



CANADIAN ARMED FORCES RECRUITMENT: LESSONS FOR THE BUNDESWEHR?

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JCSP 50

Service Paper

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Commander Marcus Fröhling

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AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to analyze selected measures introduced by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to improve recruitment with regard to their applicability to the Bundeswehr and to develop corresponding recommendations. In this context, it is also necessary to take into account the differences in the organization and the mission of the Canadian Armed Forces Reserve Forces.

SCOPE

2. This paper is limited to discussing selected initiatives that have a potential impact on recruitment and may be of interest to the Bundeswehr in general or the German Navy in particular. The topics covered are:

- a. Permanent Residents
- b. Reserve Force
- c. Naval Experience Program
- d. Application Process

INTRODUCTION

3. As early as 2016, the then German Minister of Defense, Ursula von der Leyen, announced the expansion of the Bundeswehr¹. As part of the annual Medium-Term Personnel Plan (MPP), the target number has been raised several times, and since 2020 has been set at a total of 203,000 soldiers (Figure1).

¹ “Verteidigungsministerium Plant Angeblich 7.000 Neue Planstellen Für Soldaten – Augen Geradeaus!,” accessed February 19, 2024, <https://augengeradeaus.net/2016/03/verteidigungsministerium-plant-angeblich-7-000-neue-planstellen-fuer-soldaten/>.

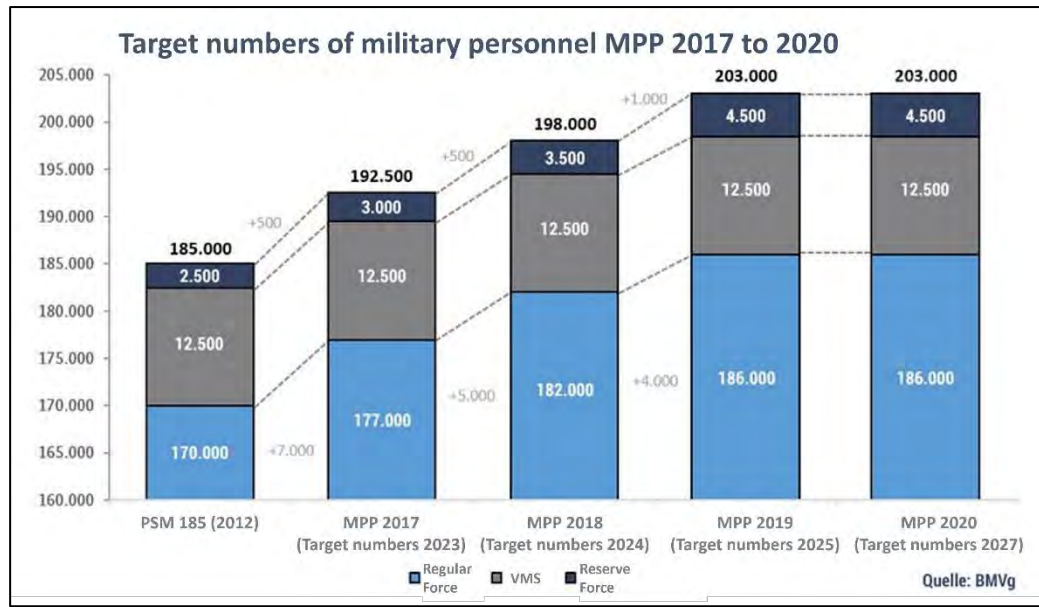


Figure 1 – Target numbers of the Bundeswehr since 2012^{2,3,4}

Source: “Personalplanung: 203.000 Soldaten sind das Ziel - 1800 zusätzliche zivile Posten,” accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.dbwv.de/aktuelle-themen/blickpunkt/beitrag/personalplanung-wichtiger-zwischenschritt-auf-dem-weg-der-trendwende>.

4. After a slight increase and an interim peak of around 185,000 active personnel in 2020, the size of the armed forces has recently declined slightly and currently stands at 181,514 (as of December 2023, Figure 2). Compared to January 2016, this is an increase of less than 3,000 soldiers, and the difference to the target number is still more than 21,000. As a result, even the German Minister of Defense has publicly expressed doubts as to whether even the current timetable for reaching the target strength, which has already been postponed from 2025 to 2031, can be met⁵.

