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Conclusive Report of the Project on

Women in Armenian Armed Forces: self-perception and opportunities for the better recruitment and adaptation policies

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Problem description

Armenian Armed Forces created in the early 1990s as a result of independence movement and need of defending Armenia and the population of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, were initially designed on the basis of the Soviet Red Army, within the scope of the previously developed military education, legal background, and culture of civil-military relations. The previous experience inherited from the Soviet times was then combined with the national experience of Armenian population defending its new Republic from the military attacks, when men and women were equally participating in both combat operations and supportive civil activities. The role of Armenian women during Karabakh war was heroic and once more proved its functionality.

Despite this, military recruitment of women in Armenia as registered in legal documents, gives certain conditions for women's military service. Although there are certain legal gaps which do not create comfortable and clear environment for women's military recruitment and service, there are risks of social-psychological nature, which determine self-perception of women as actual/potential militaries, as well as their perception by others based on existing gender roles and stereotypes in the society.

Traditional role of women in the Armenian society is both heroic and paternalistic. Armenian women did their best for the protection of the country and of the nation, while their commitment to serving in Army is still undermined by stereotypes and public perceptions, which depict military service person as predominantly male, and especially high ranking military officers are widely considered as male representatives.

Giving orders is also preoccupied by social prejudices and stereotypes: if there is a giver of orders and one who takes them, the active part of the relationship who gives orders must be physically and psychologically stronger than the passive part, which must take and follow the orders. Accordingly, the part that possesses physical and psychological power ought to be traditionally male personage, while the weaker (and accordingly passive) part must be a woman. This kind of stereotypes still exist and sometimes affect social relationships, which prevent young women from applying for the military service and from building up their military career.

Besides the legislation gaps, there is obvious and actual lack of mechanisms which would enable women to get involved in the military service, to get successfully adapted and

accommodated in the military framework and infrastructure taking into consideration their specific needs. The infrastructure of Armenian military bases is basically designed for accommodation and military service of men, while current military reforms in Armenia count on Armenian women's active recruitment and patriotic wish to equally participate in the military service along with men.

Among the problems which women may face while being recruited and serving in the military bases, is the social-psychological adaptation of women to the military relationships, service and infrastructure, problems with leadership in the military collectives where women are involved, possible prejudices and stereotypes concerning women's potential in occupying leading officer positions and ruling military men.

There are also problems with military education for women. In 2013 the Military Institute of Armenia after Vazgen Sarkisyan, and the Military Aviation Institute first time announced open-door policy for young Armenian women to study in the 4-year standard program and become an officer. However, only 3 girls applied for admission. Although during implementation of this project (2014) the number of female applicants to The Military Institute as compared to the previous year grew up essentially, existing problems may include both poor advertising of military education for women, as well as present stereotypes in the society concerning military service as not appropriate for women. Meanwhile, stable emigration and declining population in Armenia (with predominantly leaving male population as labor force and potential military men), makes the need of military enrollment of women and creation of clear and appropriate policies a part of national security agenda.

The range of the problems mentioned above was embraced within this project with strong focus on how older and younger generations of female military personnel as well as experts see potential and actual role of women in the Armed forces of RA, and how gender issues are to be tackled in order to accommodate more effective female military involvement.

Research methodology

Research methodology was focused on data collection and analysis concerning the following aspects of the problem:

1. Female military staff in the Armenian Armed Forces: their self-perception, social-psychological, communicative, status and infrastructural problems and difficulties which they or their female colleagues face during their military service. The possible

and actual limits they bump into while building up their military career. Their perception and experience concerning treatment by military men. Their view on how the military service of women in Armenia should be advertised and encouraged appropriately.

2. Military accommodation for women: actual conditions and necessary changes. Female militaries' perceptions and views on necessary reforms and changes to host their service more appropriately.
3. Status of female militaries in the Armenian society: stereotypes, difficulties, advantages and disadvantages. The views of female militaries concerning their social envisioning by the society, and stereotypes which they notice and tackle.
4. Necessary information for the potential female applicants for the contract military service and military education, the alternative and more effective ways of advertising military education for female audience.
5. Legal aspects and gaps concerning military service of women in Armenia. Research on actual Armenian legislation gaps and on international experience which may be adopted by Armenian legislature to fill the gaps and make the law on military service more proper for women.

In order to study the above mentioned issues concerning reforms of the military sector in Armenia and more effective enrollment of women in military service, the following research methodology was applied:

1. In-depth interviews with women serving in Armenian Military Forces, including female military and civil personnel, as well as female cadets. 25 female representatives of the groups mentioned were selected from among the personnel of military management staff (Ministry of Defense staff, General Staff personnel), the military bases staff, and the military education/research institutions staff. Among the interviewed female personnel are both low and high ranking military officers (the highest rank of the two female military officers is lieutenant colonel), as well as three female cadets (the first cadets involved in the military education). This target group is mostly aware of the actual problems and difficulties, advantages and disadvantages concerning female military service and the changing social role of female military staff. In particular, interviews with military service women were focused on self-perception of female representatives' role in military collectives, on their changing role in- and out of the military service, on the quality of duties completed by them compared with services accomplished by military male personnel. It was also important to study their views on the military infrastructure around, on their rights and duties, on their formal and informal relationships with other members of military collectives. One of the target issues analyzed via in-depth

interviews was set of necessary mechanisms to attract women and encourage their commitment to military service.

2. Expert interviews with 10 experts representing military and civil organizations and dealing with regulation of military service in Armenia, as well as with protection of women's rights. Most of the experts were selected from among high ranking male military officers whose military units involve women and who have proper experience in both communicating and interacting with female military personnel. Army lawyers were also among preferable experts.
3. Analysis of legal documents concerning regulation of gender equality, rights and duties in the military service in Armenia was one of the accompanying project methods.

