

Swedish military under fire for blunder

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Sweden's military must explain an error in calculating the number of new recruits since mandatory military service was abandoned a year ago, the defence ministry said on Friday.

Sweden's chiefs-of-staff recognised last week that they had erred in counting how many part-time recruits had signed up. The number was not 2,700 -- as originally reported -- but 300.

Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors is "very irritated by what happened" a spokeswoman said, adding that military head Sverker Göransson must fix the mistake.

In a report, the chiefs-of-staff admitted confusing the 300 actual recruits with the target of 2,700 for the period.

Since switching to a professional military, Sweden had set a goal of recruiting 6,600 new soldiers: 3,900 on a full-time basis and 2,700 part-time.

The new goal for part-timers has been reduced to 2,000 in order to make-up for the recruitment gap caused by the blunder.

The social-democratic opposition, who had opposed the end of mandatory military service, strongly criticised the government for its difficulty in recruiting.

"The government generally embellished the situation," Peter Helquist, who presides over the defence committee in parliament, said.

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In July, newspaper Svenska Dagbladet reported that the Swedish military was having great difficulty meeting its recruitment targets. Several recruits had given up during or just after initial training, it said.

At the time, the chiefs-of-staff recognised that they might have to ease entry requirements for new recruits.