

Armed forces must be thought European

Opening up the Bundeswehr to foreign applicants is sensible and appropriate

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The new Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer has taken over some construction sites from her predecessor. In addition to the major topics of armaments and budgets, the trend reversal in personnel, as it is called in the Bundeswehr, is of particular importance. In this context, the recruitment of urgently needed specialists such as IT experts and doctors for the Bundeswehr from other EU countries is being discussed. They are mainly focused on German speaking citizens from Poland, Italy and Romania who live in Germany and speak German, a total of around 595,000 people. Important topics of the debate are potential conflicts of loyalty, the attractiveness of salaries and the quality of living and working conditions. Young applicants attach particular importance to the last two points. Citizenship does not play a decisive role.

Demographic change and shortages of skilled workers are not only posing major challenges for European armed forces. In direct competition with the economy, the military is becoming more and more difficult to recruit suitable personnel for increasingly complex weapon systems or the cyber sector. The military leadership is therefore paying more attention to innovative recruitment concepts and cooperation with the civil sector. Some countries open their armed forces to citizens of other countries. Since 2016, EU citizens and foreigners have been allowed to serve in the armed forces of eight EU states as well as the USA and Canada. Germany is therefore by no means a pioneer, but would be in good company if the previous practice were to change.

In scientific studies and case law, it is considered that only jobs with a special proximity to the state, i.e. in the judiciary, police or military, can be excluded from the free movement of workers. However, the question arises whether this special closeness can still be justified today by citizenship or whether other aspects are not more important. It is well known that specialists in Germany are generally better paid in the private sector than in the public sector.

But what is the situation in the case of the German armed forces in direct comparison to European forces? What are the working and living conditions like?

EU citizens in European armed forces

The debate in Germany about opening up the Bundeswehr to EU citizens, which has been going on for some time, was also reflected in the White Paper 2016. There, such an opening was included as a possibility for personnel recruitment. Recently, this was again discussed in public. There is growing support among the citizens of the 28 EU Member States for a common security and defence policy and the establishment of a European army. This shows that this topic does not only include personnel economic aspects. It is also about the question of what nation-state armed forces must still look like today.

The German initiative to open up the Bundeswehr to EU citizens caused concern in other countries. Poland, for example, fears greater emigration because Germany offers better salaries and working conditions. However, such concerns are only partly understandable, as EU citizens can already serve in European armed forces today. Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom allow citizens of the EU and/or other countries to join their armed forces under certain conditions. These include, among others, fulfilled compulsory military service in the country of origin, residence requirements, language skills, no criminal record or origin from certain countries. Since January 2004, Belgium has allowed citizens of the EU and Switzerland to serve in its armed forces and has achieved the most far reaching opening. However, only 136 active foreign soldiers served in the Belgian military in 2016, which is less than one percent of the target strength of 25,000 soldiers. In Great Britain there are about 10,000 foreign soldiers, most of whom are recruited from the commonwealth and the Nepalese Gurkhas. Only about 65 soldiers come from other EU countries, for example Ireland. Luxembourg's military has recruited about 300 EU nationals since 2003. Most foreign personnel are recruited by the USA, namely around 5000 so-called Green Card soldiers per year. There can therefore be no question of enticing away specialists from other countries on a large scale.

The free movement of workers in Europe is legally significant for the admission of EU citizens into the armed forces of the respective member states. It does not apply to employment in public administration (Article 45 (4) TFEU), but may be invoked if national legislation allows the police or the army to open up, as the example of Belgium shows. In Germany, and particularly for the Bundeswehr, Paragraph 37 (1) of the Soldatengesetz (SG) provides that German citizenship is a prerequisite for the appointment of temporary and career soldiers. However, Section 37(2) SG already gives the Federal Ministry of Defence the possibility of

deviating from this provision in exceptional cases. A Romanian citizen is already serving as a medical officer in the Bundeswehr. By adapting the SG, Germany could open its armed forces to foreigners.

The question of citizenship

Critics of an opening of armed forces to foreigners cite above all the unique relationship of allegiance and loyalty to the state, which is manifested through citizenship. They associate it with the will to defend or the readiness to defend. However, scientific surveys show that the willingness to defend its country among the Muslim population of many European countries is higher than that of the domestic population, including in Germany. Citizenship therefore plays only a subordinate role in the will to defend the country in which one lives. For example, about half of the Turks living in Germany, whether they have German citizenship or not, would contribute to the defence in the event of an attack on Germany.

Foreign citizens often place the greatest trust in the armed forces of their host country, followed by other state institutions or social systems. The first interim report on the Youth Study 2015 of the Helmut Schmidt University states that 84 percent of all foreigners surveyed have a neutral to positive attitude towards the Bundeswehr. The stronger the desire to acquire German citizenship, the higher the motivation to join the Bundeswehr. It can be concluded from this that service in the armed forces has a certain potential for integration and that citizenship itself is merely an incentive to apply, but not an indicator of the will to defend the host country. In the case of German young people, citizenship or service to the fatherland are not important for the choice of a profession. The decisive factors are rather factors such as a good income, a good comradeship or a secure job. For young people, the concept of citizenship is generally not a significant feature of their everyday life and therefore has little relevance in their reality.

