

**TRANSFORMING THE BULGARIAN ARMED
FORCES AND THE CHALLENGES OF
DIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

1. Introduction

In the recently approved Strategic Defence Review in Bulgaria the establishment of modern human resources management policy is recognized as a basic requirement to ensure sustainable development of defence capabilities. It should provide an “effective system to recruit, employ, educate, train, motivate, retain and discharge personnel” (Strategic defence review policy framework, 2004). The equality in employment and integration of minority groups and females in the military organization is a key dimension of this policy in the context of the transformation of Bulgarian armed forces and the emerging post-modern trends.

The aim of the paper is twofold:

First, to analyse the potential of the Bulgarian armed forces for social integration of diverse ethnic groups. In addition, it aims at exploring how possible systemic and attitudinal barriers operate and influence the successful development of equal opportunity policy in the Bulgarian armed forces.

Second, to summarize some recommendations for the development of equal opportunity policy in the military based on critical analysis of domestic practice and lessons learned from the comparative study on the European and the North American experience.

The analysis in the paper is based on the results from a research project carried out by the author in 2003-2004 on the topic “Managing Ethnic, Cultural and Gender Diversity in All-Volunteer Forces: Applicability of the US Model to the Bulgarian armed forces”.

2. Managing Diversity in the Post-Modern Military: Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The main post-modern trends of military institution are related to implementation of non-traditional missions; abolishment of conscription and development of small professional military to respond to the new security threats; changing the roles of the military professionals from “soldier-warrior” to “soldier-statesman”; full integration of women in the armed forces; increasing role of civilian employees in the military, etc. (Moskos, Ch. C., Williams, J. A., Segal, D. R., 2000). In brief, the post-modern military can be characterized by the processes of diversification of the missions and tasks as well as diversification of personnel. These trends can be observed and are common also for the contemporary Bulgarian armed forces. Under these challenging circumstances a key research agenda of both academic and policy interest focuses on introduction of Equal Opportunity Policies (EOP) in the post-modern military and a number of reasons are presented in support of the making armed forces representative of the populations they serve. Most of these reasons are valid to the present-day Bulgarian military.

The first group of arguments raises the issues of social justice and citizenship building and relates to the military institution’s contribution to the process of social integration of minority groups. Charles Moskos argues that the US Army provides “bridging environment” in which “black and white social attitudes can become significantly closer in egalitarian settings with shared experiences.” (Moskos, Ch. C., 1998, 25)

With respect to the UK military, Christopher Dandeker and David Mason argue that the “military service can provide ethnic minority communities with a sense that they are valuable elements of the social and political system. They feel included not excluded; skills enhance

their socio-economic mobility; and a range of leadership skills can be transferred back to local communities. All these could be seen, then, as facets of a process of citizenship building” (Dandeker, Ch. & Mason, D., 1999, 62).

The second group of arguments often characterized as “business case” is related to the abolishment of conscription and the shift to All-Volunteer Forces (AVF). On the one hand, it is argued, “the services could benefit from being seen to live up to the ideal of being an equal opportunity employer. While this may enhance their standing in ethnic minority communities it is just as important to sustain the legitimacy of the armed services and thus to found good will amongst the general public (Dandeker, Ch. & Mason, D., 1999, 61). In addition, the development of AVF raises the question of how to keep the military fully integrated into society. As Donna Winslow writes “it is important that the Canadian Forces be integral to the society it serves, not isolated from it, therefore the composition of the military must reflect the population it serves [Winslow, D., 1999, 35]. On the other hand, in the context of the shift to AVF, “the pursuit of greater representativeness would improve access to a wider recruitment pool as the armed services compete with civilian companies for scarce labour both in terms of quantity and quality.” [Dandeker Ch. & Mason D., 1999, p. 61].

The third group of arguments relates to the greater effectiveness of “race and gender mixed” military organization, particularly in the case of international peacekeeping operations [Miller, L. & Moskos, Ch. C, 1995, 635]. The accumulated skills to work in multicultural environment in the course of diversity management training could be very important for the success of contemporary international military operations.

