

THE GERMAN-NETHERLANDS CORPS AFTER FIVE YEARS: THE CULTURE OF A MULTINATIONAL UNIT

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ABSTRACT

Just a glance at the Bundeswehr's structure and organisation will already show that these armed forces today are almost completely put in an international frame concerning attachment, command and co-operation. The level of integration covers the attachment of complete divisions to bi-national and even multinational corps up to mixed units, as it is the case with both integrated headquarters of the German-Netherlands Corps. The history of this multinationality easily shows that it was rather created led by political-utilitarian considerations than by military-functional obligations of an optimal task accomplishment.

Nevertheless, this won't mean that the bi-national German-Netherlands armed forces had been created without rational intentions and aims. But not the military organisational aim was in the foreground at their build-up but rather political intentions. The differences between military and political interests result in a whole series of questions which have to be investigated on the organisational-theoretical field to find answers on the chances and risks of European or multinational armed forces. The elements to be linked together being supplied by different nations, the organisational-theoretical construct of 'culture' has been chosen to interpret the phenomenon.

This study arises from an accompanying survey of the German-Netherlands Corps since its commissioning and is based upon interviews with German and Dutch soldiers in 1995, 1997. and this year. It is confined to prove certain changes in the attitudes of the soldiers from both nations and tries to give an answer of the question whether the expectations expressed at the commissioning of the bi-national unit have come true or were deceived.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of internationalisation is accompanied by a similar development also in the sphere of military, as is witnessed, among other instances, by SFOR, KFOR and a great deal of military missions under the umbrella of the UN. In the course of European integration, fundamental changes in structure have taken place – and continue to do so – in political, economic and financial spheres, and undoubtedly also throughout the armed forces of the 15 EU member-states.

One reason for building up the German-Netherlands Corps as an example of *multinationality* is given by the necessity of concentrating and rationalising resources, a general trend to be ascertained in the European context, as well as by the political goal of demonstrating the intended deeper European integration through action. Readiness for action was supposed to stay the same or even rise.

The phenomenon of *multinationality*¹, however, is much older than the GE/NL Corps. Within NATO, *multinationality* has always been an element of an integrated and commonly budgeted military structure, without being explicitly named. As a rule, this term related to units built-up in peacetime on the basis of bilateral or multilateral agreements which also stipulated the question of financing. But a problem of the technical use of this term seems to consist in the fact that not only the level, i.e. the assignment to political/strategic, operational, or tactical command and the differentiation between the structures of command and armed forces remain open, but moreover doubts are left whether this term describes structures built-up in peacetime or rather regards arrangements for a particular mission (Siedschlag 1999: 815 f). This form of *horizontal* multinational military co-operation between military alliances and UN peacekeeping missions therefore differs in its quality from *vertical multinationality* as developing in Europe since the end of the East-West conflict with the German-French Brigade and the GE/NL Corps. It is particularly distinguished by the fact that the multinational units mentioned stand also in peacetime under a common supreme command.

Generally, different steps of standardisation constitute the means to obtain military integration: compatibility (capacity of undisturbed interaction), interoperability (capacity of complementary cooperation), functional interchangeability of military equipment and personnel, up to the fourth step of equal equipment and training. But not only arms and equipment are covered here, but particularly the communication between the soldiers of several armed forces (Hahn 1997:341).

Now, five years after its entry into service, the GE/NL Corps as a model of modern multinational armed forces is to be examined under the aspect of *multinationality*² and its realization, with focus theoretical questions about organisations. Whether or not the soldiers from both nations came closer to each other, whether or not a feeling of solidarity developed or even a particular organisational culture of its own has been created – these questions (and more) were to be answered by a research study that was commonly led by the Royal Dutch Military Academy (KMA) in Breda and the German Armed Forces Institute for Social Research (SOWI) in Strausberg. The data here collected by means of the so-called ‘Hofstede questions’ could actually contribute to comparative cultural research in military-related sociology.³ A first step in this direction was accomplished already by Soeters (1997) and Soeters & Recht (1998) by using the essential organisation-culture survey developed by Hofstede for IBM for the first time with regard to the military. They asked officer candidates from 18 military academies and imbedded the results in the discussion. Based on these works, this study will examine the question: which were the communities and differences between the German and the Dutch contingent of the

¹ A detailed presentation of literature dealing with *multinationality* is offered by P. Klein & G. Kümmel (2000): *The Internationalization of Military Life. Necessity, Problems and Prospects of Multinational Armed Forces*, in: G. Kümmel & A. Prüfert (Eds.): *Military Sociology. The Richness of a Discipline*, Baden-Baden (in printing).

