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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

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News in Brief

 The Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Andrei Spînu, has declared in a recent press conference that the situation of natural gas supply remains the most vulnerable, but assured that the Republic of Moldova will not run out of energy resources. He admitted that the reserves are enough for one month in summer and one week in winter. Likewise, the money provided by the EBRD is enough for the gas supply for one winter month. Andrei Spînu also communicated that the Government will launch negotiations with the Romanian Ministry of Energy regarding the procurement of natural gas from Romania the following week. The Deputy Prime Minister gave assurances regarding provision of compensations for vulnerable segments of the population during the cold period of the year. Also, Spînu announced plans to reduce gas consumption by 15%, one week after the European Union took a similar decision, against the background of the decrease in Russian supplies. The plan promised by the European Commission and approved almost unchanged by the member states focuses on replacing gas with other fuels and saving energy in all sectors.

 The Moldovan government has developed an action plan that describes the concrete measures and the terms they will be carried out in order to fulfil the new requirements of the European Commission launched when the Republic of Moldova received the status of a candidate country for EU accession. The plan aims at fulfilling all the conditions to start the accession negotiations of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union within one year. The areas covered by these conditions are: justice, combating corruption and organized crime, deoligarchization, public administration and public services reform, public finance management, strengthening the role of civil society in decision-making processes and protecting human rights. Afterwards, the actual negotiations for joining the European Union will be conducted on chapters that will de facto represent various key areas, especially the economic sector.

 The Ambassador of Romania to Chisinau, Cristian-Leon Turcanu, stated in an interview for the Radio Chisinau that Romania will not abandon the Republic of Moldova in the event of a deepening of the security crisis generated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. "We have now witnessed an escalation and expansion of this particularly aggressive, completely unjustified and illegal conflict. These scenarios were discussed and analyzed together with our partners from Chisinau. There are various measures that can be taken depending on the need, but I think that the best answer was already offered by the President of Romania on Friday [July 29] in Bucharest, after the meeting with Mrs. Maia Sandu on this subject and showed that Romania will remain close to the Republic of Moldova and will not abandon it", mentioned Cristian-Leon Turcanu. He stated that "decisions will be made depending on the developments", because the war in Ukraine generated security risks not only for Romania, but for all the neighbouring states.

Moldova, face to face with the army reform in wartime



Moldovan soldiers marching

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has changed the paradigm of the national defense approach for several neighbouring states of Ukraine, including the Republic of Moldova. A prey to political indifference and a lack of vision, the national army of the Republic of Moldova has gradually and surely degraded in the 30 years of its existence.

It all started in 1994, during the time of the Agrarians, with the introduction of an article in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova that confirmed the country's neutrality. With this excuse, none of the politicians who ran the country cared about the military sector.

However, neutrality did not have to mean

the lack of training and maintenance of the army. Examples in this sense are Switzerland, but also the newly invited members, Finland and Sweden, the latter having a recognized neutrality of about 200 years.

Yet, the narrative promoted has always been that the Republic of Moldova does not

► need an army because it has not fought anyone since the war in Transnistria and, anyway, could not face any external attack.

The Republic of Moldova needs armament first of all for the balance of forces in its own country. On 11 percent of its territory, in the separatist region of Transnistria, there is both an army of occupation - the Russian one, which numbers around 1,700 soldiers - and Transnistrian paramilitary forces with a total of 8,000 people. They are equipped with superior weaponry, while the ammunition depot in Cobasna serves as their supply base, where there are still about 20,000 tons of ammunition from Soviet times.

On the other hand, the Moldovan army only has light and poorly equipped infantry. The Republic of Moldova has no tanks, no combat aircraft, and no combat ships. In other words, the military resilience of the Republic of Moldova is extremely low in the face of any military danger. In conclusion, the Republic of Moldova has an extremely low military deterrence capacity.

The war in Ukraine has also changed the priorities in Chisinau, where, at least at the declarative level, there is talk of a minimum equipping of the army through a reform that will extend until 2030. However, the Republic of Moldova is facing some imminent dangers that may come from Russia or even from the separatist region of

Transnistria, controlled de facto from Moscow.

It is necessary for the leaders in Chisinau to consider, at least at the eleventh hour, effective and efficient measures for the minimum equipping of the National Army and the increase of defense capabilities in the event of the worst scenario - that of a military attack of the Republic of Moldova. The military crisis in the region has also brought windows of opportunity, because the authorities in Chisinau are now speaking much more openly about the need to modernize and equip the national army. Until recently, this has been a taboo topic repressively penalized by the pro-Russian political forces in Chisinau.

