

# Security Sector Reform in Transition Countries –

Personal Reflections on a Project by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (1998 – 2002)

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**Abstract:** Post World War II, Germany has adopted a successful model of civil military relations which seems highly relevant also for transition countries. A project by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, led by the author, attempted to familiarize both military and civilian groups in a number of transition countries with basic features of the German model and to discuss how it could help in defining the place and role of the military in the respective countries. Initially, seminars were conducted in the Baltic States, later followed by activities in Indonesia, Bulgaria and the Western Balkans. The combination of a foundation with expertise in issues of democratic transformation with a retired officer well versed in military reform issue proved to be particularly useful for the project. The article describes the rationale of the project, elements of its implementations as well as achievements and lessons learned.

**Keywords:** Transition countries, Security Sector Reform/Military Reform, political foundations

## 1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War opened up many opportunities to promote and support change in former socialist countries. One of these areas was the proper place and role of the military in civil democratic societies. On the following pages, the author reports on one of the earliest activities in this area, organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FEF) and led by him. The program focused on lectures to both military and civilians. While obviously this can only be a small contribution to what has to be achieved in terms of security sector reform in the relevant countries, the lectures in all cases were well received and seen as an important contribution for local thinking and planning on the future role of civil-military relations. While time has moved on, and in many of the countries mentioned below, major reforms have occurred,<sup>1</sup> not least in the framework of NATO Partnership for Peace and NATO accession programmes, the lessons learned from this early phase of trying to initiate military reform seem valid for many parts of the world.

One issue that deserves particular attention is whether and to what extent the German model of civil-military relations is and can be an »export product«. Some thoughts on this are offered in this text after an initial description of the major activities the author was involved in. In the concluding section, some reflections on lessons learned are presented.

## 2. Working with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on military reform

In late-1998, the regional representative of the FEF in the Baltic Countries developed an interest in the activities of the International Defence Advisory Board (IDAB), which had assisted the governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in developing good governance in the security sector and was planning to bring its mission to an end in the following year.<sup>2</sup> The author was a member of the IDAB at this time. The foundation had already co-sponsored two conferences organised by that board, in practice limited to co-financing. Out of this marginal involvement in a purely government and military oriented engagement grew the intention to familiarise broader walks of society with issues related to military reform – obviously an intention close to the foundation's mandate on democratic reform in general. As a kind of continuation of IDAB's activities it was agreed to have a closer look at reform of the military and its relations with civil society. The board members liked the idea because earlier IDAB activities had not sufficiently pursued the objective to strengthen civil society, and in particular non-governmental organisations, in their capacity to take an interest in, understand and accompany military reform. Until 1999 there had been no FEF program dealing with the role of civil society in the field of security and defence. In particular place and role of armed forces in a civil democratic society in all its political, social, and economic dimensions, including participation in the democratic control of the armed forces had never been a specific focus of FEF activities in transition countries. After mus-

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1 See e.g. Wilhelm N. German and Andrzej Karkoszka (eds.), *Security Sector Reform in Central and Eastern Europe. Difficult Paths Towards Success*. BICC/DCAF Security Sector Governance and Conversion Studies No. 10, Baden-Baden 2005, Dimitar Dimitrov et al., *The Military in Transition: Restructuring and Downsizing the Armed Forces of Eastern Europe*, BICC Brief 25, Bonn, September 2002, available at <http://www.bicc.de/publications/briefs/briefs.html>.

2 The International Defence Advisory Board to the Baltic States, consisting of eight senior and retired experts from eight western states, active between 1995 and 1999. See General Sir Garry Johnson, Chairman of the International Defence Advisory Board, »The Baltic States have demonstrated their support.« *NATO's NATIONS and Partners for Peace*, Special Issue 1999, p. 20.

tering support from FEF's Central Office in Bonn a sequence of three seminars was projected and held, one in each of the Baltic States in early 1999.

