THE BELGIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE "POST-MILITARY SOCIETY"

PHILIPPE MANIGART
ERIC MARLIER

Philippe Manigart is associate professor of sociology at the Free University of Brussels and the Royal Military Academy, 30 Avenue de la renaissance, 1040 Brussels. Eric Marlier is expert consultant to the Survey Research Unit of the European Commission.

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Introduction

The end of the cold war, technological and social-cultural changes have caused the end of the mass army. With the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and of the Soviet Union itself, our armies' missions have changed. They are no longer to deter a known adversary, but (probably) to maintain or enforce peace in regions where our interests are in jeopardy and/or for humanitarian reasons.

This change in the role of modern military organisations had already been foreseen by M. Janowitz. In a now classical book, published for the first time in 1960, *The Professional Soldier*, he used the expression "constabulary force" to typify such a force that "is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeking viable international relations rather than victory". Recent examples of such constabulary missions are the Gulf War, Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia, Cambodia, etc.

The format Western military organisations should take in the future has been the topic of numerous studies. Various names have been proposed. The two most famous are probably Martin Shaw's (1991) **post-military society** and Moskos' (1992) **warless society**.

If one tries to summarise their arguments, one arrives at the following portrait of future military organisations (Van der Meulen 1992):

(1) They will be constabulary forces, acting for the U.N. or other international bodies;

(2) They will be All-Volunteer Forces (AVF);

(3) To be competitive on the labour market, they will have to become more attractive. They will have to propose better working conditions: better salary, flexible working hours, more open access to women and to minorities in general.

In a constabulary force and in the new engagements scenarios, draftees do not have their place anymore. This explains why, in most countries where a conscription system still exists (almost everywhere in continental Europe), the debate on the end of the draft is now open.

Constabulary missions, however, raise two interrelated kinds of problems for armed forces:

(1) **Public support:** peace-keeping or peace-enforcing operations, while very popular in the short-term, can be more difficult to

legitimise in the long-term among the public, particularly if it involves casualties and/or fuzzy goals.

(2) **Recruitment:** Constabulary missions can act as a deterrent as far as enlistment of young volunteer personnel is concerned, because of the higher risks to life involved.

This paper aims at assessing the impact of these new constabulary missions on the public image of armed forces and on recruitment prospects of enlisted personnel. In particular, it analyses the complex relationship between these new missions, public image of armed forces and recruitment prospects. It takes the Belgium armed forces as a case.

In "standard" ("normal") organisations, there is a positive relationship between the image the organisation has among the public and its recruitment prospects (Perrow 1961). In the case of military organisations, a third variable makes this relationship more complex: the degree of risk involved in the job.

Survey data indeed show that, if participating in UN missions has a rather positive impact on the image of the Belgian armed forces, this does not result in making military career more attractive, because of the risks perceived in the new roles of armed forces.

Insofar as Belgian armed forces are more and more involved in the so-called "new" missions, the prospect of recruiting enough volunteers to meet the needs of the future all-volunteer force seems problematic, if no remedial measures are taken.

Surveys in 1993. This paper uses data from two omnibus telephone (CATI) surveys commissioned by the Department of Social Sciences at the Royal Military Academy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff (manpower directorate). Both surveys were carried out by INRA-Marketing Unit.

The first survey was conducted in January 1993 among a representative random sample of the Belgian population aged 15 and more (N = 1008). The second survey was conducted in July 1993 among a representative random sample of young non university Belgian graduates aged 15-25 (N = 1001).

Public Image of the Belgian Military

Controversial opinions of the Belgian armed forces. Respondents in the two surveys in 1993 were asked the following question: "Do you rather agree or rather disagree with the following statement: Since it participates in operations in ex-Yugoslavia and Somalia, I have a better opinion of the Belgian military." Fifty-six per cent respondents in the Belgian population agreed with the statement, and so did fifty-one per cent of youngsters. In both samples, thirty-five per cent disagreed, and nine or eleven per cent, respectively, did no answer the question.

A majority in both samples has a better opinion of the Belgian armed forces since their participation in U.N. peace-keeping missions. This could be partly because a majority of Belgians approve such peace-keeping interventions. For example, the Eurobarometer 39 of Spring 1993 found that 58% Belgians aged 15 and over were in favour of the proposal that "in the framework of a common foreign and defence policy, the EC should intervene militarily in the former Yugoslavia, in order to re-establish peace," and only 24% against it (EC12: 55% in favour, 28% against).

