

Review article

## Twenty years of functioning of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense in the years 1999-2019

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### INFORMATION

#### Article history:

Submitted: 17 February 2020

Accepted: 16 April 2020

Published: 15 June 2021

### ABSTRACT

The article summarizes 20 years of operation of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense. The author explains the basics of the functioning of this body, its tasks, and competences. What is more, she presents subsequent soldiers, who acted as the chairwomen of the Council in individual years. The publication also presents the most important initiatives and activities in which the Council has been involved over the last two decades.

### KEYWORDS

women's military service, woman-soldier,  
Women's Affairs Council Women in the Ministry of National Defense,  
national action plan, UNSCR 1325 resolution



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## Introduction

In recent years, the role of women in social life has increasingly gone beyond what is considered stereotypical. Until a dozen, twenty or thirty years ago it was difficult to meet women working in male professions and military service. Currently, women more and more often take up professions considered so far to be typically male, thus taking on the difficult social role of people who blaze the paths for future generations of women in this profession. The above observations may indicate a slowly changing role of gender in society. The interest of women in military service is also greater, and the today's enrollment opportunities are the same for both women and men and are clearly stated in the military regulations. However, the current legal situation has evolved since 1989 to function as it is today. The growing presence of women in uniformed services resulting from cultural changes has become a symbol of the transformation of modern society. Fewer and fewer people are surprised by the fact that women participate in education, management or politics, and a woman driving a tank, piloting an airplane or commanding soldiers is less shocking [1, p. 20].

Twenty years is a period that prompts to sum up experiences and observations, as well as discuss further perspectives, opportunities, and threats in the field of women's military service. It is assumed that the presence of women in the Polish Armed Forces is exactly 30 years, when they gradually and systematically began to be accepted as professional

soldiers. Initially mainly in the medical group as doctors and psychologists. The 2019 was special for Poland and its Armed Forces, due to the country's 20-year membership in the North Atlantic Alliance and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense.

## 1. Research assumptions of the article

The article aims to solve the main research problem formulated as follows: *What was the functioning of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense in 1999-2019?* To solve the main research problem, the author decided to formulate and solve the following detailed problems:

- 1) What are the legal bases for the functioning of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense?
- 2) What are the competences of the chair of the Council and who performed this function in previous years?
- 3) What tasks and competences does the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense have?
- 4) What is the composition of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense?
- 5) What were the most important activities in which the Council for Women in the Ministry of National Defense was involved?

## 2. Legal basis for the functioning of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense

Poland's accession to NATO was a turning point in terms of women's service in the military. 1999 was the first year that the Armed Forces opened its ranks to women while enrolling in military universities. It happened thanks to Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance and the accompanying visit by Major Sara Garcia, the Head of the Women's Affairs Office in the NATO Armed Forces. The visit made it possible to raise the issue of the presence of women in the Armed Forces and change the policy in this regard. These changes were accompanied by a great deal of media interest, which initiated many discussions and surveys on the usefulness of women in the Armed Forces, equal treatment or sharing the constitutional responsibility to ensure the national security.

In 1999 in Bergen, Norway, the Conference of the Committee on Women's Affairs in the NATO Armed Forces was held, in which a delegation from Poland participated for the first time. A special character resulted from the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO, which was additionally combined with the inclusion of the Polish delegate in the Committee [2, p. 7].

The Women's Affairs Council in the Polish Armed Forces was established by decision no. 22 by the Undersecretary of State for Social and Parliamentary Affairs of November 25, 1999. During the election of the representative office of the Women's Affairs Council after its creation, efforts were made to involve people with the longest service in the work of the body, at the same time differentiating according to the place of service and personnel, to efficiently capture phenomena that require awareness, introduce new, or improve existing formal and legal regulations. The cooperation with the Council was also joined by male soldiers with experience in military service in matters relating to the updating of military documents, such as

various regulations, uniform regulations, or legislative and executive acts [2, p. 7-8] regarding military service in a gender-diverse environment.

Apart from the Council, there was also a body of the Plenipotentiary for the of Women's Military Service of the Ministry of National Defense. It was established for the first time by the decision No. 102/MON of the Minister of National Defense of April 3, 2006, on the appointment of the plenipotentiary of the Minister of National Defense for the women's military service, who functioned alongside the previously appointed Women's Affairs Council. Col. Beata Czuba was the first plenipotentiary. In 2009, pursuant to Decision No. 157/MON of the Minister of National Defense of May 6, 2009 on the establishment and operation of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense (Journal of Laws of the Ministry of National Defense No. 9, item 111), the position of the chairwoman of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense was combined with the Plenipotentiary for the of Women's Military Service of the Ministry of National Defense [3].

