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Governance

Building Integrity & Reducing Corruption in Defence



A Compendium of Best Practices
Volume II

Building Integrity and Reducing Corruption in Defence: A Compendium of Best Practices, Volume II

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The NATO Building Integrity (BI) Initiative was launched in 2007 by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, with the primary goal to establish efficient and effective institutions that uphold the principles of integrity, transparency, and accountability. The BI Programme is committed to supporting NATO, Allies, and partner countries in promoting good governance and integrity within the defence and related security sector. NATO BI operates on the basis of mutual interest and goals, by providing country-specific support through tailored strategic advice and consultations, along with customized capacity building to strengthen national good governance. This includes strengthening defence institutions, developing their leadership, individual and institutional capabilities, and improving the processes and procedures for managing defence resources. It also encompasses an enhanced understanding of corruption as a threat to peace and stability, including in the context of NATO-led operations and missions, and as part of capacity-building efforts in non-permissive environments, such as military conflict zones.

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Chief editors: Prof. Todor Tagarev, Prof. David Whetham, Dr. Grazvydas Jasutis

Editorial board & institutional affiliations: Benedicte Borel (NATO IS), Dr. Nadja Milanova (NATO IS), Per Aage Christensen (CIDS), Dr. Grazvydas Jasutis (DCAF), Thomas Gooch (NATO SHAPE), Dr. Michael Ofori-Mensah (TI DS), Rinske Fieten (COID), and Rudi van Eck (COID).

Contributors: Dr. Grazvydas Jasutis, Dr. Karolina MacLachlan, Alexandra Addison-Wrage, Prof. Todor Tagarev, Prof. Francois Melese, Dr. Nadja Milanova, Thomas Gooch, Damir Ahmetovic, Roman Rukomeda, Valeri Ratchev, Christopher Staudt, Francisco Cardona, Anela Duman, Teodora Fuior, Dr. Stephanie Trapnell, Matthew Steadman, Dr. Michael Ofori-Mensah, Denitsa Zhelyazkova, Dr. Erny Gillen, and Gen. Steve Thull.

Research support: Vlasta Kovbasa, Nikol Petkova, Richard Steyne, and Nino Shanshashvili.

Other contributions: Darko Stancic, Kristina Vezon, George Lucas, and Vassil Genchev.

NATO Building Integrity/Governance and Institutions Team coordinated the project: Benedicte Borel (2020-2023), Alice Wilhelmi (Jan. – Jun. 2022), Sophie Buddenhorn (Jan. – Jun. 2023), and Dr. Mihaela Racovita (2024-2026).

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Introduction: From Building Integrity to Strengthening Good Governance

Dr. Grazvydas Jasutis

NATO's Building Integrity initiative (NATO BI) emerged as part of NATO's commitment to promoting good governance and reducing corruption within the defence and security sectors of its member and partner countries. In 2010, the First NATO BI compendium edited by prof. Todor Tagarev was launched. It addressed corruption risks in NATO member armed forces such as opaque personnel policies, procurement, and military involvement in economic activities, emphasizing the need for ethical standards, transparency, and accountability through legal frameworks, independent oversight, and sustained leadership.

Since its inception, the NATO BI programme has grown in both scope and significance, mirroring NATO's geographic and political enlargement. As the Alliance has welcomed new members, particularly from Eastern and Central Europe and the Western Balkans, the NATO BI initiative has adapted to support these states in strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms and embedding international best practices into defence institutions. NATO advanced its BI initiative through tools like the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, Peer Review Process, and SME pool; expanded participation for Allies and partners; formalized BI at the 2014 Wales and 2016 Warsaw Summits with a policy, action plan, curriculum, and online course; and launched a Trust Fund supported by Norway, Switzerland, the UK, and the EU to strengthen integrity-building cooperation.¹

NATO BI has come to serve not only as a technical assistance program but also as a platform for dialogue, peer learning, and capacity-building, helping to align the security sector reform efforts of partner and aspiring member states with NATO standards of security sector governance². In light of these developments, NATO recognized the need to formalize the lessons learned and emerging challenges through an updated policy framework. As a result, the decision to develop a second volume of the BI Compendium was taken, and work on the Second Compendium began in 2021.

The war in Ukraine challenged and further catalysed the transformation of BI. It has profoundly influenced political discourse, particularly by introducing the public and political use of military terminology. Terms like 'Javelins', 'HIMARS', 'Stingers', 'NASAMS' and other types of advanced weaponry used by the Ukrainian Armed Forces have become part of the everyday vocabulary of politicians, media commentators and even ordinary citizens. Military hardware has increasingly become a symbol of solidarity, deterrence, and strategic commitment. As military aid, increases of defence budgets and operational concerns dominate policy agendas, the foundational principles of SSG risk being overshadowed. The war in Ukraine has triggered a substantial increase in BI programme activities. Nevertheless, there is still limited clarity regarding their concrete outcomes and measurable impact. Even based on the comparison of NATO summit declarations, a discourse analysis reveals an evolving shift in NATO's official language from value-driven governance to hard security, especially in the aftermath of major geopolitical events. Partly, the variables of resilience and human security might compensate. As an official NATO concept, resilience can perhaps bridge the gap between value-driven governance and hard security, considering it is defined as 'the individual and collective capacity to prepare for, resist, respond to and quickly recover from shocks and disruptions, and to ensure the continuity of the Alliance's activities'.³ In addition, the concept of human security can also work as a bridge

¹ NATO, *Building Integrity in Operations: A Toolkit for NATO*, https://shape.nato.int/resources/3/website/building_integrity_toolkit.pdf; NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration," September 5, 2014, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2014/09/05/wales-summit-declaration> (accessed February 23, 2026).

² DCAF, *Security Sector Governance: Applying the Principles of Good Governance to the Security Sector* (Geneva: DCAF, 2015), https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/DCAF_BG_1_Security_Sector_Governance_EN.pdf.

