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**MISSION (IM)POSSIBLE. IDENTITY CRISES
IN THE BULGARIAN ARMY'S OFFICER CORPUS
DURING THE NATO ACCESSION**

Introduction

“We should distinguish between the so-called reform and transformation. The reform was nothing but a reduction of the personnel. The reform was foolish. It is over now. Transformation is something else. Transformation is a process of continuous renewal. Transformation can never be over. Transformation is not just a project, a plan, a doctrine or a strategy. Transformation is a way of life.” (Interview 21).

The words above belong to a thirty-five-year-old lieutenant-colonel from Sofia. His words, taken from an interview in which he describes the enormous changes that the Bulgarian Army has been undergoing, point to the challenges military reform poses to peoples' identities inside and outside the army. The present research project was originally aimed at verifying the extent to which one can detect in the Bulgarian Army the identity tensions that are characteristic of the transition from modern to “post-modern” armies (Moskos), or from “second-wave” armies to “third-wave” armies (Toffler). Contrary to my initial expectations, however, the 42 in-depth interviews I conducted between October 2005 and June 2006 with Bulgarian army officers (both male and female) suggested another type of identity crisis in the Bulgarian Army that is different from the Western tradition.

Firstly, there are **serious tensions between men and women** (both cadets and officers) in the Bulgarian army. However, in no way are these related to the women's struggle for equal opportunities in the military, like access to positions occupied traditionally by men, for instance. The tensions arise mostly from the process of army “de-politicization,” that is, eliminating the dominant role of the Communist Party at every commanding level in the

military. The army “de-politicization” exposed the problem with the so-called “connections,” and more specifically, the perception that women’s careers in the army are products of “connections”. Thus, neither women nor men have problems with the army’s “machismo.” Men and women appear to have two distinct options: 1) striving to become professionals who count on their competence and personal merits; and 2) succumbing to the temptation of becoming successful through “connections,” that is, by renouncing their personal and professional dignity.

Secondly, there is a profound **crisis in the society around the formality of civil control over the army**. The crisis stems from a couple of problems: 1) misunderstandings between military and civil experts, which appear as soon as efforts are made to define the army’s values and mission; 2) insufficient institutional mechanisms for the practical implementation of efficient civil control. Additionally, there is a new type of crisis. At the same time, veiling the refusal to discharge a large number of officers under the guise of demilitarization and inflating the civilian personnel (hidden under the “civil control” camouflage). “Civilians” remain within the old hierarchical system and keep the old subordination reflexes, but are at the same time deprived of the uniform, together with all other external symbols of belonging to the officers’ corps. Moreover, by being transferred under the charge of the army’s political leadership, they are forced to deal with the conflict between loyalty to their new superiors and the interests of the military leadership.

The crisis in the army discussed thus far is related to a third problem. According to the opinion of the largest part of the interviewees, the system for promotion and modernization depends mostly on the **personal assessment** of the immediate superior. Consequently the impartiality of the process gets undermined thereby de-legitimizing the entire army reform effort. Reform is mostly perceived as personnel reduction that many officers characterize as a “purge” in private. When reduction degenerates into personal feuds, no room is left for the alternative perception, namely: reform operates according to strategic long-term motives. At the same time, the “modernization” of the army is only thought of as a technical renovation entailing, for example, the replacement of the vehicle fleet, the computers, the communication systems, etc. These technological improvements are once again interpreted as someone’s **private** interest prevailing over those of others. Hardly anyone views these measures as an example of a well thought out and legitimate strategy for the development of the security system.

Generally speaking, the tensions registered by this study refer to a fundamental problem, namely: **the absence of an efficient system for balance of powers and mutual control** within the Bulgarian security sector, which allows unchecked manifestations of personal power. The lack of an effective regulatory system, hence, explains the opposition to women’s presence

in the army, to the dismissals, to the “modernization” methods, and to the promotion system. Nevertheless, the conclusions that can be drawn from my research are by no means pessimistic. Although the so-called reform consists in fact of constant, more or less concerted, attempts to put off to an uncertain future the **real** army restructuring, there are **powerful generators of pressure to modernizing the military**. These include: 1) pouring huge financial resources into the security system, 2) the enlistment of women and 3) the participation in international peacekeeping missions. The pressure for reform is increasingly felt largely because those harmed by the “personal power system” develop an awareness that their chances for access to the limited resources would improve should legitimate, meaningful criteria for efficient task implementation, for promotion, or for the awarding of projects get established. In this manner they exert institutional pressure (through the normative basis both on legislative level and on the level of internal rules and regulations) for the establishment of a competitive environment with clear “rules of the game.” It is this institutional pressure that forms the basis of the real modernization of the Bulgarian Army (beyond the mischief of the world of “the service”).