Madalin Necshutsu

Our approach is to modernize the army and not to increase the personnel or technical ceiling

The State Secretary of Defense, Valeriu Mija, spoke in an interview for the foreign policy newsletter about the plans of the Republic of Moldova regarding the army modernization. While for more than 30 years the military has been neglected due to lack of vision or carelessness, things are about to change in the current security context in the region. In the coming years, the Republic of Moldova will also benefit from a support of Eur 40 million from the EU to modernize in several strategic directions. We are inviting you to read more about this in the interview with Valeriu Mija:

■ Mr Mija, what is the Ministry's vision for reforming the national army? What is going to be the focus in this endeavour?



■ We have two documents guiding us. The first is the National Defense and Military Strategy from 2018 stipulating the risks, threats or

realities. Based on them, in 2020, the Military Capabilities Plan of the National Army for 2030 was developed.

■ It should be mentioned also the vision of the Minister of Defense, Anatolie Nosatii, who took office in August 2021, according to whom the national army must be a mobile, modular, flexible and functional army. In other words, to be flexible and fast, the army should perform three basic functions.

■ And what are they?

■ State defense, emergency assistance to civilian authorities in crisis management, and participating in and contributing to international peacekeeping missions.

All these objectives of the reform process outlined by Minister Nosatii are intended to develop capabilities, along modern lines, so that the army is more mobile, faster and maintains the element of survival.

We would like to replace the heavy combat equipment inherited from the Soviet times by a lighter and more mobile one, but at the same time, we want to maintain the firepower. For example, we want to change the TABs on the 8x8 platforms, which are heavy and consume a lot. We have armoured infantry vehicles on rails that are very heavy too. We want to replace them with lighter and more mobile equipment such as IVECO or Humvee.

But as I said earlier, we would like to maintain the fire element, like increasing the anti-tank capabilities. This is a defensive element and the principle of sufficient defense is maintained throughout this conception. In the security dilemma, when building the army, we should not resort to increasing the number of soldiers.

Currently we have 6,500 soldiers and we want a maximum of 6,800 and about 2,000 civilians to remain as

auxiliary personnel. We are going to modernize the army but not increase the personnel or technical ceiling.

Increased mobility

■ What does the modernization of the Soviet-style weaponry mean? What exactly will you do?

■ When it comes to modernization, we are talking about land and air transportation to raise mobility. We are also talking about the desire to have more mobile and faster logistics. We want to increase the anti-tank defensive capability. In this way we will increase the defense capacity and modernize the anti-aircraft defense.

We are talking about increasing the command-control and communications system. We want to move from analogue radio to digital systems which are more secure. In this way, we also increase cyber defense.

At the same time, we want to modernize the early warning capacity and our line of equipment such as drones, ground-based radars and optoelectronic devices that allow surveillance and detection of information in real time.

■ In which area and for which equipment will the EUR 40 million announced as aid from the EU be used? They spoke about non-lethal equipment, but is it about something else?

■ First of all I have to explain that there is equipment and weaponry. Because any gun is classified as a legal weapon. So, when we talk about lethal weaponry, it is weaponry that shoots gas, or tear gas, but which is rather used by the police. The military has conventional weapons of mass destruction, but we do not have such

weapons. There is 100 mm calibre armament and slightly lower caliber armament.

In relation to the EU, we are discussing about equipment and not armament. These things are public and transparent. Allocating these resources, the EU manages them at the capacity we asked for. The cooperation programme with the EU is called the European Peace Facility. We received EUR 7 million in 2021 which was allocated for two projects: strengthening engineering capabilities and medical capacity.

And here I stated that the Republic of Moldova could help the post-conflict operation in Ukraine with engineering troops. Part of the capabilities will be redirected in this area.

In the discussions with the EU, we referred to mobility, the modernization of some 4x4 platforms. We discussed about enhancing logistics, early warning and cyber defense. Another project will be the modernization of the communications systems. The EUR 40 million will be allocated to these six segments. We very much hope that this programme will continue because certain capabilities form part of the modernization plans for the national army by 2030. Our hope is that we will continue and will do it in stages.

European money for modernization

■ The EU assistance of EUR 40 million has sparked reactions in Tiraspol according to which a modernization of the Moldovan army would affect the security of the separatist region. What is your opinion about such statements and will you continue on the path of the proposed modernization?

■ These statements from Tiraspol is a reaction to the statements from

about two months ago by the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and British Foreign Minister Liz Truss that these countries would be prepared to provide lethal weapons according to the needs of the Republic of Moldova. That was a political signal at the time.

It is possible that Tiraspol got inflamed by the fact that the Republic of Moldova was included in the final declaration of the recent NATO Summit in Madrid followed by the announcement of the European Council that it would offer EUR 40 million for the defense of the country. We know that the annual budget of the Ministry of Defense is USD 50 million and that it is difficult currently for Moldova to increase the budget.

