

Angelika Dörfler-Dierken,
Mats Nowak

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VOJAŠKA DUHOVNA OSKRBA V SLOVENIJI V LUČI VOJAŠKE DUHOVNE OSKRBE V DRUGIH DRŽAVAH ZAHODNE EVROPE

MILITARY CHAPLAINCY IN SLOVENIA IN THE LIGHT OF MILITARY CHAPLAINCY IN OTHER STATES IN WESTERN EUROPE

Povzetek Ta študija proučuje razvoj, strukturo in vlogo vojaškega kaplanstva v Sloveniji ter ga umešča v širši kontekst evropskih in natovskih sistemov vojaškega kaplanstva. Na podlagi mednarodne raziskave, izvedene v letih 2023–2024 v okviru projekta Nemške raziskovalne fundacije (DFG) Vojaško kaplanstvo v Evropi na Univerzi v Hamburgu, članek preučuje zgodovinsko dediščino, organizacijske modele in sedanje funkcije kaplanstva v izbranih državah članicah Nata. Poseben poudarek je na tem, kako je postsocialistična Slovenija, ki je članica Nata od leta 2004, razvila svoje kaplanske strukture v primerjavi z dolgoletnimi članicami Nata.

Ključne besede *Vojaško kaplanstvo, slovenske oborožene sile, Nato, postsocializem.*

Abstract This study examines the development, structure, and role of military chaplaincy in Slovenia, contextualizing it within broader European and NATO military chaplaincy systems. Drawing on an international survey conducted in 2023–2024 as part of the German Research Foundation (DFG) project “Military Chaplaincy in Europe” at the University of Hamburg, the article investigates the historical legacies, organizational models, and current functions of chaplaincy across selected NATO member states. Special emphasis is placed on how post-socialist Slovenia, as a NATO member since 2004, has developed its chaplaincy structures in comparison with longer-standing NATO members.

Key words *Military chaplaincy, Slovenian Armed Forces, NATO, post-socialism.*

Introduction

In recent years military chaplaincy has very often been the object of scientific research. In trying to make an overview of the wide range of studies, it would be helpful to focus on the question of how military chaplaincy has changed in recent decades. Until the end of the Second World War, military chaplaincy was religiously and confessionally divided into several branches on the one hand, and organized as an integral part of the national armies on the other. Each European state had its own national army with its own national traditions. Roman Catholic priests and Protestant preachers – in some states even rabbis – fostered the motivation of the soldiers of their army. They told them that soldiers should be obedient to their superiors, and follow the path to heaven. They should love their homeland and nation.

After the end of the Second World War, the armies of Western Europe began their programme for working together – as a defence agency against the Soviet Union. NATO was founded in 1949 by the USA and Canada, together with the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway and Portugal. In 1956, the Federal Republic of Germany, the divided frontline state, was admitted, as East Germany, the GDR, belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence and thus to the Warsaw Pact. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, followed by Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovenia in 2004. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Finland and Sweden also applied to join NATO; their admission has since been completed. Joining NATO was also discussed in Switzerland – but a referendum put paid to the plans. However, the Swiss military is strengthening its capabilities for interoperability with NATO, according to the current thinking of the political decision-makers. Now only one country in Central Europe is not a member of NATO and is not starting a programme of stronger cooperation: Austria, which is forced by its constitution (Article 9a/23j) to avoid participation in NATO.

The changes in politics and the process of military concentration and of the integration of Western European states into NATO has some consequences for the work of military chaplains – still, up to today, bound to their national military organizations. Their mission is the fostering of soldiers working together, no longer in fighting one against the other. French and German soldiers are invited to cooperate even though they were enemies until 1945; Polish and Czech soldiers must work with their German colleagues, even though the Wehrmacht attacked their homelands. Military chaplains can be seen as a kind of bridge for mutual understanding and of overcoming cultural strangeness (Nachtsheim, 1990). Although they have the same goal, the national organizational structures and functionalities of military chaplaincies differ according to old national traditions. At present there is no overview of the current differences and the advantages and disadvantages of the individual structures. Therefore, using a questionnaire, an attempt to identify the individual national traditions, organizational structures and functionalities was made (Dörfler-Dierken, 2024), in order to draw conclusions for the cooperation of the military chaplaincies in NATO.

In the pertinent literature on military chaplaincy, four directions of research dominate (we concentrated on studies carried out after 2000). The ethical perspective describes military chaplaincy from the point of view of its responsibility for fostering peace in periods of fighting and violence (see, for example, Peuckmann, 2022; Thonak, 2020). The historical perspective is especially interested in war crimes (Pöpping, 2017) or special groups of soldiers (Berger, 2006, Jewish soldiers; Güsgen, 1989, Roman Catholic chaplains; Reller, 2020, Protestant chaplains) or a particular time (Kaiser, 2004; Marschke, 2005). The third focus is a new one, growing because of the new military experience of missions abroad (Biehl, 2003; Dijk, 2019); and the fourth and last one is the sociological approach (Dörfler-Dierken, 2021 and 2024; Grimell, 2020; Liuski, 2023; Wanner, Ebeling, 2013).

