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THE CONTEMPORARY MILITARY: BETWEEN PUBLIC INDIFFERENCE AND TRUST

Marjan Malešič¹

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Abstract

The early debates on civil-military relations were limited to the relations between the military and the state whereas contemporary studies encompass the military, state and political institutions, and civil society (the public). The article deals with two elements of the triad, namely the relationship between the military and the public, and it deals with the following concepts: marginalization of the military in contemporary society, public trust in the military and public support of the military in terms of missions performed, provision of financial and human resources, and development projects. The article brings about a comparative analysis and a typology of countries reflecting the attitude of the public towards the military.

Key words: civil-military relations, military, public, indifference, trust, social distance

Introduction

When we consider the relationship between the public and the military in contemporary societies we should observe that the early debates on civil-military relations were limited to the relations between *the military and the state* (see, e.g. Huntington 1957), where *the public was not considered* as a relevant factor. Janowitz (1960), however, conceptualized civil-military relations in terms of the relations between *the military and society*, and also left some space for the general public to be explored in this context. He argued that the military ought to reflect civilian society as closely as possible.

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Segal (2003: 61) introduced some concepts that attempt to explain recent civil-military relations in U.S. The '*culture gap*' (Feaver/Kohn 2001) between the military and society which contributes to the weakening of the civilian control of the military and the alienation of soldiers from the civilian populace, appears not to be fully validated. In a broader context, the concept of a *postmodern military* (Moskos et al. 2000) is also significant for an understanding of civil-military relations. The question arises, however, whether contemporary military organizations, warfare and soldiers have undergone any major change, or whether they are, in fact, merely a modern incarnation of the same long-term historical patterns (Segal 2003: 62). Concepts that deserve our full attention in this context are the *institutional versus occupational (I/O) hypothesis* (Moskos 1977), the conceptualization of new military professionalism which stresses the *overlap of civilian and military spheres* (Sarkesian 1981), and the recognition that *military officers are not necessarily representative of the military as a whole* (Segal et al. 1974). Also important is Bland's concept of '*shared responsibility*' between politicians and military officers which requires constant dialogue between them. Bland (1999: 8) warned that the problem of civil-military relations is often "politicians' *indifference and inattention* to military matters and the inadequate understanding of the politics of defense by military professionals".

Cohn (2003: 65) concurs that the civil-military concept is broader in its nature, having in mind that 'civilian' can be divided into those civilians who represent the authorities and those who comprise '*general society*'. In the past, the analyses of civil-military relations were too often limited to the relationship between the political and military elites. Cohn (2003: 65) asserts that "to reduce all civil-military relations to a question of who is holding the reins" is too simplistic – it is true that the state cannot survive without the protection of the military, but it is also true that in a democracy the military cannot survive without the support of the *general public*. She introduces *the triad of civil-military relations*, in which *the government* should not abuse its authority over the military institution; *the general public* should inform itself of and participate in matters of national security; and *military personnel* should subordinate their institutional and personal interests to the legitimate civilian authority. The military should also be constantly aware of the mutual dependence between themselves and the general populace. Boëne (2003: 121) also uses a triad to explain civil-military relations, taking into account "the armed forces, the state and society".

Pinch (2003: 82) similarly recognizes civil-military relations as an interface between the military and the political/governmental

establishment on the one hand and between the military and civilian society on the other. As to the military-societal interface, the cooperation between the armed forces and civilian institutions and the level of value congruence among both is regarded as being of strategic significance in terms of 'human resource management'. Pinch (2003: 82) also sees *the public attitudes towards the military and military-media relations* as an indicator of civil-military relations in society.

Kuhlmann (2003: 93), in a cross-national comparative research on civil-military relations, notices that it is important to decide which strata of society should be taken into account when studying the relationship between the military and society. The inclusion of only those institutions that have the legal authority to execute control over military bodies represents too narrow an approach. All institutions and organizations that contribute to the public debate about security policy and military matters should be included in the analysis.