Research conclusions and policy proposition

Legal background and legislature gaps

Article 46 of the Constitution of RA defines: **“Every citizen shall be obliged to take part in the defense of the Republic of Armenia in conformity with the procedure prescribed by the law”** (Constitution of the Republic of Armenia). This is the only Constitutional provision defining the legal basis for military service, which, however, does not detail conditions of military service, terms and order of participation in the defense of the country, delegating arrangement of those issues to the Legislature. The only distinguishing factor is that the obligation “to take part in the defense of the country” is distributed among **all citizens of RA** regardless of their sex, age or other characteristics. But the further law-based specialization of these provision shows that above mentioned constitutional obligation is distributed unequally among the citizens, particularly based on sexual aspect of it. The Law on Conscription of the RA defines that “conscription is the constitutional obligation of Armenian citizens to take part in the defense of RA” (The Law on Conscription of the Republic of Armenia). Presumably, the constitutional obligation to take part in the defense of the country is being realized through the conscription. In accordance to the law conscripts are male citizens of pre-conscription and conscription age, reservists, as well as those **female citizens who carried out military service or have a military profession**. It follows that the Law on Conscription clearly distinguishes constitutional basis for entering military service, setting that for female citizens it should be either existence of military profession or the fact of formerly passing military service. This distinguishing factor is more concretized in the Law on Military Service of RA, Article 4 of which sets forth that there are 2 types of term military service: contractual and mandatory.

- mandatory service is military service of the draftees or officers recruited to the armed forces or other forces of the RA, and cadets of military educational institutions,
- contractual service is voluntary military service of draftees, non-commissioned officers, officers (including graduates of military educational institutions and the officer or sergeant graduate courses) and women in the Armed Forces and other forces of RA.

Based on the definitions mentioned above, it should be stressed here that in contrast to male citizens’ constitutional obligation to participate in the defense of the country is not as much mandatory for female citizens, as it is carried out only on voluntarily basis, by contract. In other words, if female carry out military service on their free will it

ceases to be obligatory for them. Moreover, the same Law defines that female servicemen will be assigned for military position if there is a vacant one, which can be occupied by female. This is a very controversial moment, as it is the Head of relevant state agency who settles whether the position is applicable for female servicemen or not. Reserving decision on military positions for female to the Head of state agency, and separation of female positions from ordinary ones' adds subjective elements to assignment process and even stirs up prejudice, which is problematic from the point of view of equality and non-discriminatory treatment.

To sum up, there is a number of shortcomings, gaps and limitations of legal, social and cultural character that challenge military service of female citizens:

- How fair is exemption of female citizen from mandatory military service taking into account the constitutional obligation which has no limitation based on sex and the principle of legal equality.
- Whether it is applicable for Armenian society to accept mandatory military service for female citizens, if the interpretation of constitution insists on that.
- Is it necessary to define a list of positions specified for female servicemen, who should define those positions and based on what kind of criterion, and if so, should not it affect the professional development and promotion of military women negatively?
- In legal acts regulating the sphere the general definition "female" as a sex is interchangeably used with the term "women - military serviceman", which may cause problems both in terms of legal understanding and socio-physiological contrasting perception of the words "girl", "women", "female", hence unification of the terms in favor of "female" should be taken into consideration.
- How will admission of female students into military educational institutions affect study process and professional development of male cadets?
- How theories of security studies on feminism or gender equality influence on establishment of mandatory military service for female, and the process of provision equal conditions of military service for both sexes.

There is wider international experience of women's military service equal to men's one, based on industrial economies and democratic political regimes. The international experience of creating necessary capacities for female military service and of protecting military service women's rights may be fruitful and helpful for appropriate reforms and modernization of Armenian Armed Forces.

In such countries as the United States and Israel women serve in the military forces equally to men. In particular, starting from the second half of the 20th century the number of military service women increased essentially, and to avoid various types of violations of

women's rights in the military collectives, the policy of actively involving women in the sergeant and officer staff was applied. But anyway, the United States Armed Forces still remain the only state institution of the US where there is a restriction on the women's equality with men applied: women have the right to serve in all military branches except those which may be directly involved in combat operations: the nature of a woman to give birth and not to take somebody's life is taken into consideration (see: Atanesyan, A., Shakaryan, A., Avetikyan, V., Avetisyan, A., Harutyunyan, D. (2012). *Military Leadership: Effective Management of the Military Collectives*, Yerevan, OSCE Yerevan, p. 29; Kelty, R., Kleykamp, M., Segal, D. R. (2010). *The military and the Transition to Adulthood // The Future of Children*, Vol. 20, N. 1, Transition to Adulthood, Spring, pp. 181-207).

Similar experience of involving women in a military service is demonstrated by Israeli Defense Army. It is well known that Israeli women equally serve in the military forces with men. In addition to the equality, Israeli military forces accept women in all branches, including those serving at the borders and being ready to get involved in combat activities. Israeli military forces are based on the principle of general recruitment, which means that all population of the recruitment age and of necessary health condition (with exceptions based on religious specifics) is being enrolled in the military service, so that men and women serve all together, and women's military service directly affects national security of the state of Israel. Female soldiers and officers are widely advertised and encouraged in Israel, and are shown as not only good soldiers, but as women who simultaneously continue completing their social duties, including family, study, and having more advantages than those who did not serve in the army yet (see, for example: Creveld, Martin van. (2000). "Armed but Not Dangerous: Women in the Israeli Military" // *War in History*, N 7 (1), pp. 82-98; Dar, V. and Kimhi, Sh. (2004). "Youth in the Military: Gendered Experiences in the Conscript Service in the Israeli Army" // *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 30, N 3, Spring, pp. 433-459; Sasson-Levy, O. (2003). "Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in "Masculine" Roles" // *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 73, No. 3, August, pp. 440-465).