³ NATO, "Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3," November 13, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/resilience-civil-preparedness-and-article-3> (accessed February 23, 2026).

between more principled considerations and security-centred approaches (with its five different areas: combatting trafficking in human beings; protection of children in armed conflict; preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence; protection of civilians; and cultural property protection)⁴.

This requires reinforcing the need for the integration of BI and good governance principles in building long-term institutional integrity, public trust, and state legitimacy. A base for this is the premise that the overall security of the state fundamentally relies on the dedication, integrity, courage, and professional competence of each individual serving within its security institutions and that individual's respect for human rights. It is of no consequence whether these individuals serve in the military, domestic security services, or international peacekeeping. Individual shortcomings, such as incompetence or corruption, and the absence of appropriate professional education and training, significantly undermine the effective and ethical performance of their duties. These visible weaknesses, however, are often the manifestations of deeper, more nuanced issues within the broader security culture. At the core of a resilient and trustworthy security apparatus lies not only technical skill and compliance with regulations, but also the cultivation of an ethical security orientation.⁵ This orientation encompasses an internalized commitment to democratic values, personal accountability, and an understanding of security as a service to the public rather than as an instrument of unchecked power. Without systematically nurturing these subtler dimensions through leadership, continuous education, institutional ethics programs, and societal engagement, the state risks weakening the very foundations of its security institutions. Thus, the integrity of the entire security system is inseparably linked to the moral and professional strength of its individual members, supported by a broader environment that prioritizes transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights.⁶

The second NATO BI Compendium builds on the 2010 Compendium. It offers a more strategic, operationally integrated, and future-focused framework for integrity in the defence sector. It positions BI not just as a governance tool, but as a critical element of NATO's collective resilience and mission success in an increasingly complex security environment. It recognizes that the wider impact of NATO BI initiatives promotes an overall emphasis on good governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights generally. The second compendium reflects recent experience and shifts in the global security landscape. It moves beyond awareness and capacity building toward operational integration (also known as interoperability), hybrid threat response, and holistic governance. There are significant advantages that improve the conceptual basis of integrity and make it more operational.

First, the second compendium provides **an augmented perception** of the concept. It significantly advances the conceptual understanding of corruption by framing it not merely as a governance issue but as a direct security threat. It recognizes that corruption undermines operational effectiveness, erodes institutional trust, and can be weaponized in the context of hybrid warfare. For instance, the article 'Corruption as a Weapon in the Hybrid Influence Toolbox' examines how Russia and China have redefined warfare by incorporating corruption into their hybrid influence strategies. Corruption is used as a weapon to weaken state institutions, compromise officials, and destabilize societies while avoiding open conflict. The article goes on to detail historical evolutions from Cold War tactics to modern-day hybrid warfare and highlights how corruption, once a covert tool, is now openly deployed against the West to erode governance, trust, and stability. The article 'The Impact of Corruption on Defence' highlights how corruption wastes resources, fuels violence, weakens military readiness, and undermines international peace efforts. By explicitly linking the BI agenda to operational outcomes and resilience against hybrid threats, the Compendium strengthens

⁴ NATO, "Human security," August 30, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/wider-activities/human-security> (accessed February 23, 2026).

⁵ George R. Lucas Jr., Dragan Lozancic, Grazvydas Jasutis, et al., *Conceptualizing the Relationship of Good Security Sector Governance to the State Security System* (Geneva: DCAF, 2022), https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/RelationshipGoodSecuritySectorGovernanceStateSecuritySystem_EN.pdf.

⁶ Ibid.

the strategic relevance of anti-corruption efforts within broader security and defence planning. Addressing corruption is positioned as an essential element in safeguarding national and allied security.

Second, the Compendium captures **much broader governance perspectives**. The Compendium moves beyond a narrow anti-corruption focus to embrace a wider governance lens. It underscores the importance of values-based leadership, societal trust, and human-centric approaches to security sector reform. This broader framing acknowledges that **integrity must be deeply embedded in leadership practices and institutional culture** to ensure sustainable, long-term resilience. This can be seen clearly in the 'Case Study: **Luxembourg** Armed Forces' Values Charter.' The Luxembourg Armed Forces developed **a new Values Charter and Military Code of Conduct through a collaborative, participatory process involving the Ministry of Defence, military leadership, and an ethics expert.** The initiative emphasized embedding values into military identity and operations, reflecting the diversity of Luxembourg's multicultural society. New trends are emphasized in the article 'Human Resource Management for Building Integrity.' It argues that effective Human Resource Management (HRM) is vital for building integrity within defence institutions. It outlines good practices for planning, recruitment, performance management, and professional development, drawing on international standards. HRM should support an ethical culture, minimize corruption risks, and align military HRM practices to civilian public service norms while retaining necessary military specifics. The broader governance aspects are well captured by the article 'Military-to-Civilian Transition and Integrity Risks.' The transition of military personnel to civilian life is a complex process critical for personal well-being and national security. Poorly managed transitions can create integrity risks such as corruption, marginalization, or criminal involvement. A human-centric Military Career Transition system supports service members before, during, and after leaving the military, ensuring they adapt successfully. Best practices emphasize early preparation, public support, inter-agency cooperation, and protecting veterans' dignity while integrating them into civilian society.

Needless to say, civil society plays a pivotal role in strengthening defence governance by enhancing transparency, oversight, and accountability. Historically excluded from defence decision-making, civil society organizations now advocate for reform, provide expertise, facilitate dialogue, monitor government actions, and sometimes even help implement programs. Using tools like the Government Defence Integrity Index, CSOs assess integrity risks and civic space in NATO countries. Their engagement as mentioned in the article 'Civil Society and Defence Institutions' is essential for democratizing defence governance and for building societal trust.