According to Dandeker (2000: 9), civil-military relations have two dimensions. The first one is related to the question raised by Boëne (1990), namely how the military and society deal with tensions emanating from "the need of armed forces to remain apart from society with distinctive organizational structure and a culture or ethos to (...) protect society, and at the same time to reflect that society's civilian norms and values". The second dimension raises the question of how the military's use of coercive force serves the legitimate and democratic objectives of the society without prejudicing the professional autonomy of an effective military. Dandeker (2000: 37) discerns two trends that are crucial for the political dimension of civil-military relations and are relevant for our discussion. The first one is the impact of electronic media and public opinion on the formulation and implementation of security policy in terms of managing the potential tensions between the military imperative for secrecy and the public's right to be informed. The second trend is related to the ICT revolution that further erodes the boundaries between political and technical military decision-making and makes the work of politicians and military officers less distinctive.

Therefore civil-military relations extend far beyond the relationship between the military and the civilian authorities; they also involve civil society with the public playing a significant part in it. Various permutations are possible within the individual elements of the triad; among them, however, we will be interested in the question of public trust in the contemporary military, which reflects the legitimacy of armed forces in society. We will try to explain four distinctive but interrelated and even ostensibly contradictory observations: (1) The military is

marginalized and less visible in contemporary society, (2) The contemporary military enjoys public trust, (3) The level of public trust in the military does not reflect in the readiness of civilian society to cooperate with the armed forces and in the public support of the military's missions and development projects, and (4) the ratio between trust and indifference is idiosyncratic and varies from one country to another.

To explain these observations, we will first theoretically conceptualise the relationship between the military and the public. That will be followed by secondary analysis of public opinion data in various countries whereas at the end of the process we will make a comparison among and classification of countries explored in the analysis.

Public Trust in the Military: A Comparative Approach

Several researchers have explored the relationship between the public and the military as an institution. Burk/Moskos (1994) assert that public opinion on the armed forces in postmodern societies is sceptical and even characterized by '*apathy*'. Since the end of the Cold War defense no longer seems to be an important social objective; the armed forces are subject to a transformation towards an all-volunteer force, and the military has consequently become somewhat marginalized in the public's view². Shaw (2000: 23f.) touches upon the issue in the context of a '*post-military society*'. He examines the post-Cold War trend in Western states in particular, and notes that, due to the technological advances in weaponry and the subsequent diminished participation of citizens in the military as a component of citizenship, militarism no longer takes the same forms and no longer holds the same significance that it did in the past. Even military institutions could be described as 'post-military' in terms of their assuming new missions of peacekeeping and peace-making, humanitarian assistance, policing in a global context, and war-managing. Moskos et al. (2000) characterize the public attitudes toward the military in the post-Cold War era as '*indifferent*'. The 'postmodern military' is confronted with a diminished level of military threats, the transformation of the manning system, and a limitation on the resources available for their operations and further development. All these trends should lead to the *marginalization* of the military. Van der Meulen (2003: 299) examines that relationship in the context of *legitimacy*. In his view, the typical institutional characteristics of the military as 'managers of violence' explain why the issue of legitimacy is so important for the

² Today more than three quarters of European countries made a decision to suspend conscription and to introduce the All-Volunteer Force.

military, especially in a democratic society. For van der Meulen (1998: 148) public opinion is a central concept for assessing the legitimacy of the armed forces.

However, public attitudes towards the military have not necessarily followed the above mentioned patterns of indifference, apathy and marginalization. On the contrary notes Van der Meulen (2003: 200), while defense may no longer be widely regarded as an important common goal, *the trust of the public in the military has increased*. Similarly, new military missions in a postmodern society are understood in the context of protecting human rights and therefore receive a high level of approval with the public. Indeed, van der Meulen's cross-national analysis of public opinion trends in **Europe** during the 1990s displayed a growth of confidence in the military.

Manigart (2001: 26; 2003: 34) also obtained cross-national data to prove that *confidence in the military has increased* in all **EU countries** (15 at that time) between 1997 and 2001, with the exception of Finland and Greece, where indicators of trust were the highest anyway. The data reveals that the armed forces top the list of the most trusted social institutions (reaching 71 percent), ahead of the police, the educational system, humanitarian organizations, the United Nations, the mass media and so forth. At the bottom of the list are political parties, scoring only 18 percent. Manigart (2001: 28) also revealed that the Finns trust the military the most (91 percent), followed by the Greek and the Irish with 87 percent and 85 percent respectively, whereas the lowest level of trust was expressed in Spain (65 percent), Denmark (66 percent) and Italy (67 percent).