Pursuant to § 5 of the Decision on the establishment and operation of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense, a plenipotentiary performed the tasks of the Minister of National Defense in the field of women's military service, representing the interests of women serving in the military, and taking actions to counteract discrimination and other negative social phenomena. By the decision of the Minister of National Defense, on June 1, 2009, Commander Bożena Szubińska [3] was appointed the Plenipotentiary, who from 1999 (the year when the Council was established) was also the Chairwoman of the Women's Affairs Council in the Polish Armed Forces. In the result of the above decision, both functions were combined, which was aimed at improving the functioning of the Council and strengthening the functions of the Minister's Plenipotentiary for Women. Thus, the Council also became a representative body of women, apart from its opinion-making and advisory activity.

At the meeting of the Women's Affairs Council, which took place on February 12, 2015, Cdr Bożena Szubińska's successor was elected, Lt. Col. Bożena Hunia, who had previously served in the Department of Military Foreign Affairs. Lieutenant Kinga Krawczyk-Sadurska, serving in the 5<sup>th</sup> Lubuskie Artillery Regiment in Sulechów, was elected the Deputy Chairwoman. A new composition was elected for the new term of the Council 2015-2018. It happened based on the decision of the Minister of National Defense of November 25, 2014, on the establishment and operation of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense (Journal of Laws of the Ministry of National Defense of 2014, item 376) [4]. The Chairwoman of the Council also acted as the Plenipotentiary [5].

Since 2016, the re-separation of both functions [6] meant that Lt. Col. Bożena Hunia continued to serve as the Chairwoman of the Council. In the period from January to the end of 2015 (elections to the composition of the Council took place in November 2016 and taking over duties at the beginning of 2017), the duties of the Chairwoman were performed by Lieutenant Kinga Krawczyk-Sadurska. From 8 March 2016, Maj. Anna Pęziół-Wójtowicz [7] was appointed the Minister's Plenipotentiary. After less than two years, in January 2018, the position was liquidated by the Minister of National Defense, Mariusz Błaszczak, following which the acting Plenipotentiary was dismissed from the position.

At the same time, from January 2017, the position of the Chairwoman of the Council was assumed by Major Beata Targońska, who has been holding her position to this day. Currently, the Chairwoman holds the duties at the rank a lieutenant-colonel, and her involvement in the activities of the Council began in 2006, when, as a specialist-psychologist of the Military Police, she was invited to the meetings of the Council in the form of an advisory-expert voice.

Subsequently, as a representative of women-soldiers serving in the Military Police, she was a member of the Council in 2007-2009, 2012-2015 and 2015-2018 [8].

On June 29, 2018, the Head of the Ministry of National Defense met with representatives of female soldiers. In March that year, a decision was also made to transfer the Chairwoman of the Council into direct subordination to the Minister of National Defense. That action was most likely the result of the earlier liquidation of the position of the Minister's Plenipotentiary for the of Women's Military Service and the need for direct exchange of information and cooperation between the milieu of women soldiers and the Minister of National Defense. The direct subordination to the Minister has strengthened the position of the Council and enables quick and direct response to all situations requiring urgent intervention in the field of military service in a diverse gender environment. During the meeting, it was also decided to review the regulations and procedures related to the service of female soldiers in the Armed Forces and appoint supernumerary plenipotentiaries for women in individual military units. Each plenipotentiary is the foremost arm of the Women's Council in the unit that any soldier can approach on matters relating to serving in a gender-diverse environment. Plenipotentiaries are responsible for reacting in cases of violating interpersonal relations by reporting any violations in this regard directly to the President of the Council.

The Head of the Ministry of National Defense got acquainted with the current results of the Council's work and its recommendations, and the significance of the relevant legal regulations regarding the military service of women, including in the field of pro-family policy, was emphasized. Due to the introduced changes, women-soldiers in military units and in agreement with the unit commander appoint their plenipotentiary for female soldiers, who makes it easier for soldiers from a given unit to contact the Council for Women. In any case of violation of interpersonal relations, where one of the parties is a female soldier, the plenipotentiary is obliged to immediately report the incident to the Women's Affairs Council [9].

