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# **What is at stake when Muslims join the ranks? An international comparison of military chaplaincy**

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In this article I analyse the ‘strategic action field’ (Fligstein and McAdam 2013) evolving in five European countries around the inclusion of Muslims into military chaplaincy. I show that cross-national institutional differences in particular with regard to the state-religion relationship have an influence on the accommodation of Muslims in military chaplaincy: countries with a strong focus on equality in their state-religion relationship are the European forerunners in setting up a Muslim military chaplaincy, whereas countries whose state-religion relationship explicitly allows for the differential treatment of religious groups lag behind, in particular if Muslims are among the groups for whom official cooperation with the state is impossible since they have not acquired the requested legal status. At the same time, I show that organisation-specific arguments that push for religious accommodation and equal treatment in the military lead to a convergence of practices across the various European countries. Similar things are ‘at stake’ in the strategic action field that evolves around the inclusion of Muslims into military chaplaincy: the distribution of scarce chaplaincy posts; training and education of chaplains; security and control of religion; attracting new recruits; and assuring social cohesion, as well as being in line with principles of equality and religious liberty. France stands out in this comparison because it reached a high level of Muslim accommodation in military chaplaincy that stands in stark contrast with the limited accommodation of religion reached in state schools. An additional cross-national comparison shows that all European countries in the study differ fundamentally from the USA, where the distribution of chaplaincy posts is organised along a relatively easy market-based system that does not depend on the European institutionalisation of faith-specific military chaplaincies.

**Keywords:** Military chaplaincy, religious accommodation, Islam, organisational change, international comparison

## Introduction

In Europe, the integration of large immigrant groups of Muslim faith has challenged host-country institutions (Rath, Groenendijk, and Penninx 1991; Laurence 2012; Bowen et al. 2014, Burchardt and Michalowski 2014). Some public institutions, in particular schools, have been in the centre of conceptual and ideological debates about how to renegotiate the secular and the religious in the light of religious pluralisation. In these public debates, the military has received relatively little attention which might have been different at times when it was still perceived as a central force behind the reproduction of the nation-state. Today, most European countries (with the exception of Austria, Switzerland and some Scandinavian and Baltic states) have abolished or suspended conscription, which is seen as a reason why the military has lost importance as a public institution that contributes to nation-building. In this process of becoming all-volunteer forces the military has also had to redefine its links with society. While during times of conscription it was relatively easy to claim that the military was 'representative of society' (though it never was, given that women were not drafted and that alternative civilian service has long existed in liberal democracies) all-volunteer forces feel pressurised to prove that they are still representative of society. Thus the armed forces in Europe face many challenges that range from finding new recruits willing to engage in military operations abroad to maintaining social cohesion despite pluralisation, not along the historically important lines of social class and regional belonging,<sup>1</sup> but along categories such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background and religion that are of increasing importance for all public institutions in twenty-first-century liberal democracies. From this perspective the military is a very typical public institution, yet one whose strategies towards the arrival of Muslims as a mostly new immigrant religious minority have received little attention in public and scientific debates.

In this article I aim to fill this void by focusing on the real, planned and/or discussed emergence of a Muslim military chaplaincy. Military chaplaincy is the central structure in the armed forces of most western democracies when it comes to organising and practising religion. The creation of a new chaplaincy usually goes along with a detailed definition of religious rights for soldiers of that particular denomination and the military chaplains become internal 'lobbyists' for their religion. As such they not only provide religious and more general spiritual support to soldiers but they can also advise commanding officers in cases concerning their religion. Thus military chaplains also take on the role of religious experts in the armed forces and they act as representatives for their religion in daily but also in highly official situations. Therefore having a military chaplaincy of one's own denomination means much more than 'just' having a spiritual leader for common prayer.

Three things should be noted, however, right away. First, the absence of a Muslim military chaplaincy does not imply the absence of any chaplaincy support for Muslims. In European countries that dispose of a Jewish military chaplaincy, Jewish chaplains have taken

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1 I thank Jochen Oltmer from the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS) in Osnabrück for pointing this out to me.

on the role of lobbyists for Muslims for example on issues of dietary requests. Jewish and Christian chaplains have also provided spiritual care to Muslim soldiers if they wished so. This spiritual care that is open to any soldier is not focused on religion but on personal or ethical problems that an individual soldier might face. From this perspective, which is certainly one of the most important chaplaincy tasks, deontologically as well as time-wise, the provision of military chaplaincy services can be understood as a low-threshold counselling service. Second, even in countries where Muslims do dispose of an own military chaplaincy, other religious minorities are still excluded. Thus the question for which groups military chaplaincy should be open is a permanent dilemma, at least under the European model where chaplaincy posts are never distributed uncoupled from a denomination-specific chaplaincy whose introduction requires important organisational change. Third, military chaplaincies cannot be created without the strong support of the minister and Ministry of Defence; but their absence is not the pure result of official refusal either. Many religious communities show no or little interest in having a military chaplaincy of their own. Muslim communities in Europe are currently striving for accommodation in many public institutions including the military but the military certainly does not occupy the most prominent position on the list.

