

**REASONS AND PRINCIPLES OF ROMANIAN MILITARY REFORM AT THE END
OF THE 20TH - BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY.
VIEW FROM UKRAINE**

Andriy Pospelov¹

Abstract

Various Romanian governments attempted to comprehensively and consistently upgrade and modify the national military structure. Romania adopted principles of military reform that proved adequate to the modern geopolitical environment and to the economic opportunities of the country. Moreover, after a slow start, the military reform in Romania has reached the planned level of advancement seems to satisfy the requirements that have emerged. The military reform allows Romania to maintain and even expand its military capabilities, despite the reduction in the number of military personnel. And, most importantly, the Romanian army can maintain and develop its striking component.

Keywords: Romania, Ukraine, military reform, NATO

¹Andriy Pospelov, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow, Regional Branch of the National Institute for Strategic Studies in Odessa, Ukraine; contact: andreas.pospelov@gmail.com

Introduction

Relevance of the theme

In April 2004, Romania became a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This new status implied an active participation in common military and political developments with other Member States, as well as qualitative structural and technical modernization of the national armed forces and their transition to NATO standards. However, since the beginning of NATO membership, the political, socio-economic and military-technical potential of Romania did not allow to do it independently and without any problems. As a result, complex structural military modernization of Romania lasted more than one year (or even decades). However, its causes differ significantly from those in Bulgaria and Ukraine.

Today, Ukraine lacks scientific papers which can give us some information about the military reform in Romania. Ukraine treats with suspicion and some caution the military might of Romania. It is mainly connected with the great problems in putting the Ukrainian military reform into effect. In this case, any modern military reform in Ukrainian scientific space is considered superficially. Nothing but the political reasons of these processes are emphasized. This article is the first one in Ukrainian historical and political science that reveals the reasons and principles of the military reform in Romania in the complex of problems.

Main reasons of Romanian military reform

Currently Romania is an industrial-agrarian country. The condition of Romanian heavy industry, which was created during the socialist regime, generally allows the country to develop and produce almost all kinds of weapons and military equipment with the exception of supersonic tactical fighter jets, submarines, warships with a tonnage of water more than a destroyer and space equipment for reconnaissance, navigation and communication. In the 1970s the potential for nuclear industry was created, which had not only a research nature². However, the turbulent changes in the country after the Revolution in December 1989 led to the situation when a politically stable country still occupies one of the last places in Europe, in terms of the living standards of the population.

Meanwhile, the character of the actions of the Romanian leadership (ruling elites) during the existence of independent Romania has distinguished itself by the specific direction of creating a „Greater Romania”. This has been observed in the interwar period, and it continues now, as historians often noted³. Moreover it comes not only about the „ambition” and „intent”, but constantly realized in concrete actions. So, just remember the Romanian „assistance” to Moldova in 1992, during the conflict with Transnistrian Moldovan Republic⁴ and the recent Ukrainian-Romanian diplomatic conflict around Snake Island⁵. Therefore, in any case, given the historical experience and with creating appropriate analogy, this factor can not be discounted. Also, for the realization of "Greater Romania" plans, its management should be based solely on the military potential of the country.

² Korotkov E. K., Moiseyenko M.G., Strashun B.A., „Социалистическая Республика Румыния. Основы государственного строя” [„Socialist Republic of Romania. Fundamentals of the state system”], Legal Books, Moscow, 1977, pp. 222-223, 233; Chichkin A., „Бомба в Карпатах. 20 лет назад Румыния "без пяти минут" была с атомным оружием. Но вряд ли оно стало бы "просоветским"” [„A bomb in the Carpathians. 20 years ago, Romania was "five minutes" away from an atomic weapon. But it is unlikely it would be "pro-Soviet"”], *Российская газета [Rossiyskaya Gazeta]*, 20 July 2009.

³ Meltyuhov, Michail, *Освободительный поход Сталина [Liberation Campaign of Stalin]*, AST, Moscow, 2010; Pokas, Michail S., „Великая Румыния, или Гиена, подвид восточноевропейский” [„Greater Romania, or hyena, subspecies Eastern European”], 27 May 2009, <http://timer.od.ua/?p=14026>.

⁴ Pospelov, Andriy S., „Военные аспекты Приднестровского конфликта 1992 г.” [„Military Aspects of the Transnistrian conflict in 1992”], *Одисос. Актуальні проблеми історії, археології та етнології [Odysos. Current issues in history, archaeology and ethnology]*, Preview Issue II, Odessa, 2010, p. 266.

