

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF THE STATE BORDER GUARD OFFICIALS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA: ESSENTIALS, CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Abstract. *Topicality of the Paper is determined by the dynamic and considerable changes that influence the fulfilment of the State Border Guard professional activities which in turn impose additional requirements to the professional training of border guards. The quality of the State Border Guard work reflects in its implemented functions that also results from the proficiency and professionalism of the personnel. The aim of this Paper is to analyse the current system of border guards' professional training, regulatory aspects as well as gathered statistical data regarding the issues of presented topics. Authors of the Paper bring forward several suggestions that in future could satisfy the central demands in the field of border guards' professional education and could be successfully implemented in the Basic concepts of the State Border Guard's personnel training.*

Keywords: *State Border Guard officials, professional training, enrollment requirements, Basic concepts of State Border Guard's personnel training.*

Introduction

Professional, qualified and motivated personnel plays a crucial role and builds the system and the reputation of any institution at national and international levels. Professional development of personnel is considered to be one of the most important and the most significant investments in the organization's long-term perspective. Service in institutions of the system of the Ministry of the Interior envisages a long-term professional development, where educational institutions which provide the opportunity to receive professional education as well as necessary professional qualification take a *special niche*.

Topicality of the Paper is determined by the dynamic and considerable changes that influence the fulfilment of the State Border Guard professional activities which in turn impose additional requirements to the professional training of border guards. The quality of the State Border Guard (hereinafter - the SBG) work reflects in its implemented functions that also results from the proficiency and professionalism of the personnel.

In order to ensure the reflection of occurred changes and successful implementation of introduced requirements in border guards' professional training, the aim of this Paper is to analyse the current system of border guards' professional training, regulatory aspects as well as gathered

statistics (for the period 2011 - 2016) regarding the issues of presented topics. Authors of the Paper draw attention to the Basic concepts of Border Guards personnel training bringing forward several suggestions that in future could satisfy the central demands in the field of border guards' professional education and complement the existing Basic concepts.

To come up with practical suggestions authors of the Paper used general theoretical methods - study and analysis of the appropriate methodological sources concerning the theme of the paper and data processing and statistical method - descriptive statistics.

The system of border guards professional training

The modern information and knowledge century lays down high professional criteria and standards where increases the role of professional education.

Lieģeniece D. points out that currently the social partners, education policy-makers and society in general appraise the role of professional education institutions and actively express their views. The society determines the demanding requirements regarding the activities of professional education institutions and hence the considerable importance is devoted to the objective and comprehensive evaluation of the quality of activities carried out by these institutions. (Lieģeniece, 2002)

Since the quality of education is one of the most important elements in service quality assurance, it is important that every official is motivated to continue his professional education and development throughout his career. (Latvijas Republikas Iekšlietu ministrijas 30.09.2013. rīkojums Nr. 1-12/2209)

After Latvia has joined the European Union (hereinafter- the EU), requirements of border guards' qualification became more demanding. In order to ensure the implementation of functions applied to Latvia as a member state of the EU, by ensuring the inviolability of the state border, prevention of the migration as well as guarding the external border of the EU according to the requirements of the EU and the Schengen Agreement, border guards have to be appropriately educated, highly qualified and able to apply professional knowledge and skills.

Authors of the Paper draw attention to the fact that the professional training of the SBG personnel is ensured in compliance with regulatory framework of the EU and the Republic of Latvia – the Constitution of Latvia, the Bologna Declaration, the Latvian Law on Institutions of Higher Education, Vocational Education Law, corresponding laws and regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Ministry of Education, as well as in line with a special regulatory framework - the Schengen Convention, the Border Guard Law, Immigration Law, the Basic concepts of SBG's personnel

training (hereinafter- the Basic concepts), the EU Schengen Catalogue and *Regulation 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders* (hereinafter- *Schengen Borders Code*). In addition to above mentioned, the training of the SBG personnel is implemented referring to professional standards.

Organization and implementation of the SBG professional development is determined by the Basic concepts approved by the SBG Order No.236 of 14 March 2006 "On Basic Concepts of the State Border Guard's Personnel Training". The aim of this document is to form an integrated, qualitative and effective SBG personnel professional training system which within the incorporation into the joint Latvia's and European Union's education system would ensure the formation of *well trained personnel and would facilitate its development. The specific aim of this document is to promote* the improvement of border guards' proficiency ensuring the acquisition of up-to-date knowledge and skills by implementing the SBG study programmes, specialization and refresher courses. (Latvijas Republikas Valsts robežsardzes pavēle Nr.236, 2006.14.03.)

