

## Slovenian police celebrate 40 years of systematic employment of women

The Slovenian police are celebrating forty years of systematically employing women as police officers. To commemorate this anniversary, a photography exhibition entitled "Women Police Officers through Time" opened on the International Women's Day on 8 March.



Director General of the Police **Stanislav Veniger** congratulated women colleagues on their day and said: "You have been challenging stereotypes and building a better public image of the police for forty years. Time and time again you have proved your dedication, professionalism, knowledge and experience. Throughout history you have convincingly shown how versatile and irreplaceable you are." He added that every year the International Women's Day serves to remind us that social, economic and political rights of women did not just

happen. "It gives us an opportunity to assess the situation and reaffirm our dedication to the improvement of the status of women, where equal opportunities have not yet been recognised as a basic value. Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right; its implementation is of essential importance for the progress of human society. It should become so self-evident as to render any mention of it redundant."



The assembled guests were addressed by Human Rights Ombudsman **Vlasta Nussdorfer** and Deputy Director General of the Police **Tatjana Bobnar**, who underlined that Slovenian police officers of both genders carry out their everyday tasks of providing security to all Slovenian citizens very well and very effectively and that the percentage of women within the police is growing. As the number of women police officers is increasing, the attitude towards them has improved. According to Bobnar, Slovenian women police officers consider gender relations in the police as good. They do not have any problems in relations with their superior officers and do

not encounter double standards. Of course, all is not ideal and it is our job to create a positive working environment for all employees. "In the police force, which has been increasingly opening up to women, one of the first appropriate further steps would be to encourage trust in organisational and operational abilities of women officers and thus a higher share of senior positions being occupied by women."



A short, yet lovely ceremony was attended by a number of **women police officers from different units** in their working uniforms. They introduced themselves briefly on stage: a police pilot, a bicycle police officer, a motorcycle police officer, a border police officer, a security police officer, a scene of crime officer, a negotiator, a mounted police officer, a special police officer, a specialised police unit officer, a community policing officer ... Visitors had an opportunity to see how diverse police work is and how women successfully take part in all the different areas of policing.



Also invited were retired women police officers. **Mihaela Brezovnik, Irena Fekonja and Marija**

**Skubic** as first women officers were breaking new ground in policing. They talked to **Martina Stergar**, the coordinator for equal opportunities in the police, and shared with the audience their experiences and impressions as women police officers. They said that although they have good memories of their working years, the beginnings of women employment in the police were not easy. In those times the traditional role of women in society was still firmly rooted and was anything but an armed and uniformed figure of authority.



After the ceremony all ladies were given red carnations.

The first woman police officer, not only in Slovenia but on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, joined the Slovenian police as early as in 1936, which is 77 years ago! Danica Lovrečič Melihar even headed the Ljubljana police directorate for some time. As in those times women within the police were mostly secretaries this was quite an achievement.

However, systematic employment of women in uniformed posts began in 1973, when the Secretariat of the Interior of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia published the first ad for women police officers to work at police stations. At the end of 1960s and beginning of 1970s there was a shortage of police officers in the Slovenian police, which gave rise to calls for allowing women to join the uniformed police. Thus, six women were accepted as intern police officers in 1973.

**Photography exhibition of Slovenian women police officers at work (1973-2013)**



The Police Academy of the Slovenian police hosts an exhibition of photographs of women police officers at work.

## Address of Deputy Director General of the Slovenian Police:

"Wherever you go, there is talk about all sorts of equality, also gender equality. Women deserve a place in the economy and politics and are allowed to vote and wear trousers. It is desirable that we are good drivers and can open the car bonnet. It sounds good. We also have our own day – 8 March. It is the day when economic, political and social equality and achievements of women are celebrated. The initiative for such a holiday was given by German feminist Clara Zetkin, who had been fighting for rights and equality of women for many years.

