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# A Penny for our Thoughts

The influence of military identity and military culture on cultural interoperability

## Master Thesis

MSc Human Geography: Conflict, Territories and Identities

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## **Abstract**

This master thesis explores the influence of military identity and military culture on cultural interoperability during multinational deployments. The focus of the research lies on the experiences of Dutch officers during their Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) deployment in Lithuania.

Interoperability is seen as crucial for successful multinational deployments. It consists of three factors: technical, political, and cultural. Cultural interoperability research has been lacking in quantity despite its importance.

The Ukraine war has reinvigorated western efforts into the NATO eFP, which was created to deter Russian aggression. Credibility of NATO's deterrence forces is crucial for it to be effective. Therefore it is important to highlight the cultural interoperability aspect of multinational deployments. Whether it be to add to the existing, yet few, literature or to provide attention or underscoring the importance of cultural interoperability during the current geopolitical events.

The main research question is: "How does military culture and military identity influence the cultural interoperability according to Dutch officers during their Enhanced Forward Presence deployment (2017-2021) in Lithuania?".

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were held with 17 respondents who have been deployed to Lithuania or were deployed at the time of the interview. The first participants were provided through the intern supervisor and subsequent participants on recommendation of previous participants. The main subjects of the interview were the respondents military identity, the Dutch military culture, differences in military cultures during their deployment and whether it influenced cooperation, and overall view on their deployment. The grounded theory approach was used for analysing the interviews.

The data gathered suggests that military identity and military culture do influence cultural interoperability. Three military identity categories were found: more Dutch oriented, more military oriented, and a mix of both. The Dutch oriented and mixed identity groups seem to be the most affected by military cultural differences on their deployment in Lithuania to the point it actively hinders cooperation. The military oriented identity group seems less affected by these differences in their perception of the other, yet does seem affected by it in terms of their perception of effectivity.

The study has also found a dissonance in experience between those who have fulfilled a operational staff function and those who fulfilled a function in the field or staff function in mental health facilitation. The former having a positive view on multinational cooperation and the latter predominantly a negative view.

The data from this study suggests ineffective and undesirable consequences for multinational cooperation due to military cultural differences and military identities. Further research is needed due to the sample size being too small. It also suggests that this is not unsolvable as a large underlying tendency is a feeling of being undervalued.

*Keywords:* Organisational Identity, Military Identity, Military Culture, Cultural Interoperability, Multinational Cooperation, Deterrence

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Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my mother who has passed away during the writing of this thesis. The two and a half month fight she delivered against all odds, despite its tragic conclusion, is inspiring. She is missed.

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## Introduction

This research explores the importance of cultural interoperability in the multinational NATO deployment in Lithuania, which entails the influence of military cultures on cooperation between the several nationalities operating in the NATO battalion. This study will specifically look at the influence of differences in military culture and identity on the cooperation as experienced by Dutch officers during their deployment in Lithuania. The multinational NATO deployment in Lithuania, and those in other Baltic states, have increasingly been getting more attention due to recent events.

It has been more than a year since Russia has invaded Ukraine, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, as part of its 'special military operation' to 'de-nazify' Ukraine. As the war is still raging in Ukrainian territory, Europe is yet again faced with war on its soil. Although the threat to Europe and NATO has increased, the Russian threat already existed. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia changed the regional security environment as this act of aggression sparked the creation of eFP (Enhanced Forward Presence): multinational battalions stationed in the Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia) and Poland. The goal of eFP to this day still is to deter Russia from undertaking any acts of aggression to NATO members. According to art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, an attack on a NATO member state is considered as an attack on all members.<sup>1</sup> Ukraine is not a member of NATO, therefore does not fall under its protection. It does however not dissuade NATO member states to provide support to Ukraine today, as shipments of weaponry, supplies, and donations have found their way from NATO member states, and other nations, to Ukraine in adding to the already imposed heavy economic sanctions on Russia. The 'boots on the ground' support has only been reserved for NATO members, in this case the Baltic states and Poland as they are under direct threat of Russia.

Whilst eFP was created in the wake of the annexation of Crimea, it has gotten considerable priority since Russia's invasion. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, eFP consisted of four battalion-size Battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic states of

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<sup>1</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'Collective defence and Article 5', [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_110496.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm) (retrieved, 13-6-2023).

Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. After the invasion of Ukraine, NATO members have agreed to the creation of four more Battlegroups in the countries of Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.<sup>2</sup> Even the possibility to increase the Battlegroup size from battalion to brigade when and where required, underlines the increased importance of eFP.<sup>3</sup>

The total number of troops in eFP, as of November 2022, is estimated by NATO to be 10,232.<sup>4</sup> These troops are spread over eight Battlegroups that are multinational. Without going into the discussion of whether or not such a small number of troops is sufficient to deter Russian aggression, it can be argued that the diversity of so many nationalities within the small force might be a challenge for cooperation, effectivity and threat credibility. According to Houben and Peters, in order to operate effectively, multinational battalions have to be concerned about three factors: consensus regarding the instrument to be used in a specific situation (shared sense of instrumentation); synchronised decision-making; and the various national elements have to work together seamlessly (interoperability).<sup>5</sup> Referring to the latter, different national elements should be able to function as one coherent unit, and especially this might be at stake in a multinational battalion.<sup>6</sup> If interoperability were to be compromised, due to incompatibility between national elements within a multinational unit, such a multinational deployment could lose its effectiveness.

A well-known example of interoperability being compromised, is the Srebrenica debacle in 1995. Srebrenica was a United Nations (UN) safe zone, protected by the Dutch UN peacekeeping force; Dutchbat. Due to several factors, including chaotic and unclear communications and a vague UN mandate, the Dutch peacekeepers had to surrender to the Bosnian Serb army which massacred thousands of Bosniak men not long after. Prior to this, the United States and the United Kingdom had withheld crucial intelligence which indicated that the Bosnian Serb army was about to attack Srebrenica – the reasons for withholding this

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<sup>2</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance', [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm) (retrieved, 13-6-2023).

<sup>3</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance'.

<sup>4</sup> NATO, 'NATO's Forward Presence' (November 2022) <https://shape.nato.int/efp/efp/fact-sheet> (retrieved 13-6-2023).

<sup>5</sup> M. Houben and D. Peters, 'The Deployment of Multinational Military Formations: Taking Political Institutions Into Account', *Centre for European Policy Studies* 36 (2003) 1-13; 3.

<sup>6</sup> M. Houben and D. Peters, 'The Deployment'.

crucial information had to do with their own interests as well as miscommunication.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in the stressful situation cooperation between the various nationalities had to deal with severe problems.<sup>8</sup> One of the problems arising in the heat of the moment, was the lack of air support caused by unclear agreements and rules of when to send in air support.<sup>9</sup> According to a later declassified CIA memo, the safe zones were ‘fish bones in the throat of the Serbs’, showing the US knew that Srebrenica was untenable. The US had already decided that the ‘safe zones’ had to be sacrificed in order to coerce Milošević, the Serb leader, into a peace accord.<sup>10</sup> ‘Srebrenica’ shows that the different national elements did not work together seamlessly – thus compromising the interoperability.

As the UN peacekeeping mission was a multinational effort, it was confronted with the same cooperation obstacles any multinational deployment has to face. Jakobsen argues that during the Bosnian War (1992-1995) the coalition cohesion suffered because of disagreements between the participating nations.<sup>11</sup> This caused problems for international cooperation, not only on the strategic, but also on the operational level. The operational level is defined as “*the planning, conducting and sustaining of larger units to obtain strategic goals within a theatre*”.<sup>12</sup> Jakobsen therefore urges academics to look at the operational level, and specifically at the consequences for the strategy of deterrence as it can negatively impact interoperability.<sup>13</sup>

Disagreements and misunderstandings on an operational level are arguably a consequence of the fact that different nations have different views on how to conduct a specific mission. Ruffa states that the military culture varies from nation to nation and influences the decision-making on the ground; it also influences the perceptions regarding a

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<sup>7</sup> F. Hartmann and E. Vulliamy, ‘How Britain and the US decided to abandon Srebrenica to its fate’, *The Guardian* (2015) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/04/how-britain-and-us-abandoned-srebrenica-massacre-1995> (retrieved 13-6-2023).

<sup>8</sup> T.B. Brown, ‘It Was Hell’: Dutch Troops Recall Failure to Stop Srebrenica Deaths’ *Balkan Transitional Justice* (2019) <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/08/it-was-hell-dutch-troops-recall-failure-to-stop-srebrenica-deaths/> (retrieved 13-6-2023).

<sup>9</sup> T.B. Brown, ‘It Was Hell’.

<sup>10</sup> F. Hartmann and E. Vulliamy, ‘How Britain and the US’.

<sup>11</sup> P.V. Jakobsen, ‘Chapter 17: Deterrence in Peace Operations: Look Beyond the Battlefield and Expand the Number of Targets and Influence Mechanisms’, in: F. Osinga and T. Sweijts (ed.) ‘Deterrence in the 21st Century – Insights from Theory and Practice’, *NL Arms. Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies* (2020).

<sup>12</sup> E.R. Snoke, ‘The operational level of war’, Series: *CSI Historical Bibliography* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1985) v.

<sup>13</sup> P.V. Jakobsen, ‘Chapter 17’.



specific deployment.<sup>14</sup> As nations have different approaches that are embedded in the decision-making and rationale of their military personnel, multinational unit deployments might very well complicate cooperation. The (differences in) military identity – comprised of a military-oriented identity and a civilian-oriented identity alike – can also add to the complications of multinational deployments.<sup>15</sup> Paget refers to this as cultural interoperability.<sup>16</sup> During the multinational peacekeeping deployment ISAF 3 (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan in 2003, for example, the cultural differences between German and Dutch troops led to frustrations, ‘substandard cooperation’, and even conflict.<sup>17</sup>

In light of the above, this research will explore the implications for cultural interoperability of multinational battalions in a deterrence mission. It will do so, by more specifically focus on the case of the Dutch contribution to eFP in Lithuania. The Dutch government has committed 250 military personnel to NATO’s mission to protect the Baltic states by deterring Russian aggression.<sup>18</sup> The Dutch commitment of troops is part of the German-led ‘Battlegroup Lithuania’. Effective multinational cooperation is needed to achieve interoperability; when interoperability is compromised or severely lacking, it might hurt the credibility of the deterrence threat against Russia.

## **Research objective and research questions**

Cultural interoperability is dependent on the perceptions of the soldiers involved. Perceptions are influenced by culture and identity.<sup>19</sup> This research considers the military culture and military identity as important factors that influence the perceptions of Dutch soldiers of the other nationalities and the cooperation with them. The main research

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<sup>14</sup> C. Ruffa, *Military cultures in peace and stability operations: Afghanistan and Lebanon* (2018).

<sup>15</sup> L. Heinecken, ‘Discontent Within the Ranks? Officers’ Attitudes Toward Military Employment and Representation—A Four-Country Comparative Study’, *Armed Forces and Society* 35 (3) (2009) 477-500; 480-481.

<sup>16</sup> S. Paget, ‘Interoperability of the Mind’, *The RUSI Journal* 161 (4) (2016) 42-50; 42-43.

<sup>17</sup> R. Moelker, J. Soeters and U. Vom Hagen, ‘Sympathy, the Cement of Interoperability: Findings on Ten Years of German-Netherlands Military Cooperation’, *Armed Forces and Society* 33 (4) (2007) 496-517.

<sup>18</sup> C. Mulken, ‘Verantwoordingsdag 2020: voortgang Nederlandse bijdragen aan missies en operaties’, *De Veiligheidsdiplomaat* (2020) <https://magazines.rijksoverheid.nl/bz/veiligheidsdiplomaat/2020/04/07> (retrieved, 13-6-2023).

<sup>19</sup> C. Ruffa, *Military cultures in peace and stability operations: Afghanistan and Lebanon* (2018).

question is: “How does military culture and military identity influence the cultural interoperability according to Dutch officers during their Enhanced Forward Presence deployment (2017-2021) in Lithuania?”. This research specifically focuses on Dutch officers, given the limited scope of a master thesis which makes interviewing multiple nationalities hard, especially in times of the COVID pandemic. This research tries to formulate hypotheses for further research. In other words, the Dutch case will be used to highlight a problem for multinational deployments, which might incite further exploration.

In order to be able to answer the main question, several sub-questions will be addressed:

- “How do respondents define their military identity?”
- “Does the identity Dutch officers hold, influence the multinational cooperation experience of their deployment?”
- “How do respondents define Dutch military culture?”
- “Do differences in military culture influence respondents’ experiences with and perceptions on other nationalities during their deployment?”
- “Do military cultural differences affect the cooperation between Dutch officers and other nationalities? If so, do respondents think it influences the effectivity of the battlegroup?”

It is to be noted that the interviews were conducted before Russia amassed its troops at the border with Ukraine to subsequently invade it. This could influence the perception on the deployment and cooperation as the threat has become more tangible which might result in people ‘overlooking’ some points of friction.

### **Societal relevance**

Rising tensions between Russia and the West, due to the invasion of Ukraine, make this topic relevant. As argued, cooperation between troops of various nationalities during stressful situations might cause severe problems.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> E. Ben-Hari and E. Elron, ‘Blue Helmets and White Armor multi-nationalism and multi-culturalism among UN peacekeeping forces’, *City & Society* 13 (2) (2001) 271-302.

Multinational military efforts, like NATO's eFP, are prone to language barriers and varying interests between the participating nations, as argued by Ben-Ari and Elron. They also point at the competition between various nationalities when part of a multinational deployment, or of multinational units.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the military culture in multinational deployments is complex. General frameworks for multinational organisational analyses are not applicable to military multinational cooperation.<sup>22</sup> The competition between nationalities and their respective cultures, while sometimes healthy, proves problematic in combat situations, especially if national pride is involved.<sup>23</sup> National pride can contribute to a 'we versus them' sentiment between allies which in multinational military setups, like eFP, is undesirable as it can harm the ability to cooperate efficiently and productively.

As eFP is currently still deployed and will most likely be so for some time in the future, it is important to evaluate and research complications for multinational cooperation in order to learn and improve. Recent developments in Ukraine especially warrant critical thought and research into multinational cooperation to be able to contribute to the safety of NATO member states.

Multinational cooperation is also important for any multinational deployment whether it be peacekeeping, aid, or training missions. Whilst this thesis focusses on cultural interoperability, other interoperability aspects are as important.

Lastly, the debate on eFP often focusses on proposing (military) solutions for an insufficient 'show of force'. The dominant debate concerns the effectiveness and shortcomings of eFP's deterrence goal.<sup>24</sup> Deterrence is commonly defined as "*the practice of discouraging or restraining someone – in world politics, usually a nation-state – from taking unwanted actions, such as an armed attack*".<sup>25</sup> In case of eFP, Russia is obviously the actor NATO is trying to deter. Given its goal of deterrence (by presence), eFP is also addressed in the broader academic debate on the strategy of deterrence. This debate revolves around the current state of the deterrence strategy, and the need to review and revise it as the world

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<sup>21</sup> E. Ben-Hari and E. Elron, 'Blue Helmets and White Armor'.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> J.R. Deni, 'Is NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Fit for Purpose?' *Orbis* 63 (1) (2018) 92-103.

<sup>25</sup> M.J. Mazarr, 'Chapter 2: Understanding Deterrence' in: F. Osinga and T. Sweijts (ed.) 'Deterrence in the 21st Century – Insights from Theory and Practice', *NL Arms. Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies* (2020) 13-27; 15.

has become more complex as a consequence of technological innovations (cyber threats, long-range strike missiles, unmanned weapon systems) and a renewed emphasis on nuclear weapons as part of the strategy of deterrence.<sup>26</sup> Deterrence credibility should also be evaluated through cultural interoperability.

### **Scientific relevance**

The debate on deterrence is more often than not characterised by discussions and analyses on a strategic, macro level, involving geopolitical arguments. Jakobsen, however, calls upon academics to look at the micro implications of deterrence as well, focussing on the operational level.<sup>27</sup> He specifically looks at UN peacekeeping operations (in particular UNPROFOR), focussing on the possible implications of multinational battalions. As said, the disagreements between various coalition countries did damage the credibility of deterrence in Bosnia.<sup>28</sup> The same issue is also hinted at by Deni in his article dealing with eFP, albeit only briefly.<sup>29</sup> Deni focusses on the strategic level of eFP and discusses its shortcomings in terms of manpower, resources and credibility; the implications of a multinational deployment as such are only mentioned in passing. Complications for cultural interoperability can prove undermining for any multinational deployment, whether it be directed at deterrence or peacekeeping.<sup>30</sup>

The under-researched implications due to insufficient cultural interoperability during a multinational deployment make this anticipated research valid; especially, the focus on the influence of military cultural differences deployed soldiers experience during multinational cooperation. Based on a case study of NATO's multinational eFP battalions, this study can enhance our insight in and understanding of the complexities of multinational deployments.

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<sup>26</sup> F. Osinga and T. Sweijts (ed.) 'Deterrence in the 21st Century – Insights from Theory and Practice', *NL Arms. Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies* (2020).

<sup>27</sup> P.V. Jakobsen, 'Chapter 17'.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> J.R. Deni, 'Is NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Fit for Purpose?', 92-103.

<sup>30</sup> S. Paget, 'Interoperability of the Mind', *The RUSI Journal* 161 (4) (2016) 42-50.

## **1. Situational context**

This research is a case study of the Dutch eFP deployment in Lithuania. The goal is to determine the influence of military culture and military identity on the cultural interoperability of the deployment. The context of the deployment is important for understanding the data and the replies from respondents. Therefore this chapter will focus on the context of this research: the Enhanced Forward Presence.

Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by Russia, NATO had to redefine their strategy in order to strengthen its alliance in the changing security environment. At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO addressed the concerns regarding Russia's aggressive behaviour towards Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> NATO decided that there had to be a military presence in the Baltics and Poland in order to deter future Russian aggression. The Enhanced Forward Presence was installed to achieve that goal. This NATO military presence came into effect in 2017 and has been deployed in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Each of these countries are host to a battlegroup, named respectively to the host nation. The military presence in Lithuania is called Battlegroup Lithuania for example.

Battlegroups are comprised of several NATO nationalities. The battlegroup functions as a single battalion and, according to NATO's own estimate, each battlegroup consists of roughly 1000 to 1250 troops pre-invasion of Ukraine.<sup>32</sup> Pre-invasion Battlegroup Lithuania was around 1249 troops strong.<sup>33</sup> As of November 2022, NATO estimates the size of the Battlegroups between 574<sup>34</sup> and 1840 troops.<sup>35</sup>

Battlegroup Lithuania has since grown in size to 1805 troops.<sup>36</sup> The Dutch

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<sup>31</sup> NATO, 'Warsaw Summit Communiqué', [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm#interop](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm#interop) (retrieved, 9-5-2021) para. 5.

<sup>32</sup> NATO, 'Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup Lithuania', [https://kariuomene.kam.lt/download/122280/190926\\_akk\\_191010\\_pressemappe.pdf](https://kariuomene.kam.lt/download/122280/190926_akk_191010_pressemappe.pdf) (retrieved, 15-6-2021) 3.

<sup>33</sup> NATO, 'NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence' (February 2021) [https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/factsheet\\_efp\\_2021.pdf](https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/factsheet_efp_2021.pdf) (retrieved 15-6-2021).

<sup>34</sup> Battlegroup Romania has 574 troops, excluding the additional troops which would bring the total troop count to 1126. The additional 552 troops in Romania are however not integrated in the Battlegroup, but do fall under the command of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe. As stated in: <https://shape.nato.int/efp/efp/factsheet> (retrieved, 13-6-2023).

<sup>35</sup> NATO, 'NATO's Forward Presence' (November 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

contribution to Battlegroup Lithuania adds up to 270 soldiers. As Germany leads the battlegroup, their contribution lies at 620 troops. The other nations are Belgium, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, and Norway. Partaking nations may vary over time per Battlegroup.

The goal of eFP is to deter Russia from undertaking any aggressive action against one of these countries and therefore against NATO. The strategy of *deterrence* is commonly defined as: “*the practice of discouraging or restraining someone – in world politics, usually a nation-state – from taking unwanted actions, such as an armed attack*”.<sup>37</sup> This is related to the concept of compellence, which is to force an actor to do something.<sup>38</sup> There is made a distinction between two forms of deterrence, which are important for this research. The first one is deterrence-by-denial which is defined as convincing the enemy or opponent that an attack would only succeed its objectives at a very high cost, outweighing a healthy cost-benefit balance. Secondly there is deterrence-by-punishment, where an attack would result in a failure and a disastrous retaliation would befall the opponent.<sup>39</sup> Whilst there is a debate to which category eFP belongs, there are academics who believe eFP falls short on both in terms of military commitment.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, deterrence can be direct or extended. Direct deterrence entails a state’s effort to protect its own territory. Extended deterrence is the effort to protect the territory of a state’s ally.<sup>41</sup> As the goal of eFP is to protect the Baltic from Russian aggression, extended deterrence is employed form of deterrence. Countries pledge their military to the NATO deployment in the Baltic, defending the borders of another state. The Russian threat does not end at the Baltic and one can see that devoting troops to eFP protects more than just the allied countries in the Baltic.

To conclude which deterrence strategy is applied to eFP, it is clear that the strategy is deterrence-by-denial. Each battlegroup does not have the manpower to retaliate a foreign attack, but it has the capacity to cripple, stop or at least slow down an attack. As the interviews have shown: the Dutch soldiers are very aware that in the event of a Russian

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<sup>37</sup> M.J. Mazarr, ‘Chapter 2: Understanding Deterrence’, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> J. Noll, O. Bojang and S. Rietjens, ‘Deterrence by Punishment or Denial? The eFP Case’ in: F. Osinga & T. Sweijs (ed.) ‘Deterrence in the 21st Century – Insights from Theory and Practice.’, *NL Arms. Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies* (2020) 109-128; 110-112.

<sup>40</sup> D.A. Shlapak, ‘Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States’, *RAND Corporation* (2017) 1-5.

<sup>41</sup> M.J. Mazarr, ‘Chapter 2’, 16-17.

invasion, they would be overrun.

Considering the task each battlegroup has, one could imagine that these multinational battalions should operate effectively and coherently. The next chapter will elaborate on identity, military identity and culture and its relation to cultural interoperability in multinational deployments. As it is the theoretical chapter it is also the backbone of this study.

## **2. Literature on military culture and identity**

NATO deployments to eFP are multinational, which means that certain NATO member states donate military personnel to a eFP battlegroup battalion. Soldiers from varying nations find themselves working with each other within a battalion. The need for these national elements to work seamlessly together is referred to as *interoperability*.<sup>42</sup> According to Houben and Peters, interoperability is one of the three main factors needed for a successful multinational deployment.<sup>43</sup> In the creation of multinational battalions, cultural differences are already taken into account.<sup>44</sup> Houben and Peters state that nations with very different world views do not create a multinational unit together.<sup>45</sup> Opposing views and perceptions between soldiers do undermine interoperability.

Interoperability is mostly used as an umbrella term for technical interoperability (technological elements of different militaries should easily correspond with each other); political interoperability (consensus between the contributing countries regarding organisational aspects); and cultural interoperability (national elements within a unit should be compatible in a cultural sense).<sup>46</sup> Of these three elements, cultural interoperability is vastly overlooked in interoperability research.<sup>47</sup>

### **2.1. Identity and Military Culture**

#### *2.1.1. Organisational Identity*

In order to explore cultural interoperability, military culture and military identity have to be defined. To understand how both influence each other the core approaches to identity in organisations is analysed. The following chapters will be military culture and military identity respectively, as the military culture provides aspects for the military identity.

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<sup>42</sup> M. Houben and D. Peters, 'The Deployment', 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> S. Paget, 'Mind over matter? Multinational naval interoperability during Operation Iraqi Freedom', *Defense & Security Analysis* 36 (1) (2020) 65-87.

<sup>47</sup> S. Paget, 'Interoperability of the Mind', 42-43.



The views and perceptions of a person take form in one's identity. The notion of identity and what it entails is still ground for debate due to its complexity.<sup>48</sup> There are many variables that influence the development of an identity. A consensus on which variables have a significant influence remains to be reached.<sup>49</sup> This applies to identity as to answer the question of who you are.

For this research it is not needed to dive that deeply into identity, as the goal is to explore identity in relation to the military. There are many identity theories that have been influential in the field of organisational identity studies.<sup>50</sup>

There are six major identity theories that touch the organisational identity: social identity theory, psychoanalysis, Foucauldian theory, symbolic interactionism, narrative theory, and the micro-interactionist theory. These theories all revolve around aspects that people use to form, or complement, their identity. Additionally, these aspects can be found in organisations.

The social identity theory states that people identify themselves in relation to others they deem to be alike.<sup>51</sup> It relies on social dynamics like the 'in-group' and 'out-group', or 'we versus them'.<sup>52</sup> The Stanford Prison Experiment is a famous example of the social identity theory where participants were divided in two groups: guards and prisoners. The dynamics quickly turned to 'we versus them' and the experiment had to be aborted prematurely as participants started to develop dehumanising behaviour towards the other group.<sup>53</sup>

The social identity theory and the experiments that lay at its foundation, showed the influence of group membership on how one views himself. Membership of a group can boost one's self esteem as it satiates a feeling of belonging, which in turn easily can lead to

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<sup>48</sup> N. Ergün, 'Identity Development: Narrative Identity and Intergenerational Narrative Identity', *Psikiyatride Guncel Yaklasimlar* 12 (4) (2020) 455-475; 456.

<sup>49</sup> N. Ergün, 'Identity Development: Narrative Identity', 455-475.

<sup>50</sup> K. Kenny, A. Whittle and H. Willmott, 'Theoretical Perspectives on Identity' in: K. Kenny, A. Whittle and H. Willmott, *Understanding Identity and Organizations* (2011) 13-39; 13.

<sup>51</sup> K. Kenny, A. Whittle and H. Willmott, 'Theoretical Perspectives on Identity', 16.

<sup>52</sup> A. Haslam, 'Chapter 2: the Social Identity Approach' in: A. Haslam, *Psychology in Organizations: The Social Identity Approach* (2012) 17-37.

<sup>53</sup> A. Haslam, 'Chapter 2: the Social Identity Approach'.

attributing negative characteristics to other groups.<sup>54</sup> Especially when the other group is considered to be a rival group.

The social identity theory is criticised for reducing identity to a cognitive phenomenon and thus not taking social processes into account, in particular the influence of discourse. In addition it does not explain the origin of certain processes of identification such as the intricate meanings of being a man or a woman.<sup>55</sup> Although the critique has merit it overlooks that the social identity theory is based on social processes. Also, researching the origins of very old instruments for identity such as 'man' and 'woman', might prove difficult for every study to give a 'definitive' answer to as it requires historical study.

The second theory is psychoanalysis which claims that desire or fantasy are driving factors for the forming of one's identity. The desire for a stable sense of identity leads to continuous identifying with people and things.<sup>56</sup> Identity, according to psychoanalysis, is therefore ever-evolving as opposed to the social identity theory.

In relation to organisations the allure of an organisation warrants a person to have the desire to be a part of the organisation in order to maintain a positive self-image.<sup>57</sup> In case of the military, the allure of being a member of the military would create a desire or fantasy for a person to identify strongly with it. This formed identity will be established until a new desire arises to identify with.

The problem with this approach lies in the reliance on desires and fantasies in the subconsciousness. The subconsciousness is a hard-to-grasp concept and open to interpretation. In addition, the theory implies that identity is feeble and fleeting due to arising desires that would continuously alter one's identity.

The third approach is the Foucauldian theory. The theory states that identity is influenced by ruling discourses. The discourse affects how one speaks to himself in order to correct behaviour or views to align with a certain discourse.<sup>58</sup> There are multiple discourses within society, for example religion, school, institutions or organisations. A person is therefore not subjected to just one discourse and a person is believed to have not just a

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<sup>54</sup> K. Kenny, A. Whittle and H. Willmott, 'Theoretical Perspectives on Identity', 17.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, 20-23.

singular identity, but rather having multiple identities.<sup>59</sup>

The Foucauldian theory is and has been influential in organisational identity studies.<sup>60</sup> It is however critiqued for the elusiveness of discourses as it is almost impossible to empirically measure its influence in data.<sup>61</sup> For this study, the Foucauldian approach would increase the influence variables. This does not mean that these variables are irrelevant, but many would be indirect and each individual is influenced by different discourses. The approach would therefore warrant a scope that does not fit the scope of a master thesis. Additionally, each respondent would have to be interviewed on their lives prior to the military in order to identify influencing discourses. Even then, the interviewer would be dependent on the answers and memory of the respondent. The elusiveness of discourses for empirical data becomes apparent in this case.

Symbolic interactionism is the fourth influential theory in organisational identity studies and is very similar to the Foucauldian approach. Symbolic interactionism states that people form their identity through socialising with others and through the environment.<sup>62</sup> For example, a boy is seen as a human child and behaviour befitting a human is expected from the child. Additionally, the boy is male and is then expected to exhibit behaviour befitting the perception a culture has on the concept of 'man'. The child learns and adapts to these 'symbols' and what it means to be associated with them. The identity regarding these symbols vary across cultures as different cultures have different meanings for the same symbol.<sup>63</sup>

The relation to the Foucauldian approach lies in the symbols as it can be argued that these symbols are manifestations of different ruling discourses. Symbolic interactionism is not fit for this study for the same reason the Foucauldian approach is not; the scope of the research that would be needed. Also, the complexity of influencing variables serves a study dedicated to identity better. Symbolic interactionism is also critiqued for ignoring wider social context and structures, and as well as over-focussing on meaning and subsequently

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<sup>59</sup> T. van Meijl, 'Anthropological Perspectives on Identity: From Sameness to Difference', in: M. Wetherell and C.T. Mohanty (ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of Identities* (2010) 63-81; 71.

<sup>60</sup> K. Kenny, A. Whittle and H. Willmott, 'Theoretical Perspectives on Identity', 20.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, 24.

<sup>63</sup> S. Lawler, 'Masquerading as Ourselves: Self-Impersonation and Social Life' in: S. Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (2011) 116-137; 116-118.

less on situational context.<sup>64</sup>

The fifth approach is the narrative approach which states that identity is formed through stories of the past and present. One learns and forms identity not only through the history of these stories, but the identities within them.<sup>65</sup> The theory of forming identity through narratives is problematic as these are subject to interpretation. One can learn something completely different from the same narrative as someone else. This approach is therefore suggestive and does not serve the purpose of this study.

Lastly, the sixth approach is the micro-interactional approach. This approach is an umbrella concept for several related approaches that share the focus on analysing natural occurring conversations and text.<sup>66</sup> Particular wording or phrasing is analysed to explore meanings and identities. A major critique is that the approach makes itself too vulnerable for possible rhetorical strategies a speaker may employ.<sup>67</sup>

Given the many approaches to organisational identity is testament to the complexity of identity. There are many variables influencing one's identity whether it be one's social circle, family position, career and/or culture. There also seems to be a deviance on an individual level on which norms and values, from an organisation or other social structures, one adopts in his or her identity.

In regards to the military, and thus this study, the identity of a soldier is not limited to the organisation itself. For example: the soldier is a father, a husband, the oldest sibling, a catholic, a Dutch citizen, and a member of the local football club. All of which he takes certain aspects from to adopt in his identity, including the military and its culture. Additionally, it varies from person to person which aspects from varied roles are incorporated in one's identity, as is shown by the organisational identity approaches.

The non-military variables on the forming of a soldier's identity might have its influence on the person's military identity; as to the length one internalises the norms and

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<sup>64</sup> K. Kenny, A. Whittle and H. Willmott, 'Theoretical Perspectives on Identity', 26.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, 28.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, 31.

values of the military culture. This will be explored in the following chapter.

### 2.1.2. Military Identity

Military identity is often defined through the social identity theory due to the military requiring adoption of its norms and values through doctrine and training. Identity, based on the social identity theory, entails: *the process of people categorising others into different groups, while adopting the identity of the group they consider themselves a part of.*<sup>68</sup>

Regarding military identity the group people consider themselves a part of would be the military.

According to the notion of social identification, people internalise the values and goals of the organisation they are part of to correspond with their identity.<sup>69</sup> In other words, military identity is based on the internalisation of the values and goals of the military organisation, influencing the perceptions of the other and that of the mission.

Yet, there is a duality to this identity.<sup>70</sup> On the one hand the identity is part of the military identity, while on the other hand identity is shaped by the realisation that most of the servicemen end up in a civilian career later in life.<sup>71</sup> This results in a 'conflict', where a soldier identifies himself as part of the military institution, at the same time preparing himself for a career outside the military, holding a more civilian-oriented identity.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, military personnel become less committed to the institution, which might in turn affect their views and perceptions of the deployment they are a part of.

The military dimension of the identity is therefore embedded in the military culture, whereas the civilian dimension is linked with the culture of the nation. As shown by Ruffa, however, the military culture also correlates with the national culture. In other words, national culture influences military culture with societal norms and values that do not contradict a military setting. The military culture in turn influences the military identity. This

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<sup>68</sup> R.B. Johansen, J.C. Laberg and M. Martinussen, 'Military Identity as Predictor of Perceived Military Competence and Skills', *Armed Forces and Society* 40 (3) (2014) 521-543; 522-523.

<sup>69</sup> A. Haslam, *Psychology in Organizations* (2004).

<sup>70</sup> L. Heinecken, 'Discontent Within the Ranks?', 480-481.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, 481.

explains the differences in perceptions and views held by soldiers from different countries on methods and codes of conduct, which in turn might (and often does) affect interoperability.

### 2.1.3. Military Culture

Hofstede shows the importance of culture, in particular also in a comparative international context.<sup>73</sup> A country's culture can be categorised into six cultural dimensions: power distance (acceptance by less powerful members of society that power is distributed unequally), individualism versus collectivism (whether individuals are expected to take care of themselves or can count on relatives and/or their group), masculinity versus femininity (materialism and achievements versus cooperation and consensus), uncertainty avoidance (the degree to which members feel comfortable with the idea of uncertainty), long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation (conservative versus progressive), and indulgence versus restraint (valuing recreation versus normative restriction of recreation).<sup>74</sup>

For example, when looking at the cultural dimensions for the Netherlands, according to Hofstede, three dimensions stand out: individualism, masculinity and indulgence. A high score on individualism indicates that a society expects an individual to look after him/herself. Secondly, a high score on masculinity indicates that a society values heroism and materialism. Lastly, indulgence indicates whether or not a society values free time and recreation as opposed to suppressing these needs by strict social norms.<sup>75</sup> The social norms Dutch people uphold differ greatly from other countries. In line with Houben and Peters' argumentation, this can have implications for multinational units.

Additionally, multinational deployments require intensive cooperation between the partaking nations.<sup>76</sup> Differences in culture are experienced more profoundly in these cases, resulting in cultural friction. This friction is felt more substantially when cultures are alike,

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<sup>73</sup> G. Hofstede, 'Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context', *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, Unit 2*. (2011) <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol2/iss1/8> (retrieved 15-6-2021).

<sup>74</sup> G. Hofstede, 'Dimensionalizing Cultures'.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>76</sup> U. vom Hagen, R. Moelker and J. Soeters, 'Introduction: Cultural Interoperability' in: U. vom Hagen, R. Moelker & J. Soeters (eds.), *Cultural Interoperability Ten Years of Research into Co-operation in the First German-Netherlands Corps* (2006) 7-14; 8.

according to Vom Hagen, Moelker and Soeters.<sup>77</sup> It is also stated that there is a dissonance in experiencing friction between those working in a staff function and those who do not.<sup>78</sup> In addition, they state that sympathy serves as a basic condition for interoperability. Sympathy consists of communication and mutual understanding.<sup>79</sup> This becomes more absent when the few differences have become the centre of attention between two culturally-alike nationalities.

