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# VOLUNTARINESS AS A NOVUM IN THE MILITARY SERVICE IN THE POLISH ARMED FORCES

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## Abstract

Military service is an inherent element of the functioning of every country. Both in the 20th as well as at the beginning of the 21st century, in the Republic of Poland one of the main types of service was compulsory military service. The introduction to this article presents a historical outline of the functioning of compulsory military service from the time the Republic of Poland regained independence until the present day, as well as the general genesis of the idea of voluntariness in the military service.

The main part of the article characterizes the concept of Voluntary Basic Military Service, with particular emphasis on the recruitment process, as well as the benefits and rules of its performance. Then, the prospects for a soldier's development after completing the Voluntary Basic Military Service training is presented, with an emphasis on performing other voluntary types of military service, i.e. professional service, territorial military service and active reserve. Finally, an example "career path" of a soldier who wants to serve on a voluntary basis is presented.

## Key words

national security, The Polish Armed Forces, compulsory military service, voluntary basic military service, active reserve, territorial military service

## Introduction

The Armed Forces have been a tool of the national security of the Republic of Poland for thousands of years<sup>1</sup>, and it is the duty of a Polish citizen to defend the Homeland<sup>2</sup>. G. Piątkiewicz and R. Socha indicate that security is one of the most important values for the state, which ensures the image of a stable and trustworthy international partner<sup>3</sup>. After regaining independence in 1918, Poles once again had the opportunity to build security, national community and love for their homeland. The Polish Army, apart from its military purpose, was intended to educate society in the spirit of patriotism and the associated ethos of military service. Shaping national awareness and civic attitudes in an independent country, this was mainly done through training soldiers of compulsory military service<sup>4</sup>. Due to the obligation to perform it, in educational activities reference was made to sacrifice, dignity and the need to serve or threats from neighbours in order to build appropriate morale, motivation and willingness to perform it. In a talk from 1920, to the question *Why do I serve in The Polish Army*,

one of the respondents replied: “I am Polish, I love my homeland, I worked for Poland and my forefathers died in its defence from ancient times to the present. Can I be different? I must wait calmly until my fighting brothers die and the enemy floods Poland and start his bloody reign here? I want to be worthy of my ancestors, I want to defend my homeland and that’s why I joined the army”<sup>5</sup>.

It can therefore be concluded that the political and military situation during the Second Polish Republic was one of the determinants of the use of compulsory military service as the main type of service, and voluntariness was a feature completely unrelated to military service. A similar situation occurred after the end of World War II, where in The Polish People’s Army, military service was only an obligation. Additionally, difficult living conditions, the possibility of harassment, and sometimes brutality from superiors contributed to the negative stereotype of compulsory military service<sup>6</sup>. As P. Orłowski writes, “It was definitely an unpleasant duty, and not the cultivation of the ethos of the uniform from the interwar period, rooted especially in the country’s peripheries”<sup>7</sup>.

1 W. Kitler, *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe. Teoria i praktyka*, Warszawa 2020, p. 141.

2 *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r., art. 85, No 1.

3 G. Piątkiewicz, R. Socha, *Evolution of Polish military missions on the example of the Polish Military Contingent of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Part I. Evaluation of drills organized by institutions responsible for civil protection*, “Security Forum” 2023, No 2, p. 47.

4 T. Leszkowicz, *Żołnierz-obywatel. Miłość ojczyzny w wychowaniu wojskowym w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2022, p. 147–148.

5 *Pogadanki (dyspozycje) o Polsce i żołnierzu-obywatelu*, Warszawa 1920, p. 33–34.

6 D. Jarosz, *Doświadczenie społeczne służby wojskowej w ludowym Wojsku Polskim: terra incognita?*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny” 2023, p. 802.

7 P. Orłowski, *Społeczne, polityczne i kulturowe warunki służby wojskowej w latach pięćdziesiątych XX w. na przykładzie wybranych instytucji oraz związków taktycznych Sił Zbrojnych Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej*, „Res Historica” 2023, p. 874.

After the political transformation in 1989, The Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland went through a process of restructuring and modernization, which also affected basic military service. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the Polish Army experienced significant reduction in numbers, which also resulted in a reduction in conscription. Along with the military reform in Poland, efforts were made to professionalize the Polish Armed Forces by promoting professional service while limiting conscript service, which was ultimately suspended from 2010<sup>8</sup>.