That is why we are turning to these bilateral and international partnerships, precisely to modernize the defense capabilities. However, we are not talking about armament and about increasing the military equipment or troop numbers. Furthermore, our plans are to replace

the heavy machinery with a light one. This is the difference.

Interoperability for external missions

■ **How are joint military exercises with Western partners going and could we also talk a little bit about interoperability with such armies as well?**

■ The joint military exercises are taking place according to our plans. They aim at interoperability and other goals. The exercises were planned several years ago and are carried out according to a predetermined schedule in order to achieve constructive goals.

We are talking here about participating in joint missions to maintain regional stability or contributing to regional security. Our servicemen are now participating in the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, but are preparing to leave soon for similar missions in Lebanon. In February next year, this contingent

will be deployed in Lebanon. For this we must have a high degree of interoperability in procedure, but also in terms of military technique and equipment. We have old equipment inherited from the times of the USSR, being produced in the 60s - 70s.

If we talk about the joint exercises with the Romanian army, they are very good and useful because we get the experience of communication and interaction, given the fact that Romania passed through modernization and transformation faster as a member of the EU and NATO. It is a transformed army. The fact that we are neighbours, speak the same language, and have the same mentality makes it much easier for the interoperability between armies.

We always appeal to the authorities in Romania to develop more joint projects because we can implement them more quickly later.

■ **Thank you!**

Editorial

Key highlights of a new Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova: what can we do differently and better?

Mihai Mogildea, Deputy Executive Director, Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE)

The authorities of the Republic of Moldova will develop a new Security Strategy, which will be based on “the geopolitical realities and available economic capabilities in the country”. This announcement, made a few weeks ago by the Speaker of Parliament, Igor Grosu, comes to prepare the ground for a joint effort at the level of public institutions, aimed at drawing up the vision regarding the consolidation and development of the resilience of the Moldovan security sector.

More than 11 years since the approval of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, there is no doubt about the need for a new strategic framework for the security sector. The risks identified, as well as the objectives outlined by the strategy in force, are overrun by the social, economic, climate and geopolitical changes, both globally and regionally. In the last six months, these changes have been amplified by the direct repercussions of the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which brought to the fore several vulnerabilities related to the economic, energy, infrastructure, and military fields.

In this context, the Republic of Moldova must initiate a reflection process on the drafting of a new



security strategy, which should be the benchmark for building a fortified security system. The mission of the authorities and political factors is not at all easy and must be based on best practices of designing previous national strategies, but also on the strategic approach for the development of the country in the coming years. At the same time, the unfortunate experience of existing strategies mainly “on paper”, without financial coverage, human or technical resources, must be taken into account by the authors

of this document. Once voted by the legislature, the new strategy can underpin the security sector reform and facilitate the review of the institutional and policy framework for the stakeholders of the Moldovan security architecture.

Lessons of the past and deliberate ambiguity

Previously developed strategies in the field of security were characterized by ambiguity and lack of foresight on several dimensions. First of all, the definition of threats and risks to national security is deficient and does not provide a clear picture of external state and non-state actors, which make the national security of the Republic of Moldova vulnerable. For example, the 2011 Security Strategy mentions “foreign military presence” or “external coercion” as threats to the national security, without expressly indicating who is guilty for instrumentalizing these threats. This indicates a poor understanding of the need to clearly identify and characterize the threats to the development of key strategy objectives.

Second, the previously developed strategic documents were unable to adequately address the issue of the institutional framework and the strengthening of a “single control center” intended to oversee the implementation of the security

strategy. According to the same 2011 Strategy, this role belonged to the Supreme Security Council (SSC), which had to be invested with “deliberative, coordinating and policy-making functions in the fields of security and defense”. However, nowadays, the SSC has a limited framework of action and lacks the scope and capabilities of similar bodies within the EU and NATO countries.

Thirdly, the financial coverage for the actions in the Strategy, as well as the encouragement of transparency regarding the spending of public money, was constantly neglected by the authorities. For this reason, the fulfilment of the Strategy objectives was not subsequently assumed by the government and was hampered by the lack of sufficient funds. As in the case of other national or sectoral strategies, the significant discrepancy between the expected results and the limited budget allocations diminishes the importance of the provisions included in the document.

Potential benchmarks for a new Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova

The drafting of the Strategy must be undertaken at the political and institutional level by the Supreme Security Council, under the coordination of the Presidency of the Republic of Moldova. On this platform, together with representatives of civil society and the academic environment, a broad process of consultations on the concept of the Strategy and its drafts should be started, aimed at ensuring an effective dialogue and a well-coordinated public communication. The new Security Strategy should

bring together the main reform commitments and strengthen cooperation with external partners assumed by the Republic of Moldova after February 24. As a priority, the Strategy should clearly point out the risks and threats to national security. Their identification should be the subject of a periodic assessment conducted at the inter-institutional level, which allows for the categorization of the nature of these risks and threats, recognition of their source and the application of an early warning mechanism to combat them. This element should be prioritized in the future Strategy, including as part of the institutional reforms that will be reflected in this document.