Similarly, Burk (1994) reports, that the military in **U.S.** is regarded as one of the most prestigious institutions in society. Although there were some signs of a growing '*social distance*' between the military and the public at the beginning of the 1990s (the quality of public support for the military engagement abroad and the structural isolation of the all-volunteer force), Burk proved that the phenomenon was not as salient as some may have thought.³ According to Leal (2005: 123), recent polls in the U.S. reveal that the military is *the most respected government institution*, too, which is crucial for the American armed forces in terms of

3 However, Ricks (1997, 2) reported on the sense of alienation from their former civilian lives felt by Marine recruits, whom he interviewed in 1995. Each of the Marines seemed to experience "a moment of private loathing for public America". They were astonished by the unfitness of civilians, their uncouth behavior, selfishness and consumerism. Some Marines avoided their old friends and even members of their families. Civilians seemed to be self-destructive losers, a bunch of freaks, goofing around and not trying hard enough.

garnering support for funding and raising recruitment. Without strong public support these two objectives cannot be adequately achieved. Cohn (2003: 66) asserts however, that the American military is both respected and slightly mistrusted: "Military personnel look down on civilians as slovenly and degenerate, and civilians look down on the military personnel as unintelligent and unimaginative; military personnel are told that politics is none of their business, and are then thrust into situations where they have no choice but to be political".

Pinch (2003: 82) reveals that the **Canadian** public has often taken an *ambivalent position* towards the military, returning "quite a positive" response when asking specific questions about the institution; however, spending on the armed forces was perceived as a rather low priority. Due to the various scandals during their deployments abroad in the 1990s, the Canadian Forces have lost a lot of media support and have also suffered from a lower level of support from both the government and the public. Recent polls show that trust and support have been re-established in several dimensions of military activities, meaning that the public's image of the armed forces has improved. This is a consequence of an improvement in internal communication and the exchange of information with the media and the public.

Wither (2003: 76) reports that the **British** public respects the armed forces for their professionalism and effectiveness, however, the military profession is little understood by most civilians. This is a consequence of the fact that, with the exception of the two world wars, Britain has relied on relatively small professional armed forces for the entire 20th century; thus, citizens in general have had little chance to experience military service. Questions of defense and the military are not salient topics during election campaigns, nor do the political elite and the public pay a lot of attention to military matters.⁴ The outsourcing and privatizing of some support functions have not improved the picture, the disappearance of military uniforms from the streets is not helpful either. All these circumstances increase "*a sense of separate military and civilian societies*" (Whither 2003: 76). Most military commanders are satisfied with the civil-military distance in order to be able to maintain the military ethos and the discipline required to sustain an individual in combat. However, rapid social change in Europe and the greater integration of the UK into the EU have emphasized the rights of the individual in the domain of employment and social legislation which has undermined the military's 'separateness' from the wider social and

4 The MoD launched a public discussion of the Strategic Defence Review in 2002 through local authorities, public libraries and via the internet, and it received only 252 replies (Wither 2003: 76).

cultural environment. Several judicial verdicts have been issued to this effect improving the position of individuals in the military and affecting changes within the military itself.

The review of public opinion data in **France** (Les Francais et la Defense 2002: 43) reveals that 81 percent of the population held a good opinion of the French Armed Forces in 2001. And a look at the trend over a decade shows that the data range +/- four percent around this figure. Judging the armed forces in 2001, the general population expresses sympathy (78 percent), a feeling of security (72 percent), and pride (67 percent).

Recent public opinion surveys have also revealed a relatively high trust in the military in **Switzerland** (Haltiner et al. 2005: 65). Haltiner (2003: 85) reports that the Swiss military was more subject to public scrutiny and criticism during the Cold War than it has been since the new millennium, although its "social and political valuation of the role of the military has changed"⁵. Although the acceptance of the military oscillates at around 70 percent, the attitude is "characterized by a kind of *apathy*" (Haltiner 2003: 85). Szvicsev et al. (2010: 15) reveal that in 2010 the Swiss Armed Forces have reached a *medium level trust among the federal institutions* and have regained the 2009 level of trust and support. Nevertheless, while three quarters of the population believe that the armed forces are necessary and wish to have well-equipped and well-trained armed forces, half of the population advocates military downsizing. Also, the ratio between the advocates of a militia and an all-volunteer force is more or less balanced. Although the trust into the military has recovered from a low in the previous year, the level remains below the average of several years. In general, the Swiss Armed Forces receive high approval rates, however opinions are divided regarding their size and form.