The discussions on the issue of managing diversity in the post-modern military puts the question of equitable representation of minority groups and females in the armed forces in a new context. The diversity is understood as a challenge to the traditional integration and a generator of institutional innovation.

3. How Diverse are the Bulgarian Society and the Armed Forces today?

Bulgaria has multiethnic and multicultural population. According to the last national census of March 2001, the group of ethnic Bulgarians composes 83.6% of the country's population. The two major ethnic groups, Bulgarian Turks and Roma, represent correspondingly 9.5% and 4.6% of the whole population. Small ethnic groups like Tatars, Armenians, Jewish and others represent 1.5% of the population. The rest of 0.8% did not show their ethnicity (National Statistical Institute, 2002).

As far as the religious communities in Bulgaria are concerned, 83.8% of the population identify themselves as Christians, 12.1% as Moslems, 0.2% as others and 3.9% did not show their religious identity (National Statistical Institute, 2002).

There are no officially published statistics about ethnic and religious self-identification of the military. For that reason, data from a recent representative sociological survey carried out among the military will be utilized to give general impression about diversity among the service members. Among the conscript soldiers, 81.8% identify themselves as Bulgarians; 12.4% as Turks; 2.7% as Roma and 3.1% – others. As regards professional service members, Commissioned officers (COs), Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and volunteer soldiers, 98.0% identify themselves as Bulgarians, 1.5% as Turks and 0.4% as others. Concerning religious diversity, 75.9% of conscript soldiers identify themselves as Christians, 12.2% - Muslims, 1.4% - with other religion and 10.4% atheists (Tomova, I. T., Yanakiev. Y. V., 2002, 54).

The above figures illustrate equitable representation of main minority groups among conscript soldiers. In the same time significant under representation exists among the professional military corps. This situation needs clarification. As a rule, before the democratic changes in Bulgaria in 1989 the predominant part of the young people of Turkish and Roma communities used to do their military service (including conscript) in paramilitary formations like the Construction or Transportation troops, which did not pertain to the regular armed forces.

Handful representatives of these groups could join the military academies or NCO's schools. This was an "unwritten law", guaranteed and supported by the Communist Party structures, security services and administrative system of the totalitarian regime. Obviously, one of the reasons for the under representation of Turkish and Roma communities among the professional military nowadays is the lack of tradition during the totalitarian period of the Bulgarian history. It is not realistic to expect a rapid growth of their representation among the professional military corps for only a decade. The other factor that can explain the situation is relatively weak interest among the representatives of these minority groups to join the military as professional service members probably due to lack of information about the procedures, requirements, career opportunities, etc. Finally, there are some objective barriers such as the level of education and proficiency in Bulgarian language which some of the young men and women from Turkish and Roma groups cannot meet.

For instance just 23.7% of Turkish ethnic group and 6.9% of Roma have graduated from high school. Regarding the university education the trends are even more negative. Merely 2.7% of Roma and 7.2% of Turkish people have completed university or college education (National Statistical Institute, 2002).

In spite of what the reasons for this significant under representation of minority groups among the professional military corps are, the situation deserves particular attention, research and implementation of an effective EOP in the Bulgarian armed forces.

Regarding the issue of females' integration of in the military, there are real achievements and a good basis for further development. The first group of female cadets has been accepted in the Army academy in 1988. Following female cadets have been accepted also in Air Force and Navy academies. Currently 2326 women serve at different positions in the BAF. The share of females among volunteer soldiers is 13.3%, among NCOs and sergeants - 6.8% and among COs - 1.9%. (Official report of Personnel Department of the General Staff, 2004)

4. Existing Legislative and Policy Framework for Promoting Diversity in the Bulgarian Armed Forces

The democratic legislation adopted in Bulgaria after 1989 has established political representation for the minorities and a working model of representative democracy accepted and upheld by the society. The equality before the law and the ban on discrimination are regulated in the Constitution which states that "all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and "all citizens are equal before the law. No restrictions of their rights or privileges are permitted on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic belonging, sex, origin, religion, education, convictions, political affiliation, personal or social position, or property status" (Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, Article 6 (1) (2), 1991)

With the recently approved Anti Discrimination Act, Bulgaria complied fully with the EU requirements on the ground of equal opportunity policy and on the protection of human rights. It "bans any direct or indirect discrimination based on gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, citizenship, origin, religion or belief, education, political affiliation, personal or social status, physical disability, age, sexual orientation, marital status, property as well as any other criteria defined by the Law or by the International treaty on which Bulgaria is a part" (Anti Discrimination Act Article 4 (1), 2003).