² Despite the fact that the German-Netherlands Corps consists of soldiers from just two nations, in the following we will use the more complex term ‘multinationality’ for describing the phenomenon.

³ See the analysis of *multinationality* by J. Keller (1997): *Multinationale Streitkräfte: Eine Untersuchung aus organisatorischer Sicht*, in: *Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr, Fachbereich Sozialwissenschaften (Ed.), Europäische Integration, Prozesse – Strukturen – Perspektiven*, Hamburg, p. 301-321.

GE/NL Corps at the date of the survey, and which were the changes meanwhile to be ascertained. One question here is of particular interest: Is a common organisation culture principally possible, and if so, does it crystallise in the course of time?

The construct of *culture*, as it is developed by organisational theory, will be used to interpret the phenomenon of *multinationality*, since management problems within organisations tend to occur when interacting members belong to (organisational) cultures unfamiliar to each other. This is precisely the case when military forces from different nations are integrated to form multinational units. However, the military poses unique and specific problems for the question of multinationality, as Harold D. Lasswell's definition of military organisations' purpose reveals. Military organisations are, he writes, "The management of organised means for the use of force and for war."

This very specific role that the military plays demonstrates that the particular organisational aim of armed forces has traditionally been considered to be the orientation toward combat and toward the posing of a potential threat through the use of violence to attain political goals. For this reason, is it crucial to clarify from the outset whether or not the D/NL Corps fulfils the pre-conditions necessary to be an organisation proper, one which can realise such goals.

2. Military as an Organisation

From the organisation (or military) sociological point of view, this intercultural study deals with the military as a general organisation type since it is to be found world-wide in a similar form.⁴

For an analysis of the military as an organisation it is thus necessary to ask in a first step for its characteristics. Following the definition by Porter, Lawler & Hackman (1975), *organisations* show the following characteristics:

Organisations

- ❖ are composed of individuals and groups
- ❖ strive to obtain definite aims or purposes,
- ❖ namely by means of functional differentiation and rational co-ordination and leadership
and
- ❖ are conceived for a long duration.

Besides the importance of aims as influencing factors of organisational structure, Porter, Lawler & Hackman (1975: 78f) see the following function of *aims*:

- ❖ justification of actions against third parties
- ❖ information of members and non-members on the purposes of the organisation
- ❖ instructions for action, motivation
- ❖ scale for performance assessment.

For the GE/NL Corps, the aims are of political definition as delivered by the declaration of German and Dutch Ministers of Defence dated 30 March 1993 on the intended fusion of the I. German with the I. Netherlands Corps.

The purpose of multinational units generally involves the same societal mission as was formerly valid for the national units. Multinational units are, however, newly composed by elements or even complete organisations, and therefore they have to coalesce to new

⁴ See J. Soeters (1997): Value Orientations in Military Academies: A Thirteen Country Study, in: *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 24 No. 1 (Fall), 24, who comes to the findings that there is an international military culture.

organisations in order to accomplish their purpose of an *organisation* according to the definition above. Organisational theory and management research can be used to identify the similarities and differences of cultures in organisations.

3. Culture

Sociological literature generally comprehends *culture* to be a system of value notions, behavioural norms and ways of thinking which has been internalised by a community of people, and which distinguishes this community from others. Besides these cognitive orientation patterns, the observable aspect of human behaviour is attributed to culture which is manifested by social interactions and objects such as organisations. Culture here is regarded as a determinant of behaviour within organisations, and as a complex multidimensional entity. Thus, the construct of culture particularly shows its proximity to organisation sociology.

Hofstede's directory research of 1980 on cultural values within organisations, however, starts at the invisible culture level of values. He starts from the supposition that environment-specific mental programs would characterise the behaviour in question. Thus, culture is a collective mental program shared by individuals within organisations, ethnic groups and cultural circles. Moreover his large-scale comparative management study based upon the evaluation of 116 000 questionnaires from 40 countries, he complied with the demand formulated by Lammers & Hickson (1979: 5) for an intercultural comparison at several dates, since managers of a multinational enterprise (IBM) were interviewed in 1968 and 1972.

