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## **Presentation of the 60th annual report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces**

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### **Culture of responsibility in times of excessive organisation**

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to present my 4th annual report to you today in my capacity as the German Bundestag's Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. At the same time, this is the 60th report since the existence of this office. A scientific symposium will be held in May to mark this anniversary.

My report for the year 2018 continues to see the personnel situation in the Bundeswehr as strained, and the materiel situation as deficient. The priority issue this year is administrative management - in the eyes of many servicewomen and men: the "bureaucratic monster that is the Bundeswehr". Or in other words - the structural aspects of the Bundeswehr's current problems.

First a few figures: By 2025, the body of military personnel is supposed to expand to 198,500 active servicewomen and men. At the end of 2018, the figure was 181,000. Currently, for various different reasons, the Bundeswehr has 21,500 vacant officer and petty officer posts. Others are left to pick up the slack, taking care of this work alongside their own. This widespread "gap stopping" is a strain on existing personnel.

Although in the year under review, the Bundeswehr recorded a plus of 4,000 temporary career volunteers and career soldiers, in contrast to this the number of new servicewomen and men entering the Bundeswehr recorded a drop of 3,000 to just 20,000 new entrants (2017: 23,000), the lowest figure in its history.

This means that the Bundeswehr is growing, but it is attracting fewer and fewer new personnel. At the moment, the extension of existing temporary contracts is playing a very crucial role in the urgently needed headcount increase. This in turn means the Bundeswehr is growing older and increasingly becoming a compact career army. This is not ideal in terms of ensuring a living, breathing exchange with society (in the old days of the large West-German conscription Bundeswehr there were 250,000 new entrants every year). The number of applicants to serve in the military is also dropping significantly: from 58,000 in 2016 to 57,000 in 2017 to 52,000 in the year under review. This negative trend is cause for concern.

One of the main points of criticism from servicewomen and men is materiel readiness. In the fifth year after the epochal year of 2014 (with the resolutions by the NATO summit in Wales

to reactivate collective defence), the trend reversals Germany adopted nationally are still largely unnoticeable. The “stop-gap” system of juggling shortfalls and shortages persists in all areas. Like the 2015 VJTF (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force), the 2019 NATO VJTF is reliant on equipment being lent back and forth on a massive scale. This includes personal equipment like armoured vests or night vision equipment, too.

An immediate action programme would be good, one could even say liberating: at least for the small things that have already been invented, tested, certified and introduced at the Bundeswehr. The upshot is that to date, full resourcing only exists on paper, to be implemented by 2031. Spare parts continue to lack on a large scale; industrial maintenance and servicing is sluggish; training is suffering particularly severely in the flying units of all services, be it combat planes or helicopters, but also in the boat and ship squadrons of the Navy. All of this has already been reported in the annual reports of the previous years, as have the tank availability rates or the army’s deplorable radio equipment situation.

I wish I could report: It is spring, everything will be different now. But the truth is: It is still winter.

Still, there are now plans for spring, for instance the new capabilities profile.

Accelerating procurement is an absolute must. This is also what the Coalition Agreement says.

Taking the large example of the Tornado and the small example of flying suits, the report shows how many agencies are working on the same thing, each from their own specialist perspective. But even if everyone does everything 100 per cent correct, often the result is not good: It takes too long, the quality is not good, costs explode or there is no solution at all. Who is responsible for this? Why are all the problems well known, but so difficult to solve?

Responsibility is a core term in the concept of *Innere Führung* (leadership development and civic education). But clear and accountable responsibility seems to be disappearing today in a labyrinth of entangled competencies. Responsibility for outcomes, responsibility for processes, command responsibility, resource responsibility, personnel responsibility - all of this is divided up across the growing number of autonomous trunks of the Bundeswehr. The specialist jargon for these is “major operational elements”.

- Example: Today, a company commander has marginal influence over the re-enlistment or change in career path of the servicewomen and men he leads.
- The commander of a tactical air wing with 1500 military and non-military staff and flying assets totalling €3 billion has funds of €250 per year at his disposal to spend under his own responsibility. (The report calls for a sum of €50,000.)
- One of the *lessons learned* from the autumn manoeuvre Trident Juncture in Norway was that the wide range of different “major organisational elements” involved from Germany was not really an advantage. Even standardised working hours arrangements had to be scrambled together later when operations were already underway.

