

Maria Wągrowska

## **Polish Soldier – Self-Portrait**

The Polish Case

PRIF- Research Paper No. III/5-2009  
© PRIF & Maria Wągrowska 2009

Research Project „The Image of the Democratic Soldier: Tensions Between the Organisation of Armed Forces and the Principles of Democracy in European Comparison“

Funded by the Volkswagen Foundation 2006-2010

## Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Never-ending changes	2
3. Fieldwork – possibilities and limitations	6
4. Main conclusions	14

## 1. Introduction

A Polish soldier, and even more an officer – as any other Pole – is aware of the state of public affairs thanks to, among other things, increasing level of interest in security issues, defence, and armed forces displayed by the electronic media. However, this increasing level of interest is usually accompanied by critical opinions on insufficient state of Polish armed forces equipment, the controversies between the state authority centres regarding security policy, rate of professionalization and modernization of armed forces<sup>1</sup> and discussion on foreign missions. All those factors have impact on the soldiers' awareness and – as it's easy to perceive – their attitude towards armed forces, their own profession and their preparedness to it. These general elements are supplemented by insufficient military training, equipment and training shortages, the fact that many units are underinvested as well as by lack of stable structural solutions (eg. within the system of armed force services and headquarters). Lack of a clear mid- and long-term vision of the armed forces as well as of a comprehensive and consistent legislative framework was an obstacle to establishing a stable system of education and vocational training for military people (especially at a higher level) which would match the needs of the state in the field of defence). The above-mentioned objective and subjective factors are reflected in opinions, voiced by soldiers, that were collected for the needs of third stage of a study conducted for Peace Research Institute Frankfurt ( PRIF).

## 2. Never-ending changes

It seemed that after the parliamentary election which took place in November 2007, the unfavourable situation would change positively. And it did so, but at the same time it became much more complicated, especially because of the financial crisis taking place also in Poland, even though it is not as deep here as in majority of other countries. As regards the armed forces, one can see the negative impact of the crisis in every undertaking. As the former reports (stage 1 and 2) stated, starting from 2002 until 2007, the armed forces budget amounted to 1.95 per cent of GDP for the preceding year. Thus, it increased along with the GDP. But in 2008 the armed forces' budget amounted to only

<sup>1</sup> The political discourse and tensions between the governmental centre, including the Ministry of the National Defence, and the Presidential centre, including National Security Bureau, affect different solutions, also those organisational, structural, power-related, personal, financial and others. They slow down numerous processes.

1.65 per cent of 2007 GDP – despite the fact that it's statutory level was defined in a special „Law on reconstruction and technical modernization and financing of the Polish Armed Forces in 2001-2006”, adopted by the parliament. Technical modernization was supposed to consume 20 per cent of the armed forces budget but the allocation for it was cut down. Such a situation undermines the reliability of the laws adopted by Sejm and at the same time provokes questions whether the government actions comply with the constitution.

Due to the reduction of spending, the plans regarding armed forces professionalization<sup>2</sup>, technical modernization<sup>3</sup>, military missions abroad<sup>4</sup>, but also training, civic education and armed forces promotion in society have been constantly changing. And they are linked to the whole range of areas on which, among other things, soldier's motivation, his expectations regarding his own career and perception of various aspects of armed forces operation depend. However, the budget reduction doesn't affect the overhead costs, the salaries and extras, and this fact should be strongly emphasized because it explains exceptional interest in military service both among those already in the service and candidates.

Apart from the financial aspect, there are two problems linked to the planned and partially being implemented professionalization, both directly connected with the issue of training and attitude towards the armed forces service. First of them consists in the fact that not long ago one couldn't be sure that there would be sufficient number of candidates (due to the drop in the birth rate, low wages, housing problem, not sufficiently attractive career prospects and other factors). However, it turned out recently that these fears weren't justified, as there are so many candidates that the Ministry of Defence can't accept all of them. At the end of March 2009, the Ministry of Defence closed recruitment to non-commissioned officer's schools because there were enough candidates from among those already in military service<sup>5</sup>. According to the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces' spokesman, all N.C.O schools will continue educating candidates who are currently in the service, according to the needs reported by the commanders of particular service. As a result of budget cut down, the armed forces again had to change their plans. The number of soldiers had to be reduced from 120 thousand to 100 thousand or less.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Tusk's government has adopted a program of full professionalization of the 120 thousand regular-soldiers-strong armed forces by the end of 2010. In 2006, President Lech Kaczyński approved the plan of government formed by Law and Justice, that the army should be 150 thousand-strong. According to this plan, the professionalization was supposed to have been completed by 2012. Additionally, it was agreed that the recruitment for compulsory service should be suspended but not abandoned, due to fears that Poland might face some threat to its security.