In this article I shall provide some elements of analysis for what is at stake in collective strategic action evolving around the arrival of a new group in the field of military chaplaincy. I assume that this collective strategic action does not take place in empty space but that it is embedded in a specific national political opportunity structure shaped in particular by a country's relationship between state and religion. Even though actors in the strategic field do have room for manoeuvre, the set of plausible and legitimate policy solutions is limited by this national political opportunity structure. Against this background, one can ask what kinds of influence cross-national institutional differences in terms of state-religion regimes have on the strategic action field evolving around the inclusion of Muslims into military chaplaincy.

### **Theorising collective strategic action and cross-national differences**

Many authors have developed ideas about collective action based on rational choice theory and thus focusing on the competition over and the distribution of scarce resources (for many see Crozier and Friedberg 1977; Schelling 1980; Friedberg 1993). They focus on the strategies that individual and collective actors employ to secure their access to particular resources and that are marked by cooperation and refusal to cooperate, general power relations and attempts to dominate the framing of a given situation.

Most recently, a book by Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2013) summarises ideas they have developed on this topic over the past 20 years. Their unit of analysis is what they call the 'strategic action field' which can roughly be described as a set of actors who know, monitor and react to each other with regard to the distribution of certain resources. Some social actors are more skilled than others in analysing the field and 'work to improve their position in an existing strategic action field or define their privilege' (Fligstein and McAdam 2013, 7). In opposition to an 'unorganized social space', a strategic action field is well defined

in the sense that it is relatively clear which collective actors do or do not operate in the field (Fligstein and McAdam 2013, 5). However, fields are also 'constructed on a situational basis, as shifting collections of actors come to define new issues and concerns as salient' (Fligstein and McAdam 2013, 10). This implies that new action fields can emerge and others disappear. As 'mesolevel social orders' (Fligstein and McAdam 2013, 3) strategic action fields can be relatively stable but stability is not natural. It is rather the result of 'actors working very hard to reproduce their local social order'.

The members of a strategic action field share a certain set of understandings, which can be regrouped into four different categories: first, what is going on in the field or what is at stake; second, who the actors in the field are, how they relate to each other and what power positions each actor occupies; third, what the 'rules' in the field are: that is, what strategies are possible, legitimate and interpretable for each of the roles in the field. Finally, there is the broad interpretive frame that individual and collective strategic actors bring to make sense of what others within the strategic action field are doing (Fligstein and McAdam 2013, 10-11). Fligstein and McAdam acknowledge that all strategic action fields are embedded in an environment and that exogenous shocks coming from this environment can lead to mobilisation within a given strategic action field (Fligstein and McAdam 2013, 18-20). From this perspective, debates about the creation of a Muslim military chaplaincy can be understood as the emergence of a new strategic action field where religious accommodation for Muslims is negotiated.

Dominant theories in migration research seeking to explain the religious accommodation of Muslims pay little attention to negotiations among actors on the organisational level. They rather emphasise the importance of cross-national ideological differences with regard to the state-religion relationship. In the logic of Fligstein and McAdam (2013) such cross-national ideological differences should influence the common understanding of all actors regarding the rules in the field – that is, what strategies are possible, legitimate and interpretable. The countries chosen for this study show such cross-national institutional differences in terms of state-religion relationship. Three of the six countries under study follow an ideology of equal treatment for all religious groups. In the case of the Netherlands and the USA this equal treatment principle translates into equal support by the state for religious groups, allowing them to unfold in the public and the private sphere. Jonathan Fox (2008) calls this 'accommodation'. In the case of French *laïcité*, the principle of equal treatment translates into equal restrictions on the expression and practice of faith in the public sphere for all groups. This is why Fox (2008) classifies France as 'separationist'. Three other countries follow an ideology of state-religion relationship that allows for the differential treatment of religious groups. Austria, Belgium and Germany all implement so-called models of 'cooperation' between state and religion (Fox 2008, 108-109) where selected religious groups that have been officially recognised as corporations under public law closely cooperate with the state on selected topics such as military chaplaincy. In the cases of Belgium and Austria, Islam has been recognised as a corporation under public law and hence as an official partner for the state since 1912 and 1974 respectively (Mattes and Rosenberger 2014; Torrekens 2014). In Germany, this official recognition of a Muslim body

as a corporation under public law is still pending. Other models of state-religion relationship (Fox 2008, 108-109) namely 'one official religion' (for example Norway as well as Denmark and Sweden until the recent past) and 'multiple official religions' (for example Finland and the UK) have not been taken into consideration in this study.