Armenia being in a similar security environment like Israel, needs similar policy regulations for women's military service, to attract women and encourage their commitment to serving to their country along with military men.

Motivation to serve in the Army:

Age difference and female service

Depending on age we can observe different perceptions towards the military service about the female military officers- ranging from pride up to disappointment. The representatives of the older generation, most of which have joined the army during its development stage up to now mostly feel pride for their service and do not see any contradictions between their service and their other social roles.

- *«My service started with the development era of the army. I have gone through all the stages of the army development. Currently our army goes toward the path of becoming a professional army, the main emphasis is being put on the military education. I can't find the words for crediting the army, since no matter what I say it will not be enough. Specifically in our department women have always been valued, we have female colonels, head of offices. The same is true about finances. I work with the same rate up to now. I will never get the idea of quitting the job. Will stay here as long as I will be allowed».*

LC. M.

The representatives of older generation of female military officers not only have never felt disappointment, but also believe that there are no reasons for that. Being well-acquainted with the history of the Armed forces, the older generation military officers state that military conditions are improving year by year.

- *«The possibility of disappointment does not make sense. I've seen huge positive changes during these 21 years».*

LC. N.

The same enthusiasm is almost missing among the younger generation of female military staff. This is conditioned especially by the idea set by younger military officers that military service is not designed for women; it is contradicting the existing idea of the gender roles. It is worthy to mention that the military officers often themselves represent gender stereotypes and share the idea that “women should not serve in the army, and if they do, this should be a very specific and extraordinary situation”. And in case she is already serving, then this should be seen as a temporary professional activity out of the barracks, maximally independent from the military order and should not contain the requirement of being represented as military servants.

According to one of the interviewed experts, the idea of having only contractual military service for women is conditioned by the gender stereotypes, due to which massive presence of women in the army is yet not possible:

- *“I think that women should not be involved with compulsory military service. I believe that if a woman wants to serve in the army, this should be based on contractual terms. This is an issue of our national mentality. We have not reached the level to allow our wives, sisters or daughters to go for compulsory service. Whereas the contractual service already depends on the desire of that specific woman. I think even when the woman has decided to go for the contractual service, specific incentives and limitations should be developed, and e.g. women should not carry the same weights or have the same exercising schedules”.*

Expert Kh.

Disappointment has also been observed among the young female military officers, who initially had differing expectations from the army.

- *“I am one of the young people who had totally different expectations when entering the system, and now I'm disappointed in some sense, because the biased attitudes towards women are very much accentuated here”.*

Leutenant A.

The main expectations of younger female officers with the process of getting involved with the army are associated with economic security, decent jobs, possibility of getting a high rank profession. The need of state protection and honor for the military pride has not been mentioned by any of the participants as a basis for choice of their career path.

- *It was an accidental decision that I found myself working at the Ministry of Defense. I graduated and had a lack of work experience. For that period the best fitting option turned out to be working here. The offered position was a brand new position in the framework of cooperation with NATO. I thought that it had nothing to do with the working stereotypes associated with the Ministry of Defense, and thought that it would be worth to be associated with the upcoming structure. I would refuse to get here from the beginning, if there was a word that soon I am turning into a regular officer, though to justify my position I was forced to be given a title of a regular officer, since there was no civil servant institution by that time. In any case, the fact that I was thinking that the selected project is outsourced from abroad and will work independent from the Ministry of Defense, was simply an illusion. Regardless of the naming of the liaison- innovative, with European views and etc., it is still functioning within this large structure and is directly influenced by it. Shortly, I didn't receive what I was expecting; I came here and came across various stereotypes. My parents, to say the least, were against my job, they had serious concerns. They were thinking that I'm only 22 years old, will go working for the Ministry of the Defense without realizing what is the inner culture there. I was not that confident myself, but that very fact caused alertness, which helped me out with the further adaptation. During the first month of the service I learnt one important*

thing- you change your environment or the environment does, that's the case here. Nevertheless, I was doing my best, so that parents will not notice lot of things.

Leading Expert M.

- *"Maybe there would be no regret or similar feelings, if I were elected for compulsory military service, but at the Main Headquarters things are a little different, this is reminiscent of the usual office work".*

Major A.

- *"It's been a year and 6 months that I am going through a contract service at the personnel department. To be honest this service at the moment is more related to having an opportunity of workplace".*

Sergeant A.

Perception of rights and duties by female military personnel: positive and negative discrimination risks

The main objective was to identify the peculiarities of military service for men and women, in particular with regard to rights and duties during military service as seen by female officers.

The study also attempted to identify the internal corporate culture and situation with gender equality based on domestic gender attitudes among military personnel, as seen by female staff.

As a matter of fact, there are some limiting, mostly "softening" internal formal and informal mechanisms of military service for female personnel, mostly seen by interviewed female personnel as necessary, objectively skill-based and subjectively desired. Here we can obviously speak about positive gender discrimination, which is actually practices by male officers in forms of putting less pressure of discipline and heavy duties on female colleagues, letting them be more free and flexible regarding deadlines, and "closing eyes" of deviation from strict rules, if female colleague is considered.

Besides informal mechanisms of framing military service of female representatives, the decision of the Minister of Defense of RA on limitation of military ranks for women was mentioned. Actually, this rule also limits career and promotion possibilities for female military staff.

