



Vortrag (Speech)

**Parlamentarischer Staatssekretär
Christian Schmidt**

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

[Anrede]

(Excellencies, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen)

1. Introduction

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall almost 21 years ago, dramatic changes have occurred in particular in central, eastern and southern Europe. This unexpected political turning point was followed by German reunification, the 20th anniversary of which we are celebrating this year. These changes have had dramatic consequences for the state, society and thus for the Bundeswehr. Since 1990, there have been many innovations in the mission and structure of the armed forces, and today the Bundeswehr is facing the largest transformation since its foundation. Not only has it become an army on operations, but it will also

undergo a substantial change to become more capable and professional.

2. Ethical demands on Bundeswehr military personnel

Operational reality and what our military personnel experience while on operational deployment have changed the image of the Bundeswehr significantly. Today, military tasks range from conducting police-like missions containing social, diplomatic and relief elements to engaging in classical combat. More than ever before, even soldiers at lower levels of command are having to shoulder great responsibility and bear in mind the political implications of their actions. They often find themselves in confused conflict situations in which they have to judge whether the use of armed force is unavoidable and when the extent to which force is used has gone beyond the ethi-

cally justifiable limit. This is not confined, however, to classical military skills. Extreme situations in particular call for soldiers with a highly developed sense of moral judgement who base their decisions on the values and norms enshrined in the Basic Law.

Observance of the principles of leadership development and civic education, *Innere Führung*, enables them to be sure of what to do in such situations. Geared to the image of a human being enshrined in the Basic Law, leadership development and civic education is the coordinate system that service in the Bundeswehr goes by. This leadership culture reflects the principles of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. Its ideal is the citizen in uniform.

Leadership development and civic education is the mandatory foundation upon every serviceman and woman in the Bundeswehr must base their

conduct and actions. Actively standing up for the principles of leadership development and civic education and, consequently, respecting and protecting the dignity of man is a form of conduct that is ethically established and honourable and one that we demand of all our military personnel.

To handle extreme situations in which they are required to change roles from one moment to the next, our soldiers need a distinct measure of ethical competence based on the canon of military values. This canon of values takes consideration of the unique duties of a citizen in uniform and is aligned with the values and norms enshrined in the Basic Law: human dignity, peace, justice, freedom, equality, solidarity and democracy.

Allow me to spell out each demand:

Bundeswehr military personnel must believe in the values and norms enshrined in the Basic Law.

They must therefore be brave, loyal and conscientious and must have a sense of comradeship, of attentiveness and of discipline.

They must be technically skilled and willing to learn.

They must be honest, fair and tolerant towards themselves and others, be open-minded towards other cultures and have a sense of moral judgement.

The concept upon which these values are based is „responsibility“ - in both its functional and moral dimension. We demand our military personnel to assume responsibility not only for their own lives and actions, but also for others. As the core element of the ethics of the military profession, „responsibility“ forms the link between the traditional military virtues and duties, which are binding under the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act,

and the democratic ethic of the citizen in uniform, which is based on human rights.

These are high demands that our state and society place on the character of a citizen in uniform. Of course, we cannot expect every soldier to be ethically stable and have clear moral concepts when he joins the Bundeswehr. This is why it is important for the core ethical competence soldiers have to be enhanced while they are in the forces. It is primarily up to superiors to see that it is.

The shaping of the ethics of the military profession, the transformation of the occupational image of a soldier and the dynamic evolution of leadership development and civic education, however, are challenges for which the Bundeswehr also needs reliable and critical partners who are willing to work with it to master them.

3. Society, the Armed Forces Chaplaincy and Christian soldiers: The expectations of the Bundeswehr

Both the Armed Forces Chaplaincy and the Community of Catholic Soldiers (GKS) have, for example, proven to be important and reliable partners. They have been a rock of continuity for all intents and purposes. I would like to take this opportunity here to discuss some points regarding our common tasks in an atmosphere of openness and constructiveness.

Not only state and society, but also the Church has changed noticeably in the past 20 years. This is a development that we call “Wertewandel” – a change in values. There are, for example, strong indications that fewer Germans are turning to the major churches for guidance in their everyday lives. At the same time, however, members of the

younger generation in particular are wanting to live their lives according to certain values as opposed to merely seeking pleasure.

Young people are not “disoriented”, and they do not want to be looked down upon and “provided” with values. They appreciate straightforward advice from people who take them seriously. They also watch others closely to see if they authentically and convincingly practice what they preach. In short, they appreciate honesty, and they are prepared to see their own actions with other people’s eyes. These are points that the Bundeswehr should keep in mind when it comes to its future status as a volunteer force.