Third, the new Compendium focuses more on **operational realities**. Recognizing the realities of today's security environment, the Second Compendium provides practical guidance on how to integrate Building Integrity principles into military operations, including during mission planning, execution, and post-mission evaluation. This operational focus ensures that integrity is treated not as an abstract principle but as a functional enabler of mission success and as a force multiplier too. The article 'Building Integrity in Operations (NATO Military Concept)' states that NATO's 2021 Military Concept for Building Integrity in Operations (BIIO) addresses corruption as a key risk undermining operational success. The concept introduces principles of integrity, transparency, and accountability in military operations and offers a practical framework (Understand, Plan, Execute, Assess) for addressing corruption risks. Case studies from Afghanistan reveal how endemic corruption contributed to mission failures, emphasizing the need to integrate anti-corruption measures into operational planning and execution. The article 'Human Rights Violations and Their Impact on Military Operations' explains how human rights violations during military operations can damage operational effectiveness, credibility, and mission success. It examines how abuses, such as torture, illegal detention, and sexual violence create corruption risks, alienate local communities, and fuel insurgencies. It stresses that integrating human rights protections into military operations is essential for maintaining legitimacy, securing local support, and ensuring mission sustainability.

The Compendium also looks into the topics that directly impact operations – such as defence procurement and defence budget. The article ‘Building Integrity in Defence Procurement’ underlines that defence procurement remains highly vulnerable to corruption. Though transparency and competition have improved, open competition is still rare. Many contracts are awarded through non-transparent procedures. Strengthening oversight, applying OECD principles, and fostering competition are recommended to reduce corruption risks and enhance public trust in defence procurement. Similarly, the article ‘Risks: Budgeting and Financial Management’ discusses how public expenditure, especially in defence, is vulnerable to corruption. It emphasizes the importance of transparent budgeting and strong financial controls. International instruments like the UN Reporting Instrument and OECD Best Practices promote transparency, while opaque defence budgets increase risks of misuse, weaken public trust, and harm security governance.

Fourth, the new Compendium explores **some innovative themes**. The article ‘Evolution of NATO’s Strategic Approach to Integrity and Good Governance in the Defence and Related Security Sector’ underlines that integrity development has been integrated within the context of NATO’s wider policy objectives and the implementation of the Alliance’s core tasks. The development of effective, transparent and accountable defence institutions, which are responsive to unpredictable security challenges, including those of a hybrid nature, contribute to the fulfilment of the Alliance’s mission. The Compendium explores emerging areas critical to contemporary defence governance, such as the management of public-private partnerships (PPPs), transitions in defence human resources, and reforms grounded in military values. For instance, the article ‘Public-Private Partnerships in the Defence Sector’ emphasizes that PPPs are increasingly used in defence to improve innovation and cost-efficiency. While PPPs offer benefits like faster technology adoption and resource optimization, they also introduce significant integrity risks, such as conflicts of interest, information asymmetry, and renegotiation vulnerabilities. The article stresses the need for rigorous risk assessments, transparency, and accountability mechanisms to ensure PPPs strengthen, rather than undermine, defence capabilities. It is not the only novelty in the compendium. Viewing veterans’ reintegration as an integrity issue (not just a social support question) is a novel argument. Poorly managed transitions create risks for corruption, societal instability, and even security threats. Emphasizing practical, field-driven BI tools, stressing the importance of civil society, parliaments, and the international community in sustaining reforms, and bringing human rights and operational aspects of integrity to the spotlight adds new added value to the concept. Integrating BI considerations into mission planning and operations (e.g. NATO’s BI in Operations Concept) shows a shift from theoretical frameworks to practical applications in the field.

Fifth, it clearly promotes **institutional synergy**. A key strength of the Compendium is its emphasis on a comprehensive governance approach that ties together the efforts of the military, civil society, oversight bodies, and parliaments. This interconnected strategy reinforces institutional synergy, recognizing that genuine reforms require coordinated action across all pillars of democratic governance. Parliaments play a crucial role in ensuring integrity in the defence sector through budgetary control (‘the power of the purse’). Despite challenges like information asymmetry with the executive, parliaments must prioritize defence integrity because corruption undermines security, wastes public funds, and damages public trust. Defence budgets, often opaque due to secrecy or complex structures (e.g. off-budget expenditure), require rigorous oversight. Special attention is needed to manage classified expenditures (“black budgets”) and ensure transparency without compromising national security. The article ‘*The Role of Anti-corruption Agencies*’ states that the internationalization of anti-corruption efforts has led to the creation of numerous Anti-corruption Agencies (ACAs), influenced by instruments like the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. ACAs vary widely but should be independent, specialized, and adequately resourced to function effectively. They coordinate national anti-corruption efforts, engage in prevention, and sometimes prosecute corruption. Their design critically affects their success. International standards emphasize

functional independence to shield ACAs from political interference and ensure credibility. By synergizing the activities, it ensures that BI remains adaptable and relevant to the evolving needs of security institutions.

Finally, the Compendium is made to be applicable to **wider contexts**. The insights and recommendations found there are not confined to NATO member states. They are highly applicable to partner countries undergoing democratic transitions, recovering from conflict, or rebuilding national institutions. The article 'Designing and Implementing Building Integrity Programmes' offers insights into successful integrity reforms in the defence sector that require structured BI programmes integrated into institutional governance. Following principles of good governance (transparency, accountability, participation) and quality management (customer focus, leadership, continuous improvement), BI programmes help organizations address corruption systematically. Key steps include setting clear goals, measuring performance, engaging stakeholders, and ensuring leadership commitment. Effective BI programmes balance short-term reforms with long-term organizational culture change. Understanding and mapping corruption risks are critical for effective integrity-building in defence sectors. Corruption risk is the vulnerability within systems that facilitates corrupt practices. Risk assessments should be methodical, using approaches like public perception surveys, expert evaluations, and case studies. Tools like Transparency International's Government Defence Integrity Index help identify high-risk areas and prioritize reforms. In this way, the Compendium supports a broader international agenda for stability, good governance, and security sector reform.

