

Guest Editors' Foreword

By Tibor Szvircsev Tresch & Eva Moehlecke de Baseggio

The recruitment and retention of well-qualified military personnel are central concerns in any armed force. In this regard, both quantity and quality play an equally important role. A military that meets its end-strength goals yet has poorly-trained and unmotivated soldiers can hardly fulfil its mission any better than an understaffed military whose personnel is of superior quality (Szvircsev Tresch, 2005). Particularly since most armed forces in Europe shifted from a conscript-based to an all-volunteer format, special attention has been paid to the topic of recruitment in military sociology. At a working group conference held on July 12-13, 2016 in Zurich, the ERGOMAS Working Group (WG) on Recruitment & Retention, under the direction of Tibor Szvircsev Tresch, focused on minorities and persons of immigrant backgrounds in order to discuss military sociology's latest research findings and insights.¹ On this occasion, the WG attempted to provide answers to questions such as : how successful is the recruitment of new professional military personnel in contemporary armed forces ? How to satisfactorily include personnel of immigrant and minority backgrounds? How can military personnel retention be improved?²

Nineteen papers in total were presented and discussed at the conference. Researchers from thirteen countries³ took part in the scientific exchange and lively discussions of individual papers. This special issue of *Res Militaris* presents a first wave of selected conference papers ; a second wave will appear in a subsequent ERGOMAS issue of the journal in late 2017.

Since the transition to all-volunteer armed forces which have to acquire their personnel on the labour market, research into successful recruitment has gained in importance. At the onset of (Western) armed forces' transformational processes, such research generally addressed the recruitment of volunteers.⁴ Given increasing international deployments abroad and Europe's increasingly multicultural population, the question arises as to how armed forces handle cultural diversity, and how the armed forces should mirror society's now variegated composition. As a result, the recruitment and retention of cultural minorities in armed forces has for some years now increasingly gained the attention of military sociologists (Szvircsev Tresch, 2010).

¹ The guest editors wish to thank the Military Academy at the ETH Zurich (MILAK) for its generous financial support of the conference. Without such support, it would not have been possible to make this conference a success.

² Cf. ERGOMAS website : <http://www.ergomas.ch/index.php/working-groups/8-recruitment-and-retention>.

³ Belgium, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, USA, Spain, Argentina, Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Israel, Taiwan.

⁴ Manigart & Prensky, 1982 ; Moskos, 1986 ; Boëne, 1998; Haltiner & Klein, 2002 ; Boëne, 2003 ; Manigart, 2003.

In broad terms, such interest in minorities vis-à-vis the military can be interpreted in two ways :

1. Armed forces, in order to conduct their missions successfully, place a premium on understanding foreign cultures. In deployments abroad, gaining people's hearts and minds becomes a top priority : in the context of diffuse 21st-century threats, a comprehensive approach is called for to find solutions taking into account the importance of cultural factors. For this purpose, culturally savvy soldiers are a boon, and the armed forces seek to attract citizens of other than Western and/ or male socialization backgrounds, seen as valuable assets when dealing with the populations and military personnel of nations with different religions and traditions. This is shown emblematically when female soldiers are assigned the task of body-checking Muslim women at checkpoints. Moreover, in Western societies the pressure for AVFs to better mirror the general population keeps growing. As a result, the military is (sometimes vocally) invited to recruit more women, youths of minority or immigrant backgrounds as well as people with different sexual orientations. Only thus can the Western militaries meet the requirements of the changed reality of their own societies as well as of foreign deployments.
2. The Western armed forces' traditional recruitment base has for years shown signs of increasing enlistment fatigue. Previously, the main body of recruits was made up of white middle-class men : this central group is increasingly difficult to motivate to enter a military career. For this reason, armed forces must expand their recruitment pool, and thus attract and open its ranks to more recruits drawn from minority groups.

While there are elements of truth in both of these “pull” and “push” interpretations (though empirical support for either varies from one country case to the next), the first approach, considering that an armed force's diverse make-up brings it a large added value, features a positive connotation. In contrast, the second line of thought takes a more negative view : since not enough (white) young men can be recruited, one falls back on minorities. Interestingly, the consensus in military sociological research, as will appear in the contributions that follow, is on the first approach as more clearly reflecting the reality of modern armed forces.

In all eight articles offered in this ERGOMAS issue, recruitment and retention are broadly defined. The first piece, penned by **Sabina Frederic**, focuses on naturalized immigrants in Argentina's armed forces between 1995 (when Argentina moved from conscription to all-volunteer military forces) and 2015. Frederic analyses the percentage of naturalized immigrants in the composition of the Argentine troops, the soldiers' origins, and the way this affected their training and retention. Her research reveals that whereas voluntary recruitment now allowed the induction of naturalized citizens into the country's armed services (which had been much less likely before 1995), the proportion of immigrants in Argentina's military remained relatively stable in the period examined.