Formulated differently, cultural differences might result in a lacking cultural interoperability, undermining the effectiveness of multinational battalions. One could argue that the military culturally differs from its nation, which would make any comparison rather useless. However, this would imply that every military acts the same and holds the same views on different matters.

Chiara Ruffa argues that every military, including the individuals belonging to it, acts differently.<sup>80</sup> These differences, in situations where multiple militaries act in missions, are a consequence of their military cultures.<sup>81</sup> Military culture in this respect is defined as '*a core set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values that become deeply embedded in a military unit and the national army to which it belongs*'.<sup>82</sup> It affects the way in which different military units or different national militaries approach a mission or objective. Ruffa studied the French and Italian military in Afghanistan and Lebanon, respectively, based on questionnaires and in-depth qualitative interviews. In the same mission, the French military operates differently than their Italian counterparts, given the national culture that influences the military culture. For instance, on an operational level there are very different approaches in decision-making to accomplish a set of goals.

When two or more cultures are forced to collaborate in a certain setting, like a multinational deployment, they interact. Whether it be in a military setting or a civilian setting, like company cultures, social processes will occur to either deal or cooperate with

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<sup>77</sup> U. vom Hagen, R. Moelker and J. Soeters, 'Introduction: Cultural Interoperability', 8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>79</sup> R. Moelker, J. Soeters and U. vom Hagen, 'Sympathy, the Cement of Interoperability' in: Ulrich vom Hagen, René Moelker & Joseph Soeters (eds.), *Cultural Interoperability Ten Years of Research into Co-operation in the First German-Netherlands Corps* (2006) 15-52; 17.

<sup>80</sup> C. Ruffa, *Military cultures*.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem, 31.

the other. Collaboration between cultures over time will result in a concept known as *isomorphism*.<sup>83</sup> The concept entails the organisational dynamics that make organisations within the same branch alike. When two countries, intensively, collaborate on a military level, like a multinational deployment, these military cultures would become alike over time. In theory that is. There are three categories in which collaboration can occur. The first category, *assimilation*, which occurs when the differences are based on disparity or inequality but there is respect for valued assets.<sup>84</sup> Secondly there is *separation*, which means that there is no isomorphism as the differences in beliefs, values, and opinions are too great or insurmountable. The last one is *integration*, which is based on a variety of differences. As isomorphism is the desired effect for NATO, through doctrines for example, assimilation is widely used to reach this desired effect.<sup>85</sup> An example to help clarify an assimilation attempt with the goal to reach a state of isomorphism: the military of Iraq had been relying on the US with expanding capacity, training, and professionalism the *American Way* yet it fell apart the moment the US left.<sup>86</sup>

Assimilation is hard to achieve when one party wants the other to assimilate, in the example above that would be the US wanting the Iraqi security forces to assimilate the American model. Assimilation can also be desired by the organisation that has to assimilate. When isomorphism is reached in that condition, it is called *exo-isomorphism*; the organisation actively tries to resemble an external organisation.<sup>87</sup> In the case of Battlegroup Lithuania, Germany is the leading nation. Germany decides, within the NATO doctrine, which doctrine is to be followed on base and operations or trainings. If assimilation, culture-wise, is to take place, there has to be willingness from the Dutch military to adopt the German military culture. Absence of such an incentive blocks isomorphism.

Differences in military culture can, in the absence of a proper incentive, hinder collaboration on the levels of isomorphism which is desired by NATO. Although it is not the only factor that troubles the route to isomorphism as military culture entails only the collective culture of a nation's military. Within this collective rests a individualistic identity

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<sup>83</sup> J. Soeters, *Organizational Cultures in the Military* (2018) 259.

<sup>84</sup> J. Soeters, *Organizational Cultures*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, 259-261.

<sup>86</sup> R.M. Hajjar, 'Emergent postmodern US military culture', *Armed Forces and Society* 40 (1) (2014) 118–145.

<sup>87</sup> J. Soeters, *Organizational Cultures*, 260.



factor as well.

As various nations contribute to eFP's deterrence mission, cooperation between these national elements is key for success. NATO states have, however, varying reasons to commit their troops to a military deployment.<sup>88</sup> These varying interests and reasons influence the cohesion of the coalition forces. According to Jacobsen, after the Bosnian war (1992-95), coalition cohesion became an even more important requirement for successful deterrence, as disagreements between troop contributing states had harmed the deterrence credibility.<sup>89</sup> When looking at eFP's multinational battalions, disagreements between participating NATO members could have a negative influence on the cooperation between the soldiers in these battalions – compromising interoperability can undermine threat credibility.

The multinational nature of the eFP battalions could have a (negative) impact on the effectiveness of these battalions. As argued by Houben and Peters, interoperability is a crucial requirement for success in multinational deployments.<sup>90</sup> They distinguish two forms of multinational units: integrated and un-integrated, respectively. Integrated units have a 'mixed' structure where officials from the various countries work together. These units can only be deployed in full or not at all. Un-integrated units on the other hand can be deployed separately.<sup>91</sup> For instance, a Dutch part of such a unit can be deployed on its own.

The literature shows that interoperability is necessary when deploying multinational units successfully. However, to achieve cultural interoperability, the views and perceptions of the various nationalities should be more or less in line. While it is often thought that culturally different nations should not form a battalion together, culturally more alike nations might also differ from each other in such a way that it could harm cooperation, at an organisational and operational level.

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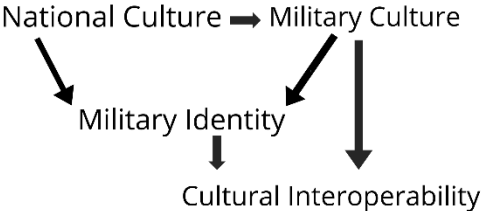
<sup>88</sup> M. Houben and D. Peters, 'The Deployment', 6-7.

<sup>89</sup> P.V. Jacobsen, 'Deterrence in Peace Operations: Look Beyond the Battlefield and Expand the Number of Targets and Influence Mechanisms' in: F. Osinga & T. Sweijts (ed.) 'Deterrence in the 21st Century – Insights from Theory and Practice.', *NL Arms. Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies*. (2020) 327-343; 333.

<sup>90</sup> M. Houben and D. Peters, 'The Deployment'.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, 2.

The national culture of these nations influences the military culture, which in turn influences the military identity of the soldiers. This shapes the views of the soldiers regarding their deployment, work and their effectiveness during the deployment. See the table below for a visualisation of the theory:



As military personnel from different countries hold different views, it might clash with each other. It could also influence their perception on their deployment, combat effectiveness and might even undermine the credibility of the deterrence threat as interoperability might not be achieved at the desired level.

Lastly, according to Houben and Peters' categorisation of multinational unit compositions, eFP is an integrated battalion as officials from the respective countries work together in a single unit with a single command structure. Cultural interoperability is therefore key for a successful deployment.

### **3. Methodology**

The subject of research, which is the influence of military culture and military identity on the cultural interoperability of Dutch soldiers during their eFP deployment in Lithuania, calls for an in-depth method. In order to explore the perceptions and motivations of the soldiers, the method of conducting a survey was abandoned. Surveys do not capture the underlying essence behind given answers. The researcher is limited by the fact that he or she cannot pursue cues in the respondent's answers to explore motivations and the essence behind them.<sup>92</sup> Given these disadvantages when researching a topic on perceptions, interview-based research was chosen.

The number of interviews that were held are 17. The chosen interview method is an in-depth semi-structured one-on-one interview. To be able to acquire the data that is needed for this research, the interview has to be structured. On the other hand, there has to be room for additional information that a respondent might want to share. As the research is about perceptions, it is crucial to give respondents room to elaborate.<sup>93</sup>

#### **3.1. Participants**

The group of participants were limited to Dutch officers and army officials that had been stationed in Lithuania. Dutch officers are able to comment on their own experiences and, to a certain degree, are able to comment on the experience of their men. The officers were also extensively involved in the multinational cooperation. This means that officers worked frequently with their counterparts from other nations. This does however exclude the non-officer majority of soldiers from sharing their experience directly.

The first respondents that were contacted were provided by, my internship supervisor at the NLDA (Nederlandse Defensie Academie), dr. Jörg Noll and an officer at the office. The following respondents were found by 'snowballing' through asking each

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<sup>92</sup> K. Gerson, 'Depth Interviewing as Science and Art', in: Kathleen Gerson and Sarah Damaske, *The Science and Art of Interviewing* (2020) 1-29; 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> B.L. Moore, 'In-Depth Interviewing' in: J. Soeters, P.M. Shields & S. Rietjens (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies* (2014) 116-128; 117-118.

respondent if they knew others that would be willing to be interviewed. These were contacted, interviewed and asked the same question.

The interviews were done in Dutch as it is the native tongue for the researcher and the respondents, which allows the respondents to better express themselves and for the researcher to find and acknowledge nuances in their responses. As this thesis is written in English, the quotes have been translated with special attention to the preservation of nuance, emphasis, and meaning as to counter the 'lost in translation' phenomenon. These errors can still be present.

### **3.2. Procedure**

Before each interview, every respondent would receive a form of consent.<sup>94</sup> Participants had to agree to being recorded for transcription. In addition they were given the option to participate anonymously, if so they could choose how to be referenced, or not anonymously.

The covid pandemic has had obviously implications for conducting the interviews. The chosen method is a one-on-one interview. While some interviews have been held face-to-face, most of them have been held through Microsoft Teams. When a respondent did not want to physically meet, due to pandemic or distance, Microsoft Teams was the alternative. In most cases the researcher chose MS Teams due to the complications posed by the pandemic.

An important note: the pandemic has led to many people being exhausted by back-to-back online video meetings. This phenomenon is called 'zoom fatigue'.<sup>95</sup> Whilst this study has no influence on the frequency of video meetings that the respondents have to attend for their work, it limits the 'zoom fatigue' by its one-on-one format and the average interviewing time being around 40 minutes. Zoom fatigue is commonly present in meetings with several participants whose cameras have to be turned on during the whole length of these meetings.<sup>96</sup> This study therefore limits the effects of zoom fatigue.

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<sup>94</sup> The form of consent can be found in the Appendix I.

<sup>95</sup> N. Williams, 'Working through COVID-19: 'Zoom' gloom and 'Zoom' fatigue', *Occupational Medicine* 71 (3) (2021) 164.

<sup>96</sup> N. Williams, 'Working through COVID-19'.

The structured questions focussed on respondents' view on Dutch military culture, the Dutch national culture and to which they identified the most. Which in some cases proved to be interwoven with no clear defining answer.

The interview followed the path to identifying differences in military culture the Dutch officers experienced with other military cultures whilst deployed in Lithuania and the influence of these differences. Respondents were also asked what they thought could be improved in the cultural interoperability area of their deployment. At the end every respondent was asked to rate their deployment from one to ten.

To collect and analyse the data from the interviews, the grounded theory approach will be used. This will enable the use of open, axial and selective coding in analysing and collecting data.<sup>97</sup> Open coding entails, after transcribing the interviews, the frequently used wordings and phrases to be put together in categories. These preliminary categories and subcategories are then analysed for connections between them and conceptualising them. This step is called axial coding.<sup>98</sup> The final step is selective coding. During this step a core category will be selected, based on the importance due to the frequency of the answers given by respondents, and the relationship with the other categories are validated.<sup>99</sup>

### **3.3. Limitations**

The pandemic caused further implications for this research as interviewing several nationalities would paint a clearer picture, but travelling was not possible. Also, the limited scope of the master thesis did not allow for such an endeavour.

In addition, the recent military invasion of Ukraine has changed the layout of eFP as a whole. More battlegroups have been created and the list of the host countries has been expanded due to the increased threat from Russia. This threat has not been as high at the time of the interviews and could be a key variable influencing results when reproducing the research at present.

Translating quotes from respondents from Dutch to English might have lead to

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<sup>97</sup> B.L. Moore, 'In-Depth Interviewing', 118-119.

<sup>98</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem.

missed nuances. It especially proved to be difficult to translate 'figures of speech' and the tone accompanied with them. The choice of conducting the interviews in Dutch facilitates respondents to better express themselves, yet posed a challenge in translating properly.

The chosen method of semi-structured interviews instead of a survey makes the researcher dependent on the ability to remember events by the participant at the time of the interview. Variables that might affect the ability to remember, like fatigue, could not be excluded.

Additionally, the choice of using the 'snowballing' method of acquiring respondents might have limited the variety of the pool as it relies on 'who knows whom' between respondents and specifically my internship supervisor. It also can have a limiting effect as it is difficult to know whether one is representative for the group as a whole. In this case the group is 'Dutch officers who have been deployed in Lithuania as part of the eFP battlegroup'.

### **3.4. Global interview outline**

The interviews were held as semi-structured. Whilst there were ad hoc questions, a global structure and chronology was adhered to. The first questions involved the respondents identity as part of the military. This includes how they view the military organisation in regards to the Dutch society as a whole. In addition, the participants were asked whether they feel more as a Dutch citizen or as a member of the Dutch military. Subsequently, as the respondents had a clear answer as how they view themselves, they were asked if they noticed any military cultural differences during their deployment in Lithuania. Additional key questions, like which nations they differed culturally the most with and with which nations they were culturally the most alike, followed. The theme of military cultural interaction during the deployment is the largest portion of the interview. The how and the why of cultural differences have been explored structurally in each interview as well. In conclusion to the interview, every respondent was asked to rate their deployment from 1 to 10. In some cases this question was split in two, as some respondents rated their deployment to their own accomplishments instead of the deployment as a whole: the deployment an sich (including their personal accomplishments), and the deployment in relation to multicultural

cooperation.

## **4. Dutch military culture and military identity**

### **4.1. Military Identity**

Lindy Heinecken found that there is a duality to the Dutch military identity.<sup>100</sup> This duality is characterised by lending aspects from the military culture in forming of one's identity and the idea or realisation that one might not sit out their working career within the defence organisation, but in the civilian working society. This duality influences the loyalty to the organisation.

However, researching this influence of the participants' perception on their deployment in Lithuania proved difficult. The problematic nature became apparent from the first interview that was conducted. The interviewee claimed to be dedicated to being a member of the defence organisation, whilst in the not-so-distant past there had been doubts: *"It was a tight call. If I hadn't had the opportunity to being promoted, I think I wouldn't have been a soldier anymore by now."*<sup>101</sup> This points out the factor of ambition and the goals a person has set for him/herself. It does not necessarily relate to a diminishing or a more fragile loyalty to the organisation. When he was asked what career path he would've chosen if he would not have been offered a chance to be promoted, he responded: *"The defence industry, for example."* It is clear that the Ministry of Defence still has the preference of the respondent. The prospect of not being able to 'climb up the ladder' and being stuck at the same position did not affect his loyalty to and his identification with the defence organisation.

As the concept of duality in regards to military identity and its influence on the perception of the deployment in Lithuania is a research on its own due to its apparent complexity and the heavy need of nuance, the duality has been generalised more to better serve the goal of this research: does the respondent identify more with the Dutch culture (how they perceive the Dutch culture) or does he/she identify more with the military culture? Instead of identifying with the Dutch culture due to the perceived prospect that one might switch from a military to a civilian career, the career aspect will be seen as one

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<sup>100</sup> L. Heinecken, 'Discontent Within the Ranks?', 480-481.

<sup>101</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie officier rotatie 2019-2020'.



amongst other reasons for identifying with the Dutch culture.

Three categories emerged: those that identify themselves as Dutch first, those that identify themselves as military first, and those that see themselves as a mix of both. Excluding the first interview, as it does not fall into the newly formulated categories without assuming and guessing to which one the respondent would've belonged, 15 interviews have been subjected to the new question and categorised accordingly. The number of interviews is not 16 in this case as one respondent could not have been asked this question as the respondent has fulfilled the role of chaplain within the military. Therefore the nature of the questions, and answers, differ fundamentally on some aspects due to sensitivity of said position and its responsibilities. Another chaplain that was interviewed was willing to dive a bit deeper into their own personal experience and is therefore included.

The Dutch identity group consists of 5 respondents. The most defining and fundamental reason has been given by a, at the time, first lieutenant: *“Yes, it [Dutch identity and military identity] is quite connected with each other. I feel Dutch and I feel more Dutch because I’m a Dutch soldier.”*<sup>102</sup> The line between identities can be grey and not well defined and the lieutenant’s answer shows that one has to think thoroughly to be able to provide a meaningful answer. The concept of a Dutch culture from which one can derive his/her identity has its own complications: *“Do we have a national culture? [laughing] Well, then I’d say military culture.”*<sup>103</sup> Said by the same respondent, prior to the first quote. As there was hesitation, accompanied with some confusion, the question was formulated differently by putting it into extremes: whether he feels as a Dutch citizen foremost or as a soldier. This clarification was given several times as it proved to incentivise respondents to think more deeply and answer meaningful to the question. It produced the most elaborate answer within the Dutch identity group:

*“Of course I am military, but I am also Dutch. Look, it is controversial: you are both of course. Basically I’m just a Dutch citizen who works for the ministry of defence. The moment something is happening or happens that requires me to be military, then I am that. Outside of that I am Dutch, naturally. For me, being in the military, is not my*

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<sup>102</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant 28 jaar’.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem.

*identity. It does not make me the person I am. The military forms you, that's true. It forms your being and who you are, but it is not my standard phrase to say: I am [...] and I'm also in the military.”<sup>104</sup>*

The respondent acknowledges the influence the organisation has on her sense of identity, but primarily sees herself as Dutch.

