

***“Female Leaders in Security and Defence:  
A Roadmap to Turn Potential into Capabilities”***

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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“STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP FOR CAPABILITIES BUILDING:  
OPPORTUNITIES, COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITIES”

Dear colleagues,

Admirals and Generals,

Distinguished guests,

It is my honor to see all of you today in Sofia to discuss an issue of high importance and priority. It is also my privilege to participate in a panel with such distinguished leaders as Secretary Wright and Vice Admiral Pottenger. For me, this is a clear demonstration of the critical role that strategic leadership should play in order to ensure that defence institutions and Armed Forces benefit from the experience and knowledge of women and are able to integrate their perspectives in planning and decision-making in a complex security environment.

Sofia Conference is the very first event organized in the framework of the project “Female Leaders in Security and Defence”. This project is included in Tier 1 of the Multinational Innovative Approaches, under the cluster of “Training and Preparation of Forces”, within the NATO’s Initiative of Smart Defence.

It is the right time to discuss this issue. So far, individual countries and NATO as a whole have undertaken actions primarily on an operational level. Examples of these are the existing national action plans to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and NATO’s plans for gender mainstreaming in operations and missions.

We however need to consolidate our policies on the basis of existing best practices and lessons learned on the operational and tactical levels and to incorporate them into our process of capabilities building. The success of this process will depend on the ability of the strategic leadership to provide the much-needed strategic guidance that will help

transform the system of recruitment, promotion, retention and professional advancement of the best and the brightest, women and men, both military and civilians.

Therefore, this is a unique opportunity for the strategic leadership to embrace new ideas and to think creatively and innovatively in order to improve the quality of performance in the area of defence and security by using all human potential and by integrating gender perspectives in strategic planning, policy making, and force preparedness.

To seize this opportunity, we need strong commitment. When I say commitment, I do not mean commitment by women for women, as many people might see it. And, regrettably, some really do see it this way. This will not be an overstatement to say that there are lots of barriers to overcome. These barriers are a result of certain societal dynamics and mindset – in some countries more pronounced than in others – that need to be properly understood and addressed.

Policy makers at the highest strategic level, both men and women, need to lead the way by setting examples and providing the right legal and political framework to facilitate transformation of mindset and to ensure equal opportunities for professional advancement. In this respect, the role of political and military leaders is crucial.

The leadership of the Ministry of Defence and Minister Anguelov personally took the decision to open all command courses and all professional posts to women in the Armed Forces. This decision was a result of a process of interaction and exchange of views between the Ministry of Defence and the “Bulgarian Armed Forces Women Association”, or in other words, between the strategic and the experts’ level. These consultations helped us identify existing gaps. In this process, the leadership of the Ministry has gradually developed an understanding of the core of the issue and was therefore able to take important decisions with long-term implications for the Armed Forces. Mindset cannot change on its own. Transformation is possible when there is convergence of the expertise of the experts’ level and the political commitment of the civilian and military leadership. Strategic guidance and commitment are needed in order to introduce policies that would enable changes in attitude and understanding of the role of women.

Commitment entails responsibilities. Security challenges are multidimensional and require new types of responses. In a complex security environment the units and their leaders – be it at a strategic, operational or tactical level - need a diversity of talent, background and experience to plan and execute effective decisions. Finding solutions to today’s crises requires the collaboration of truly creative thinkers. It has been long understood by the industry, that encouraging diversity within the staffs is a guarantee of

improved understanding of complex problems and development of adequate innovative solutions.

Personnel diversity and gender integration can bring in a variety of perspectives and experiences to the national security and defence structures and Armed Forces. One way to bolster diversity is to increase the participation of women, primarily in terms of their professional skills, to fully take advantage of their unique and diverse qualities. For women, this is about offering opportunity to succeed in defence and security careers, to have the same opportunities available to compete and to get promoted. In a broader perspective, however, it is about talent and how to successfully integrate a variety of knowledge, expertise and viewpoints in the process of strategic planning, policy formulation and decision making.

To achieve this, we need to bridge the gap between the different levels. Lessons identified and learned in theatres of operations and missions should find their way up in the system as policy recommendations. Good practices introduced and implemented by individual countries should be discussed and promoted.

On its side, the strategic leadership needs to bring all these different strands in a coherent mechanism that will enable the transformation of mindset and changes to organizational culture, both in the military and the civilian domain of security and defence.

For us, this is not one-time event. This is a process. The success of this process will depend on the unity of our efforts and the uniformity of our understanding as to what are the problems and what are the best ways to address them.

To ensure the continuity of the process, Bulgaria is proposing to host a workshop of experts within few months of this conference. The idea is to have targeted discussions among national experts on topics of priority that will be identified during the course of our discussions today and tomorrow.

My vision for this high-level conference is that it will provide a strong signal of commitment and strategic guidance that will cascade down to different forms of interaction and deliverables for a follow-up targeted action. A guarantee of this success is the fact that we are together today to discuss the way ahead - men and women, experts and political and military leaders.

I would like to conclude with a quote by Professor Joseph Nye (former US Assistant Secretary of Defence): “The key choices about war and peace in our future will depend not on gender, but on how leaders combine hard- and soft-power skills to produce smart strategies. Both men and women will make those decisions.”

Thank you for your attention.