Will this opinion continue to improve along with the continuation and "routinisation" of such constabulary missions? This would be interesting to check through the repetition of a similar survey.

Figure I: The Percentage of "Quite Favourable" Opinions of Eleven Selected Institutions

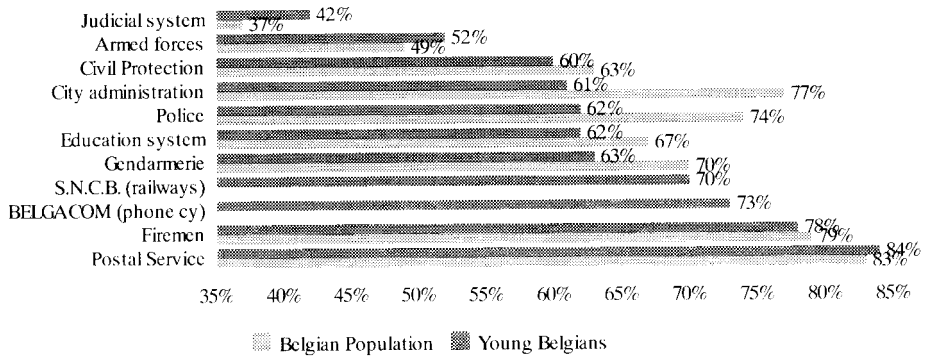


Table 1 presents the percentages of those having "quite favourable" attitudes towards eleven Belgian public institutions among the young non-university Belgian graduates aged 15-25, and among the Belgian population at large (the questions were not identical but quite close to each other). The findings show that the improvement of the image of the Belgian military does not mean that it has become very good, particularly if compared to the image of other institutions.

The rank ordering is about the same in both samples. When a significant difference exists, however, young respondents tend to have a less positive attitudes towards institutions.

With the exception of the judicial system, the Belgian armed forces have the poorest image among both the Belgian population at large and the Belgian youth. Only 49% of the Belgian population and 52% of the Belgian youth have a "quite favourable" opinion of the Belgian military. The postal service has the best image with 83% and 84% of respondents, respectively. Both the police and the Gendarmerie, two internal law-enforcing institutions, have a far better image than the military.

The image of armed forces is not only less positive than that of other institutions, but for a large part of respondents also more difficult to assess: 21% of the Belgian population and 23% of young respondents do not express an opinion on it. It is the second highest percentage among both young people and among Belgians in general (after the Civil Protection). All military's competitors on the labour market have a clearer image in the minds of all Belgians, and particularly in the minds of young people.

In both samples, no statistically significant differences exist in age, region or social class. Among the representative sample of the Belgian population as a whole, the higher the educational level, the less positive the image of the military: 73% of respondents with an elementary school degree or less have a rather positive opinion of Belgian armed forces against only 55% of university graduates. Those who have been drafted have about the same level of favourable opinions as those who have not, or not yet, been drafted (54% vs. 51%). Those who have been drafted, however, have more unfavourable opinions (37% vs. 25%), and are less undecided (9% vs. 23%, respectively, did not answer the question).

Public relations campaigns of the Belgian armed forces. The fuzziness of the public image of the Belgian military (e.g. the high level of "Don't know/No answer") is probably partly due to the lack of interest in, and/or lack of information on national security and defence issues. The respondents in both samples were asked if they agree or disagree with the following two statements: (1) Everything that deals with the Belgian military or national defence in general interests me; (2) I am well informed on everything that deals with the Belgian military or national defence. Only one third of the respondents in both samples are interested in national defence issues and even fewer respondents claim to be well informed on them.

This lack of interest and information appears in most segments of the population: there is no significant difference between the various groups. It might be due to a less than optimal PR policy. Young Belgians were asked whether they had recently seen, heard or read something concerning various information campaigns organised by the Belgian armed forces.

Two recent campaigns were specifically cited: the campaign organised by the Defence Ministry in May-June 93 (TV ads, newspaper ads, billboards, etc.) on "our Blue Helmets", and the information and recruitment campaigns organised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff around the slogan "The military, a new look" (TV, radio and newspaper ads). Only a minority of the interviewees were aware of these PR campaigns. The campaign on the Belgian Blue Helmets was the most creative and innovative. This probably explains why it received the largest exposure: 47% of the young respondents have seen, heard, or read something about it, against only 22% for the campaign "The military, a new look" and 18% for other PR campaigns organised by the military.