Even this initial overview makes it clear that military chaplaincy and the Western political system, with its promotion of freedom of faith, religion and conscience, belong together. Otherwise, the establishment of military chaplaincy would not be an indicator of a post-socialist state. Whether all European countries, as well as the United States of America and Canada, which are also members of NATO, share common basic ideas about military chaplaincy and the tasks of military chaplains is, of course, not yet clear. Are, one might ask, military chaplaincies nationalistically oriented? Do the tasks and involvement of military chaplains differ fundamentally in the individual countries of NATO armed forces?

1 METHODOLOGY

1.1 The survey design

In the last quarter of 2023 and in 2024, a survey was conducted as part of the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) project DO 2411 U 2023 (University of Hamburg, Institute for the History of Christianity and Historical Theology) on the status of religious and ethical care for soldiers in European states and especially in NATO member states. European history is deeply rooted in nationalism – and pastors or priests have been the agents of nationalistic propaganda. Noticeably, these times have changed. Religious agents are no longer propagandists of hate but builders of bridges between cultures and men. The thesis pursued was that there is a fundamental commonality between these countries with regard to military chaplaincy: they all grant the servicemen and women of their countries a high degree of individual freedom, and recognize their personal responsibility for everything they do in their service. This is why these countries strengthen the ability of the members of their armed forces to take individual responsibility. They do this through pastoral care, religious services, and measures for ethical and conscience formation.

Ten topics were covered in the questionnaire:

- Basic facts about the size of the national armed forces and the number of military chaplains (Questions 01–07)
- Tasks of military chaplains in the armed forces (Questions 08–11)
- Necessary educational requirements for military chaplains (Question 12f.)
- National organization of military chaplaincy (Question 14–18)
- Procedure for the selection and entry of military chaplains into the national armed forces (Questions 19–25)
- Participation of the military chaplaincy in the ethical education of soldiers (Questions 26–30)
- Relationship between the national military chaplaincy and other military chaplaincies (Questions 31–34)
- Special historical experiences and sensitivities of national military chaplaincies (Questions 35–43)
- Relationship and integration of military chaplains in their religious communities (Question 44)
- Assessments of their own national military chaplaincies (Questions 45–47).

The questionnaires were distributed at international military chaplaincy conferences and via the embassies of Western European countries accredited in Germany. However, this did not provide a complete picture. The response and cooperation behaviour of the individual nation states varied greatly – only a limited number of states completed and returned the questionnaire. When evaluating the responses, it is particularly noticeable that there were no results from south-western Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy) or from countries with an Orthodox military chaplaincy (Greece, etc.). It is conceivable that the integration of national military chaplaincies into the armed forces and the subordination of military chaplains to the military leadership has led to information on military chaplaincies being classified as ‘secret’.

1.2 First results

According to the Western idea of the human being, religion is an integral part of each individual. Each person has the right to choose their own religion and to live according to their religious beliefs. The religions in western Europe developed in the Middle Ages and have been individualized since the sixteenth century. Historically some types of confessions and religions are dominant in certain regions. These traditional religions have a long history in serving in the military. Two large gaps can be observed: the first occurred after the French Revolution, and the same occurred after the revolution in Russia in 1918; this gap lasted until 2008. In fact, military chaplaincy is an offer of communication and self-reflection by the armed forces for the individuals working in them, the soldiers, and in some countries also for civilian employees. It mirrors and reflects the problems of societies, which in all NATO member states are characterized by the polarization and pluralization of lifestyles, different values, and individualistic convictions. In addition, there are the needs of the armed forces, which are currently identified above all by the shortage of personnel

and technological challenges. The shortage of IT specialists is particularly serious. Individual soldiers have religious beliefs, deeply rooted imprints and behavioral imprints. Conflicts are dealt with differently; peace and consensus orientations are differently emphasized. Soldiers also belong to various spiritual communities and organizations. This third dimension is complemented by a fourth: the present is characterized by constant change. Hybrid acts of war, aggression between groups and ethnicities, wars of annexation and threats against other countries are on the rise. This situation has an unsettling and very worrying effect on soldiers from all NATO countries and their political and military leadership.

Completed questionnaires were received from the following NATO member states:

Belgium
Denmark
Finland
The Netherlands
Poland
Slovenia
United Kingdom

and, furthermore, from Austria.