<sup>3</sup> Technical modernization priorities by 2018 are the following: air defence, helicopters, commanding systems, and unmanned means of reconnaissance but also military personal equipment; however it is difficult to say at the moment if they have a chance to be implemented.

<sup>4</sup> The number of soldiers participating in such missions has been reduced, however due to arrangements with NATO, Polish ISAF contingent in Afghanistan has been increased to 2000 soldiers and another 200 soldiers serve as strategic uncommitted force.

<sup>5</sup> Still in November 2008, after the last draft, it was believed that ca 17 thousand people would have to be accepted to secure full professionalization of the armed forces. At present only ca 4 thousand professional privates are still needed.

At the same time it is planned to create the reserve consisting of 20 thousand soldiers on temporary contracts. This decision gave rise to the outrage among many disappointed young people. One of the Internauts summed it up as follows: \* oldblo: *It's a shame! I don't know who made such a decision and why. I'm very surprised that it was made already after the deadline for submission of applications. One can see what a mess our armed forces are in. This decision was absurd and I must think it over again, for I'm not sure if I want to serve in such armed forces.* Another Internaut, \* mond... said: - *The problem is that they have closed for civilians all doors to the army. At present, majority of those accepted are incidental people. If a guy who finished his education at the elementary or vocational school level is to be a commander of a unit as a corporal who got a 3-month-long training, then what professionalization we have been talking about for so many months?!*

The second ground for fear is that the soldiers won't be properly educated and that they will not contribute to the desired high quality of professionalism of the Polish Army. The high quality of the future cadres can be secured only if the number of soldiers in the regular army is decreased (what is actually happening) and money is invested in soldiers, that is in their training, armament and personal equipment. Even the secret opinion of the Polish Armed Forces Headquarters that has leaked to mass media states that there is no possibility to create the regular army by 2010 - mainly because the training process must take from three to four years. This document, prepared by the Polish Armed Forces Headquarters, is titled "Training Model of Regular Service in Fully Professional Army ("Model Szkolenia SZ PP w warunkach pełnej profesjonalizacji") and describes the rules of preparing candidates for the service; but in the light of the constant changes, it needs to be stressed here that this idea may also prove invalid<sup>6</sup>.

The presently existing training centres are prepared to train only 7 thousand specialists a year. The demand analysis says that exactly 7 thousand specialists will be needed yearly but to achieve this number it is necessary to test 3 times more candidates. To accelerate the training process, it is planned that special training sub-units will be created within the selected military units. However, this solution clearly shows that the Polish armed forces have insufficient training infrastructure and that there are no long-term specialist training programmes. According to the former concept, some 40 thousand soldiers (N.C.O cadre and privates) had to be educated in the nearest two years in order to achieve the full professionalization. At present, as one can understand from the recent Minister of Defence statements, only 4 thousand soldiers, mainly those already in service, need to be further educated. This in turn would mean that the training centres capacities are sufficient.

<sup>6</sup> Candidates are to be sent to the so called "military training centres". After a three-month-long basic course training at these centres they will have to take an exam. Such a training course may be taken as an initial selection process. Those who will qualify, will continue at a six month long specialist training course, that will end with an exam. Only when the candidate passes the exam, he can be admitted to the unit, for the period of 24 to 36 months, that is the period of integrating the units, teaching soldiers to fight as a team.

One can assume that at present soldiers and officers training status is at the level that I described in the report of the investigation level 2; that is: Polish armed forces' experience of recent years in the area of training – both in Poland (individual training and military exercises and with the participation of allies and partners) and on foreign missions – indicates certain regularities like presented at the investigations levels 1 and 2<sup>7</sup>.