From a political point of view, loyalty to the state is manifested by the oath of office or service, which must be taken upon appointment as a temporary soldier or civil servant. This loyalty is not tied to citizenship. National defence is no longer a top priority, but is now only seen in the context of alliance defence and is a task on an equal footing with the missions abroad of the Bundeswehr. As a volunteer army, the Bundeswehr does not invoke the defence of Germany in any of its current missions and none of its quasi-operational commitments, such as the Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States. At the forefront are alliance

solidarity, the protection of human rights, the fight against international terrorism and establishing of state structures. These aspects are partly enshrined in the Basic Law, but beyond that they are universally valid in whatever kind community of values, to which many people feel a part regardless of their citizenship.

From a scientific point of view, therefore, there is little evidence of a strong causal link between citizenship and the willingness or ability of the respective population to defend itself. Rather, service in the armed forces can make a positive contribution to integration and thus to the acquisition of citizenship, based on a shared commitment to human rights and the principles of the Western community of values.

Comparison of European salary structures and working hours

Pleasant working conditions and good salary are important for potential applicants. The fact that these two factors can already differ within a country is shown by the shortage of skilled workers in Germany. The number of foreign specialists there has been growing continuously in recent years and also offers the armed forces an opportunity to recruit personnel. The incentives for applicants in comparison with the European armed forces can be illustrated by the EU working time directive and the European salary structures.

In 2003, the European Parliament and the European Council adopted Directive 2003/88/EC and thus the basis for the organisation of working time for the Member States. In a 2017 report, the European Commission concluded that the directive had been largely implemented, but that there were problems in the armed forces with limiting the maximum working hours. The Scientific Service of the Bundestag also identified deficits in 2016. According to the report, eight EU Member States have not transposed the Directive for the armed forces, and a further four have not replied to a request. In the other countries, there are also considerable differences in the implementation. Germany has made some of the most far-reaching regulations for the armed forces, such as the principle that every hour of overtime should be compensated through leisure time. This is why the Bundeswehr has very attractive working time arrangements among the European armed forces.

Not only the most advantageous working time regulations, but also good salary is an important incentive for applicants. The direct comparison of 26 Euro-

pean armed forces shows that Germany belongs to the top group in terms of salary, even if the purchasing power parity of the respective countries is taken into account on a Euro basis.

As far as officers are concerned, Germany is among the top three in Europe in terms of entry level and average salaries (leaving aside the armed forces of Luxembourg and Switzerland, due to their small size and the Swiss militia system). Among the non-commissioned officers (NCO) and enlisted, Germany has the highest starting salaries and the best average salaries, if purchasing power parity is applied. The starting salary of an officer in Serbia is € 481 gross per month, whereas in Germany it is € 3 366. For the enlisted and NCO, the starting salary in Poland is € 755, while in Germany € 2 275 is paid.

In competing with other European armed forces for specialists, the Bundeswehr can therefore count attractive working conditions, the high standard of living in Germany and good salaries as advantages.

Conclusion

If the Bundeswehr wants to pursue an innovative personnel acquisition concept, it should take a number of aspects into account. Thus, the argument of citizenship does not play a significant role, neither from the point of view of possible applicants nor for the fulfilment of the Bundeswehr mission abroad. Rather, the possibility for applicants from rural areas to acquire German citizenship should be seen as an advantage in the sense of a controlled integration policy, similar to the French or American system.

In addition, states that have already accepted foreign applicants for their armed forces have so far recruited relatively few personnel from other countries. In view of this tendency and the many Turkish citizens living in Germany, it would therefore make little sense to open up the Bundeswehr only to EU citizens. Instead, it should generally be open to all those migrants who bring the necessary qualifications with them, for example sufficient knowledge of German. In terms of working and living conditions and salary, Germany is in a very good starting position in the European comparison and should make targeted use of this. Apart from this, the smaller states benefit within the framework of multinational cooperation such as the Framework Nations Concept if the Bundeswehr is well equipped in terms of personnel and material.

So there is no reason to fear that a mercenary force will be built up or that Germany will entice away masses of personnel from neighbouring countries to

meet its needs for skilled workers and specialists. Rather, it is a modern form of recruitment that attempts to exploit competitive advantages in human resources management.

Further information on the salary structures of the 26 European armed forces, including all data and explanations of the empirical survey, can be found in the working paper »Vergleich der Besoldung europäischer Streitkräfte«, International Security Division, AP No. 05, September 2019, http://bit.ly/AP05_Schulz.

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