The world of “the Service”

This section is devoted to the everyday life of contemporary Bulgarian officers. This world is composed of two mutually opposite sub-worlds: the world of “the service” and the world of “the civilization.” Albeit in a different way, each one of these two worlds charges the officer with responsibilities and requires the performance of conflicting roles. For example, in the world of “the civilization,” the officer is well aware that he must uphold the army’s prestige with his behaviour, uniform, manner of speaking; at the same time, he is conscious that “civilian values” are in deep conflict with military values, and this conflict cannot be avoided or overcome. The world of “the service” is also torn apart by contradictions that, although considered normal in “a conservative institution, such as the army, which is governed by the subordination principle,” nevertheless arouse everyday conflicts; dealing with them requires a special type of psychological attitude. To quote many of the respondents “you have to be a little dumb.” Though in different ways, these two sub-worlds engender enormous internal tensions that get released into “mischief” (this point will be discussed in more detail later). Inasmuch as the reform in the army is seen as outside political interference in the military routine, rather than stemming from the army institution itself, various strategies for opposing the reform are being developed on the micro-level of the everyday life.

The disappointment called “delivering of documents”

The world of the service is mostly associated with the routine and tedious everyday bureaucratic officer’s duties, which the officers themselves call “delivering documents,” an expression that refers to a physical activity, although in practice it consists of copying by hand from one notebook to another. “The service” is represented mostly by excessive “paperwork” – the everyday, boring administrative work, which “should not be part of the officer’s duties, but to be undertaken by sergeants or women-officers” (Interview 2). What is discernable in the male discourse on “paperwork” is the assumption that the duty of “delivering documents” should be performed only by sergeants and female officers. In other words, the boring work should be done by those who are considered inferior and are of lower rank, i.e. sergeants and female officers.

Except “paperwork,” “the service” involves being at the back-and-call of one’s superiors. Interviewees describe the army as a place where the officers are put in a “flurry,” because they are constantly “rushed” by their “bosses” (superiors) for “anything and everything” (Interview 4). “The service” is also associated with frequent field trainings in conditions resembling real combat – mud, cold, and shortages of food and water. The trainings are additionally perceived as hard, because in the last 20 “crisis” years in the army, there were no funds for the purchase of new equipment and for proper maintenance of the material conditions. In order to survive in the so defined “service” the officer could not afford to be “too sensitive” (Interview 5). He must be “reliable,” i.e. being able to demonstrate initiative, although he knows that “any initiative should not be left unpunished” (Interview 10) by the superiors.

In sum, “the service” is represented as hard, stressful and diminishing human dignity. This world is full of contradictions. For example, the military code requires things which cannot be fulfilled due to the lack of the necessary technical equipment. The army is considered “a conservative institution” (Interview 1) and that is why any resistance to initiatives, including the official reform, is legitimized.

In order to cope with those difficulties the majority of the interviewed officers nostalgically recollect the moment when they took the decision to apply to the Military Academy. The motives were mainly related to the image of the officer as self-sacrificing hero, who is ready to go through tremendous hardships in order to ensure peaceful life to the civilian population. The image presents the officer as physically strong and theoretically well-prepared. Close to this romantic view is the world of the “cadet life.”

The military profession is very romantic, at least for those who have not joined the army. So these are more or less the main motives. I suspect the economic reasons also count, but I think the major motives are: first, the patriotic reasons and second, the romantic reasons, as in fact every man, especially if

well built, looks well in uniform and this makes women like him... at least those women I've spoken with. (Interview 27)

Several topics re-occur in almost all of the officers' interviews. The first theme is the "leave" – the newly-admitted cadets go out for the first time in "civilization" as future officers. They are dressed in uniforms and soon discover that "every man, especially if well built, looks well in uniform". In addition to the legal leaves, the interviewees often mention stories about illegal leaves (AWOL – absent without leave), when the cadets sneak through the fence of the unit, often "because of youth love." Generally cadet life is associated with many girlfriends, lots of booze as well as hard training, heavy studying and lack of the burdensome "paperwork" that defines "the service" of officers. This is the period when the officers claim to feel that they develop their abilities and expect to be of benefit to the country. What motivates the officers to deal with the daily hardships of the "service" is the belief that the military will overcome "the crisis" thereby making it possible for the romantic notions of cadet life to become reality.

