



ROMANIA AND THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES: 20 YEARS IN NATO

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The dissolution of the USSR led to a temporary detente in Central and Eastern Europe, at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. In the absence of a dominant power in the region, security and stability in this area seemed to have only one truly viable solution, namely integration into the Euro-Atlantic security system and a more active and sustained presence of the EU and NATO in the region.

The initiation of NATO's collaboration process with the European democracies resulting from the end of the Cold War was achieved at the inaugural meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), on 20 December 1991, which was attended by foreign ministers from NATO and six countries from Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania. From that moment on, Romania has proven over time that it is a country with a European vocation. It has embraced and adopted Euro-Atlantic principles, norms and values, opting for integration into NATO and the EU – international political-economic and security entities capable of promoting and defending the national interests of member states.

At the Brussels reunion in 1994, the Alliance declared itself open to other European states capable of promoting the principles of the Treaty of 4 April 1949 and contributing to security in the North Atlantic area. After the creation of the Partnership for Peace – PfP, on 1 January 1994, Romania was the first state to join the partnership, committing itself to fulfilling the established objectives.

Our country has quickly transformed into a pole of stability in Southeast Europe and has undergone political and military system reform, becoming not only a consumer but also a provider of security. The actions undertaken to fulfil the conditions for NATO membership have targeted all areas of social life: political, military, legal, economic etc.

The reform in the military field had as its main objectives the reconsideration of doctrines, military strategies, organisation, equipment and training of the armed forces to fulfil the political-military objective stated in the Constitution of Romania, under the conditions of integration into European and Euro-Atlantic security structures, and participation in collective defence – the declared purpose of the North Atlantic Alliance. Also, Romania has committed to achieving the conditions of interoperability with NATO structures and participating in the fundamental tasks assumed at the level of the Alliance: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and security through cooperation. Practically, before becoming a *de jure* member of NATO, Romania began to behave like a *de facto* ally, participating

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in international joint peacekeeping and peace enforcing missions, becoming part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led by the USA, which got involved in the War in Afghanistan starting in 2001. Also, before the formal moment of accession, in 2003, Romania began its military presence in Iraq, where it was part of the Multinational Force also led by the United States. The results obtained made that, at the Prague Summit – 2002, our country received the invitation to join the North Atlantic Alliance. Romania's membership in the Euro-Atlantic security umbrella became a reality on 29 March 2004, by depositing the instruments of ratification with the depositary of the North Atlantic Treaty – the Government of the United States –, and on 2 April 2004, the ceremony of hoisting Romania's flag at NATO headquarters took place, along with those of six other states from the Eastern Europe region.

In the years that followed and under the decisions and documents adopted in Prague, Romania supported and participated substantially in the process of adapting the North Atlantic Alliance to the new security risks, to the extent of its potential and interests in the Euro-Atlantic context. In this regard, special attention was paid to identifying concrete ways of participating in the new capabilities and forces of the Alliance, in the process of developing the capabilities to combat terrorism and consolidating transatlantic cooperation. As a NATO member, our country has joined the global response to new threats and challenges and has proven this political option by continuing to participate in operations within the missions in the ex-Yugoslav space (SFOR, KFOR), within ISAF, in Operation “Enduring Freedom” and in the missions in Iraq.

NATO membership and diversification of the contribution to the security of the transatlantic area represented a catalyst for accelerating the internal processes of restructuring and modernising the Romanian Armed Forces, which targeted several essential areas, such as: the legislative framework, standardisation, interoperability, education and training, acquisition of new equipment and modernisation of the existing one, restructuring and reorganisation of the leadership system at the strategic and operational level, reorganisation of the unified logistics system, implementation of volunteer-based service etc. Optimising defence capabilities involved a sustained effort to review the force structure to generate capabilities with a high degree of sustainability, flexible, robust, mobile, interoperable and deployable, technologically superior and with self-sustainability capacity in theatres of operations, capable of participating in the entire range of NATO, EU, UN or OSCE-led international missions.