The Dutch identity group primarily see themselves as Dutch above being a member of the military. The data suggests that there might be a correlation with how they perceive multinational cooperation. From the five respondents in this group, only one is positive on multinational cooperation. From the three groups, the Dutch identity group is the least positive (20% is positive; n=5) on multinational cooperation.

The number of respondents that have had a negative experience on multinational cooperation is 11. This number has been reduced to 10 as one respondent did not comment on it. Within the 'negative experience group', 7 belong to the Dutch identity group or belong to the mixed identity group, and 3 to the military identity group. The 'positive experience group' consists of 6 respondents, of which 5 belong to the military identity group. An important note to the 'positive experience group' is that 2 respondents have fulfilled a military operational function within the battalion-staff during their deployment in Lithuania. These respondents are also the only respondents that have been interviewed that have fulfilled such functions in Lithuania, which indicates that the role one fulfils on deployment might heavily influence one's perception and experience.

The data thus suggests that the Dutch and mixed identity group are the most negative on multinational cooperation (70%; n=10) and their experience during their deployment in Lithuania. In other words: the more a person identifies himself/herself as Dutch over being a member of the military, the more likely they seem to experience military cultural difference negatively.

## **4.2. Dutch Military Culture**

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<sup>104</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Kapitein Anoniem'.

To define the difference between the Dutch culture and the Dutch military culture with current theoretical definitions does not serve the goal of this study. The goal is to determine what the participants perceive to be the differences between the two cultures as that is how they feel it defines them, the group they belong to, and how they perceive others. The image of the Dutch military culture can be split in two: the difference with Dutch culture and the difference with other military cultures.

#### *4.2.1. Military culture versus society*

Respondents were asked what characterised the Dutch military culture and how it differed from the Dutch culture. The question in itself proved difficult to answer as multiple participants formulated their response in twofold: the Dutch military is a mirror of society and at the same time it is different from society. At the root of this duality lies the characteristics that participants ascribe to the Dutch military culture in relation to society. The most reoccurring characteristic is the *can-do-mentality*. It entails the mentality that nothing is unsolvable and one does everything he or she can to achieve a goal, which respondents claim is not or much less prevalent in Dutch society.

*“The can-do-mentality relates to the saying you might’ve heard: if it can’t be the way it must, than it must be the way it can. That means you just have to execute. If we don’t have favourable conditions than we must do it with the means we do have. It is going to happen. The ‘can-do’: we can do it.”<sup>105</sup>*

Flexibility is tightly interwoven with the *can-do-mentality* and also a characteristic respondents ascribed to the Dutch military. The second characteristic is that the Dutch military is more team oriented than society as a whole:

*“Yes, I think we hold more value in tradition and looking out for each other, being there for one another. I also think our norm of decency lies a bit higher than that on*

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<sup>105</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Elnt’.

*the other side of the fence [Dutch society]”<sup>106</sup>*

The feeling of being part of a team is something the military promotes throughout training and beyond. It becomes fundamental to how one perceives the Dutch society: *“We grow up to do things together and to work together towards a common goal. That is something I personally miss when I look around me in society.”<sup>107</sup>* Society is viewed as individualistic which is in stark contrast with how soldiers are being moulded by the military. This is however inherent to military organisations as soldiers need to function in units. It does however constitute a cultural difference between society at large and the military. Respondents highlighted more aspects which could be classified as inherently military, such as: punctuality and hierarchy.<sup>108</sup>

It is noted by several respondents that the Dutch military culture also shows signs of nationalism and conservatism.<sup>109</sup> Nationalism is present in almost all Dutch soldiers according to one respondent:

*“The interesting part is that almost all Dutch soldiers are nationalistic. They are proud of their country. They are quite chauvinistic thus they think their country, their military is the best. Whilst there often is no evidence for it. The French have not won a war since 1815, yet they also think their military is the best.”<sup>110</sup>*

A dose of nationalism would seem needed for one to join the military and to be willing to make the sacrifices that come with being a soldier. One has to believe for what he/she fights or might fight for.

*“I was just thinking. Being in the military asks something of you. You have to do it*

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<sup>106</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Martens’.

<sup>107</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Rick’.

<sup>108</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Anoniem’; ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Rick’; ‘Transcriptie Geestesverzorger’; ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Wouter’; ‘Transcriptie Pors’; ‘Transcriptie Thijs’; ‘Transcriptie Wouter de Jager’; ‘Transcriptie Wagemans’.

<sup>109</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Geestesverzorger’; ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Wouter’. ‘Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant 28 jaar’; ‘Transcriptie Elnt’; ‘Transcriptie Thijs’; ‘Transcriptie Wouter de Jager’.

<sup>110</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Geestesverzorger’.

*with commitment. I am a soldier for the Dutch state and I feel happy with that. I could not be a soldier for some kind of rogue nation or failed state with norms and values that do not align with my own. That is why I feel it is important that I am a Dutch soldier and not just any soldier as that would mean I would be able to take up arms for any client or state.”<sup>111</sup>*

Being Dutch is a part of their being and an intricate aspect of their motivation to be a Dutch soldier. The level of nationalism might even be higher than that of society as a whole. They are proud of being Dutch and everything they believe it entails. This leads to some level of conservatism as demonstrated by one respondents elaborate plea when asked what he meant by ‘*vertrutting*’ (the softening of society):

*“That nowadays there are several cultural things. I don’t know how to best describe it. That there are several cultural aspects that we, society as a whole, suffer from. This is about aspects and phenomena that have been etched in our culture for decennia. I don’t mean those aspects are inherently bad, but I also want to say they are not all good either. We are offended way too quickly nowadays. We are too petty, all of us. I think it is less within the military. We grow up with all kind of luxuries and that’s not illogical as it is a product of our time, but 30 years ago the youth grew up with more resilience than now. It results from everything that is arranged for us now, being more inside than outside. This concerns society, but I also think the military has softened their standards. The military also suffers from this, but with ‘*vertrutting*’ I look at the removal of statues. Statues of historical figures like Piet Hein. Also that we get offended by certain things where I think: “Yeah okay fine. I don’t think we need to take offence on those things”. That level of ‘*vertrutting*’ is not something I see with us [military]. The military is more nationalistic than society is. As you know, the military is not as lauded as it is in other countries. A soldier 30 years ago might’ve walked 200 kilometres, where now a soldier walks 100 kilometres. I bet he would think we are softies. [laughing] Just to indicate the change that has occurred.”<sup>112</sup>*

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<sup>111</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Elnt’.

<sup>112</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Wouter’.

The military culture has been attributed to be more conservative, more nationalistic, more team oriented, and more task oriented than society. These characteristics exist next to aspects one would expect belonging to a military organisation like being more hierarchical and more strict than society. A stronger hierarchy and being more strict than society is most likely universal when looking at differences between a country's military and its society.

The characteristics, which respondents attribute to the cultural differences between the Dutch military and society, give a more defined picture as to how they see themselves as part of the Dutch military. When confronted with other military cultures, more aspects that are inherent to the Dutch military come to light.

#### *4.2.2. Dutch military culture versus other military cultures*

Aspects of one's own culture become more defined when confronted with another culture as Vom Hagen, Moelker and Soeters have shown in their study on cooperation in the first German-Netherlands Corps.<sup>113</sup> The study has a strong resemblance with this study as the lead nation of Battlegroup Lithuania is Germany, with the Netherlands as the second largest supplier of troops to the battalion. Vom Hagen, Moelker and Soeters state that the smaller party, in their study on the German-Netherlands Corps being the Netherlands, is more likely to feel the most threatened culturally.<sup>114</sup> In the case of Battlegroup Lithuania the Netherlands is also the smaller contingent to Germany's contingent. Whilst the manner in which the relationship and its effects take form in Lithuania will be addressed later, the 'clarification' of one's own cultural aspects when interacting with other cultures is relevant for this section. The multinational setup of eFP forces Dutch soldiers to discover what it is that makes them Dutch soldiers.

One of the most referenced Dutch military characteristic in the eFP setting, is *mission command*. Mission command is a method and vision on how command between officer and subordinates is handled. When an officer gets the assignment from his commanding officer

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<sup>113</sup> U. vom Hagen, R. Moelker and J. Soeters, 'Introduction: Cultural Interoperability', 8.

<sup>114</sup> Ibidem.

to take point A, the officer is free to achieve the assignment as he/she sees fit as long as point A gets taken. This is contrary to methods where the commanding officer micromanages the process up to taking point A. The commanding officer orders his officer to take point A by a frontal assault for example. Mission command states that the officer can choose whether a frontal assault is feasible, given the situation on the ground at that time, or that a different approach is necessary to ensure the capture of point A. In turn it gives more room for the commanding officer to assess changes on the battlefield and strategize on them. Whether one method is better than the other is a different study. The difference in method is perceived by respondents as a crucial aspect of Dutch military culture in relation to other military cultures.

*"It means that you do not tell someone in great detail how you have to do something, but what someone must do. It suggests that those under your command may and can show initiative. That binds us, although you need a culture where people also dare to take initiative to be able to achieve it [mission command]. The more loose the culture is, the more people will take initiative. I think that when you look on the international level at the lower levels where initiative is shown, it is precisely where we differ from the rest."<sup>115</sup>*

The difference in military doctrine stems from differences in culture. This becomes evident in the fact that one of the most addressed Dutch military cultural characteristic in relation to other military cultures, by respondents, is the 'freedom of decision-making'. This aspect has been referenced by 12 out of the 17 interviewees, which is the same for 'mission command'. Additionally, 'freedom of decision-making' has been referenced 28 times and 'mission command' 29 times. It is important to note that both codes have been referenced by the same 12 participants. The military doctrine is therefore a practical example of the 'freedom of decision-making' characteristic that respondents experienced during their deployment in Lithuania.

In line with mission command and the freedom of decision-making is the 'low

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<sup>115</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Dirk Neefs'.

hierarchy' characteristic. All 17 respondents viewed the Dutch military culture as more lenient in levels of hierarchy than counterparts in other countries, with some exceptions like Norway. Respondents noticed during their deployment that the hierarchy is more strict than their own. The chain of command does not differ as commanding officers still have the final say over their subordinates, yet the accessibility to the commanding officer and the way one can speak to his superior differs greatly. Whilst respondents framed this difference in varying ways, the underlying theme is the same:

*“Yes, you seek each other out more frequently. If you have spoken to each other a couple of times, socially, you can walk up to your commanding officer with a question. ‘Something is bothering me’ or ‘Can you help me with this?’. A Dutch commander will also ask... You have two ways on how to interact with your subcommanders. ‘What do you bring to the table?’ If I’m the battalion commander and I have a Dutch company, I can ask: ‘What do you bring to the table and what can you offer me?’. As being a Dutch officer. You can also turn it around: ‘What can I do for you as commander from another country?’. When you act in this way you get closer to one another very quickly, I think. This is a part of culture. Like I said; speaking through the ranks.”<sup>116</sup>*

*“Yes, there are similarities [with other military cultures], but there are also significant differences. A big difference is that the Dutch are a lot more outspoken. They like to know why they do things and therefore form an opinion more quickly. That comes down to an aspect of hierarchy. It depends on how creative you are as a leader and how you look at things, whether people share their opinion. It happens more and more, in the most broad sense, that people are not afraid of sharing their opinion. The bulk of countries, maybe a bit generalising, are more hierarchical and orders are orders. Maybe this is a bit over the top. If the boss says something, than it should be true. Execute, march. Anyway, I think that [low level of hierarchy] is what makes us strong. As a commander you will not hastily make a decision and think twice on a plan in order to attempt to come to the most thought out plan. That is the biggest*

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<sup>116</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Dirk Neefs’.



*difference I see when I look at other countries.”<sup>117</sup>*

*“A lot. As I said before the Dutch military culture is more informal and less rank-bound with more initiative and independency in regards to other countries.”<sup>118</sup>*

*“In regards to activities I think that the main thread throughout that period was, where even some incidents have occurred about... It comes down to this: we Dutch are very direct to each other. Whilst the military is a hierarchical organisation, it is however relatively flat. In the Netherlands you can say to your superior that you do not agree with something or that you hold a different view. There is room for giving and receiving criticism, and to discuss about certain things. At the appropriate time and in an appropriate manner of course.”<sup>119</sup>*

The lenient level of hierarchy, as shown by the respondents, is perceived as a key aspect of Dutch military culture. This became evident for participants when collaborating with international counterparts who are perceived to be more strict in hierarchy compared to the Dutch hierarchy strictness. Yet, the Dutch military culture is seen as hierarchical when respondents compared Dutch military culture and the Dutch civilian culture. Next to the civilian culture the given military characteristics are the aspects what makes one a member of the military. When looking at military cultures from other nations and how one's own military culture compares to it, the national culture's influence on the respective military culture becomes more defined.

To summarise how the Dutch military culture is perceived by its officers, is that its core aspects are: freedom of decision-making, mission command, low level of hierarchy, and professional informality. These aspects are deeply rooted as the interviews have shown that working with military cultures having opposing core aspects than those of the Dutch military culture, has led to complications in cooperation. Military cultures that have similar or the same core aspects, have shown to enhance collaboration. In addition: respondents that

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<sup>117</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Kapitein Wouter'.

<sup>118</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Majoor Berendsen'.

<sup>119</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Niels Zuur'.

adhered to a more military identity were more inclined to 'overlook' differences in military culture and hold a more pragmatic view. This does not mean that this group of respondents had no complications with other military cultures, but that their overall view is more positive. The group that adheres to a more Dutch identity or a balanced identity between Dutch and military, views the core differences in military cultures to be of a larger influence on cooperation.

## **5. Military cultures on deployment in Lithuania**

The Dutch military culture is perceived as one with freedom of decision-making and less strict hierarchy rules. During deployment in Lithuania, respondents found themselves in a multinational environment where they had to work with counterparts from other nations. Cultural differences and similarities become more tangible in such an environment. According to vom Hagen, Moelker and Soeters, on their study of the first German-Netherlands Corps, cultural differences feel more substantial when cultures are alike.<sup>120</sup> In order to reach cultural interoperability, sympathy is needed which consists of communication and mutual understanding.<sup>121</sup> This can be hard to achieve when the few differences are the centre of attention for those involved. The study states that the German and Dutch cultures are alike and the differences that exist, like differences in leadership styles (German authoritarian styles vs Dutch participative styles) become the point of focus because of it.<sup>122</sup> The lenient level of hierarchy and freedom of decision-making or mission command, which respondents have attributed to the Dutch military culture, can be seen as part of Dutch participative leadership styles.

This study looks at what the respondents perceive as their military culture and what they perceive the other military cultures to be. They state that, during their deployment, the Norwegians were the most culturally alike and the Lithuanians and the Germans to be the least alike. The latter group being the main source of complications that result from cultural differences, according to participants. Respondents have had experiences with other nations, but due to the fact that the composition of nations in the battlegroup varies, the experiences per nation amounted to too few to be included.

This chapter is divided in subchapters per country respondents have experience working with which are Norway, Belgium, Lithuania, and Germany respectively. Not every nation every respondent has worked with is mentioned, due to few mentioned experiences with these nations, as it does not serve the goal of analysing trends in experiences

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<sup>120</sup> U. vom Hagen, R. Moelker and J. Soeters, 'Introduction: Cultural Interoperability', 8.

<sup>121</sup> R. Moelker, J. Soeters and U. vom Hagen, 'Sympathy, the Cement of Interoperability', 17.

<sup>122</sup> U. vom Hagen, R. Moelker and J. Soeters, 'Introduction: Cultural Interoperability', 11.

respondents have. The United States, Canada, Czech Republic, Spain, France, and Croatia are such nations.

### **5.1. Cooperation and experiences with Norwegian counterpart**

Norway has been part of Battlegroup Lithuania during the deployments of every respondent. Their contribution is small compared to the Netherlands and Germany. However, the Norwegians are perceived as the most military culturally alike and are thus almost unanimously positively referenced. Only one interviewee had a negative experience with the Norwegians.

A majority of respondents, 12 out of 17, stated that the Norwegian military culture is the same or very similar to that of the Dutch military culture. As a consequence they have been widely regarded as a pleasant counterpart the respondents have enjoyed working with.

*“The thing I noticed, and it might be a bit charged, is that our military culture had the most similarities with the Norwegian military culture. I am talking about the relation between each other. They were pretty informal between each other and thus pretty informal with us as well. You could see that communication between us went smoothly and it just clicked. That is my experience, that might not be everyone’s experience. I got along very well with the Norwegian platoon commander and I noticed that they had the same views as we did, including the relation between commander and platoon commander. They addressed each other by their names, instead of surnames, just like us. There was room for debate and opinions could be shared. There could also be tactical discussions about certain solutions, which would end in a decision by the commander and everyone would follow said decision. They do have procedures, guidelines, and manuals of course, but when you wanted to deviate from them for tactical considerations it was not a problem. Thus it was not rigid as in: these are the drills and that’s it. For me the Norwegians were very similar to us. I have also participated in an exercise in their company. I was a platoon commander under command of the Norwegian company. The way of operating was very similar to our own. As I’m an advocate of more informality, more freedom of decision-making, and more autonomy of deputy commanders, it is a pleasant way of working [with the Norwegians]. They had a bit more freedom, more openness, and more room for*

*deviation and therefore I enjoyed working with them. Very similar [to the Dutch military culture].”<sup>123</sup>*

The similarities between the Dutch and Norwegian military culture centre around less rigid hierarchy, informality, and the freedom of decision-making or ‘mission command’, as stated by the respondent above. These aspects are regarded as of significant importance for Dutch officers. As respondents say: *“Are there big differences between the Norwegians and us? No, I don’t think so.”*; *“The Norwegians are pretty much like us.”*; and *“The Norwegians, Danish, and Swedish are similar to the Dutch in their ways, but also in their ability to speak English. In my experience I’d rather work with them than with the Germans or the French.”*<sup>124</sup> Having the same norms and values within their military creates mutual understanding and facilitates communication, which leads to sympathy. A key ingredient for cultural interoperability, according to Moelker, Soeters, and vom Hagen.<sup>125</sup>

The mutual understanding has its effects on the operational level. As the elaborately quoted officer states that cooperation in the field during an exercise was pleasant and required little adaptability from both sides.<sup>126</sup> The cultural influence on the operational level is therefore desirable, and causes little to no complications in the field.

