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AN EXPERTISE FORUM CONTRIBUTING TO EUROPEAN
ARMIES INTEROPERABILITY SINCE 1953

Conscription in the European Union Armed Forces: National Trends, Benefits and EU Modernised Service

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This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states, but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme.

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INTRODUCTION

During the 19th and 20th centuries, most countries, whether authoritarian or not, envisaged conscription in order to involve the citizenry in their armies. These centuries were a stage for copious conflicts and nations needed to ensure their protection at all times. Since the end of the Second World War, and even more so after the end of the Cold War, a majority of democratic countries began to abolish, formally or informally, their conscription systems which seemed unnecessary in peaceful times. Between 1990 and 2013, 24 current European Union countries decided to abandon the draft. In the past few years however, especially since the Ukrainian crisis, there has been a resurgence of debate on conscription in Europe, and Ukraine and Lithuania have reintroducing it. Meanwhile, other Eastern, but also Northern and Western European countries, have begun to debate the possibility of reintroducing conscription.

While the concept of conscription can be seen as straightforward, multiples aspects have to be considered when tackling the topic. Therefore, this paper aims to provide relevant information to shape the resurging conscription debate. For that reason, the research paper will not exclusively state European countries positions related to conscription, but instead will be presenting various aspects of 'the draft'.

The first section tries to tackle the question of the EU today. Where do EU countries stand on the conscription debate? Are we facing a revival of military services? What are the commonalities between the countries reactivating or willing to reactivate the draft? What is the rationale behind such decisions? Answering these questions is fundamental to understanding current trends.

Secondly, the paper will delineate the arguments in favour and against conscription. Having a global vision of the advantages and disadvantages of the draft can help to understand the relevance of the practice in a contemporary European environment. As will be shown in the first section of the paper, there are indeed some European countries contemplating or already reintroducing the draft. For such countries it is fundamental to consider all the relevant aspects before taking such a decision.

The third section of the paper tries to outline alternative models that can improve the conscription system, taking examples from outside the EU. Again this is particularly relevant to give advice to countries which are thinking about reintroducing the draft. Generally speaking, countries are realising that universal conscription has lost its relevance, but that some of its benefits should be retained. Furthermore, military conscription can be coupled with other options such as civil service, resilience training, or defence education.

The paper concludes with a proposition for an EU Service model. While it might be difficult to implement such a model at the current time, it provides something to think about. The EU has been speaking of European defence for decades and the suggested model could bring the advantage of spurring a common feeling of defence.

PART 1: THE CONCEPT OF CONSCRIPTION AND THE EU SITUATION

Before exploring conscription within European Union's armies, a brief explanation of the different facets of the theme should be a starting point. Conscription, also known simply as "the draft", is the mandatory enlistment of people in their national armed forces.

While thousands of years ago in Mesopotamia, "the draft" was already a reality, in modern Europe, this practical way of enrolment became popular after the French Revolution. Since the 1790s, many European countries have followed the French example. This first version of conscription focused on young males enrollment in national armies. This appeared to be efficient in order to increase national armed forces and have mass armies at their disposal. During these belligerent decades, the recruiting and training of troops in peacetime gave countries the advantage of having efficient and prepared forces, before war was declared.

Today, most European Union countries have abandoned or abolished conscription and where conscription is still in place, it normally includes alternatives to military service. Most

European Union countries envisage a civilian service. This alternative allows conscripted citizens to serve their nations without being involved in the army. The option, however, is only available in case of conscientious objection, namely when a citizen claims the right to refuse to take part in military service for specific reasons (e.g. religious, health, ideological motives etc.).

One last point to stress is that the majority of EU countries that abandoned conscription can still legally reintroduce it during war periods. In these countries the legal status of the draft has not been modified. Conscription was suspended but the governments still has the right to conscript their citizens if needed. While the suspension concretely means that young citizens are no longer forced to serve in the military, it leaves power of decision in the hands of governments and, given the current debate on conscription, it can allow them to easily reintroduce it. Some countries, however, decided to fully abolish conscription. They erased or modified their national legislations or constitutions and, in order to reintroduce the draft, they would have to modify them once more.

TABLE 1: *Conscription in the EU MS (as of July 2019).*

Country	Conscription today	End of conscription	Reactivation	Gender
Austria	Yes. Re-confirmed during the 2013 referendum. 6 months of Military Service or 9 months of Civil Service for conscientious objectors			Males are obliged by law
Belgium	No. Abolished with the modification to the 1962 Law on Conscription. Conscription is only possible in wartime	1992		

Bulgaria	No. Abolished by the amendment to the Defence and Armed Forces Act	2008		
Croatia	No. Suspended in 2008 by a governmental decision, but remains in law	2008		
Cyprus	Yes. Compulsory Military Service according to the 1964 National Guard Law, lasts 24 months			Males are obliged by law
Czech Republic	No. Abolished by the amendment to the Military Act. Can be reintroduced in situation of threat or in wartime	2004		
Denmark	Yes. As stated in the Danish Constitution and the Danish Law of Conscription			Males are obliged by law. Women may participate
Estonia	Yes. The constitution states for Military Service of 8 or 11 months			Males are obliged by law. The Defence Forces Service Act of 2013 states that women can participate
Finland	Yes. Military or Non-Military Service for conscientious objectors Military service can last 5.5, 8.5 or 11.5 months. Non-Military Service lasts 11.5 months			Males are obliged by law. Women can volunteer
France	No. Suspended according to the law 97-1019 of 1997. The law itself envisages the reintroduction when needed to defend the nation	1996		
Germany	No. Suspended by a parliamentary decision. It remains in the constitution and it can be reintroduced at any time	2011		
Greece	Yes. The constitution demands military service. 9 months in the army or 12 in the Navy. 15 months Alternative Civilian Service in case of conscientious objection			Males are obliged by law

Hungary	No. Abolished in peacetime by the amendment to the constitution in 2004. It can be reinstated in times of emergency	2004		
Italy	No. Suspended by the law 4233-B	2005		
Ireland	No. ¹ Officially, Ireland never had conscription. According to article 54 of the 1954 Defence Act, during emergencies it is possible to conscript men			
Latvia	No. However, Latvia introduces a new kind of project, called “Total Defence” ² in 2017	2007		
Lithuania	Yes. 9 months for males aged between 19 and 26 years old	2008	2015	Males are obliged by law
Luxembourg	No. Abolished by law in 1967	1967		
Malta	No. Conscription never existed in Malta			
Netherlands*	No. Suspended, but the law on conscription still exists. At the age of 17, all citizens receive a letter stating they have been registered for service. They can be called up in case of war	1996		
Poland	No. Abolished through amendment to the constitution	2009		
Portugal	No. Abolished in peacetime according to law 174/99	2004		
Romania	No. Suspended in peacetimes by the law 395/2005. During war times, conscription is compulsory for men	2007		

¹ UK/Ireland problems in the early 20th century.