Across the Compendium, a consistent message emerges: building integrity in the defence sector is essential to national security, democratic resilience, and public trust. The articles collectively argue that corruption in defence is not just a financial or ethical issue. It directly threatens operational effectiveness, political stability, and international security cooperation. Together, the articles offer a comprehensive roadmap for contemporary defence governance reforms. They propose moving from isolated anti-corruption initiatives to integrated, cross-sectoral strategies that align military effectiveness, democratic governance, and societal trust.

Case Study: A Values Charter in the Luxembourg Armed Forces

Dr. Erny Gillen and Gen. Steve Thull¹

The Values Charter of the Luxembourg Armed Forces (LAF) and its associated Military Code of Conduct were developed in 2019 and 2020 through a unique collaborative process under a steering committee of leaders from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the LAF and an external expert in ethics. In this article, we will describe (1) the innovative concept, (2) the comprehensive and participatory process and (3) the results. For the ease of our readers, each section can be studied separately. Our contribution was commissioned by the MoD.

1. Conceptual background and an unprecedented political initiative

Values and Identity

Values and virtues are at the core of military commitment. They often invisibly shape the identity and life of soldiers² and civilian members of the armed forces. Values and virtues indicate an inner direction giving orientation to people even in wastelands beyond paved roads and traffic lights. Well trained soldiers can rely on those values, especially in worst case scenarios. But values and virtues can also become slippery slopes if they are underdetermined and not contextualized.³ Think about the strong but shallow value of military discipline. For example, in Nazi Germany this value was isolated, absolutist and personified. Thus, soldiers of all ranks were reduced to mere instruments in the hand of the 'Führer'. Out of context and out of conscience, discipline can lead to abominable crimes against humanity, while contextualized and morally embedded discipline contributes to shaping good people and to achieving right objectives in a right way. *Individual values must be linked to and understood as part of a whole system of values*⁴.

Values in Differences

The same values and virtues can have many names, especially in a multilingual, multicultural, or multi-religious country like Luxembourg. Recruits reflect our open society and enter the armed forces not as blank slates, but as young citizens with diverse horizons and value systems, where language, force, violence, or matters of gender may be handled substantially differently. Think about respect as a value. In a male-dominated culture, woman soldiers are looked at differently than in a culture based on equal rights and obligations. The tragic events in Afghanistan, but also the Me-Too movement in North America remind us that the concepts of respect evolve over time and history through cultural shifts and perspectives. To capture the meaning of respect one has to dive deeply into the psyche, history and language of an individual person or collective bodies. *Values are transported in equivocal narratives*⁵.

¹ Dr. Erny Gillen coordinated the Flagship Values of the Luxembourg Armed Forces process as ethicist. General Steve Thull is Chief of Defence of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. While this case study is significantly longer than other case studies in this publication, the decision was to, nevertheless, include it as a particularly good example of good practices in the field of building integrity in the defence sector.

² In this article we are using 'soldier' as a generic and inclusive term encompassing all uniformed members of the armed forces.

³ Cf. Shannon E. French, *The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Michael Skerker, David Whetham, and Don Carrick, eds., *Military Virtues* (Havant: Howgate, 2019).

⁴ While philosophers and legal scholars often use the terms ethics and morality interchangeably, in military settings it is useful to distinguish between them. Morality reflects an individual's internal values and upbringing, while ethics refers to the shared professional standards that guide conduct within an institution – in this case, the armed forces. Jasutis G., Mikova R. *Comprehensive Toolkit for Defence Ethics: from Principles to Practice*, (Geneva: DCAF - Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance, 2026), <https://www.dcaf.ch/toolkit-defence-ethics-principles-practice>.

⁵ Cf. Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990); Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983-85); Dietmar Mieth, *Moral und Erfahrung* (Fribourg: Herder, 1998-99).

Values and Rules

Commonly lived values and virtues interact with norms and rules, especially in hierarchically organised structures like the armed forces. As one and the same value – when understood in a different context, can shape contradictory behaviour, it is important to draw common red lines in an unequivocal language. This is the *raison d'être* of military codes of conduct applying to all soldiers. Think about a proper salute. As part of the drill and the daily routines, this acquired automatism can express honour, respect, and loyalty. But it can also communicate disdain, and degradation if not performed or reciprocated properly. Thus, a culture of proper saluting fosters mutual integrity and professionalism. Rules and norms express and protect values. The proper interaction between values and rules is an ethical challenge in all pedagogical processes driven by values, but they are paramount for armed forces. *Values come first and provide meaning for rules.*

Values and Ethics

Specialists trained in behavioural sciences know that people buy into values when reaching out for new devices or working environments. Advertising for products, services or positions is carefully designed to nudge behaviour through values. In that context values are either strong motivational drivers or sources for serious frustration and disappointment. In that sense, values are commonly shared inner moral grounds, leading and explaining people's behaviour and actions. Where values are more used as a facade than an expression of an authentic culture, double standards make their way into daily interaction. *In each group values must be an honest expression of an ideal reality strived for by all involved.*

Values and Armed Forces

Given this general understanding of the role of values and norms, the Luxembourg Armed Forces were invited and supported by the MoD, François Bausch (Green Party) to initiate an open and ethically based process for identifying, codifying and implementing a set of flagship values. This truly unprecedented political initiative was triggered by a genuine interest in the role and function of the LAF in and for Luxembourg society. Unlike in other countries, no public ethical failures or incidents kicked off the process. This specificity has shaped a unique, comprehensive, and participatory process under the lead of two successive Chiefs of Defence (CHOD) with their staff and an independent expert in ethics.

2. A multifaceted process

We are now describing the process of the two-year-long project run in 2019 and 2020 under the title '*Flagship Values of the Luxembourg Armed Forces*'. The results laid out in the third part of this contribution are a Values Charter with a Commentary, a Values Table, and a Code of Conduct, all publicly accessible on the armed forces' official website: www.armee.lu⁶.