On the organisational level and life on base, the Norwegians and the Dutch enjoyed a good relationship as well. *“In case of the Norwegians, people went back and forth [between Norwegian compound and Dutch compound] all of the time and they regularly came to have a peek.”*<sup>127</sup> When interaction is smooth and when there is a strong relation based on shared values, the professional interaction benefits as well.

Due to the positive experiences with the Norwegians, respondents had not much to remark. Some compliment the Norwegians on the level of female integration in their military. The Dutch see themselves as advanced in that area as well compared to other nations, which will be addressed under the corresponding nation, yet the Norwegians are

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<sup>123</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant’.

<sup>124</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Rick’.; Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Kapitein Wouter’.; Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Majoor Berendsen’.

<sup>125</sup> R. Moelker, J. Soeters and U. vom Hagen, ‘Sympathy, the Cement of Interoperability’, 17.

<sup>126</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant’.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem.

perceived to be even more developed in that area. To summarise, the Norwegians and the Dutch are perceived to be the most military cultural compatible by respondents due to shared norms and values as freedom of decision-making, informality, and a less tight hierarchy. The ability to communicate in English also seems to be an enhancing factor in contributing to a positive perception of the Norwegian military and cooperation with it.

## 5.2. Cooperation and experiences with Belgian counterpart

The experiences that 9 of the interviewed Dutch officers had with Belgium are twofold: positive and negative. The positive side encompasses the shared language which makes it pleasant and easier to communicate. The negative aspect is the more strict hierarchy the Belgium military has. It is important to note that both sides are not mutually exclusive to one's experience. It seems however that, in case of Belgium, the ability to clearly communicate with one another takes precedence over the negatively viewed hierarchy. Language being the factor that negates all negative perceived military cultural aspects, seems to be only the case for Belgium as respondents are not that forgiving with others even if they were able to communicate.

Thus respondents view the cooperation with Belgium as positive: *“Also with the Belgians [good cooperation]. Between the men as well. The reason of course being that they could speak Dutch and Belgian with each other.”*<sup>128</sup> Cooperation went smooth throughout the ranks as this respondent has stated, due to language. Another respondent on his interaction with the Belgians: *“On my level it went well and pleasantly with the Belgians, mostly due to language we gravitated towards each other. It was as I had expected to be honest.”*<sup>129</sup> The respondent also states that the cooperation with the Belgians was pleasant due to speaking the same language.

Whilst respondents noticed that the hierarchy was more strict, one experience aside it seems not to have had a significant influence on their cooperation. However this is not the case with other nations with strict hierarchy the Dutch officers have worked with. Other

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<sup>128</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant’.

<sup>129</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Dirk Neefs’.

variables, which were not researched, might play a role as to why the Dutch are far more forgiving on military cultural differences with the Belgians as with other nationalities. Therefore there appears not to have been significant influence on the operational and organisational level, other than a pleasant experience.

### **5.3. Cooperation and experiences with Lithuanian counterpart**

Lithuania is the host nation of the battlegroup. Whilst they largely keep to their own, mostly separated, 9 respondents have had experiences in some form with the Lithuanians. Only one respondent has had a positive experience with the Lithuanians whilst the rest have had either a negative or neutral experience. The main points of friction that Dutch officers perceived, in relation to their own norms and values, are: stubbornness, sense of exceptionalism, and a strict hierarchy. These aspects of the Lithuanian detachments are how Dutch officers perceive these to be. Officers from other nationalities might not contribute these aspects to the Lithuanian military.

The first point of friction which respondents experienced can be captured in perceived stubbornness, which is closely related to the perceived sense of exceptionalism. The difference being that the sense of exceptionalism comprises of actions that stem from a feeling of superiority. Stubbornness entails the inability/the lack of will to see things from another angle or to do things another way. The perceived stubbornness might have a different origin than being a product of Lithuanian military culture. It might stem from the presence of foreign militaries and their doctrines, which they might perceive as 'stubbornness' on part of the other present militaries. Thus, it might not be inherent to the Lithuanian military culture, it is perceived as such by respondents. An example by a Dutch first lieutenant:

*"The thing that surprised me the most was the Lithuanian attitude of 'my will is law'. That really surprised me and it bothered me, because we are here as NATO to help you. Don't be arrogant, but a little grateful that we Dutch, Norwegians, Belgians and Germans have agreement [on a plan/to do certain things]. It might not match with the Lithuanian idea, but maybe you might have to adjust the Lithuanian idea. We are*

*there to support them. If all of us have a certain view according to the NATO standard and that you as Lithuania are the sole one to want to do things differently, than you might be a little crazy if you are the only one against all the others in that situation. They were convinced of their right a lot. They were also convinced on how good they were, despite how wrong things went.”<sup>130</sup>*

The first lieutenant describes that he experienced a lack of will on the Lithuanian part to adjust, which can be perceived as stubbornness. Important to note that there is a hint of exceptionalism on the part of the Dutch officer. He states that we, as NATO, are there to help them. This implies that Lithuania is not part of NATO, which they are, and that the Lithuanians should do as they're told. This statement however most likely stems from frustration than from the actual belief that Lithuania is inferior. It is therefore testament to the level of friction the respondent has experienced with Lithuania during his deployment.

Another, at the time of deployment, first lieutenant and platoon commander had a major incident involving the Lithuanian counterpart during a multinational shooting exercise on a shooting range. The safety rules and regulations when organising a multinational shooting exercise state that, according to the respondent, the strictest safety rules have to be followed. If the local safety rules are more strict than the international rules (NATO), the local rules apply. According to the respondent, the Lithuanian rules were not that good at the time, which resulted in every nation applying their own safety rules with no clear unilateral agreements. At the end of the day there were four safety incidents, where one incident involved a Lithuanian safety officer nearly being hit by an antitank rocket as it landed 50 metres from him. The respondent's petty officers, who were present at the exercise as instructors, notified the respondent of the incidents who decided to address it at the meeting later that day:

*“Well, during the meeting the Lithuanians said there had been some incidents and that everyone should pay attention to make sure it does not happen in the future. The end. That made my hair stand on end, that is not how you deal with these situations*

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<sup>130</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Elnt'.



*professionally. You are responsible for the men of the shooting range. Anyway, it was not the time to make a point with many Lithuanians present. I discussed it next NATO meeting. During the meeting with the NATO platoon commanders and a section 3 Croatian officer, who had to lead the meeting in name of the eFP battalion, the Croatian officer mindlessly said that it would not happen again if we pay a bit more attention next time. At that time I stated I did not agree. There had been four incidents which we acknowledged that could happen and therefore made agreements beforehand, which have not been followed. This is handled too laconically and we as officers are responsible that a shooting exercise is safe. The Lithuanian safety officers was literally nearly killed. It was more luck than wisdom that he's alive. This can't happen."<sup>131</sup>*

The respondent had experienced the 'stubbornness', which he describes as the Lithuanians doing their thing and when it goes wrong the method is not questioned. Later the respondent states that the Lithuanians tried to sweep the incident under the rug:

*"The day after we had a normal exercise. The following day there would be another shooting exercise. The day after that, I got a call from the Lithuanians if I could come by the headquarters because they had some questions for me. When I got there I got jumped by three captains, two majors and a petty officer on why we [the Dutch] had quit the shooting exercise and that all the things I had said were not true. The situation was truly bizarre. I stood my ground and told them that it [the organisation of the shooting exercise] doesn't work like that. Eventually the incident involving the near-death of a Lithuanian safety officer, was brought up on CDS [Commandant Der Strijdkrachten/Commander of the Armed Forces] level. The Dutch CDS asked the German and Lithuanian CDS for clarification. The Germans and the Lithuanians had swept everything under the rug and had made no report of the incident. The Germans and Lithuanians, top-down, started asking questions as well which eventually resulted in the range organisation being replaced by a more competent Lithuanian*

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<sup>131</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Niels Zuur'.

*battalion.*<sup>132</sup>

The respondent was shocked by the way the Lithuanian counterpart handled the situation and questioned him about the incident. However, when talking about the perception of Dutch officers that the Lithuanian military is stubborn it is overlooked by the respondent that the he himself has shown an attitude that the Lithuanians might perceive as 'stubbornness'. It shows the ambiguity of this perceived point of friction as the 'stubbornness' that respondents experience when cooperating with the Lithuanian counterpart, might be the result of misinterpretation of each other's method of communication. Some Dutch respondents have attributed directness (belonging to the professional informality and lenient hierarchy characteristics) to the Dutch military culture, which can be interpreted by other cultures as blunt and in turn might react in a way the respondent interprets as stubborn. The 'stubbornness' aspect concerning the Lithuanian military culture, is the most ambiguous as it might be a reaction to how the Dutch communicate or originating from the situation of being the host country to multiple militaries with their own views and doctrines.

The second point of friction stems from, what respondents perceive as, Lithuanian exceptionalism. A first lieutenant shared an incident involving the Lithuanian military that would fall under this category:

*"Yes, I have some examples. Lithuania recently has a JTAC (Joint Terminal Attack Controller) program to be able to train their own JTACs. We are talking about the men who request airstrikes. The Lithuanian JTACs were pretty happy with themselves in a pretty arrogant way. For example, the Germans hired a state-owned civil company that had fighter jet looking aircraft, manned by retired F-16 pilots. They were hired to test the German anti-air defences. The planes were to fly towards them a couple of times, so the 'defenders' were to spot them on the radar and were to execute the correct procedures. Without actually shooting of course, just the procedures as it was just a training exercise. The Lithuanians were, naturally, in command of their own*

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<sup>132</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Niels Zuur'.

*airspace. It's their airspace, so they decide what happens in it. The Lithuanians, however, thought the training of their JTACS was more important than the objective these planes were hired to do. The planes were hailed by the Lithuanians and redirected to another part of Lithuania to train with their JTACs. They did this, even though the Germans had paid for the whole operation. The Germans had hired a German company with German planes to participate in a German training. The Lithuanians did not care as it was in their airspace. It's pretty convenient as the Lithuanians do not have an air force, thus the planes had to come and help the Lithuanians train. There is arrogance in the whole affair. These kinds of incidents really baffled me a couple of times.*"<sup>133</sup>

The Lithuanian military ordered the planes, that were hired by Germany to train with the German military in Lithuania, to abandon the exercise and join their exercise instead. This clashed with the view of the respondent that the planes were hired by someone else to do something else and thus perceived as arrogance. The respondent also states the Lithuanian JTACs were arrogantly happy with themselves, showing his frustration with the Lithuanian counterpart. The respondent's frustration is aimed at, what he perceives as, a Lithuanian notion of superiority. In turn it negatively impacts his experience with and view of the Lithuanian counterpart.

The experience with, what respondents perceive as, the Lithuanian military culture has been viewed negatively by all but one respondent that has had contact with the Lithuanians. The one respondent with a positive view on cooperation with the Lithuanians, who at the time held the rank of captain and fulfilled the role of company commander, describes his experience as follows:

*"I thought the Lithuanians were very eager to learn. They really wanted to suck up all the information. They really opened up themselves for it. I think that there is a thought behind it: they [the Dutch/NATO] are more developed, they have been at it for longer than us. We [Lithuanians] therefore take a humble approach. [Respondent*

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<sup>133</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Elnt'.

*returns to talk from his own perspective] They [the Lithuanians] have become quite big in the meantime though. They did things really quite good already. Also if you look at how the Lithuanians do it, you see that they have been deploying their military to all corners of the world. These soldiers come back with a lot of knowledge and experience, which they incorporate quickly in their military doctrine and operations. Those are really good. They are really eager to learn and therefore take an open, hospitable approach. It's a beautiful thing to see. In a nutshell how that [cooperation with Lithuania] went.”<sup>134</sup>*

The respondent paints a very different picture of the Lithuanians with his experience than the other respondents. The fact that he was company commander, might suggest that communication went differently on a higher level when working with the Lithuanians. Also, the assumption that the Lithuanians ‘look up’ to the Dutch and NATO looms in his comment which might suggest a small hint of hubris. Additionally, the positive experience of the participant which is in contrast with, or not as neutral as, other experiences might suggest that the nature of the experience one has with the Lithuanians is shaped by their perception of them. Where one might interpret something as ‘questioning’ by the Lithuanians, another might interpret it as curiosity.

The experience that Dutch officers had with members of the host nation’s military have been largely negative. The negative experiences have impacted the cooperation, according to participants, as it resulted in incidents on the shooting range and disrupted a German held exercise. To have an objective view on those incidents requires additional information. That however does not marginalize the experiences and the impact from them felt by respondents. As these experiences lead to what they perceive as aspects attributed to Lithuanian military culture that leads to friction with the Dutch military culture. Objectively these aspects are ambiguous, as other variables might contribute to the display of ‘stubbornness’ and ‘exceptionalism’ as Lithuania is the host nation.

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<sup>134</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Wouter de Jager 8 juni’.

#### **5.4. Cooperation and experiences with the German counterpart**

Germany is the lead nation of the battlegroup, which means that they lead the battalion. Due to this fact, and respondents are aware of this, frictions or disputes one might have will most likely be with those deciding the doctrine. This is only more accentuated when that doctrine differs greatly from that of those under you. Additionally it increases the frequency of encounters between two military cultures. The frequency in interaction between the Dutch and the German contingencies is increased further by the fact that Germany, as the lead nation, contributes the most manpower to the battlegroup and the Netherlands the second most. Due to the sheer volume of data this subchapter will be the most elaborate in comparison to the previous subchapters on Norway, Belgium, and Lithuania. Due to the frequency of encounters it is not surprising that all respondents (n=17) have had some form of interaction and experience with their German colleagues during their deployment. It stands out that all respondents have had one or more neutral and/or negative experience working with their German counterpart.

This does not however mean that all respondents hold a negative perception to the, what they perceive as the, German military culture and their multinational cooperation experience. Important to note is that two respondents have fulfilled a role in the battalion staff, which is comprised of functionaries of all participating nationalities, and both have had a positive experience regarding multinational cooperation. Both respondents also identify themselves more as being part of the military culture than as part of the Dutch culture. The data handled in a previous chapter on military identity suggests that the majority of those who identify more with the Dutch military culture have a positive look on multinational cooperation and therefore in their cooperation with the German counterpart.

Additionally, in case of cooperation and experience with the German contingent, 47% of the respondents (n=17) have heard of or witnessed harassment of female personnel whereas 29% identify members of the German counterpart to be one of the perpetrators. Other nationalities include members of the Czech and the Belgian counterpart, which were identified as perpetrators by 12%. The female personnel that experienced the harassment stemmed from Norway and the Netherlands. Respondents attribute the harassment to what they perceive as military cultural differences.

This subchapter will start exploring the negative experiences with the German

counterpart and important sidenotes given by respondents; primarily what respondents perceive as a generational difference within the German army. The generational difference entails the difference in strictness and hierarchy that older generation German officers value in comparison to the younger generation of German officers, which are perceived to be more lenient by respondents. Secondly the harassment of female personnel will be addressed. Lastly it will explore the positive experiences.

#### *5.4.1. Negative experiences with the German counterpart*

The most reoccurring points of friction that respondents experienced with, what they perceive as, the German military culture are categorized in the following aspects: a strong hierarchy (authoritarian and bureaucratic), opposite doctrine of the 'mission command' doctrine, and exceptionalism. It is worthy to note that the points of friction the respondents experienced are aspects that are the opposite of the characteristics they attributed to the Dutch military culture: a more lenient hierarchy, the mission command doctrine (freedom of decision-making), and professional informality.

The first aspect that is perceived to be a point of friction between the Dutch military culture and that of the German military culture is the strict hierarchy of the German military culture. Respondents perceive the German military culture to be strict in hierarchy which entails how they address, treat, and communicate with their superior officers. In turn it also entails how one addresses, treats and communicates with his subordinates. Respondents perceive that the hierarchy of the German military culture is very strict. Three short examples given by a first lieutenant demonstrates what respondents mean by the German military culture having a strict hierarchy:

*“With the Germans it [hierarchy] is really something else. They are really hard [on subordinates]. When a platoon commander, for example, falls short in some way he will be humiliated in front of the whole company. The Germans are really mean in those matters.”<sup>135</sup>*

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<sup>135</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant 28 jaar'.

*“You mostly see yelling Germans that come across as very authoritarian and stressed 24/7. The German way of leadership is the total opposite of our own. We always try to remain calm. We are also reasonably informal with each other.”<sup>136</sup>*

*“Yes, I have attended some Sundays [meetings] that were monologues by the German commander.”<sup>137</sup>*

These three examples given by the first lieutenant reflects the experiences with the German strict hierarchy that respondents state to have encountered. According to the respondent, the German military culture values the chain of command to the level that utmost obedience is expected from those lower in rank and function. Additionally, failure is punished by humiliation, according to the respondent. As it is the complete opposite as to how the Dutch respondents see their own military culture, it seems as a logical point of friction. The lenient level of hierarchy ascribed to the Dutch military culture is said to be tightly interwoven with professional informality. The commanding officer, in Dutch military culture, is approachable according to respondents. It also leaves room for error by officers. These aspects respondents perceive their German colleagues not to possess. The difference is great, thus it can become more pronounced in the experience of respondents. Also the Germans lead Battlegroup Lithuania and therefore respondents are confronted with German hierarchy more often and more profoundly.

The Germans in their turn might view the Dutch military culture to be stubborn or even cocky. According to another respondent it can clash both ways:

*“There [in the battalion headquarters], in the hallway, you see a major scolding a captain. A German major scolding a German captain. In the eyes of the Dutch that’s unheard of. They [the Dutch] see that and experience some discomfort and disdain for what they are seeing. In turn the Dutch lose their respect for the German major. ... Yet when the Germans impose a stupid rule, the Dutch will say: ‘that is not a good rule’ or*

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<sup>136</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant 28 jaar’.

