

Katarina Djokic and Marija Ignjatijevic

# WHY ARE PEOPLE LEAVING THE SERBIAN DEFENCE SYSTEM?



---

Katarina Djokic and Marija Ignjatijevic

# WHY ARE PEOPLE LEAVING THE SERBIAN DEFENCE SYSTEM?

## **PUBLISHER**

Belgrade Centre for Security Policy  
Djure Jaksica 6/5, Belgrade  
Telephone: +38111 3287 226  
E-mail: [office@bezbednost.org](mailto:office@bezbednost.org)  
[www.bezbednost.org](http://www.bezbednost.org)

## **AUTHORS**

**Katarina Djokic**  
**Marija Ignjatijevic**

## **TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH**

Ivan Kovanovic

## **ENGLISH PROOFREADING**

Simon Banwell

## **DESIGN AND LAYOUT**

Tijana Milanovic

*Preparation of this publication was supported by Transparency International Defence and Security (TI-DS) through the project "Why are they leaving? – Casting light on the link between corruption and staff retention in Serbian defence sector". The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of TI-DS.*

**Belgrade, March 2020**

---

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Who is Leaving the Defence System?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Why Are People Leaving?</b>	<b>9</b>
• Low Pay Not a Decisive Factor	9
• Negative Selection	12
• Overtime and the Burden of Additional Duties	15
• Lack of training and professional development	17
<b>Why Are Military Personnel Leaving Rather Than Complaining?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>What Steps Have the Ministry of Defence and the Government Taken to Date?</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>While the Ministry of Defence Dithers...</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	<b>25</b>

---

# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

## Dear reader,

Before you, is a report on the personnel drain from the Serbian Ministry of Defence (Ministarstvo odbrane – MO) and the Serbian Armed Forces (Vojska Srbije – VS). To date, research conducted by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) on the defence system of the Republic of Serbia has shown human resource management to be a key area that demands greater attention. As much as, if not more than a scarcity of material resources, a dearth of personnel makes it difficult to maintain and build up the operational and functional capabilities of the military. In recent years, information has come to light revealing that Serbian Armed Forces personnel are leaving the service en masse, due to dissatisfaction, not only with pay, but also with working conditions. The BCSP has, therefore, conducted research with the aim of assessing the extent of this phenomenon, identifying why people are leaving the defence system and proposing further steps to address this issue.

The aim of this study is not to undermine the defence system but rather to prevent it from becoming further undermined. We hold the conviction that discussion on defence system management by professionals from the relevant fields far better serves national security than concealing problems behind a veil of “military secrecy”, which can be used to mask mismanagement and corruption. Democratic civilian control and engagement with other players can assist the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces to identify and resolve problems. In this regard, we hope that these two institutions will not see this report as a malevolent attack and will instead understand that it is intended to be of use in helping them with future reforms.

The study incorporated an analysis of legislation in the field of human resource management within the defence system, media reports, Ministry of Defence announcements, records of National Assembly sessions and releases by the Military Union of Serbia (Vojni sindikat Srbije). We interviewed serving and former military personnel, as well as experts well-acquainted with the defence system, who were able to provide insights from various angles. In gathering research data, the BCSP was unable to reach representatives of other military unions but in verifying some of our findings, we did make use of notes from meetings held previously with the representatives of two other military unions.

The main sample of in-depth interviews comprised of twelve respondents, mostly former members of the Serbian Armed Forces and defence sector employees, of which:

- Two were women and there were ten men;
- Seven were officers, two professional soldiers and three civilians;
- Eight respondents voluntarily terminated their service, two remain employed in the defence system and two others have retired. Most of the respondents (seven in total) who are no longer employed by the MO and VS, concluded their service in 2017 or later, while three others concluded their service in either 2015 or 2016.

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank all the interlocutors for contributing to this research with valuable insights, as well as colleagues Karolina MacLahlan, Saša Đorđević, Predrag Petrović, and Vladimir Erceg for helpful comments on previous versions of the text.

The respondents who have concluded their service, that is, terminated contracts with the Ministry of Defence or the Serbian Armed Forces, are currently employed in private sector jobs in Serbia or abroad and are not politically active.

The research findings are limited by the small sample size and the lack of NCOs among the respondents (hereinafter, the terms respondent and respondents will refer to the group of people described above). Nevertheless, the sample does include respondents of different age groups and from different units or organisational sub-divisions within the MO and VS, who are or were employed in a variety of work environments. The respondents do not know one another. We can, therefore, surmise that testimonies that appear in a number of interviews are credible. While the testimony of one respondent is subject to misinterpretation of certain events, distorted by fallible memory or corrupted by a desire to represent an event as worse than it was, the likelihood that several different and unconnected respondents will “misremember” the same situation is small.

The interviews were conducted from September to November 2019 in Belgrade, Kraljevo and Vranje. Of these, eight respondents were interviewed face-to-face, while the rest were interviewed using voice over IP applications (Viber or WhatsApp).

Since this is the first empirical study on this topic conducted in Serbia, the process of gathering data was itself both interesting and unpredictable in equal measure. We reached the respondents through personal contacts and recommendations. Around ten potential respondents we contacted declined to participate. The reasons they cited were fear (even former VS personnel thought that participating in the study could result in problems for themselves, or that talking to us could cause risks for former colleagues in their old units who have not yet “demobbed”) and an unwillingness to recall something they had “left behind”. It is possible that for these reasons, the technique of “snowballing”, in which respondents refer us to their colleagues and friends, was ineffectual. Nevertheless, the advantage of this failing was that we were able to construct a sample of respondents with no links to one another.

One common feature of those respondents who had voluntarily terminated their contracts with the defence system is a high degree of identification with their former job and a sense of regret that they had to leave (“I cried when I left the military”; “I dream about the military”; “I still feel like I’m in uniform”). Respondents report that they did not cite a reason when filing their discharge papers, giving a number of explanations for not doing so: they did not believe anybody would seriously read it; they had no trust in the system and feared that what they wrote could be used against them; or they thought their superiors were already well aware of why their employees were leaving.

This report will provide answers for a number of key questions, in terms of the outflow of personnel from the defence system. The first part will analyse the scale of the problem and attempt to answer the question of who is leaving the system – i.e. what is the structure of the departing personnel? Subsequently, we will examine the most pressing problems that are most often cited as reasons for leaving the system – these being pay, promotion and the burden of additional duties. We will also look at the long-term consequences of the outflow of personnel and discuss how this issue affects the functioning of the defence system as a whole. The end of the report contains recommendations that could contribute to overcoming the identified human resource management issues in the defence system.

---

## WHO IS LEAVING THE DEFENCE SYSTEM?

There is no precise publicly available information on the number of people who have recently left the defence system of their own volition. In response to a BCSP request for information on the numbers of SAF personnel who voluntarily terminated professional military service over the past ten years, the Ministry of Defence indicated that “all analyses, assessments and forecasts produced in human resources management information systems for the needs of the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces” are classified as “confidential”<sup>2</sup>. According to the Military Union of Serbia, on average around 1,500-1,600 professional military personnel per year have been leaving the service over the last ten years<sup>3</sup>. According to Ministry of Defence information from July 2017, in the previous year and a half, 1,048 new professional soldiers were recruited, while 948 terminated their contracts or chose not to renew them of their own volition<sup>4</sup>. For the purposes of comparison, unofficial data put the total number of systematised work places in the MoD and Serbian Armed Forces at around 32,000<sup>5</sup>.

### — Who are professionals in the Serbian Armed Forces? —

Professionals in the Serbian Armed Forces are military personnel and civilians serving in the Serbian Armed Forces. Professional military personnel include officers, NCOs and professional soldiers.

Civilians serving in the Serbian Armed Forces are military employees and military staffers.<sup>6</sup>

The term “**Serbian Armed Forces personnel**” is broader and includes those completing military service and the personnel of reserve units while they are performing duties for the SAF Nevertheless, for the purposes of brevity, in this text we will use this term to refer exclusively to professional Serbian Armed Forces personnel.

The Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces, as well as the country’s leadership, often issue conflicting information on whether staffing is a serious challenge. In response to press inquiries in 2018, the ministry emphasised that the outflow of personnel from the SAF was “within normal limits, as in previous years, and does not hinder the execution of regular tasks, nor does it affect the [military’s] operational capabilities”<sup>7</sup>. In October 2017, the then Chief of the General Staff stated that the military has been facing “problems of that kind” (recruitment and personnel outflow) since transitioning to professional

---

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Defence, Human Resources Sector – Personnel Administration. Response to a BCSP freedom of information request. Correspondence number 11684-17, 10/12/2019. In its response, the ministry refers to this provision: *Odluka o određivanju stepena tajnosti u Ministarstvu odbrane i Vojsci Srbije* (Decision on Determining the Level of Secrecy in the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces). Official Military Gazette 5/2016, Annex 3, Item 262.

<sup>3</sup> Cvetković, Lj. “Nekada major Vojske Srbije, danas kamiondžija” (“Once a Major in the Army, Now a Truck Driver”), *Radio slobodna evropa*, 03/09/2018. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/odliv-kadrovi-vojska-srbije/29467823.html>

<sup>4</sup> Popadić, J. “Iz vojske svake godine istupi 800 ‘ugovoraca’” (“800 contract soldiers leave the army every year”), *Politika*, 19/07/2017.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, *Armed forces personnel, na osnovu podataka: International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance, 2017*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.P1>

<sup>6</sup> Law on the Serbian Armed Forces, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 116/2007, 88/2009, 101/2010 – state law, 10/2015, 88/2015 – Constitutional Court Decision and 36/2018, Articles 8, 9 and 10.

<sup>7</sup> Cvetković (2018).

