Eastern Flank Institute

Ideas for the security and stability of Central and Eastern Europe

Universal Public Service. Program for building personnel reserves for the security of the Republic of Poland

Executive summary of the report (prepared by the Eastern Flank Institute and the Sobieski Institute) in English

Program for building personnel reserves for the security of the Republic of Poland is the **first coherent concept in Poland for creating reserves for the army and state personnel**. Experts propose the creation of Universal Public Service, a comprehensive solution based on the experiences of other countries, providing for the training of young Poles, which, although compulsory, involves not only an element of choice, but also the possibility of reconciling it with a professional career or education, and even additional benefits for completing it, which can be used in the labor market.

Universal Public Service is to be an important and key, though not the only, element of pro-defense education and training of young citizens. Examples from France, Israel, and Finland show that universal service strengthens social bonds, reduces social atrophy, builds the resilience of the state, serves to rebuild the community, and bridges political divisions. The benefits of its introduction are therefore not limited to the extremely important element of strengthening the resilience of the state, which deters potential aggressors. It is also about building community and bonds, which is of enormous value in the context of growing individualism and consumerism.

Why do we need universal type of service?

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has radically changed the geostrategic situation in Europe, undermining the existing international order and worsening the continent's security. For Poland, this conflict has become a direct threat to national security. As a result, the modernization of the Armed Forces has been accelerated, with defense spending increased to 5% of GDP and significant purchases of modern weapons made. Ukraine's experience has shown that in the first phase of aggression, a country must rely mainly on its own resources, which has prompted Poland to consider the need to prepare for defense on its own - by stockpiling supplies and equipment and developing personnel reserves. **A key element of this process is universal military training, which should be considered in three dimensions: demographics, the atomization of society, and civic attitudes** (the willingness of Poles to make sacrifices for the good of the country).

When analyzing the possibility of introducing Universal Public Service, **it is necessary to take into account the demographic conditions in Poland, which since 2020 has been experiencing a decline in population and an aging society**. According to data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the resident population is approximately 36.6 million, and forecasts indicate that by 2060 it may fall below 31 million. The main reasons for this are the declining number of women of childbearing age and record low fertility rates, which remain among the lowest in the world.

However, the authors emphasize that **Poland still has significant human potential - approximately 2.5 million young men could be trained for military service within a few years**. An additional reservoir is provided by foreigners settling in Poland, as well as the Polish diaspora and descendants of Poles abroad.

Another challenge in building reserves for national defense is **the growing individualism and weakening of social ties**. However, despite growing individualism, there is still a strong sense of community - e.g., the widespread mobilization after the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Opinion polls show that the majority of Poles (82%) feel proud of their national identity. At the same time, however, 59% of respondents believe that there are more things that divide Poles than unite them, which makes it difficult to build a community and implement the idea of serving the homeland, which is why pro-social attitudes should be strengthened in education and culture.

In this chapter, citing the examples of South Korea and Israel, the experts show how different value systems influence fertility and social bonds. Despite its high level of development, Korea is experiencing a dramatic decline in births due to the high cost of living, weak family policies, and social norms that promote individual success. Israel, on the other hand, maintains a high fertility rate despite its modern economy. This is due to strong family ties, religiosity, patriotism, and a sense of community, which is reinforced by, among other things, compulsory military service. The situation could be similar in Poland - **the introduction of universal service would strengthen social ties and a sense of responsibility for the community**, especially since about 15% of Poles confirm their willingness to participate in the active defense of their homeland in the event of an armed conflict. If we translate this into numbers, it turns out that such declarations are made by approximately 4.5 million adults.

Examples of conscription and universal training in selected European countries

As a result of the deterioration of the security situation in Europe, especially after Russia's aggression against Ukraine, countries in the region have begun a process of intensively strengthening their defense capabilities. These measures include both increasing financial expenditure on the technical modernization of the armed forces and expanding their numerical structures and developing a system for training reserves. At the same time, **the limitations of the professional armed forces model as the only form of ensuring national security are becoming increasingly apparent**.

European countries are also taking steps to rebuild or transform their conscription and reserve training systems. Among the countries that have not abandoned compulsory military service are Estonia and Finland. However, other countries, such as Lithuania, Latvia, and Denmark, are increasingly reinstating selective conscription, adapted to the training capabilities of their armies. In some cases, military training is combined with elements of civic education and community service.