- *“There is a special decision of the Minister, which is regulating the list of positions which can and cannot be occupied by women. All possible positions are stated there”.*

LC M.

According to one of the military experts the existence of a similar decision is a serious legal discrimination. Thus he does not want to believe it as all internal decrees are passing through a strict legal expertise in advance.

Commenting on this decree, military experts mostly stated that the real situation in the armed forces demonstrates rather equality than violation of rights of female personnel, and the treatment of women by men in Army is mostly supportive and helpful.

- *“I have been trained in many other armies abroad and can surely state that here in Armenian Armed Forces women are actually equalized to men. I even witnessed a case, when a female cadet was unable to carry her bag and the male cadet helped her, both got expelled. But in contrast here women have all possibilities of taking upper level positions just like men do. There are no gender differences, either positive or negative. In our case women are more privileged in skipping specific physical exercises and so it’s normal that as a result we cannot expect to have equality with men”.*

Military expert H.

On the other hand, there is a certain tendency among the female officers to either perceive the current differences as a necessity based on the physical and psychological differences between men and women or to support the current situation stating that there are no differences between male and female servants.

- *“In legal terms we owe some responsibilities. All social and legal guarantees are stated and this field is constantly expanding, some changes take place. There are some cases when we are more privileged than men, e.g. for March 8th we receive financial bonuses, whereas for men never do”.*

Major A.

Regarding legal background of military service, there is an impression that most of the interviewed female representatives are either unfamiliar with the legal basis of their service, or do not question the legal frames and try to get adapted. In such situations, negative discrimination risks may arise. As one of the interviewed female civil employees in the Armed forces commented on that:

- *“The legal issues are significant, especially when it comes to the obstacles for the career growth for female militaries. We are a bit luckier in terms of the legal security, since we are considered to be state system employees. Mistreatments are almost impossible. There are no cases of salary delay or reductions; we are protected in this sense. If this were a private sector, there would be a possibility that women would be paid less than men for the same job. But there are various other issues here. In the middle-level positions, where the participation of the women and men is almost equal, women frequently do more tasks than men, who are not doing their job properly, whereas the salary amount stays the same for both. Moreover, I frequently get an impression that I am being exploited since I see that men having similar position and identical salary do have less workload than I do.*

Civil employee H.

In addition, there are risks of positive discrimination which most of the interviewed female military personnel representatives noted as an advantage, which makes their service more possible and welcoming. Positive discrimination is being practiced in various forms, including order reduction regime through non-official permits, which corresponds to female representatives' personal needs, expectations and problems. The cases of positive discrimination positively perceived by most of female militaries indirectly confirm the existence of gender stereotypes among militaries, like "female representatives can not live and serve within the same military unit with men", " women are less disciplined", and so on, shared by both male and female military personnel.

- *The head of our department has an understanding approach to our problems, and whenever there are no significant issues, we are allowed to leave home earlier than others”.*

Major A.

- *“Gender issues are not only in the defense spheres but in all spheres of our society. But there is a positive shift; day after day I see more positive and caring attitude towards me”.*

LC I.

- *“Everyone is attentive towards women in the army. Male colleagues are trying to help us whenever needed. When we are facing any kind of difficulties during the service, we are always calling upon our bosses, and they always help us”.*

Warrant officer M.

- *“They always consider here that you are a woman and never cause any sort of issues. We have various privileges, e.g. we do not deal with the same physical tasks as men do”.*

Sergeant A.

Regardless of the fact that most of the respondents mentioned that women are more aware of their positions, are more willing when it comes to implement their tasks, the question if they would prefer a female or male boss if they were to choose, the answer in all cases was male, since male bosses are easier “to deal with” and to get privileges. This situation indirectly confirms the fact that there are still paternalistic views among female representatives of Armenian society about gender determination of leadership, which also reflects the situation in Army.

- *«It is easier to work with male officers than female. Men are more helpful and understanding. Female are a bit too serious on their positions, whereas men are always supportive. I have a little child. According to the law, I have a right to leave the job for 1-2 hours, but my boss allows me to work part-time. If it were a woman, she would not tolerate such a thing».*

Civil servant M.

- *«If I were to choose my commander, however, it would be a man: Men manage better».*

Lieutenant E.

- *«It doesn't make a difference whether your commander is male or female if you do your responsibilities well, but in any case I would prefer a male commander».*

Warrant officer N.

- *«I cannot tell exactly why, but when choosing a direct commander, I would prefer a man. It might be that a woman can be a better commander, but I don't know, currently I would prefer a man».*

Warrant officer A.

One of the interviewed experts explained the difficulties of assigning a higher rank positions for female servants in a following manner:

- *«I think there are positions which cannot be held by women yet. Those are commanding positions. This issue is associated with our mentality. There are various stereotypes to overcome and to perceive a female commander equally will take lot of time. On the whole, female commanders are dispassionate and can come up with drastic decisions better than men. The same operational mistake can be made both by men and women. But with the women, the situation is that they are more used to receive support, especially when it comes to their family problems when women prefer to be at home than at their workplace».*

Expert M.

Most of the middle-aged female officers are willing to explain and justify the special attention which they receive while serving in the Army, using the same stereotypes which are typical of social attitudes. According to the interviewed female officers, they cannot claim the same positions as men, since they are objectively unable to fulfill all functions that men do.

- *«Men and women are separated here much more than in the society. Prejudice has been and will be present here, as far as man enters the mud, stands in front of the first line against the enemy, and we do not do so. Automatically, it should be so, no matter how much we try to make it so, equality is impossible. I can do more work than my boss, but ultimately I do not put a limit. Everything is natural».*

Major A.