² This concept aims to reinforce national security in the long-term. It covers the introduction of national defense and civil defense courses in schools. Kepe, Marta, and Jan Osburg. 2019. *Total Defense: How The Baltic States Are Integrating Citizenry Into Their National Security Strategies*. Ebook. Zürich: Small Wars Journal.

<https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/354d2f22-8025-4065-b540-0a7d80535e84/pdf>

Slovakia	No. Conscription was suspended but it is legally retained and can be reinstated in case of emergency	2006		
Slovenia	No. Suspended in peacetime	2003		
Spain	No. Suspended by law 17/1999	2002		
Sweden	Yes. After being suspended in times of peace, conscription was reintroduced in 2017. Conscription lasts between 9 and 12 months	2010	2017	Males and females are equally obliged by the law
United Kingdom	No. Phased out by 1960. It is possible to bring conscription back	1960		

This table gives a quick account of the conscription trends in the EU. The first and most obvious information we can retrieve is that the majority of the countries do not make use of the draft anymore. With the end of the Cold War and the return of stability across the continent, conscription lost its popularity and most European countries started to suspend it, or even abolished it. Nowadays, only 8 out of 28 EU countries still employ, to different degrees, the conscription method. As shown, these are Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Lithuania and Sweden. Interestingly, some of these countries have very recently re-introduced conscription and others are thinking about bringing back the debate on conscription.

Among the above-mentioned eight countries, we can distinguish different but often concomitant reasons and trends behind the choice of never abolishing or reinstating conscription. First, we can group together the countries that consider their neighbour dangerous or unpredictable. More specifically, countries like Estonia, Lithuania, Finland but also Sweden are likely to perceive Russia

as a threat. This is even more so since 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the Donbass war. Indeed, as the table shows, both Sweden and Lithuania, who had suspended conscription after the end of the Cold War, decided to reintroduce it after the turmoils in Ukraine started, respectively in 2017 and 2015. Especially for the Baltics, conscription can be seen as a symbolic statement of their willingness to protect themselves (Bieri, 2015: 3). At this point, it is relevant to also mention that Ukraine itself reintroduced conscription in May 2014. Other countries such as Cyprus and Greece also perceive a threat from their neighbours, namely Turkey. Unresolved conflicts spurred the two EU countries to maintain their compulsory military service.

Another argument often used to justify conscription is neutrality. In this case we talk about Austria and Finland once more but also, despite not being part of the EU, Switzerland. These countries, not belonging to any military alliance, have to self-guarantee the defence of their territory as they would not be able to rely on NATO in case they were attacked, for example.

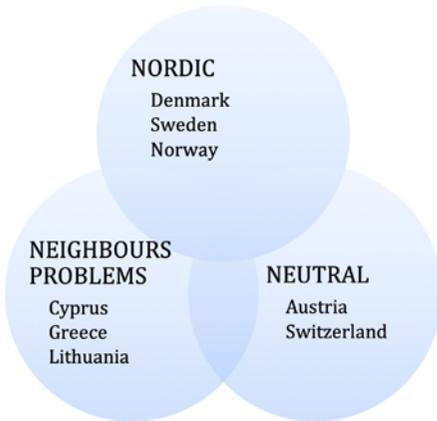


Figure 1: Representation of national trends in the usage of conscription.

A third and final subgroup can be the Nordic Countries: Denmark, Sweden, Norway and once again, Finland. As shown in the table, Denmark and Finland never abolished conscription while Sweden briefly suspended it in peacetime to then reintroduce it in 2017. While Norway is not part of the EU it is worth to mention that the country never abolished conscription and since 2013 it applies to women as well. Generally speaking, proportions of conscription have been reduced in all Nordic countries but, unlike other European countries, they decided to retain it. It is worth noting that as of today around 98% of military needs in Denmark are met by volunteers and only around 2% is made of people called during the conscription lottery. Nonetheless, the Danish Ministry of Defence (2017: 8) is planning on increasing the number of conscripts by around 500 people a year in the 2018-2023 period. The aim

is to maintain around 90% of the force on a volunteer base.

While there are some European countries that do not seem to be debating conscription again, the majority of EU countries have been re-considering the introduction of the draft or other alternative arrangements. In France, for example, President Macron has been pushing for the reintroduction of some sort of compulsory service called Universal National Service. The service, which is not strictly military but rather civilian, involves 16 year old males and females. It requires the conscripts to take part on an obligatory one-month long placement which can include working with charities but also training alongside the police and the army. The mandatory part is followed by an optional 3 months service during which the volunteers can choose to serve in the field of defence and security or to preserve the environment, etc. June 2019 saw the first test of the Universal National Service which is meant to become fully operational by 2021. France has been the only country actively testing a new model of compulsory service. But France is not the only one reconsidering this option. In Belgium for instance, according to an IPSOS survey, around two thirds of the citizens are in favour of reintroducing the draft for both young males and females.³ The German CDU has, since 2018, been suggesting that men and women should complete a year of service. The service-year, according to the CDU, should also be proposed to refugees in order to facilitate their integration in the German society⁴. In the Netherlands, 17 year olds still receive a letter about Military Service, though the letter does not bind them to take part in the service;

³ Andersen, Lars. 2018. "Two In Three Belgians Favour Compulsory Military Or Civilian Service". *The Brussels Times*. <https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/belgium-all-news/47012/two-in-three-belgians-favour-compulsory-military-or-civilian-service/>

⁴ Le Blond, Josie. 2018. "Germany Mulls Year Of National Service For Young People And Migrants". *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/26/germanys-cdu-floats-return-of-one-year-compulsory-national-service>



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since 2018 Dutch girls receive the letter too⁵. The choice was probably a matter of gender equality but it shows that the idea of conscription has not been completely abandoned. Another interesting example comes from Latvia: while the country has not been thinking about reintroducing conscription, as the table shows, a project called “total defence” was introduced. This includes the introduction of courses on defence and security in schools.⁶ In Italy too, the League party has been vocal about the reintroduction of compulsory military service, and while the left and centre-right parties oppose the idea, the League party is today the most popular in the country.⁷

The question is, why is the conscription debate coming back to Europe? First and foremost, as previously mentioned, it is important to take into account the geopolitical situation of the continent and the resurgence of Russia. With the annexation of Crimea and the Russian military exercises at the border of the Baltic states, but also with the new cyber threats, security in the European Union cannot be taken for granted anymore. Despite Europe having generally been living in peace for a long period, more and more countries today feel a new instability which needs an answer. This is increasingly being answered by empowering their armies through con-

⁵ Pieters, Janene. 2017. “Netherlands’ Military Conscription To Also Include Women From 2018”. *NL Times*. <https://nltimes.nl/2017/02/27/netherlands-military-conscription-also-include-women-2018>

⁶ Op. Cit., Kepe, Osburg. *Total Defense: How The Baltic States Are Integrating Citizenry Into Their National Security Strategies*.