² PSM = Personalstrukturmodell (Staff structure model)

³ MPP = Mittelfristige Personalplanung (Medium-Term Personnel Plan)

⁴ VMS = Voluntary military service

⁵ “Pistorius stellt Ziel von 203.000 Soldaten bis 2031 infrage,” accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.dbwv.de/aktuelle-themen/blickpunkt/beitrag/pistorius-stellt-ziel-von-203000-soldaten-bis-2031-infrage>.

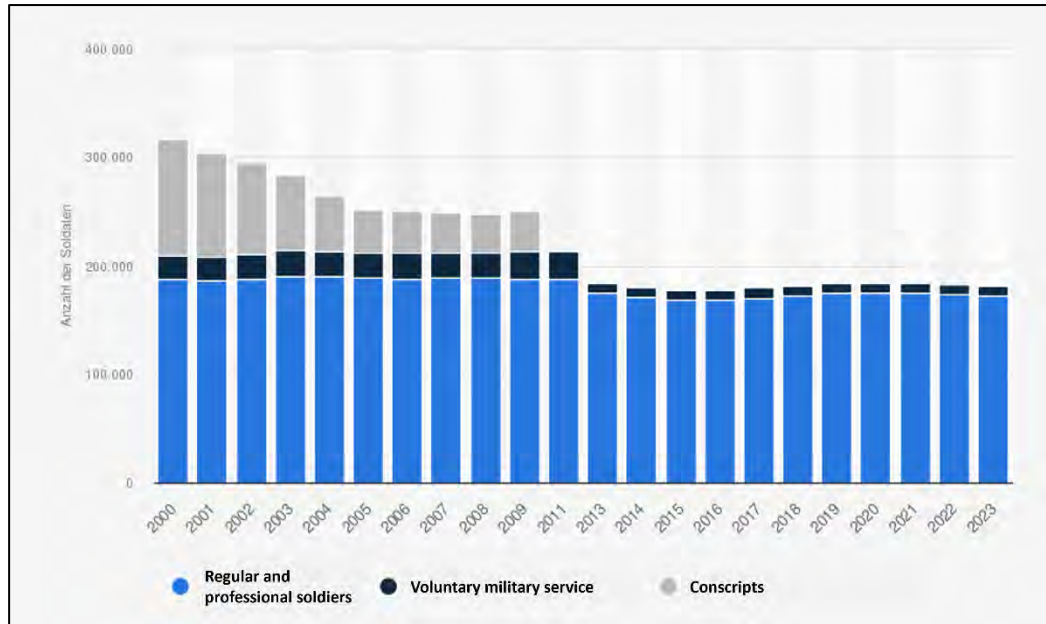


Figure 2 - Personnel strength of the Bundeswehr

Source: *Statista*. „Personalbestand der Bundeswehr bis 2023“. Zugegriffen 18. Februar 2024. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/38401/umfrage/personalbestand-der-bundeswehr-seit-2000/>.

5. Based on the experience of the recruitment centers, the general interest in joining the Bundeswehr has increased somewhat surprisingly since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the number of actual applications has declined slightly and is currently at 43,200 per year (2023). Yet, 20,000 to 30,000 soldiers leave the service each year.⁶

6. Vacancies within the force vary not only between services and organizational branches, but also within specific trades. In particular, vacancies in positions requiring key qualifications can have a direct impact on the operational readiness of entire weapon systems.

7. Since the end of compulsory military service in 2011, the German armed forces have lost their largest pool of applicants virtually overnight - after all, the armed forces had previously recruited around 50% of their temporary and professional soldiers from conscripts.^{7, 8}

⁶ Matthias Gebauer and Marius Mestermann, “Podcast: Wer der Bundeswehr wirklich fehlt,” *Der Spiegel*, February 1, 2024, sec. Politik, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/boris-pistorius-in-personalnot-wer-der-bundeswehr-wirklich-fehlt-a-c357cdce-8d79-4a52-9558-c603f2fe07d3>.