- *«I agree that women should be at the exact spot they currently are. There are truly some positions which should not be claimed by women, since those require functions, which woman will not be able to do, when the time comes. Unit commander I believe should be a man. There is a range level, which I consider a limitation for women, including me. I'm already a head of department and consider that I should not claim for more, I do realize that I should not look for more».*

LC. M.

What is “normal” according to some of the interviewed female representatives, is office work, conflict prevention and negotiations, creation of a positive social and psychological environment among traditional masculine groups, which if being accomplished by women, may have essential effect.

- *“There are people, who believe that the army is not a place for women, but the presence of a woman from a different perspective leads to development of the army. Surely, woman is weaker physically and cannot have real impact in these terms. But with our presence male officers are becoming more conscious and serious. I don't think that this is only man's world; we are doing our job in our turn. This might be only a small light that we lit, but even the small support has significance”.*

Lieutenant E.

Unlike the older generation of female officers, who are more or less tolerant about limitation of their career growth and their roles in the military service, younger generation is strongly against any type of unequal treatment, such as easier and simplified work, limitation of career perspectives and stereotypical perception of gender roles. They mostly

think military service if chosen by female representatives, must be the same as for men, including both rights and duties.

- *“I do not agree that women should strive for limited positions, women should be given the opportunity to achieve a desired threshold, while not everyone is afforded that opportunity here. I can see clearly the obstacles. Almost no woman comes to the Army with ambitious claims that she will become a general or Minister ... Just women here are working much more, often more than the majority of men in the system”.*

Lieutenant A.

One of the interviewed military experts, summarizing his experience of working with female staff representatives and considering existing rules and stereotypes, made the following comment, which combines both realistic assessment of the present situation and evaluation of potential for wider involvement of female representatives:

- *“I think that the idea present among the women, that they should not take specific positions. Well, this might be partially true when it comes to driving a heavy military machine, though even this is not accepted. As when it comes to the administrative tasks, even considering the statistical data, women are more prepared and educated based on the university knowledge, than men, women are more flexible in the negotiations process. Currently we are talking only on the theoretical level, but the opposite has not been anyhow proved in our society. Thus the female skills are being questioned; nobody gives women the possibility to prove them wrong. In contrast they are telling women in advance that it cannot be done so much, that women start believing the idea. I think a woman can be a good adviser, whereas we do not have female councilors, since 4 men gather together and make a decision, but what if they also listen to an opinion of a woman, let that be a wrong opinion, but let them hear and prove that it is wrong. I can objectively state that, yes, we do have gender issues in the Ministry of Defense. The issues are not solved on the system level and there are common indicators. If we observe the number of women taking high-level positions, we will see that there are none. We have a lot of women, who are doctors, lawyers and orderly, but you will not see de jure decision-making positions. De facto, it might be a case that my manager calls me up and asks for my opinion, I will provide my opinion, and if that's considered valuable, it might be presented or used somewhere else. But I know that I cannot get a high-level position, no matter how much I want to. This labor division is the main indicator of the inequality. We do not have female advisers, we have females who possess high-level position, which does not make any sense. Years pass and the number of different titles increase. The woman can be a colonel, lieutenant colonel, but this is a way of increasing the working experience. You will not find a woman, who is a deputy head of a department or head of a department, or at least head of a division. There are only a few of them as for now, but it is hard to believe that they have reached the position based on the career growth. It is also hard to believe that their supervisors are so much professionally developed that they can appreciate and assess the career growth possibility of their subordinates. Considering all of the above, it is possible that one day I*

might no longer want to work there. If I am just a “functionary” (executive), and I am receiving an X amount of salary, and since I can earn more with less performance, then in this case, when there are no chances for the career growth, why should I stay here? I don't see any sort of motivation here”.

Military expert M.

Another military expert was less optimistic about wider involvement of women in military services, noting that actually there are not enough conditions to host female representatives if taking into consideration their demands. On the other hand, contractual service is favorable enough for them if not considering it as military service, but as a kind of civil job:

- *“There are no conditions for the military service for women in our army. If it comes to contractual military service, there are certain conditions, but let's not forget that actually they do not need a condition to be provided as conventional servants come to work in the morning and in the evening they go home. Accommodation is not a problem. The civil service for women now, in my opinion, has more favorable conditions to offer than military service. Women cannot be properly presented, cannot have professional growth. On the other hand, women often do not seek high positions. Male officers tend to emerge, go ahead, but many women think that they are serving in the armed forces simply because wages are high, there are normal conditions, they enjoy some privileges, and that is enough. Moreover there is nothing else needed for women”.*

Military expert A.

Military education for female cadets

There are two major issues concerning military education and the current reforms of Armenian Armed Forces, including plans of wider female involvement:

1. Military education as a precondition of military professionalism, including professional involvement of female representatives, and
2. Access to military education for women, stimulation of interest in military education among female representatives and especially youth, and assurance of guaranteed security and comfortable psychological environment in the military institutes to host female cadets.

Some of the interviewed officers do not see any problem here, some others think that the issue of military education for female groups is not solved yet.

- *“We have female military doctors, who graduated from the military department (of the Medical University in Yerevan). We have cadets studying at military aviation department, who got accepted and currently study with men. If the number of those wishing to study there grows, we will encourage it”.*

Lieutenant Colonel M.

- *“I serve as a lecturer of foreign languages for military officers staff. I have faced an issue that the current generation is entering the army with a lower level of literacy. The same officers get to the university illiterate. They should study Armenian first then proceed to the foreign languages. Surely there are also some exceptions, whereas education is accessible for everyone. Previously it was an issue, but currently, everyone who wants, can come and get military education on a free basis. We have only three female cadets, thus it is rather hard to evaluate them”.*

Leading specialist H.