How it Began

As we are looking back to the early days of this process, it becomes even more obvious how important it is to start such an endeavour without fear and pressure. The open-minded political interest in the armed forces themselves

⁶ Direction de la défense, Government of Luxembourg, «Engagement, droiture et fiabilité: présentation de la première charte des valeurs de l'Armée luxembourgeoise, » October 15, 2020, <https://www.armee.lu/actualites/2020/engagement-droiture-et-fiabilite-presentation-de-la-premiere-charte-des-valeurs-de-l-armee-luxembourgeoise>.

fostered a serene climate in a small country where soldiers are deployed at home to help the population cope with natural disasters or public health issues and to be present at solemn national events. In the international arena, the LAF participate in international missions by joining UN, EU or NATO mandates under the command of other nations' armed forces.⁷ The LAF, with around a thousand servicemen and women, count soldiers and civilians from more than eight different nationalities, many of whom have a migrant background.⁸ Public trust in the LAF is high and there are very few political discussions today about its *raison d'être* or its participation in operations.

Established after the Second World War and a period of brutally ignored neutrality, the LAF were built up on the British model. Today, its officers and NCOs are trained in the military institutions of Belgium, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as it is the case for most medical doctors, lawyers and academics in our country. Luxembourg has absorbed many local and foreign cultural and educational influences. This has led to specific ways of living (*modi vivendi*) that tend to remain informal rather than being codified or written down. From a sociological point of view, it was then not surprising that the LAF did not possess a written values charter, even though some preliminary work had started before the Minister launched this initiative.

By proposing an internally recognised and experienced ethicist to facilitate the Flagship Values Project, the Minister created right from the start a climate of professionalism, opportunities, openness, and trust. Once the design of the project was accepted by the military leadership, a steering committee created by the CHOD with his delegates and members of the Directorate of Defence was put in place. The Steering Committee had the contractual authority to adapt the project plan and timing within the agreed boundaries. It met five times for formal meetings and was consulted many more times *via* mail to address specific questions. Together with the internal LAF working group the Steering Committee was a guarantee for a smooth and fair process. The internal working group was led by the Command Senior Non-Commissioned Officers and facilitated, together with the communication department, all contacts with soldiers and civilians as well as the logistics for meetings and conferences.

In addition, two events proved important for a good start of the project: a connection with the international community of military ethicists and a visit to a centre dealing with values and integrity. Becoming a member of The International Society for Military Ethics in Europe⁹ and taking part in its annual conference in Vienna in May 2019 was useful for meeting experts and to start networking. This was followed by a joint visit with the Command Senior Non-Commissioned Officers and the newly appointed official in charge at the MoD to the Central Ethics and Integrity Organisation (COID)¹⁰ at the Netherlands Armed Forces in Utrecht. Their shared experiences, tangible results, motivation, ambitions, and support served as a supplementary booster to go ahead with the intended bottom-up process approach. Derek Suchard, furthermore, fostered contacts and meetings with the NATO Building Integrity Program. Thanks to that international and professional network of military ethics, the LAF were comforted in their task to identify, codify, and implement a set of core values.

⁷ E.g. the LAF participate in the Enhanced Force Presence Mission in Lithuania: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup Lithuania marks its 4th rotation," Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), September 13, 2018, <https://shape.nato.int/efp/latest-news/natos-enhanced-forward-presence-battlegroup-lithuania-marks-its-4th-rotation> (accessed February 23, 2026); European External Action Service, *EUTM Mali: European Union Training Mission in Mali - Military Mission*, November 30, 2020, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eutm-mali/eutm-mali-european-union-training-mission-mali-military-mission_und_en (accessed February 23, 2026); and UN Peacekeeping, "MINUSMA," <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en> (accessed February 23, 2026).

⁸ Direction de la défense, Government of Luxembourg, «Engagement, droiture et fiabilité: présentation de la première charte des valeurs de l'Armée luxembourgeoise.»

⁹ EuroSME, <https://www.euroisme.eu/index.php/en/> (accessed February 23, 2026).

¹⁰ Ministerie van Defensie, <https://www.defensie.nl> (accessed February 23, 2026).

Quality interviews and their compilation in value clusters

In total, 56 people took part in interview sessions of around one hour each. The interviews followed a questionnaire guiding interviewees to express themselves as much as possible about their leading motivation when entering the LAF and their present motivation to continue their commitment. Interviewees were invited to reflect about any shifts in their motivations and to reflect about endogenous and exogenous, general or specific situations as reasons for those changes. Based on their narratives the interviewer mirrored explicitly and implicitly mentioned values and raised further questions about conflicting values as well as language preferences. The voluntary interviewees were also invited to position themselves with their present convictions about values in their respective groups and the LAF in general. The interviews took place in complete confidentiality and the notes were destroyed at the end of the project.

Interview candidates were invited and selected from all ranks, age and gender categories to provide a balanced insight into the values currently lived, perceived and expected within oneself and within the others. With one exception, all interviews took place in Luxembourgish. Luxembourgish allows speakers to choose between native, French-derived, or German-derived words to express the same idea, and the interviews were conducted in that language. When most interviews were conducted and patterns became visible, lists of word families were created out of the three Luxembourgish language sensibilities. Word families were counted and weighted, and value families were tentatively merged in five-word clouds reflecting the weightings both in terms of language and values. These word clouds were added into the last series of interviews beginning in 2020 when the youngest interviewees were asked in additional sessions, individually and in small groups, to express their understanding of the different value families and their preferences.

By the end of February 2020 three super values with their synonyms and variants could be presented to the Steering Committee: engagement, righteousness, and reliability.¹¹ They were by far the most mentioned and generally understood values. Through the in-depth interviews it had also become clear that those flagship values needed to be translated differently into four specific dimensions in military life and work: the individual soldiers; the group they are part of; the task they are assigned to; and the general mission they serve.

Building and validating a Values' Table

Through expert discussions on ethics with key actors within the LAF, the MoD, and institutions specialized in military ethics from Belgium¹², France¹³, Germany¹⁴, Norway¹⁵, the Netherlands¹⁶ and Switzerland¹⁷, a first Values Table was developed. It aimed at bringing a systematic and pedagogical order into the three core values expressed through the four dimensions (see illustration 2).

