

## PERSPECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY LAWS AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

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**Abstract:** *The new laws of education as well as the challenges of the contemporary security environment require a new approach for the military higher education. In this regard, the paper proposes a general framework which helps us to analyze a large spectrum of factors with implications in military higher education. Moreover, there are expected premises and solutions to adapt military education to the new requirements of the contemporary society.*

**Keywords:** *higher education, national security, challenges, officers, competences*

### INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental pillars of the evolution of any society. Moreover, it is the formal education that provides future citizens with skills values and knowledge through systematic processes (Suman, 2023). Today's society shapes our perspective of changes and brings attention to the need to rethink the entire educational environment. As Raskha L. (2021) said, learning is a form of change. On the one hand, social evolution from industrial society to a digital society, the qualitative changes brought by AI technologies that are typically based on algorithms, require us to include, in the future, adapted educational scenarios. On the other hand, the new security environment characterized by uncertainty, volatility, the changes among the world's great powers, but also by ongoing military conflicts have influenced the in-demand skills for the future workplace. Furthermore, the characteristics that define generation Z that are entering the workforce, shows us the need to adapt our old methodical practices and learning strategies to the requirements of digital natives. Occupational mobility (Sava et al., 2019:33), from both professional positions at the same level and vertical evolution perspective, becomes a mandatory requirement and can be transposed through transversal skills according to the specificity of the professional field.

The higher military education is the professional fields that need further attention in the future in relation to the level of compatibility between educational programs, competencies of higher education graduates and the contemporary work environment. The direct connection between the consequences of a volatile and less predictable security environment and the product of formal university-level education - the Romanian officer -, requires an update, in real time, of educational offers that enables an easy adaptation to the new military professional environment and the assumption of responsibilities based on the acquired skills. The accession, in the military

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structures, of the representatives of generation Z comes with new challenges regarding the understanding and internalization of predefined organizational values. Even if the military academy is an atypical higher-education environment, being part of the vocational education, and the fundamental mission of the Romanian armed forces has not undergone changes, the requirements of the military work environment are shaping up to be different from those in the past.

The transposition of contemporary educational policies into a new legislative framework, updated and adapted to European standards through Law 198 and Law 199 of 2023 is imposed as a requirement for adapting to military school faculties. Even if there are not taking into consideration major changes in university degrees levels, respectively Level 1 and Level 2, yet the rethinking of Level 3 (doctorate) is a necessary one. The secondary legislation, that is currently being developed and implementation prepared, will be bring the necessary clarifications for the rethinking of doctoral studies.

### **1. Methodology and Research Directions**

In this context, the main research subject is the impact of the security environment and the new legislative framework on educational environment of military university. In this sense, we consider it fundamental to present the proposed theoretical framework model for studying the changes in military higher education. Given that we are talking about a qualitative analysis, it is relevant to consider both the elements that define the proposed model and the relationships that establish between them.

As we mentioned, this research has a double purpose: on the one hand, the exposition of a theoretical model of analysis of the educational environment of military university and, on the other hand, the presentation of the first results of the research in relation to the current regional security challenges of the security environment of which Romania is integrated.

The research methodology focused on the concrete adaptation to interdisciplinary research. The modeling of the general framework for the analysis considered conceptual elements from distinct fields of study: education, military sciences, and legal sciences. Analysis, deduction, abstraction represented the main methods of the cognitive-structured course of the present research. The specialized literature from the period 2019-2023 as well as the current legislation are the main sources of documentation for this study.

