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**Transfer of democratic norms into socializing practice Image  
of the Democratic Soldier**  
The Romanian Case

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Research Project „The Image of the Democratic Soldier: Tensions Between the  
Organisation of Armed Forces and the Principles of Democracy in European  
Comparison“  
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## 1. Introduction

*“Theory as theory...but the practice kills us all!”*

Anonymous Military

The previous stage of research described and explained *in extenso* the way the military institutions regulate the democratic norms and propose to integrate them into the socialization process (supply side). It rather presented the strategic documents, teaching and training agenda, curricula, rules and regulations and the academic or training institutions within the military that were commissioned to implement the norms. One of the conclusions was that the military education faced a dramatic change after 1989 related with the acceptance of indirect career track, double specialization for military graduates and change in curricula to encompass such courses as Leadership, Management and Sociology. In the practical training of soldiers, such courses as CIMIC Doctrine or International Humanitarian Law were also incorporated. However it was not clear in what degree the democratic norms and practices are internalized by the military.

The main goal of this paper is to explain how the Romanian militaries understand the model of democratic soldier and to assess the military culture against the ideal model. “What is the relation of the democratic negotiation process with the effects of military socializing practice?” in the principal question of the research.

In order to answer the question an empirical fieldwork was carried out over the Summer and Fall of 2008, a set of interviews conducted by the author within the National Defense Academy “Carol the 1<sup>st</sup>” (with senior officers), 2nd Infantry Battalion and 495 Special Forces Battalion from Bucharest (mostly with professional soldiers- NCOs). The access was rather easy after I got the approval of the General Staff and the letter issued by the NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Erdmann, was instrumental in getting the access. A set of 24 of semi-structured interviews (11 officers, mostly majors and LTCs, 2 lieutenants and 13 NCOs) were conducted but only 17 of them were valid after the transcription. Majority of the soldiers have had experience in the peacekeeping operations abroad.

The interview guide was provided by PRIF and adapted for the Romanian language by the author. However was hard to apply it *ad litteram* because some of the questions didn’t apply to the Romanian case and part of it regarding the participant observation during the courses didn’t apply either. The findings of the empirical fieldwork are presented bellow. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part of the paper investigates the way the military represent their role-model. The second part investigates the acceptance of the democratic soldier by civil society. The third part tries to explain how the armed forces deal with the tension between the democratic norms and functional military necessities while the last part explain the perception of the out-of-area missions pursued by the military.

## 2. On personal motivation, self image and ideals

The first part of the interview was designed to inform about the self-images and professional identities among the soldiers, to understand the way they represent the role-model and the motivation to choose the military career. From the previous paper it is expected that the role-model proposed by the Human Resource Directorate that an Officer should be "...a military leader, a specialist, an educator, a citizen in service of nation and a fighter" while a NCO should be "... a fighter, a branch specialist, a small group commander, an educator and a citizen"<sup>1</sup> to have a clear operationalization into practice. However, the role model is not very clear connected to the paper statements. The lack of a clear ideological training on democratic soldiering -such as the German concept of *Innere Führung*- could be explained by the runaway from the recent past, when Political-Ideological Education was a mandatory course for the Communist Military.

Regarding the mission and objectives of the soldiers, there is a perception of adaptation to the new challenges; only the way of doing the job has changed to a peacekeeping. However some of the NCOs are very critical to the peacetime administrative jobs: "...we are cleaning toilets...our unit became a *kolkhoz*" (I 14, paratrooper). The perception regarding the role-model of a good soldier is that of a knowledgeable, disciplined, well educated, good fighter, patriot, good example for society, man of honor and altruist. Some of the militaries would favor physical qualities such a LTC that see a good soldier as "...not a Schwarzenegger but an efficient fighter, having broad worldview" (I2, LTC) while others would favor a balanced view "...a good sportsman, having integrity, aware of his mission, a symbol of Romanian society" (I6, LTC). On the other hand, even though the women in the military have no long tradition their male peers consider that they should be treated equal.

*Military ethos* seems to be a paper concept, almost unknown in practice by the soldiers. A LTC considered that "...it represents the military spirit and beliefs but we don't have a specific training for soldiers" (I2) while another LTC guessed that it might be "...a military folklore and spirit which characterizes the military system...a set of habits... ceremonies..." (I6). After seven interviews I decided to come up with a definition in order to trigger the discussion but it was not useful at all. A lieutenant bluntly put it: "Yes, is a new word for me...probable it is already used in our military system but nobody gave me a definition or I have never talked about that...(I13, Lt).