Important legislative and administrative measures have been undertaken to ensure equal rights for all Bulgarian citizens to join the military. The Law of Defence and the Armed Forces clearly states, "All men, citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria, fit for military service, without difference of race, nationality, religion, social descent and family position, which have 18 years of age, shall be liable to military service." (Law of Defence and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, art. 97, Para 1, 1995)

To summarize, there are many important developments in legislative and political sphere, which pushed forward the process of building a new legitimacy of the Bulgarian military as an institution, which represents its parent society. In the same time, new challenges have emerged that need detailed study and formulation of practical recommendations. The

importance of the research is growing because the equality before the law is just one of the basic prerequisites for introduction of equal opportunity policy in the public sector, including the military. The next more difficult step is to implement the law or to put equality into practice.

5. The Potential of the Military Institution in Integration of Ethnic and Cultural Groups

The Bulgarian armed forces, like the other military organizations all over the world, comprise some specific features that could be viewed as prerequisites or factors that may support the process of social integration of ethnic and cultural groups. Charles Moskos, when analyzed the process of racial integration in the US Army, described as one of the main strengths of the military the fact that “black and white social attitudes can become significantly closer in egalitarian settings with shared experiences.” In addition, “the more contact white soldiers had with black troops, the more favourable was their reaction toward racial integration.” [Moskos, Ch. C., 1999, 13] Despite significant contextual and cultural differences between the US Army and Bulgarian armed forces, one can find many common features between the two military organizations. The reformed armed forces after the democratic changes in Bulgaria has been developed as an institution, which unites all service members, despite of their ethnic and religious identification, around common goals. The military provides “egalitarian settings” based on equal rights and obligations of all service members despite of their ethnic, religious or cultural identification. In addition, it provides good opportunity for “shared experiences” forcing personnel to work and live 24 hours together and stimulating teamwork.

Another essential strength of the military organization, which could be interpreted as a prerequisite for ethnic integration, is the specific risky environment accompanied with many difficulties for the service members. They are forced to work together to overcome common risks and difficulties. As Moskos argue “a rule of thumb is that the more military the environment, the more effective the integration. Interracial comity is stronger in the field than in the garrison, stronger on duty than

off, and stronger on post than in the world beyond the base.” [Moskos, Ch. C., 1988, 17]

Next important “specific nature of military life”, which could support the process of ethnic minorities integration, is the hierarchical structure of the military, based on order and discipline. The US experience shows that “the main reason that integration succeeded in the military has to do with the special nature of military life. Orders, once given, must be followed, whatever a soldier’s private feelings or misgivings.” [Moskos, Ch. C., 1988, p. 19] In addition, the military institution has power mechanisms to regulate tensions, including possible tensions on ethnic or religious base.

Assessing the professional education and training of the military in the BAF, one can say that this is another important strength of the organization and prerequisite for successful implementation of the process of minorities’ integration. The commanders are highly educated and qualified and the military institution has the capacity to develop additional specialized education and training of the cadre to cope with specific, new situations like integration of minority groups into the BAF. Most of the COs and NCOs have internalized the requirements of the good leader - to treat in just and in equal manner their subordinates, to take care of them, to stimulate teamwork. Most of the military leaders demonstrate high morale, sense of responsibility, obedience and humanism that is an important prerequisite for development of skills to manage diversity in the Bulgarian armed forces.

Last but not least, the high public confidence in the military⁸ as a non-partisan, national institution that all Bulgarians despite of their ethnic, religious or cultural background perceive is vitally important to the country is also an important factor in support to the process of minority’s integration. In this sense, the Bulgarian armed forces can play the role of nation-building institution and to support the process of social integration of minority groups at national level.