A similar series of activities was initiated by the FEF in Bulgaria in 1999. Three seminars were held in Sofia and Plovdiv. The last one in November 2000 already took place in the Framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Following a visit by the author to Djakarta in early 1998 on request of the German Ministry of Defence, two FEF events followed in Djakarta and Bandung in 2000. That same year FEF decided to make the project part of the Stability Pact activities in the Balkans. In addition to the seminar in Sofia five further events were prepared and took place in 2000 and 2001, one in Skopje and two each in Sarajevo/Banja-Luka and Zagreb. A new, and continuing, round of seminars and other activities by the author began, after two preparatory visits to Tbilisi/Georgia, in March 2002 in the Southern Caucasus, which ended in December 2003 after a longer time presence of the author in Baku/Azerbaijan, this time on request of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an Individual Expert Advisor.

### 3. Concept and project design

The project, »Place and role of the military in civil-democratic societies« while emerging step by step, was designed, from the outset, as a German contribution to the development of functioning democratic societies. The project's topics concern the military as much as civil society, at least in its politically active elements of transition countries. As a transition country herself more than 50 years ago, with extensive experience in planning and implementation of military reform after World War II, Germany was seen by those initiating the programme as a source of ideas on how to plan and implement security sector reform.

The German reform model has demonstrated its validity and sustainability over decades. The integration of the armed forces in society and the citizen in the army has been successfully achieved and maintained. This model also heavily influenced the »Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security«<sup>3</sup>, adopted by the OSCE participating states in 1994. It therefore seemed natural that the military and civil societies in transition countries had strong incentives to hear about the German reform model in order to learn about the key problems connected to the existence of armed forces in democratic societies and as a source of encouragement and conviction that reform of the military is possible, however different political, social and economic framework conditions in transition countries might be.

Given the mandate of the foundation, the FEF project obviously particularly aimed at conveying the value and human rights orientation of the German reform programme to the

militaries. Another priority was to involve representatives of civil society in the activities, since the build-up of modern armed forces in a democracy cannot be achieved without active involvement of civil society. FEF with its many tentacles into society seemed best suited to attract interest in civilian circles for the subject, while the author, as a retired military man, had natural accord with local officers and also could, for instance in the Baltic States, use earlier intimate contacts to the military leadership.

The project's main method was to expose the various audiences to the central aspects of the German practice of civil-military relations and to report on the current state of affairs. The idea, however, was not only to inform the local military and civilians about the German model but also to instigate serious and critical discussions on it and military reform issues in general. Through these discussions, local arrangements of civil-military relations became more visible and transparent, in turn increasing the chances for a well-informed and intense public debate of military- and security-related issues. In a larger perspective, the hope was that through these discussions the development of a culture of discourse on security-related topics would be fostered, within the military and among factions of civil society but also between civilian groups and the military. Of particular interest to the FEF are civilian groups which have no regular or intimate day-to-day relationship with the defence community, but which are important in creating pluralism within societies. In addition, there was also the goal to contribute to civilian-military confidence-building in a wider sense, leading to a greater legitimacy of the armed forces.

The FEF's primary objective is to foster broad socio-political discourse rather than military expert discussions about specifics of military reform. Correspondingly, the project discussed here, focuses on what has been termed security sector governance issues. Thus while some presentations to pure military audience were made (commanders, staffs, military educational institutions) and internal military dialogues held, when requested, activities aiming at dialogue between military and civil personalities had priority. The same applies for exclusively civilian audiences. If possible and relevant, aspects related to the troops of the Ministry of the Interior and the police are also included in presentations and discussions.

In the overall landscape of western assistance to newly independent states in Europe the FEF project is placed between military and civilian, national and international expert meetings on the one hand and mammoth conferences which are conducted or supported by big organisations such as the OSCE, NATO and foreign or defence ministries on the other. In the FEF project, topics are dealt with in commonly intelligible ways, always keeping the societal context in focus: to create and maintain good, sustainable civil military relations on all levels, improve mutual understanding and support, to facilitate democratic control of the armed forces and foster legal, social and leadership conditions inside the armed forces commensurate with the peculiarities of democratic governance, civil life and military effectiveness.