The substantive aspects of the Strategy should be based on the EU candidate country' status of the Republic of Moldova and the opportunity brought by the initiation of the High Level Political and Security Dialogue of the EU and the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the Strategy should take into account and relate to the principle approaches of the EU Global Strategy, to ensure greater congruence with Brussels at the policy level, best practices and instruments.

At the same time, the Strategy should emphasize the importance of prioritizing issues related to cyber security and the resilience of the information space. On this dimension, the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy should facilitate the adjustment of the legislative and institutional framework to increase the work capacity and effectiveness of relevant institutions (Information and Security Service, Information Technologies and Cyber Security Service, Electronic Government Agency and the Coordinating Council of Audiovisual).

Regarding the financial allocations, the new Strategy could benefit from a greater margin of predictability. Under the conditions of the mobilization of resources available within the European Peace Facility of the EU, estimated at EUR 5.7 billion for the period 2021-2027, the Republic of Moldova could benefit from support for the implementation of actions related to the Strategy. The experience of the last nine months, during which EUR 47 million was disbursed for the defense sector, shows that the systemic absorption of these funds can be accelerated in the coming years. Beyond these aspects, the Strategy should be supported by an explicit commitment from the authorities to increase the budgets allocated for the administration of the security sector.

In leu of conclusions

The exercise of developing a new Security Strategy, in an autumn-winter period that promises to abound in public actions and political events, can be dragged down by potential crises or sectorial problems. In the conditions of the war in Ukraine, the pro-Russian and proxy forces of Moscow in the Republic of Moldova will skilfully use the consultations based on the new Strategy to move the debate to an area of speculation and disinformation. It is important for the authorities to be aware of these risks and prepare the ground for an inclusive and representative process of interaction with all interest groups in society, capable of intensifying communication and information efforts for the population as a whole. Otherwise, the good and absolutely necessary intention to draft this document could be distorted from the start.

The Moldovan army has mobility, but what needs to be developed is the enemy contact fire capability

The retired General Virgil Balaceanu, former representative of Romania at the NATO HQ in Brussels and former head of the Multinational Brigade in South-East Europe, spoke in an interview for the newsletter about his outsider's views of what could be the correct directions for a reformation of the Moldovan army. We have discussed about the types of weaponry that the Moldovan army should be equipped with, the threats it may face in a negative scenario, but also about the regional context caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We are inviting you to read about this in the interview below:

■ Mr Balaceanu, if we were to take an overview of the Moldovan army, what could you say about it?

■ Viewing it from outside, the most important problem of the Moldovan army is its effective, because it is small in terms of active forces and I don't know what it means now or in the future, the development of reserve forces and possibly of territorial ones.

In general, I would compare it with the situation of the armies of the Baltic countries. I know the situation in Estonia better because I participated in some activities organized by the Federation of Estonian Reservists. For example, they have a very strong reservist component. We can also look at the example of Poland, certainly in another dimension, but they went very far with the principles of territorial defence.

In addition to the active forces, they have also developed the territorial



forces. In general, with regards to the military development for conflict or emergency situations, there is the budget-based active military solution. Currently, the annual budget allocated to the Republic of Moldova is insufficient.

There are also problems with provision of equipment, but I am referring now to the numbers - the number of soldiers in the operational forces, the active ones. The financial resources that need to be increased can be directed to the active part, but also to the reserve forces. This is about the possible units that in peacetime have a nucleus made up of active military personnel that can be activated in exceptional situations of siege or mobilization.

They are actually established by reservists coming into these units. The positive part from this point of view regarding the Republic of Moldova is the

fact that the mandatory military service has been maintained. So, the Republic of Moldova has a reserve of citizens who have completed their military service.

■ Is it necessary for the army of the Republic of Moldova to equip itself? We know that in the last 30 years, the Moldovan army has been left in a state of degradation by the politicians who have been at the helm of the state. Is the army reform necessary?

■ Sure, it needs to get equipped. If we get back to the example of the Baltic states, where the armies are small but have an increasingly visible and consistent reserve force component, they have moved to certain stages of equipping process.

I participated in 1999 in exercises in Lithuania. The situation back then was not at all good in this country either. When they presented the only brigade

they had at the time, in addition to several types of military equipment, they also mentioned anti-tank mines. It surprised me then, but I understood the situation.

Before 2000 the anti-tank mines represented for them a means of anti-tank defense. Lithuania now has Javelin missiles, anti-tank weapons, in its forces. Some of them have now been sent to the Ukrainian army.

So Lithuania has over the time got equipped with Western military equipment that ensures their performance. It can also be seen in what is happening in Ukraine. The reaction capacity, at least for the first days of national resistance, can respond to such demands.