Currently, the basis for the activities of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense is Decision No. 19/MON of the Minister of National Defense of March 7, 2018, on the functioning of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense [10] pursuant to Art. 2 (1) of the Act of December 14, 1995, on the office of the Minister of National Defense (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 2149 and 2018, item 138) and § 2 (14) of the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of July 9, 1996 on the detailed scope of activity of the Minister of National Defense (Journal of Laws, item 426 and of 2014, item 933).

### **3. Composition of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense**

The Women's Affairs Council is a consultative and advisory body to the Minister of National Defense and a representative of female soldiers in the Ministry of National Defense. The body is a discussion forum, presents opinions, analyses, and recommendations regarding the military service of women, and provides information on official matters. It develops proposals for the necessary system changes to optimize and improve military service. It is democratically elected by women-soldiers serving in the Polish Armed Forces. Currently, a candidate for a member of the Council may be a female soldier, who has performed professional military service for no less than 6 years and who wishes to act for the benefit of female soldiers. Completion of the second year of studies is required in the candidate service, while in the case of soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces, the requirement of a specific period of service does not apply. The Women's Affairs Council consists of representatives of

the following structures of the Ministry of National Defense, together with subordinate cells and organizational units [10]:

- The Ministry of National Defense (3 female members),
- The General Command of the Branches of the Armed Forces (10 female members),
- The Operational Command of the Branches of the Armed Forces (1 female member),
- The Command of the Warsaw Garrison (2 female members),
- The Military Police (2 female members),
- military higher education institutions: the Military University of Land Forces, the Polish Air Force Academy, the Military University of Technology (1 female member performing candidate service),
- The Territorial Defense Forces (2 female members performing professional military service).

#### **4. Tasks and powers of the Women’s Affairs Council and its chairwoman**

Under Decision No. 19/MON of March 7, 2018, the tasks of the Women’s Affairs Council include:

- presenting a position in the form of resolutions on matters related to the performance of military service by women to the Minister of National Defense,
- preparation of analyzes on the performance of military service by female soldiers, at the request of the Minister of National Defense,
- identifying factors influencing the performance of military service by female soldiers,
- cooperation with the Coordinator for equal treatment in the Ministry of National Defense in the field of matters related to the performance of military service by female soldiers,
- cooperation with the representative bodies of professional soldiers, non-governmental organizations as well as state and international institutions, together with their specialized agencies in the field of matters arising from military service performed by women-soldiers,
- developing proposals for detailed legal solutions related to the performance of military service by female soldiers,
- informing female soldiers about activities undertaken by the Council in the field of matters arising from the performance of military service by female soldiers,
- promoting the professional military service of women-soldiers,
- drawing up the regulations of the functioning of the Council.

In addition to the tasks performed by the Council, it should be noted that its chairwoman also has the scope of powers and competences resulting from Decision No. 19/MON of March 7, 2018. Her position is located in the Operational Center of the Minister of National Defense. After the chairwoman is elected, the Director of the Operational Center of the Minister of National Defense applies to the body responsible for appointing a professional soldier for the service position. The chairwoman reports to the Minister of National Defense. The chairwoman’s tasks include:

- coordination of the work of the Council (at least once a quarter),
- calling the Council meetings (at least once a quarter),

- chairing the Council meetings,
- development of the Council's annual activity plan with a plan of expenses, in agreement with the Director of the Operational Center of the Minister of National Defense,
- documentation of the Council's work,
- preparation and presentation to the Minister of National Defense of a report on the activities of the Council by March 30 for the previous calendar year,
- direct cooperation with the Coordinator for Equal Treatment in the Ministry of National Defense and the Chairman of the Presidium of Professional Soldiers' Representative Bodies in the field of projects organized by the Council,
- representing female soldiers before the Minister of National Defense and other public authorities or non-governmental organizations,
- assessment of the observance of the rights of female soldiers,
- analyzing and collecting data on female soldiers' situation in the service environment,
- giving opinions on draft legal acts concerning the military service of women-soldiers,
- cooperating with state and international institutions and their specialized agencies in matters arising from the performance of military service performed by female soldiers.