Practically, respecting the commitments assumed as a NATO member state meant, among other things: achieving the military capabilities committed in the allied force planning process, by implementing the Force Goals (FGs), ensuring, preparing and making available to NATO the forces established by national decision for the NATO Response Force (NRF), achieving the necessary capabilities, according to the Prague Capabilities Commitments (PCC), fulfilling

financial obligations for the payment of national contributions to the military budget, including the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP), filling the positions allocated to Romania at NATO commands and staffs, ensuring Headquarters representation within the Permanent Delegation of Romania to NATO and at the Military Representations in Brussels, SHAPE and Norfolk.

A relevant moment in the evolution of Romania and the Romanian Armed Forces is the year 2007, which marked the accession to the European Union, an event with essential strategic significance for the development of Romanian society, as a whole. From the perspective of the military body, the relevance of Romania's integration into the EU was even greater in the conditions of the transformation process that the Union itself was going through, by developing its own security and defence dimension. One of the priorities undertaken at the level of the Ministry of National Defence was the involvement in this process both from the perspective of connecting to the institutional logic of the EU and on the practical dimension of the process of developing European defence capabilities and participation within the operations carried out by the EU. In 2008, Romania committed to make available to NATO and the EU a unique package of forces, to increase the coherence and coordination of the military capability development processes carried out within the two organisations.

Another major event with a direct impact on the activity of the military body, especially from the perspective of the implications on the process of developing its capabilities, was hosting the NATO summit in Bucharest, in April 2008. Having a special relevance due to the importance of the decisions adopted, this event gave our country increased visibility within the Alliance, coincided with the completion of the first stage of the transformation undertaken at the level of the armed forces, of the basic restructurings and came to support the objective of developing Romania's strategic profile in NATO.

The Romanian Armed Forces Transformation Strategy's second stage was defined as the operational integration stage into NATO and the European Union and covered the period 2008-2015. The main objectives of this stage consisted in: continuing the operationalisation of the NATO and EU earmarked forces, completing the restructuring of the strategic and operational level logistics system, continuing the acquisition of new equipment, reorganising military education, developing training, linguistic skills and the communications and computer system at the level of the generation and regeneration forces etc. Concretely, within the Alliance, Romania has undertaken participation in the establishment of the strategic transport unit, in the realisation of the missile defence system, the terrestrial surveillance system, the defence system against cyber-attacks and ensuring the informational superiority of the Alliance. It also continued to participate in the missions and activities of the European Union, adopting measures to support crisis management operations, to increase



the contribution to the processes of developing military capabilities, by involving in the programs and initiatives of the European Defence Agency.

The stage of full NATO and the European Union integration (2016-2025) presupposes the fulfilment of the long-term objectives of the transformation process: focusing efforts and financial and human resources to achieve all the capabilities provided in the Force Goals and fulfilling the responsibilities within NATO and the European Union; continuing the modernisation of procurement with new equipment and achieving full interoperability and interchangeability with the armed forces of NATO and EU member states; creating the conditions for the accommodation of big units and units in barracks with complete facilities for social assistance, military equipment and training; focusing the systemic and structural evaluation activities on the field of the procurement and modernisation process with technique and equipment. This stage currently overlaps with the “Army 2040” Programme, oriented towards the following main directions: budgeting the army’s personnel needs, reconfiguring the equipping programs and efforts to replenish stocks, modernising the defence industry, as well as measures for better retention of qualified military personnel. The program thus provides the necessary directions for a new generation of military leaders, urging conceptual flexibility and action efficiency in going through the stages of the transformation process of the Romanian Armed Forces until 2040, for the implementation of a flexible, multi-domain force structure, with a wide spectrum of technologically advanced capabilities, based on knowledge, resilience, multispectral camouflage, deception, centred on the multi-specialised fighter, equipped with means to ensure survival in the tactical field, extensive situational awareness and increased firepower.

