paper – and the first phase of the three-phased study – was to elicit mutual perceived obligations directly from the organisation itself, and from the volunteers of the voluntary military organisation, the Estonian Defence League. The findings have conceptual and practical implications.

### ***Conceptual Implication***

As mentioned before in previous studies, taking questions directly from pre-existing questionnaires is not an appropriate way to carry out research on psychological contracts in different environments. Additionally, most of the questionnaires were intended for paid staff rather than volunteers. It has also been noted that both quantitative and qualitative methods are important in researching these contracts<sup>63</sup>. The current approach – where the obligations are elicited directly from the volunteers – helps to create a context-specific questionnaire for the next phase of the research.

In examining the content of the psychological contract among volunteers of a voluntary military organisation, a number of different obligations emerge. One reason for the plentiful number of answers was that there were as many as 434 responders providing unedited answers to the open questions. All answers were analysed and included in the summary of the groups of the results, nothing was left out, except answers that were not understandable.

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<sup>63</sup> Rousseau, Tijoriwala 1998, p. 693.

The responses were quite diverse by nature. For example, the obligation to be available 24 hours per day in order to be ready to react if needed, was mentioned. At the same time, others felt that their obligations are only to pay the membership fee and fulfil the working hours required by the law. In many cases, however, volunteers also felt the obligation to train and develop themselves, to acquire sustainable skills, to participate and organise events and activities, to represent and promote the organisation and its values, and to promote a positive team spirit. Identifying with the organisation and carrying strong organisational values also emerged from the answers. The relational aspects – taking care of good relations, being respectful to each other and enjoying the social aspects of the organisation – were also mentioned in numerous responses.

From the organisation, in exchange for their obligations, most of the volunteers expected to receive the appropriate training and development possibilities and up to date equipment. The fulfilment of the obligations proceeding from laws and regulations was mentioned, too. In a few responses, receiving monetary compensation for the longer training periods was mentioned. Support, involvement and feedback, as well as maintaining a good reputation, being honest and trustworthy were highlighted. Providing a sense of security was also mentioned quite often in the answers. The development of the organisation and ensuring the cooperation of teams were expected from the organisation.

The analysis of the responses clearly demonstrates that mutual obligations perceived by the volunteers in a military organisation contain several transactional aspects (for example working the required hours, and fulfilling obligations stipulated by the regulations), as well as relational aspects (for example trust, respect, loyalty, taking care of healthy relations in the organisation), and quite a few value-based aspects (mutually perceived obligations to work toward the well-being of the people, the security of the country and preparedness for the defence). Therefore, the possibility to include three dimensions – transactional, relational and value-based dimensions – into the second level of the study requires an appropriate design of a context-specific questionnaire, suitable for the volunteers and the non-volunteers of military organisations.

### *Practical Implications*

The psychological contract is a powerful tool that can provide influential methods to help managers understand and manage volunteers<sup>64</sup>; these contracts play a key role in strengthening commitment to the workplace<sup>65</sup>. The first and most important step toward better cooperation with volunteers is the need to simply **be aware** of the essence of the psychological contracts<sup>66</sup>. Therefore, the findings that emerge from an analysis of the answers of the volunteers of the Estonian Defence League can convey important information to the governing body, to the leaders of the EDL as well as to the lower-level managerial staff of the organisation.

A psychological contract begins even before a person joins an organisation<sup>67</sup>. People gather information from the representatives of an organisation, through media channels and social networks, or from friends and family. Hence, it is important that clear messages and realistic promises are delivered via proper and authoritative **communication** channels. When speaking of promises and expectations it is important to note that all expectations are not necessarily obligations. For example a volunteer, expecting to find exciting activities may not find the events interesting at all, or may be disappointed, but may not necessarily believe that a promise has been broken. Promises given by the management, declared via media channels or distributed by a human resource department certainly are promises which, if left unfulfilled, can lead to the breach of the contract. For example the failure to train and equip volunteers as promised, can create a breach of the psychological contract.

According to numerous studies, the personal values of volunteers certainly play a significant role in the formation of the psychological contract<sup>68</sup>. When comparing **value-based obligations** among members of the EDL (for example preparedness for the defence of the nation) to the mission and values of the organisation, clear overlap can be seen. The values of the EDL are trust, openness, mission-awareness, community spirit, and

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<sup>64</sup> **Farmer, S. M.; Fedor, B. D.** 1999. Volunteer Participation and Withdrawal. A Psychological Contract Perspective on the Role of Expectations and Organisational Support. – *Non-profit Management and Leadership*, 9(4), p. 362. [**Farmer, Fedor** 1999]

<sup>65</sup> **Cohen** 2011, p. 663.

