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Introductory remarks provided by:

Mag. Karl Schneemann, Head of the Office, in order of the Presidium of the Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces

The Armed Forces in Domestic security: Implications for Ombuds Institutions

Due to wars, destabilization and a lack of prospects for large parts of the populations living in the regions surrounding Europe, there is an increased risk for Austria's security for an indeterminate period. Against the backdrop of this geopolitical situation, the Austrian Armed Forces have a major role to play in tackling those key challenges for Austria's security.

The Austrian armed forces have always been involved in maintaining domestic security, by providing services to maintain public order, provide counterterrorism support in assistance to the Department of the Interior, general law enforcement, crime investigation and support at large public events, among other activities. Our armed forces are bound by different penal codes and justice systems than their civilian law enforcement counterparts.

Soldiers need in case of assistance to civilian authorities special training. It sounds not too easy and maybe the military side of training has to be reduced.

The main problem is of close cooperation of civilian and military organizations are harming the clear and defined separation of tasks and authority.

The Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces responded to queries submitted during the year under review, investigated complaints, arranged for ex officio investigations, conducted on-site inspections, eliminated shortcomings and grievances in the scope of military service in close cooperation with the Federal Minister of Defence and the advisors and presented proposals for improvements with respect to military service and training.

The structure of the Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces can be a great help when armed forces engages more frequently with civilians. All political parties of the National Council are represented in the Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces and their influence will be noticeable as well in military cases like complains or grievance as well in the National Council.

The necessary measures for a successful fulfilment of the duties of the Austrian Armed Forces are set out in the government programme. This includes ensuring the feasibility of long-term planning through sufficient budgetary funds and personnel.

The Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces notes the adequate and lawful training of national service soldiers is only possible by qualified core personnel, training resources and suitable administrative processes, as well as to consistent regulations.

While recognising organisational difficulties and issues of understaffing, the Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces notes that ultimately the supervision by those in charge of training and leadership is always key to the quality of training. They have the final responsibility for events on the ground! Careless delegation of this leadership task and duty of care for soldiers under their command is absolutely inadmissible.

Society and the world around us are changing. Both the Austrian Armed Forces and we, as an oversight body, need to respond to that change. Growing financial pressures and the closure of military bases are challenges that we need to rise to in a professional manner. We also need to ensure that tensions do not have a negative impact on the day-to-day service of our soldiers.

We must be aware that forms of authority are exercised in the Austrian Armed Forces that is far from typical of our society today. Such authority must be exercised with great care. If unfair treatment occurs in this field, then we must have the courage to denounce it clearly. We must have the courage to protect the victim and to clearly show the offender the limits.

The Chairman of our Parliamentary Commission advocate a new political style.

The contribution that I can make personally is chiefly in the political sphere. However, I believe that there are approaches here in the Austrian Armed Forces that can be adopted in political life. The Austrian Armed Forces are known for upholding traditional values such as patriotism, discipline and the willingness to make sacrifices. It is our

responsibility to show that those values are compatible with values such as esteem, respect and recognition. Furthermore, the army is a world of hierarchies.

These hierarchies are necessary to ensure the strength and effectiveness of the Austrian Armed Forces. We must ensure that the weakest members of the Austrian Armed Forces are accorded the same esteem as the highest-ranking officers.

The extraordinary weight of the recommendations is derived from the fact that the Commission decides unanimously and is backed by all political parties. So far, all recommendations of the Parliamentary Commission have been implemented by the respective ministers of defence.