3 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, »The Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security«, document adopted at the 91st Plenary Meeting of the Special Committee of the CSCE Forum for Security Co-operation in Budapest on 3 December 1994 (ref. FSC/Journal No.94).

## 4. Implementation

Three aspects of the project are discussed here in some detail: preparation, participation and conduct of the main events, lectures, round tables and the seminars proper.

### 4.1 Preparation

For the first seminars, in the three Baltic States, preparation was confined to practical and organizational aspects, without much substantive introduction of the interlocutors to the substance of the project. FEF used its networks to find civilian participants while the author consulted with the Ministers of Defence and the Chiefs of the Defence Staffs to muster their agreement and willingness to send defence personnel, civil and military alike as participants. Where and when practical assistance was offered, FEF welcomed such cooperation. The outcome, however, was very uneven with respect to status, competence and numbers of individuals attending the seminars.

In Bulgaria, a preparation more focused on the topic was tried for the first time, but restricted to the military side. In the Western Balkan States and Georgia, the author made comprehensive preparatory visits. He familiarized the political-military leadership, civilian heads of non-governmental organisations and interested civilian individuals with the intentions of the project and FEF's expectations concerning participants' role in the seminars. This has become routine and prospective civilian and military participants joined the seminars with a basic understanding about the role of the project in the overall efforts of democracy building within the respective host country. Preparatory discussions did not only aim at motivated participants but also at finding moderators, and co-lecturers from the host country. Moreover, preparatory efforts were made to gain support from high-level political and military leaders and parliamentarians of the Defence Committees in order to give the project some political clout. It proved overly optimistic to think that in any of the host countries military staff officers would be able to attend the seminars without official consent. Therefore official agreement by military authorities was of the essence. We also tried to get ideas from our interlocutors about substance and procedures of the seminars without making ourselves subservient to official host country guidance of any kind.

When explaining aims, substance and methodology of the project to the political and military leadership it was underlined that FEF did not wish to duplicate existing programmes of other western institutions and that the successful German case of military reform was not seen as a blue-print but as food for thought. We also assured interlocutors of our independence from any official national or NATO guidance and emphasised our focus on assisting in the build-up of a civil democratic society and democratic governance in the field of security and defence.

Ministers of Defence and the German ambassadors regularly were asked to introduce the seminars or to join in one of the formal meals.

Civilians were prepared differently for possible participation. In discussions with NGOs and other individuals, the priority was to raise awareness of the relevance of the issue for a modern civil society. There were also cases in which we had to emphasise that dialogue with the indigenous armed forces does not preclude drastic criticism but was only possible on accepting in principle that they are an important and indispensable element of state authority. Our subject was not the abolishment of the military but army reform corresponding to democratic standards. In this context we tried to instil a sense of responsibility in the minds of even hard core peace activists and willingness to sharply debate perceived deplorable states of affairs without going at each others throats.

All in all, preparations of the described type facilitated participation appropriate in numbers and quality as well as substantive debates during the seminars.

### 4.2 Participation

In each host country, we met at least twice with participants in the project, during preparations and in the seminars proper. Taking both opportunities together a broad spectrum of individuals and groups was confronted with the project, its aims and substance. Participants from the civilian side of society joined the project either as representatives of NGOs or as interested individuals.

Some of the NGOs can be characterised as both interested and competent in security and defence matters. In particular research and other institutes promoting rational defence policies and security sector reform from outside the defence establishment showed an interest in our project. On the other hand there were NGOs highly critical of the internal situation of their armed forces, dealing specifically with violations of human rights in the military and other armed formations which we could motivate to participate. We also approached other NGOs crucial for the development of a pluralistic, civil society but without much appreciation of the importance of civil-military relations in a democratic society. These mostly had had no direct earlier contact with the defence establishment; some even looked with abhorrence at any armed institution. Examples include women organisations, student and youth groups, Helsinki Committees and circles of intellectuals and artists.