- *“I am sure that soon a group of brave women will be recruited, who will destroy all negative stereotypes about female soldiers. There is not much required here, it is only necessary to inform women correctly and precisely, and they will go to the army. This confidence is conditioned by the fact that the number of self-confident girls is larger among the younger generation. They might be a bit romantic, but that’s not important, they just never got a chance to prove their willingness to come and display their potential. One should only provide the information- the idea that for the first time in the history they are getting such a chance and they will definitely join the army”.*

Leading specialist M.

It is interesting that the vast majority of the female military officers think it is the absence of the military education, which refrains them from promotion and thus the opportunities for the female cadets will be much wider in a few years:

- *“I haven't received military education and constantly feel the need of it. I think that cadets will have more opportunities than I do, since education is the most important thing. Currently they study what issues can be faced in the army and what are the ways of overcoming them. I don't think that they will face serious issues when coming to the army, just the opposite- everybody will help them. Eventually the woman in the army is the same as the man, but even from this viewpoint I think men will respect women even more, since not all women make a decision of serving in the army”.*

Major M.

- *“I do not have military education, but there are tasks dealing with which I realize that I need it”.*

Lieutenant E.

- *“Women need military education, if they receive it, their possibilities for promotion will get improved”.*

Civil employee A.

One of the interviewed military experts stated as a precondition for effectiveness of military education assurance of necessary conditions for female service in military bases, otherwise the education will not be supported and will have less effect.

- *“The idea of accepting female cadets to the military educational system is new. I consider it to be a good achievement. But whether the system has been adapted for that? It should be taken into account that in a few years the place of serving should also be ensured. If there is no such vision that the female will grow up within the system and then get to the service, then the military education no longer makes sense”.*

Military expert A.

Another military expert, stressing the importance of military education for female representatives, mentioned the need of simultaneously working on gender stereotypes in order to neutralize them:

- *“To get high command positions the officer should have military education. The three cadets, who are currently receiving military education, can in the future claim for high ranks and change the current picture, but even here everything depends on them personally. The soldier is not a soldier if he/she doesn't want to become a general, but this requires desire and hard work. Those girls when appearing in units, should not state that they are women, they should not be treated specially, given privileges and etc. They should learn to overcome the situation equally with men. The cadets are already assigned to their future locations of service. Moreover one of them has been assigned to our unit. This is new for all of us, and all novelties have both easy and hard components. To avoid the difficulties it is clear that the cadet will be under the direct supervision of the commanding staff, so that we will help her, direct her. If any issue arises we will help to solve them. We will try in any situation to support the female cadets' career growth, will give advice, and will encourage exchange of experience. All of this is being done with every soldier, but in case of female soldiers, something more will be done. And regardless of this, everything will depend on them personally. Those girls should overcome a lot of difficulties by themselves”.*

Military Expert, LC Kh.

The stories of female cadets about their motives, the life in the military education institutions are interesting. Although for the period of the Project research only 3 female cadets were studied (the three were interviewed), they represent mostly success stories and speak about their high motivation.

- *“I have long wanted to get military education, back in school I loved the Military Science subject, my father and my grandfather are military officers, and I felt pride in their profession. I was also inspired by the image of Vazgen Sargsyan, was always interested in his life story, wanted to be like him, but since there was no option (and even an idea) of the possibility for women to study in military educational institutions, I applied for another university and graduated from it. But when I heard on TV that the Military Institution has an open call for women, I immediately went to our military commission. It is interesting, that even here they were not sure whether the news is trustworthy and I was told that they will check it out. The admission for women was unusual for everyone”.*

Cadet T.

- *“I heard first from my uncle that there is such an opportunity of applying to the military educational institutions. My uncle is a military officer and knows that I loved the military service since childhood. When I got the information about the admission, I decided that it will worth applying, so I did. I proved relevant so I didn't have any issue with admission”.*

Cadet E.

Regarding the question of legal background and protection assured for female cadets, including their studies and further service, the interviewed female cadets have not practiced any difficulty or uncertainty yet.

- *“In legal terms we are getting lots of support. I would say that we are more privileged than boys, since currently the female service is being highly encouraged and we are the first cadets. For example the dress code does not allow wearing jewelry, nail polish etc. But sometimes we are being excused for some minor deviations”.*

Cadet T.

It is noteworthy that the cadets are fully aware of the problems which may happen to female representatives and which mostly derive from unequal military service with men, as well as the unequal merit of ranks; in some cases men have easier ways to get higher positions, but as interviewed female cadets state male military personnel is also unsure about their career development which is not assured because they are men. It is natural

that any promotion may be in some way limited. They think positively about their future, and are willing to overcome difficulties:

- *“Female servants, who currently work for the Ministry of Defense, do not have the same privileges at least because they did not receive military education and never served in the real army, while we are in the process of it”.*

Cadet T.

- *“It is a wrong perception that women cannot go higher than a specific rank. This cannot be done by women who have suddenly received the rank of an officer without doing anything, whereas cadets have relevant education, will go through compulsory military service and after that no discrimination should be applicable for us. We go through career growth equal to men”.*

Cadet A.

Gender issues and human rights violation risks

Among the main questions of the research, problems and risks concerning rights of female staff representatives in the defense institutions was in focus. Interviews with female military officers on the issue demonstrated different views of representatives of the older and younger generations. In particular, older generation of female officers, including high ranking officers, are more positive about conditions of service for women, seeing almost no problems and risks concerning gender roles.