⁵ Shtepko, Elena J., „Дипломатическая война Украина-Румыния: остров Змеиный в международных отношениях второй половины XX – начале XXI века” [„Diplomatic war Ukraine-Romania: Snake Island in the international relations of the second half of 20th - beginning of 21st century”], *НОВИК. Труды по военной истории [NOVIK. Works on military history]*, Issue III, Odessa, 2010, pp. 175-184.

However, during all periods of independent Romania such potential was inferior to the military potential of its neighbors. Because of this, during the First World War, interwar years and World War II the armed forces of Romania suffered defeats. Only the assistance of its allies (Russia in 1915-1917, Germany in 1940-1943 and the Soviet Union in 1944-45 respectively) saved the country from defeat. It should be noted that the leaders of Romania always used this seemingly rather unfavorable situation for their advantage: in all cases Romania received territorial increment. Moreover, according to some Ukrainian scholars, Romania sometimes became a factor of neighboring countries' involvement in a war with a third country. A striking example of this can be the "Romanian provocation" on 21-22 June 1941 by pulling Hungary into a war against the Soviet Union - a fact that still has not been clearly proven⁶.

The only time in history the leadership of Romania tried to create a "Greater Romania" independently, without depending either politically or technically from any of its allies – during the period of the Socialist Republic of Romania (1965-1989). During this period, when Nicolae Ceausescu was in power, Romania did not take part in the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (Warsaw Pact) in Czechoslovakia (August 1968). And in 1974 the Romanian leadership started implementing a comprehensive program to create a strong economy and the military-industrial complex. The most striking example - an attempt to create a "Great (military) fleet of regional scale", that caused ambiguous reaction in Warsaw Pact and NATO in the 1980's. And although there were only laid foundations, the strategic direction was absolutely true.

However, after the overthrow of Ceausescu's communist dictatorship, the democratic government of Romania has chosen the course on primarily active cooperation with NATO countries. Since 1990, according to the Romania-NATO treaty, Romanian officers have begun to study and undergo practical training in the alliance⁷. From that moment we should talk about the beginning of structural changes of military character in Romania. As for their technical component, unlike other former members of the Warsaw Pact (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria) that during 1999-2004 became the NATO countries, the situation in Romania looked no worse, and in some range, even better. For example, during the socialist period Romanian air complex was transferred to NATO's standards and concept. This is evidenced not only by production of helicopters with French licenses, but also through the creation of sophisticated aircrafts independently and together with the former Yugoslavia⁸. Even building the destroyer "Marasesti" and the frigate - floating base "Constanta" on Romanian technologies conceptually proved a far-sighted tendency, though not without problems (the destroyer was returned three times to the shipyard for lowering the weight)⁹.

However, small steps to reform the armed forces and related military-industrial complex of Romania in the period 1990-1997 did not lead to tangible positive results. Especially clearly it became apparent in the spring of 1997, when the Romanian government was forced to approve a large-scale agreement with Ukraine. A role in this, especially advantageous for Kyiv developments, was played by the absolute military superiority of Ukraine over Romania. Bucharest drew quick conclusions. That is why Romania began a comprehensive reform of its all military complex (the armed forces and military industry) since the summer 1997. This reform is officially designed to be completed in 2021.

Basic principles of Romanian military reform

It appears that by initiating the reforms in the early 1990s the leadership of Romania going out of several key principles:

⁶ Kotlobovsky, Aleksander, „В тени Люфтваффе (Венгерские ВВС на Восточном фронте в 1941 г.)” [„In the shadow of the Luftwaffe (Air Force Hungarian on the Eastern Front in 1941)”, *Аэрохобби [Aerohobby]*, no. 4, 1994, p. 40.

⁷ Fedotov D., Nikolaev D., „Вооружённые силы Румынии” [„Armed Forces Romania”, *Зарубежное военное обозрение [Foreign Military Review]*, no. 7, 1992, p. 19.

⁸ Kotlobovsky, Aleksander, *Послевоенные ударные самолёты, Часть 2 [Postwar attack aircraft. Part 2]*, Archive Press, Kiev, 1997, pp. 11-12; Langer U., „Die Flugzeugindustrie der Sozialistischen republic Rumanien”, *Flieger-Jahrbuch*, 82, Transpress, Berlin, 1982, pp. 86-87.