Weaponry that can be purchased

■ There are discussions in Chisinau about the need for a mobile, fast army with firepower, based especially on well-equipped light infantry. What other types of weaponry does Moldova need?

■ In general, the Moldovan army has mobility, but the part which needs to be developed relates to the enemy contact fire capability. The latter is provided by anti-tank weapons, by short-range or very close-range anti-aircraft missiles. On the other hand, there is also a need to support the infantry forces, respectively the mechanized forces with artillery. The role of artillery is highlighted in Ukraine. We are talking about either rifle artillery or the 152 mm or M777 155 mm howitzer, the latter having not lost its role. These are not extremely expensive equipment, but they can be effective. We can also talk about provision with self-propelled howitzers such as the Panzerhaubitze 2000 or Caesar of French origin, as well as systems with reactive projectiles installations, respectively

operational-tactical missile installations which are more expensive and certainly involve more substantial funds.

These are some examples regarding the anti-aircraft and anti-tank defense based on anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, as well as howitzer artillery. These are just a few directions. Of course, there can be more. There is another problem currently. The infantry fighting vehicles found their place, but let's get a little into what it means heavy equipment - infantry fighting vehicles or tanks. They are expensive from the point of view of operationalization, but also of maintenance. Instead, there is the amphibious armoured personnel carrier solution. For example, in Romania we have such a transporter called *Piranha V*, which is a troop transport platform, but also a combat platform for other missions.

I am referring here to the possibility of hitting with the 30 mm cannon or anti-tank missiles. In our case we are talking about the *Spike* type ones. I am also referring to the possibility of the respective carrier also having an anti-aircraft missile system, because we have the carrier that has an armour providing protection to the personnel, but at the same time with a greater striking power, a better lethal effect, and on the other hand, we are also talking about very good mobility because the wheel transporters move more easily than the combat vehicles or tracked tanks.

An analysis should be made here based on the lessons learned in Ukraine and conclusions should be drawn as to the most necessary equipment, including armament that does not involve very high operational and maintenance costs.

Military equipment as a deterrent

■ If the Republic of Moldova starts modernizing, getting equipped with

more weaponry, could this change the current military superiority of the Transnistrian paramilitary forces?

■ Certainly, because the paramilitary forces in Transnistria have quite outdated equipment. It is unlikely that they will equip themselves with ammunition and high-performance weaponry in the coming period. At present, what they have as equipment is equivalent to what the Moldovan army has.

It would ensure a favourable balance of forces to the Republic of Moldova when it gets equipped with superior equipment from a technological point of view and the effect on the target, which will constitute a definitive deterrent.

The elements I have mentioned, and there are also others, do not mean that the army of the Republic of Moldova will be equipped for large-scale offensive operations. It will be equipped for defense missions, to be more resistant. When we talk about defense, it is about the ability to resist, which is also an element of military deterrence for the enemy. Because if you know that the other one - the enemy - has high-performance anti-tank missiles, when you attack them with tanks or with infantry fighting vehicles or transporters of lower-performance, with obsolete armour, the enemy is aware from the very beginning that it will have big losses and here the deterrent factor appears.

So, on the one hand, equipment is important, and on the other, the reserve forces that we have talked about earlier. There is one more component that can be developed - the territorial forces.

The Poles have developed them on a voluntary basis, and in Ukraine they were established during the invasion. Ukraine passed the Territorial Forces Act in December, began selection in January, and on February 24th the

invasion began. From the open data at that time, they had 10,000 fighters in the Territorial Forces, a figure I believe to be real, communicated by the Ministry of Defense in Kyiv. When talking about the more than 700,000 fighters in all the force structures of Ukraine, almost 100,000 belong to the territorial forces.

The advantage of the Republic of Moldova is that it has reservists. They can be directed towards the units set up in the war, but also towards the territorial defense units.

Interoperability with the Romanian troops

■ How do you see the interoperability between the Romanian and Moldovan troops? We know that the Moldovan military often come to Romania for training. How necessary are such exercises?

■ These exercises are necessary because it is a joint training programme. We do not have the language barrier. Moreover, the Romanian and Moldovan soldiers speak a good English. On the other hand, they also have similar equipment.

So we can exercise together. A big part of the Romanian reservists from the association I'm leading also participate in the training exercises. There was a training exercise of the training battalion from Botoshani in which soldiers from the "Alexandru cel Bun" Military Academy participated. They took part in the firing with the 152 mm howitzer. On the other hand, we also have 122 mm and 82 mm launchers, infantry weapon systems and heavy infantry weapons that are similar in most cases. And then, joint training is related to procedures, experience and exchange of experience

so that the respective types of weaponry are used on the battlefield best. Such collaboration is needed, it is absolutely necessary because a higher level of training is achieved on both sides through these joint activities. They have no other purpose whatsoever. There is another reality, many military leaders from the Republic of Moldova, even those in the junior category, have training in Romania. They already know what the Romanian army means. I don't know of any major differences outside of what the troops or various equipment categories mean, but rather there are a lot of similarities. Given these similarities we can say that there is interoperability. Based on this interoperability, joint instruction is mutually beneficial.