Even at first glance the material revealed major differences: Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have been NATO members from the very beginning, while Poland and Slovenia are former Eastern Bloc countries which only joined NATO after 2000. Finland only joined NATO after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. An initial observation could already be made: there are no fundamental differences between the countries that have been NATO members for some time and the new members. The ‘old’ and ‘new’ NATO members have a very similar understanding of military chaplaincy. Poland and Slovenia set up military chaplaincies shortly after the establishment of post-socialist armed forces, after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact – they describe a period without military chaplaincies between 1945 and 1990. Finland brought its military chaplaincy, which had proved its worth during the Cold War, into NATO. It is also noticeable that the intention of introducing military chaplaincy is formulated differently: while most states speak of soldiers exercising their “fundamental right to freely practise their religion” in the national military organization, Belgian humanists wrote that their military chaplaincy strengthens the “spiritual fitness” of soldiers. This is why they combine the spiritual offerings with those of the various professions responsible for the physical and spiritual equipping of the Belgian armed forces: doctors, nutritional counselling, psychotherapy and social work. It is also noticeable at first glance that Denmark – still a Lutheran people’s church (*Volkskirche*) – offers exclusively Lutheran military chaplaincy, i.e. Lutheran pastors are assigned to the armed forces for a limited period of service for all soldiers, regardless of their individual personal convictions. Germany, on the other hand, has a tripartite military chaplaincy: representatives of

the three Abrahamic religions are active as military chaplains in the Bundeswehr. Other countries have different arrangements. In all European states except France, military chaplains do not wear weapons.

The religious identity of soldiers is not recorded in all NATO countries. The information is available for three of the countries which responded: in Germany, 21% of soldiers are Roman Catholic and 30% Protestant; in Finland, on the other hand, 65% of the members of the armed forces are Lutheran; while in Slovenia, 18% are Protestant and 82% Roman Catholic. Other religions are only represented in very small numbers in the respective national armed forces. It is not known how large the group of atheists, humanists or non-religious people is in these three countries. In Germany it is known that this group amounts to 44%, and for Finland it can be calculated that it is probably around 30%. For Slovenia, the impression is that all members of the armed forces who are not Protestant are Catholic.

Figure 1:
Religious
Identities of
NATO-Soldiers

	DE	FI	SI	Other states
Roman Catholic	21%	0.1%	82%	No Data
Protestant (Lutheran, Reformed, United)	30%	65%	18%	
Muslim (Shia, Alevism, Sunni)	1.7%	1.5%	-	
Orthodox	0.6%	1.1%	-	
Jewish	0.1%	0.05%	-	
Humanist or non-religious	44%	No data	-	

The military chaplaincy services in the European states surveyed do not reflect all the religious affiliations of the soldiers. In Germany, Finland and Slovenia there are no humanist, Muslim or atheist military chaplains. For the past few years Germany has offered Jewish military chaplaincy for all German soldiers; however, the number of soldiers of the Jewish faith serving in the Bundeswehr is extremely low. The logic of offering military chaplaincy obviously follows a different rationality than that of numbers. Historical reasons are probably decisive: Germany has always been divided into two large confessions; Finland is mostly Lutheran with a Finnish Orthodox minority; and Slovenia is Roman Catholic with a Protestant minority. Those who completed the questionnaire did not say anything about other Slovenian minorities, Muslim and Orthodox, and they did not explain why they believe that 18% of the Slovenian Armed Forces is Protestant. The percentage for the Slovenian population as a whole is not more than 0.8% Protestant.

Figure 2:
Religious
Identities of
NATO-Military
Chaplains (total
numbers)

	BE Cath	DE Chr	DK Luth	NL Chr	FI Luth	SI	UK Refor
Roman Catholic	14	95	-	43	-	10	10
Protestant (Lutheran, Reformed, United)	1	102	80	48	25	2	204
Muslim (Shia, Alevism, Sunni)	-	-	-	5	-	-	2
Orthodox	-	-	-	-	8	-	-
Jewish	1	10	-	3	-	-	3
Humanist or non-religious	8	-	-	40	-	-	-

It is striking to analyse the pastoral care offered in NATO members' armed forces. The structure of services differs from country to country. Most religious groups are active in the Dutch and Belgian military chaplaincies, where, in addition to Christian and Orthodox military chaplains, there are also Humanist, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and even Buddhist chaplains. Like Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands are among the most secularized societies in the world. The military chaplaincies are a good example of the profile that has emerged since the division of medieval societies in Europe. The course was set during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Later, further military chaplaincies were added in the Netherlands and Belgium in line with political requirements. The history of the Dutch military chaplaincy is outlined below, using the dates of its introduction. During the First World War, the military chaplaincy was established as part of the armed forces: eight Protestant Reformed and four Roman Catholic military chaplains were appointed. During the Second World War, a Jewish military chaplaincy was established in the Dutch army in exile in Great Britain, followed by a humanist chaplaincy in 1964. After that, further military chaplaincies were set up at a rapid pace, each intended to satisfy the interests of specific groups of soldiers.