Hofstede (1980) generated from these surveys four factors of culture which have been used since in further studies.⁵

- ❖ Power Distance: the extent to which unequal power relations within an organisation and within society are perceived and accepted.
- ❖ Uncertainty Avoidance: the extent to which uncertain ambiguous situations are perceived as threatening and the attempt is made to prevent them by formal rules
- ❖ Individualism vs. Collectivism: the extent to which whether life orientation is aiming at proper initiative, self-supporting and private life, or orientations towards the state and service and work for the community are placed in the focus
- ❖ Masculinity vs. Femininity: the extent to which the gender roles in a given society are clearly delineated (wherein both men and women fulfil traditional roles) or whether they overlap. In this context, 'masculine' values emphasise material reward and career success, while 'feminine' values put a higher priority on issues of communalism and sensitivity toward others.

Typology of military cultures

After the end of the East-West conflict, particularly in Europe a peace dividend was expected, accompanied by budget cuts for the defence departments. For reasons of new challenges and the budget cuts, armed forces were, as done in the industry for obtaining scale results - and following the same logic - integrated beyond borderlines. But, similarly to industries where difficulties are to be seen in financial losses⁶, the integration of military organisations leads to problems. Hofstede explained these fundamental problems for the industrial sphere with the different cultures of the participants in the organisation concerned, thus essentially influencing the development of organisation theory and management research.

Oriented by the Hofstede factors, Soeters and Recht surveyed culture in military academies of eighteen countries including Germany and the Netherlands.⁷ We can use this

⁵ See J. Soeters (1997): Value Orientations in Military Academies: A thirteen Country Study, in: *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 25 No 1 (Fall), 7-32; M. Hoppe (1990): A Study of Country Elites: International Differences in Work-related Values and Learning and their Implications for Management Training and Development; Ph.D.diss, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

⁶ See R. Olie (1994): Shades of Culture and Institutions in International Mergers, *Organisation Studies* Vol. 15, 381-405

⁷ J. Soeters & R. Recht: Culture and Discipline in Military Academies: An International Comparison, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 26 no 2 (Winter), 169-180.

survey, however, only with qualifications from the methodical point of view since Germany does not hold a military academy in the traditional sense; students of the Bundeswehr University in Munich were questioned for the survey. Thus, the results are only partly comparable with those of other nations.

On the basis of the first surveys in August/September 1995, the second ones in Summer/Fall 1997 and the third in Spring/Summer 2000 within the GE/NL Corps, in the following we will contrast the results of the military academies survey with our own results, and moreover draw conclusions that are question-specific.

Dimensions

Soeters and Recht combined the Hofstede factors on the one hand with the differentiation *Institution vs. Occupation* (I/O model) by Janowitz (1977) and Moskos (1977), and on the other hand with a *Bureaucratisation* approach:

Individualism and *Masculinity* were chosen to evaluate *occupation orientation* (I/O model) since reflecting on the one hand the importance of occupation compared with private life, and on the other hand the importance of high income and career chances compared with non-materialistic occupation contents.