## **5. Activities of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense**

The purpose of the creation of the Council was to integrate female soldiers, improve their cooperation, represent the interests of the female soldiers and represent them before the Ministry. It should also be added that efforts were made to cooperate with the women's milieu in the country in the field of equality as well as cooperation with female soldiers from NATO countries. For two decades, apart from the tasks belonging to the Council's duties, it was involved in many projects and initiatives aimed at strengthening the participation of women in shaping the security of the country. It also faced the challenges connected with the women's military service. In addition, it should be noted that the Council fights prejudices and stereotypes, which may contribute to a change in the military organizational culture and a greater openness to human potential, manifested in a diverse gender environment.

One of the most important elements of the Council's activity was its participation in the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution UNCSR 1325 on women, peace, and security [11; See: 12]. It focuses mainly on protection against sexual violence against women and their growing participation in various spheres of political, social, military, and economic life. Both aspects are the starting point for gender equality. As far as the Member States are concerned, the Resolution aims to encourage greater women's participation in peace-building and better use of their potential, and increase the representation of women in decision-making processes at all levels of command. Within the NATO UNSCR 1325 realization, an action plan was developed in 2007 as part of the implementation of the resolution in the alliance countries, and in 2009 the *Strategic Commands Directive BI SCD 40-1. Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and gender equality issues to NATO command structures* was developed [1, p. 55].

The implementation of the Resolution was primarily based on the intensification of training and information activities changing the awareness of gender issues, which allows to eradicate

stereotypes and counteract gender discrimination as a form of violence against women. That also includes the proper preparation of mission participants prior to departure in the knowledge of UNSCR 1325 and human and women's rights under international regulations and NATO rules.

In connection with the above, NATO has developed a training template on gender equality and opportunities to raise awareness in this regard. Permanent training in this area and systemic education will bring results in the future and help to follow the desired direction of changes. At the national level in NATO, the Gender Education program is used for this. It includes UNSCR 1325 implementation progress reporting, education, information, (UN) reports and (NATO) reports as well as mission assessment questionnaires (EU, OSCE). These tasks were, among others performed by the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense.

In 2010, the *Strategy of strengthening discipline, counteracting addictions, and preventing social pathologies in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in 2010-2015* was introduced. The principles of equal status of women and men at all levels of education were added to the core curricula. The plenipotentiary of the Ministry of National Defense for the women's military service, in cooperation with the Department of Education and Defense Promotion, organized numerous projects, such as seminars and conferences related to the military service of women as part of the campaign raising awareness of women's participation in public life and decision-making processes [1, p. 59].

The Council actively undertakes meetings with the coordinator for equal treatment in the Ministry of National Defense and representatives of the Deans' Convention in the field of matters and regulations related to the women's military service. It provided opinions on an ongoing basis, analyzes and recommends various types of documents concerning women in the service. As part of promoting military service, it develops and publishes many various types of promotional materials and organized promotional stands, e.g. in the so-called "Women's Park" in 2015. It also participated active in the meetings of the "Women in Uniformed Services" Team and in community meetings with other services (BOR<sup>1</sup>, Prison Service) and others. It initiates a series of meetings with the Head of the Complaints and Applications Bureau, the Director of the National Defense Ministry or commanders, such as the Chief of the General Staff, Operational Commander of the Armed Forces, General Commander of the armed forces, the Commander of the Territorial Defense Forces, and participates in all kinds of briefings organized by the above-mentioned.

The Council actively represents female soldiers at all kinds of conferences and seminars on the issues of women's military service, including the most recent *Participation of women in overseas missions* (October 2018) or *The NATO Science for Peace and Security Program (SPS)* (December 2018). Above all, however, it has taken immediate action to intervene in urgent cases concerning the women's military service.

The Council, in cooperation with the Museum of the Polish Army, prepared an exhibition entitled *We, the Women Soldiers...*, under the official patronage of the Spouse of the President of the Republic of Poland, Agata Kornhauser-Duda [13]. The exhibition aimed to show the significant participation of women in Polish uprisings, fights for independence during World War I and II, and contemporary international peace and stabilization missions.

Due to the fact that until recently the Armed Forces was the organization almost exclusively available to men, it was adapted to the male culture, needs, and expectations. When this

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<sup>1</sup> The Government Protection Bureau, replaced by the State Protection Service from 2018.



situation began to change, the necessary changes to the regulations were introduced, and the motherhood of women during military service and childcare were taken into account. Women were granted the right to one year of maternity leave if they became pregnant while performing their candidate service. The rights of professional soldiers have been equalized regarding the exercise of parental duties – the right to sick leave and occasional leaves for childcare, and now also parental and childcare leave. Additionally, fathers are entitled to the two-week paternity leave.