Individuals interested in our subject or converted to such interest included lawyers, parliamentarians, members of political parties, university professors and in particular journalists and other media representatives. In some seminars high-level politicians participated, for at least some period of time, including ministers and their deputies, chairpersons of parliamentary committees, as well as ombudspersons or their advisers.

On the military side participants came from Ministries of Defence and the General Staffs, military academies, operational staffs and commands. Officers of all ranks and even some NCOs participated at times. Military attendance in the Baltics and Bulgaria was very senior while in the Western

Balkan states and in Georgia our preferred type of military participant dominated, staff officers at the higher working level, those considered to be the future top leaders.

Civil-military mix of audiences varied widely. While in the Baltic States military participants were more numerous, the preferred ratio of two thirds civilians and one third military was achieved in the Balkan states and in Georgia. Careful preparation paid off.

There was a case when much more individuals had announced to come, while much less actually appeared. Sometimes actual participation could only be ascertained after commencement of the seminar. Normally attendance atrophied somewhat during the course of the seminar, in particular when the venue was in the capital and the second day was a Saturday or Sunday. However, participation never dropped below 25.

Local co-speakers initially were military or MoD representatives. Beginning with the seminar in Sarajevo civilians responded to the German presenters and moderators were selected by the FEF from indigenous partner organisations. Taking preparatory discussions and the seminars together some 580 individuals have so far been familiarised with the

substance of the FEF programme in general and our specific project in particular. In addition, at the Military Academies in Bandung and Tbilisi some 600 and 300 students and staff attended our lectures and discussions periods.

### 4.3 The main elements of the seminars

For practical purposes, the overall topic of the place and role of armed forces in civil democratic societies was split into four subtopics covered by separate lectures (see also Box):

Integration of the German armed forces into state and society, principles, prerequisites and present state of affairs – supremacy of politics, democratic oversight, rule of law, civil-military relations

The constitutional and legal foundations and social security for the German armed forces and their members

Internal order and day-to-day leadership, training and education in the German armed forces

Experience of other transition countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary (if possible and appropriate).

*Box: Main elements of presentations by German speakers*

#### **Principles of Place and Role of the Military in Civil Democratic Societies**

##### **Basic Principles of established (Western) Democracies**

Representation, Rule of Law, Parliamentarism, Value Orientation, International Co-operation

##### **Political and legal principles for the military in democracies**

Firm anchorage in the constitution – fundamental freedoms and human rights, accountability to parliament, missions, parliamentary oversight

##### **Rule of Law**

Based on international law and constitutional provisions legal framework for the establishment and operation of the military, protection of personal indignity and integrity, upkeep of discipline and right to appeal, predictability and prevention of arbitrariness

##### **Supremacy of Politics**

Democratically legitimated civil political leadership, clear chain of command, political guidance recognising military advise

##### **Democratic control**

Parliamentary, governmental, judicial, civil society oversight

##### **Civil-military relations**

On government/parliament, civil elite and general public level

##### **International co-operation and integration in euro-atlantic structures**

Interlocking institutions

##### **Social and behavioural principles for armed forces in democracies**

Rights and duties of military personnel,

Command authority and obedience,

Quality of life,

Personnel planning and management,

Administration of justice

Leadership, training and education (including civic education)

Indigenous co-speakers have been invited to respond from a host country's point of view to the German presentations.

## 5. Lessons learned

The project represented a novelty with respect to the topic, the composition of the participants and methodology. Therefore the better prospective participants were informed by FEF about subject and intention of the event, the better were host country participants' contributions to the effort. The introduction of local co-lecturers helped to focus the overall topic of place and role of the armed forces to the aspects particularly relevant to individual countries and made the discussions much more lively and controversial. This specifically applied to NGOs with a basically critical attitude towards the military. They needed encouragement, sometimes even to overcome reservations to participate. On the military side, information of the leadership was essential for the selection of appropriate military participants, as well as for mustering their necessary agreement to military participation. Preparation proved to be essential for success.