### **The state of the art and the research design of this study**

The scientific literature on strategies towards religious pluralism in the field of military chaplaincy is very scarce. There is a growing but still small body of literature that focuses on strategies pursued by public institutions other than the military regarding religious pluralism (Khosrokhavar 2004; Beckford, Joly, and Khosrokhavar 2005; Thériault 2009; Becci 2011; Gauthier 2011; Stoeckl and Roy forthcoming 2014). Many publications on military chaplaincy have been produced in a military context and focus on military chaplaincy in general or on aspects other than religious pluralism, for example on the role of chaplains in peace processes (Dörfler-Dierken 2008). Some studies, all them ordered or supported by the respective armed forces, have studied the situation of individual Muslim soldiers in the military (Baumgarten and Gober 2002; Bertossi and Wihtol de Wenden 2007;<sup>2</sup> Bosman 2008; Settoul 2008; Menke and Tomforde 2010; Menke and Langer 2011; Krainz 2012; Sandhoff 2013; Bertossi 2014). From a similar perspective, two edited volumes look at diversity in the military with regard to ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation (Soeters and van der Meulen 2007, Kümmel 2012). Closest to this study, focused only on the USA, is Kim Hansen's (2012) book on chaplains and religious diversity. Hansen studies how religion is managed formally by Department of Defense policies and how chaplains work within this framework. In his case study of Wicca and Islam, Hansen concludes that Muslims are probably more easily accommodated than are Wicca because they are closer to Christianity. He concludes that what is desirable from a military perspective, namely a very broad and open-minded military chaplaincy able to work ecumenically, is difficult to achieve on the ground because some groups, in particular proselytising Christian Evangelicals, clearly reject this logic (Hansen 2012, 165-201). In the 1990s Martin Bock produced an international comparison of military chaplaincy that is largely descriptive and focuses on structural components of military chaplaincy such as its financing and the management within the military structure (Bock 1992, 1994, 1998). In addition, there are a few single-case studies on military chaplaincy such as a comparison by Inger Furseth (2003) on the role of Islam in the military and prisons in Norway. In addition, the Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies has produced research on (inter alia) military chaplaincy in the United Kingdom (Todd forthcoming).

The findings in this study result from a qualitative comparative research based on semi-structured interviews with religious experts in the armed forces of various Western European countries and the USA. The sample of interviewees is not representative of a

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2        The study by Bertossi and Wihtol de Wenden (2007) is exceptional in the sense that it was initially ordered by the French Ministry of Defence and then published in an academic context against the wishes of the Ministry.

particular religious group, of the entire corps of chaplains corps, or of the armed forces under study. I interviewed experts who in many cases are chiefs of chaplains. They have an exposed position within their organisation and are particularly knowledgeable regarding the question of religion in the military. Since this knowledge is published only to a very small extent, the interviews allow me to identify organisational logics and strategies in response to religious diversity as well as arguments supporting these strategies. I pay special attention to the influence of the respective national environment on these strategies. I always asked about comparisons with other countries in my interviews and found military chaplains to be very internationalised and well informed about the situation in other countries. In particular religious minority chaplains in Europe know about their homologues in other European countries. The study relies on 42 formal interviews in German, French, English and Dutch (based on full transcripts of written records taken during the interviews), 10 informal discussions (documented only via short notes on recollections from memory after the discussion) and written records on the participation in three conferences that brought together academics and practitioners (military chaplains). In addition, I did extensive internet research mainly on military or military chaplaincy related websites, on government and parliament websites and in the media. I also consulted the publications that were produced by the various military chaplaincies and given to me during interviews. All interview reports and internet sources providing information not mentioned by the interviews were coded with a theoretically-derived and empirically confirmed coding scheme (Mayring 2008; Gläser and Laudel 2009) using Atlas.ti. This coding scheme brought to the fore the five different issues of 'what is at stake' in military chaplaincy when Muslims join the ranks presented below.

### **Findings on the organisation of military chaplaincy**

The existence of military chaplaincy is not a natural given but a religious accommodation that is provided by many secular states throughout the world. This accommodation is contested by pacifists who are inspired by (Christian) religious principles of non-violence and oppose all forms of institutional cooperation between the military and the church, or by those with left-wing political views critical of the military and often religion as well.<sup>3</sup> Ines-Jacqueline Werkner notes that state-financed chaplaincy posts and social influence in a public institution are a major motive for the Protestant Church in Germany to maintain cooperation with the state in the field of military chaplaincy (Werkner 2004, 30-31). Aware of such criticism, military chaplains usually underline that they do not bear arms, that they have one foot in the military but also one foot outside and that their motivation is not 'win a war' but to provide spiritual assistance to individuals who unarguably face dire conditions and are thus in need of help.

In Europe, the USA and other countries with Christian majorities, military chaplaincy posts were first granted to Christians. Then, in particular during times of war and colonial

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3 See for example the material at <http://globnetabolishmilitarychaplaincy.webnode.com> and [www.ibka.org/artikel/militaer.html](http://www.ibka.org/artikel/militaer.html)

empire, Jewish and Muslim chaplains were allowed or invited to join the military (Hank, Simon, and Hank 2013; Heidborn 2014). After the Second World War Western European countries such as Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands reverted to all-Christian military chaplaincies. In the following section I present how these all-Christian chaplaincies opened up to other (faith) groups, describing pair-wise the current situation in the different countries. The section ends with a presentation of the contrasting situation in the USA.

### *A chaplaincy for Jews, a chaplaincy for Muslims: the Netherlands and France*

The Netherlands and France are two countries that cherish the idea of equal treatment of all religious groups; but they diverge on their ideas on how to achieve such equal treatment. While the Netherlands favours equal public support for all groups, France favours equal non-support for all groups. Yet, when it comes to military chaplaincy, France and the Netherlands both turn out to be particularly supportive, though in different ways.

Among all European armed forces the armed forces of the Netherlands dispose of the highest number of non-Christian religious groups established as full military chaplaincies:<sup>4</sup> as well as Catholic and Protestant there are Humanist, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu chaplaincies. Yet most of the 151 chaplain posts are distributed among what are called in the Dutch military the three 'big services': there are 55 Catholic chaplaincy posts, 52 Protestant and 38 Humanist 38 posts. The so-called 'small services of military chaplaincy' (Jewish, Muslim and Hindu) have only two chaplains each.