<sup>1</sup> See Marian Zulean, "The Image of the Democratic Soldier. Transfer of the Normative Model into the Military Institutions and Their Socializing Practice: Romanian Case, PRIF- Research Paper No. II/13-2008, pag.5, available: [Hhttp://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/downloads/Romania\\_2\\_02.pdf](http://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/downloads/Romania_2_02.pdf)H

By the same token, the soldiers don't perceive themselves very well connected with a certain tradition. Some respondents associate the military tradition with the military branch tradition. Thus, a LTC (I1) invoked Gen. Mochulski, an Alpine troop hero during the WWII while a paratrooper invoked Gen. Bastan, the founder of the post-WWII Special Forces (I6).

The style of command and leadership seems to be of greater interest for majority of the soldiers. The ideal commander should have native managerial skills, a capacity of empathy, should be a good professional who should make him respected by the subordinates. A LTC considers that "...the authoritarian style is specific to military but some branches such as Air can adopt a participatory one" (I3). The militaries don't consider themselves as the "guardians" of certain values but they consider the "Armed Forces" as the guarantor of national identity, independence and national security of the Romanian state. That is quoted as such by many officers.

In summary, it can be stated that the role-model of a democratic soldier is well designed on the paper but there is not very well explained and internalized by the soldiers. The concept of military ethos is unknown although some of democratic values are transmitted into the socializing process.

### 3. The image of the soldier and acceptance of the armed forces in society

The Army is one of the most trusted institutions in Romania. As has already been explained in the first paper realized for the PRIF project, a public opinion barometer showed that -between 1996-2006- the Military was one of the most trusted institutions, alongside the church. About 70% of the public trust the Military<sup>2</sup>. Even if the trend is declining it is expected that the image of the soldier is very good and the civil society has a high esteem for the military. Surprisingly, the respondents mentioned the contradiction between that trust measured by the opinion polls and the way the military is presented in the media. Some explain the contradiction as a recent image created by the media that the military earn high salaries while the public understand less and less the roles and responsibilities of armed forces. A lieutenant of Land forces considers that:

...there were so many public shows to a certain TV channels in which the reporters tried to underline the negative aspects of the military...that the militaries are very well paid and, except the missions abroad for peacekeeping they do nothing... (I 5).

<sup>2</sup> See Marian Zulean, "The Normative Aspects of Building Democratic CMR in Post-Communist Romania, PRIF- Research Paper No. I/13-2007, available at: [Hhttp://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/downloads/Romania\\_13.pdf](http://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/downloads/Romania_13.pdf)

Otherwise the debates about the ideal soldier are very rare and only when it was related to the Romanian efforts to join NATO. Therefore the interviewees consider that the civil society hardly understand the military within, due to the law that suspended the conscript army. Due to such misunderstanding there are many stereotypes and prejudices in the mind of civilians, such as the ones related to high salaries. A LTC from NDU considers that "... Our image is getting worst within the civil society ...the civil society doesn't understand properly our role. They think only that we earn some good money... (I 5, LTC). However there are some positive stereotypes that a military is very organized, clean and punctual.

#### 4. Democratic ways of organizing the military

The next part of the study will answer the question on how the armed forces deal with the tension between the democratic norms and functional military necessities. Despite the fact that the Army is regarded as an authoritarian organization, one of the constant concerns after the Revolution of 1989 was the democratic way of organizing the military. Since the Army was the driving force of the "Revolution", a group of young officers founded in the early 1990s the Action Committee for Democratization of the Army, the so-called CADA, which proposed a set of changes, including some proposals to regulate the military life.

As shown before, the discipline is the trademark of the modern armies and military identity. Therefore the new norms regarding the way the tensions and conflict are regulated and internalized should be very clear. Generally speaking, the respondents claim that the conflicts and tensions among the soldiers are very well regulated by the military codes of conduct. "...conflict resolution and problems solving are very well regulated by the military codes, such as RG-7..." (I 6). However some respondents considered that the conflict settlement should be more transparent and democratic, beyond the military code. They didn't elaborate but seems that the Commandant has extensive powers to judge and settle the conflict.

Practically any problem you should report to the Commandant, it is normal. You have a problem? You should go to your boss who is in charge to represent your interest... (I 2).

