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Managing diversity in the armed forces: gender; sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion

LITHUANIA

The Law on Equal Treatment of the Republic of Lithuania ensures the implementation of human rights laid down in the Constitution and prohibits any direct or indirect discrimination based upon gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions and attitudes, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, religion.

In Lithuania we have the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson who investigates individual complaints related to direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of the above mentioned forms of discrimination. Members of the Lithuanian Armed Forces have the right to file a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson concerning the violation of their rights. Approximately 10 complaints per year are filed from the Armed Forces (the Army, the Police, border guards, customs officials, Fire and Rescue Department officials etc).

82 % of all staff soldiers in the Lithuanian Armed Forces are of Lithuanian nationality and belong to the Roman Catholics. However, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has not received any complaints concerning discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity or religion, or sexual orientation, but has received some complaints from the Lithuanian Armed Forces concerning discrimination on the grounds of gender and social status. The majority of complaints were found to be reasoned ones. For example, in 2000 the Ombudsperson started the investigation on her own initiative regarding gender discrimination in the Military academy. 10 years ago girls could not enter the academy. After the decision of Ombudsperson, today the number of girls in the academy is increasing each year.

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson submits recommendations and proposals to the Parliament, governmental institutions on the priorities of gender equality policy, including recommendations on amendments to relevant legislation.

Organization

Legislation of the Republic of Lithuania ensures equal rights of men and women and their equal opportunities in the National Defence System that consists of the Ministry of National Defence, the three branches of service (Land Force, Navy and Air Force) and various supporting commands and units. Lithuanian laws do not provide for any limitations on the form of military service due to person's gender. Both men and women have the right to serve in all branches of the armed forces, to take up any position or choose any speciality. Men and women serving in the Lithuanian Armed Forces receive payments of the same amount and have equal social

guarantees. Principles of managing promotion and payroll system are the same for women and men.

The proportion of women in the military has been relatively steady in recent years and covers 12-15 per cent of the whole military personnel. Although women are allowed to serve in almost all career fields, most of them are still performing their duties in the fields of administration, human resources, finances and medical service.

According to the statistics, in December 2009, women made up 11.5 per cent of the total number of armed forces and female officers made up 7 per cent of the Lithuanian officer corps. Women in the Lithuanian Armed Forces are represented in each service branch. The largest number of women serves in the Military Medical Service, where 56 % of personnel are female.

According to the number of women in the military, Lithuania's position seems quite high. Women comprise 11.5 % of all the professional service personnel. However, the representation of women on decision-making level is lower than that of men: women take up only 15.86 per cent of leading positions, while men take up 30.12 per cent.

Career development

Promotion system procedures and the duration of military service are the same for men and women. Promotion rules are based on seniority and professional qualification. There are no legitimate leadership restrictions for female officers. However, the level of women representation in the decision-making process is lower than that of men. At the moment, there are no women holding the rank of general or admiral. Generally, female soldiers mostly occupy lower rank positions and perform supporting work.

Items of Special Interest

The Lithuanian Armed Forces have so far developed no gender-related programmes for mentoring and leadership.

Pregnant service women are eligible to eight (8) weeks of maternity leave and can submit a request for being granted maternity leave for up to 3 years. Paternity leave can be taken by either of parents. During the paternity leave, service members are transferred to the temporary reserve. When they return to active duty, they are assigned to their previous post depending on post availability. This means that they can be offered a post in a unit or city/town different from their current living location. This sometimes causes many problems for the families because very often the families are separated or the spouses must quit their jobs, or the children must frequently change schools.

To conclude, I want to say, that it seems that the rules and regulations that are applied in the Armed Forces contravene human rights. Everyone obeys the rules, but we must be aware that human rights must be a priority issue in the Armed Forces.