To achieve general and specific aims the following tasks in the Basic Concepts were brought forward:

1. To provide border guards` with an opportunity to receive professional education;
2. To educate and train a definite specialization border guards;
3. To increase and improve the proficiency of border guards.

The essence of professional training concept is to provide border guards with the opportunity to receive professional education and to develop work-related knowledge and skills by following the principle of accessibility (equal opportunities to obtain education), principle of conformity (the needs and development tendencies of the SBG are taken into consideration), life-long learning principle (possibility to study during the whole period of service), determination principle (the planning of border guards education and training is carried out by reviewing previous results and setting development priorities and principle of succession (before the acquisition of new knowledge assess factual).

Professional training of border guards comprises the following stages:

1. the course of professional training (complementary course) – gives insight into the structure of the SBG, service management and fundamental principles of professional activities;
2. professional education – provides border guards with theoretical knowledge and practical skills to perform their duties in certain positions as well as to plan and manage own work and the work of subordinated personnel;

3. specialization – ensures the training of border guards in the SBG required profiles e.g. dog handling, immigration, document examination, aviation etc.;
4. qualification improvement/ professional development courses – provide an opportunity to improve appropriate and systematic professional knowledge and practical skills required in service.

The next stage of our Paper is the confirmation of theory where the authors provide the detailed description and analysis of the stages above.

The initial selection of candidates for service within the SBG and for studies in the State Border Guard College (hereinafter-SBGC) at Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding” takes place in the SBG Territorial boards.

Into service can be accepted Latvian citizen who is from 18 to 30 years of age, has at least a general secondary education, who complies with the mandatory requirements regarding health condition, physical fitness, and psychological characteristics.

In order to assess the suitability for service candidate has to pass physical fitness test, foreign language proficiency test and interview. Based on the results of the selection, person is accepted into service and appointed to the position of the SBG inspector`s assistant (for a probationary period), during which the official acquires the course of professional training.

According to the Basic standards which are in force, the length of professional training course implemented by the SBG is two months. One month is envisaged for studies in the SBGC and one month for the training practice in the SBG Territorial board. Due to a number of reasons the second phase of this course - one month of practice in Territorial board is not implementing. At the end of the course cadets have to take examinations, where the results of examinations are considered within taking the final decision regarding the enrolment on the Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding”.

Within the second stage border guards can obtain the necessary qualification to carry out service duties.

In the general overview of pedagogical theories and resources the term- qualification is defined as a special skill or type of experience or knowledge that meet the requirements of a certain sector, specialty or profession and makes someone suitable to do a particular activity or job at the definite degree required for a certain job. (Pedagoģijas terminu skaidrojošā vārdnīca, 2000)

This stage may include the acquisition of professional (studies in the SBGC within the Professional further education study programme „Border

Guarding”) and higher professional education (studies in the SBGC and *Rezekne Academy of Technologies*).

The European Agency of operative co-operation Administration at the external borders of the European Union member states (hereinafter – Agency) developed and approved The Common Core Curriculum that represents the first standardised set of skills and knowledge criteria for basic-level border guard training in the EU. The manual aims to raise awareness and ensure a harmonised training of all EU border guards in respecting fundamental rights, aspiring to ever-higher standards of professionalism as part of an EU border guard culture. (Common Core Curriculum for EU Border Guard Basic Training, 2012)

Considering the importance and peculiarities of border guards` profession as well as the requirements set for training and education of specialists, authors would like to draw attention to the role of the Common Core Curricula which is emphasized in one of the fundamental documents - the Schengen Borders Code. It stipulates that all EU Member States have to ensure that the border guards are specialised and properly trained professionals where for training on the rules for border control and on fundamental right, the common training standards as established and further developed by the Agency shall be taken into account. (Regulation 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council)

The Common Core Curriculum requirements were successfully integrated in the Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding” and are consistent with the principles of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning at levels 4 and 5 (it means the transition from the basic to the middle-level officer training). The content of the study Programme is designed in accordance with the requirements of the EU and Agency set for the education of border guards thus ensuring the observation of common quality standards.