In their article, **Irina Goldenberg** and colleagues state that the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) plan for retaining valued personnel is to create and sustain a work

environment that makes CAF members feel valued and therefore willing and committed to remain part of the organization. Thus, they focus their study on commitment, i.e. facets of organizational fairness to predict organizational commitment and the role of cynicism in order to assess its role in mediating perceptions of fairness and commitment. They show that the effect of procedural justice on organizational commitment is fully mediated by work and organizational cynicism, contributing to the growing evidence that affective responses are important factors in the perception of justice. A different pattern of relations is observed in cases of distributive and interactional justice, indicating that individuals respond differently to different types of organizational fairness, due to their respective sources and the potentially distinct processes underlying perceptions of these various types of justice.

The topic of **James Griffith**'s contribution is minorities, especially Blacks and immigrants, serving in the US military. He argues that their participation has had and continues to have implications for recruitment, retention, and readiness. Ideologically, all of the society's groups should be represented in the armed forces. However, his study shows that, throughout American history, Blacks and immigrants served in numbers at times more and at other times less than proportional to their share in the parent society. The reasons for this were domestic and geopolitical events which shaped perceptions and attitudes toward Blacks and immigrants and how they should be treated in the military. Moreover, these events also influenced Black and immigrant recruitment intentions, and for those already serving, retention and combat effectiveness. Ultimately, by means of social identity theory, Griffith explicates the mechanisms at work behind such perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours.

Emma Jonsson and **Johan Österberg** address the problem of the skewed gender distribution in the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) and of women's greater tendency – as opposed to men – to drop out during the phase leading from selection process to basic military training. On this account, the 2014 White Paper wants the SAF to increase the proportion of women in basic training, a move which the project described by the authors precisely aims to implement. It tries to find successful methods and motivating activities that optimize women's chances of passing admission and basic military training tests. In 2015 two thirds of all women who made it to basic training were contacted by the project. Those who participated in activities were positive and looked forward to accessing basic military training. Moreover, the project shows that these women remain in the selection process longer. Nevertheless, it is still too soon to advance any conclusion regarding the aim to increase the proportion of women who sign a contract with the SAF as the recruits must go through the selection process and military training first, a process that takes time.

Igor Petrovic *et alii*, for their part, provide insights on how Dutch military personnel cope with work-related discontent. In 24 interviews with personnel from four major branches of the Dutch armed forces, they probe their positive and negative experiences, the strategies they apply to cope with discontent and the restrictions they face when doing so, the role of the trade unions, the possibility of exit, and finally the chances

of loyalty and pride related to their work. The results show that while military personnel value their jobs highly, they also feel pressured by organizational changes. Collective protest against such developments remains elusive, variously due to the restrictions placed on them by the organization – in particular the weight of strict military hierarchy – as well as to feelings of loyalty, a sense of helplessness and fear of career repercussions. Individual coping strategies seem dominant – whether that is individual voice supported by the trade unions or leaving the organization altogether.

Barbara Waruszynski's piece deals with the creation within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) of a diverse and inclusive work environment in order to produce a more unified, and agile military. In addition to a useful literature review on that topic, she provides an overview of the challenges facing the CAF when it comes to attracting and recruiting from underrepresented population groups – visible minorities and Aboriginal people. The overview illustrates that overcoming cultural resistance to a military way of life will depend on creating better engagement with ethnic communities. Moreover, a larger presence of visible minorities and Aboriginal people in the CAF will help to promote the benefits of a military career to other ethnic communities.

Catherine Wright-Isak's contribution examines the benefits of serving in the United States military. So as to get a more complete theoretical view of these benefits, she resorts to a synthesis of military sociology and marketing research. Her sample consists of both recently separated and older generations (WWII, Korea, Vietnam) of US combat veterans. Wright-Isak detects previously overlooked experiential, altruistic, and symbolic benefits of serving in addition to utilitarian items of the various G.I. Bills. Furthermore, implications of this broader theoretical spectrum for understanding the symbolic influence of the citizen soldier, the relationship of the military as a “brand” and military recruitment are discussed.

The last contribution, by **Chariklia Höfig**, returns to the topic of armed forces' attractiveness : as it happens, that of the German military, now struggling to recruit qualified young people and retain its skilled personnel. To assess its attractiveness as well as associated aspects like commitment, motivation, identification and satisfaction, Höfig probes the characteristics of the Bundeswehr as an employer by looking at work-related (i.e., existential, social and growth) needs prevalent among German soldiers. Her results support the assumption that when it comes to attractiveness human needs and desires matter. So that attractiveness can only be increased if social and growth needs, rather than only higher pay and benefits, are taken into account and emphasized.

Happy reading !

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