¹¹ In the original French text those three flagship values read: 'engagement, droiture et fiabilité.' In German they translate 'Engagement, Rechtschaffenheit und Zuverlässigkeit.'

¹² Royal Military Academy, Brussels, <https://www.rma.ac.be/en> (accessed February 23, 2026).

¹³ Académie militaire de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan, <https://www.st-cyr.terre.defense.gouv.fr> (accessed February 23, 2026).

¹⁴ Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/weitere-bmvg-dienststellen/zentrum-militaergeschichte-sozialwissenschaften> and 'Zebis' <https://www.zebis.eu/home/> (accessed February 23, 2026).

¹⁵ Centre for Integrity in the Defence Sector, Norway, <https://www.cids.no> (accessed February 23, 2026).

¹⁶ Centrale Organisatie Integriteit Defensie, <https://www.defensie.nl> (accessed February 23, 2026).

¹⁷ Militärakademie an der ETH Zürich, <https://berufsoffizier.ethz.ch/partner.html> (accessed February 23, 2026).

1. Which sub-values are represented under the super-values reliability, righteousness, and engagement?
2. How do those sub-values interact within the respective personal, group, task, and mission dimension?

The table quickly became a core instrument in expert and feedback discussions. But did it still capture and represent the results of the 56 interviews? To verify that, the table in which values and their wordings were changed and shifted was presented to four focus groups with 37 of the 56 interviewees in the military centre in Diekirch. Each workshop had soldiers and civilians from different ranks, age and gender groups. An open and fair setting was created through a virtual tool allowing everyone to express their opinion anonymously, simultaneously, and visibly on a screen.¹⁸ Younger participants were invited to take the floor first at each round. The aim was twofold. One, to check whether interviewees could understand and accept this result as part of their own contributions and a future value-based military environment. Two, to validate the table of values as it had evolved many times over time through this process of validation. The outcome was stunning. Each workshop was creative and contributed to defining the final table as it was later accepted by the military leadership during the Steering Committee meeting.

Drafting and Validating the Values' Charter and its Commentary

In mid-April 2020, the project coordinator presented a first draft for a Values Charter of the LAF. (1) In an introductory paragraph, the international and institutional context in which the LAF operates as the military branch of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg was described. (2) In the next paragraph the military and civilian members of the LAF accepted that mandate and the given authority within that specific international and national framework by saying 'we'. (3) From that point onwards the LAF and their members are the subjects speaking. They acknowledge the process through which the values were identified and codified in the Charter. They describe what those values mean to themselves, their mission, and the citizens they serve. (4) Then the draft expressed the three flagship values each in a synthetic sentence articulating their four sub-values. (5) In a final paragraph they collectively commit to the Values Charter.

Again, eight major drafts written in French, and with many variants, were discussed internally in Luxembourg and in peer reviews with the seven partner institutions specializing in military ethics. The final draft was presented by the end of June 2020 to the Steering Committee, and during its meeting, the military leadership accepted the version to be presented to the Minister of Defence who had initiated the process. Once the Minister of Defence had accepted the final draft, the last three stages in the process could be prepared. Since the end of February 2020, the successor of the outgoing CHOD has been designated by the Minister of Defence. From that moment onwards, the Ministry got involved in drafting the Charter and the next steps. The open and result-oriented transition between the successive CHODs was a key success factor one should not underestimate.

After having presented and discussed the many drafts and the final text of the Values Charter at length it appeared that a Commentary to its succinct text would be beneficial for internal and external use. A draft written in French was developed by the project coordinator and reviewed by the internal working group and the Steering Committee. Once the text was fixed and agreed upon, the decision was taken to produce an A4 formatted brochure / leaflet including the Values Charter, the Commentary, and the Values Table in French. To make this set available in Luxembourgish which serves for daily communication, it was decided to translate all three documents into Luxembourgish. This was done by the coordinator and reviewed by the communication department and internal working group before the final text was approved through the Steering Committee by the military leadership.

¹⁸ 'Mentimeter,' <https://www.mentimeter.com> (accessed February 23, 2026).

This translation encouraged the internal working group also to prepare two working translations into English and German with the intention of facilitating any international communication in this sensitive domain. Whereas the French version of the brochure serves as the original text, the different translations showcase how difficult it is to effectively communicate about ethical concepts, values and rules in diverse languages and cultures.

Preparing and Organizing an International Seminar around the Values Charter

In his 2019 Report on *The OSCE Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R)* the Secretary General invites participating States to ‘actively engage in constructive dialogue to build a common understanding of SSG/R’ and to support through these efforts ‘the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN’s ‘Sustainable Peace’ agenda.’¹⁹ Our experience in Luxembourg certainly confirms that such international efforts are highly beneficial. At all times, our national endeavour could count on expert advice from other military ethicists knowledgeable about the specificity of our country.

Before the COVID19 pandemic hit us, an international workshop around the Values Charter was foreseen for May 2020 but it had to be cancelled. Thus, the peer reviews had to be conducted through videoconferencing with the experts of the seven partner institutions. After the endorsement of the Values Charter in September 2020, it became clear that any international military workshop would only make sense if the purpose of an in-person meeting were redefined. Steve Thull, co-author of this article and Luxembourg CHOD argued for a practical workshop focused on the implementation of values in partner armed forces. The seven partner institutions and their experts agreed to convene for that purpose in Luxembourg and to share and discuss their experiences and educational tools. The international Workshop took place on 12 and 13 October, 2020 at the Military Centre Grand-Duke Jean with some international experts present and some connected *via* videoconference.

This academically and practically designed workshop brought 67 local participants together with international experts to discuss best practices for educating soldiers and civilians in a value-based environment. After an introduction about the necessity of a value driven corporate culture, the members of the LAF split into small groups to intensively exchange implementation strategies, tools and methods with the experts. The Minister of Defence hosted a dinner at the military centre and entered into vivid dialogs with the international guests. In his address to the audience, the Minister emphasized how much he supports the chosen approach and values the results generated through the collaborative approach. His encouragement and the ambition of the CHOD to go further gave this Workshop more a note of a starting point than a ceremonial thanksgiving. Further support from the MoD was shown through the active presence and contributions of several officials during the two days.