The situation is different in France. Even though the total number of religious groups represented in French military chaplaincy is smaller than in the Netherlands – namely four, two of which are Christian – France has attributed the highest share in terms of total chaplaincy posts available to Muslims as an (immigrant) religious minority. Of the 228 full-time chaplaincy posts, 139 are granted to the Catholic military chaplaincy, 34 to the Protestant, 17 to the Jewish, and 38 to the Muslim military chaplaincy: Muslim chaplains thus make up almost 17 per cent of all chaplains to the French armed forces. This situation is unique in Europe.

In addition, France and the Netherlands are as of January 2015 not only the only two European countries with a fully established Muslim military chaplaincy (the British Muslim military chaplain has civilian status); these two countries are also, with Hungary and the UK, the only European countries that have a formally established Jewish military chaplaincy.<sup>5</sup> In

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4 The UK accommodates more groups, but apart from the Jewish chaplaincy these are all Christian groups: Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Elim or Assemblies of God. The four so-called 'world faith chaplains' (Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist) are civilians, not full military chaplains.

5 For a survey on the existence of a Muslim military chaplaincy see the WZB Berlin Social Science Center research project 'Indicators of Citizenship Rights for Immigrants' that provides information on 15 European countries including those with the highest share of



France, this has existed since the nineteenth century; it ceased to exist under the Vichy regime but was quickly re-established after the Second World War. In the Netherlands, a Jewish chaplaincy emerged in the *Prinses Irene Brigade* that was in British exile during the Second World War and it was fully established within the Dutch armed forces in 1967. One interesting aspect of these Jewish military chaplaincies is that in the interviews, both the Dutch and the French Jewish chief of chaplains stated that they assisted Muslim soldiers, for example with dietary requests, before the arrival of the Muslim chaplaincy.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that Jewish military chaplaincies have acted as internal lobbyists for Muslims. (On the relevance of internal lobbyists for the adoption of diversity measures see Dobbin, Kim, and Kalev 2011.) As far as the Netherlands are concerned, it should be noted that despite the pre-existence of a Jewish and a Hindu chaplaincy (created in 2003) staffing decisions for the Muslim military chaplaincy were slow and contentious. After an initial decision to create such a chaplaincy was made as early as 2004, several years passed during which the two Muslim representative bodies in the Netherlands did not agree on who should have the authority to endorse military chaplains (Hilali 2007). After the CMO (*Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid*) had proven to be a more reliable partner in communication with the Ministry of Defence, the government unilaterally decided to take up negotiations with the CMO (Hilali 2007). One of the two candidates nominated as a result of these negotiations, however, was heavily criticised by some conservative and right-wing liberal parties for being too orthodox and allegedly disloyal towards the Netherlands. The minister of defence had to justify his staffing decision before the Dutch Parliament, which was a very unusual procedure. The Muslim military chaplaincy finally started functioning in 2009. In France, no comparable conflict emerged. After the French representative body for Muslims was created in 2003, the French minister of defence at that time, Michèle Alliot-Marie, published a ministerial directive in 2005 that stipulated the creation of a Muslim military chaplaincy. Chaplaincies in

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Muslims at wzb.icri.eu. In some countries, there is case-to-case cooperation between the military and, for example, the country's Jewish representative body, which is an interesting alternative to the European standard model of full institutional establishment. However, unlike fully established military chaplaincies, these case-to-case collaborations have little impact on the military organisation. They do not function as lobbies within the military, but respond only to the specific needs of one specific soldier.

6 At a conference in Paris in October 2012, a Jewish chaplain from the British armed forces voiced concern over the fact that Muslims and three other so-called 'world faith groups' had a civilian and not a military status: this limited their impact on the military and their room for manoeuvre as chaplains and ultimately resulted in a differential treatment of so-called 'world faith groups' in the British armed forces. As a concrete example we might note the fact that on an occasion when the bodies of Muslim soldiers who had died in Afghanistan were repatriated to Britain, the Muslim chaplain was not allowed to welcome them on the airfield because this function was reserved to 'real' chaplains. He finally managed to accompany the Christian chaplain, but this did not constitute a precedent.

prisons and hospitals followed in 2005 and 2006. The first Muslim military chaplains were recruited among military personnel who were already serving in the French armed forces. This was partially made possible by the 2005 ministerial directive lowering the level of education for military chaplains from 'bac +5' (high school diploma plus 5 years of university education) to high school diploma. All internal and external candidates for Muslim military chaplaincy were then requested to participate in a *laïcité* training provided by the *Institut Catholique*, a Catholic institute of higher education that was initially the only university to have accepted a cooperation agreement with the French state for training religious personnel in the history and politics of the French Republic with a special focus on *laïcité*, in French law, in the sociology of religion and in interculturalism.

### ***A Muslim chaplaincy planned but not enacted: Austria and Belgium***

Austria and Belgium differ from France and the Netherlands since cooperation between the state and selected religious communities in these two countries allows for a differential treatment of religious groups. In both countries Islam has acquired the position of a corporation under public law which entails public recognition as a partner for cooperation with the state in various fields, including military chaplaincy. A Muslim military chaplaincy is planned but not yet achieved in either of the two countries, which is surprising since Islam has been recognised for more than 100 years in Austria and for almost 40 years in Belgium.

