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2,238 Public Opinion and the Changing Legitimacy of the Armed Forces. The Portuguese Case in International Comparison.

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Recent theoretical models of civil-military relations have identified the growth of indifference as one of the main trends in public opinion towards the armed forces (Moskos, Williams and Segal, 2000). However, empirical data does not always confirm this tendency and evolution from support to ambivalence to indifference has rarely been observed (Williams, 2000; Keric, Callaghan and Manigart, 2002; Forster, 2006). In this paper we look at the case of Portugal in a comparative perspective, using data from existing surveys, including a recent public opinion survey on defense and the armed forces. In this country, significant transformations concerning the armed forces, namely the end of the draft, force reduction, integration of women and involvement in peacekeeping missions, have usually been backed by considerable majorities of public opinion. As in other countries, the prevision of a relative growth of indifference does not adequately characterize the attitudes of the Portuguese towards their military institution. On the contrary, previous national surveys have shown that the traditional ambivalence of public opinion in this domain seems to have given way to an effective, even though possibly temporary, support. Drawing on a comparative analysis of the Portuguese situation within the European context, we address a set of theoretical questions which have become central to discussions on the changing sources of legitimacy of the armed forces in democratic societies: To what extent do the new roles of the armed forces impact on perceptions of their legitimacy within society? Have peacekeeping and international missions delivered some new type of legitimacy? How conditional is support for the armed forces in the post-Cold War period? Is there a gap between official discourses on the armed forces – their roles, missions or structure - and the populations' views of such aspects? To which extent does public perception of global threats influence public support towards the military?