

Audit of the DTI key project Swiss command network Armed Forces Staff

Key facts

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the Swiss command network (Fhr Netz CH) project of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) for the first time as an independent project. The project was launched in 2005 and the total costs are forecast to be around CHF 1 billion by 2028, with most of the funding coming from the Armed Forces and real estate dispatches. The project is being implemented in phases, in which funds are applied for with individual project orders. At the time of the audit, the project was in phase IV. The network must keep up with increasing user requirements and technological developments. As a result, it is subject to constant modifications and updates. It is therefore already expected that there will be further project phases after 2028. The necessary financial resources are to be applied for in future Armed Forces and real estate dispatches.

In this audit, the SFAO assessed the Fhr Netz CH project in terms of target achievement and risks.

The audit found that many ICT projects in the Defence Group (D Group) are dependent on Fhr Netz CH. The constantly changing framework conditions impact the project. This means that adjustments to how the project is organised and its scope are necessary.

Many Armed Forces IT applications are dependent on Fhr Netz CH

The Fhr Netz CH is a site-based network based on fibre optic cables and microwave links, and is a core communications infrastructure for the Swiss Armed Forces and the Swiss Security Network. It is to be built in such a way that it functions in all situations and thus forms the backbone for the command and control capability of the Swiss Armed Forces and the Swiss Security Network.

According to the portfolio overview of the Armed Forces Staff, Fhr Netz CH is the project within D Group with the highest number of active dependencies. Over twenty projects are dependent on Fhr Netz CH. Neither the D Group nor the project are actively managing and prioritising these dependencies.

The project environment has changed significantly and its remit needs to be adapted

Due to various changes within D Group, the Swiss command network is navigating difficult waters. The transfer of the Armed Forces Command Support Organisation to Cyber Command, the unbundling of D Group's ICT services and new strategic guidelines for the ICT architecture are just three examples. During the transition phase, parts of the command network will be operated and maintained by the Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication (FOITT). Although this involves significant upheaval with potentially far-reaching consequences, hardly any adjustments have been made to date. The project management must ensure that the impact on the project is correctly assessed and appropriate measures are taken.

The security procedures for information and data protection, as well as the correct and secure functioning of the command network, are important aspects, especially during the transition and transformation phase. Responsibility for this remains with D Group, even if certain services are temporarily provided by the FOITT. D Group would have to take appropriate measures, but this was not yet the case at the time of the audit.

Reporting needs to be refined

As the project is financed through various guarantee credits and has a long runtime, the total costs cannot be assessed in the SAP system. The project management's manual calculations should therefore be documented and stored in an audit-compliant manner.

The new milestone trend analysis introduced in accordance with the reporting requirements to assess the progress of the project is not very informative. The number of milestones is limited, meaning that only a fraction of the projects are assessed. The project should therefore review the selection of milestones.

The process for determining the top risks is established. However, consolidation should be consistently documented. The justification for the development of the general risk situation is kept general and makes no reference to the change in the top risks. The project should pay more attention to these points in future.

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