Political/ideological/mental training a priori does not exist in contemporary Poland. It is one of the axioms adopted by civilian management and the armed forces in their policy on the army as a response to the practice of such training dating back to the time when the People's Republic of Poland was a member of the Warsaw Pact and also as a reaction to some remnants of that period, which could be still felt in the mid-Nineties. Civic education in the army is nowadays considered to be a component of the process of society's education, offering lessons in democracy and self-governance. It is supposed to facilitate understanding of modern phenomena. At least theoretically, civic education is a concept according to which a key duty of the members of society is to learn how to perform civic functions and become familiar with duties and rights ensured by the legislative system. Civic education helps to shape a civic society.

<sup>7</sup> First of all, general quality of soldiers' training has increased, although not all training objectives have been reached yet. Differences between the levels of training depend on military units' categories and types of performed tasks, i.e. foreign missions and defence preparations. Namely, mobile units, used in rapid deployment to remote areas beyond Polish borders, participate in quite successful training developed according to special curricula. This training helps professional soldiers to be ready to operate in extreme conditions, using modern weapons and equipment. Preparations of selected subdivisions for foreign missions, mostly within ISAF in Afghanistan, gave opportunities to conduct a so far unwitnessed number of exercises at the level of platoon, company and battalion. These types of exercises are supposed to dominate in future training. At the same time, soldiers are to be trained not only for battle in the field, but also in cities (due to asymmetric threats, such as urban guerrilla warfare). Training of the deployment troops lacked a number of tactical exercises in shooting, which are useful in building teams of professionals who can cooperate in formations of various sizes. In the case of other categories, including predominantly compulsory service soldiers, training mostly suffers from inadequate weapons and equipment, e.g. ammunition, although there has been an improvement in this area. These insufficiencies often are the source of frustration and complaints, contributing to a breakdown of the armed forces into those better and those worse. This gap is however considerably diminishing. The aforementioned disproportions will not disappear soon. Moreover, according to many commanders and experts, they should remain unchanged until there is an army which, in the words of the Chief of General Staff, general Franciszek Gagor, has been established „on the basis of clearly defined rules determining the number of units, their assignments and dislocation” Those units which are located in the proximity of firing ranges and have good training and logistical infrastructure have better prospects. Training of the Polish armed forces does not focus solely on foreign missions. It also concentrates on the army's traditional duties, such as defence of the territory. - „Can the experience acquired in patrol units in the deserts of Afghanistan be used in a regular battle with an equal enemy?” one military journalists has recently inquired. The meaning of this question is clear only for those who realize (investigation level 1) that the primary function of the Polish armed forces consists in confronting a symmetric military conflict. The majority of the military share this official viewpoint which anticipates threats to Poland's territorial integrity. Scenarios of large scale exercises on firing grounds include counteracting hostile invasion. Foreign missions are therefore an opportunity for the Polish armed forces to translate a scenario of defending the Republic of Poland into reality; however, soldiers who participate in foreign missions are mostly members of formations which report to the Land Forces and Special Forces whereas Air Forces and the Navy play a key role in defending a country's territorial integrity. The aforementioned national guidelines are in line with directions set out by the North Atlantic Alliance; Poland is in the course of implementing the armed forces development plan for the years 2009 – 2018.

A vital rule in force in the Polish Army states that vocational training should be associated with general education so that a soldier is a patriot.

### 3. Fieldwork – possibilities and limitations

All elements of investigations at levels 1 and 2, and especially those that show the attitude towards the Polish State, the people being the authority now and in the past, the style of leadership, importance of soldiers and officers ethos, as well as family and region of origin, played their role in the direct interviews foreseen for investigation level 3.

I must confess that I had quite ambitious plans. I believed I would manage to interview bigger and quite representative group of our target. I believed I had the proper tool in my hand. Two years ago, that is a year before the parliamentary election and announcement of the professionalization program by our government, together with the several other persons I set up a foundation. The aim of this foundation was to speed up the process of professionalization of Polish Army by which we understood: that our army is 100 percent regular, technically modernised according to highest possible standards, is seen as the chance of the cultural promotion of the individual and follows the increased democratic standards. We have named our foundation “Promilitaria XXI”. We have obtained so called Norwegian Fund grants from among others the Mazovian Province Office for individual projects. The Ministry of National Defence was interested in our projects, internet portal ([www.portal-mundurowy.pl](http://www.portal-mundurowy.pl)) and a leaflet encouraging young people to join army. At times, there were almost 2 300 visitors. So we decided to post the PRIF questionnaire, offering nice awards for filling it in. And what? Not a single answer. The experiment fell flat!

