

# LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE ON NATO'S EASTERN FLANK: INSIGHTS FROM MAJOR-GENERAL CONSTANTIN NICOLAESCU



Major-General Constantin NICOLAESCU, PhD  
Chief of Staff, Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East

Major-General Constantin Nicolaescu (b. 1973, Craiova) is a Romanian Army officer serving as Chief of Staff of HQ Multinational Corps South-East since September 2024. With a background in infantry and Special Operations Forces, he has held key command and staff roles, including brigade commander and SOF battalion commander, and served in missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Promoted to Major-General in 2025, he holds a PhD in Military Sciences and has received multiple national and international military awards.

**Strategic Impact:** Major-General Constantin Nicolaescu, you have been taking over the Chief of Staff position of the Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East for more than one year, after being the Commander of the Multinational Brigade South-East from Craiova, the

Romanian Armed Forces' only multinational manoeuvre large unit established under NATO's enhanced Forward Presence on the Alliance's Eastern Flank. At the same time, we can say that tensions on the Eastern Flank remained very high for over four years. As part of the NATO Force Structure (NFS), how would you assess the complexity and challenges of the MNC-SE mission in the south-eastern sector of the Eastern Flank, particularly with regard to providing credible and effective deterrence against the Russian threat?



**Major General Constantin NICOLAESCU, PhD:** As Chief of Staff of Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East, I consider that our mission is not a tough one, but rather a challenging one, which we take into consideration very seriously. On the other hand, when we talk about our deterrence posture, even though it was an honourable initiative, it reached its limits starting with the invasion in Ukraine.

I do not consider that the Russia Federation truly takes into account either our reaction competences or our combat capabilities when establishing and declaring its military objectives. This is exactly the reason why up-to-date long-term initiatives for the Eastern Flank require more than deterrence. Nevertheless, our entire Alliance continues to train as we fight as much as possible, while also making sustained efforts to attain new equipment, so at end of the day, our units are both well-trained and armed to accomplish all their missions.

**SI:** Having spent such a long time within NATO's enhanced Forward Presence structures, do you consider that the Alliance's measures to strengthen its deterrence and defence posture against Russia are being implemented in a balanced manner between the north-eastern and south-eastern parts of the Eastern Border? Do these measures provide sufficient protection and support for Allies in the complex Black Sea Region?

**CN:** I personally do not consider that, within NATO, the south-eastern part of the Eastern Border is different from the central or northern regions in terms of allocated forces. All these three areas are equally important for the Alliance, and in certain domains, we are better positioned than others.

We benefit from the support of the entire Alliance in our area of operations. However, you are completely right in noting that the Black Sea Region is an extremely complex and provocative one. In some cases, it is difficult, or even impossible, for all of us to execute military operations in Black Sea basin. The current situation is highly favourable for the riverine states, but it also means that the allied states should be able to develop their own military capabilities in the Black Sea in the near future.

**SI:** You are one of the Romanian Armed Forces' generals with significant warfighting experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, having been decorated by both NATO and the Romanian Defence Staff. Do you consider that Romanian generals and officers are sufficiently prepared to operate at an Army Corps level? We do not have such a higher tactical echelon in the Romanian Armed Forces, and our military personnel do not have sufficient experience to work at this level. How would you characterise your professional relationship with Allies personnel inside the Headquarters, as well as with higher echelons of command?



**CN:** I strongly believe that none of us is fully capable for a new assignment, as each new job comes with diverse challenges that one may not have faced before. However, the experience achieved in previous positions is the one that should make a difference in high-tempo situations when one responsiveness will create impact. The Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East is similar to other HQs in which I had the opportunity to serve, yet it remains a challenge for all of us, once we step in to face all the challenges with zero tolerance to any type of error. The lives of our subordinates depend on our decisions, which is why we must strive to do our best.

Romanian militaries part of this headquarters possess a large experience and expertise to serve for the Alliance. Moreover, when we talk about the relationships between all contributing nations soldiers, with higher echelons, or with other Corps HQs, they cannot be described other than outstanding.

I would also want to point out the innovative approach of LANDCOM, our higher HQs, in assigning personnel for Corps level exercises from other HQs that are not Primary Training Audience (PTA) or Secondary Training Audience (STA). This initiative allows us to gain different perspectives when we compare the quality of our internal work with the same position in other HQs. It brings considerable added value and know-how to our own processes.

