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# Changes in perception of gender stereotypes in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic

## Introduction

People around the world are influenced by gender stereotypes. Standards, unwritten rules often predict what is appropriate for women and what is for men in society. Due to gender stereotypes, girls and women are often less valued and often given lower social status. Women are more likely to experience restrictions on their mobility, their lower status in society, more than men face harassment and are limited in their choices about how they should live their lives. Trends in some of the ratio characteristics have shown a gradual, continuous consolidation of the ratio of women to men in leadership positions. However, there are still differences between countries, which are influenced by social, religious, family, and economic conditions, culture, customs, and behaviour.<sup>1</sup> Women make up (slightly more than) 50% of the world's population, and it would be fair to implement the principle of equal opportunities for these women to be adequately represented in suitable job, operator, health, education, and management occupations. The necessary participation

<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf) [accessed: 15.04.2022].

of women in the performance of functions in public administration (self-government), state administration as well as in the exercise of parliamentary mandates at all levels is fully legitimate, because women's life experience is fully relevant and competent for such representation.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, in many organizations and institutions it is still not possible to talk about an adequate state of gender equality between men and women, even in military organizations. EUROMIL together with MEP Hilde Vautmans (ALDE, Belgium) organized in the European Parliament an event on "Promoting the role of women in the military – breaking down gender stereotypes" on 6 March 2019. Vautmans stated that women make up only 3–18% of European armies. She underlined the change is urgently needed: gender stereotypes about men and women need to be reconsidered, women need to be allowed to join the armed forces and should be mentored during their service. In addition, a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment needs to be enforced.<sup>3</sup>

The number of women who are exclusively engaged in domestic work is not high today. Women perceive domestic work as monotonous, mechanical. In case they have a jobs, then they have too little chance to share properly their time between both the work and family. Of course, this is not a universally valid model, but it can be considered a majority one. The main gender stereotypes associated with work include those that divide occupations into strictly female and male. In most current opinions, the underestimation of the marital and paternal role of men and the condemnation of women who choose typically male occupations (such as military careers) prevail. Masculinity and femininity are incorrectly defined as opposites that force the assumption that all men are exclusively "masculine" and all women are exclusively "feminine."<sup>4</sup> The social situation does not yet favour the traditional role of women – mothers, and therefore women are looking for positions that society values more. The hidden barriers to women's entry into the army are gradually being eliminated, but there are still differences in the number of women, especially in command and staff positions.

According to Michelle Onello, the United States of America is obliged to ensure the meaningful participation of women in its armed forces to fulfil the "participatory" pillar of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda adopted in 2000

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<sup>2</sup> K. Rubenstein, T. Bergin, P. Rowe, *Gender, Leadership and Representative Democracy. The Differential Impacts of the Global Pandemic*, "Democratic Theory" 2020, vol. 7, issue 2, pp. 94–103, <https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2020.070212>.

<sup>3</sup> *Promoting the Role of Women in the Military – Breaking Gender Stereotypes*, EUROMIL, <http://euromil.org/promoting-the-role-of-women-in-the-military-breaking-gender-stereotypes/> [accessed: 18.04.2022].

<sup>4</sup> P. Hamaj, J. Matis, *Ženy v Ozbrojených silách Slovenskej republiky*, [in:] *Kobiety w grupach dyspozycyjnych społeczeństwa. Socjologiczna analiza udziału i roli kobiet w wojsku, policji oraz w innych grupach dyspozycyjnych*, eds. K. Dojwa, J. Maciejewski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2007, p. 149.

by the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325. But there exist barriers on the meaningful participation of women. These barriers undermine compliance with US obligations under international humanitarian law, codified in the Geneva Conventions. Women make up only 16.5% of military personnel. Participation varies considerably between types of armed forces, with the Marine Corps reporting a female participation rate below 10%. The numbers decrease at higher level positions. Only five women had reached the rank of general (four-star general rank). Even know the women occupy variety of jobs, specializations. They already have skills, including combat technics. Ministry of defence is issuing policies to increase women's participation in the armed forces. Policies set out the tasks for fulfilling the equality mandates.<sup>5</sup> The gradual updating of the model of the armed forces has led to changes in the organizational structures of the armed forces. As in the armies of other democratic countries, women are more prominent, which is in line with the conceptual materials of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic.

