

Germany: Five versions of the Bundeswehr's reform

On 23 August the federal minister of defence, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU) presented five variants of the reform of the Bundeswehr to the CDU/CSU/FDP coalition exports. Through this he started an official debate on structural changes in the German army. The final concept of the reform is likely to become clear at the end of this year. It is expected that conscription will be lifted and the German army will have between 170,000 and 200,000 soldiers.

The Federal Ministry of Defence has been working on various versions of the reform of the Bundeswehr since this January, when the government presented a budget cut plan for the next four years and obliged the ministry to cut its expenses by some 8.3 billion euros. At present, Guttenberg has presented five possible ways of reforming the army. These include various combinations of elements of professional permanent and contractual active duty, short voluntary service and compulsory conscription. The size of the army varies, depending on the variant, between 150,000 and 210,000 soldiers (at present approximately 250,000). The variant recommended by Guttenberg envisages that the army will consist of 156,000 soldiers on active permanent and contractual duty and 7,500 soldiers on short voluntary duty (up to 23 months). The minister has appealed for a suspension of conscription without the need of amending the constitution, which would enable a possible reintroduction of the draft in the future.

Guttenberg's proposals have been supported by a majority of the FDP but have, however, stirred up controversy among members of the CDU and the CSU. Some politicians oppose the liquidation of conscription, which is perceived as a factor which integrates the army with society and as a way of recruiting professional soldiers. Scepticism has also been expressed about the significant reduction in the number of soldiers. The ministry's plans will be discussed during the conventions of the coalition parties in October and November. Related legislative changes can be expected by the end of this year. <jus>