For the Belgian Blue Helmets campaign, the Defence Minister asked for private sponsorship (a TV commercial network, a big retail store, etc.). This campaign was also very well targeted and benefited from the almost daily news coverage of the Belgian Blue Helmets actions. In other words, there was a synergy between various media sources. The campaign was not entirely successful; for example, a charity concert had to be even canceled due to a lack of public interest. However, the fact that the campaign was very well received among those who had been exposed to it[1] points to the necessity of developing such PR image-building campaigns in the future.

Job Expectations of Young Belgians

With the improvement of their image, one would think that the Belgian armed forces should experience fewer difficulties in recruiting enough personnel. With the end of the draft in 1994, improvement in the recruitment of enlisted personnel is of crucial importance to the Belgian military:

- Will the Belgian military find enough motivated recruits to fill its work-force needs?
- Or, as a result of work-force shortages, will the Belgian arm forces again be reduced?

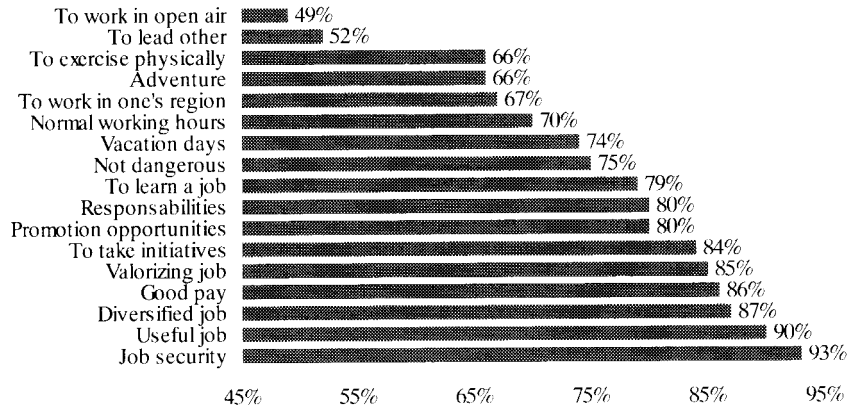
All things being equal, the better the image of an organisation, the easier it should find it to fill work-force needs with more qualified and motivated candidates. This positive relationship between image and recruitment means that the Belgian military should experience fewer difficulties in recruiting motivated and qualified personnel than a few years ago, as happened in the U.S. army after the Grenada and Panama operations and after the Gulf War.

As already mentioned, it does not seem to be the case in the Belgian armed forces. The reason for this is probably linked to the perceived risks associated with the new missions of armed forces and to job expectations of young Belgians.

As Figure 2 shows, 93% of young Belgians interviewed find it "quite important" to have a secure job that is not a goal in itself, but a means to achieve something else, for

example to go to holidays or to buy a home. This dimension is clearly the top job expectation. This result confirms international comparative surveys (such as surveys from the European Value Systems Study Group)[2], showing that Belgians attach far more importance to job security than others.

Figure 2: The Percentage of Young Belgians Who Named Different Job Values as "Quite Important"



As far as armed forces are concerned, 75% of the respondents would rather have a job that is not risky, 70% would prefer normal, regular working hours (i.e. not to work nights or during week-ends), and 67% would prefer to work near home. Because 68% of the young respondents "moderately agree" with the statement "The military is just another job" (Moskos 1988), that is, they do not consider the military career a vocation anymore, these three expectations of potential recruits contradict the operational requirements of Belgian armed forces' new constabulary missions. They clearly point to supplementary enrolment difficulties that might be caused by the emergence of these new constabulary missions of military organisations.

The search for adventure and physical training is considered to be "rather important" in a job by a much lower proportion of the young people interviewed (66%). Along with another typical "traditional" military value, the desire to lead others (52%) and to work in the open air (49%), these dimensions are bottom of the list.

In the previous geopolitical environment, these kinds of occupational expectations were not too much of a problem, at least for small armed forces such as the Belgian. Except for Belgian paratroops regiment, the probability of being sent abroad was indeed very small. Thanks to Nato's deterrence strategy, the probability of an East-West conflict was relatively small.

A career in the military offered the advantage of relative job security. The armed forces could thus recruit enough volunteers without too much difficulty (and furthermore, draftees could fill work-force shortages). These volunteers were quite occupationally motivated, because it was very unlikely that they would ever have to fight!

Compared to the Cold War era, the situation has now radically changed. Sure, on the

one hand, the probability of a conflict threatening the Belgian territorial integrity is even smaller than before. However, the probability for whatever type of soldier of being sent abroad in operations is much higher than in the past.[3] The problem for military organisations is that job expectations, contrary to the geopolitical environment, have not changed.