<sup>137</sup> Ibidem.

*'we don't agree with that'. The German will then lose his mind.'*<sup>138</sup>

The respondent states that the difference in the level of hierarchy can cause friction for both sides. It also suggests that the Dutch value their own ways more, which the Germans might do for their own ways as well. This point of friction might have another variable which is the inability or unwillingness to reach a middle ground through mutual agreement from both parties. In turn this variable might be strengthened by mutual agitation. Alas, the grand difference in how both view hierarchy causes the respondents to perceive it as a significant and impactful point of friction.

According to a major, at the time captain, stated that the cooperation with the Germans had led to many points of friction. His response when asked if he could give some examples:

*"[Laughing] A lot. Let's take an example. I was company commander at the time. At a certain time [during the Iron Wolf exercise] we had a march with the German battlegroup, the battalion we were a part of. The whole thing got stuck and led to a standstill so I drove with my Fennek to the Boxer the battalion commander was in. I proposed a possible solution on how to solve the situation we were in. My company was held in reserve at the time. The battalion commander replied: 'Captain, go back to your vehicle. I am the commander of this battlegroup, not you!' Then I thought: 'Okay fine. Then I'll just wait until you will actually do something'. Germans quickly feel attacked on their position of power when you take initiative."*<sup>139</sup>

The respondent had a personal experience with the dissonance between German military hierarchy and Dutch military hierarchy. The major, at the time captain, acted as he normally would in the Dutch military and attempted to give his commanding officer, the German battalion commander, suggestions on how to proceed. As respondents value freedom of decision-making and a lenient hierarchy, this would seem an acceptable situation *within* the

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<sup>138</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Geestesverzorgers'.

<sup>139</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Majoor Berendsen'.



Dutch military. However, the German military culture values the strict hierarchy and authority that comes with it, according to the respondents. The situation the major described, portrays the friction when these two views clash on a operational level.

The incident the major shared is also an example for the second point of friction respondents experienced; mission command and freedom of decision-making. Mission command is a military doctrine that gives officers more freedom to take decisions on the field, instead of the commanding officer micromanaging the whole operation. According to respondents it is an integral part for Dutch military culture as it does not limit itself to operations in the field, but also facilitates the possibility to give suggestions to the commanding officer in and out of the field. Important to note is that respondents state that the commanding officer naturally has the final say and orders are followed without question in high intensity situations. In case of the majors experience the Dutch *modus operandi* is different than that of the German military as the experiences of respondents suggest that, in line with German strict hierarchy, officers are expected to follow orders without question and room for own decision-making.

Another respondent, a captain who fulfilled a staff function during his deployment, observed the lack of freedom of decision-making from his German colleagues and attributes it to a feeling of insecurity amongst deputy commanders:

*“Another difference is that the German assessment policy is different from ours. Every [German] high placed officer can have an opinion on another officer, even if there is no chain of command between the two. That results into young officers having to walk on their toes and preferring the safe choices as they are afraid of making the wrong decision or your decision is not liked well by your commanding officer. Yet in our [Dutch military] lives it is valued when one occasionally takes a calculated risk in order to achieve an objective and thus pushing boundaries or going a little over them. On the condition that one takes responsibility for his choices. That is a difference in culture I think. The thing I noticed is that when you speak with the German officers, lieutenants and captains, one-on-one there’s no difference [between us]. The example that all Germans aren’t proficient in English isn’t that true either anymore. That view is outdated. One can do business just fine with the Germans. However the thing you*

*see when we have to make a decision or write an order the Germans take a step back. 'Oh yes okay, but I have to ask for permission for that first and then this and that. Handing in forms and collect signatures.' Whereas we, as west European countries, are more like: 'Alright, lets shake hands on it and that is how we are going to do it'. We are given that responsibility and a bit of independence by higher ups. That's what we call mission command where we are given an assignment and how we do it, within a given framework, is up to us. We are given the trust of our commanding officers. We make a plan and execute it with the approval of our commander. Whilst a German commander takes a more active role in the whole process, which results in his deputy commanders taking a more waiting stance. This has sometimes clashed with us when we all wanted to go forward with something and it resulted in something not progressing or at least not as fast as we would've liked. The cause being that on the German side there had to be several bureaucratic processes to be done. We had no choice in the matter as we were part of the German battalion, thus we had to adapt to it.'*<sup>140</sup>

The respondent states that he has no issues with his German colleagues on a personal level, but on a professional level experience some friction. According to the respondent German deputy officers will have to check with their commanding officer for every decision there is to be made, which delays the whole process. As Dutch officers attribute the freedom of decision-making to the Dutch military culture, one can see how the perceived German military culture might lead to some irritations. It might depend on the importance of a decision whether one would inform their superior first. Therefore the respondent was asked if he could provide a practical example of when processes were delayed due to, what respondents call, the lack of freedom in decision-making in German military culture:

*"Well yes, a little example. I was part of section Operations, so the planning and executing of exercises, but also handling support requests. For example we had a demonstration in a village as we are there to show our presence. Naturally we have*

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<sup>140</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Kapitein Rick'.

*an idea on how to organise it. A Dutch captain, me, a Belgian, a Norwegian, and a German sit together and we make a plan. 'Last week we used that unit, that one and that one. Let's do it different this week to try and spread the burden a bit. Everybody in agreement?' We assumed that everyone was in agreement, but the German captain had to collect some signatures first in addition to questions and requests to check if the commander agreed to the plan as well. Whilst we took the responsibility: 'Hey, we are going to get this done so we don't have to bother the commander with petty things such as this'. That's a whole other approach on how to do things and this is about something as simple as a demonstration. Getting some vehicles and talking to some civilians who came to watch. This [the checking in with the commander] also happens in the operation.'*<sup>141</sup>

The respondent is used to having more freedom in how to approach a task without the need to pass it to his commanding officer first, calling it 'petty things'. However, one can imagine that when there are vehicles and various units involved in a demonstration the commanding officer would like to have a say in the matter. Especially in a hierarchy structure as strict as the Germans are claimed to have. The dissonance between the two military cultures could therefore lead to impatience on the Dutch side. The respondent later claims that he felt it hurt the efficiency, the relations and feelings got involved. According to the captain this had resulted into the others and himself meeting and discussing a plan before presenting it to their German counterpart so that the process would be smoother.<sup>142</sup> He added that he was confident that when the need arises in case of an emergency for example, they could depend on each other. The absence of pressure gives room for getting annoyed over such differences, the respondent added. As there is no immediate danger it is suggested that the differences in military culture are accentuated which leads to more friction there otherwise would not be or be room for.

The third point of friction that respondents experienced is the sense of exceptionalism that respondents perceived in the German military culture. Upon evaluating the interviews it

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<sup>141</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Kapitein Rick'.

<sup>142</sup> Ibidem.

must be noted that the respondents exhibit some form of exceptionalism as well. For example the last quote, by the captain on his German colleague having to check in with his commander for every decision no matter how insignificant the respondent thought it to be, shows that one's own culture is valued more than that of another. The respondent sat down with his other colleagues to discuss plans before presenting it to the German counterpart and thus actively circumventing the German procedure. This facilitated the respondent to get as close to work according to his values, the freedom of decision-making, as possible. However, this could be the product of coming in contact with people who have different value-based modus operandi than your own. This could mean that the exceptionalism respondents experience from their German colleagues might be rooted in the same mechanism of interacting with a military culture that has a completely different value-based modus operandi.

The experienced exceptionalism is thus an ambiguous concept, yet it plays a significant role in the experience respondents have which they attribute to a difference in military culture. In addition, respondents state that social interaction and professional adaptability are a part of Dutch military culture. Professional adaptability entails the ability to adapt to other military cultures in a professional setting, which is attributed to the Dutch military culture. As one respondent states: *"I think that we, Dutch, are very good at adapting to another culture. You could see it clearly over there [deployment in Lithuania]. We as the Dutch were liked by the other nationalities."*<sup>143</sup> According to the respondent the Dutch are good at adapting to other cultures. When people see themselves as adaptable when working with another culture the shock, when they interpret behaviour by the other culture as being exceptionalist, might negatively contribute to how they perceive the other.

As the battlegroup is lead by the Germans, their military culture and modus operandi is prevalent. This is where respondents experience friction as to what they perceive as exceptionalist conduct.

*"The German does not adapt to others. I think the German battalion commander does exactly the same as he would leading a battalion in Germany. I'm not saying there is*

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<sup>143</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant 28 jaar'.

*something wrong with it, but as a result you ignore the positive things that can come from the different cultures under your command. I think.”<sup>144</sup>*

The respondent states that the German commander, during his rotation, lead the battlegroup as a German battlegroup. It is suggested that other cultures have positive things to contribute to how the battlegroup operates which does not happen due to the German way being how the battlegroup operates. The interviewee clearly states why he thinks that leading a multinational battlegroup in the same way as the lead nation would lead a battalion at home is a missed opportunity. If the lead nation was more military culturally alike, this feeling might be less prevalent. Respondents view the German military culture as different from theirs and these difference take more precedence when the German military culture is the ruling one. The same respondent states that he thinks it can be a hindrance when the leading military culture does not align with his own:

*“Yes that has to do with the lead nation who, politically and financially, has the most resources and thus being in charge. That culture [that of the lead nation] is the way it is and when you cannot find common ground, I wouldn’t say it causes a wedge, but you just do your own thing.”<sup>145</sup>*

The comment by the respondent would indeed suggest that the differences between the leading military culture and another military culture would result in these differences to be accentuated.

As the lead nation, Germany would hold doctrine classes on Sundays, which the officers in the battalion would attend. During these classes some respondents experienced what is perceived as an exceptionalist approach. As a participant states:

*“The Germans do it [use of mines and its doctrine] well as they planned, another one of these examples [on frictions with the German counterpart], doctrine lessons every Sunday when the Netherlands had a football match or a formula one race. That was*

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<sup>144</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Dirk Neefs’.

<sup>145</sup> Ibidem.

*not so well thought out, but these doctrine lessons were very good an sich. Yet, again, the German doctrine was taught and there was no room for that of other countries. I thought that was a little arrogant. For 80/90% I thought they had a point, but when it came to the other 10% I found we did things completely different. When there is no room for that, I know what I then would do. Anyway, that is who I am. I do it differently and explain it later if need be. Anyway these are examples on how you could do things differently [to improve multicultural cohesion].”<sup>146</sup>*

The respondent explicitly states he found, what he experienced as only teaching the German doctrine with no room for discussion, it arrogant. As the respondents have stated they value the ability to discuss plans and tactics with their commanding officer, the German approach does seem to incite some irritation. There seems to be a caveat however. Respondents who had a younger German battalion commander have had the opposite experience. The older generation of German battalion commanders are said to be more strict and are said not to be open for discussion.

*“Well I have to say that we had a quite open and approachable battalion commander. There was some room for discussion. The previous battalion commander, which I had for a little bit before the new battalion commander, was someone I can imagine his personality to be more in line with the classical, older generation of Germans. There was little room for discussion, let me put it like that. I knew him already from a couple of years ago, so I can imagine how he does things. I have to say that with our [the new battalion commander] commander we had quite some liberty and had quite some good discussions where we could present our views. You could see that you got the room to share your thoughts, but in the end it still is a German affair.”<sup>147</sup>*

The generational difference that respondents experience when working with a German commander seems to positively influence their perception on the Germans when their commander is of the ‘younger’ generation. It would also suggest that there might be a shift

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<sup>146</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Wouter de Jager 28 juni’.

<sup>147</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Merrienboer’.

within the German military culture itself. In addition it suggests that Dutch officers value the ability to voice their views and ideas. A commander who enables that is viewed positively and subsequently a commander who does not is viewed negatively. The inability to share thoughts is even seen as 'classic German': "*[On how the doctrine lessons were given] Well yes, initially classical German. We are taught how to convey something and how to teach. The Germans, they give frontal education: this is it and nothing else.*"<sup>148</sup> The respondent, due to his experience with a younger generation of German battalion commanders, even describes the strict method as classical German.

Whilst almost all respondents have had some negative experience with what they perceive as the German military culture, those who have had a 'younger' German battalion commander have positive experiences as well. This seems to affect the perception of the Germans as a whole as it would seem that the enablement of Dutch military cultural values contributes to a positive overall experience. Subsequently, those who had such a German commander have less or no experience with exceptionalist behaviour.

The negative experiences seem to originate from values that differ greatly from each other: the strict hierarchy versus the lenient hierarchy, control versus freedom in decision-making, and no room for discussion (perceived exceptionalism) versus the ability to share thoughts and ideas. It seems that when situations and interactions between the German and Dutch military cultures touch one of these areas, the experience will mostly be negative. The frequency of these encounters is also increased due to Germany leading the battlegroup. Therefore respondents have more to say on their cooperation with their German colleagues than on any other country.

The experience with the German counterpart does not always end up to be negative. Some respondents report to have experienced a generational difference between battalion commanders. The younger generation of commanders are held in high esteem as they are said to leave room for discussion, something respondents value greatly.

#### *5.4.2. Harassment of female personnel*

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<sup>148</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Merrienboer'.

This subchapter is short as not every respondent has actively experienced the harassment. There also have been taken appropriate actions over time, such as separate gyms, so respondents who have been deployed more recently have little to no experience with the harassment.

The interviewees that have experienced, witnessed or heard of the harassment of female personnel dedicate it happening due to the small percentage of women in the unit composition of the perpetrator. The perpetrators are said to be the German counterpart (5 participants) and much less, but also identified, the Belgians and the Czech (2 participants). The women that are victim to the harassment are identified as Norwegian and Dutch. The given explanation by some interviewees is that Norway and the Netherlands have an advanced mixed gender integration; it is therefore 'more normal' too have women in a unit. Subsequently the nationalities with less to no women in units, would be less accustomed to women in the military. Whether it is a cultural thing can be discussed, yet if respondents perceive it as a cultural thing is important. Whilst some respondents link the harassment to culture, others do not want to make that connection. The subject seems to be ambiguous for respondents whether they see it as a manifestation of a culture or not.

A female respondent, who has experienced the harassment first hand, puts the responsibility with the Germans as whole:

*“Then there is such a party [three month deployment party]. And well, these Germans don’t behave. I’ve always thought the Germans to be uncomfortable, but they can’t seem to behave. A lot of women on the medical department were constantly asked if they wanted to go on a picture with them [the Germans]. Why would you want to take a picture with me? A lot of women were uncomfortable with that. I have experienced this myself as well. They would come over to talk to me and then they would comment on my appearance. They even knocked at my door at night, asking if I would open the door. That is unacceptable. That is not allowed. You don’t feel safe. And when we went to the staff building, which I had to go to occasionally to talk to the commander... Leaving how we treat women in the Dutch military aside, we do not have posters of women in bikini. The Germans have no respect for that. When you passed an office in the staff building you would see a poster of a woman in a bikini.*



*Just no respect for women. It was tangible and visible. Absolutely.*<sup>149</sup>

Her view on the deployment and especially the German counterpart is very negative, which might've been influenced by her experience of being sexually harassed by members of the German army. She seems to attribute the inappropriate behaviour to the German military as a whole and inherent to the German military culture. Important to note is that she also thinks that the Dutch military has room for improvement in this area.

The harassment mainly focused around the gym facilities. Norwegian and Dutch women would get looks because of their 'tight' sporting outfits. The only female participant gave more context to the extent of the harassment. It happened not only at the gym, but also at parties, dining area, staff building, and even at the respondents private quarters. The Dutch and Norwegians eventually got their own sporting facility due to the harassment. The issue of harassment might've been resolved as of now or at least been brought to a minimum.

In total 8 out of 17 participants have at the least heard of the harassment, whilst others had not heard anything about the issue or given the nature of their function would not be contacted by female personnel (e.g.: platoon commanders (PC). Such issues would be reported to the company commander (CC)). The others could therefore not confirm nor deny the harassment of women.

The subject of sexual harassment is a delicate one as it is personal, often taboo, and less noticeable by men. Respondents who did not fulfil a role where women would report inappropriate behaviour, often have either not heard of it, via others, or when the battalion staff had addressed it. In addition, only one respondent is female which results in the data lacking detailed experiences. However, 8 respondents could acknowledge the existence of inappropriate behaviour through being told or overhearing.

Whether it is perceived as part of a nation's military culture, respondents remain divided and cautious. There are variables, that might or might not be inherent to culture, that could influence the occurrence of sexual harassment: the amount of women in a unit or

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<sup>149</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Kapitein Anoniem'.

the amount of women in the entire military. A lack of a significant number of women in a military might result in more, inappropriate, interest when one encounters a woman. There might not be normalisation of female colleagues. Whether this is due to culture or perceived as due to culture needs more research. However the limited data suggests it influences how one views the other.

#### *5.4.3. Positive experiences with the German counterpart*

There are few positive experiences that respondents shared, excluding the positivity on working with a 'young generation' German. Whilst these are positive experiences, the other side of the coin implies that the 'older generation' is perceived as negative. Therefore it is not a 'clean' positive experience as it is intertwined with the negative experience respondents had with an 'older generation' German commander.

This does not mean however that every respondent has a negative view of the Germans. A negative experience does not automatically lead to a negative view. Those who fulfilled a function within the battalion staff do not necessarily perceive the Germans as negative, whilst having negative experiences with them.

This subchapter will thus not be as expansive. Neutral experiences will also be included in this part as these do not have a negative load to them. The same goes for the absence of a positive load, but experiences that do not negatively impact the cooperation or the perception of the German colleague can be seen as positive.