- *“I do not exclude gender-based issues, but I think those will be resolved. I noticed another thing. Our male officers are very considerate, always remember being a gentleman when treating female representatives. They do even feel more alert with our presence”.*

LC M.

- *“Of course there is a differentiation, but young women often exaggerate gender problems, because they are idealists, striving for complete equality and besides this, they do not have anything to compare. In contrast I remember the Army of the first days, when the division was much more significant, and in comparison I see tremendous progress. Perhaps in ten years from now they will speak differently because they will have something to compare with”.*

LC N.

- *«After twenty years of experience I can say we have always enjoyed respect and honor. I am currently in medical service, soldiers constantly visit to receive medical aid, get appropriate medical care, thank and go, there are no problems, of course obscene behavior of young people might happen, but as exceptions only».*

Army medical service officer A.

Majority of the interviewed experts joins the above mentioned point of view and says violation of women's rights is almost impossible in the army:

- *«Women are treated here exclusively with respect. There are no cases when a woman decided to leave the army considering it to be a place on solely men or due to the idea that she hasn't been treated correctly or her rights have been violated. I never heard of such cases. As of the possibility of sexual harassment, there have not been such cases as far as I know. And even if such an issue occurs or somebody treats women in an inappropriate manner, then this person will be fired since the commanding staff seriously controls this».*

Military expert LC Kh.

The younger military officers frequently have the opposite opinion emphasizing both 'direct' and 'indirect' cases when their rights have been violated, stating that these cases do not promote positive environment for the female military service.

- *«Not all women have the possibility of serving in the army equally to men. Women are mostly involved in reserve departments. Promotion of women in the Main Headquarter is not possible in specific spheres. The issue of gender differentiation is not an issue to be directly seen, but it is obviously present».*

Major A.

- *«I don't think that we should hide that men treat women unequally. This is a men's society».*

Leutenant A.

One of the interviewed experts joined the point that there are covered and uncovered gender issues in Armenian society, including defense field:

- *«Gender issues start from schools and are present within most of the institutions, but their chances are getting higher since the male contingent is larger here. I am personally familiar with a gender-related sensitive case and know that the incident has been covered. And honestly, I cannot blame the guy, instead I can blame the woman, who could do the proper corresponding actions, but she hasn't done them. And here I am not talking about actual*

violence act. Women are just more likely to get sexually harassed. I don't think that any of the female bosses would call out their employee and tell them that the employee can get a promotion for which he/she should do them a "favor". Though, this is a possible scenario for male officers. They are making you a "suggestion", and you have the possibility of either accepting the offer or refusing it. And for the cases of refusal, you should have a high sense of legal consciousness to raise the information about the case. If a woman knows the tools of her rights protection and slightly remind the man that his «offer» can be followed by this or that sanction, I don't think that men will continue in the same manner. Unfortunately, a lot of women do not have that level of consciousness and get shocked whenever facing similar case. The issue is present all around the world and I would not say that the number of the cases here is too alarming. All around the world one out of five women is being sexually harassed. The thing is what the tools for fighting it are not in favor in Armenia. Men should also be aware that for their momentary decisions they can be punished by law. And women should know that raising the case is not shameful».

Leading expert M.

Part of the respondents does not exclude the possibility of being pressured by men, but believes that everything here depends on behavior of each woman.

- *«A woman in the military, of course, is in everyone's focus, but I think that's normal. Regarding possible risks of sexual violence against women, I think it's possible in any place. And army is not an exception».*

Leutenant E.

- *«There are stereotypes that women are not that many in the army and thus their rights are more frequently violated, but I used to try not to listen to what people say. If you are dressed properly, and do not provoke, there is no danger here that you will become a topic of public rumors and remarks».*

Sergeant V.

The complex of steps, according to the respondents, will eliminate widely shared gender stereotypes and create guarantees for women's effective military service, as well as make military service favorable profession for both sexes.

- *«The main mechanism to eliminate gender issues should be Mass Media. When I was a cadet abroad all new comers were gathered and explained all of the "red spots", crossing which the strongest sanctions would be taken into the action. This included drunk driving and sexual harassment if to mention some. Each point was being introduced in details, including the specific sanction for it. And then we were the one to decide whether we want*

to get involved with those actions or not. We do also need such an introduction here. Some women are pretty strong, whereas others are weaker and they need specific developed mechanisms for protection which are currently lacking in our society».

Military expert M.

The opinion of the female cadets corresponds to the mentioned idea, seeing the increase of the number of female servants as a solution for most of the problems.

- *«Comparing to previous years, the army is facing a progress. I think that the conditions will get better for us. The number of women in the army is increasing, which means that the conditions will also get better».*

Cadet T.

- *«I think the gender issues will be solved. We are the first, boys are not used to see women around them, but this will pass by time, it will be normal in the second, third year».*

Cadet E.

Among the necessary steps toward creation of more welcoming atmosphere for female military service as well as for better social-psychological environment around the image of female soldier, are concentrated on the role of Mass Media in covering Army and military service.

On the one hand, according to the interviewed female officers as well as experts, Media coverage of civil-military affairs is mostly disproportionally negative and affects public attitudes accordingly. On the other hand, female officers rarely become heroes of the reportage, and their image as well as the image of military officer and soldier in most of cases is not shown attractive.

- *“The Mass media does not cover female officers, whereas women had a significant role in the development of the army. Media tend to spread negative information, the interest towards positive information is missing”.*

LC. M.

It is necessary to note that currently the Media attention towards female cadets increases simultaneously with the reforms in the field, and reported as higher than toward other female officers, though cadets do not evaluate this as a positive case, since the news about them again seems quite formal and does not express real conditions of the military education and service from the objective viewpoint.