⁹ Petlevanny M., *Стран Варшавского договора [Ships of the Warsaw Pact countries]*, Galea Print, Sankt-Petersburg, 2010, pp. 160-161; Polmar N., *Guide to the Soviet Navy*, AAP, Sydney, 1986, p. 501.

1. The army of the Romania needed cuts for political reasons (too big and not needed in the new geopolitical conditions), technical reasons (hardly mobile and not modernized)¹⁰ and human reasons (numerical conservative corps of generals and extremely poorly prepared total personnel) character;
2. The military industry of Romania is modern and able to produce almost all the major types of weapons, including high-tech weapons, but proved almost unable to produce modern weapons at a large scale due to human and technological reasons. Because of this, most modern production samples proved to be too costly. Obvious examples are: the situation with the teaching combat aircraft IAR-99 SOIM ("Hawk"), one of the world's best in its class, all released only in 6 copies¹¹; and the main battle tank TR-125, which was created on the basis of acquired licenses T-72B from the USSR in 1984. From 1987 to 1999 only 30 such units have been produced (according to other sources - only 3 prototypes). By contrast, between 1981 and 1990 Czechoslovakia created almost 1700 such units (also on Soviet licenses for T-72)¹².
3. At the same time, as proved by practice, the modernization of military equipment of Romanian and Soviet production could bring substantial results both theoretically and realistically. Thus, the modernization of MiG-21 variant into LANCER by Israeli firms significantly expanded its tactical possibilities and led to the export gains. Modernization of its own "T-55" tanks and its Romanian analogs „TR-85” into the „BIZONUL” model significantly reinforced combat capabilities of the Romanian army and caused some concern in Ukrainian military structures.
4. After the revolution of December 1989 all political forces began to focus on the West. As a result, transition to NATO standards became necessary not only in the weapon system, but also in professional and combat training of personnel and specific units of the armed forces. As a result, the priorities have been changed: modernization was focused mainly on the naval and air force instead of the Army.
5. However, the financial capacity of the post-revolutionary Romania was extremely limited. In the new economic and geopolitical conditions it became more profitable to spend money primarily on personnel and to buy vehicles and weapons abroad, even some which were already in use. However, the line was developed in 3 stages: modernization of old Soviet and Romanian equipment with the assistance of Western countries and NATO - acquisition of former (used) NATO equipment - purchase the latest models of equipment in NATO countries. In relation to fighters we mentioned the first option, but since 2012 the Air Command of Romania has started to realize the third option – to negotiate the purchasing of 24 „F-35” fighter jets in the U.S.A. In the sphere of Navy it turned out that the acquisition of the British frigates (project 22 of second subgroup) solves all tasks assigned to the fleet and therefore funds intended for the third stage can be refocused on other targets.
6. It was necessary for Romania in the military context to go out on an international level. This required from the state leadership to participate in peacekeeping operations, so they needed small, highly mobile, well-trained and equipped units. In addition, industrial Romania could not use such beneficial method as accumulation of currency by arms trading. However, in this context it was necessary to get rid of the negative image of Romania as its manufacturer¹³, which was possible only with the assistance of Western companies.
7. The new geopolitical conditions needed the changing of potential opponents. It should be admitted that in relation to this the choice of Romanian politics was unanimous - Ukraine.

¹⁰ Заявление Комитета министров обороны государств-участников варшавского Договора «О соотношении численности вооружённых сил и вооружений организации варшавского Договора и Североатлантического союза в Европе и прилегающих акваториях» [Statement of the Committee of Ministers of Defense of the Warsaw Treaty, „On the relation between the number of armed forces and armaments of the Warsaw Pact and the Alliance in Europe and adjacent areas”], *Красная звезда [Red Star]*, 30 January, 1989; Fedotov D., Nikolaev D., „Вооружённые силы Румынии” [„Armed Forces Romania”], *Зарубежное военное обозрение [Foreign Military Review]*, no. 7, 1992, pp. 17-19.

¹¹ Kotlovovsky, Aleksander, *Послевоенные ударные самолёты, Часть 2 [Postwar attack aircraft. Part 2]*, Archive Press, Kiev, 1997, p. 16.

¹² Granovsky, Oleg (n.d.) *Танки Т-72 в мире [T-72 tanks in the world]*, <http://www.waronline.org/mideast/general-info/armament/t-72/export.php>

¹³ Танки НАТО против Варшавского Договора [Tanks NATO against the Warsaw Pact], *Альманах «Танк» [«Tank» Almanac]*, Issue 2, Riga, 2000, p. 28.