So responsibility in one set of hands is the magic word for the future.

In 2017, the Federal Ministry of Defence launched a project entitled "*Innere Führung* today", whose results are now available. The servicewomen and men themselves were asked where they saw problems. What one hears about the findings sounds very realistic. Many soldiers tell me: "We are micro-managing ourselves to death".

To change this, what is needed is not more analyses or commissions, but rather structural decisions: For example: Centralising use responsibility for the materiel of all the services at FOBwEITISS in Coblenz was a mistake. It is well known that this office is already overloaded with work. Maintaining operational readiness should be the responsibility of the user, not the procurer. This saves time, money and stress.

With regard to managing improvements in the future, in the annual report I propose a method which is not new but which can have a swift impact; in modern speak we call it *benchmarking* - learning from others to produce better results.

So: Why does the Royal Air Force of our British friends produce so many more Eurofighter flight hours than Germany? Or: Why are the Berlin Student Services (Studierendenwerk Berlin) able to guarantee good food and accommodation for tens of thousands of young people so much more cost-effectively than the Bundeswehr's services? And why does the Federal Police Force obtain its new large border patrol boats in the space of just three years?

Our Bundeswehr, from my current experiences of it, is suffering from a shortage of personnel *and at the same time* excessive organisation. Too often, different people are doing the same work twice or working against each other. Too much working time is being lost on poor structures. And not every expensive digitalisation project is always a help here.

Major individual issues in the year under review were the inbound and outbound flights to and from Mali and Afghanistan. Flight cancellations and delays spanning several days are annoying for the servicewomen and men, frustrating for the families and not acceptable for a country like Germany. With additional rented charter flights and the improving A400M shuttle, the situation seems to have eased now somewhat.

What I still find difficult, though, is civilian air transportation inside the theatres of operation in Mali and Afghanistan. Soldiers are criticising this. We should be able to ensure our own, protected military transportation.

For some of the servicewomen and men affected, the extension of the standard deployment period from four back to six months again feels like a step back. It should at least have first been investigated what impacts the varying lengths of missions abroad would have on the soldiers and their families.

The number of new cases of PTSD and comparable mission-related disorders remains high (2018: 279, 2017: 274). This can also break out years later. What is important here is to continue to expand the number of therapy places available and to reduce waiting times.

In the year under review, the change in the retirement age for career soldiers was the subject of much debate. My plea here would be to continue to make this voluntary and to couple it with financial incentives. If one makes subsequent changes to the conditions, the issue of attractiveness needs to be given some thought, too. What is more - as is the case with temporary career volunteers – this entails the body of staff being expanded without having to recruit new personnel. The Bundeswehr is getting older.

Like in previous reporting years, there were cases of inappropriate behaviour by superiors, but the boom in the number of cases reported is now plateauing.

The number of cases of sexism reported has increased. This may have to do with the awareness-raising effect of the Me-too debate, as well as the slow, continued increase in the percentage of women now in the army.

The Parliamentary Commissioner is not able to ascertain whether there are right-wing extremist networks in the Bundeswehr, other authorities and agencies are called upon here. I do note, however, that soldiers regularly continue to have to leave the Bundeswehr due to right-wing extremist incidents. Soldiers report, superiors sanction. For many this is a matter of honour. And that is how it should be. But socialisation and historical and civic education also have their part to play here.

I expressly welcome the reforms in the field of training, also as a lesson from the serious cases of the previous year. Physical fitness can be trained, but it cannot and must not always simply be assumed.

One final remark: The defence budget for 2019 is good - at €43.2 billion almost five billion more than in 2018. So a lack of money does not have to be the stumbling block anymore. Not if the coalition target of 1.5 per cent of GDP by 2024 is upheld at any rate.

From the perspective of the servicewomen and men, expectations weigh very heavy. Now it is time for decisions.