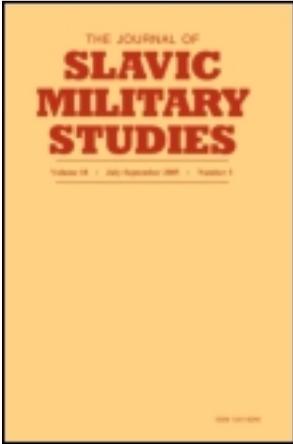


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Europe without Soldiers? Recruitment and Retention across the Armed Forces of Europe, by Tibor Szvircsev Tresch and Christian Leuprecht, (eds.)

Andrew T. Wolff ^a

^a Dickinson College

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Book Review

Tibor Szvircsev Tresch and Christian Leuprecht, (eds.), *Europe without Soldiers? Recruitment and Retention across the Armed Forces of Europe*. Montreal, Quebec, Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-55339-246-0.

In June 2011, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned that European states lack the means and willingness to deploy effective military force. He feared that Europe was becoming militarily irrelevant. One facet of these fears is the fact that most European states are having trouble recruiting and retaining military personnel. If European militaries are undermanned then they will be unable to successfully operate.

This compilation of articles edited by Tresch and Leuprecht is a welcome and timely study of the specifics of Europe's recruitment and retention crisis. It examines a broad selection of European countries to assess their resourcing challenges and policy responses. The book contains a variety of content including reports on surveys of career attitudes among soldiers and potential recruits, detailed case studies of individual countries' efforts to bolster flagging recruitment quotas, and cross-country comparative analyses of the staffing problem.

Since the end of the Cold War many European states have switched to an all-volunteer force structure. A host of factors prompted this switch: conscript armies tended to struggle in providing high-skilled labor needed by modern militaries, governments demanded expeditionary capabilities instead of static territorial defense, and societal norms of individualism and anti-conscription created a preference for professionalization.

According to this book, the switch to an all-volunteer force has subsequently created new challenges. Governments now find that they must openly compete with the private sector for qualified talent. To attract young people to a military career, policy-makers are forced to implement monetary and non-monetary incentive packages. The demographic trends of low fertility rates and a graying population mean that the pool of qualified recruits is shrinking. Furthermore, the switch to an all-volunteer force creates a skewed labor structure within the military that favors officers over NCOs and privates. Quite simply, there are too many officers and not enough foot soldiers. All of these challenges result in European countries routinely failing to meet recruitment quotas.

The authors of this volume deserve credit for their level of detail in examining this human resourcing problem. The range of countries considered (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) is quite impressive. In case study after case study, it becomes apparent to the reader that all European countries are facing similar macro-level challenges, yet the authors provide enough analysis to reveal there are important differences among countries in the specific nature of their recruitment challenges. For example, there is a divergence among countries on the issue of public perception of the military. Some countries, such as the Czech Republic, are hampered by the public's negative perception of the military as a desirable profession. But other countries, such as Belgium, do not share this perception problem.

The book also shows that policy responses tend to be highly varied. Spain has a policy of recruiting Spanish-speakers from Latin America to serve in its military. The United Kingdom draws upon foreigners from Commonwealth countries to bolster its ranks. The Netherlands focuses on ethnic minorities and women to solve their recruitment shortfalls. Other countries offer creative financial incentives to counter recruiting shortfalls, such as the Czech Republic's subsidized housing allowance for servicemen. Despite these policy innovations, European militaries continue to fail to attract and retain personnel.

As is oftentimes the case with compilations, there is inconsistency in the quality of author contributions. Some chapters are quite comprehensive in their analysis of human resource challenges faced by individual countries, whereas as other chapters, quite frankly, lack the content and analysis to adequately understand a countries' specific history in dealing with these staffing challenges. Another noteworthy flaw with this volume is the absence of analysis on the military forces of France, Italy, and Russia. Although the volume does cast a wide net for countries examined, it is disappointing for a book on armed forces in Europe to neglect these important security players.

Despite these few shortcomings, the book's authors should be commended for dealing with this important subject in a meticulous fashion. This book is a useful scholarly work for European security experts and it helps illuminate why many, such as Secretary Gates, question whether Europe will be able to muster sufficient military force in the future. Europe will undoubtedly continue to have soldiers, but will it have enough soldiers is an unresolved question.

Andrew T. Wolff
Dickinson College