I gathered the answers by the traditional method of interviews. I used the following method: first the interviews in the military unit, then meetings at the training centre for soldiers going on foreign missions according to the procedure<sup>8</sup>

#### 3.1 It's better to be anonymous

It seems to me that carrying out the survey for the needs of PRIF project was possible only thanks to the fact that it was anonymous, both as regards personal details of officers and soldiers participating in it and their units. The participants revealed only the type of armed force to which their unit belongs. In total, 37 persons answered the questionnaire, in writing but during the interviews. This number of participants is in line with the PRIF project assumptions. I believe the questions delivered by PRIF are universal, thus I modified only a few of them in order to adjust them to specificity of Polish armed forces.

<sup>8</sup> The Decision Nr 78, Ministry of National Defence of 15 February 2008 ), it was necessary to obtain the permit issued by the Secretary of State at the Ministry of National Defence.

The evaluation of the empirical research results is based on the questions modified as compared to the original ones.

Below you can find the general description of the questionnaire respondents. All of them are men. To some extent this can be seen as the incident, since there is more and more women in the Polish armed forces and they occupy higher and higher positions. Women make about 1.3% of all regular soldiers, thus if they were proportionally represented in the survey the results rather wouldn't be different. The respondents are of Polish nationality, aged from 25 to 49, with the majority of them in the age of ca 35 years, have been continuously in the military service from 1991 (those with the longest experience in the army) through the 1990s to the present time (those with the shortest experience), mostly as regular soldiers, but also some of them on contracts. Most of them has been in the service for about 15 years<sup>9</sup>.

Most of the respondents are in the Army (which accounts for ca two third of Polish Armed Forces number); four are in the Military Police, two in the Navy and two in the Air Force, and one in the line "type of armed force" entered: educational corps. All respondents are selected in line with the methodological assumptions, that is they meet the PRIF target criteria as regards their rank. Two factors were decisive in respondents selection: suggested by the project cadre (including: non-commissioned officers) and those of the cadre who took part in foreign missions or are getting ready to it.

### 3.2. Priority – material gains

Asked about their reasons for choosing their professional career and the expectations they wanted to achieve as soldiers, clear majority of respondents ranked as top the material issues and living conditions, that is stable job, possibility to provide for the family, early retirement, guaranteed apartment and social position. The soldiers indicated also the opportunities to raise qualifications during their military service. Professional development and promotion are the priorities for the second group of respondents. Respondents qualified to this group emphasize that the military service is their "*way of living*", means „*self-fulfillment*” for them, a factor “*shaping their virtues*”. One respondent said that for him the service is “*the realization of his childhood dreams*”. At the same time, one can see their disappointment with the limited possibilities of personal development in the service. One of the soldiers told me, that „*politicians aren't sure what the armed forces should look like*”.

The third group consists of people who indicated “*new challenges*”, new experiences at home and abroad as well as „*adventure*” and possibility to learn about other cultures as their expectations. Often indicated motivation that underlie the decision to join the armed forces is the possibility to participate in the military mission. However, the sociological research carried out in Poland as well as other sources show that the decisive factor as regards participation in a mission is most often remuneration which is higher than paid

<sup>9</sup> As a curiosity I quote a 35 years old senior warrant officer who wrote that he has been in the service for 16 years 3 months and 23 days

for the service in Poland. Service for the good of motherland ranked only fourth among the priorities of the respondents. Usually, the goals that the respondents hoped to achieve in the service haven't changed in time or changed only slightly. And as the respondents' answers suggest, if the expectations have changed, than only to move the financial stabilization to the top of the list of priorities.

Asked if as soldiers they feel they are defending some ideals and if so, than what are those ideals, a big group of respondents answered „No” and some of them added they didn't have any ideals at all or that those ideals keep changing so often that it is difficult to believe in them. Other group answered this question “yes” but didn't determine what these ideals are. Among those who decided to answer this question “yes”, two types of ideals were indicated, namely freedom and love for the motherland, that is traditional patriotism expressed by the old Polish slogan „God, Honour, Motherland” as well as the world peace (“*I have a hand in making the world a peaceful place*”), and „*protection of the weak civilians*”. The other type of ideals includes such universal virtues as honesty, integrity, wisdom, professional ethos, proper realization of tasks, respect for the uniform. This can lead to the conclusion that although material aspects are the most important, but traditional ideals are also still important.