## WHY ARE PEOPLE LEAVING THE SERBIAN DEFENCE SYSTEM ?

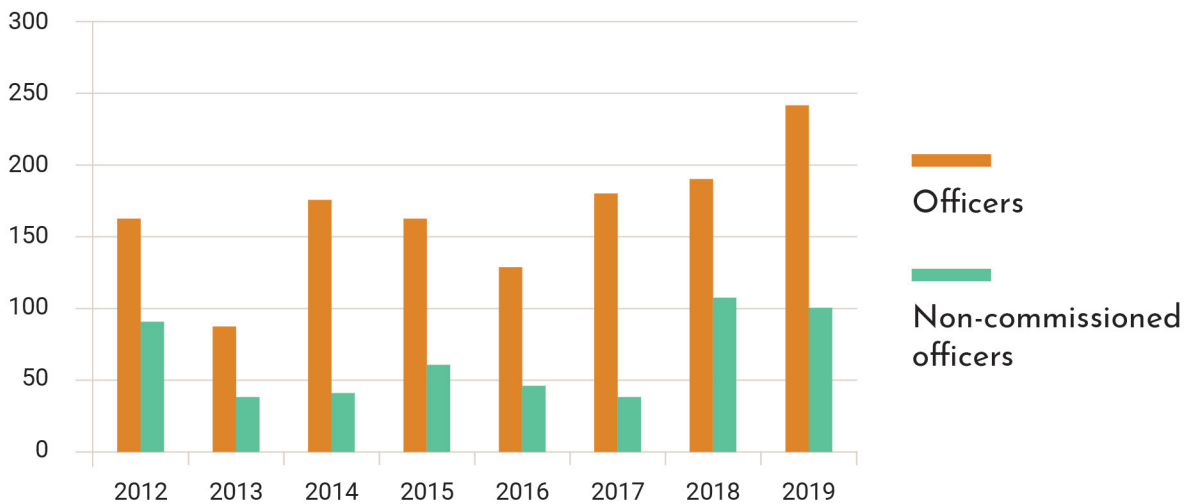
recruitment and that “this is nothing new”<sup>8</sup> – only for the minister of defence to admit the following in April 2018: “Correct, more people need to join the ranks of the army before we’ll be satisfied, for recruitment to be appropriate. They do. We are short of soldiers, we are short of NCOs, but mostly soldiers.”<sup>9</sup> The challenge of recruiting and retaining personnel in the air force, in particular, attracted the expert community in relation to recent procurement (donation) of combat aircraft. Although the Ministry of Defence recently fervently denied allegations that it is faced with a shortage of pilots and aviation technicians<sup>10</sup>, President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić was, on several occasions, open about the fact that “we are missing generations of young [pilots]”<sup>11</sup>.

In the absence of complete and up to date official information on the number of professional SAF personnel who have voluntarily left the service, the best source for an attempted assessment is in the form of discharge orders for officers and NCOs, which are published in the Official Military Gazette (Službeni vojni list – SVL). This method of assessment however, comes with its own serious limitations. First, orders are published only for officers and NCOs, but not for professional soldiers, military officials and officeholders, nor for Ministry of Defence civil servants and officeholders. Secondly, these orders do not contain the reasons given for the discharge and it is reasonable to assume that most personnel leaving service are simply retiring. Even so, as an indicator of the extent of the personnel outflow, it is possible to analyse discharge orders issued to more junior ranks (second lieutenants, lieutenants and captains), since it is unlikely that officers will reach retirement age with a rank lower than major.<sup>12</sup>

Generally speaking, an average of 166 officers and 66 NCOs have left the MO and VS over the past five years.

### Image 1

Total number of officers and non-commissioned officers who concluded their service, by year



<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Defence, “Stabilna popuna Vojske Srbije” (“Serbian Armed Forces Recruitment Stable”), 15/01/2017. <http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/11657/stabilna-popuna-vojske-srbije-11657>

<sup>9</sup> Republic of Serbia – National Assembly. Fourth Sitting of the First Regular Session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, day two. Temporary Minutes. 01 Number 06-2/82-18. Belgrade, 20/04/2018. [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/doc/stenografske\\_beleske/2.%20dan%20Cetvrta%20sednica%20Prvog%20redovnog%20zasedanja%20NSRS%2025.04.2018..docx](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/doc/stenografske_beleske/2.%20dan%20Cetvrta%20sednica%20Prvog%20redovnog%20zasedanja%20NSRS%2025.04.2018..docx)

<sup>10</sup> “Ministarstvo odbrane: nema kadrovskih problema s vojnim pilotima” (“Ministry of Defence: No Personnel Problems with Military Pilots”), Beta/Danas, 16/08/2019. <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/ministarstvo-odbrane-nema-kadrovskih-problema/>

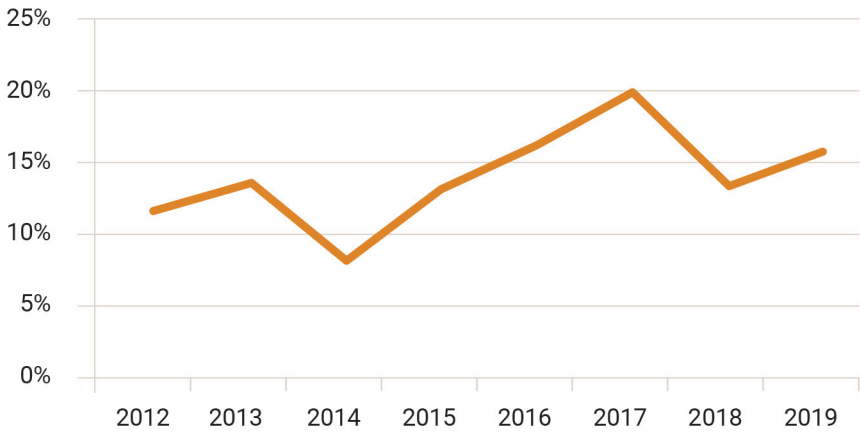
<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Defence. “Predsednik Vučić: Moćna i snaža krila nad Srbijom” (“President Vučić: Powerful and Strong Wings over Serbia”), 21/08/2018. <http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/tekst/12925/predsednik-vucic-mocna-i-snazna-krila-nad-srbijom-12925>

<sup>12</sup> Our respondents also agreed with this approach.

If we look at the period from 2012 to 2019 <sup>13</sup>, it is notable that the proportion of lower-ranking officers who have concluded their professional military service is relatively constant, with an outlying result in 2017. In that year, one fifth of all officers who concluded their service were junior officers.

**Image 2**

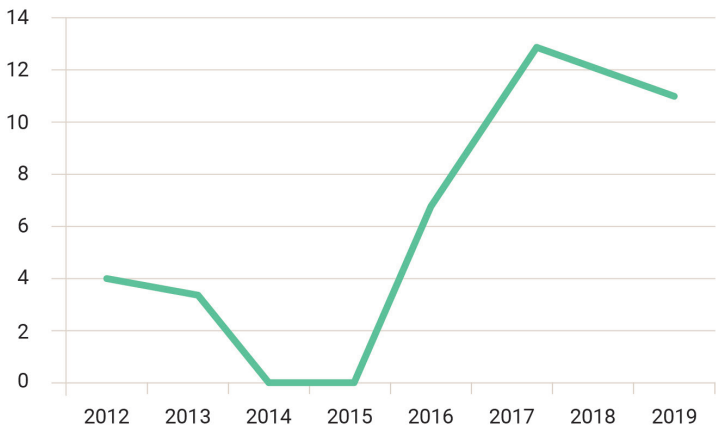
**Proportion of junior officers who concluded their professional military service (%), by year**



It is also notable that in 2017, an increasing number of second lieutenants began to seek (and find) alternative forms of employment, even at the expense of having to repay their tuition fees at the Military Academy.

**Image 3**

**Number of second lieutenants who concluded their professional military service, by year**



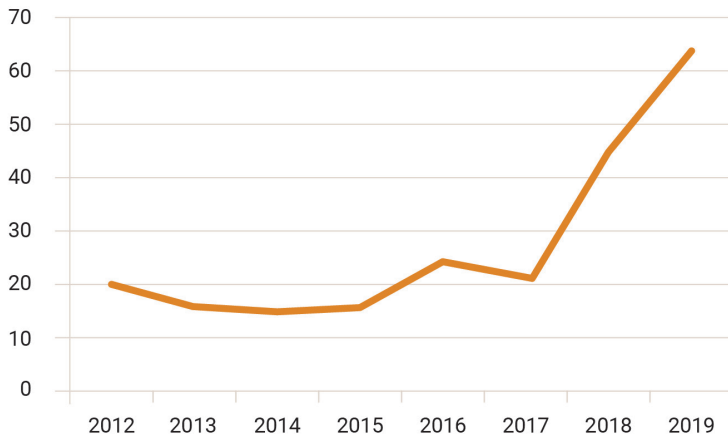
<sup>13</sup> The period before this was excluded because a reform of the Serbian Armed Forces saw a restructuring and dismissal of a number of officers and NCOs. During 2011, when the decision to suspend compulsory conscription was implemented, there were several "group" orders about the termination of professional military service for officers and those of the rank of captain. In that sense, by relying only on the data available in the Official Military Gazette, it is not possible to perform a sufficiently high quality comparative analysis or to reach any kind of conclusions on the number of people who voluntarily concluded their service prior to 2012 (independently of the reforms then underway and only on the basis of working conditions, or with the aim of seeking higher remuneration elsewhere). The BCSP submitted a freedom of information request to the Ministry of Defence on the numbers of officers and NCOs who have annually been leaving the service of their own volition since 2009, but the MO response only confirmed that this information is classified.



In addition to the aforementioned ranks, the number of majors who concluded their professional military service increased dramatically in 2018 (reaching twice the 2017 figure) and the upward trend continued in 2019.

