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Intervenção da Ministra da Defesa Nacional, Helena Carreiras, por ocasião da abertura do 5th Erasmus Gender Seminar “Gender perspectives in higher education”.

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It is with great pleasure that I participate in the opening of this 5th Erasmus Gender Seminar, organized by the Portuguese Military Academy under the umbrella of the European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers, also known as Military Erasmus.

Allow me to begin by congratulating Austria for starting this initiative with the organization of the first Gender Seminar in 2018 as well as all European Union Member States that belong to the implementation group that has lead the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the Basic Officer Education Institutions of the European Union.

The motto for this important work can be found in the Women Peace and Security Agenda, which has provided us the tools to transform peacebuilding and achieve sustainable peace, by bringing women into these processes. However, looking at the achievements so far, we need to acknowledge that there is still a lot of work ahead.

In particular, diffusion of good practices is still clearly insufficient. Cross-national imitation and learning can help to build up a critical mass of proponents, increase acceptance in more countries, and thus pave the way for a more effective implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

The Military Gender Studies Project, under the Erasmus+ Programme, clearly represents an excellent example of diffusion of good practices. Led by Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, and Romania, this project aims to develop a Military Gender Studies handbook, that will set the foundations for the integration of Military Gender Studies into the curriculum of the military academies of all European Union member states.

Allow me to address the reasons why I consider important to integrate a gender perspective in these syllabuses.

War and gender have always been interlinked. Culture has created different gender roles, and war, despite an increasing number of women in the

military, is still seen as a masculine activity, where most of the soldiers are still male. This warrants the question of whether education and training in Military Higher Studies Institutions continue to privilege the creation of a masculine soldier. 🚀

Recent research conducted in several European countries has found important results on this topic. On the one hand, the research has shown consistent effects of masculinity in military organisations, which is manifested by the asymmetrical percentages of male versus female personnel. On the other hand, basic military training is often described as a process where the military indoctrinates masculinity norms that both praise masculine characteristics and diminishes femininity.

Considering the complex international scenario we are living in, with new challenges to our security posed by growing geopolitical competition, by advances in warfare technology and hybrid threats, and by threats posed by climate change, one could argue that the preparation of our military must increasingly combine training for symmetric and asymmetric warfare,

as well as training for building peace, as different expressions of the social realities that we have to deal with.

In this context, soldiers need to do more than just use force on behalf of the state.. They also need to build trust, working side by side with societies and partners of distinct organisational backgrounds. They need to be able to address the root causes of war and create more favourable conditions for long-term peace.

Thus, combining bravery and strength with empathy and patience – two characteristics that are often feminized – can, in fact, become a force multiplier for good.

Moreover, recruitment of women is strategically important with respect to increasing the necessary military capacity to manage defence and security commitments. Hence, if we need to recruit more women, we need them to feel more welcomed, accepted and that they belong. But we cannot just

excessively focus on numbers. The basic formula “add women and stir” is simply not enough to challenge structural inequality and foster real change.

In this regard, it is important to investigate to what extent young cadets, male and female, adapt (or not) to the military culture and to its predominant masculine environment, what is the level of peer acceptance amongst cadets, and what happens when women take over leadership positions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As mentioned, the current strategic environment has evolved into a highly complex, hybrid and dynamic system. Understanding the roles of state and nonstate actors in this context, their relationships and their interdependencies is key to assess their potential impact on our security and to effectively plan and execute our operations.

Considering the highly gendered nature of war and its inter-relation with the human dimension, we require a more in-depth understanding of how women, men, girls and boys can differently influence and be impacted by threats due to their gender.

We know that our adversaries are operationalizing gender perspective in their hybrid tactics, such as cyber activities and disinformation campaigns. But we also know that many terrorist groups are using gender and gender stereotypes as an asset to enhance their mission effectiveness. We can only out-think and out-fight potential adversaries or threats if we equally integrate gender perspective in all our activities and tasks, from planning to execution.

That is why it is so important to start this process here, at the Military Academy. This is where future leaders are taught and made aware of the challenges of the present, while taking with them a clear vision for the future. And for the reasons I have highlighted before, they will only be successful leaders if they are both inclusive and effective. In order for that

to happen, they need to understand the importance of integrating gender perspective into their daily practices.

This brings me back to the beginning of my intervention, and to the importance of mainstreaming gender perspective in Basic Officer Education Institutions of the European Union. We cannot expect to have much-needed institutional change with a “quick fix” gender training program or with a gender training program which solely focuses on women.

Within the Portuguese National Defence, we have been committed to this agenda, and the Defence Action Plan for Equality 2022-2025 has established several actions in this regard, namely:

- To include a gender perspective in the curricula of all armed forces courses/trainings;
- To develop and implement a Gender Trainer of Trainers Course, allowing for gender trainers across the armed forces;
- To include a Gender Seminar in the Flag Officers Course, in order to raise awareness among the senior leadership of the armed forces;

- And to provide gender training to teachers and non-teaching personnel of our military schools.

Our goal is that, by 2025, we will have integrated a gender perspective in all courses, which means that soldiers will be trained in gender from the moment they join the armed forces as well as throughout every step of their military careers. This will contribute to a better understanding and, in the long term, to a cultural change.

I wish you a fruitful day of work, certain that it will inspire many others to join this important path.

Thank you.