Since 2008, the Austrian military budget has entailed two Muslim chaplaincy posts (see also Krainz in this issue). The Austrian Ministry of Defence wanted to staff these two posts when they were created in 2008, but as interviewees from the Ministry of Defence and the military chaplaincies explained, the representative body for Islam in Austria (*Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich* (IGGIÖ)), under its previous board<sup>7</sup> had presented two 'unsuitable' candidates who were rejected by the Ministry (apparently, one had previously been rejected as an Islamic religion schoolteacher for not supporting liberal democracy, and the other one had a criminal record). Interviewees also pointed out that the Ministry was not particularly interested in having a Muslim military chaplaincy after the concentration of all self-declared orthodox (*strenggläubig*) Muslim recruits in the *Maria-Theresien Kaserne* (barracks) in Vienna had been dissolved. Initially, the Austrian military had located all Muslim recruits who declared themselves to be orthodox in their religious practice in this Vienna barracks in order to assure the provision of meals without pork. Between 2005 and 2011, a cheaper central cooking method based on multicomponent meals was introduced in the Austrian military. As a side-effect, meals without pork became available in other parts of the country and thus rendered superfluous the concentration of Muslim recruits in Vienna. At the height of Muslim concentration, however, up to 60 military and civilian employees attended Friday prayers in a prayer room located on military premises. This prayer room had been set up on the initiative of one civilian employee of the Austrian military who was supported by individual donations. Next to the prayer room an office for the first Muslim

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7 Elections were held in 2011.

chaplain expected to arrive in 2008 had been set up. The civilian employee was interested in taking this post but was unable to apply since he did not meet the university education requirements for chaplains in the Austrian military. When the concentration of orthodox Muslims in the Vienna barrack ended, the prayer room lost its importance, the civilian employee was relocated to another military site and the office for the first chaplain remained empty. Six years after the planned start of a Muslim chaplaincy, negotiations about how to staff the two posts are still ongoing. In the meantime, in 2012, an Orthodox Christian military chaplain has joined the Austrian armed forces on a civilian contractual basis; he joins the 22 Catholic and 7 Protestant chaplains.

In Belgium, one full Muslim chaplaincy post was supposed to be filled from 2014/2015 but has not been filled as of February 2015. The delayed arrival of a Muslim military chaplaincy fits into the overall picture of a relatively weak military chaplaincy. In contrast to other countries where chaplaincies are well-identifiable units in the military that for example have of their own websites, the Belgian military chaplaincy is integrated into the service of well-being, thus working alongside social workers and psychologists. Since the arrival of the Humanist military chaplaincy in 1998, the Protestant military chaplaincy has grown weaker: from initially 7 military chaplain posts, it is down to only one in 2014, while the Humanists now hold 8 posts, second to the Catholics with 14. Initially, the Jewish faith also had one post, held by a rabbi, but he found it very difficult to maintain an entire chaplaincy on his own. The Protestants, who in early 2013 still had three posts, were obliged to surrender two of them by 2014/2015 and are afraid that they will face the same problem. The Jewish post is now vacant; the Muslim chaplaincy has a secretariat that is currently staffed part-time by a veteran. As in Austria, the Ministry of Defence argues that the Muslim Executive of Belgium (*Exécutif des musulmans de Belgique / Executief van de Moslims van België*) (see Torrekens 2014) is not able to agree on a 'suitable' candidate. Thus negotiations over how to staff the post are slow.

### ***Multiple obstacles on the way to accommodation: Germany***

Germany differs from Austria and Belgium in that Muslims have not yet acquired the status of a corporation under public law. This implies explicit differential treatment in a system not precluding it. As a consequence, it comes as no surprise that military chaplaincy is reserved for the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD). The Protestant military chaplaincy, with 90 posts, is slightly bigger than the Catholic with 75. According to interviewees in both chaplaincies, this distribution was decided unanimously, taking into account the traditional strength of the Protestant chaplaincy and the current shortage of Catholic priests in Germany. Yet what Fligstein and McAdam call a stable, two-groups field in which the main actors are able to reproduce themselves and the field over a fairly long period of time (Fligstein and McAdam 2013, 9) has come to be effectively contested. At least two incumbents, namely Muslims and Humanists, would like to join the military chaplaincy. One of the Muslim representative bodies in Germany, the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (*Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (ZMD)*) which is part of the German Islam

Conference (*Deutsche Islam Konferenz* (DIK)), has publicly claimed the right to provide Muslim military chaplains. The DIK, which is the main venue for state-Islam negotiations in Germany, has placed the creation of chaplaincies in the military, prisons and hospitals on its agenda for the year 2014-2015. Since the DIK has proved to be an influential mechanism for the religious accommodation of Muslims, one can expect its call for 'visible progress in the spiritual care of soldiers of Muslim faith in the German military' to be met even in the absence of the 'corporation under public law' status for Islam. In addition, the German military has taken initiative to accommodate Muslims. The Defense Agency for Leadership Development and Civic Education (*Zentrum Innere Führung* (ZINF)) has published two working papers on German citizens of Jewish and of Muslim belief in military service that prescribe how basic religious accommodation should be provided (ZINF 2010; ZINF 2011). This agency is also the spearhead for the development of scenarios regarding the establishment of a Muslim military chaplaincy. These initiatives taken by the military are interesting since Muslim representatives have so far put comparatively little effort into specific lobbying activities. Yet they seem closer to their goal than the Humanist Union of Germany (*Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands*) (HVD)) that is more focused in its mobilisation and has even designated a representative for military questions because the Ministry of Defence categorically rejects a Humanist chaplaincy. Thus if the strategic action field that used to be dominated by Catholics and Protestants only is being challenged, the incumbents are still succeeding in controlling the challengers. It will be interesting to see to what extent the suggestions on a Muslim military chaplaincy that will be worked out by the DIK will differ from what is currently being worked out by the ZINF.

