



Romania's Defence Policy: Ambition and Capabilities

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In the face of Russia's aggressive foreign and security policy, Romania is seeking to increase the presence of Allied forces on its territory. It is strengthening its armed forces despite the failure of some modernization programmes. The cross-party consensus on defence policy includes the allocation of 2% of GDP to defence-related spending. The growth of Romania's defence potential is conducive to security in the Black Sea region and is in Poland's interest since Romania is the nearest ally on NATO's Southeastern Flank.

Romania's Alliances. Membership in NATO and the European Union and an alliance with the U.S. are the pillars of Romania's security. Its forces are embedded within NATO, EU, and UN operations, amounting to 1,902 soldiers and 759 officers of the Interior Ministry, 11% more than last year. Within NATO, it has about 120 soldiers in the multinational battalion battle group in Poland, 56 in KFOR in Kosovo, and its contingent in Afghanistan (currently the fourth largest in the Alliance) will be increased from about 700 to 1,000 people this year. Romania also has delegated a minesweeper to the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2 (SNMCMG2). After an agreement with its partners, Romania will send 50 soldiers to the Alliance's new mission in Iraq and 120 soldiers and four helicopters to the UN mission in Mali to release the Canadian contingent. Romanian personnel also participate in EU missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mali, Somalia, and the Central African Republic.

Romania has joined seven programmes under the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) mechanism. The country perceives this as a complement to NATO's capabilities, especially in cybersecurity, countering hybrid measures, military mobility, and strategic communication. One of the priorities of the Romanian presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2019 is to strengthen the EU-NATO relationship.

Recent justice system reform in Romania is criticized at the EU forum but that has not affected its close bilateral defence cooperation with France and Germany. French warships often train with the Romanian Navy, including outside NATO, and the Romanian 81st Mechanised Brigade since 2017 has been integrated with the German Rapid Force Division. France and Germany count on arms contracts with Romania.

Tripartite consultations with Poland and Turkey are losing significance of late because of increasing Turkish antagonism of the U.S. and rapprochement with Russia. Romania uses the Bucharest 9 as an instrument to lobby for a greater NATO presence in the region. This format also serves to limit the effects of Hungarian and Bulgarian policies favourable to Russia.

Allied Presence in Romania. Romania is seeking NATO assistance to balance Russia's expanding potential in the Black Sea. Warships of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMGM2) from the Mediterranean regularly sail the Black Sea, but the Montreux Convention of 1936 limits the presence of units by non-coastal states to up to 21 days. The creation of permanent NATO forces based on Black Sea navies has been blocked by Bulgaria and Turkey. That is why Romania is asking for the presence of Allied forces on its territory. The Air Policing mission ongoing since 2014 will end in few years when Romanian F-16 fighters achieve full operational readiness. The decisions of the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw to increase the Alliance presence in Romania do not meet the country's expectations. The Multinational Brigade South East in Craiova has just a training character, and of the 10 co-founder states, only Poland constantly maintains a rotating unit.

Romania is seeking a greater presence of U.S. forces by establishing a permanent base at the Mihail Kogălniceanu military airfield near Constanta. Thanks to a 2005 agreement on access to Romanian military infrastructure, the U.S. still uses it to supply troops to the Middle East. In 2010, Romania welcomed the U.S. missile-defence (MD) installation at Devesel. Since 2017, an armoured battalion and part of a brigade of US Army Aviation have been rotating to its territory.

Modernisation of the Armed Forces. Since the end of the communist era, apart from buying 12 F-16s from Portugal for €600 million in 2014, the Romanian Defence Ministry has not made any significant military purchases. The cross-party agreement of 2015 on the allocation of 2% of GDP to defence for 10 years from 2017, including about €10 billion for new equipment, is what enables the thorough modernisation of the armed forces. Thanks to it, in 2017, Romania purchased from the U.S. seven Patriot air and missile defence batteries for \$4.6 billion and in 2018, 54 units of the HIMARS surface-to-surface missile system for \$1.5 billion. Romania also approved a programme to modernise its short-range air defences for €2.1 billion. The Romanian Defence Ministry also plans to buy five F-16s from Portugal as part of the plan to acquire a total of 52 of these fighters. In February 2019, it announced the intent to modernise its armoured forces, which now use TR-85 and TR-580 tanks based on Soviet T-55s. One option is to obtain about 60 tanks from the OMBT-Leo2 project, the European Defence Agency's program to sell or lease Leopard 2 tanks from the mobilisation stocks of EU states.