At the end of the international workshop, the CHOD met with the Luxembourgish participants to draw conclusions. The major outcome was the creation of an internal group tasked to draft a Military Code of Conduct by the end of the year 2020.

Internal and public presentations of the Values’ Charter

Days before the international workshop, two internal sessions for all members of the LAF were organized to inform them about the process and the contents of the Values Charter. A few days later the Charter was publicly presented by the Minister of Defence, the CHOD, and the external expert. During the media conference, the CHOD also

¹⁹ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), *The OSCE Approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R): Report by the Secretary General* (Vienna: OSCE, March 20, 2019), <https://www.osce.org/secretary-general/414725>.

announced his resolution to enforce a specific Military Code of Conduct reflecting the Values Charter for the daily routine, life, and work of all soldiers.

The Charter states explicitly that it also aims at supporting ‘the trust citizens naturally place in Luxembourg’s armed forces’. This is an important part of the process, as you can only measure someone’s values when you know them. The media conference was widely covered and well received.

Drafting and putting into force a value-based Code of Conduct

Before drafting the requested Code of Conduct, a group of military personnel representing the four corps met under the lead of the Head of Resources and Employment Division within the General Staff, LtCol Alain Schoeben, to study existing codes of conduct from other armed forces. The coordinator of the flagship values project assisted in this work by facilitating the exchanges and helping to extract self-commitments from the Values Charter. In only three sessions, with a lot of drafting work done in between, eight self-commitments were formulated. They were presented just in time to the CHOD who approved them with the acceptance of the Steering Committee in its final version. Thus, the CHOD put them into force and presented them publicly before Christmas to his troops and the press.

Each sentence of this Code of Conduct articulates *several* values with a sentence of self-commitment. Thus, it becomes clear that values must be balanced and that they need a concrete person taking responsibility and attempting to live up to that norm. Let’s take the second rule laid out in the Code of Conduct as an example: ‘I fulfil my mission with determination, responsibility and initiative, and once done I look after myself!’ This example shows what is expected from soldiers: they fulfil their mission as responsible, proactive, and determined subjects who only look after themselves once the mission is completed. Each soldier promising to live up to that standard will feel the ethical challenge and choices they are entrusted to make. Each sentence in this Code of Conduct articulates that appeal and hands it over to the person saying just one word: ‘I!’ In this sense the Code of Conduct translates the Values Charter into different situations and addresses soldiers’ consciences in their daily work as comrades.

3. Results and Learning

Ethical thinking fosters responsibility

People and institutions must take care of their ethos through ethical reflection and reviews. Moral norms do not fall from heaven and they are not carved in stone. It is the duty of every generation to make sure that it masters its unique challenges on the background of its traditions and within the framework of universally forged and accepted moral principles. Those principles must be applied in concrete life and they demand moral integrity and creativity. As open concepts, principles and values must be integrated into meaningful narratives which combine personal experiences with personal ambitions, thus opening hearts and minds to go ahead.

Values’ Charter of the Luxembourg Armed Forces (LAF)

The Values Charter is certainly the most tangible result of a transparent process within an ethical framework. Its elaboration was designed as a practical learning field and included many actors. Every word and every sentence were weighed by different people and looked at from different perspectives. It is truly the result of a professionally moderated and participatory process. It authentically expresses today’s narrative of the LAF which will continue to evolve in our complex world where the borders of peace and warfare have become moving grounds again. In some years it will be reviewed by new people and developed further based on new experiences and learnings. Texts like the Charter are snapshots encapsulating situational moments in a bigger picture.

Values Charter of the Luxembourg Armed Forces

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, a founding member of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, is deeply committed to the development of an open international culture based on the rule of law, peace and universal values. Within this framework, the Luxembourg Armed Forces, Military Corps within the Public Administration, is entrusted with the mission of assisting and protecting the population and the institutions of the Luxembourg State, defending the freedom of the Nation and contributing in solidarity with its partners to international peace.

Thus, we, military and civilian members of the Armed Forces have been given the authority and means to exercise our mandate to the best knowledge and belief within the framework of international law, the Constitution, the laws and regulations of the country and in accordance with our oaths of allegiance.

This Charter, developed through a collaborative process, sets out the core values that form the foundation of our profession of arms and our military culture: **engagement, righteousness and reliability**. These core values, which govern our ambition to succeed together, nourish our code of conduct and support the trust that citizens naturally place in Luxembourg's armed forces.

Engaged for our homeland, we protect human dignity and the common good with dedication and courage, and we excel, under the political authority, in the defence of our common goods.