### *Chaplains without a chaplaincy: the United States*

Before closing this cross-national comparison, a brief look at the organisation of military chaplaincy in the USA will be helpful for understanding one central commonality behind all European cases. In the US armed forces military chaplains are hierarchically organised within the five service branches, but not according to their faith group. This means that no faith-specific military chaplaincy exists even though among the over 2000 chaplains in the US military there are Catholic, Muslim and a very wide variety of Protestant chaplains. A religious group that seeks to send chaplains to the US military needs to have an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax exempt status for churches and religious organisations in order to register with the Department of Defense as a so-called 'endorsing agency'. When a chaplaincy post becomes available, a chaplaincy candidate from any of the currently close to 200 registered 'endorsing agencies' – among them two Muslim organisations and 11 Catholic churches – can apply for this post. The candidate needs the endorsement of the endorsing agency and has to meet the military requirements of the Department of Defense before starting work in one of the five service branches.

In the interviews I conducted, the European chaplains often rejected the US model of military chaplaincy, expressing some disbelief about the validity of such a non-denominational organisation, in particular since US chaplains are supposed to provide the framework necessary for the religious practice of any religious group. The flexibility of the

US system of military chaplaincy is of great advantage for new groups, however, since unlike the situation in Europe no profound organisational change is required when a new group is included into chaplaincy. This does not imply, however, that religious minorities encounter no difficulties in the US military chaplaincy.<sup>8</sup> Some of these difficulties are related to the fact that fundamentalist Evangelical Christians have come to dominate parts of the US military chaplaincy (Hansen 2012, 169-176). This domination is a result of the market-based organisation of the US military chaplaincy which strongly depends on group mobilisation.

This comparison shows that because of the denomination-specific organisation of military chaplaincy in Europe, the strategic action field of military chaplaincy has been challenged by the increasing societal inclusion of Muslims. In France and the Netherlands, important organisational change has occurred before the strategic action field has become stable again. In Austria and Belgium the strategic action field is in movement, and in Germany, a hitherto stable action field that was dominated by only two incumbents is being contested by several incumbents and on the verge of changing. This contestation and change that has already occurred in some cases gives good insights into what is at stake in the strategic action field of military chaplaincy when Muslims join the ranks.

### **Analysis: what is at stake?**

As mentioned earlier, in this analysis I focus on only one aspect of Fligstein and McAdam's theory of fields, namely on the question of what is at stake in the strategic action field that revolves around the inclusion of Muslims in military chaplaincy. I would highlight five points.

#### ***1: Chaplaincy posts: the redistribution of scarce resources***

In Europe, chaplaincy posts are not equally distributed across religious denominations. The different groups compete for the largest number of posts because larger military chaplaincy services have more impact on the military institution and more possibilities of action while very small military chaplaincies are constrained to delivering a target-group-specific service. Thus the distribution of chaplaincy posts relates to the more general question of what kind of service will be provided. Depending on the size of the armed forces, the military chaplaincy of all faith groups together comprises only some 20 military chaplain posts as in Belgium, or over 200 posts as in France (as compared with over 2000 posts as in the USA). Yet in all cases, military chaplain posts are a scarce resource. In all European countries studied here the number of military chaplain posts has been reduced over the past decades because of general budget cuts and competition with other services such as that of military psychologist. Thus when a new group has joined the military chaplaincy, chaplaincy posts have been

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8 For the experience of a Muslim chaplain at Guantanamo Bay who was the subject of intense investigation see Yee (2005). For the experience of a Pentecostal military chaplain who converted to the Wicca religion see Cooperman (2007). For a Humanist who wants to become a navy chaplain see Zucchino (2013).

redistributed from established chaplaincies (so for example in Belgium posts were redistributed from the Protestants to the Humanists, in France from the Catholics to the Muslims). In the USA, posts are distributed through the above-mentioned market-based system, while in the European countries studied here the distribution is pre-negotiated between the state and the religious groups that are officially allowed to partake in this negotiation. Each religious group officially recognised as a partner in providing military chaplains thus disposes of a fixed number of chaplaincy posts. These are not constantly re-negotiated but often remain in place for many years or even several successive decades. Changes in the attribution of chaplaincy posts have occurred mainly through a restructuring of the armed forces (for example after the end of conscription) or through the arrival of new groups. Continuous adaption of the distribution of chaplaincy posts to the religious demography of the country or the armed forces or to the demand voiced by soldiers is not foreseen. None of the European armed forces under study collects official religious statistics on a regular basis, and mismatches evidenced by occasional surveys are easily ignored. Under these circumstances, skilled negotiators are likely to obtain more chaplaincy posts. In some countries, the Muslim representatives have claimed a comparatively high number of chaplaincy posts before their chaplaincy has been set up, but their outsider claims have been dismissed as unrealistic.