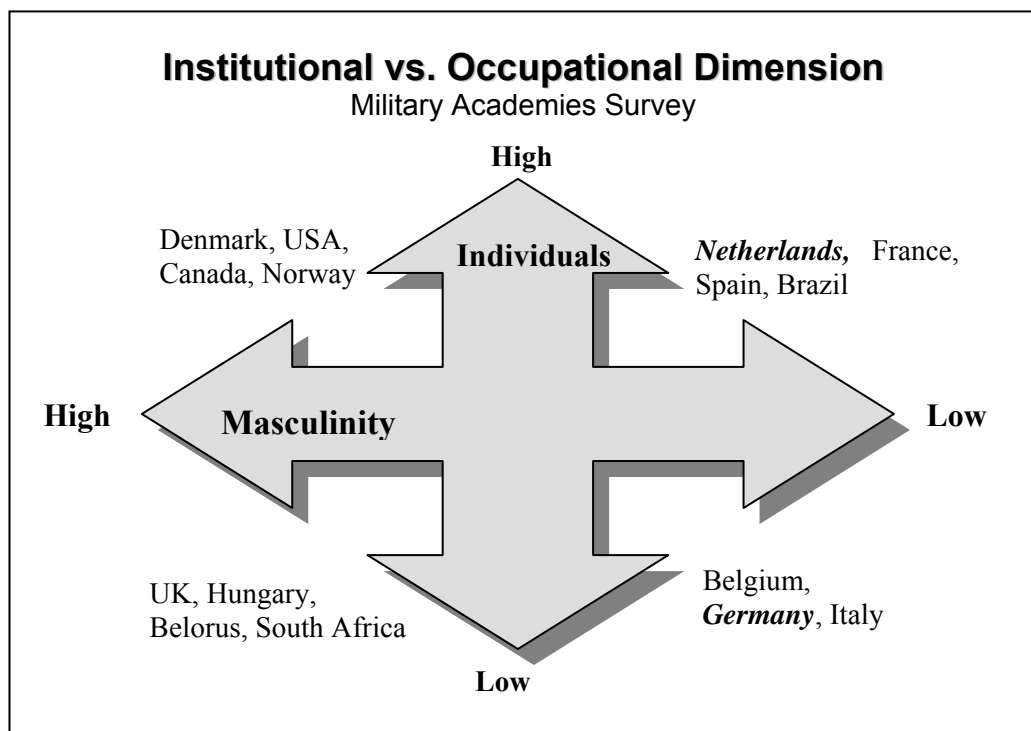
Power Distance and *Uncertainty Avoidance*, in their turn, present the dimension reflecting *Bureaucratisation* within the military culture concerned. This Dimension refers to the functional relation of hierarchy and co-ordination.⁸

Results

Survey of military academies

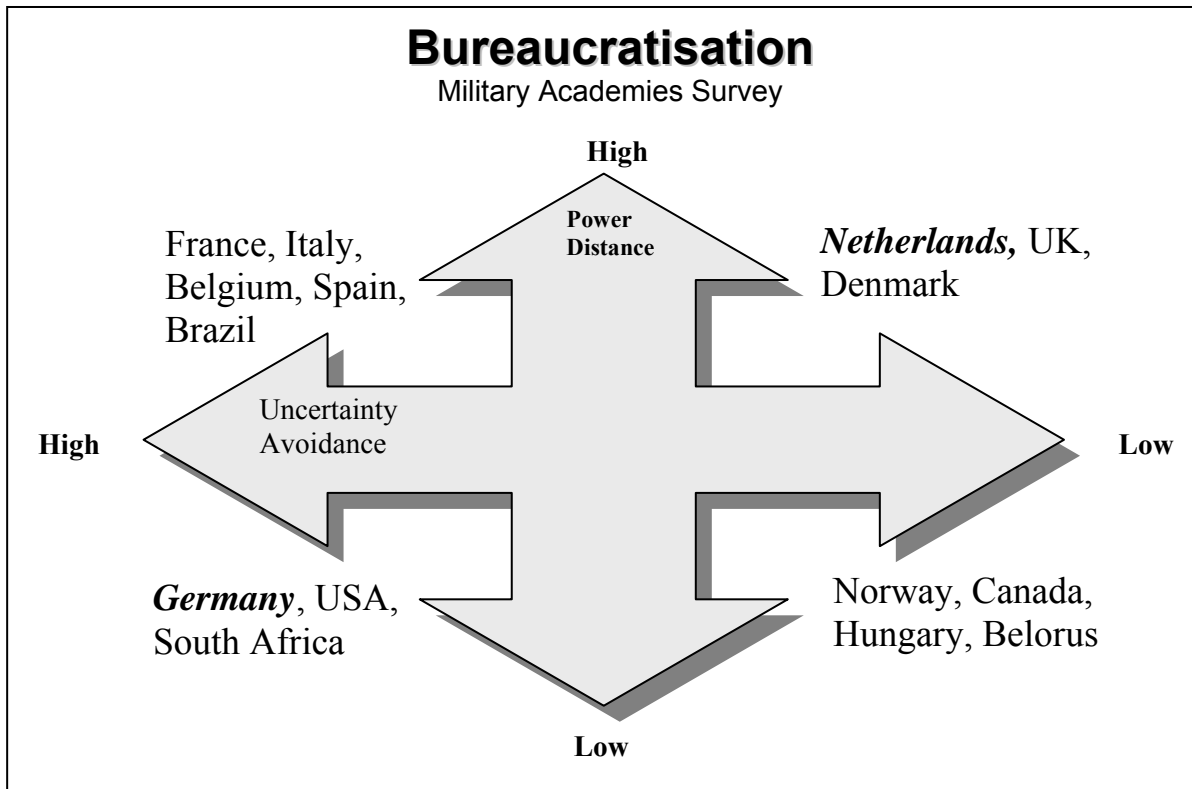
For the factors *Individualism* and *Masculinity*, i.e. the dimension of occupation orientation or the I/O model, Soeters and Richter present a differentiated picture for the Netherlands and Germany:⁹