■ Mr Balaceanu, we know that there are over 1 million Romanian citizens with Romanian passports in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, for several years, Romania has started a programme of providing the military with modern weapons, especially from the USA. The fact that Romania equips itself militarily puts the Republic of Moldova under a greater security umbrella or not?

■ That's a very good question. We should look at security and defense issues in a regional context, beyond what it means to belong or not to NATO or the EU. The European Union has an intention regarding a possible defense policy.

There is talk of a Europe of defense and this issue will be more and more present in the European context, not necessarily in the NATO context. And issues related to defense, national security in a regional context must be discussed. Why? Because in crisis situations, a problem created in one state also influences the neighbouring

state. And after all, issues related to defense, military deterrence, national security -all of these have a strong regional component.

For example, because I commanded a multinational brigade in Turkey, I know the Turkish army very well and I believe that Romania should do more through bilateral relations, so that Turkey is as present as possible in the context of NATO defense, but also within certain regional issues. For example, we have problems with the agreement on the straits [Montreux Convention], and then the presence of a NATO grouping in the Black Sea is a very complex issue. But there are three states bordering the Black Sea. One is Turkey, which has a very powerful navy, superior to the Russian Black Sea Fleet. So the regional cooperation is extremely important.

There are other situations like the ones between Belgium and the Netherlands. These countries have reached the situation where one state carries out the repairs for the corvettes and the other state for the frigates.

Regional cooperation has additional advantages. Certain capabilities that you do not have can be supplied by the other country. That's what we have to consider in the context of an alliance. But I am getting back to your question, namely the positioning of the Republic of Moldova as a candidate state and future member of the EU, along with the issue of defense at the EU level. This will become more acute, because so far there are no special results, although the EU has in a system of troop rotations several battle groups. The latter have been activated in very few situations. The Republic of Moldova, in perspective, can develop cooperation with Romania, including on the issues of the EU related to defense and security of EU members.

Expert Opinion

The National Army at the moment of truth. What is to be done?

Mihai Isac, Romanian expert on political and security issues in the ex-Soviet space

The launch of a new military invasion of Ukraine by the army of the Russian Federation and paramilitary groups affiliated with Moscow have once again underlined the vulnerability of the Republic of Moldova to the Russian threat.

Treated for decades as the black sheep by the political class from Chisinau, the National Army of the Republic of Moldova has reached the moment of truth. The politicians who have been at the head of the Moldovan Government for the last decades have prioritized the strengthening of security structures that could be used as tools to fight against the political opposition, ignoring the equipping and training of military forces.

The only reason why the Russian army and pro-Russian military groups are not marching on the streets of Chisinau at this moment is the military resistance of Ukraine, supported by Western partners. The port city of Odessa, but also the region with the same name, has become a real fortress from where the Ukrainian army keeps the Transnistrian separatist zone under observation.

According to the calculations of military experts, if Russia were to succeed in resuming the offensive in the direction of Odessa and making the junction

with the Russian military forces in Transnistria, it would only be a matter of hours until the fall of the Republic of Moldova. This evaluation emphasizes the nonexistent capacity of the Republic of Moldova to face any type of attack from Moscow or the Transnistrian allies.

Hybrid threat

For three decades the Republic of Moldova has been subject to a permanent siege by the Russian Federation, which uses both the classic military threat (Russian and Transnistrian military forces, operations of the Russian federal secret services, etc.) and large-scale socio-economic war (embargos, threatening by Gazprom, imposing sanctions on Moldovan citizens working in the Russian Federation, etc.).

The Kremlin's tough rhetoric against Chisinau is mirrored by ongoing threats from senior Russian officials. Vladimir Djabarov, the first vice-president of the International Relations Commission of the Federation Council (the upper house of the Russian parliament), has declared recently that "the transformation of the Republic of Moldova into a second Ukraine, a situation towards which its Western patrons are pushing it, pumping it with Western weapons, is only aggravating the problem, removing the



prospects of a peaceful resolution of the conflict on the Dniester".

"The opening of a real second front in Transnistria will lead to a catastrophe for the entire Moldovan state", the Russian senator also threatened, given that the Moldovan authorities have always declared they support the peaceful resolution of the conflict on the Dniester.