As for NATO, the last 20 years have had the gift of highlighting the fact that it is an alliance itself in a constant process of modernisation and adaptation to new security challenges both at the regional and global levels.

After the events in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014), NATO has made efforts to consolidate, on the one hand, its eastern flank and to respond, on the other hand, to the new configuration of threats, transposed into the hybrid sphere. These developments were addressed by launching the Readiness Action Plan at the Wales Summit in 2014, under which the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) was created to strengthen response capabilities on the eastern flank. Also, in Warsaw, in 2016, it was decided to establish the enhanced Forward Presence mechanisms (for Poland and the three Baltic countries) and tailored Forward Presence (for NATO member states in the Black Sea area), in order to discourage any potential aggressive actions against allies and ensure the best and fastest possible protection of them, if necessary.

Romania has been an actively committed party and a strong supporter of these processes. In 2014, our country received the role of lead nation within the NATO-Ukraine Trust Fund on Cyber Defence. A year later, against the backdrop

of the crisis in Ukraine, in order to ensure and consolidate its own security and to contribute to the allied one, Romania committed to gradually reach the threshold of 2% of GDP, allocated to defence, starting from an allocation of 1.4%. Of this percentage, at least 20% targets, annually, the procurement of military systems and equipment. In 2015, the Multinational Division South-East (HQ MND-SE) was established in Bucharest, with personnel from the United States of America, Germany, Bulgaria, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal or Poland, in addition to the Romanian one, and which has as its main mission the coordination of NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) from Bulgaria and Romania and the Multinational Brigade South-East, from Craiova (MN BDE SE). The command of the Multinational Brigade South-East has the mission to ensure the command and control of a NATO Article 5 – Collective Defence operation, thus contributing to strengthening the South-Eastern flank of the Alliance, to the security of the territory and the population of the member states. NATO Force Integration Unit is a multinational NATO structure on Romanian territory. It was established in 2015 as a response from NATO to changes in the security environment and threats from the east and south. The mission of this command is to coordinate the rapid deployment of NATO forces with a very high level of reaction located on Romanian territory. Also, in 2020, the Multinational Corps Command South-East (HQ MNC-SE) was established in Sibiu, also as part of NATO’s force structure, meant to strengthen the security architecture in the region by ensuring operational coherence between national and allied defence plans.

In turn, the Romanian Armed Forces contribute, since 2017, with an anti-aircraft defence subunit to the NATO US-led Battle Group in Poland, which has the mission of ensuring the Enhanced Forward Presence, on a rotation basis, in the northeast of the Alliance to discourage any potential aggression, in accordance with the missions adopted at NATO’s Warsaw Summit in 2016. Also, a detachment of the Romanian Air Forces participated in 2023 in the Enhanced Air Policing Mission (eAP) in the Baltic States, under NATO command. The first such mission was carried out in 2007, to ensure the security of the airspace of the Baltic States.

Starting with 24 February 2022, the day Russia invaded Ukraine, affecting the rules-based international order, the global and especially the regional security environment underwent dramatic changes. The invasion mobilised international efforts to coordinate support for Ukraine, both at the national level and at the level of NATO member states. The support consisted in humanitarian, economic and military aid.

In this context, NATO has shifted from reassurance measures to deterrence and defence measures, including through the deployment of response forces, in order to consolidate its posture and presence on the Eastern flank. Given the geographical location of Ukraine, the Wider Black Sea Area has gained even greater importance than before the invasion, maritime security being



mentioned in NATO's new Strategic Concept adopted in Madrid, in June 2022, as a major element of peace and prosperity. Also, the Alliance decided to establish four new battle groups against threats from Russia and Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. Battle groups have been established since 2017 in the three Baltic States and Poland, in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea, in 2014. Moreover, it was decided that these battle groups could be extended from battalion size to brigade size. But, perhaps the most important aspect was the expansion of the Alliance, through the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO.

Romania's objective, in this context, was aimed at identifying medium and long-term adaptation options for the defence and deterrence posture, in parallel with ensuring participation in the efforts to develop the defence capacity of the regional partners most vulnerable to Russia's aggressive actions (Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia).