This diagram shows how the responses of the officer candidates in the countries examined can be allocated to different cultural contexts. When considering the two characterisations before the background of the differentiation *Institution vs. Occupation* in its pure form, the North European and North American countries Denmark, USA, Canada and Norway stand for 'Orientation on the military as an occupation'.



⁸ J. Soeters & R. Recht, op.cit., 173, choose the differentiation (machine-) bureaucratic vs. professional (-bureaucratic) by H. Mintzberg (1979): *The Structuring of Organisations*, Prentice Hall

⁹ J. Soeters & R. Recht op.cit., 175.



Belgian, Italian and German officer candidates in the C quadrant support the interpretation of a proximity to *Institution*, whilst the candidates from the Netherlands represent a mixed type distinguishing in this survey from their German counterparts by a significantly pronounced individualism. The German and Dutch candidates are less materially oriented.

The study on military academies represents the Latin European countries France, Spain and Italy, as well as the partly Latin country Belgium, in the a quadrant, thus corresponding to the *bureaucracy model*. The c quadrant standing for a weak hierarchy comprehension and openness to uncertainty again collects Norway and Canada. As representatives of their organisation, the German and Dutch officer candidates are mixed types, with the Germans more shunning risk but acting in ways that are less dependent on hierarchies.

When trying to typify the two cultures by means of these results, the Dutch officer candidates show a tendency towards a post-materialistic, venturesome and individualist culture, whereas their German counterparts are oriented toward a vocation model, that is they seem to act more independently from authorities than the Dutch, despite shunning the risk.

This typification of the Soeters & Recht survey points at the differences between the German and Dutch military cultures which, due to different occupation and function comprehension, seem to make problematic a common organisation culture.

Survey of the GE/NL Corps

Our results, however, reflect a different picture. This certainly refers to the fact that the basic entity interviewed in the common German-Dutch study shows different compositions. Whilst 654 Dutch and 836 German soldiers participated in the first survey of August/September 1995, these were 739 Dutch and 566 Germans in the second phase of Summer/Fall 1997.¹⁰

From among the German samples, 14 and 17 per cent belonged to the integrated headquarters, this ratio running up in the Dutch sample to 22 and 16 percent. The education level of soldiers similar in both samples with 39 and 41 percent of Germans and 38 and 40 percent of Dutch with high school (or similar) certificate. Due to the suspension of conscription in the Netherlands, the 1997 sample did not represent any draftees whilst their ration was 36 per