## The role of women and men in the army in the light of Russia's aggression against Ukraine

The current armies face new roles in international peacekeeping. The focus of their efforts is no longer just on fighting and victory, but especially on prevention, ending wars and keeping the peace. The 21<sup>st</sup> century military mission can be summed up in words to protect, help and rescue. Homeland defence is also understood more broadly as an aid in resolving internal and inter-state conflicts. After February 24, 2022, we are witnessing an unprecedented military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation were preparing for this intervention by deploying combat units, logistical elements, including rear, technical, but also medical units of unprecedented proportions along the Ukrainian border and into Belarus. Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed decrees recognizing the independent republics of Luhansk and Donetsk on the eve of the aggression against Ukraine. He said the invasion was a peace operation to protect civilians in two Kremlin-backed breakaway regions. One of Putin's demands on Ukraine was for the country to give up joining NATO. Estimates of the total number of Russian forces involved in the invasion of Ukraine range from 100,000 to 200,000. It is estimated that about 150,000 troops were deployed at the beginning of the invasion, with the Russian deployment outnumbering Ukraine by three to one. Interim data on the course of military operations also contain the most unfortunate information

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<sup>5</sup> M. Onello, *U.S. Military's Male-Dominated Culture Harms More Than Just Women*, "Ms. Magazine", 26.10.2021, <https://msmagazine.com/2021/10/26/u-s-military-male-culture-women-sexual-assault-harassment-gender-stereotypes/> [accessed: 15.04.2022].

about the victims of human lives. The warring parties provide different numbers that cannot be immediately confirmed by independent sources. However, they are the highest since the end of World War II in Europe 77 years ago.

Russia has not yet decided whether to extend its participation in the agreement allowing the export of cereals from Ukraine. As part of the mobilization in the western Russian city of Oriol, the Uzbek employees of the waste processing factory also received summons orders. Therefore, they turned to Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev for help. According to TASR/TERAZ.sk the Russian military invasion of Ukraine will accelerate the world's transition from fossil fuels to "more sustainable and safer energy". Ukrainian troops are successfully repelling repeated attacks by Russian forces near the two key towns of Avdiivka and Bakhmut in the eastern Donbas region, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a regular video address on 13 April 2022. He called the Russian battle tactics crazy.<sup>6</sup>

Although we acknowledge the participation of women in peace processes, we cannot predict the impact of this tragic event in Ukraine on the level of active physical involvement of women in future military defence operations, as armed conflicts have different impacts and effects on men and women. Extending the civilian principles and civil rights of military personnel in general, we can understand the expansion of women's military role as a deepening of civil rights and as an indicator of a broader historical movement from a status-oriented society to a performance-oriented society.<sup>7</sup> Despite the significant social but mainly economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, which caused a drop in economic growth and inflation of almost 10%, rising energy media, food and other products, drugs, and services. We must keep in mind that society's value systems are affected by the need to maintain sustainable development and improve the quality of life. The Lisbon Strategy and the latest version of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 contain calls for adequate consumption, tolerance, and a steady improvement in the quality of life and self-fulfilment of individuals and communities. Unfortunately, the incomes of working citizens are not growing even at half the rate of inflation. This means a significant decline in real incomes and subsequent consumption in the consumer market as well as in the industrial and commercial consumer markets. As a result, there may be a decline in GDP and problems with the allocation of limited defence resources.

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<sup>6</sup> TASR/TERAZ.sk, *Ruský útok na Ukrajinu trvá už 246 dní*, 27.10.2022, TERAZ.sk, [https://www.teraz.sk/zahranicie/online-rusky-utok-na-ukrajinu-trva-u/670136-clanok.html?utm\\_source=teraz&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=click&utm\\_content=.%253Bw%253BwIndex](https://www.teraz.sk/zahranicie/online-rusky-utok-na-ukrajinu-trva-u/670136-clanok.html?utm_source=teraz&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=click&utm_content=.%253Bw%253BwIndex) [accessed: 27.10.2022].

<sup>7</sup> *Report on the observance of human rights. Including the Principle of Equal Treatment in the Slovak Republic for the Year 2020*, Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, Bratislava 2021, p. 75.

The traditional role of men and women is based on gender stereotypes, which characterize a generally accepted belief in characteristics and activities that are appropriate for men and women. They are created and maintained according to mainly by means of:

1. social structures (such as: family, upbringing, education, and culture),
2. traditions,
3. ideas,
4. habits,
5. religions,
6. media, and finally,
7. language.<sup>8</sup>

Based on gender stereotypes, different cultures divide activities into suitable for men and suitable for women. Every company has certain principles according to which it divides these activities in this way. At the same time, these principles differ from one culture to another. Traditional society has divided the activities of men and women into two opposite spheres – public (work) and private (family).