⁷ Massaro, Barbara. 2018. “Servizio Militare Obbligatorio: Come Funziona In Europa”. *Panorama*. <https://www.panorama.it/news/cronaca/servizio-militare-obbligatorio-come-funziona-europa/>

⁸ “La Encuesta De ‘El Jueves’ Que Hunde El ‘Patriotismo’ De Santiago Abascal”. 2019. *El Plural*. https://www.elplural.com/politica/encuesta-el-jueves-santiago-abascal-servicio-militar-obligatorio_208971102

scription, or at least by looking at that possibility.

The dynamics of military alliances are another factor that can make conscription appealing. A stronger national military power automatically enhances the power of the alliance. Furthermore, the lack of Europe's economic funding toward NATO's military spending mandate is not a new issue; showing motivation through higher manpower contributions can therefore serve as proof of increasing support on behalf of European states towards the alliance.

Politics too influences countries' debates on the draft. There is a link, for example, be-

tween populist movements and support of some sort of compulsory service. This is particularly true for Italy but it is also evident in Marine Le Pen's Front National, that supports the introduction of a service which includes both civic and military duties. Furthermore, the Spanish example is rather telling. At a first glance, it seems that the debate on conscription has not yet reached the country. However, it is not the case. The main defender of a compulsory service, which does not necessarily have to be military, is Vox's leader Santiago Abascal. His rhetoric is, not surprisingly, very similar to Matteo Salvini's: both leaders mention the need of reminding young people that apart from rights, there are also obligations to one's nation.

PART 2: THE RELEVANCE OF UNIVERSAL CONSCRIPTION

As the previous section of the paper demonstrated, the reasons behind maintaining or reintroducing conscription in European countries are generally quite straightforward. However, what factual aspects should countries take in consideration when thinking about activating the draft again? An analysis of conscription and its effects allows us to underline its advantages and disadvantages. This kind of information is very important as it can give consistency to the current debate.

Given that this paper aims at providing relevant inputs to EU's countries, it seems reasonable to begin this section by discussing whether or not conscription can fit in the democratic principle of the continent. As it is accurately delineated in the next paragraph, it is argued by some that the draft has "great affinity with democracy" as it is the only way to include all strata of society in the armed forces.⁹ While

this can help close societal gaps and avoid the alienation of professional armies from the rest of society, there are various arguments that point at conscription as undemocratic. In Europe, conscription instantly makes one think of the war period and about Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy or the Soviet Union, and even today the majority of countries that make use of universal conscription are authoritarian. Not by chance, the longest conscription period is seen in North Korea, where the obligatory military service lasts 10 years. From this point of view, conscription is associated with indoctrination and intimidation: a behaviour proper of authoritarian countries. Normally, such authoritarian regimes are unable to rely on international military treaties, and therefore retain the need for mass armies. It seems politically irrelevant, for democratic countries to maintain a system that is often considered as a violation of a citizens individual liberty.

⁹ Poutvaara, Panu, and Andreas Wagener. 2007. "Conscription: Economic Costs And Political Allure". *The Economics Of Peace And Security Journal* 2 (1): 10. doi:10.15355/2.1.6.

Promoting Equality Between Genders and Socio-Economic Statuses

As demonstrated by the film industry, the military has always been qualified as a masculine domain in the collective imagination. Conscription has even been pointed to as being a sexist system considering that only males have historically been obliged by law to carry out their draft, while women were not. However, a modern model of conscription might still represent a solution to bring gender equality to a typically gendered job. For instance, Norway introduced male and female conscription in 2015.¹⁰ Improvements are still needed but as of now feedback is mostly positive.¹¹ Other countries are also experimenting with conscription for both genders: since its reintroduction in Sweden in 2017, it included females too, and the Universal National Service instituted by the Macron administration in France also applies to young girls. Universal conscription, for both genders, does bring gender equality within the military staff. In the lower ranks of the military, universal conscription can quickly result in equal shares of men and women. As for the higher ranks, it will take more time but in the long term, conscription for both sexes could be the catalyst that allows more



women to eventually reach high positions in the military. Gender equality can bring benefits to the military itself, especially with a view to employ people with specific skills. It seems rather inefficient to essentially be limited in the selection process to one gender, therefore reducing choice of people by at least 50%.

Furthermore, apart from bringing gender equality to a typically masculine sector, the military lottery can create an integrative experience between different social classes. Over the last century, about the same percentage of university graduates and high school graduates were enlisted into their national militaries, and even a large amount of the non-commissioned members (NCM) had university degrees.¹² Today, university graduates are less and less part of the military, and very few NCMs have university degrees. It is true that professional armies offer good career prospects to people that would otherwise have less opportunities, but

it is also true that both privileged and unprivileged kids tend to grow up in a hermetic cultural and economic environment that provides little interaction and integration between social classes. Governmental institutions can provide the means to create some sort of class-cutting experiences in order to increase awareness. Clearly, the draft would not be a solution to

¹⁰ Botillen, Odd Inge. 2019. *Universal Conscription in Norway*. Ebook. Oslo: Norwegian Armed Forces: Defence Staff Norway. Accessed August 20. https://www.defmin.fi/files/3825/BOTILLE_2017-06-12_Universal_Conscription_in_Norway.pdf

¹¹ Dalaaker, Anders. 2017. 1 *Statement By Norway On Gender Equality In The Military – Universal Conscription*. Ebook. Vienna: Permanent Delegation of Norway to the OSCE. <https://www.osce.org/forum-for-security-cooperation/304861?download=true>

¹² Galston, William, A. 2012. "Citizenship and Civic Attachment: the Case for a Universal Service Lottery". *Public Administration Review* 72(3): 323.

economic disparities; nonetheless, the lottery system could cushion the economic reasons that spur a person to become or not become a volunteer in the army, it would facilitate the creation of relationships between people from different classes while treating them equally. In this sense conscription can be considered as a great equaliser that can break the ice between different social classes.

On a gender and societal level, conscription might to some extent bring equality. However, even on this front it is not all roses. Conscription has been proven to have different positive or negative repercussions on the professional future of the conscripts according to their educational level.¹³ While being conscripted can be positive for some (offering a first experience, teaching proper behaviour, etc.) for others it is a disadvantage. More specifically, conscripts with lower education levels, such as high school dropouts or people with only a high school education, normally benefit from conscription. In the job market they are more likely to face unemployment, and the salary they can earn with a military career might be higher than the salaries of the jobs they could potentially end up having. On the contrary, the draft has no impact or negative impact on conscripts with university degrees. The period of compulsory military service might represent a loss of experience and competitiveness on the job market. This brings the universality of conscription to its limits. No one benefits from it in the same way and therefore it will not be perceived with the same motivation by everyone. It is interesting to note that, when studying the effects of conscription and their

relationship with educational attainments, Garnier, Joseph and Joutard, used the female population as a control group given that they were not subject to conscription. If we imagine a modern universal conscription system in which both males and females are recruited for the military service, it is likely that the disadvantage that conscription might bring to people with higher education will disappear. Everyone will enter the job market after having completed the military service and females will not have a comparative advantage. While in this sense gender equality regarding conscription seems to mitigate some negative effects on the job market, it is also true that in the majority of countries that employ the draft only a small minority of young people are actually called to serve the army. Therefore, in a partially volunteer partially conscripted army this professional drawback is likely to remain.