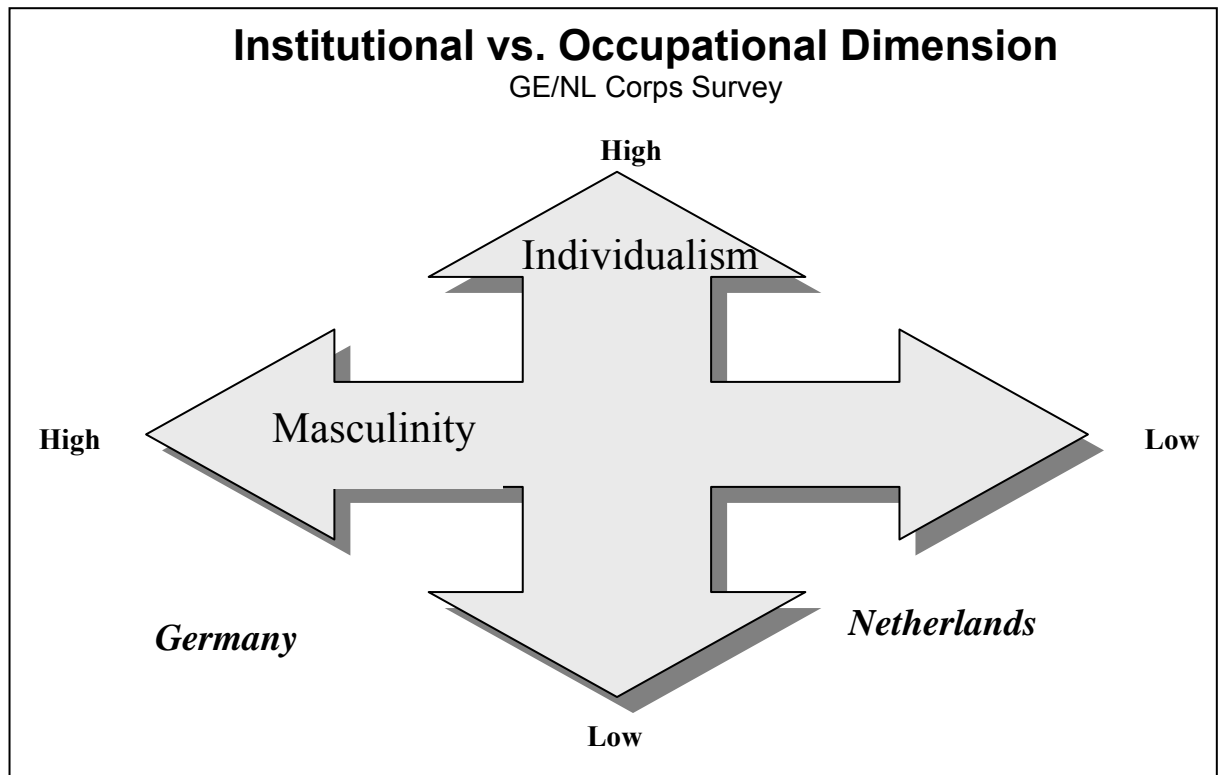
¹⁰ The Dutch samples showed ratios of rank and file of 42 and 44 per cent, non-commissioned officers 33 and 29 per cent, commissioned officers 25 and 27 per cent. For the German samples, these ran up to 53 and 50; 31 and 29; 16 and 21 per cent.

cent in the 1995 sample. As for the Germans, this ratio ran up to 47 and 44 per cent of the soldiers¹¹

The survey shows that German and Dutch soldiers in the common corps are very close to each other in three of the four characteristics as described above. Only the factor *Masculinity* shows slight differences. The course of time, however, shows a slight convergence of German soldiers to Dutch values for this factor and for the factor *Individuality*. This leads to the presumption that this year's survey evaluation probably could result in a certain congruency in all the factors, if the contacts with each other should lead to an approximation in work related values.

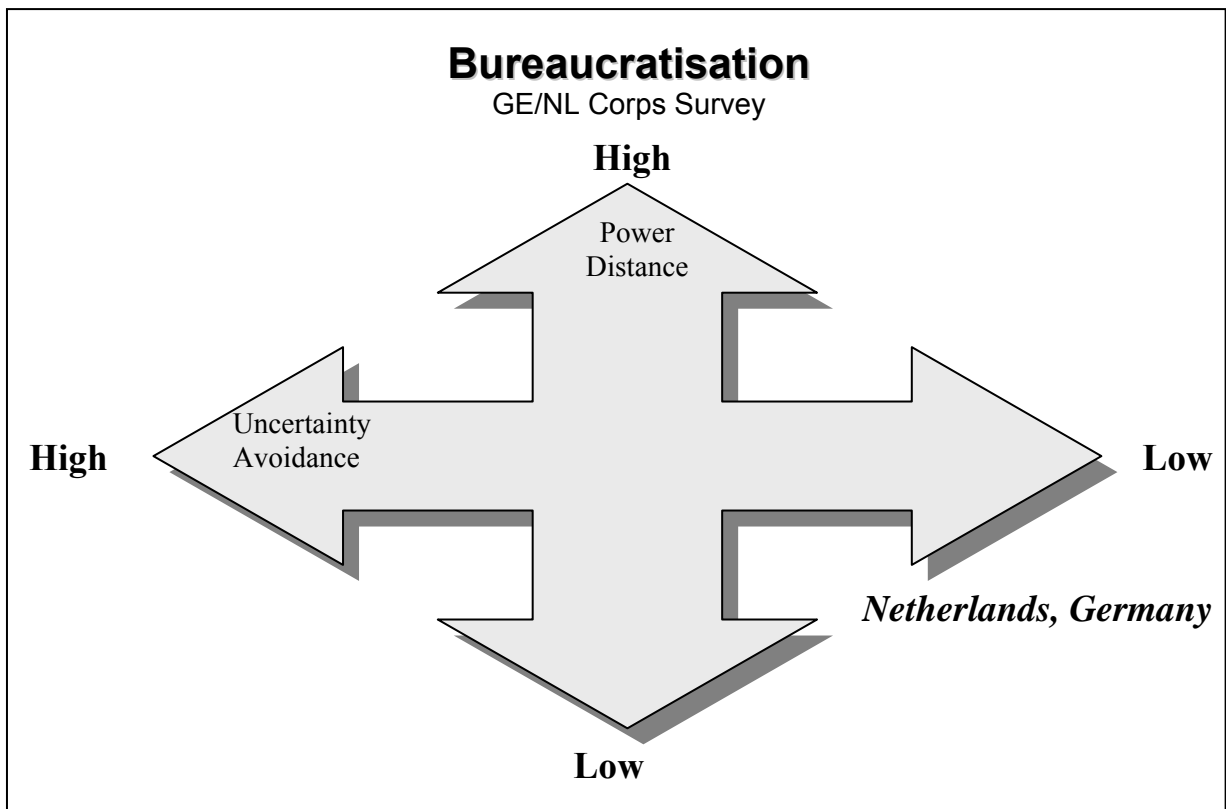
A view of the dimension *Occupation Orientation* (I/O model) shows here the Netherlands in the c quadrant – a place occupied by Germany in the military academy survey. Thus, Dutch soldiers represent the type oriented toward the *Institution*, whereas the Germans correspond to a mixed type since they show higher values for the factor *Masculinity* with equally low *Individuality* values.