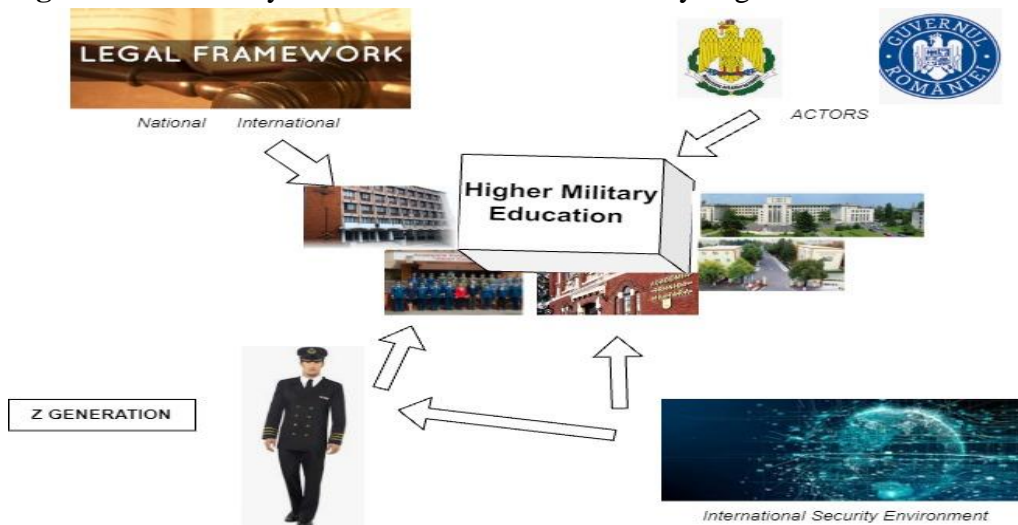
Generically, higher education aims at the developing of key skills to be able to survive both in the future professional environment and in society. In the knowledge-based society, basic skills are: technology skills, foreign languages skills, computer skills, social and entrepreneurial skills, the contemporary tendency is to replace the phrase "basic skills" with that of "key skills" (Sava et al., 2019:33). Moreover, in a society characterized by challenges of repeated adaptation to new demands of the work environment, these key competences are assumed to be transferable and multifunctional to allow the individual to use them in different situations and contexts as well as in fulfilling several kinds of objectives.

Therefore, in this world of complex and unpredictable challenges, we consider it essential to analyze military higher education in correlation with the following elements:

- (primary and secondary) European legislation with direct implications in higher education;
- the (primary and secondary) national defining legislation for Romanian higher education;
- tertiary legislation in the field of national defense with implications in the field of training and education of human resources;
- the contemporary and future military professional environment (both national and multinational; the work environment in peacetime, in crisis situations and in the case of armed conflict);
- institutional actors with a role in higher education;
- the potential human resource according to its specific particularities;
- the international security environment (regional security and global security).

We propose the following analysis model that gives us a conclusive picture of the factors influencing the military higher education in the new legislative and security context.

**Figure no. 1** – Analysis Model of Romanian Military Higher Education



In accordance with the previously proposed and schematic analysis model, military higher education must be seen in an integrative framework delimited by: specific legislation (European legislation and national legislation), institutional actors involved (both at decision-making and executive level), the (global and regional) environment of international security and the defining characteristics of the potential human resource. All these elements contribute significantly to shaping the development directions of military higher education. The awareness of this integrative framework, the periodic analysis, and the follow-up of its evolution lead to the development of a pro-active behavior of all the actors involved, allowing, at the same time, the anticipation of imbalances or the need for re-adaptation.

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The change of the legal framework that defines the Romanian higher education is a premise for the development of formal education developed in relation to the requirements of the present and future society, but also in accordance with the particularities of the human resource. The beginning of September marked the opening of this new perspective, through the entry into force of the primary legislation (Law 199/2023) of higher education. The expectation of the promulgation of secondary legislation on defining a legal framework of training and operationalization of learning process, however makes the military higher educational process keep its previously defined direction.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that a large part of the educational policies developed at the national level are based on the regional direction for the development of higher education given by the European Union through initiatives that sustain and promote collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions. In the military field, there is an initiative of the European Union (EMILYO) (<http://www.emilyo.eu/>) whose objective the exchange of young officers by creating common educational programs, or projects such as European officer model (Line of Development-16). Internationalization but also the promotion of common values, the development and implementation of improved ideas, knowledge and practices would help future European officers to integrate more easily in the new military work environment. It should be noted that the European educational model, developed by the OECD through the Education 2030 project, aims to create an educational framework oriented towards a competence-based model (OECD, 2023).