Especially with a view to providing a structured moral education, the Bundeswehr and the Armed Forces Chaplaincy are therefore necessary and indispensable partners.

Commissioned by the state, the Protestant and Catholic Armed Forces Chaplaincies provide character guidance classes. As always, the Armed Forces Chaplaincy of course remains fully independent of any government intervention in this. The objection has been raised that in providing this training, the Church is reduced to the level of an “agency for values” while the essential nature of Christianity is disregarded, but this can ultimately be considered unfounded. For the value system of the German constitution is based on a philosophy and ethic developed over centuries in Europe.

The Jewish-Christian legacy of these philosophies and ethics – let me use the plural here – becomes apparent even in their agnostic and atheist variants, although this may not always be instantly recognisable. This means that both the Bundeswehr as a public institution and the Armed Forces Chaplaincy share a task, albeit from dif-

ferent perspectives, in establishing a sound military and by no means “separate” ethic. I will admit that this task is often tedious and difficult and continues to require the full commitment of all parties involved.

Let me describe the different perspectives on our common task as follows: the Bundeswehr has a general interest in employing military personnel who act with moral responsibility, particularly on operations abroad. This interest is not directed at exploiting soldiers, for whatever conceivable purpose. It serves to protect them, and thus ultimately, in a broad sense, it helps them to accomplish their military mission. Soldiers who are unable to morally assess their own actions and to act conscientiously are ultimately unfit to be credible ambassadors of Germany in theatres of operations. What is more, military personnel must always attempt to fulfil the requirement of being “citizens in uniform”. This is why the Bundeswehr

is firmly convinced that its institutions must continue to reliably provide and even intensify structured moral education.

In our pluralistic and highly differentiated society, every institution in the Bundeswehr must provide moral education even more precisely tailored to its target groups. They must be interconnected and on an equal footing with other institutions, while staying true to their own, unmistakable profile. Moral reflection is important for officers, but it is equally important for enlisted personnel, who are sometimes overlooked. For they are the soldiers who are often in the front ranks and have to make important and sometimes irreversible decisions. And what they do or fail to do may profoundly affect the military mission in a positive or negative way.

Against this background, the character guidance classes that are organised by the two military

chaplains have a crucial function. Up to now, the chaplains are the only institutions that are able to establish regular contact with personnel of all ranks in the armed forces. Since the military chaplaincy is not subject to government oversight regarding the content of character guidance classes, we have a win-win situation for everyone involved.

The state, or in this case the Bundeswehr, has an obligation to safeguard the well-being of its soldiers. Part of this obligation is to ensure the organisational foundations for successful character guidance training. University qualifications and advanced training provide military chaplains with the broad experience they need to understand the questions, concerns and aspirations of soldiers and thus to get them to talk to each other.

Soldiers appreciate this open, constructive and critical learning atmosphere. Since military chap-

lains in the Bundeswehr are not assigned ranks, they can be all things to all men, just like Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:22). For the officer, they are an officer; for the NCO, they are an NCO; for the soldier, they are a soldier.

4. Tolerance

Germany has a growing number of people with foreign backgrounds. Parallel to this development, the Bundeswehr is about to become a volunteer force. As a result, it is quite likely that an increasing number of young people with foreign backgrounds will seek careers in the Bundeswehr. This is an excellent opportunity for the Bundeswehr, since most young people with foreign backgrounds can speak two or more languages and, in addition, are often familiar with different cultures. At the same time, foreign back-

grounds can also mean a plurality of religions, something that is already a fact of life in the Bundeswehr. And this has long been the daily reality in other armed forces such as the Dutch army and the US army.

It goes without saying that the freedom of faith, conscience and creed in the Bundeswehr is constitutionally protected for all religious groups and non-confessional philosophical communities. The Bundeswehr also publishes working papers for superiors of all ranks to help them expand their cultural and religious competence. This does not automatically mean that tensions do not arise when above all young soldiers of different confessions have to share accommodation. Superiors thus have an ambitious task: they have to help young soldiers with foreign backgrounds to integrate into the Bundeswehr. And they have to persuade soldiers without foreign backgrounds that they, too, have a contribution to make to

successful integration. As we all know, integration is not a one-way street.

Military chaplains provide major support in this process. They often have valuable knowledge of other religions and they can at the same time identify and show empathy with the situation of other believers without losing their own identity. This is why military chaplains are born mediators in religious matters, not least in situations that involve resolving misunderstandings and averting conflicts.

5. Final Remarks

At this point I would like to thank all the Christian soldiers, their organised communities and the military chaplains for their commitment, their reliability, and the services they render. They all help to build strong bridges between people, whether

in everyday military life at home or on operations
abroad.