The results of the interviews carried out for the PRIF project can be recognized as rather representative as regards personal motivation. According to the results of a survey carried out by the Wojskowe Biuro Badań Socjologicznych (WBBS, Military Sociological Research Centre) at the request of the Ministry of National Defence<sup>10</sup> and published in August 2008 in connection with the plans of Polish armed forces professionalization, three main reasons to join the armed forces are : attractive remuneration, prospects for quick promotion and guarantied employment. Next ranked the lust to experience „*a men's adventure*”. Young men interviewed by WBBS prefer the most hazardous professions and every fifth of them hopes to become a paratrooper or a pilot. Military service gives them a chance to see the world. And, as the responses given by the youngest soldiers show, the tendency to value the material gains as the top priority is getting stronger and stronger. The above-mentioned Wojskowe Biuro Badań Społecznych, the only Polish institution studying various internal issues of armed forces<sup>11</sup>, hasn't so far examined exactly the same target as the PRIF set. Therefore it would be difficult to compare our questionnaire to a representative study carried out by a specialized institute. (Until recently, WBBS focused on both conscript and regular soldiers, and in fact it has commenced studies referring to professionalisation of our armed forces only recently). Thus it would be difficult to directly compare the results of the fieldwork for PRIF with the results of a study carried out by a professional institution. However, the review of studies carried out by WBBS from 2005 to the beginning of 2009<sup>12</sup> allows assuming that the results of the questionnaire carried out for the needs of

<sup>10</sup> The Centre operates within the structure of the MND

<sup>11</sup> There are opinions that the results of these studies are not always objective or reflect reality

<sup>12</sup> The detailed analysis by Anna Orzylowska: „Sytuacja społeczno-zawodowa szeregowych zawodowych” (Social and professional situation of regular privates ) of December 2008

PRIF indicate the same trends that are shown in studies carried out on the representative groups with the use of specialized sociological tools. They show that every fourth respondent believes that the military service has met his expectations. Positive opinions are voiced as regards: the timely and guaranteed payments of salaries, guaranteed employment and harmony between their interests and profession. The reasons indicated by those who say their expectations haven't been met are: lack of guarantees for the future employment, being treated without due respect (i.e. as the conscripts and not regular soldiers) and unsatisfactory remuneration.

The soldiers and candidates' hierarchy of values similar to one shown by our study can be found in soldiers' comments published by various military newspapers and magazines. The average Polish soldier's remuneration is to be PLN 3960 gross in 2009<sup>13</sup>, that is by 6,94% more than in the previous year. It is to secure the competitive level of soldiers' remuneration versus remunerations of other uniformed services. The average remuneration in Poland in the last quarter of 2008 was PLN 3000.

One of the top-ranked declared values: traditionally comprehended service to motherland has been gradually falling to the lower positions for several or even several dozen years, even though this hasn't been publicly announced yet. That's why it is worth to quote the Minister of National Defence, Mr. Bogdan Klich; asked what motivation to join the military service should be preferred by the armed forces , he said<sup>14</sup>: *"The contemporary economy requires armed forces to be more and more competitive on the labour market. We have to think rather about the duty stemming from the tasks the soldier has to perform than the patriotic duty to serve in the Polish Armed Forces... One of the main challenges faced by the armed forces is to create the military service ethos that will play the role of a bond joining together the military and the society."*

It's worth noting that the term "job" replaced the term "service" in many soldiers' comments collected for the needs of PRIF projects. However slightly older soldiers still use in most cases the term „service”. They don't "work", they are "*in the service*" but such vocabulary is also an element of demanding attitude. The soldiers just „deserve”.

### 3.3. A good soldier and good commander

In response to the query what traits should characterise a good soldier, the following replies were given in this order: unconditional courage and discipline, and further down: physical fitness, flexibility, resistance to stress, self-control, determination, go-getting, reliable task fulfilment, loyalty to superiors and solidarity with fellow-servicemen, intelligence (cleverness), professionalism, a desire to improve one's qualifications, ambition, a sense of honour and patriotism.

The answer to the question whether those traits differ among women and men was common to all respondents and in the negative. Only three respondents refined their replies somewhat. One said that women had a right to differ from men in terms of

<sup>13</sup> Under the Ordinance by the Minister of National Defence of 21 November 2008.