The civilization

In the officers' mind the world of the service is contrasted with the so-called world of "civilization." This is the world of the civilian population, which is thought to be dominated by two major forces. The first force is the "market," which is "vehement, competitive, and unpredictable" (Interview 4) and in this sense both threatens society and contradicts the military values of order, predictability, clear hierarchy, responsibility and solidarity. The other force is "the drive for pleasure" (Interview 1, 2, 3, 10, 22, 35). The civilians' world provides a lot of opportunities for pleasure, which "spoil the mores of the civilians" (Interview 3). The desire for pleasure contradicts the military requirements for tough self-discipline, constant combat readiness and physical health. The "authentic" military men despise civilians for their susceptibility to the temptations of "civilization" – from going to the cinema, to going out for coffee, to getting high.

The officer who is out of the world of "the service" and passes through the "world of civilization" has the duty to preserve the "honor of the shoulder strap" (Interview 10). He must wear clean and ironed uniform, have an upright posture, closely trimmed hair, and be neatly shaved. He should manifest confidence, dignity and responsibility, because he is with "blue blood" (Interview 3, 10, 11). "For the officer notions like honor, dignity, courage are notions which are of permanent value" (Interview 1). Due to these requirements the officers experience their presence in the world of civilization as responsibility, duty and they cannot behave freely even there.

The mischief

As a result the world of “civilization” is not at all the image of rest and recreation from the service. The world of civilization exercises pressure on the officers because there they must behave themselves. The tension is lessened by the world of “the mischief” (*npocmomuu*), which is the set of practices that allow the officers to overcome the pressures both of the world of «service» and of the world of «civilization.» They perceive the world of «the mischief as legitimate respite from responsibility that allows them to release the tension and to continue to fulfill their duties. The «mischief» is related to group drinking in closed professional companies, prostitutes, jokes about the service; «mischief» also serves as initiation of the freshmen into the officer corps. In the world of «the mischief» hard drinking is considered prestigious, as are attempts to be with lots of prostitutes, and smart nagging about the service (Interview 5), though not about peacekeeping missions.

The missions

This is not bullying. The error was that at the beginning we were recruiting riffraff. You see, in this case they had completely lost the wish to live. The only way to turn them back to their soldiers’ duties was to slap them twice in the face. But there things are completely different from what we think here. (Interview 23)

“Things are different there” is the phrase that is most often repeated in discussions of peacekeeping missions abroad in which Bulgarian detachments take part. There are, however, some important distinctions between officers and soldiers:

... I suppose that people who went on missions, despite of saying that they want to be professionals and so on, and if we want to be fair, the main motive of the majority of people who joined missions and especially of those who have a lower rank is, if I can say so, the economic motive. Officers are a different matter. For some officers it is the self-assertion – as men of valour we happen to be a bit egotistic. The leadership in our rows is quite strong. This is the way we have been taught – to lead, to command. This is a way to assert yourself, to impose your will in difficult situations, to take a decision in a difficult situation. (Interview 22)

But in real combat even the motivated officers have difficulties coping with the situation. **And this is exactly where the problem lies.** Because “the missions” and “there” are perceived as the exact opposite of the “world of the service,” the missions are thought of as the antithesis of “the Bulgarian

military traditions.” The missions are construed as contrary to the official military school training, to the work procedures in our army, to family values, to moral standards established here, to the route to a successful carrier; in short, they contradict everything that is considered prestigious in the world of “the service.” One would expect that no breakdown should occur, no rupture of the living tissue during the transition from “the service” here to the duties in a mission. Is it not true that precisely by preparing for real combat the army legitimizes the practices of “breaking the person’s backbone” which was studied already by the Bulgarian sociologist Ivan Hadjiiski. Is it not the awareness for things being different in combat that justifies the officers’ claim that the society misunderstands them, the civilian control can never be efficient (due to the differing values), that the hard training (which is the reason for the officers’ extensive social privileges) is worth the mental energy, the resources, the environmental pollution, etc.

The participation of Bulgarian armed forces in operations that require at least some degree of military preparation opens up the possibility for **the false pretence to be exposed of our armed forces being able to carry out their duties in real combat situations.**

I can answer this. Now you have just said that the military is a hit in the society and its rating is high respectively. My opinion is that this rating is high due to the fact that the military still has not had the chance to prove itself facing the enemy fire. (Interview 29)

The principle that has long prevailed in the Bulgarian army is that appearance is more important than content. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, making things look (not work) well has become our armed forces’ main occupation in the last 30 years at least.