### Image 4

Number of majors who concluded their professional military service, by year



A review of the SVL also shows the typical profile of professional SAF personnel who are “demobbing”. Judging from the junior officers who are leaving the system, these are primarily IT technicians, members of medical services, armoured units, infantry, technicians and members of telecommunication services.<sup>14</sup>

Respondents in the BCSP research also emphasise that IT technicians, doctors and nurses, electrical engineers and technicians, drivers, bookkeepers and lawyers are leaving the defence system en masse. The Military Medical Academy faces staff shortages. The Military Technical Institute has no problem recruiting young engineers but cannot retain them for more than a few years – particularly in the case of electrical engineers, who can easily retrain to work in the IT sector. One of our respondents, a graduate of the Military Technical Academy<sup>15</sup>, pointed out that six of the twenty members of his class have now left the defence system – referring to a class of officers who are still below the age of forty. It seems that younger SAF personnel find it easier to make the decision to change jobs, due to dissatisfaction with working conditions (“they have different expectations and a different sense of self”). Even so, a respondent who is in the 40-45 age bracket concluded that he knows of four of sixteen of his colleagues – telecommunications engineers – who have “demobbed”. A respondent below the age of forty who trained as a pilot stated that one third of his class have also already “demobbed”. The Ministry of Interior has emerged as a competitor for Serbian Armed Forces helicopter pilots, as it no longer has its own training programme and is instead poaching military pilots. Even though some professions are more in demand in the labour market, one respondent from the 35-40 age bracket, whose professional specialisation is in itself not that attractive, estimated that at least 50 percent of his classmates had already left the service. This suggests that the trend of personnel outflow is not limited to specific professional groups.

Most officers and civilians who leave the system, do so to find jobs in the private sector. In much the same way as their civilian counterparts, military doctors and medical technicians are leaving for jobs abroad. Former soldiers also most often go abroad, where they work as drivers, welders, waiters on cruise ships, etc.

---

<sup>14</sup> This information is for the 2015-2019 time-period, based on information available in the Official Military Gazette.  
<sup>15</sup> Which has in the meantime been annexed to the Military Academy

---

## WHY ARE PEOPLE LEAVING?

The poor financial circumstances professional members of the Serbian Armed Forces find themselves in is recognised as a serious issue in terms of personnel retention in the defence system. However, respondents did not identify this problem as decisive, instead citing additional factors that contribute to their decision to leave the system. In addition to inadequate salaries, particularly prominent issues include poor career management and the inability to achieve promotion, as well as overtime and having to perform various duties that are not part of a military calling. The Military Union of Serbia often points out the prevalence of problematic behaviour by senior officers towards professional military personnel of a lower rank.<sup>16</sup> However, the majority of respondents did not cite workplace bullying as a problem or as a reason for quitting the service.

In the coming chapters, we will explore the above challenges and others faced by the defence system that are the most common causes given for personnel<sup>17</sup> leaving the system, and we will also provide recommendations for overcoming these issues.

### Low Pay Not a Decisive Factor

The financial circumstances of defence system employees is a common topic for press and media reports in Serbia. Every year, officials announce increases to pay and allowances in the Serbian Armed Forces and release to the public various information on the average salary of professional military personnel. In September 2019, for example, the Chief of the General Staff announced a pay increase to be implemented by the end of the year.<sup>18</sup> The regular annual analysis of Serbian Armed Forces capabilities highlighted the improved financial circumstances of those serving in the defence system in 2019 as a major success.<sup>19</sup> In November 2019, professional military personnel received a pay increase, however, the Military Union of Serbia criticised this measure because of its linear application, widening the gap between the highest and lowest paid employees in the system.<sup>20</sup> The union has also repeatedly held protests aimed at highlighting the poor financial circumstances and social problems faced by defence sector employees.<sup>21</sup> The key problems identified are low base salaries, low average salaries, small per diems for field deployments and deployments to the Ground Safety Zone (the 5 km wide zone along the administrative line with Kosovo<sup>22</sup>).

---

<sup>16</sup> Military Union of Serbia. "Pripadnici Vojske Srbije svakodnevno trpe neizdrživ mobbing, vojska nam se raspada" ("Serving Personnel Daily Endure Intolerable Bullying, Our Army is Falling Apart"), 01/03/2019. <http://vojnindikatsrbije.rs/2019/03/01/pripadnici-vojske-svakodnevno-trpe-neizdrziv-mobing-vojska-nam-se-raspada/>

<sup>17</sup> "Početna primanja u Vojsci 66.817 dinara, a dnevnicu 1.800 dinara" ("Starting Salary in the Military 66,817 dinars, per diems 1,800 dinars"). *Istinomer*, 17/12/2018. <https://www.istinomer.rs/izjava/prosecna-primanja-u-vojsci-66-817-dinara-a-dnevnica-1-800-dinara/>

<sup>18</sup> Mojsilović: "Pripadnicima vojske od novembra povećanje plate" ("Chief of General Staff: Military personnel to get a pay rise from November"). *RTS*, 14/09/2019.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Defence. "Godišnja analiza sposobnosti Vojske Srbije" ("Annual Serbian Armed Forces Capability Analysis"), 30/01/2019. <http://www.mod.gov.rs/cir/14989/godisnja-analiza-sposobnosti-vojske-srbije-14989>

<sup>20</sup> "Vojni sindikat Srbije: Razmotriti nelinearno povećanje plate, pet odsto za više činove, deset za niže" ("Military Union of Serbia: Consider Non-Linear Pay Rises, Five Percent for Senior Ranks, Ten for Junior"), *Danas*, 21/09/2019. <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/vojni-sindikatsrbijerazmotriti-nelinearno-povecanja-plata-pet-odsto-za-vise-cinove-deset-za-nize/>

<sup>21</sup> "Dve hiljade na protestu Vojnog sindikata Srbije" ("Two Thousand Attend Military Union Protest"), *Danas*, 27/11/2016. <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/dve-hiljade-na-protestu-vojnog-sindikata/>

<sup>22</sup> Serbian Armed Forces, "Ground Safety Zone", n.d., <http://www.vs.rs/en/article/F8F5B04EAE2A11E5A7C800163E135070/ground-safety-zone/>

Similarly, all respondents in the BCSP research identified low wages as one of the main problems faced by professional military personnel. A large number of the respondents were of the opinion that higher wages would reduce the outflow of personnel, but also that the essence of the problem is not pay – that is the low earnings are not usually the primary reason for leaving the system.

It was emphasised to us that the nature of military service means that earnings are not at the forefront: “In the military, you don’t care about pay, you care about your unit, your team, your teammate”, “it’s important that your job is interesting”. Also, pay was not a key factor that pushed employees out of the system, “I didn’t care about the pay, I just wanted to get out, humiliated”. For certain specialisations, the private sector offers far better conditions, hence, “if someone’s just after the pay, the defence system has no chance of holding on to him”.

However, there are different opinions as well, so certain respondents agreed that, were salaries adequate, other problems in the way the system functions, would be bearable, “when salaries are high enough, nothing else matters”. Speaking about other shortcomings, such as inadequate food barracks and mess halls, one respondent pointed out that better pay would help him to overcome them: “If I have a good wage, I will at least make sure that I’m well-fed and pay for gym membership”.

Even though there was a general consensus among respondents that better pay for military personnel would ease things, only one respondent cited poor pay as the primary reason for leaving the system and finding other work: “The money is decisive, everything else just speeds up your leaving”.

Calculating the average salary in the defence system is challenging, given the many criteria that determine the income of someone serving in the military (unit, rank, separation allowance, transport, field deployment bonuses and so forth). The perception is that salaries are certainly not high enough for life in Belgrade, while outside the capital, circumstances are somewhat more tolerable: “Conditions in the military are a bit better than in local factories” (western Serbia); “it was thought that working in the military was well paid, but it isn’t, it’s just that the pay is regular” (southern Serbia).

It was also pointed out that the reduction of per diems in 2015 had a significant impact on morale and initiated the “biggest wave of demobbing”. At that time per diems for travel, field deployments and deployments to the Ground Safety Zone were, by ministerial decree, reduced significantly.<sup>23</sup> Per diems for work-related travel were reduced to 150 dinars<sup>24</sup>, only to be increased in 2016 to 500 dinars. In 2015, per diems for deployment to the Ground Safety Zone were reduced by 40 percent, to 1,500 dinars, but in 2016 they were increased to 1,800 dinars. Even though they were later increased, the drastic reduction in 2015 sparked many disgruntled professional soldiers to leave the system and resulted in a significant drop in enthusiasm.

The monthly family separation allowance is merely symbolic – being at most 11,986 dinars.<sup>25</sup> The reimbursement for separate living is provided for officers, NCOs and civilians whose immediate family

---

<sup>23</sup> Decision determining the level of the daily allowance for official travel, reimbursement of expenses for field deployment, remuneration for service in special military facilities, daily remuneration for performing special tasks and the value of points for calculating family separation allowance, *Official Military Gazette*, 33/15-741; 7/16-97; 7/17-181; 29/17-551 – [Decision 33/15-741], Articles 1-3.

<sup>24</sup> In accordance with amendments to per diem levels for civil servants and officeholders: Regulation on Reimbursement of Expenses and Compensation for Civil Servants and Officeholders (“*Official Gazette of the RS*”, no. 98/2007 – cleared text, 84/2014 and 84/2015), Article 9.

<sup>25</sup> Rulebook on Reimbursement of Travel and Other Expenses in the Serbian Armed Forces, *Official Military Gazette*, 18/13-281; 32/15-730; 7/16-97; 19/16-305; 29/17-549; 28/19-821, Articles 15 – 17. According to Article 16 of this rulebook, the family separation allowance is equal to 650 points, with the value of each point being 18.44 dinars [Decision 33/15 – 741], which comes to a total of 11,986 dinars.

---

members (spouses, children and/or foster children) live elsewhere in a home they own. Therefore, professional soldiers are not entitled to a family separation allowance. This reimbursement is reserved exclusively for married professional military personnel, who own their own home in another place. Moreover, if both spouses serve in the SAF, only one of them can claim the family separation allowance.<sup>26</sup>

Travel expenses are limited to an amount set by the minister, which currently stands at 11,986 dinars<sup>27</sup> and is often not sufficient to cover daily inter-city travel, so military personnel are forced to cover the shortfall from their salaries.<sup>28</sup>

Until recently, professional military personnel in the Serbian Armed Forces did not receive meals and expenses reimbursements, to which they are legally entitled if the annual budget allows.<sup>29</sup> Amendments and addenda to the Rulebook on Pay for Professional Military Personnel in the Serbian Armed Forces from June 2017, meals and reimbursements were included in the coefficient from which pay is calculated.<sup>30</sup> The Military Union points out that this effectively reduced salaries by the amount that would be paid out for meals and reimbursements.<sup>31</sup> What is more, since the coefficient differs according to rank or posting, the amount issued for meals and reimbursements varies according to the category of employee.