**SI:** If you agree, we will move on to a series of related questions.

Since its full operationalisation in 2023, your Headquarters has gained significant command and exercise experience. You now command several multinational capabilities and have participated in multi-level Allied exercises, such as *Steadfast Jupiter 2023*, *Carpathian Arc 2024*, *Loyal Leda 2025* or *Dacian Fall 2025*. Could you share with us some lessons identified from these important military events? Additionally, what can you tell us about the rapid deployment of the France-led Multinational Force to its transition from NATO Battle Group to brigade level? How do you assess the level of interoperability and cooperation with the NATO Command Structure (NCS) and the participating forces at those exercises on national territory and abroad?

**CN:** Even though, at first sight, I would be tempted to say that multinational forces integration process is our biggest challenge, I have to admit that information exchange and information flow with Host Nations in our Area of Operations is also complex and demanding.

Regarding the ROU FLF – FRA FN and its capabilities to scale up from Battle Group to Brigade, from my personal point of view, I had no doubt that our French partner will achieve all missions at a high standard of professionalism.

All the multinational exercises in which we trained our HQs have helped us achieve a higher level of interoperability, in order to be able to assure command and control for our multinational subordinate forces deployed both on national territory and abroad.



**SI:** A matter of particular significance on the present NATO agenda is the establishment of a robust resilience within the Alliance and its Member States. As you are well aware, in 2021 the Romanian political leadership agreed to establish the Euro-Atlantic Resilience Centre (E-ARC) in Bucharest as an inter-agency hub and research body to promote and pursue NATO and EU resilience objectives. After its full operationalisation, the Centre will be internationalised by co-opting NATO and EU partners. Do you cooperate with this institution during exercises or other major international events? How do you assess civil-military cooperation with local authorities and population in Sibiu?

**CN:** Resilience on the Eastern Flank is a critical condition for our survival. The Euro-Atlantic Resilience Centre brings together all the significant actors which can efficiently support in the process of increasing our resilience level. While I cannot say that we cooperate with the Centre directly, we do so indirectly through inter-agency actors in our area of operations who contribute to the execution of the plans.

The civil-military cooperation process with local authorities and local population is an excellent one. We support each other at all times, and our multinational brothers within the Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East proudly use the word “home” when they talk about Sibiu.

**SI:** In the face of the manifold contemporary threats to the Allies, especially with regard to misinformation and disinformation concerning the activities of the military, what can you tell us about the means of communication used by MNC-SE to ensure a realistic perception of the security situation? Is the “FORTIS IN UNUM” magazine part of this communication strategy? Additionally, could you share the future objectives of the Multinational Corps South-East in this dynamic and complex context, characterised by multiple challenges from Russia?

**CN:** In the communication sphere, we are a small part of the larger mechanism known as the Communication Strategy at the Alliance level. We execute our missions within its framework, and if you ask me whether we could do more, I can say that there is always room for improvement. Our “FORTIS IN UNUM” magazine is meant to be a small part of the solution. Personally, I consider that we need a different mindset. We have to understand that we need a budget for this Communication Strategy, which may help us acquire broadcasting time and present the Alliance’s point of view regarding the evolving security environment, otherwise, the civil perspective may be slightly erroneous.

Our main objective remains to assure territorial integrity and national security for the populations in Romania and Bulgaria, and it takes all our time, as the challenges that Russian Federation is addressing to the Alliance are numerous and highly time-consuming.

**SI:** Finally, we thank you for sharing your views and insights regarding the issues that MNC-SE has addressed and will continue to face in the near future, as



well as for highlighting your outstanding experience. We would be honoured if you could leave a message for the readers of *Strategic Impact Journal*, offering your perspective on leadership and resilience.

**CN:** In closing, I would like to highlight that, as military professionals, we have a kinetic-oriented mindset. I have no doubt that whenever it becomes necessary to engage in combat, we will do so efficiently and with the highest standards of professionalism. Looking ahead, I would be very pleased if we could further develop the non-kinetic part of the operations, as many of our objectives can be gained through other means than weapons, and for this, I want to end with one of my favourite quotes from Sun Tzu: “The greatest victory is that which requires no battle.” Thank you.