⁷ Matthias Gebauer and Marius Mestermann, “Podcast: Wer der Bundeswehr wirklich fehlt,” *Der Spiegel*, February 1, 2024, sec. Politik, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/boris-pistorius-in-personalnot-wer-der-bundeswehr-wirklich-fehlt-a-c357cdce-8d79-4a52-9558-c603f2fe07d3>.

⁸ “Personalbestand der Bundeswehr bis 2023,” *Statista*, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/38401/umfrage/personalbestand-der-bundeswehr-seit-2000/>.

8. The Canadian Armed Forces, on the other hand, is an all-volunteer force, with the exception of the two world wars, and currently has a target strength of 101,500.⁹ As a percentage of the total population, the planned number of troops is comparable (CAN 0.25%¹⁰ of the population, DEU 0.24%¹¹ of the population), as is the weighting of the services in relation to each other. However, there is a significant difference in the design and use of the reserve forces.

9. Like Germany, Canada is faced with a shortage of skilled personnel and recruitment problems^{12,13} and has developed and partially implemented a number of initiatives to counteract this. Because of the similarities in structure and challenges, it may be worthwhile to evaluate these efforts for applicability to the Bundeswehr.

DISCUSSION

Permanent Residents

10. On December 5, 2022, the then Canadian Minister of National Defense, Anita Anand, announced that the Canadian citizenship requirement would be waived and that permanent residents could apply to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces¹⁴. In the first two months that applications were accepted, more than 6,000 immigrants took advantage of the opportunity. At the time, there was a shortage of 8,000 personnel in the regular force¹⁵. In the first year, from November 1, 2022 to November 24, 2023, a total of 21,472 permanent

⁹ Department of National Defense, “Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada’s Defence Policy,” 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2018/strong-secure-engaged/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

¹⁰ Own calculation based on the above-mentioned target strength and the number of inhabitants according to “Canada,” in *Wikipedia*, February 15, 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Canada&oldid=1207766795>.

¹¹ Own calculation based on the above-mentioned target strength and the number of inhabitants according to “Germany,” in *Wikipedia*, February 19, 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Germany&oldid=1208805472>.

¹² Murray Brewster · CBC News · “More than Half of Recent Applications to Join the Military Came from Permanent Residents: DND | CBC News,” CBC, December 10, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/military-recruitment-wayne-eyre-immigrant-permanent-resident-1.6680705>.

¹³ *The State of the Royal Canadian Navy | L'état de La Marine Royale Canadienne*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuD6Q1HXsKw>.

¹⁴ National Defence, “Minister of National Defence Announces That Permanent Residents Are Welcome to Apply Now to Join the Canadian Armed Forces,” news releases, December 5, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2022/12/minister-of-national-defence-announces-that-permanent-residents-are-welcome-to-apply-now-to-join-the-canadian-armed-forces.html>.

¹⁵ Murray Brewster · CBC News · “More than Half of Recent Applications to Join the Military Came from Permanent Residents: DND | CBC News,” CBC, December 10, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/military-recruitment-wayne-eyre-immigrant-permanent-resident-1.6680705>.

residents applied to serve in the regular force, and another 6928 applied to serve in the reserve force¹⁶.

11. The Minister's announcement already emphasized that permanent residents who serve in the CAF will have faster access to Canadian citizenship. At the same time, however, applicants must commit to accepting citizenship if they are eligible. Further restrictions have been placed on any more extensive security checks that may be required of permanent residents¹⁷. These security checks, among other factors, result in considerable waiting periods of 18 to 24 months in the application process. Thus, of the applicants mentioned in paragraph 10, only 77 have been enrolled in regular force and 76 in the reserve. As a result, some 15,000, or nearly three-quarters, of the applicants have walked away from the application process¹⁸.

12. As of 2023, there are about eight million immigrants living in Canada as permanent residents, about 20% of the total population. Currently, about 500,000 immigrants arrive each year¹⁹. By opening the CAF to this group of people, the Canadian government has thus significantly increased the potential pool of applicants.