During the preparation of our contingent for peacekeeping mission in Bosnia under the command of Dutch forces, a Dutch came to see how our military unit preparation was going on and he was completely amazed to see that they shoot on fixed targets from a lying position. He said that the preparation methods had to be changed. Following the hierarchy procedures, the chief of the unit reported to his superiors, but the Big Boss said that this was Bulgaria and the preparation was done according to Bulgarian methods. That is why there were so many casualties in our contingents and that is why there are more problems in Divaniya than in Kerbala although in Divaniya there were no contacts with the enemy. (Interview 27)

The peacekeeping missions seriously shook our officers’ key identification pillar: our army’s capability to fight. Several typologically significant strategies have been undertaken in an attempt to normalize the situation: 1) Belittling the missions’ significance by presenting them as “a war, but not quite”; 2) Surreptitious questioning of the missions’ legitimacy; 3) Shifting the re-

sponsibility to the personnel cutbacks, which has torn the continuity thread; 4) Distinguishing between “the war for Defence of the fatherland” and “the mercenary wars.” As currently, or let’s say until recently, there were no trained formations to take part in such missions. We understand that our chief function is political, the function of the army is the Bulgarian foreign policy. This is clear. In the same way we protect our territory, we have interests also in a different place to be protected. The motives are not always clear. So in my personal opinion the approach to such missions used till now was not correct – to collect anybody, people who were not trained together or trained just for a while. It is the tradition of the Bulgarian army for the soldiers to be able to rely on the soldier next to them. And how can you rely on somebody whom you don’t know? (Interview 13) 5) Emphasizing the technical side of the problem, at the expense of the organization. My study revealed, of course, the existence of officers who have the courage and valour to admit that the army is not in a position to fight in accordance with contemporary standards. Such officers seek the roots of the problem and the means to overcome it. Fortunately, these officers are no longer completely marginalized.

Referring to patriotism is one of the basic tools used to cope with the discrediting consequences of participating in missions. One can point out here two sub-varieties. Firstly, there is the opinion that the missions are much more important politically than militarily. Some officers emphasize the fact that even such prestigious armies as the German or the Dutch ones generally send to missions their least well prepared units “which very often, especially with the Germans, consist of boys from Bulgarian or Russian origin. They join the army because they are poor. We speak with them in Bulgarian.” The proponents of this view claim that the missions cannot be considered indicative of the army’s readiness for combat.

So the issue is about motivation. First, who joined the mission? As I said, at this stage and the method of formation of the missions, many of the people who join them are just poor boys. It was possible to see at their funerals what the conditions in which they lived were. For many of them the motivation was: I will go there, earn some money, buy a small house or apartment, make a family and finish with the army. This is the way in which most of the regular soldiers think. Or they think: who will give me 300 BGN out in the civilized world. Because this is the salary an ordinary soldier receives. Especially women. (Interview 19)

The missions are an expression of the ruling elite’s political interests; the army unwillingly submits to the Parliament’s will. The missions that are “peace-keeping,” in reality, and are not merely labelled so, are associated more with police work, instead of with typical military operations, since the duties there consist of patrolling and keeping contact with civilians.

In reality they participate in missions that are more police-like than military. I have never heard about a Bulgarian unit to enter into armed conflict and respectively it cannot be said that even the very fact that there were, I cannot judge how many are the victims, but there were victims even there in the closed circles. (Interview 23)

Secondly, the more widely spread opinion is that even the activities of our military units abroad are not so brilliant “because it is one thing to fight for your motherland, for your family and loved ones, who are within the country’s territory, and quite another to make war for strangers and for a foreign cause in a foreign land.” It is obvious that this position seeks legitimacy in the old distinction between a “war for the Fatherland” and a “war of aggression,” which legitimized the transition from an “offensive” to a “defensive” military doctrine undertaken by the Warsaw Pact in the early 1970s.

I am not ashamed, the problem with people who were sent on missions is purely motivational, in my opinion. Because it is one thing to protect the territory of the country where you live, where your family, parents, children and relatives live, and it is a different thing to go on fighting without clear motivation. (Interview 26)

The proponents of this position willingly reproduce the media discourse that represents the participants in missions as “mercenaries” whose only motivation is money. “The mercenaries” cannot be regarded as being representatives of the Bulgarian Army, since their motivation is fundamentally different from that of the soldiers who have joined the army with “the highest of morals and consciousness of honour and duty to the Fatherland.” As the advocates of the defensive discourse insist, one should see how the army fights in Defence of our territorial integrity in order to understand what our army really is. “When you have two children and a loan of 30,000 to pay” you would be inclined to take part in missions, even though you do not believe in their legitimacy and/or in the reform of the security sector.

The reform

The main conclusion drawn from my research is as follows: notwithstanding that 1) no well-thought-of long-term legitimate strategy exists concerning the Bulgarian Army modernization after the collapse of the communist system; notwithstanding that 2) the security sector reform is perceived by many in the military as a political interference inspired by personal or by narrow political interests; notwithstanding that 3) the army modernization is considered by the military solely as a replacement of the vehicle fleet, the aircraft and the equipment, all this notwithstanding, as a result of 1) the influx of a huge financial

resource, of 2) opening the military service to women, and of 3) participation of Bulgarian forces in international peace-keeping missions, **a modernization drive has been generated**, which, contrary to the original intentions, has the potential of contributing to the modernization of the Bulgarian Army. The latter is understood here as creating institutional prerequisites favouring the establishment of an efficient system of checks and balances both within the army itself and in the army relations with other public institutions.