8. This is explained by several factors (in reverse chronological terms). Firstly, since 2004 almost the entire length of the state border of Romania was limited by NATO allies, with the exception of Ukraine and Serbia. However, the latter, after the tumultuous events of 1998-2004, did not raise threats to Bucharest in the military context. Secondly, the Romanian government and military clearly remembered the events in May 1997. Then only the maneuver of Division of medium-range bombers Tu-22M2/3 from Poltava airfield to airfields in Nikolayev and Odessa aviation units prompted the president of Romania E. Constantinescu to arrive in Kyiv and adopt the "Great Treaty" with Ukraine. It should be added that this aircraft, which was named in NATO "Backfire" cannot be shot down by modern western anti-aircraft defense (hence, the reason of Romanian leadership's reaction in 1997). The only case of Tu-22M3R destruction (belonged to Russian Air Force) during the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008 entirely on account of poor organization and management of fighting from the Russian side¹⁴. Thirdly, radical and even moderately minded Romanian politicians constantly put forward arguments for reviewing the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939 with a view to resuscitating the concept of „Greater Romania” that was quite differently interpreted by various political forces in both Romania and Ukraine¹⁵. However, its implementation is possible only through the integration of Romania with Moldova (that Moldovan politics trying to do)¹⁶, and through expanding cooperation with the Odessa and Chernivtsi regions of Ukraine, a Romanian priority.

Conclusions

All of the above mentioned aspects forced various Romanian governments to comprehensively and consistently upgrade and modify the military structure. Unlike Ukraine, Romania adopted principles of military reform that proved adequate to the modern geopolitical environment and to the economic opportunities of the country. Moreover, it goes consistently and promptly. Because of this, since the beginning of 2010 military reform in Romania has reached the level of advance concerning the established plan and the challenges that appeared.

Unlike Bulgaria, the military reform of Romania allows, in the course of the army's significant reduction, to maintain and even expand its military capabilities. And, most importantly, to maintain and develop the striking component. Moreover, the use of the concept „development of individual components of the armed forces of Romania”, which was established during the socialist times (construction or Danube Flotilla or equipping the Air Force with aircraft and helicopters of new classes, such as subsonic fighters, light training aircraft, light helicopters of fire support) add to military reform in Romania not only industry and historical specificity, but would lead to a substantial increase in the capacity and efficiency of the armed forces as a whole.

Therefore, in our opinion, the military reform in Romania (designed to be completed in 2021), unlike the similar Ukrainian reform, will be done before the deadline with much more serious results than those that are planned during the 1997-2010. In addition, the reformed Romanian Armed Forces will receive opportunities to meet the challenges that may occur after 2021 in a perspective of at least 10 years.

REFERENCES

Apalkov, Yriy V. (2004) *Боевые корабли мира на рубеже XX – XXI веков. Часть IV-II. Корветы и катера* [Warships in the world at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries. Part IV-II. Corvettes and boats], Galea Print, Sankt-Petersburg.

¹⁴ Zhirohov, Michail, „Маленькая миротворческая война” [„Little peacekeeping war”], *Авиация и время* [Aviation and time], no. 5, 2008, p. 37.

¹⁵ „Adrian Năstase, în conflictul dintre Ucraina și UE”, 16 February 2012, available at <http://www.ziuaveche.ro/international/externe/adrian-nastase-in-conflictul-dintre-ucraina-si-ue-74934.html>; „Ucraina vs. Romania si problema Bugeacului”, 18 March 2010, available at <http://foaienationala.ro/ucraina-romania-si-problema-bugeacului.html>

¹⁶ „Traian Basescu nu a gresit in privinta Basarabiei”, 4 July 2011, available at <http://www.ziare.com/basescu/presedinte/traian-basescu-nu-a-gresit-in-privinta-basarabiei-1105311>

