

„Education is a huge responsibility." "It gives me satisfaction the success of young people, they are better than us, more adaptable, more open-minded, more demanding and more dreamy!"

Interview with the Assoc. Prof. Dr. Siyana Lyutskanova, Head of the National Security Department at the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy



Could you introduce yourself and tell a little more about your position and responsibilities at the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy?

My name is Siyana Lyutskanova and I am Associate Professor at the National Security Department at the N.Y. Vaptsarov Naval Academy in Varna. I have been the head of the department since 2023. I have passed the entire academic path from a PhD student, an assistant, a chief assistant, associate professor to a habilitated lecturer at the military department of the school and at the National Security Department. I am in a leadership position, in the spirit and traditions of the academic environment, I am "first among equals". The position of head of the department is elective, that is, my colleagues have trusted me, this is both a great recognition and responsibility. My work involves the organization and coordination of both the administrative and educational, teaching, and scientific activities of the department. I communicate and coordinate the activities of the department with the management of the Faculty of Navigation and with the management of the academy, as well as with my colleagues from other departments, with whom we work and join efforts on a daily basis to give the most of ourselves to our learners. Also, a very important part of my responsibilities are the relations and contacts with the "users" of our staff in the country and abroad. We organize public lectures, discussions, and meetings with them, visit them to give them the opportunity to get

to know each other. This is very important because in the dynamic and complex environment in which we live and work, education is a "shared responsibility" between us, university lecturers and employers. We listen to their needs and requirements and strive to adequately prepare our students for an accessible and easy career start. On the other hand, we also listen to the wishes of students because they are so smart and capable that they often surprise us with reasonable and efficient decisions about their preparation.

What motivated you to focus on a profession related to the sea and the training of maritime staff?

I have been working in the field of security and defense since 2006, and adding my education in this field, even longer... I worked in the Department of Defense in expert positions. I owe my interest and professional development in the field of maritime policy and military-political aspects of maritime security to my supervisor, Fleet Admiral Professor Doctor of Military Sciences Boyan Mednikarov. In fact, no matter how many titles he has in front of his name for me is my teacher, I am proud to be part of his school. I am motivated by students; education is a huge responsibility. Having a role and a place in their lives to be successful in their professions is a huge satisfaction. And thirdly, the sea and my scientific interests in the field of its security and safety. The sea is not of Varna and Burgas, but a national treasure and responsibility. Europe is a maritime continent, and we are part of the European maritime space with many challenges but also many opportunities for integrated, sustainable blue development.

How is success achieved? Have you experienced any difficulties in your career and what? What helped you move forward?

I still don't feel comfortable enough to talk about success, I wish it one day. However, I will answer you about the difficulties. Looking back, it's easy to say that difficulties are part of the path and success. When you meet them and you have to overcome them, the feelings are mixed. Of course I have met, I meet them now as well. First of all, the love of work helps me, it does not allow me to give up. This is my profession, I'm prepared for it, who else to deal with. I am not complaining, I go through them quietly, with a lot of patience, hard work, perseverance, and vision. I look for like-minded people, I consult with my teachers, I admit my inexperience and mistakes and correct myself. I try not to stop learning, to grow personally and socially, to mature.. The success of young people brings me satisfaction, they are better than us, more adaptable, more open-minded, more demanding and more dreamy! We need to work towards a better future and to think ahead. We are privileged generations, free to make our choices, to make independent decisions about our lives and to realize ourselves here, or abroad... People of the world!

Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy is an example of an institution that promotes gender equality in sectors related to the sea, developing and adopting a gender equality plan, as well as promoting the admission of female cadets. As Head of Department at the Naval Academy, could you share examples from your career related to promoting the successful realization of young women in a sector(s) that are dominated mainly by men?

Isn't it time to say "we" dominated only by men? Many of the profiles of modern professions have changed, the sea and the military are no exception. Automation, digitalization, communication and information commitment, artificial intelligence and other processes require highly qualified staff with a lot of knowledge and skills in specific technological spheres. How do we exclude half the population from this? This is not adequate. Many activities have specialized and integrated, the interaction in work processes increased, which requires a number of so-called "soft skills" such as communication, leadership qualities, work in an intercultural environment, teamwork and many others.

The conditions in which the professions are exercised are also changing. For example, in shipping, many activities are moved from the sea to the shore, the duration of contracts has decreased, staff are less and less willing to spend their entire career from its beginning to retirement at sea. This also has an impact on the dynamics of the maritime labor market.

I will refrain from giving specific examples, because I will certainly miss someone, there are so many already. Every day I communicate and work with great professionals- and ladies and gentlemen, I do not share them... Indeed, the results of these efforts are there, personal and professional qualities, mental and physical training have come to the fore. We do not select by gender either our students or the teaching and management staff. Of course, there is still a way to go, after all, the equal career access of women in these professional fields has not been so long. I am far from saying that there are no problems. There are, there are not a few considerations yet for women. But let's think- against upbringing, intelligent behavior, high education and overall professional radiance, prejudices have no chance.

The WINBLUE project aims to increase the number of women in decision-making positions related to the blue economy sectors. Do you think that projects such as WINBLUE and She4Sea can help more young women to orient themselves towards occupations related to the sea?

Yes, from personal experience I can confirm it because I have had the privilege of being part of several such projects. I congratulate you on the WINBLUE and She4Sea projects, thank you for the invitation. First of all, our projects provide an opportunity for many professional contacts, to unite the academic and scientific resources of many experts in innovative and useful directions, for the benefit of business and state and international institutions. Secondly, they have the task of informing and putting on the agenda current problems, outlining trends and giving guidance. Very often these projects have as product textbooks, manuals, we engage our learners in them, encourage them to be always informed and up to date with the latest directions of our work. I am convinced that the personal example and the academic foundation on which we stand in this kind of projects are the key to achieving the goal - equal and equitable access to all levels of career development in the maritime professions.