Following the collapse of the communist system the ideological protective shell of the Bulgarian Army kept up by Moscow disintegrated, thus laying bare the fundamental role “connections” have played in the army. Their central role can be attributed to: 1) ideologization, 2) the secondariness and 3) the Bulgarian Army’s integration in the socialist “economy of shortages” (Kornai). It suddenly turned out that those who were enlisted in the socialist army’s depersonalized officer’s corps must embark on the task of transforming it into an engine of change. Obviously, there is no way for this task to be implemented because the goals of the Transition come from other sources:

The architects of the Transition are from First Principal Department [of communist State Security – V. St.] who have been engaged in the training of terrorists for revolution export and in the drugs smuggling channels for the West that have to disintegrate it from inside. (Interview 2)

At the same time, however, powerful political interests in Bulgaria insisted on Bulgaria joining NATO; this essentially requires that **a reform be simulated, but not in fact performed**. During the past ten years, most initiatives aimed at reforming our army were soaked up and made senseless by the system’s inertia. Even though reform initiatives were executed only formally, they nevertheless contribute to the gradual establishment of new and clear “rules of the game” in the field of internal competition for resources. The new rules are expected to rid the army of the current illegitimate system of personal “connections” and secret lobbying by interested cliques. Pressures for reform usually originate with persons and units that were harmed by the **personal connections system**. In the past they were thrown out of the defence system and forced into the hardships of “the service,” but without receiving adequate remuneration or the benefit of serving under a high-ranking and well-connected boss.

This process has been assisted by the opening of the army to women. Women in the army are seen as taking undeservedly advantage of the privileges of the institution (undeservedly, because they do not have to bear “the hardships of service”). Women’s very presence in the army is perceived as a cynical manifestation of the complete domination personal connections enjoy. With men, this principle is more or less veiled. Women are considered plainly enjoying connections and are thus exposing the problem. Women themselves have little to do both with the establishment of the personal connections system or,

for that matter, with the initiative to open up the army to women. Yet women unintentionally contribute to the legitimization of actions that, although originally undertaken against the practices of women taking undeservedly advantage of the personal connections system, are in fact undermining the very foundations of this system.

Sensitivity to the adverse consequences of personal connections becomes heightened especially during missions; then connections usually lead to the evasion of procedures meant to ensure the efficiency of military activities. In real combat, when life is at stake, participants in missions have no tolerance for problems with equipment, communication, training, etc., that stem from the sloppiness and incompetence of superiors, political pressures, or personal benefits. To understand this proposition one has to make the distinction between the officially conducted “reform” and the actual army modernization; the latter is implemented independently from, and sometimes even in spite of, the intentions of the official reform. Respondents say that this is the difference between “reform” and “transformation”.

“Reform” versus “transformation”

Undoubtedly, most Bulgarian officers perceive the official reform in the Bulgarian Army as an ideological cover of the personnel cutbacks carried out under foreign political pressure. There exist, to be sure, a tacit understanding of the reform as consisting of changes in the higher military schools curricula, the establishment of civil control over the army, and the introduction of an attestation system, but these views are still marginal. At the same time, however, many of the interviewed officers were aware of other aspects of the official reform that take place as though independently. Borrowing one of the respondents’ words we would call these processes “transformation”.

The transformation is above all linked to the realization that contemporary challenges to the security system require an officer to be a person, a subject, an engine. While the good old subordination system guaranteed that “no good initiative should go unpunished,” it is nowadays not only allowed to show initiative, but “this is a must if you do not know the right people” and you really want to be an officer. Showing personal initiative has become necessary especially after the cutbacks in personnel. The shortage of human resources coupled with financial and technical scarcities made initiative indispensable to coping with the tasks of “the service”. Since the good old times when “the officers minded neither if their spouses had a job, nor the mileage of a tank” have gone for good, it is now of paramount importance that the available resources be managed intelligently and with foresight. Concurrently, the participation in missions, where “in contrast to here, you don’t do your job properly

only once” (Interview 24), motivates the officers to improve their professional competence, physical shape and psychological stability. As a result:

My commander, below whom I am the direct commander, is a wonderful example of a man who constantly works on himself and he does not have any strings to pull at his disposal, who is an example to follow. and I always saw him carrying a book in his pocket, by no means I do not mention this as a pose. I am not interested whether he will learn about this as well. He knows it very well and there are also other men like him. I personally do not know a man who has got success in the military with his connections, but I know many people who, with their personal qualities and, as you said it, their development in the matter, have managed to achieve great success. (Interview 36)

In order, however, for the officer to become a person, he should operate in a recognizable and predictable environment. That is why personal initiative is later on transformed into efforts to establish meaningful criteria for work assessment and promotion, since “there’s not much sense in playing well if it is clear from the beginning that the other team will win by default.” It thus becomes clear that this notion of “transformation” has little to do with the official reform’s intentions that are exemplified by the personnel cutbacks.