In 2014, the conflict that broke out in Crimea highlighted the possibility of a state that is difficult to define as a state of peace or war, but which can be defined as a “grey security zone” or hybrid war<sup>9</sup>. This became the basis not only for increasing the number of the Polish Armed Forces, but also for creating and promoting voluntary forms of its service. Concepts of service within the National Reserve Forces and the Academic Legion were created, which, in addition to preparing and training personal reserves<sup>10</sup>, were aimed at activating society in the field of national defence and promoting defence awareness. In 2015, the Territorial Defence Forces were established, to

which “the relationship of military service is established by appointment on the basis of voluntary application for this service”<sup>11</sup>. The actions against the Republic of Poland on the Polish-Belarusian border initiated in 2021, as well as the attack by Russian troops against Ukraine in 2022, were the basis for taking actions to increase Poland’s security. Their effect was the adoption of the new Homeland Defence Act from 2022, which the main assumptions are to increase the attractiveness of military service, including the creation of new types of service, especially voluntary service<sup>12</sup>.

## The idea of Voluntary Basic Military Service

Voluntary Basic Military Service is a novelty in the service in the Polish Armed Forces. A person who meets the following conditions may be called up for military service, including VBMS:

- has Polish citizenship,
- has an impeccable reputation,
- has the physical and mental capacity to perform military service,
- is at least 18 years old,
- has not been convicted of an intentional crime,
- is not intended for substitute service,

8 Ustawa z dnia 27 sierpnia 2009 roku o zmianie ustawy o powszechnym obowiązku obrony Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej oraz o zmianie niektórych innych ustaw (Dz. U. nr 161 poz. 1278).

9 K. Piotrkowski, M. Nowak, *Specyfika pozyskiwania i utrzymania kapitału ludzkiego w organizacji zhierarchizowanej w zmiennym środowisku bezpieczeństwa na przykładzie Sił Zbrojnych RP*, „Nowoczesne Systemy Zarządzania” 2023, p. 30.

10 B. Taczyn, *Szkolenie kadr rezerwy w Wojsku Polskim w latach 1945-2010*. Studia i Materiały Centralnej Biblioteki Wojskowej, Warszawa 2022, p. 157-158.

11 P. Żukowski, *Rola Terytorialnej Służby Wojskowej w systemie bezpieczeństwa militarnego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, „Studia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego” 2020, No 10, p.162.

12 G. Piątkiewicz, *Rys historyczny oręża polskiego*, „Ochrona ludności i dziedzictwa kulturowego” 2022, No 1/2022, p. 148-149.

- is not excluded from the obligation to perform active military service in the event of mobilization and during war,
- does not have an organizational and mobilization assignment to serve in a militarized unit,
- has education:
  - at least university – in the case of serving in an official position in the officer corps,
  - at least secondary – in the case of serving in an official position in the non-commissioned officer corps,
  - at least basic – in the case of serving in an official position in the private corps<sup>13</sup>.
- cook,
- operation of engineering equipment, excavators, bulldozers, bulldozer-loaders,
- operation of field power plants and mobile diesel-electric equipment,
- welder<sup>14</sup>.

The recruitment procedure is conducted by the Military Recruitment Centers and lasts no longer than 2 days<sup>15</sup>. VBMS is held for a period of up to 12 months. Its performance includes:

- basic training lasting up to 28 days, ending with a military oath and issuing a military booklet,
- specialized training combined with performing duties in an official position (...), lasting up to 11 months<sup>16</sup>.

Already during the recruitment process, a person interested in being appointed to this service indicates his/her preferred place of service. At the same time, she/he can indicate the powers he would like to obtain during his term of office. Below is a list of qualifications and authorizations particularly useful in the Polish Armed Forces, which can be acquired as part of the VBMS function:

Should be emphasized that the duration of the VBMS may be shortened for people who are graduates of secondary and high schools:

- driver with driving license – category “C”, “C+E” or “D” driving license,
- operator of earthmoving equipment and related devices,
- operator of lifting and transport machines and devices,
- diver,
- parachuter,
- implementing innovative or experimental programs of defence training or education in the field of state defence;
- receiving and completing their education in a military preparation unit;
- implementing educational programs related to state defence, supervised by the Minister of National Defence<sup>17</sup>.

It is worth noting that at the request of a person undergoing VBMS as part of basic training, it can be ended at any time, which involves dismissal and

13 Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r o obronie Ojczyzny, art. 83, No 1.