As for the factor *Bureaucracy*, the Netherlands and Germany as well are to be found in



the c quadrant, thus representing an only weakly pronounced bureaucracy type. Compared with the military academy survey, the German average value for *Power Distance* remains exactly the same, whilst Dutch soldiers here obtain an even lower value. The factor *Uncertainty Avoidance* shows a nearly equal low distribution among both nations. A presumable draft effect cannot be affirmed, as far as the Dutch side is concerned, since this value remains constant even after the suspension of conscription there.

¹¹ See P. Klein, A. Rosendahl Huber & W. Frantz (1996): Das Deutsch-Niederländische Korps im Meinungsbild seiner Soldaten, SOWI-Arbeitspapier N° 97, Strausberg, 6f.



Thus we can state that the principal preconditions of developing a common culture of the Corps are given. Moreover, tendencies show an approach of German soldiers to their Dutch comrades regarding the values of the attitudes in *Occupation Orientation*.

The study by Klein, Rosendahl Huber & Frantz nevertheless showed a rather poor acceptance of the Corps among its soldiers. This is certainly due to the fact that community in the GE/NL Corps is actually visible only in the two integrated headquarters.¹² After this rather disenchanting statement, the last section shall involve the question: Despite these problems, are there also medium-term and long-term chances for a common culture of a multinational unit such as the GE/NL Corps?

Chances of a multinational culture of the armed forces

Soldiers in the troops still scarcely recognise that they belong to a multinational large unit since there are only few characteristic signs. This could be changed by means of increased common exercises, training and symbols. The survey in 1997 of the GE/NL Corps showed that in-duty and off-duty contacts received essentially (reserved) positive evaluations. This fact given, efforts should be taken to create opportunities for more contacts. Particularly the approach of twin companies is worthy of further consideration since social events in this frame are a good way to become acquainted with each other. A deeper integration also should be taken into consideration. For this purpose, German and Dutch soldiers should live in common barracks thus making them into meeting points, without any changes in national subordination relations. In any case, common Dutch-German barracks would be a symbol to highlight the idea of multinationality.¹³

Essential elements of a common military culture already lie in the communities, even though they rank behind national differences since the identity-generating function of the nation¹⁴ seems to be imbedded in a more decisive context. In order to obtain a common organisation culture, one demand should read that the link of soldiers to a nation should be weakened in favour of a border-crossing identity, thus enabling a common efficient army in the framework of European unification on the basis of the already-existing communities.

¹² See this study, 120 f.

¹³ See this study, 122.

¹⁴ See Ernest Gellner, *Nationalismus* 1999, 19.

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