Figure 3:
Pluralism in the
Dutch Military
Chaplaincy

- 1914: Establishment of military chaplaincy as a part of the armed forces with 8 Protestant and 4 Roman Catholic army chaplains
- 1944: Jewish MC in England during WW II
- 1964: Humanist MC
- 2003: Hindu MC
- 2009: Muslim MC
- 2020: Buddhist MC
- 2024: Orthodox MC

Today, the Dutch military chaplaincy has grown to include new religions: in 1964, much earlier than in Belgium, a few positions were created for humanist and atheist military chaplains.

Adding up the figures, it is clear that there is a preponderance of Christian military chaplains in the Netherlands too, because alongside 43 Roman Catholic military chaplains, there are 48 Protestant chaplains, plus a few Orthodox ones. The second group, the humanists, is less than half the size of the first, and the third group, all the military chaplains of other religions, is less than a quarter of the size of the Christian group. In 1994, one military chaplain was responsible for 461 soldiers; in 2025, one military chaplain is responsible for 281 soldiers. The individual care possible in this way can be explained by the fact that military chaplains in the Netherlands often take on tasks which are carried out by social workers in the armed forces of other countries.

To return to the question of religious identities of Military Chaplains (cf. Fig. 2), the military chaplaincy of the United Kingdom is dominated by Protestants: the Episcopal churches (the Church of England, Church of Wales and Church of Ireland) form the first branch of Protestants, the second branch being the Scottish Church and the Free Churches (the Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Methodists). In addition, there Roman Catholic military chaplains. There are also civilian military chaplains in each branch of the armed forces: rabbis and imams. The Protestants provide almost twenty times as many military chaplains as all the other military chaplaincies combined. Denmark has exclusively Lutheran military chaplaincies; this is a late effect of a Lutheran state church. Germany has ten Jewish military chaplains in addition to its Christian chaplains – a number that has no equivalent in the number of Jewish soldiers. This can be explained by the fact that the destruction of Jewish life during National Socialism meant that there are hardly any Jews left in Germany and even fewer young Jews serving in the armed forces. Yet in earlier times, during the First World War and the Weimar Republic, there was a Jewish military chaplaincy for Jewish soldiers. Belgium has fifteen Christian and one Jewish military chaplain, as well as eight humanists. In Slovenia, too, there is military chaplaincy for soldiers and reservists in the armed forces. The military chaplains belong exclusively to the Roman Catholic and Lutheran (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession) denominations; religions or worldviews other than these two Christian denominations have no representatives in the Slovenian military. More than two thirds of Slovenian soldiers are Roman Catholic, around 2.3% are Serbian Orthodox, around 1% are Protestant – including some believers from Pentecostal churches – and around 2.4% are Sunni. Twelve military chaplains serve the soldiers: ten Roman Catholics and two from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. No other religions or worldviews are represented in the military chaplaincy. The military chaplains are responsible for all the soldiers.

If the number of servicewomen and men are correlated with the total number of military chaplains serving in the national armed forces, it becomes clear that the number of uniformed personnel for whom a chaplain is responsible varies greatly.

Figure 4:
One NATO
Military
Chaplain is
responsible
for different
numbers of
soldiers
* Slovenian
military
chaplains
are also
responsible for
a large number
of reservists
(7,500) and
thousands of
volunteers.

Country	Number of soldiers	Number of MCs	Number of soldiers per MC
BE	34,000	24	1,050
DE	185,000	191	900
DK	15,000	80	187
NL	41,533	147	283
FI	34,000	33	1,050
SI*	8,000	12	670
UK	110,000	220	500
USA	1,330,000	3,000	443

The number of servicemen and women who are looked after by a military chaplain varies greatly in purely mathematical terms. Accordingly, one of the Dutch chaplains looks after the fewest soldiers in uniform: 281 soldiers. The most soldiers are cared for by the Finnish and Belgian military chaplains: 1050 soldiers each. This result is partly due to national traditions and peculiarities, but also to the range of tasks performed by the chaplains; in some armed forces, theologians also carry out the tasks of social workers, for example, when – as in the Netherlands – young men can decide to choose military service instead of a prison sentence for the purpose of resocialization.

2 THE SLOVENIAN MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

The Republic of Slovenia only came into being in 1991, after an eventful history characterized by very different ruling contexts, and following a ten-day civil war between the rebel troops in the Slovenian part of the country and the Yugoslav People's Army of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Slovenia was a constituent republic of Yugoslavia, run centrally under Josip Tito's strong hand in the multi-ethnic state until 1980. The insurgents quickly gained the upper hand in the conflict with the Yugoslav army. On June 25, 1991, Slovenia declared itself independent, and on June 26, the military conflict with the Yugoslav People's Army

began immediately, ending with a peace agreement on July 7, 1991. The independence of the Republic of Slovenia came into force on October 8, 1991. In earlier times, the area on the Adriatic coast around Trieste and Koper had belonged partly to Italian Friuli and partly to Austria-Hungary, and formed an independent kingdom.