14 Rozporządzenie Ministra Obrony Narodowej z dnia 29 kwietnia 2022 r. w sprawie zgłaszania się do dobrowolnej zasadniczej służby wojskowej oraz uprawnień i kwalifikacji szczególnie przydatnych w Siłach Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Dz. U. poz. 970).

15 Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r o obronie Ojczyzny, art. 181–182.

16 Ibidem, art. 143, No 2.

17 Ibidem, art. 144.

transfer to passive reserve<sup>18</sup>. It should also be noted that people who complete basic training have the opportunity to submit an application for appointment to the VBMS within 3 years in order to continue it as part of specialist training<sup>19</sup>. Activities, both during basic training and specialist training, are implemented in accordance with a training program dedicated to this service and the selected military specialty and is associated with the obligation to pass selected elements<sup>20</sup>.

The legislator also defined the rules for recognizing the completion of education as equivalent to completing the VBMS. They are:

- completion of the first year of military studies by a person who, before starting education, submitted an application for convocation to professional military service,
- completion of an officer's course by a graduate of a university other than a military university, who has completed a field of study ensuring the acquisition of qualifications particularly useful in the Armed Forces and has submitted an application for convocation to professional military service<sup>21</sup>.

In the case of students, completing a year of military studies is considered equivalent to completing Voluntary

Basic Military Service, provided that they have completed basic training. This applies to:

- university students who continue their education at a military university and have submitted an application for convocation to professional military service,
- students who, during their studies at a military university, submitted an application to be drafted into professional military service<sup>22</sup>.

An important aspect is also the fact that if the obligation to perform compulsory military service is introduced, persons performing VBMS who decide to complete it are not subject to the obligation to perform compulsory military service. However, those who have interrupted their VBMS performance are obliged to complete it<sup>23</sup>. Persons undergoing VBMS receive remuneration in the amount of the lowest basic remuneration of a professional soldier, i.e. PLN 6,000 gross<sup>24</sup>. They are also entitled to annual leave, which is granted in one continuous period of 2 calendar days for each period of service totalling 30 days<sup>25</sup>.

The role of VBMS is very popular among the public. In 2024, for the needs of the private corps, it will be carried out by up to 30,000 volunteers as part of

18 Ibidem, art. 146, No 3.

19 Ibidem, art. 146, No 4.

20 Rozporządzenie Ministra Obrony Narodowej z dnia 18 maja 2022 r. w sprawie dobrowolnej zasadniczej służby wojskowej (Dz. U. poz. 1078), No 12.

21 Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r o obronie Ojczyzny, art. 148, No 1.

22 Ibidem, art. 148, No 2.

23 Ibidem, art. 154.

24 Rozporządzenie Ministra Obrony Narodowej z dnia 16 lutego 2024 r. w sprawie stawek uposażenia zasadniczego żołnierzy zawodowych (Dz. U. poz. 222), zał. 1.

25 Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r o obronie Ojczyzny, art. 331, No 3.

9 stays (27-day) of basic training, 2 stays (12-day) for school graduates<sup>26</sup> and specialized training combined with the performance of duties in a service position in military units (training centers or training centers) for up to 11 months<sup>27</sup>.

Research conducted by J. Łatacz confirmed that mainly young people who associate their future with the army apply to VBMS.<sup>28</sup> The prospects for a soldier's development after completing the VBMS training are presented below.

### Perspective of a soldier's development after completing the Voluntary Basic Military Service training

As indicated above, the duration of the VBMS position is limited to a maximum of 12 months.

Based on conversations with VBMS soldiers, it appears that most of them are interested in continuing to serve. The legislator defined three ways of performing further Voluntary Basic Military Service, at the request of the interested person. These are: performing professional military service,

territorial military service or active reserve, with an application in the above-mentioned scope is considered taking into account the needs of The Polish Armed Forces<sup>29</sup>.

According to research, the most common reason for people to apply to VBMS is the desire to move on in the future for professional military service<sup>30</sup>. It should be noted that the legislator "ensured" priority in calling to professional service for people who have completed VBMS<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, the commander of the military unit in which a soldier serves as a VBMS may appoint him to a full-time position for professional service if the course of this service indicates the soldier's special commitment<sup>32</sup>. It is worth emphasizing that in the event of initiation of the procedure for calling up for professional military service, the commander of a military unit is obliged to refer a VBMS soldier to a military medical commission in order to determine the fitness for professional military service<sup>33</sup>. Additionally, he is subjected to psychological tests to determine the existence or absence of contraindications to performing active military service in a position requiring

26 Dotyczy szkół ponadpodstawowych, realizujących programy innowacyjne lub eksperymentalne przysposobienia obronnego lub edukacji w dziedzinie obronności państwa oraz programy edukacyjne związane z obronnością państwa, nadzorowane przez Ministra Obrony Narodowej.

27 Decyzja Nr 104/MON Ministra Obrony Narodowej z dnia 2 października 2023 r. w sprawie realizacji dobrowolnej zasadniczej służby wojskowej na potrzeby korpusu szeregowych w 2024 r. (Dz. Urz. MON z 2023 r. poz. 118), No 1.

28 J. Łatacz, *Dobrowolna Zasadnicza Służba Wojskowa w opiniach jej uczestniczek i uczestników*, „Bezpieczeństwo. Obronność. Socjologia” 2023, No 1 (18), p. 114.

29 K. Bieńkowski, *Ustawa o obronie Ojczyzny—zmiany w prawie wprowadzone po rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę*. Studia i Materiały Centralnej Biblioteki Wojskowej, Warszawa 2022, p. 169.

30 J. Łatacz, *Dobrowolna...*, p. 97.

31 Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r. o obronie Ojczyzny, art. 121, No 1.

32 Ibidem, art. 147.

33 Dodatkowo, w zależności od rodzaju jednostki wojskowej, komisje lekarskie określają zdolności do pełnienia służby w rodzajach wojsk i służb oraz na stanowiskach służbowych i funkcjach wojskowych wymagających szczególnych predyspozycji zdrowotnych np. wykonywanie skoków ze spadochronem.

special psychophysical predispositions<sup>34</sup>. For professional military service

a person may be appointed to the rank and file corps if he/she meets all of the following conditions:

- has at least basic, lower secondary, vocational or basic industry education,
- has professional preparation or qualifications or useful skills in the personnel corps in which he/she is to perform professional military service,
- has completed at least the VBMS basic training referred to, unless he/she has previously performed active military service<sup>35</sup>.

Appointment to professional service is for an indefinite period<sup>36</sup>.

Performing territorial military service is another type of voluntary service that can also be performed after completing the VBMS. The duration of territorial military service is from 1 to 6 years, however, it may be extended by the commander of the military unit<sup>37</sup> for another period at the request or with the consent of a Territorial Defence soldier. It may be performed on a rotational basis in a military unit or another place specified by the commander of the military unit, on specific days of service, at least once a month for a period of 2 days during non-working time. On the remaining days, the TD soldier is on duty at his/her disposal. Importantly, the TD soldier may also perform this role on a

rotational basis on other days, according to the needs of the Armed Forces, after consultation with the soldier or at his/her request. The commander of the military unit in which TD soldiers serve as TMS determines – in the form of a collective list for a military unit – days on which rotational service is performed in a given calendar year<sup>38</sup>. After reading the list, the TD soldier immediately notifies his employer about the days on which he will perform the TMS rotationally and about changes to these dates, and also notifies the employer about calling him to perform this service on other days, except in the case of performing the TMS rotationally in the mode immediate appearance<sup>39</sup>. This may occur in order to:

- checking the mobilization and combat readiness of military units,
- participation of military units in combating natural disasters and eliminating their effects, anti-terrorist and property protection activities, search and rescue operations or protection of human health and life, clearing areas of explosives and dangerous materials of military origin and their disposal, as well as in the implementation of tasks related to scope of crisis management,
- counteracting threats to state security, if it is necessary to perform the tasks of the Armed Forces in this regard<sup>40</sup>.

34 Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r. o obronie Ojczyzny, art. 126.

35 Ibidem, art. 187, No 3.

36 Ibidem, art. 185, No 2.

37 Ibidem, art. 170.

38 Ibidem, art. 177.

39 W tym przypadku to dowódca jednostki wojskowej, do której żołnierz został wezwany, niezwłocznie po jego stawieniu się do służby zawiadamia o tym fakcie pracodawcę tego żołnierza.

