
TRAINING OF NCOs FROM THE BULGARIAN ARMY AS A PART OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Abstract: In its first part, the article presents in a summary the main characteristics of the national system for vocational education and training of the republic of Bulgaria and in its second part, it emphasizes on the model of professional training of NCOs of the Bulgarian Army, which is a part of the national system. With the review of the national system for vocational education and training, the author first describes the legislative framework of the vocational education and training. It is outlined both by the general and by the special legal provisions, regulating the public relations related to vocational education and training. Following is the description of the management of the professional training conducted in the Professional NCOs Collage. In this connection, the institutional framework is outlined at the national level and describes very briefly the distribution of the functions and responsibilities of the different institutions. At the end of the first part of the paper, the author examines the essence of the national vocational education and training system, and in particular vocational training for the acquiring of a fourth degree of professional qualification. In view of the stated topic of the article, in its second part focuses on the model of topic of the article, in its second part the highlight is on the professional training of the sergeants in the Bulgarian Army and more specifically the one conducted in the Professional NCOs College for training sergeants and soldiers, for acquiring a fourth degree of professional qualification on professions and specializations, which are approved on a national level. In the author's point of view, the described model of training of the sergeants in the Bulgarian army is one successful approach for its integration in the national system for vocational education and training of the Republic of Bulgaria. In conclusion the author argues out the positive aspects of the realization of this model of integration of vocational training in the system of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria, taking into account the national and European dimensions. The presented model of training of the sergeants in the Bulgarian Army illustrates a trend on how to try to change the old habits in a positive direction. It provides professional competence of the sergeants to ensure the development of leadership practiced in the direction from top to bottom and contributes to taking the initiative to enhance the professional skills of sergeants needed for the job. In this way, the sergeant becomes into a role model for its subordinates.

Keywords: sergeants , professional training, Bulgarian Army

1. INTRODUCTION

The military profession is with high social and civic importance. It is characterized with a big responsibility from the military personnel, especially in the commanding party, for the status of the defense capability, the safety of the country and for keeping world peace. The army as a structural unit must operate and develop constantly with the ever-changing environment.

By joining the NATO as its full members, new challenges emerged from the influence of the external environment for the Bulgarian Army (BA). This determined the reform of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria as a necessity. Priority has been given to reducing the numbers, improving the battle-ready status, interoperability and mobility of the Armed Forces. In the meantime, it is perceived that if officers were the "soul" of the army, sergeants were the "skeleton" needed for the practical capability of the military "organism". [4] This has been reflected in the increase of the requirements for the sergeant corps and the implementation tasks related to the education and training of the subordinates, as well as the organization of the daily military activities of the military units.

It was necessary to rethink the place and role of the Bulgarian sergeant, his/her rights, responsibilities and duties, making the military profession more attractive to young people. All efforts have been directed at eliminating consequences such as "sergeant mentality", characterizing the qualities inherent to the sergeant from the near past, such as rudeness, ignorance, etc. Thus, in a small and modern army, a major role is assigned to the sergeant "of a new type" – a person who educates and manages skillfully. Sergeants are an important component of the army's intellectual, cultural and moral potential.

In the course of these processes various issues relating to the sergeants arose and were solved: To whom should they look upon?, Which training model should we adopt in their preparation?; What rights, duties and responsibilities should be assigned to them? However, the main rhetorical question remains – Do we have the right

to make mistakes in the selection of the sergeant personnel and in their training process? The answer is clear. There can be no compromise, because their subordinates' lives depend on their decisions and actions.

During the years of transition and becoming more professional of the BA various forms and models were prepared for the preparation of Bulgarian sergeants. The experience of the British Army and the German army have been borrowed, whose instructor teams have helped us during this period of conducting a number of courses at home and abroad and providing advice on the training of sergeants. The adopted training model in the form of courses was appropriate, but to a certain extent, because the sergeants received only a military specialty.

At the end of 2005, with the adoption of the "Vision for Adoption, Preparation and Staff Development of the Sergeants (NCOs) of the Bulgarian Army", the path for the creation of a sergeant corps in the BA was outlined. From the in-depth analysis of the goal, it is clear the aim is to enhance the effectiveness of training and building a motivated and well-prepared sergeant corps in the near future. At the meetings in discussion and adoption of the vision was also accepted the idea of creating a college for training of sergeants like the one in the US Army. Even today, with the changes made in the Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria (LDAFRB), the "Vasil Levski" National Military University has established a Professional NCO College (PNCOC), which is part of a national system for vocational training and complies with the requirements of the law for Vocational Education and Training (LVET).

2. LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND NATURE OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA.

Provisions regulating public relations related to vocational education and training are mainly contained in LVET; The Law on the level of education, the general educational minimum and the curriculum; State Educational Requirements (SERs) for the respective professions, adopted by regulations of the Minister of Education and Science; The Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science, determines the state educational requirement for the assessment system and the state educational requirements for the documents for the system of public education and others. Special provisions are contained in the Law on Defense and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria (LDAFRB) and its implementing regulations.

The LVET ensures the realization of the pan-European fixed objectives in the vocational education and training system. The law regulates the main objectives and priorities of vocational education and training - ensuring unified quality requirements, transparency of qualifications, building and maintaining a vocational training system for persons over the age of 16 in the context of lifelong learning. [1]

The applicability of the provisions of the LVET on Professional Training conducted by the PNCOC is outlined in § 3 of the Additional Provisions of the LVET. It states the following: "In the training institutions of the system of the Ministry of Defense ... this law applies, unless otherwise provided in their instruments of incorporation and in the provisions of the special laws relating to their structure and activities." [2]

Thus, in view of the specifics of the professional training in PNCOC, the special provisions contained in the LDAFRB and its implementing regulations will apply in the first place and in accordance with them have been developed SERs for the respective professions, adopted by regulations of the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria. The regulations of the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria on the conditions and the procedure for admission of soldiers for training to acquire professional qualification from a professional field "Military and defense" in the PNCOC.

The development of vocational education and training in our country takes place in the context of the commitments undertaken by our country in the course of arisen negotiations with the European Union (EU) and in accordance with the European policies and program documents in the field of education and training. European dimensions are reflected and applied in the conceptual basis, the legislative framework, the policies pursued and the practice of the development of vocational education and training. [1]

The institutional framework for the management of professional training conducted in the PNCOC on a national level covers:

- Council of Ministers – determines the state policy in the field of education, including vocational education and training, employment in the labor market.
- The Ministry of Education and Science – manages, coordinates and controls the implementation of state policy in the field of vocational education and training. The Minister of Education and Science approves the SER for acquiring qualification in professions, approves the Vocational Education and Training List (VETL), approves (for the PNCOC - coordinates) qualification programs in the vocational education and training system.
- The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) - it is a state authority for the licensing of activities in the vocational education and training system as well as for the coordination of the

institutions involved in professional education and training. NAVET develops SERs projects for acquiring vocational qualifications for the vocational education and training system, develops and updates VETL, regulates vocational training in different types of vocational schools. [1]

- The Ministry of Defense (MoD) - as a branch ministry, participates in: developing, coordinating and updating the SER for acquiring qualification in professions; developing, coordinating and updating the VETL; the reconciliation of the state plan - admission in the Professional Colleges, which it finances, by distributing the financial resources approved for their budget for professional training. Coordinated with the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Defense approves SERs, specialties, curricula and programs and lists of state-run admissions in the Professional colleges. The regulations of the structure and activity of the Professional colleges are issued by the Minister of Defense. [3]

- The training institutions for professional training in the system of the Ministry of Defense are the Professional NCOs College and the Professional Petty Officers College, included in the structures of the "Vassil Levski" National Military University and the "N. J. Vaptsarov" Naval School (Naval Academy).

The national system for vocational education and training of the Republic of Bulgaria prepares citizens for realization in the economy and other spheres of the public life, creating the conditions for acquiring professional qualification and for its continuous improvement.

The National System of Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Bulgaria, regulated by the LVET, includes vocational guidance, *professional training* and professional education.

Professional training provides the acquiring of professional or part-time professional skills as well as its improvement. Professional training includes:

1. Initial professional training - acquiring an initial qualification in a profession or part of a profession;
2. Continuous professional training - improvement of the acquired qualification by profession or part of a profession.

Professional training is carried out by professions and specialties included in the VETL. The Minister of Education and Science approves the list in coordination with the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, as well as with the respective branch ministers.

The VETL is a systematized structure (matrix) of the names of professions and specialties classified in professional fields according to the fields of education under the ISCED - 97 International Standard Classification of Education (Article 8, paragraph 1 and § 1 of the Additional Provisions of the LVET). Moreover, in accordance with the Classification of Education and Training Areas (COO-2008) of the National Statistical Institute, the specialties in the list are consistent with national practice in the field of employment; correspond to the National Classification of Professions and Positions (NCP) and to the International Standard Classification of ISOS-88.

