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**ROMANIA’S NEW NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE
COUNTRY’S DEFENCE – A STRATEGY FOR A VOLATILE
ENVIRONMENT?**

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Abstract:

The current strategic security and defense context is characterized by uncertainty and complex risks and threats. The border between conventional and unconventional risks and threats becomes blurred, generating additional challenges in building an appropriate response from the countries, which have to deal with a very fluid environment. The aim of this paper is to outline Romania’s strategic direction in this new and challenging environment, based on the new National Strategy for the Country’s defense.

Key words: defense, threats, fluid, environment, challenges

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to perform a critical analysis of Romania’s New Strategy for the Country’s Defense, from a theoretical point of view and based on the existing literature, in the context of the current volatile security and defense environment. The purpose is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of all the issues presented in the strategic planning document, but to highlight a few selected issues that make the document different from the previous strategy.

2. Romania’s new strategy as viewed in the literature

The new strategy has attracted the attention of analysts, as it comes in a moment of increased volatility in international relations and in which Romania’s role in the regions may be enhanced. The authors do not attempt to provide an exhaustive review of the literature in this area, but to highlight the most notable views on Romania’s perceived security approach.

Peter Gross, from the University of Tennessee, acknowledges the attempt of the document to provide guidelines to navigate the treacherous and complex waters of the current security environment, but the conclusion is a rather wry one, stated in the article’s title: “Romania’s new defense strategy gets it; executing it is another matter”.^[1]

From the many challenges in the strategy, it is interesting to notice that Gross focuses on just a few of them, none of military nature. The first challenge identified is a political and external one, relating to the impact the proliferation of illiberalism in other countries may have on Romania. Two other challenges are domestic and of economic nature, namely the decrepit infrastructure and poor management of European funds. These challenges have society-wide



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implications but they are not necessarily highlighted in the strategy as high priority risks. A third one, also domestic, is the lack of multiannual budgetary planning, leading to issues related to strategic investment programs. The strategy actually mentions that this issue has negative impact on the economy in general, but also specifically on the development of military capabilities and defense expenditures. Gross's focus on this aspect pinpoints actually one of the important challenges in the field of ensuring credible defense capabilities.

In Gross's opinion, the main challenge for Romania's security, the remains unaddressed in the strategy and actually underlines all the other domestic challenges, is corruption: “two key (problems)...remain untouched during the strategy's 2020-2024 period: eliminating corruption and harnessing educational institutions and the media to combat domestic and foreign-influenced disinformation outlets”[2]

George Visan does not have an overly appreciative view on the new strategy, considering it “dense, the style is dull and even redundant in some places as it strides to be as prescriptive as possible for the national security and defense bureaucracy”, but at the same time acknowledges that the reason the rather scholastic and too detailed approach is due to the fact that “the president and his advisors wanted the strategy to be entirely self-explanatory for those charged with implementing it.”[3]

Visan notices that a novelty in the 2020 strategy is the inclusion of areas not directly linked to national security or defense (such as education), but who are part of the so called societal dimension of security (which also includes health, social and demographic approaches)[4].

He also highlights the fact that Russia is defined as a “regional threat, a destabilizing force in the Black Sea, and the main reason for why Romania is spending 2 percent of GDP on defense and wants to deepen its strategic partnership with the United States”, but also draws the attention on the fact that “Russia is not considered an existential threat, and the document carefully avoids language that could be deemed excessive”. [5]

Jean Patrick Clancy focuses on the fact that the strategy is shaped around the three pillars of “US, the EU, and NATO remain the country's main foreign and security policy pillars, while Russia is designated as a security threat to stability in the Black Sea region” [6]. The Black Sea region is considered a driver for Romania's strategic approach, as the author considers that “the adoption of Romania's latest National Defense Strategy... suggests that Bucharest is hoping for a stronger US and NATO focus on the Black Sea which is a crucial yet vulnerable part of NATO's Eastern flank stretching from the Arctic to the Caucasus.” [7]

3. Romania's strategic approach to a volatile environment

The core of the strategic document follow the classical approach to a security strategy, by identifying the national interests, security objectives, providing an analysis of the security environment and establishing ways of action.

The main issues around which the strategy is developed are the following:

- building resilience (especially in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic),
- the destabilizing role of the Russian Federation (specifically named) and other countries with “offensive / aggressive behavior, including in economic terms...whose interests are contrary to those of our country”
- the volatility in the West Balkan and Southern Caucasus Area



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- hostile information and influence activities
- emerging and potentially disruptive technologies
- cyber crime
- the situation in the Republic of Moldova etc.