<sup>14</sup> In the interview for „Polska Zbrojna” weekly, No 1, 4 January 2009

physical fitness<sup>15</sup>, and another that men make better commanders. Yet another stated that there should be no women in the army. With regards to women in the army, Lt-Commodore Beata Szubińska, chairwoman of the Council for Women in the Armed Forces, emphasises that according to a stereotype men are suited for the service, whilst women first have to prove themselves. According to the findings of the WBBS, nearly half of the women have encountered envy on the part of males, and one-third have encountered hostility.

As regards the ethos of the military, some respondents felt it was important, whilst others claimed it didn't really count. The first group described the ethos of the armed forces as comprising courage, honour, righteousness, military tradition, memory of Poland's military triumph, service to the country, respect for national symbols and the uniform, dedication, brotherhood and helping others. Members of that group are among those who stress the importance of 'principles' (such as those contained in the military code of honour). Some refer back to the question about the qualities of a good soldier. But more than one-half left a query instead of an answer or simply replied: 'I don't know'. ('Nowadays nothing' or '*It's worth considering whether that concept still functions in the armed forces*').

The situation was much the same with regards to the question: what links a given person to military tradition? More than one-half either left that question unanswered or answered 'nothing.' The replies of the remaining respondents may be grouped as follows: most equated military tradition with family tradition (usually a father had served in the armed forces). Other associations included: the uniform, military oath, one's own unit, its banner and finally the country and its history. In this context worth noting is the term 'uniform', which is not just a synonym for military garb but is equated with military tradition. Fascination with uniforms is deeply rooted in our history, emphasised political sociologist Professor Jacek Wasilewski<sup>16</sup>. The respondents eagerly, extensively and quite similarly voiced their opinions as to what should characterise a good commander. They ranks his personal and command characteristics on a single level. A commander should have knowledge and skills, combine intelligence with resoluteness and initiative, properly evaluate situations and prudently take decisions. At the same time, he should maintain good cooperation with his subordinates, respect and care for them, set tasks commensurate with their potential and 'be orientated towards people' ('*A good commander is one whom people follow.*')

<sup>15</sup> For a number of years, the lowering of lowering physical-fitness requirements in the army has been a debate

<sup>16</sup> Statement for the daily *Dziennik*, 2 June 2008

### 3.4. The armed forces and society

Traditional Polish society has basically approached the national armed forces uncritically. As noted in the introduction, only recently have the armed forces become the subject of more profound interest. The armed forces have always ranked at the top slots in surveys on the credibility of Polish state institutions (investigation level 1). Surveys are generally not conducted on how the military perceives itself or what its attitudes towards society are. Hence even fragmentary research such as that linked to the PRIF project are of considerable value. Questions such as ‘is a public debate conducted in your country as to what constitutes a ‘good soldier?’ and ‘do you feel it is it on the mark?’ evoked fairly emotional reaction.

According to many respondents, such debates are not being conducted. According to another group, they are conducted exclusively within the military community, particularly in front-line units. Still a third group of respondents felt they were conducted among people with no idea about military service, and academic deliberations do not reflect reality. ‘*Any such digressions lead nowhere, because no-one puts them into practice,*’ was one respondent’s view.

To the question as to whether the way society perceives the armed forces is changing and, if so, as a result of what factors — the replies varied greatly. *Society was never negatively disposed towards the armed forces, because the armed forces are society,* was one respondent’s view. *Society places greater confidence in the army, and a positive attitude to it prevails,* said another. In general, military personnel believe the image of the armed forces in society is improving. On the one hand, the army is viewed as a’ *mainstay of patriotism*’ and a ‘*guardian of democracy and Western civilisation*’. Military personnel know that a sense of security is expected of them. On the other hand, the image is changing ‘in the context of professionalization’, because most opt for an army of choice, not one of coercion. However, society tends to be opposed to missions. The impression one gets when reading the survey is confirmed by following several Internet portals which show how wide a spectrum of opinions are encountered, particularly amongst younger servicemen. In general, military people feel that society has little awareness of what the armed forces and their tasks are all about. Ordinary people form their opinions on the basis of press reports, especially negative ones. Such views may be encountered amongst net surfers, and our respondents have replied in the same general vein when asked about the prejudices and stereotypes civilians hold towards the military. Among the negative traits ascribed to military personnel the most frequently cited are: alcohol abuse and downright drunkenness, parasitism, the similarity of the present armed forces to those of the communist era, military hazing, undereducated personnel and, in the view of public opinion, high earnings.

