

The Establishment of the National People's Army (January 18, 1956)

Abstract

The GDR's admission to the Warsaw Pact was the backdrop to the establishment of the National People's Army [*Nationale Volksarmee* or NVA]. The government presented the NVA as a security force demanded by the people, but it had actually been decreed from above without any public debate. In addition to the NVA, Red Army troops were already stationed in the GDR, and the Soviets were sending ever larger contingents. The response to the uprisings of June 17, 1953, had already demonstrated that these troops were nothing but guarantors of the Communist regime.

Source

As you know, the Law Supplementing the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic was passed by the People's Chamber on 26 September 1955. The working people have expressed their approval of the supplementation of the constitution in innumerable rallies and statements. They recognize that service in defence of our country and its achievements is an honourable national duty for citizens of the German Democratic Republic. The construction of socialism, the further increase in industrial and agricultural production, and the constant increase in the cultural and social standard of our population can be guaranteed for the long term only if the state organizes the necessary protection.

The working people of the German Democratic Republic call for the creation of a National People's Army to protect the only sovereign, democratic, peace-loving German state, which is closely and indissolubly linked to the great bloc for peace by the Warsaw Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Support and also by the State Treaty between the German Democratic Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The creation of a well-trained National People's Army with modern equipment in the German Democratic Republic is thus fully in accord with the interests of the working population and is an essential undertaking. No responsible democrat and patriot will close his eyes to developments in West Germany; the conclusion that must be drawn from these is that the German Democratic Republic must take all measures to ensure that the imperialists and militarists are kept in check and all their experiments are frustrated. (*applause*)

Until now only police forces have existed in the German Democratic Republic. These include the branches of the People's Police quartered in barracks. However, it is now time to create a National People's Army in our Republic in accordance with the elementary right of every independent sovereign state. The National People's Army will consist of land, air, and sea forces necessary for the defence of the German Democratic Republic. [...]

In contrast to the West German mercenary units, which wear American uniforms, our National People's Army will wear German uniforms which conform to the national traditions of our people. There are important progressive traditions in our people's military history, and these also find their expression in military uniform. However, German imperialism and fascism sacrificed the uniform as a symbol of military and patriotic honour, so that the uniform became the embodiment of lack of freedom, oppression, terror, the epitome of militarism.

In the National People's Army, our uniform will take on a truly patriotic meaning as an expression of our readiness to defend our democratic attainments with determination. It is intended that equipping our People's Army with a uniform in line with the national tradition of the German people in its colour, its cut and the way it is worn shall make manifest social progress in our state and emphasize that what is coming into being is a new army of the German people and its working class, free of any aggressive aims.

The National People's Army will be equipped with modern technology and arms, and trained by the most modern methods on the basis of progressive military science.

Service in the National People's Army is an honourable service for the German people and for our state of workers and farmers. Supported by the love of our workers and farmers and the intelligentsia, our National People's Army will be ready and able to safeguard peace, to protect the Republic, and to fulfill honourably the German Democratic Republic's obligations towards the other states participating in the treaty.

Source: "From Deputy Prime Minister Willi Stoph's Declaration on the Law Establishing the National People's Army" (January 18, 1956), in J. K. A. Thomanek and James Mellis, *Politics, Society and Government in the German Democratic Republic: Basic Documents*. Oxford: Berg 1989, pp. 255–56.

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