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Opportunities and Trends in the Development and the Improvement Processes in the Bulgarian Military Educational System

Venelin TERZIEV¹

Abstract

The paper presents current challenges which the Bulgarian military educational system is facing in the context of the basic features of the security environment and trends for the first half of the 20th century by identifying the main problem areas in its functioning. The status and the capabilities of the military educational system of the Republic of Bulgaria are discussed on the basis of conducted analysis about key strategic documents in the sectors of education, security and defence, as well as the current state of the military and civil education and the inherent activities of the training institutions. Military educational system ensures individual training of the servicemen in the system for armed forces preparation, defined in the Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria. That is why individual training is reviewed in details. Described are the main elements of the military educational system as a complex, adaptive and flexible system that develops in unity and complementarity with the system of civil education in Bulgaria. Guidelines are formulated for improving the military educational system in relation to its contribution to strengthening national security and defence of the country in three directions - conceptual, organizational and technological improvement.

Keywords: *education, military education, training, civil rights, security.*

1. Introduction

Modern world acknowledges the significance of quality education. Europe declares the necessity of long-term investments in education. Each

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country needs enough and well educated human resources as a fundamental prerequisite for enhancing national security [14]. The concept for national security defines national security as a dynamic status, where there is no direct danger of armed attack, political pressure or economical compulsion for the state as well as for the society, so that they can freely realize their development and progress [11]. Specific problematic areas that have political, economic, social, ethnic, spiritual, military, information and ecological components are inherent for the national security. Each one of these components, independently or in combination with the others, as well as with number of side (secondary) factors may turn crucial for the national security and all of them are characterized by being, one way or another, dependent on the human resources' level of education. The great problem of our society today is the setting up of clear and correct policy in the field of education and science, taking into consideration the requirements of the national security system [15-17]. The employed in the field of security and defence occupy specific knowledge and skills, acquired through special education, practical experience, skill and individual improvement in work. This defines education to be fundamental element of the human resources preparation, which ensures the appropriate knowledge, skills and competences [13]. We could say, in that very context, that country's educational system has significant contribution to the national security, contributing to enhancing the erudition, competence, forming appropriate skills and capacity, acquiring adequate qualification as well as quite a significance regarding personal progress. Educational system should be referred to as a subsystem of the national security system and the military educational system (MES) is its basic element.

2. Challenges facing the military educational system of the Republic of Bulgaria

The characteristics of the security environment development outline some trends, characteristic of the 21st century, which influence directly the military educational system of the country. The most important of them could be defined as follows [10]:

- The security environment's military aspects do not fade but acquire new dimensions as a result of political changes in the world and Europe, of the widening the scope of asymmetric risks and threats and of the waning of the significance of some factors that influenced the missions and the preparation of the armed forces in the past. The threats of a big international military conflict arising is significantly reduced because of lack of inter-

blocks confrontation and of the imposed necessity of interaction between the countries for neutralization of contemporary risks and threats. Yet, regional centres of tension and stability still exist, where military resources are inevitably involved.

- A clear global trend and specific negative factor for the condition of Bulgarian military educational system at present is the fact that the world and the country are in a period of worsening demographic progress. World's population is ageing; it is reducing in the "rich" Western countries and increases only in some countries in Asia, the Muslim countries in the Near East and the Asian-Pacific region and Latin America. Bulgarian population registers continuing trend of reducing as a result of the negative growth and the intense migration the last thirty years.

- This leads to the inevitable reduction of the people finishing high school and therefore reduction of the number of potential candidate students for the higher military schools. This factor reflects also on the impossibility for filling up the members of the lecturers' staff with young well-prepared and perspective cadres, and these result in the continuing ageing of the academic members, precisely the academically ranked lecturers, who are providers of the most valuable – knowledge and traditions of Bulgarian military educational system [1].