The Slovenian Armed Forces are now responsible for just under 47 km of the Adriatic coast and the hinterland, characterized by the Alps in the west and north and hilly country in the north-east and east. It is bordered by Italy in the west, Austria in the north, Hungary in the north-east and Croatia in the south-east and south. Slovenia does not differentiate between the three different branches of military as most countries do. Air or naval forces are integrated into the military in general without having their own branch. Slovenia has a total population of 2.1 million. It joined the EU and NATO in 2004, with both decisions being democratically legitimized by referendum.

The Slovenian military chaplains are responsible for all soldiers; there is no mention of the fact that representatives of other religions and worldviews are also wanted. The tasks of the military chaplains consist of individual pastoral care, group pastoral care, mission support, and conducting church services and other religious celebrations, blessings and funerals, as well as ethical instruction and teaching. If a military chaplain has to bury a soldier, they should be of the same denomination as the deceased. What actually happens when an atheist needs burial cannot be ascertained from the answers to the questionnaire.

During exercises, the military chaplains work together with the military doctors and psychologists or with social workers. Of course, there are no rules for this cooperation. Confessional secrecy applies to all military chaplains, as it does to all other pastors. All military chaplains must have completed a university degree in theology; other courses of study cannot qualify anyone to work as a military chaplain. Slovenian military chaplains, like other young men in Slovenia, have completed military service; at the beginning of their service as military chaplains they also receive military training.

Slovenian military chaplains are members of the military and at the same time remain ministers of their church or religious community during their service. They are paid by the Slovenian state. Military chaplaincies exist in all branches of the Slovenian Armed Forces, and military chaplains are deployed in all armed forces facilities, in schools and training facilities, and in field camps during missions abroad.

Slovenian military chaplains have two superiors: a military superior and a military chaplain. They follow the orders of their military superiors and the instructions of their religious superiors. They are integrated into the military chain of command. The Slovenian military chaplaincy has the same hierarchical structure as the Slovenian Armed Forces. There are special regulations and directives for cooperation between military chaplains and military superiors. Interested priests can apply to serve in the

Slovenian military chaplaincy themselves. Potential Catholic military chaplains are selected by the head of this military chaplaincy and proposed to the armed forces. The civilian churches must then approve the selection.

The military superiors are responsible for ethics education in the Slovenian Armed Forces. They can entrust officers or military chaplains with the implementation of these lessons. There is a special curriculum for ethics lessons, which covers the topics of religion, customs and culture.

Slovenian military chaplains are convinced that their integration into the armed forces is an advantage compared to the situation in other countries. They consider themselves to be “small and flexible”. A negative aspect in Slovenia is that the Catholic military chaplains are committed to both their home diocese and the diocese in which they serve in the military. They therefore have three ecclesiastical relationships: military, diocese of origin and diocese of location. The fact that NATO does not offer any organized structures for cooperation between the military chaplaincies of its member states, and that the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme does not provide for cooperation between military chaplaincies from different countries, causes problems in international cooperation between military chaplains.

Military chaplaincy was only established in Slovenia in 2000, after there had been no military chaplaincy from 1945 to 1999. On September 21, 2000, an agreement was reached between the Slovenian Bishops' Conference and the government of the Republic of Slovenia on the care of members of the Slovenian Armed Forces. A similar agreement was reached with the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession on October 20, 2000. Parts of the Slovenian Armed Forces were deployed in missions abroad. Some soldiers supported NATO and EU forces in Bosnia, Slovakia, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Chad, Latvia and Lebanon. Slovenian military chaplains, like other European ones except the French, never carry a weapon in their service.

The head of the Roman Catholic military chaplaincy is appointed by the Catholic Church, and his deputy is always the Protestant military chaplain appointed by the Protestant Church. The reason why military chaplaincy is provided for Slovenian soldiers is that the state offers them the freedom to practise their religion. This means that the soldiers receive “integrated care”.

In the following passages we present the answers to the questionnaire given by representatives of the Slovenian Armed Forces. Any Slovenian soldier can visit the military chaplaincy at any time (“Yes, by all means”). Religious services and discussions are offered regularly in all military facilities (“Yes, definitely”). “Under no circumstances” may soldiers refuse to serve in the armed forces. “Under no circumstances” does the Slovenian military chaplaincy “encourage and strengthen” soldiers to fight. It should also “rather” encourage soldiers to show “goodwill towards the enemy”. The military chaplaincy helps “to develop a liberal and peace-oriented understanding of the military profession” (“Yes, definitely”). Of course, it also helps

“with personal problems and life crises”. Military chaplaincy in Slovenia should “definitely not” be abolished. The motto of the Catholic military chaplaincy in Slovenia is “Deo et patriae fidelis” (Faithful to God and country).