- Chichkin A. (2009) „Бомба в Карпатах. 20 лет назад Румыния "без пяти минут" была с атомным оружием. Но вряд ли оно стало бы "просоветским"” [A bomb in the Carpathians. 20 years ago, Romania was "five minutes" away from an atomic weapon. But it is unlikely it would be "pro-Soviet"”], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 20 July.
- Fedotov D., Nikolaev D. (1992) „Вооружённые силы Румынии” [„Armed Forces Romania”], *Зарубежное военное обозрение* [*Foreign Military Review*], no. 7, pp. 17-21.
- Granovsky, Oleg (n.d.) *Танки Т-72 в мире* [*T-72 tanks in the world*], <http://www.waronline.org/mideast/general-info/armament/t-72/export.php>
- Korotkov E. K., Moiseyenko M.G., Strashun B.A. (1977) „Социалистическая Республика Румыния. Основы государственного строя” [„Socialist Republic of Romania. Fundamentals of the state system”], Legal Books, Moscow, pp. 222-223, 233.
- Kotlovovsky, Aleksander (1994) „В тени Люфтваффе (Венгерские ВВС на Восточном фронте в 1941 г.)” [„In the shadow of the Luftwaffe (Air Force Hungarian on the Eastern Front in 1941)”], *Аэрохобби* [*Aerohobby*], no. 4, pp. 40-44.
- Kotlovovsky, Aleksander (1997) *Послевоенные ударные самолёты, Часть 2* [*Postwar attack aircraft. Part 2*], Archive Press, Kiev.
- Lahvinets V. (2011) „Военная мощь Украины и Румынии: повод для тревоги Киева” [„Military power Ukraine and Romania: Cause for alarm in the Kiev”], *Флот 2017* [*Fleet 2017*], March 9, <http://flot2017.com/item/opinions/36133>
- Langer U. (1982) „Die Flugzeugindustrie der Sozialistischen republic Rumanien”, *Flieger-Jahrbuch*, 82, Transpress, Berlin.
- Meltyuhov, Michail (2010) *Освободительный поход Сталина* [*Liberation Campaign of Stalin*], AST, Moscow.
- Pavlov, Alexander S. (1994) *Военные корабли СССР и России 1945-1995* [*Warships of the USSR and Russia 1945-1995*], Yakutsk.
- Petlevanny M. (2010) *Стран Варшавского договора* [*Ships of the Warsaw Pact countries*], Galea Print, Sankt-Petersburg.
- Pokas, Michail S. (2009) „Великая Румыния, или Гиена, подвид восточноевропейский” [„Greater Romania, or hyena, subspecies Eastern European”], 27 May, <http://timer.od.ua/?p=14026>.
- Polmar N. (1986) *Guide to the Soviet Navy*, AAP, Sydney, p. 501.
- Pospelov, Andriy S. (2010) „Военные аспекты Приднестровского конфликта 1992 г”. [„Military Aspects of the Transnistrian conflict in 1992”], *Одиссос. Актуальні проблеми історії, археології та етнології* [*Odysos. Current issues in history, archaeology and ethnology*], Preview Issue II, Odessa, pp. 266-268.
- Shterko, Elena J. (2010) „Дипломатическая война Украина-Румыния: остров Змеиный в международных отношениях второй половины XX – начале XXI века” [„Diplomatic war Ukraine-Romania: Snake Island in the international relations of the second half of 20th - beginning of 21st century”], *НОВИК. Труды по военной истории* [*NOVIK. Works on military history*], Issue III, Odessa, pp. 175-184.
- Zhirohov, Michail (2008) „Маленькая миротворческая война” [„Little peacekeeping war”], *Авиация и время* [*Aviation and time*], no. 5, pp. 35-38.
- *** (1989) Заявление Комитета министров обороны государств-участников варшавского Договора «О соотношении численности вооружённых сил и вооружений организации варшавского Договора и Североатлантического союза в Европе и прилегающих акваториях» [Statement of the Committee of Ministers of Defense of the Warsaw Treaty, „On the relation between the number of armed forces and armaments of the Warsaw Pact and the Alliance in Europe and adjacent areas”], *Красная звезда* [*Red Star*], 30 January.
- *** (2000) Танки НАТО против Варшавского Договора [Tanks NATO against the Warsaw Pact], *Альманах «Танк»* [«*Tank» Almanac*], Issue 2, Riga, pp. 24-30.
- *** (2010) „Ucraina vs. Romania si problema Bugeacului”, 18 March, available at <http://foaienationala.ro/ucraina-romania-si-problema-bugeacului.html>
- *** (2011) „Traian Basescu nu a gresit in privinta Basarabiei”, 4 July, available at <http://www.ziare.com/basescu/presedinte/traian-basescu-nu-a-gresit-in-privinta-basarabiei-1105311>
- *** (2012) „Adrian Năstase, în conflictul dintre Ucraina și UE”, 16 February, available at <http://www.ziuaveche.ro/international/externe/adrian-nastase-in-conflictul-dintre-ucraina-si-ue-74934.html>