It is a general impression that the international women's day has been losing its significance lately. There are many who question its meaning. It seems that women long ago achieved what they had been fighting for: equal status in society. How about in practice, what is it like in everyday life? Equality before the law, regardless of one's gender and other personal circumstances, is one of the fundamental human rights and basic principles of modern democracies. With the adoption of the Equal Opportunities for Men and Women Act in 2002 Slovenia joined other countries that legislatively regulate gender equality. On the basis of this Act the Ministry of the Interior and the Police appointed an equal opportunities coordinator and in 2009, on my initiative, a consulting body for equal opportunities of men and women in the police was set up, where all police directorates are represented. Their tasks are to monitor the situation as regards unbalanced status of both genders, raise awareness among the employees and strive for equal opportunities of women and men in the police.

The proportion of women within the Slovenian police has been growing every year. Women police officers are present in all the areas of policing. The National Forensic Laboratory and Criminal Police Directorate are the units where the share of women employees is the highest.

When he was preparing his Master's thesis entitled (Un)equal Status of Women in the Slovenian Police, colleague Tomaž Pavček did a survey of 491 women officers of the Slovenian police. In the survey women officers said that gender relations within the police were good and that the attitude towards

them had improved thanks to the increased number of women officers. Women police officers did not have problems in relations with their superiors and as a rule did not face double standards.

Of course, all is not ideal. In the police force, which has been increasingly opening up to women, one of the first appropriate further steps would be to encourage trust in organisational and operational abilities of women officers and thus a higher share of senior positions being occupied by women.

There are 2,041 women employed in the Slovenian police, which represents 24.26 % of all employees. 1,122 are authorised officer, i.e. police officers and 919 technical staff.

The majority of the 1,122 authorised officers work at police stations at the local level, holding positions such as commander (1), assistant commander (12), community policing officer (18), criminal police officer (32), other police officer positions (537) and police officer – border guard (171).

At the regional level, at police directorates, there are 131 women, most of them in criminal police divisions (87) and in operation and communication centres (18).

At the General Police Directorate, i.e. at the national level, there are 220 women, most of them at the Criminal Police Directorate (82), National Forensic Laboratory (36), Police Academy (24) and Security and Protection Centre (18).

Among technical staff positions, women mostly occupy positions of typists and secretaries (539), positions connected to material maintenance (241) and positions in connection to financial operations (71).

Let me underline that Slovenian police officers of both genders are very successful in performing their duties and take good care of the safety of all Slovenian residents. Successful work requires certain prerequisites; among them are definitely good interpersonal relations, comradeship, solidarity and general culture. We need to be aware that a desired culture cannot be established by pushing a button; it is created gradually, day by day, through behaviour of each and every one of us. This is why

the work of the Ethics and Integrity Committee is so important, as it devotes a lot of attention to this topic.

I have been working for the Police for twenty years. During this time I have been a criminal police officer at the Ljubljana Police Directorate, Assistant Director of the Police Directorate, Assistant Director of the Slovenian Criminal Police and Deputy Director General of the Police. At the same time I have founded a family and completed a Master's degree. I am grateful for all the opportunities I have been given. Women in the police can succeed and be equally good at the job and we here are proof of that.

Four decades ago, dear colleagues, you were breaking new ground and we thank you for it. The Slovenian police force is an open institution able to find qualities rather than weaknesses in individuals. Self-imposed restrictions have no place in our organisation, the time we are living in requires joining forces and we are good at that.

Let me conclude by congratulating all women police officers and other women in the Slovenian police and thanking them for their work.



Tatjana Bobnar, Deputy Director General of the Police

I would like to extend my congratulations to all colleagues from European police forces. The newspaper *The Economist* once said: *"Forget China, India and the internet: economic growth is driven by women."* There is no arguing with that!"







Slovenske miličnice so se leta 1975 udeležile vojaške parade v Beogradu



## **Representative of Police Officers' Trade Union on women in the police:**

"Women in the police – an added value

Women's emancipation is a result of decades of efforts to make the world a fairer place for women. It is thanks to the tenacity of this movement that women have an equal status in society today. But even though equality brought a lot of good, it has not made life so much easier for women. While retaining almost all traditional roles, women were given a number of new ones.

First uniformed female officers were hired by the US police in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were predominantly responsible for female convicts. In Europe, Germany was the first country to hire women police officers, in the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays, they have become commonplace in a number of countries and hundreds of articles have been devoted to them.

