

**ZRÍNYI MIKLÓS NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY**  
Doctoral Board

**CONVERSION,  
AS ONE OF THE STRATEGIC QUESTIONS OF  
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OF  
THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY**

a summary of the Ph.D.-thesis of

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# **I. THE STATEMENT OF THE SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM**

## **1. Actuality**

After the change of regime at the end of the 20th century a social and economic transformation began in our country as it did in several other countries in Europe. The country and the Hungarian Defence Forces faced a lot of challenges during the changeover to a market economy. These broad changes required the leaders of military organizations to approach tasks and organisation activities from a new view point, and to redefine operational policy. Just like in other countries in Europe, the reduction of the mass military began in Hungary as well. The last conscripted soldier was demobilized on 4th November 2004 and the transformation of the Hungarian Military into a voluntary, professional military force was launched. The organisational changes, involving a significant headcount reduction, took place in several phases adjusted to the changes of governmental cycles.

As a result of this process, the effective force has been reduced from 125,000 to 25,000. The last big headcount reduction was realized between 1st March 2002 and 31st December 2006. During this 5-year period the number of people employed by the Military was being gradually reduced, in phases, from 45.000.

Taking vacancies into consideration, the process of the Hungarian Defence Forces' reform meant dismissing approximately 16.000 people by degrees, which imposed a huge burden on the economy and the labour market supply system. Since 2000, in order to reintegrate people dismissed from the Military into the economic environment and the civilian labour market, the Ministry of Defence has been attempting to establish a system to assist them in finding new jobs.

According to our information a major part of the demobilized people needed career orientation, career correction or retraining since they have a profession or professional knowledge of little practical value in civilian life. There are also such people whose expertise can only be used strictly in a military environment. The rest have up-to-date knowledge and desirable professions but they do not have any experience in 'civilian' administration or economic organisation. Besides, they are not familiar with those ways of job-hunting in which

they would be able to exploit their knowledge and experience. Thus it is not straightforward to make the transition into the civilian world with knowledge and skills that have been acquired in the military.

Its social and labour law background is the 'soft way' of dismissal, which appeared 15 years ago in Hungary, and plays an important role in the caring and humane execution of a military reorganisation which constantly changes and leads to mass lay-offs. The Military is in an extremely difficult situation and has a unique employment policy which differs from all the other employers. The majority of its effective force, mainly in troops, includes young employees. They have to return to the civilian labour market at a young age and have to be useful and employable. As a result, there is a constant and significant migration of manpower in the military, which depends to a great extent on the effects of the labour market.

The professional work of reconversion is fundamentally two-way in the Hungarian Defence Forces. On the one hand it aims at reintegration into the civilian labour market and the maintenance of existing jobs and positions on the other. At the same time soldiers must acquire skills that can be used in a civilian job. It includes training connected with the system of promotion through which soldiers can gain such qualifications (certified qualifications, college and university degrees, different drive training) as to enable them to find work in the civilian labour-market.

It should be noted however, that it was frustrating for departing soldiers, their family members and for the rest in the military when a military carrier, chosen as a lifelong mission, was cut short as a result of the reorganisation. The fact that there was an over-supply in the labour market, the soldiers had special and less marketable qualifications and lack of relation capital, made their problems more serious. Another concern was that these people could not earn enough to create a financial buffer during their service, so most of the leavers got into a difficult financial situation. They could not organise their retraining for themselves, improve their own situation in the labour market or set up their own business. It was much later that the management of the military realised this frustration generated from the unsolved problems. And by this time, it was unable to meet the requirements effectively. It can be

honestly stated that the learning process is still not over. A similar previously mentioned headcount reduction is not forecast in the defence force in the future, but it is an essential task to manage fluctuation and to organise reconversion in line with European standards.

## 2. Research goals

The most important goals of the theoretical and empirical research was to **investigate** :

- **How much the contemporary, officially approved conversion programme is known** by the professional and vocational military personnel?
- **How many of the responding** professional and vocational military personnel **used to use or would like to use the opportunities**, offered by the contemporary conversion programme? What are the **main reasons of the possible differences** between **expectations and motives**?
- How former military personnel have evaluated retrospectively: have they experienced any kind of positive or negative results while they were seeking for jobs for themselves, as a result of formerly using the conversion—related support services offered by the military (if there were any)?
- How can we assess of the current conversion-related activities of the military?
- What should be done in case the current system is not sufficient enough? What are the best foreign practices for lessons learned from NATO and EU member militaries and countries?
- How can be a new, really effective system of reintegration and conversion of former military personnel build up?

## 3. Research methods

1. *Survey research by a halfly structured questionnaire* among active and former military personnel;
2. *comparative documentary analysis* – analysis of international and national level documents related to the legal, political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of the research topic;
3. *Halfly structured interviews and focal group conversations* with vocational military personnel and their commanders, plus officers responsible for human resource management in the military;
4. Case studies – lessons learned from abroad
5. *Secondary data analysis of previous empirical researches* from abroad and from Hungary too.

## II. MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

The **empiria-based analysis** not only offered a simple description of the current situation, indicators of working and living conditions, but also **detected the sources and reasons of the recent situation**.