### **2. Security Context Analysis**

From the perspective of the contemporary security environment, the current period we are going through is characterized by changes, challenges, and uncertainties. Manifestations of aggression in the international environment bring into the attention new realities. Some of these have already been experienced, others only predicted and conceptualized: hybrid warfare, hybrid threat, multi-domain operations, joint operations, and others. As we mentioned before, the military work environment is complex, and the variety of situations in which an employee can find himself confers it uniqueness. In order to understand it and to be able to foreshadow the professional perspectives of the Romanian defense sector, we propose to identify the main influencing factors and to clarify the relevant concepts that are brought to attention along with the new requirements. The particularities of the new security environment require new skills from the human resource in the Romanian army.

If Romanian officers just prepare and train in peacetime, with the aim of being able to formulate viable responses when need it, in situations of crisis or military conflict, their duties and responsibilities increase in complexity and vary according to the requirements of the operational environment. In peacetime, the level of technology development represents the main challenge in relation to adapting to the requirements of the contemporary context, in the multinational environment foreshadowed by a potential aggression on the national territory or in a crisis context wherein the response is multinational, and alongside the level of technology development there are other demands specific to the new types of confrontations.

Against the background of the aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukraine, the armed conflict that took place in the vicinity of the border of the Romanian state, led to the awareness and updating of a series of aspects concerning the national security of Romania. First and foremost, the strategic partnership with the United States of America, the essential role in strengthening capacities in support of NATO operations (Chifu, 2023:544) and our country's participation in the development of European defense capabilities, have been brought back into attention. The prospect of active involvement in these international relations and participation with military forces in different contexts, worldwide, in missions under the auspices of NATO or the EU, requires Romanian officers to have both communication skills in an international language accepted by partners and transversal skills that allow flexibility, professional mobility and permanent adaptation to new places and work requirements. Knowledge of the Romanian military environment with all the implications required by the assumption of responsibilities in local military bases is no longer sufficient. Involvement in joint training, with military forces of other states, participation in international missions under the command and in partnership with other states, requires a high capacity to adapt to new and unknown challenges.

Shaping the future professional environment must be in full agreement with the existence of a wide spectrum of technologies. In the planning of military operations, conducting military actions and logistics, digitization and robotics are in full development (Stanciu, 2023:157-169). The mentality of today's leaders correlates the resolution of crises and the achievement of victories in military confrontations with the level of technological development and, at the same time, with the technology skills. In this sense, the inclusion, in a significant percentage, in the didactic activities, of several types of technology to acquire good and profound knowledge, to build technology skills but also to analyze the possibilities of optimizing tasks specific to the work environment, is another requirement dictated by the current evolutionary trends of the security environment.

Another challenge of the contemporary security environment is to better understand the optimal way to report to hybrid military confrontations in which two or more actors, including non-state actors, use conventional and non-conventional means to achieve some strategic objectives (Lupulescu, 2023:56-68). To combat disinformation, terrorist attacks, propaganda, cyber-attacks, and manipulation Romanian army officers need to have a high capacity for analysis and critical thinking.

Worldwide, there are structures that offer training courses to develop action capabilities, using educational contents focused on eliminating individual weaknesses to obtain a competitive advantage in a multi-domain operating environment (Neeley, 2023:73-75).

Therefore, this picture of the security environment could lead to different scenarios, in relation to military higher education, such as:

- The interest in the military career could decrease, in the context of fear and insecurity among the population regarding the actions of regional or international military aggression, and therefore the military universities should adapt their study programs making them attractive as much as possible to arouse the enthusiasm of young people;

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- Technological changes (the use of weapon systems but also of the computing technique built based on artificial intelligence algorithms) could radically change the military work environment, and the skills developed at university;
- The change in the operational environment could require the officers (the main product of the university study programs of the military high vocational schools) to use their transversal skills to be able to perform duties in a "new" work environment.