13. On the other hand, German citizenship is still a prerequisite for military service in the Bundeswehr²⁰. Earlier this year, however, German Minister of Defense Boris Pistorius discussed opening the system to certain nationalities, such as EU citizens or citizens of NATO countries²¹. However, it is difficult to assess whether such an opening would have the same effect. Although the foreign population is 16.4% (as of the end of 2023), this includes all nationalities, not just those mentioned above. Of these approximately 13.9 million foreigners, about 5.1 million are from other EU countries (about 6%) and another 1.8 million (about 2%) are from other NATO countries²². In relation to the total population, the potential is therefore not even half as large as in the Canadian context. On the other

¹⁶ Ashley Burke · CBC News · “Vast Majority of Permanent Residents Lost Interest in Joining Military amid Security Check Delays | CBC News,” CBC, February 19, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/permanent-resident-military-applications-enrolment-1.7116469>.

¹⁷ National Defence, “Minister of National Defence Announces That Permanent Residents Are Welcome to Apply Now to Join the Canadian Armed Forces,” news releases, December 5, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2022/12/minister-of-national-defence-announces-that-permanent-residents-are-welcome-to-apply-now-to-join-the-canadian-armed-forces.html>.

¹⁸ Ashley Burke · CBC News · “Vast Majority of Permanent Residents Lost Interest in Joining Military amid Security Check Delays | CBC News,” CBC, February 19, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/permanent-resident-military-applications-enrolment-1.7116469>.

¹⁹ “Topic: Immigration in Canada,” Statista, accessed February 18, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/topics/2917/immigration-in-canada/>.

²⁰ “Freiwilliger Wehrdienst | Karriere Bei Der Bundeswehr,” accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.bundeswehrkarriere.de/freiwilliger-wehrdienst-378>.

²¹ “Pistorius-Vorstoß: Debatte über Ausländer in der Bundeswehr,” ZDFheute, January 23, 2024, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/deutschland/bundeswehr-pistorius-soldaten-ausland-100.html>.

²² “Rohdatenauszahlung ausländische Bevölkerung,” Statistisches Bundesamt, accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/rohdaten-auslaendische-bevoelkerung-zeitreihe.html>.

hand, the 448 million inhabitants of the European Union²³ enjoy freedom of movement, which means they can change their residence to Germany and apply if other conditions allow.

14. In addition to many other authorities, the state and federal police forces have been able to recruit EU citizens for a number of years. Although no figures are available on the number of applications, reports of continuing staff shortages suggest that this measure has not brought the hoped-for relief.

15. In comparison with Canada, two other aspects are particularly relevant in my assessment. First, the language barrier in Canada is much lower than in Germany because English is one of the two official languages. Second, Canada's background as a country of immigration is important. Not only do most Canadians see immigrants as equal fellow citizens and future Canadians, but the majority of immigrants also aspire to citizenship. This is also evident in official statements - where the Canadian context refers to immigrants, the German authorities refer to foreigners.

16. Even if the latest CAF figures on the recruitment process for permanent residents clearly show the need for appropriate conditions for the application process, not all experiences can be easily transferred due to the different contexts. Nevertheless, a future exchange of experiences would be useful in connection with a possible opening of the Bundeswehr to foreigners.

Reserve Force

17. A significant difference between the Canadian and German armed forces, which also affects recruitment, is the structure and use of the reserve force. While only 4,500 of the 203,000 planned positions in the German armed forces are allocated to reservists (about 2.2%)²⁴, the proportion in the Canadian armed forces is 29.55% (30,000 of 101,500)²⁵. In contrast to the German Armed Forces, the Canadian Armed Forces do not recruit mainly from the ranks of the former regular forces, but offer those interested the opportunity to serve part-time²⁶. The exact structure varies from element to element, but the possible fields of activity are largely congruent with those of the regular forces. Army and Navy Reservists serve in their own units one or two evenings a week and on average one weekend a month.

²³ "EU-Bevölkerung - Statistisches Bundesamt," accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.destatis.de/Europa/DE/Thema/Basistabelle/Bevoelkerung.html>.

²⁴ "Personalplanung: 203.000 Soldaten sind das Ziel - 1800 zusätzliche zivile Posten," accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.dbwv.de/aktuelle-themen/blickpunkt/beitrag/personalplanung-wichtiger-zwischenschritt-auf-dem-weg-der-trendwende>.

²⁵ Department of National Defence, "Strong, Secure, Engaged - Canada's Defence Policy," 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2018/strong-secure-engaged/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

²⁶ National Defence, "Reserve Force Components," November 24, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/canada-reserve-force/about-reserve-force/reserve-components.html>.