<sup>66</sup> **Randmann** 2013, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> **Van de Ven** 2004, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> **Scheel, Mohr** 2013.



sustainability<sup>69</sup>. The mission of the EDL is to ensure the society's defensive capability. This is achieved by members contributing their free time and their will to defend their country to keep Estonia free, and increase people's sense of security and well-being. Volunteers who contribute their valuable time to pursue these values would like to be assured that things are going well. It is extremely important to indicate the commitment of the organisation to its avowed mission through its organisational policies and leadership practices. These policies and practices need to be as transparent as possible, because "perceived failure to uphold organisational values may be just as damaging as an actual failure"<sup>70</sup>. Leaders have to keep in mind that value-driven volunteers are looking for clear and visible indications that their work is actually contributing to the overall mission and goals of the organisation, and they must help the volunteers to see the connection between their efforts and the results they value<sup>71</sup>. Management and volunteers need to arrive at a shared vision regarding the goals of the organisation<sup>72</sup>. Ernst van der Bergh expressed this view with regard to German armed forces at the very beginning of the 20th century, "We [the German Army] have no use for soldiers without a will of their own who will obey their leaders unconditionally. We need self-confident men [and women] who use their whole intelligence and personality on behalf of the senior commander's intent."<sup>73</sup>

When we talk about values we also talk about **ethical behaviour**. In an organisation, people have preconceived notions of the way things "ought" and "ought not" to be, and these notions contain definite interpretations of right and wrong. Maintaining ethical behaviour, in accordance with social values and beliefs, while at the same time recognising social responsibility has become essential to sustaining an organisation's "licence to operate"<sup>74</sup>, wherein outcome must be congruent with ethical and social values, i.e. with peoples' psychological contracts. This is only possible if it rests on two fundamental principles: motivation and effective leadership. For instance, if authorities (political/military or senior civil servants) express doubts about voluntary contribution and question the quality of their service, or impose

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<sup>69</sup> **Estonian Defence League**. Homepage, <<http://www.kaitseliit.ee/en/edl>>, (14.05.2015).

<sup>70</sup> **Scheel, Mohr** 2013, p. 405.

<sup>71</sup> **Farmer, Fedor** 1999, p. 363.

<sup>72</sup> **Vantilborgh et al.** 2012, p. 1088.

<sup>73</sup> **Widder, Gen. W.** 2002 Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung: Trademarks of German Leadership. – *Military Review*, September/October, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> **O'Donohue, W.; Nelson, L.** 2009. The role of ethical values in an expanded psychological contract. – *Journal of Business Ethics*, 90, p. 252.

artificial obstacles, be it of a legal or administrative nature, the volunteers can take offence to it and perceive it as a violation of their right to defend their country. If there is a perception of unethical behaviour, then it may seriously affect volunteers' motivation.

**Leaders play a key role** in an organisation. According to the leader-member exchange theory leaders develop different exchange relationships with their followers, whereby the quality of the relationship is dependent upon the leader and member exchange<sup>75</sup> – or a willingness to contribute or job satisfaction. These relationships are central to organisational functioning. It requires leaders who possess a moral consistency that will serve as a compass. This of course is impossible in a command situation where micro-management and a “zero-defects mentality” are prevalent.<sup>76</sup> Value-based obligations, however, may have the potential to stabilize work relationships, but only if these obligations coincide with the organisation's core values and are fulfilled<sup>77</sup>. In the survey among the volunteers of the EDL, values, such as the security of the family and national security were mentioned quite often, so it can be concluded that even if the relationships between the volunteer and the immediate leader are not satisfactory, completing the mission – working for the security of the family and the entire nation – will continue and even can improve the relationships.

One aspect of a voluntary organisation that leaders (and the governing body as well) should keep in mind concerns the **delegation of the responsibilities** and the imposing of a more strenuous work-load on volunteers. Accepting the importance that the vital services of the Defence League are dependent upon the capacity and limits of the volunteers becomes vital for the management of the organisation. It is the leaders' responsibility to avoid overexploitation of the volunteers. Volunteers cannot be seen as a cheap labour force; rather, they form an incredibly valuable human resource asset that should not be wasted<sup>78</sup>. To recognise their contribution, their feeling of

<sup>75</sup> Gerstner, C. R.; Day, D. V. 1997. Meta-analytic review of leader- member exchange theory: Correlates and construct issues. – *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82.