Based on these scenarios, we could see changes, both in study programs and in relation to the learning-evaluation models in the Romanian military higher education. These changes can be the result of an analytical and proactive behavior of the actors involved in the military higher education and can be seen in the medium or long term. On the other hand, the changes generated by the new reality can be an imprint of the present, and the reactive measures may be their key phrase.

### **3. New Demands in Higher Education**

As an extension of the analysis of the security environment presented above, we consider will be relevant to reinforce the idea of the need for change in the university educational environment through the opinion of experts in the field of education such as Gary Hepburn (Dean of the Faculty of Continuing Education at Ryerson University) who stated that "the period we are going through will be remembered as one of the greatest transformations that learning will go through" (Hepburn, 2020).

Regarding the military professional area, military training to perform professional tasks under the conditions of principal uncertainty and variability of the globalized world requires the formation of a military man as a citizen, a self-sufficient individual and a professional (Sevruc et al., 2021:324-348). Starting from this idea, the first level of university studies will create the foundation of key professional skills, through its training programs. Considering that the military education is a part of the vocational education and the professional insertion of the officers will be carried out in organizational structures that are clearly stated, the correlation of the requirements of the professional environment with the training of the future human resource can be easily achieved. The directions for analysis and action in the education area can be outlined only through the concrete identification of the requirements of the security environment.

The emphasis on transversal skills, such as communication in international languages, analytical thinking, teamwork, or the ability to integrate new technologies in the current activity are just some of the results highlighted following the analysis of the current security environment. Three main approaches to competencies can be identified: the educational approach, the behavioural approach and the organizational approach, a company-specific approach (Manolescu, 2020: 1-3). It is relevant to state that, in the context of this analysis, we talk about the concept of competence in accordance with its definition from the perspective of outputs, i.e. human behavior in a work environment (Ungureanu, 2022:190-215). At the same time, the new reality of the military professional environment and the requirements imposed by the volatile security context that the present, but also the future foreshadows, the need for

training future officers to acquire independence in the learning process is observed. Considered as a potential subsidiary objective of educational programs, this competence is characterized by the awareness of the need for permanent training and the assumption of continuous individual development, throughout the entire professional life. Change has become a constant in the military work environment and adaptation to new work realities has become a requirement. The new technologies, such as the equipment and military techniques used, the variety of challenges related to new types of military confrontations (example: hybrid war) (Wither, 2016), their expansion to increasingly varied fields, the need to increase and diversify the measures and tools used to promote national security and safety awareness oblige to a permanent predisposition to adapt to the new, varied, and different reality. Knowing how to adapt to potential situations radically different from everyday life, but also being able to adapt to changing environments and work processes, requires awareness and the assumption of a professional training.

Synthesizing the identified elements of the international security environment and correlating them with the military work environment by transposing them into the formal needs of future officers, we bring to your attention the following table.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Through this paper we tried to explore various aspects of the higher military education. We focused on the dynamic nature of education, the factors involved in defining the integrator framework, and the central role of the international security environment in the educational process. The current security context has a great influence on the Romanian university military educational environment. Pending methodological clarifications regarding the implementation of the new legal framework for the Romanian higher education, the "software update" metaphor can also be invoked in the previously exposed context. The analysis carried out shows us the forms on which this update should have effects, namely:

- military education institutions;
- curricula and the content of the study programs;
- the necessary skills and the military training system of teachers and military personnel with explicit roles and direct involvement in the educational process;
- the skills portfolio of the graduates of the study programs, with an emphasis on those that are specific to the professional orientation.

It is important to find a common body of skills for Romanian officers and to substantiate courses of action learning, to rethink the goals of Romanian higher education, thus representing a requirement to ensure the premises of performance in the defense sector. To have a strong army, first we need an educated human resource with specialized professional training in accordance with the requirements of the contemporary security environment.

The evolution of society requires us to assume that the human subject becomes a builder of his own knowledge throughout the general training program (Neacșu, 2019:86-99), and guiding the formal educational process in the military university system remains a decisive factor in promoting and ensuring national security.

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