



STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

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President of the Romanian Reserve Officers Association –

I. The Romanian Reserve Officers Association (AORR) – a think-tank in support of the Ministry of National Defence (MoND) and Chief of Defence’s (CHOD) decisional act

Strategic Impact: Does the AORR’s mission include think-tank tasks?

Virgil Bălăceanu: First and foremost, AORR aims to be a think-tank on security and defence issues. Being a NGO, we have no decisional role, but rather an advisory role. However, our strength lies in our experience and our ability to envision and why not, innovate. One main characteristic of the AORR is its coherent thinking and acting in all its’ diversity, as it reunites retired generals and officers, volunteer reserves of all personnel categories, higher education graduates that have completed the short-term military training and civilians taking an interest in defence and security. This diversity represents AORR’s main strength as a think-tank.

S.I.: Is AORR built to support the military decision-making process?

V.B.: AORR definitely supports the decision-making process of the military, not only by its ‘consistent presence in the academic and training areas, on topics related to defence and security issues, but also by its’ direct involvement in the strategic defence analysis developed by the Defence Staff or the work groups established following our proposal, inside the Personnel and Mobilization Directorate and the Training and Doctrine Directorate. These work groups deal with the volunteer reserves in relation to proposals for the development of the National Military Mobility Strategy.

S.I.: What is the link between AORR and MoND and CHOD?

V.B.: An agreement was recently signed between the AOOR and the Ministry of National Defence, as proof of the mutually beneficial relation in working together towards common goals.



S.I.: How important is the permanent membership status of AORR within the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers (CIOR) in NATO?

V.B.: Since its inception, AORR has played an active role as a permanent member of CIOR (Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers in NATO), overcoming critical times when we got suspended for not being able to pay the membership fee.

During the past years we have been actively involved in the CIOR's Executive Council, in various CIOR Committees and specific Confederation actions.

As such, teams representing AORR took part in the MILCOMP (Military Competition), Romania organised the 2022 YROS (Young Reserve Officers Seminar) and is involved in organising the 2024 seminar, we also had reserve officers participating in the second edition of the YROW (Young Reserve Officers Workshop). Our aim is the 2028-2030 CIOR presidency, alongside France, the CIMEX exercises, the foreign language courses being organised by CLA (CIOR Language Academy), with instructors and students, having more teams take part in the MILCOMP. As a side note, inspired by MICLOMP, we intend on creating a Reserve Officers Cup in Romania.

II. The Romanian Armed Forces' Reserve – challenges and realities

S.I.: Does Romania have truly efficient Reserves to support Active Forces in case of a major conflict?

V.B.: Romania is deficient in terms of having an adequate number of well-trained reserve forces that could support the active forces in dealing with a potential threat. Post 1997, all the political and military decisions aimed to resize the Military as per NATO requirements and standards.

In 2007, when the mandatory military service was postponed, three years after Romania became a part of NATO, the issue of reserve forces, their procurement and modernisation were totally ignored, on the grounds that expeditionary forces were in no need of permanent, young and well-trained reserve forces.

S.I.: Do you consider that the provisions of the Law no. 446/2006 on the preparation of the population for defence and of the Law no. 477 of 2003 on the preparation of the national economy and the territory for defence are effective in the current circumstances and produce the desired effects?

V.B.: These provisions are certainly outdated and to make matters even worse, its amendments are lagging, especially when it comes to the population defence readiness programmes, establishing the volunteer military service, training for the



reserve forces that have completed military service prior to 2007 and pre-military training for the youth. Romania is missing a territorial defence doctrine integrated with the collective defence and overlooks population defence readiness, as well as economy and territorial defence readiness, the three pillars of national resilience.

S.I.: Do we expect any national considerations to increase the Reserve Force in the near future, as a lesson identified from the Ukrainian War?

V.B.: The War in Ukraine will determine fundamental changes in Romania and other NATO countries concerning the reserve forces. We are forced to give greater importance to the two major issues – the reserve forces and the national defence industry. Establishing the Territorial Reserve Infantry Battalions is a first step in the right direction, same as involving the national defence industry in many procurement projects.