After receiving the professional secondary education, where the length of studies is one year, border guards obtain the qualification – SBG inspectors (3rd level professional qualification) and are sent to join the service in the structural units of the SBG or the SBGC.

Every year around 100 – 130 border guards take up studies at Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding”. Enrolment procedure is organized twice a year – the basic enrolment is in September and the additional- in March.

Since 2012 the SBGC enrolled 410 students for studies on Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding”, and 341 border guards graduated the SBGC.

As shown in Fig. 1 in September, 2015 70 cadets were enrolled on

Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding” (four groups of cadets), while in March 2016 33 cadets took up their studies (2 groups of cadets). At the present moment 103 cadets acquire Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding”.

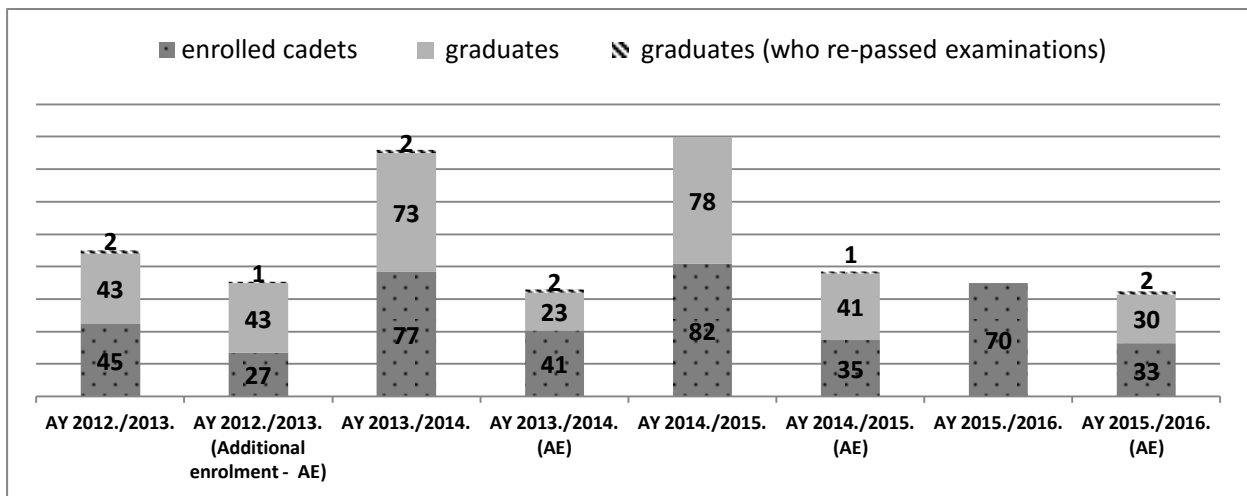


Fig.1. The number of enrolled and graduated cadets (Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding”)

The SBG officials, who do not have the necessary qualification for their current position, but who during their professional activities have acquired job-related competencies, knowledge and practical skills, since 2012 in compliance with Delegation agreement on the assessment of outside formal education acquired professional competence may pass the professional qualification exam in order to obtain qualification- the SBG inspector. Examination process is the same as it is carried for cadets completing the Professional further education study programme „Border Guarding”. Since November 2012 296 SBG officials gained professional qualification -SBG inspector.