- *“The journalists tend to show our conditions in a better light, than those really are. They do constantly interview us. Though the conditions are not that bad, but the presented ones are way better. The reality is that there is no word about our sleepover here, since there are relevant conditions here. But it seems like they are currently working on the development of such areas, though I don’t think that those will be ready earlier than in 1-2 years. In short I think that a girl, who has no initial idea about the Armenian army and reads the article about us will get a desire to join us. That will not be a wrong decision, but I would like to remind those girls that the pride of wearing a uniform or the attraction of being the first ones are just surface triggers, which will not help when dealing with real problems”.*

Cadet E.

All interviewed military experts agree on the opinion mentioned and believe the possibility of solving gender problems associated with attitudes toward women will increase as far as the number of female officers in the Army increases. Experts also state that real change in the quality of service will take place when women start to serve equally to men, will understand the full capacity of serving and will not look for special conditions and special privileges.

- *«As I believe the gender issues can be solved only in one case, if women start with compulsory service and go through all stages as men do- women get involved in the service and army development. When the number of women becomes significant in the army, they will be perceived as normal. Currently their number is not large. Thus the follow-up is also missing. If you do not serve in a compulsory army, don’t know what troop is, do not have a military education and skip the steps previous steps, suddenly becoming an officer... Excuse me, but this is the same as having a child without being pregnant. The efficiency of women is not highlighted. Nobody knows any task which is done better by a woman, than a man. If these functions get revealed, specific departments will get more enhanced with women. But currently women only deal with paperwork at the Ministry of Defense. There are women at the personnel management department, there are lawyers, some of them work as technical operators, but this is not military, there are no military skills required here. The state should ensure the presence of women on all levels- women compulsory soldiers, women as a lower-level commander, women as commanders and even commanders of special units. Only in this case women will be perceived as normal. When the number increases, the phenomenon turns into a normal case. Nobody will see a military servant in here; female military officer will still be seen as a Woman. The same situation worked with in the Police. The Police offices at some point started recruiting female officers. Currently there are women working for all levels there. In the beginning it was weird to see a girl wearing a police uniform next to a male policeman, but who cares about that today?»*

Military expert A.

- *“People will get used to female officers, and for the soldiers it will be common to have a female commander. This is only a matter of time. I don’t think that there are specific things that should be done for this. Let’s not forget, that only 20 years ago, the number of women in the defense sphere was only a few, but currently we have totally different picture. A positive progress will be accomplished if it were possible to have military subdivisions with female commanders”.*

LC. M.

Conclusion

Although there is a strong desire among Armenian military leadership to develop Armed Forces in a way to make them more desired and welcoming for female representatives, there are 5 major issues that make the results of the reforms concerning wider involvement of female staff partly uncertain:

1. Lack of motivation among younger generation including both sexes to serve for their country, widely shared culture of consumerism and fashion of individualism which in its form contradicts to collective values, including patriotism. Being a patriot is often demonstrated on the level of discourse and speech, while when it comes to real actions, young people prefer to blame on the state and demand first, to give second.
2. Lack of necessary infrastructure to host female officers after completion of the military institutes. The issues concerning military bases and special conditions to host female officers, are mentioned as most important, but on the other hand there is strong motivation and willingness among the command staff to enforce reforms in the field, and to support female soldiers the way that sometimes military service for female representatives becomes more favorable than for male.
3. Public gender stereotypes and symbolically contradicting role of women in Armenian society; on the one hand, Armenian women deal with all kinds of activities on the personal and professional levels, accomplishing duties which traditionally were prescribed to men. On the other hand, symbolically they are still deprived of being perceived accordingly and equally with men. Actually, many female representatives used to share and reproduce the opinion that they either are not able or should not do the same job as men, including military service in its direct form.
4. Female military officers seem to be a marginal group, which is not fully integrated in the defense sphere and at the same time they are somewhat isolated from the Armenian society by stereotypical perceptions. Many of them prefer not to wear uniform publicly, some others do it with favor and demonstrate their belonging to the

Armed Forces with honor. The younger generation of female cadets is much stronger toward accenting their belonging to the Armed Forces, and is ready to maintain their role and their strength to go forward with military career. On the other hand, military education should assure their career growth, and their high motivation must be constant and effectively encouraged with both symbolic and real means, such as promotion, special courses, health care for their family members, etc., which will raise their status in the society and attract more female representatives.

5. Mass Media coverage is what should be reformed simultaneously with reforms in the defense field. In particular, professionally trained embedded journalists should cover military events objectively and realistically, and at the same time keep the necessary balance between positive advertising and critical approach which will enable military staff to improve the problematic situations. The role of female military staff in the society should be covered the way to eliminate public stereotypes and to create a new look on combined image of female soldier as attractive woman and at the same time an important actor of the state security system.

To overcome the possible obstacles the interviewed female officers and cadets offered different approaches which can be combined in the following types:

- Significant increase of the number of female military staff. The more female representatives involved in the defense field, the easier accommodation and adaptation in the armed forces. Besides, with further increase of female militaries their image in the society will become a common thing.
- Mass media proper coverage of army and military service, initiation of media campaigns to raise military service ratings.
- Elimination of stereotypes about female soldiers in the society using properly designed social advertising, as well by enhancing the role and status of female soldiers in the society by means of additional social benefits, opportunities for promotion, etc.
- Maintenance of rule of law, ensurance of military servicemen's and women's rights protection.

To be effective, the mentioned issues and recommendations, must be accompanied with appropriate work on all levels of society, including schoolchildren and parents, university education, and political will.