The traditional notions about typical female and male characteristics are the cause of the division of human labour into female and male. It is generally assumed that it is the female qualities that are necessary for the functioning of the household and the upbringing of children, and conversely, the male qualities enable men to achieve performance and success in the public sphere, especially in employment. Horizontal gender segregation is the concentration of men and women in certain occupations. Women work mainly in sectors with lower average wages, in trade, education, health care, social care, men in areas related to the economy, politics, armed forces. Vertical gender segregation involves certain positions of men and women in one organization. There are minimal women in managerial positions, they are assigned lower positions.

## Gender equality in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic

Since the 1990s, the traditional male organizational structure of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic has been slowly but gradually changing from a purely male to a male-female structure. The professionalization of the army has brought for women soldiers, a shift from their traditional military support positions in administration, security, medicine, logistics, etc. to positions for women – non-traditional soldiers, which are associated with direct combat activities. At the same time, this process brought about the emergence of a new phenomenon – a mixed military unit

<sup>8</sup> M. Barošová, B. Perichtová, *Rodová rovnosť vo svete práce*, Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny, Bratislava 1997, [http://www.sspr.gov.sk/texty/File/bulletin/Bulletin\\_05\\_07.pdf](http://www.sspr.gov.sk/texty/File/bulletin/Bulletin_05_07.pdf) [accessed: 20.04.2022]; E. Farkašová, *Rodová spravodlivosť ako téma feministických diskusií*, “Aspekt“ 1997, no. 1, p. 211.

(a type of military unit in which at least one woman serves in a different social position, whether the unit commander or a member of the rank). This change certainly brings new challenges. The transformation of a military organization into a gender-integrated organization, where women and men have equal status, opportunities, and financial reward, must focus on:

- ascertaining the state of working conditions and job satisfaction of men and women in the armed forces,
- harmonization of work and family responsibilities,
- the possibility of conflict prevention in mixed military units and workplaces of the armed forces in terms of overcoming gender stereotypes.

Mária Martinská analysed the social positions of women in a military organization and concluded that the armed forces must address the issue of gender equality through changes in the organizational culture of the armed forces.<sup>9</sup> A social dialogue was needed to distinguish between two opposing approaches to women – the masculine and the positively discriminatory approach. Resolving this discrepancy contributed to the shift in the solution of the gender approach, denying not only the first but also the second approach by their integration (connection, merging), which contributed to tolerance towards different lifestyles. The Armed Forces is currently in the process of analysing the state of fulfilment of the current tasks of the issue of equality between women and men, arising from the *Plán uplatňovania rovnosti žien a mužov* [Plan for the Implementation of Equality between Women and Men]. If the traditional gender-stereotyped division of labour is not only an obstacle to progress for the individual, but especially for the organization, and we consider that equality between men and women gives the organization a competitive advantage, especially in recruiting staff and creating a better image, which ultimately supports its performance and quality, adopting a quality gender equality program is best way to achieve this.

According to Personnel Department of the Ministry of Defense more and more women are finding employment within the defense resort. A total of almost 5,000 women currently work within the resort. This number represents 22.9% of all employees of the Department of Defence and members of armed forces. It is interesting that the highest position among women in one of the international operations was held by an outstanding Slovak woman. It served as part of nine national military units in the operation named Forward Presence in Latvia (eFP). Female soldiers are increasingly performing tasks in international crisis management missions and operations. There are currently 36 female members of Slovakia armed forces deployed abroad. Captain Jana Pastorčáková spent the past twelve months there. “Although the military environment is generally associated with male soldiers, women in the

<sup>9</sup> M. Martinská, *Muži a ženy v ozbrojených silách Slovenskej republiky*, “Vojenská osвета” 2012, no. 1, pp. 82–97, <https://lest.mil.sk/22673/index.php?pg=7&page=1> [accessed: 15.04.2022].

defence sector are an invaluable asset. They hold various positions and perform tasks with the same determination and commitment as their colleagues – whether in civilian clothes or in uniform,”<sup>10</sup> commented Slovak Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď in an official report. He explained that the department includes a total of 3,020 civilian employees and 1,879 professional soldiers. Within the Slovak Armed Forces, female soldiers are currently represented at the level of 12%. They are mostly female officers, with the highest military rank currently held by a colonel, followed by dozens of lieutenant colonels, majors, captains, first lieutenants, and lieutenants. Among female non-commissioned officers, there are the most female company and company foremen. Within the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic, more than half of the jobs are currently filled by women. Employees in the ministry’s structures also have a significant share in management, holding almost half (46.3%) of managerial positions. In the case of soldiers, they are mostly officers, with the highest military rank currently held by a colonel, followed by dozens of lieutenant colonels, majors, captains, and lieutenants. Among non-commissioned officers, there are the most companies and sergeants. According to the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, Daniel Zmeko, the soldiers are also performing an increasing number of tasks in missions and operations of international crisis management. There are currently 36 members of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic deployed abroad. According to him, women have an irreplaceable place in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. At the same time, he stressed that there are functions that are more suitable for women, others less so, but women are an integral part of the structures of the armed forces with great benefits.<sup>11</sup>