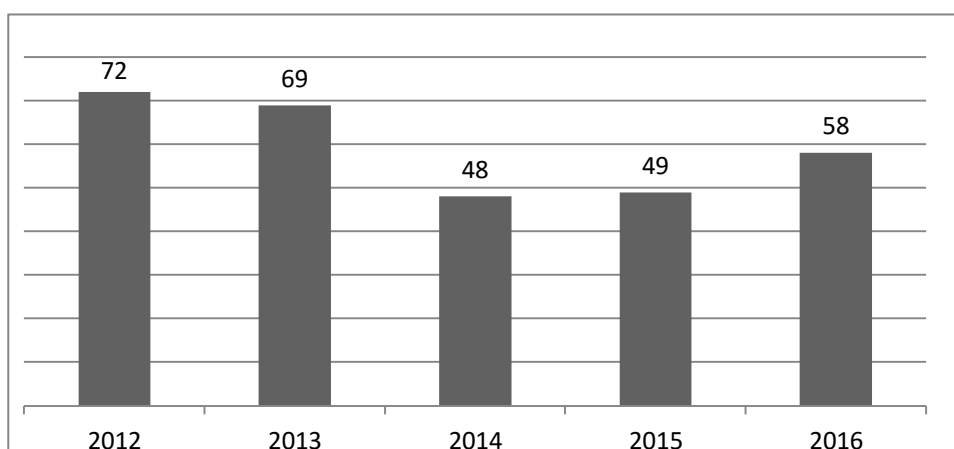


Fig. 2. The number of officials who obtained Professional qualification

According to the Basic concepts SBG officials after the definite period of service experience may apply for studies in the SBGC in the programme – 1st level professional higher education study programme “Border Guarding” (2 years in full time studies or 2,5 years in part-time studies) .

Taking into consideration the admission requirements for full time studies, applicants must have 3rd professional qualification level (qualification – State Border Guard inspector) and must not be older than 35.

Analysing the number of students enrolled in the last five years it can be concluded that on average 20-24 SBG officials are enrolled for full time studies on the 1st level professional higher education study programme "Border Guarding". Since 2011 the SBG enrolled 103 full-time students (see. Figure 3).

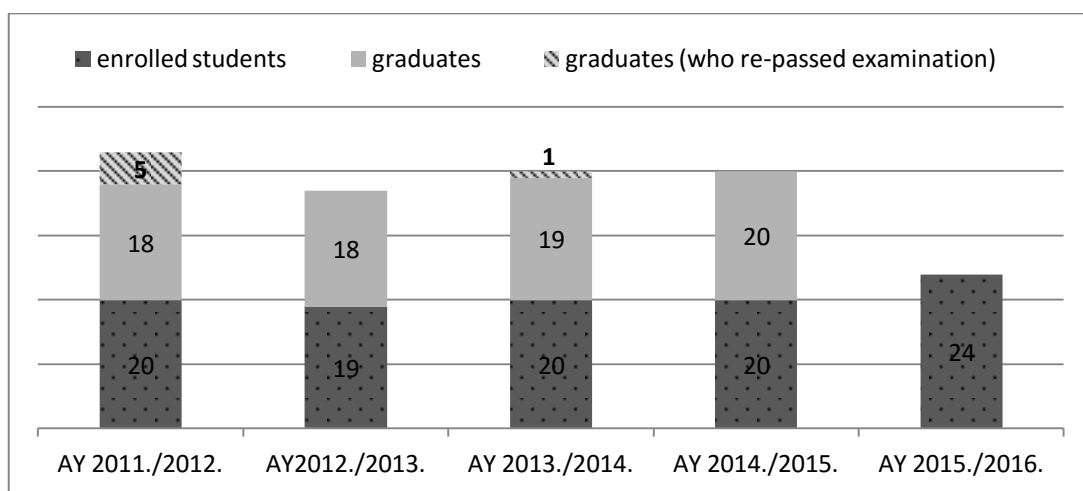


Fig. 3. The number of enrolled and graduated full-time students

As can be seen from Fig.3 that in the period from 2011 to the first quarter of 2016 81 full-time students successfully acquired the abovementioned programme and obtained the qualification "State Border Guard junior officer".

In accordance with the SBGC Decision No.15 of 29 October, 2015 for part-time studies SBG officials can apply if they:

- have secondary or higher education and serve in the SBG in positions of first lieutenant, captain, major or lieutenant colonel having more than one year professional experience and are not older than 42 until the 31st December of the year of admission;
- serve in the SBG in positions of first sergeant or warrant officer and have at least 4 years professional experience and are not younger than 32 and older than 42 until the 31st December of the year of admission. (Valsts Robežsardzes koledžas 2015.gada 29.oktobra lēmums Nr. 15)

Figure 4 shows that since 2011 the SBG enrolled 86 part-time students, 68 of them got the diploma of the SBG 1st level professional higher

education.