In 2019, housing loans subsidies were completely abolished. According to some respondents, this measure could have serious consequences in terms of housing, since a large number of serving personnel have no way of saving money for a deposit. Moreover, the paying out of subsidies ceased in 2018, even though they had been included in the budget for that year.<sup>32</sup>

Due to the low wages, according to the respondents, many professional military personnel find other jobs on the side (e.g. painting and decorating, construction, etc.).

The research has shown a discrepancy between the organisational culture that is still nurtured in the defence system and the expectations of employees. This is most concisely summed up by one of the respondents who pointed out that, "everything in the military leans towards enthusiasm and patriotism", while, in his opinion, "rescinding one's personal sovereignty for a soldier's calling should be compensated". The other respondents cite patriotism as one of the motives for choosing military service in the first place but add that this is not enough ("I'm a patriot, but some things you can tolerate [only] to a point"; "why would I die for thirty-something thousand, I can't provide for my family, I have nothing"). They also add that patriotism can be expressed through other work ("an officer isn't more of a patriot than a baker who has to bake bread in wartime"; "now I work for myself and my family, and therefore for my country").

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Article 20.

<sup>27</sup> „Rulebook on Reimbursement of Travel and Other Expenses in the Serbian Armed Forces”, *Official Military Gazette*, 18/13-281, 32/15- 730; 7/16-97; 19/16-305; 29/17-549; 28/19-821, Article 27

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Novica Antić, President of the Military Union of Serbia, Belgrade, 29/11/2019

<sup>29</sup> Law on the Serbian Armed Forces. "Official Gazette of the RS", no. 116/2007, 88/2009, 101/2010 – state law, 10/2015, 88/2015 – Constitutional Court Decision, 36/2018 and 94/2019, Article 92.

<sup>30</sup> Rulebook on Amendments and Addenda to the Rulebook on Pay for Professional Military Personnel in the Serbian Armed Forces, *Official Military Gazette*, 13/17-305, Article 2.

<sup>31</sup> A.S. "Vulin u Vranju: Povećanje plata u vojsci do kraja godine" ("Vulin in Vranje: Pay Increases in the Military by the End of the Year"), *Južne vesti*, 29/08/2017. <https://www.juznevesti.com/Drushtvo/Vulin-u-Vranju-Povecanje-plata-u-vojsci-do-kraja-godine.sr.html>

<sup>32</sup> Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2018. "Official Gazette of the RS", no. 113/2017

---

### Negative Selection

#### *“If I made rank, I’d still be in the military”*

In addition to poor financial conditions, the uncertainty of the promotion process has proven to be a marked problem in the defence system. The unpredictability of a career path greatly demotivates employees and is frequently top of the list of reasons to leave the service. One respondent cited the inability to advance as a decisive factor for his departure: “If I made rank, I would still be in the military [...] Everyone I know demobbed for the same reason”. A retired officer noticed a pronounced outflow of younger personnel who, in addition to financial instability, sense a lack of opportunity for training and advancement: “Younger people see that they have neither the opportunity to develop their finances, nor to develop professionally”.

Officers often end up “stuck” at a certain rank or posting and are prevented from advancing, regardless of whether they fulfil the official requirements or receive the positive evaluations necessary for promotion. Officers remaining at one rank for too long results from disbalances in the personnel promotion pyramid and available formation positions.

*“There are older colleagues from the branch who are still lieutenants [at over 38 years of age]”*

#### *“People who work hard get stuck in some backwater”*

The prevailing view among interviewees is that promotion is not based on ability, merit or the official criteria, but that it takes place instead by inertia and through connections, which results in negative selection of personnel.

“Promotion is slow, the criteria are unclear, because often people who get to receive training are 100 percent unable to pass the fitness test or fulfil some other standard”.

There is a perception that advancement flows through informal channels, that is, that it depends to a large extent on the decisions of superiors in the chain of command (primarily the unit commander), while the criteria and procedures are merely formally checked off – from second lieutenants fresh from the Military Academy, to promotion for more senior ranks.

“They make it so it looks fair, but they show their cards after a year [...]” there is a policy to deploy [graduates of the Military Academy] to places other than where they are from “but X knows the right people and after a year, back he comes.”

Moreover, pressure from the General Staff or the Ministry of Defence can influence professional development, regardless of the fulfilment of formal criteria or training, “one phone call can ruin a whole career path.”<sup>33</sup>

Also, a number of the respondents pointed out that there is no clear system for the notification of vacant postings and that they are instead, “informed by telephone”. Commanding officers decide on transfers and postings so, as the respondents see it, they can be obtained, “if you’re in the boss’s good books, then through his connections”. In terms of how postings are allocated, an officer who has left the service points out that there is a way to express interest in a particular posting, but only through informal channels:

---

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Nikola Lunić, retired navy captain and the Executive Director of the Council for Strategic Policy. Belgrade, 26/11/2019.

---

*“First, you find yourself a posting [call a number], second, you prepare your boss to let you go, then the Personnel Administration does only the formal, administrative part of the job”.*

A good relationship with superiors can speed up advancement, however, too much discretion in choosing can reveal the flipside of the coin, which also contributes to negative selection. Namely, commanding officers can hold on to high-quality personnel in their own units, while those who they do not want get sent to better postings to “get rid of them”. Even in cases where candidates want to apply to internal job postings, they need to get permission from their superiors, who may deny it on the pretext of, “maybe I’ll need you”. Respondents claim that some deliberately underperform so as to avoid becoming stuck at a bad posting.

*“If they like you somewhere, you’ll stay there”  
“People who work hard get stuck in some backwater”*

Additionally, those who are obedient can apparently progress more quickly up the pyramid.

*“The yes-men end up in Brussels, not the best.”  
“Positions of authority are filled with those who are yes-men, rather than those who are capable”*

One respondent emphasised that he had tried on several occasions to get a transfer and even had offers from other departments, but never received assent from his commanding officer. He was also on the receiving end of other repercussions: “When they heard I wanted to leave, they crossed me off every list [e.g. for promotion]”.

Negative selection can affect the morale of all categories of professional military personnel. Officers and NCOs can be demotivated by the impossibility of advancement in line with their capabilities and experience, while on the other hand, it can undermine the authority and trust of officers and NCOs among their men:

*“With many of them, I’d think twice before going into battle on their command”.*

### ***“To go on a course, you need luck or good connections”***

In order to advance, after graduating from the Military Academy, officers are enrolled in further education (specialist, master or doctoral studies) or in various training programmes (basic command and staff course, command and staff development, general staff development and higher security and defence studies).<sup>34</sup>

Commanding officers decide who will attend further education or training, in accordance with annual quotas set by the MO. Interviews with the respondents revealed that, in some respects, the quota for the basic command and staff course, necessary for progression beyond the rank of captain, is too small and that it is difficult to get on this course. We also heard from a respondent that, “to go on a course, you need luck or good connections”.

The respondents were not well enough informed to explain under which circumstances a master’s degree is equivalent to command and staff development, when it comes to criteria for advancement. According to a Ministry of Defence response to a BCSP inquiry, master’s studies and command and staff

---

<sup>34</sup> Rulebook on Forms of Development and Detailed Conditions, Means and Procedures for Special Development Courses, Official Military Gazette, 11/19-302

development have not been formally made equivalent, so it depends on the posting.<sup>35</sup>

For some postings, command and staff development is required, while a master's degree is required for others. As educational courses have not been made equivalent to training programmes, some have been unable to progress through the ranks, as the Serbian Armed Forces paid for its members to complete master's studies, but then prevented them from advancing using their degrees.

### ***"If you're good, if you keep your head down, we can send you on some course"***

A shortage of NCOs is also one of the serious challenges facing the defence system. Since the closure of specialised military high schools, non-commissioned officers are generally recruited from among the ranks of professional soldiers. Vocational Military Secondary School was reopened for certain specialisations, such as aviation technicians (in 2015)<sup>36</sup> or mechanics for tracked vehicles (in 2018).<sup>37</sup> In order to become NCOs, soldiers must complete a course at the Centre for Training and Development of NCOs in Pančevo.<sup>38</sup>

Just as with promotions, our respondents point out that it is often not the most capable soldiers who are put forward for the basic and leadership courses for NCOs and that for these courses too, it is necessary to have good connections, due to a shortage of spaces and great demand. According to a professional soldier who has left the system, the courses are attended by "pen-pushers who have someone in the General Staff". The respondent had the support of his commanding officers to train as an NCO and passed selection, however, he did not attend the course in Pančevo under the excuse, "it's ok, you'll go next time".

### ***"No boss will let a good employee go on a peace-keeping mission"***

Negative selection manifests itself also when it comes to multinational operations, since the decision on this also lies with unit commanders. Respondents point out that commanding officers send "slackers" on missions, seeking to keep hard workers in their units:

*"No boss will let a good employee go on a peace-keeping mission, they'd rather let a bad one go to be rid of him"*

Part of the problem is that the post of an officer sent on a mission remains unfilled, that is, they are not relieved of the post in their unit. As one respondent claims, commanders resist sending their people on missions as it disrupts their team and they do not recognise that the development and skills learned on multinational operations can contribute to their teams.