Similar public attitudes towards the military have been observed in **Slovakia** and Poland. In the former the military is perceived 'very positively' and the armed forces represent an institution which the Slovaks 'deeply trust', however, the military "has never been paid any special attention by society' (Čukan 2003: 117). In addition, trust in the military is not a consequence of its combat experience, but rather a result of positive interactions between soldiers and the general public, such as the military's involvement in search and rescue activities during

5 Haltiner refers to two referenda held in Switzerland on the abolition of the armed forces that took place in 1989 and 2001, respectively. The latter was regarded as a complete failure with a minimal turnout and only 22 percent of voters favoring abolition; even among young voters the idea was not accepted.

natural disasters, and performing other tasks that follow from the 'societal imperative'. However, Čukan warns that the public is not well informed about the problems in the military due to an information barrier that has been erected to protect the military from public scrutiny. As a consequence, Slovak public opinion of the military can be said to rest on certain myths rather than on reality. The trust in the military has grown from an initial 52 percent in 1993, when the Slovak armed forces were established, to over 70 percent in recent years.

In **Poland**, the military also seems to be an institution of high social prestige which inspires public confidence: In various polls the public has chosen the military "as one of the most trusted institutions" (Gogolewska 2003: 104). Some 60 – 75 percent of the population holds a positive image of the military. In 2001, 76 percent of the respondents declared their confidence in the armed forces. According to Gogolewska, a high level of trust in the army *does not necessarily mean that it is popular and socially respected*. Compulsory conscription is rejected by a majority of the respondents; meanwhile officers have become frustrated at the loss of jobs, the drop in living standards and the continuous reductions and reforms of the armed forces, as well as *the communication gap* between the military and the rest of society. The gap is also a consequence of the absence of a genuine security community in Poland (Gogolewska 2003: 106).

On the contrary, at the end of the last and the beginning of new millennium, the level of trust in the military in **Hungary** is characterized as being *rather low*. Only 27 percent of respondents 'absolutely' or 'rather' trust the military as an institution; this is closely related to the heated debates at the time regarding the abolition of conscription and the introduction of an all-volunteer force (Kiss 2003: 137).

In **Ukraine**, the armed forces *do not attract much public attention* except as a result of extraordinary events such as the missile that hit a house, the missile that brought down a civilian airplane (70 casualties) and a tragedy during an air show (80 casualties) at the beginning of millennium. Consequently, more than half of the Ukrainian population is concerned about the situation in the military and believes that the country should not maintain large and ill-equipped armed forces (Churylov 2003: 157).

As reported by Rukavishnikov (2003: 163f.) **Russian** trust in its armed forces has been very much *dependent on the wars in Chechnya*. During the first war, from 1994 – 96, the armed forces have experienced a considerable *reputation damage*: The portion of respondents who claim

to be 'fully confident' in the armed forces has dropped from 37 to 27 percent. During the second Chechen war, which began in 1999 as a 'counter-terrorist operation', the public trust in the Russian army has increased to 48 percent due to its initial success, however in 2001 it has again dropped to 33 percent. According to Rukavishnikov, Russian public opinion is very much influenced by the mass media that have challenged the official version of the wars, and it is evident that the state and the military institutions have lost the 'information war' despite their continuous effort, especially during the second Chechen war, to control the flow of information and to influence the public view.