Political pressure

Practically all interviewed officers view “political” as synonymous with “partisan.” This view colours understandings of “the de-politicization of the army” as well as what “political leadership” and political control over the military entails. None of the interviewees viewed the “political” as an expression of common interest that is distinct from narrow partisan political interests.

The army “de-politicization” is mostly related to the elimination of the leading role of the Communist Party. Even those officers who chose their words most carefully did not deny the existence of sharp disagreements between field officers and political officers during the communist period. These differences, however, are interpreted in controversial ways. Some insist that membership in the Communist Party was purely formal, since it was a prerequisite for successful career, and thus no one looked upon this membership seriously. Other respondents claim that it was precisely the political officers who in practice implemented “the civil control” over the military, and in so doing helped improve the living conditions and curtailed the personal power of the commanding officers. They were intelligent and “able to talk.”

From the third generation like me, we are ... one or two of us in this unit. It is brought up by technocrats, but it is clear that the things do not go well, unless there are efforts to teach the same officers to be able to talk. They can’t talk,

they can't express themselves, they can't write.. .and he is to take strategic decisions. (Interview 24)

A third group shared the opinion that the political officers were the upholders of the Bulgarian Army's traditions, since they dealt with history, politics, management, strategies, psychology, etc., all subjects that have much more to do with the proper officer's role than "filling out spreadsheets with numbers" has.

As long as there is this uncertainty in the military that even when the job is well-done the superior can be still dissatisfied and, of course, the opposite -when the job is not well done, then some prognoses can be done. That is it. (Interview 33)

This is precisely where some of the younger officers see problems in the efficient implementation of reforms. Since the political officers were the first ones to be discharged from the army on purely political, rather than professional grounds, the institution's cultural continuity was broken. For many young cadets, the political officers are the embodiment of the "primordial officers' virtues" that have to do with being "interested in people, not equipment." The political officers "had dignity and were educated in the humanities," they had "a wide outlook" to the world, they could "motivate their subordinates and spoke clearly," they could "manage easily large amounts of information." In contrast to the "technical guys," who were mostly "peasant boys," the political officers came as a rule from foreign-language high schools in the large cities.

The "the purge" of the political officers from the army exposed several wounds. Firstly, the lower level bosses were left with practically no external control and became **local feudal lords**. Although "it depends on the particular person, if he is decent, you've got no problems," the discharge of the political officers had negative impact on the army. "The brighter ones, who would not be silenced" left and "those who lie low, in order not to get into the boss's sight, remained." Secondly, a whole generation of officers, who took care of the young officers' adaptation, went away, and those who remained were either elderly big shots who "have connections and just can't be discharged" or "young boys like me, without any experience, who have to learn through trial and error." Thirdly, and most importantly, the "technical guys" came to power, who "may well know their nuts and bolts," but "can't express themselves decently," "are scared by journalists more than by tanks" and "have no global vision about things." Since the political officers were dismissed, the responsibility for implementing reforms fell on the shoulders of the technical guys. They, however, are used to obeying orders, rather than communicating with people, and so "when the political leadership assigns them a task they say "YES SIR" without even thinking whether it can be done. And then we beat our brains out how to patch up the situation."

The political leadership of the army, epitomized by the Ministry of Defence, thinks of itself as the party leadership. There are no expectations, therefore, that a long-term public policy could be carried out in a way that serves public interest. Quite the opposite, various political parties send incompetent party members to become ministers of defence “who have to learn on the move what the army is.” Since politicians are aware that they are temporary figures, they try to channel the budget to their own men. It is only right, then, that the officers’ corps should resist these incompetent characters, acknowledging their right to a share of the budget, but preventing their drastic interference in military matters. Not a single one of the ministers of defence in the past 15 years has been regarded by the officers’ corps as an exponent of the defence interests. The army perceives all ministers of Defence in the last 15 years as mere tools in the hands of foreign interests aiming at diminishing our country’s fighting capacity. Thus, the political leadership is seen not so much as a defendant of the common interest, but rather as a conduit of foreign interests. The political is reduced to the partisan. This is the source of the problems associated with civil control over the military establishment; civil control is thought of as a system of procedures intended to hide and legitimate graft, rather than as monitoring that could ensure the transparency of the institution.

