

Subsidy audit on contributions for shooting exercises

Defence Group – Training and Education Command

Key facts

The Armed Forces Act stipulates that members of the Armed Forces must complete annual shooting exercises. The shooting exercises are organised by shooting clubs and must be free of charge for those shooting. In addition, the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) supports, in accordance with the law, the recognised shooting clubs for the shooting exercises carried out with service weapons and ammunition.

In 2019, payments for shooting exercises eligible for contributions amounted to around CHF 5 million. In 2020, during the pandemic, there were significantly fewer payments (CHF 0.6 million) due to the suspension of compulsory shooting by members of the Armed Forces and the cancellation of federal shooting exercises. The provision of free and discounted service ammunition to the approximately 2,500 shooting clubs corresponded to a subsidy of CHF 10.2 million in 2019, and CHF 7.9 million in 2020.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) is of the opinion that subsidies should be based on the actual needs of the Armed Forces, which is currently not the case. Consequently, there is potential for savings to be made.

Long-standing cooperation between the Armed Forces and shooting clubs

The roots of Swiss marksmanship, shooting competitions and the activities of clubs to support military training go back deep into history, in some cases to the 15th century. Although there has been no lack of questioning of the military benefits of shooting training outside of military service in Switzerland over the past 150 years, the basic features of the shooting policy, which have essentially remained unchanged since the Military Organisation Act of 1874, have been consistently reaffirmed up to the present day.

In 2017, the DDPS Internal Audit Office conducted an audit of shooting exercises outside of military service and identified a need for action mainly in the sub-areas of transparency, compliance and information security. Subsequently, the DDPS developed a package of measures that was published at the beginning of 2020 and addresses a large part of the concerns identified in the audit. Individual activities that were questionable from a legal point of view were abolished (e.g. supply of sports ammunition, support for special events in military societies).

Aligning subsidies to actual needs

On the one hand, the shooting clubs are clients of the DDPS because they purchase large quantities of service ammunition for their shooting exercises. On the other hand, they hold shooting exercises and training courses for the Confederation as part of a legal mandate, for which they are paid and receive a credit for the ammunition required for these services. The clubs can obtain service ammunition for additional shooting exercises at a reduced price. While the SFAO sees no need for action with regard to financial compensation, it does see a need for corrective action with regard to ammunition subsidies. Ammunition supplies

should be oriented more towards shooting with the current Armed Forces weapon in the future. This focus should increase the direct benefit for the Armed Forces and at the same time reduce costs, as the subsidy share for ammunition for the current Armed Forces weapon is significantly lower than that for ammunition for older Armed Forces weapons.

The SFAO would like to draw attention to a planned amendment to the Subsidies Act, under which administrative units that provide subsidies will in future have to document their supervisory activities in a written, risk-based concept. It welcomes the fact that the responsibilities and processes that have developed over time will be critically reviewed as part of the future creation of a supervision concept.

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