The effects of conscription on the labour market depending on the level of education is only one example of how the draft might bring negative social impacts. Some studies have for example shown that this way of enrollment provokes a negative effect on the achievement of postsecondary education for conscripts.¹⁴

Economic Results

As for the economic aspects of conscription, it is not as straightforward to take a position and argue about its absolute advantages or disadvantages. On the one hand, conscription can be compared to a tax “in the form of coerced and typically underpaid labor services”¹⁵

¹³ Granier, Pierre, Olivier Joseph, and Xavier Joutard. 2011. “Le Service Militaire Et L’insertion Professionnelle Des Jeunes Suivant Leur Niveau D’étude”. *Revue Économique* 62 (4): 651. doi:10.3917/reco.624.0651.

¹⁴ Keller, Katarina, Panu Poutvaara, and Andreas Wagener. “Does a Military Draft Discourage Enrollment in Higher Education?” *FinanzArchiv / Public Finance Analysis* 66, no. 2 (2010): 97-120. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40913249>

¹⁵ Poutvaara, Panu, and Andreas Wagener. 2007. “Conscription: Economic Costs And Political Allure”. *The Economics Of Peace And Security Journal* 2 (1): 7. doi:10.15355/2.1.6.

to young people. This is particularly true for less developed countries which might face difficulties in collecting fiscal taxes. Such countries can potentially afford to collect less taxes if they force young people to spend a segment of their life serving the social or military sector. On the other hand, this is clearly not the case of European countries and the evidence of positive economic impact of the draft are not so obvious.¹⁶ While raising an army through the draft might be cheaper in terms of labour costs,¹⁷ this is at the expense of specialisation of tasks and efficiency. We cannot ignore the comparative advantages of hiring people in the field in which they excel. Not everyone excels at being a soldier as everyone is good at different things. Coercing young people to enter military framework creates an economic loss of their potentially skilled profiles in the private sector. In the army, their capacities might not flourish to their highest potential, and on the contrary it might cause inefficiency.¹⁸ In this sense, forcing young people to take part in the military of their country would not be different from forcing all of them to become, for example, teachers.

It is also important to compare the economic aspects of a conscription army with a professional army composed by volunteers, especially as far as specialization of skills and efficiency are concerned. An all-volunteer army is likely to be more efficient, as specialised soldiers have higher degrees of experience in handling and taking care of weapons. Short term soldiers could unlikely reach such expertise. However, in order for the position

of professional soldier to be appealing, their remuneration has to compete with the private sector. In terms of money spent, an all-volunteer force might be more expensive; comparative advantages, however, have to be taken into account. Supposedly, in an all-volunteer army, hired servicemen feel suitable for the tasks they are assigned to and they feel at ease working in the framework of the army. Therefore, they do not represent a loss for the rest of the society, due to the fact that everyone is more likely to perform their preferred job.

The Efficiency of Armies

Strictly related with the economic efficiency of the draft, is the efficiency of the army in terms of the quality of people employed and their abilities. As indicated in the table, conscription generally lasts between 8 months and 2 years in European countries. This short amount of time only allows conscripts to obtain basic training, generating an under-trained and potentially inefficient army. If they are asked to be deployed on the battlefield, the conscripts might commit mistakes more easily, due to their lack of ability in handling specific tasks and this may result in more failed missions. In volunteer armies, people are more involved in the educational process of their positions which means a better knowledge of the military tools and a more efficient outcome of their involvement¹⁹. Furthermore, when volunteering in an army, the recruits are normally asked to commit for a period that far exceeds the duration of compulsory mili-

¹⁶ "There is no clear correlation between military expenditure and the use of conscription", Poutvaara, Panu, and Andreas Wagener. 2011. "Ending Military Conscription". DICE Report. Ifo Institut. <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/dicereport211-rr1.pdf>. p.39.

¹⁷ Poutvaara, Panu, and Andreas Wagener. 2009. "The Political Economy Of Conscription". Discussion Paper. Helsinki: HECER – Helsinki Center of Economic Research. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ec28/e292eed179d9e2044f9f7d74ad2ed17103ff.pdf>

¹⁸ Op. Cit., Poutvaara and Wagener. "The Political Economy Of Conscription".

¹⁹ Op. Cit., Poutvaara and Wagener. "Ending Military Conscription".



tary service. Such lengths vary from country to country and also according to the position the recruit wishes to fill, but it generally answers to the need of a period longer than 8 to 24 months to acquire advanced knowledge and expertise. This point is even more relevant nowadays, with new technologies taking more and more space in the armies. Training soldiers for a short period cannot be sufficient for the sake of teaching them the technical skills required to operate more complex systems and new technical gear. In the long-run, in terms of qualitative efficiency, it is more convenient to hire dedicated staff willing to be involved for a longer period.²⁰

In addition to the lack of specific training, conscription can bring inefficiency due to the lack of motivation of the conscripts that, despite not being interested in a military career, are obliged to carry it out. The draft normally takes place when young people start taking decisions for their professional future therefore

binding them to participate in the military at the beginning of their careers. That issue is often highlighted as the main drawback for young people taking part in compulsory military service and it is one of the primary discouraging factors. That effect can be opposed to the rigorous environment of conscription, or other factors, like the risks of being sent to the battlefield, religious factors, beliefs, etc. Basing an army on volunteers is the way to get rid of the lack of motivation as it specifically aims at enrolling people interested in the military field and ready to serve their countries, while acknowledging and accepting the risks of being involved in its defence.

Maintaining a large army can be expensive, and putting boots on the ground in foreign warzones is explicitly set aside for trained soldiers. How then can conscription be efficient for an army today? With constantly developing ways of war, conscription systems have to adapt accordingly.

²⁰ Ibid.

PART 3: CONSCRIPTION IN THE CHANGING NATURE OF WAR

Despite all the positive and negative aspects of the draft, it is clear that nowadays the concept of universal conscription has become obsolete. This is mainly due to the changing nature of war and threats. Today, we talk about hybrid wars in which, for example, cyber means are very effective in weakening an adversary. Furthermore, European countries are engaged in peacekeeping operations rather than mass wars. If the number of soldiers a state could deploy on the battlefield used to be the main indicator of its military power, now a single atomic bomb can erase a country from the worldmap. Furthermore, military operations often require specific abilities in order to use

complicated equipment and weapons; it follows that drafted soldiers with short training would not contribute to these missions. In this context, universal conscription loses its relevance. Shifting the focus from Europe, it becomes evident that some countries have been modernising their conscription systems for the above-mentioned reasons. An interesting example is Israel. According to Israeli law, conscription is an obligation for all citizens turning 18 except the Ultra Orthodox and Arab Israelis. Interestingly, the two categories exempted from conscription have the highest birth rates and while today they represent around 30% of the population, it is expected



Figure 2: Reported number of young Russian people drafted during the years 2011–2014 compared to the number of servicemen on contract and the forecast until 2035 of number of young men who most likely will be drafted. Planned number of servicemen on contract until 2017. Estimated number of conscripts until 2035 – estimation is based on expected size of conscript age youth from whom 39.6% will be drafted.*

* Source : Svyrenenko, Arseniy. 2016. *The Russian Demography Problem And The Armed Forces Trends And Challenges Until 2035*. Ebook. Riihimäki: Finnish Defence Research Agency.