In post-socialist Slovenia, the military chaplains of the Roman Catholic denomination (five priests and five pastoral assistants), together with two military chaplains from the Lutheran denomination, are responsible for the professional army with 8,000 soldiers, 7,500 reservists and several thousand volunteers. The military chaplaincy is fully integrated into the military organization. The head chaplain is responsible for appointing the religious personnel for the units.

3 A COMPARISON FROM A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

The analysis included answers from very differently organized European armed forces which responded to the questionnaire on the organization and use of military chaplaincy in their country. The representatives of military chaplaincies who were willing to answer came primarily from countries with a Protestant history (Denmark, Germany, Finland, Netherlands, the UK). Only Belgium and Slovenia had a Catholic history. The historically Catholic countries of France, Italy, Poland and Spain did not complete the questionnaire. Also missing are the south-eastern European states of Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria, which built up their armed forces according to NATO standards after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and the Baltic states on the north-eastern European flank which also joined NATO at this time: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It is known that the Estonian military chaplaincy was abolished for financial reasons, as was military music.

The current structure of military chaplaincy still reveals the history of its establishment; it was only with the establishment of standing armies in the 17th and 18th centuries that the spiritual care of soldiers was organized by the authorities. The so-called ‘field preachers’ appointed then (named after the ‘field’ of killing and being killed, the ‘battlefield’) had the function to have an educational and moralizing influence on the soldiers and thereby promote their faithful performance of service. Above all, they were supposed to counteract the tendency to desertion. This cannot always have been easy, because even back then it was said: “God is sorry for forced oaths!”. Recruitment under duress was common. The widespread inclination to desertion was countered by preaching divine wrath and exhorting people to love their sovereign, who protected the patria like the *pater familias* protected his own, and who represented God in the world. By warning against immoral acts towards the female population, by instructing them in the correct understanding of the binding power of the oath, and by pointing to divine power and divine judgment, the military chaplains were to promote victory – which could only be achieved with courage that went beyond the human instinct for survival – and, if necessary, take the horror out of death, because the spiritually mentored soldier would die, if necessary, reconciled with God. For this reason, soldiers in the 19th century still liked to take communion before the start of a battle or to celebrate Mass.

German military history is characterized by the rollercoaster between success and defeat. The victory at Sedan on September 2, 1871, at the latest, confirmed the conviction of the superiority of their own weapons. Therefore, at the beginning of the war in the summer of 1914, the older anti-French propaganda was taken up and a 'hurrah' mood was spread, which testifies to the nationalistic blindness of Protestant academic theologians and pastors. During the Second World War, some Wehrmacht chaplains may have felt close to the Confessing Church ("Bekennende Kirche" – an opposition movement by protestant theologians during the Nazi regime) and tried to maintain an inner distance from the armed forces of the totalitarian regime of injustice. In fact, the clergy in the Wehrmacht at the time were marginalized.

After 1945, the relationship between soldier, church and society was fundamentally reorganized in Germany. The freedom of chaplains and their segregation from the military hierarchy and chain of command was legally regulated. Because (almost) all chaplains in the Bundeswehr return to their civilian parishes after a limited period of service, the emergence of a militarized spiritual ethos has been prevented in terms of organizational sociology and structure. Incidentally, since 1993 there have also been female pastors in the Protestant military chaplaincy in Germany and female pastoral workers in the Catholic military chaplaincy. In some NATO chaplaincies, this still does not seem to be common practice.

All the countries that completed the questionnaire were victims of German conquest in the 19th and 20th centuries: German soldiers passed through Belgium in 1914 and 1939 in order to conquer France; Denmark and Finland were occupied and exploited by Nazi Germany, as was Slovenia, which temporarily belonged to the Habsburg Empire and Venice-Friuli. The UK was subjected to bombing terror by the German Reich during the Second World War.

An open and clear break with the usual organization of national military chaplaincies during the Second World War – integration into the national military organization and subordination to the military command – only occurred in the defeated state, in Germany, which was divided into two halves. In West Germany, offensive and proactive thought was given to how a military chaplaincy could be set up for the future in such a way that it would no longer serve the nationalist and aggressive narrative of conquering foreign territory. The decisive contribution to this was to be made by anchoring military chaplaincy in the civilian churches. In this way, a Christian logic – at least in theory – which ran counter to the military was anchored in the armed forces. In East Germany, which was part of the Warsaw Pact until the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no state-authorized military chaplaincy. The soldiers there could only visit places of worship in the surrounding area during their sparse leave, and officers were not allowed to belong to a church.