## ***2: Training and education of chaplains***

Individuals wishing to be employed as military chaplains have to meet certain criteria that are defined by their religious group and by the military. While the military sets certain age, security, fitness and general educational standards, the respective religious groups often require that the candidate should have studied theology and have several years of practical experience in the civilian world before joining the military. Although precise requirements differ across countries, the established Christian churches which are insiders to military chaplaincy usually emphasise that several years of higher education are necessary for new chaplains to be on par with the existing chaplains. These educational standards are thus part of what in particular the Christian and Jewish incumbents defend. They can represent a hurdle for immigrant religious groups since individuals of immigrant background who are already in the military have rarely had higher university education while immigrants with higher education often seek more prestigious or better remunerated positions, for example in engineering or medicine, and find military chaplaincy relatively unattractive. Among the countries studied only France has decided to lower the educational requirements for military chaplains to a simple high school diploma instead of university education.

## ***3: Security and control of religion***

In the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria debates about who would be suitable to fill the first post in a newly created Muslim military chaplaincy have proved to be lengthy. Discussions about whether candidates adhere to the principles of democracy and whether they stand for a too orthodox interpretation of Islam show that the Ministry of Defence is concerned

particularly about its ability to control religion and weed out fundamentalists. These discussions about the suitability of individual chaplaincy candidates are not theological in nature, but in the case of the Netherlands have focussed on previous statements by the Muslim chaplain candidate who had voiced comprehension for Muslim men not wishing to shake hands with women and had questioned the righteousness of the military mission in Afghanistan and the integrity of the former Dutch president. In Austria, the military chaplain candidate has been criticized for boasting of not having served in the military. This suggests that these first recruitments that are to lead to the creation of a new military chaplaincy are of high political symbolic value. At the same time, the actual capacity of the Ministry of Defence of the respective country to distinguish 'good' and 'bad' chaplains is limited because of the liberal state's institutionalised lack of competence in theological matters.<sup>9</sup> In order to know whether a future chaplain will support the liberal democratic consensus in his or her preachings and in individual consultations, which in all the countries studied fall under the confessional secret, the ministries have to rely on the judgment of the sending organisation. Relationships with these sending organisations, however, are often in themselves still unstable since the representative organisations are still evolving and defining their relationships with the state (Laurence 2012). Muslims, however, are not the only religious group that experiences control, and the control of who is able to send chaplains to the military does not emanate only from the state. For example, among the manifold Protestant churches that exist in the various European countries under study some are also excluded from participation in military chaplaincy because they are not part of the representative body for Protestants that negotiates chaplaincy positions with the state. In Germany, for example, only the 20 Lutheran, Reformed and United Protestant churches that are part of the EKD can send chaplains to the military while Evangelical churches are per se excluded. In France, new churches can join the official representative Protestant Federation of France (*Fédération protestante de France*), but some churches are prevented from joining. In addition, the non-religious Humanists have been kept out of the system of military chaplaincy in the USA and in all European countries except the Netherlands and Belgium. In sum, we can say that the control of who comes into the military is a concern shared by the established churches and the Ministry of Defence. It should be mentioned that some groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses do not wish to send chaplains to the military and thereby avoid government control.

#### ***4: Attracting new recruits and ensuring social cohesion***

Austria is one of the few European countries which still has conscription. The armed forces of all other countries in this study are all-volunteer forces and thus rely heavily on new recruitment. Women and ethnic minorities are important target groups (see Apt 2009). From this perspective, the accommodation of Muslims can also be understood as a strategy not only

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<sup>9</sup> For a similar question and two different answers about Muslim prison chaplaincy in the Netherlands and Great Britain, see the articles in the special issue edited by Kristina Stoeckl and Olivier Roy (forthcoming 2014).

to secure recruitment among ethnic minorities, many of which are Muslim, but also to retain those who are already in the armed forces. Even though self-selection usually precludes particularly religiously observant individuals from enlisting, the existence of a military chaplaincy that acts as an advocacy group for Muslims within the military is of great symbolic value also to all 'cultural Muslims'.

### ***5: Being in line with principles of equality and religious liberty***

Finally, the organisation of a Muslim military chaplaincy is also a matter of respecting principles that are cherished in all liberal democracies, such as equality and religious liberty. Especially since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, it has become important for liberal democracies to demonstrate that they are firm on religiously motivated radicalism and violence but that they also work for the integration of Islam (Bleich 2009) and do not discriminate against this particular religious group. Like the creation of Muslim representative councils in many European countries (Laurence 2012), the establishment of Muslim military chaplaincies can be understood as a symbolically important political response. A second important strategic aspect here is that by creating a Muslim military chaplaincy, military institutions send out the message to the rest of society that even though they have become all-volunteer forces they are still attached to the principles that govern twenty-first-century liberal democratic societies.

### **Conclusion: national differences versus organisational commonalities**

In this article I have shown that the organisation of military chaplaincy and its opening to Muslims responds to two different logics: first, nation-specific logics that can push the armed forces in Europe towards divergence (in cases where these logics differ); and second, organisation-specific logics that can push them towards a convergence of practices in the field of religious accommodation.