<https://puolustusvoimat.fi/documents/1948673/2015525/The+Russian+demography+problem+and+the+armed+forces+Trends+and+challenges+until+2035/a2ef95eb-b9ab-4563-ba31-cc1010b3c20c> P. 35

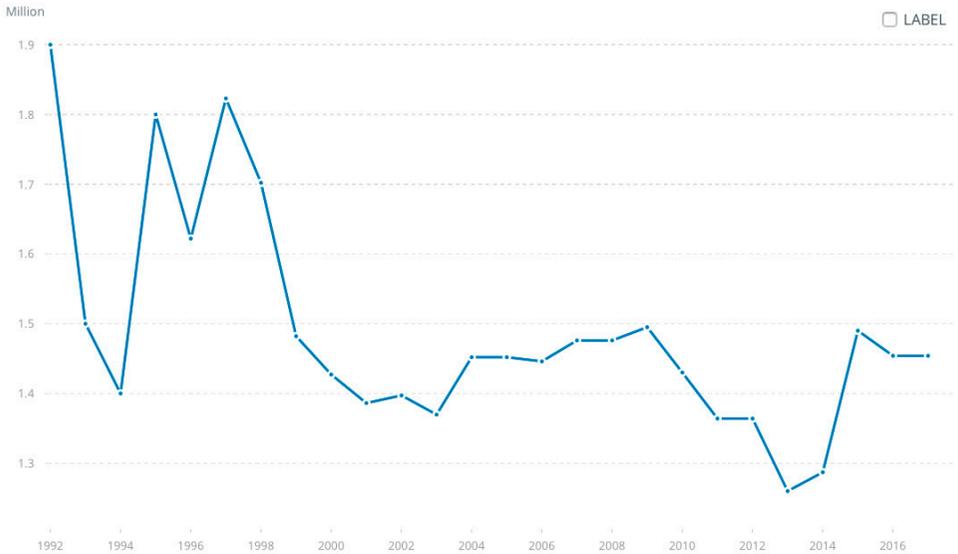


Figure 3: Total of Armed Forces Personnel in the Russian Federation*

* Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance. 2019. *Armed Forces Personnel, Total*. Scheme. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.P1?locations=RU>

that by 2050 they will jump to 60%.²¹ Moreover, many young Israelis have successfully been circumventing their obligation to serve the military and despite the law envisaging punishment for “draft-evaders”, most cases have been ignored. Israeli politicians, however, do not seem to be concerned with this trend and have not been trying to solve it because the threats faced today do not justify universal conscription and mass armies. On the contrary, in 2015 the IDF approved the Plan Gideon which aims at creating “smaller, more efficient ground forces that can more effectively deal with current threats”.²² Some of

the main goals of the plan were to cut down the reserve forces by 100,000 individuals and to create a cyber wing. Israel’s choice says a lot, considering that the country itself lives in continuous tension with its neighbours and is always vigilant about insecurity in the region.

Russia as well is trying to switch from a conscription army to a professional army. On its website, the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation underlines the “clear advantage of qualitative characteristics over quantitative ones, which implies increasing the number of contract professionals in the

²¹ Jager, Avi. 2018. “The Myth Of Compulsory Military Service In Israel”. *Jpost*.

<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/The-myth-of-compulsory-military-service-in-Israel-569779>

²² “IDF Details “Plan Gideon” An Expansive 5-Year Modernisation Programme”. 2016. *Soldier Modernisation* 1 (16): 43.

<http://www.soldiermod.com/volume-16/pdfs/articles/idf.pdf>

Armed Forces' strength".²³ Normally, around 39% of the young Russian males falling in the conscription age-range are called to serve the military. This percentage does not seem to have decreased in the past years, nonetheless there have been demographic changes in population which resulted in a fluctuation and decrease of the conscripted people.

Meanwhile, as we can see from figure 2, the share of servicemen on contract has been increasing, and has surpassed the number of draftees. This is further proven by figure 3, which shows that after the drop between 2009 and 2013 the number of military personnel almost reached the level of 2008. This leads us to confirm that, given the more or less stable decrease of conscripts, the percentage of volunteers has been increasing steadily. Russian leaders have also been debating for decades the possibility of abolishing the draft once and for all. While this has not materialised yet, it is interesting to take into account that even the Russian Federation has begun to value the benefits of professional soldiers instead of conscripts.

Universal conscription has clearly shifted away from being an effective and popular way of enrolling people in the military and on the contrary, countries have until recent times abolished it, or have at least tended to reduce its impact. Nonetheless, the draft is not completely irrelevant and it is possible to retain some of its advantages through a modernised lottery based system. As a matter of fact, the need for modernisation of an exclusively military-conscription has started to be debated

and tested in different countries. Given that the feeling of insecurity in some European states is spurring the continent to bring back the conscription debate, it is necessary that the countries considering its reintroduction take into account the options to improve the system.

The first trend that is visible in some countries is the introduction of a national civil service. More and more countries are providing, or trying to introduce, this option for young citizens. As stated in a previous section, religious motives, conscientious objection, health issues or any other relevant reason may lead to the exclusion of some individuals or to inappropriate profiles to be conscripted. National or civilian service can offer an alternative model. This service is still binding for the people selected through the lottery, however, if the system is modernised it could allow citizens to choose between different options. France, which recently introduced the Universal National Service ("Service National Universel"), is an illustrative example. In this system of non-military conscription, as we explained earlier, only the first month is binding. This first step focuses on increasing cohesion among the draftees and on attracting their interests towards national-related positions. This explains why, the second optional phase offers more military related positions in the field of security and defense (army, police, ...), but also civilian positions, such as heritage preservation, healthcare, tutorship, ...²⁴ Russia also provides the opportunity to be involved in the so called "Alternative Civil Service" instead of military service.²⁵ Finland too, envis-

²³ "Contract Service". 2019. *Eng.Mil.Ru*. Accessed August 20. <http://eng.mil.ru/en/career/soldiering.htm>

²⁴ Groupe de Travail SNU. 2018. "Rapport Relatif À La Création D'un Service National Universel". Paris: Ecole Militaire. https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2018/08/rapport_du_groupe_de_travail_snu.pdf 12.