When comes to the issue of protecting the individual rights and liberties in the army, the soldiers believe that they are respected. However they are aware that some liberties are contained due to the specificity of the military life. One of such rights is the right to be involved in politics. Of course the soldiers can vote but they cannot campaign or candidate as a military for any political office. They see politics and the military as opposing concepts. Majority of the interviewees agreed with the statement that "A soldier has to serve his nation and should not care about politics".

We are not political partisans. All our actions are non-political.

We only have to be informed (in order to vote?? -n.a.) but I don't think we need to practice politics because it is not our job (I 3).

Such courses as civic education are not seen as very important although they pursue some lessons on civic education. The respondents don't see it as a requirement for the military life; they rather advocate that the Army should recruit the volunteers already educated in the spirit of civic culture.

In conclusion it can be assessed that the soldiers assumed that a military life has some limitations of their personal rights but they perceive it as normal. "...Of course our rights have some restrictions, we all entered the military system aware of that...since I accepted I think my basic rights are protected..." said a LTC. (I 7) It is not evident if the new changes proposed by the new regulations are internalized. However the general norm of civilian control of the military was fully embraced. None of the respondents questioned the statement that a soldier should not care about politics and focus on their professionalism.

## 5. Relations with out-of-area missions

The military doctrine during Ceausescu regime -The struggle of entire people- was based on the assumption that Romania never attacked a neighbor and pursued just wars only, for defending its territories. However, when NATO and Partnership for Peace opened the doors for the former Communist countries they asked the candidate countries to show the willingness to participate in the out-of-area missions. That triggered debates in the early 1990s about the peacekeeping missions. The next part of the research would deal with the issue of legitimization of out-of-area missions and perception of both the militaries and civil society about such missions.

The opinions of the militaries were diverse ranging from some that view the missions abroad as an opportunity for Romania to contribute to the global peace and, others, that would favor a more balanced view between foreign missions and domestic ones. Thus a LTC considers that "...being a NATO member you have to execute whatever NATO decides...today you cannot rely on self defense, you cannot live alone...of course it is related with the process of globalization..." (I 1). On the other hand, some others consider that it is a win-lose strategy, the more you invest in mission abroad the less you get for the military units at home.

I have the feeling that we have two armies: one that fight in the missions abroad, well trained and equipped, and another that does what it always did, training more or less, depending on the funds allocated by the Government (I 6).

Thus, the strategic culture of the Romanian soldiers changed over time, starting from a critical approach to sending troops abroad to an enthusiastic approach in sending troops in peacekeeping missions and even to the “Alliance of the Willing” such was the mission in Iraq. The politicians were more critical than the militaries in sending troops abroad. The criticism of the military was mostly related to rational allocation of resources but they understood that a mission abroad would increase the Romanian chances to join NATO and EU.

## 6. Conclusions

The issue of civilian control of the military was high on the political agenda in the Romanian transition. Both Western institutions that assisted the Romanian transition as well as the domestic political forces asked for democratic norms of civil-military relations and adopted laws and institution. However, no study until now assessed how the individual military internalized the norms of democratic control. They focused mostly on “supply side”, how the norms were institutionalized and legalized, if the curricula or regulations are in place or if the military organizations adopted the norms. The first part of the paper showed that the role-model of a democratic soldier is well designed on the paper but there is not internalized by all the soldiers. Concepts such as military ethos or civic education are not very well understood.

On the other hand, even though the military is one of the most trusted institutions in Romania that doesn't correlate directly with the democratic image. In the last year some soldiers claim a stereotype from the media and a bias of presenting the Military as earning more money and doing not much for the country. Regarding the issue of limitation to their individual freedoms it is an assumed choice. It seems that the general norm of civilian control of the military was fully embraced by respondents. A young lieutenant explained that “...I think it is normal to have a civilian control over the armed forces, because control means transparency and civil society should permanently know what the military does...” (I 16).

As a general conclusion of the empirical study it can be noticed a gap between the ideal-type of democratic soldier drawn in strategic documents and the socializing practice. I didn't meet the ideal soldier whose discourse proved that he fully understood the norms and habits of democratic military and pursued civic education or military ethos courses. The lack of a clear ideological training on democratic soldiering could be explained by the runaway from the recent past, when political-ideological education was a mandatory course of Communist indoctrination. Despite the shortcomings it can be assessed that the norms of democratic soldiering are internalized by majority of the military and included in the socializing process.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> \* The author would like to acknowledge the help of Ms. Delia Badoi as research assistant, Gen. Constantin Degeratu and Gen. Teodor Frunzetti for supporting the research.