- Next clearly unfavourable trend that has to deal with the military educational system's functioning is the limiting of military budgets globally and the reduction of armed forces number, which leads to considerable reduction of possibilities for the military forces to be completed with young officers. Actually, insufficient financing is an extremely unfavourable factor for the functioning and progressing of the military educational system on a national scale. The consequences from the economic crisis as well as the severe financial restraints have inevitable negative impact upon the funds for social expenses and transport, healthcare, education and scientific studies, as well as upon the funding of the security system and particularly the defence of the country within the frame of considerably complicated military budget. This trend in the military educational functioning environment imposes the latter to function and progress in conditions of financial restraints (even serious deficits) and armed forces discharging.

- It is necessary to consider also the materially outlining trend for the military academies and schools to function in highly competitive market environment of higher education alongside the other educational institutions in the country, including the similar ones in the region, NATO and EU. The competitiveness on the higher education market leads to natural competition in offering educational and scientific research services in the sector of security and defence. Civil higher schools enter in educational and training

fields traditionally considered “military”: national and regional security; management of defence resources; protection of population and critical infrastructure; management of crisis; management of air traffic; training of pilots, etc. Trends for drawing intellectual potential away and expertise flowing is observed in the competition mentioned, from military schools towards civil universities. This is a signal for giving new meaning to the policy of creating and retaining science cadres, of keeping already “gained territories” as well as of extending the scope and establishing indisputable leader position in the education of cadres in the fields connected to national security and defence.

To summarize, we can point that researchers, experts and political analysts are unanimous that contemporary security environment is a way far complicated, unpredictable and full of risks and threats of various nature, origin, direction and power of effect. Today, when the world is in a new spiral or geopolitical transformation, these risks and threats are cause for regional instability and unstable development, for the occurrence and sharpening of conflicts of ethnic and religious origin, for the globalization of organized criminality and the connected forms of terrorism more than ever.

The reform / transformation going on in the Armed Forces is one of the most important challenges the military educational system is facing, because there are big tasks in front of the Bulgarian state, connected to restructuring of the Bulgarian Army with a view to fulfilling the responsibilities that result from the NATO and EU membership and their conceptual formulation. The armed forces transformation is conducted on the grounds of the new views of the armies’ development and of the new doctrine understanding about the structure and preparation of commanders and personnel [2]. This imposes the necessity of conducting relevant reformations in the system for preparation of military cadres and the military education [18-21].

In order to meet the requirements of the continuously changing strategic environment, of the increasing need of professional military education and of the penetrating new technologies, MES is structured and functions in compliance with the state educational and qualification requirements, the national qualification frame, the European directives and NATO directives for organizing and conduction of individual preparation of Armed Forces personnel.

The control is realized through the system of procedures for institutional and programme accreditation by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) and the annual financial audits of the Court of Auditors. Thus the trend for development of integrated educational model that is under continuous civil control, characteristic of the leading

NATO member countries is confirmed. Military education as part of the national higher educational system subordinates its organization, functioning, management and funding to Higher Education Act to a high extent [4]. In this regard, one of the most serious challenges is associated with the accreditation process, through which NEAA recognizes the relevance of activity and education quality in the relevant higher school with the legal and state requirements [12].

The challenge MES faces for preparing soldiers, sergeants and officers, who are capable to act in multi-national environment is mainly connected to the mastering of new strategic culture, set in the ideology and the NATO allies' documents and connected with the changing security environment, the mastering of new model of strategic and commander's leadership, to managerial skills in managing the resources for defence, the construction and integration of the armed forces and capabilities for successful commanding in wide scope of operations, conducted in peace time, in the circumstances of crisis and military conflict [8-9].

3. State-of-art and capabilities of military educational system in Republic of Bulgaria

According to the National Defence Strategy and the Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria [3] one of the key priorities in the development of a modern defence institution is training and preparation of the people in the defence according the present-day standards, as far as the human resources are the most important element of the defence capabilities and basic capital of the armed forces [5]. Military preparation represents quite a purposeful process of selection, training, education, development, evaluation, self-evaluation and self-training for establishing leaders capable of realizing modern, effective and resulting operative-tactic and strategic management.

The system of preparation of human resources for the armed forces is realized as individual military preparation of the staff, collective preparation of the permanently appointed formations and joint preparation within established national or multi-national military formations [5]. Military educational system ensures individual training of the servicemen in the system for armed forces preparation, defined in the Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria. That is why individual training is reviewed in details.