The neutral experiences can be summarised in one category: formality. Respondents do not have issues with some level of formality. Whilst they value informality, some participants find the formality they perceive with the Germans intriguing or even amusing:

*"A funny example is that when we [Dutch] walk on base we greet each other with hey, hoi or hai. I did the same when I saw German soldiers. Then I would just say 'good morning' or 'hello'. Sometimes they looked confused because they are way more formal. They were just really formal. They wouldn't immediately stand in attention,*

*but an officer walking by saying 'good morning' was a bit alien to them.*"<sup>150</sup>

The respondent states that he enjoyed the reactions of German soldier when greeting them as an officer. The difference in formality that respondents perceive between the Dutch military culture and the German military culture does not lead to a negative perception. It rather is seen as amusing or interesting. This suggests that not every difference in military culture leads to friction.

The positive experiences are aspects that respondents admire about the German military culture or are aspects that align with their own values: cleanness and spiritual/mental facilitation. The German counterpart is perceived as being clean as a respondent explains:

*"And we, as the Dutch culture, are pretty untidy. Especially if you compare it to the Germans who throw their cigarettes in the ashtray as everyone should. If you look at the Dutch smoking zone you would see cigarettes everywhere, which bothered me. They would just flip their cigarettes away. The discipline [with the Dutch] is significantly lower. You would see all kinds of cultural differences on base, all of them with pro's and con's."*<sup>151</sup>

The respondent admires the tidiness of the Germans, wishing the Dutch were more tidy. His personal values on the subject align with that of the Germans. However said participant has experienced some friction with the Germans yet overall has a neutral view on them. The interviewee also states how some Dutch cultural behaviour might not be productive:

*"Another good example of the Dutch culture. You can buy fireworks day and night in Lithuania. The heavy fireworks is allowed all year there. We bought a big fireworks machine tray for a couple hundred euro's. We thought it funny to let everyone know, in the middle of the night, the Dutch are leaving. We think that is funny right. So I light the fireworks and the whole base starts to panic, including the Lithuanian base. I*

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<sup>150</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Eerste Luitenant'.

<sup>151</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Wouter de Jager 8 juni'.

*had to report to the commander and it went up to the highest circles. 'How does it come you accept this and actually do it?' I said: 'Well if you guys cannot appreciate this, I won't do it again'. We also had boxes with water with us. They commented on the risk of fire and all that. I said: 'I don't buy safety rules, we have them... I get that a good night's rest is valued here and thus will not do it again'. So that's the Dutch guy thinking: 'We can do this, it's a nice joke'. Yet in a multinational community, I found out, it is not smart to do.'*<sup>152</sup>

The respondent views the joke as something only the Dutch would do. He also states that he acknowledges how it is contra productive behaviour. During the whole interview the respondent reflects on behaviour the Dutch expressed. For nearly every negative experience, he also reflects it back to his own behaviour. One could say that the respondent has a pragmatic and reflective nature. The result is that the participant reflects on the Dutch shortcomings as well, when talking about a negative experience with the German counterpart. Subsequently his overall experience with the German colleagues are neutral as the observed cultural behaviours seem to slightly level the experience out. This might suggest that one's personal view on life can have a significant influence on how one experiences multinational cooperation.

The second positive aspect a respondent addressed, on working with the Germans, is the mental and spiritual health facilitation. The respondent, having a overall negative experience cooperating with the Germans, values the facilitation of mental care within the German military.

*"The Germans only have a mental care worker. The Norwegians have one that only comes to the country when needed, very interesting. Other countries do not have a social worker or mental care worker, so that is interesting to see. It is interesting to see that the Dutch said: 'Well, [name] it is very special to see you are here because if I look at the other countries..' The Norwegians already asked themselves why we were here.'*<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Wouter de Jager 8 juni'.

<sup>153</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Kapitein Anoniem'.

Although the respondent has a negative experience with the German counterpart she compliments them, although carefully, for having mental care. As the participant fulfilled a role within mental care, the Germans having a similar department aligns with her values. In addition, the respondent's positive experience did not outweigh the negative experiences that shaped her overall perception on the German counterpart. This suggests that a positive experience does not necessarily lead to a positive view on the Germans, as a negative experience does not necessarily lead to a negative view on the Germans. It seems it depends on the frequency of either experience and how one interprets an experience.

The given positive experiences are scarce. It might not mean that these are the only positive experiences, it might suggest that negative experiences leave a more lasting impression. Whilst there are more respondents that have no negative perception of the Germans, the given clear positive experiences are few.

## **6. Critical factors for successful cultural interoperability according to respondents**

The multicultural experiences by respondents vary per nation. The points of friction seem to concentrate on differences in the strictness of hierarchy, the freedom of decision-making, perceived exceptionalism/authoritarianism, and level of bureaucracy. When a military culture is perceived to be alike on these points, that military culture is perceived to be pleasant to work with (e.g. Norway).

The data suggests that differences on these aspects can contribute to a negative experience when working with another military culture. A negative experience, on its own, does not mean that it influences cooperation. Therefore respondents were asked whether differences in military culture affected the cooperation with international partners. The areas in which participants claimed it influenced cooperation, can be categorised in two: organisational cooperation and operational cooperation. The organisational cooperation entails the whole structure of eFP Lithuania, excluding the operational in-field level, from facilities to on-base etiquette and the on-base code of conduct. It also entails the organising between officers and personnel; e.g.: planning (multinational) exercises or bureaucratic procedures. The operational cooperation entails the activities of a military operation in the field. The execution of exercises and the cooperation between different nations on critical military procedures (e.g. requesting fire support, methods of approaching and achieving a goal), are part of the operational cooperation.

Additionally respondents were asked what they considered to be important factors for successful cooperation on the military cultural front. The perception of what respondents think is necessary for successful cultural interoperability are categorised in: the ability to adapt, appreciation of each other, and language.

This chapter will follow the structure above. The influence on the two cooperation levels will be explored first. Whether respondents think that the differences in military culture affect the cooperation will be discussed as well. From there the factors needed for successful cultural interoperability, according to the participants are analysed.

## 6.1. The influence of military culture on organisational and operational cooperation

Cooperating with different military cultures can lead to positive and negative experiences. These experiences can influence the cooperation between military cultures, according to respondents. In the case of organisational cooperation, 14 out of the 17 participants stated that the difference in military culture had an influence. The Germans are referenced the most as they lead the battlegroup and are the most prominent, defining military culture on base. The organisation of the battlegroup is said to be mainly done the German way.

*“To give a good example. Section 2 does the maps, that is the same for every country. You have the Aegis system, a very good system where you can get a ‘blow up’ from a map. If I, as second, want this [‘blow up’] and I want it via the Dutch, I would approach the Dutch corporal and ask: ‘Hey could you give me a blow up of this and this?’ That corporal would go to work and then come to me: ‘Hey, is this what you meant?’. ‘Yes’ – ‘Yes, perfect. Done’. Then I would have what I asked for. In Germany it works differently. There I go, as company commander, to the relevant section. In this case to the head of Section 2. I file an official request. He would then decide who is to process the request. It will then go from officer to petty officer and the petty officer will then put the corporal to work. The corporal, who is Dutch, is then annoyed as the request has passed four layers. He had no clue what the person who made the request wanted precisely. So it is a completely different culture, but it is a defect in the line. It’s just different.”<sup>154</sup>*

According to the respondent the difference in military culture has an influence on how a request is processed. He states that the procedure is longer and even leads to annoyance of Dutch personnel who work in the German model. The participant thinks the German method is flawed as the Dutch corporal does not know what the filer of a request specifically wants.

Another example is given by the same respondent, in which he states that the organisation is slow:

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<sup>154</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Martens’.

*“Where else do you notice it [influence of military culture]? Having to ask permission for everything. There is a pool in Lithuania. It’s a developed country like any other. We went swimming there from time to time, but we have to be brought there by bus. If we were in the Netherlands, two busses and drivers would be standing ready. In Lithuania, the planner is responsible. If we did not find common ground, someone higher up would decide. In Lithuania it went like this: the planners for the busses ask Germany for permission to have the busses on Monday. They [Germans] would then look if everything is correct and would then sent a mail back: ‘Yes, granted’. So everything, the permission has to come from Germany which takes time. Planning something on Saturday doesn’t work either as on Sunday all the Germans in Germany have a day off. The planning would then stop because you cannot get permission. Everything needs permission from Germany. Things would therefore go very slowly.”<sup>155</sup>*

The respondent is annoyed by the time it takes to get things done through the German structure. It is tightly interwoven with the freedom of decision-making the Dutch respondents value. The participant in question is used to be able to quickly organise two busses and drivers, yet in Lithuania is confronted with a different system that takes more time and takes away some ‘freedom’ due to the need for permission from Germany.

It is important to note that in the Netherlands people have their weekend as well. On base however, the Dutch worked until noon on Saturday and were free for on Sunday. The Germans on base were free on Saturday and worked on Sunday. This indicates a mismatch that might contribute to experience of the respondent. There appears to even be a mismatch in working schedule between the Germans at home and those on base in Lithuania. The same goes for the Dutch at home and the Dutch on base. It therefore complicates the applications for requests even further. Putting the procedural annoyances aside, the variable of different working days for those at home and those on base in Lithuania seems to play an equal important part. Which is not exclusively German.

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<sup>155</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Martens’.



The procedures that are required when working in Lithuania under German leadership, are unfamiliar to respondents. When cooperating with the Germans when planning something creates another dissonance for some respondents: the previously addressed strict hierarchy. According to some participants the strict hierarchy has its influence on the organisational cooperation. This is specifically experienced in who talks to who:

*“In the whole [German] organisation it is ‘the officer is the officer’ and only officers do business. The decision-making lies with the commander. I think it stems from a certain fear, we Dutch can also have it a bit. When you give someone freedom for an assignment, you have to have a lot of faith in a person to comfortably send him on his way. You put your name under it, so you are responsible as commander. That fear, which you also see with Dutch colleagues, causes one to filling in documents and everything so that something happens as you want it to or that you at least are not responsible when it does not work out. That is, of course, the biggest enemy of mission command. The majority of our [Dutch] army does not work like that [fear based document filing]. Then it [in cooperation with the Germans] happens that it clashes, yes.”<sup>156</sup>*

The ‘fear’ that is perceived to be present in German colleagues has been given as an explanation for the strict hierarchy before. The respondent gives his thoughts on his experience as to why only officers talk to each other in the German hierarchy. This experience is in line with the other respondent who could not file a request for a map directly to the corporal responsible for delivering it. Said respondent gives another clear example, after being asked about the influence of military cultures, on who speaks to whom:

*“Yes, especially with the Germans. One time I went to the office of a major to talk about logistical business. In the Netherlands it is normal that the second handles the logistical matters for the company commander. In Germany it is not, because in*

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<sup>156</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Merrienboer’.

*Germany the company commander cannot make a mistake so he has to do everything himself. He cannot let his second do it, because if his second makes a mistake he will be held responsible. In the Netherlands, when the second makes a mistake, we go like: 'Oh well it can happen. Next time do it better'. What is done is done and we continue. So [returning to him visiting the major in his office] I enter the office at Section 4 and he [the major] asks me, I was a lieutenant at the time: 'Is the company commander in the Netherlands a lieutenant or how does it work?' I said: 'No, I'm the second in command'. 'Oh, so you are not the company commander? I don't know if I can do business with you then.' Guys, be calm. It is normal in the Netherlands. Then you convince the man and then it's fine, but you notice that they are more hesitant."<sup>157</sup>*

The respondent had a little hiccup when trying to discuss logistical matters with a German major. The major was reluctant to talk to the respondent as he had not the rank, nor function, he was used to talk to when working within the German military. According to the respondent, he had to actively convince the major to do business with him after which everything was fine. This specific case does not seem to significantly influence the cooperation, but it illustrates the overall perceived strict German hierarchy which is seen to influence the cooperation by respondents.

The second area that respondents state, when they experience influence of multinational cooperation due to differences in military culture, is the operational cooperation. When looking at the operational level of cooperation, 13 out of 17 stated that military culture influenced the cooperation on that level.

Procedural influences are spilled over from the organisational level, e.g.: logistics, path of decision-making, differences in material. These have roots in the organisational level but do have a considerable effect on the operational level, according to the participants. The aspect of 'time' has also been mentioned as differences in procedures lead to taking more time, something that is seen as an undesirable effect when operating on the operational

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<sup>157</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Martens'.

level. As stated by a respondent: *“The operational cooperation is doable. The thing is that I have more people to send out to do business with others. Other countries have less which makes getting things done, take more time. This has consequences for the operational side where time is scarce.”*<sup>158</sup> The participant underlines the influence of time due to procedures spilling over into the operational level.

Additionally, the influence of hierarchy is close to the procedural influences but differs in its execution. Where procedural influences affect the manner in which units of one nationality function and might 'mismatch' the procedures of units of a different nation they are cooperating with, the hierarchy factor is more prominent yet shortly noticeable on the operational level. For example: Dutch officers are trained with freedom of decision-making, German officers are being told what to do and how to do it. Situations where a Dutch unit under a Dutch officer is being led by a German senior officer, leads to short but highly negatively perceived events when the German officer tells the Dutch officer exactly how to do what he is commanded to do.

The perception of one officer on another officer seems to play an important role in the trust that cooperation goes smoothly. This is demonstrated by a respondent, who fulfilled a staff function, who comments on the event where his German colleague refused to give his sergeant-major paid leave after his wife went to hospital after an accident:

*“Yes, well look... It creates an image when you as a captain of the sergeant-major your own personnel – won't let him go home in such a situation. Look we were the same rank. I was also captain at the time, but it was not my sergeant. It did create a [certain] image of that man. I had an opinion on the matter. I did not voice my opinion, but I treated him differently after that. I had much less respect for him after that. When you are fighting, or you have to complete an assignment or goal, and you have no respect for the man next to you in the fight you are inclined to work less hard. This can create very dangerous situations. You have to earn respect, yet that man [German captain] didn't that day. I was specialist in my field of expertise and he was captain of operations, so he was the specialist on the infantry area. So you can guess,*

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<sup>158</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Dirk Neefs'.

*we have to be able to work together and be able to communicate well for a smooth integration. Because, you can imagine, if bombs start to drop in the wrong places, things go wrong. Civilian casualties can occur, which is never ever the desired result. Bombs can drop to close to your own troops; 'blue on blue', friendly fire it's called. Everything can happen except on target. So that is difficult, yes.*<sup>159</sup>

The respondent's view of his German colleague had negatively affected his trust in a successful cooperation with his counterpart. The incident about the sergeant-major's wife was given earlier in the interview as an example of Germany's strict hierarchy and doing things by the book. The sergeant-major was not allowed to go home to support his wife in hospital, because there was an exercise planned for the following week. The respondent clearly has his opinion on the matter, which negatively influenced his perception on the German captain. The perception then spills over into the operational level and the ability to cooperate effectively, according to the participant.

Not only the perception of the other, due to military culture, is claimed as an influencing factor on the operational level. Differences in national interests, and military culture, are perceived to be a negative influence on the operational level as well. A respondent when asked if he noticed any influence of differing military cultures during the annual NATO Iron Wolf exercise:

*"Yes, a lot. Yes, a lot. How am I going to say this politely. You see there is an integrated battalion staff. A battalion staff that has to lead four companies, the thing is the battalion staff is multinational. Certain national interests play a role. The national representatives have certain interests, but also the units on how they want to be deployed. Or who gets to make decisions and when. As you are close to each other and the difference in culture of the Norwegians and Germans, it clashes sometimes. This is what happens during such an exercise [Iron Wolf] as friction arises in the battalion staff. That does not contribute to the objective at hand. There is also difference in how one views taking certain actions, which results in delayed decisions*

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<sup>159</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Thijs'.

*or no decisions. It shows how it can clash on the tactical level.*<sup>160</sup>

It is claimed that the differences in culture between every nation, including the Dutch, and the differences in national interests influence the operational, tactical level. The participant states that during the Iron Wolf exercise, these differences resulted in delayed decision-making or even the absence of decisions. This result can be linked to another respondent's comment on procedures taking time which is scarce on the operational level. The operational level seems to be reliant on how smooth decision-making and cooperation occurs on the organisational level. When it is perceived that the organisational cooperation is undergoing difficulties, friction arises on the operational level:

*“The cultural differences between nations caused an endless series of miscommunications. Also for things, I don't mean it like this.. [unintelligible] It became a slow sequence of military posturing which caused us to get stuck, unless a lower executive level like a company takes the initiative instead of aimlessly waiting. That's how you can turn the tide. Other countries wait until they get orders from a higher level and thus they take no initiative themselves.”*<sup>161</sup>

The irritation from the respondent stems from, what he perceives as, ineffective cooperation at the battalion staff. His irritation also stems from the lack of freedom of decision-making, which is contrary to what Dutch officers value. The comment suggests that the freedom of decision-making, or the lack thereof, influences the operational cooperation.

The organisational and operational cooperation seems to be influenced by differences in military culture. As these effects on the two levels of cooperation seem to carry some weight, respondents were asked if they think the influence of military cultures affected the effectivity of the battlegroup.

The combat effectiveness of the battlegroup in case the battalion is forced to engage in actual fighting is referred to as 'the effectivity of the battlegroup'. A small majority of

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<sup>160</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Merrienboer'.

<sup>161</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Majoor Berendsen'.

respondents (9 out of 17) think the differences in military cultures affect the effectivity of the battlegroup. Additionally, 7 out of 17 are sceptic on multinational cooperation, where 6 question the multinational cooperation in its current form (lower levels should be free of multinational cooperation. e.g.: multinational cooperation only from brigade level onwards, or not lower than battalion level) due to differences in military cultures. Whilst the battlegroup is viewed as effective at deterrence due to the presence of multiple NATO members, it is the combat effectiveness that some respondents feel is subpar.