This inadequacy should not, however, be overstated. As our data also show, many youngsters are driven by a "sense of calling". To do a useful job is thought to be "quite important" by 90% of young respondents, and to have an esteemed job is judged to be "quite important" by 85% of the respondents.

Another indication that there are still young people driven by a "sense of calling" and who want to escape a routine life, is given by humanitarian organisations, such as Médecins Sans Frontiers, Amnesty International, etc. How can such young people be attracted to the armed forces? As we will see later, these are not the people most likely to consider enlisting in the armed forces; they do not belong to the "primary" sector of the military labour market. To persuade a few of them to enlist for a short time will require at least an imaginative and flexible human resources management policy.

A Job in the Armed Forces?

Propensity of choosing a job in the military. When asked whether they would advise someone they know, and who is looking for a job, to accept a job in seven selected organisations, 69% answered they would recommend the Belgian telephone company, 60% the civil service, 58% postal service, 57% the railway company, 52% the Gendarmerie, 47% the police, and only 41% the military.

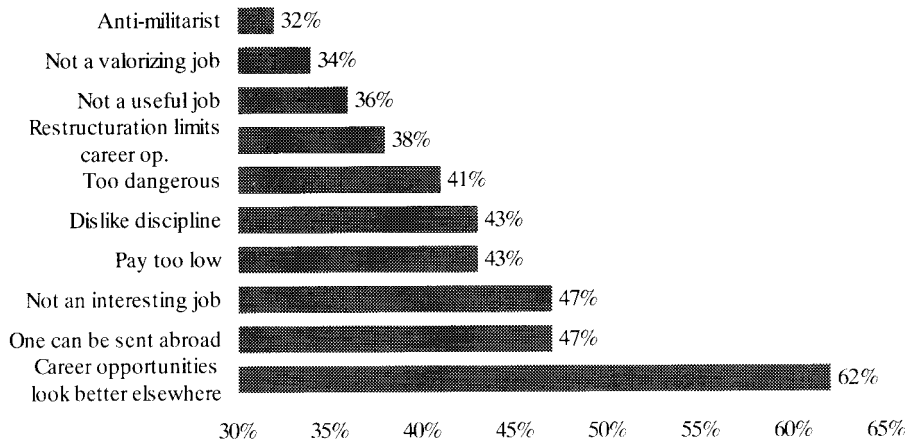
In this ranking order, the risk dimension might be seen as one of the main organising principles. Indeed, the military comes last with only 41% of the respondents answering yes, followed by the police (47%) and the Gendarmerie (52%). After these three "hazardous" occupations, one finds the four "risk- free" occupations. The more dangerous a job is perceived to be, the less likely one would advise someone to take it. Another result that might at least partly confirm this hypothesis is the one obtained through a factor analysis of the seven professional choices. Two dimensions were indeed extracted from a principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The first factor was composed of the four least dangerous professions and the second factor of the three most dangerous ones.

Young respondents were also asked whether they would be interested in a military job: 75% answered no, 9% would perhaps be interested in a short-term enlistment (2 to 6 years), 9% would perhaps be interested in a long-term contract, 3% would be interested but had no preferences, and 4% did not express any opinion. In other words, 75% of the young Belgians are not interested in a military career, and 21% of them do not exclude the possibility of working in the military. This, of course, does not mean that they will actually enlist in the armed forces, but only that they are receptive to the recruitment arguments presented by the military. Only a smaller percentage will take steps to receive information on job prospects in the military, and an even smaller percentage will show up at the recruitment centre of the Belgian armed forces. Finally, a few of applicants will be accepted and recruited. In other words, this 21% of "candidates" might be considered as the upper limit of the recruitment pool of the Belgian military, at least in the present circumstances. It is towards this group that the military must concentrate the bulk of its information and advertising resources.

Why people do not want to enlist in the Belgian armed forces. Those who were not interested to work for the military were asked about the reasons for this. Ten reasons were offered to them. For each of them, respondents had to say whether it was a "quite important" reason or not. "Because career opportunities look better outside the military"

is the first reason given (62%). The fear of being sent abroad for constabulary missions (47%) comes second together with "it's not an interesting job". That a military job is perceived as dangerous was cited by 41% of the respondents who were not interested in a military job.