<sup>76</sup> Krulak, General C. C. 1999. Cultivating Intuitive Decisionmaking. – *Marine Corps Gazette*, May, p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> Scheel, Mohr 2013, p. 390.

<sup>78</sup> Pearce, J. L. 1993. Assumptions in Employee-Organization Relationship Research: A Critical Perspective From the Study of Volunteers. *The Employee-Organisation Relationship. Applications for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Routledge, Chapter 7.

greater autonomy, and their enthusiasm are factors that need to be treated with real care<sup>79</sup>.

Volunteers are especially sensitive to the **challenges to change** the values, objectives and aims of the organisation. Ian Cunningham in his exploration of the resilience of a value-based psychological contract in the third sector found that using the labour of volunteers is not like “drawing from the bottomless well”<sup>80</sup>. He argues that although volunteers use a “wait and see” approach if there is a breach<sup>81</sup>, there are nevertheless clear limits as to how far value-based aspects of the psychological contract compensate for unfulfilled obligations. The breaches most commonly occurred as a result of “value interpenetration”<sup>82</sup>. Fundamental changes in the organisation’s objectives and traditional values may seriously undermine the commitment of the volunteers. For instance, if the EDL were to be transformed into a primarily law and enforcement organisation, the members who joined in order to become warriors would likely quit. Hence, for the leaders and governing bodies it is imperative to convey strategic decisions and activities tied to the mission and values of the organisation.

Volunteer members who have joined and given their time free of charge do not require or wish to be subject to excessive **bureaucratic and administrative restrictions** or commands<sup>83</sup>. At the same time, this can prove to be problematic, as military structures are after all regimented organisations that follow a chain of command. Over-bureaucratisation, however, has to be managed by the organisation.

**Breach** of the psychological contract can cause serious negative reactions. When people perceive that the organisation has failed to fulfil the promised obligations, their reactions can become manifest in poor job performance or quitting<sup>84</sup>. Value-based obligations can activate certain “moral hot-buttons” and thereby create intense emotional reactions<sup>85</sup>, even more emotional than breaches related to the transactional and relational spheres<sup>86</sup>. Hence, the promises given by the leaders of the organisation have to be thoroughly examined and assured before they are forwarded publicly.

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<sup>79</sup> Nichols, Ojala 2009, p. 369.

<sup>80</sup> Cunningham 2010, p. 699.

<sup>81</sup> Thompson, Bunderson 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Cunningham 2010, p. 715.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 713.

<sup>84</sup> Conway, Briner 2005, p. 67–68.

<sup>85</sup> Thompson, Bunderson 2003, p. 576.

<sup>86</sup> Vantilborgh *et al.* 2012, 1087.

**Support** has been mentioned in many answers. It has been found that one powerful aspect of the psychological contract is related to the level of support from the organisation. This support can increase participation in various events<sup>87</sup>, or the failure to give this support can, on the contrary, be the reason for a breach.

Perceptions of **trust** increase the likelihood of volunteer satisfaction and retention<sup>88</sup>. The highly regarded concept of *Auftragstaktik* as a command principle developed a specific organisational culture where trust, initiative (an essential condition of competence among commanders) and a strong sense of responsibility were very highly valued. According to General Hans von Seeckt's definition of military leadership, the leader had to have the "trust and the respect" of his troops. In addition to knowledge and ability, a "strong will and a forceful character" were also prerequisites, as well as joy in taking responsibility (*Verantwortungsfreudigkeit*).<sup>89</sup>

In their research of value-based obligations among the volunteers in the religious context Scheel T. and Mohr G. pointed out that "effectively managing value-oriented obligations on the job is important, not only to prevent unfavourable outcomes, but also because of the great potential to promote, for example, **loyalty** that lies in mutually fulfilled obligations"<sup>90</sup>. Obligations, if endorsed as volunteers' rights, promote their performance and strengthen their motivation. For instance, some volunteers suggested that the constitutional requirement to defend one's country is their right rather than an obligation. If the leadership advocates the same opinion, then it has great potential to be mutually understood as one of the keystones of the psychological contract and a multiplier of organisational effectiveness.