*"The team is wrecked when someone from upstairs calls down"*

Speaking about the process of selection itself, one respondent pointed out that commanders will often not provide support, that is, they resist providing a good reference for members of their unit when a call for participation in a multinational operation comes through.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Defence response to BCSP inquiry, 10/12/2019, available at: <https://cutt.ly/6roYJ4z>

<sup>36</sup> Banković, Ž. "Nakon 15 godina odškolorani prvi podoficiri za vazduhoplovnotehničku službu" ("First aviation technical service NCOs trained after 15 years"), Tango Six, 26/08/2019. <https://tangosix.rs/2019/26/08/nakon-15-godina-odskolorani-prvi-podoficiri-za-vazduhoplovnotehnicku-službu/>

<sup>37</sup> "Novi smerovi u vojnoj školi" ("New Subjects at Military School"), Radio Televizija Srbije, 18/05/2018. <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/3142279/novi-smerovi-u-vojnoj-skoli.html>

<sup>38</sup> Centre for Training and Development of NCOs, Serbian Armed Forces, [http://www.vs.rs/sr\\_lat/jedinice/vojska-srbije/komanda-za-obuku/centar-za-obuku-i-usavrsavanje-podoficira](http://www.vs.rs/sr_lat/jedinice/vojska-srbije/komanda-za-obuku/centar-za-obuku-i-usavrsavanje-podoficira)

---

---

Unit commanders decide on placement on courses and multinational operations, transfers, postings and other conditions that make it possible for professional military personnel to progress up the hierarchy, hence they have the authority to affect the career paths of their employees. Too great a degree of discretionary personnel decision-making, including decisions that directly or indirectly relate to promotion, opens up space for abuse and the promotion of yes-men, which results in negative selection. Promotion and training that is not founded on merit and ability, greatly affects the motivation of professional military personnel and prevents them from planning their professional development.

## Overtime and the Burden of Additional Duties

### *“Regular working hours, which don’t exist”*

Excessive workloads, overtime, weekend work and the performance of duties that fall outside of job descriptions are very serious problems. Workloads vary from posting to posting; nevertheless, most respondents confirmed that, for at least one period during their career, they worked overtime, while four respondents cited “regular working hours, which don’t exist” as a reason for leaving the service. A respondent who had been a troop commander pointed out that during preparations for an inspection, working hours were from 6:30-7am to 10pm, “and then the inspection is over and measures of effectiveness come along”, which means that overtime continues. According to some respondents, the problem is not the workload itself, but the urgent orders that arrive at the end of the working day.

The respondents also stated:

*“It was rare that we didn’t stay behind longer, it was simply normal, and to come into work on the weekends”*

*“There wasn’t one weekend that I didn’t work”*

*“In the military, they give you duties until they break you”*

One of the reasons SAF personnel are overworked is simply that there is a personnel shortage, which creates a vicious cycle – fewer people means more work for individuals, which can lead them to leave the service and put even more pressure on those who remain behind. The lack of manpower is particularly palpable in the Ground Safety Zone (GSZ), where rotations extend beyond 21 days. According to one respondent, “the tour is supposed to last twenty-one days, but it never does, it lasts thirty or more days, then guard duty for seven days, then a weekend at home and then on tour again.”

Another problem pertaining to overtime that was highlighted by the respondents is that overtime is neither recorded nor compensated. According to current MoD regulations, professional SAF personnel are entitled to an hour and a half off for every hour of overtime worked and recorded in writing by their commanding officer. Time off is aggregated on a quarterly basis and soldiers can use it within six months of the quarter in which it was accrued.<sup>39</sup> If they are prevented from using their time off due to a high workload, service-persons are to be compensated with 26 percent of their hourly rate for each hour of overtime. In practice, overtime is possible without an explicit written order from a commanding officer. The lack of recordkeeping poses a particular risk. A lawyer who has represented SAF personnel in litigation over compensation for overtime highlights that it is difficult to prove that overtime was worked if records on this are not kept in the units themselves.

---

<sup>39</sup> Rulebook on Pay for Professional Personnel of the Serbian Armed Forces (cleared text), Official Military Gazette, 10/2017, Article 35.



### *“People come with a desire to defend their country and they get a broom to sweep the parade square”*

The performance of duties that fall outside of regular job descriptions is a major source of frustration; this frustration is expressed by former professional soldiers, officers and civilians alike. Stereotypes common in the public discourse about professional soldiers, NCOs and officers spending their time “sweeping the parade square” instead of training are confirmed by all. It seems that the reasoning for this, inherited from the days of conscription, that “troops must not be idle” continues to be applied, even though there are not enough professional soldiers to perform hygiene and maintenance duties, nor are they interested in doing so. “People come with a desire to defend their country and they get a broom to sweep the parade square”, commented one former professional soldier.

Given the shortage of professional soldiers, maintenance duties also fall to officers: “everyone has to do everything because there aren’t enough people, clearing snow, cleaning barracks, whatever”. One respondent recalls that in the Ministry of Defence, even high-ranking officers would be ordered to clear snow in front of buildings. The duty to sweep the parade square sometimes falls even to medical officers and garrison dispensaries. In the opinion of a respondent who worked as a military health professional, this additionally motivates them to “demob”, given all of the opportunities they have in civilian life (especially the opportunity to work abroad). A respondent who worked in military research and development reported that, since cleaners did not come regularly, researchers would have to take on hygiene-related duties. This was a source of irritation (“I want to do my job”).

“Doing one’s job” is important, not just for personal job satisfaction, but also for the functioning of the system as a whole. For example, there have been complaints that aircraft maintenance is made more difficult by the fact that “technicians do their jobs until three, then they go on guard duty and after guard duty they are entitled to twenty-four hours of rest, so inspections run late”.

The overspill of duties is not limited to maintenance. A former professional soldier lists the duties he performed, including commander, department commander, quartermaster, painter, waiter and cleaner. Officers, on the other hand, are frustrated by the increasing load of paperwork:

*“Work has turned into pen-pushing, you have no time to train properly.”*

*“We write five reports on one flight.”*

*“We had two ways of assessing ability, the same man was the subject [...] and then you think up details you know no one can check.”*

Part of the reason for this, according to the respondents, is the inconsistent application of NATO standards. In the opinion of former Chief of the General Staff, Zdravko Ponoš, the problem is not the introduction of NATO standards per se. Instead, it is that in the Serbian Armed Forces they are, “introduced halfway, taking some and retaining others”, which means that paperwork can double if it has to be done according to both the old and new procedures.<sup>40</sup>

Overwork also encourages defence system personnel to rethink how satisfied they are with their pay. One can hear the opinion that, “the pay doesn’t reflect how much of myself I put into the job”. Most of those

---

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Zdravko Ponoš, former Chief of General Staff and Executive Director of the Centre for Strategic Policies, Belgrade, 18/11/2019.

---

who stayed in the system think about leaving “when they hear from those who’ve left, how much they are paid and how much they have to work”.

Overtime and “extended” tours in the GSZ also have adverse effects on the family lives of Serbian Armed Forces personnel. It is estimated that the number of divorces is high, due to the fact that spouses who work in the military are often absent. According to one respondent, it is impossible for a man to take leave to look after a sick child. Families are also disrupted by transfers, especially if the new posting is so distant that VS personnel cannot commute daily and have to live separately from their family.<sup>41</sup>

## Lack of Training and Professional Development

The lack of training is emphasised as a significant problem in the service, which is often presented as another face of the “sweeping the parade square” issue. The reasons given for shortfalls in training include insufficient financial resources, insufficient personnel to provide training, but also a lack of planning for certain types of training. For example, Serbian Armed Forces personnel are not provided with any training for the service’s third mission – providing support to the civilian authorities in emergency situations (not including first aid training). One respondent, who was tasked with providing assistance in the wake of flooding in Obrenovac and Tekija whilst serving in the River Flotilla, claims that “everything was improvised in the moment”, but that even after the incident, no training on reacting to emergency situations was provided. Training for the first mission of the SAF (defence from external armed threats) is also deemed to be inadequate. “If the shooting starts tomorrow, professional soldiers won’t know how to hold a rifle,” a professional soldier notes in resignation. On the other hand, a former military pilot gauges that, due to shortages of spare parts, fuel and overhaul capacity, pilot training also suffers: “There are majors who have maybe been in action once on the range, their usefulness in case of war is questionable.”

According to the respondents, civilians and technical officers do have sufficient opportunities to participate in training courses but, at the same time, the perception is that their work leads to nothing or that the system hinders their development as specialists. One respondent cites “the enormous investment of time and energy, only to be doing the same thing a year on” as a reason for this. A respondent who worked in military research and development notes that she has progressed more in a professional capacity in two years at the private company where she is currently employed, than she did in almost three times as long in the defence system. She admits that the slow process of project approval and a lack of understanding by the MoD and SAF leadership for research work is demotivating.

### “...then you take your own car and are out of pocket”

According to the Military Union of Serbia, employees perform their duties in inadequate accommodation, lacking the military equipment and other resources necessary for their work.<sup>42</sup> Interviews with all of the respondents offer up examples to support this. Particularly notable is the fact that in the most diverse parts of the system, employees contribute their own resources to provide themselves with adequate working conditions, which includes “informal” procurement that they themselves finance:

---

<sup>41</sup> The form filled in by officers and NCOs who apply for a transfer from one place to another does contain questions on family life (Regulation on the Status of Professional Military Personnel and on the Promotion of Officers and NCOs. Official Military Gazette 10/2019, p. 247), however, they do not necessarily affect the final decision on the transfer order. The Government of Serbia does not have policies in place for keeping families united during transfers (by, for example, assisting the spouse in finding a new job).

