

Bulgaria – National Report

Since the Republic of Bulgaria is one of the newly accepted NATO members, the main purpose of this report is to give basic information on women in the Bulgarian Armed Forces. It will briefly review the historic background of the issue, the legal regulations concerning women in uniform as well as their current status in the armed forces.

Introduction

In our modern history examples of women taking part in military units date back to the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878 as well as to the Serb-Bulgarian War of 1885. Nevertheless, their organized participation in activities supporting the army began at the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1912, when the First Balkan War was declared, the Bulgarian Red Cross organized short sanitary courses in some of the big cities. Many women volunteers, called "Samaritans", attended those courses and after that were sent to field hospitals and small medical compartments close to the front lines. One of them was the first woman in the world to take part in a combat flight on Oct 30th 1912. At this same time Bulgarian women took also part in infantry units, fighting shoulder to shoulder with their brothers and husbands.

Thirty years later, in 1944, when Bulgaria joined the anti-Nazi coalition, 4200 women voluntarily participated in Bulgarian military units, 800 of them being directly engaged in combat activities. Others served as doctors, nurses, military correspondents and even as actresses in the front theatres.

As a part of the constitutional changes in the country after the end of the Second World War, discrimination based on sex was banned and women were officially given the right to practice the military profession. At the same time they were not allowed to enroll at higher military schools and only few of them became officers – usually physicians, dentists, jurists and other civilian specialists needed for certain activities in the armed forces. Most of the military women in this period were NCOs.

In 1988 for the first time women were accepted at one of the Bulgarian higher military schools. They were promoted officers in 1992 with a profile "Information and cultural relations" (13 women). Other alumni (14 women) graduated in 1993 and after that, because of disputes in the military leadership on the role of women officers, the next group of cadets were not promoted officers until the year 2000. This group of 19 women had specialties in the sphere of logistics.

Legal regulations

The basic legal documents providing regulation of the status of women in uniform are:

- Law on Defence and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria 1995 (LD)
- Rules of Procedure for the Professional Military Service 2001 (RP)
- Regulations for the Service of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria 2001 (RS)

The right of women to practice the military profession is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, which in Art.6 states that no discrimination is allowed on any basis including sex, as well as by Art. 48 providing for the right of all Bulgarian citizens to freely choose their profession and place of work.

According to Art. 88 of LD "women are appointed to professional military service in the armed forces on positions, determined by the Minister of Defence and proposed by the Chief of the General Staff". A list of jobs, which were considered heavy to perform by women and could have harmful impact on their health and maternal functions, was enacted with a ministerial order in 2001. All jobs in it were forbidden for women in uniform.

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A law against discrimination has been passed by Parliament and came into force on Jan 1st 2004. It is expected to give additional impetus for the improvement of the legal aspects of equality of military men and women. In accordance with it, Art. 88 of LD was denounced and now women can occupy all jobs in the armed forces with the sole exclusion of those for which male gender is a prerequisite.

Women are given the opportunity to enroll at higher military educational institutions after passing entrance exams. Men and women qualify for separate quotas. There are different criteria for the physical capabilities required for male and female candidates. Women can also study in all specialties of the Defence and Staff College.

In relation to their professional status women have equal professional rights to those of men in the armed forces. The appointment, promotion, working hours, rests, vacations, disciplinary responsibility, training and qualification, evaluation and etc. are regulated with one and the same provisions for both men and women.

The LD and the RP provide for special rights for women in uniform concerning their maternal functions. **Some** of them are:

- Special protection against dismissal;
- Pregnancy, childbirth, adoption and maternity leave for a period of time determined in the Labor Code; if a woman does not want to use this leave she has to be paid compensation for that;
- Suitable working conditions for pregnant and breastfeeding women according to physician's recommendation;
- Pregnant women and mothers of children up to 6 years of age cannot be commissioned, cannot execute night duties (from 10 p.m. till 6 a.m.) and cannot work extra hours without their written consent.

All these regulations, giving preliminary protection to women in uniform, are based on the principles, institutes and provisions of labor legislation. Their purpose and nature is to broaden and improve the Constitutional texts for child and motherhood protection. In defence of socially significant interests, all rights given to a mother in this respect can be executed by the father of the child (even if a military man) in case the mother is not able to take care of him/her.