Denmark organized the military chaplaincy from within the civilian parishes. Civilian priests are seconded to the barracks for short periods or to accompany soldiers on missions abroad. In the Federal Republic of Germany, however, the Christian

churches send some priests and chaplains into the military organization for a period of six or ten years. They are mentally bound to their churches, not to the officers of the army. In all countries other than Germany and Denmark, the military chaplaincy is more strongly and deeply integrated into the armed forces. This embedding of the national military chaplaincies into the military is clearly visible in the uniforms worn by the military chaplains. Of the countries compared here, the UK occupies a special position because it had significant colonies. Obviously, the UK is more aware of its colonial heritage and tradition than the Netherlands and Belgium. In the Netherlands, the inclusion of a Hindu military chaplaincy at least reflects the past, especially as an offer to the Tamils from the former colony of Sri Lanka. Interest in their history seems to be rather low in all NATO military chaplaincies at present. Most responses not only refrained from mentioning colonial wars, although these were also accompanied by military chaplains, but also references to wars of liberation. The pluralism of denominations, religions and worldviews or denominational uniformity reflects the development of society and the relationship between religion and the state. Those who became biconfessional, partly Roman Catholic, partly Protestant, in the early modern period have remained so to this day. Those who were centrally organized and allowed only one denomination for their citizens have not changed their practice to this day. It was only with the introduction of Jewish military chaplaincy in Germany in the 19th century that the range of services expanded. In other countries it then became broader from the 1960s onwards, when non-Christian religions or atheistic world views were added. Overall, the high degree of homogeneity in NATO's military chaplaincy is remarkable.

The Netherlands was born out of a rebellion. It had to endure divisive discussions between two reformed theological schools of thought much earlier than other countries. This led to influential scholars such as Justus Lipsius arguing that religion should not be used in the military at all. The tasks that a pastor or priest usually performed in the 16th and 17th centuries were imposed on the military commander by Lipsius. He was responsible for the motivation and ethical behaviour of his soldiers. In this way, Lipsius reactivated the views and teachings of ancient military writers for his contemporaries. However, the diversity of world views, religions and denominations characteristic of the present day reflects Christian dominance rather than distance from religion.

In all the countries studied, military chaplaincy existed and still exists as pastoral care in the army, air force and navy. Since pastors or priests were also on board ship, there were church services on board, pastoral care for ordinary sailors and their superiors, funerals at sea with the participation of clergymen and, of course, punishments such as keelhauling or executions with spiritual care. Since the air force came into existence, there has also been pastoral care for this branch of the armed forces.

In view of the deep ties in European military history – mercenaries were hired out to one army or the opposing one, Protestant officers joined the service of Catholic

princes, it was not uncommon for soldiers to be loaned out to other countries – and the traumatizing experiences of the Second World War, it seems almost miraculous that the cooperation of military chaplaincies in NATO takes place rather quietly. In view of the intensive cooperation between NATO countries, it is remarkable that there are no common standards and regulations for cooperation. The military chaplains of the countries bordering the Baltic Sea do meet; there are also international conferences on military ethics issues, and NATO organizes Chaplains' Conferences. Nevertheless, there has not yet been any unification of national military chaplaincies. Nor have those influential NATO countries that have a completely hierarchical military chaplaincy (such as the USA) been able to take the lead in NATO military chaplaincy; it operates nationally, not internationally or transnationally. It therefore offers soldiers a special kind of home in a multinational environment.

Conclusion The results of this survey can form the basis for an analysis of national military chaplaincy concepts and inspire further studies. As far as we can see, there are currently no discussions about abolishing military chaplaincy or reducing staffing levels. In the countries with more diversified military chaplaincies, special regulations have been found to represent the concerns of military chaplaincies vis-à-vis the Minister of Defence and at the higher levels of the ministries: not every group is to stand up for itself – a general representative has been appointed. In the other countries, the highest clergymen of the respective denominations, as military bishops or chief rabbis, are authorized to represent the religious interests of their religion or denomination in relation to the Minister of Defence.