<sup>42</sup> Military Union of Serbia, “Kritika lošeg upravljanja ljudskim resorsima” (“Critique of Poor Human Resources Management”), 01/08/2019. <http://vojnisinindikatsrbije.rs/2019/08/01/kritika-loseg-upravljanja-ljudskim-resursima-u-vojsci-srbije/>

*"We usually bought parts of the uniform ourselves; through military surplus shops you could find everything you needed and the logistics warrant officer doesn't have."*

*"Even for small-scale procurement the obligation to seek various offers means that the process is dragged out, meanwhile the parts are needed urgently... and then you take your own car and are out of pocket."*

*"We buy our own chairs."*

*"My colleagues [doctors] go to the pharmacy themselves to buy some medicines, and these are cheap medicines."*

The conditions in which they work have a demoralising effect on professional soldiers. According to one respondent, "young soldiers who are fired up about the military get demoralised when they get given a uniform that's too big for them". Soldiers deployed to the GSZ are housed in portakabin barracks that they believe have long since passed their use-by-date. Poor nutrition is also emphasised as a problem:

"two hours of guard duty, four hours of rest and then your dinner is three tiny pastries". On the other hand, a university-educated respondent who held an office job cited the office not having air conditioning as the decisive factor for leaving: "at 50 degrees my computer shuts down, but I have to stay and work." This may appear naïve compared with the complaints of professional soldiers, but it is important to bear in mind that "electrical engineers won't put up with conditions like that" because they can easily find other, better paid work.

The respondents' attitudes to these problems varies from acquiescent ("so it goes", "we don't ask for much, to spare the state") to outright expressions of frustration ("the military is a reflection of the state, here everything's window-dressing").

Approached more broadly, however, these problems indicate inexpedient planning and resource management. The testimonies of some respondents suggest that the centralisation of public procurement is not always the most efficient approach (e.g. requests are sent to a higher command even when certain spare parts are needed urgently or, conversely, equipment certain employees need to do their work is lost in "cutbacks"). Procurement procedures can also be repeated due to poor specifications that result in unsuitable offers; this is, it seems, particularly a problem in military healthcare. Employees and former employees of organisational departments that generate their own revenue, also find that centralising their revenues within the MoD and SAF – initiated in 2013<sup>43</sup> – prevents these departments from using their own incomes and makes their day-to-day operations more difficult, since they can no longer simply order small-scale supplies and services.

---

<sup>43</sup> *The Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on the Budget System. Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 93/2012, Article 47. Additional amendments and addenda to the Law on the Budget System (Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on the Budget System. Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 62/201, Article 16) enabled units of the MO and VS tasked with the following activities to retain their own revenues: research, education, development, modernisation, overhaul, production and sale, testing, quality control and arms codification, military equipment and meteorology. However, the MO shut down all of its revenue calculations with the Treasury Administration and the minister of defence alone determines expenditure. (State Audit Institution. Izveštaj o reviziji svrsihodnosti: Sopstveni prihodi direktnih i indirektnih korisnika budžeta Republike Srbije prema Zakonu o budžetskom sistemu (Expendiency Audit Report: Proprietary Revenues of Direct and Indirect Users of the Republic of Serbia Budget According to the Law on the Budget System), Number 400-4483/2015-08. Belgrade, 07/12/2016, p. 29. <https://bit.ly/36ye3Ue>*

---

## WHY ARE MILITARY PERSONNEL LEAVING RATHER THAN COMPLAINING?

Ministry of Defence and Serbian Armed Forces personnel are not encouraged to report violations of their labour rights. They prefer to leave the system altogether, rather than trying to resolve the problems they face through the available complaint mechanisms. The reasons for this lie in a lack of information, a lack of confidence in the system and a fear of sanctions, as well as the prolonged nature of these procedures.

The existence of a number of different mechanisms is a cause of confusion and miscomprehension regarding the channels through which appeals can be made. Our respondents highlighted the fact that the first point of contact that can be addressed is the commanding officer. Consequently, the decision on whether to initiate a procedure depends largely on the person occupying that role and, if the subordinate trusts them, it is more likely that they will call out irregularities.

*"If the commander is a person of authority and integrity, you'll go to them first"*

---

In a unit in town X there were several cases of harassment and abuse of female SAF personnel by their commanding officer. Their immediate superior reported this to the unit commander. According to the claims of our respondents, there was a period when the military tried to cover up the whole thing and only when it leaked out into the public sphere did the prosecutor of the court martial initiate proceedings. The accused was eventually acquitted of all charges and returned to the same unit, irrespective of the fact that his unit co-workers had testified against him.<sup>44</sup>

However, it is possible that the commanding officer is the subject of the complaint, so the mechanisms need to circumvent this point of contact. Our respondents are generally unsure what the next point of contact would be and put forward various organisational departments to which a professional soldier could turn – the next superior officer in the chain of command, the Defence Inspectorate, the Military Security Agency, the court martial and so forth.

Even though various options exist, the prevailing view is that the complaint mechanism does not work in practice. Our respondents hold the view that the various channels for complaints were elaborated on paper only and that they cannot really be used to solve problems.

*"Who're you going to complain to? Complain about what?"*

*"It is possible to appeal a decision by a minister or a superior, but nothing will change"*

A similar story is repeated with the courts martial, in whose work the respondents had little faith:

*"The prosecutor and the judge sit in the same office and come to an agreement."*

In 2018, MoD and SAF personnel filed complaints regarding the exercise of their employment rights with the Ombudsman, before exhausting all of the legal approaches available within the defence system.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Testimony of a former member of the unit in which these events took place.

<sup>45</sup> Ombudsman. "Redovan godišnji izveštaj Zaštitnika građana za 2018. godinu" ("Regular Annual Report of the Protector of Citizens 2018"), 15/03/2019. [https://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/6062/Zastitnik%20gradjana\\_Godisnji%20izvestaj%20](https://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/6062/Zastitnik%20gradjana_Godisnji%20izvestaj%20)

This fact also indicates a lack of confidence in, or awareness of, the mechanisms available within the defence system itself.

A fear of being punished, perhaps through transfer, is another reason for not initiating a complaint procedure. Some of the respondents agreed that financial instability is another factor affecting the decision to turn to a commanding officer or other point of contact in the event of a problem. Most complaints are submitted by those with permanent contracts, while it is emphasised that adequate pay and contracts would provide professional military personnel with greater security and confidence in reacting to irregularities and breaches of their rights.

The prolonged nature of proceedings before courts martial and civil courts (3 to 4 years) is another fact that discourages employees from embarking on this process. Employees of the defence system are able to initiate proceedings before first and second level courts martial. If they are dissatisfied with the judgments of the High Court Martial, professional SAF personnel can initiate administrative proceedings.<sup>46</sup> According to information provided to the BCSP by the MoD, in 2018 eleven suits were filed regarding transfer or deployment orders issued to officers, however none of them have yet been concluded.<sup>47</sup>

### — Whistleblowers —

The Serbian defence system has a developed mechanism for internal whistleblowers.<sup>48</sup> Procedures are in place and an official has been authorised to receive information pertaining to internal whistleblowing. According to information provided to the BCSP by the Ministry of Defence, between November 2017 and November 2019, twenty submissions of information pertaining to whistleblowing were received and 14 procedures initiated.<sup>49</sup>

In October 2019, the public became aware of the case of an officer who had refused an order pertaining to recruitment that came from the very top echelons of the ministry because it implied circumvention of the conditions of the call.<sup>50</sup> Namely, a lieutenant colonel posted to the personnel service reported to his superiors that the commission admission to employment had received an order from “up on high” that, regardless of the results of the open call and legal regulations, it was to accept four individuals. Following this, retribution began immediately by demoting the whistleblower. The minister of defence signed a decision that would see this lieutenant colonel demoted to a posting for majors, which was, moreover, not designated for his military specialisation (vojnoevidencionu specijalnost – VES).<sup>51</sup> The whistleblower’s commanding officer supported him and resisted the transfer but without success. The Ministry of Defence denied the whole case,<sup>52</sup> while the Military Union points out that the lieutenant colonel took sick leave so as to avoid retribution. The public has yet to hear how this case played out.

---

za%202018.%20godinu.pdf, p. 72

<sup>46</sup> Law on the Serbian Armed Forces, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 116/2007, 88/2009, 101/2010 – state law, 10/2015, 88/2015 – Constitutional Court Decision and 36/2018, Article 167

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Defence response to BCSP inquiry, 10/12/2019

<sup>48</sup> Rulebook on Procedures for Internal Whistleblowing in the Ministry of Defence and Serbian Armed Forces, Official Military Gazette, 34/15-890

<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Defence response to BCSP inquiry, 12/10/2019, <https://cutt.ly/6roYJ4z>; Ministry of Defence response to BCSP inquiry, 14/06/2018, <https://cutt.ly/9r1rspV>

<sup>50</sup> Zorić, J. “Zašto je smenjen oficir Vojske Srbije” (“Why was the Serbian Armed Forces officer dismissed?”), N1, 16/10/2019. <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a535284/Zasto-je-smenjen-oficir-Vojske-Srbije-koji-je-prijavio-korupciju.html>

<sup>51</sup> Lukač, D. “Potpukovnik nema kome da se žali” (“Lieutenant Colonel Has No One to Complain to”), Vreme, 24/10/2019. <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1727242>

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Defence. “Announcement”. 17/10/2019. <http://www.mod.gov.rs/cir/14573/saopstenje-14573>

---

## WHAT STEPS HAVE THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND THE GOVERNMENT TAKEN TO DATE?

Recruiting and retaining personnel, as well as improving the circumstances of defence system employees, has not been recognised to a sufficient degree as a defence policy priority. Defence Strategy, a primary document that guides, among other things, the financing and resource marshalling in defence, does not mention human resources, other than to say that special attention will be paid to building up personnel capacities to “facilitate all aspects of defence.”<sup>53</sup> Other defence system planning documents are completely classified, hence it is not possible to evaluate how they approach recruitment and personnel retention.

The Ministry of Defence’s ambitions in the field of human resources are more clearly expressed in the Government’s Work Programme for 2019:

“Employed personnel capable of executing assigned tasks, missions and assignments. The focus will be on the education and training of Ministry of Defence and Serbian Armed Forces personnel at all levels, the continuation of normative regulation of the military education system, the planning of development for teaching staff, the maintenance and raising of standards for employees and the valuing, preservation and development of military traditions.”<sup>54</sup>

Concern for the wellbeing of employees is a novelty compared with the same programme for 2018, when the focus was on indirect strengthening of morale among Serbian Armed Forces personnel, through improvements to their visual identity and “cultural awareness”.<sup>55</sup>

The most recent round of amendments to the Law on the Serbian Armed Forces from December 2019 gives the impression that the Ministry of Defence has recognised the outflow of personnel as a problem. However, the nature of the adopted amendments does rather suggest that this is a knee-jerk reaction and that the short-term approaches aim to ease recruitment and attract new personnel, without significant improvements to working conditions.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> “Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia”. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, no. 94/2019, p. 10

<sup>54</sup> Government of the Republic of Serbia. *Plan rada Vlade za 2019. godinu (Government Work Programme for 2019)*, Belgrade, January 2019, p. 509.