NGOs which are civilian by status but military if not militaristic in mentality have not been particularly constructive in dealing with visions of a coming future. They were, however, helpful in reminding everybody of the pressing day-to-day problems the members of the host country's military were and, in many cases still are, facing. As long as they did not dominate the civilian side of the audience their participation was welcome.

Best suited for the seminars have been officers young enough not to have been extensively influenced by soviet/communist/nationalist socialisation, but old enough to have gathered substantial experience in military policy and leadership in their armed forces. The substance of discussions was much improved by participants who had attended internships in western countries, civilians and military alike.

Initially a FEF representative moderated the seminars, mostly the author. Beginning with the Sarajevo event it turned out to be much better to leave moderation to a local personality. It underlined the aspect of local ownership of the project and increased host country contribution to the overall success of all events.

The best long term presence of participants was achieved when the venue chosen was outside the capital, with little chance to go home over night and fall prey to the temptation to stay at home during the second day of the seminar.

During the Tbilisi seminar we for the first time chose to organise part of the discussion in discussion groups, each chaired by one of the German lecturers. Contributions were even more spontaneous and to the point, and attendees reluctant to voice their ideas in plenary turned out to be committed discussants in a small group, in particular women. Our conclusion from this experience was that we should have used this method earlier.

A tremendous role in bringing members of the different groups in closer contact was played by coffee breaks, meals and receptions. Here one could find participants talking calmly with each other whom in plenary had fiercely opposed each other. Therefore breaks are important and should be long enough.

All participants enjoyed distribution of our written texts and never did we have too many copies.

But the most positive reactions were triggered when we had our texts translated in the indigenous language.

Overwhelmingly, participants, civilians as well as military, expressed interest in follow-up activities of a similar kind. As soon, however, as we asked indigenous attendees whether they would be willing to take the initiative to organise follow up events, response was more muted. Without outside stimulation and support continuation of the effort seems to be very difficult.

## 6. Assessment

The project introduced the FEF to a comparatively new area of work. The simultaneous consideration of conditions inside the armed forces and the responsibilities of civil society representatives to show an active interest in internal developments of the military has no tradition. The project, however, has a solid foundation in the broader endeavours of the foundation in promoting civil society building in transition countries worldwide, a mainstay of its work. Still it was already a success to convince the central authorities of the FEF to recognise the importance of the topic and agree to the start of the project. The keen interest of local FEF representatives played the crucial role in bringing the project to their areas of responsibility; in particular to finance it out of allocated resources, although none of them was willing to do so at the expenses of other longstanding projects.

The objective of the project is rather broad, namely to contribute to the development of a military-civilian discourse by presenting a successful western model of military reform and civil-military relations, confronting it with indigenous experiences and exposing it to discussion among civilians and officers. The project has a cognitive dimension by conveying to military personalities and civilians alike key aspects of security sector reform as one of the preconditions for forming a civil democratic society. And it has a communicative dimension in offering an opportunity to exchange views between civilian and military officers on the issue with the chance to develop mutual understanding in a peaceful, neutral environment. Both serve the overall aim to assist in civil society building.

