



Today's E-edition



Sign Up for Newsletters



Opinion

Straight from the Source: An uneasy, but so far calm, life in another former Soviet republic



The bust of Estonian war hero Juhan Pitka is adorned with a scarf bearing the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Both the bust and the tank commemorate the Estonian War of Independence (1918-1920), when Estonia gained its first independence. *Courtesy of Dan Franch*

By Dan Franch Straight From The Source

Posted March 25, 2022 5:15 am

The sun is back and the days are getting longer here in Estonia. However, a new darkness has descended in this part of the world. Of course, I am talking about

Ukraine.



High Intent Dating Platform

 Dream Singles - Sponsored

[Sign Up Free](#)

The bleak times there awaken memories and reflections here, which, like Ukraine, was also part of the Soviet empire.

My wife's grandma lived through World War I, World War II, Stalin times and life in Siberia, yet still was somehow lucky enough to reach the light at the end of the tunnel when Estonia got its second independence in 1991. My wife's mom grew up during World War II and Stalin times. Just the other night she grieved, "I lived through one war, my mom lived through two wars. I don't want my children and grandchildren to experience a third war."

So past memories are being stirred by current news. But outside of relatives and close connections, you wouldn't necessarily notice it.





Estonians are very private people and famous for their poker faces. Still water runs deep in these people, nearly as deep as a bottomless well.

There is nary a sense of panic or concern outwardly. But as I poke around, asking questions of my adult students, feelings become more revealing. One mom has her son doing his mandatory military training at the moment. Another wonders if her summer house can be used year-round, her thinking that Tallinn is more likely to be bombed than a small village well beyond the city limits.

Hence, awareness and concern are there once you look behind the curtain. Further evidence is at one of the military bases. The alert has been raised from green to blue. That's one step away from red, yet that blue has a wide berth, meaning that blue for the moment is less threatening than it seems.

Estonia's chief of the press department of the General Staff of the Defense Forces stated that the Defense Forces office constantly monitors the security situation and adjusts its activities and attitude to ensure a permanent readiness for defense.



Caution and preparation are in the blood. As they say in this part of the world, measure seven times, cut once.

So while the Estonian military and NATO are doing their part to ready

themselves to protect the country if needed, Ukrainian refugees have started arriving. The anticipated number of 10,000 has already been eclipsed. The realistic outlook is now 100,000. That's no small number in a country of only 1.3 million, a third of whom are Russian speakers. The potential for future flare-ups is there.

That said, peace and calm prevail in Estonia, though people - including us - are buying some rations just in case.

Rest assured, this is not paranoia. It's prudence. "Be prepared," the Boy Scout motto goes. Though never a Boy Scout myself, I was in the Marines, and there we were taught that "Prior Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance." That's what compels me to get things in order.



I have done what I can to prepare for the worst. I registered with the U.S. Embassy to let them know that I and my family are here. Financial matters have been addressed. And I have organized my important documents in a folder and have mentally thought through what else I will take with me. We did something similar while living in the dictatorship of Eritrea, having a packed suitcase in our bedroom, so we know the drill.

As a teacher there from 2008 to 2010, more than a few times I went to bed afraid of something I had said in the classroom. In 1995 while working as an election volunteer in Bosnia after the war there, I saw what bombs can do to a country and its people.

Now I am in Estonia - a piece of land that Russia would love to take over again - and keeping an eye on a war taking place a few countries south of here. And my wife and son and I are having conversations that are more than just whimsical parlor games of "Imagine if .../What would you do if ..."

They're real and they're surreal.



I'm not scared or overly concerned. I am ready. And I put my trust in my embassy to let me know if and when it's time to go.

- An Addison native, Dan Franch, franchdan@gmail.com, has lived since 2015 with his wife and youngest son in Estonia, where he teaches and owns a language and copy editing business.