²⁵ "Alternative Service In The Armed Forces Of The Russian Federation". 2019. *Eng.Mil.Ru*. Accessed August 20. <https://eng.mil.ru/en/career/alternative.htm>

ages a non-military service called Siviilpalvelus. The service, which also applies to women, aims to “support general civic education, develop general readiness related to civil defence and rescue operations, and to provide the basic skills for carrying out the work service”.²⁶ In Russia and Finland, citizens are not free to choose between the military or civil service. The civilian option only comes about if the individual presents sufficient reasons not to perform military service. The French system, however, gives young people various options on which they can decide to focus.

Another interesting alternative supported by the scholar Elisabeth Braw is the introduction of Resilience Training for teenagers. Such an option is particularly relevant in the event of hybrid means of war or in case of natural disasters. Let’s imagine, for example, that a cyber attack leaves the population without power or access to groceries for several days. In such a scenario the emergency would be the resilience of citizens. The majority of the population does not have the skills to organise itself and react and, when hit by a calamity, people tend to rely on their governments. This option would avoid having high numbers of soldiers waiting for their governments to call them into action and could transform the normal citizens in “Samaritans” trained to counter a civilian crisis.²⁷ Military conscription has often been considered as a burden to the army rather than as a benefit and, the majority of conscripted people would not have the skills required to participate in strategic missions. Therefore, it seems logical to offer citizens the

possibility to gain the skills they might need the most. This kind of training could take the form of a summer commitment for the drafted young people without forcing them to postpone their education or miss entry into the labour market for very long.²⁸

If conscription was able to bring some interesting advantages for the drafted and for the states, the above explained models might also contribute positively. A National/Civil service or a Resilience Training are possible answers to the society gaps and the inequalities between genders and between people from different socioeconomic statuses. Furthermore, they can also make citizens feel more patriotic, more engaged and more involved in the matters of their states while making them understand the meaning of being citizens without the need to take up arms if they do not wish to do so. Ideally, offering the citizens drafted through the lottery the possibility to choose could solve part of the democratic deficit of which conscription is often blamed for. Furthermore, offering alternatives might also correct the lack of motivation in recruits that feel they have been forced to do something against their will. For some, the alternative of the civil service is more than a mere substitute of military conscription, but it is rather a new way of thinking about our society: “The reality is that if you don’t have national service, you don’t have anything else that brings people together²⁹”.

Another way to improve the draft is to couple it with the introduction of defence courses in the curricula of students. Schools should be

²⁶ *Non-Military Service Act (1446/2007) (As Amended By The Act No 940/2013)*. 2015. Ebook. Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland. <http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2007/en20071446.pdf> 1.

²⁷ Braw, Elisabeth. 2018. “Opinion | Europe Takes A Second Look At Conscription”. *WSJ*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/europe-takes-a-second-look-at-conscription-1535311309>

²⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁹ Goldsmith, Courtney. 2019. “Redrafting National Service Policy”. *Europeanceo*. <https://www.europeanceo.com/finance/redrafting-national-service-policy/>

able to offer national defence courses which teach to young citizens the strategy of their country, but also how to recognize threats and respond to them. As we have seen, this approach is being experimented by Latvia. Introducing defence as a school subject can have multiple benefits. First, it can increase the level of engagement of citizens in terms of increasing support for the armed forces and the defence of one's country. Secondly, it can create a sense of national unity and of confidence in the state. Furthermore, this kind of education can increase the interest of young people and spur them to present themselves as volunteers later on. Indeed, as underlined in the previous section of the paper, an all-volunteer army is likely to require high publicity costs in order to make the military career attractive. If national defence courses were introduced during compulsory schooling, they would target the entire population regardless of the gender and socio-economic status of individuals. Clearly, the most effective way to tackle gender, economic and other disparities in the army is to implement universal conscription. However, through education it would at least be possible to offer everyone a basic education on national defence.

There are other ways in which a military or civil service can be integrated in the educa-

tion system without young people having to spend an entire year of their life training. In Mongolia, for example, the military envisages a “Student-Soldier” option which consists of

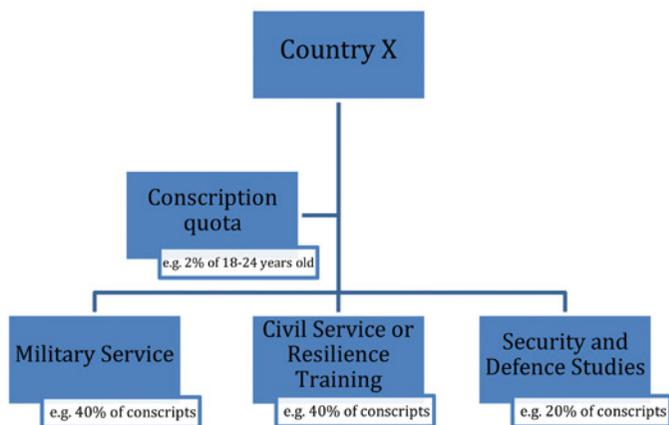


Figure 4: Representation of quotas distribution for alternative models

an accelerated service divided in two months of classroom training and two months of field training for first year college and university students.³⁰ If the young people drafted through the lottery were able to choose the option to integrate their service with their education, they would be able to enter the job market with the rest of their peers therefore avoiding the loss of competitiveness. As a matter of fact, the previous section of the paper explained that the loss of experience due to the obligation to take part to a long military service is the sore point of the draft. Potentially, draftees might be given the choice between an accelerated service which might take place during the summer before

³⁰ Erdenechuluun, Tuya. 2018. “Mandatory Military Service In Mongolia”. *Lehmanlaw.Mn*. <https://lehmanlaw.mn/blog/mandatory-military-service-in-mongolia/>

they start their academic year, or a longer service if they wish to do so.

To conclude this section of the paper, we recommend a modernised conscription model for the countries still envisaging it and for the countries reintroducing it. First of all, to efficiently face current threats conscription does not need to be universal but should only recruit a small percentage of the youth population. Secondly, the conscription system should at least offer the choice between a military service, a civilian service and/or a resilience training, and some sort of integration of defence and security courses during the academic curricula. Each young person selected through the lottery should be able to specify a preferred choice between the avail-

able options, but recruits will be allocated according to states' requirements and quotas and also according to the level of volunteers. Let's hypothesize that country X has decided to draft 2% of the eligible citizens. In this 2%, country X will decide the amount of people that should be allocated to each of the three categories according to specific need that the country might have. For instance, if country X is in lack of strategic analysts, it might be a good idea to increase the quota for the study option. The ability to play with the quotas, can allow a state to be more efficient in the recruitment process in the labour market. Furthermore, it can be part of the long term strategy of a country, especially in this period of hybrid war.