### 3.5. The armed forces and democracy

To the respondents, issues relating to the relationship between the armed forces and the democratic state seemed the most remote of all the subjects they voiced opinions about. Only the issue of conflicts and how they are resolved in the army was close to the heart of all the respondents and exceptionally unanimous.

Their general feeling was that internal matters should not go beyond the military community, confirming the most common practice in that area. In general, conflicts do not get beyond the military unit or the local community. Conflicts get out into the open only when they are so deep or so broad in scope that they cannot be concealed or when they are connected to disasters and accidents involving the military (such as the above-mentioned losses caused by the military air disaster). In the army collective responsibility is still in force, one of the respondents emphasised and regarded it as out of place. Human-resources management leaves a lot to be desired, another respondent noted, adding that cliques and old-boy groups often run things — a situation difficult to accept. No-one listens to ‘ordinary soldiers’ who, as a rule are losers from the start, complain the respondents. They agree that conflicts should be resolved through talks between the commander and a psychologist and soldiers.

Only a few of those asked about respect for rights and freedom in the army gave more exhaustive replies than simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The latter short affirmative or negative replies were roughly equal in number and therefore provided no basis to evaluate whether the basic rights of soldiers were respected in the army. Those who did give replies indicated only the requirement of staying put for an extended period and qualified that as a violation of rights. The number of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers were also more or less equal to the question: Do you agree with the thesis that a soldier should serve his country and be apolitical? Since this matter was not elaborated on by the respondents, their explicitness makes one wonder, especially with regards to negative responses, since both themes — love of country and apolitical attitudes — are inculcated in all soldiers. Worth citing, however, are two extreme responses. One stated: *‘This matter is beyond discussion; we serve the Nation, not some political option.’* The other said: *‘No, because the country does not serve the soldier.’* The soldiers declined to or did not know how to evaluate civic education. Only one more developed response mentioned that education was necessary, since the overall educational level is poor. The armed forces need good cadres. To the question as to whether civic education was useful in military life, most indicated — in accordance with the tenets of their educational programmes — that it is a source of information about the region in which their home unit is based and the historical continuity of the Polish Armed Forces. The frequent references to Polish history and martyrdom, with which people in Poland regularly encounter, as well as what is known as historical politics leave the soldiers rather indifferent. To them it appears to be a matter of secondary importance.

### 3.6. Service beyond Poland's borders

Attitudes to military service beyond the country's borders and the realities prevailing during the fulfilment of missions abroad turned out to generate the most emotion. The spectrum of responses as to relations amongst politicians sending troops abroad and the soldiers performing such missions was fairly broad. However, no response contained any new elements diverging from commonly held opinions. Some soldiers feel Polish politicians have acted responsibly, whilst others — on the contrary — believe they were irresponsible when sending soldiers beyond Polands' borders or the NATO and European Union areas. It was pointed out that politicians were not familiar with the military aspects of foreign policy nor the realities in which the soldiers (who '*stick out their necks*') have to stay and serve. On the other hand, it was stated that '*soldiers are meant to follow orders*'. Two of the responses emphasised that soldiers are not sent directly by politicians but by '*the people Polish citizens have voted into office.*'

The soldiers voiced divergent opinions as to the sense of foreign missions, from the negation thereof, without backing their opinion with any argument, to the view that the missions do make sense, since they contribute to Poland's security even if they take place far beyond its borders. One response expressed regret that Poland has practically not benefited from a single mission even though there had been economic opportunities aplenty. With regards to personal motivation, the respondents stated their mission had been motivated by their desire to help others, hence politicians should not be the ones to take such decisions. For the majority a foreign mission was an opportunity to gain experience and make money. One of the respondents stated that he loved Poland and wanted to serve it, but the pay for the type of work being done is too low.

Most of those surveyed were of the opinion that Polish military contingents engaged in foreign missions were not as well trained for the task as the armies of other countries. At the same time they noted a tendency towards improvement. In the view of the respondents, including some experienced in foreign missions, the main value of those missions are the soldiers themselves and — despite being under-equipped — the contingent's fighting spirit.<sup>17</sup>

The soldiers quickly adapt to the conditions prevailing at the mission venue. In terms of training, the respondents emphasise, they are not essentially inferior to others. But the soldiers complain of poorer combat gear and equipment, including personal equipment and logistic back-up. They also point out a chronic lack of financial resources, inadequate social facilities, a poorer knowledge of languages and the excessive formalities required when dealing with even the simplest of matters. One person stated that the state of Polish contingents has been improving since the Iraqi mission (which started in spring 2003 and ended in autumn 2008).