Figure 3: The Percentage of Respondents who Named Different Reasons for Not Working in the Military as "Quite Important"



Portrait of young people interested in a military job. In socio-demographic terms, the portrait of the potential candidate that emerges is the following[4]: a young French-speaking male who has a very low educational level and, fairly important, whose probability of finding work soon is slim. Indeed, French-speaking respondents are significantly more interested in a job in the military than Flemish-speaking respondents (25% vs. 19%); young males are more interested than young females (26% vs. 18%); of those who have left school (N = 381), 25% of those who have an elementary school degree or less would perhaps be interested by a job in the military, versus 22% of those who have a high school degree; there is a clear negative relationship between enlistment readiness and perceived job opportunities: 31% of those who assess their chances of finding a job in the near future as very low declare that they could eventually be interested in accepting a job in the Belgian armed forces versus only 12% of those who think their chances are high.

Such a portrait is bad news for the Belgian military because several studies[5] have repeatedly shown that, besides being difficult to train, such people are undermotivated, and are more likely to desert or quit the military than other, more educated recruits.

When one regresses the propensity to enlist on the 17 job expectations items, only two items have statistically significant coefficients: "to be able to work in open air" (beta = 0.1) and "to have a job that is not risky" (beta = -0.08). In other words, those who like to work outside tend to be more interested in a military job than others. The small negative regression coefficient between propensity to enlist and a job that is not risky means risk seems to be less a worry for those who would be willing to enlist.

This is quite positive for the armed forces, because it means that those who think of the possibility to enlist do not ignore the risks associated with a military job. Unhappily for the military, those who look for an occupation that is not risky are significantly less numerous than others.

Logically, those who have a rather positive image of the Belgian military tend to be more interested in a military career (26%) than those who have a rather negative image (16%). However, 16% of young respondents having a rather negative opinion of the Belgian military would nevertheless be willing to enlist. This denotes a typical occupational orientation towards the military profession. Those who have a better opinion of the Belgian military since it participates in operations in ex-Yugoslavia and in Somalia would also be a little more willing to enlist than others (25% vs. 19%).

These data confirm a classical observation in organisational sociology and marketing that, all other things being equal, there is a positive relationship between the image of an organisation (or a product) and the level and quality of its recruitment (or sales). However, the military is not a "normal" organisation because of the degree of risk associated with it. A military job is perceived as dangerous and the vast majority of young Belgians would prefer an occupation that is not dangerous.

The analysis of the net influence of the two variables, image and risk, on the propensity to enlist, reveals that it is mainly the image that has a — slightly — positive influence on recruitment. If indeed one regresses the propensity to enlist on these two independent variables, it turns out that only the multiple standardised regression coefficient of the variable "image of the military" is statistically significant, and marginally positive (.09), while the coefficient associated with the dangers of military work is not significant (it is, however, negative, as hypothesised).

The willingness to enlist is evidently associated with various dimensions of the military's image. For instance: 24% of those who think that for Belgium an army is necessary, would be willing to enlist, versus 12% of those who think otherwise. Supporters of an European army are less willing to enlist than others (21% vs. 27%). Those who think that, if further public spending cuts are necessary, they should inflict national defence budget, are less willing to enlist than others (20% vs. 26%). Those who believe the military is just another job are more willing to enlist (24% vs. 17%).

What is the impact of the military's information campaigns on willingness to enlist? Are those who have been exposed to such campaigns more likely to consider enlisting? Before analysing the data, a methodological remark is necessary: if these variables are eventually associated, does not imply that there is a causal link between the two. Or, more exactly, the direction of this possible causal relationship should not be automatically assumed. A positive relationship between having heard something on the Blue Helmets campaign and willingness to enlist does not imply a causal relationship in the sense that information campaign results in individuals' willingness to enlist. One could also postulate the inverse relationship, i.e., that those who think of enlisting would tend to be more aware of the military's information campaigns than those who are less interested.

Bearing this in mind, one observes a few significant positive relationships between the various information campaigns and the willingness to enlist. For instance: Those who have seen, read, or heard something on the campaign "The Army, a new look" are significantly more likely to consider enlisting (38% vs. 17%). The same is the case for the Blue Helmets campaign (26% vs. 18%). Those who had a favourable attitude towards TV and newspaper advertising tend to be more willing to enlist (28% vs. 15% and 34% vs. 19% respectively). Those who are well informed on, and interested in everything that deals with the Belgian military or national defence, are significantly more likely to consider enlisting (32% vs. 16% and 36% vs. 13%, respectively).

Conclusions

With the end of the cold war, the missions of military organisations have radically changed. These new missions are of a constabulary nature. This requires considerable organisational adaptations of the armed forces in developed countries (for instance, the end of the draft, more movable forces, etc.). In terms of manpower policy, the emergence of the constabulary missions has created recruitment and retention problems that will require innovative approaches in solving.