An example of an integrated approach is France, which launched the **National Public Service** in 2018. This program consists of three stages: a period of cohesion, community service, and active or reserve service. Similar concepts are emerging in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Analyzing the solutions adopted by a number of European countries, the following patterns can be identified - common elements of conscription systems in European countries:

· **Selectivity of conscription** - the number of conscripts is adjusted to the actual training and infrastructure capabilities of the armed forces.

· **Flexibility of service** - the possibility to choose between military training and civilian service, including forms of voluntary service.

· **Civil-military fusion** - some training tasks are being transferred to the civilian sphere.

· **Participation of women** - the introduction of compulsory military service for women is increasingly being considered, which is in line with the trend towards gender equality in defense (e.g., Switzerland, Denmark).

The solutions adopted in other countries should be analyzed in the context of potential changes in Poland. In the context of service-related rewards, it is worth reviewing the following examples:

· In **Lithuania**, conscripts receive an additional financial bonus of up to €5,418, and employers who hire former soldiers receive state subsidies.

· In **Latvia**, volunteers receive twice the pay (€600) of those who are conscripted.

· In **Austria**, members of the militia (a formation combining military and civilian training) receive €3,830 per month and a fixed allowance of €506.70.

· In **Switzerland**, citizens who have not completed military service are subject to a *Wehrpflichtersatzabgabe* tax of 3% of their taxable income, applicable for 11 years.

· In **Turkey**, it is possible to “buy out” service after completing one month of basic training – the cost is approximately $5,380.

Maintaining a professional armed forces alone is impossible in the face of modern threats. It is necessary to expand reserves based on a universal, yet flexible and selective conscription system. Changes in the modern battlefield, including the development of unmanned technologies, are forcing a new training model, and the future of national defense will increasingly rely on close military-civilian cooperation.

Universal Public Service – a new model for building personnel reserves for national security

The dynamic economic growth of recent decades, social and cultural changes, and a series of government decisions (including the suspension of compulsory military service in 2009) have reinforced the transactional attitude of many citizens towards the state. A significant part of society has decided that by paying taxes, they are entitled to a range of services from the state, including security, without having to get involved or make any sacrifices.

Taking all these factors into account, **experts from the Eastern Flank Institute and the Sobieski Institute have developed a project for universal compulsory state service—an expansion of the compulsory military qualification mechanism that will allow the state to rebuild the necessary personnel reserves for security, and allow citizens entering adulthood to gain a sense of connection with the community and acquire new skills**. This solution should be guided by two objectives:

1. Shaping social attitudes: every citizen has a duty to serve their country.

2. Training personnel reserves for the military, civil defense, and key government services during crises and wars.

Qualification for the UPS would apply to both men and women aged 19. It would include health examinations, psychological tests, and an assessment of aptitude for service in various modules. The system is to be tailored to the skills and preferences of the citizen, but at the same time meet the needs of the state.

The program also provides for **financial and social incentives** - decent pay (at the national median level), skill certificates (e.g. drone pilot course, driver's license, first aid), and a component of patriotic and civic education. Service is to be seen as an honor and a source of prestige, rather than an unpleasant duty.

The authors also point out the need to move away from the so-called **“silo mentality”** - i.e., separate, uncoordinated actions by ministries - and to create a **coherent personnel policy** covering all structures of the administration and uniformed services. The UPS system should not only be a tool for training citizens, but also an element connecting state human resources and improving their use in times of peace and crisis. Effective implementation of the UPS requires inter-ministerial coordination, digitization of processes, public participation, and flexible adaptation of the system to changing national security conditions.

The report also proposes a **division into paths** corresponding to different areas of security: (military training, civil defense, medical service, State and Volunteer Fire Departments, Non-Governmental Organizations, companies key from the point of view of state security).

In conclusion, the authors emphasize that **Universal Public Service should to be a modern tool for social integration and strengthening national resilience, combining defense, educational, and civic functions**. However, it requires legislative changes both at the statutory level and in lower-level acts - regulations and ordinances. In order to efficiently prepare the regulations after the government is sworn in, an inter-ministerial team should be set up to prepare the necessary proposals.

Follow Eastern Flank Institute:

Website

X

LinkedIn