The points of friction that respondents experience seems to affect the level of trust one has in the capabilities of the battlegroup:

*“I think that if they would’ve given me, with my company at the time, more independency we would’ve been more effective than we were in the battlegroup. I think, under the current battlegroup, we would’ve been decimated by [Russian] air support and long distance artillery before we even start moving out. Because it was such a slow exercise to get everyone in line. Defending as a company, to the death, we could have more of an impact than engaging the enemy as the current battlegroup. Purely due to the time it takes and awaiting for things to develop [in the battlegroup].”<sup>162</sup>*

The respondent critiques the slow procedure in decision-making, which leads to a diminished level of trust in the battlegroup in the event of a Russian attack. He places his trust in his own company. Whether a lack of trust results in poor performance in combat is a subject for another study. However, the respondent believes it does.

Some respondents feel that multinational cooperation on battalion level is not desired when facing a combat situation. It is suggested by some that multinational cooperation should occur on higher levels, keeping battalion level and down as a single nationality for optimal performance:

*“Yes, and that’s [influence of military cultural differences] why I think we have to ask*

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<sup>162</sup> Transcript, ‘Transcriptie Majoor Berendsen’.

*ourselves on what level we want multinational cooperation if we want to engage in war. On certain levels there is no time to overcome such cultural differences. I think that you have to keep a company as a single nationality at minimum and in case of large scale combat a battalion as well. When you look at the cooperation with the Germans on the tanks, it is already well integrated and that will turn out fine. It's about when you are put together in a short time. In a training setting you get to know each other and things are allowed to go badly sometimes. You can learn from that. When you want to engage in fighting, you still have to have larger units of the same nationality for things to go well.*"<sup>163</sup>

The above response states that multinational cooperation in a training setting is something good, a high intensity setting would warrant more national cohesion in unit levels. Important to note is that the respondent is positive on multinational cooperation and his deployment, but does not believe the battlegroup to be combat effective. The battlegroup's main task is deterrence and not engaging in combat, yet some respondents state that the military cultural differences on battalion level would negatively affect the effectivity of any combat related task.

According to a small majority of respondents (9 out of 17) the differences in military culture will influence the effectivity of the battlegroup in a combat scenario. However, high intensity environments might have the opposite effect on the hurdles participants experience; it might make the differences in military culture not or less noticeable or valuable as there is less time to develop a focus on these differences. This does not render the experiences and views of the respondents obsolete. It seems to be testament to the lack of trust in the capabilities of the battlegroup that participants experience.

The perceived differences in military culture seem to be at the root of the friction respondents experience. Whether they occur at the organisational level and spill to the operational level or solely on the operational level. The occurring friction that is experienced then leads to a diminished level of trust in the capabilities of multinational cooperation if

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<sup>163</sup> Transcript, 'Transcriptie Pors'.

they were to engage in combat.

The deployment in Lithuania is not a combat mission, but a mission of deterrence due to the presence of multiple nationalities. Whilst active combat is absent, the experiences during the deployment might affect the perception of certain nationalities and might prove a hurdle when working with certain nationalities in the future.

## **6.2. Reflection on deployment by respondents**

### *6.2.1. Critical factors for successful cultural interoperability, according to respondents*

Respondents shared a variety of experiences that they perceive as the result of differences in military cultures. As to understand the biggest points of friction that have been experienced, the respondents were asked what they thought the main characteristics of the Dutch military culture to be. These are classified into: low level of hierarchy, freedom of decision-making (mission command), and professional informality. The data suggests that the negative experiences stem from cooperation with military cultures that are perceived to be the opposite on one or more of these characteristics.

These characteristics are perceived to be inherent to the Dutch military culture which would suggest that friction would always arise when working with another military culture that differs on one of these aspects. Any future multinational cooperation would seem difficult. Respondents were therefore asked what they perceived to be necessary for cultural interoperability, despite the military cultural differences. Three main factors arise from the responses: adaption, appreciation, and language.

Adaption entails the necessity respondents feel for the leadership of the lead nation to adapt to the various cultural entities under their command. The respondents felt that under German leadership, everything was done the 'German way'. The data suggests that the Dutch differ on, what they perceive as, important core military cultural aspects. The respondents thus experience a 'one-way-street' of adapting to the other, as they feel to be the only ones forced to adapt.

Appreciation is related to adaption and entails the need for feeling appreciated for the ideas and insights another military culture might be bring to the table. It requires



adaption from the lead nation, but adaption does not equal appreciation. One can adapt its leadership style to accommodate various military cultures, yet still be unappreciative of advice or insights from the differing military cultures.

Language entails the ability to communicate in English with the counterpart. This factor is not exclusively applied to the lead nation. Other nations in the battlegroup that were less or not able to communicate in English, were perceived as less pleasant to work with. Important to note is that the language factor is impossible to ascribe to a military culture as it is unlikely for a nation's population to be able to speak English, and losing the ability to do so when they join their military. It might be a cultural difference, in the broad sense, but not a military cultural difference. However, the inability to speak English is perceived to hinder military cultural integration.

The given factors by the respondents align with the shared experiences on multinational cooperation and its influence respondents perceived to stem from military cultural differences. The points of friction with the lead nation take root in aspects that are valued highly by participants. The most favoured cooperation partner, Norway, is seen as the same on these highly valued aspects. In the case of Norway there is no need for adapting or appreciation as respondents view the Norwegians as alike. Germany is perceived to differ greatly in military culture. In addition, the respondents experience a lack of adaption and appreciation from the lead nation.

Slow procedures, due to the perceived nature of the German military culture, are seen as taking too much time and influencing the cooperation and effectivity. The data suggests that the respondents value smooth and efficient cooperation, which would explain why respondents ascribe language as a critical factor for successful cooperation. Difficulties with communicating requires patience and takes more time.

### *6.2.2. Overall view on multinational cooperation during deployment*

As the request for respondents to state what they feel is needed for successful cultural interoperability is reflective in nature, the respondents were also asked to rate the multinational cooperation they experienced and why. A minority looks back positively on

multinational cooperation, despite having one or more negative experiences (6 out of 17). The majority that view the multinational cooperation as negative (10 out of 17) due to military cultural differences, do mostly look back positive on their own accomplishments and that of their men during the deployment.

The data therefore suggest that whilst there is friction when cooperating with a different military culture, it does not necessarily lead to having a bad experience overall regarding the cooperation. When looking back at the military identity the data suggests that those identifying themselves more with being a member of the military than a member of Dutch society, an overwhelming majority looks back positively on multinational cooperation. Of the 6 respondents that have a positive experience on the cooperation, 5 hold a more military identity.

Those who have a negative view on multinational cooperation, only 3 hold a more military identity. Whereas the remaining 7 respondents hold a more Dutch identity or claim to have a mix between the military and Dutch identity. The data suggests that, whilst friction between military cultures do produce negative experiences, the identity of the respondents influences the impact of the negative experiences. For example; those with a more military identity, despite having given negative experiences due to military cultural differences, are more inclined to look back positively on the cooperation. In doing so, the negative experiences seem to have less 'weight' to the overall perception of multinational cooperation. They also tend to approach a negative experience with pragmatism and understanding on why it happened. On the opposite side, those who hold a more Dutch identity or a mix of both tend to experience more 'weight' to the frictions due to military cultural differences and thus having an overall negative view on multinational cooperation.

Additionally, regarding the positive view group 2 respondents fulfilled a staff function in the battalion and both hold a more military identity. This suggests that there is a dissonance in experience whether one had a function in the battalion staff or a function in the field (from company commander to platoon commander). On the other hand 2 respondents in the negative view group have also fulfilled a staff function, but in a mental healthcare role. This could be due to the fact Dutch soldiers sharing negative experiences with them during the deployment as those having a good time would be less inclined to visit that department. Although both have negative experiences of their own as well. However it

stands out that those who have fulfilled an operational military function within the battalion staff, have a positive view on multinational cooperation.

## **7. Conclusion**

At the core of the research lies interoperability which can be described as the ability of two or more parties to work seamlessly together through common equipment (technical interoperability), shared goals (political interoperability), and cultural compatibility (cultural interoperability). This study specifically focussed on cultural interoperability.

The literature on cultural interoperability advocates the importance of said interoperability, next to technical and political interoperability. However, as the literature states, it has not received the same attention as its more pragmatic counterpart; technical interoperability.

The goal of this study was to determine the influence of military identity and military culture on cultural interoperability. Military identity and culture, which varies between nations, form the basis of intercultural cooperation in a military setting.

This study has focussed on Dutch officers and their experiences during their deployment in Lithuania as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. The Enhanced Forward Presence is a collective of multinational deployments in the Baltic states with the goal to deter Russia from taking aggressive actions towards NATO members.

Military identity has been explored first through the lens of organisational identity. The literature on organisational identity is vast and diverse. A multitude of different approaches on how to understand organisational identity stems from the complexity and lack of an overall consensus on identity itself as some approaches on identity carry over to organisational identity as well. The Foucauldian approach and social identity theory are two well-known examples.

However, the interviews made it apparent that the development of identity varies from person to person and thus could not be captured into one approach. The variation in development of an identity could also be found in the development of one's military identity.

In an attempt to explore military identity, the question was framed as a choice between identifying more as Dutch or identifying more as a member of the military. Despite the binary framing of the question three categories of military identity emerged: more Dutch oriented identity, more military oriented identity, and a mix of both.

The Dutch military culture is influenced by the Dutch national culture through societal norms and values. When respondents compared Dutch military culture with the national culture, for example, they attributed more military inherent characteristics to the Dutch military culture. The 'can-do-mentality' being the most referenced characteristic. When respondents compared Dutch military culture with other military cultures they have worked with in Lithuania, characteristics not inherently militaristic were attributed to their military culture. Lower level of hierarchy, freedom of decision-making, and professional informality being examples of said characteristics.

The level of identification with the Dutch military culture ties back into the three military identity categories: more Dutch oriented identity, more military oriented identity, and a mix of both. These categories seem to correlate with how one perceives military cultural differences.

The most referenced nationality when discussing points of friction during the respondents deployment in Lithuania, are the Germans. As the lead nation of the battlegroup, most multinational cooperation happens mostly with them and thus it increases the chance for friction to occur. However, the respondents who identify themselves mostly as being Dutch or a mix seem to be more negatively influenced by the points of friction with the other. Whilst those who identify themselves more as being a member of the military seem to be less, or not, affected by it in their overall perception of the other.

Additionally, nationalities the respondents view as military culturally alike seem to influence the perception of them positively due to shared views. The prime example being the Norwegian counterpart.

It should also be noted that there seems to be a difference between those that have fulfilled an operational staff function and those that have fulfilled a field function, or a staff function in the mental health facilitation. The former being significantly more positive on multinational cooperation. This is in line with the findings of Vom Hagen, Moelkers, and Soeters who have also reported a dissonance in experience between the two. Interesting to note is that those who have fulfilled an operational staff function predominantly identified themselves with the military, which is the identity group that seems to be less affected by military cultural differences.

The 'Dutch' and 'mixed' identity groups predominantly experience the friction as

intrinsic. It actively hinders the multinational cooperation as it influences their perception of the other and the willingness to work with the other.

The majority of the 'military' identity group also believe the effectiveness is compromised but due to efficiency. The reasoning being of a pragmatic nature as they believe that multinational cooperation should take place on higher command levels, leaving the lower levels comprised of one nationality. As this identity group perception of the other seems largely unaffected by cultural friction, they do seem to think it hinders the efficiency of cooperation and therefore the effectiveness of the battlegroup.

The findings of this study tie into the academic debate on interoperability in multinational deployments by addressing the importance of cultural interoperability for successful multinational cooperation. The data shows that the differences in military cultures during a multinational deployment can have a significant effect on the perception of the effectiveness of the deployment. Cultural interoperability is often glossed over in interoperability research. The findings of this study signal the importance of cultural interoperability and the need for increased attention to the subject. This is in concordance with the studies by Ben-Ari, Elron, Paget, Moelker, Von Hagen, and Soeters whose results also highlight the importance of cultural interoperability for successful multinational cooperation. Houben and Peters do so as well, albeit shortly.

However, this research points out another layer to cultural interoperability; military identity. Military identity should be included in the cultural interoperability debate as the data has shown its significance in the perception of a multinational deployment's effectiveness and ability to cooperate seamlessly. Those who adhere to a more Dutch oriented military identity are significantly more pessimistic on multinational cooperation and experience more complications in cooperation due to military cultural differences.

This finding has overlap with Ben-Ari and Elron and to what they refer to as national pride. However, national pride is an insufficient explanation because of its limited scope. The data shows that those with a more Dutch oriented military identity and a mixed military identity value national culture characteristics more than those with a military oriented military identity. This increases the gravitas of the differences in values with other nationalities rather than dismissing the other's values due to national pride. Therefore military identity should be more present in cultural interoperability debates.

As this research is a case study of the Enhanced Forward Presence deployment in Lithuania, it has merit for the debate on deterrence which now focusses on the strategic level of threat credibility. Jakobsen has urged academics to look at the operational level as well as it can impact threat credibility.

The data from this study does strengthen Jakobsen's plea by the influence cultural interoperability has on threat credibility. Respondents do not believe in the efficiency of the battlegroup as a result of insufficient cultural interoperability. They are aware that the presence of several NATO members in the battlegroups are the main deterrent, yet the inefficiency and experienced hurdles in multinational cooperation do undermine the credibility of the threat NATO tries to convey.

Respondents did address solutions for this problem. Multinational cooperation should only occur from brigade level upwards and everything beneath should be one nationality, for example. This solution requires more commitment of troops and therefore willingness from NATO members. The underlying feeling of being undervalued within the battalion, that respondents experienced, does however provide more practical recommendations. Respondents felt the 'German way' was the only way with no room for discussion, which led to more friction due to military cultural differences. A possible solution could be instating a binding standardised NATO doctrine for multinational NATO deployments; as participants have stated that the German doctrine was prevalent and was taught to other nationalities. This led to friction during the deployment in Lithuania.

Houben and Peters have argued that opposing views and perceptions undermine interoperability, which is why vastly different cultures do not form multinational units together. The data however suggests that the value placed on opposing views plays a significant part. The Dutch and the Germans are not considered to be vastly different from each other. Yet the differences that exist and manifest are experienced as more significant by the 'more Dutch' and 'mixed' identity groups.

Houben and Peters have stated that opposing views and perceptions do undermine interoperability. The data suggests there is friction due to military cultural differences and thus differences in views and perceptions. Interoperability seems to be undermined and, given its crucial role for successful multinational deployments, therefore seems to actively harm threat credibility of the deterrence mission. This alone underscores the importance of cultural interoperability.

This research is meant as a foundation for further research and hypotheses as the sample size is too small for conclusive findings. Whether the influence of military identity and military culture on cultural interoperability has the same effect on non-officers should prove an interesting subject, especially in smaller multinational units. Additionally, the reason for the difference in experience between operational staff members and those in the field could prove useful to explore. Expanding this research with more participants and more nationalities should also yield more meaningful results and could (in)validate whether the findings of this study are exclusive to Dutch officers.

This study has its shortcomings, the sample size aside. It was my first time conducting qualitative interviews and as a result some questions have been posed as a choice, which might have steered respondents' answers within the given choice instead of answering from their own frame of reference. However, overall the interviews went well and every respondent has been enthusiastic and thorough in their answers.

Additionally, recognising and separating objective fact or useful information from a respondent's perception and experience was something I had to learn throughout analysing the interviews. An error of this nature still might have slipped through the cracks.

Another shortcoming, which ties in with the recommendations for further research, is the fact this research was a case study. The results might hint at an issue spanning multiple multinational cooperations, but it cannot factually confirm it being so.

As this case study is limiting in observing unilateral tendencies, it also does not account for high intensity deployments. Active combat deployments add numerous variables that might trivialise military cultural differences or might enhance them. The closest respondents got to 'combat' were large scale exercises. Participants reported that military cultural differences had an influence during these exercises. These are not actual 'life and death' combat situations, thus the findings of this study cannot account for these situations.

To conclude, the data from this study suggest that military identity and military culture do influence cultural interoperability and even the perception of the effectivity of the multinational deployment. The more Dutch oriented military identity group and the mixed military identity group seem to be negatively affected by military cultural differences as opposed to the more military oriented military identity group. All three groups however think the efficiency of the battlegroup is negatively affected due to military cultural



differences.

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## Appendix I

### Toestemmingsformulier

#### Onderzoek

The influence of military culture and military identity on cultural interoperability for Dutch soldiers during their Enhanced Forward Presence deployment (2017-...) in Lithuania

#### Onderzoeker

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*Het interview en de opname zullen enkel gebruikt worden voor dit onderzoek en zullen daarmee niet met derden worden gedeeld. De transcriptie zal enkel gedeeld worden met de Radboud Universiteit en zal verwerkt worden in de scriptie. Tijdens het interview heeft u het recht deze op elk moment te beëindigen. Dat betekent dat u ook na het interview mag besluiten om niet meer deel te willen nemen.*

<b>Opnames</b>	Ja/nee
Ik geef toestemming voor het maken van een opname van het interview die <u>enkel</u> gebruikt zal worden door de onderzoeker voor het transcriberen van het interview. De opname zal daarna vernietigd worden.	

<b>Publicatie en identificatie</b>	Kies uw voorkeur
Niet anoniem – Ik geef toestemming dat de informatie wordt gedeeld zoals het gegeven is. Er hoeven geen aanpassingen gemaakt te worden en mijn naam mag gebruikt worden in de publicatie en presentaties.	

Anoniem – Ik geef toestemming dat de informatie wordt gedeeld zoals het gegeven is. Ik wens echter anoniem te blijven.	Voorkeur voor verwijzing (bijv.: rang, leeftijd, ...):
--	---

*Hierbij verklaar ik dat ik het bovenstaande heb gelezen en ingevuld. Ik geef toestemming om mee te werken aan het onderzoek.*

Datum/Plaats:

Naam:

Handtekening:

**Onderzoeker**

*De onderzoeker verklaart hierbij de wensen van de deelnemer, zoals hierboven aangegeven, te respecteren en te vervullen.*

Handtekening: