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## GERMANY PROPOSES ALLOWING FOREIGNERS TO JOIN ITS ARMY

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Germanys defence minister wants to allow its armed forces to recruit nationals from other EU countries to combat a shortfall in personnel. EurActivs partner Der Tagesspiegel reports.

Ursula von der Leyen has backed the idea of allowing non-German EU nationals to join the Bundeswehr. The proposal has been batted around for the last 18 months and was mentioned in the governments new security policy paper, presented by the defence minister yesterday (13 July). The White Paper, approved by Angela Merkels government, pushes for more joint European military initiatives.

On first inspection, the idea of allowing non-German in the army seems obvious and begs the question why career soldiers should be excluded from the EUs freedom of movement principle, enjoyed by most other EU workers. On the flip-side, there is, of course, the question of the oath of loyalty that soldiers pledge to defend their country and sacrifice themselves if necessary.

Leyen pointed out that there are already top civilian officials from other EU states currently operating at the highest level. She also highlighted European integration of the armed forces and voiced her view that the soldiers themselves see their mission more broadly than in the past: It isnt about the soil they stand on, its about the values. But, she did admit that the discussion about the idea would have to include Germanys partner countries.

Germanys Constitutional Court has also ruled that soldiers can undertake sovereign tasks in especially serious instances, including terrorist events. On whether German troops could end up on armed patrol in France, Leyen said that decisions would have to be made depending on the situation and would be difficult to make.

During the presentation of the White Paper, the first review Berlin has carried out in a decade, Leyen also put a positive spin on the UKs decision to leave the EU, saying London has paralysed European efforts in the past to integrate defence policy. She added that the UK had blocked everything with the label Europe on it.

Germany has struggled to find enough recruits in recent years after the country put an end to conscription back in 2011. Volunteer organisations have also been hard hit, as Germany used to offer a Civil Protection programme as an alternative to military service.

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