Immediately after WWII, the national police in Slovenia hired some women. When the National Police Act had been adopted in late 1946, this became impossible as only men could become police officers. The initiative to again allow women officers was realised on 13 May 1973, when sports games of Yugoslav law enforcement took place in Tacen, Ljubljana, and the first six female police officers took part. The admission conditions for women were similar than for men. There was a lot of interest and in the same year more women started working in the field. After completing the police cadet school, women officers were mostly tasked with assignments laced with social work or were given the same jobs as their male colleagues. The public soon got accustomed to them. When Slovenia gained independence in 1991, there were 156 women employed with the Slovenian police.

### **Emotional intelligence**

In emotional intelligence women are not stronger than men. Nor are they weaker from them. Each of us is different in these skills. Some have a good capacity for empathy yet are unable to control their own sadness, while others are well aware of every tiny change in their mood yet are socially very clumsy. It is true that in general men and women each have their own set of strong and weak characteristics. In recent years criteria and requirements

for professionals have changed a lot globally. More attention is devoted to the personality as a whole rather than just grades or the "success balance sheet". In a team emotional intelligence is very important for rapport and positive conflict solving.

Where are we today?

Today the number of women police officers is very unevenly distributed both by organisational levels and by police directorates and stations. Otherwise, female officers are present at all areas of policing. The majority of them decided to become police officers because they like the job and like helping people. As a survey on women in the police showed, for the most part they are happy with their job and proud of it. They want to be equal to their partners and do not agree with the traditional division of work, which puts women "between four walls". Neither do they agree with the claim that a husband's job is to earn money and a wife's job is to take care of the home and family. A lot of female police officers say that they have support of their partners and families.

The percentage of women in the police has been growing steadily. They work in all the areas of policing. Certain types of work suit women better than men and vice versa, since there are and always will be differences between men and women. Also in the police. But without these differences life would be too simple and boring."



Monika Golob, Public Relations Representative of Police Officers' Trade Union

Regardless of whether police officers are men or women, there is no denying that their work is extremely stressful. As part of their job they have to deal with different incidents, including fatal accidents, murders, suicides, domestic violence, breaking bad news, etc. These are demanding and emotionally and psychologically draining assignments, which police officers nevertheless have to do with professional detachment, while keeping the presence of mind and staying strong so that they can help others. As a result they need help themselves, therefore the Slovenian police – following some successful examples of police forces from other countries – in 2009 started the project of 24-hour emergency psychological assistance to police officers and set up a system of peer counsellors and hiring psychologists at police directorates.

### **Psychologist at the Special Unit of the Slovenian police, on the importance of psychological assistance and support to police officers:**

“Police employees are regularly exposed to stressful situations, which threaten our physical and psychological wellbeing. Crisis and traumatic events tend to defeat individuals’ normally effective way of coping with stress. Psychologists employed with the Slovenian police and Ministry of the Interior provide round-the-clock emergency psychological assistance to address emotional distress of police officers at traumatic events. Assistance is provided immediately at a location closest to the crisis event where minimum requirements for giving assistance are provided. It is provided in a form of individual or guided group therapy or over the telephone.

A network of peer counsellors has also been established providing peer psychological support, under expert guidance of psychologists, to police employees. Peer counsellors are police officers who are well liked and respected in their environment, have at least six years of operational experience, are communicative, empathic, keen to provide support to fellow officers and resourceful. They have encountered various traumatic events at work and privately and have successfully overcome them. Police counsellors with their empathic attitude provide their colleagues with similar problems with support and assistance in solving problems and crises.

Police officers most frequently seek help from psychologists and peer counsellors in emotional distress due to witnessing stressful events in the course of their work, when their lives or lives of colleagues are in danger, when witnessing a suicide or

suicide attempt, when dealing with traffic accidents resulting in severe or fatal injuries or criminal offences involving children or people close to police officers. They often seek assistance in case of inappropriate workplace relations, or personal problems and difficulties in partnership and family relations, which are not directly linked to police work.”



Elizabeta Vovko,  
Senior Police Inspector – psychologist  
at Special Unit of the Slovenian Police



The logo of psychological assistance and support in the Slovenian police depicts hands of psychologists, peer counsellors and police officers, which are linked, support and help each other in relieving emotional distress at traumatic events, stress, critical situations and emotional and interpersonal difficulties.

**Seeking help is a sign of strength.**



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