The volunteers' attitudes and behavioural reactions have important consequences for the organisation as a whole, as the combined efforts of the volunteers influence the organisation's overall performance, reputation and service provision<sup>91</sup>. Taking precautionary steps, communicating problems openly and admitting mistakes are essential, and a leader must in turn be ready to tolerate them<sup>92</sup>. Also it entails the profound realisation that in a

<sup>87</sup> **Farmer, Fedor** 1999, p. 349.

<sup>88</sup> **Taylor et al.** 2006, p. 143.

<sup>89</sup> **Citino, R. M.** 1999. *The Path to Blitzkrieg, Doctrine and Training in the German Army, 1920–1939*. Lynne Reiner Publishers, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> **Scheel, Mohr** 2013, p. 405.

<sup>91</sup> **Vantilborgh et al.** 2011, 654.

<sup>92</sup> **Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications (MCDP 1)**. *War fighting*. Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 06.20.1997, p. 61.

voluntary organisation where members possess vast and diverse personal experiences, there cannot be ideal and immediate solutions, thus there is no point agonising over solutions that are not “book solutions”. The skill to utilise this vast experience and turn it into desired outcomes is a real multiplier of the potential of a voluntary organisation.

Last but not least. Since filling out fields concerning mutual obligations was voluntary, it was interesting that the number of obligations members listed and perceived to have, was greater than the number of obligations they perceived the organisation to have. Based on this, it could be concluded that, first and foremost, volunteers perceive their own obligations and only then do they expect the organisation to fulfil its obligations. In his inauguration address, President John. F Kennedy addressed citizens by saying: “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”<sup>93</sup> This guideline is an important element of success – and furthering and maintaining it is the obligation and challenge of paid personnel.

## Conclusion

*“Both have the same obligations! To defend the Republic of Estonia against enemies; to defend the local population; to pass on knowledge and skills to the younger and less experienced.”*

*“I have to participate in training to justify the equipment that was given to me. I have to maintain and develop further the level of my training so that my fellow fighters can depend on me in battle. I have to be ready to step up when the Defence League needs me to fulfil the tasks it has been created for.”*

According to the literature the content of a psychological contract largely depends on the surrounding environment, cultural, historical and organisational background, and other environmental factors, the contracts are subjective in nature and each individual has their own different perception of mutual obligation under the contract. This paper contributes to previous studies about psychological contracts of volunteers, and focuses on volunteers in military organisations in the context of a critical geopolitical situation. It provides answers to the question – what are the volunteers’ expectations

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<sup>93</sup> “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” John. F. Kennedy Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961, <<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntF17SVAjA.aspx>>, (15.04.2015).

towards the organisation and which obligations do they perceive, or, in other words – what is the content of psychological contracts?

The results show that there are many different expectations among EDL volunteers. Perceived obligations toward the organisation differ as well. In most answers, however, the main expectation from the EDL was that the organisation should provide training and development opportunities and create the corresponding working conditions. The next most often mentioned aspects were acknowledgment, feedback, support and involvement expectations. At the same time, most of the respondents felt that their paramount obligations were to train and develop themselves, and to participate in events and activities, followed by the obligation to represent the EDL and pass on its values, as well as the obligation to be ready to defend family, loved ones, community, village and country.

From the organisational managerial point of view this research also has practical implications. The EDL is a voluntary organisation, whose mission is to maintain the independence of the country and guarantee the security of the population. The perception of being responsible for the safety of the country and the population is reflected clearly in the respondents' answers, indicating that today's volunteers are ready to fulfil this mission. In return, the EDL is expected to provide the possibilities and conditions to fulfil this mission.

Of the variety of measures used to assess the content of psychological contracts there is no single, agreed upon one. At this point, for the next phases of the study and originating from these perceived mutual obligations in the EDL, a three-dimensional questionnaire related to the psychological contract will be created, consisting of transactional, relational and value-based parts. Transactional obligations, for example, are obligations derived from regulations and responsibilities of the immediate position. Relational obligations are about creating a positive team spirit and sense of belonging, promoting cooperation and good relations. Value-based mutual obligations are about fulfilling the mission: protecting the independence of the country and ensuring the security of the nation. A comparative study will be carried out among volunteers in the EDL and paid staff in Estonian Defence Forces.

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