⁸ Opinion pools carried out in Bulgaria in the period after the democratic changes in 1989 found confidence in the Army as an institution to have varied between 63% and 70%, and lack of confidence, between 10% and 12%.

In brief, the military institution combines very important specific features that could be interpreted as prerequisites for integration of minority groups. One can hardly find other state institution in Bulgaria that combines all these features which gives reason to define it as a “bridging environment”. The problem is that these potential strengths are not fully utilized yet.

6. Main Barriers to the Implementation of Equal Opportunity Policy in the Military

The analysis of the legislative and political developments in Bulgaria in the past fifteen years shows that despite important achievements in guaranteeing equal treatment of minority groups and females in the military, there is still no comprehensive EOP in place in the Bulgarian armed forces. One of the indicators in support of this conclusion, which is being usually applied to measure the progress in the EOP implementation, is the fact that the main ethnic minority groups are significantly underrepresented among the professional military. In addition, there are also some indicators of inequality in employment with respect to females, related with obstacles to access to so-called “battle positions” (Yordanova, Sv., 2003). The completed studies proved the existence of certain problems that can be interpreted as barriers to the process of practical implementation of EOP in the military, which must be carefully analyzed and measures to their gradual overcoming should be taken. Therefore, the main stress in this paper is laid on identifying the main system and attitudinal barriers to successful execution of equal opportunity policy in the Bulgarian military and to summarize some recommendations for the improvement of the present situation.

6.1 System Barriers to the Implementation of Equal Opportunity Policy in the Military

The term *system barrier* was defined in the research as “policies, guidelines or procedures, which intentionally or unintentionally favour one group over another” (Winslow, D., 1999, 48). One should add that the lack of transparent, appropriate and adequate policies, guidelines and procedures for selection and recruitment of military personnel free of

ethnic, religious, sex, etc. criteria could be interpreted as system barriers as well.

According to the results from recent expert study one of the most important system barrier for the professional realization of minority groups in the military is the requirement of the Armed Forces Act for the candidates for volunteer soldiers and NCOs to have completed high school education. Having in mind comparatively low educational level of young people from Turkish and Roma minority, this requirement automatically excludes large proportion of these groups from the recruitment pool for professional military service (Angelov, A. Z., 2004, 118). Those are 20.7 % of Bulgarians, 53 % of Bulgarian Turks and 44.9 % of Roma, who have completed elementary education and might be suitable candidates for some positions providing they demonstrate appropriate qualifications and positive aptitude to military service.

Beside this problem attention should be paid to the lack of well-established system for personnel education and training in working in a multiethnic, multicultural and gender mixed environment. The analysis of survey's data shows that there exist low awareness among the military about ethnic, cultural and gender diversity and sporadic attempts to recognize and to accommodate differences. Furthermore, attention deserves also unsatisfactory developed military system for psychological support, which has to assist the commanders' work, including the activities in interethnic relations management.

With respect to the equality in employment of females in the armed forces, one can say that there are no legislative barriers to join the institution and to make professional carrier. In the same time, according to the results from recent studies there exists a possibility for restrictive treatment applying different procedures for selection and recruitment for particular positions through insertion of specific requirements in the job descriptions. Ethic considerations and the interests of the military organization usually motivate these acts. (Yordanova, Sv., 2003). Therefore, the experts recommend to change the normative basis for the females' service in the military and to provide free access to all positions

excluding only those that could impose danger for women's health and generative abilities.