In the former **Federal Republic of Yugoslavia**,⁶ where the military was defeated in several wars during the 1990s (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Hercegovina and Kosovo), *the level of trust did not fall below 50 percent*. It appears to be the case that military defeat during the NATO air strikes against the country in Spring 1999 has even strengthened public trust (65 percent), which has decreased to 53 percent in 2000, just prior to the fall of Milošević's regime. Soon after the toppling of Milošević trust in the military increases to 75 percent again, but another drop in public support can be seen in mid-2001, down to 57 percent and even to 48 percent by the end of that year (Timotić 2003: 206, 208). In **Bosnia & Herzegovina** *trust in the military is also rather high*: 54 percent in the Republika Srpska and even higher in the Federation – 60 percent. This trend is supported by two important factors: (1) the conviction that each entity should have its own armed forces; and (2) the strong feeling that the armed forces' main mission is to defend the territory against a potential enemy (Turković 2003: 224). In **Macedonia**, a 2001 poll demonstrated that the armed forces are also *highly trusted*. They are regarded as a successful crisis management institution and as fully capable to defend the country by 78 percent of the respondents (Vankovska 2003: 224).

The **Bulgarian** Armed Forces have also managed to attract a *high level of support and trust* from the very beginning of its democratic transformation in 1989. Yanakiev (2003: 257) reports that the level of confidence in the armed forces varied from 63 to 70 percent in the period immediately following the democratic transformation and has not changed since then. This is due to the armed forces' political neutrality in the transitional process, the cadre reform of the upper echelons of the military, and the assumption of its new role as a peacekeeper and participant in humanitarian missions. In **Romania** the trust in the military is also high and accompanied by a willingness of the public to support

6 The FRY was renamed in the State Community of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003, whereas following the declaration of Montenegrin independence in 2006 both countries became separate and independent states.

the reform process and to increase of defense budget (Watts 2003: 280).

In **Slovenia** recent data reveal (see DRC public opinion poll 2012), that the armed forces rank third among fifteen relevant social institutions. The most trusted institutions are the family and relatives, the educational system, and the armed forces. The latter enjoys more trust than humanitarian organizations, the ombudsman, the police, the president of the state, trade unions, the courts, the Euro, and the mass media. The least trusted institutions in society are the parliament, the government, the intelligence agency and the church.

The armed forces therefore currently enjoy a relatively high level of trust within society. However, trust in the armed forces has been significantly changing over the last two decades. At the beginning of the 1990s it was rather high (60 percent), however from that time to the mid-1990s trust in the armed forces gradually eroded (30 percent). In 1998, the level of trust began to increase again, and during the next two years this trend became even more prominent (54 percent). In the first years of the 21st century the armed forces enjoyed almost the same level of trust as they had at the beginning of the 1990s (around 60 per cent), and until 2007 it remained fairly stable. However, in 2009 the level of trust has once again fallen below 50 percent, whereas in 2012 it slightly recovered again (53 percent).

The reasons for these changes during the last two decades are not easy to explain. The initial high level of trust can be reasonably explained by the successful role of the territorial defense units during the armed conflict against the Yugoslav People's Army after Slovenia's proclamation of independence in 1991. We can speculate that the downward trend in the first half of the 1990s was connected to the loss of prestige which the armed forces felt they had earned by their successful protection of Slovenia's independence and also connected to the unclear and only partially successful military reforms in the following years. This process was accompanied by several 'affairs' in which the military was involved.⁷

The political project of NATO membership and the military reforms necessitated could also be linked to the shift in trust during the 1990s. In

⁷ Here, one has to mention the 'Depalavas' affair, where the military police stopped and beat a civilian, a supposed spy; an arms trafficking affair, where a transfer of arms to Bosnia & Herzegovina that was under UN embargo was disclosed; and the misuse of trust in the MoD that became obvious when training video tapes were used to test the political inclinations of military officers. (for more details see Malešič 2006).

1997, despite expectations, Slovenia was not invited to join NATO. For politicians this represented a thorough disappointment resulting in an even more active reform policy to meet the criteria for NATO membership. In 1998, Slovenia adopted a comprehensive national strategy for NATO integration which included the 'restructuring, reorganization and modernization' of the armed forces and an announced increase in defense spending. The pace of reforms was accelerated. Additionally, participation in peace operations began in 1997 with the number of soldiers deployed constantly increasing since then. Through these missions the armed forces have become more visible to the public. Modernization, together with new objectives performed in support of international peace and stability could perhaps best explain the subsequent increase in trust in the military (Malešič/Vegič 2009: 115). At the beginning of the millennium we witnessed the theft of weapons from military storages that remained for a long time unexplained, and, even more importantly, the system of conscription faced a crisis: Demographic trends in Slovenia were unfavorable, the level of conscientious objection was particularly high and still increasing, and the number of conscripts who were not medically fit was also increasing, most probably in large part in an attempt to dodge the draft (Malesic 2003: 173). The introduction of an all-volunteer force in 2003 improved the picture and the level of trust again increased. However, within the last couple of years, trust in the armed forces has once again decreased most probably due to the 'Patria affair'⁸ and the heated political debate questioning the wisdom of the deployment of soldiers abroad, especially in Afghanistan. The 2012 positive turn could be explained by the fact that the armed forces were the first institutional 'victim' of social and economic crisis, renouncing app. a fifth of their regular budget.