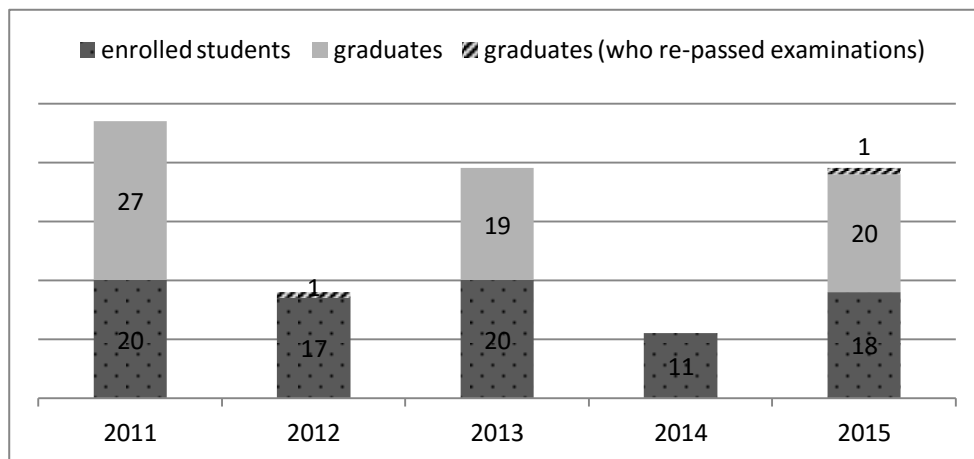


Fig.4. The number of enrolled and graduated part-time students

The graduates of the College, who have acquired the 1st level professional higher education study programme “Border Guarding”, have the opportunity to continue studies in the 2nd level professional higher education bachelor study programme “Border Guarding” implemented in Rezekne Academy of Technologies. The programme was developed taking into consideration profession standards. The duration of full-time studies - 2 years, part time studies - 2,5 years. Programme graduates get professional bachelor's degree in Border Guarding and the qualification - the SBG senior officer. Figure 5 clearly shows that since 2011 52 SBG officers have completed this study course.

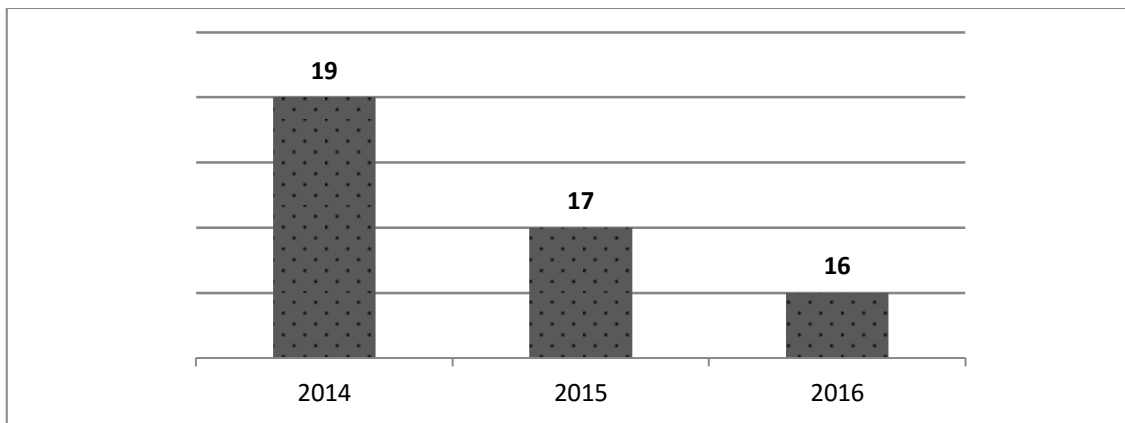


Fig. 5. The number of 2nd level professional higher education bachelor study programme “Border Guarding” graduates

Authors of the Paper would like to point out that only the particular educational programmes – for professional secondary education and the 1st level professional higher education studies are defined in the existing Basic Concepts. With relation to the border guards, who have already acquired the 1st level

professional higher education study programme, it is mentioned that they have the possibility to continue their studies in other higher education institutions and obtain the second level professional higher education, which makes it possible to stand as a candidate for the SBG senior officer position in the SBG structural units or the SBGC.

In turn the SBG personnel policy framework lays down the specific requirements with regard to the necessary levels and areas of education, which gives the right to take positions of officers and instructors in the SBG system institution. In fact, all border guards ensure the border control and immigration control functions as well as they have the requirement to receive the professional education in Border Guard specialization. Such a situation, when the requirements are not clearly reflected in the legislative base, may lead to misunderstandings in the process of planning the SBG personnel training and career growth.