6.2 Attitudinal Barriers to the Implementation of Equal Opportunity Policy in the Military

The term *attitudinal barrier* was defined in the research as “beliefs, and/or behaviours that can lead to a non-supportive work culture and environment” (Winslow D., 1999, 48). In accordance with this definition the completed sociological surveys identified three basic problems that could constitute attitudinal barriers to the realization of the EOP in the Bulgarian Armed Forces. The first problem is related to comparatively widespread and stable prejudices and stereotypes towards the main minority groups among different generations Christian Bulgarians both in the military and the society. In the same time, there exist reciprocal prejudices and stereotypes against Christian Bulgarians among the representatives of minority groups as well. The second one concerns existing comparatively high interethnic distances between Christian Bulgarians, Bulgarian Turks, Muslim Bulgarians and Roma. The third issue is related to the predominantly negative attitudes of the majority towards possible appointment of representatives of the two biggest ethnic groups – Bulgarian Turks and Roma at key positions in State administration, the armed forces and police. (Yanakiev, Y., 2002) All these problems could be interpreted as potential source of ethnic or religious based harassment and could produce tensions in the introduction and successful implementation of EOP in the Bulgarian armed forces.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The integration of minority groups in the Bulgarian armed forces has become one of the most important issues that affected civil-military relations during the last fifteen years. The reason is that under the conditions of transformation of the Bulgarian military from a “guard of socialism” to a “guard of democracy”, the integration of previously adverse ethnic groups like Bulgarian Turks and Roma into the regular armed forces is one of the bases of building a new legitimacy of the

military institution. A significant progress in the legislative and political sphere was achieved during the period of democratic government in Bulgaria as a result of which many legal barriers for the full professional realization of the minority groups' representatives in the public sector, including the military were eliminated.

The decision of the Bulgarian National Assembly for gradual abolishment of conscription and development of All-Volunteer Forces⁹ put the issue of equitable representation of minority groups in the armed forces in a new context and made it even more sensitive for both the society and the military. In a completely different situation when the BAF switch to manning entirely on voluntary basis, the institution has to develop as an equal opportunity employer in order to attract broader public support and to keep the military fully integrated into society. Under these circumstances the main challenge in front of the political and military leadership is to develop a policy and to implement a strategy for providing equal opportunity for professional realization in the military adequate to the changing situation in the organization and consistent with the international experience and the national specifics. The main stress should be laid on the development of comprehensive institution-level policy as an integral part of state-level anti discrimination policy.

In order to fulfil this strategy some important practical steps have to be undertaken by the society and the military. Briefly they can be summarized as follows.

First, the reach of a higher representation of the basic ethnic communities among the professional military corps should become a priority in the equal opportunity principle implementation. In this regard a pro-active personnel policy for attracting qualified applicants for professional service members from the basic minority groups' should be implemented.

⁹ According to the Bulgarian Strategic Defense Review this process has to be completed until 2010.

Second, the successful implementation of EOP in the Armed Forces requires a review and actualization of the active duty service legislation according to recently accepted national anti-discrimination legislation. In this regard, the necessity of keeping the of Armed Forces Act requirement for soldiers and sergeants' candidates completed high school education needs a careful assessment.

Third, the realization of the Armed forces equal opportunity policy will not be successful without the establishment of a specialized institutional body for coordination, analysis and control of the equal opportunities' principle implementation process. At national level the newly established ombudsman can play this role. At institutional level it would be useful to establish "Equal Opportunity" section at the Personnel Department of the Ministry of Defence.

Fourth, some consideration should be given to the establishment of a system for personnel education and training in working in multiethnic and multicultural environment.

Fifth, some concern should be given also to the Bulgarian Armed Forces units staffing with specialists which to assist the commanders work with their subordinates, the so called "human relations management specialists", which will have an additional training in Bulgarian basic ethnic groups' customs, culture, traditions and psychology.

Last but not least, to be successful in the implementation of an Armed Forces equal opportunity policy the Ministry of Defence will need comprehensive, multi-disciplinary and policy-oriented studies. The research is expected to fill the gap in theoretical elucidation and particularly translation and adaptation to the Bulgarian cultural, legislative and organizational context of concepts as "affirmative action", "managing of integration", "gender mainstreaming", "valuing differences" and "diversity management". In addition, little is known on how different organizational barriers are operating at the point of entry during the recruitment and selection process as well as inside the institution. With respect to attitudinal barriers it is important to know how the specific Bulgarian military culture and the traditional combat

training are related to the effectiveness of equal opportunity programs. Furthermore, the ability of minority groups to integrate into organization and to participate effectively in the organizational culture is another basic question, which deserves additional research attention. Not the least, there is clear need to promote study of advantages and possible disadvantages of the concept of diversity for military organization from the perspective of military effectiveness, cohesion and teamwork in the units.

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