PART 4: THE WAY FORWARD, THE EUROPEAN UNION SERVICE

The question of European Defence and European Army has been on the table for a long time. While nowadays there is no set framework yet and the possibility seems far away, the topic is more and more debated. With the USA withdrawing from the INF Treaty, Europe is again facing a period of uncertainty regarding their own security. If the Treaty aimed at decreasing tensions with Russia during the Cold War, the American decision to leave it can be perceived as a hint for Europe to focus on its own defence. Meanwhile, the popularity of conscription, which had tremendously lowered in the early 2000s, seems to be reaching a new peak in European countries. For the aims of this paper it is therefore relevant and interesting to dedicate some thoughts in combining the European framework with possible modernised service systems. The proposed European Union Service, however, should be based on volunteers rather than on conscripts. While one of the main advantages of the model would be to increase the European feeling, forcing people into it might have the oppo-

site effect. Nonetheless, the advantages of the conscription models described in the previous section can be reproduced in the volunteers based EU Service, as the graph illustrates. The EU Service, should be seen as a sort of Erasmus but in the military/civilian field. It would offer to young people the possibility to discover different EU countries while engaging in Security and Defence activities. Again, as for the suggested National Conscription Model, European service should offer three possibilities, namely "European Security and Defence Studies", a "European Military Service" and the third option could be the already existing "European Voluntary Service".

Given that the mechanism of the EVS is already in place, the main contribution of this section lies in the delineation of possible models for the study option and for the EU military Service. Despite that, the EU Service should be based on volunteers, and the EU Member States through the Council of the European Union and relevant EU insti-

tutions, should cooperate in order to suggest quotas on the amount of volunteers from each country. In this process, they should decide the maximum number of individuals that should take place in the “European Security and Defence Studies” and in the “European Military Service”, but also how many individuals a country should recruit and how many a country should host in the relocation process explained below. As will be developed in the next paragraphs, specific European Institutions will be in charge of delineating the profiles needed. The quotas shall not be binding but rather, they should represent an objective for member states and a cap on the amount of people who can take part in the service. The suggested quotas should mostly depend on the population of the country. In case a country receives less applications than its quota, the remaining places should not be allocated to countries which applications exceed the quota, in order to keep equity between participating countries and avoid some countries being overrepresented.

The “European Security and Defence Studies”

The “European Security and Defence Studies” option refers to a form of yearly summer school. For it to be accessible by most eligible students, we suggest that the course should take place between July and August and it should last around 6 weeks. This would

prevent it from clashing with the beginning of the academic year. Given the short duration of the program, it should be full-time and intensive. It can take place in Brussels,

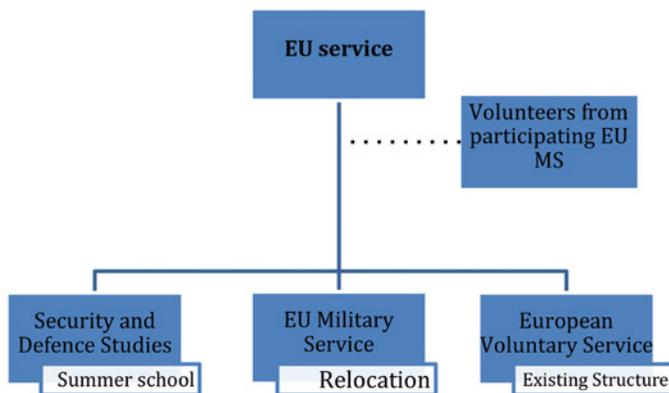


Figure 5: European Union Service model

and it should involve a maximum number of young volunteers from all participating member states according to the state quotas. It is suggested that the summer school to provide applicants with different course tracks rather than one generic option. Some examples of possible topics could be hybrid warfare, energy security, environmental security, European Neighborhood Policy etc. Topics can change from year to year according to the developments in the security field and the long-term strategy of the EU. In their application process, volunteers should be able to select 2 or 3 preferences. The teaching language should be English and provided by experts, related to the chosen topics. This would allow young students to get in contact with people involved directly in those fields. Moreover, those experts might be the most relevant people to answer specific questions about the accessibility of their positions.



Figure 6: Timeline representation of the European Union Military Service

The Study option is likely to attract more volunteers than spaces available. For this reason, some criteria should be applied during the selection process. As mentioned before, the study option has been sometimes used as a substitute for conscription. While it is important to once more underline that the EU Service should be based on volunteers, it is also fundamental to stress that the Study option targets a specific category of people, namely university students. The first criteria should therefore be enrollment in university. To limit the amount of candidatures only bachelor students should be able to apply, and each person could take part to the European Security and Defence Study summer school only once. The subject studied at university and previous knowledge of EU mechanisms, however, should not be a selection principle. This is because the course aims at involving the most diverse people in EU security and defence matters. The application form could, for example, present applicants with some questions to justify their motivation (e.g. “How could your field of study be relevant for European Defence?”, etc.). The selection process should focus on the motivation and possible long-term investment of student in European project. It is of paramount importance for the selection process not to fall in a “bubble trap” picking only people with political science and European defence background. This would not help the boost of European feeling as this

profile of people is already likely to be an EU supporter.

The EU body in charge of coordinating the “European Security and Defence Studies” option should ideally be the DG Education and Culture. The DG should, for example, suggest the quotas to member states. Similar to Erasmus+, a scholarship covering part of the living costs should be provided to the selected students. Again, not to limit the participants according to their social backgrounds, the allowance of the scholarship should be calibrated on the economic status of the applicant. Member States and their universities should be in charge of selecting the pre-fixed number of students.

The “EU Military Service”

The EU Military Service is based on an exchange of volunteer military manpower between the European Union member states that would take part in the program. This idea is not completely new, German Defence Chiefs have in the past raised the possibility of foreigners joining their army.³¹ In this way, the program could enhance European mobility allowing volunteers to carry out Military service in a different EU country. To begin with, two possibilities have to be underlined. If country X already has a binding national

³¹ “German Army ‘Could Recruit EU Citizens’”. 2018. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46692176>



scription, its young draftees have to either take part in it at the national level or choose to follow the path of the EU Service model. If country X does not bind its young people to a national draft, volunteers have the right to choose either a national military training, as already adopted in the country, or again take part in the EU Service programme. If national conscription quotas are imposed by the country itself, the EU Service quotas should be suggested by the European Union Military Staff and the European Union Military Committee together. While the EUMS might tackle the issue of manpower requirements, the EUMC might bring recommendations

and advice towards how to hold such an European Service, along with all member states. Moreover, the EUMC can bring together all the Chiefs of Defence or the Military Representatives of European member states, and create a consensus concerning procedures and quotas. The EUMS expertise, on the other hand, can provide useful analysis to influence the emergence of specific profiles and suggested training. This may permit the emergence of relevant future profiles, sought for long-term strategy within the European Defence. Both body's point of views have therefore relevant outputs and need to be debated together. In regard to training, one suggestion is to

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provide recruits with Resilience Training. According to the EU Global Strategy Resilience allows “states to recover from the shocks and the crisis”. For now the EU has been trying to enhance Resilience in neighboring regions, however, it would be beneficial to provide such skills to EU citizens as well.³² The US Army, for example, already offers Master Resilience Training (MRT) Skills.³³ To sum up, each country will have a suggested quota for the amount of people who should take part to the EU Military Service, a suggested quota for the amount of foreign military volunteers who should be hosted and, for the countries that still have conscription, their own conscription quota. The suggested quotas on the number of volunteers to be recruited for service abroad and on the number of foreign volunteers to be hosted do not necessarily correspond. While the first should depend on population, the aim of the second is to fill gaps in shortages of military staff. Belgium for instance may need, nowadays, to host more international volunteers than sending Belgian volunteers abroad. This will help such a country to maintain an efficient future number of military personnel.