Due to the increasing gender diversity of the military, there has also been an increase in marriages in which both spouses perform professional military service. The issue of appointing married soldiers to service positions in the same or a nearby garrison [14] was regulated, as far as possible. In connection with the above, regulations were also introduced regarding the rights to accommodation and housing benefits, and the issue of rehousing marriages of professional soldiers after divorce was also discussed [2, p. 46].

The provisions on the uniforms of professional soldiers allow for exemption from the obligation to wear uniforms and military badges for women-soldiers during pregnancy [15]. In turn, the *General Regulations*<sup>2</sup> contain provisions on mobbing [16]. If the soldier decides that he/she has been mobbed, he/she has the right to submit a written complaint to the supervisor (point 32). Moreover, cases when it is possible for a soldier to skip the chain of command (point 111) were identified. The document also includes points specifying the required external appearance of soldiers (both in relation to women and men – point 96) and the prohibition of displaying sexual behavior (point 34).

Currently, access to all positions is equal, and the only restrictions result from the protection of motherhood. *A professional soldier – a woman who is pregnant or breastfeeding a child is not entrusted with the performance of official tasks, which are particularly burdensome or harmful to the health of women, as specified in the regulations issued based on Art. 176 of the Labor Code*<sup>3</sup>.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is impossible to discuss all the initiatives and activities carried out by the Council, but there is no doubt that its existence is justified. The most important factors determining the establishment and activity of the Council include Poland's accession to NATO and the adoption of Resolution 1325. The Council has helped to solve many issues on many occasions, it was a mediator and representative of the voice of female soldiers both at home and internationally. Currently, work is still underway on the implementation of Resolution 1325, and the main area of focus is the development of the National Action Plan, which was signed in October 2018. After 17 years, for the first time since the signing of Resolution 1325, an official action plan for 2018-2021 was drawn up. It aims to increase the participation and role of women in the security sector, especially in combat, peacekeeping, and observation missions as well as taking diplomatic and decision-making positions. What is more, it aims at

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<sup>2</sup> The General Regulations of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland (the last version from 2014) is a set of provisions, orders, and prohibitions regulating the internal activities of the Polish Armed Forces, including in particular the daily functioning of military units and institutions and the activities of soldiers while performing official duties. The Regulations specify the provisions contained in higher level acts.

<sup>3</sup> The Labor Code is reflected in Decision No. 360/MON of the Minister of National Defense of December 3, 2013 on the job description sheet.



developing better procedures for dealing with cases of violence in a gender-differentiated environment and support victims of armed conflict, where women and children suffer most [17].

Currently, the index of the number of female soldiers serving in the Armed Forces is the fastest growing among NATO countries. Despite this, it is necessary to continue working on changing the organizational culture of the military and increasing gender awareness. That will help to gradually eradicate stereotypes and counteract discrimination and sexual harassment. It will also have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the operations and missions. Thorough education and awareness-raising that influence the shaping of attitudes and behavior are a long-term investment, the benefits of which will not be visible immediately but will be felt by future generations.

### **Acknowledgement**

The article was written as part of the research project “Determinants of the military service of women” as part of scientific and research work financed by funds for young scientists. It is a post-conference publication “Dilemmas of modern security”, Wojanów 2019.

### **Conflict of interests**

The author declared no conflict of interests.

### **Author contributions**

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

### **Ethical statement**

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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## Biographical note

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## 20 lat funkcjonowania Rady do Spraw Kobiet w resorcie obrony narodowej w latach 1999-2019

### STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł podsumowuje 20 lat funkcjonowania Rady ds. Kobiet w resorcie obrony narodowej. Autor przybliży podstawy funkcjonowania tego organu, jego zadania oraz kompetencje. Co więcej, dokonuje prezentacji kolejnych żołnierzy, pełniących funkcję

przewodniczącej w poszczególnych latach działania Rady. W publikacji dokonano również przybliżenia najważniejszych inicjatyw i działań, w które angażowała się Rada na przestrzeni ostatnich dwóch dekad.

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### How to cite this paper

Szkudlarek I. *Twenty years of functioning of the Women's Affairs Council in the Ministry of National Defense in the years 1999-2019*. Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces. 2021;53;2(200):402-12.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.9799>



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