The Ministry of Education and Science in accordance with the decision of the Licensing Commission of Higher Education Study Programmes in 2015 granted the licence which allows to implement the European Joint Master’s programme “Strategic Border Management”.

This programme aims to promote interoperability and the highest standards in cooperation and at EU borders and the harmonisation of learning and professional standards in formal academic and disciplinary structures, providing a stimulating and innovative environment for teaching, learning and research. The first group of mid to high level border guard managers will receive their degrees in June 2017. ([FRONTEX-launches-new-master-s-programme](#))

Continuing the analysis authors refer to Basic concepts where persons with higher education (e.g. computer specialists, accountants, teachers, engineers etc.) have the opportunity to complete the pre-service stage which includes 1 month complementary course.

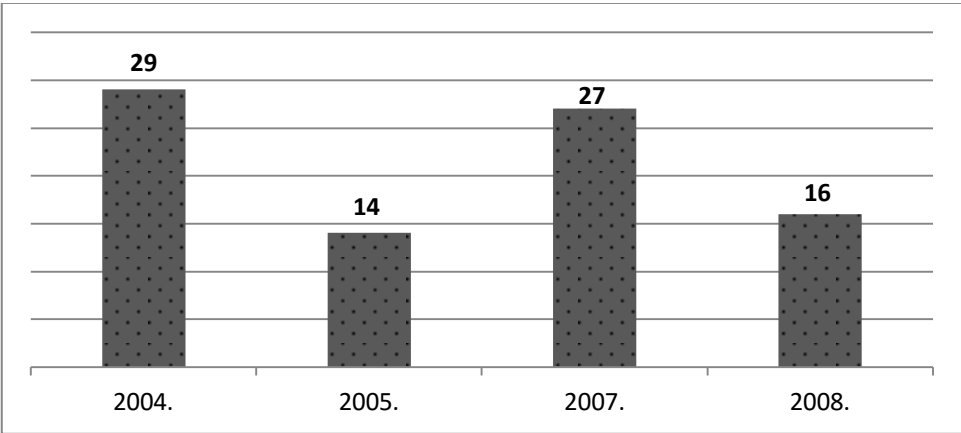


Fig. 6. The number of officials who have completed complementary course

After completion of complementary course an official taking into consideration position or necessity to develop proficiency, knowledge and skills may participate in different courses and seminars, as well as continue studies taking Master's and Doctoral degree.

Figure 6 shows that in the last 8 years complementary course was not implemented, thus the authors provide statistical data for the period from 2004 to 2008. During this period, 86 SBG officials completed complementary course programme.

Within the third stage the SBG officials whose service duties require specific knowledge and skills, are offered to take up courses in different specializations carried at the SBGC, other educational institutions or SBG Territorial boards.

In the frameworks of the fourth stage – qualification improvement– the SBG officials improve their knowledge, skills and abilities which are necessary to fulfil service duties effectively.

Introduction of new border guarding methods and techniques, border control tools and engineering equipment lead to the current changes in laws and regulations where border guards are requested to improve their professional knowledge and skills regularly. Border guards have to improve their professional qualification and attend corresponding courses at least once in 5 years.

The SBG qualification improvement courses are developed and implemented by the SBGC. The Central board participates in the development and assessment of curriculum of qualification improvement and specialization courses, but the SBG Territorial boards are involved in the development, assessment and implementation of qualification improvement and specialization courses.

In carrying out their service duties border guard have to deal with many and varied problem situations. In order to provide an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for a competent and operative solution to work related problem situations, the SBG officials are offered to sign up for qualification improvement courses, which are mostly organized by the SBGC.

Qualification improvement courses are developed, organized and implemented mainly in the following specializations: dog handling, foreign language acquisition, immigration, document analysis.

In order to ensure the SBG officials' qualification improvement, several qualification programmes were developed. The implementation of these programmes are realized taking into account the requirements set by the SBG Territorial boards and according to the SBG Central Board's assessment of the need to realize particular qualification courses.

Authors of the Paper would like to point out that the SBGC implements different qualification courses even though there are several qualification courses which are carried out annually or several times a year, there are courses, which in recent years have not been implemented due to the loss of content relevance and conformity with the realities and needs of the employer.

In 2015 1,759 officials improved their proficiency by acquiring qualification improvement programmes implemented by the SBGC. Among them were 156 officers of the State Revenue Service and the National Armed Forces (in 2014 – 2060 officials, including 140 officers of the State Police, the State Revenue Service and the National Armed Forces).