We also checked the correlations between the performance rating, trust and reputation of the Slovenian Armed Forces, and selected independent variables by using the method of cross-tabulations. As far as *performance rating* is concerned, age (sig (χ^2) = 0.161) and education (sig (χ^2) = 0.639) of the respondents are not significant variables. However, gender is significant as far as the performance rate of armed forces is concerned (sig (χ^2) = 0.026) since 68 percent of the men think that the armed forces do not perform well compared to 32 percent of the women. The t-test confirms that men are much more critical towards the armed forces performance than women.

⁸ The Slovenian MoD commissioned 135 armored vehicles from the Finnish provider Patria in December 2006; allegations of corruption erupted even before the delivery of the first vehicle. Several court trials are taking place in Austria, Slovenia and Finland as a result of this ongoing affair.

Furthermore, there is a significant correlation (sig (χ^2) = 0.000) between *trust* in the Slovenian Armed Forces and age of respondents. Trust in the armed forces increases with the age of respondents. Whereas 61 percent of those aged 56 and above rather or completely trust in the armed forces, only 35 percent of those 26 – 35 years old do so. The strength of the correlation between education and trust is a bit weaker (sig (χ^2) = 0.042), but still existing. Less educated respondents have slightly more trust in the military than those with a higher level of education. Gender, in turn, does not significantly influence the level of trust (sig (χ^2) = 0.097).

Finally, there is a significant correlation between *reputation* of the Slovenian Armed Forces, age (sig (χ^2) = 0.017) and education (sig (χ^2) = 0.017). Again, the reputation of the armed forces increases with age (the older the respondent the better the perceived reputation) and decreases with the level of education (the higher the level of education, the lower the perceived reputation). When it comes to gender, this is not a significant variable affecting the perceived reputation of the armed forces (sig (χ^2) = 0.227).

Bebler (2000: 147) warns however that the *high public trust in the Slovenian military is not followed by its high prestige in the society, nor by adequate public interest* in military matters. The awareness of the Slovenian political and military elites that efficient and legitimate armed forces must equally satisfy the social, political and functional expectations of the public seems to be crucial in this context (Jelušič 2003: 183).

Why is the trust in the military so high in almost all the countries analyzed? According to Kuhlmann (2003: 99), *participation in international missions has brought back legitimacy and prestige* to Europe's armed forces in general. This level was never achieved in times when traditional military missions prevailed. The highest levels of trust and prestige associated with the armed forces were experienced in Finland, Bulgaria and Romania; whereas Russia, Hungary and the Czech Republic experience the opposite pattern. Haltiner (2003: 85) reports that in Switzerland most people acknowledge the need for some form of national defense and the role of military in it, but they do not want to be involved personally: The so-called '*without me*' attitude. Similarly to Haltiner's observation, Kuhlmann notes that a high level of public support for the armed forces does not mean that the 'count me out' inclination among civilians has been overcome, quite the opposite is true. Boëne (2003: 121) discerns that the process of transformation from

a conscript army to an all-volunteer force has triggered some fears among politicians that the military may become socially and culturally isolated. However, the strengthening of military-society links via outsourcing, recruitment policy contacts, the education of officers at civil universities and the possibility for officers to serve part of their career in civilian institutions has brought about the closer integration of the military with their parent society. Boëne (2003: 126), having in mind the case of France, seems to concur with Haltiner and Kuhlmann claiming that a “favorable public image of the military does not automatically translate into high recruitment figures”.