The number of members of the Slovak armed forces is slated to swell from the current 14,100 to 17,000 by 2024, Defence Minister Jaroslav Naď confirmed on Monday. This year, the plan is to increase the number of soldiers by 880. “Interest in joining the military does exist. As we’re already carrying out steps to boost the numbers gradually, I believe that we’ll reach the target by the end of the year,” stated Naď. The planned increase has been welcomed by Chief of General Staff Daniel Zmeko. “The ball is in our court now; we need to maintain interest in joining the military and raise recruitment potential to the maximum, as only about 30 percent of Slovak citizens meet the requirements for military service,” he said.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> L. Cebrová, *V slovenskej armáde máme stále viac žien, dosahujú dokonca najvyššie pozície v medzinárodných operáciách*, STARTITUP, 15.12.2021, <https://www.startitup.sk/v-slovenskej-armade-mame-stale-viac-zien-dosahuju-dokonca-najvyssie-pozicie-v-medzinarodnych-operaciach/> [accessed: 20.10.2022]. Transl. M.P.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Z. Botiková, *Number of Slovak soldiers to grow to 17,000 by 2024*, RTVS. Rádio Slovakia International, 12.07.2022, <https://enrsi.rtvs.sk/articles/news/297473/number-of-slovak-soldiers-to-grow-to-17000-by-2024> [accessed: 12.07.2022].

## Bases for the success of gender equality in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic

To determine the starting points and measures aimed at deepening gender equality in the armed forces, we used data and conclusions of documents containing important variables relevant to milestones in the armed forces. The first milestone was on 31 December 2005, when the compulsory military service in Slovakia ended for 137 years.

The task of recruitment is to arouse interest in joining the armed forces. This is ascertained through preferences for joining the army and ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of working in the army:

- For girls, the highest motive is interesting work, followed by better salary conditions than in civilian jobs and pension provision after the end of active service.
- For boys, better pay conditions in the army and pension provision are paramount, and only then interesting work and the opportunity to take part in a foreign mission follow.
- Both girls and boys consider good pay and early retirement and retirement benefits to be the two biggest benefits of working in the military, with differing views on the third advantage, where boys prefer job stability and girls prefer their country and state protection.
- Girls and boys consider the risk of death to be the biggest disadvantage of working in the military, and they pick dangerous work and foreign missions as other disadvantages of this profession.

The mission of military basic and social professional training is to create the basic conditions for the creation of a social structure of a military organization, including from a gender perspective. A comparison of the numbers of graduates of The Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik for the period 2008–2010 showed that out of the total number of 268 graduates, 30% were women. Over the next 10 years, the number of women declined. The declining trend in the number of women joining the armed forces by graduating from the Armed Forces Academy is not being addressed either by increasing the number of recruiters among public university graduates, as the representation of women has also decreased in this form of recruitment.

The dismissal of a professional soldier from the civil service ends his immediate involvement in the armed forces. It is an act of departure of a professional soldier from a military organization or an act of termination of the military profession based on one's own decision or based on a decision of a military organization, in both cases before and after the termination of the commitment. The provisions of the generally binding regulations in this case do not differentiate between men and women, which is an important prerequisite for achieving gender equality at this



stage. Nevertheless, the unequal position of women will only result from an analysis focusing not only on the number of departures, but also on the rank achieved and the resulting amount of pension.

## Possible consequences of the war in Ukraine on gender equality in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic

According to a press release by Michaela Lukovičová from Seesame, concerns about the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine, especially the rise in prices and the economic crisis, are growing slightly in Slovakia. Concerns about the ongoing war in Ukraine also remain high. This follows from the survey “Ako sa máte, Slovensko” [How are you, Slovakia], which was conducted on a sample of thousands of respondents by Mnforce in cooperation with the Seesame agency and the Institute for Research in Social Communication of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS). The survey was conducted from March 31 to April 7, 2022. Respondents are most concerned about rising energy prices and inflation. 88.7% of respondents are afraid of them, in the previous survey 85.7% of respondents were afraid of price growth and inflation. Concerns about the economic crisis caused by the war also increased slightly (from 77.5 to 83.6%), but concerns about the war in Ukraine itself declined. 74% of respondents fear this. A large proportion of respondents also feel concerned about the state of the Slovak healthcare system (81.2%) and the popularity of extremist and anti-system groups in Slovakia (65.8%). Concerns have also been raised about the arrival of refugees from war-torn countries (68.8%) and coronavirus pandemics (49.2%), but these are the lowest compared to other facts.<sup>13</sup>

