

More drones crash in Latvia on the morning of May 7. Basic facts about drone incident.

As information continues to gradually emerge about the latest instances of drones crashing on Latvian territory, here is a brief summary of what is known so far.

- Alerts were issued in the early hours of the morning about possible drone incursions in districts close to the Russian border. The alerts are no longer in force.
- One drone crashed in city Rēzekne (about 30 000 inhabitants) at an oil storage facility. It does not appear to have caused significant damage and no injuries are reported.
- At least one more drone is believed to have crashed on Latvian territory, most probably in the Viļāni area, west of Rēzekne. A search for it continues.
- It is possible that more drones overflew Latvia, but the number has yet to be established.
- Flights to an altitude of approximately six kilometres were been restricted in the eastern border region during the day. Commercial airliners were not be affected as they use higher altitudes, and the restrictions were lifted at around 6 p.m.
- The origin of the drones has yet to be confirmed. They entered Latvian airspace from Russia, but in similar previous incidents, the drones have turned out to be Ukrainian drones engaged in attacks on Russia which have wandered off course. Officials said they were not ruling out any possibilities until their investigation is complete, including the possibility that captured Ukrainian drones could potentially be used by Russia as a form of provocation.
- Police have warned the public not to spread unsubstantiated rumours about drone strikes in the wake of recent incidents. For example, social media posts claiming that a train fire was caused by a drone are untrue.
- As a result of the security incident, schools will be closed in Rēzekne and Ludza municipalities, and lessons will be held remotely in Balvi district.
- Following a meeting of the government crisis council, Prime Minister Evika Siliņa said that whatever the origin of the drone, it is "a consequence of Russia's brutal war in Ukraine" and that Latvian society should be ready for more such incidents. However, she also said she was unhappy with the manner in which warnings were issued via mobile phone networks only after the drone crash was reported in Rēzekne and that she has asked the Defence Ministry to clarify this.
- Speaking in Rēzekne, Defence Minister Andris Sprūds (Progressives (Greens/EFA)) also said the incident had its origins in Russia's aggression against Ukraine and that "this is one more of several such serious incidents which we have come to have to live with." He said that despite improvements in Latvia's air defences, no country can guarantee "absolute" security against drones. He said he would be checking "what worked and what didn't work" and, in particular, why warnings about drones in the air were only issued after one of them had already crashed in Rēzekne.
- Opposition parties Latvia First, the National Alliance and the United List have announced that they will demand the resignation of Defence Minister Andris Sprūds over his handling of the drone incidents.
- The drones that entered Latvian airspace were identified on radar, but their shooting down was not possible because all safety criteria were not met and there was no certainty that civilians or infrastructure would not be harmed, said Brigadier General Egils Leščinskis, Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff for Operational Affairs of the National Armed Forces (NBS), at the same press conference.
- Residents of Rēzekne speaking to Latvian Television said they only received a mobile phone warning about an hour after they had already heard a drone or drones flying overhead.

The drone that crashed in Latvia on Thursday, May 7th, definitely had a warhead, Modris Kairišs, head of the Autonomous Systems Competence Centre of the National Armed Forces (NBS), has said after examining video footage and the scene of the impact in Rēzekne.

He stressed, however, that it was too early to definitively state the type and origin of the drone. Kairišs speculated that drones could be equipped with artificial intelligence to select targets and this might explain why one of them ended up hitting an oil storage facility.

"Long-range drones have the germs of artificial intelligence. They search for targets that are pre-programmed into the drones. That's probably why it crashed into barrels at an oil terminal that are visually similar to targets on Russian territory," Kairišs pointed out.

Ukraine has in recent weeks enjoyed success in targeting Russian refineries in the Gulf of Finland with the Baltic states more or less on the flightpath from Ukraine.

"If a drone has lost its way, it does not distinguish whether the forest is on the Russian side of the border or the Latvian side. The artificial intelligence tools used in drones are not yet sufficiently developed," Kairišs emphasized.

The fate of another two drones that were detected by Latvian systems is still unknown. The military's expert said that one of the investigation's lines of enquiry is that the drones were in route to targets in Russian territory and were diverted from their route by electronic warfare means. Other versions are also being investigated, such as that they could be third-party drones used for hybrid warfare activities.

Kairišs also explained that one of the main challenges in air defence remains the difficulty of detecting drones in the first place. They fly at low altitudes and are relatively small, but classic air defence systems are designed to detect and counter much larger, higher-flying targets. "Currently, the air defence system is being completely rebuilt. The main direction for detecting drones is interceptor drones, as well as new radar and acoustic systems," said Kairišs.

Regarding why the drones were not shot down, Kairišs suggested that, shooting down can often be more dangerous than waiting and seeing what happens – particularly over populated areas.

Foreign drones were not shot down over Latvian territory due to safety concerns

Unmanned aerial vehicles that entered Latvian airspace were detected by radar, but shooting them down was not possible because not all safety criteria were met. Weapons were not used, as there was no certainty that civilians or infrastructure would not be harmed, said Brigadier General Egils Leščinskis, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations at the Joint Staff of the National Armed Forces (NBS).

Meanwhile, Jānis Garisons, Chairman of the Board of the military company SIA "NEWT21," noted that a broader public discussion is needed on how and under what circumstances drones should be shot down.

Source: Latvian Public media