A second problem is striking: there is very little military chaplaincy cooperation between different national churches, religions and worldviews. At best, there is personal cooperation between pastors, rabbis, humanists and imams – they are all called 'military chaplains' in NATO regulations, according to their function. Evangelical Lutheran pastors may invite Episcopalian or Catholic colleagues to preach and all military personnel to attend the service. Of course, every pastor puts soldiers who wish to do so in contact with other military chaplains who represent Islam or Judaism, for example. Catholic chaplains also arrange contact with a Protestant colleague at the request of a client. But more intensive collaboration and deeper interdenominational or interreligious cooperation is not common, and is not required by national defence ministries. This is probably due to the importance of the respective national language in singing, prayer and preaching. It is also difficult to have a pastoral conversation in NATO English, since it is a technical language and not a language of piety. For this reason, there appear to be no plans to standardize the existing regulations in the long term. Problems between military chaplains have not become public either. This may be the result of the high level of education of the chaplains; they have almost all studied theology at state universities for years and have therefore practised certain methods of discourse on differences and argumentation. They are also creative in solving problems and are independent in their work. On the other hand, it is remarkable that not a single problem with nationalism has been reported. One can get the idea that chaplains foster the understanding of soldiers

from different nations. Actually, they identify themselves as ‘builders of bridges’ for understanding and cooperation by organizing common events for all nations and inviting soldiers of other confessions or religions to share their time together.

The questionnaire did not reveal any indications that there are specific problems in the national military chaplaincies. The acceptance of mono-denominational military chaplaincy also appears to be quite high, despite the religiously and ideologically pluralistic societies from which the soldiers come. This could indicate that the denominational, religious or ideological orientation of the military chaplains is of less importance than their function of being able to open up a space of freedom in the military organization. The ‘outstanding insiders’ (Heiko Biehl) are trustworthy contacts – regardless of the beliefs they espouse.

In our opinion, the various degrees of integration of military chaplains into the military, which are closely linked to the organizational-sociological question, are worth discussing. Some of the European military chaplaincies are fully integrated into the military organization, while others remain more closely linked to the civilian church community structure. In Germany and Denmark, contact between the military chaplaincy and the civilian religious community is particularly close. Here, the ‘civility’ of the clergy is likely to be greater, as is their independence from the military hierarchy. In these two countries, it can be expected that these military chaplaincies will take the opportunity to act as the ‘conscience of the military’.

Figure 5:
Military
chaplains
and military
obedience

Who is obedient to whom?

Are soldiers
forced to
be obedient
to military
chaplains??

No, never!

Can military chaplains be forced to
be obedient to generals?

Soldiers are never superiors to military chaplains.

Chaplains are **not involved in the military chain of command**.

They are only subordinate to the technical and service supervision of their religious superiors. Military chaplains are especially **bound to their priestly or ordination vows**.

They are **self-responsible teachers** of their church or community.

They are restricted only by **safety** regulations.

In this context, it is also important to consider whether there are ethical lessons for both ordinary soldiers and officers for which the military chaplains are responsible, and which are educational for the individual lives of the soldiers. This is because teaching under the supervision of the military leader could be understood as if the military chaplain were an assistant to the officers. In the present day, it is very important that every soldier is aware that no power in the world and no command can dispense them from their own ethical responsibility.

Soldiers ask about religion – they turn to the military chaplains and accept their service in the armed forces. This certainly has to do with the fact that they are existentially preoccupied with questions of life and death. Religious practices – including magical and superstitious ones – were widespread in pre-modern bands of soldiers, and they still exist in state-organized armed forces today. Religion and faith are an important field of activity for individuality in NATO armed forces and demonstrate their recognition. The promotion of individuality is an increasingly important field of activity for military chaplains, because only those who can live out all facets of themselves as human beings in the armed forces will fulfill their service for the good of their neighbours and in the spirit of the European community of values. The military chaplaincy helps with the correct understanding of individuality and mission – in all NATO countries.

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E-mail: angelika.doerfler@uni-hamburg.de

E-mail: mats.nowak@studium.uni-hamburg.de

Prof. dr. Angelika Dörfler-Dierken je predavateljica na Inštitutu za zgodovino krščanstva in zgodovino teologije na Univerzi v Hamburgu. Raziskovalno se ukvarja s preučevanjem politične etike, transformacijo oboroženih konfliktov, mirovnim procesom, sociologijo religije, vojaško etiko in duhovno oskrbo v oboroženih silah.

Prof. Angelika Dörfler-Dierken, PhD, is a lecturer at the Institute for the History of Christianity and the History of Theology at the University of Hamburg. Her research focuses on political ethics, the transformation of armed conflicts, peace processes, the sociology of religion, military ethics, and spiritual care in the armed forces.

e-mail: angelika.doerfler@uni-hamburg.de

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Mats Nowak je študent in asistent pri projektu Vojaška duhovščina v Evropi, ki se izvaja na Inštitutu za zgodovino krščanstva in zgodovino teologije na Univerzi v Hamburgu. Njegovi raziskovalni interesi so cerkvena glasba, duhovna oskrba v oboroženih silah in medsebojne povezave.

Mats Nowak is a student and assistant in the project “Military Chaplaincy in Europe,” which is being carried out at the Institute for the History of Christianity and the History of Theology at the University of Hamburg. His research interests include church music, spiritual care in the armed forces, and interconnections.

e-mail: mats.nowak@studium.uni-hamburg.de

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