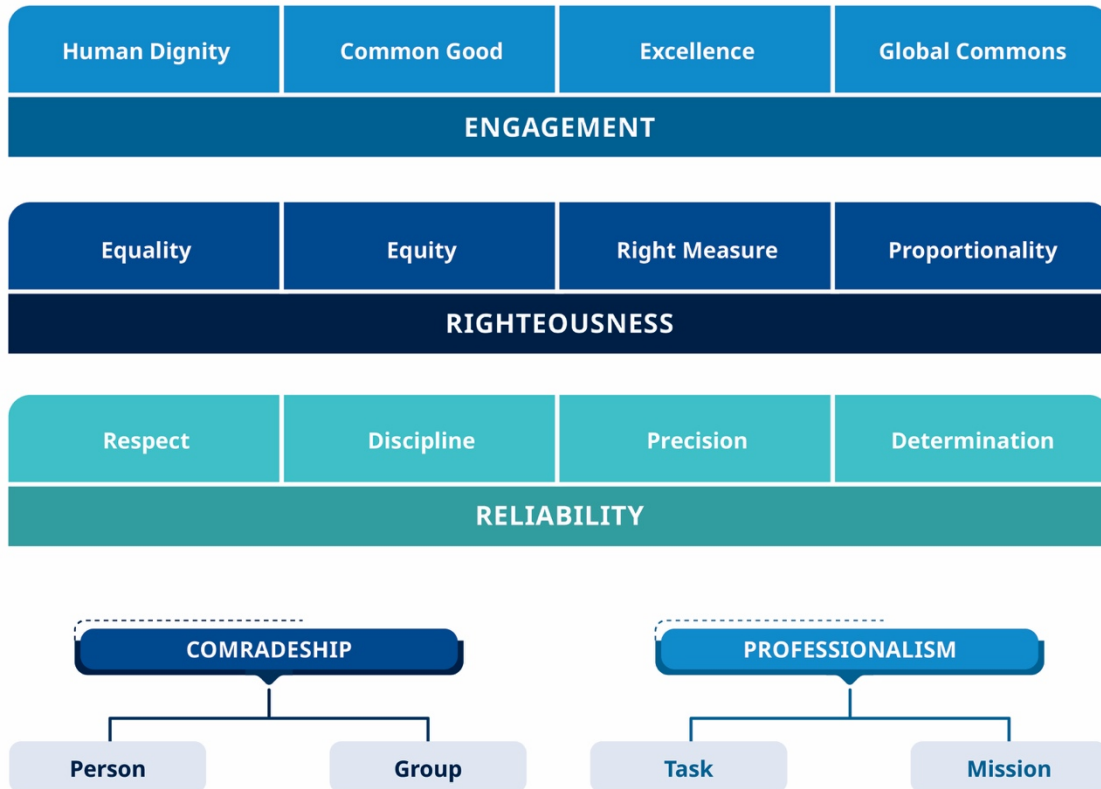
Righteousness and integrity are at the heart of our formation, which is based on the values of equality, equity, the right measure and proportionality.

We carry out our work **reliably**, in a spirit of comradeship and respect for the dignity of the individual, with resolution, discipline and precision.

By adhering to these institutional, professional and personal values, we cultivate a serene, formative and demanding environment common to all members of the armed forces serving the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

Figure 1: Text of the Charter

Values Table



Another result elaborated in this two-year process is the Values Table. The three horizontal lines enunciate the three super-values: engagement, righteousness, and reliability. The four dimensions distribute each of the three super-values into four dimensions: the person and the group standing for people related values and the task and the mission standing for the work-related values.

As a pedagogical and didactical tool, the Values Table conveys a glimpse at something interconnected and interrelated. Like any table, it can be read from different angles. The super-values described in the three horizontal lines build on each other. Reliability is in each dimension the ethical starting point and required minimum, but not an end. Reliability, as an attitude and habit, is at the service of higher values which represent the ends for any soldier's engagement: the dignity of the person, the common good, excellence and the global commons. In our Western civilisation, these values are commonly shared by all citizens and thus clearly express that those soldiers are also citizens in uniforms. These highly abstract and open values need to be specified in different contexts, however. In the case of democratically controlled armed forces, the role and responsibility to specify those values rests with the political authority and the military leadership.

What part of the common good needs military protection? This can be peace at a local, regional, or national level. During a pandemic, it can be public health. The same specification goes with the global commons which must be balanced and articulated in ever new political equilibriums. Think about international waters, climate, outer space

or world peace. Depending on political priorities and situational necessities or opportunities, the global commons will conflict with others. In those cases, ethical decisions need to be taken by those responsible. When and where human dignity is at threat must be openly assessed, discussed, and agreed upon. Military leaders must define the degree of excellence they want their troops to achieve under given circumstances.

The middle horizontal line in the Values Table states that all those necessary ethical assessments will be done righteously. This core ethical value offers four criteria to be considered while deciding: equality and equity when it comes to people, and the right measure and proportionality when it comes to the things to be done.

The Values Table can easily be used in formation sessions for officers and serve as a short guide when decisions become confusing. It offers a common semantic field to structure communication about complex issues.

The Code of Conduct - A Mirror

The Code of Conduct — which for the time being is available in Luxembourgish only — addresses all soldiers directly as moral subjects by offering eight *prima facie* simple self-commitments. Here, as in the Charter, it becomes obvious that ethical behaviour cannot be delegated to a faraway internal hierarchy or sometimes anonymous political level. The Code breaks the ‘we’ in the Charter down to the ‘I’ at the front line, where moral dilemmas occur and must be addressed on the spot. The eight self-commitments must not be isolated individually, because they cover the whole military ethos and represent a critical mirror for each and every soldier. Together they express what it means to be an effectual integer and loyal member of the LAF. They are not meant to blame but to motivate, first oneself and then one’s comrades by serving as a good example.

It is a duty for the military leadership and those in charge of military education to ‘cultivate a serene, formative and demanding environment common to all members of the armed forces’. Enabling and empowering people to behave according to outspoken and commonly elaborated values is a noble and citizen’s task. Good soldiers will be good citizens in the city they serve and belong to. Didactical tools and methods can help foster a learning environment which must be governed by a continuous leadership and a commitment to provide the necessary means and put in place the structural conditions promoting and protecting the Values Charter and its Military Code of Conduct.

4. Conclusion

Our unique process Flagship Values of the Luxembourg Armed Forces was a success because it addressed the armed forces as a moral agent and encouraged its leadership to shape its ethos in a participatory and professionally designed ethical process. It could count on the active support of the members of the LAF across all ranks and the civilian employees, thus giving the Charter and the Code overall acceptance. It was only possible because the Minister of Defence invested trust and support in all those in charge of a demanding mission. Thus, a favourable environment for open dialogue and freedom of action was created and used by the military leadership to strengthen ethical awareness and moral behaviour within the LAF. The Charter and the Code reflect ethics as an ongoing and transparent process which invites soldiers and civilians to get involved as moral agents.

A process is a narrative as this contribution has shown. It integrates and excludes options and differences by creating a storyline underpinning one’s identity and ambitions. Thus, we are happy to share our story of moral learning and we are eager to read or to listen to yours.

