

Audit of the personnel policy for career military officers

Defence group

Key facts

Some 2,900 professional soldiers supervise the conscript soldiers of the Swiss Armed Forces. Two thirds of them are regularly required to change functions. The law stipulates that in principle career officers and non-commissioned officers as well as general officers hold a post for a period of four to six years. The aim of these transfers is twofold: to renew motivation and to allow career progression.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the implementation of this rotation principle and the appointment processes. It analysed a sample of fourteen career soldiers selected according to various risk criteria. This sample is therefore not representative. However, it does reveal some potential for improvement in the traceability of appointment decisions and in the management of exceptions in salary matters.

Principle of rotation usually applied but traceability of exceptions needs improvement

Based on its data analysis, the SFAO believes that the rotation principle is generally applied. The Armed Forces have specialists in "Deployment and career management" whose role it is to plan transfers. However, for half of the sample, appointments were made directly by superiors without following the process. The Defence Group must ensure that the process is followed and, if necessary, document any exceptions and the reasons for them.

Half of the soldiers in the sample received a salary higher than that set out in the relevant job description. In total, the special schemes granted to all career soldiers amount to about CHF 1.8 million out of a personnel budget of about CHF 250 million, i.e. around 0.7%. The analysis of the personnel files of those sampled showed that the justifications were not always documented.

Significant recruitment difficulties

From a strategic point of view, the implementation of the personnel policy does not currently cover the needs defined in the "Development of the Armed Forces" reform: currently around 9% of career officer posts are vacant, as are almost 7% of career non-commissioned officer posts. In total, there was a shortfall of approximately 140 career soldiers in 2019. This problem could be exacerbated by the recent increase in the retirement age from 60 to 65 for career soldiers, which is likely to make the profession less attractive. The Armed Forces have already launched a project to reduce vacancies and improve recruitment efficiency.

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