

Polish-Romanian Defence and Security Policy

Eugene Kogan

Poland and Romania are two of the most ardent supporters of the North Atlantic Alliance and spend 2% of their GDP on defence. The two countries are eye-to-eye vis-à-vis Russia as their adversary, although they are based in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea, respectively.

A joint initiative of Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and Polish President Andrzej Duda, known as the 'Bucharest Nine', was launched in November 2015 and laid a foundation for foreign and security policy meetings and discussions. As the next step, the Warsaw NATO Summit in July 2016 accelerated military-to-military cooperation. As a result, the initiative brought Romanian troops to Poland and Polish troops to Romania on a rotational basis in March 2017. In addition, their pivotal positions in the east and in the south of NATO's reach have further increased their cooperation in a variety of defence and security programmes.

Even though the first Romanian-Polish intergovernmental meeting took place in Warsaw on 25 May 2018, the cornerstone of this meeting was laid in Warsaw in July 2016. The participants in the 2018 Warsaw consultations agreed on strengthening bilateral cooperation in security and defence. During the visit of Pawel Soloch, the Head of the Polish National Security Bureau (BBN), to Bucharest on 27 February 2021, Romania's Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu, reiterated his country's interest in strengthening bilateral cooperation in security and defence. The participants in the Warsaw consultations also agreed to conclude a bilateral cooperation agreement in the defence industry in the near future. However, the coronavirus pandemic in 2020-21 has delayed the signing of the agreement. Finally, a joint EU-NATO Military Mobility initiative that is likely to impact on the rail and road infrastructure of the two countries, among other things, and which was unveiled in March 2018 has come

Photo: U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Kohl



Romanian air defence soldiers pose for a photo during exercise SABER STRIKE 2017 at Bemowo Piskie Training Area, Poland.

Photo: MoD Poland



In June 2020, Poland, the US, the UK, Romania and Croatia conducted military exercises on NATO's eastern flank near the Suwalki Gap.

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Photo: Presidential Office Romania

'The Bucharest Nine' (B9) format intends to promote cooperation on national security matters vis-à-vis Russia.

to a halt. For the time being, it can be renamed Military Mobility with Financial Deficiency. As usual, the lack of funds for a "flagship initiative" hampers progress.

'The Bucharest Nine'

'The Bucharest Nine' (B9) format was created in Bucharest in November 2015 on the initiative of the Romanian and Polish presidents. President Duda emphasised in his speech in Warsaw on 12 May 2020 that the "regional cooperation format like the B9 is

a key instrument to bolster the security of the countries around the Baltic Sea, in Central Europe and in the Black Sea region." The B9 format brings together Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. It has the potential to promote practical cooperation and regular consultation on national security matters. To date, this format has proven to be an arena for foreign and security policy meetings and discussions and less as a means for practical cooperation. However, the practical cooperation

between the two countries on defence issues began shortly after the pivotal NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016.

Military Cooperation

Following the NATO Summit in Warsaw, the two countries agreed to host each other's military forces on a rotational basis. The robust military-to-military cooperation to ensure the security of NATO in Central and Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe has turned out to

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be a first milestone in bilateral relations. Romania has deployed a GEPARD self-propelled air-defence artillery battery to Poland within the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group, while Poland deploys troops of the 17th Greater Poland Mechanised Brigade to Romania within the Tailored Forward Presence, which is the Alliance's initiative in the Black Sea region. Their deployment started in March 2017. According to Ovidiu Dranga, Ambassador of Romania to Poland: "The soldiers of Romania and Poland are excellent ambassadors of both countries. Their presence is an expression of a mutual strategic commitment Romania and Poland have assumed. This arrangement is a real success story and we are exploring possibilities to enhance and enlarge it."

Although Ambassador Dranga did not elaborate further, the Head of BBN Soloch, during his visit to Ukraine in January 2020, proposed the formation of a Romanian-Polish-Ukrainian military cooperation. He said that he "Supported trilateral military ties in the form of the existing cooperation within the framework of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade, LITPOLUKRBRIG." The proposed brigade, based on the experience and lessons learned of the LITPOLUKRBRIG that was formally established in January 2016, will be crucially important for the three countries involved. Soloch, however, added, "There was so far no fixed date for its inception." If, however, the pro-

posed idea goes ahead, it will be the next milestone in the first trilateral cooperation, and it will further cement strategic relations between Poland, Romania and Ukraine.

Similar Weapon Systems

The two countries have so far separately acquired similar weapon systems without even considering joint consultations. The weapon systems include F-16 fighter aircraft, the PATRIOT Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile defence system, a High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and a Naval Strike Missile (NSM). For instance, cooperation in training, operation, maintenance, upgrade and the production of spare parts for the F-16 by the two countries can be extended to Bulgaria and Slovakia which have recently acquired the F-16. As a result, the four countries will save enough funds to reinvest in their respective countries' defence industries and in the improvement of their rail and road infrastructure that is of crucial importance to the European Union (EU)-NATO proposed Military Mobility project.

The next step in the cooperation should include not only the joint procurement of armed helicopters and the Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile (AARGM) anti-radiation missiles for F-16s, for instance, but also joint manufacturing and development projects. As for the missiles, they can be used in breaking the Anti-

Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) systems belonging to an adversary.