The Air Force, on the other hand, tends to deploy reservists on shift duty in units with regular force. Common to both is that certain training phases are also conducted full-time and at training facilities across Canada²⁷.

18. Reservist pay and other benefits, such as health care and pension plans, make working in the reserve force economically attractive. There are also opportunities to work full-time through additional assignments, such as supporting the regular force, as well as certain positions in reserve units. Some smaller naval units, for example, are manned predominantly by reservists. Reservists may leave the reserve at any time at their own request; overseas deployments are not possible without the reservist's consent²⁸.

19. Through the reserve force, the armed forces are also present in areas of Canada where there are no regular force. For example, the Naval Reserve is organized into 24 Divisions across the country, including all major cities. In contrast, there are only two regular fleet bases in all of Canada. Thus, Naval Reserve Divisions are not only a training facility and augmentation for emergency and regular force, but also an important link and face of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in Canadian society²⁹.

Naval Experience Program

20. With the Naval Experience Program (NEP), the Royal Canadian Navy has created a low-threshold entry point for non-servicemen and women, while providing the opportunity for job shadowing³⁰. One of the reasons for the program was that only about six percent of those who walked into a recruiting center were interested in serving in the RCN³¹.

21. Once recruited, candidates undergo 8 weeks of general basic training and 4 weeks of navy-specific basic training before being assigned to one of the two naval bases. During the remaining months, they are exposed to a variety of activities and assignments, both ashore and especially on board as part of a crew. At the end of the year, the candidate may choose to remain with the RCN - assuming the RCN also chooses the candidate. In this case, the trade is assigned and the soldier undergoes the required specialized training before being transferred to a unit^{32, 33}.

²⁷ *Army vs Navy vs Air Force in the Canadian Armed Forces Reserve*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_aReor738w.

²⁸ "Life in the Forces | Canadian Armed Forces," accessed February 19, 2024, <https://forces.ca/en/life-in-the-military/#bt>.

²⁹ "Naval Reserve Divisions," organizational descriptions, April 19, 2013, <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/corporate/our-organization/structure/navres/divisions.html>.

³⁰ "Naval Experience Program | Questions and Answers," March 31, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/nep/nep-qa.html>.

³¹ *Canada's Role in Global Maritime Security*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8yr6xma7Kg>.

³² "Naval Experience Program | Questions and Answers," March 31, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/navy/nep/nep-qa.html>.

³³ *The Naval Experience Program*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQChM6ck50Q>.

22. Participants in the NEP receive the same pay and benefits as any other member of the RCN. Their service also counts toward their pension. One limitation is that the program is currently open only to junior non-commissioned members, not those interested in an officer career. Another limitation is that there is no entitlement to signing bonuses at the end of the NEP, even if the chosen trade would be eligible for bonuses³⁴.

23. The main difference from the previous - and still existing - options to enroll in the RCN is the short commitment period of one year compared to the usual minimum of three to seven years, as well as the fact that no trade is specified. This is also made visually clear by a corresponding badge.

24. The main difference from the German model of voluntary military service³⁵ is that there is no requirement for a specific trade and the special training that goes with it. The focus of service in the NEP is on observing and gaining personal experience, not on filling a position. Accordingly, participants are not assigned to crews but to bases. The bases then ensure that the experience package is as broad and attractive as possible. The NEP is therefore more like an extended internship under realistic conditions than a voluntary military service. It is crucial that the NEP participants are not used to fill vacancies, but for job shadowing, and that this is also implemented by the respective superiors.

25. As the NEP was not introduced until 2023, there are no figures yet on the success of the program, but the Commander of the RCN, VAdm Topshee, estimates a retention rate of 80%³⁶. However, it is likely to be more difficult to match the demand in the various trades with the wishes of the candidates. The lack of bonus entitlement may also have a negative impact.

26. There is also no information on what proportion of recruitment has actually taken place through the NEP and what proportion has been at the expense of established recruitment channels. However, the attention that the NEP has received has already improved the visibility of the navy in Canada, and the percentage of those interested in the RCN at recruiting centers has already increased from six to 20 percent³⁷.