Interestingly, one of the risks identified refers to the “absence of real multiannual budgetary planning that would support the commitment and implementation of strategic investment programs, with negative effects on the development of infrastructure, the economy in general, as well as on modernization and development of military capabilities and the compliance with the military expenditure commitments” [8]. The issue is an important one, but the fact that it is still mentioned after 20 years since the implementation of the Planning Programming Budgeting System PPBS in the Romanian MoD signals the fact that Romania’s defense planning and resource management system continue to face significant challenges. These are aggravated by the volatile environment, but also by the lack of real commitment of successive decision makers to make full use of the advantages of the system or replace it with a system more suitable for the Romanian specifics.

The solution proposed to this issue in the ways of action related to the defense dimension of the strategy is less than satisfactory: “the implementation of the force structure resulting from the “Strategic Defense Analysis 2020” will allow the transition to a multi - annual planning, which will ensure the dynamics of personnel and endowment according to the current and perspective needs of the Ministry of National Defense.”[9] The reason is that it suffers from a lack of logic (multi-annual planning is a tool for the development of a force structure, not the other way around), but also because it offers no specific ways to achieve the desired outcome.

One of the crucial factors that contribute to the volatility of the current security environment (the technological evolution and the emergence of potentially disruptive technologies) is mentioned both as an essential security coordinate at global level, but also as a specific threat to Romania’s security. The strategy specifically mentions in this respect hypersonic vectors, 5G technology, quantum communications infrastructures, laser and electromagnetic applications, air and submarine space monitoring equipment, artificial intelligence, autonomous platforms.

Unfortunately, considering the potentially significant impact these technologies will have in the future of defense (the recent successful use of drones in the Nagorno Karabach conflict, in Syria or Lybia should serve as a stark reminder), the ways of action for Romania in this respect are kept to a minimum of political statements. The only mention in the strategy is in the defense dimension ways of action, in a rather ambiguous phrasing “unlocking the potential of emerging and disruptive technologies on the development and the use of the armed forces.” [10] From this phrasing, it is impossible to tell what exactly Romania’s approach in this matter is: does Romania plan to invest in such technologies (for instance, in the acquisition of drones) or does it have in mind to identify and devise ways to counter these technologies?

The issue of health security is yet another area that proved recently to be a big generator of volatility, with the emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic. Considering that the strategy was approved in June 2020 (after 5 months from the first COVID case in Romania), the strategy could have been better developed to respond to this challenge.

The document acknowledges in the first chapter that the “the perspective of a cyclical evolution of the virus compels the Romanian state to continue the measures to increase the capacity to manage such a crisis on multiple levels: medical, public order, from the perspective of the educational system, public services and especially in terms of increasing resilience economy”[11].



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The pandemic effects are identified as major security tendency, with durable effects on global security, but also as a threat that may affect transatlantic and EU cohesion.

The document also highlights the fact that the low resilience of the medical system is a major vulnerability, and “the major challenge in this case is to ensure an adequate and effective response from the state in combating epidemic risks and their consequences, proper preparation of procedures and availability of the relevant number of medical personnel, as well as taking the necessary protective measures.”[12]

Unfortunately, the strategy is less detailed in providing guidelines and ways of action to counter the identified threat and vulnerability. The issue of health is relegated in a common dimension (the society dimension of the ways of action, along education, social and demographic areas) and the only two paragraphs that mention it are extremely general, bring nothing new compared to previous strategies and do not provide any specific guidelines for tackling the challenges of the health area (such as a pandemic): “creating and modeling a health system that prioritizes placing the patient / citizen at the center of this system” and “correlate public health policies so that they lead to the sustainable development of the society”.[13]

4. Conclusion

Strategies are often viewed as a magical solution, a silver bullet that have the power to provide straightforward answers to complex international political, military and economic challenges. In reality, they are just the starting point for a very complex process and mindset, of attempting to provide a broader picture on the security environment, beyond the day-to-day decisions, and to provide a more systematic framework for shaping decision making. They provide a firsthand picture of a country’s interests and values, security and defense planning assumptions and principles and of the way the volatile international order influences them. The purpose of this paper is to provide a glimpse on the main changes apparent in Romania’s security strategy, due to the changes in the security environment and the increased uncertainty faced by the world. Romania’s 2020 National Strategy for the Country’s Defense, as any other strategy, can be subject to improvement, but overall it fulfills its role of capturing the evolution of the security environment and attempting to provide a framework for building a multi-dimensional approach to providing the national security.

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[9] idem

[10] idem

[11] idem

[12] idem

[13] idem