The idea of European military service can still be improved with the inputs of military staff. However, here is a proposed framework for a future model. First of all, a timeline has to be developed. The first part of the service should last for 9 months in total. Those months are divided in two periods which take place in different locations. The first three months will be held in the volunteer’s country of citizenship, and this training period should provide the volunteers with their basic training in a military field. After the first three months, young volunteers will be relocated to a differ-

ent EU country, ideally they will be able to carry out the service in their chosen country. In this phase they will be included within a national unit in the selected country for six months. The relocated volunteers will then take part in the military training of that country. The EUMS might give advice on specific training. However, the host countries will be the main decision makers in this regard. The effort asked to the host country is to use English language in giving instructions to the units which will host the foreign volunteers. In the meantime, it is important to make sure that these units also include citizens of the hosting country, this will allow foreign volunteers to integrate in the host country and not to isolate themselves in their own international bubble.

After having completed these 9 months, volunteers of the EU Military Service will find themselves at a crossroad. If they decide not to pursue a military career, they can stop their training. Otherwise, if the new recruits would like to continue their military-oriented career, they can either join the military of their home countries or choose to be enrolled in the military of the hosting country, provided that the country is still interested in their profile. Whatever the country chosen, the new recruit should perform their 3 more months to complete the Service. These 3 months will help to round off lacking skills of the recruit, which could for instance include basic linguistic skills of the host country. Finally, it is important to mention the selection procedures and the funding. The Member States should be responsible for the two matters. The most efficient way to tackle the selection procedure would be for each country to take care of it by its own. Requirements to join the army are al-

³² *The European Union’s Global Strategy: Three Years On, Looking Forward*. 2019. Ebook. European Union Global Strategy. https://ec.europa.eu/sites/ecas/files/eu_global_strategy_2019.pdf.

³³ “Master Resilience Training”. 2019. *US Army Reserve Official Website*. Accessed August 21. <https://www.usar.army.mil/MRT/>.

ready implemented in each country, keeping the same would ease the selection of efficient and motivated volunteers for the European military Service. Once more, when applying, young people should be able to express some preferences in regard to the country of allocation. As for the funding, a compromise shall be found between the Member States taking part to the EU Service and the EU institutions. More specifically, each MS should equally pay their volunteers going abroad and their recruits training in the country. The European Defence Fund, or any other relevant EU body, should compensate the living costs in case a volunteer relocates to an EU country which is considerably more expensive.

At first sight, it would be more relevant to integrate such a Military Service within a European structure. However, the lack of a concrete European military structure does not allow the proposition of such a model today. With existing structures, namely national ones, the proposed model is a realistic possibility. If such a European structure was to be developed, implementing the proposed EU military Service within it would be more relevant.

The European Voluntary Service

The third option of the EU Service model should be the already existing European Voluntary Service. The structure allows EU citizens between 17 and 30 years old to spend a period of their lives volunteering in a different country. The experience can last between 2 weeks and 12 months and it includes an array of different organisations in the fields of culture, sport, health, youth, and also animal welfare, environment, etc. In order to partic-

ipate in the programme, eligible European citizens have to get in contact with the Sending Organisation of their country and the Receiving Organisation in the country where they will relocate. The volunteers are provided with accommodation, food, and some pocket money but they have to cover the costs of transportation to the hosting country. Considering that this third option is already an existing structure of the European Union, it is suggested to consult EU resources for more detailed information.³⁴

This last section of the paper attempts to present an initial framework for a possible and relevant approach to a future European Union Service. Clearly, some of the raised points still need to be deepened and refined in the near future. If Rome was not built in a day, the same applies to the European Union. Therefore, the proposed EU Service does not aim to be introduced as such, but be enhanced by qualified individuals, while inputs of relevant and interested people might bring this proposition to a reality. The framework still has a lot of questions waiting to be answered in order to make it a realistic and efficient process. The first one regards salary and relocation. While it was mentioned that salaries should be provided by the home countries and compensated by the EDF, the latter might not be the relevant structure to fill the gap. Another question is whether three months of optional military training would be sufficient to cover the differences between national armies. The competence of military experts and advisors is required in order to provide such answer. Furthermore, a strategy is needed to make all participating MS attractive to volunteers. Otherwise there would be an excessive amount of applications directed to specific countries. An ideal way to make the EU Military Service

³⁴ "European Voluntary Service: What Is It Really?". 2013. *European Youth Portal*. https://europa.eu/youth/eu/article/46/73_en.

more effective would be to have uniformised training programmes. This, however, could present considerable obstacles and oppositions from MS. While preferably the EU Service should include all EU Member States it is likely such a project would start between a few countries to then be enlarged to others. In this sense, political will of member states would be fundamental. The project should be presented to MS politicians in an appealing way.

Last but not least, it is fundamental to carefully take care of communication. While EU institutions should make sure to publicize such an initiative, the main role lies on MS. They have the ultimate responsibility to involve their citizens. Relevant structures should be part of the process: from universities and high schools, to national militaries, to governmental channels and media etc. The EU Service project would only be possible with the participation of motivated citizens, therefore communicating with them efficiently is the basis for success.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the aim of this paper was to analyse the EU's situation as far as conscription is concerned. After a brief description of the main trends, which discerned the countries that still apply conscription from the others, the paper proceeded to underline the main benefits and disadvantages of universal conscription. While the conscription system can bring some benefits, such as gender and social equality, the paper demonstrated that universal conscription per se is not relevant anymore. This was further underlined with the changing nature of war. Nonetheless, conscription has been evolving by alternative

models. Positive aspects of conscription can be retained, for example, through offering a civilian service or cultural activities. To this end, the last part of this paper aimed at delineating a first framework of European Union Service which can bring together the positive aspects of the alternative models in a regional rather than national fashion. Given that the EU has been working towards the recent implementation of European defence structures (e.g. PESCO in 2017), the introduction of a Military Service at the EU level seems today more relevant than ever.



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Created in 1953, the Finabel committee is the oldest military organisation for cooperation between European Armies: it was conceived as a forum for reflections, exchange studies, and proposals on common interest topics for the future of its members. Finabel, the only organisation at this level, strives at:

- Promoting interoperability and cooperation of armies, while seeking to bring together concepts, doctrines and procedures;
- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

Finabel aims to be a multinational-, independent-, and apolitical actor for the European Armies of the EU Member States. The Finabel informal forum is based on consensus and equality of member states. Finabel favours fruitful contact among member states' officers and Chiefs of Staff in a spirit of open and mutual understanding via annual meetings.

Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and *ad hoc* coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



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