In January 2022, the application of Enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) was obtained, including in the Black Sea region, particularly in Romania, which led to the consolidation of allied efforts and presence in support of regional security. Also, the successive decisions adopted at allied meetings and summits in 2022, led to the following: the activation of advanced defence plans and the deployment in Romania of the High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the NATO Response Force; the establishment of the Collective Defence Battle Group in Romania, with France as the lead nation; long-term adaptation and consolidation of the collective posture with the main benchmark being the strengthening of the capacity for deterrence and collective defence in the Eastern Flank region, including the Black Sea area. In the same context, our country benefits from NATO and allied support for ensuring security in the Black Sea area, through structures belonging to member states deployed in Romania. At the Mihail Kogălniceanu Base, soldiers belonging to the 10th Mountain Division and the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions of the US Army were deployed, by rotation. Detachments from Canada, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Turkey have ensured, also on a rotation basis, the missions of Enhanced Air Policing under NATO command, by deployment on the air bases in Mihail Kogălniceanu and Borcea – Feteşti. The French Armed Forces have strengthened the forward presence of the multinational NATO battle group with the SAMP/T - MAMBA ground-to-air missile defence system, located at Capu Midia.

Another consequence of the conflict in Ukraine was the issuance by the North Atlantic Council, on 24 February 2022, of the NATO Execution Directive (NED) for authorising the activation of the five Graduated Response Plans (GRP) of the Alliance. Consequently, the commander of the Multinational Division Command South-East – HQ MND-SE ordered the relocation of a Deployable Communications and Information Module (DCIM) from Romania to support the command and link with the allied Battle Group (BG), located in Bulgaria, under its operational control.

To ensure maritime security in the Mediterranean Sea, the Aegean Sea, the Baltic Sea and the North Sea, the Romanian Armed Forces contribute to the missions of the Permanent NATO Groups with staff personnel in embarked commands.

Given the dynamics of the security environment in the Black Sea region, full of uncertainties, with complex, hybrid threats, it is evident that conceptual and tactical approaches adapted to a security ensemble subject to continuous changes and evolutions are required.

In the last twenty years, since its accession to NATO, Romania has undergone a remarkable transformation in the field of defence and security. This journey represented a significant stage in the evolution of the country and the Romanian Armed Forces, offering unique opportunities and challenges in a constantly changing international context. Since its accession to the North Atlantic Alliance, Romania has consolidated its commitment to democratic values and collective security, showing a solid spirit of partnership and cooperation with its allies. Through NATO, but also strategic partnerships, Romania has had access to resources, expertise and military interoperability, strengthening its defence capacity and actively contributing to allied operations and missions around the world. Also, Romania has invested significantly in the modernisation and professionalisation of the armed forces, adapting them to NATO standards and the requirements of a rapidly changing security environment.

However, there are still changes and objectives to be achieved. Strengthening cyber defence capacity, continuing structural reforms within the defence sector and consolidating the transatlantic partnership remain important priorities for Romania within NATO. Therefore, the transformation of the Romanian Armed Forces is a permanent process, it does not represent an end in itself, but the proper response to the evolution of the security environment, the transformation of NATO and the commitments that Romania has assumed internationally.

For Romania, the status of full NATO member represents: the guarantee of security and stability, vital for the prosperity of the Romanian people; access ensured to the decision-making process, which is important in the field of European and Euro-Atlantic security; reconfirmation of Romania as part of the family of states with a European calling; solid foundation for the relaunch and development of its own policies towards third states; undertaking of common NATO responsibilities and risks.

In conclusion, while we celebrate two decades since Romania's accession to NATO, it is important to recognise the remarkable progress made, but also to focus on future challenges and opportunities for the development and consolidation of Romania's position within the North Atlantic Alliance. Through continuous commitment and solid cooperation, Romania can play a significant role in promoting international peace and stability in the coming decades.