

National Report of AFMP/FNV and MARVER/FNV

1. Netherlands-Germany cooperation and integration at Army level

As mentioned before in national reports, we are apprehensive about the integration of NLD and DEU Army's, as part of the so called "deep integration" programme, and how this affects working conditions for Dutch personnel Both AFMP and MARVER will be visiting the NLD units in Münster and Veitshöchheim. In addition we will confer with our members in the units that are stationed in the Netherlands and will be integrated in German units.

2. Defense Budget 2024

As usual on the third Tuesday of September 2023, it was time for the public budget for the coming year. A combination of words that was mentioned is "Breed Prosperity". This approach shows that it is more than just money when you talk about prosperity. Security is named as part of that prosperity. In doing so, security shifts from the 'cost of money' table to 'prosperity', and that really breaks with the past trend.

The question is, of course, to what extent our politicians take security seriously. This is where we are skeptical. The promised raise to almost 2% of GDP in 2024, as agreed with NATO, will maybe/probably be followed by a steady decline in the following years if there were to be an expectation that "World Peace" could emerge. History has taught us that lowering Defense expenditure is totally unwise but past sell-off of equipment and capabilities is a harsh reality. If politicians calculate peace dividends while we are living with the threat of perhaps the biggest conflict ever, it does not offer much hope for the future. The current promise that we will meet and maintain 2% of GDP for Defense expenditure will really have to be reflected in government policy over the coming decades.

In any case, it is a good thing that investments will finally meet the 2% NATO standard. This is also essential if we are to catch up regarding our Defense. We know that the upkeep and maintenance of the ammunition stockpiles alone will be at high cost. Investing in equipment is equally important, but without personnel to handle the equipment it has little meaning. Of course, for recruiting and retaining personnel money is not the only solution.

The MOD has recently given the military a boost by means of the new wage table, but it is now important to maintain this. In addition, many further steps need to be taken to upgrade and improve the working conditions of all Defense personnel. At the end of the day, good working conditions – and pay is an important part of this – are elements that make people apply to a potential employer. We therefore need to keep a watchful eye on how to match up with other (civilian) sectors.

The War in Ukraine has made it clear to the politicians that protecting this broad prosperity can also mean being actively involved in a large-scale conflict. The changing security situation requires a military that is prepared for this. The striking force, battle readiness, independence and adaptability of the NLD Defense forces are therefore increased. For this purpose, the Army Brigades are converted to independent and specialized commands.

Also, the Marine Corps is going to be more diversified with self-employed, small, light and networked units to enable collusion and be more effective against modern threats. For this, It will receive all necessary equipment. Furthermore, we are increasingly seeing the Government working towards expanding international cooperation in all areas of Defense.

As AFMP and MARVER, we remain firm in our policy of maintaining this upward trend and fulfilling our commitments with our allies. Above all, we urge politicians not to forget to continue investing in Defense personnel. Safety, the right resources and equipment for Defense personnel guarantees safety and prosperity for the whole of Dutch society. 2% of GDP is a small price to pay for all of this.

3. Working conditions agreement Defense personnel

On December 12, 2023, the military trade unions reached a collective labor agreement with the Minister of Defense for defense personnel, covering the year 2024. This agreement entails several key provisions:

Salary Increase: Effective from January 1, 2024, there will be a 7% salary increase for all defense personnel.

One-off payment: Employees in service as of January 1, 2024 will receive a one-time payment of €1500 gross, counting towards the pension.

Additional Measures: Beyond the salary increase and pension benefit, the agreement includes various other measures. Notably, there will be higher mileage allowances for domestic work-related travel and commuting.

Furthermore, an examination of the compensation position of civilian personnel revealed disparities between their salaries and those of military personnel, which disproportionately affected civilians. To address this, adjustments to the civilian salary structure were agreed upon. These changes will further enhance the income of civilian personnel alongside the 7% salary increase applicable to all defense personnel.

Additionally, a new Military Deployment Regulation has been established. Its purpose is to clearly differentiate between various military activities occurring within and outside the Netherlands, whether in NATO and/or EU contexts. This regulation not only considers the types of deployments military personnel encounter but also addresses associated benefits such as deployment protection, healthcare systems, and allowances.

