

Konversion - Herausforderung für Wissenschaft und Forschung Dokumentation der RWI/BICC-Konferenz am 16. März 1995 in Bonn

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Defense conversion has gone through various stages of political acceptance during the last twenty years, and since expectations for a 'peace dividend' have been raised after the end of the Cold War conversion has reached a new level of practical experience within the last five years. BICC report 7 presents the proceedings of a conference 'Conversion - A Challenge for Science and Research', co-hosted by the Rhine-Westphalian Institute for Economic Research (RWI), and the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) held 16 March 1995 in Bonn. The event, prepared primarily for a German audience, brought together representatives, researchers and practitioners from different backgrounds, including universities, military research institutes, defense industry, trade unions, and governmental institutions. In their introductory statements, the Director of BICC, Dr. Herbert Wulf, and the President of RWI, Prof. Dr. Paul Klemmer, both agreed on the significant human and economic potential given by the initiation of a worldwide disarmament process. Nevertheless, as reductions in armed forces and defense industry production are more influenced by budgets constraints than by changes in the security policies, and as the short term costs often seem to exceed the long term benefits, conversion will stay a challenge not only for the scientific community but for politicians also. Thus, in her inaugural speech Ms. Anke Brunn, Minister of Research and Higher Education of the state of North Rhine Westphalia, mentioned the necessity of broadening the conversion agenda: "Conversion, the shifting from military potentials and purposes towards civilian use covers all political fields: Social politics, education and research, economics and structural politics, disarmament and development. This multi-dimensional feature of conversion can only be captured by an international and interdisciplinary research approach." The following sample from the presentations provides an overview of the issues raised in four

conference sections: (1) Conversion of military research and development (R&D), (2) Demobilization and reintegration of military personnel, (3) Base closures and reallocation of military facilities, (4) Conversion of defense and defense supply industry (defense industry and their supplying enterprises ?). In discussing the obstacles to and incentives for conversion the specifics of German defense industry and of military R&D must be considered. Companies and research institutes in the United States and Russia generally face distinct problems due to differing structures. Military production is only a sectional branch in most German defense enterprises, allowing opportunities for diversification - if not conversion - within the same enterprise. Experiences of such diversification did not always guarantee employment for those people leaving the military sector, but often helped to diversify the technical know-how of the companies. Experience from the leading organization for applied research in Germany, the Fraunhofer Society, reveals that conversion of military R&D can be successfully implemented in similar high-level technologies, such as information or environmental technologies. On the other hand, recent development in dual-use technologies may be a serious barrier to research conversion. Experts on demobilization, using examples from both Eastern Europe and Africa, explained why reintegration programs must be included for conversion to contribute to social development, or even to function as an instrument of conflict prevention in the future. Therefore, new links between scientists and politicians, non-governmental and governmental organizations working on security and development issues must be found. For four years now, Germany has had some experience with the problems of restructuring former military bases. The majority of these sites need ample creativity from local and regional authorities - as well as initiatives, technical know-how and assistance from scientists and companies and support from the state - for many reasons, including contamination. The KONVER program installed by the European Union can only help in a few cases and in some respects. Ultimately, the German federal government is required to give conversion a higher priority through legal acts and financial resources. One of the general conclusions of the conference, throughout all sections, was that conversion still faces strong resistance from the parochial interests of privileged groups who are not willing to accept pure market-oriented restructuring. These obstacles, based on a conservative 'military culture', can be overcome only by long-term, reliable (and

profitable) civil options as well as the intellectual willingness to change.