While the geopolitical environment and the missions of armed forces have changed, job expectations of young people have not. In Belgium, the vast majority of them still evaluate job security highly. They do not like to go abroad or to work far from home. Hence, the relative incongruity between new military manpower needs and job expectations of prospective recruits. Enlistment motivations are essentially of an occupational nature while armed forces will need increasing numbers of young motivated people willing to be sent abroad on constabulary missions.

The fact that these new missions are often not well defined complicates the problem further.

While, for the moment, the various peace-keeping operations of the Belgian armed forces seem to be having a positive impact on their public image, this support could become very thin, as the controversy around the paratroopers in Somalia demonstrates,[6] and as the number of casualties grows.[7] The improved public image has not translated into an increase of the number and, what is more important, quality of recruits. Apparently, the traditional recruitment strategy will not suffice if the Belgian army wants to succeed in its transition from a conscript army to an all-volunteer force. Market-based recruitment strategies (such as pay raise, occupational inducements, etc.) will not suffice to attract the kind of motivated and skilled people the new Belgian armed forces need.

In this context, the idea of organising a national voluntary service seems rather attractive. Such an idea is also envisaged by President Clinton and was proposed long time ago by Janowitz (1971 and 1980) and later by Moskos (1981), among others. Such a national service would have the advantage for the military of ensuring a sufficient supply of motivated young individuals. The danger of an "army of the poors", to use the expression of the Belgian Minister of Interior (an adversary of an AVF), would be set aside.

The organisation of a national service would not only be a good thing for the military. Its greatest achievement would certainly be at the societal level. Such a service could indeed help to solve a whole series of social needs, that, in the present budgetary context, are not likely to be solved by means of full-time jobs. Finally, the creation of a voluntary national service would be a way of giving a concrete basis to the idea of a new citizenship, advanced by several Belgian political parties.

Notes:

1. Seventy-three per cent of those who had been exposed to the campaign thought it contributed to the improvement of the armed forces' image.

2. See, among others, Harding and Phillips (1986) and Stoetzel (1983).

3. The possibility of being sent in mission outside Belgium is now clearly printed on all recruitment ads of the Belgian armed forces.

4. It is evidently a caricature, because the differences upon which this portrait is based are not very big, although statistically significant. They rather indicate trends.

5. See, for instance, Horne (1987), and Scribner et al. (1986).

6. Returning paratroopers have told of alleged human rights violations on the part of some of their colleagues. Belgian troops there have been accused, without hard evidence, of having murdered hundreds of Somalians. The fact that troops there operate in a very dangerous environment of lawlessness is often neglected by observers here.

7. See, for instance, what happened in the U.S., as far as public support is concerned, after several American soldiers were killed in Somalia.

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PHILIPPE MANIGART
ERIC MARLIER

BELGIJSKE OBOROŽENE SILE V "POSTVOJAŠKI DRUŽBI"

POVZETEK

Članek proučuje vpliv novega poslanstva vojske kot "policijsko-nadzorne sile" (*constabulary force*) na podobo vojske v javnosti in na rekrutiranje poklicnega vojaškega osebja. Obravnava kompleksen odnos med novim (bodočim) poslanstvom vojske, njeno podobo v javnosti, kakršno poskuša armada uveljaviti prek "stikov z javnostjo", in obeti pridobivanja poklicnih vojakov, pri čemer se osredotoča na sodobne spremembe v Beligiji, zlasti na zaposlitvena pričakovanja in ambicije belgijske mladine. V "običajnih" organizacijah obstaja pozitivna zveza med podobo, ki jo ima organizacija v javnosti, in obnovitvenimi pričakovanji. V primeru vojaške organizacije pa nastopa tretja spremenljivka, zaradi katere je odnos med prvima dvema kompleksnejši: to je stopnja tveganja, ki je povezana z opravljanjem vojaškega poklica. Podatki iz mnenjskih raziskav kažejo, da sodelovanje belgijske vojske v misijah Združenih narodov pozitivno vpliva na njeno podobo v belgijski javnosti, vendar pa zaradi tega vojaški poklici niso postali privlačnejši, ker so nove vloge vojske v predstavah ljudi povezane z večjimi tveganji. Bolj ko je belgijska vojska vključena v takoimenovane "nove misije", bolj se povečuje dvom glede zadostnega števila kandidatov, ki naj bi v prihodnosti zadostili potrebam armade.