S.I.: How were reservists used in the COVID-19 pandemic?

V.B.: During the COVID-19 pandemic the reserve forces were not called upon, except for some medical reservists. However, they were actively involved in combating the negative effects, one example being AORR donating supplies not only to Romanian hospitals but also to schools in the Republic of Moldova.

III. The Voluntary Military Service and its feasibility within the Romanian Armed Forces' Operational Reserve

S.I.: In the current security context, in your opinion, what is the optimal recruitment solution for Romania that you consider most effective in terms of the cost-benefit binomial: voluntary military service or conscription? Or, perhaps, a hybrid formula resulting from combining them? Please consider the answer also taking into account the fact that there is no interest from the civilian population in voluntary military service.

V.B.: Although we cannot state that the 2017-2022 selection within the recruitment process for the volunteer reserves was a success, as the numbers reached only about 20% of those planned and budgeted, at this stage we can still improve the situation by intensifying the volunteer reserve forces recruitment campaigns, amending the Law dealing with the population defence readiness and establishing the 4-month volunteer military service. A welcomed addition could be establishing a training programme based on the American ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps). If these measures would prove to be inefficient in the next five to ten years, a hybrid volunteer reserve-mandatory service system could be an alternative.



S.I.: Do the current voluntary reservists have real military career opportunities after their first tour of duty for retaining perspectives (advancement in the next military rank and job promotion)?

V.B.: The lack of interest for the reserve corps is also caused by the fact that the MoND did not make use of the legislative framework concerning the reserve forces training, promotions, switching corps during fulfilling their contract or moving from one unit to another. The reserve forces are far from being a selection base for the active forces. The system needs radical improvement in various areas, first and foremost when it comes to the attitude and acceptance towards reserve forces, seeing as the relation is not always one of comradeship.

S.I.: How efficient is the military education and training system for voluntary reservists?

On the one hand, seeing as the 15 days of annual training are the bare minimum in order to be able to retain information and build the necessary skills, at least half of it must be dedicated to tactical exercises, especially when it comes to firearms training.

On the other hand, there is little to no possibility of voluntary reservists to attend the national military education and training system. Therefore, AORR provides a lot of opportunities for young reserve officers to be trained via CIOR's organised courses, such as CLA, YROW, YROS or MILCOMP.

IV. The Procurement Programmes and the Defence Industry

S.I.: How is the defence industry anchored to the realities of the national security and the European and Euro-Atlantic development perspectives?

V.B.: The National Defence Industry, especially that owned by the state, has a limited contribution to Romania's procurement programmes. There is a huge gap between procurement spending and investing in the defence industry. The offset law is yet to be amended, and cannot be put to good use. The private defence sector has slightly better results, however it cannot compete with the financial power, lobby and production flow of the multinational corporations, as we are missing a protection and support system for the private defence industry.

S.I.: Do the military operations carried out in Ukraine, which are mainly based on land capabilities, require the urgent revitalisation of the national defence industry and the programmes to equip Romania's Land Forces with modern capabilities?



V.B.: The War in Ukraine brings to attention not only the manoeuvring warfare but also the mechanised war and the war of attrition. The equipment must correspond to the specificities of the European landscape and to the new rules regarding mobility. Prior to 1990, Romania's defence industry was "total war" oriented, and as such it is now unable to provide equipment and maintenance specific to fighting a war on Romania's territory. This is a crucial reason for investing and enforcing some protectionist policies, in order to at least have the ability to build components of military equipment, manufacture ammunition and be able to ensure total maintenance of foreign equipment.

S.I.: Do you consider that the current procurement programmes are realistic for facing all future risks and threats for the national security?

V.B.: Current procurement programmes are appropriate not only when talking about the need for modernisation but also taking into consideration lessons learned from the War in Ukraine. However, we have also planned Multirole Corvettes and Frigate Modernisation programmes, in stand by for some time now. This indifference of those in charge towards providing for the defence of Romania is extremely hard to understand and difficult to tolerate. Not to mention the newest trends of UASs, AI, robotics and human performance modification projects.