When developing the VETL, two basic principles have been compiled:

- Wide-profile training of specialists;
- An opportunity for mutual recognition of qualifications on the European labor market.

The broad-based profession provides:

- Mobility of the workforce within one or more professional fields;
- Integration of related work activities into parts of the profession;
- The possibility of raising the professional qualification.

The systematization of the professions in professional fields under ISCED-97 and the International Standard Classification of Positions ISOS-88 create conditions for the implementation of Directive 99/42/EU on the recognition of professional qualifications in the Member States of the European Union (EU). [5]

Professions and specialties classify by degree, as well as by degree of professional qualification (first, second, third and *fourth*).

For the *fourth degree of professional qualification*, professional competences acquired for the pursuit of professions are required, including a wide range of complex activities carried out under changing conditions as well as assuming managerial responsibilities for the work of others and for the distribution of resources. The incoming minimum level of education for acquiring the fourth degree of professional qualification is completed secondary education.

Professional schools, high schools, *colleges*, art schools and vocational training centers have the right to carry out vocational training. Training for acquiring professional qualification can also be carried out by universities. *Professional colleges* carry out vocational training with the acquisition of a fourth degree of professional qualification of up to 2 (two) years depending on the degree of professional qualification. They include persons with completed secondary education.

Framework programs approved by the Minister of Education and Science regulate the receiving of professional qualification in the vocational education and training system. The Framework Programs define the age, incoming educational level, and qualification level of applicants as well as the content and duration of professional education and professional training.

One of the programs for the training of persons over 16 years of age is *Framework Program G* for Professional Training with the acquiring of a fourth degree of professional qualification and lasting up to 2 years for people with completed secondary education.

Framework Program G specifies for each profession of VETL with SERs to acquire qualification in professions based on which curricula plans and programs in general are developed. The structure of the professional training framework programs includes mandatory and eligible professional training for programs for acquiring of professional qualifications. *Mandatory professional training* provides the necessary knowledge, skills and professional competences to acquire qualification in the profession and includes theoretical and practical training. *Eligible professional training* provides for the broadening of the knowledge, skills and professional competencies of the respective profession. Mandatory professional training includes theoretical and practical training. Mandatory professional training and eligible training are determined according to the SERs *for acquiring qualification in professions*.

The SERs determines the level of compulsory vocational training at the end of the vocational training, which guarantees the trainee the opportunity to practice the profession. SERs for acquiring professional qualification defines the general, branch and specific compulsory professional training for the profession, as well as compulsory foreign language training in the profession and the eligible training.

The content of each type of mandatory professional training includes:

1. The necessary professional competences (knowledge, skills and professional qualities);
2. Thematic areas from which the content of the subjects / modules is formed.

Professional training under Framework Program G ends with state examinations for acquiring professional qualification – theory of the profession and practice of the profession. The organization of the examinations is determined according to the SERs for the assessment system and the content according to the SERs for acquiring qualification in professions.

State examinations in the theoretical part of the profession and practical part of the profession are carried out under national examination programs in accordance with the state educational requirements for acquiring qualification in professions. The Minister of Education and Science endorses national examination programs. [2]

3. TRAINING IN THE PROFESSIONAL NCO COLLEGE AS PART OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Professional NCOs College of “Vasil Levski” National Military University is a state professional school created by an order of the Minister of Education and Science № ПД - 14 - 261 dated 24.08.2007, at the proposal of the Minister of Defense.

The College conducts training of sergeants and soldiers to acquire a fourth degree of professional qualification in professions and specialties included in the VETL. The professions and specialties are in the field of education – “Public security and safety” and in the professional field “Military Affair and defense”. To date, the training in the PNCOC is carried out in the following professions and specialties:

1. Profession - "Sergeant - Commander" specialty - "*Command of troops to platoon*".
2. Profession - "Sergeant - Logistics", specialty - "*Logistics*".
3. Profession - "Sergeant - Technician", specialties: "*Exploitation and repair of automobile and armored vehicles*"; "*Exploitation and repair of engineering, chemical and special equipment*"; "*Exploitation and repair of radio technical, information and computer equipment*"; "*Exploitation and repair of artillery and optical equipment. Work with ammunition*"; "*Exploitation and repair of weapons of mass destruction and radio equipment*"; "*Exploitation and repair of aviation and navigation equipment*"; "*Explosive Technologies and Neutralizing Unexploded Ammunition*".
4. Profession - "Sergeant - Administrator", specialty "*General and specialized administration*".
5. Profession - "Sergeant - Instructor", specialty "*Instructor activity in general and special education*".