The Romanian government wants to use the modernisation of the armed forces to rebuild its own armaments industry. To support this, Romania ordered 227 Piranha V carriers, a Swiss-U.S. wheeled armoured fighting vehicle, and 179 will be built in Romania in a total deal worth \$1.1 billion. Since 2020, in consortium with German Rheinmetall, Romanian plants will produce 300 of the AFV Agilis. Romania's authorities are particularly interested in developing the IAR-Ghimbav helicopter factory, which is state majority-owned. In 2017, they signed a letter of intent with U.S. firm Bell Helicopter to produce 24 AH-Z1 Viper attack helicopters and 21 UH-1Y Venom multi-purpose helicopters at the IAR factory. That deal, though, almost led to a collapse in cooperation with Franco-German Airbus, which had been building H215M multi-role helicopters at the IAR factory for many years. Ultimately, thanks to the involvement of presidents Emmanuel Macron and Klaus Iohannis, Romania agreed to purchase 50 H215Ms and maintain exclusive production at IAR for 15 years.

Managing large orders is a challenge for the Romanian Defence Ministry. The reason is an abrupt increase in funds, from 1.4% of GDP in 2016 to 2.0% of GDP in 2017, and the lack of preparation in procurement departments. Therefore, in 2017 and 2018, despite being allocated up to 2.0%, only about 1.8% of GDP was spent. The reasons for this were the annulment of a tender for 3,000 military trucks worth about €700 million in January 2019 and the suspension of a tender for the construction in Romania of four corvettes and the modernisation of two frigates, worth €1.6 billion in total. A plan to build three submarines may also fail because of a lack of experience at the Romanian shipyards (which have not built the ships since World War II) and the lack of trained crews (since the withdrawal of Romania's only submarine in 1996).

Defence and Domestic Politics. Romania's defence policy, including the assessment of the threat from Russia, is shared as cross-party consensus. There is no significant social movement contesting the government's priorities, including spending 2% of GDP on defence. Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, is only about 200 km away from the Romanian coast, and Russian planes regularly fly near the country's borders. Russia also has threatened a pre-emptive attack on the MD installation at Devesel. Such aggressive policy concerns Romanians and 31% of those surveyed consider Russia to be the greatest threat to their country. At the same time, 59% assess the installation in Deveselu as positive, with 20% seeing it as negative. Among the respondents, 53% are satisfied with the scale of NATO presence in Romania, and 33% would like it to be larger.

Despite consensus, the implementation of defence policy can be hindered by personal frictions. Although there are many conflicts between President Klaus Iohannis and the ruling coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, they mostly have not concerned defence policy. However, at the end of 2018, the president provoked a personal conflict with the government (now being resolved by the Bucharest Court of Appeal) on appointing the chief of general staff (the first instance resolution of the Court of Appeal in Bucharest at the end of March 2019 was in favour of Iohannis).

Conclusions. Poland and Romania have a similar view of the threat from Russia and the importance of the alliance with NATO and the U.S. In the region, only these countries have a real contribution to strengthening common security. Romania engages considerable numbers of its forces to joint operations, including the battalion group in Poland and, despite some problems, is modernising its armed forces. It also supports an increase in NATO's potential on the Eastern Flank, but expects a parallel strengthening not only in the north but also in its southern part.

It is in Poland's interest to develop cooperation with Romania, the only state on the South-Eastern Flank determined to counteract Russia's expansion in the Black Sea Basin. It could be supported by Poland in its endeavours to establish a NATO corps command and battalion combat group in Romania. However, such a decision requires the consensus of all the Allies. To move in this direction, including overcoming the scepticism of some Alliance members, the Bucharest 9 format could be used more effectively. Increasing Allied presence in Romania is especially important given its problems with the corvettes tender and inability to establish NATO naval forces in the Black Sea, which postpone the implementation of such a key programme to deter Russia in this region.