40 Ustawa z dnia 11 marca 2022 r. o obronie Ojczyzny, art. 175, No 1.

The last type of service that can be performed voluntarily, also after the end of VBMS, is active reserve. This service is performed quarterly, once, for at least 2 days during non-working time, and once, for 14 days, at least once every 3 years. It may also be performed on other days, according to the needs of the Armed Forces, after consultation with the soldier or at his request, and on days on which he was obliged to appear immediately<sup>41</sup>. The days of service are determined by the commander of the military unit in the form of a collective list. Similarly to the TVS, after reading the list, an AR soldier immediately notifies his employer about the days on which he will perform military service, and about changes to these dates, and also notifies the employer about being called to perform this service on other days. Additionally, it is important that this list may be changed at the justified request of an AR soldier or with his consent. It should also be emphasized that an AR soldier may be assigned to serve in positions in the Polish Military Contingents at his/her request and may serve in the Polish Military Contingents in positions intended for professional soldiers<sup>42</sup>. It is also extremely important that an AR soldier can be appointed to another duty position if:

- the health condition of the AR soldier has deteriorated, making it impossible to perform military service in his

official position, and this was confirmed by the decision of the military medical commission,

- the AR soldier has lost the qualifications required for the position held,
- AR soldier acquired new qualifications,
- there has been liquidation or change of the position held,
- the employment needs of the military unit have changed,
- official reasons support this<sup>43</sup>.

Service in the active reserve is performed on the basis of appointment for an indefinite period<sup>44</sup>. The types of Voluntary Basic Military Service described above create a wide range of possibilities for performing it after the end of VBMS. However, the choice of military service depends on many factors, including personal preferences, skills, interests, physical and mental health, and career and life goals. The figure below shows examples of “career paths” for a soldier expressing a desire to perform Voluntary Basic Military Service. Option 1 (Fig. 1) is proposed for people who want to connect their professional life with military service. For example, a person aged 18 may undergo VBMS as part of basic and specialized training, then become a professional soldier for about 25-35 years, and at the age of 45-60 he/she can continue to serve in an active reserve or territorial military service, sharing his knowledge and experiences.

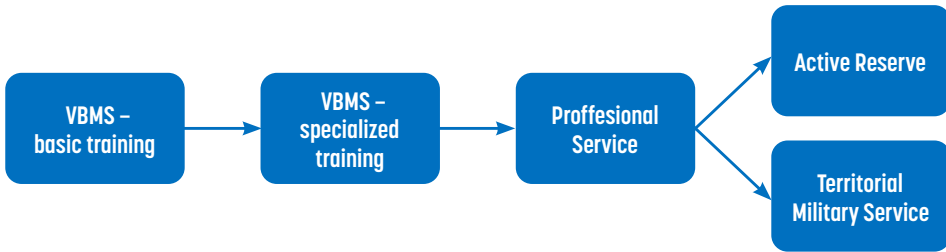
41 Ibidem, art. 243.

42 Ibidem, art. 242.

43 Ibidem, art. 246, No 4.

44 Ibidem, art. 240.



**Fig. 1.** Option 1 of the “career path” of Voluntary Basic Military Service.

Source: Own study based on the Homeland Defence Act (2022).

Option 2 (Fig. 2) is intended for people who do not want to associate their entire professional life with military service, but are willing to actively serve in the local community. For example, a person aged 25 may undergo specialist VBMS training, take the

military oath and then become a soldier of territorial military service for a period of 6 years (or longer). In the following years, he can become an AR soldier, still bringing benefits to his development and to the Polish Armed Forces.

**Fig. 2.** Option 2 of the “career path” of Voluntary Basic Military Service.

Source: Own study based on the Homeland Defence Act (2022).

## Summary

Voluntariness is a real novelty in the performance of military service. As indicated in the article, it also refers to other types of military service, i.e. professional service, territorial military service and active reserve, which may be the next stage of a soldier’s life after completing VBMS. Voluntary Basic Military Service can bring many benefits both for military units and for the volunteers themselves. People who voluntarily decide to serve in the military are usually more motivated and committed to

performing their duties. Their dedication may lead to better efficiency in performing tasks, which has a positive impact on the entire functioning of the military unit. Volunteers often bring with them a variety of skills, experiences and knowledge that can enrich military personnel. People who voluntarily enter military service often choose this path due to their interests, passions or professional goals. This allows them to be more engaged in the implementation of specific tasks, which facilitates better adaptation to work and achieving higher results. Voluntary Basic Military Service

can contribute to strengthening the sense of national identity and patriotism in society. People who choose to serve voluntarily are often seen as role models and symbols of dedication to the good of their country.

To sum up, Voluntary Basic Military Service can bring many benefits, such as increased motivation, flexibility, skill diversity and social support, which promotes the efficiency and effectiveness of military operations.

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