V. The State Military Pension System – between collapse and reform

S.I.: Why do you consider the State Military Pension System is so debated in Romanian society and a 'hot potato' on the agenda of each political party?

V.B.: The topic of military pensions became not only an important point for the political parties but also a focal point for the media. Starting with 2010, we have witnessed a mayhem that has reached new proportions in the last two years. It is in fact a direct attack on the Military, with its active and reserve components.

S.I.: How is the military pension system organised in other NATO and EU Member States?

V.B.: Romania tried to align itself with NATO and UE military pension systems, especially after becoming a NATO member. Over time, however, wrong political decisions have taken us further and further away from these systems.

S.I.: How beneficial do you consider the proposed amendments to the law on special pensions to be (increasing the retirement age to 65 in stages, until 2035, for



military personnel, surtaxing special pensions by 30% for the part of pension income that exceeds the level of salary earnings gross environment, reducing the number of beneficiaries of service pensions by excluding some categories of staff such as employees assigned to executive positions within diplomatic missions etc.) for the Romanian Military personnel and the attractiveness of the military profession to young people?

V.B.: Up until military state pensions came to be considered special pensions, the system was already facing serious issues, such as updating the pensions, freezing them, confiscating the additional pension that the military had contributed to, refusing to acknowledge the contribution of those that continued working in the civilian sector, after retiring, together with a major discrepancy between similar pensions for the same position, rank, and seniority. The debates concerning the military pensions as special pensions came as a shock to reservists, perceiving them as an attack on their honour and dignity and on the Military as a whole.

The proposed measures, regarding the over taxation of military pensions do not apply righteous principles for all the pensioners and raise a very important issue regarding the retirement age of 65, which will have an aging effect on military echelons that execute missions as their main purpose. As a direct consequence, they will simply not be able to physically accomplish them.

The uncertainty and abusive practices mean that fewer young people are considering a career in the military, as shown by the statistics for the previous two years.

VI. Ukraine under the sign of Mars

S.I.: *Do the strategic documents, such as the National Defense Strategy, the White Paper of Defence and the Military Strategy, still correspond to the current characteristics of the security environment (an ongoing war on Romania's borders)?*

V.B.: Looking at the Russian threat, all the strategic documents require a profound update, as they were developed on a different basis of defence and security at that time, focused on national territorial defence.

S.I.: *It is a known fact that the Russian Federation is also waging an information war in Ukraine. Its disinformation campaigns are also targeting NATO and EU member states, including Romania. How do you assess the measures taken by NATO and the EU – applicable to our country as well – to counter disinformation? And, to the extent that you can provide an answer, how do you assess Ukraine's resilience to Russian propaganda and disinformation?*



V.B.: The so-called Sputnik movement is largely present in NATO and UE countries, including Romania, with their disinformation and pro-Russian propaganda. The effects are obvious, as our institutions grow weaker through campaigns of depreciation, through the lack of proper governing and the lack of a societal security culture.

Ukraine is successfully responding to these campaigns, through their own disinformation strategies that seem to be superior to the Russian ones. When fighting disinformation, one needs to defend but also attack, this is why we are talking about cyber defence as-well as cyber-attacks.

S.I.: Are the Romanian Armed Forces prepared for a possible escalation of the conflict in Ukraine?

V.B.: The Romanian Armed Forces are ready for a possible escalation of the conflict, however they are not ready for a possible generalisation.

S.I.: What are Romania's options in case of an unwanted expansion of the conflict from Ukraine to the Republic of Moldova?

V.B.: Our options when it comes to a possible spread of the conflict towards the Republic of Moldova need to take into consideration the following elements: sending weaponry, ammunition and equipment, providing intelligence, early warning, training for Moldovan soldiers, medical assistance, hosting refugees, financial support, energy support and food aid.