The physical and professional criteria for recruitment of men and women in the armed forces are provided in the LD and RP. They are as follows:

- Bulgarian citizenship only;
- Higher education degree for the officers and secondary or higher education degree for the NCOs and soldiers according to the requirements for the position they apply for;
- Age – up to 40 years for the officers, 35 years for the NCOs and 30 years for the soldiers;
- To be fit for military service according to physicians conclusion;
- To have passed conscript service – only for male candidates;
- Not to have been convicted for a criminal offence and not to be a defendant in a pending criminal trial;
- Not to have been charged with disciplinary dismissal.

Women and men are trained in compliance with one and the same programmes both in the military units and the higher educational institutions. They have equal legal and professional opportunities for career development according to the principles accepted in the Bulgarian Army.

Current status

Last year an NGO, called "Army and Civil Society", with the support of the General Staff made a research on the status of women officers in the Bulgarian Armed Forces.

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According to its report at the beginning of 2003 1890 women served in the Bulgarian Armed Forces, 1060 of them being professional soldiers, 700 - NCOs and 130 - officers. Military women consisted of 4,2% of the total number of the Bulgarian army, whilst women officers were 1,2 % from the overall number of officers. They were appointed to jobs where physical capabilities were not the main factor and that excluded direct engagement in combat activities.

94 women officers served in the Armed Forces and other 36 were in a six-month period of advance notice before leaving the army. 37% of the serving women officers were in the Land Forces, 35% in the Air Forces, 6,4% in the Maritime Forces and 21,6% in the General Staff. Their age distribution was as follows:

- Up to 25 years – 32 officers (16% in the Land Forces, 50% in the Air Forces and 34 % in the General Staff);
- 26-30 years – 28 officers (50 % in LF, 32% in AF, 7% in MF and 11% in GS)
- 31-35 years – 22 officers (50% in LF, 23% in AF, 14% in MF and 13% in GS)
- 36-40 years – 7 officers (29% in LF, 43% in AF, 14% in MF and 14% in GS)
- 41-45 years – 5 officers (60% in LF and 40% in GS).

Their rang distribution was as follows:

- Lieutenants – 59
- Senior lieutenants – 39
- Captains – 20
- Majors – 11
- Lieutenant colonels – 1.

These figures have undergone small changes in the current year. At present most of the women officers are up to the age of 30. This is due to the fact that in the period 2000-2003 the higher military schools have promoted 69 women officers.

Table 1

Women in the Armed Forces 2004	Officers	Sergeants	Soldiers	Total
Land Forces	39	228	748	1015
Air Forces	50	254	434	738
Maritime Forces	16	54	38	108
General Staff	23	163	70	256
Total	128	699	1290	2117

Women officers are usually appointed to positions in the headquarters of the military units. Most commonly they are technical and logistics specialist, chiefs and assistant chiefs of sections, registry offices and services. There are also jurists, physicians and dentists. Women officers rarely deal with drill training.

Many women nowadays choose the profession of the soldier. The reasons for that are basically connected with the high unemployment rate in the small provincial towns and the social stability, which the army gives to them. The recruitment of female professional soldiers in the Bulgarian Armed Forces started in 1999, a year after the beginning of the recruitment of male professional soldiers. They attend 30-day courses for combined-arms training and after that they are sent to different garrisons to execute their service.

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For example 10% of the overall number of personnel in the 61st Striamska mechanized brigade in Karlovo (a small town in the middle of Bulgaria, close to the Balkan chain) consists of women soldiers. They perform different functions as chemical reconnaissance specialists, sanitary instructors, operators of electronic devices, radiotelegraph, telephone and rangefinder operators and others. 40 female soldiers serve in the artillery battalion of the brigade.

Presently Bulgarian military women take part in 3 missions abroad. 10 women serve in the Bulgarian mechanized battalion in Iraq, 3 in the Bulgarian mechanized platoon in Afghanistan and 8 in the Bulgarian guard company in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their functions are administrative, technical and logistic. A special analysis for the role of military women in operations has not been made by now but practice shows that they have positive impact on the overall performance of the contingent since they are extremely disciplined, highly motivated, precise and accurate in the execution of their duties.