It is still unknown whether Poland and Romania will join forces in R&D for the next generation main battle tank (MBT) together with Spain and Italy or South Korea. This, however, requires the two countries' presidents, prime ministers, ministers of defence and leaders of the defence industries to have a collective discussion and then decide if such a mutually agreed project goes ahead. Such a project may become a cornerstone of defence industry cooperation that may also include Bulgaria. It will also spur investments in R&D, provide expert service for marketing analysis and lead to joint manufacturing, sales efforts and the establishment of post-sales services.

Defence Industry Cooperation

Both countries have well-developed defence industries; for example, Poland's WB Electronics able to manufacture unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) currently operated by the Polish Armed Forces. The PGZ Group (Polish Armaments Group) has experience in designing and manufacturing its own tanks and upgrading the LEOPARD 2PL MBT, designing and manufacturing the infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) BORSUK and upgrading the Soviet-era BWP-1 (BMP-1) platform, as well as upgrading the Soviet-era Mi-24 helicopter. At the same time, Romania has a well-known aviation industry capable of manufacturing trainer aircraft, as well as maintaining and modernising Soviet-built fighter aircraft. Recently, it was announced that Aerostar Bacau will modernise and maintain F-16 fighters for the Romanian Air Force. The two industries also have fruitful cooperation with Israeli companies such as Elbit Systems, Israel Aerospace Industries and Rafael Advanced Defence Systems. However, it is unknown whether the defence industries of the three countries can join forces, but this is certainly not inconceivable.

It is clear though that the Romanian Ministry of National Defence (MoND) is interested in acquiring UAVs. The new competition is expected to attract bids from the US, Israel and Romania. Why not to invite WB Electronics? It was reported in December 2020 that Poland is interested in acquiring the GRYF medium-range tactical UAVs. The two countries' acquisition of the UAVs should encourage the Polish and Romanian defence industries to join forces.

As a result of this competition, Romaero and Avione Craiova, together with El-

Photo: MoD Romania



In March 2018, the Chief of the Romanian General Staff, General Nicolae Ciucă, met the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Leszek Surawski, in Bucharest to discuss the security situation in the region.

bit Systems, signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for cooperation in manufacturing Elbit's UAVs in May 2020. The MOA states that Romanian companies will be liable for the assembly, integration, training, maintenance and repairs and programme management. Attending the 3 September 2020 signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Romaero and the Lockheed Martin subsidiary, Sikorsky, for the establishment of a Central European Regional Centre for the Maintenance of BLACK HAWK helicopters in Romania, the US Ambassador in Bucharest, Adrian Zuckerman, said that the "Current cooperation between Lockheed Martin and Romaero is representative of the security partnership and extraordinary relations between the US, Romania and Poland." In case Romania decides to acquire BLACK HAWK helicopters, they will be delivered by Romaero from the Poland-based PZL Mielec factory for their final assembly (the BLACK HAWK is already in service with the Polish Air Force). PZL Mielec is the largest production facility of Lockheed Martin in the EU. Finally, the EU-NATO proposed project to improve the rail and road infrastructure for the nations on the EU and NATO's eastern flank is likely to bring many benefits to Poland and Romania and their military coop-

eration. However, much depends on the funding released for such a large project.

Military Mobility

In 2018, the EU Commission set out a plan to improve infrastructure and remove legal hurdles to allow for the faster movement of troops and vehicles across the continent, a vital security issue for nations on the EU and NATO's eastern flank. In March 2020, EU and NATO members Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania argued that the European Commission's technical document on the EU's 2021-27 budget proposed reduced funding for the military mobility programme.

Throughout the negotiation process, the proposed funding for military mobility has declined from €6.5Bn in the initial EU Commission proposal to €2.5Bn under the Finnish Presidency negotiating box and to €1.5Bn under the EU Council President Charles Michel's proposal. According to the final document, the funding for the military mobility programme was kept at €1.5Bn; namely, just slightly under 25 percent of the initially proposed €6.5Bn. This sum is undoubtedly not sufficient for improving infrastructure for the so-called joint EU-NATO "flagship initiative." Whether the European Commission will provide extra funds for the initiative remains unknown.

Conclusion

Bilateral military cooperation remains the cornerstone of the two countries relations' for the time being. The joint procurement and manufacturing of weapon systems, as well as a joint effort in R&D can be the next step in their bilateral cooperation. For such an initiative to succeed, the relevant political and defence industry stakeholders in both countries must seize the opportunity and turn political will into industrial deeds. It can be recalled that the two countries possess well-developed defence industries able to succeed in this endeavour. Poland and Romania also have high-skilled labour and funds to invest in R&D to promote their military goods globally. What the author proposes is not inconceivable, but it is doable. Another option for the two countries' joint development is linking their efforts in the defence industry field with Israeli companies. This trilateral cooperation will lead to a healthy competition for the EU and NATO defence markets. As for the future of the B9, the judgement is still pending. However, one thing is for sure - turning meetings and discussions into practical cooperation is a must for the B9. Finally, military mobility with reduced funds turns a "flagship initiative" into military immobility. ■