Concerns in Chisinau

The Russian military invasion caught the Republic of Moldova unprepared, a situation best illustrated by the statement of the Moldovan Minister of Defense, Anatolie Nosatii, who specified in an interview, published on 14 February 2022 by the Moldovan media, that "being a neutral country, we can't count on anyone, we have to count on ourselves and appeal to international institutions to react in the established way, in case of the

aggression of a small state like the Republic of Moldova, with the status of a neutral country".

Five months after the invasion, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, declared on the sidelines of her recent visit to Bucharest that "We are worried. We admit all scenarios, including the most pessimistic ones. We are preparing for all scenarios. In the event Russia tries to attack Republic of Moldova, we will obviously ask for help".

For her part, the Moldovan prime minister, Natalia Gavrilitsa, declared last week for the CNN that "We are worried, of course. This is a risk (...) it is a very difficult position not only for the Republic of Moldova, but for any small country, any country that relies on the rules-based international order. If a country can start a war of annexation with disregard for international law, then nobody is safe in that sense, and I think a lot of countries are worried."

In March 2022, President Maia Sandu stated that "the Republic of Moldova does not have an effective shield in the face of danger" because, despite its professional soldiers with an international reputation, the Moldovan army "was left without equipment, without military technique".

According to the statements of Moldova's Minister of Defense, Anatolie Nosatii, the National Army of the Republic of Moldova counts 6,500 soldiers on term and on contract and about 2,000 civilian employees. This number is insufficient for the Republic of Moldova to withstand an attack by the Russian military contingent in Transnistria and local pro-Russian forces in the separatist zone, without taking into account the impact of the junction between these forces and the Russian army on the offensive in Ukraine.

In the area controlled by the Tiraspol authorities there is a Russian military contingent of approximately 1,700-2,000 soldiers and Transnistrian paramilitary forces with a total strength of 8,000. They are equipped with superior weaponry compared to that of the National Army, and the ammunition depot in Cobasna is an important asset.

The National Army has three motorized infantry brigades, as well as artillery units, engineers, anti-aircraft missiles, other support or peacekeeping units. They are poorly equipped, the equipment being morally and physically worn out.

The military forces of the Republic of Moldova were periodically shaken by various corruption scandals, which left a painful mark on the morale of the officer corps. The National Army is also affected by the massive migration of the population, which considerably decreases the recruitment base of professional soldiers, on a contract basis, but also of officers.

Western political support

The large-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine has forced NATO states to drastically change the Alliance's Strategic Concept. The transformation of Moscow from a strategic partner into a direct threat has directly affected the Republic of Moldova and other states in the region.

NATO states unanimously decided to include the Republic of Moldova in the final declaration of the NATO Summit. "Given the changing security environment in Europe, we have decided to adopt new measures to intensify political and practical support for partners, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. We will work with these countries to strengthen their integrity

and resilience and to support their political independence," reads the document approved on June 29 at the Madrid Summit.

Romania is the main promoter of the rapprochement of the Republic of Moldova with NATO and the EU, the diplomacy from Bucharest playing a decisive role in ensuring the support of the EU and NATO member states for Chisinau through a real offensive behind closed doors.

Possible solutions

For a genuine transformation of the armed forces, Chisinau must adopt painful measures to optimize human resources. This optimization can only be done by professionalizing the army and turning it into a contract army. This needs to be supported by measures enabling professional soldiers to earn incomes allowing them to remain employed for long periods of time and avoiding large staff turnover.

Chisinau must implement an extensive process of forces' appraisal by excluding those who do not present enough security guarantees in order to avoid cases of betrayal in the event of a war. A solution can also be the strengthening of the information and counter-intelligence system specific to military institutions, following the model of Western partners.

The Republic of Moldova can no longer afford the luxury of postponing the process of modernization and equipping of the National Army. The process of the equipment upgrading must take place simultaneously with the modernization of human resources.

From the point of view of the training of human resources, Moldova can count on the support of external partners that will provide scholarships for the corps of

officers in educational institutions. At the same time, it is expected that after the end of this phase of the war in Ukraine, the number of international exercises in which Moldovan soldiers will participate will increase significantly.

At present, the Republic of Moldova cannot afford purchasing modern weapons systems, against the background of the current economic crisis and the worldwide increase in prices on the weapons market. A provisional medium-term solution is provided by the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Defence, Valeriu Mija, in one of his recent statements. He emphasized that “we are not arming ourselves, we are modernizing. We have Soviet-type equipment, produced in the 60-70s, which is specific to the strategies of the 20th century, however, the plan for the modernization of the National Army foresees the re-equipment of the army by 2030”.

The example of the fighting in Ukraine offers important lessons for the political and military factors in Chisinau, but also for Western partners.