The FEF project should be seen as a piece in a jigsaw puzzle of many complementary endeavours aiming in the same direction but using different methods and addressing other actors. The whole reform effort in new democracies requires a multifaceted, pluralistic and long-term effort, involving a host of different »donors« and a wide range of »recipients«. FEF was right to look for a »niche« between expert-to-expert and more general high level conference events, sometimes overloading recipients' time and personnel. Within the confines of that niche, the project has produced remarkably positive results. We attracted support from the highest political level, without having to give away full control over our programme. A range of indigenous officers, mostly of mid-level responsibility and competence could be confronted with SSR

substance, was challenged to compare it with the actual situation in their armed forces and had to stand and respond to inquiries from sometimes highly critical compatriots. Many important NGOs could be motivated to engage in the programme although many had had no contacts of this kind before. They became encouraged to recognise their responsibility in overseeing developments in the defence and military arena. Even in cases where only military personnel could be addressed and involved like in Bulgaria and Indonesia, the impetus of the German presentations, which underlined the role of political supremacy, rule of law and democratic control including civilian oversight, worked towards a better understanding of place and role of the military in civil democratic societies among the audiences. The impact of the German personalities on the host audiences should not be underrated. They represented living results of thorough military reform in Germany, had participated in their career in the development of modern style armed forces, could speak from their own experiences, exposed themselves to inquiries and critique from the audience, showed patience and understanding and kept a good sense of humour even in tight situations during discussions. There was not much theory about the democratic control of armed forces but a lot of practical substance that could be conveyed and made the event highly attractive to all participants.

In all countries our lecture texts were made available to participants, in the Baltic States in English, in Bulgaria, Indonesia, the Balkan States and Georgia in national languages, on special requests in German. The texts have been published in various national publications.<sup>4</sup> In Indonesia, the Research Institute for Democracy and Peace (RIDEP) and others organised follow-up workshops and a study on civil-military relations in a regional military command area, published by FEF and RIDEP.<sup>5</sup> In Georgia the NGO »Justice and Liberty«, the chairman of which played a decisive role in our seminar in Tbilisi, organised together with other NGOs a »Coalition for Dialogue between the Military and the

Citizens«. In other countries FEF deliberately abstained from initiating follow-up events in order to focus on its more traditional lines of activities, however remaining ready to respond to local requests for support. Finally it needs to be recognised that financial constraints force the FEF as all other suchlike institutions to concentrate available resources on priority projects. In view of the traditionally broad range of FEF activities in civil society building our project sometimes has problems to compete.

Spontaneous reactions from participants in all countries have been positive, sometimes enthusiastic, requesting follow-up activities of a similar kind. FEF representatives, on request from the author, voiced a basically positive judgement of what was described as an act of »impulse giving« activity. In their judgement the project had positive repercussions on the overall willingness of society and governments to proceed further in Security Sector Reform, which, as local FEF representatives see it, is also supported by many other actors. One representative admitted that the project in his area of responsibility regrettably but unavoidably has had an episodic character. In an information brochure the FEF Bonn centre, however, published a very positive account of project implementation in Sofia and particularly in Sarajevo.<sup>6</sup>

We have not trained governments in good governance in the security field, we have not educated NGOs in how to contribute to democratic oversight of armed forces in a technical sense, and we have not changed bad habits in armed forces towards modern standards of leadership, education and training. What was done in the project described here can be seen as a useful contribution to those much larger reform efforts, which some of the countries involved in the project have since implemented, countries which, except Georgia and Indonesia, are now members, or close to membership, of both NATO and the EU. In many other countries, continued efforts of reforms are necessary, preferably with much better political and organisational support than the one reported in this paper for the very early days of the promotion of democratic control of the armed forces.

4 See for instance TEMPAT DAN PERAN MILITER DALAM MASYARAKAT SIPIL YANG DEMOKRATIS (Place and Role of the Military in a Civil Democratic Society, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Djakarta 2000; POLEMOS, Journal of interdisciplinary Research on War and Peace, Volume IV, Zagreb, January – June 2001.

5 Reformasi TNI (Reform of the Indonesian Military), FEF and RIDEP, Jakarta, June 2002.

6 »Der Balkan braucht Stabilität. Überraschend gesprächsbereit: Zivilgesellschaft und Militär in Bosnien-Herzegowina.« (The Balkan needs Stability. Surprisingly ready to talk: Civil Society and the Military in Bosnia-Herzegowina), FEF Info 1/2002, P. 28, Bonn, Spring 2002.