[http://www.gs.gov.rs/doc/PLAN\\_RADA\\_VLADE\\_2019.pdf](http://www.gs.gov.rs/doc/PLAN_RADA_VLADE_2019.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Government of the Republic of Serbia. *Plan rada Vlade za 2018. godinu (Government Work Programme for 2019)*, Belgrade, January 2018, p. 455.

[http://www.gs.gov.rs/doc/PLAN\\_RADA\\_VLADE\\_2018.pdf](http://www.gs.gov.rs/doc/PLAN_RADA_VLADE_2018.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> See more in: Ignjatijević, M. “Legislative amendments as a reaction to the outflow of personnel from the defence system”, Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2020.

Further information on the steps taken by the Ministry of Defence to retain employees of the defence system can be found in the declarations of Minister of Defence, Aleksandar Vulin, particularly in his responses to questions in the National Assembly. The measures he has so far announced are as follows<sup>57</sup>:

- “Housing construction for members of the defence sector”;
- Pay rises (“Salaries are higher than they have ever been.”);
- Increases to per diems;
- Introduction of solidarity aid for the birth of a child;
- Introduction of additional food vouchers “for certain categories in our military, for certain branches”;
- Investment into military infrastructure so SAF personnel will have better accommodation.

When it comes to addressing the housing needs of those working in the defence system, in 2019 the Ministry of Defence invested funds into the construction and maintenance of housing, and also into assisting employees to pay off the housing loans for housing they had purchased on the “regular” market.<sup>58</sup> In December 2017, the Government launched a massive housing construction programme for members of the security sector<sup>59</sup>, whilst revoking subsidies for housing loans.<sup>60</sup> Given the long waiting lists for temporary housing, which discriminate against younger employees, it seems that subsidised loans were a popular choice. It is interesting, however, that none of the respondents proactively brought up the housing policies of the Ministry of Defence, either as a potential incentive to remain in service, or as a problem. Some respondents below the age of forty emphasised that they were not even interested in the possibility of resolving their housing requirements with assistance from the Ministry of Defence.

Investment in military infrastructure is on the rise, given that expenditure in the category “buildings and structures” in the MoD budget has been increasing since 2014. Nevertheless, information is scant about what this money is being spent on.<sup>61</sup>

It can be concluded that the Ministry of Defence has recognised the outflow of personnel as a problem, but has not yet developed a comprehensive programme of measures to improve working conditions and incentivise employees to remain in the system. Part of the human resources policy is not a response to the real problems faced by defence system employees, nor is there any evidence that it has any effect on morale – for example, the development of military traditions, visual identity and “cultural awareness”.

---

<sup>57</sup> Republic of Serbia – National Assembly. Fourth Sitting of the First Regular Session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, day two. Temporary Minutes. 01 Number 06-2/82-18. Belgrade, 20/04/2018. [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/doc/stenografske\\_beleske/2.%20dan%20Cetvrta%20sednica%20Prvog%20redovnog%20zasedanja%20NSRS%2025.04.2018..docx](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/doc/stenografske_beleske/2.%20dan%20Cetvrta%20sednica%20Prvog%20redovnog%20zasedanja%20NSRS%2025.04.2018..docx); National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. Deputy Questions in march. Temporary Minutes. 28/03/2019. [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/Посланичка\\_питања\\_у\\_марту.36169.43.html](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/Посланичка_питања_у_марту.36169.43.html)

<sup>58</sup> In 2017 and 2018 the Ministry of Defence invested 138.4 million dinars into building and maintaining housing, while 732.8 million dinars were invested in employee mortgages. (Our calculation based on reports of allocated and expended funds, which are available for 2017, here:[http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki\\_sadrzaj/informator/2018/oktobar/pregled\\_rasporedjenih\\_utrosenih\\_sredstava\\_III\\_kvartal%202018.xls](http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/informator/2018/oktobar/pregled_rasporedjenih_utrosenih_sredstava_III_kvartal%202018.xls) and for 2018, here:[http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki\\_sadrzaj/informator/2019/oktobar/Pregled\\_utrosenih\\_sredstava\\_oktobar\\_2019\\_informator\\_o\\_radu\\_cirilica\\_latinica%20KON.xls](http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/informator/2019/oktobar/Pregled_utrosenih_sredstava_oktobar_2019_informator_o_radu_cirilica_latinica%20KON.xls)).

<sup>59</sup> See more in: Nenadić, N. “The 2018 Special Law for State Housing Construction and its Implementation”, Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Funds for this purpose were not allocated according to the 2019 Law on the Budget, nor by the 2020 Law on the Budget. The Military Union of Serbia announced in the autumn of 2018 that more than one hundred Serbian Armed Forces personnel have not received the mortgage subsidies that were due to be paid out to them that year. („Vojni sindikat: Pripadnici VS nisu dobili subvencije za stambene kredite”. Beta, 18/10/2018. <https://beta.rs/vesti/vesti-drustvo/99203-vojni-sindikat-pripadnici-vs-nisu-dobili-subvencije-za-stambene-kredite>).

<sup>61</sup> The exception being projects that appear individually in the budget, of which one is the reconstruction of a residential building at the Military Academy (Obrazloženje budžeta – programske informacije (Budget Explanation – Programme Information), b.d, p. 213-214. Document annexed to the 2019 Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia, available at: <https://mfin.gov.rs/UserFiles/File/zakoni/2019/Programske%20informacije.docx>)

---

Moreover, it is questionable whether, and to what degree, the construction of housing can encourage young Serbian Armed Forces personnel to remain in the system, if they do not believe it will ever “be their turn”. Even though per diems were increased in 2017, they are still not at the level they were in 2015, hence this is still a cause of frustration. Finally, the Ministry of Defence and the Government have not offered any solutions to many of the key issues raised by our respondents, such as negative selection, failure to record overtime, overwork of employees through duties that are not part of their job description, and inefficient public procurement that disrupts their regular work.

## WHILE THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE DITHERS...

The outflow of personnel has a negative impact on the system as a whole, particularly in circumstances in which, due to various external factors (employment freezes<sup>62</sup>, Serbia’s negative population growth), the MoD and SAF struggle to replace those employees who have left. Moreover, young people may become discouraged from enrolling in military schools or voluntary military service when they hear from friends and relatives who have “demobbed” (according to one respondent, in small towns like Vranje, where a relatively large number of people are employed in the military, stories spread easily). The high turnover of personnel, even when interest in military service exists, is not a sustainable solution, since training requires time and money. This has been noted by Minister, Vulin:

“You can find people with various educational achievement looking for work, but go on, find a tank driver. Find a marksman. You won’t find him in the National Employment Service. You have to train him and you mustn’t lose him, at the end of the day.”<sup>63</sup>

The shortage of personnel hinders the functioning of the most diverse elements of the system. For example, the shortage of aviation technicians and their deployment to other tasks (e.g. guard duty) slows maintenance and overhaul. A shortage of pilots lengthens the retirement age, which means pilots are older – a fact that introduces completely new risks, since reflexes deteriorate with age. In research and development, employees who have formally retired, continue to work, so projects would not suffer. In military healthcare, in addition to shortages and poor maintenance of equipment, the shortage of medical staff lengthens waiting lists. According to one respondent, the shortage of personnel is felt in every unit, which further burdens serving personnel (“people work on ten or so things at once”).

All of this makes it questionable whether the Serbian Armed Forces can perform all three of its missions, particularly mission two, participation in multinational operations. Even though, due to increased pay and the opportunity to gain new experiences, SAF personnel are exceptionally interested in serving in peace-keeping missions and operations, commanding officers often resist approving their applications to do so. Our respondents have some understanding for this, since “when you go on a mission, nobody

---

<sup>62</sup> A public sector employment freeze was introduced in late 2013. At the time of writing, the prime minister has announced that the Government will recommend the abolition of this employment freeze. (“Brnabić: Verovatno potpuno ukidanje zabrane zapošljavanja od 2020” (“Brnabić: Total abolition of employment freeze likely in 2020”), Tanjug/RTS, 28/11/2019. <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/3754158/brnabic-verovatno-potpuno-ukidanje-zabrane-zaposljavanja-od-2020.html>).

<sup>63</sup> Republic of Serbia – National Assembly. Fourth Sitting of the First Regular Session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, day two. Temporary Minutes. 01 Number 06-2/82-18. Belgrade, 25/04/2018. [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/doc/stenografske\\_beleske/2.%20dan%20Cetvrta%20sednica%20Prvog%20redovnog%20zasedanja%20NSRS%2025.04.2018..docx](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/doc/stenografske_beleske/2.%20dan%20Cetvrta%20sednica%20Prvog%20redovnog%20zasedanja%20NSRS%2025.04.2018..docx)



comes to replace you in your unit". These circumstances give rise to the question of what is a priority: a unit's regular tasks, or deployment to multinational operations. Commanders "don't want to get in trouble for not doing their job in the unit, while they've allowed people to go on peace-keeping missions".