Comparative Analysis Findings

On the basis of the (limited) data available we have made a provisional attempt to display the clusters of countries (either individual countries or the EU-15 countries as a group) according to the level of trust and the level of indifference in the public’s attitudes towards the military. We placed this attitude in the broader context of the legitimacy of the armed forces in society and the potential social distance, and also in the context of the new military missions performed in the international arena, and military related “projects” (budget, human resources, weapons and equipment, development objectives...). It seems that maintaining a high degree of trust in the military is a necessary, but insufficient precondition for achieving its legitimacy in society. Legitimacy is reached when trust is accompanied by a generally favorable attitude, including the public’s acceptance of military missions and their support for military ‘projects’.

As Graph indicates, we may distinguish several typical clusters. In the first cluster there are countries (Switzerland, Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia, and Ukraine) in which one or more of the favorable features are perceived as (relatively) high as far as public attitudes towards the armed forces are concerned: *Trust*, respect, a feeling of security, pride and sympathy; but concurrently one or more of the unfavorable characteristics are also perceived as highly present: *Indifference*, inattention, invisibility, marginalization, apathy and unpopularity.

The second cluster comprises EU-15 countries with a (relatively) high degree of trust in the military, but at the same time indifference is not as salient as in the first cluster.⁹

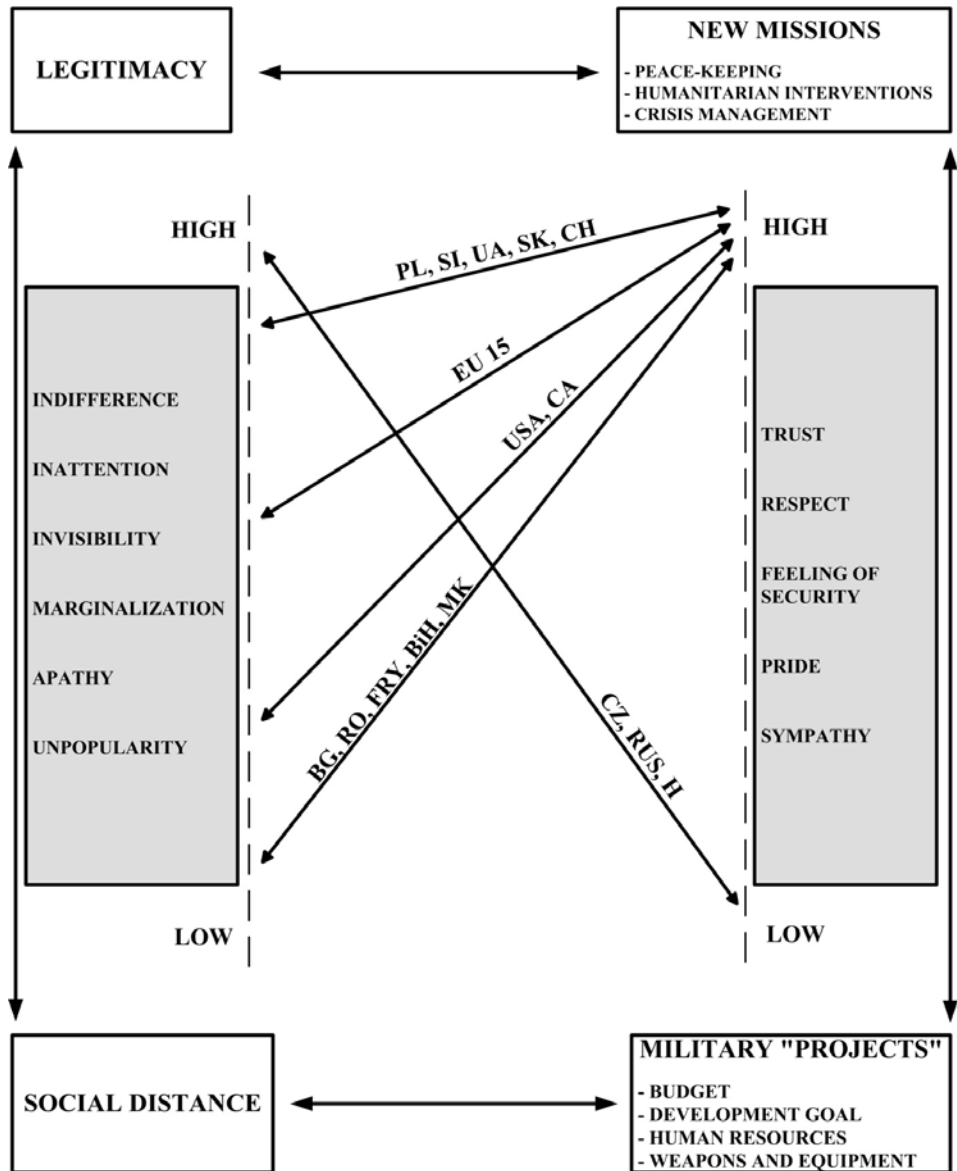
⁹ We are cognizant of the fact that some EU-15 countries, e. g. Finland and Greece, might deviate from the average having an extremely high level of trust in the military and a concurrently relatively low level of indifference. Similarly, we could see that British armed forces are trusted by the public however public attention to military matters is rather low.