On the basis of our complex **assessment of the activities of the authorities, and the expectations of** military personnel, we would like to call the attention to the fact there is an urgent need to build up a **new, complex system of conversion** in the military. The research called our attention to the **diverse responsibilities of the commanders** as well, which drives them into an uneasy situation.

To be able to adjust to the new system, the Hungarian Defence Forces have to keep developing its human resource system along with its human and social policy. Truly effective, active labour market policies are needed to apply training (further training, professional training, retraining). Considering these tasks, a new guideline has appeared in the employment policy of the military to integrate the demobilized soldier into the civil society and its labour sector with a minimum of shock and frustration. This process should be useful and advantageous not only for the individual but also for the family, the micro community and the whole society. In this work, the military cannot do without non-governmental organizations which can help by complimenting the possibilities offered by governmental institutes and considering the special interests of soldiers.

## II. NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. New scientific results

On the basis of the empirical research the author **explored the current situation, and found that**, a general requirement of employment policy can be defined and summarized as follows:

- intensive assistance in job-hunting; providing information about labour market and employment. (in order to find a job),
- counselling in work, career, job, rehabilitation and/or local employment,
- labour exchange-organising meetings between job hunters and employers with immediate vacancies,
- managing special employment problems of the target group: within its scope, improving effectiveness of employment services by adding value of non-governmental partnerships.

In conclusion it proved, and it must be emphasized that, the actual situation of the reconversion is influenced to a great extent by the insufficient financial, moral and ethical support of the military concerns, and by uncertainty, imperfection and delays deriving from the reorganisation and lay-offs in the Ministry of Defence. At the moment the human resources groups are performing the task of reconversion training for the troops. The gravity of the situation is also shown by the fact that this task is performed by personnel officers at middle management level. This is laid out in their job description and is not an independent job. However, this responsibility is time-consuming and responsible work as it involves everyday contact with the Personnel Department, the Socio-Political Public Foundation of the Hungarian Defence Forces, the non-governmental organizations and training institutions, informing the constantly changing members of the effective force and, last but not least, looking after them individually. In order to accomplish this task and to improve the effectiveness of the training programmes demands full-time work and up-to-date information. This requires the creation of an independent job. This concern requires that the human service be re-established, the reconversion activities of the Hungarian Defence Forces be mapped, the possibilities of training be exploited and the question be tackled at a social level as well. I am convinced that further research and study is needed with respect to the current and important nature of the project.

## **2. Recommendations**

The professional work of reconversion is fundamentally two-way in the Hungarian Defence Forces. On the one hand it aims at reintegration into the civilian labour market and the maintenance of existing jobs and positions on the other. At the same time soldiers must acquire skills that can be used in a civilian job. It includes training connected with the system of promotion through which soldiers can gain such qualifications (certified qualifications, college and university degrees, different drive training) as to enable them to find work in the civilian labour-market.

The employment policy of the military must comprise a preventive reconversion in addition to the 'classic' reintegration.

Firstly, the present system renders training possible for those soldiers who have to leave the military due to the organisational change (including people who retire from service) so that they can be in a better position in the labour market.

Secondly, it also supports professional soldiers, prior to the termination of their contract, by enabling them to participate in training programmes needed to find a job in the civil labour market, provided that they apply for it a year in advance.

**Lieutenant General Tibor BENKŐ**  
**Commander of Joint Force Command**



**Personal Information:**

Date and birthplace: Oct 16<sup>th</sup> 1955, NYÍREGYHÁZA  
He has been on professional military service since 1975  
He is married with two children.

**Studies:**

1975-79 KOSSUTH LAJOS Military College, Artillery branch  
1985-88 KALINYIN Artillery Academy, St. Petersburg  
2000-2001 Military War College, USA  
2004-2006 SZENT ISTVÁN Civilian University, Human Resources Management

**Military career:**

1979-1985 36<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment, platoon leader, deputy battery commander, regiment operation officer, KISKUNHALAS  
1988-1990 5<sup>th</sup> Military Artillery Branch, staff officer, SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR  
1990-1993 36<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade, Deputy Commander, KISKUNHALAS  
1993-1995 36<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade, Commander, KISKUNHALAS  
1995-2000 36<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment, Commander, KISKUNHALAS (since 1995 Colonel)  
2001-2005 5<sup>th</sup> BOCSKAI ISTVÁN Light Infantry Brigade, Commander, DEBRECEN (since 2001 Brigadier General)  
2005-2006 Deputy Commander of the Hungarian Land Forces Command, SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR  
2006. Acting Commander of Hungarian Land Forces Command, SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR  
2007- Deputy Commander (Land Forces) of Joint Force Command, SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR (since 2007 Major General)  
2009- Commander of Joint Force Command, SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR (since 2009 Lieutenant General)

**Foreign languages:**

English STANAG 6001 3.3.3.3  
Russian advanced

**Medals and Decorations:**

Service Medal for Flood Control  
Merit of Service Medal, Bronze grade,  
Merit of Service Medal, Silver medal  
Service Medal  
Service Sign First Class  
Officer's Service Sign 2nd Class  
Order of Merit of the Hungarian Republic Officer's Cross  
Officer's Service Sign 1st Class  
Cross of order of 56 Patriotism  
Hunyadi János Prize  
Service Sign for Flood Control  
Merit of Service decorated with laurel wreath