27. Given the size of the RCN, the total annual recruitment requirement is 1,200, and the target for the NEP is only 150 to 250. As in the case of the German Navy, a double-digit increase in additional recruits should therefore be considered a success³⁸.

³⁴ *The Naval Experience Program*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQChM6ck50Q>.

³⁵ "Freiwilliger Wehrdienst | Karriere Bei Der Bundeswehr," accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.bundeswehrkarriere.de/freiwilliger-wehrdienst-378>.

³⁶ *Canada's Navy Recruiting amid Shortage | Vice-Admiral Angus Topshee on Serving*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM5h2aK7Nw4>.

³⁷ *Canada's Navy Recruiting amid Shortage | Vice-Admiral Angus Topshee on Serving*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM5h2aK7Nw4>.

³⁸ *Canada's Navy Recruiting amid Shortage | Vice-Admiral Angus Topshee on Serving*, 2023,

Application Process

28. Another unique aspect of the NEP is that applications can be made not only through the Joint Recruiting Centres, but also through the Naval Reserve Divisions. This effectively results in 24 additional Royal Canadian Navy recruiting centres across Canada, where naval personnel provide advice in a naval environment³⁹.

29. In addition, it was announced, at least initially, that enrolment would take place within 21 days⁴⁰ and would be handled primarily by the Naval Reserve Division, i.e. locally. While this has not yet been successfully implemented in terms of time, the goal remains to significantly shorten and simplify the recruiting process, not least because applicants are not willing to wait several months. The vision is to be able to make a binding offer to a potential candidate who walks into a recruiting center on the same day. Aspects such as security checks and aptitude tests, however, stand in the way.

30. To my knowledge, the Bundeswehr has already recognized the need to make recruitment procedures and entry dates more flexible and faster, and the first steps have been taken. However, in light of similar challenges, a continued exchange of experiences seems useful⁴¹.

CONCLUSION

31. The CAF and the Bundeswehr face similar challenges in the area of recruiting. Although this paper only develops recommendations for the Bundeswehr and the German Navy based on the Canadian approach, I believe that a regular, reciprocal exchange of experiences and solutions would be useful and beneficial to both sides.

32. In my view, two measures are particularly worthy of consideration for the Bundeswehr and the German Navy:

- a. In the short term an adaptation of the Naval Experience Program and at least a trial introduction in the German Navy. (Recommendations 1 - 4)
- b. In the medium to long term an analysis of whether and which aspects of the Canadian reserve system could be transferred to Germany, particularly with regard to an improved presence throughout Germany and closer integration with the active forces. (Recommendations 5 and 6)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM5h2aK7Nw4>.

³⁹ *The Naval Experience Program*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQChM6ck50Q>.

⁴⁰ *The Naval Experience Program*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQChM6ck50Q>.

⁴¹ "Zeitenwende in Zahlen: Ergebnisse der Task Force Personal," February 18, 2024, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/zeitenwende-in-zahlen-ergebnisse-der-task-force-personal-5718558>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Term Action Items

Recommendation 1: Establish a (DEU)NEP in the German Navy and possibly throughout the Bundeswehr. The scope of the program must be such as to ensure a diverse and attractive service.

Recommendation 2: If a (DEU)NEP is implemented, ensure that participants receive the same bonus eligibility upon retention as if they had been recruited directly into an occupation.

Recommendation 3: Consider extending the (DEU)NEP to those interested in the officer career.

Recommendation 4: Provide targeted media and public relations support for the introduction of a (DEU)NEP.

Medium Term Action Items

Recommendation 5: Examine in depth whether aspects of the Canadian reservist system can and should be transferred to the Bundeswehr.

Recommendation 6: Investigate the feasibility of creating units similar to the Naval Reserve Divisions in Germany.

Long-Term Action Items

Recommendation 7: Continue to implement measures to increase the speed and flexibility of recruitment procedures.

Topics to include in staff talks and working-level exchanges

Recommendation 8: Exchange experiences on the introduction and implementation of the NEP

Recommendation 9: Exchange of experiences on the Reserve Force

Recommendation 10: Exchange of experiences on the service of immigrants in the armed forces

Recommendation 11: Exchange of experiences on recruitment procedures and their acceleration

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