Most of those queried as to whether international cooperation in security policy had made an impact on the Polish armed forces answered in the affirmative. That influence

<sup>17</sup> This concerns the fact that, unlike certain other allied contingents, Polish forces are unencumbered by national caveats.

has usually been evaluated as essential or positive. It has manifested itself in terms of new military formations as well as adapting training programmes to current military needs. The answers received to questions about conflicts with superiors during foreign missions were insufficient to determine whether they were the same or different in nature to those occurring in military units at home. Some felt they were similar, whilst others regarded them as different (*'Less army-wide stupidity prevails there,'* said one of the respondents).

Polish contingents are still at the stage of learning from others, the respondents emphasised. In general, they evaluated their one preparation to perform a mission abroad as mediocre. The general evaluation was confirmed by the opinions voiced about training courses ahead of foreign missions which are obligatory for Polish forces. Some feel the courses provide good training to perform missions beyond the frontiers of Poland, NATO and the EU by enhancing a soldier's knowledge and skills. Others, quite the opposite, regard the level of preparation as poor.

Opinions were more or less equally divided as to whether the course contents could be learnt during normal exercises. Some said the courses gave a broader range of knowledge and specialist skills for sappers and topographers as well as communications and medical-rescue personnel. Others said similar or roughly similar exercises are held in the home unit. They refer to exercises in the field of military tactics. Judging by the volume and tone of the opinions expressed by the respondents, the courses involve more practical activities including marksmanship and aid. That is also attested to by the fact that, asked what interested them the most during training, the soldiers mentioned factors that could be divided into three groups: conditions prevailing during missions; the safety of fellow-soldiers, treatment of POWs, responsibility for using firearms; and knowledge of the society, culture and religion of the indigenous population of mission areas.

#### 4. Main conclusions

In general, the PRIF survey has confirmed the generally accepted view of the attitudes held by professional and contractual Polish soldiers towards basic and frequently changing issues relating to their military service as well as towards the model of a democratic state still taking shape in Poland. The views compiled herewith point out above all the material motivation of an army career. That development is not new. It has been intensifying ever since Poland embarked on market reforms, when it has become easy to compare the living standards of those employed in the public and private sectors. Material motivation also existed in the past, although the uniformed services largely declared their dedication to higher causes such as defence of the homeland (which dedication of course cannot be denied). But only quite recently, about a year-and-a-half ago, did the competitive earnings offered by the armed forces and the material aspects of military service become the subject of downright demonstrative discussion. That was the

result of a wide campaign to promote military careers launched in connection with the full professionalization of the army. As can be seen in the responses to the survey at hand, the financial aspects of a military ‘job’ are now openly emphasised.

One also notices that for many career and contract soldiers an important motive for linking up with the armed forces is the desire to experience something new, put themselves to the test and compare various situations both at home and abroad. All idealistic motivation, or even indirect or direct involvement in issues of an idealistic nature, are a further consideration. That is relatively surprising for two reasons: earlier, ignoring idealistic issues had not been openly admitted, and the armed services had been regarded as a special, deeply patriotic component of Polish society. That unique significance of the armed forces and military tradition is emphasised at every step of the way in an effort to inculcate it into servicemen.

But it is understandable that soldiers are more concerned about matters pertaining to each of them individually or affecting their military units than about more remote issues. It should be noted that the modern soldier is functioning amid conditions of general stability in Poland and Europe and is not put to the direct test of, for instance, fighting in defence of Polish territory. It seems therefore that most of the respondents demonstrate a rather indifferent and passive attitude to the armed forces and would not be prepared to risk insubordination towards their commanding officers in a situation evoking their internal opposition. The soldiers’ responses display considerable criticism of their superiors, the way military life is organised and the equipment at their disposal. The armed forces have retained their hierarchical structure as well as behavioural conventions specific for that institution. In developing new means of communication on matters essential to a given formation (which had not been the subject of fieldwork), they nevertheless do not take full advantage of a democratic system. That feature apparently cannot be changed without protracted and concerted effort.