

## **“The Romanian Army Helicopter Endowment Program”**

*A Debate from the “Romanian Army Endowment Program. Cooperation Opportunities for the National Industry” Series*

In 1990 the Romanian Air Force owned about 200 helicopters, mostly IAR-316, IAR 330, but also MI-8, built by the Soviet Union mainly for transportation. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, signed by the members of the Warsaw Pact and NATO in November 1990 in Paris, allowed Romania to hold up to 120 attack helicopters. Romania currently owns 24 multi-role helicopters, IAR 330 Puma, manufactured in the 1970s, upgraded to SOCAT (Anti-Tank Optronic Search and Combat System), in the 1998-2005 upgrade program.

This year, the Army has seen a substantial increase in funds allocated, to reach 2% of GDP, namely 16.322 Billion lei. The money injection allows it to start major endowment programs, as defined in the introduction to Appendix 3/18 of the draft budget law for 2017: 8x8 and 4x4 armoured personnel carriers; 4x4 light armoured and non-armoured off road vehicles; C4I systems with integrated ISTAR capabilities; multipurpose corvette; long-range ground-to-air missile system; minehunter; helicopters.

New Strategy Center wants to emphasize the need to develop the helicopter program so as to meet both the requirements set by the Army, and the broader interest to develop technological cooperation with a foreign partner willing to produce such equipment in Romania. The interest and persistence showed by external partners and large weapons manufacturers are proportional to the amounts allocated by Romania for the endowment with combat equipment. Local politicians must work together to obtain political dividends for Romania following the rollout of large army endowment programs and determine the setting up of some production capabilities on Romanian soil. So wide is the technological gap of the national security industry, especially in the public sector, that, without industrial and technological cooperation with the large foreign weapons manufacturers, Romania would not be able to relaunch its own defense industry and increase its exports.

Replacing an aircraft fleet and making it operational is a long process, which takes in the best of cases five to six years. The technological leap involved will also result in extending that period of time. Considering Romania’s strategy to build defense capabilities, the need to maintain operability using local facilities, as well as its desire to manufacture the items and ensure subsequent maintenance locally, the process will take significantly longer. This is the reason why the Ministry of Defense needs to establish a multi-annual endowment program, based on financial resource predictability, able to generate both more security for Romania, and opportunities for cooperation and development for the national defense industry.