To accommodate the additional expenses and the impact of overseas placements, several innovations and financial improvements have been introduced to the benefits system for defense personnel stationed abroad.

4. New Pension system for the Netherlands

As mentioned in previous national reports, the Netherlands is undergoing a significant overhaul of its national Pension System. This transformation also affects both military and civilian defense personnel. In late March, the unions and government employers reached a **negotiated result** for a new pension scheme for government employees. Simultaneously, the military unions made agreements with the Minister of Defense regarding military participation in this broad government-wide scheme and additional pension arrangements necessitated by the unique position of military personnel.

The accrued pensions from the existing pension scheme will transition to this new system starting on **January 1, 2027**.

The most significant difference between the two systems lies in how future obligations are calculated. In the new system, these obligations will no longer be determined by a fictitious (low) interest rate, as is currently the case. Instead, participants will build a **personal pension fund** dependent on investment results. Consequently, the pension fund can maintain much smaller financial buffers than it does now, allowing more of the fund's assets to contribute to participants' pensions. Our members will soon receive detailed information and consultations regarding this outcome. Depending on the consultation's outcome, the implementation of the new pension scheme for both military and civilian personnel will be set in motion by the pension fund (ABP).

5. 2019 EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Employment Conditions

The AFMP and MARVER, along with other military unions, have served a summons to the Minister of Defense. Despite repeated requests and letters from our side, the Minister has refused to implement the 2019 EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Employment Conditions. Furthermore, she has declined to halt the execution of outdated legal provisions that conflict with this directive until discussions with the unions occur regarding whether certain aspects of the directive should be exempted for Defense.

The EU directive explicitly stipulates that prior consultation between social partners must take place before any decisions are made. Under Dutch civil law, the government has decided not to make exceptions to this EU directive. However, without consulting the unions, the Minister sent a letter to parliament claiming that certain articles in the defense legal framework already serve as exceptions to the EU directive, and therefore, she believes no further action is necessary.

The military unions strongly disagree with this stance. In our view, new legislation aimed at improving workers' rights should not be hindered by outdated laws or regulations. This case is particularly crucial because another recent EU directive, which addresses equal pay for women and men, could face a similar situation.

6. Military support for Ukraine

The Netherlands has recently signed a 10-year security MOU with Ukraine. For the first 4 months of 2024, the NLD government has made €102 million available for humanitarian support on order to help Ukraine get through the winter and prepare for spring.

The remaining support earmarked for 2024 is divided into €2 billion for military support, €295 million as a contribution to the European Peace Facility (EPF) and €92 million for several forms of non-military support.

Together with Denmark and the United States, the Netherlands leads the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG) air force coalition. The NLD government has decided to prepare 24 F-16 aircraft for delivery. In order to keep the aircraft deployable, the MOD is also working on a broad support package with spare parts and ammunition in this coalition.

7. Defense Recruitment

Within the armed forces about 25 percent of the 41.000 military posts are not filled.

Before our elections in late 2023 several political parties in the Netherlands were flirting with the idea to propose a compulsory service, inter alia, because of the urgent medical staffing and armed forces personnel shortages.

As mentioned in our last National Report, military service is still compulsory in the Netherlands. Contrary to popular belief it has not been abolished. By decree, the Ministry of Defense no longer “calls up” conscripts for service, nor are there any plans to do so during times of peace.

As the Dutch economy is still doing very well and there are more than 400.000 vacant civilian jobs, recruitment of personnel is tedious. Measures have been taken by the MOD to get more people interested in a military career by TV commercial advertising, salary has been raised and all contracts are now “for life” (no more short term contracts).

The government has also been looking at the “Swedish model” for conscription. In Sweden all young men and women are called up, then a rigorous selection takes place. As a result only the real motivated youngsters are enlisted.

This system is not possible in the Netherlands as we do not call up conscripts. However, a solution found is the “voluntary service year”. Young people can now join the armed forces for a year and then decide whether they stay or leave. This seems to work well and a good number of volunteers have applied.