The “so-called civil control”

“The situation is simply ridiculous! I’m talking about the well known gypsy companies, if you know what I mean. So, what’s going on? What’s going on is that we let them in the site to dismantle the buildings, but they sell the metal equipment for scrap. There is an awful lot of iron in the barracks -hangars, storage areas, fences, it is mind boggling. From the iron alone they make a profit of 200 – 300%. But in order for them to make their profits, we conduct a tender procedure and we pay them. the army pays them so that they can make a profit. But you’d be deeply mistaken if you thought these companies were chosen at random. At random, my foot!” (Interview 25)

The respondents who allowed themselves the liberty to express an opinion on the tenders conducted by the Ministry of Defence pursuant to the Public Orders Act were unanimous that these procedures are a mechanism of milking the army; the process was not public and did not guarantee that the army would get the best deal for its money. The quotation above testifies to one of the many examples of waste related to me by the officers whom I interviewed. However, the aggressiveness with which the respondents approached this matter is indicative of something more than mere civic indignation. On the one hand, a large number of the officers, particularly the younger ones,

often insist that the army must get rid of alien responsibilities. These officers see as unfit for their position activities like the breeding of pigs, maintaining the grass in city squares, building and construction, maintenance of the equipment, administrative duties. The most extreme opinion was expressed by a young captain from Veliko Turnovo who held that the officer should only concentrate on managing his outfit, on planning and on public relations. He should not waste his time with “filling out spreadsheets with numbers,” dismantling and assembling engines, and copying data from one notebook to another, since these duties can be performed by noncommissioned officers and soldiers. In any case, technology nowadays develops at such fast pace that in a few months, in a year at the most, the equipment will be obsolete. This radical opinion maintains that even taking part in activities “on overcoming the consequences of natural disasters and industrial accidents” is performing “duties inappropriate for the army.”

On the other hand, however, many of the officers are acutely aware that transferring tasks that were carried out in the near past by the army to external, “civilian” (to use the officers’ parlance) organizations would not only justify personnel cutbacks and general budget reductions, but would also give the political leadership greater say in the budget at the expense of the military leadership. That is why, as a whole, the officers give numerous examples of how army units which until recently “have been doing an excellent job” (Interview 22) were disbanded and their tasks assigned to external companies that take more money for lower quality production. The officers argue that people who work in the army structures get paid salaries anyhow, and therefore the army can make products that are many times less expensive than if bought at free market prices. Moreover, insiders are highly motivated to do their job properly; while private firms operate on the principle “take the money and run,” the officer knows that he will have to be accountable to those for whom the respective product was made. Since private firms are only interested in profit, they are not willing to invest in diligence, thoroughness and accuracy, all of which are qualities inherent to an officer, especially if the officer is a woman. The desire for profit explains why external companies “just hire students who have no experience and work as if on a conveyor belt” (Interview 26). For instance, “we bought computers and it turned out that none of them had their video cards mounted correctly. But the computers are sealed. It will take two minutes to fix them, but we have no right to open them. So, everything is taken back to the company’s service, and then we wait for two weeks to bring them here again. In the meantime we just sit and wait. That is our system now.” (Interview 23)

The officers are discontented with the cutbacks and know well both that their positions are not guaranteed and that all of their colleagues who were dismissed felt bitter. Hence, the officers tend to complain about the inefficiency of the cutback procedures, instead of asking themselves why the system al-

lows failures and how these could be overcome. These complaints are not rational, but stem from the officers' values. The officers are intrinsically suspicious of the civil world, which is personified most generally by the market. But the market is sporadic, unpredictable and begets egotism, greed, and lust for profit at any price. In terms of values, the market is the diametrical opposite to the officer's world, the latter being based on collectivism, solidarity, self-sacrifice and high morality. For this reason, many of the officers «knew it since the beginning» that the political pressure for transferring orders to civilian companies was doomed to failure. But since they cannot see the values on which this pressure is based, they are inclined to discern ulterior motives. A large number of interviewees (especially interviews 1, 2, 4, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26) think that since politicians (personified by the political leadership of the Ministry of Defence) were appointed by political parties, they insist on the carrying out of open tenders and competitions in order "to get fat kickbacks." In other words profit is the only motivation: "they personally or their relatives sit in the boards of directors of the companies that win the tenders," or "give the job to the party donors; after all, the money spent during the electoral campaign came from somewhere and must be returned somehow".