“We don’t want weapons to fight against our neighbours, as Russia is doing. We want to be safe at home and we don’t want anyone to attack us. If it wasn’t for this aggression by Russia, we probably wouldn’t have discussed much about the need to equip the army. However, in the situation where we see what Russia is doing in Ukraine, it would be completely unserious not to think about how to defend ourselves, if such a tragedy happens to us. I really hope we don’t get there, but it’s not up to us and we have talked about this earlier. If one day Russia tries to attack us, what do we do? Are we going to send the army with a hoe to defend us?”, President Maia Sandu said recently.

Ukrainian experience

It is illogical to expect the army of the Republic of Moldova to stand alone in the face of a Russian-Transnistrian offensive, Chisinau counting on the diplomatic support of foreign partners to avoid the invasion.

Donations from the NATO and EU member states are crucial to maintaining the cohesion of the National Army. A very good example is the several dozen HMMWV (High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle) technical units, donated by the USA according to an agreement signed in 1994.

The experience gained from the way in which the Western states donated weapons to Ukraine can be fruitfully used by Chisinau to obtain the necessary equipment. The light and heavy infantry weapons must be replaced as a matter of priority, and consideration should be given to the development of a separate sector of the defense industry to supply the necessary ammunition. Chisinau can easily obtain large donations to start this process, given the relatively small number of soldiers.

The National Army of Moldova is equipped with several dozen Soviet-made combat vehicles, such as TAB-71 (also having amphibious capabilities), MT-LB, and BMD-1. They can be modernized with the technical support of NATO partners, such as Romania or Bulgaria, that have the necessary experience to implement such programmes. Together with the HMMWV, they can become platforms for various anti-tank or anti-aircraft systems, which proved their effectiveness during the war in Ukraine.

Chisinau would still need several dozen light armoured vehicles, which

would allow it to maintain mobile reserves to counter the threat coming from Transnistria. They should have amphibious capabilities given the presence of the Dniester River in the possible theatre of operations.

ATVs have proven their effectiveness on the Ukrainian front, where they can be used to trigger point operations.

The kind of military equipment it would be needed

When the Moldovan authorities make requests to NATO partners, they must take into account the fact that the National Army does not have the human resources to allow the scale of defensive or offensive operations launched by the Ukrainian army. Chisinau should focus on the development of the special forces segment, which would allow it to take quick actions aimed at blocking the aggressor forces. The *Fulger* Battalion can provide a base for the expansion of this segment of the National Army.

The drastic decrease in the recruitable population forces Chisinau to implement an attractive programme for candidates in order to ensure the stability of the trained force within the National Army.

From an artillery point of view, Chisinau has no chance of dominating any attacking force without external support. Even if the Republic of Moldova were equipped with complex systems, such as HIMARS, they would not change significantly the balance of forces unless they were present in a sufficiently large number, which is unlikely.

The Republic of Moldova must ensure an artillery equipment specific to a flexible army, capable of maintaining a fluid front. This means light and medium artillery, including anti-aircraft, easily

transportable, artillery radars, as well as a limited number of modern artillery systems. Upgrading the D-20 systems can represent a temporary but short-lived solution.

The acquisition or receipt of anti-tank systems, such as the NLAW, and anti-aircraft systems, such as the Stinger, from international donations must be a priority for Chisinau.

Considering the lack of capacity to produce modern weapons systems by its own industry, the Republic of Moldova should also form the necessary reserves of equipment that would allow it to maintain a high degree of training of the troops.

Chisinau is not able to defend the integrity of its airspace, requiring the intervention of external partners to be able to ensure this. It is unlikely that the Republic of Moldova has the financial, technical and human capacity to deploy and manage an extensive anti-aircraft missile system. In this sense, Chisinau must identify alternative airspace protection systems, through

collaboration with external partners. In this sense, the Republic of Moldova should equip itself with helicopters capable of carrying out anti-tank operations as well as transporting special forces. Such an asset would weaken the enemy's ability to advance, but especially to resupply the troops on the offensive.

The effectiveness of drones during combat actions in Ukraine shows that a military force equipped with modern technology can inflict significant losses on the invader. The Republic of Moldova could try to obtain through donations some models of combat drones, which could be effective even if they are older models.

The participation of the Republic of Moldova in the international mission in Kosovo, as well as in other missions, such as demining in Iraq, is an excellent way through which the National Army can obtain expertise and not only that. This participation also sends a strong signal to the international community

and will significantly contribute to strengthening the image of the Republic of Moldova at the international level.

The Moldovan authorities must be more involved in sending contingents of the National Army or from within the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in international peacekeeping missions. The Republic of Moldova can participate by sending staff officers to various operations of interest on different continents much more intensively than it does at the moment.

It is expected that after the end of the active phase of the current conflict in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova will participate with various detachments specialized in demining operations, and not only, in removing the effects of the war in this country.

In this context, the Republic of Moldova can demonstrate its ability to play an active role at the regional level in creating the conditions for the return to normality in the Black Sea basin.

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