The main fields of study in the college are:

1. Training of sergeants and soldiers for acquiring professional qualification in specialties from the professional field “Military and defense” of VETL in the field of “Public security and safety”;
2. Training to improve sergeant qualification.

The categories of college students according to the fields listed above are:

1. cadets – sergeants and soldiers admitted for training for the fourth degree of professional qualification from the professional field "Military Affair and defense".

2. Postgraduates – sergeants and civil personnel who are trained in acquiring and upgrading or re-training courses.

The learning process is based on the SERs for acquiring the qualification for the respective profession and is conducted according to the educational documentation.

The educational documentation includes a curriculum of the Framework Program G, study programs of the subjects, a schedule of the learning process, and schedule for the classes.

The curricula for each specialty and curricula for each discipline are developed on the basis of the SERs and the framework program G for vocational training. After coordination with the types of armed forces and the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria approved them.

The professional training of cadets at the college to acquire a fourth degree of professional qualification structurally covers military, leadership, foreign language and physical training.

Military training is structured in three modules:

- General military training – conducted with students from all specialties during the first term of study.
- Special military training – takes place during the second term of study to cover the necessary professional competences (knowledge, skills and professional qualities).
- Training practice (internship) – conducted within 1 month in the military units in which the cadets are serving.

The specific subjects determine the content of the modules included in the military training.

Leadership preparation takes place in regular school hours on a modular basis, with theoretical and practical sessions, during the two sessions. This training covers the following subjects: military affair, management skills, communicative abilities, training methodology, sociology, and leadership.

Foreign language preparation includes 120 hours of English language teaching during the second term, giving cadets the opportunity to attend a STANAG-6001 level test.

Physical training takes place throughout the training course, regularly and in out-of-school time, each cadet providing three times a week 2 hours of sports. At the end of each term, a physical training exam is given. The duration of training in PNCOC in acquiring a fourth degree of professional qualification under Framework Program G is approximately 1 year (38 weeks). The school year is divided into 2 (two) study periods. The learning practice (internship) passes after completing the training in a second term. Between the two study periods, cadets receive paid home leave within one month.

All cadets who have passed the full course and successfully completed their duties under the curriculum are admitted to state examinations. Those who have passed the state exams successfully receive a Professional Qualification Certificate.

The cadets, who have successfully completed the full course of study at the college and obtained a fourth degree of professional qualification in specialties from the professional field "Military and Defense", are assigned first sergeant rank.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The following positive aspects can be outlined from the adopted model of training of sergeants from the BA as part of the national vocational education and training system:

1. The "Sergeant - ..." professions are included in the VETL. As a basic document for the organization of vocational guidance, vocational training and vocational training, the list is mandatory for all institutions where vocational training is carried out to acquire professional qualifications. In the context of Bulgaria's membership in the EU, this also leads to recognition of the professional qualifications gained in the Member States of the Union.

2. Those who have completed their training in professions from the professional field "Military affair and defense" may be appointed to sergeants positions in BA.

3. Notwithstanding the fact that the training is mainly aimed at acquiring the competencies necessary for the military specialty, the graduates of the PNCOC training may also enter civilian positions from the NCPP, which correspond to the respective profession "Sergeant -" in the VETL. This will turn sergeants into competitive and demanding specialists not only in the field of the military profession but also in the free labor market.

4. College graduates receive a certificate of professional qualification recognized also outside the Ministry of Defense system.

5. Anyone who has acquired the fourth degree of professional qualification in one of the professions "Sergeant - ..." may continue his/her training for acquiring professional qualification in another profession of

professional field "Military affair and defense", and the training in the general mandatory training and part of the specific professional training are respected.

The development of sergeants is a long and prolonged process. Sergeants continue to develop as leaders during their careers. The presented model for sergeant training in BA illustrates the tendency to try to change old habits in a positive direction. It provides professional sergeants' competencies to ensure leadership development from top to bottom, and helps to take on the initiative to raise the professional skills of sergeants needed for the job. In this way, the sergeant becomes a role model for his subordinates.

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