Conclusions and suggestions

Based on the analysis of statistical data and the stages of border guards' professional training laid down in the SBG Basic concepts, the authors of the Paper come up with a number of recommendations aiming to improve the existing *deficiencies* in the SBG Basic concepts and the SBG officials' professional training mechanisms.

In accordance with the SBG Order No.105 of February 2, 2015 "On establishing the working group", the working group with the primary aim to develop border guards professional development system that shall correspond to actual situation and comply to modern requirements, as well as determine border guards' career growth prospects was set up. (Valsts robežsardzes 2015.gada 02.februāra pavēle Nr.105) Taking into account that this study concentrates on the SBG personnel professional training and is based on actual statistics, the authors put forward several suggestions that could be taken into consideration by the above working group in order to perfect the SBG Basic concepts.

- 1) The SBG Basic concepts stipulate that the length of professional training course implemented by the SBG is two months. One month is envisaged for studies in the SBGC and one month for the training practice in the SBG Territorial board. Due to a number of reasons the practical implementation of such a model has limited usefulness, the second phase of this course - one month of practice in Territorial board is not implemented. Based on the above, the authors propose to exclude from the SBG Basic concepts the requirement regarding one month training practice in the SBG Territorial board, thus keeping only one month training in the SBGC.
- 2) Pursuant to the Basic concepts, persons having a higher education who want to join the service in the SBG and get the officer position of

a narrow specialization (e.g. computer specialists, accountants, teachers, engineers etc.) have to complete 1 month complementary course. Based on the fact that this program was carried out for the last time in 2008, that could be explained with internal reorganizations accomplished in the SBG system, where during the several years, the positions of officers carrying out supporting functions are converted to civilian posts, the authors suggest to appraise the topicality of this programme and the necessity to be a part of the SBG officials professional training system.

- 3) The SBG Basic concepts specify that all SBG officials who have duties related to the implementation of the core functions of the SBG (border control and immigration control), once every 5 years must complete corresponding professional development courses. However in the "Officials` of the Ministry of Interior with special service ranks Professional education development concept for 2014 -2017" is mentioned that so far the SBG does not succeed in creating comprehensive SBG officials` professional development system. (Latvijas Republikas Iekšlietu ministrijas 30.09.2013. rīkojums Nr. 1-12/2209)
Based on the above, in order to solve the issue related to the officials` professional development sequence and control, as well as the SBG officials professional development, planning and control mechanism has to be improved. To complement the existing mechanism, authors of the Paper suggest to develop for every border guard position/job category standardized professional development and training plan. This plan would include the information on the required professional training and development courses, its fields and realization frequency during the whole service period. The SBG Central Boards` Personnel Board and the SBG Territorial boards` competent officials have to be assigned a duty to be responsible for the development and implementation of this mechanism.
- 4) Taking into account that there are developed and defined by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 461 adopted on 18 May 2010 "Regulations Regarding the Classification of Occupations, Basic Tasks Corresponding to the Occupation, Basic Qualification Requirements and Procedures for the Use and Updating of the Classification of Occupations" the SBG senior officer`s profession standard and the SBG has already started implementation of the 2nd level professional higher education bachelor study programme "Border Guarding", authors of the Paper suggest to complement the SBG Basic concepts with the entry that the 2nd level professional higher education can be received at a higher educational institution the SBG has concluded an agreement.

- 5) Recognizing the topicality in the future to ensure uniform standards and criteria for competence as well as in order to promote within the EU uniform improvement of professional abilities and skills of a person in strategic border management, Rezekne Technology Academy since 2015 implements the European Joint Master's programme "Strategic Border Management" separate modules, the authors propose to complement the SBG Basic concepts with the fact that the SBG officials have the opportunity to acquire Joint Master's programme "Strategic Border Management" and reflect this fact as well in the scheme of the SBG personnel professional training.
- 6) In order to create the common policy and ensure the consistent observation of the principle of compliance (considering the SBG needs and development tendencies), the authors of the Paper propose to consider the possibility to lay down in the SBG Basic concepts in addition to the level of acquired education, the name of professional education programme, the acquisition of which is approved and recognized as an appropriate for meeting the requirements set down for the corresponding positions in the SBG system.

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