This cluster is followed by another entailing the U.S. and Canada where public trust in the military is again relatively high, but indifference is lower than among the majority of EU-15 countries.

The fourth cluster consists of Russia, the Czech Republic and Hungary which display a rather low degree of public trust in the military and a high level of indifference.

And finally, there is a cluster of countries (Bulgaria, Romania, the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Macedonia) where it seems that a (relatively) high level of trust in the armed forces is accompanied by a (relatively) low level of indifference.

Graph: The Public and the Military: Trust and Indifference



Source: own research

Conclusion

Public support for the military is crucial to achieving its legitimacy in society, however many scholars warn that the public's attitudes towards the military in a post-modern or post-military society is indifferent, characterized by the marginalization and invisibility of the military, and even a sense of apathy regarding the military. All these features produce a sense of separation between the military and civilian society or at least a growing social distance between them. However, the survey data, as a rule, demonstrate that public trust in the military has increased significantly over the last two decades. The military is (one of) the most trusted and respected social institutions that maintains a good image, attracts sympathies and produces feelings of security in the majority of countries surveyed. Nevertheless, high approval rates do not necessarily equate to concrete public support for the military in terms of approving a higher defense budget, faster development and a better human resources management.

Why is there such a contradiction in the majority of countries in which a high level of trust in the armed forces is accompanied by a relatively high level of indifference? One possible general explanation can be found in the value structure of post-modern society, the prevailing values being pluralization and individualization, specialization and professionalization, hedonism, and the increasing importance of global concerns. One reason explaining the contradiction is most probably the profound change in threat perceptions where military threats as a rule no longer attract public attention, and the 'fight against terrorism' did not prove to be an adequate substitute in the majority of countries. It is possible that the communication gap between the military and the public also plays an important role to this effect, as noted by some analysts. There is also the question of the influence of different image-damaging 'affairs', such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, the behavior of peacekeeping soldiers in Somalia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Afghanistan etc., and the various military-related problems of corruption and crime in transition countries and so forth. The diminishing military experience amongst the general populace due to the suspension of conscription and the introduction of an all-volunteer force and the invisibility of the military in societies (there are no military uniforms on the streets) are not helpful either in creating more fruitful relationship between the military and the public.

The extent of the impact of these general characteristics of postmodern societies and their militaries should be studied on a case by case basis: Their significance and the combinations in which these characteristics appear are idiosyncratic and depend on the various countries. In the case of Slovenia, the question arises whether the public places its

confidence in the real military or perhaps in the military as imagined and wishfully thought by society: Well organized, effective and rational, the military that could be an important element of national identity and pride? Although the various disgraceful affairs in which the armed forces have been (in)directly involved from time to time cause oscillations, the level of public trust in the military remains relatively high. It also appears to be the case that 'new military missions' that were initially a source of legitimization of the armed forces from the end of 1990s onwards, in times of economic and social crisis and mass media reports on unsuccessful and 'never ending' operations abroad, have slowly, but steadily become a source of their de-legitimization¹⁰. It remains to be seen whether this trend will be followed by the public in other countries.

¹⁰ The poll results in 2012 revealed that 42 percent of population supports participation of Slovenia in peace operations whereas 45 percent opposes it.

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