The result of the low willingness to fight for the country is significant for the armed forces. The survey also revealed that if a war broke out in Slovakia, only 27.5% of respondents would be willing to fight for their own country. More than 37% of respondents (37.1%) would not be able to fight for Slovakia at all, 35.4% of Slovaks are undecided. Men (33.5%) would go to fight for Slovakia more often than women (21.7%). According to the survey, men over the age of 60 are more willing to fight for Slovakia than men over the age of 40. The authors of the survey emphasized: “The willingness to fight for Slovakia is related to trust in institutions such as the government, parliament or president, but also to trust in the media or employers. Respondents who think that Slovakia should be geopolitically on the side of the West would also be more willing to fight for Slovakia,”<sup>14</sup> the survey states.

<sup>13</sup> *Slováci sa obávajú zdražovania či konfliktu na Ukrajine, trápi ich aj popularita extrémistov*, ParlamentnéListy.sk, 18.04.2022, <https://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/spravy/486448/slovaci-sa-obavaju-zdrazovania-ci-konfliktu-na-ukrajine-trapi-ich-aj-popularita-extremistov/> [accessed: 18.04.2022].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*. Transl. M.P.

Respondents who think that Slovakia should side with Russia are willing to fight less for their country.

Most Slovaks would refuse to fight for their country in a war if Slovakia ever found itself in an armed conflict.

In fact, just about a quarter of people, 27.5 percent, would be willing to pick up a gun, the latest “How Are You Slovakia?” poll has found. Conversely, 37.1 percent said they would not engage in any fight, and 35.4 percent did not know how to respond to the question.

Researchers asked Slovaks whether they would be willing to fight for their own country if Slovakia were on the brink of a war. “The very low willingness to fight for Slovakia can be linked not only to low trust in some institutions and the state but also to a certain geopolitical split,” sociologist Robert Klobucký said. [...] As the poll shows, men would be more determined to join battle compared to women. A total of 33.5 percent of men said they would be willing to fight Slovakia’s enemy. In the case of women, the number is lower, at 21.7 percent. At the same time, men more often than women answered this question in the negative.<sup>15</sup>

## Results and conclusions

The professionalisation of the military has led to a shift in women from holding support positions to more combat-related positions. From this point of view, it is necessary to focus on:

- status of working conditions and job satisfaction,
- harmonization of work and family responsibilities,
- options for preventing conflicts arising from gender stereotypes.

At present, it is necessary to address the recruitment of women into the armed forces in the labour market and the equal financial security of women with men. To perform the civil service well, it is desirable to reconcile the family and professional lives of soldiers. As in advanced armies, it is necessary to assess the conditions and prepare a gender audit in the armed forces. In promoting gender equality between men and women, the armed forces should focus on:

- fair division of labour and tasks between women and men,
- fair and objective recruitment of new people without prejudice,
- non-discriminatory career advancement – equal financial evaluation of comparable work,
- prevention and punishment of sexual harassment,
- prevention of discrimination.

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<sup>15</sup> *Despite a war across the border, most Slovaks refuse to fight for their country*, “Slovak Spectator“, 14.04.2022, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22885338/despite-a-war-across-the-border-most-slovaks-refuse-to-fight-for-their-country.html> [accessed: 14.04.2022].

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## *Changes in perception of gender stereotypes in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic*

### *Abstract*

Women's participation in an ever-widening range of occupations is related to growing emancipation, their physical and mental fitness, their ability to solve complex problems based on acquired scientific knowledge, skills, and a strong specific disposition in leading teams. With their natural empathy, inherent to women – mothers, feelings, responsibility, and rational thinking, they show that they are rightly given the same opportunities as their male co-workers. They occupy a wide range of manual work, they are irreplaceable in services, health care, education, science, parliament, but also the police or the armed forces. They do business, run multinational companies, fly aircrafts etc. Less than a century ago, it was rare to see women in the military, and yet women now fight in ground combat, command air combat, pilot combat aircraft, and oversee medical operations. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the participation of women in the tasks of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic in terms of gender stereotypes and to identify the possibilities of full employment of women in the civil service in the reflection of the current military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Key words: military, gender stereotypes, women in the armed forces, military skills, women's preferred skills, equal opportunities