Individual preparation includes the training in national and foreign military academies, higher military schools and professional colleges that

ensure the initial training and the consecutive professional qualification of servicemen and military leaders. Individual training ensures basic knowledge and skills of servicemen and is one of the main criteria in their career development as well as is base for building ready for action headquarters and formations [5]. The military educational system gives the necessary education and qualification for successful realization in the military profession as well as in other fields of public life, after discharging the servicemen from the contract-based engagements for service in the armed forces.

The mission of the military educational system is to conduct training of military servicemen and civilians for acquiring education, qualification, competences and to form value orientations and mind-set, physical and psychic qualities that comply with the needs of the armed forces for building the necessary defence capabilities [5].

Main tasks of MES are [10]:

- Preparation of uniform qualification frames for officer and sergeant (petty-officer for the Naval Forces), on which base the qualification features of the various specialties to be elaborated;
- To complete a review of the training documentation for training of officers at strategic, operative and tactic level and of sergeants (petty-officer for the Naval Forces) for conforming to the qualification frames and the system of credits accumulation and transfer;
- Synchronizing the specialties and specializations on which training at tactic and operative level is realized with the table of specialties kept on record;
- To complete the building of academic networks in the military schools;
- To synchronize the system for scientific - lecturing and scientific-researching staff evaluation with the requirements of Republic of Bulgaria Defence and Armed Forces Act (RBDFAFA) and Higher Education Act (HEA) [4, 6];
- Improving the system for training process evaluation in interior and foreign aspect.

According to the Doctrine for human resources management, the acquisition of higher education for tactic level is realized in the higher military schools and in foreign military academies and schools. The acquired military education and the periods of training abroad are recognized on conditions and under order, defined by an act of the Council of Ministers, and the qualification is equalized by the Minister of defence's order [5, 7].

The higher military schools train Bulgarian and foreign civilians with secondary education as cadets for acquisition of educational-qualification

degree and professional qualification „officer for tactic level of management” and specialized preparation for service in the armed forces according the state requirements. The conditions and order for admittance of trainees are defined by regulation and annual orders of the Minister of Defence and the chiefs of the higher military schools.

The cadets, who have completed the training in all subjects included in the curriculum and successfully took the relevant exams, are awarded higher education diploma in educational-qualification degree „Bachelor” in the relevant specialties with professional qualification „officer for tactic level of management”.

The training of civilians and civil officers that have diplomas for higher education in specialties, in which no training is realized in the higher military school (medical men, meteorologists, financiers, jurists, topo geodesists, conductors and others), is realized according curriculum for acquisition of qualification in Military Sciences, adoption of first officer rank and appointing to a position in the armed forces in the scope of career field „professional” [5]

The training of servicemen that have diplomas for higher education and possess military rank from „private soldier” to „officer candidate” after curriculum for acquiring qualification in Military Sciences, adoption of first officer rank and appointing to a position in the armed forces is realized only for honoured after command order servicemen with proven qualities, participation in missions, foreign language preparation and classed for the relevant training [5].

Characteristic feature of the military educational system is that in contrast to the national educational system, the training for acquiring educational-qualification degree “Bachelor” in the professional field of Military Sciences ensures narrower specialization and extension of preparation in compliance with the acquired military specialty corresponding to the type of army.

4. Directions for improvement of the military educational system and its contribution for strengthening national security and the defence of the country

Analysing the main military educational system elements’ condition (personnel, educational and material base, organization and technology of education) and considering the necessity of complete military education harmonizing with the requirements of the European directives and NATO directives, we can outline the main directions and possibilities for improving

of the Bulgarian military educational system in conceptual, organizational and technological aspect.