8. Netherlands Defense Missions and Operations:

Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea)

The European Force provides support for political and social stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Goal is to diminish the possibility of a new (armed) conflict. The Netherlands provides 150 Marines for security and to enhance the capacity of the armed forces. The Marines are part of a battalion with approximately 500 soldiers from different nations. The battalion is stationed in Camp Butmir in Serajevo and can be deployed in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Lithuania (eFP)

The Dutch Defense contributes to NATO's enhanced military presence in Lithuania, the so-called enhanced Forward Presence. It concerns 270 soldiers for the multinational battlegroup. The battalion of which The Netherlands are part off, is under German command and is stationed in Rukla. Because of Russia's worrying actions, NATO decided to send additional troops to Europe's eastern border. It is one of the 'reassuring measures' for the Eastern European allies.

Romania (eFP)

The Dutch Defense contributes to the enhanced military presence of NATO in Romania, the so called enhanced Forward Presence. It concerns of 120 troops for a multinational battlegroup.

The battalion of which Dutch contingent is part of, is under French command and is stationed in Cincu. Due to the Russia's alarming actions, NATO decided to send additional military personnel to the European Eastern border. It is one of the 'restorative measures' for the Eastern European Allies.

East flank NATO territory (AP)

Together with 16 NATO allies The Netherlands provides fighter planes (in a rotating schedule) for the Air Policing (AP) mission at the NATO territory eastern flank.

Iraq (NMI (as of May 1st 2024), OIR, JOCAT and MoPA)

The NMI mission provides training and advise to the Iraqi MOD in order to strengthen stability and security in Iraq. The Netherlands contributes with 160 Army personnel and 120 Air Force personnel (3 x Chinook detachment). The Chinooks are also available to the OIR.

The OIR mission was developed as a reaction to the rise of IS and focuses on building capacity and strategic advice for the Iraqi and Kurdish forces. The Netherlands contributes to the training of Iraqi special forces with 12 special ops advisers. Also, 5 officers are stationed in Qatar, Kuwait and Tampa (USA) in support of OIR.

The JOCAT mission supports the strengthening of security in the Kurdish autonomous region. The Netherlands provides 5 military advisers for guidance to the Peshmerga (Kurdish forces) on military operational matters such as planning and logistics.

The MoPA mission, supported by The Netherlands, United States, United Kingdom and Germany, is to reform the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA, the Kurdish MOD in Iraq) into a modern, well organized security organization. Dutch support is one military adviser.

Israel (USSC)

With 5 military personnel, the Netherlands contributes to the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah.

USSC focuses on professionalizing the Palestinian security sector. The mission improves the functioning of the security services and the Presidential Guard of the Palestinian Authority and seeks to contribute to the viability of a stable Palestinian state.

Lebanon, Syria and Israel (UNTSO)

The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) is observing the agreed upon ceasefire lines between Lebanon, Syria and Israel. UNTSO operates in the same area as UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) and in South Lebanon in the same area as UNIFIL (United Nations International Force In Lebanon). The Netherlands is providing 12 personnel to this mission.

Bahrain (CMF)

At Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a combined fleet from 34 different countries is involved in naval operations. CMF has headquarters in Bahrain. It operates with 4 Coalition Task Forces (CTF150, 151, 152 and 153) in the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and West Indian Ocean.

The CTFs:

- combat terrorism and monitor safety at sea (CTF150);
- combat piracy (CTF 151);
- guarding security in the Persian Gulf (CTF 152);
- strengthen maritime security in the Red Sea (CFT 153)

Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH)

With several staff officers, the Netherlands contributes to the EMASoH (European-led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz) mission. The Netherlands participates in support of the international right of free passage and transit through the Strait of Hormuz. By participating, the Netherlands promotes and safeguards the international legal order.

Somalia (VPD)

Our navy provides security along shipping routes through the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa near Somalia, seeking to detect, deter and combat piracy. The number of hijacked ships has fallen sharply since 2012, although the fight against piracy remains necessary. In some cases, the Dutch MOD provides military security teams to Dutch vessels.

Africa (GPOI)

The Netherlands participates in the US led Global Peace Operations Initiative with 4 military personnel, stationed in Togo. The program expands the capacities of 25 African countries through instruction and training, in order to enable those countries to carry out peacekeeping missions in Africa (with a mandate from the United Nations and the African Union).

Mali (EUTM)

The Netherlands contributes with a maximum of 6 soldiers to the EU training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali). Training is provided to the Malian armed forces and also the so-called G5 troops in order to achieve a better operational status. The G5 consists of troops from Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Chad.