First, in my comparison I have identified a number of differences in the outcomes of religious accommodation across the selected European countries and the USA.<sup>10</sup> These cross-national differences in religious accommodation are in line with the cross-national differences in state-religion relationship. The equality-oriented models of France and the Netherlands that are similar in goal but different in approach have pushed both countries to become the European forerunners in the establishment of a military chaplaincy for Muslims. Austria, Belgium and Germany, that allow for the differential treatment of religious groups, have however not established a Muslim military chaplaincy. Two of these selective cooperation models (Austria and Belgium) have granted official recognition to Islam and, as a consequence, they are more advanced in establishing a Muslim chaplaincy than Germany

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<sup>10</sup> The case of the USA is so different from that of Europe that a direct comparison is not appropriate. I rather use the case of the USA in order to think about the commonalities and thus the specificities of the European cases.



where Islam is not yet recognised as an official partner for the state. On a broader scale, the organisation of European military chaplaincy differs profoundly from that in the USA, where the distribution of chaplaincy posts is organised according to a relatively simple market-based system that plays out favourably for Muslims and other religious minorities which wish to send chaplains to the armed forces. These differences in military chaplaincy organisation also have an influence on 'what is at stake' in the different strategic action fields. In Europe, the distribution of chaplaincy posts across denominations is of central importance whereas this is not an issue in the USA. In Europe, France stands out because it has let go the requirement of university education for military chaplains, thereby assuring the recruitment of some 40 chaplains of Muslim faith (see above). Also, there have been no public debates in France about whether individual candidates were 'in line' with principles of democracy and laicism. Since they have partly recruited from the ranks, the French armed forces have been confident that they have at their disposal a sufficiently large pool of Muslims who fully endorse the principles of the French Republic. Strategic action in Austria differs from that in other countries because the persistence of conscription greatly reduces the need to attract new recruits. However, there is also pressure for religious accommodation because the state obliges conscripts to serve in the military.

At the same time - and this is the second point - the strategic action fields in the various European countries around the inclusion of Muslim military chaplains show that similar issues are at stake. The distribution of chaplaincy posts, the training and education of chaplains, the security and control of religion, the attracting of new recruits, the assuring of social cohesion, and being in line with principles of equality and religious liberty are all issues 'at stake' in most of the countries. Also, with regard to outcomes in accommodation, striking cross-national similarities can be observed, even among countries that are marked by differences in state-religion relationship, such as France and the Netherlands. As discussed earlier, both countries have a state-religion relationship that is strongly committed to the idea of equality and equal treatment. Ways to achieve equality, however, differ: while the Dutch system grants equal support to all religious groups, the French system denies any preferential treatment by the state to any religious group. According to the French ideal, the state establishes equality among individuals regardless of group membership, whereas according to the Dutch ideal of religious governance, the state establishes equality among individuals while paying attention to their religious group membership. These differences play out very clearly in many public institutions, most prominently in schools. The French armed forces, however, seem to adopt a strategy of '*laïcité positive*', closer in a sense to the religion-friendly accommodative but still neutral attitude of the USA. How is this deviation from the national ideology of strict separation between state and church possible?

Institution-specific opportunity structures might account for these cross-national commonalities. In particular the argument that a strict separation between the public and the private sphere – one basic principle of the French *laïcité* model – is impossible for soldiers, along the lines of Goffman's (1961) ideas on total institutions, provides strong support for making an exception in the military. This, however, assumes that decision-makers in the

French military have an interest in not following the national model of *laïcité*. At least three arguments may explain why this could be the case.

First, the practice of religion is expected to help at least those who believe to cope with great uncertainty such as is produced by fighting in war. Critics of military chaplaincy say that chaplains make soldiers 'fit for war'. They also argue that even though military chaplains in Western Europe have stopped blessing weapons, their mere presence at sites of military operations contributes to the legitimisation of military action and may help individual soldiers to make sense of their action.

Closely linked to this argument is a second one, pointing to the fact that military chaplaincy has a long tradition in many European armed forces as well as in the USA. From this perspective, the accommodation of Muslims might make it possible to demonstrate one of the core military principles, that of providing similar treatment to all groups, which helps to strengthen the institution.

Finally, the need for all-volunteer forces to identify new recruitment potentials also pushes the armed forces in the European cases examined towards the accommodation of Muslims, since accommodation is thought to send out a signal of openness and equal opportunities. This organisation-specific interest in accommodating religion has contributed to the observed moves towards opening military chaplaincy to Muslims. The former balance of powers has already been effectively contested in all European countries under study, because Muslims are perceived to be a group with legitimate claims on military chaplaincy. Thus, for reasons that are also intrinsic to the military institution, Muslims have made their way onto the agenda of defence policymakers. This is all the more interesting since not only some forms of state-religion relationship theoretically contradict the establishment of a military chaplaincy but also because increasing religious diversity and growing secularism among European populations should push for the replacement of denomination-specific military chaplaincy with for example secular military psychologists. Against this background, the inclusion of new groups into military chaplaincy (in the Netherlands and Belgium this also includes Humanists) gives support to the argument that there are military-specific arguments for religious accommodation.

In sum, these findings on religious accommodation in the military help to formulate the hypothesis that institution-specific opportunity structures for religious accommodation are shaped by national political opportunity structures such as the state-religion relationship. If, however, strong institution-specific pressures for a certain type of accommodation of religion exist, and if the arguments formulated in favour of such accommodation can still appeal to at least some elements of the national ideology (for example, the French armed forces still refer to equality as a principle but not to the refusal of state support for religious communities), then institution-specific forms of religious accommodation can differ from nation-specific approaches to accommodation as they are implemented by other public institutions. A systematic cross-organisational and cross-national research design should be used to test this hypothesis.

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