At first glance, the public orders and the public tender procedures should create a competitive environment that would create pressure for the improvement quality of the services. At the very least, the existence of an application procedure, a commission that assesses the tenders, as well as the public nature of the call for tenders should limit the opportunities for fraud. This remains only in the realm of fiction, according to the officers, because 1) "Those who apply are not just anybody," and besides "if you didn't know beforehand that there would be a competition, it would be impossible to prepare everything within the deadline." Moreover, "most of our colleagues have their own firms through which they apply;" 2) "The competitions are meant to be won by someone" since "the public order is not announced for what the army really needs, but for what someone wants to sell to the army" (Interview 21). And "my dear young boy, after all, this is us who write the specifications – you tell me who you'd like to win the tender and I'll make the specifications in a way that would ensure success in the bidding. It might be a matter of two pennies, but they will win" (Interview 26). So, now it is understandable why:

Among my commanders and superiors, not to say all of them, there have always been people who treated relatively favorably, the word "favorably" is not suitable, they have always displayed their tolerance with the clear idea in mind that these are good professionals who should not be lost in order to have someone to do the job. Personally I have never met commanders that say to me "you, after having a private business ..." There were colleagues of mine that had been engaged in private business, but there was always tolerance if this fact did not interfere with the service. (Interview 1)

Conclusions

Even though neither the concept nor the specific practices of the so-called reform of the Bulgarian Army are intended to modernize the security sector (quite the opposite, there is more or less concerted effort to postpone actual reforms to the indefinite future), a drive for modernization has been generated. This modernization drives results from: 1) the opening of the army to women; 2) increased financial resources; and 3) participation in international peacekeeping missions. These three changes have introduced a way of thinking among the army's civil and military leadership that favours reforms. The persons harmed by the previous system of inbreeding and personal dependence have begun making the effort to institutionalize clear rules for access to (power) resources as well as for launching a competitive system of mutual control and balance of powers among the army institutions (both among the military and the civil leadership).

Bearing in mind what was said above concerning the missions one can also understand the shyly offered proposition for the legitimacy of the internal and external competition in the army; internal competition in awarding projects, and external, public, competition with other public institutions for winning the public's confidence. It must be perfectly clear that this proposition is an expression of a huge transformation of values, which is now taking place within the Bulgarian officers' corps. The participation in real combat for the first time in at least fifty years legitimized honour and self-esteem as basic values of the military ethics. These values were replaced in the socialist period with the love for the motherland, thereby contributing to the depersonalization of the officers. When one has no honour and someone else defines what the motherland is, then one loses the last reason for not running away when facing the enemy's fire. The restoration of honour is a bridgehead to the formation of persons in the Bulgarian Army. While in the not so distant past it was believed that the system would sooner or later expel the bright, the enterprising and the rebellious, now there are officers who hold exactly the opposite view: that being enterprising and able to find innovative solutions, in other words, being creative, will make them invaluable to the army. It is only a matter of time before the military establishment adopts this view as well.

List of interviews

Interview 1 – man, Sofia, 29 years old

Interview 2 – man, Sofia, 37 years old

Interview 3 – man, Veliko Tarnovo, 32 years old

Interview 4 – man, Veliko Tarnovo, 28 years old

- Interview 5 – man, Sofia, 32 years old
Interview 6 – woman, Veliko Tarnovo, 31 years old
Interview 7 – woman, Pleven, 26 years old
Interview 8 – woman, Sofia, 26 years old
Interview 9 – woman, Veliko Tarnovo, 32 years old
Interview 10 – man, Shoumen, 39 years old, major
Interview 11 – man, Shoumen, 56 years old, colonel
Interview 12 – man, Shoumen, 40 years old, lieutenant-colonel
Interview 13 – man, Veliko Tarnovo, 37 years old
Interview 14 – man, Shoumen, 36 years old
Interview 15 – woman, Sofia, 28 years old
Interview 16 – woman, Sofia, 36 years old
Interview 17 – woman, Sofia, 33 years old
Interview 18 – woman, Pleven, 32 years old
Interview 19 – man, Sofia, 42 years old
Interview 20 – man, Tarnovo, 26 years old
Interview 21 – man, Sofia, 35 years old
Interview 22 – man, Sofia, 42 years old
Interview 23 – man, Sofia, 28 years old
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Interview 25 – woman, Sofia, 26 years old
Interview 26 – man, Sofia, 43 years old
Interview 27 – man, Kazanluk, 22 years old
Interview 28 – man, Karlovo, 25 years old
Interview 29 – man, Shoumen, 46 years old
Interview 30 – woman, Karlovo, 28 years old
Interview 31 – man, Karlovo, 26 years old
Interview 32 – man, Karlovo, 35 years old
Interview 33 – man, Karlovo, 39 years old
Interview 34 – woman, Karlovo, 31 years old
Interview 35 – man, Karlovo, 26 years old
Interview 36 – man, Shoumen, 40 years old

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