### *"Everyone took advantage of that, why wouldn't I-?"*

The motivations that lead Serbian Armed Forces personnel to voluntarily terminate their service reflect systematic weaknesses and a lack of integrity in human resource management. One option employees have at their disposal, is to leave the system, with all of the consequences of a mass personnel outflow. Another possible reaction employees could choose to the problems they face, is to accept the "rules of the game" and find a way to "struggle through". For example, a high degree of arbitrariness in promotion and posting encourages employees to accept connections and influence trading as a normal part of their career progression. According to one respondent, "everyone took advantage of that [connections], why wouldn't I?". Our respondents were aware that one "phone call" was key to advancement or transfer, and that this was the only way to overcome the negative influence of a direct superior who can hinder promotion.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which employees use poor working conditions and the perception that everyone around them is guilty of abuses as justification to "game the system" for themselves, but our interviews do reveal the widest variety of examples of petty abuses:

*"The cook cuts a little more [meat] for himself and his warrant officer, and puts what's left on to cook. That's the cook, the question is what the warrant officer is getting up to."*

*"It's time for a break, the NCO takes a box of cakes home, we help him to load them into the car, and we get apples for our break."*

*"People move, for example into their girlfriend's flat in Belgrade, but stay registered at their old address and claim travel expenses."*

*"All out-of-hours work is done illicitly, nobody asks for approval <sup>64</sup>, and those who're lucky have a wife or husband who can open a business in their own name."*

Sanctioning individuals in such cases does not seem like an effective approach, particularly considering the perception that high-ranking officers are even more prone to more serious abuses, and that the military is being used for the "private" interests of politicians.

In its annual integrity plan for human resources management, the Ministry of Defence prescribes measures comprising education and prevention of corruption among its employees, especially those who work in finance. These integrity plans do not, however, contain measures for improving integrity in human resources management such as, for example, in recruitment, promotion, posting, referral to training courses or multinational operations, recording overtime, protection from mobbing and protection of whistleblowers. The 2012 integrity building self-assessment, on which the annual plans are still based to a large degree, only superficially touches upon or fails to mention these areas at all. Furthermore, it is not evident from publicly available documents that the Ministry of Defence has, of how employee perceptions of whether they work in fair and equitable conditions, affect their behaviour, e.g. their readiness to engage in minor abuses or their decision to leave the defence system.

---

<sup>64</sup> According to data provided by MoD to BCSP, in the course of 2018, a total of 96 members of the Serbian Armed Forces asked for permission for out-of-hours work and all requests were approved. In the period between 1 January and 31 October 2019, 146 members of SAF requested such permission and only one request was rejected. (Ministry of Defence, Human Resource Sector – Personnel Department. Response to BCSP's request for free access to information. Letter number 11684-17, 10/12/2019. <https://cutt.ly/6roYJ4z>)

---

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although official data on the outflow of personnel from the defence system is not publicly available – the data which is available points to the fact that this problem has become more pronounced in recent years. Members of the Serbian Armed Forces terminate their service of their own volition, not only because they are dissatisfied with their pay, but also because of other factors. These include the perception of negative selection in promotion and posting, as well as in referral to training courses (on which further opportunities for promotion and status depend); work overload; unpaid overtime and a lack of time for family life; dissatisfaction with too frequently performing duties that are not part of their job description (particularly maintenance of premises and the parade square); the poor treatment of subordinates by commanding officers and dissatisfaction with working conditions (accommodation, food, equipment shortages). More than one respondent talked of a sense of injustice, “hopelessness” and a misplaced “essence of existence” as reasons for leaving the system.

Research has also highlighted the gap between the expectations of employees and the organisational culture in the defence system that is still being nurtured, despite changes in the contemporary environment. It is unrealistic to expect patriotism to be the main motivational driver of employees, regardless of poor working conditions and demotivating work environment.

In that sense, the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces need to understand that, in the 21st century, they have become an employer much like any other. This means that they must compete in the labour market to attract the most capable employees from various backgrounds, who have clearly defined expectations regarding pay, working conditions, job satisfaction and the ability to maintain a work/life balance. The competitive nature of the labour market and the expectations of employees mean that the MoD and SAF must also continually work on retaining staff. Military personnel are in touch with what is happening in their civilian environment and exposed to societal trends – “if everyone’s leaving for Germany, that’s an option officers also start thinking about.”<sup>65</sup> What is more, according to a lawyer who represents MoD and SAF personnel at employment tribunals, military personnel are aware what their rights and duties are. Therefore, they can quickly react to breaches of their rights by finding other work elsewhere.

The measures the Ministry of Defence has enacted to date in order to retain personnel largely miss the real reasons people are leaving the system. The one thing the MoD has correctly identified is the importance of pay rises. Our respondents agree that, with appropriate salaries, it would be easier to tolerate the other workplace problems. However, in the current financial climate, the Government of Serbia cannot offer a pay rise that would be sufficient to satisfy all those working in the defence system, and especially not all those working in the public sector. Additionally, as this study shows, in many cases salaries are not the key reason given for leaving professional military service.

In the absence of high salaries, the defence system can offer its employees other forms of job satisfaction, which some respondents cited as their main reasons for joining up in the first place: pride that “I’m working for my country”, interesting work (e.g. young engineers can work on projects they will rarely encounter in civilian life), identification with the values the military propagates (especially solidarity and “love for the team”), reduced years of service to retirement, regular and secure remuneration and additional work through which SAF personnel can effectively supplement their monthly incomes.

---

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Z. Ponoš.

On the other hand, all financial and non-financial incentives are futile if Serbian Armed Forces personnel perceive their working conditions to be unfair and if finding work elsewhere is the most effective way to tackle workplace issues. This is the outcome of a series of deficiencies in human and other resource management, which the Ministry of Defence will not resolve by reinstating the Morale Administration<sup>66</sup> or investing in strengthening the “cultural awareness” of military personnel. Instead, the MoD should recognise the connection between personnel retention policies and a far-reaching integrity building process designed to strengthen the defence system, make it abuse-resistant and an environment for all its employees.

Based on this research, we can recommend the following:

Bearing in mind the limited resources available to it, **the Ministry of Defence should analyse which branches suffer from the greatest personnel shortfalls** and, in accordance with this, should establish solving problems with staff retention as a priority. It is imperative to re-examine the most commonly cited reasons for personnel leaving these branches – be it through exit interviews, analysis of contract termination requests or anonymous questionnaires.

In the absence of a comprehensive pay increase, **the Ministry of Defence and the Government of Serbia should identify which allowances and reimbursements are crucial to increasing employee motivation.** This should include per diems for official travel, deployment to the GSZ and to the field. Additionally, the issues of recording overtime and paying those who cannot use the accrued off days, should be resolved at the level of the system as a whole.

It is imperative that the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces develop a transparent system for providing information about vacant posts, which would enable professional military personnel to check at any time what opportunities are available to them and, in accordance with this, plan their professional development. Also, **establishing better communication between the Personnel Administration and unit commanders is necessary**, so as to develop medium-term plans and to make it possible to efficiently exchange information on staffing needs and capacities.

In order to ensure career progression is in accordance with merit and ability, **it is necessary to introduce promotion committees**, these would be ad hoc bodies, which would independently assess the eligibility of individual cases for transition to a higher rank. These bodies would include members of the candidate's unit as well as other units, who would deliberate on the advancement of a military professional on the basis of their previous performance assessment reports.

It is important to ensure turnover through more frequent rotation of posts by **limiting how long it is possible to stay in one post to two or three years** – depending on the rank required and the complexity of the role. Personnel remaining in one post for too long can create bottlenecks in career progression and the piling up of certain ranks.

In the absence of confidence in the grievance system, many believe that a change of career is the only effective way to tackle the problems they face. Firstly, **it is important to ensure employees are better informed** about the options they currently have.

---

<sup>66</sup> During a parliamentary debate in December 2019, the Minister of Defence stated that the Armed Forces needed a morale administration, which had thus been reinstated. („Vulin za donošenje potpuno novog zakona o vojsci”. Tanjug/Večernje novosti, 26/12/2019. <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:838275-Vulin-za-donosenje-potpuno-novog-zakona-o-vojsci>)

---

Also, **the Ministry of Defence should re-examine all existing complaint mechanisms and analyse how they could be improved.** The capacities of the Defence Inspectorate should be strengthened, as should this institution's functional and personnel independence, so as to enable it to process complaints regarding violations of employee rights.

**The Ministry of Defence should explore the most expedient measures for maintaining and cleaning premises and barracks.** Currently, it may seem that the most cost-effective approach is for soldiers, NCOs and officers to do this, but this study shows that performing such duties eats into their training time and has a negative impact on morale. Additionally, it is important to reduce the amount of administrative work that burdens all professional military personnel and slows their ability to perform their real duties.

More broadly, improvements to the management of financial and other resources will affect the position of employees in the system and their satisfaction with their working conditions. This study did not address this area in greater detail, but the testimonies of multiple respondents indicate possible problems in planning and implementing budgeting and public procurement. Therefore, **the State Audit Institution should carry out an audit of the expediency of procurement in the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces** in order to determine what barriers are preventing more effective procurement and how they could be addressed so that greater efficiency does not increase the risk of corruption.

---

In terms of the slow pace of public procurement procedures, the new Law on Public Procurement adopted in 2019 may be a false friend to the defence system. Under the auspices of alignment with European Union acquis, it enables practically all Ministry of Defence procurement to be exempt from the application of this law under the pretext of protecting national security.<sup>67</sup> In addition to this, low-value public procurements have been abolished and the value of a procurement to which the law does not apply has been increased from 500,000 to 1 million dinars. This can affect more rapid acquisition of, for example, equipment, but it also increases the risk of corruption. **Therefore, the Ministry of Defence should avoid seemingly easy solutions and strive to improve the planning of public procurement procedures, so that the functioning of the military is impaired neither by delay, nor by corrupt activities.**

**The National Assembly's Defence and Internal Affairs Committee should organise a thematic session devoted to human resource management in the defence system,** in order to help the Ministry of Defence tackle its personnel outflow problems.

---

<sup>67</sup> Đurković, S. (ed.). Izeveštaj koalicije prEUgovor o napretku Srbije u poglavljima 23 i 24 – Septembar 2019 (Coalition prEUgovor Report on Progress of Serbia in Chapters 23 and 24 - September 2019). Beograd: Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2019, pp. 54-55. <http://preugovor.org/upload/document/preugovor-20191017-alarm-sr-web.pdf>