Conceptual improvement of military educational system

The activity on development and setting the system for acquiring of military education and qualification in compliance with the Alliance's strategic documents is conducted in the following directions:

1. Further improvement of military educational system according national and European legislation and NATO directives for achieving quality individual preparation of the armed forces personnel;

2. Acquisition of knowledge and enhancing the skills aiming building necessary skills and competences for achieving conformability with the NATO member countries in participation in multi-national missions, trainings and operations;

3. Realization of close and continuous relation between educational and training institutions and the users/requester of cadres;

4. Better use of information technologies based on WEB-training, simulators and trainers and introduction of modern technologies of lecturing and learning;

5. Ensuring the quality of higher education and professional training in qualification courses;

6. Setting and bounding the national qualification system with the European qualification frame (EQF);

7. Establishment of new and change of the existing courses for acquisition and extension of qualification aiming ensuring the career development of sergeants' staff;

8. All certificates for acquired qualification, diplomas and other type of documents issued by the higher military schools to clearly point grounding on the relevant EQF level;

9. Improvement of sergeants' staff preparation in the professional sergeants'(petty officers') colleges as well as through creating opportunities for adopting the military rank Junior Sergeant after completing training in training center of the relevant type of armed force;

10. Ensuring training in the course of the entire period of military service and use of the possibilities of information and communication technologies for access to training at any time;

11. Increase of the investments in military education and qualification and efforts for up-dating and modernizing of material and training base [7].

Military educational system organizational improvement

MES organizational improvement includes the elements personnel and training organization, as far as this process concerns the inter-relation between the academic staff, the trainees, the administrative and servicing staff of the military educational entities, but also influences the organizational structure, the responsibilities and inter-action between the institutions that conduct the training, and the organizations users and requesters of cadres.

The other direction for MES organizational improvement is an interdisciplinary joint training of the officer (employee) from the security and defence system at strategic and operative level as well as education that allows him growing in the national hierarchy and in the international organizations.

Crucially significant for the MES organizational improvement and training quality raising is the effective involvement of the users/requesters of cadres, i.e. Ministry of Defence, Staff of Defence and the various types of armed forces in the elaboration of the qualification characteristics as well as the extending of cooperation between the Military Academy and the higher military schools, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the universities and other institutions and higher specialized schools in Bulgaria, and particularly the international cooperation. The active inclusion and participation in the Military Erasmus initiative contributes more and more to bringing closer the standards in the future officers preparation in the military schools of the European Union member countries.

Military educational system technological improvement

MES technological improvement includes the elements of personnel, training and material base and technology of training, as far as this process requires academic staff preparation enhancing, training and material base improvement and applying modern forms and methods of training as well as training quality management system.

The high requirements towards the military education and qualification imposed the wide introduction of information technologies, modeling and simulations and modern web-based training in education. Modeling and simulations virtual world is the modern military education and military scientific research environment. New national and allies' missions and tasks require preparation for holding operations in any geographic and climate conditions, which could be virtually reproduced only through modeling and simulations.

New realities require from MES enhancing quality and effectiveness in the process of training cadres for the security and defence sector through applying new interactive lecturing methods and technologies, impose higher requirements towards the professional competencies of graduates of military educational institutions and towards the lecturers' preparation for better use of information technologies, based on web-training, simulators and training equipment and introduction of modern technologies of lecturing and learning as well as ensuring access to training at any time.

Applying the newest achievements of science, technics and technologies in the field of military education and qualification leads to achieving optimization of the element technology of training and considerable modernization of the training process itself in several directions: higher effectiveness and efficacy, embracing bigger group of trainees, more efficient training time and training at any time, distant training and training under individual plan, joint/cooperated training with other academies, schools and institutions in real time, enhancing the overall academic staff preparation, etc. This contributes more and more to getting closer to the standards of preparation of future officers in the military schools of the NATO and European Union member countries and to achieving high extent of compatibility.

5. Conclusions

The condition of MES in the time of the research is in objective connection and dependence on the security environment in the country and on the processes taking place in NATO and the EU regarding education and training. The systems functions in the conditions of insufficient financial, material and human resources for execution of its mission and tasks and develops for setting in full compliance with the state educational and qualification requirements, the national qualification frame and the European and NATO directives.

Military educational system has established national strategic documents for its future development in medium term and has potential to perform the planed actions for improvement and for contribution to the enhancing of national security and country's defence.

The Bulgarian military education and qualification synchronizing with the ones in the EU and NATO countries in conceptual, organizational and technological aspect is of primer significance for the transformation of military education and for achieving the goals on operative compatibility between the armed forces.

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